

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

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**Title**

*Using PATH to support person-centred planning and child and parent  
participation within the Education, Health and Care Plan assessment process.*

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## ***Abstract***

Person-centred planning (PCP) approaches offer a valuable way for Educational Psychologists (EPs) to enable participation for children within statutory planning processes. EPs are increasingly using PCP tools such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) in the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) (e.g., Bristow, 2013). However, the research base investigating the outcomes of PCP within education remains limited (Hughes et al., 2019) and there have been no studies to explore the use of PATH within the EHCNA. This thesis investigated how PATH can be effectively used to facilitate children and parents' participation within EHCNAs and compared outcomes of PATH to present EP practices. The research adopted a critical realist theoretical perspective and utilised a multiphase convergent mixed methods comparative design. 124 attendees participated in either a PATH ( $n=15$ ) or traditional ( $n=9$ ) EHCNA meeting facilitated by EPs from across three different Local Authorities. 86 questionnaires were completed following the meetings, five meetings were video-recorded and analysed using a systematic observation schedule, and 19 subsequent draft EHCPs were analysed using a document analysis schedule. The research found that all children actively participated in their PATH EHC meeting, compared to 22% of children who attended their traditional EHCNA meeting. Participants were generally satisfied with parents' and CYP's participation in both meeting types and found both meetings helpful for the EHCNA. Differences in participation experiences and practices were reported in the themes from the qualitative questionnaire data, with PATH meetings being more child-centred and leading to more meaningful contributions to the EHCNA. Generally, the child's views were not well represented in the subsequent PATH and traditional EHCPs. Findings suggest that PATH can be used to support CYP participation in the EHCNA meeting, but that additional processes need to be in place to capture CYP's views in the EHCP.

### ***Impact statement***

This research is the first to investigate the use of Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) in the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) and has presented the largest comparative study of PATH with EPs' current practice. The findings from this research add to the weight of evidence showing that PATH enables children's participation in decision-making and is a strengths-based, solution-focused, inclusive process. The inclusion of multiple EP facilitators for example, means that findings can be generalised to the PATH approach, rather than the skill of any individual facilitator. Further, the range of data collection methods shows that impact can be seen across participants' perceptions of the meeting and within the meeting processes and subsequent documentation, providing both qualitative and quantitative evidence for impact.

This research has demonstrated that when PATH is used, CYP can participate in their EHCNA meetings. This is compared to EPs' traditional meeting approach, where children are typically not invited to the meeting, echoing EPs' recognition that this limits the possibility of true co-production of EHCNA advice. Importantly, even nursery-aged children and those with speech and communication difficulties were shown to participate in a meaningful and age-appropriate way when PATH was used. Therefore, this research has implications for how EPs conduct their EHCNA meetings, showing that PATH can be used to support CYP across the span of ages, SEN, and ethnicities, to engage in their EHCNA and contribute to decision-making about their lives.

However, this research also highlighted some precautions that EPs should take when using PATH. For example, EPs should take care to ensure that CYP, parents and staff are adequately informed and prepared before the meeting to ensure that everyone is onboard with the process. It should also be accepted that this approach may be too far removed from what some parents need at this point in their child's SEN journey and that some parents/education staff may feel too restricted by contextual factors and current realities to engage in unrestricted thinking. The research also found that some children, particularly those with autism and social anxiety, did not always enjoy being the centre of attention and sometimes became overwhelmed/ distressed in the meeting. Caution should be taken to consider whether PATH is appropriate for the child's needs and EPs should consider whether the child would want to be invited to the meeting, exploring this with the child first.

The draft EHCPs explored in this study did not always include the child's views and often did not reference the PATH meeting or the discussions that were had during those meetings. This has implications for both EP and LA SEN professionals' practice, including how they incorporate the child's and parent's voice into the psychological advice and the draft EHCP. This research highlights that there is considerable scope for more collaborative working, training and sharing of best practice between EPs and SEN professionals and that LAs should consider introducing a consistent framework for person-centred practices across children's services. Therefore, this research has implications for both individual EPs and LA-wide SEN systems.

## ***Glossary of abbreviations***

ADHD- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AEP- Assistant Educational Psychologist

APO- Assessment and Planning Officer

AR- Annual Review

ASD/C- Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition

C&I- Communication and Interaction

CFA- Children and Families Act

CoP- Revised SEN and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015)

CYP- child or young person, between the ages of 0-25.

DBV- Delivering Better Value

DfE- Department for Education

DHSC- Department of Health and Social Care

EHCNA- Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment

EHCP- Education, Health and Care Plan

EOTAS- Education Otherwise Than At School

EP- Educational Psychologist

EPS- Educational Psychology Service

GF- Graphic Facilitator

HI- Hearing Impairment

HLTA- High Level Teaching Assistant

IEP- Individual Education Plan

LA- Local Authority

LSA- Learning Support Assistant

MLD- Moderate Learning Difficulties

ONS- Office for National Statistics

PATH- Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope.

PCP- Person-Centred Planning

PCR- Person-Centred Reviews

PF- Process Facilitator

SEMH- Social, Emotion, and Mental Health

SEN- Special Educational Needs

SEND- Special Educational Needs and Disability

SENCO- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SEP- Senior EP

SLCN- Speech, Language and Communication Needs

SPA- Statutory Psychological Advice

TA- Teaching Assistant

TEP- Trainee Educational Psychologist

UNCRC- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRPD- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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## ***Chapter 1. Introduction***

This chapter offers an overview of the national and legal contexts in which the current research is positioned and provides a rationale for the importance of this research. It starts by exploring UN Conventions relating to children's rights (UN, 1989; UN, 2006), the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014) and introduces Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the needs assessment (EHCNA). An exploration of children's participation in the EHCNA follows, and subsequently the importance of this legislation to Educational Psychology (EP) practice, including how EPs can support children's participation. Person-Centred Planning (PCP) approaches and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) are then introduced as a means of enabling participation in the EHCNA, introducing how EPs are already using these approaches. Lastly, a rationale for the current study is provided.

### **1.1 National Context**

#### ***1.1.1. United Nations Conventions***

The importance of including children and young people (CYP) in decision-making and hearing their views is increasingly recognised in both UK and international contexts. In the late 1980s, countries across the world ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; UN, 1989) and established that each child who can form his or her own views has the right to freely express those views in all matters that affect them (Article 12). These views should be given due weight in decision-making according to the age and maturity of the child. The Convention also places a responsibility on adults to engage in creative ways to enable children's communication and suggests children should have the right to convey their ideas orally, in writing or print, through art, or another media of the child's choice (Article 13; UN, 1989). This has been important for children who have difficulty expressing their views through speech, as is often the case for children with special educational needs (SEN). These rights have also been protected for children with disabilities. Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD; UN, 2006) affirms that children with disabilities should have the same right as other children to express their views, and that children with disabilities should be provided with disability- and age-appropriate assistance to express their views and take part in decision-making. EPs, and other professionals working with children, should therefore consider ways to facilitate all children's communication and engagement with decision-making in matters which affect them.

Whilst the UK Government ratified both conventions with the promise of endorsing children's rights, there is still progress to be made towards enacting these rights for children. England has been highlighted as one of the few countries that has not embedded the UNCRC within daily practice (KidsRights, 2023), and consultation on children's views is often disregarded (Shier, 2001). The 'KidsRights Index' ranked the UK 174<sup>th</sup> (out of 193 countries) in adherence to the UNCRC (KidsRights, 2023). Further, a review conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) exploring the extent to which the UK is enforcing disability rights reported concerns that not enough is being done to apply the UNCRPD consistently across the UK, to involve disabled people in decisions that affect their lives, and to ensure that the human rights of disabled people are protected by UK law. Therefore, more systems and procedures need to be established to support inclusion and children's participation in decision-making, that EPs can contribute to in their work with CYP.

### **1.1.2. Children and Families Act (2014) and Revised SEN and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015)**

In the UK, the rights afforded by the UNCRC (UN, 1989) and UNCRPD (UN, 2006) have been somewhat assimilated into legislation aiming to support CYP in various aspects of their lives. The Children and Families Act (CFA; HM Government, 2014) and Revised SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (CoP; Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), 2015) introduced reforms for the support of CYP in England with SEND (with variations legislated in the devolved nations). Central to the reforms was the introduction of EHCPs (Box 1). The EHCP replaced the Statement of SEN, with intention that these plans would be more holistic, multi-disciplinary, and child-centred (Fox, 2015).

#### **Box 1**

*A brief introduction to EHCPs and the EHCNA*

##### *Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)*

An EHCP is a legal document specifying the educational, health and care outcomes sought for CYP with SEN to enable progress in their learning and preparation for adulthood. The EHCP specifies the child's background, the child's and parent's views and aspirations, the child's strengths and needs, and outcomes and special educational provision to meet their learning needs. Special educational provision is defined by the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) as "*provision that is different from or additional to that normally available to pupils or students of the same age, which is designed to help children and young people with SEN or disabilities to access the National Curriculum at school or to study at college*" (p. 285). An outcome has been defined by the CoP as "*the benefit or difference made to an individual as a result of an intervention... it should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART)*" (p. 163).

An EHCP is drawn up by a Local Authority (LA) following an Education, Health and Care needs assessment (EHCNA) which has indicated that an EHCP is necessary to meet the child's needs (DfE & DHSC, 2015). A LA must gather assessment information, including educational advice from the child's education setting, psychological advice from an Educational Psychologist, social care advice, medical advice, and advice from any other relevant professionals. A LA must also consult with the child's parents/carers and seek the child's views. Based on this information, a LA should then decide if the special educational provision required is enough to warrant an EHCP. If a LA does decide to issue an EHCP, a draft EHCP should be sent to the CYP and their parents for their views on the content and to provide an opportunity to express a preference for an education setting.

A key development within the CoP is the stipulation that the EHCNA should be person-centred (DfE & DHSC, 2015). The CoP proposes a definition of person-centred working (Box 2), including that it should be strengths-based, tailored to the child, and that the CYP and parent should be at the centre of the EHCNA. The CoP describes how LAs should support participation by providing the relevant information in accessible formats, giving time to prepare for discussions and meetings, and dedicating time in meetings to hear the child's views. To enable the EHCP to be person-centred, there is an area within the EHCP dedicated to representing the views, interests and aspirations of the CYP and their parents (Section A), and the child's voice should run throughout the EHCP. The CoP places responsibility on professionals to use various methods to ascertain the child's views, including observation for very young children and/or those with significant needs or the use of alternative

communication systems such as Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Therefore, whilst the involvement of CYP and their parents was previously encouraged, it is now a statutory requirement that children and their parents contribute to the assessment, development and review of documentation and provision, supported by person-centred practices.

## **Box 2**

*Person-centred working in the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015)*

A person-centred approach, as defined by the Revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DHSC, 2015; Section 9.22, pp. 147-148), should:

- focus on the child or young person as an individual;
- enable children and young people and their parents to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- enable children and young people and their parents to be part of the decision-making process;
- be easy for children, young people and their parents or carers to understand, and use clear ordinary language and images rather than professional jargon;
- highlight the child or young person's strengths and capabilities;
- enable the child or young person, and those that know them best to say what they have done, what they are interested in and what outcomes they are seeking in the future;
- tailor support to the needs of the individual;
- organise assessments to minimise demands on families;
- bring together relevant professionals to discuss and agree together the overall approach, and
- deliver an outcomes-focused and co-ordinated plan for the child or young person and their parents.

### **1.1.3 Evaluation of the EHCNA and EHCPs**

Research has investigated service-user perspectives on EHCPs and found that in some LAs, the EHCNA had led to greater parental involvement and a more person-centred approach (Sales & Vincent, 2018). Further, a DfE commissioned survey examining the views of 13,643 parents and CYP with EHCPs reported that most parents agreed that their own wishes and opinions had been included in the EHCP (Adams et al., 2017). Almost three quarters of parents agreed that the EHCP led to their child getting the help and support that they needed and over two-thirds agreed it had improved their child's experience of education. Therefore, there is some evidence from parents that the EHCNA has led to increased representation of parents' views and positive outcomes for CYP with SEND.

Whilst some research has indicated positive parent perceptions of EHCPs, other research has found considerable shortcomings and dissatisfaction with the EHCNA. An Ofsted report (2021) suggested that many LAs have struggled to implement the reforms required by the CFA (HM Government, 2014). The report summarised findings from inspections between 2016-2020, indicating weaknesses across LAs such as ineffective or absent co-production with parents and poor-quality EHCPs. The report highlighted how many parents felt they had to "fight for the rights" of their children and that their views were rarely taken seriously. This suggests that the process has not lived up to being 'person-centred'. Additionally, Ahad et al.'s (2022) review of 25 studies which explored service users' experience of the EHCNA, concluded that the process is generally met with dissatisfaction and that

the meaningful involvement of CYP and parents is often limited. This dissatisfaction is evident in the number of appeals taken to court for EHCPs. Statistics from the Ministry of Justice show that appeals against EHCPs increased by 151.57% between 2014/15 to 2019/20 (Ministry of Justice, 2020). Many of these appeals were linked to the “contents” of the EHCP (Ministry of Justice, 2020), suggesting that families are not being involved in co-production of the EHCP. This research indicates that there is significant parental dissatisfaction with the EHCNA and suggests that the process is not person-centred.

A major area of shortcoming appears to be around the inclusion of the child in the process and parents in some research have expressed that their child's involvement in the process was limited (e.g. Franklin et al., 2018). The results from Adams et al.'s (2017) survey study suggested that CYP were not always being given choices of how to take part in the EHCNA and steps were not being taken to help CYP understand what was happening and why, making it difficult for CYP to participate. The proportion of positive reflections on the process increased with the age of the CYP, suggesting that older YP felt more included than younger children. Similarly, research has highlighted that children did not know they had an EHCP, or were unfamiliar with its content (Franklin et al., 2018; Rao, 2020). It is difficult to aim for participation in a process that children are not even aware is happening. The Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2022) also conducted interviews with 62 CYP aged 11-16 with SEND to discuss ways in which pupils are involved in decisions about their support. Involvement in meetings (e.g., Annual Reviews) received mixed evaluations from CYP, with some saying they found them helpful to reflect on progress and express their feelings, whilst others felt that they were not heard by decision-makers. One YP felt that: *“You haven't really got the rights to say 'yes' or 'no'. Like, no, you don't really want to do some of your GCSEs like your Maths, English and Sciences... That's what I want to change for young students like us”* (p.18). This suggests that progress is yet to be made regarding CYP feeling fully included in decision-making within all statutory SEN processes.

Further, it seems that children's views are often left out of the EHCP. In Adams et al.'s (2017) study, it was apparent that the wishes and opinions of CYP were included in the EHCP less frequently than parents. A range of barriers to CYP's participation in the EHCNA is explored later (Section 2.4). Even in Section A of the EHCP where the child's views should be recorded, research suggests that the child's voice is often lacking. Palikara et al. (2018) analysed 184 EHCPs from nine LAs and found variability in the way children's voices were captured in Section A and variability in the methods used to ascertain the children's views. For instance, although 63.6% of EHCPs reported the child's voice in first person, it was clear from the language used that these were not the child's views (e.g. *“I enjoy interacting with people including strangers”*, p.4). Further, there was often mention of the fact that the parent had filled in the child's views section. In addition, Smillie and Newton (2020) also found that EPs often do not include the child's actual words or record the way their views were ascertained in their reports, recording children's actual words only 12% of the time. This suggests that children's views are not being included in SPA and EHCPs and the lack of information about how children's voices are being accessed raises questions around whether CYP are being supported to participate at all.

It is noteworthy that research and reviews post-Covid 19 pandemic suggest that the difficulties with the system have not arisen from the pandemic. Whilst the recent SEND Review (DfE & DHSC, 2022) acknowledges that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted CYP with SEND, this has only exacerbated the challenges that already existed within the system. The Government commissioned the SEND Review in 2019 before the pandemic as a response to widespread recognition that the SEND system was failing to deliver improved outcomes for CYP and had become financially unsustainable. These issues have become increasingly problematic as the numbers of requests for EHCPs have increased since the pandemic (DfE & DHSC, 2022), and the Government has invested in

improving delivery of SEND services in LAs through the Delivering Better Value (DBV) and Safety Valve initiatives (DfE, 2022). This indicates the broad, persistent problems with the current SEN identification and support systems in which the EHCNA and EHCPs are entrenched. However, with the increasing demand for EHCPs (number of initial requests for an EHCP increased by 23% from 2021 to 2022; National Statistics, 2023), it is important that education professionals and researchers explore what can be done to increase service-user satisfaction with the EHCNA. The above research indicates that increasing pupil and parent participation should be a key priority. The next section will explore EPs' role in the EHCNA and how they could apply their skills to promote greater child participation in the process.

### **1.2 Significance to EP Practice**

EPs have a key role in the EHCNA and are well-placed to support children's participation and gain their views. The contribution of EPs in statutory assessments has been enshrined in law since the Education Act (HM Government, 1981). The current CFA (HM Government, 2014) and CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) states that advice (known as 'statutory psychological advice' or SPA) must be sought from an EP during the EHCNA. A significant amount of the work undertaken by EPs within LAs consists of EHC assessments (Atfield et al., 2023). Fox (2016) describes how the CoP principles outline that EPs have a responsibility to listen to CYP, enabling them to participate in decisions around their outcomes and provision. Additionally, the UK's ratification of the UNCRC (1989) has also influenced EP practice. The UNCRC is referenced in EP professional guidance documents, including "*Guidance for EPs when preparing reports for CYP following the implementation of the CFA 2014*" (British Psychology Society (BPS), 2015) and "*Guidance for Educational Psychologists providing advice and information for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments*" (Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), 2020). Therefore, EPs have a legal and professional responsibility towards including children in the EHCNA.

Professional guidance for EPs conducting statutory assessments outlines how the principles '*person-centred*' and '*collaborative*' underpin all work completed by EPs (AEP, 2020). This guidance highlights that EPs have the skills to elicit the views of CYP and to enable CYP, parents/carers and professionals to contribute to the EHCNA (AEP, 2020). EPs develop these skills during training, in adherence to the Standards of Competence required for Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration. For example, Standard 8.12 requires psychologists consult with service users and their carers when planning assessments and interventions to meet their goals, and Standard 7.1 requires psychologists to use appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users (HCPC, 2023). Further, the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021a) requires that EPs have '*Respect*' for everyone they work with, including recognising the importance of self-determination and consent to participate. The BPS also underlines the importance of psychologists developing appropriate ways of communicating with the CYP that will ensure they can effectively express their views and feelings (BPS, 2017). Therefore, EPs must have the necessary skills to ascertain and represent children's views.

Whilst EPs are skilled at gaining pupil's views during their individual work with CYP (e.g. Harding & Atkinson, 2009), the evidence presented in section 1.1.3 suggests that CYP's views are not being included in the EHCP (e.g., Adams et al., 2017). This indicates a gap between EPs' supposed skills at eliciting pupil views in individual assessments and children's participation in the EHCNA. This may be due to the finding that EPs' EHCNA meetings are often held without the child being present. During the EHCNA, it is commonplace that EPs consult with parents/carers, education staff and other professionals, to meet the co-production requirement of the CoP (AEP, 2020). During EPs' EHCNA meetings (hereon referred to as traditional meetings; see Section 4.6.3 for full definition), information is gathered relevant to each section of the EHCP, and outcomes and provision are co-



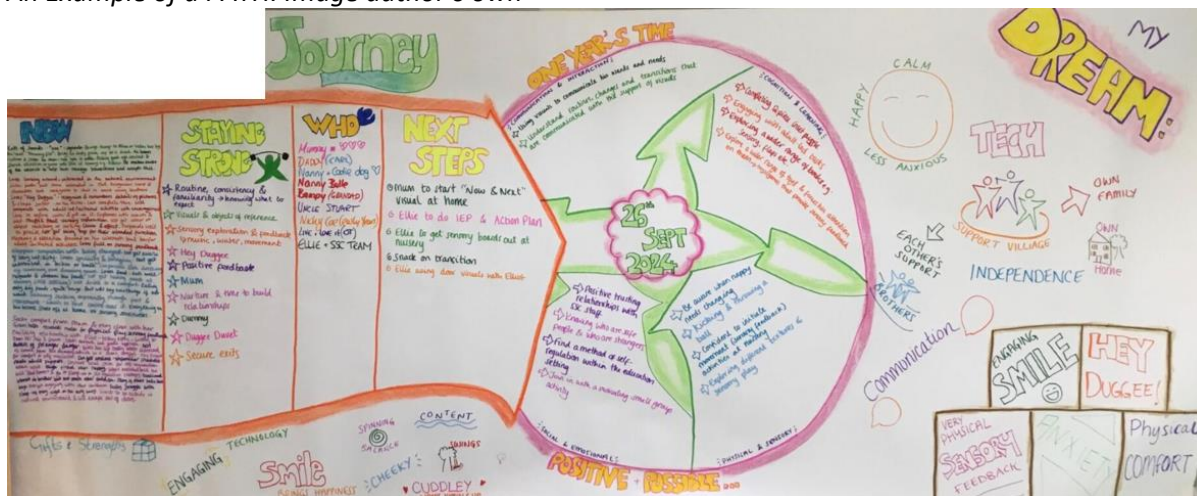
produced with parents and a multidisciplinary team (AEP, 2020). However, it has been reported that in these traditional EHCNA meetings, children are not supported to be present, or to participate if they are. For example, Adams et al.'s (2017) study found that only 44% of CYP were asked if they wanted to take part in the EHCNA and just 19% were given choices of how to take part. This indicates that whilst EPs have the skills to collect CYP's views on an individual basis, more could be done to include CYP in the EPs' EHCNA meetings where key decisions are made.

### 1.3 Person-Centred Planning in EP Practice

Person-centred planning (PCP) approaches are increasingly recognised as a valuable way for EPs to enable participation for children within planning processes (e.g., Bristow, 2013). PCP approaches involve bringing a team together around the CYP and then focussing on identifying their goals and aspirations, strengths, and support needs, to establish a collective vision of a desired future for that person (Thompson & Viriyangkura, 2014). Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH), developed by Pearpoint et al. (1993), is one PCP tool that is being increasingly used with CYP within community and education settings for planning purposes (Figure 1). PATH is a group process for discovering ways to move towards positive and possible goals by enrolling others for support, building strength in the CYP and the systems around them, and creating a workable action plan (O'Brien et al., 2010). The emphasis in PATH on including the CYP in the planning meeting and focussing on the CYP's goals and aspirations (O'Brien et al., 2010) could ensure that the EHCNA is more person-centred.

**Figure 1**

*An Example of a PATH. Image author's own*



The UK Government has recognised the value of PCP in planning processes. Numerous publications have been produced advocating for the use of PCP for people with SEN and disabilities (e.g., "Valuing People - A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century"; DHSC, 2001). The CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) has advised that PCP approaches should be used as a means of effectively involving children and their parents in the development of the EHCP and in decision-making. This is because the values and principles of PCP processes are commensurate with the stipulations in the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) that EHCNAs should be collaborative and representative of the child's views. Research suggests that parents and professionals participating in the EHCNA agree that the philosophy of person-centred assessment and planning is important to families, and that the involvement of the child can lead to new insights which support the creation of effective, realistic and relevant EHCPs (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Therefore, there is support for the use of PCP approaches in EHCNA.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is increasing interest from EPs and LAs in using PATH within their practice. For instance, there have been recent discussions on EPNET (an email exchange forum for ideas and information within the EP profession) and X (formerly Twitter) about how both EPs and LAs can use PATH and other person-centred practices in the EHCNA. From professional discussions with EPs in neighbouring LAs in the Southeast of England, the researcher understood that LAs across the region are already using PATH to support their EP work (e.g., Annual Reviews, post-16 transition work, individual casework, and whole-school development projects), with other EP Services interested in doing so in the future. An online survey of EPNET users (Bristow, 2013) also found that EPs in the UK are using PATH during their work in schools. Bristow reported that 33 EPs from across 25 different LAs were using PCP approaches for work including transition planning, Annual Reviews, Team Around the Child, and other multi-agency meetings. Further, some LAs have published guidance on how they are using PCP approaches, such as Tower Hamlets' 2015 publication "*Person-centred planning with children and young people: The Tower Hamlets model*". Therefore, there is anecdotal evidence and emerging publication evidence/guidance to suggest that EPs are already successfully using PCP and PATH in their practice.

#### **1.4 Rationale**

Whilst evidence suggests that EPs are increasingly using PCP approaches and PATH within their practice, the research base investigating the outcomes of these processes within education is still limited (Hughes et al., 2019). The dearth of research may be due to reported barriers to using PCP approaches, such as how time-consuming PCP approaches can be (Wood et al., 2019) and the need for confident, well-trained facilitators (Bristow, 2013). Most previous research explored PCP with adults rather than children and in community, rather than education, settings (e.g. Holburn et al., 2004). There have been few papers which explore PCP processes or PATH with children with SEN or facilitated by EPs, and even fewer which demonstrate how PCP can be used to support statutory SEN processes. Research is beginning to explore this area, with several studies in the last few years exploring topics such as EPs' use of PATH with pupils who have been excluded and/or are in alternative provisions (Bristow, 2013), the impact of PATH for SEN pupils at mainstream schools (Wood et al., 2019), and person-centred Annual Reviews for YP with SEN (Bason, 2020). To date, there has been no research exploring the use of PATH in EHCNAs and no research which systematically compares PATH to EPs' traditional EHCNA meeting. Therefore, this thesis provides a unique contribution to the literature by exploring how PATH can be used within EPs' EHCNA meetings, an important area of EPs' work which has so far been neglected in research.

The aims of this thesis research were:

- To explore how PATH can support greater pupil and parent/carer participation in EPs' EHCNA meetings.
- To explore whether the draft EHCPs are more person-centred when PATH has been used during EPs' EHCNA meetings.
- To provide a comparison between PATH and current practices in EPs' EHCNA meetings, referred to in this research as traditional meetings.

## **Chapter 2. Literature review**

This chapter begins with defining CYP's participation and pupil voice and critically evaluates key theories, including Fox's (2016) theory relating to CYP's involvement in EP assessments. A range of identified facilitators and barriers to meaningful participation are then identified, leading into a discussion of what is needed to overcome these barriers. Models of Person-Centred Planning (PCP) are introduced, with the use of these approaches within education critically evaluated. Last, gaps in the research are identified and the current research study is presented.

### **2.1 Defining Pupil Voice and Participation**

A plethora of terminology and phrases have been used in the fields of inclusion, children's rights and participation to capture pupil involvement. These include, but are not exclusive to, "hearing" or "listening to CYP"; "pupil/student/child views"; "voice of the child"; "CYP participation" and "CYP consultations" (e.g., Clark et al., 2005, Norwich & Kelly, 2004). For simplicity, three terms: "pupil voice", "pupil's/child's views" and "participation" will be used in this thesis. These terms reflect the language used in the models presented below (Section 2.2) and in previous research conducted by EPs (e.g., Bristow, 2013). However, these terms have no singular agreed definition and apparently consist of multi-layered concepts consisting of different processes. The theories and definitions presented below have been useful for conceptualising and operationalising participation and pupil voice in this research.

Fielding (2008) defined "pupil voice" as the practice of "*listening purposefully and respectfully to young people in the context of formal schooling*" (p.2). This requires not only that children are able to express their views, but that those views are listened to when they are expressed (Howells, 2021). This places a responsibility on adults to actively listen and provide opportunities for students to have a say in decisions that affect them at school (Whitty & Wisby, 2007). "Pupil voice" can also refer to the collection of methods or activities through which students are given opportunities to express their views and ideas (Rudd et al., 2007). This includes initiatives such as student councils, students on interviewing panels, student feedback surveys, and student-led learning walks (Fielding, 2004). However, Kay (2019) criticised the term "pupil voice", as "voice" implies CYP can vocalise their perspectives, thereby excluding children with limited speech from pupil voice practices. Further, Lundy (2007) critiqued notions of "pupil voice" as just a phrase commonly used to abbreviate the rights laid down in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), and that such phrases have the potential to diminish Article 12's impact as they provide an imperfect summary of the full extent of the obligation. However, in line with language used commonly in professional practice and literature, in this research, pupil voice is defined as CYP having the opportunity to express their views in any method appropriate to the child (e.g., vocally or written), with adults listening to children when they do.

Intertwined with the concept of "pupil voice" is the notion of "participation". Dickens et al. (2004) suggests that "participation" is not just an alternative to "pupil voice", but rather refers to the additional process of change that results from listening to a child/young person's views. Similarly, Kay (2019) argues that "participation" suggests an enhanced sense of agency in decision-making, whilst Treseder (1997) suggests that participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their life, and this leads to change. Therefore, participation refers to the process of taking part in decision-making processes which affect one's life. As participation is an umbrella term, it can refer to different processes and degrees of pupil involvement in school activities, as referred to by Hart's (1992) ladder of participation (Figure 2). Thus, in this research, participation refers to the processes of including children in decision-making, ensuring that their views and ideas can affect change about their lives, and ensuring that opportunities are in place to enable participation.

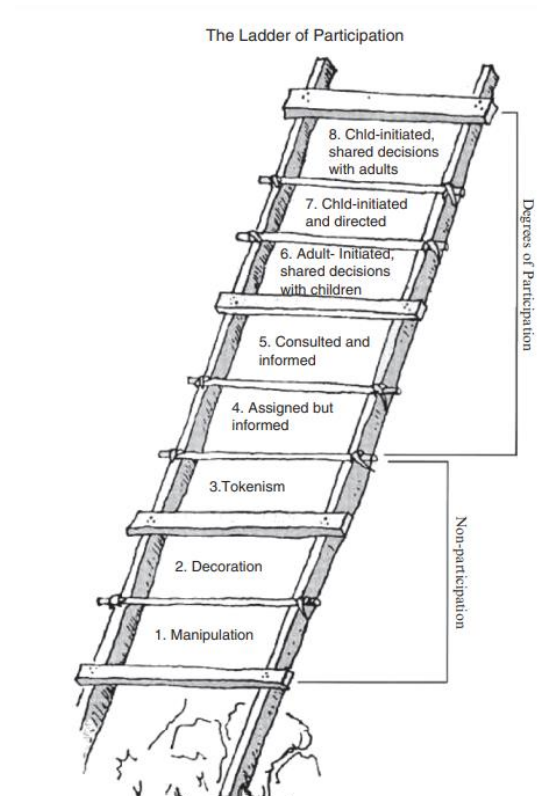
## 2.2 Models of Pupil Participation

### 2.2.1 Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation

Participation models have explored the various degrees to which children may participate in decision-making. Arguably, the most influential of these is Hart's (1992) model, which uses a ladder metaphor to explore various 'rungs' of children's participation (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation*



Note. From *The Ladder of Participation* [picture], by Hart, 2008.

<http://tiny.cc/m748zz>

Hart (1992) suggested that the lowest rungs represent '*manipulation*', where children do or say what the adults suggest, and '*decoration*', where children take part in events to boost the adult's cause. In both cases, children have little understanding of the issues and are only included to support the adult's agenda. Third is '*tokenism*', where children are asked to give their views but have no choice regarding the issue being discussed or how to express their views. Hart suggested that these lower rungs of the ladder reflect models of non-participation as children have no real role in decision-making. At the fourth, fifth and sixth rungs, adults have the initial ideas for the projects, but children take increasing amounts of responsibility in planning and implementing the projects and children's views are given increasing weight in decision-making. Finally, at the seventh and eighth rungs, children have the initial ideas and set the projects up, with adults available to support (seventh rung) or invited to share their ideas (eighth rung). This model has reportedly helped practitioners working with children to recognise and eliminate false participation from their practice (Shier, 2001) and has helped various professionals and institutions rethink how they can involve young people (Hart, 2008). Hart's ladder has also been used to guide EP research, particularly within participatory

research designs, such as Pearson and Howe's (2017) project which involved primary school pupils in the re-development of their school playground. Therefore, application of this model in practice has benefited CYP's active involvement and supported adults to re-think how they afford CYP opportunities for participation.

However, Hart (2008) has critiqued his own model and reflected on the ladder's use since 1992. Hart acknowledged that the model only addresses a narrow range of participation activities (e.g., involvement in projects), as opposed to informal participation opportunities which regularly occur in children's everyday life and more readily reflect school experiences. This limits the model's applicability to other situations where children could participate, such as in meetings. Further, the term 'levels' implies that children progress through the levels as their competence grows (e.g., Reddy & Ratna, 2002). Jensen (2000) suggests that the rungs should be described as different *forms* rather than different *levels* of participation. This would ensure that emphasis is placed on the degree to which adults enable participation, rather than onus being placed on the child to develop. Further, the ladder was developed from a Western perspective of participation, with an emphasis on individual agency that may be inappropriate when applied to other cultures, especially those who value community responsibility (Hart, 2008). This Western bias should be considered when working with families from other cultures to both promote the child's rights and maintain the integrity of these cultures. Therefore, some caution should be taken when applying this model in broader school contexts.

### **2.2.2. Alternative Models**

Shier (2001) offered an alternative five-level model of participation, influenced by Hart's (1992) model and Shier's own work with CYP (Table 1). Addressing the critique that Hart's model is too narrowly focused, Shier's model can be applied to any form of participation in decision-making, not just projects. The model is intended to be an additional tool for practitioners to explore participation processes and therefore does not describe any non-participatory practices like Hart's model. Shier (2001) suggested that at each level of participation, adults may show one of three stages of commitment: '*opening*' (the adult is ready to start operating at this level), '*opportunities*' (the adult has the resources and skills to operate at this level), and '*obligations*' (it becomes the policy that staff should operate at this level). Questions are given to prompt reflections on practice and serve as a tool for practitioners to recognise their position towards participation. This arguably makes Shier's model more useful than Hart's original model when considering how practitioners can facilitate pupil participation in meetings. Additionally, Fielding (2004) reduced Hart's model down further and suggested that in schools, there are only four levels of participation (Table 1). This model perhaps more readily reflects class-based activities and suggests the next step to increase participation in practitioners' own classrooms.

**Table 1***Levels of Participation Proposed in Shier's (2001) Model and Fielding's (2004) Model*

Level	Shier's (2001) model		Fielding's (2004) model	
	<i>Label</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Label</i>	<i>Description</i>
1.	Children are listened to.	Children are listened to with care and attention when they take it upon themselves to express a view.	Students as data sources.	The teachers collect information about their students' needs and performance to aid teaching.
2.	Children are supported in expressing their views.	Adults working with children take positive action to support and enable children to express their views and to overcome barriers that may be preventing them from doing so.	Students as active respondents.	Students give feedback about lessons and school.
3.	Children's views are taken into account.	Children's views have an influence on decision-making. This level is recognised by Shier to be the minimum level of participation according to Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989).	Students as co-researchers.	Students are actively involved in projects that are significant to them.
4.	Children are involved in decision-making processes.	Children participate at the stage where decisions are actually made.	Students as researchers.	Students identify an issue to be investigated and take the lead on research with staff support.
5.	Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.	Adults make a commitment to share their power and allow children to make final decisions.		

However, these models could be critiqued for providing a description of children's involvement only in relation to adults' behaviour (i.e., they were listened to by adults), rather than describing the child's participatory behaviour. This framing is helpful as it places responsibility on adults to have an active role in supporting children's participation, however it also makes it challenging for researchers to assess the extent of a child's participation. Research has also suggested that sometimes children do not want to participate (e.g., Wells et al., 2012), which these models of participation do not account for. Research from Whitney-Thomas et al. (1998) offers a useful way to conceptualise participation in meetings which focuses on the child's behaviour. In their study of 10 transition meetings, the researchers analysed observation and interview data with students, parents and meeting facilitators, to conclude that children had shown one of four 'types' of pupil participation. These included; 'active' (e.g., students were contributing to the conversation and responding to

questions), 'controlling' (e.g., students changed the course of the conversation, disagreed with or corrected others), 'limited' (e.g., student lost attention, displayed escape behaviours, or gave brief non-committal answers), and 'absent' (e.g., student left or was not in the meeting). This classification system is helpful for understanding students' role in participation in meetings.

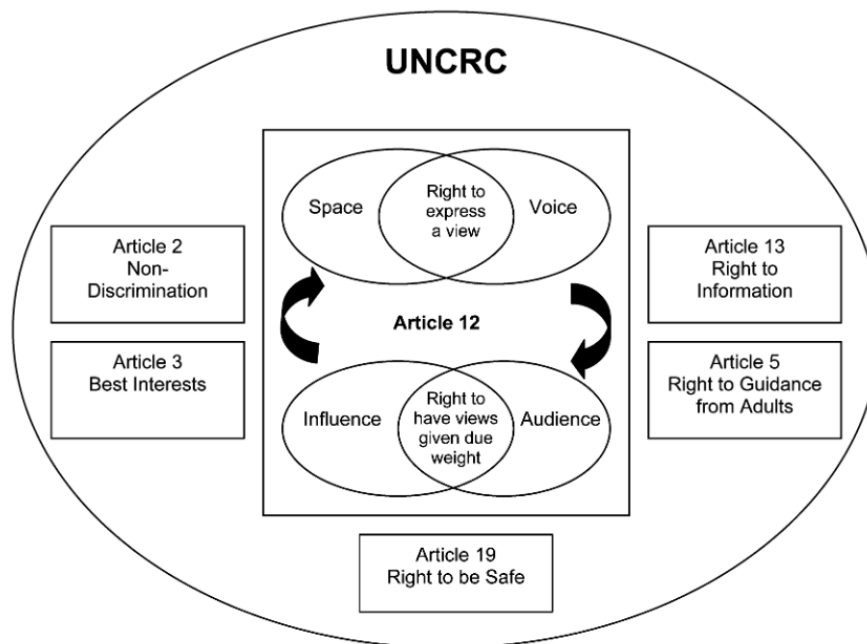
When the above models are considered alongside research on children's participation in EHCNAs, it could be argued that children are not being supported to participate at a higher 'rung' or 'level' during their assessments. In many cases, children's participation may be 'tokenistic' (Hart, 1992). Research suggests that children are being asked to give their views during the assessment, however, these views rarely have an impact on decision-making (i.e. are not included in the EHCP), and children are not asked how they would like to be involved (e.g., Adams et al., 2017; Palikara et al., 2018). This is reflective of level two of Shier's five-level model and of Fielding's four-level model. However, it should be recognised that these models (particularly Hart's (1992) and Fielding's (2004) models) generally apply to participation within projects, where children could initiate and lead the project themselves. However, CYP can only submit their own request for an EHCNA when they reach the age of 16 (CoP; DfE & DHSC, 2015), meaning the process is inherently driven by adults. To explore how children could be supported to participate in EHCNAs, Fox (2016) proposes an alternative model.

### **2.2.3 Lundy's (2007) Model for Conceptualising Article 12**

Lundy (2007) provided a critique of models of participation and conceptualisations of "pupil voice", claiming that these terms detract from the obligations set out in Article 12. Indeed, Lundy (2007) suggests that Article 12 is one of the most widely cited, yet commonly misunderstood, of all the provisions of the UNCRC. Widely used "cosy" terms such as "pupil voice" and "participation" (Roche, 1999) depict that children's participation is a goal to be aimed for, based on the goodwill of adults, and portrayed as an option. However, Lundy (2007) argues that the active involvement of children in decision-making needs to be more clearly depicted as described in Article 12; as a legal imperative. Thus, while there is widespread support for the practice of consulting with students, this may be based on an understanding of children's rights which does not always match up to Article 12. Lundy (2007) has proposed a model to aid understanding of Article 12 which attempts to capture more fully the extent of the UK's legal obligations to children in terms of inclusion in decision-making (Figure 3). Those seeking to include children in decision-making need to consider all four elements of the provision in Article 12:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view.
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views.
- Audience: Their view must be listened to.
- Influence: Their view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

**Figure 3**  
*Lundy's (2007) Model for Conceptualising Article 12*



*Note.* From *Conceptualising Article 12* [picture], by Lundy, 2007.

[https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/01411920701657033?saml\\_referrer](https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/01411920701657033?saml_referrer)

The model acknowledges that Article 12 has a chronology; the first stage is ensuring the child's right to express their views, followed by ensuring that the child's views are given due weight. The model also considers that Article 12 can only be understood fully when it is considered in the light of other relevant UNCRC provisions, such as Article 5 (right to guidance) and Article 13 (right to seek, receive and impart information). In contrast to other models which depict varying degrees or 'levels' of participation (e.g. Shier's 2001 model), this model states what conditions need to be in place to ensure children's right to meaningful engagement in decision-making is met. This makes it a useful model when considering how we can ensure that children are included in the EHCNA. For example, ensuring that there is an opportunity for involvement or a space for the child to express their views during the EHCNA and ensuring that their views are listened to and taken seriously, such as having influence over decisions around outcomes and provision. This model also fits with the requirements laid down in the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) around including the child in decision-making and the provision set out to support this, such as ensuring that adequate information is provided to the CYP and their family and time is dedicated to collecting their views.

#### **2.2.4 Fox's (2016) Model of Participation in EHC Needs Assessments**

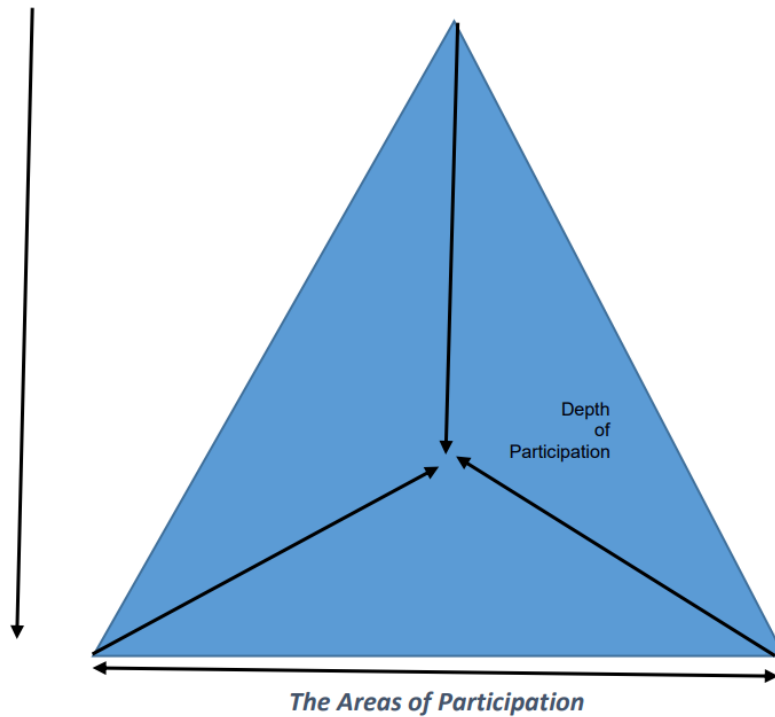
Fox (2016) devised a model to support EPs to develop their participatory practices in EHCNAs. After analysing 21 TEP SPA reports, Fox (2016) conceptualised a pyramid of participation which contained three dimensions (Figure 4). Fox also took influence from Hart's (1992) ladder of participation and reframed the ladder to make it applicable to EPs' EHCNAs.



**Figure 4**

Fox (2016) *Pyramid of Participation* (p. 61)

*The Degree of Participation*



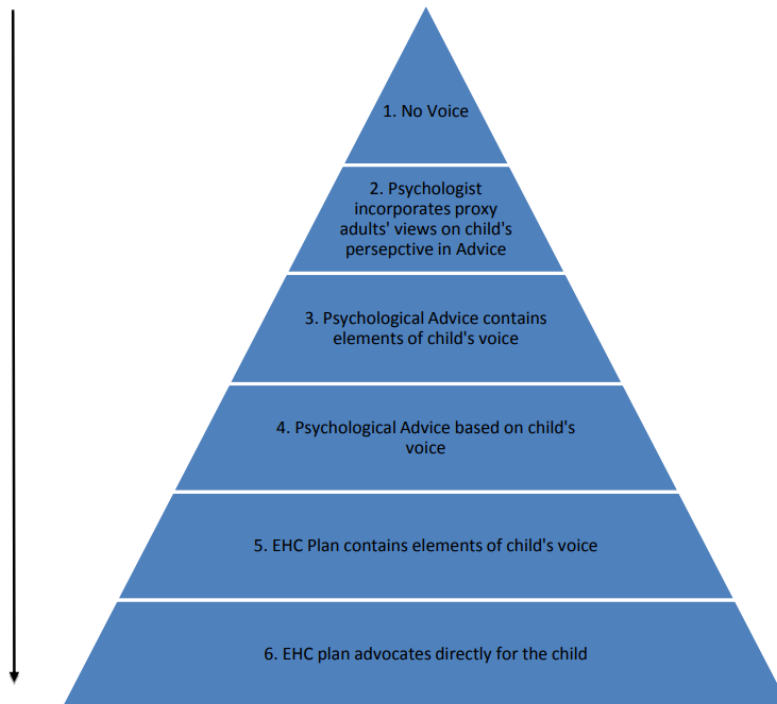
Note. From *The Pyramid of Participation* [picture], by Fox, 2016.

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The first dimension, *degree* of participation, is represented by moving vertically down the pyramid. This dimension indicates the degree of importance given to the CYP's views and whether they are represented in the SPA (Figure 5). Levels 1 and 2 equate to the CYP not being involved, with levels 3-6 indicating increasing involvement, finally culminating in level 6 where the resultant EHCP directly advocates for the CYP.

**Figure 5**

*Fox (2016) Degree of Participation (p. 62)*



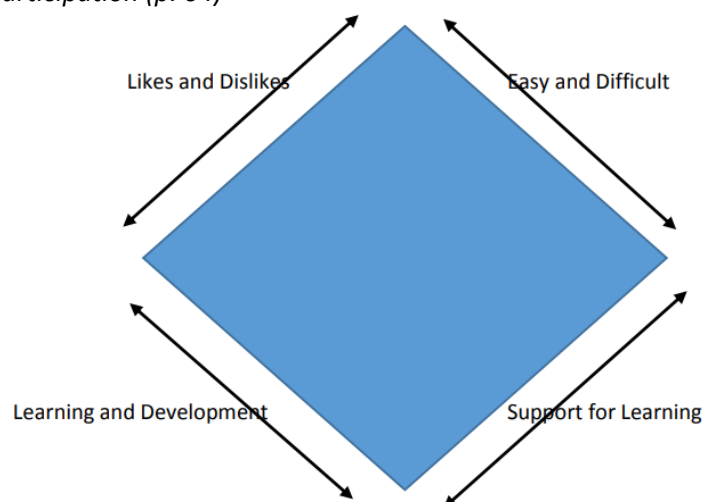
*Note.* From *The Degree of Participation* [picture], by Fox, 2016.

[https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/40e75afb6b231aeaa3c0787da157f91dd41cac4b9ca293ef7cb\\_a5883c18a3b43/246127/Educational%20Psychology%20Research%20and%20Practice%202016%2012%20Fox.pdf](https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/40e75afb6b231aeaa3c0787da157f91dd41cac4b9ca293ef7cb_a5883c18a3b43/246127/Educational%20Psychology%20Research%20and%20Practice%202016%2012%20Fox.pdf)

Secondly, *areas* of participation, comprises the horizontal dimension (Figure 6). This dimension concerns the areas in which EPs gather information, such as likes and dislikes. Therefore, opposite to Hart's (1992) ladder, movement in the pyramid is conceptualised as downwards, towards a wider base and solid foundation for understanding the CYP. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the areas in which the child could potentially have a voice in the EHCNA. Area 1 (likes/dislikes in school) is a common focus of EP views gathering and equates to a lower degree of participation. Area 2 (easy/difficult at school) may relate to progress and what is working well for them. Area 3 (learning and development) explores what the child is learning and what areas they are getting support in. Area 4 (support for learning) explores what support would help the CYP in the future. EPs can increase children's participation by moving away from surface-level discussions of likes/dislikes, towards the child's learning and how they can be supported. To achieve Area 4, the child would need to be supported with additional information to know what is available beyond current provision.

**Figure 6**

*Fox (2016) Areas of Participation (p. 64)*



*Note.* From *Areas of Participation* [picture], by Fox, 2016.

<https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/40e75afb6b231aeaa3c0787da157f91dd41cac4b9ca293ef7cb a5883c18a3b43/246127/Educational%20Psychology%20Research%20and%20Practice%202016%2012%20Fox.pdf>

Thirdly, *depth* of participation, is represented as movement towards the centre of the pyramid. This indicates the range of strategies/techniques EPs can use to develop a deeper understanding of the child's views. Strategies and techniques can range from 'surface depth' (e.g., observation), 'social depth' (e.g., informal, unstructured conversations with the child about likes/dislikes), 'solution depth' (e.g., structured conversation using solution-focused or problem-solving techniques) and 'psychological depth' (e.g., using creative techniques such as Personal Construct Psychology or projective approaches to get a deeper understanding of the child's inner world and aspects of the situation).

Fox (2016) suggests that EPs can improve participation by adapting their practice to move along all three dimensions. This would address concerns expressed by professionals that whilst children's views may be sought in the EHCNA, they are not always acted upon, meaning that gaining CYP's views can feel tokenistic (Sales & Vincent, 2018). LAs have also been criticised for encouraging a 'tick-list culture' (Bradwell, 2019), where pupil views are only gathered to show that the LA has fulfilled their duty to do so. EPs should move away from surface-level discussions aiming to elicit information from Area 1 only, to using a range of techniques associated with psychological depth of discussions to ensure the child can express their views about a range of topics. By giving attention to all dimensions of participation, the views of CYP may be represented more fully within the SPA. This thesis has used this model as a theoretical framework to support the development of the research materials and data collection, so that conclusions can be made on the extent to which children participate and their views are included in EHCPs. However, it should also be recognised that this model was devised following analysis of reports for children aged 2-12 and predominantly male (81%). Participation practices may have been different for older YP and for females/non-binary YP. However, this is a useful framework for thinking about participation in EHCNAs.

## **2.3 Pupil Participation in Statutory Assessments- Enablers and Barriers**

### **2.3.1. Enablers for Successful Participation**

Research has provided examples of successful participation and identified ways that EPs have ascertained pupil views for the EHCNA. With the aim of exploring potential enablers and barriers to including CYP, Howells (2021) conducted interviews with six EPs and reported four factors which EPs felt enabled participation of children in the EHCNA. These included: openness (CYP understand the EHCNA process/EP role and are prepared in advance); facilitating child communication (e.g., use of appropriate tools and preferred methods of communication); professional skills (e.g., reflecting on how to involve CYP, demonstrating curiosity and ‘attunement’); and practicalities (e.g., having sufficient time to work with CYP, a carefully timed visit, in an environment that the CYP feels safe in). Regarding systemic enablers, research suggests that when professionals have an existing relationship with the CYP and their family prior to the EHCNA, this can support CYP’s involvement in the process (Redwood, 2015). This could be because professionals knowing the child’s needs and the family’s case well before has also been found to support collaboration (Thom et al., 2015). This suggests that there are a range of professional skills and values as well as supportive system factors which can enable successful participation in the EHCNA.

Professional’s ability to use a range of appropriate tools to facilitate communication and their skills working with CYP have consistently been found to be enabling factors of participation. Research found that EPs use up to 30 different approaches/tools with children during EHCNAs to gather views, ranging from informal (e.g., puppets, play) to formal approaches (e.g., standardised assessment), and methods differ depending on the child’s age (Howells, 2021). After conducting a focus group of six EPs to ascertain their methods for collecting and reporting pupil views, Harding and Atkinson (2009) also reported that EPs used various approaches, including discussion-based methods (e.g., direct questioning), therapeutic approaches (e.g., scaling activities), and indirect methods (e.g., asking familiar adults about the child’s preferences). Further, Fox’s (2016) analysis of 21 TEP SPAs, found that TEPs tried to capture the child’s voice during the EHCNA through discussions with the child (structured or unstructured), observations, drawings, Personal Construct Psychology or projective techniques. TEPs ascertained the child’s views about a range of topics, including likes/dislikes, progress in school and what they find easy/difficult, their current support for their learning, and what would help in the future. This indicates that EPs have various ways of eliciting pupil views for the EHCNA. Smillie and Newton (2020) provided an analysis of EPs’ methods of recording and reporting pupils’ views and the challenges and benefits for EPs when representing CYP’s views in their reports. Responses of EPs in Wales to questionnaires (n= 73) and interviews (n=8) were analysed using thematic analysis. They found that most participants used discussion-based methods (69 responses), asked parents/carers (65), and used solution-focused approaches (65), self-report scales (54), therapeutic approaches (54), and person-centred planning (51). It was felt by EPs that using a range of strategies to enable CYP to give their views was beneficial, and that gathering the CYP’s views was beneficial for their assessment, including for more successful outcomes. The five children interviewed in Rao’s (2020) doctoral research exploring children’s and professionals’ views on CYP’s involvement in the EHCNA valued when familiar adults had engaged them in talking about their views and facilitated the conversation by encouraging them to express themselves through creative methods, including drawing and crafts.

Other professional skills have also been found to be important, including use of attunement and interpersonal skills when co-constructing SPA with a CYP, e.g. listening carefully and being patient (Alrai, 2016). The SENCOs interviewed in Rao’s (2020) research also highlighted the importance of using child-centred skills, such as using child-friendly language, and the importance of the quality of the relationship with the child to facilitate involvement. YP have also expressed that professionals’

behaviour in the meetings have helped them to express their views. All four CYP in Sales and Vincent's (2018) research into parent, CYP, and professionals' views on the EHCNA in two LAs in the Midlands, felt that they had received help at school to give their views and two expressed liking being given choices about aspects of the plan. In addition, the five children in Rao's (2020) research reported that they had appreciated having some control over aspects of their involvement in the EHCNA, such as choosing the seating arrangement in the meeting and choosing the time and place to share their views with their teacher. The presence of familiar adults at the meetings was a source of support for the children, and they reported appreciating receiving praise and encouragement from the adults. This suggests that EPs can support participation when they use a range of attunement skills and keep the child at the centre of planning the meetings.

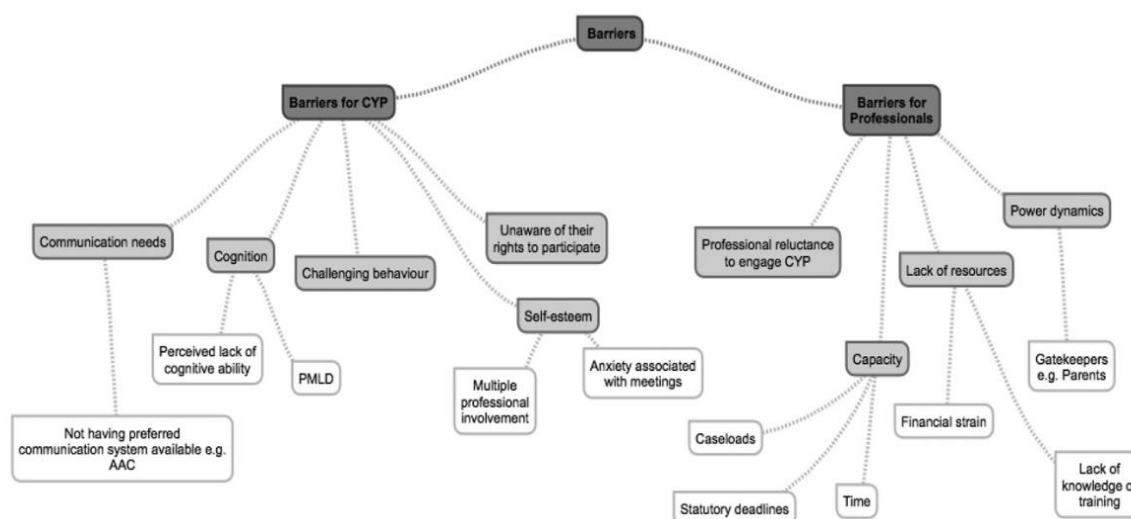
### **2.3.2. Barriers to Successful Participation**

Research has also explored barriers which professionals, parents, and CYP state prevent children from fully participating in statutory processes. One of the most important barriers for participation stated in previous research appears to be that children's involvement in the EHCNA is inconsistent and children are often not aware of their EHCPs (e.g. Franklin et al., 2018; Rao, 2020). The five children that were interviewed in Rao's (2020) research reported that they were not asked their views on requesting an EHCNA and were not involved in making the decision to apply for an EHCP. However, the two children who had attended meetings reported that it was an enjoyable experience and they valued the opportunity to share their views with a wider audience, indicating the benefits of including children in their EHCNA meetings.

In Howells' (2021) research on EP's perceptions of enabling and limiting factors to participation, four barriers were identified: lack of time, powerful non-child voices (i.e. parent's views over-ruling children's voices), lack of information beforehand and child not being prepared. These barriers are all factors relating to the systems around the child and the professional's behaviour/skills, which are factors that the EP could affect. Other research has also identified systems-level barriers to participation, which Sharma (2021) termed '*barriers for professionals*'. Sharma conducted questionnaires and interviews with 36 SEND professionals from LAs and 16 SEND educators from specialist schools in England to explore views around eliciting pupil voice for the EHCNA and Annual Reviews, focussing on the barriers that professionals experience. Barriers included the power dynamics between CYP and professionals, limited resources, and capacity and time restraints (Figure 7). However, Sharma (2021) did not differentiate between professionals when analysing the interview data and therefore it's not known whether different themes relate to different professionals, who may differ in their approach to pupil voice depending on their field and training. However, there are common themes emerging in both Sharma's (2021) and Howells' (2021) research relating to systemic barriers, such as time constraints. In addition, Rao (2020) reported that SENCOs identified that the knowledge and skills relating to the purpose and process of the EHCNA of the adults supporting the child's involvement was key to knowing how to facilitate the child's involvement. Therefore, it is likely that professionals experience multiple systemic and professional barriers preventing them from truly including children's views in their daily work.

**Figure 7**

*Barriers to Eliciting Pupil Views for EHCNAs and Annual Reviews, Identified in Sharma (2021).*



*Note. From The barriers for children and young people and for professionals identified during the semi-structured interview [picture], by Sharma, 2021.*

[https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1467-8578.12386?saml\\_referrer](https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1467-8578.12386?saml_referrer)

Difficulties supporting CYP's communication has also been reported as a barrier within the research. Research has found that only 21% of professionals in EHCNA meetings perceived that they had used a CYP's preferred communication method (Redwood, 2015). This would be in direct violation of the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) which states that professionals should use a variety of appropriate methods to gain pupil views (Section 9.45). Professionals have reported a scarcity of appropriate methods or tools of communication (e.g., Marchant & Jones, 2003), and oftentimes methods may not be appropriate to the child's age or SEN. For instance, Harding and Atkinson (2009) found that the predominant method for gaining pupils' views was direct questioning. However, Gray (2018) cautions that children with SEN such as autism may struggle to express their views when directly asked due to their social communication needs, meaning that the views of children with autism may not be adequately captured. Difficulty finding methods appropriate for the child's age and SEN has been evidenced in research; Adams et al. (2017) found that 30% of parents felt that their children under 5 years old had been listened to, as opposed to 70% of parents or YP aged between 16-25 years old feeling they had been listened to. In addition, research by Smillie and Newton (2020) found that even when a range of strategies are used, children may not want to share personal or sensitive information with the EP, they may be 'disengaged' or 'disillusioned', and the EP may have a challenge representing the CYP's views accurately and sensitively (e.g. if the CYP's views may offend or upset others). EPs should be challenged to explore further ways to gain pupil's views which feel more supportive and can overcome some of these barriers, regardless of their age or SEN, with Harding and Atkinson (2009) suggesting that EPs should try using Personal Construct Psychology approaches and Person-Centred Planning processes to do so.

Young people themselves have also indicated barriers which hinder their participation in decision-making and ability to share their views. Reported barriers include a lack of exposure to prior decision-making situations, being unaware of their right to participate and a lack of accessibility to meetings (e.g., Barnard-Dadds & Conn, 2018). For instance, YP have reported that professionals showed a lack of mindfulness towards their needs during assessments and did not provide appropriate methods to elicit their views (Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). Some YP also reported finding

the format of planning meetings intimidating and scary (Sales & Vincent, 2018) and described feeling shy or anxious about expressing their views during formal meetings (Soar et al., 2005). This suggests that there are still pervasive power dynamics that exist within the adult–child interactions in meetings which reinforce the adult-centric nature of EHCNA meetings (Sharma, 2021). Sharma (2021) suggests that professionals should change their conceptions of these meetings, using Person-Centred Planning approaches, to design meetings that children would feel comfortable to attend and contribute to.

### ***2.3.3. Overcoming the Barriers- What Needs to Change to Promote CYP Involvement?***

The research presented above suggests that despite the legal requirement for participation in decision-making for the EHCNA (DfE & DHSC, 2015), there are many barriers which prevent children from fully participating. These include systemic, professional, relational and child-oriented barriers which have meant that professionals are challenged to effectively include children whilst also meeting statutory expectations associated with EHCNAs (Sharma, 2021). However, identifying these barriers also means that there is scope for finding approaches to overcome these barriers and enable greater participation in the EHCNA. Howells (2021) reported EPs' suggestions of how the EHCNA could be improved, including: increased time and tools available; preparing children and involving them earlier in the process; involving children in planning and ensuring they are aware of provision options; and developing the statutory assessment process itself. Three of these areas could be addressed by developing professional practice and increasing children's involvement.

To overcome the barriers and improve the EHCNA, a change of approach is required. Whilst the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) clearly espouses a person-centred approach, it is likely that person-centred practices are missing or limited in most EHCNAs (e.g., Palikara et al., 2018). It could be argued that the recommendations outlined in the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) for person-centred practices are too vague to enable successful implementation, and it might be beneficial for EPs conducting assessments to use a more structured PCP approach which has clear guidelines for including the child and their family (Howells, 2021). This may include an approach such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH; Pearpoint et al., 1993). PCP approaches are viewed by EPs as being collaborative and CYP-friendly, using accessible language and a visual approach to support communication (Howells, 2021). Further, PCP approaches help to overcome some of the barriers identified above. For example, a PATH will typically involve preparation of the YP and their family, providing information about the meeting beforehand and gaining the child's preferences so that these can be catered for at the meeting (O'Brien et al., 2010). Therefore, PCP approaches such as PATH could be used to overcome the barriers to participation in EHCNAs.

### **2.4 Person-Centred Planning**

PCP covers a range of approaches which share a set of principles and values (see Appendix A for the theoretical underpinnings of PCP). PCP aims to support individuals and their communities by obtaining people's unique perspectives on their lives and what is important to them, using these views to plan an approach to overcome barriers to inclusion (Murray & Sanderson, 2007). PCP emerged through professional practice in the 1980s, predominantly within the context of Health and Social Care, for the purpose of planning and service delivery for adults and YP with disabilities (Franklin & Sanderson, 2014). The aim of those who developed PCP approaches was to create a way of working that was centred around the individual as opposed to 'service-centred' planning, which focuses on what the service can offer (Franklin & Sanderson, 2014). PCP has been aligned with the social model of disability and the view that an individual with disability has an array of abilities and capacities which should be celebrated, whilst developing their independence should take priority over treatment of their 'deficits' (Thomas, 2013). The individual with a disability has a central role in

creating their plan in partnership with family, friends, community members, and professionals, with their views and aspirations influencing the planning process. As O'Brien and Lovett (1993) state, PCP approaches involve *"paying attention to people's unique capacities, listening better to what really matters to them and striving to follow through more directly on what we hear"* (p. 482).

Four distinct PCP approaches have emerged through practice, include Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH; Pearpoint et al., 1993), Making Action Plans (MAPS; Forest et al., 1996), Personal Futures Planning (Mount, 1987) and Essential Lifestyle Planning (ELP; Smull & Sanderson, 2005). It is important to note that: *"Although different, each planning style is based on the same principles: all start with who the person is and end with specific actions to be taken"* (Kilbane & Sanderson 2004, p. 19). However, PCP seems to lack a single agreed definition, making it challenging to know if one is 'doing' PCP and to evaluate the effectiveness of PCP approaches (Howells, 2021).

PCP approaches have been used increasingly with students with SEN, particularly secondary school students, as a collaborative approach for developing a personalised plan for the YP (Michaels & Ferrara, 2005). The process enables relevant information for developing long-term goals and objectives to be identified and for the YP's aspirations to be acknowledged, enabling actions and strategies to be agreed which focus directly on the YP's needs and goals. The discussions in PCP meetings are thought to be enriched by the contribution of different perspectives, including those of the CYP, their friends, school staff, family members and any relevant external agencies. Franklin and Sanderson (2014) argued that the advantage of using PCP within education is that pupils can use their voice to transform their experience of school by identifying what is important to them and what support works well. The benefits that come with active participation, such as enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence (Jelly et al., 2012), are cited as further advantages of PCP. PCP may also be suitable for YP who experience difficulties with communication. For example, the use of visuals in PCP meetings (Franklin & Sanderson, 2014) could be particularly helpful for CYP with autism. Therefore, PCP can be helpful for supporting students in school and enabling participation in decision-making.

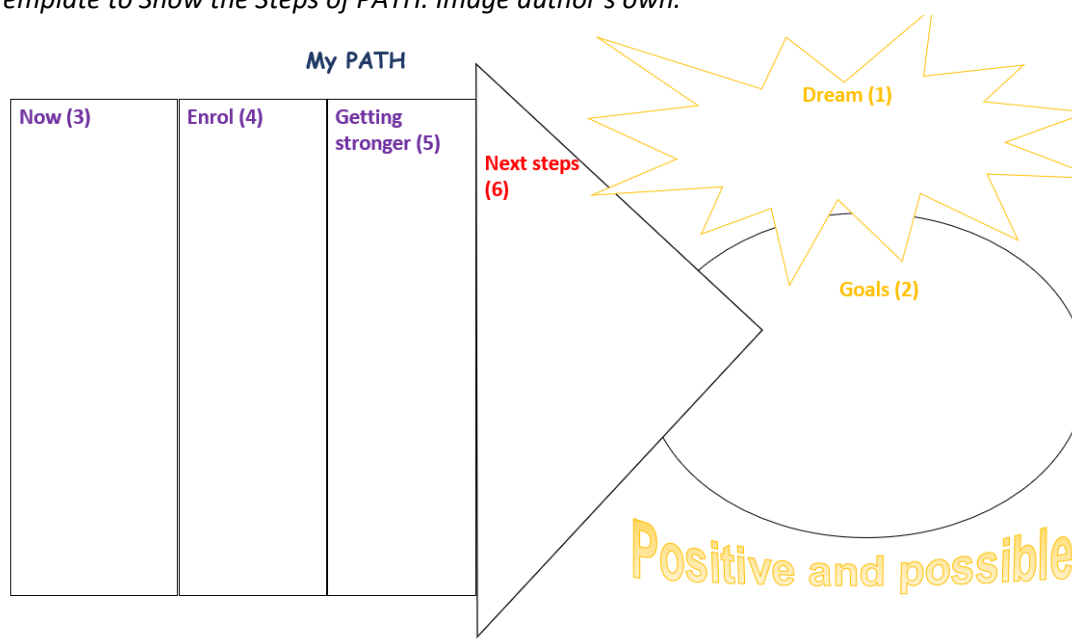
#### **2.4.1. Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope**

PATH is a PCP approach which focuses on a collaborative, team approach to future planning (Franklin & Sanderson, 2014). During a PATH meeting, the child is purposefully included, with their views central to the process. The discussion is guided by a process facilitator and recorded visually by a graphic facilitator (O'Brien et al., 2010). The process begins with visioning activities with the circle of support to identify the desired dreams and aspirations for the CYP (Figure 8). Once the dream has been identified, short-term goals are agreed and a plan is made to support the CYP to achieve those goals (O'Brien et al., 2010). PATH also ensures that there is commitment to support the CYP with their plan by gathering the child's natural support figures and 'enrolling' those present to state their commitment to the PATH (O'Brien et al., 2010) (see Section 4.6.1 for more details). PATH is being increasingly used by EPs during the EHCNA process to support CYP participation in the EHCNA and to identify strengths, areas to develop, short-term and long-term goals, and plan provision and actions (e.g., Bristow, 2013).



**Figure 8**

*A Template to Show the Steps of PATH. Image author's own.*



## **2.5 Evidence-Base for PCP Approaches and PATH**

Due to its development through practice, the lack of agreed single definition and the focus of PCP practitioners on implementation, it has been challenging to conduct objective research (O'Brien & O'Brien, 2000). Therefore, the evidence-base for the effectiveness of PCP approaches in education settings is still emerging and there is little research exploring the use of PCP within statutory processes. This section aimed to review the existing research, focusing on exploring why PCP approaches could be useful for supporting pupil participation and lead to positive outcomes following statutory processes. This review will be presented in three sections: using PCP with CYP to support participation, using PATH with CYP, and using PCP in statutory processes.

### ***2.5.1. Using PCP with CYP to Support Participation***

Research has explored the extent to which PCP approaches can enhance participation practices. In a review of 15 research articles on the effectiveness of PCP with adults and children, Claes et al. (2010) reported positive accounts of the planning process, including greater involvement of the CYP and their family, improved communication and teamwork, incorporation of the individual's wishes in written goals, development of a wider vision and increased parental participation in meetings. Exploring views on participation specifically, White and Rae (2015) explored Person-Centred Reviews (PCRs) with 14 CYP with a range of SEN at two transition points (Years 6 and 9). Interviews with the CYP and their parents/carers and scaling questionnaires were completed one week before and one week after the PCRs. Parents and CYP reported feeling listened to, involved, important and equal to professionals. This research indicates enjoyment and engagement in PCP meetings, and importantly, that the PCP meetings facilitated children's right to be listened to and have a say in decision-making (UNCRC; UN, 1989). As well as subjectively feeling more involved, research also suggests that PCP meetings achieve higher student attendance than standard meetings. Kaehne and Beyer (2014) investigated 44 PCRs for YP with intellectual disabilities from a special school in one LA, focusing on attendance at the meeting and what was discussed. They reported that more stakeholders were present at the meeting in comparison with traditional meetings and a higher than usual attendance from YP (83%) and their parents (68%). Attendance of CYP is important for increasing the likelihood that person-centred planning will occur and possibility of having the CYP's views heard. Kaehne and

Beyer (2014) also found that the review documentation contained more accessible language, which is important for enabling CYP to access information to make informed decisions (Howarth, 2016). This suggests that PCP approaches can be useful for supporting access and participation in decision-making meetings.

However, some research has found limited long-term positive outcomes for CYP and potential shortcoming of PCP meetings. For example, Claes et al. (2010) argued that there is little evidence that PCP results in improved accessibility of person-centred plans for service users. Further, even when a plan was agreed, there was limited support options for carrying out the plan. It can be hard to align the flexible, individualised plans generated at PCP meetings with the traditional, 'all-in-one' packages provided by key services (Claes et al., 2010). However, many of the studies Claes et al. (2010) reviewed were in relation to adult service-users, meaning that the accessibility and support for plans may be different for CYP being supported within an education setting with consistent staff. As well as difficulties implementing the follow-up, research has found that this approach does not always fit the needs of the stakeholders. In a small-scale study that monitored outcomes over time, Corrigan (2014) explored PCP transition/reintegration meetings for six pupils who had been excluded from school. Corrigan (2014) found that staff from one school thought the process was less effective, took up more time and did not focus enough on the pupils' difficulties compared to traditional meetings. Corrigan concluded that PCP may be a positive experience in schools with an inclusive culture but may be less helpful in schools where the ethos does not 'fit' with PCP approaches. Further, Claes et al. (2010) recognised that at times, circles of support (which are a requirement of PCP) were difficult to establish, recognising that those with disabilities may have fewer relationships and may experience more social isolation. Claes et al. (2010) reported that whilst the meetings were called 'person-centred', there were times when the individual and/or their families were not present, when participants did not understand the meeting process, and when parents and/or professionals steered the process, admonishing that it would be tokenistic to call these meetings person-centred. Caution should be taken to ensure that everyone attending a PCP meeting is onboard with the key values of person-centred practice, that the plans are followed-up and that the CYP remains at the centre of the process to ensure positive outcomes are achieved.

Potential barriers have been reported which limited CYP's access to PCP approaches. For example, Claes et al.'s (2010) review indicate that people with communication difficulties, challenging behaviour, or severe intellectual disability are often excluded from PCP processes. Research by Whitney-Thomas et al. (1998) found a range of factors that either supported or hindered participation during 10 transition meetings using Whole Life Planning. By observing the meetings and conducting interviews with students, parents and meeting facilitators, they found that student participation varied from active to non-existent between meetings. Factors such as student's communication style, group size, the level of abstract information discussed, concerns expressed by others, and the behaviours of others all influenced the degree to which CYP could participate. Studies have specifically found that this approach may not be suitable for students with social communication difficulties. Both Wells et al. (2012) and Barnard-Dadds and Conn (2018) explored PCP meetings for pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)/Asperger's Syndrome and found whilst the pupils were present, they did not participate in the meeting. The contribution of the YP in Barnard-Dadds and Conn's study was minimal throughout, despite encouragement and prompting by adults and five hours of individual preparation sessions beforehand. The researchers hypothesised that the social conditions of the meeting (e.g., face-to-face) might be a barrier given the CYP's diagnosis of Aspergers, leading the researchers to question the suitability of PCP meetings for CYP with autism. However, both studies explored PCP meetings for only one student. These findings would be impossible to generalise to all CYP with a diagnosis of autism due to the wide-ranging nature of the condition. This suggests that using PCP approaches alone may not be enough to enable participation but that professional skills still need to be applied to ensure that CYP can be

included. There may also need to be a case-by-case analysis as to whether PCP is appropriate for CYP.

The research presented here suggests that whilst PCP processes can enhance student participation, there are many factors which influence the extent to which CYP are enabled to participate which need to be considered when planning a PCP meeting. In addition, whilst the research has begun to explore the impact of PCP, these studies have largely been conducted with small samples which have been predominantly White British (e.g., White & Rae, 2015), placing restrictions on the generalisability of findings. Where there has been inclusion of other ethnic groups (e.g., Whitney-Thomas et al., 1998), diversity factors have not been analysed, so the impact of culture on the outcomes of PCP processes is not known. Further, in most studies, longer-term impact was not measured, such as in White and Rae's (2015) research where data were collected one week after the PCRs. Additionally, in most studies, the PCP meetings were conducted by the same facilitator, meaning that the findings may be reflective of that individual's skills as a facilitator rather than PCR processes. Therefore, additional research addressing these limitations needs to be conducted to draw conclusions about the impact of PCP. This thesis intends to address some of these limitations, including; exploring the impact of the meeting on the EHCNA processes, recruiting a diverse sample of CYP, and utilising multiple meeting facilitators.

### **2.5.2. Using PATH with CYP**

Several studies have explored the use of PATH with children in education settings and found that PATH can lead to positive education outcomes. To explore the impact of PATH with secondary-aged students attending Pupil Referral Units (PRU) or Alternative Provisions (AP), Bristow (2013) conducted a study of nine PATHs facilitated by EPs. PATH meetings were explored using semi-structured interviews 3-6 weeks after the PATH meeting to gather the views of the students ( $N=6$ ), parents ( $n=6$ ), EPs ( $n=3$ ), school staff ( $n=13$ ) and other professionals ( $n=6$ ). It was found that some students, parents and school staff reported enhanced sense of belonging and improved pupil-parent relationships and parent-school relationships. Students also reported increased confidence and motivation to achieve their goals. These positive outcomes were reported up to six weeks after the PATH meeting, suggesting that PATH may have a lasting influence on student outcomes. Exploring the impact of PATH over a longer period and with students with SEN in mainstream settings, Wood et al. (2019) conducted interviews with three males (aged 11-16) who had undertaken PATHs in the previous six months. The parents and staff member who had facilitated the PATHs were also interviewed. Supporting Bristow's (2013) findings, the participants also reported increased confidence, extra support in school, increased motivation, and a sense of direction. These positive outcomes were seen up to six months after the PATH, adding to the evidence-base for the sustained impact of PATH on students' confidence and motivation.

The research also suggests that PATH can enhance participation in planning processes. For example, Kueneman and Freeze (1997) explored parents' and teachers' views of PATHs they had recently participated in for individual transition planning for 36 students (average age 17.5 years) with 'cognitive and severe physical disability'. During interviews, all parents reported that their ideas had been heard, and 86% thought the same was true for their child. However, the students' views on the process were not gathered, limiting conclusions of YP's perceptions of inclusion in the PATH. In Bristow's (2013) research where student views were gathered, students and parents gave positive feedback of the PATH process, reporting that it felt more inclusive, non-judgemental and child-focused than typical meetings. Parents and students felt they had contributed to the process as equal partners and that their voices were heard. Participants in Wood et al.'s (2019) study also reported that the meeting felt more child-centred and that children were given more control in

decision-making. This indicates that PATH can successfully be used to support participation and inclusion in planning meetings.

Research has attempted to explore which aspects of PATH are particularly helpful. For example, Kueneman and Freeze (1997) reported that 75% of parents and 89% of teachers felt that PATH meetings were better than Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings they had previously attended. They reported that the meeting was focused, the planning progressed from the present to the future in clear steps, the planning was action-oriented, and the roles and responsibilities of the participants were clearly established. Participants felt that the graphic record (a unique and core component of PCP) helped to keep their attention and convey information. Students and parents in both Bristow's (2013) and Wood et al.'s (2019) research also reported that the graphic had been helpful. The EPs and school staff in Bristow (2013)'s research also reported that PATH fits with the LA's agenda and is useful for EP practice as it is time-bound and practical. Therefore, participants are reporting positive experiences of the PATH meeting which align with person-centred practices and EP practice.

Previous research has tended to explore participant's perceptions of PATH meetings (e.g. Bristow, 2013). To date, one study systematically evaluated the quality of PATHs and demonstrated measurable outcomes of PATH meetings. Veneziano-Lemos (2015) conducted a controlled trial study exploring PATHs in transition planning for 20 YP aged 16-21. The research assessed the effectiveness of PATH using quantitative measures, including 'objective' (i.e., compliance with US-based special education regulations) and 'subjective' measures (i.e., parent satisfaction with the plan and perception of overall quality of the meeting) for delivering independent living, employment, and lifelong learning skills. A convenience sample comprising of 10 experimental (PATH+IEP) and 10 control (IEP-only) participants was used, recruited from one school, all with intellectual disabilities. They found that the PATH group showed greater pre-test/post-test gains compared to the control group regarding compliance with regulations for post-secondary education planning and parent-perceived quality of planning regarding independent living and employment skills. They also found statistically significant increases between pre-test and post-test scores for overall compliance with regulations and all three areas of transition planning on the parent-perception measures. The findings provide empirical evidence that PATH can be used to improve the quality of transition planning.

However, the research also identified possible barriers to successful PATHs. Participants in Wood et al.'s (2019) study reported barriers including; not knowing the child well enough, lack of time, not having correct participants present, and insufficient preparation for the meeting. These echo some of the wider barriers identified for participation in EHCNAs (e.g. Sharma, 2021), suggesting that it is not just about the specific tool used, but how that approach is used by the professional and wider systemic factors which are harder to control. However, in Wood et al.'s study, all the PATHs were facilitated by the same staff member, making it difficult to determine whether the observed effects were due to the facilitator's personal skills/qualities or due to the PATH process. Two of the reported barriers were only identified by the facilitator, and these may have reflected personal views rather than PATH. The facilitator was not an EP and therefore reflections on the process may have been different if an EP was facilitating. Further, no reason was given for holding the PATH meetings other than for the purpose of collecting research data and so the contrived nature of the PATHs may also have impacted the perceived barriers. However, the participants in Bristow's (2013) research also reported feeling daunted by the process beforehand and unprepared. They also reported embarrassment at some aspects of the process (e.g., the use of props). Therefore, it is important to consider preparing the meeting participants beforehand and adapting the meeting according to the CYP's preferences to minimise negative experiences.

As well as barriers effecting the running of the meeting itself, Kueneman and Freeze (1997) also found reported shortcomings regarding the implementation of plans after the meeting, with 50% of the parents expressing dissatisfaction. Parents reported a lack of follow-up after the PATH meeting, expressing concern that the school did not communicate with them about plan implementation, that goals established during planning were not acted on, and difficulties with home-school communication. Teachers felt that the goals were not comprehensive enough and that parental goals were sometimes unrealistic. Therefore, although parents and teachers expressed satisfaction with the PATH meeting itself, there was little to no follow-up. Practitioners using PATH therefore need to ensure that due consideration is given to follow-up processes after a PATH meeting to ensure that the positive outcomes shown in the research can be achieved.

Whilst being mindful of these potential shortcomings, Kueneman and Freeze (1997), Bristow (2013) and Wood et al.'s (2019) research demonstrate the potential usefulness of PATH within mainstream and alternative education settings for supporting pupil participation and decision-making in meetings. Participants have reported enjoying many aspects of the PATH meetings, such as finding the graphic useful and the planning process clear and focused. The research also suggest that PATH can lead to positive outcomes for CYP, such as increased motivation and confidence. It has also been suggested that PATHs can be useful for EPs as the process is aligned with the LA's agenda, is time-bound and practical. That these studies have explored views from different stakeholders across multiple PATH meetings, in a context which is applicable to EP practice, adds to the weight of corroborating evidence for the impact of PATH. Further, considered together, the studies examined the impact of PATH from three weeks to six months, showing positive outcomes over time.

Although the research has shown potential benefits of PATH, there are some consistent limitations of previous studies. For example, impact has been primarily measured through participant's reflections on the process using interviews or questionnaires, rather than exploring outcomes-driven data or quantitatively measuring the processes occurring in the meeting, such as how much the child is participating in/contributing to the meeting. The only study to do so has been Veneziano-Lemos's (2015) research, which demonstrated how mixed methods could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of PATH on particular outcome measures. However, this study was US-based, conducted with young adults and looked specifically at adherence to regulations, so has limited applicability to a UK context. Further, some research has been conducted retrospectively (e.g., Wood et al., 2019), and therefore participants may have mis-remembered or forgotten important aspects of the PATH. Additionally, CYP have largely been White British and male, making it difficult to generalise the findings to other groups of students. More Black Caribbean and Irish Travellers pupils have EHC plans (5.7% and 5.4% of pupils respectively) compared to White British pupils (4.1%) in the UK and a significant percentage of those with EHCPs are female (2.2% of girls compared to 5.6% of boys) (National Statistics, 2022). These populations therefore need to be represented in the research, as those from different cultural backgrounds might hold a different worldview on the values and principles underlying PCP (Hart, 2008). Therefore, there are limitations to the current research base which this thesis addresses, adding to the weight of evidence for PATH.

### ***2.5.3. Using PCP in Statutory Processes***

There have been just a handful of studies to explore the use of PCP in statutory SEN processes. Hayes (2004) explored a visual Annual Review (AR) similar to MAPs with a Year 6 child identified as having 'moderate learning difficulties'. All the adults involved rated the review as 'very good' and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) reported that it was more child-centred and relevant to the pupil compared to typical AR meetings. However, this study only included one PCP meeting so caution should be taken when generalising results to other PCP meetings. Nonetheless, the study provides encouraging evidence to suggest that PCP meetings for ARs can be enjoyable and

beneficial. Focusing on YP's perceptions of PCP, Taylor-Brown (2012) gained the views of three boys regarding their annual Statement review meetings. The boys (in Year 9 and attending a Social, Emotional and Mental Health school) reported experiencing a positive meeting that was 'better' than a traditional planning meeting. They enjoyed being able to talk about home and other aspects of their lives during the meetings. However, the research did not explore the views of parents/carers or professionals and did not monitor outcomes or impact over time. Bason (2020) also found that using PCP could be useful for ARs to support transition planning for YP with SEN at post-16 transition. They found that PCP enhanced the involvement of external services that were responsible for post-secondary destinations. Together, there is emerging evidence for the potential usefulness of PCP approaches within statutory processes, such as AR meetings.

## **2.6 The Present Research**

Whilst there is little research investigating the outcomes of PCP approaches in statutory processes, the research outlined above points towards multiple benefits to using PCP approaches in planning meetings with CYP. It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that there may be benefits to using PCP with CYP during EHCNA meetings. However, there are numerous gaps in the literature and limitations of previous research identified in the literature review. This research therefore looks to address some of these gaps and limitations. One of the main gaps in the literature this thesis seeks to address is the lack of quantitative evaluation of the impact of PATH and exploration into the processes occurring during PATH meetings. Due to its very nature as an individualised process (Holburn, 2002) and the lack of an agreed single definition (Howells, 2021), PCP has been difficult for researchers to explore in a systematic way. However, PATH allows for individualisation whilst maintaining a structure that facilitators follow, meaning that the process can be used by different facilitators with some degree of replicability (Veneziano-Lemos, 2015). Veneziano-Lemos' (2015) study has shown that it is possible to systematically evaluate the quality of PATHs and evaluate outcomes in comparison to pre-determined variables. Therefore, this thesis has used both quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the impact of PATH during the EHCNA and the quality of the resulting EHCPs. In addition, previous research has not aimed to compare PATH to EPs' current practice or 'traditional' meeting approaches. In this thesis, PATH meetings are compared to EPs' traditional EHCNA meetings to draw inferences as to whether PATH enhances participation in comparison to EPs' traditional meetings. This hopes to fill a gap in the current research as to whether PATH has any additional benefits beyond current best practice.

To do this, the research utilised mixed methods to gather qualitative and quantitative data to explore participant's perspectives on EPs' PATH and traditional EHCNA meetings, the processes which occurred during the meetings and the quality of the draft EHCP. A questionnaire was given to meeting attendees after the meetings to collect Likert-scale ratings of aspects of the meetings and reflective responses to open-ended questions. A systematic observation of the meetings enabled study of the child and parent's contributions to meetings and the behaviour of adults, offering an addition to our understanding of *how* PATH and traditional meetings may support participation. A document analysis of draft EHCPs has provided additional data on the wider reaching impact of PATH and traditional meetings and their usefulness in the EHCNA. Further, the meetings in this research were facilitated by multiple EPs across three different LAs to ensure that findings can be attributed to meeting types as opposed to the specific facilitator. Meetings took place with children of different ages, SEND and ethnic backgrounds to explore if PATH is an approach that can be used with all children. Combined, this research provides a unique understanding of how PATH can be used by EPs to support participation in statutory processes.

### **Chapter 3. Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity has been described as the researcher’s “position” or “stance” towards and within the research (Creswell, 2013). A reflexive critical realist researcher reflects on their background, culture and personal experiences and how these factors may shape the design of their research, their purposes, how the methods are used, and how they make sense of the data (Maxwell, 2012). In a critical realist worldview, these personal constructs and experiences are treated as real phenomena which influence the research and serve as valuable resources as well as possible sources of bias and distortion (Maxwell, 2012). It is not the intention to reduce all subjectivity to zero, rather to be aware of what we bring to research so that these beliefs and personal motives can be a part of the process of understanding.

Since I bring values and beliefs based on my experiences, a reflexive research journal was kept during research design, data collection and data analysis phases to reflect on my thought process and decision-making during the research activities. I have referred to these journal entries whilst writing this report and interwoven reflections on my position and decision-making throughout (Maxwell, 2012). For instance, my theoretical orientation is clarified in Section 4.1. Where decisions had to be made about the methodology, data analysis, presentation of data and interpretation of findings, I have endeavoured to explain this decision-making process. For example, it has been impossible to present all the data gathered and so choices were made about which data to present, which I explore throughout the Data Analysis section. I also made use of supervision to reflect on my decision-making and my overall positioning towards my research. I have also included a pre-research reflexive account in Box 3 below in which I attempt to position myself for the reader through relating my personal story and motivations.

#### **Box 3.**

##### *Positioning Myself as the Researcher: My Story*

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) currently completing my Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology (DEdPsy). I am currently on placement in a LA in the Southeast of England (one of the LAs included in this research). Being on placement whilst completing the doctoral training course means that I am not directly employed by the LA so can somewhat distance myself from LA practices and I have the protection of university regulations for training requirements, e.g., to use person-centred practices. I am also conscious that I have a dual role as researcher and LA representative when completing EHCNA meetings for statutory casework in the LA. This dual role could have made it challenging at times to separate out my responsibilities for the research, my training requirements and the LA, though this is somewhat mitigated with the actions I took in the ethical consideration section (4.9).

My desire to complete research in this field has been shaped by my previous professional experiences and values. Before starting the Doctorate, I worked in special schools with children with ASD, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties, often with very limited speech. I got to know these children well and built relationships where mutual understanding could develop through the child’s unique communication style. I was disheartened when I moved to an SEN Case Officer role within a LA processing EHCNA applications and developing EHCPs, as a high number of SEN documents stated that children could not express their views and were not included in decision-making processes. The children’s Final EHCPs often did not reflect their views, and parents’ views

were secondary to professionals' views. Through personal experience working with 'non-verbal' children, I believe that every child can communicate preferences, needs and wants, and that the people who know them well could represent these views during an EHCNA. For this reason, I have endeavoured both within my professional practice and previous academic research to use person-centred practices to include children and their families in decision-making processes and to gain children's views.

In my previous role as an Assistant EP, I was introduced to and trained to use PCP approaches and PATH. The Principal EP was keen to establish the use of PATH in EHCNAs for all young people at the Preparing for Adulthood phase of their education to enhance their role in decision-making about planning for their future. Through this work, I developed my skills and passion for PCP and realised that this could be a vehicle through which children and families could be more included in the EHCNA. I am therefore coming to this research with the hope of finding a way to improve parent and child representation and voice within the EHCNA and the Final EHCP.

I am also conscious that as a White British female, I am bringing certain cultural biases to my understanding of participation and children's rights. Hart (2008) cautions that Western perspectives of participation, with an emphasis on individual agency, may not appropriately reflect participation practices in other cultures, especially those who value collective responsibility. I have tried to maintain awareness of this bias when working with families from other cultures to both promote the child's rights and honour these cultures by, for example, monitoring the language I use and giving time for additional discussions of topics that are important to the family.



## **Chapter 4. Methodology**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the philosophical and methodological approach taken to the research. The research questions and design are then presented, followed by a description of the participants and sampling method. Next, the measures are presented, including the development procedure and amendments made following the pilot study. Ethical considerations are then discussed, followed by the data collection procedure, and lastly, the data analysis procedure is presented.

### **4.1 Philosophical Approach**

This research adopts a ‘critical realist’ theoretical perspective to research design and methodology. There are two dominant worldviews or paradigms in research which describe a set of beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and how we gain knowledge of this reality (epistemology), which inform how researchers choose to gain knowledge (Maxwell, 2012). The two main paradigms are *constructionism* (the belief that all knowledge of the world is built from our own construction and there is no ‘objective’ reality) and *positivism or realism* (the belief that there is an ‘objective’ real world independent of our beliefs and perspectives) (Maxwell, 2012). Critical realism offers a middle ground between these two worldviews.

Critical realism acknowledges that people bring their own perspectives and beliefs to their understanding of the world, but argues that this process does not contradict the existence of a real world to which their understanding refers (Maxwell, 2012). Instead, critical realists acknowledge that there is an interaction between people’s perspectives and the real world, and therefore treat individual’s perspectives as equally valid and as ‘real’ as physical objects and processes. Therefore, research adopting a critical realist position aims to gather information from multiple sources and perspectives to understand what is ‘really’ occurring in a particular context (Maxwell, 2012). Fitting with PATH’s person-centred approach, the researcher is interested in understanding participant’s perspectives of participation and their insights into the PATH process. However, the researcher is also interested in what is ‘really’ happening in the meeting; i.e., the children are given the space to contribute their views, they are asked for their opinion, and adults make adjustments to bring children into the discussion. It is by collecting data from these multiple angles that the research endeavours to get a sense of what is *really* happening in EPs’ EHCNA meetings and *how* PATH and traditional meetings may support participation.

### **4.2 Methodological Approach**

The critical realist worldview is commensurate with numerous research methods and with a mixed methods methodology (Smith, 2007). Mixed methods research is a stand-alone methodology with a distinct approach to design, procedure, integrating data and drawing conclusions (Creswell, 2022). Within mixed methods designs, researchers gather both qualitative and quantitative data, integrate or combine these data, and then draw inferences above and beyond what can be achieved from exploring quantitative or qualitative data alone (Creswell, 2022). As the research aims to understand participation in PATH and traditional EP EHCNA meetings, including the views and experiences of individuals participating in these meetings and explore the draft EHCPs, a mixed methods approach has allowed the collection and analysis of data using various methods as befitting the research questions.

### **4.3 Research Questions**

The research explored whether PATH can be used during EPs' EHCNA meetings to enable CYP and parent/carer participation in decision-making and ultimately lead to person-centred EHCPs, as well as provided a comparison between PATH and EPs' traditional meetings. Table 2 details the main research questions and associated sub-questions.

**Table 2**

*Research Questions and Corresponding Data Collection Method.*

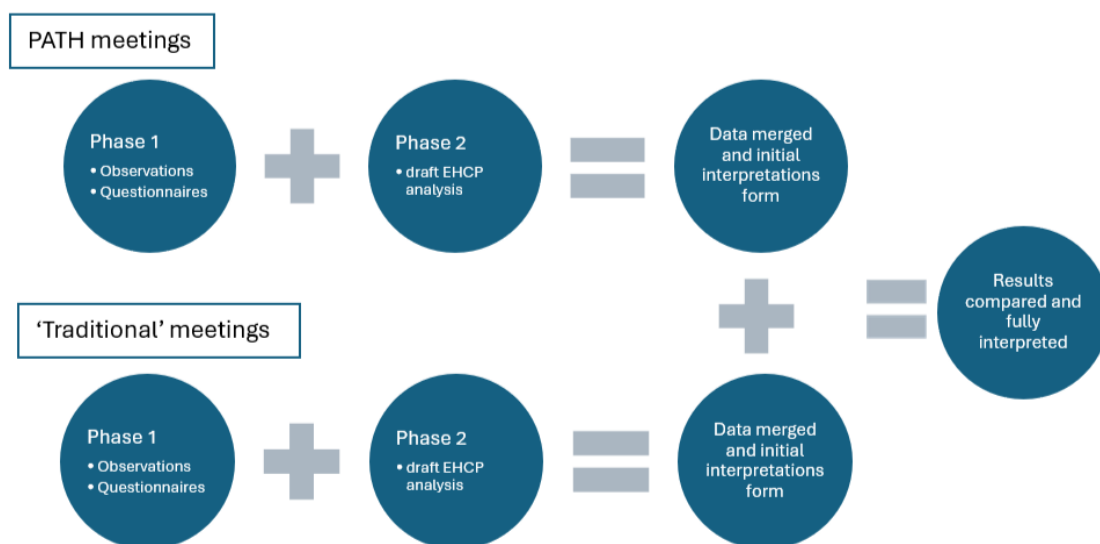
<b>Research question</b>	<b>Sub-question</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>
<b>1. In what way does using PATH increase CYPs' and parents' participation in the EP EHCNA meeting compared to when a traditional meeting approach is used?</b>	<p><b>1a.</b> Do CYP and parents attend the EP EHCNA meeting more when PATH is used compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?</p> <p><b>1b.</b> Does using PATH lead to more CYP and parent contributions during the EP EHCNA meeting compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?</p> <p><b>1c.</b> How do participants view the extent of CYP and parent participation in PATH EHCNA meetings compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic observation schedule, including tally of number of times the CYP/parent talks and duration of speech.</li> <li>• Questionnaire for CYP, parents, education staff and EPs- Likert-scale questions.</li> </ul>
<b>2. What occurs during PATH EHCNA meetings and traditional EHCNA meetings that enables CYP and parent participation in the meeting?</b>	<p><b>2a.</b> How often do adults attempt to engage CYP and parents and record their views during PATH EHCNA meetings compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?</p> <p><b>2b.</b> What did participants enjoy/ find helpful and enabled participation during the PATH EHCNA meetings and the traditional EHCNA meetings?</p> <p><b>2c.</b> What did participants find less enjoyable/ helpful or were barriers to participation in the PATH EHCNA meetings and traditional EHCNA meetings?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic observation schedule, including number of times CYP/parents are asked to contribute and number of times their views were recorded.</li> <li>• Questionnaire for CYP, parents, education staff and EPs- qualitative questions.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Does using PATH for the EP EHCNA meeting result in draft EHCPs that are more person-centred compared to when a traditional EHCNA meeting was held?</b>	<p><b>3a.</b> Is there greater presence and depth of parent and CYP views in Section A of the EHCP following a PATH EHCNA meeting compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?</p> <p><b>3b.</b> Are there differences in the number of outcomes which reflect the parents' and CYPs' views in the draft EHCP following a PATH EHCNA meeting compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document analysis of EHCPs.</li> </ul>
<b>4. How useful do participants feel PATH is for the purpose of an EP EHCNA meeting in comparison to a traditional EHCNA meeting?</b>	<p><b>4a.</b> How helpful do EPs, education staff, and parents feel PATH meetings are for the EP's EHCNA meeting compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?</p> <p><b>4b.</b> How useful do EPs feel PATH is for gathering information and generating person-centred outcomes and provision for the EHCNA?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires for parents, education staff, and EPs- Likert-scale questions and qualitative questions.</li> </ul>
<b>5. To what extent would participants want to have a PATH meeting or traditional meeting again in the future?</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires for CYP, parents, education staff, and EPs- Likert-scale question.</li> </ul>

Different sub-questions related to different participant roles depending on the focus of the question. As the research focused on parent and child participation, sub-questions exploring at their level of participation focused only on these participant roles (e.g. 1a. Do CYP and parents attend the EP EHCNA meeting more when PATH is used compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?). Sub-question 4a. focused only on adults' views on how useful the PATH meeting was for EPs' EHCNA meeting, as previous research suggests that children are not usually informed about the EHCNA and therefore would not have been able to reliably give their views on this question (e.g., Franklin et al., 2018). In addition, sub-question 4b. focused only on EPs as the professional drawing together the strengths, needs, provision and outcomes to write the SPA. Whilst co-production of outcomes and provision with CYP, parents and other professionals is encouraged (CoP; DfE & DHSC, 2015), the formulation of these into the SPA is down to the EP writing the SPA and so it was felt they would be best placed to give their views. In addition, the researcher is aware from their own professional practice that EPs have questioned the suitability of PATH for collecting all the necessary information for the SPA, so this sub-research question addresses this point regarding the practical application of PATH.

#### **4.4 Research Design**

This research consisted of a multiphase convergent mixed methods comparative design for collecting and analysing data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) posit that the term used for a mixed methods research design should reflect the researcher's intent for using and integrating the qualitative and quantitative data, not necessarily the timings of the data collection. In this research, quantitative and qualitative data have been synthesised to combine and compare findings to gain a more complete understanding of participation in the EPs' EHCNA meeting. Combining databases during the data analysis therefore reflects a convergent research design, also known as concurrent, parallel or triangulation design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) (Figure 9).

**Figure 9**  
*Phases of Data Collection and Analysis.*



This research project was completed in two phases. Phase one involved data collection from the EPs' EHCNA meetings, utilising observations and questionnaires to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. The second phase involved data collection from the draft EHCPs that were produced if the LA agreed to issue an EHCP following the EHCNA. The completed methodology did partially deviate from the initial methodology; for example, the response rate to the follow-up

questionnaire following the issue of the draft EHCP was so low that it could not be included in the data analysis (see Appendix B for planned methodology and Section 6.2 in the Discussion for further details).

The research also aimed to provide a comparison between PATH meetings and EPs' traditional EHCNA meetings. Data were collected using the same methods for both types of meetings, starting with PATH meetings and then traditional meetings (there was overlap of the data collection period for the two types of meetings). A multiple case study approach (Yin, 2014) was considered for exploring each PATH meeting as a case study. However, this approach would not allow comparison of PATH to EPs' traditional EHCNA meetings, which is missing from existing literature and is considered important for adding to the rigour of the evidence-base for PATH.

#### ***4.5 Participants and Sampling***

As the research sought to explore EP's use of PATH in their EHCNA meetings to support participation, EPs were the first participants to be recruited and acted as gatekeepers for identifying CYP, parent/carers and education staff. Various main-grade EPs, Senior EPs, Trainee EPs and Assistant EPs participated. For simplicity, this collective is referred to as "EPs" in this research. EPs within the researcher's LA who were interested in using PATH, or who had used PATH previously in their practice, were contacted during team meetings and via email and asked to volunteer to complete PATHs. The participant pool was expanded to include EPs from two additional LAs following professional discussions with first the Senior EPs in those services and then team meetings with their EPs (see Appendix O for participating LA details). The sampling method for recruiting EPs was therefore purposeful volunteer sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In total, 15 EPs from across three LAs participated in the research.

The researcher also conducted two PATH meetings and two traditional meetings from their own caseload of EHCNAs and participated in a further PATH meeting as co-facilitator. The decision was made to include meetings that the researcher had facilitated to increase the number of meetings studied, to provide a model for other participating EPs and because PATH is an approach that the researcher felt passionate about using in their practice. Ethically, the researcher is bound by their professional code of practice and ethics (BPS, 2021a) to facilitate meetings to the best of their ability, so their position as the researcher should not impact the quality of meetings. However, a reflexive research diary was completed during the research to reflect on any potential bias and positioning during the meetings when analysing the data. Further, where the researcher was the main facilitator, the EP co-facilitating the meeting was asked to complete the questionnaire instead. Combining findings from the researcher's own meetings with the other 15 EP facilitators has added to the weight of evidence exploring the impact of PATH, rather than the skill of any one individual facilitator. This should therefore contribute to the validity of results.

##### ***4.5.1 Number of Participants and Response Rates***

In total, 15 PATH meetings and 9 traditional meetings were completed (Table 3; see Section 5.1.1 in the Data Analysis chapter and Appendix C for demographic information).

**Table 3***Meetings Completed by Each LA*

<b>LA</b>	<b>Number of PATH meetings</b>	<b>Number of traditional meetings</b>
LA1	5	5
LA2	5	0
LA3	5	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>9</i>

In total, 94 meeting attendees participated in PATH meetings and 30 meeting attendees participated in traditional EP EHCNA meetings. Not all meeting attendees participated in the data collection activities. The terms ‘meeting attendees’ and ‘participants’ are used to distinguish between those who attended the meeting and those who also completed the research activities. For example, as PATHs were completed by two EP facilitators, only the EP who was responsible for completing the SPA was asked to complete the questionnaire and was therefore a participant. Table 4 shows the number of participants that completed questionnaires.

**Table 4***Questionnaire Response Rates by Participant Role*

<b>Participant role</b>	<b>PATH meetings</b>		<b>Traditional meetings</b>	
	<b>Number of questionnaire s completed</b>	<b>Response rate as a %</b>	<b>Number of questionnaires completed</b>	<b>Response rate as a %</b>
<i>CYP</i>	10	67%	2*	100%
<i>Parents</i>	20	91%	9	82%
<i>Education staff</i>	18	82%	6	75%
<i>EP</i>	15	100%	6	86%
<i>Total</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>M=85%</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>M=86%</i>

*Note:* \*3 questionnaires were completed, however one was excluded as the YP did not attend the meeting

The response rates reflect the percentage of meeting attendees who could have completed questionnaires. For example, whilst only two CYP attended traditional meetings, they both completed questionnaires, giving a response rate of 100%. There was a lower response rate for CYP who attended PATH meetings. Three children who did not complete the questionnaire were in the Early Years and had communication and interaction needs and the questionnaires had not been differentiated for children with very limited language and attention skills. In both meeting types, there were instances when one parent/staff member completed the questionnaire for both parents/staff. There were two CYP in the PATH group and two staff members in the traditional meeting condition who did not return the questionnaires when they were sent out after the meeting. One EP in the traditional meeting condition did not complete the questionnaire as they went on leave shortly after completing the meeting.

Data was also gathered from draft EHCPs and video recordings of the meetings (Table 5).

**Table 5***Frequencies of Draft EHCPs and Video Recordings Returned by each LA*

LA	Draft EHCPs		Video recordings	
	PATH	Traditional	PATH	Traditional
LA1	5	3 (2 'no to issue')	3	2
LA2	4 (1 'no to issue')	0	0	0
LA3	5	2 (1 'no to issue', 1 not returned in the data collection period)	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>

Regarding sample size, an a priori g\* power analysis was not calculated before data collection began owing to the variety of measures used and the exploratory nature of the qualitative data. Sample size information was estimated based on Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) suggested sample sizes of between 1-30 for qualitative research and between 30-350 for quantitative research. The sample size of 86 questionnaires, for example, will meet this criterion. However, it is recognised that there is a relatively small sample size for some data collection methods (e.g. the video recordings for the observations), and therefore less emphasis has been placed on this data in the discussion and conclusions.

#### **4.6 Defining PATH and Traditional Meetings**

##### **4.6.1 Defining PATH**

Defining the core components of PATH meetings was important to ensure treatment fidelity across facilitators and LAs. The core components of PATH were taken from O'Brien et al. (2010) and reiterated during a professional discussion with Derek Watson from Inclusive Solutions (personal communication, March 2023). Training was provided to each LA on the core components of PATH and materials were provided to assist the EPs setting up and facilitating PATHs (see Appendix D for examples materials).

PATH meetings therefore had to meet the following criteria to be included in the research:

- A person-centred mindset, which includes adherence to values and principles such as a belief in the capacity and strengths of the person, deep listening, open-mindedness, collaboration, and a belief that positive change is possible;
- Inclusion of the CYP in the meeting (the PATHfinder) as fully as reasonably possible for that CYP;
- A circle of support, or planning circle, around the CYP to add their views and to agree actions;
- Two facilitators to guide the planning circle through the PATH process. The process facilitator (PF) asks questions and helps with problem-solving, whilst the graphic facilitator (GF) records and reflects the group's work in the graphic record;
- A graphic record which provides a template of the meeting's agenda and a record of the planning circle's discussions;
- A set series of steps which the conversation moves through. These include:
  - Setting 'Ground Rules' and the 'Agenda' (these are not captured on the graphic record);
  - Locating the 'Dream' (the North Star);

- Generating 'Goals' for a positive and possible future;
- Describing the 'Now';
- Inviting those present to 'Enrol';
- Deciding to 'Get Stronger';
- Identifying 'Next Steps' and agreeing 'Actions';

#### **4.6.2 Criteria for Selecting Cases for PATH Meetings**

Decisions whether an EHCNA could be completed using PATH were entrusted to the EP's professional judgement. Limits were not placed on age, ethnicity, or SEN of CYP as the meetings should be representative of CYP going through EHCNAs in the LA. The sampling strategy for PATH meetings was therefore purposeful and opportunistic as and when EHCNA cases that were deemed appropriate arose. The researcher's personal criteria for deciding if a case is appropriate for a PATH was made available to the facilitators as a guide for decision-making (Appendix D). The researcher's criteria included:

- Having sufficient time to plan and make all the necessary arrangements;
- Having a second facilitator available;
- Parents and school staff being open minded to try a positively framed meeting;
- CYP who is able and happy to be included in the meeting (for Early Years children, this may include just being present in the room and giving views on preferences if able);
- Parents/CYP who can speak English to a standard where they can access the PATH meeting independently;
- Level of need such that the CYP is likely to be issued an EHCP.

#### **4.6.3 Defining Traditional Meetings**

A focus group of nine staff in the EP team at LA1, consisting of six qualified EPs, one TEP and two AEPs, were gathered to explore 'typical' EP practice for EHCNA meetings during the pilot phase. This was with the aim of gaining consensus on what a traditional EP EHCNA meeting looks like. Common components of a traditional meeting included:

- Explaining the role of the EP in statutory assessments;
- Explaining the EP assessment and the data gathered;
- Identifying the CYP's strengths and what is going well;
- Identifying the CYP's needs and what is not going as well;
- Gathering the parent's views about the current situation;
- Identifying outcomes and aspirations for the CYP;
- Collaborating with parents and school staff.

The focus group identified that they would work through the sections of the EHCP, focusing on gathering information for each section (i.e. background, parent views, strengths, needs, outcomes, provision). The group identified that they focused more on the background, strengths, and needs during the meeting and often did not have time to discuss outcomes and provision, so meetings could feel very 'needs-focused'. The group also identified that the CYP did not tend to be present in these meetings. Instead, they would gather the child's views in a separate 1:1 meeting with the child, generally before the EHCNA meeting, and present them in the parent/child's views section of the EP's SPA.

Considering both the information provided by the focus group and AEP guidance on the production of SPA as detailed in Section 1.2 (AEP, 2020), traditional meetings are defined in this research as a meeting with parents/carers and/or education staff/other professionals which takes place during the EHCNA and is facilitated by the EP writing the statutory advice. The aim of the meeting is to gather



information relevant to each section of the EHCP, with a focus on the child's background, strengths and needs.

#### ***4.6.4 Criteria for Selecting Cases for Traditional Meetings***

Purposeful quota sampling was used to obtain a sample of traditional EHCNA meetings that were representative of the sample of PATH meetings that had been completed. Through liaison with link EPs at the three LAs, EHCNA cases for traditional meetings were identified by roughly matching the demographics of CYP to those who participated in a PATH meeting (e.g. similar key stage, gender, SEN category, and or/ 'type' of education setting).

#### **4.7 Measures**

There are no standardised materials to measure degree of participation in meetings, perceptions of participation in meetings and reflections on PATH, nor to analyse the content of the EHCPs to infer how well they reflect the parent's/child's views. Therefore, suitable, bespoke measures were developed which were fit for purpose for investigating the research questions, including a systematic observation schedule (Appendix E), questionnaires (Appendix F), and a document analysis schedule (Appendix G).

##### ***4.7.1 Measures development***

###### **4.7.1.1 Pilot Study Procedure**

The measures were piloted during two PATH meetings in LA1. This was done to ensure the measures are clear, unambiguous and fit for purpose, increasing external reliability (Coughlan et al., 2007). For example, the questionnaires were piloted with the parent/s, CYP, education staff and EP/s during two pilot PATHs to ensure that the items were easily understood, avoid jargon, and address one issue. This limited the chance that differences interpreting the question would be a reason for differences in scores between participants.

The first pilot PATH was facilitated by the researcher as PF and another EP as GF and took place in a mainstream secondary school. The PATHfinder was 15 years old, male and had a diagnosis of ASD. The PATH was attended by the CYP, his mother and the Assistant SENCO. The CYP was present for approximately half of the meeting. The meeting was video recorded allowing the observation schedule to be piloted. Questionnaires were completed by the GF, mother and Assistant SENCO. Revisions to all questionnaires and the observation schedule were made following this pilot. A second pilot PATH using the revised measures was then completed, facilitated by an additional EP as PF and the researcher as GF at a different mainstream secondary school. The PATHfinder was 12 years old, male and had diagnoses of ASD and ADHD. The CYP attended the whole meeting with breaks. The meeting was attended by the CYP, the CYP's mother, his sister, the SENCO and an independent advocate. Consent was not given for the meeting to be video recorded. Questionnaires were completed by the CYP, his sister, mother, and the PF. Further amendments to the questionnaires were made following this pilot.

###### **4.7.1.2 Development of the Systematic Observation Schedule**

A systematic observation schedule (SOS) was developed to gather quantitative data from the meetings (Appendix E). By using an observation schedule, data could be gathered on participation *as it occurred* in the EHCNA meetings. This data supplemented the data collected on participants' perceptions of what had happened in the meeting.

Categories for classifying contributions were initially drawn from Flanders Interaction Analysis System (FIAS; Flanders & Amidon, 1981). However, during the pilot, classifying type of contributions was challenging due to difficulties deciding what another person's speech meant and some contributions were too short to classify. This meant coding felt subjective and time-consuming. This classification process was adapted to instead reflect Whitney-Thomas et al's. (1998) 'types of student participation', which included 'active', 'controlling', 'limited' and 'absent' participation. These described participant's behaviour rather than speech content, so judgements could be made on participant's engagement during each time interval, rather than each contribution.

Coding the whole pilot recording was time-consuming, so the first and last 15 minutes of the meeting (30mins in total) were coded. Following the pilot, a time interval coding procedure was implemented, coding the middle 5 minutes of every 15-minute segment of the recording. This allowed a representative sample of the meeting to be analysed, and as these meetings were typically 90 minutes or longer, provided at least 30 minutes' worth of data. When the pilot recording was re-analysed using time interval coding, the total number of times each participant contributed, and total length of contributions expressed as a percentage of the meeting differed between the original coding within a range of 5% and 13% of scores respectively. This shows that the time interval coding consistently captured data which was representative of the whole meeting. Additional amendments are highlighted in Appendix H.

#### 4.7.1.3 Development of Questionnaires

Questionnaires were developed to gather data regarding participant's views of the meetings (Appendix F). Additionally, the inclusion of Likert-scale questions enabled comparisons to be made between traditional and PATH meetings using descriptive statistics. By using questionnaires, more data could be gathered from participants compared to interviews, enabling more PATH meetings to be studied than in previous research (e.g. Bristow, 2013). It was also felt that meeting attendees would be more likely to complete questionnaires compared to interviews due to time constraints in schools.

Items on the questionnaires were clearly linked to the research questions to ensure face validity. Inspiration was also drawn from Bristow's (2013) interviews with participants of PATHs, adapted to suit a questionnaire format, and from Shier's (2001) model of participation, to ensure the questionnaires were aligned with theoretical constructs of participation. Questions reflected the defining element of each level of participation (e.g. feeling listened to). The questionnaires were developed in collaboration with an academic researcher and a practicing EP to gain consensus on key measurable behaviours for each construct related to participation to ensure the questionnaires measured what they were designed to measure. The questionnaires for each participant role were compared to ensure that each questionnaire captured the same constructs.

Following the pilot meetings, amendments were made to the questionnaires. The scales were amended from a 5- to a 10-point scale to increase sensitivity of the responses, as participants tended to choose the same response for all questions. Any questions that addressed two or more constructs were split into separate questions to ensure that each question focused on one construct at a time, increasing validity. For example, "*I felt that my views were listened to and that I could contribute to discussions during the meeting*" was separated into "*I felt comfortable/confident to express my views*" and "*When I did speak, I felt like I was listened to*". Additional amendments are described in Appendix H. Different versions of the questionnaires (prior and following amendments) were reviewed by an LA colleague who is a parent of a child with SEN and who confirmed that the amended questionnaire was clearer, captured more questions and was easier to complete.

#### 4.7.1.4 Development of the Document Analysis Schedule

A document analysis schedule (DAS) was developed to gather quantitative and qualitative information about the participating CYP's draft EHCPs (Appendix G). Frequencies of person-centred items in the draft EHCPs were gathered so that comparisons could be made between EHCPs from traditional and PATH meetings. Draft EHCPs were analysed rather than Final EHCPs as the draft reflects only the information the Case Officer receives in EHCNA application and assessment reports. After the draft has been issued, the parents can make changes and add information, so the content of the Final EHCP may not come from the EHCNA.

The initial schedule was developed following the structure and content of EHCPs from LA1. The DAS was re-designed after the collection of draft EHCPs from LA2 and LA3 to address the significant variation in the format of Section A across LAs. The DAS was re-designed to align with Fox's (2016) model of participation in EHCP assessments. Each dimension of the model was embedded into items on the schedule. For example, items addressing the '*areas of participation*' explored the presence of the child's and parent's views in each area (e.g. likes/dislikes in school) in Section A. To address '*depth of participation*', items pertaining to the methods used to gain the CYP's/parent's views and the depth the views in Section A represented were included (see Appendix I for coding examples). The '*degree of participation*' was analysed by comparing the CYP's/parent's views recorded in Section A to the outcomes in Section E. If the content of an outcome could be linked back to the views in Section A, this was said to be a 'person-centred outcome' (see DAS in Appendix G for an example of a person-centred outcome). This was to establish if there was a 'golden thread' of the CYP's/parent's views through the EHCP and if the EHCPs addressed all these areas of participation.

Gaining inter-coder agreement was considered, however due to the limited timing of the data collection period, this was not possible. The DAS was considered robust enough due to the theoretical and practical development procedure, that whilst an inter-coder agreement calculation would have added additional confidence in the measure, it was not needed.

#### **4.7.2 Final Measures**

##### 4.7.2.1 Systematic Observation Schedule

A SOS was used to analyse the video recordings of the PATH and traditional meetings to gather quantitative data relating to participation behaviours in the meetings (Appendix E). Items included: length of contributions (in seconds), number of contributions, number of times asked to contribute by another, type of participation (active, control, limited, or absent), and whether the contribution was recorded. Items were coded per participant role. Field notes captured the researcher's impressions of each meeting, such as room layout, atmosphere, and how the child appeared to be feeling. A time interval coding procedure was used, coding the middle 5 minutes of every 15-minute segment of the recording.

##### 4.7.2.2 Questionnaires

A self-completion questionnaire was given to participants after the meeting to gather their views of the meeting. Likert-scale questions (on a scale from 1-10 for adults and YP and 1-5 for children) were used to generate quantitative data and open-ended questions were used to gather qualitative data. Similar questionnaires were developed for primary school children, secondary school YP, parents, education staff, adult friends and family, CYP friends and family, and EPs (see Appendix F for examples). Questionnaires were either completed at the end of the meeting or sent to the

participants to complete in their own time. CYP questionnaires were at times completed with the help of an adult.

#### **4.7.2.3 Document Analysis Schedule**

A document analysis schedule (DAS) was used to evaluate how person-centred the participating CYP's draft EHCPs were (Appendix G). Occurrence of content which indicated CYP/parent participation (according to Fox's (2016) model) and number of person-centred outcomes in the draft EHCPs were recorded to provide quantitative data. Examples of where the parent's and child's views had been captured in the draft EHCPs were recorded to provide qualitative information.

### **4.8 Ethical considerations**

The research received ethical approval from the UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee (number Z6364106/2023/03/14). Approval for the research to take place in LA1 and LA2 was given by the EPS senior leadership. Additional ethical consent for the research to take place in LA3 was granted through the Research Governance and Consultation Quality Assurance Approval Process within the LA. The research adheres to the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021b) and the principles contained in the code have been considered throughout the project. The full ethics form is presented in Appendix P.

#### **4.8.1 Consent and Assent**

Once consent was granted at the LA level, the EP completing the EHCNA was the gatekeeper to potential participants and interacted most with the participants (i.e., they facilitated the meeting and handed out the questionnaires). Ethical decisions were often made by participating EPs and the researcher relied on their professional ethical knowledge and expertise to make informed decisions. To facilitate consistent and quality ethical decision-making across the LAs and EPs, training was provided by the researcher before data collection commenced. Frequent and ongoing opportunities were provided to ask ethical questions over emails, Teams calls and in team meetings, and materials were provided for participants and EPs, e.g., information sheets, consent forms, checklists for EPs and PATH invite templates (see Appendices D, K and L for examples).

Informed consent was sought from all participants completing the questionnaires and from all meeting attendees when the meeting was video recorded (see Appendix K for and L for example consent forms and information sheets). Parental consent and child assent was sought for children under 16 years, and direct consent was sought for participants over 16 (BPS, 2021b). Where the CYP's friend attended the meeting, education staff could consent to their friend's involvement and assent from the CYP was sought (BPS, 2021b), though it was advised that the friend's parents be informed. Gaining CYP assent meant ensuring that the CYP felt comfortable and willing to participate in the research activities and did not feel pressured to participate. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw during, and up to a month after, completion of the data collection period. No participants actively exercised this right, though some did not complete the follow-up questionnaires.

Consent could also be given for various degrees of participation. Consent to complete the questionnaires and consent for the meeting to be video recorded were separate items on the consent form. This meant that participants could consent to participating in the questionnaires and sharing of the draft EHCP, but not the meeting being recorded. In LA3, the EPs expressed that they were not comfortable asking participants for the meetings to be recorded and so did not take part in this element of the research. This meant that overall, most meetings were not recorded.

#### **4.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Precautions were taken to ensure respect for the privacy of participants (BPS, 2021b), such as not discussing any unnecessary personal details with the EP completing the assessment (e.g. the child's full name) or accessing the child's file until parental consent had been granted. Participants were informed of the anonymity and confidentiality measures taken in an information sheet and discussed with the EP before the meeting. Participant's personal data were stored in a secure UCL OneDrive account, separate to the participant's measures data. Participants were assigned a code and a pseudonym, and all measures data were labelled with only the participant's code. Measures data were anonymised by ensuring any identifying or personal characteristic were removed (i.e., names were removed from the questionnaire data), and no quotations were reported in the Data Analysis chapter which contain strong contextual cues.

#### **4.8.3 Transparency and Fairness**

Due to the timing of the research (during the CYP's EHCNA), parents and education staff could feel obliged to participate for the EHCNA to be completed. To manage this, information sheets contained clarification that the research is separate from the LA and does not affect the EHCNA in any way. EPs were asked to specify to potential participants that the research is an opt-in activity and that the meeting will go ahead regardless of whether they choose to participate or not. The researcher also made attempts to distance themselves from the LA during the research by sending emails to participants from their university account rather than their LA account.

In LA1 and LA2, traditional EP EHCNA meetings were offered as their 'business as usual' approach. This traditional approach is still currently considered best practice in LA1 and LA2 and adheres to BPS ethical and HCPC competency guidelines. Therefore, in these LAs, there was no additional risk associated with not offering a PATH meeting. For full transparency, parents were provided with information about the two types of EP EHCNA meetings, and they were given the chance to ask questions about their child's meeting. In LA3, no traditional meetings were completed as all EPs use PCP for their EHCNA meetings. It was therefore deemed unethical to ask EPs to deviate away from what they considered to be best practice.

#### **4.9 Data collection**

Data collection took place between September 2023 and February 2024 (see Appendix J for chronology and Table 6 for procedure). Link EPs were nominated in each LA to ensure the smooth running of data collection in each LA, to liaise with the researcher and to collate all data.

**Table 6***Procedure for Data Collection.*

Phase	Task
1.	Development of measures and resources, along with participant information sheets and consent forms.
2.	Recruitment and training of EP participants.
3.	Completion of first pilot PATH meeting. Revision of measures following pilot.
4.	Completion of second pilot PATH meeting and final revisions to measures.
5.	EPs identified cases appropriate for PATH from their caseload of statutory assessments (using the checklist in Appendix D). Researcher informed that a PATH meeting has been identified.
6.	EPs approached education staff and parents to inform them of PATH and gain consent to participate in the research. CYP informed and asked for assent/consent as appropriate to their needs (using the information sheets and consent forms in Appendices K and L).
7.	PATH meetings took place (for procedure for the PATH, see Appendix D and Section 4.6). Meetings recorded if all meeting attendees consented.
8.	Participants and EP completed questionnaires after the meeting, either immediately after using a paper questionnaire or later if sent via email.
9.	Consent forms, questionnaires and video recordings for PATHs sent to the researcher and demographic information uploaded to shared, secure spreadsheet.
10.	Link EP monitored CYP's casefile for draft EHCP being issued and subsequently sent to researcher. Participants sent follow-up questionnaires* after the draft EHCP had been issued.
11.	Link EP liaised with Senior EPs to identify EHCNA cases appropriate for traditional meetings.
12.	Completed steps 6-10 for 'traditional' meetings.

*Note:* \*follow-up questionnaires were not included in the final data analysis (see Section 6.2 in Discussion)

#### **4.10 Approach to Data Analysis**

##### ***4.10.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Data***

Eighty-six questionnaires ( $n=63$  PATH,  $n=23$  traditional) were analysed. Quantitative questionnaire data (e.g. Likert-scale responses) were analysed in SPSS (v.28). Where the questions were the same or similar (i.e. measuring the same construct, such as the child participating in decision-making) across the different questionnaire types (e.g. parent and education staff), these items were considered as the same variable in SPSS.

Parametric and non-parametric tests (e.g. Mann-Whitney u tests) were not considered an appropriate means of data handling. Whilst the overall number of questionnaire responses was relatively large, sub-group samples were inconsistent for meaningful statistical analysis. For example, only two CYP in the traditional condition responded to items on the questionnaire, rendering statistical comparisons on child perceptions inappropriate ( $N= 4-10$  PATH,  $N= 2$  traditional). In some instances, sample sizes were larger for individual items (e.g. combined adults' responses on the item relating to parents' inclusion in decision making was  $N=52$  in the PATH condition and  $N=21$  in the traditional condition) whilst the overall range for combined adults' responses was between 20-52 responses per item in the PATH condition and between 9-21

responses per item in the traditional condition. As most questionnaire items did not yield this response rate, (and accounting for possible effect size), statistical analysis was not conducted on these individual items to avoid presenting potentially misleading comparisons. As such, although the initial study design was comparative, the quantitative data presented in the tables below are to give further context to the qualitative data presented in sections 5.3 and 5.5.

In lieu of inferential statistics, because of inconsistent within and between group responses, descriptive statistics were considered most appropriate. This is because statistical comparisons with unequal sample sizes and representative of individualised experiences may not be wholly meaningful in the broader context of the study, and bootstrapping those data for statistical analysis would not successfully replace the smaller response rates for items. Descriptive statistics were run by first splitting the database by meeting type and participant role. Mean scores of Likert scale questionnaire responses (1-10, whereby 1 = strong disagreement and 10 = strong agreement), are presented in the Data Analysis chapter. A mean score of 7.5 represents “agreement”/positive response to the item, and subsequently is used to benchmark a “good” participant experience. Means and standard deviations for the two meeting types (traditional and PATH) have been reported side-by-side in the same tables to support understanding of differences in mean group scores, standard deviations, and sample size, but owing to the variation in response rates caution is advised when reading/interpreting these descriptive data. As such, the quantitative data presented should be understood as contextual in response to the established research questions, and complementary to the qualitative data analysis and subsequent conclusions.

To analyse the qualitative data from the PATH questionnaires, participant responses for each item which related to the same research question were gathered in a table, organised by participant role. Thematic analysis was then conducted on the questionnaire responses. The five phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) are outlined in Table 7. Phase one began during the gathering of qualitative data into the tables. The data were then read through and highlighted according to the research questions the data pertained to. During phase two, the data were read through again and initial codes were written alongside the data, whilst memos were made of possible themes. During phase three, codes were typed up, refined and sorted under research questions with example quotes and grouped together to begin to form sub-themes and themes. In this phase, it was identified that there were similar/same codes between participant roles and so the dataset was no longer separated by participant role (unless specified by the research question). In phase four, themes were separated from sub-themes (generated directly from codes), and themes and subthemes were checked back against the participant data and refined. In phase five, the themes were labelled, giving consideration to the focus of the subthemes and processes occurring during meetings to develop meaningful labels. Themes were compared across research questions and PATH/traditional responses so that consistent labelling was used. This process was then repeated for the traditional questionnaire data. Checking of understanding and subsequent coding of participant quotes which were ambiguous or open to interpretation was done both during the meetings that the researcher attended and, where this was not feasible, with a qualified teacher external to the research.

**Table 7***The Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).*

Phase	Task	Description
1.	Familiarisation with the data	Transcribing and re-reading the data.
2.	Generating initial codes with the data	Organising and labelling the data.
3.	Identifying initial themes	Sorting codes into possible themes.
4.	Reviewing themes	Checking and re-checking themes with the original data.
5.	Defining and naming themes	Refining, grouping and labelling themes.

**4.10.2 Analysis of Observation Data**

Five video recordings ( $n=3$  PATH,  $n=2$  traditional) were analysed using the SOS. The videos were coded using the time interval sampling method (Section 4.7.2.1). A stopwatch was used to accurately record the duration that each participant spoke for, frequencies of participant behaviour were recorded, and a judgement was made about the nature of parent's/CYP's participation (see Appendix E for SOS). The quantitative data by each participant role in the meeting were converted into percentages (e.g. the amount of time the child spoke in minutes was calculated as a percentage of all participants' contributions). These percentages were reported and compared between participants and meetings in the Data Analysis chapter.

**4.10.3 Analysis of Draft EHCP Data**

Nineteen draft EHCPs ( $n=14$  PATH,  $n=5$  traditional) were analysed using the DAS. The draft EHCPs were read through three times alongside completing the DAS. After the first read through of all EHCPs, it became clear that there was an additional distinct 'depth of participation' category relevant to the parent's views. Fox's (2016) categories, whilst helpful for categorising the depth of participation of CYP, did not capture the other types of involvement the parent might have in the EHCNA. A new category was introduced, which the researcher termed 'descriptive depth', referring to parent views which were descriptive of the problem situation, the child's needs and the parent's goals and aspirations. In this category, the views in the draft seem to have come from written information provided by the parent prior to meeting with the EP (e.g. submitted as part of the EHCNA request documents). After this category was introduced, the draft EHCPs were re-read two more times. The first re-read involved re-assigning mis-assigned categories to the new category, to create a reference table (see 'Types of depth coding' table in Appendix I) and to make reflective notes. The third read through involved double checking the assignment of the categories according to the table.

Once the draft EHCPs had been coded using the DAS, the data were brought together into a spreadsheet, separated by meeting type. Percentages were calculated for frequency of occurrence of each item relating to depth, area and degree of participation. Percentages are presented in the Data Analysis chapter, with comparisons made between traditional and PATH. There were noticeable differences in the EHCP structure and content between LAs, and so an analysis of draft EHCPs relating to each LA was conducted. This has been presented in Appendix O as it does not directly pertain to the research question.

**4.10.4 Bringing the Data Together**

Findings from qualitative and quantitative data are presented alongside each other under the corresponding research question in the Data Analysis section. Quotes from the questionnaires have



been presented alongside the mean scores from the Likert-scale questions where it was felt that the quote would contextualise the quantitative data and give richness to the data. Traditional and PATH data are presented under each research question, and the two datasets have been compared at the end of each section. In the Discussion, meta-inferences from the combined datasets have been drawn and presented as key findings to answer each research question.

## ***Chapter 5. Data Analysis***

This chapter first presents the demographic information for the PATH and traditional meetings, focusing on who attended the meetings and the child's demographics. The demographic information underpins analysis in this section and is indicative of EP's choice of running either PATH or traditional meetings. Next, data from PATH meetings and traditional meetings are presented, organised by research question, with a comparison between PATH and traditional meetings presented at the end of each section. A more in-depth analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data for the PATH meetings is presented in line with the aims of the research. All participant names presented in this chapter are pseudonyms, used for confidentiality.

### **5.1 Demographic Information**

The demographic data below shows differences in the demographics of CYP the meeting approaches are used with in PATH compared to traditional meetings and between LAs. Additional information regarding response rates can be found in Section 4.5.1 and demographic frequencies can be found in Appendix C.

#### ***5.1.1 PATH Meetings***

Fifteen PATH meetings were conducted across the three LAs (5 PATH meetings per LA; see table 8).

**Table 8**  
*Demographic Information for Each PATH Meeting*

<b>Meeting code</b>	<b>LA</b>	<b>Who attended the meeting?*</b>	<b>Did CYP attend?</b>	<b>Child's Key Stage</b>	<b>Child's gender</b>	<b>Child's area of SEN*</b>	<b>Child's nationality</b>	<b>Child's education provision</b>
<b>SPATH1</b>	LA1	EP, TEP, CYP, mother, father, SENCO	Yes	3	Male	ASD	White British	Mainstream secondary
<b>SPATH2</b>	LA1	EP, AEP, CYP, mother, father, SENCO, teacher, child's friend	Yes	2	Male	HI	White British	Mainstream primary
<b>SPATH3</b>	LA1	EP, AEP, CYP, mother, stepdad, LSA, Head of Year	Yes	4	Female	SLCN- ASD	White British	Mainstream secondary
<b>SPATH4</b>	LA1	TEP, AEP, CYP, mother, father, HLTA, SENCO, Head of Year	Yes	3	Male	SLCN	White British	Mainstream secondary
<b>SPATH5</b>	LA1	TEP, TEP, CYP, mother, teacher, SENCO, child's friend	Yes	2	Female	MLD	White & Any Other Asian	Mainstream primary
<b>EPATH1</b>	LA2	EP, AEP, CYP, mother, father, SENCO	Yes- part	2	Male	C&I SLCN	White British	Mainstream primary
<b>EPATH2</b>	LA2	SEP, AEP, CYP, family friend, SENCO	Yes	3	Female	MLD	White British	Mainstream secondary
<b>EPATH3</b>	LA2	EP, AEP, CYP, mother, SENCO, teacher	Yes	2	Female	SEMH	White British	Mainstream primary
<b>EPATH4</b>	LA2	EP, TEP, AEP, CYP, mother, father, SENCO, APO	Yes	3	Male	C&I- ASD	White British	Mainstream secondary
<b>EPATH5</b>	LA2	EP, AEP, CYP, mother, SENCO	Yes	2	Male	SEMH	White & Black African	Mainstream primary
<b>WPATH1</b>	LA3	EP x2, mother, CYP, nursery worker	Yes- part	Early Years	Male	C&I- ASD	White British	Specialist nursery
<b>WPATH2</b>	LA3	EP x2, mother, father, CYP, SENCO	Yes- part	Early Years	Male	C&I- ASD	White British & Any Other White	Specialist nursery
<b>WPATH3</b>	LA3	EP x2, mother, CYP, Family Support Worker, Wellbeing and Attendance Officer	Yes	4	Male	C&I	White British	EOTAS
<b>WPATH4</b>	LA4	EP x2, mother, CYP, SENCO	Yes- part	Early Years	Female	C&I- ASD	White British	Specialist nursery
<b>WPATH5</b>	LA5	EP x2, mother, father, CYP, Additional Support Lecturer	Yes	5	Male	ADHD	British	College

Note: \*See glossary of abbreviations used

Table 8 shows a range of attendees at PATH meetings, including parents, CYP, child's friends, a family friend, teachers, SENCOs, pastoral lead, LSAs/TAs/HLTAs, Heads of Year, Family Support Worker, Wellbeing and Attendance Officer, Additional Support Lecturer, and an Assessment and Planning Officer. Calculation of the mode revealed that there were six attendees in any PATH, typically two EPs, the CYP, at least one parent, and at least one representative from school, such as the SENCO. CYP ages ranged across the full breadth of school stages, including three children in the Early Years (aged 3-4) and one in KS5 (aged 16, at college). Of the aggregated sample, 66% of CYP were male and 33% were female. PATHs were predominantly held for children with social and/or communication and interaction needs (e.g. ASD). CYP were largely from White British nationalities. CYP were mainly attending local mainstream provisions, however the three children in the Early Years were attending a specialist nursery assessment placement and one CYP was not in school (EOTAS).

Overall, PATHs were most frequently completed for children in KS2, however this varied between LAs. For example, LAs 1 and 2 predominantly held PATHs for KS2 and KS3 CYP, and LA3 held PATHs for CYP in the Early Years and Preparing for Adulthood (KS4/5). This indicated variation in decision-making regarding suitability for PATH across LAs.

### ***5.1.2 Traditional Meetings***

Nine traditional meetings took place across two LAs ( $n=5$  LA1,  $n=4$  LA2; Table 9).

**Table 9**  
*Demographic Information for Each Traditional Meeting*

<b>Meeting code</b>	<b>LA</b>	<b>Who attended the meeting?*</b>	<b>Did CYP attend?</b>	<b>Child's Key Stage</b>	<b>Child's gender</b>	<b>Child's area of SEN*</b>	<b>Child's nationality</b>	<b>Child's education provision</b>
<b>STrad1</b>	LA1	TEP, mother, SENCO, LSA	No	3	Female	SpLD	White British	Mainstream secondary
<b>STrad3</b>	LA1	TEP, mother, SENCO	No	2	Female	C&L SEMH	White British	Mainstream primary
<b>STrad4</b>	LA1	SEP, mother, SENCO	No	Early Years	Female	SLCN	Any Other White	Mainstream nursery
<b>STrad5</b>	LA1	EP, AEP, father, teacher, SENCO	No	1	Male	ASD	White & Black African	Mainstream primary
<b>STrad6</b>	LA1	EP, AEP, mother, father, teacher	No	1	Male	C&I- ASD	Indian	Mainstream primary
<b>ETrad3</b>	LA2	EP, mother, father	No	2	Female	C&I- ASD	White British	Mainstream primary
<b>ETrad2</b>	LA2	SEP, mother	No	3	Female	ASD C&L	White & Black African	Mainstream secondary
<b>ETrad5</b>	LA2	TEP, mother, Pastoral Lead, CYP	Yes- part	3	Male	SEMH	White British	PRU
<b>ETrad6</b>	LA2	TEP, CYP, mother	Yes	3	Male	SEMH	White British	EOTAS

Note: \*See glossary of abbreviations used

Table 9 shows that compared to PATH meetings, there was a smaller range of attendee roles, including parents, CYP, SENCOs, LSAs or teachers, and a pastoral lead. There was usually only one parent present and CYP attendance was only reported in two meetings (ETrad5 and ETrad6), compared to both parents and CYP being present at most PATH meetings. Calculation of the mode revealed that there were 3 attendees at each traditional meeting, half of that attending PATH meetings. The child's stage of schooling ranged between Early Years and KS3, the most common being KS3. This differs from PATH meetings, where three participants were in the upper stages of schooling (KS4 and 5). Of the aggregated sample, there were more female CYP (56%) than male CYP (44%), reversing the trend seen in PATH meetings. The predominant need was also social and/or communication and interaction needs, though there were a greater proportion of CYP with SEMH needs too. The majority of CYP were White British, though there was a greater proportion of CYP from other ethnic groups compared to the PATH meeting group. Similar to the PATH meeting group, most CYP attended their local mainstream provision.

**5.2 RQ 1: In what way does using PATH increase CYPs' and parents' participation in the EP EHCNA meeting compared to when a traditional meeting approach is used?**

**5.2.1 Sub-RQ 1a: Do CYP and parents attend the EP EHCNA meeting more when PATH is used compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?**

**5.2.1.1 PATH Meetings Findings**

The Table of PATH Meetings (Table 8) shows that 100% of children attended their PATH meeting for their EP EHCNA meeting. Of the 15 child participants, 11 children (73%) attended for the whole meeting and four (27%) attended part of their meeting.

**5.2.1.2 Traditional Meetings Findings**

Demographic data for traditional meetings (Table 9) shows that 22% of children (2 CYP) attended their traditional EP EHCNA meeting, either fully (11% or 1 CYP) or in part (11% or 1 CYP).

**5.2.1.3 Comparison Between PATH and Traditional Meetings**

Data showed that more children attended their EP EHCNA meeting when a PATH meeting had taken place compared to a traditional meeting (100% compared to 22% respectively).

**5.2.2 Sub-RQ 1b: Does using PATH lead to more CYP and parent contributions during the EP EHCNA meeting compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?**

**5.2.2.1 PATH Meetings Findings**

Data from the three observations of PATH meetings indicated that in this type of meeting, the EPs would contribute most across both length of time and frequency (Table 10). Friends and/or other family members would contribute the least when they were present.

**Table 10**

Frequencies and percentages of meeting attendee participation in the PATH meetings as indicated by the observations.

<b>Meeting and participant role</b>	<b>Total duration of meeting</b>	<b>Number of observation periods</b>	<b>Total time of contribution (percentage in brackets)</b>	<b>Number of contributions made (percentage in brackets)</b>	<b>Type of participation</b>
<b>SPATH2</b>	1h 33m 37s	6			
CYP			2m 24s (10%)	40 (20%)	Active x4 and limited x2
Parents x2			5m 8s (22%)	37 (18%)	Active x5 and control x1
Education staff x2			5m 40s (24%)	56 (27%)	
Friend/family			47s (3%)	2 (1%)	
EPs x2			9m 15s (40%)	69 (34%)	
<b>SPATH4</b>	1h 25m 59s	5			
CYP			3m 24s (15%)	28 (21%)	Active x3 and limited x2
Parents x2			8m 22s (37%)	36 (27%)	Active x4 and control x1
Education staff x3			5m 12s (23%)	25 (19%)	
EPs x2			5m 56s (26%)	42 (32%)	
<b>SPATH5</b>	1h 15m 07s	5			
CYP			2m 40s (12%)	63 (30%)	Active x5 and limited x1
Parent			4m 40s (19%)	12 (6%)	Active x5
Education staff x2			6m 38s (28%)	35 (16%)	
Friend/family			1m 17s (5%)	22 (10%)	
EPs x2			8m 52s (37%)	81 (38%)	

The relative amount of time (in minutes) the child spoke was either the lowest or second lowest of the meeting attendees. However, the total *number* of times (frequency) the child contributed was always higher. Field notes indicated that children would often use words or short phrases to express agreement or disagreement with what parents and/or staff had said and to answer specific, direct questions. Conversely, parents tended to talk for longer periods than CYP did (in minutes), though contributed fewer times (frequency). Meeting membership was then analysed to better understand proportion of contribution relative to attendees. There were often two parents, two EPs and at least two education staff present in the meeting compared to one child. For example, in SPATH2, the CYP contributed 10% of the time (the second least). However, when the totals for each role were divided by the number of participants in that role (i.e.  $n=2$ ), the average staff members', parent's and EP's contribution time was similar to the child's (12%, 11% and 20% of the time respectively). Overall, the data suggests that parents and children contributed a proportionate amount of time and number of times to the meetings, with a trend towards children contributing more often for a shorter length of time and parents contributing for longer less frequently.

#### 5.2.2.2 Traditional Meetings Findings

Of the two traditional meetings that were recorded, the child did not attend and were therefore not able to contribute. Exploring the parent data, SOS data showed that parents contributed for the longest time (in minutes) and the education staff the shortest amount of time (in minutes) (see Table 11). In STrad1, there was a noticeable difference in the length of time in minutes that the parent spoke compared to the education staff, whilst in STrad3 there was a more equal balance in the amount of time (in minutes) that each participant contributed. The number (frequency) of contributions made were also similarly split across all participants and the parents were actively involved for the duration of the observation periods.

**Table 11**

*Frequencies and percentages of meeting attendee participation in traditional meetings as indicated by the observations.*

<b>Meeting and participant role</b>	<b>Total duration of meeting</b>	<b>Number of observation periods</b>	<b>Total time of contributions</b>	<b>Number of contributions made</b>	<b>Type of participation</b>
<b>STrad1</b>	1h 13m 12s	5*			
Parent			11 min 8 sec (48%)	33 (36%)	Active x 5
Education staff x2			3 min 49 sec (16%)	27 (29%)	-
EP			8 min 26 sec (36%)	32 (35%)	-
<b>STrad3</b>	1h 35m 24s	6			
Parent			11 min 50 sec (42%)	37 (30%)	Active x 6
Education staff			8 min 9 sec (29%)	43 (35%)	-
EP			8 min 27 sec (30%)	43 (35%)	-

\*An extra observation period was analysed due to introductions having taken place before the recording started, therefore the first 5 minutes of every 15-minute period was analysed.

### 5.2.2.3 Comparison Between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Observation data showed that EPs often spoke most in PATH meetings, whilst the parents spoke most in traditional meetings. Children in PATH meetings often made a lot of short contributions, however there were no children present in the traditional meetings that were recorded to compare this to. There were fewer meeting attendees overall in the traditional meetings, perhaps accounting for why parents were able to contribute more. However, too few traditional and PATH meetings were recorded to make firm conclusions from this data.

### **5.2.3. 1c. How do participants view the extent of CYP and parent participation in PATH EHCNA meetings compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?**

#### 5.2.3.1 CYP's Participation in PATH Meetings

CYP were asked to rate their experiences of participation in the PATH meetings (see Table 12 and Table N in Appendix N; traditional scores also offered side-by-side in Table 12 for context) on a scale from 1-10. CYP reported feeling listened to and that they got to contribute and say everything that they wanted to. CYP agreed that they understood what the adults were talking about. Young people strongly agreed that they felt like equal partners in the meeting. However, CYP did not always feel comfortable to talk during the PATH meetings. There was variation in how comfortable CYP reported they felt; two CYP scored this question 1/10 or 'not at all' whilst four CYP gave scores of 8/10 or 'a lot/all the time'. CYP also reported that they did not always feel that they had helped make decisions nor created goals for themselves, with one YP scoring both these items 1/10. However, as aforementioned in section 4.10.1, due to small and inconsistent sample sizes this data should be interpreted cautiously and traditional data is presented for context.



**Table 12**

*Descriptive Statistics for Items Relating to CYP Participation in PATH and Traditional Meetings as Scored by CYP.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>PATH</i>				<i>Traditional</i>			
	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Child's views were listened to</i>	10	5-10	<b>8.35</b>	1.58	2	8-10	<b>9.00</b>	1.41
<i>Child was supported to make decisions</i>	10	1-9	<b>5.65</b>	2.73	2	6-10	<b>8.00</b>	2.82
<i>CYP felt comfortable to talk</i>	10	1-8.75	<b>5.33</b>	2.92	2	6-10	<b>8.00</b>	2.82
<i>CYP felt they got to say everything they wanted to</i>	10	5-10	<b>8.90</b>	1.73	2	8-10	<b>9.00</b>	1.41
<i>CYP felt they understood what the adults were talking about</i>	10	1-10	<b>7.75</b>	3.08	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71
<i>CYP felt they created goals for themselves</i>	4	1-9	<b>6.25</b>	3.59	2	6-10	<b>8.00</b>	2.83
<i>CYP felt like an equal partner in the meeting</i>	4	7-10	<b>9.00</b>	1.41	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71

When asked to rate children's participation in the meetings, parents, staff and EPs' responses were generally positive (total  $M=8.98$ ,  $SD=1.66$ ). Adults strongly agreed that children were supported to be present in the meeting, to express their views and were listened to (see Table 13 and Tables O, P and Q in Appendix N). These scores were congruent with CYP's perceptions of their participation in the meeting. However, the adults' mean score ( $M=8.86$ ,  $SD=1.96$ ) was higher than the CYP's mean score ( $M=5.65$ ,  $SD=2.73$ ) regarding whether they felt the child had been supported to make decisions, though statistical analysis was not appropriate to compare this data. The data presented in Table 13 are to indicate descriptive differences between the two conditions as statistical comparison could not be run due to small sample sizes.

**Table 13**

*Descriptive Statistics for Items Relating to CYP Participation in PATH and Traditional Meetings as Scored by Adult Participants (EPs, Education Staff and Parents).*

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PATH</i>			<i>Traditional</i>			
		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Child was supported to be present in the meeting</i>	52	5-10	<b>9.12</b>	1.31	12	4-10	<b>8.33</b>	2.10
<i>Child was supported to express their views</i>	52	1-10	<b>8.68</b>	1.87	11	5-10	<b>7.91</b>	1.87
<i>Child's views were listened to</i>	52	1-10	<b>9.25</b>	1.51	14	4-10	<b>8.93</b>	1.69
<i>Child was supported to make decisions</i>	51	1-10	<b>8.86</b>	1.96	12	5-10	<b>7.50</b>	2.24

Several adult participants disagreed on items relating to the child's participation. One parent strongly disagreed that their child had been supported to express their views, listened to, and supported to make decisions, scoring these items 1/10. However, this parent explained that their child was non-verbal and that she was his "advocate". One EP felt that the child was not supported to make decisions (scoring 2/10), and associated qualitative commentary indicated that "because of the very unfamiliar setting and adults the child found it difficult to stay in the room or participate... The child was therefore less involved than normally is the case". The staff member who attended the same meeting felt that the child was not supported to express their views (scoring 3/10), however corresponding comments suggested that this was "due to the child's attention, listening and understanding difficulties, and still settling into the nursery".

#### 5.2.3.2 CYP's Participation in Traditional Meetings

The two young people participated in their traditional EHCNA meetings agreed that they had been supported to participate and scored most items 8, 9 and 10 (Table 12). However, one young person scored items relating to feeling comfortable speaking in the meeting, creating goals, and helping to make decisions as 6/10, indicating that whilst they felt that adults included them in the meeting, they reported less positively on being comfortable speaking and making decisions.

Adults agreed that the child had been supported to be present in the meeting in a way appropriate to their SEN, supported to express their views, were listened to, and supported to make decisions (Table 13). The *SD* on items relating to child participation was greater than parent participation, indicating a more varied degree of satisfaction with the child's participation compared to parent participation. The EPs generally scored the items relating to child participation lower than parents and school staff did, e.g. one EP disagreed that the child had been supported to be present in the meeting in a way appropriate to their age and SEN, scoring this item a 4/10. This child had not attended this traditional meeting.

#### 5.2.3.3 Parents' Participation in PATH meetings

Quantitative questionnaire data indicated that parents felt comfortable to express their views, were listened to, included in decision-making and that they felt like equal partners/contributors in the meeting (Table 14; please note owing to small sample sizes, statistical comparisons could not be run). Two parents (of the same child) reported a lower score on the item relating to feeling

comfortable expressing their views, scoring this question 6/10. In the corresponding comments, one parent described that they felt that they could not express their views properly as “*the conversation had to be kept in the positive for Sonny's wellbeing*”. Parents’ mean scores were higher than CYPs’ mean scores on the items relating to feeling comfortable to talk (adult  $M=9.15$ ,  $SD=1.46$ , CYP  $M=5.33$ ,  $SD=2.92$ ) and participating in decision-making (adult  $M=9.50$ ,  $SD=0.89$ , CYP  $M=5.65$ ,  $SD=2.73$ ). Owing to small sample sizes, statistical analysis was not run so these differences are descriptive.

**Table 14**

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Questions Rated by Parents on Aspects of their Own Participation in PATH and Traditional Meetings.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PATH</i>			<i>N</i>	<i>Traditional</i>		
		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Parents views were listened to</i>	20	7-10	<b>9.65</b>	0.81	9	8-10	<b>9.67</b>	0.71
<i>Parents were included in decision-making</i>	20	7-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.89	9	8-10	<b>9.67</b>	0.71
<i>Parents were equal partners in the meeting</i>	20	7-10	<b>9.40</b>	1.00	9	7-10	<b>9.56</b>	1.01
<i>Parent felt comfortable to talk</i>	20	6-10	<b>9.15</b>	1.46	9	5-10	<b>9.33</b>	1.66

Education staff and EPs were also positive about parents’ participation in the meetings. Staff and EPs both strongly agreed that parents had contributed, that their views were listened to, that they were included in decision-making and that they were equal partners in the meetings (see Table P and Q in Appendix N). These scores are congruent with scores given by parents for these items, indicating that participants scored parent participation similarly in the meeting.

#### 5.2.3.4 Parents’ Participation in Traditional Meetings

Quantitative data from the questionnaires showed that parents, education staff and EPs were generally positive about parents’ participation in the EP EHCNA meeting. Education staff and EPs strongly agreed that parents had contributed to the EHCNA meeting (Table M in Appendix N). Education staff, EPs and parents agreed that the parents had been listened to, were included in decision-making and were equal partners in the meeting. Parents also strongly agreed that they had felt comfortable to speak in the meetings (Table 14).

#### 5.2.3.5 Comparison Between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Overall, participants reported similar mean scores on items relating to their experiences of CYP and parent participation in PATH and traditional meetings (Tables 12, 13 and 14 and Table M in Appendix N). For example, adult participants strongly agreed that parent’s views had been listened to in both PATH ( $M= 9.74$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ) and traditional ( $M= 9.67$ ,  $SD=0.66$ ) meetings. Some items were scored lower on average by CYP who attended PATH meetings compared to the traditional meetings. For example, CYP reported a lower mean score on the item relating to feeling comfortable to talk following PATH meetings ( $M=5.53$ ,  $SD=2.92$ ) compared to traditional meetings ( $M=8.00$ ,  $SD=2.82$ ). However, there were more participants in the PATH group ( $n=10$  compared to  $n=2$ ), contributing to

greater variability and likelihood of outliers in the PATH group. Further, one young person indicated that they did not enjoy the PATH meeting, scoring three of the items 1/10, bringing down the mean score. When accounting for this YP's scores, the mean scores relating to perceptions of participation are more similar between the two meeting types.

**5.3 RQ 2: What occurs during PATH EHCNA meetings and traditional EHCNA meetings that enables CYP and parent participation in the meeting?**

**5.3.1 Sub-RQ 2a: How often do adults attempt to engage CYP and parents and record their views during PATH EHCNA meetings compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?**

**5.3.1.1. Participation in PATH Meetings**

In response to Likert-scale questions, CYP on average agreed that adults had tried to include them in the meeting (e.g., by asking questions) and recorded their views (Table 15). One child felt that the adults only asked them questions about what they thought 'sometimes' and another child thought adults wrote down what they said 'sometimes', reflected in a slightly lower mean score for children compared to young people (see Table N in Appendix N).

**Table 15**

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Questions on Possible Facilitators of Participation in PATH and Traditional Meetings as Scored by CYP.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PATH</i>			<i>N</i>	<i>Traditional</i>		
		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>CYP felt the adults included them, e.g. by asking questions</i>	10	5-10	<b>8.45</b>	1.66	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71
<i>CYP felt the adults wrote down what they said</i>	10	5-10	<b>7.93</b>	1.75	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71

The observation data contextualised how often children were engaged in the meeting. Table 16 shows that CYP were asked to contribute most to the meetings out of all the attendees. Field notes indicate that CYP were often asked questions about their views and asked whether they agreed/disagreed with a statement made by another participant. Parents were asked to contribute the least or second to least in the meetings. This is interesting when considering the data in Table 10 showed that parents spoke for a greater length of time than CYP. Parent and CYP's views were actively recorded in the meetings (e.g. written on to the PATH graphic) with similar frequency.

**Table 16**

Frequencies and Percentages of Participant Engagement in the PATH Meetings as Indicated by the Observations.

<b>Meeting and participant role</b>	<b>Total duration of meeting</b>	<b>Number of observation periods</b>	<b>Number of times requested to contribute (percentage in brackets)</b>	<b>Number of times contribution recorded</b>
<b>SPATH2</b>	1h 33m 37s	6		
CYP			33 (67%)	5
Parents x2			3 (6%)	8
Education staff x2			8 (16%)	-
Friend/family			2 (4%)	-
EPs x2			3 (6%)	-
<b>SPATH4</b>	1h 25m 59s	5		
CYP			28 (68%)	8
Parents x2			3 (7%)	5
Education staff x3			8 (20%)	-
EPs x2			2 (5%)	-
<b>SPATH5</b>	1h 15m 07s	5		
CYP			33 (56%)	4
Parent			4 (7%)	4
Education staff x2			10 (17%)	-
Friend/family			7 (12%)	-
EPs x2			5 (8%)	-

#### 5.3.1.2. Participation in Traditional Meetings

Quantitative data from the questionnaires indicated that the two young people who attended traditional meetings felt that adults had included them in the conversation (e.g. by asking questions) and that adults had written down what they said ( $M=9.50$ ,  $SD=0.71$  for both items) (Table 15).

CYP did not attend the two meetings that were recorded. Exploring parent involvement in these meetings, the SOS data in Table 17 shows that in one of these meetings, the parent was asked to contribute the most and in the other, the education staff was asked to contribute most. There was evidence that the parent's contributions were recorded in both meetings.

**Table 17**

Frequencies and Percentages of Participant Engagement in Traditional Meetings as Indicated by the Observations.

<b>Meeting and participant role</b>	<b>Total duration of meeting</b>	<b>Number of observation periods</b>	<b>Number of times requested to contribute</b>	<b>Number of times contribution recorded</b>
<b>STrad1</b>	1h 13m 12s	5*		
Parent			7 (44%)	5
Education staff x2			6 (38%)	-
EP			3 (19%)	-
<b>STrad3</b>	1h 35m 24s	6		
Parent			13 (46%)	20
Education staff			15 (54)	-
EP			0 (0%)	-

### 5.3.1.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

The CYP who participated in traditional meetings reported a slightly higher mean score for the item relating to adults including them in the conversation (e.g. by asking questions) than CYP who attended PATH meetings (traditional  $M=9.50$ ,  $SD=0.71$ , PATH  $M=8.45$ ,  $SD=1.66$ ) (Table 15). CYP who attended traditional meetings ( $M=9.50$ ,  $SD=0.71$ ) also reported a higher mean score for the item relating to feeling that adults had written down what they said compared to the mean score for CYP who attended PATH meetings ( $M=7.93$ ,  $SD=1.75$ ). Two traditional meetings were observed and CYP were not present, so comparisons cannot be made between the observation data. Parents, present at all five recorded meetings, were asked to contribute more to traditional meetings than to PATH meetings. There was evidence that the parent's contributions were recorded in both types of meetings.

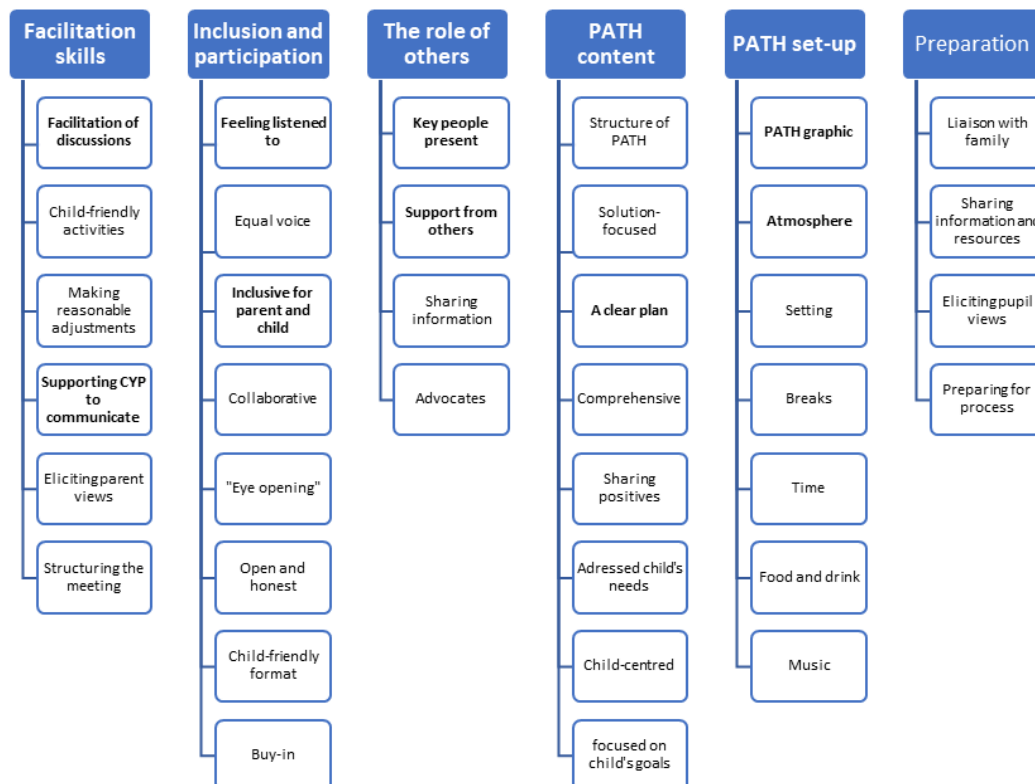
### 5.3.2 Sub-RQ 2b: What did participants enjoy/ find helpful and enabled participation during the PATH EHCNA meetings and the traditional EHCNA meetings?

#### 5.3.2.1. Themes from PATH Meetings

Thematic analysis of the questionnaire responses reported six themes relating to parents', CYP's, education staff's and EPs' descriptions of what they found helpful, enjoyable and supportive during the PATH meetings (Figure 10). Themes and sub-themes shown in bold in Figure 10 were reported by all participant groups. Where sub-themes have only been reported by one participant group, this is stated in the description of that sub-theme.

**Figure 10**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Relating to Participant Reports of What They Found Helpful, Enjoyable and Enabled Participation During the PATH Meetings.*



### 5.3.2.1.1 Facilitation Skills

Staff and parents found the process was well-planned, well-led, well-structured, and well-organised (see Figure 11 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). One staff member reported the process was fluid and one parent felt the meeting was in-depth. One EP reported that parents felt they were supported through the structure of the conversation. Staff, parents and CYP reported specific elements of the facilitation which had been helpful, including being given time to reflect on answers, clear and direct questions, and prompts to elicit further details. One EP felt it was helpful giving meeting attendees time to discuss their ideas with their neighbouring attendees.

*“The EP was asking lots of questions and helped draw the information out.”* (education staff)  
*“As parents, we were supported through the structure of the conversation.”* (parent)

Participants reported that the EPs had actively supported the child’s communication within the meeting. This included re-phrasing questions, communicating to the CYP in a child-friendly way, asking for the child’s views first, asking if the child agreed with other comments being made and giving some suggestions if the child was struggling to think of their own ideas. Parents and EPs reported that EP actively included parents in the meeting by asking questions, giving parents a chance to provide information, and asking parents if anything else needs to be added. One staff member also recognised that the EP had praised the parent *“for all that she does.”*

*“They would always ask me first when a new topic was mentioned.”* (young person)  
*“When I couldn’t come up with the words, everybody helped me get out the words I was trying to say.”* (child)

Parents, education staff and EPs reported that EPs made adjustments/accommodations when the meeting was being facilitated to respond to the child’s needs, including using activities and games to distract the child when feeling overwhelmed, using visual timetables to support understanding, and providing fiddle toys and breaks to support regulation. Education staff and EPs reported having toys available and using art and crafts activities to facilitate engagement with the PATH, such as drawing, sticking on photos of the child doing things they like, and adding different textured materials onto the PATH. Two children reported enjoying drawing on the PATH graphic.

*“He wouldn’t normally join in creative activities but was given choice of coloured pens to use and different materials which he helped stick on the PATH”* (education staff)  
*“...it was helpful to have a visual timetable for the YP and the book You Choose to help stimulate ideas...”* (EP)

### 5.3.2.1.2 Inclusion and Participation

Parents, CYP, education staff often reported feeling listened to and that their views taken into account (see Figure 12 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). EPs also recognised that parents felt heard and that CYP felt included. The child-friendly format and delivery was described by two participants as helpful for engaging the child in the process. As well as individually feeling listened to, participants reported that everyone at the meeting had been included and had their views heard, with all contributions being valued. They reported that they felt able to have open, honest conversations where families could speak freely and every concern was heard.

*“Included in all the conversations and we were all encouraged to participate and have our voice heard.”* (parent)  
*“The process was very good at giving everyone an equal voice.”* (parent)

Participants reported that the child was more involved in this meeting compared to previous meetings. They were impressed how well the children engaged and participated in the meeting. One staff member and one child reported how the process had enabled the child to be open about their feelings. Two staff members and one parent also commented on how the parents had felt able to participate and fully included.

*“Useful to hear the child’s input and thoughts directly as very powerful.”* (education staff)

*“Feel like Brandy was listened to when normally decisions are made without her.”* (parent)

*“I got to speak with my feelings”* (child)

Participants felt that the meeting provided a space where those concerned about the child could gather in one place and share their views as a group. Participants felt it was helpful to have everyone hearing the same information and to collaborate on decision making.

*“Never had an in-depth meeting to discuss Jack with so many people.”* (parent)

Three participants also mentioned that during the meeting they learnt things they did not know about the child.

*“I found the whole meeting an eye opener and I learnt things about Thomas.”* (parent)

Two EPs reported that it was helpful when parents, CYP and education staff *“bought into”* and threw themselves into the process. For example, one EP who uses PATH regularly reported that *“...College is very familiar & supportive of this approach...”*.

### 5.3.2.1.3 The Role of Others

A range of key people were mentioned in participants’ responses to have been present at the meeting and to have supported the process in some way (see Figure 13 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). This included children’s keyworkers, other education staff, children’s friends, and family (e.g. younger brother). Participants reported that it was helpful to have people there who know the child well and have a good relationship with them to share information about the child and to support the child. For example, one EP reported that the keyworker helped the child stay regulated by playing a game. One parent felt the staff helped them express themselves.

*“Staff were also present to give valuable oversight from their experiences.”* (parent)

*“Allowing Timmy to bring a friend to support him”* (parent)

Four participants described how parents and key staff members could advocate for the child and represent the child’s views when they were not able to for themselves. In three instances, the child was very young (Early Years) and with communication and interaction difficulties which limited verbal communication. In another instance, the parent was not present and so their views were represented by a close family friend.

*“...he was represented well by both his parents and keyworker who could share the things that are important to him.”* (education staff)



#### 5.3.2.1.4 PATH Content

Participants reported finding the content of the PATH meetings helpful (see Figure 14 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). Three parents and one staff member reported that the PATH format and structure had been helpful, including the step-by-approach. They found it helpful to start with the 'dream' and "unlimited thinking" and work backwards to the practicalities.

*"The whole format- starting by looking at the future aspirations and working back made it very positive and solution focused."* (education staff)

*"It was helpful as step-by-step approach of the Now, End Goal, How to get there."* (parent)

Four participants felt that it was helpful to create a clear plan for goals and the future, including the support needed to achieve these goals. Three participants felt that the meeting focused on solutions, strategies and generating ideas. One staff member also reported that it was helpful hearing about the parent's experiences and the parent of the same child felt it helped to have heard a rounded picture of their child.

*"Focused on the future and how we want to achieve this, so was very positive."* (education staff)

*"... it feels like we've made progress with thinking about Jack's future."* (parent)

*"Mum felt relieved to talk through the key concerns as well."* (EP)

Parents, education staff and EPs enjoyed how positive and strengths-focused the PATH process was. When they were discussing the child's needs, two participants enjoyed expressing the child's needs in a positive way, with less negativity.

*"This was so positive and celebrated my child rather than focusing on what he can't do."* (parent)

*"The meeting created a space where parent were involved in/supported to formulate a different, more positive view of the situation..."* (EP)

Parents, staff and EPs also felt that the content of the meeting was child-centred, placing the student at the centre of the meeting. There was a focus on the child's ambitions and the child had a say in planning goals and provision.

*"YP had a clear plan for long-term & short-term future & was fully involved in planning for these."*  
(EP)

#### 5.3.2.1.5 PATH Set-Up

Staff, parents and EPs stated that the PATH graphic was helpful for supporting the discussion and providing a shared focus (see Figure 15 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). It was felt that the PATH graphic was easy to follow, supported the child's understanding, and two parents enjoyed seeing what was being written about their child. Three EPs explained that the parents and their child are left with something visual that they can take home with them.

*"The visual aspects of it (recording with pictures and writing) made it very easy to follow and supported the child's understanding."* (education staff)

*"I liked the PATH journey drawing. It helped me able to visual my thoughts and put them down onto paper."* (parent)

*"The child was delighted to take his PATH back to the classroom to show his teacher and tell his class all about it."* (EP)

CYP, parents, education staff and EPs often commented positively on the atmosphere at the meeting, including that it was comfortable, fun, calm, non-judgmental, caring, relaxed, friendly, and warm. Additionally, individual participants reported that it was engaging, safe, and a *“...pleasant and a lovely experience.”* Three participants specifically stated that this had a positive effect on the child and helped everyone feel able to contribute.

*“Calming, friendly, open and easy to share information.”* (education staff)

*“Amazing to see how relaxed the families become and to be able to speak freely without judgement.”*  
(education staff)

Several aspects of the meeting environment specific to PATH were noted to have been enjoyable, helpful and/or supportive. Participants described enjoying the music playing, the circle format, and food and drink provided/the child being allowed to eat lunch. It was also noted when the room used was comfortable, welcoming, private and less formal. One parent felt the meeting was the right length of time and gave *“more time to go into detail.”* and two EPs spoke about the importance of having breaks.

*“The room is welcoming and parents sit on a cozy sofa together.”* (EP)

*“More emphasis on snacks, music, breaks & things YP & parent needed to be comfortable.”* (EP)

#### *5.3.2.1.6 Preparation*

Staff, parents and EPs reported that it had been helpful when the meeting was arranged ahead of time and when meeting attendees had been adequately prepared before the meeting so they knew what to expect. They also reported that it was helpful to know what kind of questions would be asked so that they could prepare their answers to the questions ahead of time. EPs reported that it was helpful to have good liaison with the family, CYP and other attendees before the meeting and did this by meeting with the child, sending resources home to outline the meeting and explain the process, and encouraging school staff to talk with the child beforehand. This also helped to quell anxiety about the meeting and for the EP to gather some information to use during the meeting. See Figure 16 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme.

*“The YP felt confident in sharing her views because she had been well prepared”* (EP)

*“It was also helpful to liaise with the family in the week before as they were anxious about the meeting.”* (EP)

#### *5.3.2.2. Summary of Themes from Traditional Meetings*

Five themes and numerous sub-themes were found following thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of the traditional meeting questionnaire responses from education staff, parents, CYP and EPs. Themes related to the EP’s facilitation skills and qualities, the content and format of the meeting, the role of others in the meeting, and inclusion and participation in the meeting (Table 18). Themes relating to EP’s facilitation and skills and inclusion and participation in the meeting came up more frequently in participant’s comments than themes relating to content, the role of others and the meeting format. Themes in bold indicate those which were reported by all participant groups.

**Table 18**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Relating to Participant Reports of What They Found Helpful, Enjoyable and Enabled Participation During the Traditional Meetings.*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>EP facilitation skills and qualities</b>	<b>Facilitation to gather views</b>	<i>"...asking direct questions to provide a space for views as needed."</i> (EP)
	<b>EP approach and qualities</b>	<i>"Jenny was compassionate and understanding..."</i> (parent)
	Child-friendly activities	<i>"...Derek played... with him which made him build a small relationship with him..."</i> (parent)
	EP knowledge	<i>"The EP answered our questions we as well as questions from parents."</i> (education staff)
Inclusion and participation	Listened to	<i>"We felt listened to as education staff..."</i> (education staff)
	Child and parent voice	<i>"...listened attentively to mum and the young person. I personally felt pleased and happy that the young person would finally be listened to."</i> (education staff)
	Feeling comfortable to share	<i>"Carter felt very at ease...Derek really made him as comfortable as possible."</i> (parent)
	Parent-led	<i>"Being parent-led as well."</i> (EP)
	Atmosphere	<i>"The meeting was very productive and with a friendly atmosphere."</i> (parent)
	Open and honest	<i>"Opportunity to have an open &amp; honest discussion."</i> (education staff)
	Collaborative	<i>"It felt like there was generally a good consensus/shared understanding as a group."</i> (EP)
Meeting content	Focus on strengths and needs	<i>"...encouraged by EP to share their views/thoughts/feelings/concerns about M's needs. The EP also encouraged the parents to share M's strengths."</i> (education staff)
	Focus on planning provision and outcomes	<i>"We had the opportunity to discuss Mary's further education."</i> (parent)
	Positive focus	<i>"It also felt quite positively focused as we discussed a lot of the child's strengths and how much progress he has made..."</i> (EP)
	Use of previous information	<i>"He was considerate of previous reports and was able to build on that information."</i> (parent)
The role of others	Support from staff	<i>"Staff know parents well and helped explain some terms/information to them when needed."</i> (education staff)
	Advocates	<i>"...I was talking and making decisions on her behalf."</i> (parent)
Meeting format/ set-up	Preparation/ prior liaison	<i>"Simon was able to call me to arrange the meeting and gave time for a follow-up meeting."</i> (parent)
	Structure	<i>"Less structured process in this instance allowed parent to fully voice their concerns..."</i> (EP)

### 5.3.2.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

The main themes arising from parent, CYP, staff and EP's views were similar across PATH and traditional meetings. Across both meeting types, focus was on the facilitation skills of the EP, the content of the meetings, the format/structure of the meetings, the role of others in the meeting, and the inclusion of the CYP and parent. However, there were differences in the content of themes and the emphasis placed on particular elements of the meeting, shown within the sub-themes. Within the 'Facilitation Skills' theme, there was a greater focus in the PATH meetings on how the EPs had facilitated and enabled the child's participation and communication in the meeting, for example, by use of different child-friendly activities and adaptations to the language used to meet the child's needs. However, there was less mention of strategies and approaches to facilitate the child's involvement in the traditional meetings. Instead, there was a greater emphasis on the EP's knowledge, ability to share information, their approach, and personal attributes.

In the 'Inclusion and Participation' theme, similar sub-themes arose across traditional and PATH meetings around feeling listened to, having a positive atmosphere, an open and honest discussion, and collaborative dialogue. However, the sub-theme 'parent-led' also arose from the traditional meeting data whilst themes around 'child-friendly format' and 'inclusive for parent and child' were more prominent following PATH meetings. There was also a greater emphasis on all meeting participants having an 'equal voice' in PATH meetings compared to the parents' and education staff's views being heard in the traditional meetings.

In the 'Role of Others' theme, participants in both PATH and traditional meetings found it helpful to have present someone who knew the child well and could speak on their behalf. Participants in PATH meetings commented that there were a range of people present, some who would not normally be at meetings, such as siblings and friends. In both meetings, it was felt that those present could offer support, though this mostly came from staff in traditional meetings, whilst support could be offered from various meeting attendees and take different forms in PATH meetings.

Exploring sub-themes around meeting content, it was apparent in traditional meetings that the content of the meeting focused on information gathering and discussing the child's strengths, needs, outcomes and provision. However, in the PATH meetings, whilst the child's needs were addressed, this was done in a positive way. There was also an emphasis on how PATH facilitated conversations around goals, the future, and the child's aspirations, as well as developing a clear plan for next steps. Participants in both meetings felt the meeting was positive and strengths-based, however, participants in PATH meetings also emphasised that the meeting content was child-centred and that they had heard a rounded picture of the child.

The last traditional theme/two PATH themes focused on practicalities and the meeting format. In both traditional and PATH, there was an emphasis on preparation before the meeting and prior liaison with the family and CYP. In the traditional meetings, participants valued the informal structure of the meeting. In the PATH meetings, however, participants spoke positively about the environmental adaptations and provision unique to PATH (e.g. music, food, comfy chairs) and the visual support (the PATH graphic), which were not present in traditional meetings.

### **5.3.3 Sub-RQ 2c: What Did Participants Find Less Enjoyable/ Helpful or were Barriers to Participation in the PATH EHCNA Meetings and Traditional EHCNA meetings?**

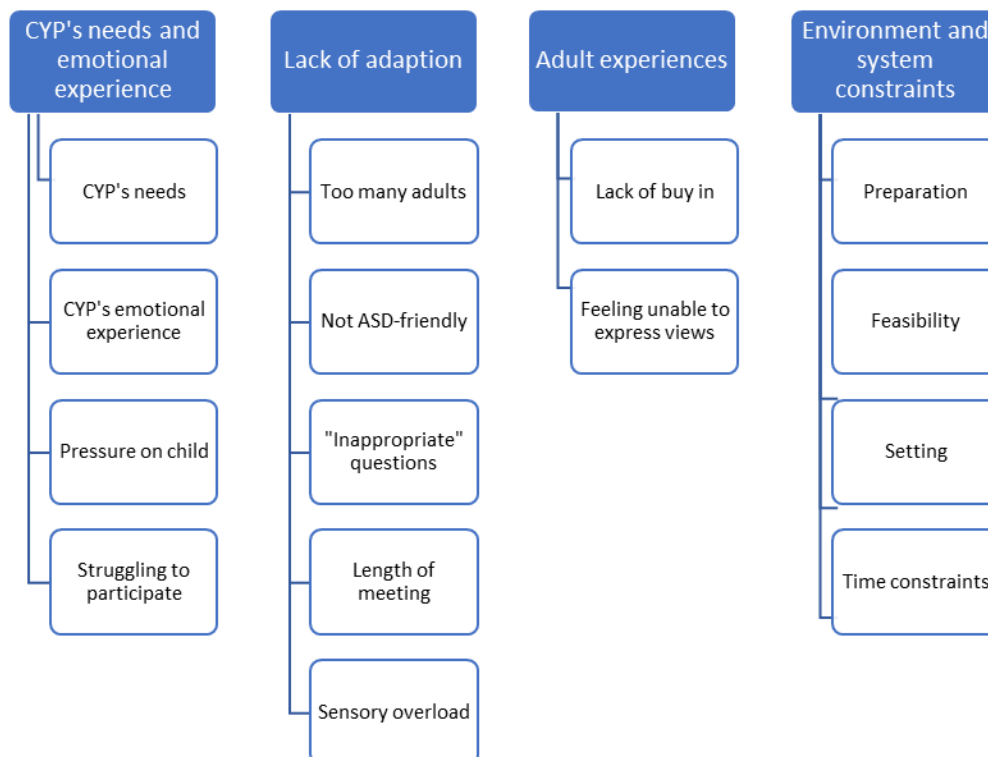
#### 5.3.3.1. Themes from PATH Meetings

Themes and sub-themes relating to what participants reported they did not find helpful/enjoyable, or were barriers to participation, were similar to sub-themes reported for RQs 2b (Figure 17). Sub-

themes indicated that barriers/elements participants did not enjoy were often in opposition to those that participants enjoyed/were supportive. For example, whilst participants often spoke positively about the EP's ability to respond to the child's needs during the meeting in the Facilitation Skills theme, there were times when there was little adaptation for the child's needs. During the presentation of results below, it will be highlighted when sub-themes are in contrast to sub-themes presented for RQs 2b. Most of the sub-themes presented here were drawn from responses provided by participants following the same four PATH meetings.

**Figure 17**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Relating to What Participants Reported Finding Less Helpful, Enjoyable and a Barrier to Participation During the PATH Meetings.*



#### 5.3.3.1.1 CYP's Needs and Emotional Experience

Eight participants reported that the child's needs could have been a barrier to the child engaging in the meeting (see Figure 18 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). For example, three staff members described the child's difficulties expressing themselves, metacognition needs and/or level of understanding, with one staff member suggesting that the SEN needs prevented inclusion in decision-making. One young person also mentioned that it was hard to focus at times. One EP also noted a child's trauma-related needs and another commented on the child's anxiety being a barrier to participation.

*"In this situation the child has difficulties expressing himself in speech... so he would not have been aware of the goal setting process." (education staff)*

Five participants reported that the child had become overwhelmed, stressed or heightened during the meeting and in one case, the meeting had to be stopped. Four participants also reported that at times the CYP could be shy, anxious or nervous to take part. Two participants mentioned that it

seemed there was a lot of pressure on the child to come up with answers and that at times the child seemed to be put on the spot.

*“...in Sonny’s case it was overwhelming for him and he was very stressed, almost hiding in my jumper. He could barely speak to give answers..”* (parent)

*“A couple of times it felt a little bit like Timmy was on the spot and didn’t know what to say”*  
(education staff)

This led to four participants reporting that the child had found it difficult to join in and participate. One EP noted that the child had struggled to settle and stay in the room. The parents of one child felt that *“in reality he didn’t want to be there”*.

#### 5.3.3.1.2 Lack of Adaption

Both parents from one PATH felt that the number of strangers present was not enjoyable for their child and had created a barrier to their participation. A child from a different PATH meeting said they did not enjoy the meeting because *“...I don’t like people talking about me.”* One EP acknowledged that although the child knew all those who were present, having all his key adults in one place could have heightened him.

*“...too many adults he didn’t know and him being the focus of all their attention was not comfortable for him.”* (parent)

In contrast to some parents who felt that the EPs accounted, and adjusted the process, for their child’s needs, parents from two PATH meetings felt that their child was not well supported, the questions were inappropriate and the process wasn’t accessible for their child’s needs. Two parents of the same child felt that he struggled to engage in discussions about aspirations and his future as the child was not mentally ready for these discussions and they made him uncomfortable. These parents indicated that they felt it was inappropriate for their child to be at the meeting.

*“I don’t think there were many adaptations made to accommodate my son’s autism.”* (parent)

*“It felt a bit like we were making a big deal out of Sonny’s comments that were not really true. In truth he doesn’t really know what he desires for his future yet.”* (parent)

One YP and one staff member reported that the length of the meeting was difficult to manage. One staff member also thought that the meeting could *“...be a bit of a sensory overload”* given all the people, talking, music and activities. See Figure 19 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme.

*“At times it was hard to keep focused because of how long the meeting was”* (young person)

#### 5.3.3.1.3 Adult Experiences

Three meeting attendees struggled to get behind the idea of the PATH process (see Figure 20 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme). One parent felt that *“this meeting felt a bit like a game”* and was unable to see how the meeting may benefit the child. Another parent felt that the SENCO struggled to get on board with certain aspects of the PATH, such as the unlimited thinking.

*“The school SENCO seemed to struggle with the unrestricted thinking part of the meeting because they were focused on current realities/limitations.”* (parent)

In contrast to many of the participants who felt that PATH enabled them to express their views, five participants reflected that parents felt they weren't able to express their true opinions. One parent felt it was uncomfortable being critical in front of school staff and two parents felt unable to talk about their child's needs in front of them. This contrasts with other parents who felt it was nice to talk about their child's needs in a strengths-based, positive way.

*"...we were not really able to give out true thoughts re Sonny and his future as the conversation had to be kept in the positive for Sonny's wellbeing." (parent)*

#### *5.3.3.1.4 Environment and System Constraints*

One staff member spoke of the difficulties that arose when meetings were arranged with less than 24 hours' notice and when staff and parents had not been adequately prepared, suggesting that *"...these experiences were very different and not as satisfactory"*. This contrasts with the positive experiences reported when parents, CYP and education staff felt well prepared for the meeting. In addition, one EP reflected that they couldn't meet with the CYP before the summer break, so wasn't able to do any preparation. One SENCO reported that it would be difficult to implement some of the ideas generated at the meeting in a mainstream secondary school.

In contrast to participants who spoke about a comfortable and welcoming physical environment for the PATH meeting, two participants highlighted instances where the environment was not supportive. Education staff spoke about the difficulties of having the meeting in a small room, outside or out in the main nursery, though acknowledged it is not always possible to rearrange the rooms and that *"...you have to make the best of what you have."*

Six parents, education staff and CYP mentioned the length of the meeting. They reported challenges that came with the increased length, including difficulties focusing, missing out on college work, and difficulties arranging staff to be present. It also meant that in one instance, the appropriate staff members could not be present due to teaching commitments. This is in contrast to some of the positives mentioned regarding the increased length, such as being able to have a more in-depth meeting. See Figure 21 in Appendix M for list of codes within this sub-theme.

#### *5.3.3.2. Summary of Themes from Traditional Meetings*

Following thematic analysis of questionnaire responses, the most frequent theme to appear when considering barriers to participation in traditional meetings was the lack of child involvement (Table 19). Six participants mentioned that the child was not present in the meeting and was unable to contribute their views. Three participants described the child's needs (e.g. communication difficulties) and age (e.g. in the Early Years) as barriers to their participation. One EP highlighted that this meant there was a lack of truly collaborative decision-making. Other barriers included parents/children feeling unable to fully share their views with those present, parent's emotional experiences in response to the meeting content and the length of the meeting.

**Table 19**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Relating to What Participants Reported Finding Less Helpful, Enjoyable and a Barrier to Participation During the Traditional Meetings.*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Lack of CYP participation</b>	CYP not present	<i>"... my child was not in the meeting with me."</i> (parent)
	CYP's needs	<i>"Child was not involved as 3 years old, no functional language or communicative intent..."</i> (EP)
<b>Lack of inclusive practices</b>	Feeling unable to share views	<i>"School and parent views can sometimes differ- it would have been more comfortable for parent only to be present."</i> (parent)
	Lack of collaboration	<i>"I was able to support the child to think about provision/ support/ outcomes.....but as we met separately to the adults weren't privy to this and there wasn't genuine joint decision making."</i> (EP)
<b>Parent emotional experience</b>		<i>"It was upsetting having to relive some of the situation we have to deal with."</i> (parent)
<b>Practicalities</b>	Time	<i>"Mum was concerned that the meeting went on for a long time and began to feel guilty."</i> (education staff)

### 5.3.3.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Some barriers raised following PATH meetings contrasted to those raised following traditional meetings. For example, following traditional meetings, participants reported a lack of child participation due to the child not having been invited to the meeting and the child's needs being a barrier to participation. Alternatively, following four PATH meetings, participants reported that whilst the child had attended, they had difficulties participating in the meeting due to their needs and their emotional experience of the meeting. Three of these children were reported to feel overwhelmed and anxious, and/or pressured to contribute. Participants in these PATH meetings felt that when the child's needs were not appropriately considered, reasonable adjustments not made, the content was inappropriate for the child, length of meeting was too long, too many adults/strangers, and the environment was too stimulating, the child was not able to participate even though they were present. Two CYP who attended PATHs reported that they would rather have not attended. There were also more practical and environmental considerations to arrange for PATH meetings, and when these were not done properly (e.g. the right people not being present, the room being too small), this impacted the quality of the meeting. These factors were less of a consideration for traditional meetings which tended to be more informal. It was clear that several meeting attendees did not 'buy into' the PATH approach, ultimately meaning that they did not think the meeting was productive or supportive.

There were similar barriers reported too. Five participants reported that children and parents sometimes found it difficult to share their views. Parents sometimes felt it was difficult to express their concerns and worries in front of their child and/or education staff. Additionally, five participants across both meetings commented that the meetings were long, and in the case of PATH meetings, an additional two PATH participants reported the time commitment for staff created a barrier (average length of recorded meetings for PATH 1h 24m 52s, average length for traditional 1h 24m 18s).



**5.4 RQ 3: Does using PATH for the EP EHCNA meeting result in draft EHCPs that are more person-centred compared to when a traditional EHCNA meeting was held?**

**5.4.1 Sub-RQ 3a: Is there greater presence and depth of parent and CYP views in Section A of the EHCP following a PATH EHCNA meeting compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?**

**5.4.1.1. PATH Draft EHCP Findings**

The extent to which parent's and CYP's views are contained in their draft EHCPs was explored using Fox's (2016) framework for participation in the EHCNA. 14 EHCPs were explored in terms of the depth, degree and areas of participation covered by the content of the draft EHCP using the Document Analysis Schedule (DAS; further detail in Appendix O).

**5.4.1.1.1 Depth of participation**

The child's views were represented in 79% (11) of the draft EHCPs. Various methods for ascertaining the child's views were reported, including PATH meeting, individual discussion with a Speech and Language Therapist, individual discussion with the EP, pupil voice questionnaires completed at school and at home, dynamic assessment, and activities such as 'A "5" Could Make Me Lose Control!' and 'Three wishes'. In 21% (3) of EHCPs, it was stated that the child's views were ascertained either with the support of the parent or school staff, with no further description of how this was done. The draft EHCPs often did not record that a PATH meeting had taken place or that the child's/parent's views had been obtained during the PATH. Only one draft EHCP contained a picture of the PATH graphic and 36% (5) of draft EHCPs did not mention the PATH meeting. 36% (5) of draft EHCPs reported that the child had attended a PATH meeting and 29% (4) stated that the child's views were gained from the PATH meeting. 29% (4) of draft EHCPs stated that the parent had attended the PATH meeting and 21% (3) stated that the views represented in the draft EHCP were those that had been gained at the PATH meeting.

The views recorded in Section A of the draft EHCPs suggested that the children most frequently participated at the 'social' or 'solution' depth (Table 20). Three children participated at the 'surface' depth as their views were not directly sought for the draft, rather they were provided by key adults (e.g. "David's views were gained through observation and from talking to the adults who know him well."). These were all children in the Early Years. One draft EHCP described the child's views in a way that suggested that the child participated at the 'psychological' depth through activities such as 'A "5" Could Make Me Lose Control' and 'Three wishes'. When the children participated at the 'solution' depth, it was often stated that they had attended the PATH meeting (in 80% of cases). There was no mention of children having attended the PATH when they participated at the 'surface' depth. It was unclear if the child who participated at the 'psychological' depth attended the PATH meeting.

**Table 20**

*Percentage of Draft EHCPs Where the Child’s and Parent’s Participation in PATH Meetings Reached Various Depths of Participation as Described by Fox (2016)*

Depth of participation	Child’s participation	Parent’s participation
Surface	21%	0%
Descriptive	0%	57%
Social	36%	14%
Solution	36%	29%
Psychological	7%	0%

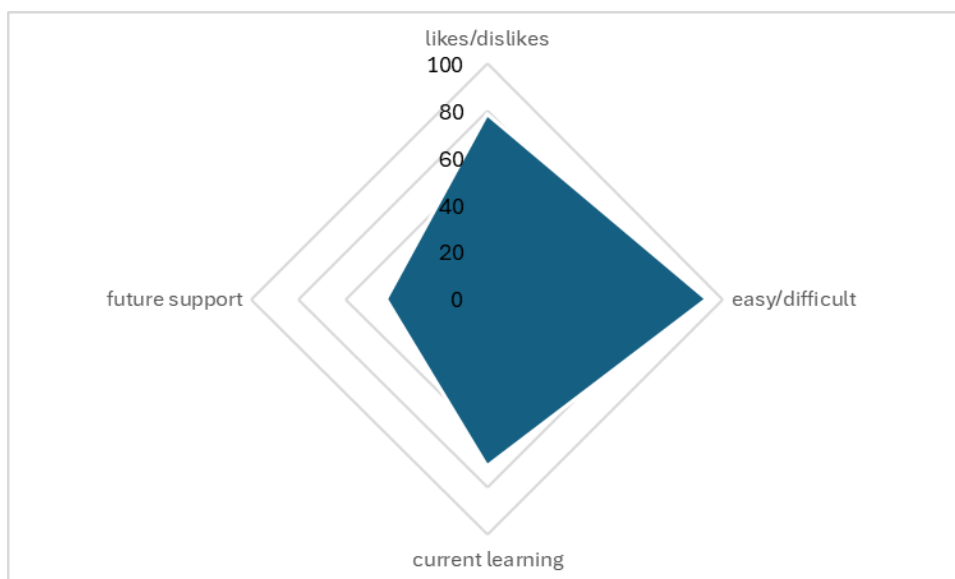
Over half of the parents participated at the ‘descriptive’ depth. Fewer parents than children participated at the ‘social’ or ‘solution’ depth and none participated at the ‘psychological’ or ‘surface’ depth. When parents did participate at the ‘solution’ depth, it was often mentioned that they had attended the PATH meeting (in 75% of cases). For parents who participated at the ‘descriptive’ or ‘social’ depth, it was either mentioned that they did not attend or it was unclear if they had attended the PATH/if their views came from the PATH meeting. The percentages outlined in Table 20 are also based on descriptive data and are used for context to the qualitative analysis.

*5.4.1.1.2 Areas of participation*

In most Section As, parent’s and/or child’s views were present, covering areas including likes/dislikes in school (79% (11) of draft EHCPs), what the child finds easy/difficult at school (93% (13) of draft EHCPs) and the child’s current learning and development (71% (10)). It was less common for the draft EHCPs to represent the parent’s and child’s views on future support for learning in Section A (this area was covered in 43% (6) of draft EHCPs). Overall, one draft EHCP covered only one area of participation, 21% (3) covered two areas of participation, 36% (5) covered three areas, and 36% (5) covered four areas (Figure 22).

**Figure 22**

*Percentage of Draft EHCPs from PATH Meetings which Represented the Parent’s and Child’s Views in Each of the Areas of Participation Proposed by Fox (2016).*



The draft EHCPs generally did not represent the child’s views using the child’s own words or in first person. The child’s views were most likely to be recorded in first person/quotes when depicting their views on what they find easy and/or difficult at school (recorded in 50% (7) of EHCPs). For example, in Section A it was recorded that one young person said: *“I find reading quite easy – and assembly time. Computing and writing are both tricky.”* The child’s views were not often depicted in their own words or first-person for the other areas of participation; likes/dislikes in school (21% of the time (3)), current learning and development (21% of the time (3)), and future support for learning (7% of the time (1)). Even when the child’s views were depicted in first person, it was unclear whether the child had expressed that view. For example, one draft EHCP reported the child’s views as: *“I need adults to repeat instructions. I need extra time to complete tasks. I need reminders to listen...”* It was stated that Section A was completed by the child with support of school staff and as quotations were not used, it is difficult to know to what extent the child used those words to express her views.

#### 5.4.1.2 Traditional Draft EHCP Findings

##### *5.4.1.2.1 Depth of participation*

Five draft EHCPs following traditional meetings were analysed using the DAS. The child’s views were represented in 60% (3) of the traditional draft EHCPs. There were two EHCPs where the child’s views were not represented; one stated that *“Due to the nature of his needs it was not possible to talk to him directly about his views and aspirations”*, whilst the other stated that the child’s views had been completed by *“other professional”*. The method of obtaining the parent’s views was not reported in any draft EHCP and the method of ascertaining the child’s views was reported in one draft (questionnaire completed by child with parent and views obtained by EP during assessment). One draft stated that an attempt had been made to gather the child’s views but the child had not wanted to participate. The EHCPs indicated that two children (40%) participated at the ‘surface’ depth, two (40%) at the ‘social’ depth, and one (20%) at the ‘solution’ depth. Two parents (40%) participated at the ‘descriptive’ depth and three (60%) at the ‘solution’ depth. There was no mention in the draft EHCPs whether the child attended the EHCNA meeting or not.

**Table 21**

*Percentage of Draft EHCPs Where the Child’s and Parent’s Participation in Traditional Meetings Reached Various Depths of Participation as Described by Fox (2016)*

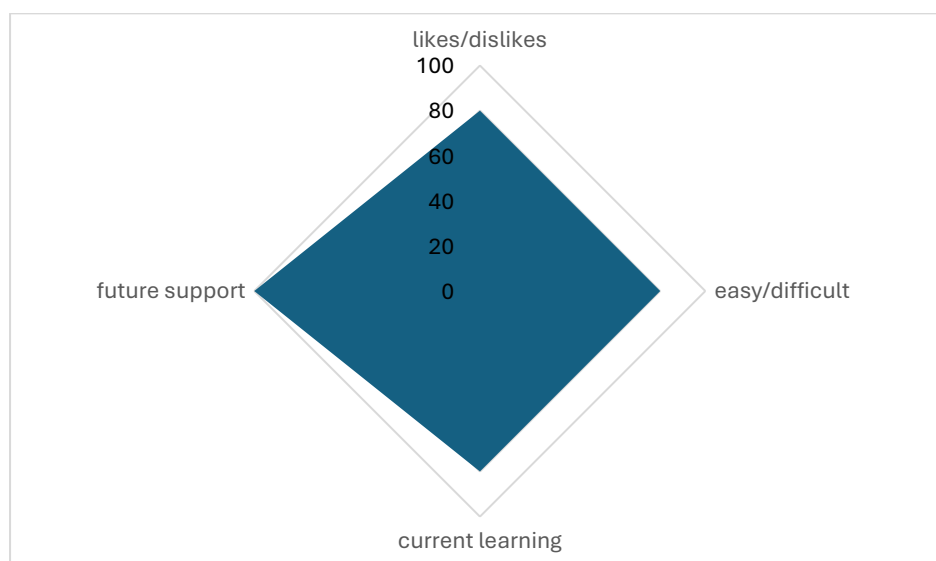
<b>Depth of participation</b>	<b>Child’s participation</b>	<b>Parent’s participation</b>
<b>Surface</b>	40%	0%
<b>Descriptive</b>	0%	40%
<b>Social</b>	40%	0%
<b>Solution</b>	20%	60%
<b>Psychological</b>	0%	0%

##### *5.4.1.2.2 Areas of participation*

In the draft EHCPs, the parent and child views covered the areas of participation, including likes/dislikes at school (80% (4) of draft EHCPs), what the child finds easy/difficult at school (80% or 4), the child’s current learning and progress (80% or 4/5), and future support for learning (100% (5)). All draft EHCPs covered at least three out of four areas of participation. However, three of the drafts (60%) did not include the child’s views directly (i.e. did not report the child’s views in quotes or first person) in these areas. Looking at the demographic data for the corresponding meetings, these children did not attend their EHCNA meetings. The child’s views in those areas were therefore directly referenced in draft EHCPs for two CYP, where the CYP had attended their EHCNA meetings.

**Figure 23**

*Percentage of Draft EHCPs from Traditional Meetings which Represented the Parent's and Child's Views in Each of the Areas of Participation Proposed by Fox (2016).*



#### 5.4.1.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

##### 5.4.1.3.1 Depth of Participation

The child's views were represented in more draft EHCPs (PATH  $n=14$ , traditional  $n=5$ ) following PATH meetings (79% of draft EHCPs) compared to when a traditional meeting had been conducted (60% of EHCPs). The PATH draft EHCPs more often reported the method used to ascertain the child's and parent's views and a range of methods were reported, whilst only one traditional EHCP reported the method of ascertaining the child's views. There was no mention in traditional draft EHCPs whether the child had attended the traditional EHCNA meeting, compared to 36% of draft EHCPs reporting that the child had attended a PATH meeting. More traditional EHCPs indicated that the CYP had participated at a lower depth of participation (mainly at the 'surface' depth and 'social' depth) than PATH EHCPs, where children were indicated to have participated up to the 'psychological' depth. Parents more often participated at the 'descriptive' depth in PATH EHCPs, a potentially 'lower' level of depth, whilst in traditional EHCPs, more parents appeared to participate at the 'solution' depth.

##### 5.4.1.3.2 Areas of Participation

In both traditional and PATH draft EHCPs, the parent and child views in Section A covered likes/dislikes at school, what the child finds easy/difficult at school, and the child's current learning and progress. However, traditional draft EHCPs more often contained the parents'/child's views on future support for learning. There was more inconsistency in how many areas of participation were covered in PATH draft EHCPs, with some only covering one area, whilst all traditional draft EHCPs covered at least three of the four areas. In both the traditional and PATH EHCPs, the child's views were often not represented using the child's own words or in first person (60% and 43% of EHCPs respectively did not directly report the child's views).

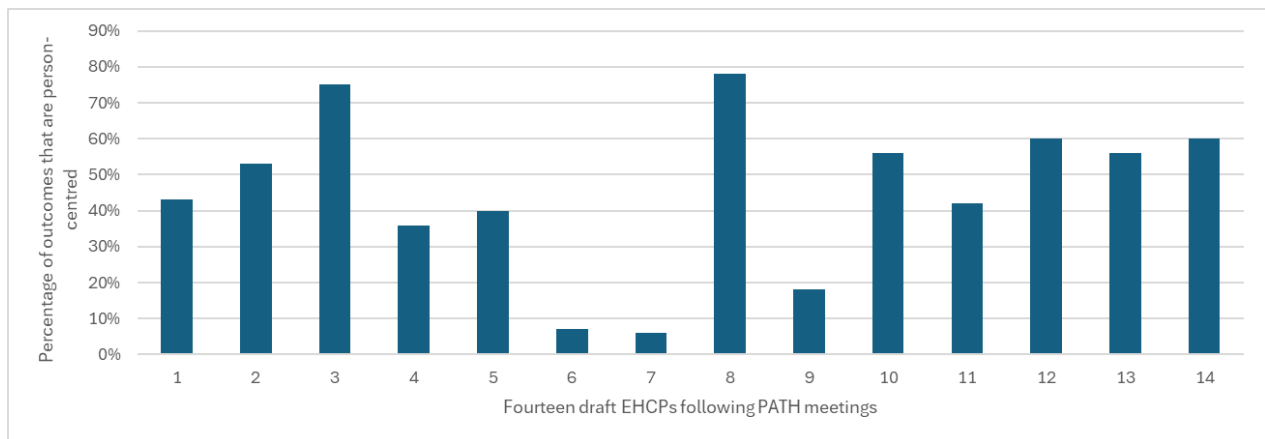
### 5.4.2 Sub-RQ 3b: Are there differences in the number of outcomes which reflect the parents' and CYPs' views in the draft EHCP following a PATH EHCNA meeting compared to a traditional EHCNA meeting?

#### 5.4.2.1 PATH Draft EHCP Findings

There was a wide range in the percentage of person-centred outcomes in the 14 draft EHCPs reviewed after PATH meetings, spanning from 6%-78% of outcomes ( $M=45\%$ ) (Figure 24). The outcomes reflected both the child and parent's views as recorded in Section A 50% of the time (in 7 EHCPs), the child's views only 7% of the time (1 EHCP), the parent's views only 29% of the time (4), and neither parent nor child's views 14% of the time (2). In the two EHCPs with the least person-centred outcomes, it was unclear if the parent's or child's views in Section A had come from PATH meetings. In the two EHCPs with the most person-centred outcomes, it was clear that the CYP had attended PATHs and that one parent had attended the PATH meeting.

**Figure 24**

*Percentage of Outcomes in Each Draft EHCP for PATH Meetings that were Person-Centred.*

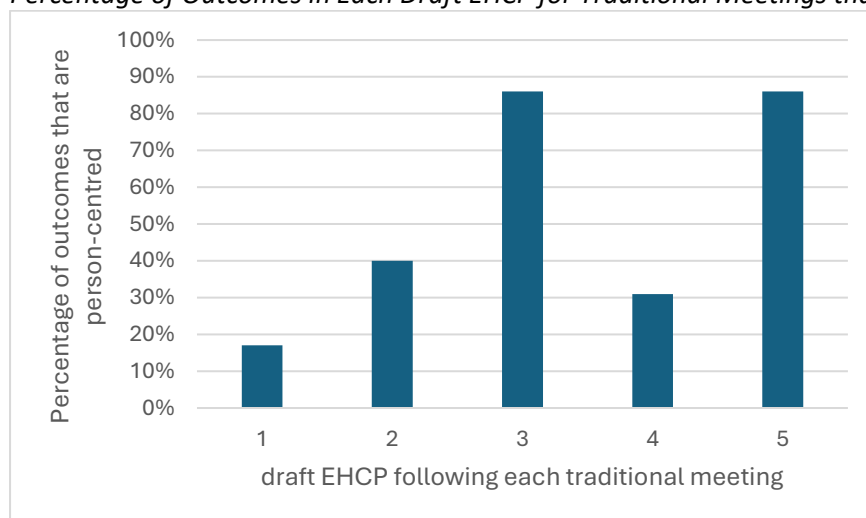


#### 5.4.2.2 Traditional Draft EHCP Findings

The number of person-centred outcomes each draft EHCP contained ranged from 17%-86% ( $M=52\%$ ). The outcomes represented both the parent and child's views from Section A of the EHCP in 60% (3/5) of draft EHCPs and just the parent's views in the remaining 40% of EHCPs. In the EHCP with the least person-centred outcomes, there was very little content in Section A, no reference to how the views were gained and parents participated at the 'descriptive' depth. In the EHCPs with the most person-centred outcomes (both 86%), the parents had participated at the 'solution' depth.

**Figure 25**

*Percentage of Outcomes in Each Draft EHCP for Traditional Meetings that were Person-Centred.*



#### 5.4.2.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Descriptive statistics showed slightly more person-centred outcomes in the traditional draft EHCPs ( $M=45\%$  PATH,  $M=52\%$  traditional). There were wide ranges in the percentage of person-centred outcomes following both types of meetings ( $Range=17-86\%$  traditional,  $Range=6-78\%$  PATH), indicating that the inclusion of person-centred outcomes was inconsistent across both groups. Where there were person-centred outcomes, these were likely to reflect both parent and child views half the time. In both meeting types, the EHCPs with the least person-centred outcomes did not reference how the views were gained or whether the parent and/or child had attended the EHCNA meeting.

#### 5.5 RQ 4: How useful do participants feel PATH is for the purpose of an EP EHCNA meeting in comparison to a traditional EHCNA meeting?

##### 5.5.1 Sub-RQ 4a: How helpful do EPs, education staff, and parents feel PATH meetings are for the EP's EHCNA meeting compared to traditional EHCNA meetings?

###### 5.5.1.1 PATH Meetings Findings

On questionnaire scales from 1-10, education staff, parents and EPs on average agreed that the PATH meeting had been helpful for the EHCNA (Table 22). Two parents (of the same child/PATH meeting) disagreed that the meeting had been helpful, scoring this question a 3/10. All other parents scored this question at least 6/10.

**Table 22**

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Question "How Helpful was the Meeting for the EHCP Assessment?" Split by Participant Role for PATH and Traditional Meetings.*

Participant	N	PATH			N	Traditional		
		Range	Mean	SD		Range	Mean	SD
Education staff	18	7-10	<b>9.17</b>	1.04	6	9-10	<b>9.67</b>	0.52
Parents	20	3-10	<b>8.65</b>	2.30	8	7-10	<b>9.50</b>	1.07
EPs	15	6-10	<b>8.53</b>	1.30	6	5-10	<b>7.83</b>	1.94

### 5.5.1.2 Traditional Meetings Findings

Quantitative data from the questionnaires indicated that parents and education staff agreed that the meetings had been helpful for the EHCNA (Table 22). EPs scored this question lower than the staff and parents did, however they still agreed it had been helpful.

### 5.5.1.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Parents and education staff who had traditional EHCNA meetings ( $M=9.50$ ,  $SD=1.07$  Parents;  $M=9.67$ ,  $SD=0.52$  Education staff) reported a marginally higher mean score for helpfulness for the EHCNA than those who had participated in PATH meetings ( $M=8.65$ ,  $SD=2.30$  Parents;  $M=9.17$ ,  $SD=1.04$  Education staff). Alternatively, EPs who participated in PATH meetings reported marginally higher average scores for helpfulness ( $M=8.53$ ,  $SD=1.30$  PATH;  $M=7.83$ ,  $SD=1.94$  traditional). The range of parent scores was wider for PATH meetings than traditional meetings, largely due to the scores from two parents who disagreed that PATH had been helpful. The qualitative analysis of the questionnaire responses indicated that these two parents did not ‘buy into’ the PATH approach (see Section 5.4.3).

## **5.5.2 Sub-RQ 4b: How useful do EPs feel PATH is for gathering information and generating person-centred outcomes and provision for the EHCNA?**

### 5.5.2.1 PATH Meetings Findings

EPs on average thought that the PATH meetings were helpful for information gathering, developing outcomes and planning provision (Table 23). Average scores were highest for helpfulness for information gathering about strengths and needs.

**Table 23**

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Questions Relating to How Helpful EPs Rated the PATH and Traditional Meetings for Various Aspects of the EHCNA.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PATH</i>			<i>N</i>	<i>Traditional</i>		
		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>How helpful was the meeting for gathering information about the child’s strengths and needs?</b>	15	5-10	<b>8.93</b>	1.39	6	5-10	<b>8.33</b>	1.72
<b>How helpful was the meeting for developing outcomes to address the child’s needs and aspirations?</b>	15	5-10	<b>8.53</b>	1.51	6	4-10	<b>7.83</b>	2.40
<b>How helpful was the meeting for planning provision which addressed the child’s needs and aspirations?</b>	15	4-10	<b>8.13</b>	1.85	6	6-8	<b>7.00</b>	0.89

### 5.5.2.2 Traditional Meeting Findings

Questionnaire responses to Likert-scale items indicated that EPs felt that the meeting was helpful for gathering information about the child’s strengths and needs and developing outcomes (Table 23). EPs did not report as positively on helpfulness for planning provision, slightly under the 7.5 benchmark for indicating ‘positive’ experience.

### 5.5.2.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Exploring EP views of how helpful the meetings were for individual components of the EHCNA, EPs’ mean scores following PATH meetings were marginally higher than following traditional meetings for gathering information ( $M=8.93$ ,  $SD=1.39$  PATH;  $M=8.33$ ,  $SD=1.75$  traditional), developing outcomes ( $M=8.53$ ,  $SD=1.51$  PATH;  $M=7.83$ ,  $SD=2.40$  traditional) and planning provision ( $M=8.13$ ,  $SD=1.85$  PATH;  $M=7.00$ ,  $SD=0.89$  traditional). However, owing to small and imbalanced sample sizes, statistical analysis was not conducted.

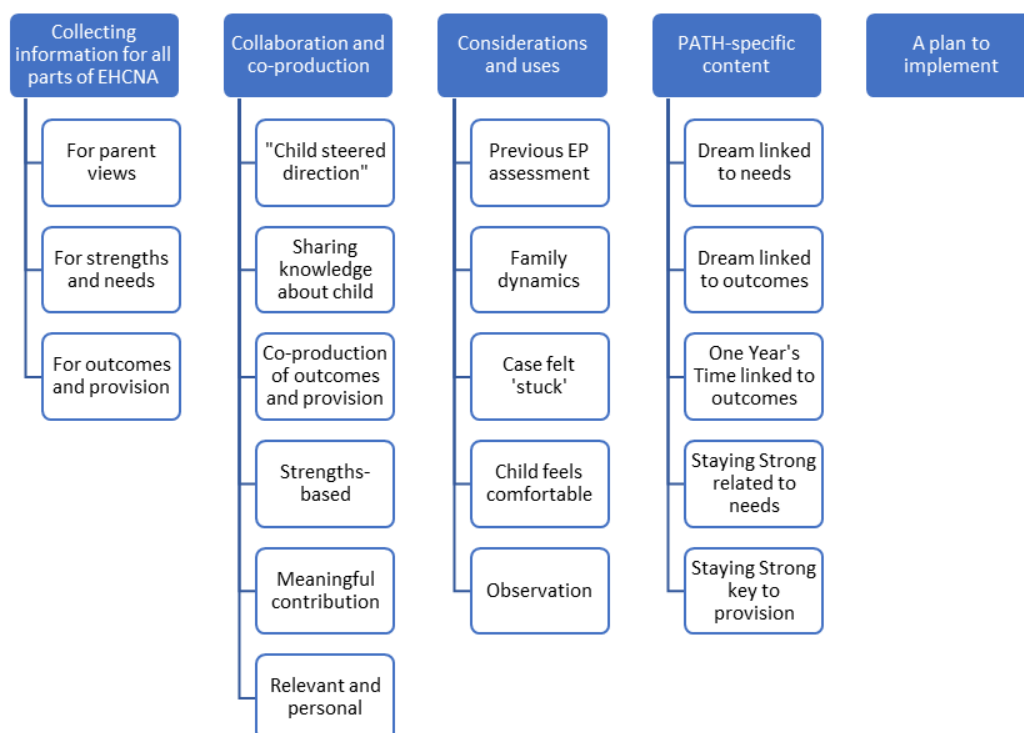
## 5.5.3 Themes from EP Questionnaires Related to Sub-RQs 4a. and 4b.

### 5.5.3.1 Themes from PATH Meetings

To contextualise data presented in Tables 22 and 23, thematic analysis was completed for EPs’ questionnaire responses regarding usefulness of the meeting for the EHCNA (Figure 26). Similar themes arose in the qualitative responses from EPs compared to the reasons they gave for why they enjoyed using PATH (see section 5.4.2, e.g. collaborative, strengths-based). The additional themes reported below expand on why they found these facets helpful (e.g. why they found it helpful to get the child’s views) as well as further reasons why PATH was useful within the context of the EHCNA. Barriers to usefulness are also reported below (Figure 27).

**Figure 26**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Relating to How Helpful EPs Reported PATH Meetings were for the EHCNA.*





#### 5.5.3.1.1 Collecting Information for All Parts of the EHCNA

Three EPs reported that PATH is helpful for collecting all the information needed for the EHCNA during the meeting with the CYP, parents and education staff. Two EPs reported that PATH was helpful for gaining CYP's and parent's views, particularly where there had been minimal input in the EHCNA application paperwork. Three EPs felt that PATH revealed strengths and needs and four EPs felt PATH provided direction for planning outcomes and provision.

*"...these meetings ensure that all the necessary information is gathered and everyone shares in collecting it."*

*"We were able to plan provision which would support the YP in achieving their identified goals."*

#### 5.5.3.1.2 Collaboration and Co-Production

Four EPs reported finding it helpful for the EHCNA to have ascertained the child's views in the meeting. EPs felt that the child's views were drawn upon and steered the direction of the outcomes and provision recommended.

*"YP's clear dreams for long & short term & ability to talk about what he would need to get there were key."*

Five EPs reported that it was helpful having a range of people in the meeting who know the child well to contribute the child's strengths and needs. As well as contributing strengths and needs, it was helpful for those present to develop a shared understanding of these.

*"...bringing a peer... meant that we heard strengths such as "she's a really good friend"."*

EPs also reported that the PATH process enabled everyone to contribute to the co-production of outcomes and provision. This meant that goals and strategies were led by the child and agreed by all present at the meeting.

*"Using a PATH elicited conversations around strategies that all parties could agree on."*

Two EPs commented on how PATH being strengths-based meant there could be a stronger focus on outcome generation and what is required to meet those outcomes.

*"...much stronger focus on outcomes and the future than 'the problem'."*

This meant PATH was viewed by one EP as a person-centred way of eliciting the information needed for the EHCNA. One EP described how using PATH produced *"...more meaningful contributions to the EHC advice (and ultimately the EHC)."* Outcomes generated for the EHCNA were described as highly personal and relevant by another EP.

#### 5.5.3.1.3 Considerations and Uses

Two EPs reported that it was helpful to use PATH when there had already been previous EP assessments or a lot of information already available. Another EP felt that PATH provided *"a way to pull it altogether."* One other EP found it helpful when there was a difficult dynamic between the family and school, and another felt it was helpful when the situation felt "stuck". One EP reported that the child would feel more comfortable being around family for assessment work. Two EPs also reported that PATH was helpful as it provided an opportunity to observe the child.

*“...as the child is in the room I can observe their presentation which helps feed into outcomes.”*

#### 5.5.3.1.4 PATH-Specific Content

Seven EPs felt that the PATH process and structure itself helped to reveal and develop strengths, needs, outcomes and provision for the EHCNA. For example, there were specific sections of the PATH where strengths and needs could be discussed, such as during the Staying Strong and Dream sections.

*“As the dream was developed and the family talked about hobbies and activities... a wide range of strengths were identified.”*

Similarly, EPs felt that the Staying Strong section *“is key to thinking about provision.”* They felt that this section provides information about what provision currently helps and what the child needs. EPs also felt the Dream could be related to outcomes and that the One Year’s Time section *“provided very rich information to base outcomes on.”*

#### 5.5.3.1.5 A Plan to Implement

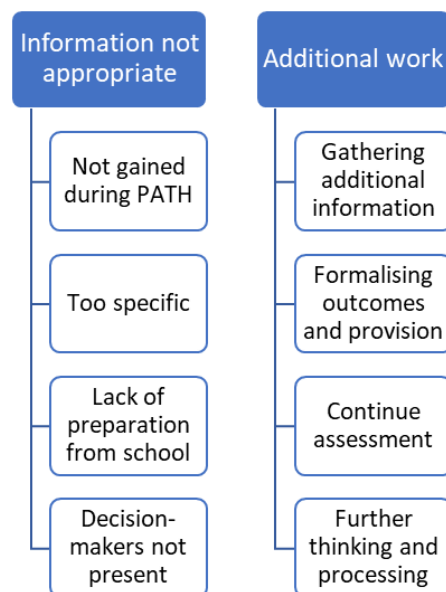
Three EPs felt that PATH was useful for providing a plan for the parents and education staff that could be implemented right away, without necessarily having to wait for the SPA to be written and/or the EHCP to be granted.

*“Parent is pleased that the school have already implemented some of the changes.”*

#### 5.5.3.2 Themes from PATH Meetings- Barriers to Usefulness

**Figure 27**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Relating to EP-Reported Barriers to PATH’s Usefulness for the EHCNA.*



#### *5.5.3.2.1 Information not Appropriate*

Four EPs reported difficulty gathering all the information needed for the EHCNA. One EP commented that the child's discomfort during the PATH meeting made it difficult for them to continue gathering information and they therefore stopped the meeting. Two EPs felt that the PATH process could produce information that was too specific for some of the sections of the SPA. Another EP felt that there wasn't much room to explore needs as the parents expressed a wish for this not to be the focus of the meeting, meaning this information was not collected.

*"...really specific [provision] and therefore doesn't provide enough information for more general provision".*

Two EPs commented that school staff did not contribute much or prepare anything for the PATH meeting, meaning that there may be information lacking from the SPA. In addition, it was noted that decision-makers do not usually have the capacity to attend, therefore reducing the likelihood the plan will be implemented.

#### *5.5.3.2.2 Additional Work*

EPs reported that they often had to do additional work beyond the PATH meeting for the EHCNA, including follow-up phone calls, gathering information separately from the meeting, and additional thinking and formulation for the outcomes and provision. One EP reported that they would have to do additional assessment if there was less known about the child and another EP reported that they would have to formalise the PATH discussion content so that the SPA was *"fit for purpose"*.

#### *5.5.3.3 Themes from PATH Meetings- Parent and Education Staff's Views*

Four parents and education staff were concerned about whether this process had enabled an accurate assessment of their child's needs and how the content of the discussion would fit into the psychological advice. One parent felt the meeting would have been less helpful if there hadn't already been a private EP assessment and another was unsure if this meeting was the best use of the professional's time.

*"I'm wondering how things in previous meetings- i.e. discussions about outcomes and provision- will be decided upon, as they weren't explicit in this meeting."* (education staff)

#### *5.5.3.4 Themes from Traditional Meetings*

To contextualise data presented in Tables 22 and 23, thematic analysis of participants' questionnaire responses to open-ended questions revealed that parents, staff and EPs described various ways that the meeting had been helpful for the EHCNA (Table 24). EPs provided most (8/10 sub-themes) of the themes below, though parents and education staff also felt that the process had been helpful for information gathering and contributing to the draft report (2/8 sub-themes). The themes in bold indicate those which were mentioned by all participant groups.

EPs felt that the process was helpful for gathering information to include in their SPA, including developing their understanding of the child and feeding back assessment/observation information to parents/staff. EPs found it had been helpful for developing strengths, needs, outcomes, and provision through collaborative, strengths-based discussions based on the attendees' views. It was also helpful for making progress with the staff's/parent's thinking about the child's needs and planning strategies and interventions, meaning that participants felt there could be value to the

meeting beyond the EHCNA. However, one EP felt that the meeting had not allowed them to collect all the necessary information; “...we did not speak about too many specifics for provision.”

**Table 24**

*Themes, Sub-Themes and Examples Relating to Participant Reports of why they Found Traditional Meetings Helpful for the EHCNA.*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Collecting information for the EHCNA</b>	<b>Information gathering</b>	<i>“It felt like information was being gathered about Naomi that is relevant and appropriate for the EHCP process.” (parent)</i>
	Shared understanding of strengths and needs	<i>“...shared understanding of strengths, difficulties and what works...” (EP)</i>
	Developing EP’s understanding of the child	<i>“I felt I had a good understanding of the child following the meeting...” (EP)</i>
	Feeding back information/ triangulation	<i>“...I shared observations I had made about his views and checked these/triangulated these with information from his teacher and parents.” (EP)</i>
<b>Collaboration and co-production</b>	Value of adult’s views	<i>“Outcomes were clearly derived from parental views” (EP)</i>
	Value of child’s views	<i>“I was able to support the child to think about provision/ support/ outcomes that were important to them and feed this into the advice.” (EP)</i>
	Collaborative decision-making	<i>“It felt like a collaborative meeting where everyone contributed their thoughts regarding needs, outcomes and provision.” (EP)</i>
	Strengths-based	<i>“Rapport with family and creating a positive strengths-based approach to EHCNA...” (EP)</i>
<b>Practicalities</b>	Report	<i>“It was good to get to contribute to the content of the report.” (education staff)</i>
	Time	<i>“...time effective.” (EP)</i>
<b>Progress</b>		<i>“...this felt like a consultation that was both for the EHC process and to support family and child with current circumstances, so performed a dual purpose.” (EP)</i>

#### 5.5.3.5 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings

Some sub-themes relating to the usefulness of the meetings were similar across meeting types, including the value of the meetings for information gathering, developing an understanding of the child’s strengths and needs, the value of a strengths-based approach, value of gathering the parent’s/child’s views, and collaborative discussions and decision-making. In PATH meetings participants, particularly the EPs, spoke more about the value of the meeting for generating outcomes and provision that were based on the child’s aspirations and which had been agreed on by all meeting attendees. In traditional meetings, there was a greater focus on gathering strengths and needs information and feeding back assessment data. It was felt by one EP that the meetings were not that effective for co-producing outcomes and provision. EPs who completed PATHs also felt that at times the meeting could be too specific and not cover all the necessary information (e.g. about the

child’s needs). It was also more likely following PATH meetings that the EP would need to complete additional thinking and/or meetings and at times education staff did not come to those meetings with all the necessary information.

**5.6 RQ 5: To what extent would participants want to have a PATH meeting or traditional meeting again in the future?**

**5.6.1 PATH Meetings Findings**

On the Likert-scale questions in the questionnaire, education staff, parents and EPs agreed that they would like a meeting structured in this way again, with EPs most keen to have a meeting like this again (Table 25). Two parents disagreed that they would want a meeting like this again (the same parents who did not find the meeting helpful), scoring the question 1/10 and 3/10. The two young people who answered this question also did not want another meeting like this again, with a mean score of 2.5/10.

**Table 25**

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Question “Would You Like a Meeting to be Structured in this Way Again?” For All Participants in PATH and Traditional Meetings.*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PATH</i>			<i>N</i>	<i>Traditional</i>		
		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Education staff</b>	18	5-10	<b>9.06</b>	1.55	6	8-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.84
<b>Parents</b>	20	1-10	<b>8.90</b>	2.44	8	7-10	<b>9.63</b>	1.06
<b>CYP</b>	2	1-4	<b>2.50</b>	2.12	2	6-9	<b>7.50</b>	2.12
<b>EPs</b>	15	8-10	<b>9.47</b>	0.83	5	5-10	<b>7.60</b>	1.95

**5.6.2 Traditional Meeting Findings**

The quantitative questionnaire data showed that education staff and parents strongly agreed that they would like a meeting to be structured in that way again in the future (Table 25). CYP and EPs scored this question slightly lower, though overall agreed that they would like a meeting structured in the same way again.

**5.6.3 Comparison between PATH and Traditional Meetings**

The two young people that took part in ‘traditional’ meetings indicated that they would like a meeting like that again in the future ( $M=7.50, SD=2.12$ ), whilst the two young people who responded to this question following PATH meetings indicated that they would not like a PATH meeting again ( $M=2.50, SD=2.12$ ). EPs felt that they would like a PATH meeting again, scoring this item slightly higher than those who had done a traditional meeting ( $M=9.47, SD=0.83$  PATH;  $M=7.60, SD=1.95$  traditional). Parent and education staff felt they would be happy to have either of the meeting types again.

## **Chapter 6. Discussion**

This research has presented the largest comparative study of PATHs and traditional meetings to date and has explored the use of PATH in a context thus far neglected by previous research, but which forms an important part of EPs' statutory work; the EHCNA. The key findings will be presented and discussed here, along with the implications of these findings. The strengths and shortcomings of this research will then be considered, along with suggestions for future research. Last, a reflexivity statement will be included to reflect on how this research has influenced the researcher's view, and future use, of PATHs.

### **6.1 Key Findings**

#### ***6.1.1. RQ1. In what way does using PATH increase CYPs' and parents' participation in the EP EHCNA meeting compared to when a traditional meeting approach is used?***

This research shows that when PATH is used in the EHCNA, parents are included in, and actively contribute to, the meetings. Parents in PATH meetings contributed a proportionately equal amount to the meetings, though it was often the EPs who spoke most. Parent's attendance at PATHs was similar to attendance at traditional meetings, though parents at traditional meetings spoke more. Participants were generally very positive about the parent's participation in both PATH and traditional meetings, strongly agreeing that they had contributed to the meetings, were listened to, were included in decision-making, and were equal partners in the meetings. This means that the quantitative data indicates few differences between the two meeting approaches for enabling parents' participation in the EHCNA. This suggests that there is already substantial good practice around the inclusion of parents in EHCNA meetings, which somewhat contradicts previous research which shows meaningful involvement of parents is often limited and parents often feel dissatisfied with the EHCP process (Ahad et al., 2022). It may be that parents feel able to participate in the EHCNA meeting with the EP but feel dissatisfied with the broader EHCNA process.

When PATH was used, all children attended their EHCNA meetings, compared to only two YP being present at their traditional meeting. Children in PATH meetings made lots of small contributions to the discussions, often to express agreement or disagreement with what others had said and to answer specific questions. This means that CYP were able to express their views in the meetings when PATH was used. Participants were generally positive about CYP's participation in PATH meetings. Parents, staff and EPs strongly agreed that the child was supported to be present, to express their views, was listened to and was supported to make decisions. Similar results were found following traditional meetings, despite poor CYP attendance. It seemed that some participants scored these questions in relation to the individual assessment the EP had done with the child, rather than the EHCNA meeting with the adults, or chose not to respond to questions regarding children's participation when they had not attended, rather than scoring these questions lower. This may explain why positive scores regarding children's participation was found in traditional meetings, despite children not attending most of the time.

In addition, this research showed that PATH can be used with CYP across the span of ages, SEN and cultural backgrounds. This is a new finding within the PATH literature, which has tended to explore PATH with secondary-school aged CYP and upwards (the youngest being 11 years old; e.g., Wood et al., 2019) for uses such as transition to adulthood planning (e.g., Veneziano-Lemos, 2015). Previous research has found that parents of young children often felt that their child had not had a voice in the EHCNA (e.g., Adams et al., 2017) and other researchers have talked of the difficulties finding methods to facilitate communication that are appropriate to the child's age or SEN (e.g., Marchant & Jones, 2003). The current research shows that PATH can be successfully used to facilitate

communication and participation with children as young as three years old, providing a suitable method to fill this gap.

However, this research also identified that some YP did not enjoy the experience of participating in a PATH. Some CYP with autism and social anxiety found the process overwhelming and they reported that they would rather have not been present. Interestingly, these CYP still reported that the adults had listened to them, included them in discussions, wrote down what they said, and that they got to say everything they had wanted to. However, these CYP did not feel comfortable talking during the meeting and reported that they would not like another meeting like this in the future. In addition, staff and parents reported that these CYP had become overwhelmed and/or were anxious participating. Therefore, there was a disconnect between participatory practices and CYP's feelings about being in the meeting. It may be that the direct questioning used in PATH meetings, whilst aiming to be positive and supportive, is challenging for some CYP with autism due to their social communication needs (Gray, 2018). This echoes the work of Sales and Vincent (2018) into strengths and limitations of the EHCNA process, which found that CYP reported the planning meetings to be intimidating and too scary to attend. One YP in the current study also reported that they did not like the whole process because they did not like people talking about them. This suggests that for some CYP, attending meetings with lots of adults and where they are required to give their views may be overwhelming and undesirable, regardless of the 'type' of meeting they attend, suggesting that PATH did not overcome this barrier to participation in EHCNA meetings. However, the CYP who attended traditional meetings agreed that they were comfortable to talk and would like another meeting like this in the future. However, with a sample size of only two, it is hard to conclude that therefore every child would feel included, and enabled to participate, in their traditional meeting.

#### 6.1.1.1 Implications

EPs should consider using PATH in their EHCNA meetings to support parents and CYP across the span of ages, SEN and ethnicities to participate in their EHCNA. Importantly, even nursery-aged children and those with speech and communication difficulties have been shown to participate in a meaningful and age-appropriate way when PATH was used. However, EPs should also cautiously consider whether the child would want to be invited and participate, exploring this with the child first. If the CYP does not want to attend, this decision should be respected, and other methods of ascertaining the child's voice should be explored, such as asking the child to provide their views beforehand, allowing the child to participate in the meeting through a different medium (e.g., giving a presentation or showing a video), or allowing the child to nominate someone to talk for them. The CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015) stipulates using methods to ascertain CYP's views which are appropriate to the child such as observations and Picture Exchange Communication Systems, so there should be flexibility to use approaches that both enable participation and which the child feels comfortable with.

#### **6.1.2 RQ2. What occurs during PATH EHCNA meetings and traditional EHCNA meetings that enables CYP and parent participation in the meeting?**

This research found many enabling factors and barriers to CYP and parent participation in the meetings. Participants described factors which had been helpful, enjoyable and which had supported participation in both types of meetings. Following PATH meetings, participants emphasised the EP's facilitation skills (e.g. using child-friendly activities), inclusive practices (e.g. the meeting was collaborative and gave all attendees an equal voice), the role that others took in the meeting (e.g. advocating for the child), the content of the PATH (e.g. the 'Dream' stage) and the PATH set-up (e.g. the PATH graphic). Participants also spoke about the importance of liaison, information-sharing and preparation before the meeting took place. Participants commented

warmly on the experience of the meeting and felt the meeting was relaxed, positive, comfortable, non-judgemental and enjoyable. These themes reflect factors which EPs have noted in previous research to be supportive of participation in the EHCNA, such as facilitating child communication, the EP's professional skills and practicalities, such as a comfortable environment (Howells, 2021). In addition, some of the ways that EPs enabled participation could be seen in the observations. For example, in the few observations that were done, CYP were actively invited to contribute more to the meetings than parents, staff and EPs. This means that the processes and structure of PATH enables participation in a tangible and evidence-informed way.

Whilst the quantitative data did not indicate many differences between PATH and traditional meetings, the qualitative data captured some interesting differences in themes that came up relating to participants' experience of the meetings. Although most of the main themes were similar across PATH and traditional meetings, the content of these themes diverged and there was emphasis on different aspects of the meetings. For instance, under the theme 'meeting content', there was greater emphasis in traditional meetings on the informal discussions, the opportunity for information gathering and a focus on gathering views for the EHCP. In the PATH meetings however, there was a stronger emphasis on how the specific aspects of the PATH structure and process had been helpful, such as the 'Dream' stage, and participants felt that the discussion focused on sharing positives, the CYP's goals and aspirations, planning for the future, and understanding next steps. Much of what participants reported they enjoyed and found helpful about the meeting related to the person-centred values underpinning PCP and the unique approach of PATH (O'Brien et al., 2010), such as the strengths-based approach, the PATH graphic, the steps of the PATH, and the environment of the PATH meeting. Therefore, there seemed to be much gained in participant's subjective experience of the EHCNA meeting when using PATH.

However, whilst most participants reflected positively on their experience of the PATH meeting, there were a small number of participants who did not enjoy the process as much. These participants had generally attended the same four PATH meetings and they spoke of barriers to participating. Reported barriers included the child's needs and emotional experience of the meeting, lack of adaptation to support the child, the adult's experience of the meeting (e.g., lack of buy-in and feeling unable to express their views), and environmental and systemic constraints (e.g., time constraints). Some barriers were in opposition to the enabling factors reported to have supported participation. For example, participants often spoke positively about the EP's ability to respond to the child's needs during the meeting, however, there were times when there was little adaptation for the child's needs, and this became a barrier. Similar to previous research exploring participation in the EHCNA process, barriers around the time commitment and lack of preparation emerged (Howells, 2021; Sharma, 2021). The identified barriers are therefore not necessarily barriers related to the PATH approach but related to EHCNA meetings in general. Other research exploring children's participation in the EHCNA emphasised that powerful non-child voices (Howells, 2021) and the power dynamics between CYP and professionals (Sharma, 2021) are often barriers to participation. These themes did not occur in the current research, which could suggest that using a PCP tool does not create such a power dynamic and helps to overcome these specific barriers to child participation.

In addition, there were a few parents and education staff who did not 'buy in' to the PATH process. One parent felt that the meeting felt a bit like a game and was unable to see how PATH benefitted the child. Another parent felt that the SENCO struggled to get on board with certain aspects of the PATH, such as the unlimited thinking, because they were focused on current system-based limitations. Claes et al. (2010) recognised that it can be hard to align the flexible, individualised plans generated at PCP meetings with the traditional packages provided by services, such as schools. It may be that this meeting approach did not suit the agenda that these participants were coming to



the meeting with. For instance, PCP meetings are positive and strengths-focused (Gray et al., 2022), whilst traditional meetings usually involve an in-depth discussion of the child's needs, in line with the requirements of SPA in the CoP (DfE & DHSC, 2015). Corrigan (2014) found that staff from one school thought the PCP meetings did not focus enough on the pupils' difficulties compared to traditional meetings. Bruce's (2021) research on EP's perspectives of change processes in consultations found that differences in agenda between consultees may have a direct impact on their openness to collaboration and change. When consultees feel the need to fight for goals which hold meaning for them and hold anxiety around gaining support for their agenda, their sense of psychological safety to engage actively in the collaborative consultation process is reduced. The few parents and staff who did not enjoy the PATH meetings may not have been feeling psychologically safe to engage in the strengths-based, solution-focused process due to being on a different agenda to the EPs facilitating the PATH. This highlights the importance of ensuring that parents and staff are well prepared and on-board with the process before the PATH meeting.

#### 6.1.2.1 Implications

EPs should consider using PATH or another PCP tool in their EHCNAs to overcome some of the barriers reported in previous research and to enable parents, staff and CYP to have a positive experience of the EHCNA. However, EPs should take care to ensure that CYP, parents and staff are all adequately informed and prepared before the meeting to ensure that everyone is onboard with the process. Indeed, preparation was considered a key enabling factor for successful meetings in this research and previous research (e.g., Howells, 2021). Sharing of goals and agenda items between attendees before the meeting could ensure that a joint understanding of the expectations, process, and agenda of the meeting is established, ensuring a sense of psychological safety to engage in the process (Bruce, 2021). It should also be accepted that this approach may be too far removed from what some parents need at this point in their child's SEN journey (e.g. if they are still struggling to accept the nature of their child's SEN, Ahad et al., 2022) and that a more traditional approach may be more befitting the situation. EPs should judge carefully which approach to use when planning the EHCNA meeting.

#### **6.1.3 RQ3. Does using PATH for the EP EHCNA meeting result in draft EHCPs that are more person-centred compared to when a traditional EHCNA meeting was held?**

The PATH draft EHCPs in this study generally included some representation of the child and parent's views and most EHCPs covered a range of areas of information that parents and children could contribute to. However, it was clear that the PATH EHCPs did not always represent the child's views using the child's own words/first person and in three of the draft EHCPs, there were no CYP views recorded at all. In addition, the number of person-centred outcomes in the EHCPs varied widely and it seemed that the views that CYP/parents gave at the PATH meetings were not always included in the draft EHCPs. Five draft EHCPs did not mention that a PATH meeting had taken place and only one EHCP included a picture of the PATH graphic. The EHCP data also suggested that parents most often participated at the 'descriptive' depth and children at the 'social' or 'solution' depth. This is not what would be expected if the EHCP information reflected the depth of participation that had occurred during the PATH meetings. For example, the 'Getting Stronger' and 'Next Steps' sections of the PATH encourage problem-solving and solution-focused planning (e.g., O'Brien et al., 2010), so the draft EHCPs should reflect participation at the 'solution' and 'psychological' depth. This indicates that whilst children participated in their EHCNA meetings when PATH was used, their views were not always included in the subsequent draft EHCP. This is in direct violation of the CoP which states that children's and parents' views should be represented in Section A and should inform the rest of the plan (DfE & DHSC, 2015). This also raises the question of whether the child's involvement in those meetings was tokenistic (Hart, 1992). This finding reflects ongoing concerns that children's participation in the EHCNA is often tokenistic, seeking to capture the information that the adult

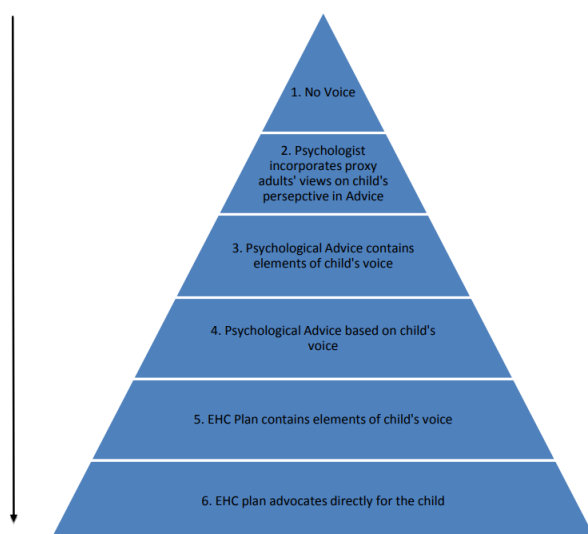
requires to 'tick the box' of pupil voice, but without incorporating these views into decision-making or action planning (Sales & Vincent, 2018; Fox, 2016).

Statistical comparison of PATH and traditional draft EHCPs was not possible due to small and inconsistent sample sizes, so the commentary here is based on the descriptive data presented in chapter 5 and to give context to the qualitative data. Comparing EHCPs following PATH and traditional meetings, children/parent's views were more often included in PATH EHCPs compared to traditional EHCPs. The method of obtaining the child's view and the child's presence at the meeting were more often reported when PATH had been used. CYP who attended PATH meetings had participated at a 'higher' depth of participation more often compared to traditional EHCPs, whilst parents participated more at a potentially 'lower' depth in PATH EHCPs. Traditional draft EHCPs more often contained views on at least three of the four areas that CYP/parents could contribute to, whilst there was greater inconsistency in how many areas were covered in PATH draft EHCPs. There were also slightly more person-centred outcomes in the traditional draft EHCPs. This means that using a PCP tool in the assessment meeting does not necessarily lead to EHCPs which are more person-centred than traditional meetings according to Fox's (2016) model.

This research indicates that there is a gap between the CYP's participation in the EHCNA meeting and what is recorded on the EHCP. This means that participation in the EHCNA has been achieved across two of Fox's (2016) dimensions, but it is *degree* of participation that appears to be missing from these EHCPs (Figure 28). This shortfall in child voice representation in the EHCPs could be because the EP had not included the child's/parent's views expressed in the meeting in the SPA. However, this is unlikely due to EPs' professional training and guidance emphasising the need for person-centred working (e.g. AEP, 2020). However, if professionals other than EPs had contributed to the draft EHCP, they may not have gained the child's/parent's views before writing their advice. Alternatively, rather than at the level of the professional writing the advice, it may be that what was written in the advice is not being transferred into the EHCPs by the LA professionals (e.g. SEN Case Officers). Indeed, LA professionals have expressed concerns about the lack of consistency in the production of EHCPs, even within the same LA (Ahad et al., 2022). To enable greater participation along all of Fox's (2016) dimensions, the EHCP also needs to advocate directly for the child and represent their views.

**Figure 28**

*Fox's (2016) Degrees of Participation Pyramid Model*



*Note. From The Degree of Participation [picture], by Fox, 2016.*

<https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/40e75afb6b231aeaa3c0787da157f91dd41cac4b9ca293ef7cb5883c18a3b43/246127/Educational%20Psychology%20Research%20and%20Practice%202016%2012%20Fox.pdf>

### 6.1.3.1 Implications

To enable greater participation in the EHCNA, the EHCP also needs to advocate directly for the child and represent the child's and parents' views (Fox, 2016). In their SPA, EPs should be conscious of writing advice in a way so that children's and parents' views can easily be incorporated into the EHCP. This may mean changing the structure of the SPA to focus more heavily on parent and child views. In addition, EPs should work with SEN professionals who write EHCPs (e.g. SEN Case Officers) to ensure that the child's and parents' views are captured in the EHCP. This could include training for LA professionals on how to actively involve parents and CYP in the EHCNA in a meaningful, person-centred way (Ahad et al., 2022). Quality assurance processes should focus on the 'golden thread' of CYP and parents views throughout the EHCP. Previous research also suggests that there is a need for nationally standardised guidelines to reduce discrepancies across and within LAs, such as a template EHCP for professionals (Palikara et al., 2018). If the appropriate emphasis is placed on parent/CYP views in this template, this could ensure greater consistency in the production of person-centred EHCPs.

### **6.1.4 RQ4. 6.1.4 RQ4. How useful do participants feel PATH is for the purpose of an EP EHCNA meeting in comparison to a traditional EHCNA meeting? And RQ5. To what extent would participants want to have a PATH meeting or traditional meeting again in the future?**

Participants from both traditional and PATH meetings found the meetings helpful and would like to have a similar meeting again. The mean scores from the EPs questionnaires indicated that they may have found the PATH meetings marginally more helpful than traditional meetings, whilst parents may have found the traditional meetings marginally more helpful. EPs commented on many aspects of the PATH process, structure and content which were helpful for the SPA, such as the 'Goals for One Year's Time' section that enabled planning of outcomes and the 'Staying Strong' section that was key to thinking about provision. In traditional meetings, there was a greater focus on information gathering of strengths and needs, developing the EP's understanding of the child, and feeding back assessment information. A key difference therefore appears to be the focus in PATH meetings on outcomes and provision compared to a focus on strengths and needs in the traditional meetings, with EPs feeling that PATH meeting enabled greater meaningful contributions and co-production of EHC advice. Some similar themes were reported across meetings, including that the meeting had been helpful for information gathering, for gathering the parent's/child's views, and collaborative discussions and decision-making. Participants in PATH meetings also reported that it had been helpful to observe the child, to add to existing assessment information, and to generate a plan that the meeting attendees could leave with. However, at times, EPs felt there was additional work to do afterwards, that the information was too specific to use, and that the child and staff were not prepared to contribute. This data suggests that PATH can align with the EHCNA process and be used to gather the content needed for the SPA.

### **6.2 Strengths and Shortcomings**

A strength of this study has been the inclusion of three different LA Educational Psychology Services and their EPs as meeting facilitators. All EPs conducting PATHs received initial training by the researcher, provision of materials such as a checklist for completing PATHs (Appendix D), regular meetings (at least half-termly) with the link EPs in each EPS, and ongoing email support. This was to ensure that there was consistency amongst EPs regarding how they were completing PATHs (e.g., in

accordance with the core PATH components; O'Brien et al., 2010) and that problems could be solved as they arose (e.g. ethical dilemmas relating to consent). This meant that treatment fidelity using the PATH approach could be ensured. Most other research has explored PATHs facilitated by the same facilitator (e.g. Wood et al., 2019) or EPs/staff members from the same EPS/school (e.g. Bristow, 2013). Therefore, the inclusion of a range of trained facilitators strengthens conclusions about the impact of PATH itself and shows that person-centred EHCNA meetings can be achieved when PATH is used by different EPs.

In addition to ensuring treatment fidelity of PATH meetings, consensus on what was meant by a traditional meeting approach was gained through a focus group at the researcher's LA. Previous research has not been clear at defining what EPs typically do in their EHCNA meetings (e.g. Bristow, 2013) and so it was deemed important to gather this information before the meeting began to have a clear, operational definition. However, it emerged during the research that concepts of traditional EHCNA meetings across LAs and EPs could be quite different. For example, whilst the focus group emphasised collaborative working between home and school, EPs in LA2 fed back that they would usually meet with the parents and staff separately. This led to negotiation over which of these meetings should be defined as the traditional meeting for research purposes, which was different depending on the case, causing possible inconsistencies in the data collected for traditional meetings. Future research is needed to explore the range of approaches that EPs take during typical EHCNA meetings so that best practice can be evaluated.

Another strength of this research was the broad range of ages, genders and SEN that the sample of CYP participating in PATHs and traditional meetings consisted of. This is in comparison to previous research on PCP approaches which have mostly used a White British sample and secondary-school aged CYP (e.g., White & Rae, 2015; Wood et al., 2019). The demographics also roughly align with national statistics for children who received an EHCP in 2022 (National Statistics, 2023). For example, white CYP make up the majority of those receiving an EHCP (68%), similar to this study's sample (71%). The most predominant need of pupils with an EHCP is recorded as ASD and/or speech, language and communication need (51%), similar to the present sample of 54% (National Statistics, 2022). The present sample did have proportionally more females than national average for CYP receiving an EHCP, with 42% females compared to 31% as the national average (National Statistics, 2023). This demonstrates that the sample is roughly aligned with national statistics and is diversified across age, SEN, ethnicity and gender.

In addition, a mixture of methods was used to gain both the participants' views and perspectives of the PATH meetings, triangulating this information with observation data to support participants' perceptions with what could be observed as occurring during these meetings. The usefulness of PATH in the EHCNA specifically was evaluated by exploring the differences between draft EHCPs from both traditional and PATH meetings. This study also collected data from both adults and children, gaining a range of perspectives from different stakeholders in the meetings. However, whilst a substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative data was collected, there were difficulties completing the planned methodology. For example, there was not enough time once all the meetings had been completed to conduct follow-up interviews. However, as rich, detailed data had been gathered from the questionnaires already, conducting interviews was not considered vital to answer the research questions. However, CYP often missed questions out, wrote short answers or did not complete questionnaires. Questionnaires were not adapted for very young children/CYP with significant speech and language needs as it was not anticipated that these CYP would participate in the meetings and due to time constraints on the EPs completing PATHs to work directly with the CYP afterwards. This means that the child's voice does not come through in as many of the qualitative themes as the adults' voice.

There were difficulties gaining participant consent for some aspects of the research and participant attrition throughout the study. Some EPs expressed discomfort at the concept of the meetings being

video-recorded and LA3 asked to not participate in this part of the research. Where EPs were comfortable being video-recorded, there were further difficulties gaining consent from all meeting attendees for it to be recorded, with at least one attendee not consenting to this in most meetings. This meant that in total, only five meetings were recorded ( $n=3$  PATH,  $n=2$  traditional), with the researcher facilitating four of these. This means that the findings from the observations cannot be generalised to the same extent as the rest of the findings and could not be triangulated with the questionnaire data to a greater extent. Also, as no CYP attended the traditional meetings that were recorded, comparisons between CYP's observed participation in PATH and traditional meetings could not be made. Regarding the questionnaires, participant attrition was experienced both after the meetings before the first questionnaires were completed and after a second, follow-up questionnaire was sent out. If there was not time to complete the questionnaires at the end of the meeting, paper copies were sent home with participants or emailed. At this point, some participants decided to not return the questionnaires and did not continue with the research. An additional, follow-up questionnaire for participants to reflect on the draft EHCP had also been developed, however the attrition rate was so high (only 29% of PATH and 17% of traditional participants who completed the first questionnaire returned the follow-up questionnaire) that this data was not included in the analysis.

In addition, fewer traditional meetings were completed than PATH meetings. In the original research design, a matched pairs protocol was proposed in which traditional cases had to match PATH cases that had already been completed on at least three of four criteria (key stage, gender, school type, SEN type). It proved more challenging than anticipated for EPs to find matching cases from their caseload of EHCNAs to complete. Whilst this protocol was relaxed, the short timescale of this project, in addition to cases not being considered appropriate/lack of consent to participate and other factors (e.g. one EP went on leave), meant that fewer traditional meetings were completed by the time data collection ended. In addition, one LA felt that they could not complete any traditional meetings as their EPs no longer used this format for EHCNA meetings. It was deemed unethical to ask them to use an approach that they did not believe was in the best interests of the child. Additionally, not all draft EHCPs had been returned by the end of data collection (five fewer draft EHCPs were included in the data analysis than meetings conducted). In some cases, the child was not issued with an EHCP, and in other cases delays in the LA SEN systems meant that they took longer to be issued than anticipated. This reduced the amount of data that could be included in the analysis.

EPs who took part in PATHs had volunteered to be part of the research, and so either had a keen interest in learning about PATH or already successfully used PATH in their EHCNA meetings. This represents a potentially biased sample of EPs who would be more likely to report positive reflections on the process and perhaps greater effort should have been made to include EPs who were less familiar with PATH or preferred other approaches. However, as EPs are autonomous professionals and ethically must choose approaches they think are appropriate (AEP, 2020), it would not have been ethical to make them use this approach. In addition, the other LAs that participated may have had additional motivations for taking part. For example, LA2 wanted to evaluate whether PATH was the right approach for their LA to start using and so was keen to participate and explore the data from their LA. This may have biased their participation in the research. In addition to recruiting for the PATH meetings, additional EPs were recruited just for the traditional meetings as not all EPs who facilitated PATHs then completed traditional meetings. This means that there could be differences in the approaches and skills these EPs have which made them willing to volunteer for one meeting type opposed to the other. Therefore, there is the possibility that some of the findings may be due to facilitator characteristics as opposed to meeting characteristics.

### **6.3 Future Research**

Whilst this research presents the largest comparative study to date, statistical comparison between the two meeting types was not possible with the amount of data that had been gathered. Additional

large-scale studies are needed with a greater number of participants so that statistical comparisons can be made. This would help solidify PATH's status as an evidence-based approach for EPs to use in the EHCNA meetings. Mixed methods should still be used to enable practitioners to support participation and ensure they know *why* these approaches work.

As the child should be at the centre of this approach, additional research needs to fully explore CYP's perceptions of participating in PATH meetings for their EHCNAs. Appropriate methods need to be devised to do so, such as the participatory research techniques used in Hill et al. (2016), including an ethnographic observation, a graffiti wall, diamond ranking activity and school preference cards. Longevity studies are needed to track outcomes over long-term implementation of the PATH plan (Kueneman & Freeze, 1997) and parents' and professionals' perceptions should be harnessed regarding post-PATH EHCPs. Future studies could also explore other outcome variables relevant to the EHCNA, such as motivation to change.

Additional research should focus on how LA professionals can be trained to represent parents' and children's views more in the EHCP itself. Research could also explore whether PATH can be implemented as an LA-wide approach to ensure consistent person-centred practice during the needs assessments (Ahad et al., 2022). As more LAs are using PATH in their practice (Bristow, 2013) and the researcher is aware that LAs are adapting PATH/PCP tools to better fit the statutory assessment process, it would be useful to explore how effective these 'adapted' versions of PATH are and whether they still have person-centred values at their core. Justification for these adapted approaches cannot rely on the evidence-base for PATH itself until it has been shown that they produce similar outcomes and have similar core values.

#### **6.4 Reflexivity Statement**

Throughout this research, I have been an active proponent of PATH and using PCP approaches in statutory assessments. I have used PATH both within my own EHCNA meetings and encouraged other EPs in my LA to try a PATH meeting. However, through the process of this research, my attitude towards PATH has shifted. I have been encouraged to use PATH in some cases where I previously would not have (e.g. with nursery-aged CYP). I have also become more cautious about using this approach in some circumstances and acknowledge that this approach won't be for everyone (e.g., for CYP with autism and social anxiety, or with education staff who have difficulties thinking more flexibly about provision). I have also been conscious of the time and organisational commitment to facilitating PATHs and acknowledge that at times, a full PATH is not possible in the 6-week statutory timescale for providing SPA. However, I will continue to use PATH in the future for my EHCNA meetings and take with me the person-centred values of PATH into my other work.

#### **6.5 Conclusion**

This research has shown that PATH can be used to enable CYP to attend their EHCNA meetings and make active contributions to planning and decision-making processes. Whilst parents and staff reflected positively on both PATH and traditional meetings, showing that both approaches can be considered good practice, participants enjoyed many aspects of the PATH meetings, including how positive, strengths-focus, forward-looking, child-centred and non-judgemental the meetings were. It was felt that many aspects of the PATH structure and content translated well into the EHCNA, such as the 'Dream' stage for providing direction for outcomes. In addition, most adults reported that having the child present was a positive experience, and enabled the child's views to be heard, for adults to learn things about the child they never knew, and for truly collaborative and meaningful decision-making to take place.

However, there were some adults and CYP who did not enjoy the PATH meeting as much, leading to the conclusion that this approach should not be used without consideration. Some, but not all, CYP with autism became overwhelmed and anxious during the meeting. Some adults did not feel that it had been helpful, whilst others did not get onboard with aspects of the approach, such as the 'unlimited thinking'. Practitioners wishing to use PATH therefore, should always ensure that meeting attendees have been informed and prepared, and should consider using a more traditional approach if this feels more in line with the adults' agenda. Alternative ways of enabling the CYP to participate can be explored in cases where children do not want to attend the meeting.

In addition, whilst this research shows that PATH can enable participation in the EHCNA meeting, participation in these meetings has not yet translated to participation in the EHCP. The draft EHCPs explored in this study did not always include the child's views and often did not reference the PATH meeting or the discussions that were had during those meetings. Recommendations have been made for future research exploring person-centred EHCPs and actions that LAs and professionals should take to help ensure that children's and parents' views are represented in their documentation.

In summary, this thesis has presented the largest comparative PATH study to date and the only research to explore the use of PATH in the EHCNA. The findings indicate benefits of the EP using PATH for their EHCNA meetings to enable CYP and parent participation in the meetings, whilst recognising that this person-centred work needs to extend to the EHCPs themselves to create a truly participatory EHCNA.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A- Theoretical Underpinnings of PCP

PCP approaches took their influence from Person-Centred Psychology, developed through therapeutic practice by Carl Rogers in the 1940s (Thorne, 1992). Person-Centred Psychology sits under the umbrella of Humanistic Psychology, which aims to understand the development of human potential and considers the importance of motivation, goals and meaning in understanding human behaviour (Rogers, 1951). Rogers' (1980) theory proposes humans have an 'actualising tendency,' an inherent tendency to strive to become fully functioning individuals. Rogers (1980) stated that: *"individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided"* (pp. 115-117). Therefore, in an environment where a person feels free from threat and supported in relationships which are empathetic, understanding and genuine, individuals have the capacity for their own change processes. This is echoed in the values of PCP, in which the individual is supported to make their own decisions about their future.

Influence was also taken from Positive Psychology, which intends to promote optimal functioning, growth, and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities through the application of psychological knowledge (Wehmeyer, 2014). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined the aim of positive psychology as *"to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities"* (p. 5). People are viewed as *"decision makers, with choices, preferences, and the possibility of becoming masterful"* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 8). Positive psychologists propose that one possible solution to problems, and in some cases the most effective solution, is to build on the positives of a situation rather than address the problem (Diener, 2009). As such, PCP approaches value individual's strengths and capabilities, personal growth, individual choice, mutual respect, collaboration and equality, and place the individual and their family at the centre of planning and decision-making (Gray et al., 2022).

Another important psychological theory that has been referred in research on pupil voice and participation is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Ryan and Deci (2000) summarise SDT as a theory of CYP's motivation to act for themselves, on their own behalf, termed intrinsic motivation. SDT explores the intersection between CYP's intrinsic motivation and their environment, and how social contexts may support or hinder capacity for intrinsic motivation by providing for the person's basic psychological needs, which Ryan and Deci (2000) define as autonomy, competence and relatedness. PCP approaches support intrinsic motivation for change by promoting autonomy (by making decisions about their own lives), competence (by building on strengths) and relatedness (by enrolling a team of natural supports). For example, Wilding (2015) concluded that EPs should use person-centred approaches with students and teachers to enhance student perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness when working with students who are disengaged from school. Therefore, PCP approaches go hand-in-hand with self-determination theory and can be helpful for developing CYP's intrinsic motivation.

Lastly, elements of Personal Construct Psychology Theory (PCP Theory) (Kelly, 1955) can also be seen within PCP approaches. PCP Theory proposes that each CYP has a unique understanding of the world (termed 'constructs'), developed over time due to their individual experiences. These constructs affect how each individual interprets past events and anticipate future events, and what influences and motivates them (Kelly, 1955). Therefore, as Gersch and Thorne (2016) assert, CYP are experts on themselves and their lives and consequently, if adults act without eliciting the CYP's views, they will

fail to develop an understanding of the world as the child sees it. This can create conflict between the adult and child's views, and therefore to avoid conflict, each CYP's perspective should be obtained for adults to support them appropriately (Roller, 1998). Therefore, it holds that obtaining the child's views during meetings using PCP approaches will enable a deeper understanding of the child and a greater likelihood that the plan will be successful.



## **Appendix B- Proposed Methodology**

This multiphase mixed methods research project will consist of two studies. Study one will use a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell, 2022), where both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected, combined, and compared to explore the impact of PATH and traditional meetings. Study one will involve collecting data from up to 50 (combined) PATH and traditional meetings. Each meeting will be systematically observed, followed by two post-meeting questionnaires (one directly after the meeting and the other after the Final EHCP has been issued), and a document analysis of the Final EHCP (if the assessment results in a decision to issue an EHCP). An additional questionnaire for EPs to reflect on the PATHs they have facilitated will also be completed after enough data has been collected.

Study two will consist of semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of individuals who participated in the PATH meetings. This technique allows the researcher to ask exploratory questions whilst maintaining some structure to enable the research questions to be addressed (Menter et al., 2011). Conducting semi-structured interviews aims to expand on post-meeting questionnaires (study one) and is targeted at parents, children, school staff and EPs. See Table A for the proposed procedure.

**Table A**

*Planned Procedure for Completing the Research.*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Task</b>
1.	Conduct a pilot study of PATH meetings using the measures designed for this study.
2.	Collaborate with LA EPs and explore my own caseload of EHC assessments to identify cases where PATH could be used.
3.	Once a case has been identified, approach the school staff and parents to gain consent and assent from children below age 16.
4.	Observe/facilitate meetings, including taking a video recording, speech transcription using a transcription app and field notes.
5.	Complete post-meeting questionnaires after the meeting.
6.	Send follow-up questionnaires to participants after the Final EHCP has been issued (approximately three months after the meeting).
7.	Obtain the Final EHCPs for the meetings observed and conduct document analysis.
8.	Work with EPs to identify cases which match the characteristics of the PATH cases to complete traditional meetings.
9.	Complete phases 3-7 for 'traditional' meetings.
10.	Analyse the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the systematic observation schedule, questionnaires and document analysis.
11.	Approach all participants of PATH meetings to gain a sample to conduct the interviews with.
12.	Conduct semi-structured interviews.
13.	Complete thematic analysis of interview data.
14.	Combine quantitative and qualitative together to draw inferences relating to research questions.

### **Appendix C- Demographic Frequencies**

	<i>PATH frequency</i>	<i>Traditional frequency</i>
<b>Participant role</b>		
<i>CYP</i>	15	2
<i>Mothers</i>	14	7
<i>Fathers/stepdads</i>	8	2
<i>SENCOs</i>	11	4
<i>Class teachers/ nursery worker</i>	4	2
<i>LSAs/ TAs/ HLTAs/ or equivalent</i>	3	1
<i>Any other school staff (e.g. Head of Year)</i>	3	1
<i>Non-school staff (e.g. Family Support Worker)</i>	2	0
<i>Family friends</i>	1	0
<i>Child's friends</i>	2	0
<i>EPs</i>	12	3
<i>TEPs</i>	10	4
<i>AEPs</i>	8	2
<i>SEPs</i>	1	2
<b>Child attendance</b>		
<i>Yes</i>	15	2
<i>No</i>	0	7
<b>Key Stage</b>		
<i>Early Years</i>	3	1
<i>1</i>	0	2
<i>2</i>	5	2
<i>3</i>	4	4
<i>4</i>	2	0
<i>5</i>	1	0
<b>Gender</b>		
<i>Male</i>	10	4
<i>Female</i>	5	5
<b>Area of SEN*</b>		
<i>C&amp;I/SLCN/ASD</i>	9	5
<i>MLD/C&amp;L/SpLD</i>	2	3
<i>SEMH</i>	2	3
<i>ADHD</i>	1	0
<i>HI</i>	1	0
<b>Nationality</b>		
<i>White British</i>	12	5
<i>White British &amp; Black African</i>	1	2
<i>White British/Any other White</i>	1	0
<i>White British/Any other Asian</i>	1	0
<i>Any other White</i>	0	1
<i>Indian</i>	0	1
<b>Education provision</b>		
<i>Mainstream primary</i>	5	4
<i>Mainstream secondary</i>	5	2
<i>Nursery</i>	0	1
<i>specialist nursery</i>	3	0
<i>College</i>	1	0
<i>PRU</i>	0	1

\*Note: may be higher than 100% due to dual primary areas of SEN.

## **Appendix D- Materials Provided to EPs for PATH Training and Planning Purposes**

1. Research criteria and checklist- this was adapted to each LA context

# **PATH criteria and research checklist**

### **PATH criteria for inclusion in the research**

Inclusion of the child or young person as fully as possible for that child.  
A circle of support, or planning circle, around the child to add their views and take action.  
2 facilitators- process facilitator and graphic facilitator.  
Use of graphic to record the steps and the discussion.  
Follows the set series of steps, including the Dream, Goals, Now, Enrol, Staying Strong and Actions stages.  
A person-centred mindset.  
Parents/child who can speak English to a standard where they can access the PATH meeting independently.

### **Criteria for selecting PATH-appropriate cases**

I will leave it down to your own professional judgement as to whether you feel a case is appropriate for PATH. I am not placing any limits on the age, ethnicity or SEN of the children involved. If it is helpful for your decision-making, here are some of my own criteria:  
Having sufficient time to plan and make all the necessary arrangements.  
Having a second facilitator available.  
Parents and school staff being open minded to try a positively framed meeting.  
CYP who is able and happy to be included in the meeting room (for Early Years children, this may include just being present in the room and giving views on preferences if able).  
Level of need such that the CYP is likely to be issued an EHCP.

### **Criteria for 'matched pairs' 'traditional' case**

Same key stage  
Same gender  
Same SEN category (e.g. SEMH, ASD)  
Same 'type' of school (e.g. mainstream, special school)

<b>Checklist of research activities</b>	<b>Tick</b>
Contact parents to describe the research to them and ask for their consent to participate.	
Contact the school organiser to describe the research to them and ask for consent to participate.	
Complete your own consent form.	
Contact Saya to make her aware of a new PATH meeting if necessary and ask for any additional resources.	
Send the information sheets and consent forms to school staff, parents (parent and child forms) and any other professionals/friends or family attending the PATH.	

Print of copies of the first questionnaire to complete immediately after the PATH meeting.	
Organise a method for recording the meeting (if recording)	
<b>After the meeting</b>	
Ask participants to complete the first questionnaire immediately. If cannot be done immediately, either ask them to complete at home and email to their link EP or email them the questionnaires to complete at home.	
Complete the EP questionnaire	
Send the participant consent forms, completed questionnaires and recording of the meeting securely to Saya. Also send picture of PATH.	
Monitor the outcome of the EHCNA to see when a draft EHCP has been sent	
Send link to follow-up questionnaire	
<b>Work with Senior EP to identify a matched pairs EHC case where a 'traditional' (business as usual) meeting could be used. Repeat these steps for the 'traditional' type meetings.</b>	

2. A young person's guide to the PATH meeting which could be sent to the CYP before the meeting or discussed with them during the EP's 1:1 assessment.

# Your PATH meeting

A PATH, which stands for Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope, is a type of meeting. People who know you well, such as your family, friends, teachers and other support staff have been invited to this meeting to talk about what's great about you, your future and how to help you. You can also invite a friend or two to the meeting if you would like to.



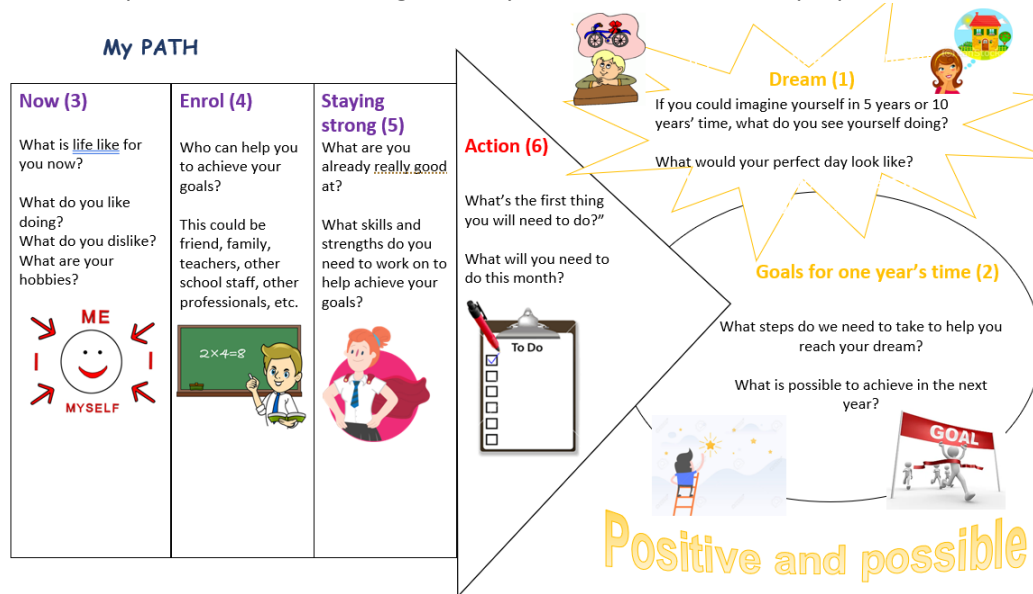
In the meeting, you will meet two Educational Psychologists (EP). One EP- the process facilitator- will ask you and everyone else some questions and guide you through the structure of the PATH. The other EP- the graphic facilitator- will write what is being said onto a big piece of paper on the wall called the 'graphic' so that everyone can remember what has been discussed. You can take this graphic home with you afterwards.



You don't need to talk if you don't want to. You could do some drawings, write your thoughts down or ask someone to talk for you.

The meeting will take about 1 hour and 30 minutes. You can ask to have a break or to leave if you don't want to be in the meeting anymore.

There are 6 steps to the PATH process, which are shown as different boxes on the graphic. Each step has a different topic and different set of questions associated with it. You might like to start having a think about these topics before the meeting so that you have some answers prepared.



**The steps include:**

**Your dreams for the future-** What would a perfect day look like for you? What is important to continue in the future? What might you like to be different in the future?

**Goals for one year's time-** What do we need to do to help you reach your dreams? What is possible to achieve in the next year?

**All about you now-** What is life like for you now? What things do you enjoy, dislike, find easy or find difficult? What is important to you and what would you like to change?

**Who can help you-** Who will we need to help you achieve your goals?

**Staying strong-** What skills you have already? What skills, knowledge and relationships do you need to build to achieve your goals?

**Actions-** What next steps can be achieved tomorrow, in a week, or in a month's time?

**For more information, please watch these YouTube videos:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKIBcsf6\\_uo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKIBcsf6_uo)




<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj-tO63Xds0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-F640L5CfU>

*We look forward to seeing you at your PATH!*

3. Example of a PATH visual timetable which could be sent to the CYP before the meeting or discussed with them during the EP's 1:1 assessment.

**My PATH visual timetable**

<p><b>Now (3)</b></p> <p>What is life like for you now?</p> <p>What do you like doing? What do you dislike? What are your hobbies?</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p><b>Enrol (4)</b></p> <p>Who can help you to achieve your goals?</p> <p>This could be friend, family, teachers, other school staff, other professionals, etc.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p><b>Staying strong (5)</b></p> <p>What are you already really good at?</p> <p>What skills and strengths do you need to work on to help achieve your goals?</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>
---	--	---

**Action (6)**

What's the first thing you will need to do?"

What will you need to do this month?



To Do

- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**Dream (1)**

If you could imagine yourself in 5 years or 10 years' time, what do you see yourself doing?



What would your perfect day look like?

**Goals for one year's time (2)**

What steps do we need to take to help you reach your dream?

What is possible to achieve in the next year?

Positive and possible

4. PATH invite and information form which could be sent to parents and education staff ahead of the PATH meeting.

## PATH invite and information form

We hope you are looking forward to your child's upcoming PATH meeting!

PATH is a way of structuring a meeting to focus on your child/young person's goals and aspirations and to work together to find ways to help them achieve these goals. Two members of the EP team will facilitate the meeting and will guide the discussion through a series of steps which focus on: identifying dreams and a vision for your child/young person's ideal future, identifying short-term goals, understanding the current situation and where we are now, finding strengths and areas of skill to develop, identifying who we need to support your child/young person, and setting some actions.

It would be helpful if you could answer the following questions to help us get to know your child/young person and plan their PATH meeting. Please do email this form back to the EP who sent it to you.

<b>Child's name:</b>
<b>Preferred dates/times for the meeting (if not yet arranged):</b>
<b>Are there any lessons that your child would not want to miss?</b>
<b>Is there anyone that your child would like to have present in the meeting?</b> <i>This could be teachers, TAs, sports coaches, friends, grandparents, etc.</i>
<b>Will your child need a break scheduled into the meeting?</b>
<b>What is your child's favourite music?</b>
<b>What are your child's favourite colours?</b>
<b>What are your child's favourite toys? (e.g. for Nursery and KS1 children)</b>
<b>Do you have any specific access requirements for the meeting?</b> <i>e.g. an interpreter, disabled access</i>
<b>Is there anything else you need us to know before the meeting?</b>

Thank you for completing this form.



## PATH cheat sheet- process facilitators

### **The role of the process facilitator:**

- To have a person-centred mindset of belief in the person, open-mindedness, collaboration, seeking capacity and connections, and a belief that positive change is possible;
- To use facilitation skills such as active listening, asking questions, and problem solving;
- To ensure the focus individual, or a PATHfinder, is the primary voice in the process and the centre of attention;
- To welcome ideas from the planning circle and encouraging them to take action, whilst being mindful to any judgemental or negative attitudes in the room;



### **The process facilitator guides the conversation through a series of steps**

- Setting Ground Rules and the Agenda (these are not captured on the graphic record);
- Locating the Dream (the North Star);
- Generating a Vision of a positive and possible future (e.g. goals);
- Describing the Now;
- Inviting those present to Enrol;



- Deciding to Get Stronger;
- Identifying Bold Steps and agreeing Next Steps and actions for Next Month;

### **Top tips for on the day**

- Chairs could be in a horseshoe around the graphic template – no tables are needed.
- The focus person should ideally sit in the middle of the circle, but can choose who sits next to them and can choose to sit at the side if they are uncomfortable.
- Have music on as people enter the room. This could be music that is important to the focus person.
- See if the school can provide tea/coffee.



- Start with a happy, smiley welcome and clear introductions.
- The key person is the focus of the process facilitator's attention, not the graphic.
- Active listening – repeat the key elements of the conversation back to show you are listening and check the understanding of what is being said. This also gives the graphic facilitator time to capture the content of the conversation.
- Ensure to ask the child/young person their thoughts and ideas first before moving around the room. You could ask the child who they want to hear from next after having their turn.
- Check in with the young person after ideas are given by other circle members- do they agree with this idea? How do they feel about it?
- Consider using prompt cards with key questions when you first start out facilitating.
- Take a picture of the PATH at the end for your own records so that the young person can take their PATH home.

### **Potential 'problems'**

#### High Emotions e.g. Tears / Anger

- acknowledge the person, offer them a tissue.
- "I can see you are upset, Is it time for a break?"
- If the person wants to leave the room ask for a volunteer to go with them.
- Re focus the group "[name] has just reminded us of what a powerful process this is....if we go back to [name PATH]" and then carry on.

#### Sidebar Conversations

- Gentle reminder "[name] is holding the wand at the moment".
- "Hold that thought / that sounds really important, we will come back to you".
- Blame yourself "I'm struggling to hear"
- Props can add humour – e.g. giving someone the masking tape to hold.

#### Loud Group Members

- "Loving it all, but you are working way too hard over there."
- "We are going to take a break – come talk to me in a minute."
- Make them feel important - give the loud or difficult group member a job to do.

#### Silent Group Members

- Use their name and ask a closed question.

- Ask the room to talk in pairs to share their thoughts so the person has the chance to rehearse their answers. If the quiet person is still reluctant to talk, ask their partner “what did [name] say?”, then check back with them “Is that right [name]?”.

#### Feeling stuck

- “Can we say what we think is true and helpful?”
- “How deeply are we listening? Are we using our own words and images or the focus person’s words and images?”
- “Are we rushing the process or avoiding steps or questions? Can we make adjustments?”
- Members may become tired and need to re-energise themselves – taking a 10 minute to let things soak in can help.
- Sometimes acknowledging the difficulty e.g. “we are stuck” or simply stating there are differences in the room can help.
- Others may feel a bit disorientated in the process and a reminder of where we have been, where we are and next steps is needed.

#### Participants that Jump Straight to Actions or Solutions

- Give a reminder of the PATH section you are in and the current focus.
- “Hold that idea until we are in [name section].”
- “That’s a good idea, write it down (give out a post it) until we get to [name section].”
- Rephrase the action if given during ‘one year on’ into the appropriate tense.
- Note it down as a ‘key word’ in the action section and come back to it later.

#### “I don’t do dreaming”

- Find a small dream e.g. “have a cat”
- Use alternative language for ‘the dream’ e.g. “What would a world look like that works for you?”, “What would your perfect day look like?”, “What does it feel like when you are happy? What would you be doing?”
- Bring in other voices “What do you see for [name]?” with a ‘check back’ with focus person.
- Create a scenario “If I could take you on a plane, where would you go? What would your destination look like?”
- Use any information the young person has previously shared with you “You told me you wanted to be [job]. What do you need in your dream to do this job?”

#### The young person struggles with verbal communication

- Ask an adult to speak for them, but check with a thumbs up or down that the young person agrees.
- Prepare the young person in advance for the type of questions you might ask.
- Still continue to address the questions to the young person, never forget they are there.

#### People who leave the room early

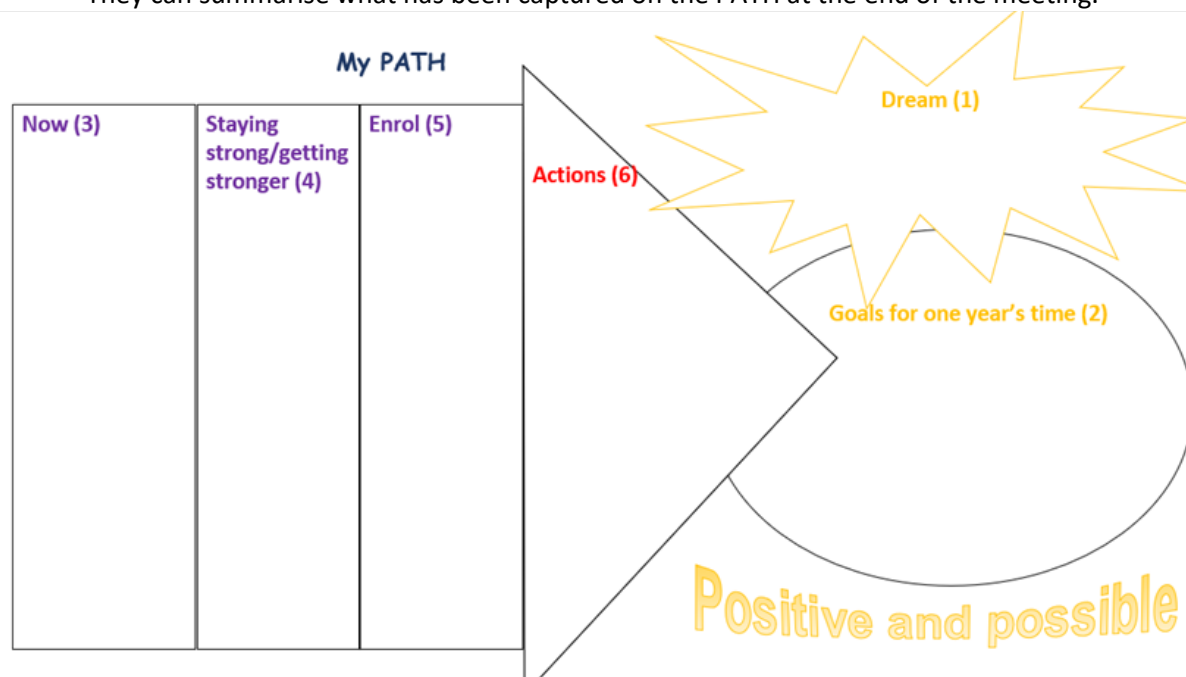
- Be clear when arranging the meeting with all those attending about the meeting time expectation of 1.5 hours.
- If someone tries to leave early, make them accountable to the focus person “When will you touch-base with [name] to pick up on what you have missed”, “Who is going to volunteer to spend some time with [name person leaving meeting] to catch up on what has been missed?” “Who can talk to [name] about what they have missed?”, “Can you leave your actions with someone else in the room in post-it notes?”

*Adapted from Person Centred Planning - A Facilitators Guide – January 2017 (West Sussex, 2017)*

## PATH cheat sheet- graphic facilitators

### The role of the graphic facilitator:

- Reflects the group's work in the graphic record;
- The graphic record provides a template to give shape to the meeting's agenda and provides a record of the planning circle's discussions and agreed actions;
- The graphic facilitator isn't just drawing and writing, they are an essential part of capturing key phrases and moments that the process facilitator might miss. They can stop the discussion to point out these key moments and reflect on them.
- It is key to use and record the focus person's words, not yours.
- They can summarise what has been captured on the PATH at the end of the meeting.



### The graphic facilitator records the conversation in each section of the graphic:









- Locating the Dream (the North Star);
- Generating a Vision of a positive and possible future (e.g. goals);
- Describing the Now;
- Inviting those present to Enrol;



- Deciding to Get Stronger;
- Identifying Bold Steps and agreeing Next Steps and actions for Next Month;

## Useful equipment

- Large sheets/roles of white paper.
- Highlighters, marker pens, soft pastels, coloured pencils.
- Masking tape or Blutac to stick the paper to the wall.
- Extra paper to stick behind the template to avoid wall staining.
- A camera/phone for recording the finished graphic.
- Your voice: don't forget you can ask a question/ask for an image or word to express an idea or thought.

<p>Practice drawing some basic shapes before your first PATH. A useful guide to graphic facilitation can be found here: <a href="#">7 Elements of Graphic Facilitation by Bigger Picture</a>. These graphic reminders are taken from the Bigger Picture 7 Element Guide.</p>	 <p><b>1<sup>ST</sup> ELEMENT PEOPLE</b></p>	 <p><b>2<sup>ND</sup> ELEMENT PLACE</b></p>
 <p><b>3<sup>RD</sup> ELEMENT PROCESS</b></p>	 <p><b>4<sup>TH</sup> ELEMENT SPEECH</b></p>	<p>MAKE IT EASY TO READ! → Don't write like THIS...</p> <p>USE BULLETS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• → ✖</li> <li>• → ✖</li> <li>• → ✖</li> </ul> <p>LISTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DRAW</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGAGE</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> ASK</li> </ul> <p>USE GUIDELINES!</p> <p>HELPS DISPLAY INFORMATION</p> <p>TITLE HEADING 1 Heading 2</p> <p>ANYMORE TO ADD?</p> <p><b>5<sup>TH</sup> ELEMENT TEXT</b></p>
<p><b>6<sup>TH</sup> ELEMENT COLOUR</b></p> <p>DARK COLOURS:</p>  <p>← TEXT</p> <p>BRIGHT COLOURS:</p>  <p>← HIGHLIGHTS</p> 	 <p><b>7<sup>TH</sup> ELEMENT EFFECTS</b></p>	

Drawn from Person Centred Planning - A Facilitators Guide – January 2017 (West Sussex, 2017)

**Appendix E- Systematic Observation Schedule**

**Systematic observation schedule**

<b>Meeting code</b>	
<b>Who was present?</b>	

Instructions-

- Time interval coding- code for the middle 5 minutes of every 15-minute interval.
- Each new section of speech after there has been a pause longer than 3 seconds will count as a new contribution or if there is a considerable change of topic (e.g. reflection point, 2 second pause, question). Do not count small vocalisations in response to someone else/during someone else talking (e.g. 'uhuh', 'yes', 'mmmm').
- Type of participation and contribution added to PATH- code for the whole time interval rather than each contribution.
- Active- times that participants were talking and contributing to the conversation.
- Control- times participants changed the topic/went off-topic, disagreed with what was said, corrected others, asked questions to involve others, or otherwise took charge.
- Limited- child not engaging as much as they could do, lost attention, displayed escape behaviours, or gave brief non-committal answers to questions.
- Absent- student left or was not in the meeting.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Time interval</b>	<b>Length of contributions (in seconds)</b>	<b>Number of contributions</b>	<b>Number of times asked to contribute by another</b>	<b>Type of participation (active, control, limited, or absent)</b>	<b>Contribution recorded?</b>	
<b>Child</b>	1						
	2						
	3						
	4						
	5						
<i>Totals</i>							
<b>Parent</b>	1						
	2						
	3						
	4						
	5						
<i>Totals</i>							
<b>Education staff</b>	1						
	2						
	3						
	4						
	5						
<i>Totals</i>							
<b>EP-process facilitator</b>	1						
	2						
	3						
	4						
	5						

<i>Totals</i>					
<b>EP- graphic facilitator</b>	1				
	2				
	3				
	4				
	5				
<i>Totals</i>					

**Access arrangements**

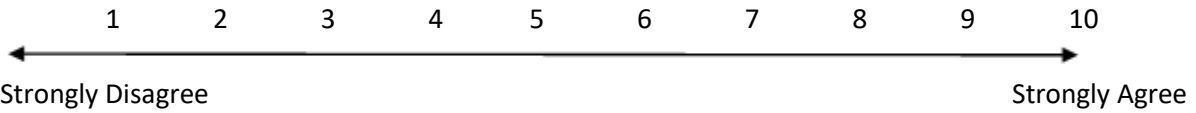
*Has an interpreter been arranged if appropriate?*

**Meeting reflections**

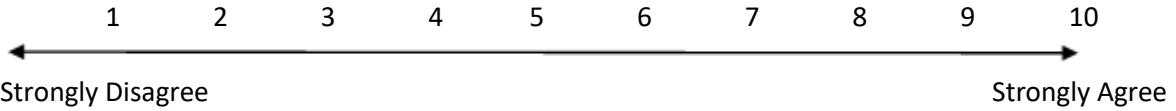
*What is the set-up of the meeting room? Where are the child and parents sat and the school staff positioned? Is the child present for the duration of the meeting? How does the atmosphere feel in the room?*



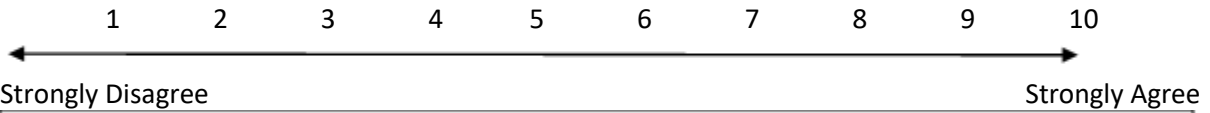




**8. I felt that the adults listened to, and took into consideration, my child's views** (e.g., their contributions were written down/added to the meeting graphic or they were not talked over).



**9. I felt that my child was supported to join in decision-making processes** (e.g., my child was able to make decisions about their goals/actions or they were supported to be present when decisions were made).



Please use this space to give comments on the above questions:

**10. How were you and your child supported to participate in the meeting?**

Comments:

**11. Was there anything about the meeting that you enjoyed or found helpful?**

Comments:

**12. Was there anything about the meeting that you didn't enjoy or wasn't helpful?**

Comments:

**13. Is there anything that could have been better?**

Comments:

**14. Was there anything different about this meeting compared to other meetings you've had with school staff and/or other professionals (e.g. an Educational Psychologist)?**

Comments:

**15. How helpful did you feel this meeting was for the EHCP assessment process?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Very unhelpful

Very helpful

**16. Would you like a meeting to be structured in this way again in the future?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Comments:

**17. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?**

Thank you!



### Child questionnaire

I hope you enjoyed the meeting we had recently at your school which was all about you!  
I would like to ask you some questions about this meeting to get to know what you thought about it.

**1. Did you know why we were having this meeting?**



Yes

Mostly

A bit

Not sure

No

**2. Did you feel comfortable talking during the meeting?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

**3. Do you think the adults listened to you during the meeting?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

**4. Did you get to say everything you wanted to say during the meeting?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

**5. Did the adults ask questions about what you thought?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

**6. Did you understand what the adults were talking about?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

**7. Did you get to help the adults make decisions about school and home?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

**8. Did the adults write down the things that you said?**



All the time

A lot

Sometimes

A little bit

Not at all

Comments:

**8. What did the adults do to help you to speak or be involved in the meeting?**

Comments:

**9. Was there anything you liked about the meeting?**

Comments:

**10. Was there anything you didn't like about the meeting?**

Comments:

**11. What could have been even better about the meeting?**

Comments:

**12. If you have been to any other meetings before, did you like this one more or less?**

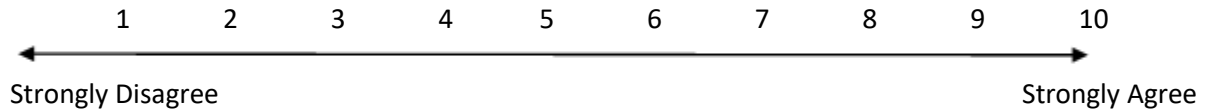
Comments:

**13. Would you like another meeting like this in the future?**

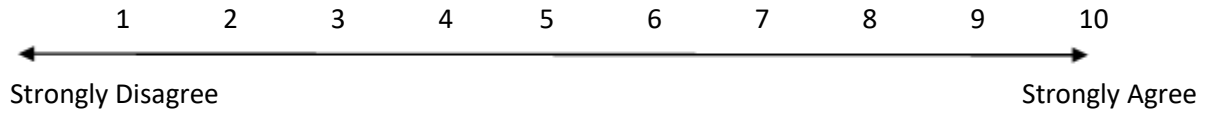
*Thank you!*



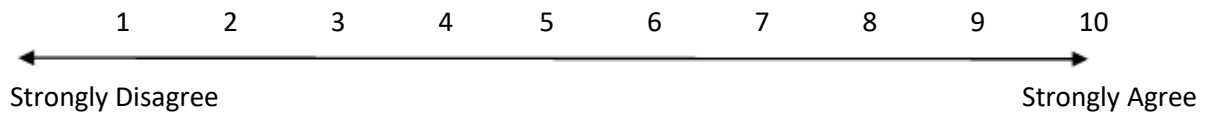
**6. I understood what the adults were talking about during the meeting.**



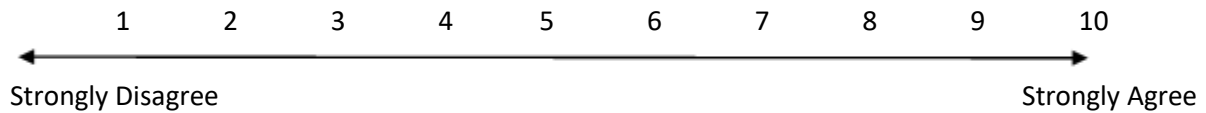
**7. I helped create goals for myself to work towards at school and at home.**



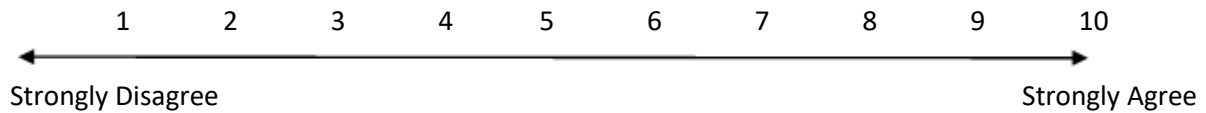
**8. I helped make decisions about actions and support I will receive at school and home.**



**9. The adults wrote down the things that I said.**



**10. I felt like an equal partner/contributor during the meeting** (e.g. I was listened to, I wasn't talked over, I was given a chance to make decisions).



Comments:

**11. What did the adults do to make you feel included or listened to during the meeting?** (How were you supported to participate?)

Comments:

**12. Was there anything about the meeting that you enjoyed or found helpful?**

Comments:

**13. Was there anything about the meeting that you didn't enjoy or wasn't helpful?**

Comments:

**14. Is there anything that could have been better?**

Comments:

**15. Was there anything different about this meeting compared to other meetings you may have had at school?**

Comments:

**16. Would you like to have a meeting like this again in the future?**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Comments:

**17. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?**

*Thank you!*



**Education staff questionnaire**

We would like you to consider the meeting you had recently with the member of the Local Authority Educational Psychology Service at your school. This meeting would have been for a child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment.

Please read the statements below and consider your thought and feelings in relation to this meeting on a scale from 1-10. Please circle the answer which you feel most reflects your experience. Please add any additional comments you have relating to that statement in the answer box at the bottom.

**1. Was the child present at the meeting?**

Yes                                  No

**2. I felt that the parent/s actively contributed to the meeting.**

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**3. I felt that the parent/s' views were listened to.**

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**4. I felt that the parent/s had a say in decision-making about goals and actions for their child.**

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**5. I felt that the parent/s was an equal partner/contributor in this meeting.**

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

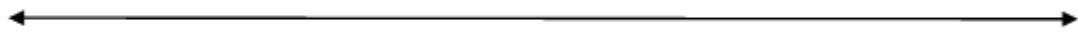


Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**6. I felt that the child was supported to be present in the meeting in a way appropriate to their age and SEN.**

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**7. I felt that the child was supported to express their views in a way appropriate to their age and SEN (e.g., to contribute drawings of their favourite things or to talk about their goals).**

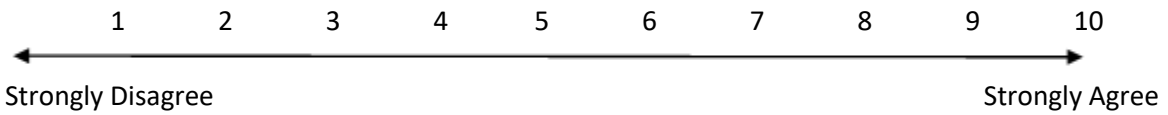
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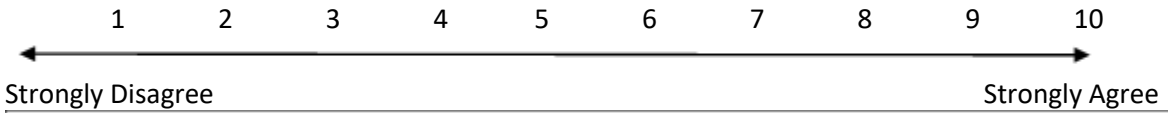
Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**8. I felt that the adults listened to, and took into consideration, the child's views (e.g., their contributions were written down/added to the meeting graphic or they were not talked over).**



**9. I felt that the child was supported to join in decision-making processes** (e.g., my child was able to make decisions about their goals/actions or they were supported to be present when decisions were made).



Please use this space to give comments on the above questions:

**10. How were the parents and child supported to participate in the meeting by the EPs/staff?**

Comments:

**11. Was there anything about the meeting that you enjoyed or found helpful?**

Comments:

**12. Was there anything about the meeting that you didn't enjoy or wasn't helpful?**

Comments:

**13. Is there anything that could have been better?**

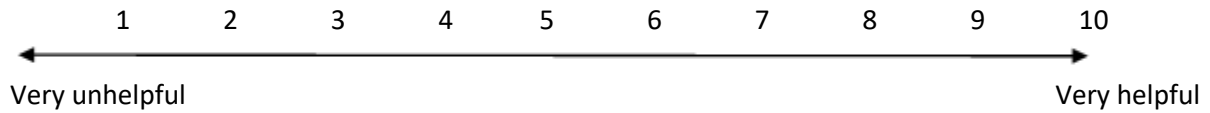
Comments:

**14. Was there anything different about this meeting compared to other EHCP meetings?**

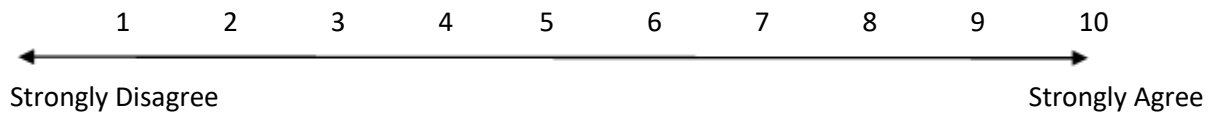
Comments:

*(Please only answer this question if you have attended other EHCP meetings with an EP).*

**15. How helpful did you feel this meeting was for the EHCP assessment?**



**16. Would you like a meeting to be structured in this way again in the future?**



Comments:

**17. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?**

Thank you!

### Educational Psychologist questionnaire

We would like you to consider the meeting you facilitated recently for a child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment.

Please read the statements below and consider your thought and feelings in relation to this meeting. Please circle the answer which you feel most reflects your experience and add any additional comments you have relating to that statement in the answer box below.

**1. Was the child present at the meeting?**

Yes

No

Comments:

**2. Why did you choose to facilitate the meeting in this way (either PATH or your 'business as usual')?**

Comments:

**3. Were there any similarities between how you facilitated this meeting and how you usually facilitate meeting?**

Comments:

**4. Were there any differences between how you facilitated this meeting and how you usually facilitate meeting?**

**5. I felt that the parent/s actively contributed to the meeting.**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**6. I felt that the parent/s' views were listened to.**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

**7. I felt that the parent/s had a say in decision-making about goals and actions for their child.**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

←-----→  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**8. I felt that the parent/s was an equal partner/contributor in this meeting.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

←-----→  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**9. I felt that the child was supported to be present in the meeting in a way appropriate to their age and SEN.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

←-----→  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**10. I felt that the child was supported to express their views in a way appropriate to their age and SEN (e.g., to contribute drawings of their favourite things or to talk about their goals).**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

←-----→  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**11. I felt that the adults listened to, and took into consideration, the child's views (e.g., their contributions were written down/added to the meeting graphic or they were not talked over).**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

←-----→  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**12. I felt that the child was supported to join in decision-making processes (e.g., my child was able to make decisions about their goals/actions or they were supported to be present when decisions were made).**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

←-----→  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Please use this space to give comments on the above questions:

**13. Was there anything that you did, or other staff did, which you felt helped include the child and their family in the meeting?**

Comments:

**14. How helpful did you feel this meeting was for the EHCP assessment?**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Very unhelpful

Very helpful

Comments:

**15. How helpful did you feel the meeting was for gathering information about the child's strengths and needs?**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Very unhelpful

Very helpful

Comments:

**16. How helpful did you feel the meeting was for developing outcomes to address the child's needs and aspirations?**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Very unhelpful

Very helpful

Comments:

**17. How helpful did you feel the meeting was for planning provision which address the child's needs and aspirations?**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10



Very unhelpful

Very helpful

Comments:

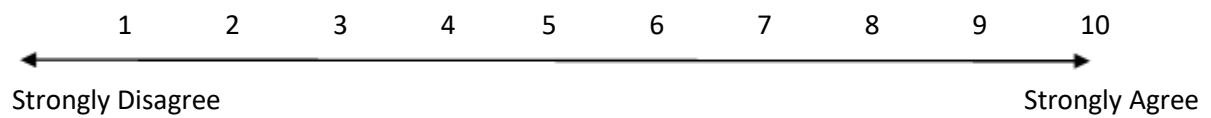
**18. What did you feel went well in this meeting?**

Comments:

**19. Is there anything that could have been better or that you would do differently next time?**

Comments:

**20. Would you structure a meeting in this way again in the future?**



**21. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?**

Thank you!

**Appendix G- Document Analysis Schedule**

**Document analysis schedule**

<b>Meeting code:</b>			
<b>Was a picture of the PATH included in the EHCP?</b>			
<b>Were the child's views directly obtained? What is the evidence for your answer?</b>			
<b>Fox's (2016) areas of participation</b>	<b>Is there information recorded across child and parent views?</b>	<b>Are the child's comments quoted in their own words/in first person?</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Likes and dislikes in school</b>			
<b>Easy/difficult at school</b> <i>e.g. progress and what's working well</i>			
<b>Current learning and development</b> <i>e.g. what the child is learning and what areas they are receiving support</i>			
<b>Support for learning in the future</b> <i>e.g. what support would help them in the future</i>			
<b>Fox's (2016) Depth of participation</b>	<b>Is the method of obtaining the child's/parent's voice reported?</b>	<b>What method was used? (e.g. PATH, interview, observation)</b>	<b>What depth of participation does the content indicate? E.g. 'surface depth' (e.g., observation), 'social depth' (e.g., informal, unstructured conversations with the child about likes/dislikes), 'solution depth' (e.g., structured conversation using solution-focused or problem-solving techniques) and 'psychological depth' (e.g., using creative techniques such as Personal Construct Psychology or projective approaches to get a deeper understanding of</b>



			<i>aspects of the situation to find new ways of viewing the issues).</i>
			Parent- Child-
<b>Fox's (2016) Degree of participation</b>	<b>Do the outcomes reflect the content of Section A?</b>	<b>Outcome- is it general or person-centred?</b> <i>A person-centred outcome would relate to themes arising from the parent or child's views (e.g. if the child expresses a difficulty with maths and/or a desire to improve in maths and the outcome is about improving in maths). A general outcome would not refer to the child's or parent's views, would not be specific to the child and/or would relate to the professional's opinion only (e.g. an outcome to say that the child would achieve in line with age-related expectations).</i>	
<b>Section E- outcomes</b>	Yes- parent Yes- child Yes- both neither		
		<b>What % are person-centred?</b>	

## **Appendix H- Additional Amendments Made During the Pilot Phase**

### *Additional questionnaire amendments*

- adding an open question asking participants what the EP or staff may have done to help participants feel included/listened to capture qualitative data on participant's views around the inclusionary processes in the meeting.
- most of the comment boxes attached to the scaling questions were removed as these were not used by participants.
- Some of the language was adapted to avoid jargon and explanatory notes were added into some of the questions to give examples, e.g. "I felt that my child was supported to express their views in a way appropriate to their age and SEN (e.g., to contribute drawings of their favourite things or to talk about their goals)." This helped to ensure that participants could more reliably interpret the questions in a similar way and helped to give examples of participation behaviours of different age groups to ensure that the questionnaire felt applicable to younger as well as older children.

### *Additional Systematic Observation Schedule amendments*

- 'Number of times speech is interrupted by another' was removed as meeting participants often spoke over each other in a positive way, for example, either to indicate agreement or to extend the first speaker's point. This question therefore did not provide any information about non-participatory behaviours.
- "Contribution recorded" was also added to reflect Shier's (2001) model of participation and capture moments when children are having a say in decision-making.
- The SOS was compared to the questionnaires to ensure comparable items between perception of participation and behaviours in the meeting (e.g., both measures containing items on being asked questions by others).

### *Additional Document Analysis Schedule amendments*

- The original DAS was designed to be completed alongside the video recordings to see if what was discussed in the meeting matched the views recorded on the draft EHCP. However, due to reasons outlined in the Discussion (see section 6.2), most of the meetings were not recorded, therefore it would have been difficult to corroborate what was said in the meeting with the EHCP content.

**Appendix I- Type of Depth Coding Table with Examples**

Type of depth	Example for child	Example for parent
<p><i>'surface depth' (e.g., observation of child, without asking their views directly).</i></p>	<p><u>What I would like to do in the future</u>            Due to the nature of his needs it was not possible to talk to him directly about his views and aspirations. An attempt was made to engage David in a non-verbal activity using cards, but he did not want to participate. David's views were gained through observation and from talking to the adults who know him well. Based on what we know about David, we expect his aspirations would include continuing to find school enjoyable, having opportunities to play with the things he finds most interesting and being able to make himself clearly understood. We can also expect that he would like to be able to engage in play with others so that he can enjoy his favourite games and activities when others are already playing in those areas.</p>	
<p><i>Added: 'descriptive depth' (e.g. a description of the problem and/or desired goals is recorded, likely to have been pre-written by parent and/or copied from EHCP documentation).</i></p>		<p>Mr and Mrs W would like Jack to be able to read and write at an average pace and to be able to understand what he has read. They would like Jack to feel like he is keeping up in class and work at a faster pace so that he can engage in the lesson content more, and they would like Jack to be able to approach learning tasks with confidence and independence. They would like Jack to be able to pass some of his GCSEs. In the future, Mr and Mrs W would like Jack to feel more confident reading in everyday life situations and able to complete everyday tasks which require reading and writing skills independently, such as completing forms.</p>

<p><i>'social depth' (e.g., informal, sometimes unstructured conversations with the parent/child about likes/dislikes/goals).</i></p>	<p><u>What's important to me</u>  My hearing aids and my glasses  My pets - my dog can sense when people are feeling upset or need something to cheer them up!  My family and how they help me</p> <p><u>What I'm good at</u>  Being kind and helpful to others  Helping children with their work, helping teachers  Being funny  "I like myself the way I am, because I am quite different to everyone else, nobody was born like me!"  I like seeing others like me!</p> <p><u>What I would like to do in the future</u>  In the future, Timmy would love to be a policeman, a pilot or become a teacher. Timmy also mentioned that he is keen to start working a part-time job as soon as he can. In the short term, Timmy is hoping that he can make it onto the school council following next year's elections, and potentially also become a house captain.</p> <p><u>How I like to be supported</u>  Hearing other children in the classroom when they are speaking  Struggle to concentrate when there is a lot of noise going on  My radio aid supports me  Learning British Sign Language (BSL) - I am starting to get used to it!</p>	<p>Ethan's PATH Team shared about his gifts and strengths. He is content, engaging, cheeky and cuddly (he wraps himself up) and he has a smile that brings happiness. He is very fast at technology. He has good balance and loves spinning on a swing.</p> <p>Ethan's PATH Team shared their aspirations for his life. They hope that he will:  Be Happy  Be Calm  Be Less Anxious  Have the support of his brother and friends.  Have his own family and his own home.  Be communicating with others.  Be experiencing Independence.  Have a job in technology as he is very good at it.</p>
<p><i>'solution depth' (e.g., structured conversation using solution-focused or problem-solving techniques).</i></p>	<p><u>What's important to me</u>  It is important for Becca that she can be herself and she is supported in a way that is flexible when she is finding things tough. It is crucial for Becca that she is supported by adults who understand her and show consistency in their approach to</p>	<p>Timmy' parents, Robert and Sharon, communicated their views both during the PATH meeting and through a follow up call two days after the meeting. They spoke of how Timmy is a mature, positive boy who has an excellent attitude towards learning and puts in lots of effort in school. They are happy</p>

	<p>supporting her. She needs staff to know that at times, she needs space and time to regulate if something has overwhelmed her. To achieve this, Becca would like to have her voice heard more and have opportunity to share how things feel for her. Becca likes to feel independent and feel as though she has choices over her learning.</p>	<p>with how he is performing across all subjects at school, and feel he benefits enormously from the support he currently receives. At the moment, Timmy seems happy and enjoys going to school. He also shows a great amount of determination and resilience in overcoming some of the challenges he faces.</p> <p>When asked about the future, Timmy's parents are hoping that he will improve his ability to recognise when he is becoming tired and develop some strategies for both communicating and managing this, for example subtly flipping a card over to indicate he needs a break. They also hope that Timmy can continue to be supported as he transitions into secondary school, as this will bring its own, new set of challenges for him, such as noisier classrooms. It is important that school remains a place that Timmy enjoys attending and that his hearing impairment does not become a barrier to any opportunities he might have throughout his time in education.</p>
<p><i>'psychological depth' (e.g., using creative techniques such as Personal Construct Psychology or projective approaches to get a deeper understanding of aspects of the situation to find new ways of viewing the issues).</i></p>	<p>'A "5" Could Make Me Lose Control' is an activity-based method for assessing and supporting anxiety. The 5 point scale is used as a way of breaking down social and emotional concepts into five parts and using a number system, rather than just spoken words to clarify each level of emotion or behaviour. Individuals use cards on a 5 part scale in order to identify how different situations can make them feel.</p> <p><i>[an example from this activity]</i>  This can make me mad:  Naming my feelings. I find it hard and it makes me want to punch.  Sharing, I don't like it when people snatch.</p>	

	<p>Working with others because I try to help others but they say they don't want my help and that I am annoying. People saying no. Dogs because they bark.</p> <p>Brandy also shared that if she had 3 wishes and 3 things would be different tomorrow at the wave of a magic wand, she would wish for: Seeing flying dragons and having another cat Having a water slide and pool in school. Having a bigger classroom so it feels nicer and less busy. Writing in the morning instead of quadrants and a ticket to Thorpe Park.</p>	
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### **Appendix J- Chronology of Data Collection**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Task</b>
<b>Autumn 2022</b>	Initial literature review and formulation of research questions and aims. Thesis proposal drafted and research supervisors assigned. Contacted EPs at researcher's Local Authority to request EP volunteer participants.
<b>Spring 2023</b>	Development of measures and participant information sheets and consent forms. Ethics form drafted. Professional discussion with Derek Watson from Inclusive Solutions regarding core elements of PATH. Contacted EPs from other Local Authorities about participating in the research.
<b>April 2023</b>	Ethical approval granted by the IOE Research Ethics Committee.
<b>May 2023</b>	Continued revision of measures. Training with Inclusive Solutions on PATH and PCP approaches. Completed focus group of EPs from LA1 to discuss 'typical' EHC meetings. Ran training with EPs and Assistant EPs from LA1. Continued contacting senior EPs from other LAs. Completed first pilot PATH meeting and data analysis.
<b>June 2023</b>	Edited measures following pilot. Second scoring of pilot observation using new schedule. Met with senior EP from LA3 to agree research participation.
<b>July 2023</b>	Continued to refine measures and consent forms. Completed second pilot PATH meeting. Completion of first PATH meeting in LA1. Completion of additional ethics form for LA3 to gain consent to complete research in their LA. Continued liaison with LA2 and LA3 to ensure data collection was ready to begin in September.
<b>August 2023</b>	Ethical approval granted for research in LA3.
<b>September 2023</b>	Training provided to LA2, LA3 and a fourth LA. Link EPs were identified at LA2 and LA3 to manage data collection in the LA and sharing of information with the researcher. Continued to recruit EPs from LA1 via email and team meetings. Data analysis of second pilot PATH meeting and final revisions to ethics form, consent and information forms, questionnaires and the SOS. Completion of the first PATH meetings in LA2 and LA3.
<b>October 2023</b>	Began coding SOSs for completed PATH meetings and uploading questionnaire data to Excel and SPSS. Final PATH meeting completed in LA2. Began gathering draft EHCPs and sending follow-up questionnaires.
<b>November 2023</b>	Completion of first traditional meetings in LA1 and LA2. Final PATH meetings completed in LA1 and LA3.
<b>December 2023</b>	Final traditional meetings completed in LA1.
<b>January 2024</b>	Revisions made to DAS following submission of draft EHCPs from LA2 and LA3. Began coding draft EHCPs. Final emails sent requesting follow-up questionnaires and draft EHCPs. Submitted exam entry form for viva.
<b>February 2024</b>	Final 'traditional' meeting completed in LA2. Stopped data collection period (any additional questionnaires and draft EHCPs received after this point were not analysed).

## **Appendix K- Examples of Information Forms**

### **1. Example of a parent information form for a PATH meeting**

# **Exploring person-centred planning within the Education, Health and Care Plan assessment**

## **Parent Information Form**

**Name of the Researcher:** Saya Dunford, Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Contact Details of the Researcher:** [saya.dunford.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:saya.dunford.21@ucl.ac.uk)

**Name of the Supervising Researcher:** Dr Jessica Hayton, Lecturer in Psychology

**Contact Details of the Supervising Researcher:** [Jessica.hayton@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Jessica.hayton@ucl.ac.uk)

I am inviting you and your child to take part in a research project to explore participation within the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment. I am interested in exploring how Educational Psychologists (EPs) can work with schools, young people and their families to ensure that the EHCP assessment process feels inclusive and person-centred. So far, there is very little research exploring how children and families are helped to feel included and listened to in EHC planning meetings and how your views are represented in the EHCP.

I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me or your link EP if there is anything else you would like to know. Please also explain the research to your child and discuss whether or not they want to take part. This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the UCL Institute of Education.

### **Why am I being invited to take part?**

You are being invited to take part because your child is undergoing an EHCP assessment and you will be having a meeting with an Educational Psychologist to discuss your child. Currently there are two EHCP meeting types: a 'standard' type and a PATH type. PATH stands for Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope and is a person-centred planning tool that follows a set structure to plan for the young person's future. The 'standard' type is the meeting that is usually offered for all EHCP assessments and reflects 'business as usual' in the service. The EP is responsible for using their professional judgement to decide which type they will use. If you have any questions about your child's meeting, please talk to your EP.

### **What will happen if I choose to take part?**

I am interested in finding out what you and your child thought about the meeting and about the draft EHCP (if issued). After the meeting, your EP will give you and your child a questionnaire to ask how you both felt about the meeting. I would also like to look at your child's draft EHCP so that I can understand better how your views are captured in the EHCP. This will be shared by your Local Authority if you consent. A final questionnaire will then be given to you to ask you how you feel about your child's draft EHCP.

I'm also interested in exploring the different ways that an EP includes the family and child in the meeting. I ask that the meetings can be video recorded by your EP so that I can watch it afterwards to explore how the EP facilitates inclusion and participation. The EP can only video the meeting with everyone's permission.



You do not have to consent to any part of the research you do not feel comfortable with. If you would prefer not to be videoed but are still happy to give your views about the meeting, please let your EP know and they will not record the meeting.

I will then invite some parents and children to an interview to find out more about their reflections of the meeting. This could be up to 6 months after the meeting. Questions might be asked around your participation in the meeting and whether you think the meeting was helpful for the EHCP assessment process. If I invite you to a follow-up interview, you do not have to take part.

**Will this impact the EHCP assessment process and likelihood of being issued an EHCP?**

This research is being undertaken in fulfilment of the thesis requirements for the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education, University College London. Whilst the research is taking place in Local Authority schools, the research activities are separate from the activities of the Local Authority and will not impact on the decisions made by the Local Authority.

**What will happen with the information I have provided?**

Any personal information you or your child provide will only be used for the research purposes explained in this information form. Any personal information that the Researcher stores about you or your child will be stored securely and destroyed one month after your last research activity. Any personal information collected and stored for research purposes can only be accessed by those directly involved in the research project. Any information that is written up by the Researcher will be pseudonymised (using a pretend name) and the identity of all participants will remain confidential. Confidentiality will only be broken in exceptional circumstances where it was felt that any child, parent/carer, or member of staff was at risk of harm. In these circumstances, advice would be sought from a senior manager from the University and the Local Authority who will advise on the appropriate course of action. You and your child will have the right to withdraw from the research activities at any point without giving any reason, and you can withdraw your data up to one month after participation. If you decide to withdraw, any personal data that has been collected up to that point will be deleted unless agreed otherwise. Withdrawing from the research project does not mean you are also withdrawing from the EHCP assessment process and the assessment will continue to go ahead.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is entirely up to you whether or not you or your child chooses to take part. I hope that if you do choose to be involved then you and your child will find it a valuable experience. There will be no repercussions if you do not choose to take part and your decision will not impact on your child's EHCP assessment in any way.

**What happens afterwards?**

The anonymised data will be presented in a written thesis which will be made available on the internet through UCL Discovery. If you would like a copy of the research sent directly to you, please provide your email address to your EP. If you wish to make a complaint or raise a concern about how the research has been conducted, please contact the researchers at the top of the information sheet in the first instance. Alternatively, you could also contact the Data Protection Officer using the email address below. If you are affected in any way by difficult or sensitive topics raised during the research, Child Line or the Samaritans can provide free additional support.

**Finally...**

I hope from this Information Form you understand why I want to run the research project alongside the EHC assessment meeting. If you have any questions, please ask do contact the Researcher, your EP or speak to your child's school before you decide whether to participate. Please keep this Information Form to refer to at any time. If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form by ticking each item as appropriate and return to your link EP or the Researcher via the contact details above.

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

### **Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk)

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in our 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies (see link below).

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data. Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk)

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice>

2. Example of a young person's information form for a PATH meeting in LA1

## YOUR EP/CP meeting



Hi,

My name is Saya and I study at a university in London called UCL Institute of Education. I understand that you will soon be having a meeting with an Educational Psychologist (EP) at your school. I'm doing some research about what goes on in meetings in schools and I would like to find out how you feel about the meeting.

I hope that you would like to take part in my research. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please ask me, your link EP or an adult at school if there is anything else you would like to know.

### **What will happen if I choose to take part?**

You will see me or one of my colleagues soon in a meeting at your school.

After your meeting:

You will be given a questionnaire about what you thought of the meeting. You can do this alone, with your parents/carers or with an adult at school. This will take you about 10-15 minutes to do. You will be given another questionnaire in a few months to see if anything has changed since the meeting.

I might also ask you in a few months if you want to meet with me to talk in person about how you felt about the meeting. You do not have to say yes to this interview.

I will then write about your meeting in a report.

I would like for the meeting to be video recorded by your EP so that I can watch it afterwards to help me remember what happened or if I was not there. The EP can only video the meeting with everyone's permission. You do not have to consent to any part of the research you do not feel comfortable with. If you would prefer not to be videoed but are still happy to give your views about the meeting, please let your EP know and they will not record the meeting.

Whatever you write/say will be kept safe. The only time we would tell someone about what you said is if we were worried about your safety. I won't tell anyone your name or where you go to school. Nobody will see the video recordings except for me and my research supervisor.

### Do I have to take part?

It's up to you if you decide to take part. You may want to talk to your parents/carers or other adults you trust about taking part in these activities. You can also ask me or my colleagues any questions you have. I hope that if you do choose to take part, that you will find it a helpful experience.

It's also OK if you decide not to take part. If you do not want to take part, let me or your parents/carers know and they will tell me. Even if you decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time. You won't get in trouble if you decide not to take part.

If you are affected in any way by difficult or sensitive topics raised during the research, Child Line or the Samaritans can provide free additional support.

For more information, please visit this website:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice>

Thank you!

### 3. Example of a children's information form for PATH meetings in LA1

**HELLO**

My name is **Saya**.

I go to a university in London called UCL Institute of Education. I'm really interested in what goes on in meetings in schools.

You will see me or one of my colleagues soon in a meeting at your school. I would like to film the meeting to help me remember what happened or because I might not be there. You can tell an adult if you don't want to be filmed and they won't film the meeting.

**THOUGHTS?**

After your meeting, an adult will:

- Give you a questionnaire about what you thought about the meeting. You can do the questionnaire with your parents/carers or an adult at school.
- Give you a questionnaire in a few months' time to see if anything has changed for you since the meeting.
- I will then write about your meeting in a report.

Whatever you say to me will be kept safe (unless it's about someone being in danger). I won't tell anyone your name or where you go to school. Nobody will see the video except for me and my teacher.

You may want to talk to your parents about taking part in these activities. It is OK if you decide not to take part.

**Any Questions?**

For more information, please visit this website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice>

## **Appendix L- Examples of Consent Forms**

### **1. Example of a parent's consent form for a PATH meeting**

# **Exploring person-centred planning within the Education, Health and Care Plan assessment Parent Consent Form**

If you are happy for you and your child to participate in this research, please complete this consent form by ticking each item as appropriate, and return to the Researcher via the contact details below:

I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet.

I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.

I consent for me and my child to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary.

I understand that myself and my child can choose not to answer any or all of the questions in the questionnaire.

I understand that both me and my child can withdraw from the research activities at any time without giving any reason. I understand that I can withdraw our data up to one month after participation. I understand that if me or my child decides to withdraw, any personal data we have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.

I consent to the Researcher viewing my child's draft EHCP. I understand that any information taken from the draft EHCP will be pseudonymised and kept confidential.

I understand that all personal information will remain confidential. I understand that mine and my child's personal data will be stored securely. Personal data will be stored for up to a month after the last research activities. I understand that our personal information will only be used for the purposes explained to me.

I understand that the information provided by me and my child will be pseudonymised (pretend names) for the purpose of data analysis and reporting. All efforts will be made to ensure neither me nor my child can be identified. I understand that the information we provide will be used in a written project report and that small direct quotes may be used (these will be pseudonymised with pretend names).

I understand that in exceptional circumstances, anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken. For example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances, advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what has been disclosed.

**Additional options:**

I agree for the EHC meeting to be video recorded. I understand that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

12) I agree to be contacted to discuss my/my child’s participation in the meeting in a follow-up interview.

Name:.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name of researcher:.....Saya Dunford.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

**Name of the Researcher:** Saya Dunford, Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Contact Details of the Researcher:** [saya.dunford.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:saya.dunford.21@ucl.ac.uk)

**Name of the Supervising Researcher:** Dr Jessica Hayton, Lecturer in Psychology

**Contact Details of the Supervising Researcher:** [Jessica.hayton@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Jessica.hayton@ucl.ac.uk)

2. Example of a young person’s consent form

**Consent form**

Please show if you are happy to answer questions about your meeting on some questionnaires. Please also show if you are happy for your meeting to be filmed. You can do this by putting a tick in the box next to the thumbs up.

If you don’t want to have your meeting filmed or answer questions on some questionnaires, put a tick in the thumbs down. If you say yes now, you can change your mind any time and that’s OK. It’s OK to say ‘No’ if you don’t want to take part.

If you want to find out any more information, you can ask me, one of my colleagues, an adult at school or your parents/carers.

Whatever you say to me or one of my colleagues will be kept safe. The only time we would tell someone about what you said is if we were worried about your safety. I won’t tell anyone your name or where you go to school. Nobody will see the video recordings except for me and my research supervisor.

I am happy for my meeting to be filmed:

Yes  

No



I am happy to answer some questions:

Yes



No



Name:.....

Date: .....

**Thank you!**

3. Example of a child's consent form

*Your EHCP meeting*

Please show if you are happy for your meeting to be filmed and if you are happy to answer some questions. You can do this by putting a tick in the box next to the thumbs up.

If you don't want to have your meeting filmed or answer some questions, put a tick in the thumbs down. You can say no to either.

If you say yes now, you can change your mind any time and that's OK. It's OK to say 'No' if you don't want to take part.

If you want to find out any more information, you can ask me or my colleagues, an adult at school or your parents/carers.



Tick one box (✓)



Name:

Date:

I am happy for my meeting to be filmed:

Yes



No



I am happy to answer some questions:

Yes



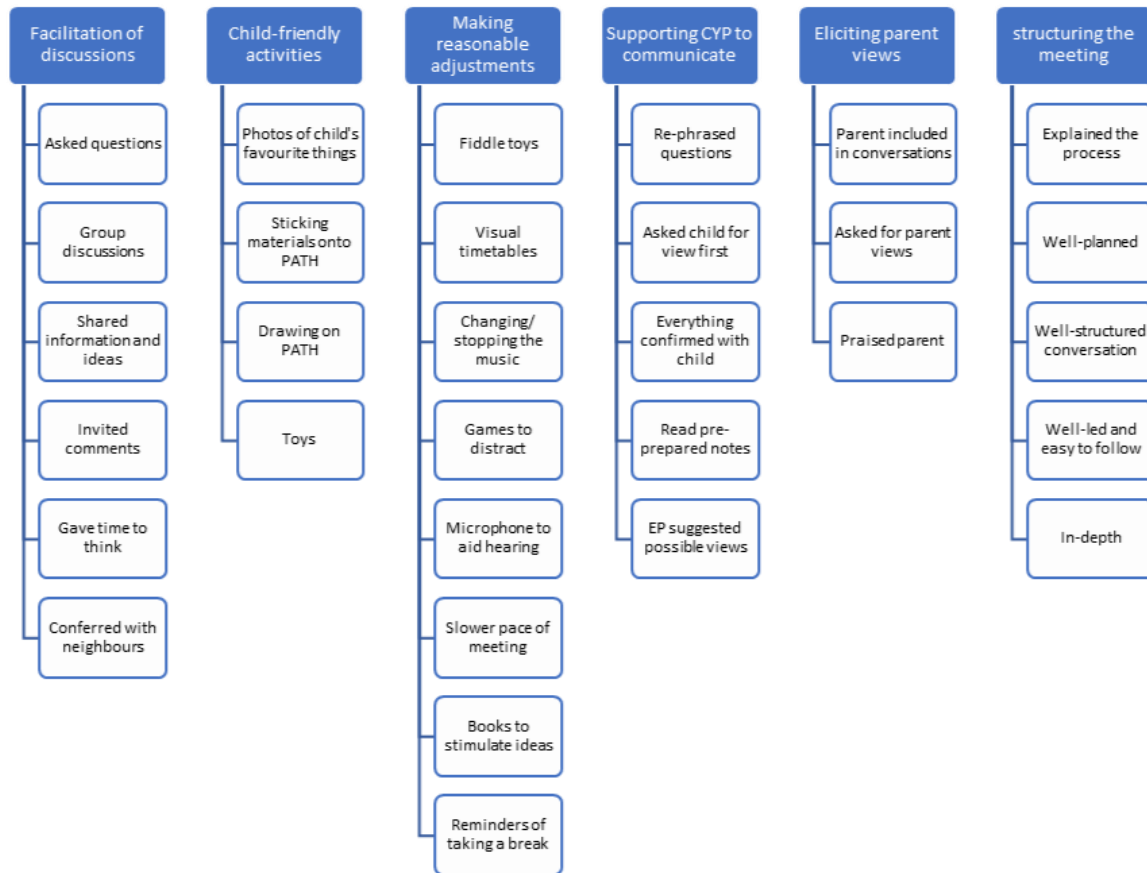
No



**Appendix M- Sub-Themes and Codes from PATH Meetings**

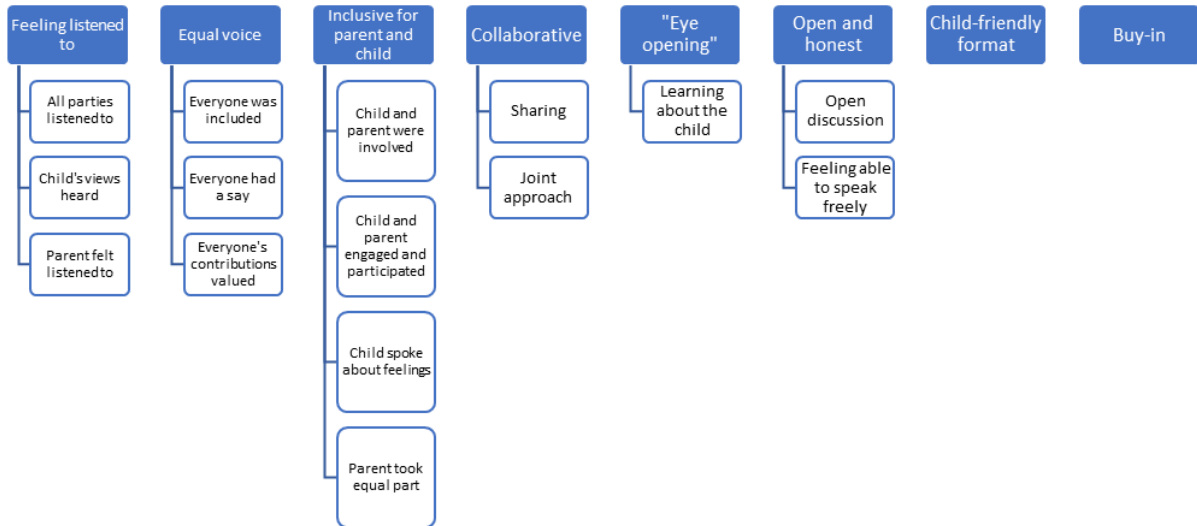
**Sub-RQ 2b: What Did Participants Find Enjoyable/ Helpful and Enabled Participation in the PATH EHCNA Meetings and Traditional EHCNA meetings?**

**Figure 11**  
*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the Facilitation Skills Theme.*

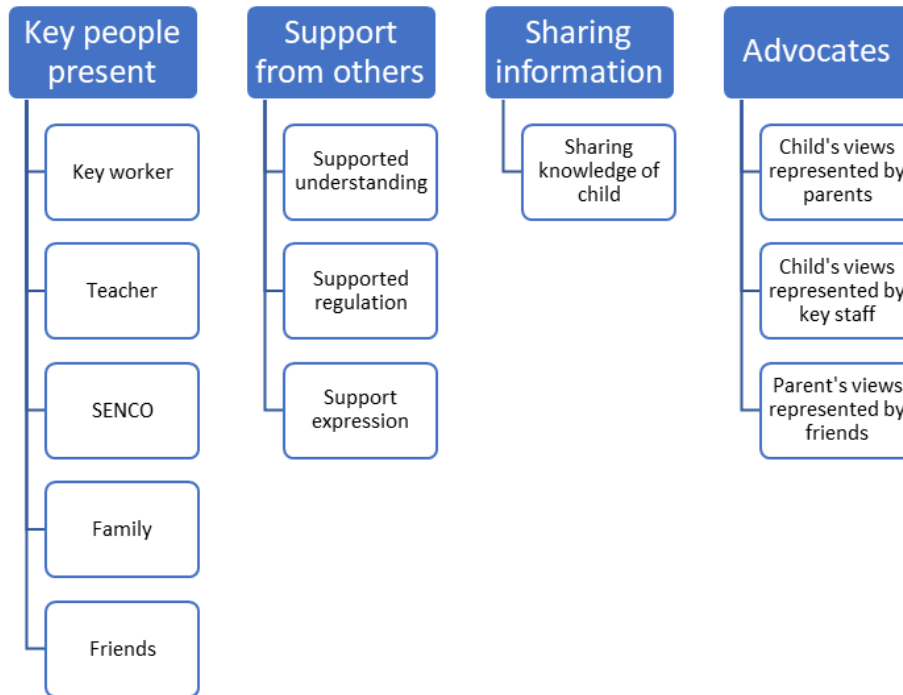


**Figure 12**  
*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the Inclusion and Participation Theme.*

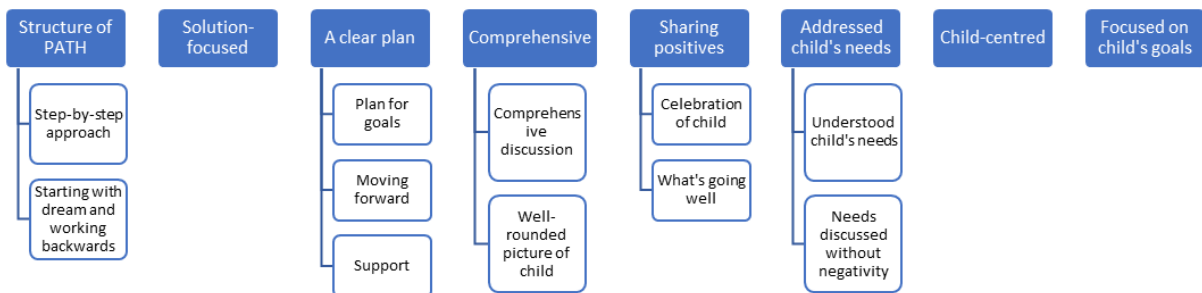




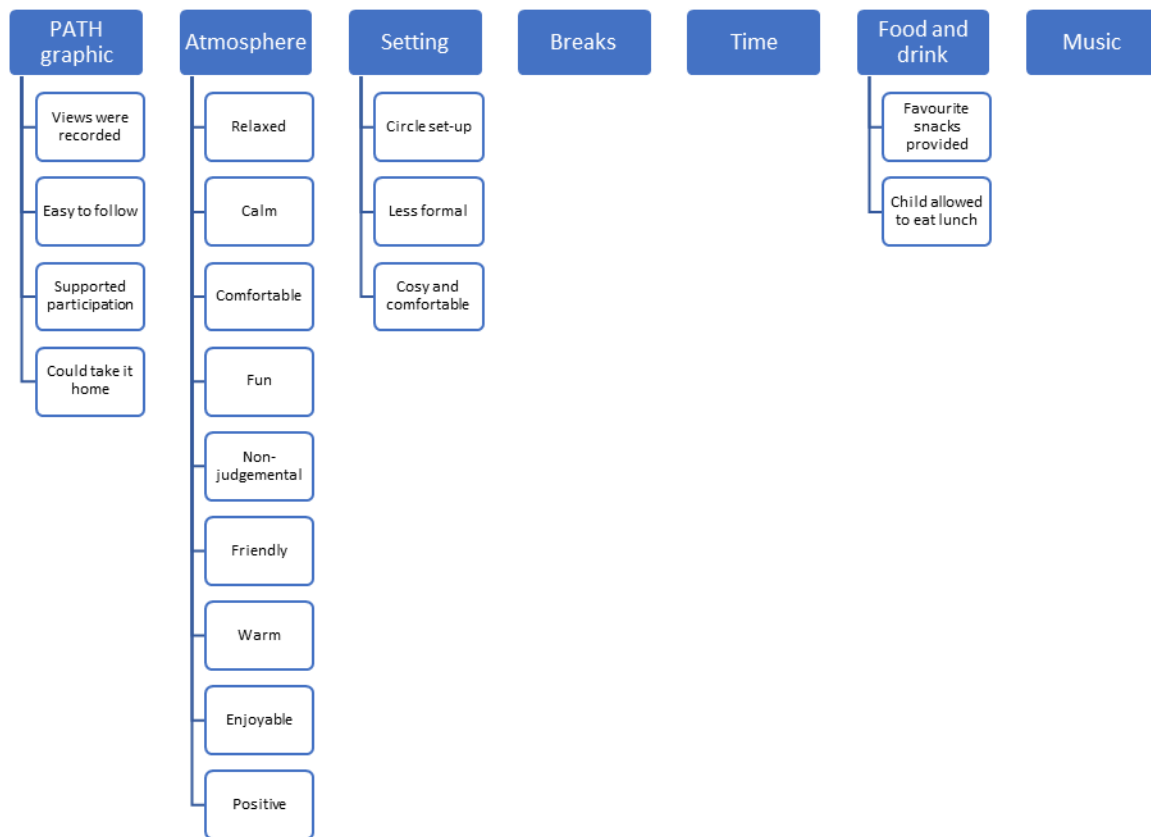
**Figure 13**  
 Sub-Themes and Codes Within the Role of Others Theme.



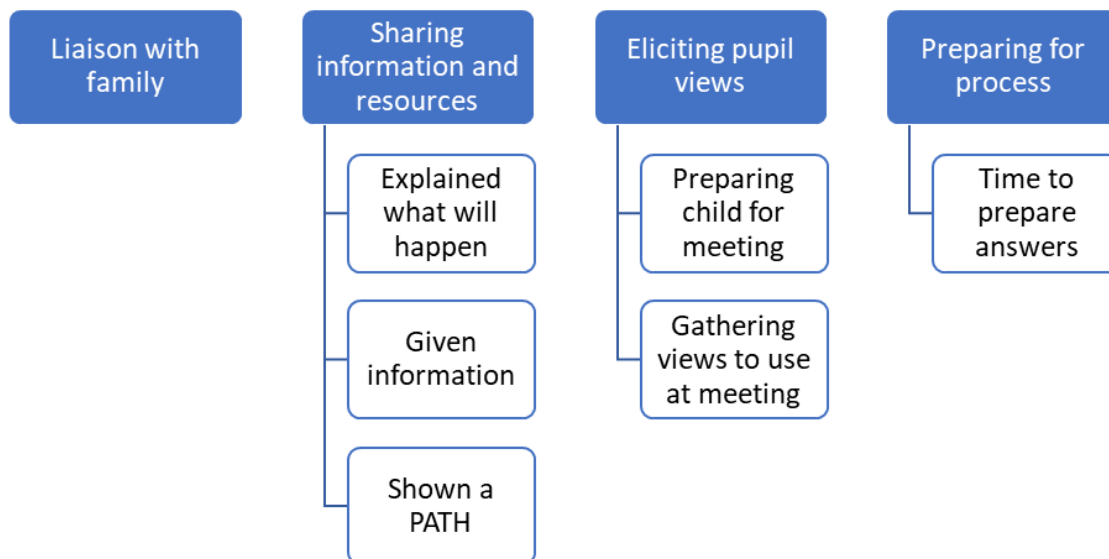
**Figure 14**  
 Sub-Themes and Codes Within the PATH Content Theme.



**Figure 15**  
*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the PATH Set-Up Theme.*



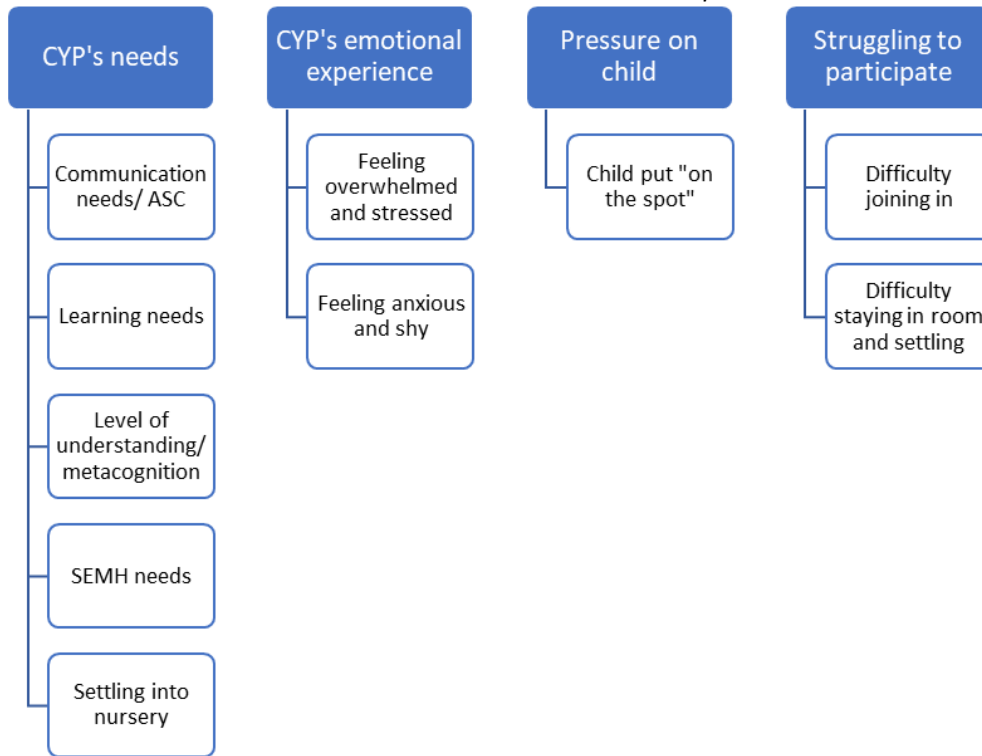
**Figure 16**  
*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the Preparation Theme.*



5.4.3 Sub-RQ 2c: What Did Participants Find Less Enjoyable/ Helpful or were Barriers to Participation in the PATH EHCNA Meetings and Traditional EHCNA meetings?

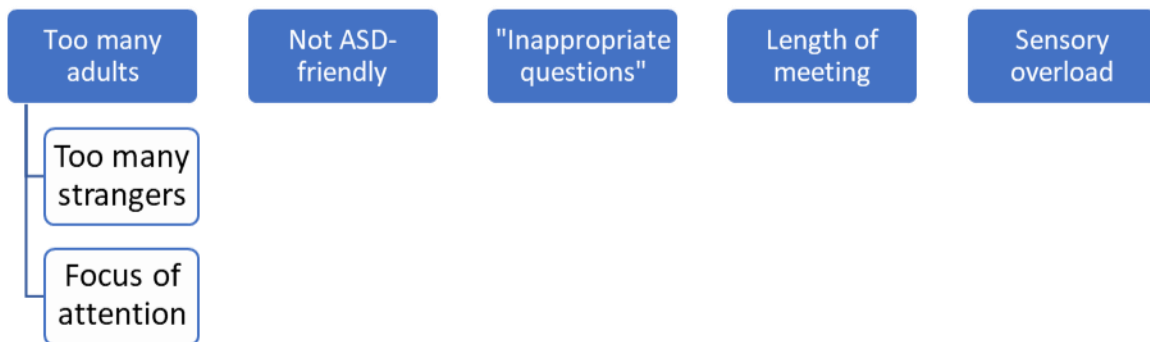
**Figure 18**

*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the CYP's Needs and Emotional Experience Theme.*



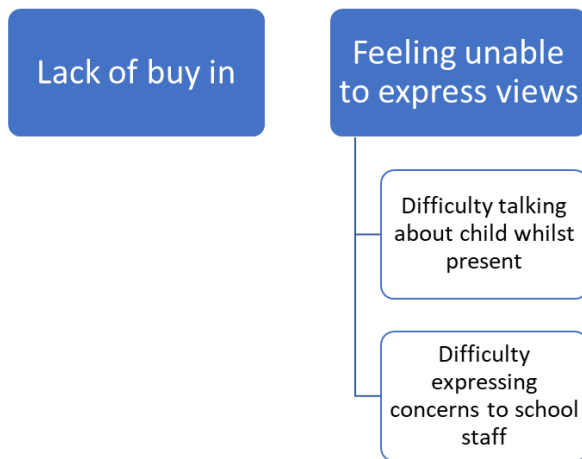
**Figure 19**

*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the Lack of Adaption Theme.*



**Figure 20**

*Sub-Themes and Codes Within the Adult Experiences Theme.*



**Figure 21**  
*Sub-Themes Within the Environment and System Constraints Theme.*



## **Appendix N- Additional Data Tables**

**Table M**

*Descriptive statistics for questions relating to child and parent participation in traditional and PATH meetings across all participants.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>PATH</i>				<i>Traditional</i>			
	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Parents contributed to the meeting</i>	33	8-10	<b>9.55</b>	0.83	12	8-10	<b>9.58</b>	0.79
<i>Parents views were listened to</i>	53	7-10	<b>9.74</b>	0.63	21	8-10	<b>9.67</b>	0.66
<i>Parents were included in decision-making</i>	52	7-10	<b>9.62</b>	0.66	21	6-10	<b>9.38</b>	1.02
<i>Parents were equal partners in the meeting</i>	53	7-10	<b>9.55</b>	0.80	21	6-10	<b>9.29</b>	1.19
<i>Child was supported to be present in the meeting</i>	52	5-10	<b>9.12</b>	1.31	12	4-10	<b>8.33</b>	2.10
<i>Child was supported to express their views</i>	52	1-10	<b>8.68</b>	1.87	11	5-10	<b>7.91</b>	1.87
<i>Child's views were listened to</i>	62	1-10	<b>9.11</b>	0.56	16	4-10	<b>8.94</b>	1.61
<i>Child was supported to make decisions</i>	61	1-10	<b>8.34</b>	1.40	14	5-10	<b>7.57</b>	2.21
<i>Parent/CYP felt comfortable to talk</i>	30	1-10	<b>7.88</b>	2.72	11	5-10	<b>9.09</b>	1.81
<i>CYP felt they got to say everything they wanted to</i>	10	5-10	<b>8.90</b>	1.73	2	8-10	<b>9.00</b>	1.41
<i>CYP felt included in the conversation</i>	10	5-10	<b>8.45</b>	1.66	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71
<i>CYP felt they understood what the adults were talking about</i>	10	1-10	<b>7.75</b>	3.08	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71
<i>YP felt they created goals for themselves</i>	4	1-9	<b>6.25</b>	3.59	2	6-10	<b>8.00</b>	2.83
<i>CYP felt the adults wrote down what they said</i>	10	5-10	<b>7.93</b>	1.75	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71
<i>YP felt like an equal partner in the meeting</i>	4	7-10	<b>9.00</b>	1.41	2	9-10	<b>9.50</b>	0.71
<i>Participants thought the meeting was helpful for the EHCP assessment</i>	53	3-10	<b>8.79</b>	1.68	20	5-10	<b>9.05</b>	1.47
<i>Participants would like a meeting structured like this again</i>	55	1-10	<b>8.87</b>	2.18	21	5-10	<b>8.90</b>	1.58

**Table N**

*Descriptive statistics for Likert-scale questions rated by children and young people on aspects of their participation in PATH.*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Child n=6</b>			<b>Young person n=4</b>		
	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b><i>CYP felt comfortable to talk</i></b>	1-8.75	5.38	3.1	1-8	5.25	3.1
<b><i>CYP felt listened to</i></b>	5-10	7.92	1.88	8-10	9	0.82
<b><i>CYP felt they got to say everything they wanted to</i></b>	5-10	9.17	2.04	7-10	8.5	1.29
<b><i>CYP felt the adults included them, e.g. by asking questions.</i></b>	5-10	7.92	1.88	8-10	9.25	0.96
<b><i>CYP felt they understood what the adults were talking about</i></b>	1-10	8.08	3.61	4-10	7.25	2.5
<b><i>CYP felt that adults wrote down what they said</i></b>	5-10	7.71	2	7-10	8.25	1.5
<b><i>CYP felt they helped to make decisions</i></b>	2.5-7.5	5.42	2.46	1-9	6	3.46
<b><i>CYP felt they created goals for themselves</i></b>	- -	-	-	1-9	6.25	3.59
<b><i>CYP felt like an equal partner in the meeting</i></b>	- -	-	-	7-10	9	1.41

**Table O**

*Descriptive statistics for Likert-scale questions rated by parents on aspects of their child's and their own participation in PATH meetings.*

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b><i>Parent felt comfortable to talk</i></b>	20	6-10	9.15	1.46
<b><i>Parent felt their views were listened to</i></b>	20	7-10	9.65	0.81
<b><i>Parent felt included in decision-making</i></b>	20	7-10	9.50	0.89
<b><i>Parent felt they were equal partners in the meeting</i></b>	20	7-10	9.40	0.96
<b><i>Child was supported to be present in the meeting</i></b>	19	5-10	9.32	1.34
<b><i>Child was supported to express their views</i></b>	19	1-10	8.79	2.35
<b><i>Child's views were listened to</i></b>	20	1-10	9	2.18
<b><i>Child was supported to make decisions</i></b>	19	1-10	9.05	2.17

**Table P**

*Descriptive statistics for Likert-scale questions scored by education staff on aspects of parents' and CYPs' participation in PATH meetings.*

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<i>Parents contributed to the meeting</i>	18	8-10	9.72	0.67
<i>Parents views were listened to</i>	18	9-10	9.94	0.24
<i>Parents were included in decision-making</i>	17	9-10	9.82	0.39
<i>Parents were equal partners in the meeting</i>	18	8-10	9.83	0.51
<i>Child was supported to be present in the meeting</i>	18	7-10	9.33	1.09
<i>Child was supported to express their views</i>	18	3-10	8.81	1.89
<i>Child's views were listened to</i>	17	8-10	9.77	0.56
<i>Child was supported to make decisions</i>	17	6-10	9.29	1.40

**Table Q**

*Descriptive statistics for Likert-scale questions scored by Educational Psychologists on aspects of parents' and CYPs' participation in PATH meetings.*

<b>EPs n=15</b>				
<b>Item</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	
<i>Parents contributed to the meeting</i>	8-10	9.33	0.98	
<i>Parents views were listened to</i>	8-10	9.60	0.63	
<i>Parents were included in decision-making</i>	9-10	9.53	0.52	
<i>Parents were equal partners in the meeting</i>	8-10	9.40	0.74	
<i>Child was supported to be present in the meeting</i>	5-10	8.60	1.45	
<i>Child was supported to express their views</i>	7-10	8.40	1.12	
<i>Child's views were listened to</i>	7-10	9.00	1.00	
<i>Child was supported to make decisions</i>	2-10	8.13	2.13	

## **Appendix O- Local Authority Contextualising Information and Analysis of Draft EHCPs**

### ***Participating LAs- Contextual Information***

#### **Local Authority 1**

LA1 is a large county council in the Southeast of England and is where the researcher is currently on placement as a Trainee EP. In 2020, there were 1.2 million residents living in LA1, 24.3% between the ages of 0-19 (Plumplot, 2021). LA1 has seen an increase in EHC assessment requests, rising from 1959 in 2017 to 2837 in 2022 (a 45% increase) (National Statistics, 2023). The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in LA1 is split into quadrants covering the administration of services in the Northwest, Southwest, Northeast and Southeast of the county. Each quadrant has its own team consisting of senior EPs, main-grade EPs, Trainee EPs and Assistant EPs.

The EPS is operating on a non-traded basis, providing a largely statutory and reduced capacity core offer to schools in the LA whilst a large backlog of EHC assessments is being cleared (at the time of commencement of data collection in September 2023). The EPS has no formal guidance or position regarding PCP practices or person-centred EHC assessments and PATH is not regularly being used by the EPs in the team. The EPS was approached to participate in the research and the EPs in the Northwest agreed to participate. The researcher delivered training on the PATH approach to the Northwest team and to the Assistant EPs across the quadrants. Four EPs/TEPs/AEPs (not including the researcher) facilitated PATHs for the research and an additional three EPs facilitated 'traditional' meetings.

#### **Local Authority 2**

LA2 is a large county council in the Southeast of England. In 2020, there were approximately 851,000 residents in LA2, 20.8% between the ages of 0-19 (Plumplot, 2021). LA2 has seen an increase in EHC requests for assessments, rising from 375 in 2017 to 900 in 2022 (a 140% increase) (National Statistics, 2023). The EPS is split into three teams to cover the administration of services over three areas of the county. Each area has its own team consisting of senior EPs, main-grade EPs, Trainee EPs and Assistant EPs.

The EPS operates a traded model of service delivery where schools can buy additional EP time on top of their free core offer to schools and statutory duties. The EPS has avoided having any backlog of EHCNAs to complete and currently statutory work makes up about 30% of main-grade EPs workload. The EPS is developing its person-centred planning practices in relation to EHCNAs and was keen to participate in the research to understand how PATH might fit into and benefit their current EHC assessment practices. EPs at the service had received their own training in PCP before the project started and additional training was provided by the researcher on the use of PATH in EHC assessments and detailing the research. Seven EPs/AEPs/TEPs facilitated PATHs from LA2 for the research and an additional two TEPs facilitated 'traditional' meetings.

#### **Local Authority 3**

LA3 is a large county council in the Southeast of England. In 2020, there were 868,000 residents living in LA3, 22.2% between the ages of 0-19 (Plumplot, 2021). LA3 also saw an increase in the number of EHCNA requests, increasing from 1091 in 2017 to 1735 in 2022 (a 59% increase) (National Statistics, 2023). The EPS is split into quadrants to cover the county, with each quadrant comprising of SEPs, main-grade EPs, TEPs, and AEPs. LA3 was part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme (DfE, 2022), chosen due to high deficits in SEN spending and delivery.

The EPS deliver a free core offer to schools as well as its statutory duties and a traded package. The EPS has a strong foundation of using PCP in EHC assessments already and most of the EPs in the



service use either the PATH approach or a 'mini PATH' for their assessments. The EPS have received training from, and have worked closely with, the professionals at Inclusive Solutions to embed PCP approaches in their EPS-wide service delivery and many of the team are established PATH facilitators. The team have procedures, resources and practices in place to ensure that PATH can be used for most EHC assessments and many of the education settings in the LA are now also familiar with PATH. A meeting was held with the team to clarify questions around the research activities. Two EPs from LA2 agreed to participate in the research.

### ***Local Authority-level Analysis of Draft EHCPs***

During initial coding using the DAS, the researcher observed noticeable differences in the structure and content of the draft EHCPs between LAs. An additional analysis was therefore undertaken to explore the draft EHCPs for each LA to capture LA-level differences.

#### ***Local Authority 1***

In LA1, the child's views were represented in all the draft EHCPs, however, it was often unclear how these views were ascertained. In 3/5 draft EHCPs, it stated that Section A was completed by the child with an adult, without expanding on the method used. Only one EHCP stated that the child attended a PATH meeting. The occurrence of a PATH meeting was not mentioned in three draft EHCPs. Three children participated at the 'social' depth and two participated at the 'solution' depth. Three parents participated at the 'descriptive' depth and two participated at the 'solution' depth. A maximum of three areas of participation were covered by the parent's and child's views in Section A and 36%-75% of outcomes were person-centred. The draft EHCP that contained 75% person-centred outcomes was also the draft EHCP that contained reference to the PATH meeting, whilst the draft EHCP that contained the least person-centred outcomes did not mention the PATH.

#### ***Local Authority 2***

In LA2, the child's views were represented in all draft EHCPs, and it was clearly stated *how* the child's views were ascertained. The draft EHCPs reported that the EPs had used a range of methods to ascertain the child's views. The PATH meeting was mentioned in all the draft EHCPs, though at times it was not clear if the parents or child had attended or whether the views recorded in Section A had come from the PATH meeting. LA2 was the only LA to have a draft EHCP which contained a picture of the PATH graphic. Two children participated at the 'solution' depth, two at the 'social' depth and one at the 'psychological' depth. Two parents participated at the 'descriptive' depth, two at the 'solution' depth and one at the 'social' depth. At least three of four areas of participation were covered by the child's and parent's views in Section A. The number of person-centred outcomes ranged from 42-60%.

#### ***Local Authority 3***

In LA3, the child's views were not represented in 3/4 draft EHCPs. This was the only LA to use PATH with children in the Early Years. The CYP's views were represented when the YP were in Key Stage 4, and it was mentioned that their views were gained during the PATH meetings. There was no mention of the PATH meeting in two of the EHCPs. Three children participated at the 'surface' depth and one participated at the 'solution' depth. Three parents participated at the 'descriptive' depth and one participated at the 'social' depth. One to three areas of participation were addressed in Section A. The draft EHCPs contained 6%-78% of person-centred outcomes; when the child participated at the 'surface' depth, this range was between 6%-18% and when the child participated at the 'solution' depth, the percentage of person-centred outcomes was higher (78%).

## Appendix P- Ethics Form

### Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

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

#### Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

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

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

#### Section 1 – Project details

- a. Project title: Can PATH support participation and person-centred planning within the Education, Health and Care Plan assessment when used by Educational Psychologists?
- b. Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678): Saya Dunford 21204694
- c. **\*UCL Data Protection Registration Number: No Z6364106/2023/03/14 social research**
  - a. Date Issued: 02/03/2023
- d. Supervisor/Personal Tutor: Dr Jessica Hayton
- e. Department: Psychology
- f. Course category (Tick one):

PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>
EdD	<input type="checkbox"/>
DEdPsy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
- g. **If applicable**, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.
- h. Intended research start date: March 2023
- i. Intended research end date: August 2024
- j. Country fieldwork will be conducted in: UK
- k. If research to be conducted abroad please check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: [UCL travel advice webpage](#)

I. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes

External Committee Name:

Date of Approval:

No  **go to Section 2**

**If yes:**

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

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

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

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

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

**Purpose of the research:** The purpose of this research is to explore whether person-centred planning (PCP) approaches, specifically Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH), can be used during SEN statutory assessment processes to encourage greater pupil and parent participation and inclusion in decision-making during these processes. The values and principles of PCP approaches are commensurate with the requirements in the Code of

Practice (2015) for the collaborative input into Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments and for the representation of the child’s and parent’s views. Therefore, PATH lends itself well as a tool with which Educational Psychologists (EPs) may gather the child’s and parent’s views during the EHC assessment. However, the research base investigating the outcomes of PCP processes, including PATH, is still limited (Thompson & Viriyangkura, 2014) and has tended to explore PCP with adults rather than children and in community settings rather than education settings (e.g. Holburn et al., 2004). There have been few papers which explore the use of PCP processes or PATH with children with SEN or facilitated by EPs, and even fewer which demonstrate how PCP can be used to support statutory SEN processes. To date, there has been no research which explores the use of PATH in EHC assessments and no research which systematically compares the use of PATH to a more ‘traditional’ EHC meeting. Therefore, this research proposes to offer an expansion on the current evidence-based of the usefulness of PATH and PCP approaches within SEN assessment processes.

**Research aim:** The research aims to extend the evidence-base for PATH and to establish PATH’s role within the Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessment process and in producing person-centred EHCPs. I hypothesise that using PATH will lead to increased inclusion and participation of parents/carers (hereon just referred to as ‘parents’) and children and young people (CYP) in the EHCP assessment process in comparison to a traditional EHC planning meeting. I also hypothesise that using PATH during the assessment will result in an EHCP which is more reflective of the parents and CYP’s views and aspirations compared to when a traditional planning process has been used. Lastly, I hypothesis that PATH will be deemed a useful addition to the EHC assessment process.

Research question	Sub-question	Data collection method and participants
<b>1.</b> Does using PATH increase CYPs’ and parents’ participation in the EHC assessment meeting compared to traditional EHC meetings?	<b>1a.</b> Does PATH increase the contributions (both number and length of contributions) CYP and parents make during the meeting compared to traditional meetings? <b>1b.</b> Does PATH lead to shifts in EPs’/TEPs’ and school staff’s behaviour towards parents/CYP during the meeting compared to traditional meetings?	Both PATH and traditional meetings will be observed. <b>1a and 1b-</b> Systematic observation schedule, including tally of number of times the CYP/parent talks, duration of speech, number of times CYP/parents are asked to contribute, number of times CYP/parents are cut off, access arrangements been accounted for e.g. interpreter). <b>1b-</b> Diary to record field notes- e.g. atmosphere during meeting, set-up and seating arrangements of the room.
<b>2.</b> Do those that attended a PATH meeting feel that CYP and their parents were more included and participated more compared to a traditional EHC meeting?	<b>2a.</b> Do CYP and their parents feel that their views were listened to more and that they were more included in decision-making during a PATH compared to traditional meeting?	<b>2 and 2a.</b> Post-meeting questionnaires about views on the meeting. CYP, parents, school staff, friends and family over 16 or with parental consent, and EPs/TEPs from both PATH and traditional.

		AND- Semi-structured interviews, recorded using a transcription app. CYP, parents, school staff and EPs from PATH meetings.
<b>3.</b> Does PATH result in greater CYP and parent voice representation and more person-centred outcomes in the <b>draft</b> EHCP compared to when a traditional EHC meeting was held?	<p><b>3a.</b> Are there differences in the number of outcomes which reflect the parents' and CYP's goals and aspirations in the <b>draft</b> EHCP following a PATH compared to a traditional meeting?</p> <p><b>3b.</b> Is there greater presence of the parent's and CYP's views in Section A of the EHCP following a PATH compared to a traditional meeting?</p> <p><b>3c.</b> Do school staff, parents and CYP feel that the <b>draft</b> EHCP reflects the parents' and child's views?</p>	<p><b>3a and 3b.</b> Document analysis of EHCPs, including cross-referencing the outcomes and content of section A with the meeting transcripts to find out the extent to which the outcomes and information in section A reflect parent's and CYP's views.</p> <p><b>3c.</b> Post-meeting questionnaires about views on the meeting and the <b>draft</b> EHCP. School staff, CYP and parents from both PATH and traditional.</p> <p>AND- Semi-structured interviews, recorded using a transcription app. CYP and parents from PATH meetings.</p>
<b>4.</b> How useful do EPs, school staff, and parents feel PATH is for the purpose of an EHC assessment in comparison to a traditional EHC meeting?	<p><b>4a.</b> How useful do EPs/TEPs, school staff, and parents feel PATH is for the gathering of information for the EP's statutory advice compared to a traditional meeting?</p> <p><b>4b.</b> How useful do EPs/TEPs, school staff, and parents feel PATH is for the generation of person-centred outcomes and provision compared to a traditional meeting?</p> <p><b>4c.</b> How would school staff and EPs feel about using PATH in the future for EHC assessment meetings?</p>	<p><b>4a, 4b and 4c.</b> Post-meeting questionnaire about views on the meeting. Parents, school staff and EPs/TEPs from both PATH and traditional.</p> <p>AND- Semi-structured interviews, recorded using a transcription app. CYP, parents, school staff and EPs/TEPs from PATH meetings.</p>

*Table A- research questions and corresponding data collection method.*

**Research design and data collection:** My research will consist of two studies (see Table A for research questions and the corresponding data collection method). Study 1 will use a mixed methods evaluation design (Creswell, 2022), collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to explore and compare the impact of PATH and traditional meetings on those who participated and the **draft** EHCPs. Study 1 will involve collecting data from up to 50 PATH and traditional meetings (see Table B for data collection methods for Study 1 and Study 2). Each meeting will be explored using two post-meeting questionnaires (one directly after the meeting, the other after the **draft** EHCP has been issued) (Appendices 12-23) and a document analysis of the **draft** EHCP (if the assessment results in a decision to issue an EHCP). I also aim to video record **some meetings** so that a systematic observation of the meeting can be conducted (this is an optional addition based on whether the participants consent to video recording their meeting) (Appendix 11). A questionnaire for EPs/TEPs to reflect on the PATHs they have facilitated will also be completed after data collection of meetings finishes (Appendix 15).

Study 2 will consist of semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of individuals who participated in the PATH meetings. Semi-structured interviews (informed by Study 1) aim to expand on the data collected from the post-meeting questionnaires in Study 1 and to gather further information from parents, CYP, school staff and EPs/TEPs.

Suitable measures bespoke to outlined research questions will be developed (e.g. the systematic observation schedule, the questionnaires and the interview schedules). Measures will first be piloted to ensure they are fit for purpose. Please see examples of the types of questions that will be asked in the questionnaires in appendices 12-23 (these are subject to revision following the pilot).

I will analyse the data according to the procedure of mixed methods designs (Creswell, 2022), whereby quantitative and qualitative data are analysed separately and then the databases are brought together for comparison and meta-inferences are drawn. (See Table B for more information about data analysis methods).

	Study 1	Study 2
Research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1a, 1b, 1c, 2, 2a, 3a, 3b, 3c, and 4a, 4b, 4c.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2, 2a, 3c, 4a, 4b, and 4c.</li> </ul>
Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 25 PATH and 25 'traditional' EHC assessment meetings</li> <li>CYP, parents, school staff, friends and family, LA staff such as EPs, TEPs or AEPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 PATH meetings will be explored.</li> <li>CYP, parents, school staff, EPs</li> </ul>
Type of data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quantitative and qualitative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualitative</li> </ul>
Data collection methods (described in more detail in table A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systematic observation schedule</li> <li>Diary to record field notes.</li> <li>Document analysis of EHCPs.</li> <li>Immediate post-meeting questionnaire.</li> <li>Follow-up questionnaire.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-structured interviews.</li> </ul>
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Descriptive and inferential statistics on the observation schedules and quantitative data from the post-meeting questionnaires.</li> <li>Analysis of main themes emerging from qualitative data from the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic analysis</li> </ul>

	post-meeting questionnaires. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collate vignettes from field notes collected during observations.</li> <li>• Systematically record the content of section A and the outcomes in each EHCPs and cross-reference with the meeting transcripts.</li> </ul>	
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*Table B- a table to show the research questions, sample, type of data, data collection methods and analysis methods relating to each study of the research.*

**Participants and sampling:** Study 1 aims to recruit approximately 10 Local Authority EP/TEP volunteers who are interested in using PATH, or who have used PATH, in their practice. EP volunteers will be drawn from within my own Local Authority and through professional links with EPs from neighbouring Local Authorities. The participating EPs will be the gateway person for sharing the participant information forms and seeking consent from parents, CYP, school staff, and **friends and family over 16 years or with parental consent.** EPs/TEPs will use their professional judgement about which cases they feel are appropriate for PATH; limits will not be placed on the age, ethnicity or SEN of the children as the meetings should be representative of the children going through EHC assessments in LAs. The sampling strategy for PATH meetings will therefore be purposeful and opportunistic. ‘Traditional meetings’ will then be identified in which the children undergoing the EHC assessment match the demographics of those who have participated in PATH meetings (a matched pairs design). For example, if a PATH is completed for a boy in Key Stage 2 who has a diagnosis of ASD, I will aim to find a traditional EHC meeting being undertaken for a boy in Key Stage 2 with ASD. The sampling strategy for the traditional EHC meetings will therefore be purposeful and criterion-based. The meeting participants will be approached before the PATH or traditional EHC meeting to gain consent about participating in the research.

I will also conduct up to half of the PATH and traditional meetings myself from my caseload at my Local Authority (sampling strategy= convenience and opportunistic). Ethically, I am bound by my professional code of practice and ethics (BPS, 2021) to facilitate meetings to the best of my ability, so my position as the researcher should not impact the quality of meetings. However, I will note my bias and positioning whilst taking field notes during the meetings to later reflect on when analysing my data. Using multiple EP meeting facilitators will add to the weight of evidence exploring the effectiveness of PATH as an approach itself, rather than the skill of the facilitator, and should therefore increase the validity of results. Regarding sample size, I aim to collect data from up to 50 meetings as I intend to use inferential and/or description statistics to analyse the quantitative data and this should provide a sufficiently large sample size to do so. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) suggest sample sizes of between 1-30 for qualitative research and between 30-350 for quantitative research, and so a sample size of 50 will meet this criteria for both the quantitative and qualitative data.

I will also collect interview data from up to 3 parents, 3 children/young people, 3 staff members and 3 Educational Psychologists to ensure a range of roles and perspectives are

captured. Creswell (2013) suggests that with qualitative methods, it is appropriate to gather data from only a few individuals to gather extensive details about everyone. I will ask all participants who completed PATH meetings to participate in the interviews and interview those that respond (volunteer sampling). If there are more respondents than I have capacity to interview, I will choose participants based on the following criteria: PATH meetings from which all or most meeting participants are happy to be interviewed and PATH meetings which are distinct from each other (e.g. have different EP facilitators).

**Reporting and Dissemination:** Processed data will be used to fulfil the DEdPsy degree requirements, and will be presented in the final thesis and associated defence. Processed anonymous/pseudonymous data may also be used for manuscript submission and/or presented at conferences. Every effort will be made to preserve anonymity of participants, however some participants may be able to identify themselves in illustrative quotes used in the presentation of the thematic analysis/qualitative data.

### Section 3 – research Participants (tick all that apply)

- Early years/pre-school
- Ages 5-11
- Ages 12-16
- Young people aged 17-18
- Adults please specify below
- Unknown – specify below
- No participants

Enter text

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

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

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

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

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

### Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

- a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants?



Yes\*  No

b. Will you be analysing any secondary data?

Yes\*  No

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

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

## Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a. Name of dataset/s:

b. Owner of dataset/s:

c. Are the data in the public domain?

Yes  No

**If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?**

Yes  No\*

d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

Yes\*  No

e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?

Yes  No\*

f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?

Yes  No\*

g. **If no**, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?

Yes  No\*

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

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

## Section 7 – Data Storage and Security

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

a. Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?

Data will be collected from children and young people, parents/carers, school staff, EPs/TEPs, friends and family over age 16 or with parental consent, and the draft EHCP documents of the children involved.

b. What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected.

Personal data regarding the child's name, age, gender, Special Educational Need (SEN) and type of school (e.g. mainstream primary) will be collected. Personal data

regarding adults' name, relationship to child (e.g. mother, school SENCO) and contact details (e.g., email address/telephone number) will be gathered.

- Is the data anonymised?** Yes  No\*
- Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes\*  No
- Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes\*  No
- Do you plan to pseudonymise the data? Yes\*  No

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

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

This project is being undertaken in fulfilment of my doctorate. The results will be written up in my thesis and published on the UCL IOE database of theses. Processed, pseudonymised/anonymised data (see section 8) will be written up as a manuscript for publication in suitable and reputable journals. Individual level and raw data will not be made available and will be destroyed as soon as it is no longer needed.

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

No individual/school/setting names or identifying characteristics will be disclosed and any quotes written in the final thesis will be screened to ensure that the individual couldn't be externally identified from the quote, though participants may be able to identify themselves.

- d. **Data storage – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored** i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick\*\*, encrypted laptop\*\* etc. Video recordings of meetings will initially be recorded on my password protected work laptop and uploaded to my secure UCL OneDrive account at the earliest opportunity and deleted from my laptop storage. Video recordings made by other EPs will be emailed to me using a secure email service at the earliest opportunity or handed directly to me on a USB stick (LA2) and deleted from their own laptops. IntervFiew transcripts will initially be recorded on a mobile phone which is protected with fingerprint recognition software before being transferred onto the laptop. Pseudonymised data will be stored on a personal laptop protected with a password. All participant personal data will be stored on my secure UCL OneDrive account.

\*\* *Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS*

- e. **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution) – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?**

Yes  No

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

Hard copies of data will be destroyed upon digitalisation as soon as possible.  
Pseudonymised electronic data will be kept for up to 10 years according to the Data Protection Act.

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

No.

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

No.

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

I will assign each participant a unique personal identifying code. The data will be labelled with this code and I will keep a record of the child's name and the assigned code in a separate document stored on the UCL OneDrive account. This will be kept until the project ends (award of DEdPsych). The interview participants will have a pseudonym for the purpose of reporting quotes in the thesis report. Identifiable data will not be kept for longer than is reasonably necessary. Participants maintain the right to withdraw up until a month after their last involvement with the project, identifiable data will be destroyed after the 1 month time frame has been met.

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

## Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

**All** issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

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

**Recruitment:** Due to the timing of the research (during the child’s EHC assessment process) and the sampling strategy (opportunistic, as EHCP requests come in), there is a possibility that parents and school staff feel obliged to participate in my research to get their EHC assessment completed. To manage this, I will endeavour to fully explain the purpose of the research (including distribution of information sheets/consent forms and remaining open to answering any questions). I will clarify that whilst acting as researcher, I am not in my Local Authority role, and as such it will not affect the EHC assessment in any way. I will also make it clear that this is an opt-in activity; it is their choice whether to participate.

**Gatekeepers:** In other LAs, the senior EP will be the gatekeeper to EPs who are completing PATHs. The EP completing the EHC assessment will be the next gatekeeper and will be asked to seek consent from parents, CYP, friends and family over 16 or with parental consent and school staff. My sampling method is reliant on EPs highlighting cases to me that they will be completing PATHs for as part of the EHC assessment. Parents may not want their child’s EHC assessment to be discussed with another professional who is not directly involved in the case, raising issues around confidentiality and respect for the privacy of individuals (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2021). Within my own Local Authority, I will have access to EHCP documents (for document analysis), which I will only access once I have consent. When gathering data from other Local Authorities, the Business Support team will be the gatekeeper for access to the EHCP documents. When parental consent is sought, this will be shared with the Business Support team, so that the relevant documents can be shared using a secure email system. I will take precautions by endeavouring to not discuss any unnecessary personal details with the EP completing the assessment (e.g. the child’s full name) until parental consent has been gained.

**Consent:** I will be collecting data from all participants in the meeting, including children, parents, school staff, friends and family and EPs. I will gain consent from the parents, school staff, friends and family and EPs using a consent form (EP- Appendix 1; education staff- Appendix 2; parent/carer- Appendix 3; primary-aged child- Appendix 4; secondary-aged child- Appendix 5, adult friends and family- Appendix 25, young person friends and family- Appendix 24). The information forms and consent forms for use in other LAs will slightly adjusted to reflect the fact that I will not be present collecting the data myself (see Appendix 28). The EP will approach parent/carer to inform them of the project and seek consent for both themselves and their child to engage in the research activities. School staff may therefore feel under pressure to also agree to participate if they know the parents/carers have already said yes. I will manage this by ensuring I make it clear in the information sheet that I require consent from all those included in the meeting to go ahead with the research activities and that everyone has their own choice of whether to participate or not. Bespoke information sheets have been prepared to give to all involved parties (EP- Appendix 6; education staff- Appendix 7; parents/caregivers- Appendix 8; primary-aged children- Appendix 9; secondary-aged children- Appendix 10, adult friends and family- Appendix 26, young person friends and family- Appendix 27). All participants will be made aware when signing the consent form of their right to withdraw from the research activities at any point and of their right to withdraw their data for a period of a month after their last research activity has been completed.

Regarding gaining consent from the children participating in the research, I will gain consent from the parents for any child under the age of 16 participating and consent from the young person if they are aged 16 and over, in line with the recommendations made in the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). The Code also highlights that it is important to gain assent from children participating in research. This means ensuring that the child feels comfortable and willing to participate in the research activities and does not feel under pressure to participate when they do not want to. I will ensure the child has opportunity to assent to participate by going through a visual information sheet and consent form (Appendices 4, 5, 9, 10, 24, 25, 26 and 27) about the research with them prior to beginning any activities. During the interview, I will also take notice of any non-verbal cues (e.g. becoming withdrawn and quiet, taking longer than expected to answer questions, avoiding eye-contact, or looking towards exits or out of windows) which suggest that the child is not happy participating in the activities and will give the child the opportunity to take a break or leave the session if this occurs.

**Deception:** This research will not involve any elements of deception. I will make it clear to participants in my consent form and information sheets that I am researching participation in meetings and I will give full details of what their participation will involve in terms of research activities. For full transparency, parents will be told in the information form that there are two types of EHCP meetings. The child's provisional entitlement will not be interrupted and the decision is at the EP's discretion as to which type of meeting they feel is most appropriate as per usual service practise. Parents will be given the chance to ask questions to their EP about their child's meeting.

**Risk to participants:** During EHC assessments, either a PATH or a 'traditional' EHC planning meeting will be offered at the professional judgement of the EP who is responsible for the assessment. As PATH isn't regularly offered or used yet in the service that the research will be conducted in, and because 'traditional' EHCP assessment meetings are currently facilitated based on EPs knowledge of best practice and BPS and HCPC ethical guidelines, there is no additional risk associated with not offering a PATH meeting.

**Safeguarding:** During the EHC meetings and interviews, information which raises a safeguarding concern may be discussed. If this happens, I will discuss the concerning information with the EP responsible for the EHC case to ensure appropriate action is taken. If the EHC case is mine, I will ensure that I speak to my placement supervisor after and follow the appropriate Local Authority procedures. I will also raise this to my EP research supervisor and discuss if this is a cause to follow UCL safeguarding policies. Ensuring I seek supervision from multiple supervisors will also help to ensure my psychological safety. On the consent forms and information forms, I will make all participants aware that any information shared that raises a safeguarding concern will be shared with the appropriate persons. This is unlikely to occur in my interviews due to the nature of my research aims and the questions I am going to ask.

**Sensitive topics:** Sensitive topics may be discussed during the assessment meetings, which parents and/or school staff may feel uncomfortable about being heard by a professional not directly involved in the case (e.g. myself). Further, there is the potential for some of the interview questions to elicit sensitive conversations if participants feel that participation is a sensitive topic. Information about organisations to contact which offer free additional

support if participants have been affected in any way by topics discussed have been included on the information sheets. Further, when gathering consent, I will make it clear the purpose of the research and that I will not be reporting any direct quotes or information from the meetings in my thesis report unless relating directly to the child or parent's participation in the meeting or comments on the meeting process. I will also inform participants of how their data will be stored to reassure them of the security of the content of their conversations.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** No identifying, personal characteristics will be included in my written report (e.g. references to the child's school), though the participant may be able to identify their own quotes in my report. This will ensure confidentiality of my participants. I will also ensure anonymity by using pseudonyms to label participants in my data set to avoid storing the data by the participant's name. Participants have been informed that any personal information they provide will only be used for the research purposes can only be accessed by those directly involved in the research project. With data from my own LA and LA3, a separate document will be kept linking the participant's name to their pseudonym should they wish to withdraw their data; this will be stored on the UCL OneDrive account. LA2 have requested to keep their resident's personal information anonymous. I will receive only anonymised data labelled with a code and pseudonym. The LA will store a record of their participants' names along with their codes/pseudonyms should participants wish to withdraw their data. Consent forms will be sent over together so that I have a record of the consent forms but cannot link them to the individual participant's data (LA2 will keep this record).

**Data storage:** During the period of data collection and analysis, it will be necessary for me to store personal information about participants. The personal information will be stored on the UCL OneDrive account for the duration of the research project. Pseudonymised data for use in analysis will be stored on a personal secure laptop protected by a password. Video recordings of meetings will initially be recorded on my password protected work laptop and uploaded to my secure UCL OneDrive account at the earliest opportunity and deleted from my laptop storage. Video recordings made by other EPs will be emailed to me using a secure email service at the earliest opportunity or handed directly to me on a USB drive and deleted from their own laptops. Where interview data is recorded on a mobile phone, this will be protected with a biometric and a password and the data will be transferred onto a secure laptop at the earliest opportunity.

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

Yes