

An exploration of the views and perspectives of young people with ASD, their parents and practitioners on the transition from secondary education into further education.

Danielle Greenidge-Scott

University College London

Degree of Doctor in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

It is well documented that transitions can be challenging for children and young people, particularly for those with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Young people with ASD possess intrinsic characteristics, such as social interaction difficulties and insistence on sameness, which make them particularly vulnerable during this time. In addition, a number of common barriers to this transition exist, including a lack of options, information, planning, and services available at the time of transition. As a result, many of these young people do not successfully transition into further education (FE).

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore what supports or prevents young people with ASD, aged 16–18 years, transitioning from compulsory education into one FE college, within one local authority. The young people participating in this study had transitioned from a range of provisions, including specialist schools, specialist sixth-form and mainstream schools, into a FE college in the United Kingdom (UK). Multiple perspectives were gained by interviewing young people, their parents, and professionals that support transitions into FE provision.

The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis; Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development was used as a conceptual framework to interpret the findings from the data. The findings from this study revealed that young people who had transitioned from specialist provisions into the FE college were noticeably more successful than those transitioning from mainstream schools. Transitions were improved by co-ordinated services provided by professionals and by

opportunities to attend open days, extended visits, and taster sessions at the FE college. The findings from this study have implications for young people, parents, secondary schools, FE colleges and educational psychologists. It is hoped that this study will inform local initiatives on how best to support young people with ASD to transition successfully into further education.

Abbreviations

ASD	autistic spectrum disorder
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Science
<i>DSM- IV</i>	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th edition</i>
<i>DSM- 5</i>	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition</i>
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	educational psychologist
FE	further education
HFA	higher functioning autism
LA	local authority
LDA	Learning Difficulty Assessment
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NEET	not in education, employment or training
PCP	person-centred planning
SEN	special educational needs
SENCo	special educational needs co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability (reforms)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

First, this chapter provides the context in which the research study was conducted. Second, it discusses the rationale of this research study.

1.1. Research context

This research was conducted as part of the requirements for the successful completion of a Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) at the University College London, Institute of Education. As part of the doctoral training, it was a requirement to complete a two-year work placement as a trainee educational psychologist. In 2013, the researcher was placed in a local authority (LA) in the Southeast of England.

The LA where the researcher was employed was given Pathfinder Champion status in 2011 (DfE, 2011a) and was tasked with trialling a number of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms (DfE, 2014), prior to them coming into effect nationally in September 2014. Part of the national reforms involved the examination of ways of improving the transition of young people with special educational needs (SEN) to further education (FE) college. It was recognised by this LA that only a limited number of young people with special educational needs, including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), were effectively transitioning into the FE college.

In 2013, the local authority's mainstream FE college was chosen as one of the national hubs by the Department for Education and the Ambitious about Autism Charity (2015) to run a two-year project which aimed at improving access and the transition of young people with ASD with complex needs to

the FE college. It was during this placement that negotiations were held between the LA and the researcher of this study about the topic of this research.

1.2. Professional and personal interest

Prior to joining the doctoral training programme, the researcher had worked for a number of years with children and young people with ASD within different educational settings. Initially, the researcher had worked as a Teacher Assistant in ASD provision that was attached to a mainstream secondary school. In subsequent years, the researcher worked as an Early Years Autism outreach practitioner, providing support to families shortly after they received their child's diagnosis of ASD. Within this role, the researcher had supported many children having severe or complex needs with their transition into specialist schools. During this time of close family liaison, many parents raised concerns about the future outcomes for their child, and whether their child would meet the typical markers of adulthood, for example gaining independence.

While undertaking the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, a two-year training placement at the Southeast LA provided the researcher with the opportunity to work as a Link Trainee Educational Psychologist to an ASD provision attached to a mainstream school. This extended the researcher's knowledge and experience of young people with ASD at the cusp of Year 11. Further opportunities arose for the researcher to work with young people with ASD who were emerging into adulthood (school sixth form), and it was noticed that many of the families the researcher had met were still unsure about their young person's future and the options available to them once they had left secondary education. In addition,

parents seemed to be concerned about finding an appropriate further education provision that would meet their young person's social, academic and developmental needs.

Such valuable experience of working with families with young people with ASD across the different age groups led the researcher to read around the subject of transitions. The researcher found that only a limited amount of qualitative research specifically explores the transition of young people with ASD into FE college in the UK. In addition, aside from the national and local relevance of this topic, the topic touched the researcher's personal experiences. This led to negotiations with the LA's Principal Educational Psychologist about conducting an exploratory study to examine which factors support or prevent young people with ASD from successfully transitioning into FE college.

1.3. Study rationale

A campaign carried out by the Ambitious about Autism Charity (2015) states that only 1 in 4 young people successfully transition into FE college. This statistic suggests that many young people do not successfully transition into adulthood, which is often marked by accessing further education, employment, or training, and achieving independent living. It has been acknowledged by government policies that further education is one of the pathways to improving the life outcomes of young people with ASD by developing their personal and independent skills to prepare them for the workforce (DfE, 2013b; HM Government, 2014b; Wolf, 2011). However, previous research suggests that when preparing for their transition into FE college, many young people with ASD lack planning, support and information

from transition services (Beresford et al., 2013; Breakey, 2006; McGurkin et al., 2013). As a result, many such young people enrol on inappropriate courses within FE college, which do not match their future aspirations or learning needs. Others are likely to remain dependent on their parents or go into residential care (Knapp, Romeo, & Beecham, 2009). All of these factors place further financial demand on the LA's diminishing budget to support these young people who fall into the category of "not in employment, education or training" (NEET) (Knapp et al., 2009; Wolf, 2011).

The Government's response to these unsatisfactory outcomes has been to prioritise reform of the provisions available for children and young people and to improve the inclusion and access of young people with ASD to FE college (DfE, 2011c, 2014; DfES, 2001; Higgins, 2009; HM Government, 2014a). Moreover, recent government policies, for example, the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b) and SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) has had direct implications on the role of Educational Psychologists. Alongside these reforms, a number of policies of the Labour Government and the subsequent Coalition Government have been released in subsequent years, which advocate eliciting the views of young people in decision making (DfE, 2014; DfES, 2004; Higgins, 2009).

Despite this legislative drive, the views and experiences of young people with ASD have not been consistently included within research studies, or the views of young people have been overshadowed by their parents' views (Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009). There is a clear need for further academic research that prioritises the views of young people with ASD in research to help improve outcomes for this vulnerable group. Furthermore, research that specifically focuses on the transition process from secondary

school into further education is limited (McGukin, Shevlin, Bell, & Devecchi, 2013; Mitchell & Beresford, 2014), and little is known about the systemic factors that influence this critical time of change. This research study intends to extend previous research by gaining multiple perspectives on the transition of young people into FE college. By eliciting the views of young people, their parents and the services that support this transitional process, the researcher seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of what factors promote the successful transition of young people with ASD into FE college. A key objective of this study was to include and to interview directly young people from across the autistic spectrum. A more detailed overview of the policies and relevant research is provided in the literature review in Chapter 2.

1.4. Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the existing academic literature that is relevant to this research study. It discusses the current definitions, diagnosis criteria, and prevalence of ASD. It reviews the current government legislation that is specific to improving young people's transition and inclusion in FE college, the raising of the participation age for compulsory education, and literature accessing the views of young people with ASD. The thesis then focuses on the theoretical model that underpins this research and provides a critical overview of research examining the transition of young people with ASD into further education or adulthood. The literature review helps to explain the reasons why this research was undertaken, the participant recruitment process, and the methodology employed in the study. The research questions that were developed to address the research aims are outlined.

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the reasons for the research design, approach and methodology used in this thesis. It then provides the reader with explanations for the selection of the critical realist epistemological stance in this research. Then the study outlines the procedures used to collect and analyse the data.

Chapter 4 reports the data obtained from the qualitative semi-structured interviews that were carried out with the young people with ASD, their parents, and the professionals that participated in this study. First, a summary from the young people's data is discussed and second, the overarching themes, main themes and subthemes that emerged from the young people's, parents' and professionals' data are explored.

Chapter 5 reviews the research questions and the key findings that answer them. Similarities and differences between the findings from this study in relation to previous research are discussed and links are made with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development. Both the strengths and limitations of this research and areas for either improvement or development in the future are explored. Finally, this thesis interprets the implications of this research study in relation to young people, parents, schools, FE provisions and educational psychology profession.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This literature review intends to examine the current issues and benefits concerning the transition process for young people with ASD into FE colleges. In order to explore this area, the diagnostic criteria for assessing and defining autism and its prevalence within the UK will first be discussed. This section will then define and discuss the different concepts of transition. Next, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development, which will be used as a conceptual framework in this study, will be outlined. The literature review will then explore the wider context of transition, by providing an overview of national policies and legislation that support the inclusion and participation of young people in FE college, as well as policies that promote person-centred practices and eliciting the voice of the young person in decision making. Finally, this chapter will provide a critical overview of current research in the area of transition into further education and adulthood, which will provide insight into what supports or hinders young people's transitions. In light of this literature review, the researcher will provide a justification for carrying out this research study, for the research questions and for the methods used to answer them.

The literature on transitions presented here was compiled by utilising a systematic approach to identify peer-reviewed journals. The search engines and the key words used in this database search can be found in Appendix 1. Searches included journal articles from around the world; this decision was reached because of the limited number of journals published on this topic in the UK. In addition, in order to provide a critical review of the most recent

research, journal articles that were published in the past ten years were selected.

2.2. ASD definition and diagnosis criteria

The term *autism* was defined in the early works of the psychiatrist and physician Leo Kanner (1943). Since then, a number of changes have been made to the assessment, diagnosis and categorisation of autism (Frith, 2003). In 2000 the *DSM* version 4, text revised (*DSM-IV-TR*) (APA, 2000) classified autism as a “pervasive developmental disorder”. The term *pervasive* was used to describe the effect autism has on all aspects of a child’s social development, including social interaction and communication, as well as restricted, repetitive behaviour and interests, previously known as the triad of impairments (Frith, 2003; Wing & Gould, 1979). It is acknowledged by clinicians that autism is a heterogeneous disorder, in which the presenting difficulties experienced by the child occur to varying degrees, and may or may not be accompanied by a language impairment and/or learning difficulty. The *DSM-IV-TR* created subcategories to account for these subtle differences: for instance the term *Asperger’s syndrome* was used to define children who experience social interaction and communication difficulties, alongside stereotyped behaviours and interests, but who do not experience language difficulties or cognitive delay (APA, 2000). Alternatively, a child could receive a diagnosis of high-functioning autism (HFA) if they had met the above criteria but had shown signs of a language delay in their early development. Although the *DSM-IV-TR* provided clinicians with a way of defining and understanding autism, current research suggests that no clear distinction exists between the different subcategories, and that this often leads to inconsistencies and inaccuracies

in the diagnoses given by different clinicians. This creates a potential risk to young people: for instance, receiving an inaccurate diagnosis could deny them the support and services that they require when transitioning into adulthood and FE college (Howlin, 2003; Williams, Atkins, & Soles, 2009). Howlin (2003) conducted a study of 72 adults aged 18 and older who were matched for age and the age they had acquired their language skills. From this sample, the author made comparisons between 34 adults who met the criteria for HFA and 42 adults who met the criteria for Asperger's syndrome. The author demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the two groups in all areas of the triad of impairment, in their everyday functioning and life outcomes based on established assessment paradigms (Autism Diagnostic Interview – Revised, Raven's Matrices, the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence and British Picture Vocabulary Test). These findings suggest that there are no distinct differences between Asperger's syndrome and HFA. However, it is possible that the differences between the two groups become less apparent with age.

In order to address this issue, within the new *Diagnostic Statistical Manual Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* (APA, 2013) Asperger's syndrome and pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) have been removed as distinct subcategories of autism, in favour of one overarching category, which is now referred to as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) (Halfon & Kuo, 2013; Worley & Matson, 2012). Alongside these changes in *DSM-5*, the triad of impairment has been collapsed into two domains: (1) persistent difficulties in social communication and interactions, and (2) signs of restricted behaviour, speech, interests or activities. In order to receive a diagnosis of ASD the child is required to meet all of the criteria outlined in

domain 1 and at least two in domain 2. Another important change made to the latest version of the *DSM (DSM-5)* is the acknowledgement that young people with ASD tend to have accompanying sensory processing difficulties, namely hyper- or hyposensitivity to sensory stimuli or unusual sensory interests (Pellicano, 2013). Lastly, the *DSM-5* has created a distinct diagnosis of social communication disorder. This disorder is characterised by specific difficulties with verbal and non-verbal communication which impair interpersonal and social comprehension skills (APA, 2013).

Within the literature, different terms have been used to describe young people with autism. However, in order to provide consistency in this thesis and in line with the changes made in *DSM-5* the term *ASD* will be used to describe young people who have received a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome or HFA and PDD.

2.2.1. The prevalence of ASD

In the UK, no current register or database exists that is able to give an accurate count of the number of young people diagnosed with ASD (Baird et al., 2006). Rather, information pertaining to the number of children and adults who have been diagnosed with ASD is based on findings from epidemiological surveys. Two recent studies have investigated the prevalence of ASD in the UK prior to the changes made to the *DSM* criteria in 2013. One of the studies, Baird et al. (2006), explored the prevalence of ASD in the South Thames region of the UK. Here the authors screened 56,946 children aged 9–10 who were on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register, including those who were suspected to have ASD. The findings from this study reported an estimated prevalence of 116.6 per

10,000 children, which suggests that approximately 1 per cent of the UK population may have ASD (Baird et al., 2006). An earlier prevalence study, conducted by Lotter (1966) investigated the prevalence of ASD in 8–10-year-olds by screening 78,000 children in the county of Middlesex and observed that ASD occurs in 4.5 per 10,000 children (Lotter, 1966). In comparison to the study by Baird et al. (2006) this would suggest that there has been a rise in the prevalence of ASD. However, the reasons for this increase remain unclear and could be related to a number of factors, including practitioners' increased awareness of ASD, and improved identification and assessment tools used by clinicians, which have resulted in children being identified and diagnosed from an earlier age (Gernsbacher, Dawson, & Goldsmith, 2005). Additionally, research suggests that the broadening of the *DSM-IV-TR* criteria may account for the increase in the number of young people diagnosed with ASD (Frith, 2003; Gernsbacher et al., 2005).

A further study conducted by Brugha et al. (2011) investigated the epidemiology of ASD in adults (16 years or older) living in households across England, by screening for adults who took part in the 2007 National Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. On average 2,250 households were stratified based on the measure of socioeconomic status within each region. One adult from each participating household was screened and selected if they met the inclusion criteria for ASD. From 13,171 households, 618 adults were selected for this study, and in this case the authors reported the overall prevalence of ASD to be 9.8 per 1,000 adults (Brugha et al., 2011); however, this finding contradicts children's epidemiological studies (Baird et al., 2006; Lotter, 1966), which suggested that the diagnosis of ASD is on the increase. It must be noted that this study has not been replicated which makes it difficult to make comparisons. Brugha and colleagues had also observed

that adults with ASD tend to have poorer life outcomes; for example, adults with ASD were more likely to be male, single, have low educational qualifications, be living in local-authority-supported housing and not in receipt of mental health services (Brugha et al., 2011). However, Brugha's (2011) findings maybe an underestimation of the adult ASD population due to the small sample size used, and the fact that the authors excluded from this study adults living in residential institutions or having severe learning difficulties. Furthermore, Wing, Gould, and Gillberg (2011) noted that the changes made to the *DSM-5* criteria may affect prevalence figures in the future; for instance it has been raised as a concern that the *DSM-5* criteria may not be sensitive enough to identify all of those who have ASD. Although these studies reporting the prevalence rate of ASD are inconclusive, research indicates that there are a significant number of young people with the condition, thus emerging into adulthood and requiring support with their transition into further education, training and employment.

2.3. Definitions of transitions

The term *transition* is used in this thesis to describe the period of leaving school provision. Although transitions are universal and experienced by all young people, the transition for young people with ASD is complicated because they require considerable support from different services during the time of transition. Equally the transition into adulthood involves progressing through different physiological and psychological stages of development (Erikson, 1968), and significant alterations to lifestyle such as changes in relationships, responsibilities, provision and status (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2010). Dee (2006) suggests that the transition period when young people are expected to leave secondary school often involves the transition from different educational and professional personnel as well as from

children to adult services. The number of individual and external changes that a young person may encounter at this time highlights the complexity associated with the transition. There is a range of perspectives and conceptualisations of transition, reflecting different theoretical perspectives on transition in relation to phase, agency or time, which will now be discussed (Dee 2006).

2.3.1. Phase definition of transitions

Polat, Kalambooukam Boyle, & Nelson (2001, p. 20) define 'transition' as 'the passage from one life stage to another'. Phase theorists regard the transition to adulthood as a number of important transitional phases or 'rites of passage' that a person is required to pass through in the course of their lifetime – for example, entry into further education or employment, independent living and marriage, which signify the transition into adulthood (Dee, 2006). For most people, the transition into adulthood begins in the final years of secondary education and does not end until the young person is in their early twenties when they enter into the workforce (Lloyd, 2005). Ecclestone et al. (2010) note that for young people with special educational needs (SEN) the transition into adulthood is not linear; rather transitions are a continuous process throughout an individual's life.

2.3.2. Agency definition of transitions

The agency definition of transition arises from a sociological perspective and considers that how much control a person has over their life determines how they progress through the course of their life (Dee, 2006). Sociologists suggest that individuals have increasingly acquired the freedom to oppose society norms which dictate when and how a person should progress

through life stages (Ecclestone et al., 2010). In addition, according to this perspective these stages are influenced by both biological and non-biological factors such as gender, ethnicity and class (Dee, 2006). However, the reality for many young people with ASD is that they have little control over their lives and are often reliant on the support and guidance of others (Dee, 2006).

2.3.3. Time definition of transition

The time definition of transition is influenced by biological, social psychology, and sociological perspectives (Dee, 2006). According to this theory, transitions are perceived as bound in time and in space and are often temporal, occurring at single time points during the lifelong development process. This definition is concerned with the three dimensions of time: social, history and lifetime. For example, transition can be viewed from the point of leaving school or after entering into a new education system (Dee, 2006). The time definition of transition is most relevant to this study, which will focus on the following points of time:

- the transition from secondary or sixth form school to FE college;
- when families received support from services during the transition process;
- and by collecting data at a specific point of time.

2.4. Conceptual framework on transitions

The conceptual framework utilised in this study derives from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. This theory has evolved over the years into its mature form which is referred as Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological systems theory described a child's development as occurring

within four nested systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem) that make up his or her environment. These nested systems (described in Table 1), include people close to the young person, those within their community, as well as the cultural and political contexts which directly or indirectly influence the young person's development, experiences and transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The main limitation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is the assumption that all young people living within the same environment are equally affected, regardless of their biological condition or personal characteristics (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). This theory has therefore denied the role the young person's personal, genetic and biological characteristics have played in determining their development. For example, young people with ASD have intrinsic characteristics (difficulties with social interaction and communication as well as restricted, repetitive behaviours) which may also influence the young person's development and life transitions (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This issue was later addressed in Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development theory. Here, Bronfenbrenner emphasised the role played by the individual, as well as the impact that time and the environment have on the developing individual (Tudge et al., 2009).

Table 1: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory

Nested system	Description
The Microsystem	The immediate environment (home and college) in which the young person belongs and including their family, teachers and peers.
The Mesosystem	Interactions that take place between two or more microsystems where the young person actively participates.
The Exosystem	External environments which indirectly influence young people's transition, for example, this refers to influences at the community level including social norms and values.
The Macrosystem	The socio-cultural contexts; these are cultural values and customs as well as a political and economic system that influences the microsystems surrounding the young person.

Bronfenbrenner's theory in its mature form (the bioecological model of human development, 2005) includes the Process-Person-Context-Time model which considers development as a product of complex reciprocal interactions (processes) between the young person and those within (the microsystem) their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). It further suggests that the "form, power, content and direction" (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p.117) of proximal processes affecting development vary depending on personal and environmental characteristics; therefore this model emphasises interactions between heredity and the environment during development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000;

Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This model also highlights the fact that interactions must occur on a regular basis over an extended period of time to be effective; acknowledgement of the significance of both the duration and the timing of experiences is reflected in Bronfenbrenner's additional nested system, the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The chronosystem refers to the patterns of environmental events and transitions over the individual's life course (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

The bioecological model of human development (2005) has been chosen as a theoretical framework to situate this research study for the following reasons: first, this theory acknowledges that a young person has the ability to engage in effective transition planning. Second, this theory acknowledges that the young person's transition is heavily influenced by both their personal characteristics (including typical ASD characteristics), and the way in which these interact with features of their environment. Third, this model acknowledges the importance of time (chronosystem) which is marked by major life transitions and historical events that take place during a young person's development. This links with this research study's focus on transition and the introduction of recent policies (DfE, 2014; HM Government, 2014b) that have changed practices pertaining to young people's transition into further education. A further benefit of situating this study within this conceptual framework is it can contribute to and help organise the findings of this study to aid our understanding of how the young person and the systems that surround them influence transition planning and the transition process itself. All of the key aspects of Bronfenbrenner's theory are explored in this study, and described in Table 2.

Table 2: Outline of how Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model of human development will be applied to this research study based on Tudge et al. (2009)

<p>Process</p> <p>“Proximal processes” emphasises the role that individuals play in their own development. The process refers to reciprocal interactions that take place over time between a young person and their environment.</p> <p>Processes of development occur in settings that are most familiar to the young person (e.g. home, college, community) and with those they are familiar with (parents).</p>	<p>Study the setting (FE college) where the young person spends time and develops relations with others.</p> <p>Proximal processes associated with transition could include their interactions with their parents and professionals who support transitions, for example, by researching and making visits to the FE college.</p>
<p>Person characteristics</p> <p>Biological condition and genetics of the young person make up three types of characteristics of the person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Demand (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity) ➤ Resource (e.g. mental and emotional resources, such as personal skills, experience, and cognitive ability) ➤ Force (e.g. temperament, motivation and task persistence) 	<p>Young person’s age, diagnosis and additional learning needs were included in this study.</p>

<p>Context</p> <p>The young person is consistently viewed as influencing and being influenced by (their immediate environments) four nested systems described in Table 1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Microsystem ➤ Mesosystem ➤ Exosystem ➤ Macrosystem 	<p>Each of these nested systems were considered in this study and the following features of their secondary school / sixth form were included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff ➤ Peers ➤ Family ➤ Voluntary and statutory services ➤ Legislation and government policies
<p>Time</p> <p>Involves interactions that take place over time between the young person and their environment and the era (historical time) they live in.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Micro time: Continuous interactions (proximal processes) with their immediate environment ➤ Meso time: The frequency of these interactions or activities (e.g. daily, weekly) ➤ Macro time: The timing of events and experiences within the individual's life span. Important historical events that have taken place during that time. Changing expectations and norms 	<p>The concept of time from Bronfenbrenner's theory links with this study's focus on the young person's transition into FE college and the historical time in which these individuals live.</p> <p>The following was considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Micro time: What interactions had taken place between the young people and services supporting transitions? ➤ Meso time: When and how often did interactions between the young people and these services occur? ➤ Macro time: The impact of the current government focus, which is to improve the transition of young people from school to FE, and the effect of the shift from statements of SEN to the Education, Health and Care Plan

within society.	(EHCP) on transitions.
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2.5. The inclusion of young people with SEN into mainstream provisions

The government's initiatives that support the inclusion and transition into FE college of young people with SEN, including those with ASD, will now be reviewed. In the past four decades, there has been a move towards including children and young people with SEN in mainstream education. For the first time in history, with the passing of the Education (Handicapped Children) Act (1970), it was made possible for all young people, despite their disability, to be educated. In 1974 the Warnock Committee was established, which led to the release of the Warnock Report (1978); this has significantly influenced the development of policy and guidance for those with SEN (HM Government, 1981). It was in the Warnock Report that the term *SEN* was introduced, and Warnock (1978) advocated that all children and young people have the ability to learn and should be integrated into mainstream provisions. The term *integration* has since been replaced in policy with *inclusion*; this is regarded as more child-focused as it places the onus on the education system to make adaptations to its methods, teaching and procedures in order to fully include all children (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). To achieve this, the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE, 1997) which highlights the need to remove barriers that prevent children and young people from fully participating in mainstream education. This is to ensure an inclusive approach or ethos, which serves the needs of all children, and enables them to achieve their full potential. The concept of inclusion continues to be advocated in subsequent policies, such as the Department for Education (2001) describes inclusion as an active process whereby policies and

practices at all levels (individual, group, organisational) should be developed. Furthermore, the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995; 2005a) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) places the legal duty on education providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure all young people have the same opportunities that are available to typically developing young people. Alongside the legislation's promotion of inclusion, the Disability Equality Duty (Disability Rights Commission, 2006a, 2006b) places additional responsibility on further and higher education colleges to improve and to develop their own inclusion policies to meet the needs of young people with SEN entering into further education. According to a report by the Learning and Skills Council (2006), there were 336,537 young people with SEN in FE colleges in 2002 and 477,417 by 2005. The gradual increase observed in the number of young people with learning difficulties entering FE colleges is not reflective of the number of young people with ASD accessing this provision. According to a report by the charity Ambitious about Autism's 'Finished at School' transitions campaign, fewer than 1 in 4 young people with ASD successfully transition into further education (Ambitious about Autism, 2011). This suggests that the issue of inclusion of young people with ASD into FE colleges has not been fully addressed. One of the suggested reasons for this, proposed by the Learning Support Council (LSC, 2006), is that it can be difficult to support the inclusion of young people with ASD into FE college due to the challenge of having to adapt the available provisions to meet their varying needs (Breakey, 2006; Chown & Beavan, 2012; Kaweski, 2011; Reid, 2007; Vanbergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008). Additionally, FE colleges are required to invest time and additional resources and to employ teaching staff who have specialist knowledge and skills in ASD (Breakey, 2006). Furthermore, current literature indicates that the typical characteristics of

young people with ASD – including social interaction difficulties, insistence on sameness, and heightened levels of anxiety – make them particularly vulnerable during the time of transitioning to FE college (Reid, 2007). Chown and Beavan (2012) highlight that the transition into FE college involves changes of setting, routine and rules, which young people with ASD have difficulties adapting to.

Knapp and colleagues have noted that the unsuccessful inclusion and transition of young people with ASD into FE college can result in poor life outcomes; for instance, many of these young people continue to live at home, dependent on their families, and are less likely to enter further education, employment or training after leaving compulsory education (Knapp et al., 2009). Similarly, Wolf (2011) claims that many young people with SEN leave school lacking the personal and vocational skills necessary for joining the labour market, and therefore fall into the NEET category of 16–25-year-olds. Importantly, the increase in the number of young people with ASD who do not acquire independent skills causes increased costs to the local authority (LA) (Knapp et al., 2009).

Knapp et al. (2009) conducted a study aimed at estimating the cost of ASD in the UK. This was achieved by combining data from recent studies that investigated the prevalence of ASD with or without learning difficulties and the cost of different living arrangements (supported living, residential care and private households). The data was combined to give an average annual cost of services (health, social care, education, housing, leisure and ASD-specific) across all age groups. It was estimated (based on the mean of annual costs) that young people who are aged 18 and have an associated learning difficulty cost LAs approximately £88,937 per year in terms of the

costs of residential care (Knapp et al., 2009). In addition, as discussed in the Ambitious about Autism report (AaA, 2011), young people living in residential care experience further difficulties when they are required to reintegrate back to their home community and to re-establish relationships. It is becoming apparent that the findings of such research is influencing UK government policies and guidance, which aim to improve the inclusion and transition of young people with ASD into FE college. This has been achieved by increasing the participation of young people in education, reforming the system, and producing guidance and policies that support young people with SEN in their transition from school to FE college.

2.5.1. Raising the participation age of young people in education

In the UK, young people tend to transition from school to further education provisions at the age of 16. These provisions include school-based sixth form or sixth-form college, mainstream FE college, 16–19 academies, and independent specialist provisions including residential care (DfE, 2014). However, it was recognised by the UK government that there is a rise in the number of young people aged 16 to 19 who do not achieve A–C grade GCSEs and consequently do not successfully transition into FE provisions (DfE, 2014). As a result of this, the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Coalition Government set Wolf (2011) the task of reviewing the vocational education system for young people aged 14 to 19. Wolf had undertaken a review of the education system and based the findings of this review on the responses of young people who had participated in two longitudinal surveys the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and the Longitudinal Study of Young People (LSYPE) in England. These studies had collected data from the year 2004 through to 2010 and the main focus of these longitudinal studies was to examine the activities undertaken by young people (aged 13 to 20 year old)

for example, those in full time education, employment or training. In reviewing the education system for this age group Wolf (2011) highlighted a number of fundamental flaws which needed to be addressed. It was reported that many young people aged 16 to 17 who transition into FE college enrol on courses that do not appropriately match or meet their learning needs or interests; as a result, a number of young people move in and out of education or enrol on several short courses without successful completion. Wolf advised that measures should be introduced to ensure the inclusion of all young people, and to enable them to reach their full potential by offering new vocational study programmes and apprenticeships that would better develop the transferable skills that are needed for employment (Wolf, 2011). The government has accepted Wolf's report and has published a response documenting a number of changes to be made to the further education system (DfE, 2011c). One of the most significant changes made was to raise the participation age of young people remaining in full-time compulsory education or training from 16 to 18 (DfE, 2011c, 2013a, 2013b; Wolf, 2011; Woodin, McCulloch, & Cowan, 2013). A possible limitation of the Wolf report is the YCS and LSYPE studies used, had only identified in their sample young people who had a mental or physical disability. It was not specified in the YCS and LSYPE studies how many of the low-attaining young people had a general SEN and what proportion specifically had ASD; this makes it difficult to generalise the implications of the Wolf report to young people with ASD.

Hendricks and Wehman (2009) had conducted a review of the literature focussing on the transition of young people with ASD from secondary school to adulthood. The authors had included international articles published from 1996 to 2008 that were peer reviewed and had a sample of participants who

had a diagnosis of ASD. The findings of this review were similar to those of the Wolf report: the authors found that young people with ASD benefit from spending extended time within the education system, as they were observed to take longer to acquire the skills required to suitably equip them for employment and for adulthood (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). A limitation of the Hendricks and Wehman (2009) study is that the authors included articles where the sample size of young people studied included less than 50 per cent with a diagnosis of ASD, and some of the young people were as young as 13. The lack of consistency in the articles included in this literature review may suggest that these findings are not representative of young people with ASD.

2.5.2. Legislation that supports the transition of young people into further education

Transition guidance was first provided by the SEN Code of Practice in 1994 (DfEE, 1994), which was revised in 2001 (DfES, 2001). The codes of practice (DfES, 2001) state that for young people who are entitled to a statement of SEN, an annual review meeting should be held when the individual is in Year 9 and, within this meeting, transition plans should be discussed (DfES, 2001). However, many young people having a statement of SEN under these codes of practice (DfES, 2001) only received statutory protection up to the age of 16, or 19 if the young person remained within a school-based sixth form provision (HM Government, 1996). For young people transitioning into a FE college, the statement of SEN was converted into a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) under section 139a of the Learning and Skills Act (2000), which meant that affected individuals lost the statutory protection which is associated with a statement of SEN (HM

Government, 2000). When the Coalition Government came into power in 2010, it was acknowledged that due to the bureaucratic nature of the SEN system, some young people with SEN were not realising their full potential. The Coalition Government therefore proposed a number of radical reforms to improve the transition process for young people into further education and ultimately into adulthood, by narrowing the gaps in provision and creating educational and employment opportunities which are comparable for all (DfE, 2011b, 2012, 2014; HM Government, 2014b). The government (House of Commons, 2013, p.75) asserted:

Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities should have the same opportunity to apply to higher education as their peers. The new Education, Health and Care Plan will provide a much greater focus on outcomes, building on young people's own ambitions and aspirations. This can include progressing to higher education, as well as finding employment and living independently.

More recently, the Support and Aspirations paper (DfE, 2011b, 2012), the SEN and Disability (SEND) code of practice (DfE, 2014) and the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b) have been published. These documents suggested that, where possible, young people with SEN should be supported to remain in education or training up to the age of 25. To achieve this, the Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014) has extended the SEN system from birth to 25. Furthermore, this act has replaced statements of SEN and LDA with a single point assessment process to produce the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), thereby requiring co-ordination between all statutory services that support young people and their families (HM Government, 2014b). EHCPs are outcome-focused and should include goals to support young people's ultimate transition to adulthood by targeting the following areas: employment, independent living, health and community participation (Preparing for Adulthood Programme, 2013).

2.5.3. Transition policies and guides specific to young people with ASD

Young people with ASD were identified as one of the most vulnerable groups by the Valuing People Now Strategy (DoH, 2009). These individuals are most likely to be socially excluded from society, including education, and will likely experience difficulties at their transition points. Consequently, in 2009, for the first time in history an act that was specific to individuals with ASD was passed (HM Government, 2009). The Autism Act (HM Government, 2009) has helped to put ASD high on the national and political agenda by providing specific guidance and support for LAs and health authorities (HAs) on ways to improve life outcomes for this group. This has been achieved by appointing an ASD commissioner in each LA. The act was supported by the Adult Autism Strategy (DoH, 2010, 2014) and advocates that all professionals who work with young people with autism should receive basic autism awareness training. In response to the Adult Autism Strategy and the Valuing People Now programme (DoH, 2001, 2009), the National Autistic Society (NAS) has produced guidance for commissioners on best practices to facilitate the development of services for young people and adults with ASD (Higgins, 2009). This guidance raises awareness of the challenges young people with ASD may experience when leaving school, which may include difficulties coping with the change in provision and experiencing high levels of anxiety. This guide asserts that the transition of young people with ASD requires careful preparation including use of visual aids and opportunities to visit the new provision. Since the publication of the guide in 2009, several further publications have been produced which give strategies and guidance on improving the transition into further education

(AaA, 2015; Breakey, 2006; Cullen, Cullen, Lindsay, & Hastings, 2014; Stobart, 2011). These publications place emphasis on practitioners personalising transition plans to meet the young person's individual and heterogeneous needs.

2.5.4. Person-centred planning approach to improve transition

In 2001 the Department of Health published the *Valuing People* White Paper (DoH, 2001), which highlighted that the transition from children's to adult services is often fraught with difficulties, as a result of the lack of information, coordination and support received. This White Paper initiated a three-year strategy for the development and delivery of health and social care services for individuals with learning difficulties in England. A key objective of this strategy was to provide person-centred planning (PCP) approaches to transition planning, which place young people's wishes, needs and aspirations at the centre of the planning process, rather than centring decisions around the resources and services available (DoH, 2001, 2009). This approach to transition planning has been emphasised by the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014), which stipulates that EHC plans, and subsequent annual reviews, should be person-centred by involving young people and their parents in decision making and in the early stages of the transition planning process.

2.5.6. Eliciting the views of the young person

In the past twenty years, there has been a gradual shift in how children and young people are conceptualised in policy, in society and within research. Children are no longer predominantly viewed as passive recipients of decisions; they are now viewed as social actors and active participants in

change, particularly in policies concerning their education, transitions and service development (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011; Read, Clements, & Ruebain, 2006). The onset of this change was stimulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989), which advocated for young people's involvement in decisions that directly affect their lives. Articles 12 and 13 of the UN Convention specifically highlight the importance of 'listening to the voice of children' and ensuring their 'freedom of speech' by providing them with the legal, social and political right to express their views and for their views to be acted on (Unicef, 1989).

Since the UN General Assembly (1989), these rights have been set and agreed as an international standard for all children under the age of 18. More recently, the SEN code of practice asserted that services and school staff should listen to the views of young people with SEN, particularly during the statutory assessment process (DfES, 2001). Following this came the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2004), which was enshrined in law under the Children Act (2004). It included five outcomes that each young person should achieve. One of these outcomes was to ensure that each young person is given the opportunity to 'make a positive contribution' in their school or college and within their communities (DfES, 2004). In the past few years, there has been emphasis on the importance of finding methods of communication in order to include the views of young people with severe learning difficulties. The Mental Capacity Act (2005b) stipulates that this requires both acceptance as well as commitment by practitioners to make use of multiple methods and approaches in order to include young people's preferences and experiences (DfE, 2014; DfES, 2001; Read, Read, Blackburn, & Spencer, 2012). In scenarios where the young person lacks capacity under the Mental Capacity Act, it is stipulated that consideration

should be given to appointing an independent advocate to present the views of the young person (HM Government, 2005b).

More recently, the SEN code of practices (DfE, 2014) and the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b) have placed emphasis on giving young people increased choice and control over their education; this includes the right to request or appeal their EHCP (DfE, 2014; HM Government, 2014b). Furthermore, there is a clear drive towards prioritising the voice of the young person, and thus, for the first time in history, both policies state that when a young person reaches the age of 16 they have the right to lead discussions about their education and care instead of their parents. Current government policies highlight the need for research to explore how local and national (systemic factors) policies influence the transition of young people into FE college, which is one of the aims of this study.

2.6. Current research on transitions

It is evident from the currently available literature that while the voice of the young person is being increasingly included both in legislation and in policy, it has only recently become a priority area in academic research (Bryony et al., 2004). Research into transitions predominantly focuses on the transition of young people from primary to secondary school for typically developing children, and increasingly for children with ASD (Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, & Sammons, 2008; Saggars, 2015; Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007). Although many of the studies that will be critically reviewed in this section do not directly examine the transition of young people with ASD into FE college, they provide useful insight into what supports or prevents

effective transitions into FE college and the experiences of individuals within this setting.

A study conducted by Camarena and Sarigiani (2009) explored the perspectives of families on their post-secondary-school aspirations for high-functioning young people with ASD aged between 12 and 18 years. The authors carried out interviews which included semi-structured and rating scale questions with young people (n=21) and their parents (n=33; 20 mothers and 13 fathers). 11 interviews were completed with the young person, mother and father trios, 9 child–mother pairs and 1 child–father pair. The main themes reported from this study were: (1) post-education goals; (2) perceived obstacles to college success; (3) recommended support to help college transition. With regards to post-education goals, the majority of parents reported that they wanted their son/daughter to move on to FE college after leaving school. Mothers (45%) were more likely to report that their child was more suited to a vocational college programme in comparison to young people (29%) or fathers (17%). The authors explained this difference by suggesting that mothers are more likely to consider options and to set goals that they think are realistic or a best fit. With regards to perceived obstacles, families regarded both academic and non-academic situations as potential obstacles to their young person's transition into FE college. Young people frequently spoke about academic obstacles (coursework and curriculum requirements) that could prevent them from getting into college or that they felt might prevent them from keeping up with the pace of learning. Conversely, parents reported concerns about what accommodations and support their young person would receive in FE college, such as note takers or extra time on exams and assignments. In addition, many parents expressed the view that colleges had a limited

availability of programmes that matched their son's or daughter's talents or interests. Finally, with regards to recommended support, families suggested that young people could be supported further in their academic work if provided with assistive technology, given increased time to complete tests and assignments and a quiet environment for assessment. In addition, it was perceived as beneficial for colleges to employ social mentors to help young people to engage in the social aspects of college life. A strength of this study is that perspectives were obtained from both the young person as well as their parents. However, a limitation is that the authors had included scaling questions within the young people's interview schedule: for example, 'How important is it to you to attend a college of some sort after high school?' (Carmarena and Sarigiani, 2009, p. 118). Then the young person had to rate their experiences on a seven-point Likert scale. However, this method might not be appropriate to use with all young people with ASD who may have difficulties interpreting language and quantifying their experiences (Beresford et al., 2004). In addition, using Likert scale questions does not allow participants to talk freely about their experiences (King & Horrocks, 2010). A further limitation of this study is that young people's interviews were often conducted in the presence of one or both parents, which may have biased responses (Beresford et al. 2004).

In 2013, Beresford and colleagues conducted a study, on behalf of the Department of Health, to explore the transition process of young people with HFA or Asperger's syndrome into adult services and the cost of services that support the transitions of young people, within five LAs across England. The authors utilised mixed methods and collected data through postal surveys and semi-structured interviews with young people (n=18), their parents (n=36) and the managers and/or practitioners who represented statutory and

non-statutory transitions services (n=68). Data was collected from two groups of young people; the pre-transition group were 16–18-year-olds who were on the cusp of leaving school, and the post-transition group were 19–21-year-olds who had recently left school. These young people's transitions included the following post-16 provisions: into further education, employment, training or adult services. The key findings from this study were that young people felt more able to contribute to decisions about their transition when adults provided information in a simplified format. Additionally, the participants reported that they felt it was useful when they were able to visit or to attend taster sessions during the planning and decision-making stages of their transition into FE college. Many of the young people also reported that they found it unhelpful when their key contact at FE college had limited ASD awareness and made assumptions about their needs based on general ASD characteristics. After transitioning into FE college, many of the young people described feeling more included in college than they did in school; for example, they emphasised having more social opportunities than those experienced at secondary school. Beresford et al. (2013) found that parents of young people with a statement of SEN reported that they valued having a transition planning meeting prior to their son's or daughter's transition, as this document clearly outlined their child's strengths and needs all in one place. Further findings from the parents' perspective highlighted that there is a lack of consistency and transparency amongst LAs as to what transition services young people with ASD are entitled to and at which point professionals should become involved. The majority of parents and transition services agreed that the use of PCP in transition meetings leads to joint working and a holistic view of the young person. The themes raised from this study provide some insight into the transition experience from children's to adult services, which included the

views of young people about their transition into FE college that need to be explored further. An advantage of this study was its large sample size, and that participants were recruited from several LAs. Furthermore, the authors had sought multiple perspectives, which included the views of professionals representing a range of services including health, social care and education. A possible methodological flaw of this study is that the interviews with young people were conducted either by phone or in the family home in the presence of their parents. It is possible that more in-depth interviews could have been achieved if face-to-face interviews were carried out with young people in their preferred place or a neutral location (Beresford et al., 2013). A further critique of this study pertains to the sample used in this study, Beresford et al. (2013) only included the views of young people with ASD who were higher-functioning or had a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome and therefore the findings from this study may not be representative of young people across the ASD spectrum. This means the experiences and perspectives of young people with ASD with varying level of need have not been captured in this study. The second sampling issue is the fact the authors included a different group of young people within the pre-transition phase to those included within the post-transition phase of this study. Furthermore, the young people in the post-transition phase had transitioned into either further education, training or work, which makes it difficult to decipher whether the differences in experiences are due to these group differences.

In the same year, McGukin et al. (2013) carried out a longitudinal qualitative study in Ireland on behalf of the National Council for Special Education Research. Here, the authors collected data at two points in time, and they interviewed young people with SEN (including young people with ASD)

within the pre-transition phase (n=42) and again in the post-transition phase (n=23). Additional information was obtained by interviewing the educational professionals supporting the transition (n=28) in a focus group. The key finding of this study was that the young people felt isolated in college due to experiencing ongoing difficulties with making friends. Additionally, the young people reported that they preferred receiving support from a mentor during their breaks rather than having a teacher assistant working with them in the classroom; they felt that the former reduced the likelihood of being bullied and allowed them to blend in with their peers. The professionals interviewed suggested that the main barrier to young people's transition into FE college is the long application process colleges tend to have. Furthermore, professionals reported that during the application process many families do not disclose their young person's SEN, making it difficult for colleges to plan or to meet the young person's needs post-transition. The main advantage of this study is that it provides an in-depth overview of the transition process by interviewing the same young people pre- and post-transition. Conversely it is limited by the lack of parental input (n=2), as due to poor recruitment on this front, the authors decided not to include their views. Parents make an important contribution in improving our understanding of this transition process and should be included in subsequent studies. Furthermore, this study took place in Ireland and it is possible that different findings will be yielded in the UK (McGukin et al., 2013).

Finally, in 2014 Mitchell and Beresford (2014) conducted a qualitative study by interviewing 18 young people who had a diagnosis of ASD (specifically those with higher-functioning autism and Asperger's syndrome) and were aged between 15 and 21. The accounts of the participants were taken from a wider study (already discussed) conducted by Beresford et al. (2013) and

specifically focused on the factors that support the smooth transition of young people into further education. From the young people's perspective their transition into FE college was improved by the following support systems: (1) support from their parents with organising and planning their transition; (2) emotional support in the form of someone to talk to prior to their transition; (3) the support of professionals to help them plan for leaving school and being provided with information; (4) support from parents when deciding on post-16 provisions; (5) co-ordination between school, college staff and statutory services to help plan and to make arrangements to meet academic needs. The young people had also reported that receiving travel training helped to prepare them for their move to college. This study focused specifically on the views of young people with ASD, which improves on the sample size of previous studies; however, the authors only included the views of young people with ASD who were higher-functioning. To be able to inform FE college staff and LA practice it is important to include a range of views from young people with varying communication needs (Mitchell & Beresford, 2014).

2.7. Implications for This Study

The review of literature has provided some insight into the views of families regarding the move from the secondary phase of education into further and higher education, which needs to be explored further. The views and perspectives of parents (Beresford et al., 2013; Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009), young people (Mitchell & Beresford, 2014) and professionals (Beresford et al., 2013; McGukin et al., 2013) have been included in previous research. This thesis aims to find out whether this research study will yield the same or different findings to previous research and to gain new

insights into this area. To achieve this, this study has included the strengths and improved on the methodological limitations of previous research in the following ways:

1. It would be of benefit to explore the views of young people across the autistic spectrum including those with severe learning difficulties. The literature and government policies highlight young people with ASD as one of the vulnerable groups during transition points (DoH, 2009). However, there remain gaps in the literature, because much research focuses on the transition of young people with ASD who are high-functioning (Beresford et al., 2013).
2. By carrying out a qualitative research study; previous research has been able to gain an in-depth understanding of the multiple perspectives pertaining to the transition process from secondary school into FE college and into adult services, which suggests that qualitative research is appropriate to achieve this purpose in this study. Furthermore, the perspectives of young people, their parents and transition services were gained.
3. In light of current legislation set out in the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b) this study aims to elicit and to prioritise the views of young people on their transition. This was achieved by giving young people the respect and freedom to opt into the study prior to gaining permission from their parents. In addition, the researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the young people, which improves on the possible biases and methodological limitations found in Camarena and Sarigiani (2009), Beresford et al., (2013) and Mitchell and Beresford (2014), where data was collected with young people by using surveys, telephone interviews or interviews at home with their parents.

4. This study aims to explore the interacting factors that currently support or present a barrier to the transition process, by exploring the impact that the individual's characteristics, their environment and timing has had on the young person's transition. This was achieved by interviewing young people, parents and professionals who support transitions and then triangulating the findings across each group of participants.
5. This study aims to provide recommendations for young people, parents, schools, FE provisions and educational psychologists on how best to support young people with ASD with a successful transition into their local FE college. The research questions are therefore purposively broad to fully explore this transition process and to allow new and unexpected knowledge to be gained.

To address these research aims the following research questions will be explored:

1. What are the views and experiences of young people with ASD transitioning into further education?
2. What are the views of parents regarding this transition?
3. What supports or hinders access and the successful transition of young people with ASD into FE college?
4. What are the roles of professionals in supporting young people with ASD with their transition into FE college?
5. What are the views of parents and professionals on national and local initiatives that exist in relation to this transition process?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to outline the research design and its chosen epistemological position. Subsequently, a description of the participant selection procedure, ethical considerations, the methodology used, and the procedure of the study are elaborated. Data analysis procedures are outlined and information on the study's validity in accordance with Yardley's (2000) four validity principles is given.

3.2. Epistemological position of the current research

There are three distinct research paradigms in which research can be conducted in the social sciences, and they differ in how they view reality (ontology) and how knowledge is created (epistemology) (Matthews, 2003). A researcher's chosen research paradigm determines which methods should be used and how they should attempt to address their research questions (Mertens, 2015). This research study was conducted from a critical realist position. Critical realists are positioned between positivist and constructivist research communities and the similarities and differences between these approaches are outlined in Table 3. In contrast to positivists, critical realists posit that there is a single reality which is independent of human knowledge, perception and observation (Bhaskar, 1979, 2010). According to this position the world is made up of processes (mechanisms) which has a cause-and-effect relationship. Critical realists attempt to understand the social world by examining the generative (causal) mechanisms that cause events to occur and underpins all behaviour (Matthews, 2003). Critical realists therefore assume that an individual's behaviour is generated by underlying (biological,

economic or social) mechanisms, which is outside of their control (Maxwell, 2012). Thus, critical realist highlight the importance of understanding the way in which people behave by exploring the interplay of social processes (culture, norms) and agency (free will, preferences) in the social context in which they occur (Houston, 2001; Matthews, 2003; Mertens, 2015).

According to this epistemological position, knowledge can only be partially¹ accessed through the means of research, and it rejects the positivist view that this can be achieved purely or objectively (Willig, 1999, 2001). Critical realist posit that in seeking to understand and examine reality is only possible through our limited understanding and interpretations, even though it is agreed that there is only a single reality critical realist suggest that there can be multiple interpretations of reality which is relative to our culture and time period (social context) (Matthews, 2003; Mertens, 2015). However, unlike, constructivists critical realists reject the idea that there are multiple realities which are socially constructed by different individuals, nevertheless, critical realists acknowledge that there is always an interpretive element to making sense of and the methods used to uncover reality, which is inevitably prone to human error and distortion (Maxwell, 2012).

Critical realist position has been chosen for this research study as it places value on understanding the causal mechanisms that underpin events and behaviour by listening to the views of individuals within the social context in which they occur. According to this position, by interviewing participants

¹ Braun and Clarke (2013 p. 28) state that: 'Critical realism would be like looking at a view where the only way to see it is through a prism, so what is seen is nuanced by the shape of the prism (the prism is culture, history etc). If you could just get rid of the prism you would be able to see what lies behind it (truth) but you can never get beyond it.'

directly it is possible to produce knowledge that reflects the truth about individual's experiences in the world (Maxwell, 2012). Thus, embarking on an exploratory study by using qualitative interviews to explore and understand the experiences of participants and the factors which improve or hinder transitions into FE College is consistent with this ontological and epistemological position. Furthermore, by adopting the critical realist position this has helped the researcher to recognise that the research methods used and researcher's interpretations of data can be influenced by her culture and experiences. Acknowledging this issue has enabled the researcher to challenge personal biases by remaining conscious, reflective and self-aware of how subjectivity may have influenced this study, this will be discussed further in section 3.3 (Greenbank, 2003).

Table 3: Comparison between positivist, critical realist and constructivist paradigms

Adapted from Matthews (2003)

Paradigm	Positivist	Critical realist	Constructivist
View of reality	There is one single reality and it can be directly accessed	There is a reality that can only be partially accessed	Produces many realities each of which is socially constructed
How knowledge is created	Produces a conclusion that corresponds to a real world	Identifies causal processes underlying behaviour/ events	People construct a reality that applies only to them
Methodology	Uses objective methods such as controlled experiments	Uses methods to uncover and understand these causal processes	Uses methods to identify and explore how different people perceive events and to produce new constructions between them

3.3. Reflexivity

Willig (2001) notes that differing interpretations can be given to data and highlights the importance of engaging in reflexivity within the research process, to ensure that one's interpretations of the data are representative of the voice of the participants. Furthermore, Finlay and Gough (2008) highlight the importance of researchers becoming aware of their own personal and moral values and how they interface with the research study. Although Gough (2008) highlights that the process of reflexivity does not necessarily eliminate or reduce the researcher's values in research, instead engaging in

reflexivity helps the researcher to consider how the development of the research study and their interpretations of the data may be influenced by previous experiences and beliefs. For this reason, the researcher aimed to engage in reflexivity throughout the research process. In this case, the researcher's interest and motivation to research the experiences of young people with ASD transitioning to FE college and ultimately into adulthood were influenced by the researcher's professional experiences and their perceived relevance to the LA. The researcher had previously worked with children and young people in a number of settings across all educational phases. Therefore, the experience gained by the researcher in current and previous roles has clearly influenced the aims of this doctoral research study.

3.4. Context of this study

In order to contextualise this research project further the researcher will provide an overview of the LA and the FE college where this research study was conducted. This study was conducted in a LA situated in the Southeast of England. This LA is geographically the largest borough of Greater London and spans 59 square miles (ONS, 2012). Based on the most recent census data this borough's population was 309,392 (ONS, 2012). The number of young people from this population who were aged between 16 and 19 years was 14,094 (ONS, 2012). At the time of carrying out this research a database search was conducted to identify the number of young people who were known to the LA's SEN Department and had a statement of SEN under Section 324 (DfES, 2001) within Years 10 and 11. Up to 2014, there were 32 young people identified as having a statement of SEN which declared that their primary need was a ASD. Additionally, it was identified that 48 young people had a statement of SEN which defined their primary need as a social

communication difficulty. It is possible that a proportion of this total will have an additional diagnosis of ASD. These figures highlighted that a number of young people within the borough had a diagnosis of ASD and would possibly be transitioning into the LA's FE college, which justifies the need for this study.

3.4.1. Local authority context

The LA has 17 mainstream secondary schools and 3 specialist provisions, all of which have sixth forms attached. Additionally, there is one mainstream further and higher education college available in this LA. For young people whose needs cannot be met within any of these provisions, families have an additional option of sending their young person into out-of-borough independent specialist provisions (ISP), or residential settings, which they can attend daily or where they can live as a residential student.

3.4.2. Local and national context

Having received Pathfinder status in September 2011, this LA was set a range of proposals to implement on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills, in preparation for the SEN reforms being set nationally (DfE, 2011b, 2014; Preparing for Adulthood Programme, 2013). One of the tasks proposed is specific to this research study and required this LA to improve the transition process for young people with ASD into further education provisions. At this time there was also a national and local drive towards reducing the expenditure of LAs and to improve the life outcomes of young people with ASD (HM Government, 2014b) through ensuring that young people live, learn and work within their local community instead of receiving out-of-borough residential provision.

In accordance with the Children and Families Bill (DfE, 2014), the Department for Education had commissioned the Ambitious about Autism (AaA) charity and Preparing for Adulthood charity to carry out a two-year transitions project. The LA where the researcher conducted this research study had signed up to this project. Specifically, this project aimed to improve access for young people with ASD into FE college by offering training and guidance to participating LAs and FE colleges, and to impart these best practices to all LAs within a good practice transitions guide (AaA, 2011, 2015; Cullen et al., 2014). To support the AaA project, a work discussion group was set up that invited the attendance of all professionals who support the transition of young people into FE college. An additional aim of this group as stipulated by the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) was to develop the LA's Local Offer for families in need of post-16 provisions, by documenting all of the provisions and resources available to young people within their local FE college.

3.4.3. Further education college context

This LA has one FE college, which is based on two sites. This FE college was contacted to participate in this study, as the researcher did not work directly with this setting in the role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. Furthermore, the Department for Education and Skills has recently invested £2.4 million into this particular education establishment in order to improve the provision and services available to young people with complex needs. Some of the changes made included employing a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist to work on site at the FE college. Staff had received training in managing challenging behaviours and in person-centred planning principles. In addition, the FE college has

developed taster sessions, or link courses, with local specialist schools for a year prior to the young person's transition into FE college. The FE college offers a mainstream vocational curriculum, which has differing entry requirements for each of the courses. In addition, it has a specialist provision attached, which offers a range of specialist courses that aim to develop the independent living and employment skills of young people.

From November 2014, it was reported that 8,000 students between the ages of 19 and 24 were accessing either part-time or full-time education in this FE college. Out of these young people, 96 students between the ages of 16 and 24 had a diagnosis of ASD. 32 of the young people had transitioned from one of three neighbouring boroughs surrounding the LA.

3.5. Identification of participants for this study

Identification of the participants was achieved by using multiple recruitment strategies. First, for the purpose of this research the researcher joined the Ambitious about Autism (AaA) Transitions Working Group. This group met monthly within the LA's FE college for the duration of this research study. Attending this working group helped to establish relationships with key members of staff who had both experience and knowledge about this transition process, and it was also an opportunity to discuss the feasibility of this project. A follow-up letter that provided further details about this study was sent to the management team of the FE college, and the researcher then met with the management team to discuss the aims of the project and the criteria for identifying participants in more detail.

3.5.1. Selection Criteria

For the purpose of this study, participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy. This strategy was used because the researcher aimed to explore the views and experiences of young people with ASD who were transitioning into FE college. Identifying young people in this way was the best means to ensure that the research questions of this research study were answered and a range of views was obtained. Therefore, young people were identified for this research study by carrying out a search on the FE college database. All of the young people who met the specified inclusion criteria were invited to participate in this study. The inclusion criteria were:

1. They had received a clinical diagnosis of an ASD, including what is formally known as autism and Asperger's syndrome.
2. Where applicable they possessed a statement of Special Educational Needs under Section 324 of the Education Act 1996 or an Education Health Care Plan under Section 36(1) of the Children and Families Act 2014, stating ASD or social communication difficulties as their primary need.
3. They had transitioned into FE college at the end of Year 11–14 with chronological ages ranging from 16 to 18 in the year September 2015.

The young people who were purposively selected were also required to have been educated in one of the following provisions prior to their transition into FE college:

- Local or out-of-borough specialist secondary school.
- Local or out-of-borough mainstream school.
- Local or out-of-borough independent mainstream or specialist sixth form.
- Local or out-of-borough school, based on mainstream or specialist sixth form.

3.5.2. Difficulties with access and recruitment of young people

The objective of this research was to capture the perspectives of young people and their parents at two points in time and therefore the researcher intended to collect data both before and after the young person's transition into FE college. Study One (pre-transition phase) would have involved collecting data when the young people were at the cusp of leaving secondary school or sixth form. In Study Two (post-transition), data would have been collected when the young person had completed their transition into FE college. The reason for choosing this study design was to reflect the researcher's chosen conceptualisation of transition as previously outlined. In addition, the chosen study design would have enabled a full exploration of the transition process by examining the views, experiences, and role of services when supporting the transition from school to FE college. However, a change in this research design was enforced due to the difficulties experienced by the researcher working in the FE college context. Gaining access to the participants meant that the researcher had to change the research design to perform a snapshot of data collection when the young people had already moved to FE college.

At the request of the FE college, it was agreed that the Inclusion Support Administrator would send out invitation letters to potential participants. This decision was reached as it was deemed by the FE college to be a potential breach of the Data Protection Act (HMSO, 1998) to pass on details of potential participants to the researcher as a third party for research purposes. The researcher was informed that all young people who were college applicants and met the inclusion criteria were sent the researcher's invitation letters by the FE college Inclusion Support Administrator. This initial paperwork was sent with a covering letter from the Head of the

Learning Support Department, and parents were asked to return forms in a pre-paid envelope that was addressed to the researcher. However, due to the fluidity of the FE college recruitment process, the college continued to receive applications from potential students up to early September. This meant that the distribution of invitation letters to parents and the final placement decisions were not made until well into the summer term which was a highly stressful time for both college staff and parents. Given these difficulties, only one young person and their biological parent was recruited during the pre-transition stage of this study. This was problematic as the study aimed to explore the views of young people's transition, which needed to be captured at specific points of time.

At this point of the study, it was not possible to recruit further participants as the original timeframe for collecting data had already lapsed. In September 2014, the researcher re-approached the FE college; another database search was conducted and it revealed that additional young people who met the inclusion criteria had made their transition. Due to the difficulties encountered in the study the consent and sampling process were intertwined, and therefore a sequential approach had to be adopted by the researcher to gain access to participants and to achieve consent on different levels.

3.5.3. Recruitment process for the young people participants

In order to recruit further participants for the final sample of this study the researcher decided to hold two briefing meetings within the FE college. The purpose of the briefing meetings was twofold. First, it gave the young people the opportunity to meet with the researcher and to learn about this research study in accessible terms. Second, the briefing meeting gave the young

people the opportunity to give their assent to participate in the study. Each briefing meeting took place either during an enrichment lesson or during tutorials; this was in order to avoid withdrawing participants from any of their subject lessons. Information regarding the research study and briefing meeting was provided to the FE college course tutors and learning support assistants (LSAs) who then informed and encouraged the young people to attend. Consent forms were given to the young people at the briefing meeting. Each briefing meeting was supported by each young person's LSA; these LSAs were able to explain the consent form to the young people in their preferred communication style.

Two briefing meetings were held in the FE college. One involved 5 young people who were enrolled on mainstream vocational courses. The second briefing meeting included 5 young people with moderate or severe learning difficulties who were enrolled on the college's specialist course. All of the young people who attended the briefing meetings gave their assent that they wanted to take part in this study. Three of the young people who had expressed an interest in participating in this study did not receive permission from their parents to participate despite several attempts made to get in contact with them. In addition, one young person became very ill during the time of data collection and was unable to participate.

3.5.4. Recruitment process for the parent participants

The young people who attended the briefing meetings were asked to hand-deliver an invitation letter, (parent) consent form and information sheet to their parents (please refer to Appendix 2). These outlined the purpose of the research study and requested their parents' permission and signature to indicate that they agreed to the young person's participation in this study. In

order to increase the return rate, the young people were asked to return the permission slips directly to the FE college Inclusion Administrator who then informed the researcher of the outcome. The researcher returned to the FE college a week later to collect consent forms. The parents were provided with the researcher's contact details and were made aware that they could contact the researcher directly. Non-respondents were followed up with a reminder letter, which was sent to parents in the mail via the Inclusion Administrator, and each young person was reminded to hand in their return slip. These procedures were implemented to gain consent for each young person's participation in the study, and to simultaneously invite their parents' participation.

3.5.5. Recruitment process for the professional participants

To obtain a range of views and experiences the researcher used an opportunity and snowballing sampling approach to identify services that support young people's transition into FE college. The researcher had initially approached professionals who attended the AaA Working Group to participate in this study. The researcher had chosen the professional to represent health, education, social care and voluntary services to ensure data was collected from all sectors outlined in the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014). Each of these participants was then asked to help to identify other relevant professionals.

3.5.6. Participant sample

In total, 20 participants took part in this study. They comprised young people who met the inclusion criteria for this study, their parents and professionals

representing services that provide support during young people's transition into FE college. The final sample included:

- 7 young people with ASD having an age range of 16–18 years (pen portraits for each of the young people can be found in Appendix 3). Four young people were White British and 3 belonged to 3 ethnic groups, Philippino British, Latin American, and Black African respectively. Six of the young people had a statement of SEN (see Table 4).
- 6 parents of the young people participants, comprising 5 mothers and 1 father (see Table 5). One parent declined to participate in the research study.
- 7 professionals from education and social care disciplines and the voluntary services sector across adults and children's services (see Table 3). The length of service in their current professional roles ranged from 0.5 to more than 10 years (see Table 6).

Table 4: Young people participant details²

Young person's pseudonym	Age	Gender (M/F)	Diagnosis	Statement of special educational needs (Y/N)	School attended Pre-transition	Ethnicity	Year group transitioned from school	Course enrolled on
Zane	16	M	Asperger's syndrome	Y	Local mainstream secondary school	White British	Year 14	Mechanics and Engineering English BTEC
Max	16	M	Autism	Y	Out-of-borough mainstream secondary school	Philippino British	Year 11	Car Mechanics
Hailey	16	F	Autism	Y	Local mainstream school	White British	Year 11	Information Computer Technology (ICT)
William	18	M	Autism with severe learning difficulties	Y	Out-of-borough independent specialist sixth form	Black African	Year 14	Personal and social development course
Sam	16	M	Autism with mild learning difficulties	Y	Local specialist secondary school	Latin American	Year 11	Personal and social development course
Tom	16	M	Autism with mild learning difficulties	N	Out-of-borough mainstream secondary school	White British	Year 11	Personal and social development course
Marvin	18	M	Autism with mild learning difficulties	Y	Local school-based specialist sixth form	White British	Year 13	Employment preparation course

² Demographic information gathered from FE college database and Young People and Parent Participant interviews.

Table 5: Parent participant details

Parent participant	Gender (M/F)	Ethnicity
Parent 1	F	White British
Parent 2	M	White British
Parent 3	F	White British
Parent 4³	F/M	Latin American
Parent 5	F	White British
Parent 6	F	White British

³ Parents speak English as an additional language and therefore both parents requested joint participation in the interview.

Table 6: Services that support transitions participants

Participant number	Gender (M/F)	Service	Employer	Number of years in current role	Children or adult services	Client age group
Professional 1	F	Preparing for Adulthood Co-ordinator	Local authority	10+	Adult services	14–25
Professional 2	F	Learning Manager	FE college	6–10	Adult services	16–25
Professional 3	F	Transition Co-ordinator Manager	Specialist secondary school	10+	Children services	11–19
Professional 4	M	Course Leader	FE college	6–10	Adult services	17–25
Professional 5	F	Parent Participation Officer	Voluntary organisation	6–10	Children services	0–25
Professional 6	F	Transitions Social Worker	Social care	0–5	Adult Services	16-24
Professional 7	F	Deputy Head / Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator	Mainstream secondary school	0–5	Children Services	11-18

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the University College London, Institute of Education Psychology and Human Development Department Ethics Committee in May 2014, and further clearance was received in November 2014 (see Appendix 4). The planning and implementation of the current study was conducted under the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009) and consideration was given to gaining informed consent, the right to withdraw and confidentiality of participants (which will be discussed in subsequent sections). These issues were of particular relevance to this research study due to the vulnerability of the participants recruited. The researcher reflected on these issues with research supervisors prior to and during the commencement of this study.

3.7. Gaining assent or consent from the participants

In order to support the understanding and capacity of young people to make an informed decision about participating in this study and to prepare them for their interview, the researcher prepared two versions of simplified age-appropriate information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix 5). One of the forms was pictorial and the other was text-based utilising clear fonts and well-spaced text. Each young person was given a consent form during both briefing meetings, on which they were required to tick or circle their responses.

Professionals and parents were all given relevant information to support them in making an informed decision about their participation in this study (please refer to professional invitation email and consent form in Appendix 6). Written consent for their personal involvement was obtained at the point

of their interview. In this study informed (verbal) consent was seen as a continuous process that continued throughout the study's duration. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded about the purpose of the study and they were asked if they still wanted to participate (King & Horrocks, 2010). It was also made clear to all participants that they had the right to stop or withdraw from the study at any point during their interview (BPS, 2009). No forms of deception were used in this research and therefore participants were informed that their interview would be used in the write-up of the study. Furthermore, none of the participants seemed distressed by their participation in this study. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality within all of the transcripts and within the final write-up of the study. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide a pseudonym for reference purposes in this research (BPS, 2009). For young people who had difficulties with this concept, the researcher assigned pseudonyms within the write-up of this research study. Audiotape recordings and interviews were saved as secure electronic files and manual data was kept under lock and key.

3.8. Including the views of young people within research

Tisdall et al. (2009) highlight that although it is important to involve the voice of young people with ASD in research, there can be significant challenges to achieving this. This is often the case as young people with ASD are perceived to have a literal interpretation of language, inflexible thoughts, restricted interests, and social interaction difficulties (APA, 2013; Frith, 2003). In addition, Beresford et al., (2004) note that sometimes young people with ASD show little motivation to interact and lack of motivation for the research topic, and have difficulties understanding their emotions or the concept of time. Because of these difficulties, in research the views of young

people are only obtained from those who are most able to respond, those who are higher-functioning or those with physical difficulties (Beresford et al., 2004).

Beresford et al., (2004) advocate the value of including young people with ASD in research and providing information to participants in a format that they can access. Preece (2002) specifically promotes the use of assisted technology, photos, visuals and talking mats to facilitate accessing young people's views. These techniques can also help with gaining additional information which cannot be easily retrieved by using interview techniques alone (Preece, 2002). However, Germain (2004) points out that there are many practical, legal and ethical implications that need to be considered by researchers. These include ways to determine the mental capacities of young people with ASD, and Germain also observes that taking decisions on and determining a young person's best interests can be difficult to define.

3.9. The mental capacities of the young people participants

The researcher sought to view each young person as autonomous and capable of participating in this study (Fraser, Alderson, & Pattman, 2004; HM Government, 2005b; Tisdall et al., 2009). However, in reality there are multiple complexities involved in conducting research with young people with ASD who are considered vulnerable adults and have a limited 'mental capacity' (HM Government, 2005b). This raises a number of issues in relation to gaining young people's informed consent without their parents' knowledge and agreement. A further difficulty noted by Tisdall et al. (2009) is that young people's decisions to participate in research are often constrained by 'gatekeepers,' namely their parents and other adults who intend to protect them but who at the same time may limit their opportunities

for involvement in research. Given this, the researcher attempted to increase the young persons' ability to understand the purpose and implications of participating in this study by using the three points advocated by Lewis et al., (2004), namely that each young person is

- able to understand information relevant to their decision – this was determined by asking the young person questions about what they were required to do;
- able to communicate a decision – the young person was required to make a decision verbally, by pointing to or ticking their responses, and
- able to retain what is asked of them – the young people were given frequent reminders about the research objectives.

This checklist was used throughout the study to determine how best to support each young person's participation.

3.10. Building rapport

Thomas and O'kane (1998) note that it is important to build effective rapport with young people with ASD to encourage their participation in research.

That was achieved in this study by spending additional time in the FE college to meet with the young people on several occasions to observe and to learn their specific interests prior to conducting their interview. This helped to gain their trust and to alleviate any of their anxieties. The researcher met with each young person in their preferred location within the FE college. An additional benefit of observing the young people within their natural environment was that this allowed the researcher to learn contextual information about the young person, which helped the researcher to respond to their specific needs during their interview.

3.11. Data collection

Regarding the professionals participating in this study, the researcher decided to carry out individual semi-structured interviews instead of facilitating a focus group; this was because of the difficulties encountered when trying to organise a time that all of the professionals could attend, due to their limited availability. These interviews were conducted with professionals prior to conducting interviews with the young people and their parents. Conducting the interviews in this order had informed the interview schedules for the latter participants and ensured that the questions asked were relevant to the local context of this study. A demographic questionnaire was designed by the researcher to gain further information about the professionals participating in this study. This gave details about their professional role, their employer, and the number of years they had worked for their service (please see Appendix 7).

The researcher devised semi-structured interviews for each group of participants to obtain the necessary information required to answer the research questions (see Appendix 8). Each interview was devised around themes identified from previous research, and questions were constructed so that they covered the full transition process. Interviews included questions that covered four time points, that is, before, during and after the young person's transition and their future transitions upon leaving the FE college.

The interview schedules covered the following themes:

- views, experiences and emotions pertaining to the different stages of the transition process;
- services involved during the transition process;
- factors that prevent or support the successful transition into FE college;
- implementation of the Local and National policies and

- services working in partnership with young people and their parents.

3.11.1. Semi-structured interview design

Semi-structured interviews were created for each group of participants as this was the most appropriate method to achieve the research objective (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Mertens, 2015). An advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they tend to resemble a free-flowing conversation, which encourages participants to speak openly and freely about a topic whilst ensuring that the questions asked link with the overall research aims (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Furthermore, this method has a degree of flexibility, which enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions and to respond to the individual experiences of each participant. It is believed that this process permits new and unexpected themes to emerge during data collection. King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that conducting face-to-face qualitative semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to build rapport with participants. In addition, the researcher is able to observe and respond sensitively to participants' non-verbal responses and to encourage participation. Lewis and Porter (2004) highlight that face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to respond to the varying language levels of the young people participating therein.

The disadvantage of using semi-structured interviews with young people is the possible effect the researcher may have on the participants due to the power imbalance between the researcher and the young person (Holland, Renold, Ross, & Hillman, 2010). The researcher attempted to overcome this by employing the following strategies advocated by previous research (Dockrell, Lewis, & Lindsay, 2000; Lewis & Porter, 2004; Tisdall et al., 2009):

- encourage participants to answer questions openly and honestly and ensuring consistency in the approach across all the interviews;
- encourage participants to ask for clarification when unsure of questions posed;
- emphasise that there is not a right answer to questions asked;
- use active listening and avoid verbal and non-verbal responses that might influence the responses of participants.

In addition, Gillham (2005) notes that face-to-face semi-structured interviews tend to be time-consuming as they involve several processes. These include the development of an interview schedule, piloting and refining questions, and travelling to participants' locations, together with data transcription and analysis.

3.11.2. Pilot study

A pilot study was undertaken to inform the development of the final design and interview techniques used by the researcher within the final study (King & Horrocks, 2010). Pilot interviews were carried out with one parent and with one young person who had already made the transition into the FE college. The researcher had also consulted with a member of the Preparing for Adulthood Team and with the LA's Learning Disability Commissioner during this piloting phase. Participants who participated in the pilot study were asked to provide feedback on the interview schedule as well as the interview process (Mertens, 2015).

The pilot study highlighted a number of changes that needed to be made to each group's interview schedule. In general, the wording of questions within the final interview schedule was rephrased when it was noticed that

participants did not understand or misinterpreted questions. The following is an example from the parents' interview schedule:

Pilot interview question: So did you notice any changes in Marvin during that transition period?

Final interview question: Have you noticed any changes in your son/daughter since starting college? (Prompt) In their behaviour, sleep routine, mood?

Additional questions were rephrased to ensure that they were not leading questions and they were open-ended to allow extended responses about the transition process and their experiences in FE college. An example from young persons' interview schedule follows:

Pilot interview question: Are you worried about anything at college?

Final interview question: How are you finding college?

The pilot study identified a number of issues with the interview schedules for the young people, particularly the accessibility and meaningfulness of the language used. It assisted in developing the researcher's overall interviewing style, which was crucial when working with this population. For example, the pilot study highlighted the importance of informing parents of the date and time, which helped to prepare the young people for their interview and the changes that were to take place. Moreover, the young people's participation was supported by focusing on making each young person feel comfortable by discussing their hobbies and interests prior to starting their interview. It was also necessary to allow the young people enough time to process and respond to the questions posed before providing a follow-up question. On other occasions, additional prompts and closed questions helped to refocus the young person on the questions initially asked. Furthermore, piloting the interview schedule was an opportunity to test the order of questions. Indeed,

as an result of this pilot, the researcher re-ordered some of the questions to ensure that they followed in a logical order to allow the exploration of each phase of the transition process.

Data collection procedures

3.11.3. Specific procedures with young people and their parents

Once parents had responded to the initial invitation letters, the researcher was able to contact parents directly by email or by telephone. On most occasions, the young people were seen on the same day as their parents. When this was not possible because of a parent's work commitments, parents were interviewed within a council building on a date and time that was more convenient for them. The parent and young people interviews took place between December 2014 and January 2015. Interviews with parents lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and interviews with the young people lasted for approximately 15 minutes.

Parents were contacted prior to carrying out any interviews with the young people, in order to remind them of their interview. Interviews with the young people took place within a room that was both quiet and familiar; this was intended to make the young person feel comfortable and safe. The young people were seen without their parents' presence. Nind (2009) notes that interviewing young people with their parents can lead to production of desired characteristics or can inhibit the elicitation of their views. However, young people who were usually supported by an LSA in the FE college were given the option for their LSA to join them during their interview. This was to make the interview as non-threatening as possible. However, all of the young people indicated that they wanted to be interviewed on their own.

Beresford et al. (2004) note that young people with ASD tend to feel uncomfortable when they are required to make direct eye contact. In this study, the researcher decided to sit next to the young people to avoid making direct eye contact and to create a shared poster. The young people were given the option to draw a picture that had a personal relevance to their transition or to answer questions directly. The young people were also given a 'stop' card to use in their interview, to enable each young person to notify the researcher when they wanted to take a break or to end their interview. To support direct participation of young people with varying social, communication and language needs, visuals such as emotion or word cards were used when discussing feelings or to reinforce the questions asked (Fraser et al., 2004; Lewis & Porter, 2004; Westcott & Littleton, 2005).

3.11.4. Specific procedures for professional participants

Professionals were initially contacted via email and they were sent a demographic questionnaire to complete. Interviews were organised at a convenient time and location for them. Most of the interviews took place at the professional's place of work, which gave the researcher the opportunity to observe and join professionals on work-related visits. Interviews were conducted with professionals between October 2014 and November 2015, and each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

3.11.5. Procedures carried out with all participants

Participants were reminded about the objective of the research, their right to withdraw from the study, and their anonymity rights. All participants were thanked for their participation and co-operation during this study and those that requested feedback were informed that they would receive an outline of key research findings, which would be adapted to ensure that it could be

easily accessed by the young people participating in this study. Also, at the conclusion of each interview, the participants were debriefed regarding the overall study objective and how the data collected would be used.

Participants were reminded that they could contact the researcher to discuss this research study further.

3.12. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was the method chosen to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes across data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In deciding upon the appropriate method of data analysis, the strengths and weaknesses of thematic analysis were considered. Braun and Clarke (2006) have provided a rigorous systematic framework of analysis, which is now a widely accepted and acknowledged method of data analysis. One of the main strengths of thematic analysis and reasons for choosing it in this study is the inherent flexibility of this method. According to Braun and Clarke (2013, p.178) thematic analysis 'only provides a method for data analysis; it does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks'.

This suggests that thematic analysis is compatible with the critical realist epistemological and ontological position. However, the flexibility of this method is often criticised by other researchers as 'lacking in substance' and interpretive rigour when compared to other theoretically driven methods such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Grounded Theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mertens, 2015). In favour of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that the identification of themes can be carried out inductively 'bottom up' or deductively 'top down'. First, by using an inductive approach to data analysis, themes are identified without using a pre-existing

framework or theory. Second, using a deductive approach, analysis is mainly driven by the researcher's theoretical and analytical position. The different ways that thematic analysis can be applied suggests that it can be used for both developing theoretical ideas and for comparing data with previous research. Within this research study in the first stage of analysis, the identification of codes and themes was (inductive) based on what was found in the data (Boyatzis, 1998), which allowed for the researcher to remain open and flexible to the emergence of new themes from the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In the second stage of analysis, the findings from the analysis were considered (deductively) in relation to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). A further advantage of using thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2013), is that this method is relatively easy to learn for those considered to be novice qualitative researchers and it is less labour-intensive than other methods particularly when conducting a time-limited research project (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) further suggest that thematic analysis can be used with a small sample size, as in this study, in order to produce a detailed analysis that will answer any research question.

3.12.1. Data analysis process

The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) systematic six phases of thematic analysis, which provided the researcher with an analytic guide to analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013) advocate that thematic analysis is not a 'linear' process but a recursive process, which allows the researcher to revisit previous phases throughout the entire analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The young people participating in this study varied in their language and

communication abilities and the extent to which they were able to elaborate on their responses (Germain, 2004; Nind, 2009; Shepherd, 2015). A few of the young people tended to give limited responses whereas others were able to form extended sentences. For this reason the thematic analysis undertaken within this study was both at the semantic (explicit) and the latent (interpretative) level. The researcher sought to provide a deeper level of analysis at the latent level by creating themes that went beyond what was explicitly stated in order to interpret the ideas, assumptions, and concepts underpinning the data (King & Horrocks, 2010). Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (2006; 2013) are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) six stages of thematic analysis

<p>Phase 1 Familiarisation with the Data</p>	<p>The researcher proceeded with the analysis by becoming reasonably 'immersed' and familiar with the data through listening to the audio data shortly after conducting each interview. All the audio data was fully transcribed verbatim. After a full verbatim transcription was carried out of each interview audio recording, datasets were then read and re-read on several occasions. Notes were made based on ideas that were both of relevance and of interest to the researcher.</p>
<p>Phase 2 Developing Initial Codes</p>	<p>At this stage, initial codes were developed by systematic manual coding of all that was relevant to the research questions within the entire dataset. The data was coded in as many ways as possible, to ensure that the codes captured both the patterns and the essence of the data. The dataset was re-read and the initial codes were revised or discarded if they were ambiguous or irrelevant. As the coding process evolved, data relevant to each code across the datasets was collated in tabular form within an electronic document (Saldana, 2013).</p>

<p>Phase 3</p> <p>Identification of Overarching Themes, Main Themes and Sub-themes</p>	<p>All of the coded data extracted from the individual interviews were grouped together under identified overarching themes, main themes and subthemes. At this stage, a visual thematic map was created to aid the exploration, organisation and combining of codes into overarching themes, themes and subthemes. To ensure accuracy of the researcher's analysis of the data, three transcripts from each group (can be found in Appendix 9) were given to a fellow trainee educational psychologist who also manually coded the data and generated a list of codes. Both researchers' lists of codes were compared, revised, and discussed until codes and themes that best fitted the data were agreed upon (Yardley, 2000). After the researcher had analysed each dataset separately (for parents and professionals), the researcher searched across all datasets in order to identify repeated patterns of meaning, similarities and differences between each group of datasets. The researcher had then identified themes that were evident across the entire data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2013).</p>
<p>Phase 4 Refinement of Themes</p>	<p>Refining the emergent themes comprised a quality control check employed at this stage. Each theme was re-checked for a match with the coded data extracts, which ensured that the themes captured the meaning of the data. The researcher also wrote a description for each theme, which helped to reorganise and collapse themes to ensure they encompassed the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A list of overarching themes, themes and subthemes was taken into supervision sessions with research supervisors who possess extensive experience in qualitative research.</p>

<p>Phase 5</p> <p>Development of Final Themes</p>	<p>The researcher attended three sessions of supervision to discuss interpretations of the data, whether the themes worked across all of the data, and the themes were linked to the research questions and to the academic literature. Discussing and re-reading the themes helped to develop clearer theme names. The criteria for including and determining the importance of a theme were based on whether it answered the research question rather than how frequently it was recorded within the data. Once the themes were agreed with the research supervisors, the visual thematic map was revised accordingly.</p>
<p>Phase 6 Writing the Research Report and Data Presentation</p>	<p>This final phase involved writing up the research report that encompassed the visual thematic map that represented each theme alongside the data interpretation.</p>

3.13. The validity of this study

In this thesis, the term *validity* is used to refer to the plausibility, credibility and trustworthiness of this study. The researcher sought to improve the quality of this research by maximising its validity through the application of Yardley's (2000, 2008) four validity principles. These principles consist of the following: 'sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and the impact and importance of the study' (Yardley, 2000, p. 219). Yardley's (2000) criterion was chosen by the researcher because the principles therein are theoretically neutral and flexible, which means they can be applied to all forms of qualitative research methods and data analysis approaches. These criteria therefore complement the researcher's critical realist epistemological stance and use of thematic analysis. The researcher therefore consciously attempted to apply Yardley's criteria throughout the research process, and the manner of achieving this is outlined below.

3.13.1. Sensitivity to context

The researcher attempted to situate the findings of this research within the context of where the data was collected, by providing an overview of the LA and FE college contexts. The researcher remained sensitive to the context by including and expanding upon previous research and relevant theoretical perspectives. This led to the development of new research questions about the participants' views on the transition process into the FE college. The researcher was sensitive to the participants' perspectives and developed an interview guide that allowed participants to openly share their views (Thomson, 2011). However, it was not possible to gain participant feedback on the analysis of this study, which would have involved taking data and interpretations back to participants to ensure both credibility and interpretive validity of the data. Due to the difficulties experienced in gaining access to the young people within this study, this was deemed inappropriate and difficult to coordinate.

3.13.2. Rigour and commitment

The researcher attempted to provide rigour and commitment in this study by obtaining multiple perspectives from young people, their parents, and professionals. The purpose of collecting data from these three groups of participants was not to validate the views of the young person; it was intended to enrich the analysis by gaining a wider perspective of the transition process. Triangulating the findings across the three datasets also allowed an in-depth exploration of the different factors that affect this transition process (Willig, 2001) .

3.13.3. Transparency and coherence

The researcher provided a transparent account of how the data was

collected and analysed by ensuring that the interpretations of the data captured the meaning of the participants' responses, and direct quotations from the participants' data within the research findings are provided in the write-up of this study. Analysis included verifying the coding of the data with a fellow researcher, to reduce subjectivity whilst ensuring inter-rater reliability of the data analysis process (Smith, 2008). The researcher paid careful attention to reporting data that disconfirmed the emergent themes. This involved systematically searching through the data to identify any deviant cases that were contrary to the researcher's aims and interpretations of the data (Yardley, 2000). Such instances have been reported in the write-up of this study. The researcher attempted to report an accurate account of participants, by engaging in reflectivity throughout this research project. This is illustrated by the researcher's reflections on the reasons for conducting this research, choice of the research design, and interpretations of the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

3.13.4. Impact and importance

The impact and importance of this study is that it has given voice to the experiences of young people with ASD regarding their transition into the FE college. Additionally, all of the data collected has implications for those supporting young people with ASD during their transition. These are detailed further in Chapter 6.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of this research study. First, a summary of each dataset will be outlined and then analysis from children's, parents' and professionals' data will be outlined.

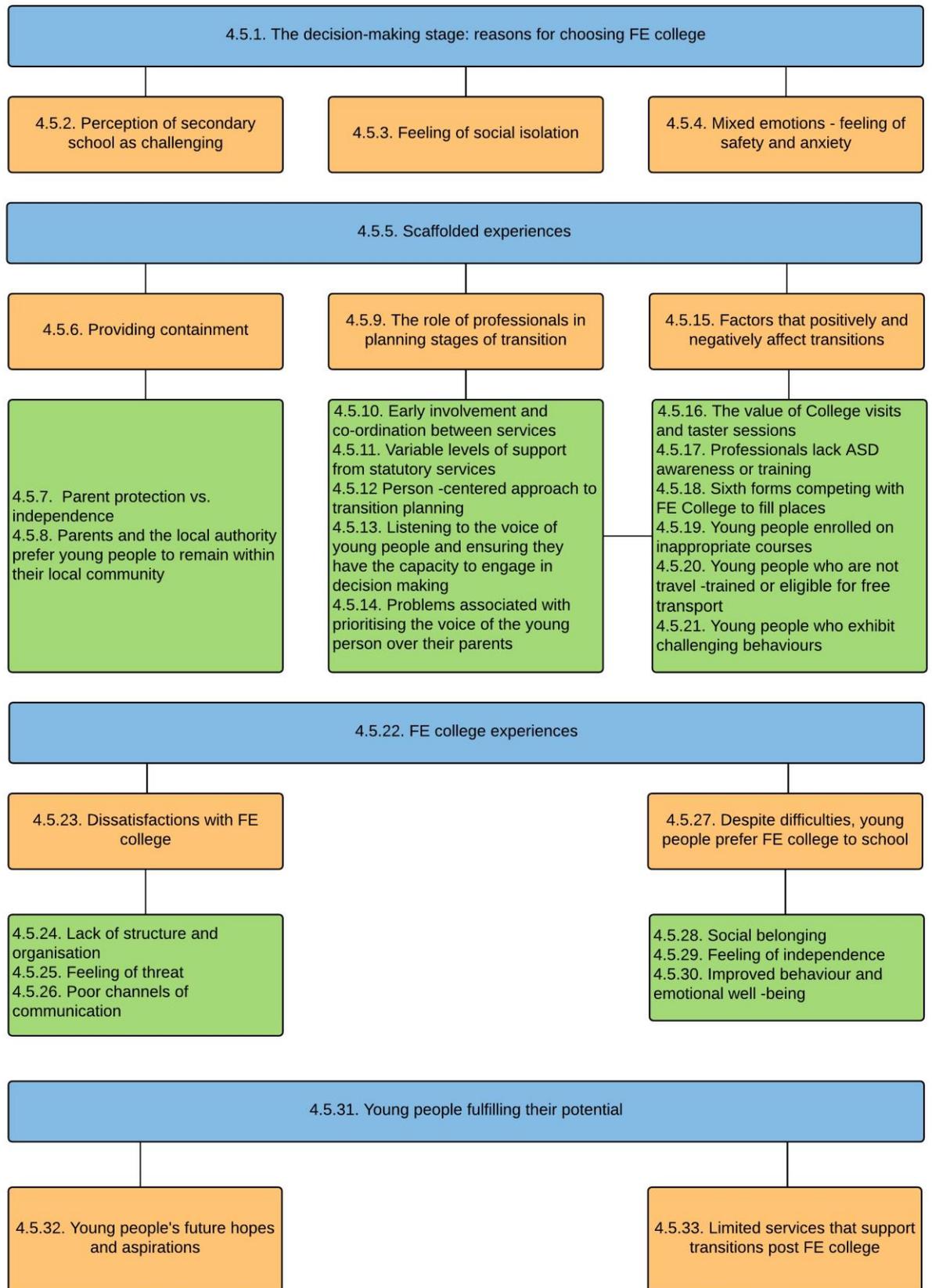
As discussed in section 3.11.1 a thematic analysis was conducted for each dataset (for the young people, parents and transition services). It was initially intended that analysis for each dataset would be completed separately.

However, during analysis it became apparent that many of the themes were relevant to most participants. The themes presented in Figure 1. represent the data of all participants. Throughout this section it will be highlighted when the views are specific to a particular group of participants. It also became apparent during analysis there were differences between the experiences of young people who had attended a mainstream school and the experiences of those who had attended a specialist provision. Similarly, there were differences between the experiences of young people who had enrolled on mainstream vocational courses and the experiences of those enrolled on specialist courses in the FE college. Throughout this section, relevant examples of these differences and similarities will be highlighted. Quotations from the interviews are presented to support each theme and to compare the different issues or perspectives within the data.

The thematic map, in Figure 1. provides an illustration of the overarching themes (in blue), main themes (in orange) and subthemes (in green) that emerged from the data. Although the themes are distinct they are also

interconnected: the significant connections have been illustrated by the vertical/ horizontal lines between the overarching themes, themes and subthemes.

Figure1: Thematic map for young people’s, parents’ and professional data



4.2. Summary from young people's data

The findings from the young people's data suggested that many of the young people who had attended a mainstream secondary school did not want to continue into the school sixth form. This was due to experiencing ongoing social and academic difficulties in school, such as being bullied, not feeling as if they fitted in and not understanding the relevance of studying the mandatory subjects provided in secondary education. The young people's accounts suggested that their parents played an important role in supporting their transition: parents took a proactive role in gathering information on post-16 provisions and they were responsible for training the young people in how to travel independently to FE college. Upon transitioning into FE college, the young people's narratives suggested that they had experienced many difficulties. For example, with coping with the unstructured times of the day, particularly the long lunch breaks, and with not having a designated space within the FE college where they could go to be on their own or to calm down when feeling stressed or anxious. Further, the young people who had transitioned onto mainstream courses in FE college had suggested that there was a lack of organisation and adaptations made in order to meet their learning and social needs. Despite these difficulties, the young people seemed to prefer being in FE college because they were given the opportunity to study subjects that had a clear link with their interests, strengths and future aspirations.

4.3. Summary from parents' data

Parents' accounts suggested that during the pre-transition stage they had felt unsure of where to find information pertaining to local FE provisions. Further, parents suggested that little information is readily available on what

courses FE colleges deliver and their admissions criteria. Parents felt that there was a lack of support from special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and other professionals during the early decision-making stage. Parents of young people attending mainstream schools had highlighted that they had concerns about their young person's transition into FE college, and that there was a lack of communication and updates from staff about their young person's progress and about the daily changes made in FE college.

4.4. Summary from professionals' data

Professionals' narratives indicated that young people's transition into FE college could be greatly improved. The main strategy promoted by professionals to improve the success of young people's transition is the use of person-centred planning principles, which can be used to develop transition plans and outcomes that are tailored to meet the young person's future needs and aspirations. Professionals had highlighted that the SEND code of practice has provided valuable guidance on ways to improve the transition process, for example the use of different augmentative methods or the use of an Independent Mental Capacity Advocate to obtain the views of young people. A difficulty raised by professionals in implementing the SEND code of practice guidance is that very often professionals have a lack of time which means they are unable to carry out recommendations. Professionals highlighted that a further difficulty they have in supporting young people's successful transition is the fact they have not received ASD-specific training. Professionals felt that receiving this training would better inform their practice and the decisions being made to support young people with ASD during this time of major change.

4.5. Overview of the Overarching Themes

Four overarching themes emerged from the data (as illustrated in thematic map figure 1.) which will be discussed in turn:

- 4.5.1. the decision-making stage: reasons for choosing FE college
- 4.5.5. scaffolded experiences
- 4.5.5. experiences in FE college
- 4.5.11. young people's fulfilment of their potential.

4.5.1. The decision-making stage: reasons for choosing FE college

This overarching theme refers to the reasons why young people and their parents had decided to choose their local FE college. This theme also discusses parents' and their young person's perceptions of secondary school, which had also influenced their decision. Then the emotions the young people had experienced at the point of leaving school are explored.

Three main themes emerged from this overarching theme:

- 4.5.2. Perception of secondary school as challenging
- 4.5.3. Feeling of social isolation
- 4.5.4. Mixed emotions – feeling of safety and anxiety.

Each of these will be discussed in order to answer research questions 1 and 2.

Research question 1: What are the views and experiences of young people with ASD transitioning into further education?

Research question 2: What are the views of parents regarding this transition?

4.5.2. Perception of secondary school as challenging

This main theme refers to both the parents' and young people's data, which suggested that a few of the young people found many aspects of secondary school life challenging. The young people who were educated within a

mainstream school reported that they did not like or understand the relevance of studying subjects that did not have a clear link with their interests. A few of the young people felt dissatisfied with their school subjects and described them as 'pointless' or 'tedious'. A few of the young people gave the clear impression that they did not like and felt misunderstood by their subject teachers; this seemed to have a negative impact on their overall school experience. Furthermore, several of the young people reported that they found both the pace and the demands of academic studies, especially during their GCSEs, challenging. These secondary experiences seemed to have negatively influenced their decision when they were considering post-16 provision. Similar to the young people's data, parents of young people attending mainstream provisions indicated that based on their young person's past experiences they did not feel their young person would cope with the increased academic demands of completing A levels. Parent narratives also suggested that many of the difficulties the young people had experienced at school were contributed to by typical characteristics associated with their ASD diagnosis. For example, having difficulties interpreting language, heightened levels of anxiety, and difficulties completing literacy-based tasks. For these reasons, parents indicated that they felt their young person would be more suited to vocational learning rather than taking A Levels within a school sixth form.

None of the young people who had attended a specialist school or sixth form prior to their transition reported experiencing any difficulties during this time.

"I liked it at [names school sixth form] because I was well ... I was nice and kind." – **William** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

"I liked it at [names school] all the teachers were nice and I got used to it there." – **Sam** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

A young person who had attended a local mainstream school commented:

“I don't feel that I learned anything [at school] and I doubted myself many times; the class I hated the most during the GCSEs was probably Resistant Materials which was the closest thing that would of come to engineering but I did not like it at all.” – Zane (enrolled on an engineering vocational course)
A young person who had attended an out-of-borough mainstream secondary school said:

“Some teachers are annoying [at school], they get on your nerves sometimes, they like shout at you and stuff I did not want to see [names teacher] again.” – Max (enrolled on a car mechanics course)

“We made the decision not to do A levels, based more on the fact that Zane is quite literal. He finds exam taking very, very stressful; and I didn't ever feel it was reflecting his ability. I thought that where he will remember facts he doesn't always know how to use those facts in a practical manner ...” –

Parent 1

It was highlighted by parents that although the school sixth form was not the right place for their young person, they knew their young person would benefit from remaining in education.

“I think with people like Marvin he needs as much education as he can get because it's just a slow, slow progression towards the idea of independence.” – Parent 6

Parents indicated that FE college offers a wider range of vocational courses, which links with the young person's future aspirations.

“There's not a lot in [borough] and you're very limited if you're on the autistic spectrum so we decided to choose our local college, because she is very good with computers and she'd love to learn computer graphics in the future.” – Parent 3

Another parent commented:

“Because he can’t read and write we sent him to college because they do these special needs courses, like the living and working skills courses which teach them practical skills and basic reading and writing.” – Parent 5

4.5.3. Feeling of social isolation

This subtheme represents the parent and young people’s data, which indicated that a few of the young people who had attended mainstream school felt socially isolated and “*lonely*” within this environment. Some of the young people had also highlighted that they had experienced bullying and found managing social conflict, particularly within their break times, difficult. A young person who had attended a local mainstream school said:

“I found it a bit difficult talking to others ... I spent my lunchtimes walking in the playground on my own.” – Hailey (enrolled on a ICT vocational course)

A young person who had attended an out-of-borough mainstream school said:

“Not many people liked me they called me psycho and crazy and stuff, everyone I tried to talk to they got rude to me or just don’t understand what I’m like ...” – Tom (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

One parent said:

“I think he was bullied, when he was younger he was bullied a lot more at secondary, so it’s always been a concern with us ... The good thing is he was never beaten up. I was always scared that somebody was going to hit him or something like that, but that never really happened.” – Parent 2

4.5.4. Mixed emotions – feeling of safety and anxiety

This theme refers to the young people’s data: many of the young people indicated that they had mixed emotions about leaving secondary school/

sixth form. On the one hand the young people described feeling “*excited*” about leaving school and having the opportunity to make a fresh start. On the other hand the young people’s data also indicated that they were initially “*scared*”, “*worried*” and “*nervous*” about the prospect of transitioning into a new and bigger environment. The young people’s narratives suggested that they had felt safe and secure in their earlier environment because they had become familiar with the school routine, their teachers and their peers.

“I felt grown up when I was leaving school but I felt sad that I was finished not being able to see the same people every day at school anymore.” –

Hailey (enrolled on an ICT vocational course)

“I did not really like that school much and to be honest I am glad I'm gone. I ran out of school saying yes finally at home and I can go to college and everything will be different.” – Tom (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“I was briefly nervous and actually it felt like this because it was new and then maybe after a week it was easy and then at the end I actually felt quite excited.” – Zane (enrolled on an engineering vocational course)

“I felt worried because I left [names sixth form].” – William (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

4.5.5. Scaffolded experiences

This overarching theme refers to the support the young people received during the planning and/ or during their actual transition into FE college, in the form of national and LA policies, from their parents or transition services.

Three main themes emerged from this overarching theme:

- 4.5.5. Providing containment
- 4.5.9. The role of professionals in the planning stages of transition

- 4.5.15. Factors that positively and negatively affect transitions. These themes will be discussed in order to answer research question 3, 4 and 5.

Research question 3: What supports or hinders access and the successful transition of young people with ASD into FE college?

Research question 4: What are the roles of professionals in supporting young people with ASD with their transition into FE college?

Research question 5: What are the views of parents and professionals on national and local initiatives that exist in relation to this transition process?

4.5.6. Providing containment

It emerged from all three data sets that parents and professionals aim to provide a sense of containment (safety) for young people when transitioning into FE college. Both parents and professionals have identified that young people with ASD are potentially vulnerable during this time and will need additional support to ensure their smooth transition. Two subthemes link to this main theme:

- 4.5.7. Parent protection vs independence
- 4.5.8. Parents and the local authority prefer young people to remain within their local community.

4.5.7. Parent protection vs independence

The data obtained in this study suggested that parents' ultimate goal is to protect their young person whilst ensuring they are able to develop their independence skills. Several of the young people reported that they had valued the support received from their parents during the early planning

stages of their transition into FE college. The young people's accounts highlighted that their parents had mainly supported them when deciding on appropriate post-16 provision and courses. However, the parent and professional data also highlighted the tensions between parents providing support and giving their young person the opportunity to make decisions autonomously. For example, the professionals' data suggested that parents who are overprotective sometimes prevent their young person from transitioning into FE college because they are fearful about their young person's safety within this environment.

"((meow)) I suspect it was something known as my mum, she suggested an employment preparation course at [names college]." – **Marvin** (enrolled on an employment preparation course)

"My mum really, coz she thought it would be a good start-off, I went college coz I was kind of bad at my reading, writing and my spelling so she thought personal development course would help me." – **Tom** (enrolled on a personal social development course)

A few professionals highlighted that the local FE college used to have a negative reputation prior to the changes made to the college; this reputation had deterred many parents from encouraging their young person to choose this environment.

"Parents had negative perceptions of how it was previously, a lack of security with regard to the campus, that timetables weren't personalised, they didn't take into consideration that their needs may be different and previously these life skills and independent skills courses weren't taught ..."
– **Professional 6** (social care)

Another professional commented:

"They [young people] want to go to [name of college], they want the change but their parents don't want them to because they are worried about their

safety. A lot of parents think that their young person is going to be attacked by young people in hoodies.” – Professional 3 (specialist school)

One parent said:

“I also wanted to make sure he was going to be safe. The engineering department has got a bit of a reputation at the level one stage. There are a lot of guys with testosterone walking around at level one, some of them don’t have the best education or backgrounds ...” – Parent 1

Another parent commented:

“We’re too worried a lot of the time about letting them have their independence, it’s just what if, what if. You hear all the things in the paper, hate crime, so you tend to be far too careful and cautious, but they’ve got to have that chance to develop, otherwise they’re never going to ...” – Parent 3

4.5.8. Parents and the local authority prefer young people to remain within their local community

This subtheme refers to the parents’ and the LA’s preference for young people with ASD to be educated locally. Parents said that during the decision-making stage they wanted to ensure that their young person would remain living in their local community and within the family home. However, a few parents said that they felt there were limited post-16 options available locally that could appropriately meet their young person’s learning needs and interests. The professionals and parents’ data highlighted that the main benefits of young people remaining in their locality is that they are able to learn independent travel skills and to form lasting relationships with those living in their community. Furthermore, professionals highlighted that with the recent changes to national and local policies, they now have a duty to promote local provisions as this makes financial savings for the LA.

“Problem with residential is after two or three years they come back into [borough], then what? What I think is the big advantage of your local college is that they make those friendship groups, those social groups, they try things out locally, when college finishes it won't just be a black hole.” –

Parent 6

“There was no way she could travel to [out-of-borough provision], because we felt it was important to be close to home so she can do independent travel, which she's only recently started doing.” – Parent 3

“It is important to his dad and me that he went to college that is close, so I can pick him up if anything ...” – Parent 4

Professionals highlighted that prior to the changes made to the LA policy, many young people with complex needs had transitioned to out-of-borough residential colleges.

“Normally the vast majority of my clients will go on to residential college, and with it being a residential college it's quite often not within the local area.” –

Professional 6 (social care)

“We would ideally want that placement to be as close to their home borough as possible in order to support sustainable outcomes for the future in terms of community access, friendships, engagement in various different activities in the borough.” Professional 1 (local authority)

“It's really expensive to fund young people to go out of borough and it is better for them to be within their local community close to their families. But FE colleges are not for everybody.” Professional 5 (voluntary agency)

4.5.9. The role of professionals in the planning stages of transition

The role of professionals in the planning stages of transition is a main theme that links to the overarching theme of scaffolded experiences. Five subthemes were identified from this theme:

- 4.5.10. Early involvement and co-ordination between services;
- 4.5.11. Variable levels of support from statutory services;
- 4.5.12. Person-centred approach to transition planning;
- 4.5.13. Listening to the voice of young people and ensuring they have the capacity to engage in decision making;
- 4.5.14. Problems associated with prioritising the voice of the young person over their parents.

4.5.10. Early involvement and co-ordination between services

This subtheme refers to professional and parent data which highlighted the importance of statutory services becoming involved in the early planning stages of the transition process, and for this support to be co-ordinated between services. It was emphasised that professionals play an important role in planning and preparing paperwork, which needs to be transferred to adult services and the FE college. Professionals also play a significant role in directing families to information and appropriate statutory and community services, to enable them to make informed decisions. Furthermore, the data suggests that professionals' early involvement allows sufficient time to identify any potential barriers to the young person's transition. This then gives FE college staff enough time to make adaptations and modifications to the curriculum and physical environment in order to support the young person's successful transition and inclusion at college. Professionals acknowledged in their responses the importance and value of co-ordinating with other services. The professionals highlighted the benefits of implementing EHC plans which facilitate co-ordination between services

across all sectors, but due to the poor economic climate, where there have been large cuts to LA budgets and local services, professionals' responses indicated that they do not always have the time or capacity to co-ordinate with other services.

"The whole point of becoming involved at that early stage is to give us the time to conduct the assessments, to assess eligibility, to identify what adult service are needed, and then to plan the service and set appropriate goals..." – **Professional 6** (social care)

This professional contributed a lot to this topic and said:

"... not a criticism of other teams because we work closely with them and they're good at what they do, it's a criticism of implementing a policy that there isn't the money or the time to implement ..." – **Professional 6** (social care)

"So we now look at everything, right from health, the education, the family, the community, we look at all of the areas of that young person's life, so we are in a position now to be able to identify where there are difficulties ..." – **Professional 1** (local authority)

A professional indicated that one of the most important and most valued roles in the early planning stages of transition is that of an educational psychologist.

"A young person should be seen by an Ed psych in sufficient time to enable the young person and the parents to make an informed choice about what is the appropriate placement, whether that be college, sixth form, supported apprenticeship or whatever it may be." – **Professional 5** (voluntary agency)

However, parents of young people attending mainstream schools indicated that they received little support during the planning stages of their young person's transition.

“They [the services] could have helped him more instead of putting it all down to me. I think the school could have prepared him a bit better and got services involved in the early and they didn’t, they just didn’t really bother. So he was like left to his own devices ...” – Parent 5

Parents indicated that there was a lack co-ordination between professionals during the planning stages of the young person’s transition.

“We had a [annual review] meeting and none of the professionals turned up, the SENCo just read reports from the speech and language therapist and educational psychologist, the meeting seemed pointless to me.” – Parent 2

4.5.11. Variable levels of support from statutory services

This subtheme refers to the data which suggested that young people with ASD tend to receive variable levels of support from statutory services.

Professionals and parents indicated that, in their opinion, there is an inequality in the services received by young people across the ASD spectrum. This data indicated that young people attending specialist provisions tend to have recognised needs and receive greater levels of support than young people attending a mainstream school or those who have a diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome. Similarly, parents of young people attending specialist provisions recognised that they had more of an advantage than families with children in mainstream schools.

“If he went to a mainstream school we would have been dependent on the special needs coordinator who does not always have the information, or in fact I think very often those are the youngsters who suffer most, whereas at least at special schools they’re really looked after.” – Parent 6

Another parent of a young person who attended a specialist school prior to transition commented:

“We got a lot of help at [name of specialist school]; there were so many people we could turn to.” – Parent 4

Conversely, parents of young people attending mainstream schools did not feel their young person’s transition was well supported.

“In that transition period I would have thought that there should be a lot more support considering they really want to give young people that opportunity and not lose sight of young people.” – Parent 2

A few professionals highlighted that young people with ASD who are considered higher-functioning can be at a disadvantage at the point of their transition even though it is recognised that many of these young people experience similar difficulties to young people with complex needs.

“It’s such a wide-ranging spectrum, in some ways a young person with high-functioning autism or Asperger’s who actually are academically really able but socially really struggle, and unfortunately because they are so bright the system doesn’t cater in terms of offering them support.” – Professional 5

(voluntary agency)

Another professional commented:

“Students with ASD who are high-functioning, they tend to get lumped in with the rest of students with special needs: really, I think it’s all about time and resources, as always. If a family seems like they’ve got it all under control, then we kind of leave them to it really ...” – Professional 7

(mainstream school)

Professionals indicated that parents often have to act as an advocate for their young person to get the support that they require during their transition.

“If you’re not on that phone making demands, nobody’s going to be necessarily throwing services at you, so you do sometimes feel that there are some families that get so much because they are far more

knowledgeable, experienced, potentially a legal background ...” –

Professional 1 (local authority)

None of the young people mentioned that they had received any form of support from statutory or voluntary services during their transition.

4.5.12. Person-centred approach to transition planning

This subtheme refers to the data that highlight the benefits of using a person-centred approach during transition planning. Professional responses suggested that although young people with ASD share similar intrinsic characteristics, “*one size does not fit all*”, and therefore consideration should be given to the young person’s individual needs, views and wishes. The professionals reported that such an approach enhances the transition planning stage and improves the support received within FE college and in adulthood.

“I think it’s about knowing the individual young person and tailoring the process for them so it is truly person-centred really, but I think it’s always helpful to have an open dialogue with the college, with the tutor so you know how the young person is going to settle.” – Professional 3 (specialist school)

Professionals also indicated that sometimes the LA’s policies restrict their ability to tailor plans to the young person’s needs.

“I think they need to be person-centred, very person-centred, and my concern with [LA] policies is that they are quite generic and so it’s like okay, well this is [LA] policy, therefore we expect all young people to do this, whether or not it is the right thing for them.” – Professional 5 (voluntary agency)

Parents highlighted that outside agencies often had little knowledge about their young person.

“We had a careers person come in to the school [annual review] meeting when she was in Year 11 and they didn’t have a clue about Hailey and that really annoyed me.” – Parent 3

Parents felt that there is still room for improvement to ensure that transition plans are person-centred and draw on the young person’s strengths and wishes.

“Perhaps drawing up some kind of wants or needs list with the child, but in a very informal non-pressurised way then they might learn actually you really like animals don’t you or you’re showing an interest in so and so, perhaps this should go on the list.” – Parent 6

4.5.13. Listening to the voice of young people and ensuring that they have the capacity to engage in decision making

Listening to the voice of young people and ensuring that they have the capacity to engage in decision making emerged as a dominant subtheme within the data. Both parents and professionals highlighted the importance and value of involving young people in the planning stages of their transition. However, the data also revealed that, because young people with ASD have varying levels of communication skills, gaining their views can be difficult and involves an investment in both time and resources. It was acknowledged by professionals that in best practice, it is important to meet with the young person on several occasions to build sufficient rapport and to gain their views prior to their annual review meeting. However, within the current climate where professionals have limited time and capacity this can be difficult to implement in practice, even though recent policy and guidance

emphasises giving young people greater choice and control over their post-16 provision and the services they feel they would require during the transition period or in adulthood. Many professionals emphasised that despite having gained the views and choices of young people it is not always possible to act upon these views as in reality the choices of young people are often restricted by local policies, budgets, service thresholds and bureaucracy. Parents also described feeling dissatisfied with the way professionals attempted to involve their young person during the decision-making stage of their transition, which on many occasions took place for the first time during annual review meetings.

“We all had to sit round in a very formal situation and the first question they asked him was, ‘Well Marvin, what would you like to do in the future?’ and we all stared at Marvin, sitting round this table, and Marvin was acutely uncomfortable and finally after staring at his feet he growled, ‘How the hell would I know’...” – Parent 6

A few parents reported that their young person had a clear idea of what they wanted to do post-school and they had the ability to communicate their views to all those involved.

“From a very young age he’s known what he wanted to do, so from a very young age we have had this view that he would go into engineering. So, when it came down to GCSE time I think he literally burned his bridges at one stage and said to the A-level department, ‘No, I’m not going to go. I’m going to college’ and that was it.” – Parent 1

A few professionals recognised that the barrier to many young people with ASD being able to contribute to decision making is their anxiety and difficulties communicating with unfamiliar adults.

“Where we are able to establish their views, we will clearly get that view from the young person. But for a young person with autism, if it is about building

relationships with that young person so they are not nervous and to get them to open up ...” – Professional 7 (FE college)

Professionals highlighted that when young people have limited communication skills or are deemed to have a limited mental capacity, professionals are more reliant on those who know the young people best to provide the necessary information during decision making.

“I think often a lot of the young people that I work with, you would question do they have the mental capacity in terms of making those decisions, in which case, you do rely very heavily on the professionals and the family members.” – Professional 4 (FE college)

A few professionals advocated the use of a General Independent Advocate or Mental Capacity Advocate who is trained specifically to elicit the views of the young person and to present them within meetings without any biases.

“An advocate will share just the opinions of the young person. Nothing more, nothing less. Just the opinions. No professional opinion about whether it’s safe. Parents will try and, ‘But wouldn’t it be nice if you did this’ and gently coerce them along” – Professional 6 (social care)

Another professional commented:

“The reality is the choice is really quite restricted because there are policies behind the choice which actually means that the young person’s views aren’t necessarily going to be listened to and aren’t necessarily going to be followed through.” – Professional 3 (specialist school)

4.5.14. Problems associated with prioritising the voice of the young person over their parents

Parent and professional data revealed that there are often problems associated with prioritising the voice of the young person over their parents.

The professionals' data highlighted the necessity of striking the balance of empowering young people to make decisions pertaining to their transition and involving parents throughout the transition process. Furthermore, it was highlighted that parents are often experts on their young person and they play a key role in providing the necessary information to be able to assess the young person's needs. A few parents commented that although they recognise that their young person should be given more opportunities and the freedom to express their views, parents also feel they themselves play an important role in guiding their young person when making important decisions such as deciding on future placements.

"At 16 it's the young person's voice takes precedence over the parents' is a concern for parents because they still tend to advise their young person. I think it's a tricky one and I think that needs to be managed really carefully." –

Professional 5 (voluntary agency)

Another professional commented:

"You'd be a fool not to listen to 18 years of experience and knowledge and just think you know better, it is parents that give you all the information you need to know about a young person to make a thorough assessment."–

Professional 6 (Social care)

A few professionals described how sometimes they have to adopt a mediator role when parents and young people have differences in opinion in order to ensure that decisions reached are in the young person's best interest.

"In listening to the views of the young person sometimes they're different to the views of the parents about placements and you need to listen to both sides and to try to mediate some sort of solution where we can get the best of both worlds." – **Professional 5** (voluntary agency)

A parent highlighted that a further concern with prioritising the young person's voice is that sometimes the young person does not understand the consequence of their decision.

"He is very quick to say yes to a suggestion and not understand the impact of it. So, sometimes I think suggestions were made and he flippantly responded without understanding the impact and I had to get involved." –

Parent 1

A parent commented that some young people still require support when making decisions FE provisions:

"When I explained to him you're interested in cars, but also you're going to be able to keep your bus pass and get your free travel in college he understood. But if I'd said to him 'You need to sit down and decide what college you want to go to', I don't think he would have been able to do that."

– Parent 2

Another parent said:

"We still give him help and tell him what he has to do, he just says yes and no to his teachers and that's all." – **Parent 4**

4.5.15. Factors that positively or negatively affect transitions

This theme is linked to the overarching theme of scaffolded experiences. Six subthemes emerged from this theme:

- 4.5.17. The value of college visits and taster sessions
- 4.5.16. Professionals who lack ASD awareness or training
- 4.5.18. Sixth forms competing with FE colleges to fill places
- 4.5.19. Young people enrolled on inappropriate courses
- 4.5.20. Young people who are not travel-trained or eligible for free transport
- 4.5.21. Young people who exhibit challenging behaviours

4.5.16. The value of college visits and taster sessions

Parent and professional interviews revealed that young people who were able to attend college visits or taster sessions had improved their transition into FE college. Within this local context, it was highlighted that the FE college provides open evenings and parent coffee mornings to all young people with SEN transitioning into this provision. These opportunities help to prepare young people for their eventual move by allowing them to tour the facilities and speak with staff about the courses on offer. Additionally, it emerged from the data that FE college staff had made several changes over the previous year to support the transition of young people with ASD and additional needs into FE college. One of the most significant changes was the development of link courses (taster sessions) for young people who attended local specialist provisions within the borough. The young people were given the opportunity to attend a weekly course at the FE college for a year prior to their transition, which helped to prepare the young people and familiarise them with the college environment. However, young people transitioning from a mainstream school on to a mainstream vocational course within the FE college did not receive this level of support.

“At 15, they all start a link course [taster sessions] for a year and that sort of encourages independent travel, it encourages working as teams, it encourages getting to know the building and facilities, the tutors at the college ...” – **Professional 3** (specialist school)

Another professional commented:

“We’ve got very good transition arrangements for our students, particularly those with complex needs. We are part of the Ambitious about Autism Finished at School project and we have good links with [names of specialist school] and [name of specialist school], which are schools for severe and complex needs.” – **Professional 2** (FE college)

Parents of young people who attended specialist schools highlighted that taster sessions had helped to alleviate both their and their young person's anxiety as well as to prepare them for their eventual transition.

"... it was different subjects and again he was meeting the different teachers who would be teaching him. I mean [name of school] staff came with them, so you've got this face-to-face contact between the college tutors and the school tutors and which made us feel less daunted about his move to college ..." – **Parent 6**

Another parent commented:

"Sam liked the taster sessions at [name of college] and they helped to get him ready to come to college." – **Parent 4**

A parent of a young person who attended mainstream school said:

"I do think there could be more information on that open day for those that want to go into the mainstream part of the college, what's available for them, rather than just talks about the specialist courses." – **Parent 3**

Another parent of a young person who attended a mainstream school commented:

"I would say it wasn't only the level threes [open evening] that went in on that day, so he could have really benefited from that small group time in the summer holidays only meeting the guys on his course." – **Parent 1**

4.5.17. Professionals lack ASD awareness or training

This subtheme refers to professional and parents data which suggest that some professionals lack ASD awareness or training. Professionals highlighted that their current knowledge of ASD was gained from their professional or personal experiences of working with, or parenting, a young person with ASD. A few professionals indicated that they did not feel

qualified or confident enough to provide a service to young people with ASD.

It was apparent from the data that professionals felt that receiving specific ASD training would improve the service that they provide to young people, particularly during their transition.

“... to assume that as a learning disability worker I am equipped to work with individuals with autism is far from the truth. Everything that I have learnt and know about autism is self-taught through my own training and my own research and my own reading and there is no training within the council ...” –

Professional 6 (social care)

“A lot of my knowledge in autism is from having [son’s name] who is transitioning into residential college and he has severe learning difficulties on top of his autism so this has helped me with my work” – **Professional 5**

(voluntary service)

“My knowledge in autism is from my many years of teaching young people on the spectrum and I have learnt a lot from speaking to colleagues in the learning support department.” – **Professional 4** (FE college)

One parent suggested that services involved in supporting their young person’s transition did not have much ASD knowledge.

“Social Services hadn’t really got their act together and they didn’t really know much about people with ASD ...” – **Parent 2**

Other parents did not contribute to this theme.

4.5.18. Sixth forms competing with FE college to fill places

The parent and professional data indicated that a barrier to a young person’s successful transition into FE college is that school-based sixth forms are often in competition with FE colleges to fill places. Professionals reported that traditionally school sixth forms had received additional funding when a

young person with a statement of SEN transitioned into the school sixth form. As a result, many mainstream and specialist sixth forms were reluctant to promote FE college courses even if they were the most appropriate provision for the young person. Parents had also described how they and their young person felt under pressure to enrol their young person onto the school's sixth-form course even though it was understood that their young person would have difficulty achieving the necessary grades.

"The sixth form want the young person to stay on because they get extra funding when they are at that age and the sixth-form staff do not really promote the FE college courses." – **Professional 3** (specialist school)

A parent said:

"At the schools, they want you to stay on, and they want their sixth form filled. But by the same token they're very strict about the criteria for going on to an A-level and I don't think the school really promoted [name of college] very much." – **Parent 1**

Another parent commented:

"They [SENCo] kept giving him [son] forms to give to me even though he told them he did not want to go there. He kept on saying, 'I've got to fill this out, Mum, I've got to fill this out for this school sixth form but I don't want to go.' and I said, 'You don't have to'..." – **Parent 4**

4.5.19. Young people enrolled on inappropriate courses

The data revealed that another barrier to a smooth transition into FE college is that young people are often enrolled on inappropriate courses.

Professionals emphasised that sometimes FE college courses do not have a clear admissions criteria and they do not carry out appropriate risk assessments, which means that many young people are enrolled on courses

that do not suit their learning or physical needs. Professionals highlighted that this mismatch often leads to a breakdown in placement. Furthermore, professionals reported that if a young person is unable to cope or is unmotivated by a course that is at too high or low a level, behavioural issues may arise which sometimes result in the young person being excluded. Additionally a few parents reported that once they had declared that their young person had autism they felt under pressure from FE college staff to enrol their young person on specialist life skills courses despite their academic level.

“They [FE college staff] directed us to the specialist courses three times and that wasn’t appropriate for Hailey, but we were being pushed towards that course because she has autism. So, it was by chance that I hit on the right member of staff who explained to us, ‘You don’t have to go there. If she is assessed and she gets the grades she could do something else with support.’” – Parent 3

A parent stressed that the FE college courses’ varying inclusion criteria can prevent a young person from accessing a course of their choice:

“Marvin is really relaxed by animals, he finds them therapeutic, he talks to other people through animals, there was an animal care department here but it was only for people at a higher level, so he couldn’t access it at all ...” –

Parent 6

A professional said:

“Obviously colleges are run as businesses, so they’re keen to obviously accept as many people as they possibly can and you do worry that they sometimes accept young people that they haven’t done a risk assessment or really planned for how complex potentially that student might be.” –

Professional 1 (local authority)

Another professional commented on the changes taking place in FE College:

“We try to have discussions and assess the young people in the early, to identify which programme they would be most suited to so that we try and get it right first time, having said that if a student moves onto a course and we think that they would benefit from either moving to a higher-level course or moving to our personal progression pathways [specialist course] we would encourage and support that transition.” – Professional 2 (FE college)

4.5.20. Young people who are not travel-trained or eligible for free transportation

The data from all participants revealed that young people can be prevented from transitioning into FE college by a lack of access to travel training or free transport, which is provided by the LA. Some professionals and parents described how because of cuts to services there are currently no services left in the borough that train young people to develop independent travel skills. Again there seemed to be a discrepancy in the support received by families depending on whether the young person attended a mainstream or specialist secondary school: travel training opportunities seem to be available in specialist secondary provisions. Professionals described having experienced further difficulties in obtaining the relevant funding from the LA’s SEN team in order to guarantee transportation for young people with complex needs even after they had secured an FE college place. Because of the eligibility criteria for some FE college courses, this means that some young people have been unable to access courses in FE college which require them to be an independent traveller, particularly courses where the young person has to complete training or a work placement. Parents and young people who attended a mainstream school described receiving

support from their parent with their independent travel skills due to the lack of services available in the borough.

“if you are looking at the employment preparation course, the criteria states that you have to travel independently, which can cause a barrier for some. But in the past, [name of FE college] used to state that you need to be able to travel independently to apply for most courses but they no longer do that.”

– **Professional 1** (local authority)

“As a borough we are fighting as to whether or not someone should be given transport, in a lot of cases it’s taking longer to secure the funding for the transport even though some can’t actually physically get there. You can source a college on the resources, but if someone won’t fund the transport to the college it’s not a lot of use.” – **Professional 6** (social care)

A parent of a young person who had transitioned from a mainstream school said:

“There was no one to help us at the school so I spent all summer after she left Year 11 teaching her how to travel on the bus to FE college and she’s finally got it now.” – **Parent 3**

One of the young people reported that her parent had supported her with learning how to travel on public transport prior to her transition.

“My mum showed me how to get on the right bus to college.” – **Hailey**
(enrolled on ICT vocational course)

In contrast, a parent of a young person who had attended a specialist provision said:

“The other brilliant thing they did was travel-train him to the college. This was done by the school and it was absolutely personal to us so they worked out which bus he should catch. In fact it was two buses from home to college.” –

Parent 6

4.5.21. Young people who exhibit challenging behaviours

The data from professionals' interviews highlighted that the extremely challenging behaviours exhibited by some young people can prevent them from accessing FE college. A few professionals suggested that these challenging behaviours are sometimes triggered when professionals have not planned or put in place the resources needed to support the young person's successful transition. In addition, professionals reported that FE college staff tend to lack training, experience and confidence in managing these behaviours. Other professionals commented that members of staff do not read the advice given by previous professionals or put in place the necessary interventions in order to avoid the triggers of these undesirable behaviours.

"If their behaviours are severe we do not have the facilities to have them here, we do not restrain our students and we do not have the training to actually support their needs if their behaviours are at high risk." –

Professional 4 (FE college)

"I think for some young people who can present with very challenging behaviour and require a very, not a controlled environment, but an environment where they're able to actually really manage that, I think for [name of FE college] it could be a barrier." – **Professional 1** (local authority)

This professional contributed a lot to this theme:

"it was really clear that although the college had been presented with all of the information regarding what the triggers are for this young person, they hadn't followed the rules of that..." – **Professional 1** (local authority)

A professional highlighted the recent improvements made to the FE college to support a young person with behavioural needs.

"If a student has autism or complex autism we might offer a longer period of assessment so that they have time to settle in and we can make a better

judgement as to how they can be supported and we have recently had behaviour that challenges training ...” – Professional 2 (FE college)

Another professional commented:

“Colleges are becoming better at dealing with students with special education needs and behavioural needs etc, and I would say it’s hugely dependent at the moment from college to college. It’s not a national standard that’s expected...” – Professional 6

4.5.22. FE college experiences

This overarching theme reflects the data, which discusses the young people’s and parents’ disappointments with FE college and the opportunities that have arisen since the young people have transitioned into FE college.

Two main themes emerged from this overarching theme, which will be discussed in relation to questions 1 and 2.

- 4.5.23. Dissatisfaction with FE college
- 4.5.24. Despite difficulties, young people prefer FE college to school

4.5.23. Dissatisfaction with FE college

This main theme refers to parent and young people’s dissatisfactions with FE college. Some of the young people and parents said that FE college did not necessarily live up to their expectations. A few parents had highlighted that their young person was made promises by FE college staff prior to starting FE college (for example support with their social skills) which did not materialise. Whereas a few of the young people enrolled on mainstream courses described having specific subject interests and seemed disappointed by the broader application of their chosen subject, the young people were particularly disappointed by the fact that emphasis was

predominantly placed on theory rather than practical application of the subject. However, many young people enrolled on specialist courses indicated that on their course there was a good balance between academic work and activities to support their personal development.

“I know when she started they offered a social skills group, and I actually don’t know what’s happening about this social skills group, so I need to find that out, and now the more I think about it, I’m thinking hang on, what social skills?” – Parent 3

“I was thinking it was definitely going to be great doing engineering, and for the most part a lot of it was connected to the subjects I enjoy, but a lot of it is just background noise and there are still traces of things that I thought I had left behind like assignments and revision, tests and all this, that I didn't want to do. I really hated exams.” – Zane (enrolled on an engineering vocational course)

This young person had contributed a lot to this theme and also commented:

“I thought the course was going to be more practical but it’s ended up being more theory. I only have one practical lesson a week in the workshop and all I'm doing there is machining a piece of metal.” – Zane (enrolled on an engineering vocational course)

“I thought I was going to work with cars more but I’m not.” – Max (enrolled on a car mechanics course)

The data from parents and young people who were accessing specialist courses gave another picture:

“They [teachers] help us what we’re stuck at, if we were stuck at reading we do English, if we don't know much about maths we do maths, or travel training to help us travel a lot ...” – Sam (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“His lessons are practical and teach him independence, he’s just learnt to use his bank card and his pin number and things like that. He said, ‘We went and got McDonalds and I got £20 out my account, Mum.’” – Parent 5

There are three subthemes associated with this theme:

- 4.5.24. Lack of structure and organisation
- 4.5.25. Feeling of threat
- 4.5.26. Poor channels of communication

4.5.24. Lack of structure and organisation

This theme refers to the young people’s and parent data, which suggested that young people had experienced difficulties in FE college caused by the lack of structure and organisation in this environment. The young people enrolled on mainstream courses described feeling anxious because of lack of warning about changes made to the grouping of their classes, and to the room and times of their lessons. All the young people had described experiencing difficulties coping with the unstructured periods of the day, particularly their long lunch breaks. The young people commented that they tended to spend their break times *“in the corridors”*, *“waiting outside of the classroom”*, or sitting in the reception area. Many of the young people indicated that they had avoided using the shared facilities within the FE college, for example, the canteen or common room, as these environments are often too “crowded” or “loud”. Similar to the findings from the young people’s data, a few parents of young people on mainstream courses reported that minimal preparation, planning and adaptations had been made by FE college staff in order to support the overall inclusion, both social and academic, of young people on vocational courses.

“My class was changed a few times, and sometimes my timetable changes and I don’t know where to go.” – Hailey (enrolled on an ICT vocational course)

“It’s very disorganised here, I don’t always know what I am doing. I sometimes find this stressful.” – Max (enrolled on a car mechanics vocational course)

“Lunch break lasts an hour. I stay upstairs, outside or downstairs where everyone is sitting on chairs [reception area], anywhere I can get peace and quiet really.” – Tom (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“I don’t go into the canteen: it’s very loud in there... I go in the computer room where it’s quiet” – Marvin (enrolled on an employment preparation course)

One parent commented:

“Zane needs a very clear timetable; you stick to that timetable. If you think that school is very rigid, the college is being very fluid. It’s not easy to stay on board when everything is changing all the time ...” – Parent 1

One parent, however, seemed to suggest that when given the opportunity young people sometimes adapt to their new environment.

“At first he was resistant to go into the common room ... he’s started getting used to it and he’s started going in there. So I thought great, you know, I’m glad that they didn’t make a sort of special provision, but it’s knowing when to give that little nudge and say yes you can do this, you’ll be fine, and when to say no, that is too much ...” – Parent 2

4.5.25. Feeling of threat

This subtheme refers to young people’s data which suggested that a few of the young people felt threatened in FE college. The young people described feeling anxious about being in a larger environment and felt that they could be at risk of being bullied because of the number of young people that attend different courses in the FE college. A few young people also

commented that in comparison to school, in FE college there are many adult learners, which they felt put them at further risk of being bullied.

“People are bigger and older than you here, in school you know that people are almost the same age as you and you get used to people in school because in school if anyone bullies you, you know and recognise them and you know their names. Here if someone bullies you, how are you going to know their name?” – **Sam** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“I thought I would not be seeing any of the bullies at college but most of the people I knew from school came to this college.” – **Tom** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

4.5.26. Poor channels of communication

This emerged as a dominant theme amongst the parent and professional data: that there are often poor channels of communication between parents and FE college staff. Parents indicated that they received very little information from FE college staff pertaining to their young person’s progress. The data implied that although parents had acknowledged their young person should be treated as an independent and adult learner, parents still wanted to be involved in supporting their young person in meeting their long-term goals. Parents seemed to be concerned about how their young person was coping in this new environment and about finding ways to support their emotional well-being.

“I still feel like there’s not enough communication. I’ve never had a child go to college, I didn’t have the first clue about it, let alone a child with special needs. Fingers crossed, she’s coping well – because Hailey doesn’t give me much feedback.” – **Parent 3**

Parents highlighted the importance of receiving regular feedback from FE college staff due to young people having difficulties communicating their needs and emotions verbally.

“He doesn’t really say that much to me, but I think he seems to be okay. When I ask him he’s like, ‘It’s fine, it’s fine, it’s fine.’ I say to him have you got college and he’s like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah’ ...” – Parent 5

One parent said:

“He still says practically nothing about college which is a big problem at times, it’s like a compartment, and I’m at home now. ‘How was your day, Marvin?’ Grunt. And that’s all I’d get, you know. But I mean I could tell he was fine just by his demeanour and he never protested about going there [FE college] or anything like that.” – Parent 6

Another parent commented:

“He don’t say much to me when we come home.” – Parent 4

Parents suggested that the FE college’s current method for communicating concerns is by sending a joint letter to the young person and parent which is not simplified.

“Then you send this letter out. It’s a highly inappropriate letter to send to the student and to the parent. I was really ticked about it; I just didn’t think it was right ... subsequently there are about three kids with Asperger’s on his course and at least one of the others has also received a letter and has also gone into meltdown about it.” – Parent 1

A few professionals highlighted the fact that with the changes made to the SEN Code of Practice, FE colleges have the responsibility to encourage parent involvement.

“We support the students through our review process, we look at what progress they’re making; any development needs; then we set targets and

we share those targets with the young person and with their parents and we will be engaged in annual reviews of EHC plans.” – Professional 3 (FE college)

The professional data also suggested that there are no arrangements in place in the FE college that support parents’ involvement outside of annual review meetings.

“Students once they’re here [in FE college] their parents are very much involved in their progress, for instance we have our reviews, and then we would automatically have a parents’ evening where we would share the progress, the development needs and the targets that the students are working towards.” – Professional 4 (FE college)

4.5.27. Despite difficulties, young people prefer FE college to school

This theme refers to the data, which suggest that young people prefer FE college to secondary school. Overall, the data suggested that despite experiencing ongoing difficulties in FE college, young people prefer this environment. Young people enrolled on mainstream courses emphasised that the main benefit of attending FE college is the fact that they are studying subjects that are closely linked to their interests; this seems to have made the young people’s overall college experience more enjoyable.

Similarly, young people enrolled on specialist courses reported that they appreciated the opportunity to engage in new experiences within the community. The young people also suggested that they prefer the staggered start and finish times of FE college: this allowed them to travel during less busy times of day, which helped to reduce their anxiety levels. As indicated by the young people, a further advantage of the FE college timetable is that students are only required to attend two or three times a week. The young

people reported that on their days off they have the opportunity to unwind from both the social and the work demands of college life.

“It’s better here [FE college] my course is about cars and I am interested in cars ... working with cars and putting tyres on.” – **Max** (enrolled on a car mechanics vocational course)

“It’s better than school, college is good.” – **William** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“We don’t do sport here [FE college], we go to a gym and we do it there, whereas in school you do it there but now you get to go to new places, you get to play golf, tennis, basketball, bowling, swimming. We do different things every Thursday not do work everyday, we get to try new stuff ...” – **Sam** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“I start later at college ... it’s less crowded on the bus.” – **Marvin** (enrolled on an employment preparation course)

“I sometimes find college hectic. On Tuesdays and Fridays [days off from college] I get to relax, sometimes I just play with my two dogs or play with my video games and go on my computer, sometimes I go shopping.” – **Hailey** (enrolled on an ICT vocational course)

“I had enough of school you don’t really get days off and this place [college] is bigger and you get to meet new people.” – **Max** (enrolled on a car mechanics vocational course)

Three subthemes are related to this theme:

- 4.5.28. Social belonging
- 4.5.29. Feeling of independence
- 4.5.30. Improved behaviour and emotional well-being.

4.5.28. Social belonging

This subtheme refers to all three datasets, which suggests that the young people seemed to feel as if they socially belonged in FE college. Parent and

professional data indicated that in FE college the young people had started to show an interest in others. Responses from young people suggested that they appreciated the “diversity” of students who attend FE college as this means they do not feel as if they stand out from their peers. Evidence from the data suggests that most of the young people felt that in FE college they have had increased opportunities to make friends with those who have similar interests to them. The young people who had not made any friends seemed hopeful that they would be able to make friends in the future.

“I come in the college and everyone is happy to see me, I have made way more friends than I did back in school, no one hates me here, when I try and talk to people everyone listens.” – **Tom** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

“I think I could make friends easier here than I would have done in secondary school because there is more different types of people here.” – **Hailey** (enrolled on an ICT vocational course)

“I am friends with [mentions name] I normally see her at the start of the day and then occasionally during lunch breaks, not always.” – **Marvin** (enrolled on a preparation for employment course)

“I have made friends in my class and some of my friends from my school are here in this college.” – **Sam** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

One parent stated:

“The thing is, at school he never went anywhere, but actually in college he’s gone to play football with this group of friends, which I’m really, really pleased about. He’s even thinking about a New Year’s Eve party” – **Parent 2**

Another parent commented:

“He’s always been typically autistic, in his own little bubble at school, other people didn’t seem to affect him, he was like a little island, and when he got into college that changed and he decided that he wanted friends.” – Parent 6

One professional commented:

“Some young people in [names FE college] often meet up with other peers, develop their social skills, learn a different way of life and you know some of them even meet in the pub or café and form relationships ...” – Professional 3 (specialist school)

4.5.29. Feeling of independence

A key subtheme that emerged from the data is that young people have gained increased independence in FE college. The parent and young people’s accounts suggested that since transitioning into FE college the young people have been encouraged to develop their independence skills, in terms of both work and travel. The young people commented that in college, they feel respected by staff and they appreciate being treated like an adult. A few young people reported that they no longer feel that they require the support of a LSA in their lessons, and have embraced becoming an independent learner. Additionally, several of the young people said that they have now developed the skill and confidence to travel independently. Similar to the findings from the young people’s data, the parent data suggests that in FE college young people have had increased opportunities to develop their independence skills and this seemed to have instilled confidence in the young people.

“I like the teachers here, I feel grown up because we have fun with teachers and you get to know the teachers more, what the teachers like or what the

teachers doesn't like." – **Sam** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

"I don't like when the teacher assistant sits next to me in the classroom, the other people in my class then misbehave." – **Marvin** (enrolled on an employment preparation course)

"I travel to college on my own and I travel to my local shopping centre now." – **Hailey** (enrolled on an ICT vocational course)

Just one young person reported using transportation organised by the local authority to get to and from college:

"I wait in reception ... I go in a taxi with group of students on grey van I go with the taxi driver and he drops me home to meet my support worker." – **William** (enrolled on a personal and social development course)

One parent said:

"She can go on the bus now and she has managed the train, although I get very scared she's going to end up in London, but she seems fine! It's all about my nerves I think!" – **Parent 3**

Another parent said:

"So when he's not at college he will now travel as far as Surbiton, Heathrow Airport, Kew Gardens." – **Parent 2**

4.5.30. Improved behaviour and emotional well-being

This theme encompasses parents' data which suggests that they have noticed positive changes in their young person's behaviour and emotional well-being. Overall, parents reported that they were surprised by how well their young person had coped with their transition and their ability to overcome difficulties that had arisen, including young people who had received inadequate support. Many parents reported that they have seen

improvements in the young person's behaviour at home since they have transitioned into FE college.

“He’s not as moody or as grumpy or as miserable as he used to be. He’s a bit more happy, much more energetic than he used to be, so no I think he’s got a bit better since he’s been at college.” – Parent 5

Another parent stated:

“He is much braver than he was before. He’s a lot more thick-skinned than I thought he was.” – Parent 1

“There were times when she was at school she said she wanted to kill herself, she’s said that on Facebook as well, I want to die, I want to stab myself, life isn’t worth living, but so far so good I have not seen any other posts like this on Facebook ...” – Parent 3

4.5.31. Young people fulfilling their potential

This overarching theme refers to young people being given the opportunity to fulfil their potential in FE College. This theme captures young people and their parents' hopes and aspirations pertaining to their future transitions into employment, training, further education and independent living. This theme also captures professionals' views about the statutory and community services available to support young people's progress into adulthood. Two themes emerged from this overarching theme, as discussed below:

- 4.5.32. Young people's future hopes and aspirations
- 4.5.33. Limited services that support young people's transition.

4.5.32. Young people's future hopes and aspirations

This theme reflects the young people's hopes and aspirations for the future, which was linked to their preferred job. A few of the young people seemed to have a clear idea of the area of work they would like to be involved with in

the future. For some of the young people, their preferred job was linked to their interests and the subject they were studying in FE college.

Furthermore, some of the young people interviewed seemed to have two possible job options in mind; one job was aspirational and the other a more realistic option.

“I would like to work for BAE’s, a really big multinational defence co-operation everything from assault rifles to missiles all kinds of weaponry or develop tank armour but I would not be opposed to working for Dyson.” –

Zane (enrolled on an engineering vocational course)

“I want to be a footballer ... I know I need to play and study sports, then play lots of sports then I can try and get into a team. But I don’t know, I can’t really say coz I might work and you never know I could come back here and keep studying I don’t know.” – **Sam** (enrolled on a car mechanics vocational course)

“I think maybe I will become a car mechanic” – **Max** (enrolled on a car mechanics vocational course)

“I would like to be a builder, like building a house, or an engineer” – **William** (enrolled on a personal social development course)

4.5.33. Limited services that support transitions post FE college

This theme captures parent and professional data, which suggest that there are currently limited services in place to support young people’s transition into other areas of adulthood after completing FE college. Overall, parents seemed to be optimistic about the future of their young person due to the progress they had made in FE college. Parents emphasised that they felt their young person could transition into adulthood (marked by employment,

higher education, independent living) once they had received the right support. Professionals stressed that despite such progress, due to the cuts made to adult services, very few young people receive the support needed to transition into adulthood. There was a sense gained from the professional data that too much emphasis is placed on investing and supporting the transition of young people to FE college, while there has been a lack of investment and services that support young people with their transitions into the other pathways into adulthood.

Parents said that their young person would benefit from accessing further courses within the community:

“I mean academic learning for somebody like Marvin ... is not appropriate really; what matters is the life skills, the social skills, so closer to the time we will see what [names local charity] have to offer.” – Parent 6

Parents also acknowledged that their young person would require ongoing support with their progression into other areas of adulthood, which might include supported living.

“Max is not suddenly going to one day say I want to leave home now and suddenly go and make his own way completely independently. I don’t think he could go and start paying Council Tax and all his own bills, I think he is always going to need some kind of support.” – Parent 2

A few parents indicated that they hoped their young person would continue to develop relationships in the future.

“I hope he will one day meet someone. I do say to him, ‘One day you’ll want to have a girlfriend’ and he says ‘Yeah, okay, maybe.’ ‘So, you have to get used to phoning people up and making arrangements’.” – Parent 1

Professionals commented that it is difficult to find employment opportunities for young people with ASD.

“Too much time and emphasis is placed on the transition into college and not exiting, there needs to be more funding made available for learners with ASD to find routes into employment, because this requires a lot of funding and a lot of time and a lot of resources ...” **Professional 4** (FE college staff)

A few professionals indicated that with the LA’s diminishing budgets, services have been instructed to encourage young people to remain within the family home.

“We’re told the borough’s main focus is for individuals to remain living within their families unless their families are completely unwilling to do so. That puts families and individuals in a very difficult position ...” – **Professional 6** (social care)

Another professional said:

“We don’t have careers or connexions advisers any more so all of the learning support team try to help young people in this area as much as they can.” – **Professional 7** (mainstream school)

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

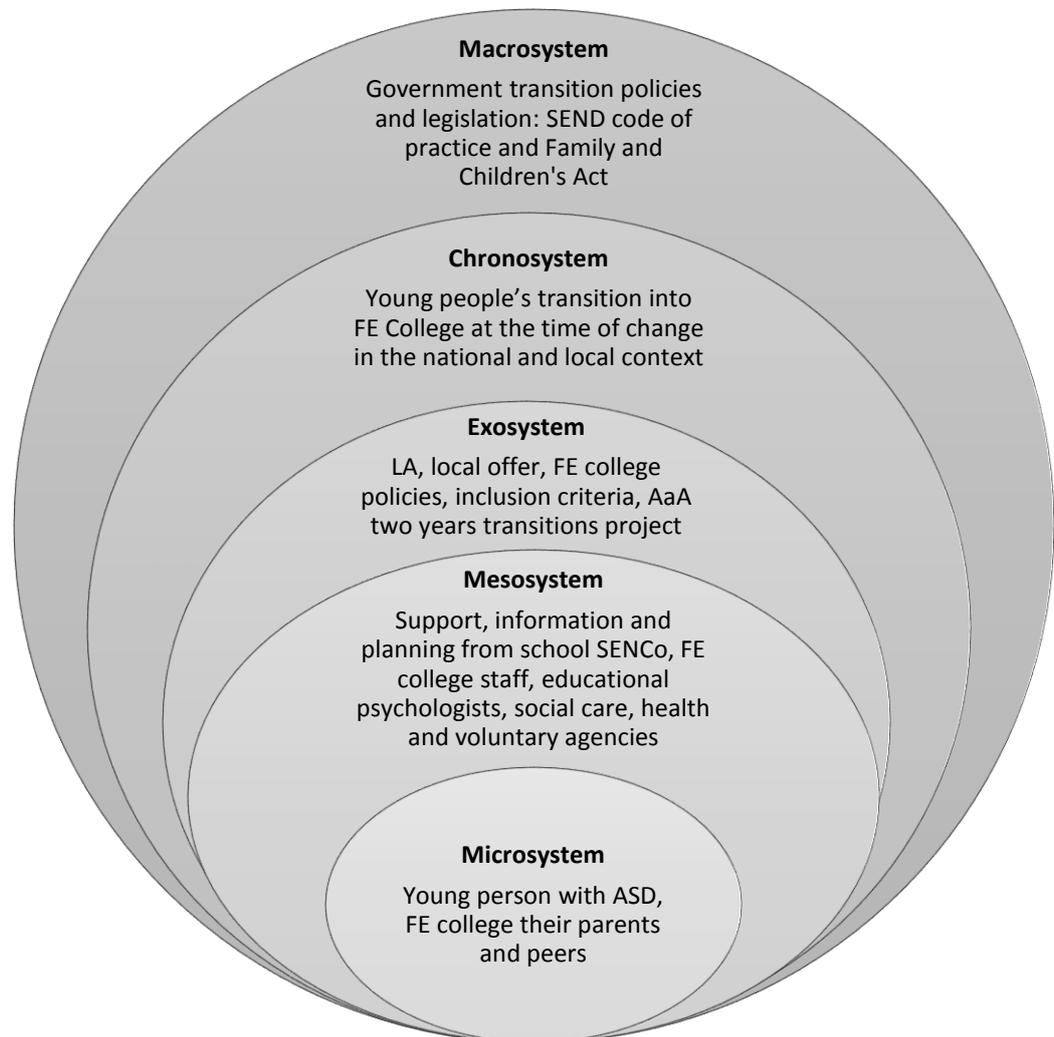
This section will discuss the key findings from this research study in relation to the researcher's chosen conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development theory, relevant research literature and psychological theory.

5.2 Overview

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory will be used in order to aid understanding the interaction of the different systems that were highlighted in this research. The different factors that were identified at every level of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory that either positively or negatively influenced the transition and experiences of young people in FE college are illustrated in Figure 2.

Similarly, many of the views and the emerging themes from the data were implicitly and explicitly linked with aspects of Maslow's (1999) hierarchy of needs theory. This is made up of five levels of needs, such as physiological needs (food, sleep), safety needs (security, protection, resources), love/belongingness (friendship, relationships), esteem needs (self-esteem, confidence) and self-actualisation needs (self-fulfilment). Maslow (1999) suggests that humans are motivated to get these needs met and when an individual manages to get their lower-level (basic) needs met they are then able to grow and move on to acquiring their higher levels of needs. Relevant examples that link to both theories will be discussed throughout this section.

Figure 2: The systems that support or hinder the young person's transition into FE college: using Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory



5.3.The decision making stage prior to transition

On the microsystem level this study revealed that many of the young people who had attended a mainstream secondary school had experienced ongoing social and academic difficulties in this environment, such as being bullied and studying subjects that were difficult and unrelated to their interests. The young people's accounts suggested that these experiences had deterred them from applying to their school's sixth form. This finding resonates with previous research (Beresford et al., 2013; Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009)

which found that young people aspired to go on to FE college because they wanted to have a fresh start. The theme rising from the data (theme-4.5.4.) 'mixed emotions- feeling of safety and anxiety' indicated despite the young people recognising that the school sixth form was not the right environment for them, the school environment had also provided them with a sense of safety, where they had become accustomed to the staff, pupils and the school routine. This finding links with Maslow's (1999) theory which suggests that sometimes humans are reluctant to embark on new experiences because change can cause the feeling of fear and anxiety, this unpleasant feeling can prevent the individual from taking risks and achieving the other levels of the hierarchy of need. The young people's narratives suggested that they had also mixed emotions about their transition because they were worried about moving on to a larger setting with mature students which they felt put them at risk of being bullied. These findings are similar to that of Mitchell and Beresford (2014), who highlighted that although young people were pleased about transitioning into FE college they were also worried and anxious about the prospect of going into an unfamiliar environment.

This study revealed that a potential barrier to a young person's access and transition to FE college is sometimes linked to the young person's individual characteristics. This links with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) emphasis on the young person's demand characteristics, resource and force and how this interacts with the systems supporting them and influences their transition. The findings indicated that sometimes the selection criteria for further education courses can make it difficult for young people to transition onto their desired course, if they (themes- 4.5.20 and 4.5.21.) 'exhibit challenging behaviours' or if they have not been 'travel-trained or are not eligible for transport' provided by the LA. However, according to inclusion policies and

legislation, for example the Equality Act (HM Government, 2010) as well as the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b), young people should be afforded the same opportunities as their peers and therefore accommodation should be made to allow their fair access onto courses. This finding indicates that further development is needed by FE provisions to ensure that the entry criteria for courses are more inclusive of all young people's strengths and needs.

5.4. Adults who support or hinder young people's transition into FE college

This study also revealed that many of the adults found in the mesosystem namely; school staff, FE college staff and services that were supposed to support young people were also a potential barrier to their transition. This study found that instead of young people feeling supported by school staff in exploring their potential career options, (theme-4.5.16.) they were encouraged to continue on to the school sixth form without the young person's wants and needs being taking into consideration. This study revealed that schools are sometimes keen to secure funding and to fill places in the school sixth form, and therefore these influential adults encourage young people to explore options that are not always suited to their needs. A further finding from this study, which is similar to that found by McGukin et al. (2013), is that a further barrier to young people's successful transition is when they are (theme- 4.5.19.) enrolled on inappropriate courses in FE college. This can be due to a lack of planning or to families being badly guided by school or FE college staff; the result could be an eventual breakdown in placement. This finding echoes those of Wolf (2011), who reported that enrolment on inappropriate courses often leads to a young

person's exclusion and to a rise in the number of young people falling into the NEET category (Wolf, 2011). This finding also goes against recent transition guidance, which suggests that professionals should tailor their advice in accordance with the young person's strengths, needs and future aspirations to ensure young people are matched to appropriate course and provision (DfE, 2014; DoH, 2009; Higgins, 2009).

Further findings from this study highlighted that parents played a crucial role in preparing their young person for their transition. This is similar to a finding of Mitchell and Beresford (2014), who reported that due to the lack of support provided by professionals, parents had to take the lead in supporting their young person during this process. The narratives of parents in this study revealed that, similar to the young people's responses, they too were worried about the young person's emotional and physical safety in FE college. The accounts of respondents showed that parents' attempts to protect their young person can also prevent their young person from transitioning into FE college. This finding resonates with the study by Beresford et al. (2013), who reported that overprotective parents sometimes limit their young person's progress and development into adulthood. A possible reason for parents desiring to protect their young person could be linked to the many years they would have spent protecting and advocating for their young person in order to get the appropriate support, education and services that they required. Naturally, parents want to continue to protect their young person and to ensure their (theme- 4.5.6.) containment. This theme links with Bion's (1962) theory of containment which suggests that when an individual is going through a difficult situation, another individual, in this instance the parent, can act as an emotional container enabling the young person to process, make sense of and regulate their feelings to

manage the anxiety provoking situations such as their transition. This research also found that there is a fine balance between (theme- 4.5.7) parent protection and the young person achieving their independence. According to Maslow's (1999) theory, humans in the early stages of their life are reliant on their parents for nurture and to provide their needs. Maslow asserts in order for a young person to develop their independence skills they have to be given the freedom to acquire their higher level of needs. However, in the case of young people with ASD, research suggests that it often takes these young people a longer time to acquire the necessary skills for adulthood, which means they often remain dependent on their parents for a longer period than their typically developing peers (Knapp et al., 2009).

5.4. Difficulties experienced in FE college

Similar to the findings from previous research (Beresford et al. 2013; McGukin et al., 2013; Mitchell & Beresford, 2014) this study demonstrates that many of the young people experienced further difficulties after transitioning into FE college including difficulties (theme- 4.5.24) coping with the unstructured times of the day and the unpredictability of the FE college timetable. This finding provides further support for the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), Disability Discrimination Act (1995; 2005a) and the Disability Rights Commission (2006b) in FE colleges. Each of these policies assert that educational provisions should make reasonable adaptations and modifications to their curriculum as well as to the physical environment of the college to further support the inclusion of all young people. The findings from this study also indicate that further development is needed in order to meet such a standard. One extension on the findings from previous research in this study

is that the accounts from respondents suggest that there was a clear difference in the experiences of young people depending on whether they were enrolled on a mainstream vocational or specialist course. This study revealed that the young people enrolled on mainstream vocational courses felt that their course was not suitably adjusted to meet their personal, social and learning needs. Further to this, parents' accounts suggested that there was a lack of communication and feedback from FE college staff pertaining to their young person's progress and any arising concerns. It would seem that at this stage of a young person's education, there is a difficult balance to be achieved between staff encouraging parents' involvement and maintaining the young person's confidentiality and independence. This finding provides evidence in favour of the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014), which suggests that professionals should continue to encourage parent involvement at this stage of the young person's education by holding EHCP annual review meetings. However, this study has highlighted that perhaps further work is needed to improve the communication channels between parents and FE college staff outside of the formal arrangements of annual review meetings.

This study showed that despite the difficulties experienced by the young people in FE college, given sufficient time many of the young people were able to adapt to this new and once-threatening environment. The accounts of respondents had also suggested that the young people had made advancements in their personal development particularly in the area of their (theme- 4.5.28) independence skills. This seems to be linked to the fact that the young people were able to develop in their independent travel training skills and to develop independence in their learning. There was also evidence in the data that the young people had also started to take an

interest in others and had developed in confidence. This finding can be linked to what Maslow (1999) regarded as the acquisition of higher levels of need, namely, (theme- 4.5.29 and 4.5.30) social belongingness, which represents the desire to develop friendships, and esteem needs. This finding suggests that the young people's transition into FE college had given them the opportunity to continue to develop the skills and resources needed for adulthood. In contrast to this finding, Camarena and Sarigiani (2009) and Mitchell and Beresford (2014) had found that many young people had difficulties developing friendships with other students in FE college due to the advancement in social skills required at this stage of education. A possible reason for the difference in findings is that in this present research study most of the young people had transitioned onto courses of their own choosing and therefore had more opportunities to meet with other young people who had similar interests and abilities to them. In addition, the young people attending this FE college had transitioned from a range of settings, cultures and boroughs which may have increased the diversity of students attending this provision.

5.5. Post FE college transitions

The final stage of Maslow's (1999) hierarchy of need is self-actualisation. Maslow (1999) stated that all humans' ultimate goal in life is to fulfil their potential, to gain self-fulfilment and to flourish as a human being. Maslow asserts that self-actualisation can be achieved in different ways, in this study (theme- 4.5.31.) young people fulfilling their potential was symbolised by their future aspirations in terms of their preferred job, which in most instances seemed to be linked to their interests and the subjects they were studying. In contrast to this finding, Beresford et al. (2013) found that many

young people had difficulties thinking and talking about their future aspirations. A possible reason for the differing findings may also be linked to the fact the young people participating in this study were enrolled on courses that matched their future goals, which might have made it easier for the young people to imagine what they wanted to do in the future. This finding is in line with Wolf's (2011) report, which suggests that young people should be offered a curriculum that will motivate them to learn and to develop the transferrable skills needed for employment. This finding also supports the Valuing People White Paper (DoH, 2001) and the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014), which suggests that professionals should try to match young people to appropriate courses as this will prepare the young people for their transition into employment.

5.6. Early involvement and co-ordination between services

The mesosystem in this study also refers to the support young people received during their transition from services that have a statutory or voluntary role in supporting transitions. The findings from this study highlighted that families had received limited support from (theme- 4.5.11.) statutory (health, education and social care) services and voluntary services during the transition process. These findings echoed those of Beresford et al., (2013) and McGukin et al., (2013); both authors had highlighted that the statutory support received by families varied – some received support at specific points during their young person's transition whilst others received support throughout the entire transition period. An extension on previous research findings, this study found that although 6 out of 7 young people who were participating in this study had a statement of SEN and were entitled to statutory transitional support, many young people transitioning

from mainstream provisions received less support from services than those transitioning from specialist secondary provisions. This finding links with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) attention to proximal processes (interactions over time), in this study there appeared to be a qualitative difference in support received by young people, depending on whether they were considered higher functioning and this was without taking into consideration the young person's individual needs. Parents' accounts also suggested that they felt uncertain of the roles, responsibilities and the criteria of services and they felt their young person's transition could be improved if professionals became involved in the early planning and preparation stages of the young person's transition. Parents did not indicate that there is a specific service that they would have appreciated receiving support from, however, professionals' data highlighted that EPs have a valuable role to play. The study revealed that professionals expect EPs to support the transition of young people into FE college, by conducting assessments and providing advice on appropriate provisions and ways of developing the young person's skills that are needed for adulthood. Parents' accounts suggested that they felt that professionals should have provided support in explaining and disseminating information pertaining to post-16 provisions and in working alongside other professionals. Parents' dissatisfactions with professionals also resonates with the Beresford et al. (2013) study, which reported that parents appreciated when professionals worked in co-ordination with other services as this promoted effective transitions. These findings therefore supports the guidance from the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) and the Valuing People Now Strategy (DoH, 2001, 2009) which advocates improving the support and provisions available for all young people with ASD transitioning into FE college by providing early personalised support. This would suggest that further improvements are needed to ensure sufficient

support is available for families at key points during the young person's transition, particularly when transitioning from mainstream secondary schools and for young people who may not meet the criteria for an EHCP.

5.7. Changes to the local context regarding transitions

The exosystem in this study refers to the local context in which this study was conducted. An important finding from this study is that within this local context, the LA had made considerable investment and implemented a number of changes within the LA to support the transition of young people with ASD into their local FE college. This is in line with local and national policies which promote raising the participation age of young people into compulsory education to 18 years of age (DfE, 2013b) and improving the access and inclusion of young people with SEN into further education (DfE, 2011c; HM Government, 2014b; LSC, 2006; Preparing for Adulthood Programme, 2013; Wolf, 2011). In this context the LA had gained Pathfinder status, the LA had received financial investment from the DfE, and further support was received from the Ambitious about Autism charity. All of this helped to develop the practices, facilities and provisions available in this FE college in order to improve the inclusion and transition of young people with ASD who have complex learning or medical needs. The findings of this study also indicated that staff in the FE college had received training specifically in PCP principles and in managing young people's challenging behaviour which further improved their practice. The FE college participating in this research had introduced (theme- 4.5.15) taster sessions for young people attending specialist schools, and the findings from this study demonstrated that the young people who attended these taster sessions and extended FE college visits had improved their transition into FE college. This also echoes

the findings from McGukin et al. (2013) and ASD transition guides (Breakey, 2006; Higgins, 2009; Stobart, 2011) which advocate that the use of visuals and college visits improves the success of the young person's transition. However, in this local context, this study revealed that the ASD transitions initiative that was running within this LA had only benefited and improved the transition of young people with ASD with complex learning or health needs transitioning from local specialist schools into the FE college. Since this study suggests that young people transitioning from mainstream schools also have significant difficulties with their transition, consideration should be given to extending these provisions to all young people with ASD.

5.8. Limited services that support transitions post FE college

A further finding relevant to the exosystem, is that with the increase in funding in order to support the transition of young people into FE college, (theme- 4.5.33.) cuts were made to the resources and services available locally to support young people upon leaving FE college. A possible implication of these cuts is that without the appropriate support many young people may not progress into employment or supported living and may lose their learned skills. This finding also suggests that further attention is needed in examining ways to effectively support the transition of young people upon leaving FE college and entering into other areas of adulthood such as employment, further education and supported living, as well as providing training for services that support young people with ASD.

5.9. National legislation and policies impact on transition

A key aspect of the macrosystem/chronosystem is the fact that this study was conducted at a historic and transitional point of time when many

changes were made to policies pertaining to transition. This section will discuss relevant government legislation, policies and transition guidance which has influenced the practices of professionals. Since this borough had become a Pathfinder Champion, the work of professionals and families experiences were directly influenced by these changes in legislation. For example, professionals participating in this study had the opportunity to trial many of the recommendations suggested by national guidance. The most prominent policies discussed in this research were the release of the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b), the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) and the Mental Capacity Act (HM Government, 2005b). Professionals' accounts revealed that although they were aware of the release of recent legislation and the subsequent changes that would be made to their roles, professionals were not always implementing guidance. This finding links to Schön (1991) observations on espoused theory which provide a distinction between what professionals describe as their espoused theory and their theory in use. This theory helps to explain the discrepancy between what professionals had described as good practice (espoused theory) and what families actually experienced (theory in action). In this study, professionals seemed to be aware of best practices and national guidance in terms of what supports transitions and ways to encourage the participation of young people, but this awareness was not always reflected in the work they actually carried out. For example, the importance of including the views of young people has been advocated in policy (UNESCO, 1994) and the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) and Mental Capacity Act (HM Government, 2005b) have re-emphasised the importance of empowering young people with limited communication skills. These policies advocate that young people should be given the means to contribute their views about their education, future placement and planning for adulthood. However, none of

the young people participating in this study indicated that they were able to contribute to the planning stages of their transition in a meaningful way. These findings suggest that young people continue to have a passive influence on their transition and indicate that further improvements are needed in regard to how professionals engage young people during this time. However, it must also be noted that these interviews took place within the first term after the young person's transition, and therefore some of the young people interviewed may have forgotten about the roles and names of services that were previously involved.

5.10. Accessing the voice of young people

Although professionals' narratives indicated that they were aware of the importance of empowering young people to express their views (HM Government, 2005b), professionals also implied that in reality they did not have the time, resources (in terms of staff and funding) or the capacity to implement such guidance within their day-to-day practice. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicated that sometimes professionals' attempts to obtain the views of young people were inappropriate, such as asking for their views for the first time during annual review meetings. This is an area that needs to be addressed, especially as the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) emphasises the importance of encouraging young people to contribute to decision making about their lives.

A further finding from this study concerns the difficulties associated with trying to obtain the views of those with limited understanding or (theme-4.5.13) mental capacity. This study revealed that when professionals have difficulties obtaining the views of young people they are often reliant on the

views of their family. However, this study demonstrated that sometimes young people, parents and professionals have conflicting views about which FE provisions would be appropriate. This would suggest that it is important that professionals do not just assume that the young person has the same viewpoint as their parents and that decisions made are in their best interest. This finding therefore provides evidence supporting the Mental Capacity Act (HM Government, 2005b), which highlights the value and importance of using an Independent Mental Capacity Advocate, who provides unbiased support, to obtain young people's views (HM Government, 2005b). This study is also demonstrates based on the research methods used by the researcher and strategies suggested by previous research, that there is a need for professionals to adapt their practices when working with young people who have difficulties verbalising their views. This may be achieved by building rapport, incorporating their interests, using assisted technology, talking mats, using photos, visuals, emotion cards and drawings (Beresford 2004 et al., 2004; Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Lewis & Porter, 2004; Tisdall, 2009). Furthermore, this suggests the need for professionals such as EPs and social workers to use assessment techniques which are appropriate to use with young people with ASD, such as personal construct psychology techniques (Kelly, 2003). For example, drawing the ideal- self technique which was developed by Heather Moran (Moran, 2001) allows professionals to explore the young person's personal preferences, world view and views of themselves which may help to identify areas needed for their EHCP.

5.11. Professionals lack of ASD awareness or training

A major finding from this study was that many of the professionals participating in this study had gained their knowledge in ASD either from

working directly or from parenting a young person with ASD. Despite this, many professionals (theme- 4.5.17) lacked formal training in this area. This finding is similar to one of Beresford et al. (2013) who found that transition services were more effective when they had good ASD knowledge. Such evidence provides support for the Autism Act (HM Government, 2009), which recommends that professionals that work directly with young people with ASD should receive at the very least basic autism awareness training. A possible reason for this finding is that the reduced budgets in the LA may result in many services lacking the training or career professional development required. Clearly, this area needs to be further addressed at the LA level.

Chapter 6: Strengths, Limitations and Future Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

First, this section will discuss the strengths of this study and how attempts were made to address the gaps in previous research. The discussion will then turn to the limitations of this study and how they can be reduced in future research. Finally, the implications for those involved in supporting young people with ASD transition into post-16 provisions (school staff, parents, FE college staff and educational psychologists) will be discussed.

6.2. Strengths of this study

This research study is timely as it is one of the few to be conducted during the changing national and local context on transitions. The main strength of this research study is that it has been able to provide insight on how the introduction of the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) and Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014b) have impacted the transition of young people with ASD. Secondly, in light of government policies and legislation there has been increasing emphasis on accessing the voice of young people with SEN (UN General Assembly, 1989) which in turn has influenced the recruitment strategy and methodology employed by this research study. This study aimed to prioritise the views of young people with ASD and to give them the means to be able to express their views. In this study, the majority of young people were recruited directly by the researcher during briefing meetings. The briefing meeting gave the young people the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to participate in this study prior to gaining

consent from their parents, demonstrating respect for them as individuals. Further to this, in this study the author had utilised techniques for interviewing young people with ASD that were found useful in previous research. This study demonstrated that these techniques can be useful in aiding young people's understanding of the purpose of the research study and in gaining their views (Beresford 2004 et al., 2004; Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Lewis & Porter, 2004; Tisdall, 2009).

Thirdly, the methodology employed was an improvement on previous research whereby the views of stakeholders and parents were sought instead of the young person themselves. When the views of the young person were obtained in previous research this was achieved by carrying out surveys, telephone interviews or by interviewing young people in the presence of their parents (Beresford et al., 2013; Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009; Mitchell & Beresford, 2014). A further improvement on previous research in this study was that the young people's views were gained by conducting individual face-to-face interviews which helped to obtain a better understanding of the transition process from the young person's unique perspective. Furthermore, this research provides support for current government policies (DfE, 2014; HM Government, 2003, 2014b; UN General Assembly, 1989) by illustrating the value of directly involving in research young people with ASD.

A further strength of this study is that it is one of the first studies to have recruited young people from across the ASD spectrum with varying learning and communication needs. The sample recruited in this study is an improvement on previous research, which tended to focus on the views of young people with ASD who were higher-functioning, because their views

can be more readily accessed (Beresford et al., 2013; Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009; Mitchell & Beresford, 2014). Another strength of this study is that only the views of young people with ASD were included whereas previous research had also included the views of young people with general SEN when exploring the topic of transitions (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Wolf, 2011). In addition, the young people participating in this study represented four different ethnic groups which means a range of views were sought. A further identified strength of the sample population recruited in this study is the fact there were group differences amongst the young people interviewed. Although the researcher did not initially intend to include young people transitioning from a range of settings, in order to expand the research sample the researcher recruited young people who had transitioned from a mainstream or specialist secondary school or sixth form provision onto either a vocational or specialist course within one FE college. An advantage of these group differences is that they allowed for the differences in the young people's experiences to be compared.

Finally, this research study replicated an area of strength that was identified in previous research by gaining multiple perspectives on this transition process by including young people, parents and professionals who support young people with their post-school transition. This has allowed for an in-depth understanding and the triangulation of findings on the experiences and factors that affect transitions (Beresford et al., 2013; Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009). Furthermore, this study had also highlighted the value of embarking on a qualitative research study from a critical realist epistemological and ontological position, this research has highlighted the importance of gaining and interpreting the experiences and perspectives of participants to inform

understanding the transition process within its context and to inform future recommendations.

6.3. Limitations of this study

Firstly, it is acknowledged by the researcher that the overall sample size for each group of participants was small and reflects the recruitment difficulties experienced by the researcher. For example, one, the researcher was not permitted to send out invitation letters to the young people and their parents directly. Two, the number of young people who attended the briefing meetings (n=10) seemed to reflect difficulties typical of young people with ASD, for example difficulty adapting to changes made to their daily routine (Breakey, 2006; Chown & Beavan, 2012). Three, the researcher did not have the contact details of parents to help remind the young people about the briefing meeting and the changes to their routine. Four, the researcher did not have access to the young people's college records and therefore it was not possible to personalise their individual timetables. Although the researcher worked closely with the FE college LSA's the factors stated above still influenced the overall sample size. In addition, the overall sample of young people (n=7) recruited may reflect the fact current research suggests individuals with ASD are a hard-to-reach group and their participation in research tends to be low (Beresford et al., 2004). Employing a larger sample size in a future study would allow further exploration of group differences, which might yield different findings.

Secondly, a further limitation of this study is that there was an observed gender imbalance in the number of participants recruited. Within the young people's sample more males (n=6) than females (n=1) were recruited, although it must be noted that this is typical of the gender ratio (4:1 male:

female) observed by other researchers in this field (Attwood, 2008; Frith, 2003). In addition, only one male professional, one father and one mother–father pair participated in this study. The gender imbalance noted in this research is similar to that found in previous transition studies (Beresford et al., 2013; Camerena & Sarigiani, 2009; Mitchell & Beresford, 2014). Two possible explanations for the underrepresentation of male participants particularly fathers in research examining the transition of young people into further education maybe due to many mothers taking the lead role in their child’s development and education. In addition to this, the time of day that the interviews were conducted may have been inconvenient for working fathers (Phares, 1996). In future studies, consideration should be given to recruiting more female young people, fathers and male professionals in order to gain a range of perspectives on this topic.

Thirdly, a further shortfall of this study is that it was not possible to interview the young people at two time points (pre and post their transition), this meant the views obtained from the young people regarding their expectations, perspectives and experiences of the transition process were retrospective. It would be useful if in a future study repeated interviews were conducted with the same young people pre- and post-transition in order to gain the young people’s prospective and retrospective views in order to fully explore this transition process (King & Horrocks, 2010). The researcher also acknowledges that if time permitted this research could have been improved if interviews were conducted with the young people when they initially transitioned into FE college and few months after they had settled in this environment in order to compare their experiences. This research design could be incorporated in a future study.

Fourthly, in further reflection of the steps taken by the researcher to ensure the validity of this research could be improved if the researcher had carried out a member check. Although the researcher did not initially intend to carry out a member check with participants due to the difficulties experienced in gaining access to participants as well as taking into consideration the young people's learning difficulties. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) carrying out a member check allows the researcher to double check whether the researcher's interpretation of the data is representative of participants experiences and how they perceive them. In a future study this could be achieved by checking the analysis of the entire dataset or individual transcripts with participants in order to improve the validity of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Fifthly, another limitation of this research study is that the views of the educational psychology (EP) profession were not included in this study even though they were incorporated in previous research (Beresford et al., 2013). At the time of conducting this research study, the EP service was only in the early stages of forming relationships with the local FE college, and it was deemed inappropriate to involve EPs at this time as the team had limited experiences of working with this age group and with FE provisions. It is important that once EPs have established their role within post-16 education, a future study should include the views of EPs. This is particularly important as one of the findings from this study suggests that EPs play a significant role in supporting effective transitions. A further limitation of this study was that perspectives from health services, such as transition nurses, were also absent from this study. This was because the health services that were approached reported that they did not have the time to participate in this study due to the lack of staff capacity. However, in light of recent legislation,

in a future study it would be important to incorporate the views of health professionals in order to gain views that are representative of all sectors, which is key to gaining an in-depth understanding of the transition process.

Finally, one of the parents who participated in this study spoke little English and requested to be interviewed with her husband rather than receiving support from an interpreter. During the interview both parents continued to have difficulties understanding some of the questions posed, which meant questions had to be repeatedly rephrased. On other occasions both parents gave minimal responses and seemed to think that the questions asked should have been directed to FE college staff who the parents felt were best placed to answer questions pertaining to their young person's education. This finding may also indicate that there may be cultural differences in how participants perceive education and their young person's transition which could be explored further in a future study by including a larger sample of parents representing different cultures.

6.4. Implications of this research

A number of difficulties were documented in the accounts of respondents concerning factors that had improved or negatively affected the young people's transitions into FE college. Based on these accounts this section aims to provide recommendations for young people, teachers, parents, educational psychologists and FE college staff. It must be noted that the recommendations outlined do not aim to be an exhaustive list for these groupings, but they should be used as a starting point for ways they could support and improve the transition of young people with ASD.

6.5. Recommendations for schools

The accounts from participants suggested that families – particularly those of young people who had attended a mainstream school – had received insufficient support from school staff, particularly the school SENCo, in the lead-up to the young person’s transition. The following recommendations are based on what parents and young people who had attended specialist provisions found useful and recommendations to address concerns raised by other parents.

Table 8: Recommendations for schools

1	Early planning	School SENCo to hold and invite relevant professionals to attend Year 9 annual review meeting. A key focus of this meeting should be on planning and preparing for adulthood, including future employment, independent living and participation in their community. Use person-centred planning principles during this meeting; this may involve using an A3 paper on the wall for all those involved to contribute.
2	Careers guidance	Schools should consider providing an independent careers advisor for pupils in Year 9 through to Year 11 to provide impartial advice on the range of education or training options available including A levels, apprenticeships, internships, training with employment and other vocational pathways.
3	Providing information and researching post-16 provisions	SENCos should provide parents and young people with a list of local FE provisions. If needed a member of staff could support the young person with researching courses and visiting FE provisions.
4	Communication between schools and	Collaboration and information sharing between school staff school and FE college staff.

	FE provisions	
5	Travel training support	SENCOs to source services that can provide travel training support as early as Year 9.
6	Upskilling staff	Ensure staff, for example form tutors, are aware of ASD transition guidance and policies, to enable them to support young people with their worries around transitions during tutor time or personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons.

6.6. Recommendations for parents

A key finding from this research study is that parents of young people attending mainstream schools felt that they had lacked support from services involved and were unaware of what post-16 provisions were available.

Table 9: Recommendations for parents

1	Local Offer	Parents should look at the local authority's Local Offer website, in order to get a better understanding of what provisions or services are available to them.
2	Early visits to FE provisions	Parents should start visiting FE provisions with their young person before they attend their young person's Year 10 annual review meeting, so that they will be able to discuss and seek advice about these provisions. They should speak with subject teachers of chosen courses.
3	Parent EP requests	According to the changes made to the SEND code of practice, in time to come parents will be able to contact the EP service directly to get advice and to commission EPs to provide further support.
4	Meet with school SENCo	Parents should discuss any concerns with the school SENCo or the SEN lead of the chosen FE provision.

5	Support professionals in working with their young person	Parents can inform professionals before they work with their young person about their young person's interests to support professionals building rapport. If necessary, parents should prepare their young person for working with an unfamiliar adult and the changes made to their timetable.
6	Write down questions	Parents should write down questions that they want to ask professionals, so they will be able to do so during the EHCP annual review.
7	Transition/EHCP annual review meeting	If professionals are not able to attend the annual review meeting, parents can request for a copy of their report in time for this meeting.

6.7. Recommendations for young people

The accounts from young people suggested that they did not feel supported or engaged in the transition process by professionals. The following recommendations have been developed as a checklist to help empower young people with ASD to make decisions and to be able to ask questions or request support during and after their transition. This checklist could be adapted for young people with limited communication skills by using visual aids, this checklist can be found in Appendix 10.

6.8. Recommendations for FE provisions

This study found that there was insufficient pre-transition support in place for young people transitioning onto mainstream vocational courses. Upon transitioning to FE college many of the young people had difficulties coping with the lack of structure, organisation and planning of their lessons by teaching staff. The young people also highlighted sensory difficulties, for example difficulties coping with the crowded and loud environments in the

FE college. Moreover, although many of the young people indicated the desire to make friends there were no groups in place to support the development of their social skills.

Table 10: Recommendations for FE college staff

1	Promoting FE courses on offer	Provide open days, taster days, extra visits, virtual tours and pictures of subject teachers on the FE college website. Member of staff to present to local schools on course options; this will give FE colleges the opportunity to inform families directly on what they are able to offer.
2	Appropriateness of course	Young people should be enrolled on courses that match their strengths, interests and aspirations. To decide on the appropriateness of the course, staff should also carry out a risk assessment based on the young person's learning needs and behaviour. Adaptations should be made to the course accordingly.
3	Settling into FE college	Provide a peer buddy for the first few weeks of the young person transitioning into FE college.
4	Improve channels of communication	Offer a follow-up meeting with parents and young people soon after their transition to discuss any immediate concerns. Include a page on the FE college website to inform parents of up-and-coming events and changes made in college. Provide contact details of a member of staff who parents can call when they have concerns outside of annual review meetings.
5	Ensuring inclusion	Monitor young people's learning and assessment outcomes, progress, understanding and skill development. Individualise learning targets and make adaptations to accommodate their needs. Provide regular updates on the staff system to alert subject teachers about the young person's presenting needs.
6	Hold EHCP annual reviews	In accordance with the SEND code of practice, FE colleges are required to hold an EHCP review meeting annually and to invite a

		representative from the LA. The link EP should attend when necessary.
7	Involve young people with their learning	Invite the young person to attend and to contribute to their EHCP review meeting. If the young person has difficulties verbalising their views, consider inviting an independent/mental capacity advocate. Where possible, encourage pupils to self-evaluate and get them to set joint targets with staff.
6	Changes to timetable	Designated member of staff to update timetables and notify young people to provide sufficient warning of when these changes will occur.
7	Support during lessons	Use of visuals and computer. Make special arrangements to meet each young person's learning needs: for example, use of a scribe, extra time to complete assignments or exams.
8	Being bullied	Make the young people aware of which members of staff they can meet with if they have any concerns.
9	Social skills group	Provide support groups for young people with ASD where they can develop their social skills, discuss their diagnosis and form relationships with other young people who have similar difficulties.
10	Unstructured times of the day	Provide activities such as a computer club, as well as a designated room that is less crowded and noisy than other environments, which young people can go to when they want to be alone, feeling stressed or anxious.
11	Completing assignments	Provide homework groups and a learning mentor for the young people to go to when they need extra support with assignments. This support can be provided during their breaks or after college.
12	Post FE college options/ support	FE college staff to involve employers, universities and mentors so pupils can find out what options are available to them upon leaving FE college and understand what they need to do to make this a reality. Plans, support and advice from professionals should be linked to each young person's individualised outcomes. FE College staff should be aware of what adult services are available to be able to signpost young people for further support.

6.9. Recommendations for educational psychologists

This study demonstrated that educational psychologists play an important role in supporting and advising young people, parents, school SENCOs and FE college staff on the transition of young people into FE provisions.

However, respondents felt that there was a lack of support, planning and co-ordination between services including EPs. The implications for educational psychology practice based on the findings of this study will now be discussed in relation to the four systems discussed in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). The rationale for using this theory is to illustrate how the findings can be applied to the different levels and contexts of EP work.

Microsystem/mesosystem: EPs have been trained to work directly with the young person and with those who make up the young person's immediate environment (parents and professionals). EPs also have knowledge and experience of working with young people with ASD and in child and adolescent development. However, the recent legislation has extended the age range that EPs work with, and many EPs have had only limited experience of supporting young people up to the age of 25 and may require further career professional development in order to support them in working with adults with ASD. Nevertheless, EPs have the skills needed to be able to access the voice of young people, including those who are deemed to have limited mental capacity, particularly during the early planning stages of a young person's transition. This may include using: visuals, augmentative technology, different techniques to build rapport with the young person and

assessing how best to support the young person's involvement based on observations.

In addition, the findings of this study have suggested that parents are not always involved in or supported by services during the early planning stages of their young person's transition. EPs therefore have a role in ensuring parents' full involvement throughout the transition process, by holding consultation meetings to gain their views. EPs also have the skill to mediate relationships between staff, parents and young people when there has been a breakdown in the relationship between parents and school staff.

Exosystem: Whilst there is an emphasis placed locally on supporting young people with ASD with their transition into local FE provisions, the findings of this study suggested that FE colleges need to make better adaptations and modifications to the FE college curriculum. To aid the inclusion of young people with ASD on mainstream vocational courses, EPs therefore have a role to play in informing FE colleges on the interventions, resources and adaptations necessary to support the social and academic inclusion of young people. Furthermore, EPs can provide guidance on implementing evidence-based practice in FE colleges to support young people with ASD to develop their social skills, dealing with bullying and sensory aversions noted in this environment. Once the young person has transitioned into FE college, EPs have a role in continuing to assess the young person's personal, social and learning needs. In addition, the data from respondents suggested that many professionals lack the necessary training needed in ASD, and EPs are well equipped to offer training to FE college staff and LA professionals such as social workers.

The macrosystem: This study has provided evidence supporting the changes to the SEND code of practice and consequently to the EP role. The main recommendations from the SEND code of practice which are applicable to this study are that EPs should provide early intervention, co-ordinate with other services involved, and provide services to post-16 provisions. This study emphasises the importance of EPs becoming involved with young people as early as Year 9, in order to assess the young person's strengths, needs, personal development and independence skills. This would allow appropriate decisions to be made regarding future placements for the young person after leaving school. EPs have a further role to play in Year 9, by supporting schools and professionals during EHC plan annual review meetings. In facilitating the development of appropriate outcomes for the young person's transition to further education and into adulthood based on the use of PCP principles, EPs also have the role of co-ordinating with other services and facilitating the sharing of information to inform assessments and recommendations. Furthermore, it is felt by the researcher that EPs have a vital role to play in keeping abreast of research, legislation and good practice guidance pertaining to ASD transitions and inclusion. This can be achieved by supporting the development of the LA Local Offer and policies on transitions. For example, based on the findings of this study the transition of young people with ASD from mainstream schools into mainstream vocational courses still needs to improve, and this may be achieved by EPs promoting taster sessions, extended college visits and smaller open evenings to FE provisions.

Table 11: summary of recommendations for EPs using Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) theory⁴

Name of the system	Key findings from this research that links with each of the systems
The microsystem	<p>Work directly with the young person to gain their views and include the views of parents.</p> <p>Collate resources to support working with young people with limited communication skills.</p>
The mesosystem	<p>Build rapport and develop relationships with young people.</p> <p>Provide co-ordinated support with other services involved.</p> <p>Attend and contribute to Year 9 annual review and transition planning meetings.</p>
The exosystem	<p>Support FE college staff with developing transition policies and Local Offer.</p> <p>EPs to support FE colleges with developing their anti-bullying policy.</p> <p>Provide workshops on ASD for young people who attend FE college.</p> <p>Provide professional development training for staff.</p>
The macrosystem	<p>Support the LA and FE college staff with the implementation of government policies, legislation and guidance pertaining to transition planning and ASD in adulthood.</p> <p>Support the development of the LA Local Offer.</p>

6.10. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the transition process from secondary school to FE college for young people with ASD, by gaining multiple perspectives on this topic from young people, parents, transition services and professionals.

This study is certainly necessary at this time considering the changes made

⁴ Many of these recommendations will be applicable to other professionals who support young people during their transition.

to the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014) and the reforms set out in the Children and Families Act (HM Government, 2014). In this respect, this study adds to the findings of past research by focusing specifically on the transition of young people from across the ASD spectrum into FE college. Attention was given to including the views of young people with varying levels of communication skills and to prioritising the views of young people by the methodology used.

The data collected and analysed here revealed that, whilst recent legislation (DfE, 2014; HM Government, 2014b) has caused a power shift, which has moved in the direction of young people being given respect as active rather than passive participants in decisions, more work needs to be done to make this a reality. This research demonstrated that although professionals are aware of the changes made to legislation and to transition guidance, young people's views are not consistently sought or acted upon during the transition process.

Additionally, this study has highlighted a range of factors that may support or hinder a young person with ASD accessing and/or transitioning into FE college. These factors included a young person exhibiting challenging behaviour, lacking in independence skills or guidance, as well as co-ordination and early planning from professionals. This study also demonstrated that adults, namely parents and teaching staff who are overprotective or make decisions without taking into consideration the young person's profile of needs, can negatively affect the young person's transition. The findings from this study also revealed that the success and experiences of young people's transition was determined by the type of school (special/mainstream) the young person had transitioned from and whether

they had transitioned onto a mainstream vocational or specialist course. It was found that the young people attending specialist provisions received automatic support from professionals involved.

Finally, this study has highlighted ways in which school staff, FE provisions, parents and EPs can better support, inform and prepare young people with their transition, to ensure that young people with ASD reach their full potential and achieve their future aspirations. The main implications arising from this study are that professionals would benefit from receiving ASD training, and EPs need to develop both their work with FE provisions and their professional awareness and understanding of how best to support young people with ASD emerging into adulthood. This study provides further evidence for the need for EP doctoral training providers to include these opportunities within this three-year course. In conclusion, it is felt that the EP profession is well placed to inform and disseminate best practices and knowledge and to support schools, FE provisions, young people and their families regarding transitions by accessing the voice of the young person, and by supporting the development of transition plans, policies and training packages.

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Volume II: Appendices

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Appendix 1

Literature search

The Boolean search operators “and”/“or” were used to search for journals in the following databases: EBSCO (which allowed the researcher to search the following databases: Academic search complete, British Education Index, PsycINFO, PsycEXTRA, PsycARTICLES, MedLine), ERIC and Google Scholar. The following search terms were used individually or in combination within the database already outlined in the Literature Review Section:

- Autism;
- Autistic;
- Asperger’s syndrome;
- High functioning autism;
- Transition;
- Move;
- Planning;
- Leaving school;
- Adolescence;
- Young people;
- Adulthood;
- Adult;
- Post 16;
- Post-secondary;
- Further/ higher education;
- College.

These search terms were entered into the search engine to identify all of the literature that is relevant to these research topics. The journal articles that were found were refined in order to identify articles that used similar

methodologies. For journal articles, which included the views of young people, their parents and professionals were found using the following keywords:

- Participation;
- Perspectives;
- Experiences;
- Involvement.

Further journal articles on young people with ASD transitions were identified by searching the National Autistic Society, Ambitious about Autism and Preparing for adulthood publications.

Appendix 2

Parent invitation letter

Danielle Scott

Trainee Educational Psychologist

xxxxx Educational Psychology Service, Civic centre, Stockwell Close, BR1
3UH

Dear Parent/ Carer,

As part of my training for my doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education, I will be carrying out a small research project at xxxxx College, which aims to find out about young people with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), transition from secondary school into further education (FE) College. I would like to invite you and your son/ daughter to take part in this study, as I am interested in learning about your personal views and experiences regarding this transition.

I met with your son/ daughter today to tell them about this research project and they have informed me that they would like to take part. I am writing to you to ensure that you are happy for your son/ daughter to participate. If agreed, they will be asked to speak with me for 15 to 30 minutes within xxxxx College. This will incorporate ways that they prefer to communicate as well as their interests. The interview is voluntary and their privacy and confidentiality will be protected. If there are any questions that your son/ daughter does not want to answer, he/ she will be free to skip questions or stop taking part in the interview at any time. The questions that will be asked in the interview aim to explore and to understand their thoughts and feelings regarding their transition into FE College and it is hoped that this will be an enjoyable experience for them. If you would like your son/ daughter to participate in this research project, it is important that you complete the return slip on the following page.

Following this, I would like to interview you for 30 to 45 minutes in order to learn about your views on your son/ daughters transition. Both yours and your son/daughter's views are very important, and it is hoped that the findings of this research project will help to improve the transition process for other young people with ASD both locally and nationally. However, please note that your son/ daughter can still participate in this study even if you do not want to participate yourself, alternatively, you can participate in this study if your son or daughter is not able to.

If you have any questions please contact Danielle Scott by telephone on 07984 037138 or via email danielle.scott@xxxxxx.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Danielle Scott

**Please remind your son/ daughter to return the completed slip below to
xxxx Inclusion Support Administrator in room [REDACTED], preferably by
tomorrow or by the 14th November by the latest.**

I Do/ Do Not want my son/ daughter to take part in this study.

(Please delete as appropriate)

I do/ do not want to participate myself.

(Please delete as appropriate)

Son/ daughter's name: _____

Parent/carer's name: _____

(Capital letters)

(forename)

(surname)

Signature: _____ Today's date: _____

Telephone number: _____

Email: _____

Information sheet

Transitions from school to a Further Education College

Why is this research being conducted?

Recent research suggests that ASD is prevalent disorder affecting 1 in 100 children and young people. According to the Ambitious about Autism campaign, only 1 in 4 young people diagnosed with ASD between the ages 16-25 are accessing Further Education College. Research suggests that many young people with ASD do not successfully transition into adulthood, which is often marked by going onto further education, employment, training and achieving independent living. These statistics suggests that many young people with ASD are not realising their full potential. However, despite these findings there is limited research that includes the views of young people, parents and transition services about this transition process. It is an important aspect of this current research project to provide young people, their parents and transition services with the opportunity to express their experiences on what supports or hinders young people with ASD access and transition from compulsory education into further education.

Who is conducting this research?

Danielle Scott is currently employed by xxxxx Local Authority as Trainee Educational Psychologist and has experience of working with children and young people diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder, having worked in a secondary specialist ASD provision and as an autism outreach practitioner. Danielle has received Ethical approval from the Research Ethics committee at the Institute of Education and by xxxx Local Authority to carry out this research study.

How can I get in contact with Danielle?

Danielle does not have access to your contact details and will not be able to contact you directly, which is why Danielle is sending you this information sheet and letter about this research project via your son/ daughter. If you

would like your son/ daughter to participate in this study, it is important that you send back the return slip with your son/ daughter preferably by tomorrow to xxxx- Inclusion and Support Administrator at xxxx College (room G166). Alternatively, you can contact me by telephone on [REDACTED] or email danielle.scott@xxxxxxx.gov.uk.

How will I hear about the findings of this research?

If you chose to take part in the study, on request you will be sent a link to be able to view a brief report regarding the findings of this research, which will be posted online. The findings of the research will be confidential and will not contain any personal information ie. names, address or anything that would identify participating schools, college, participants or services involved.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Danielle Scott

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Parent consent form

Parent/carer's name: _____
(Capital letters) (forename) (surname)

Please tick the following statements if you consent to the following,

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------------|
| I have read the attached letter and I am happy to take part in this research study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| My son/ daughter has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| I understand that my interview is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason why. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| I understand that my interview will be voice recorded; these recordings will be transcribed and analysed. All names in the transcripts and within the write up of the research will be anonymised. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| I understand that my interview data will be held confidentially and no one will have access to it except for the researcher and her research supervisor. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| I understand that anonymised quotes from the raw data may appear within the write up of this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please tick |
| I understand that this interview is being conducted as part of a Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| I understand that I can contact Danielle Scott by email danielle.scott@xxxxxx.gov.uk or by telephone on 07984 037138 to discuss this research study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |
| Once this research is completed, I would like to receive feedback on the findings of this research. | <input type="checkbox"/> | please tick |

Appendix 3

Pen portraits of each of the Young People

Zane

Zane was 16 years old when he was interviewed. He is a White British boy who has a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome (ASD). Zane attended a local mainstream school before transitioning into FE College. Zane enjoys researching weaponry and has an interest in hoovers, particularly how they are created and designed. Zane is studying Mechanics, Engineering and English BTEC. On his days off from FE College, Zane works in his father's Coffee shop, where he has learnt to bake and now he is able to serve customers. Zane would like to become an Engineer or Weapons Designer in the future and he is contemplating going to university.

Zane is a very articulate boy and he preferred to talk rather than draw during his interview.

Max

Max is a 16-year-old boy who had transitioned to FE College from an out-of-borough mainstream secondary school. Max is of mixed Pilipino and British heritage and has a diagnosis of Autism. Max has an interest in cars and he is currently studying Car Mechanics in FE College, which has given him the opportunity to work on different car models. Max also enjoys travelling on public transport and memorising the different bus schedules. On his days off from FE College, he travels to far destinations from his house on some occasions he travels by bus to Heathrow airport. Max hopes to go onto an apprenticeship course after leaving FE College to support his pursuit of becoming a Car Mechanic.

Max required support during his interview with the use of visual aids.

Hailey

Hailey is a 16-year-old girl who has a diagnosis of autism. Hailey is White British and she attended a local mainstream school prior to transitioning to FE College. Hailey is studying ICT and she enjoys drawing and painting. Hailey aspires to become a Graphics Designer and intends to stay on at FE College to complete a Graphics vocational course when she passes her ICT course. On her days off from FE College, Hailey enjoys drawing, shopping and spending time with her cat.

Hailey becomes anxious when she has to talk with an unfamiliar adult; she was supported in her interview by drawing and squeezing her calming ball when she was feeling anxious.

William

William is an 18-year-old boy who moved to FE College from an out-of-borough specialist 6th form. William is of Black African ethnicity and has a diagnosis of autism and severe learning difficulties. William is enrolled on a Personal and social development course in FE College, where his tutors are supporting him to learn to read and write and to develop his independent travel skills. When I first met with William he mentioned that he was being bullied by a few of the young people who attended the mainstream vocational courses, however, when we met for his interview he said things had improved and was reluctant to discuss this situation further. William seemed unsure of what course or training he wants to do when he leaves FE College but he told me that he wants to become a Carpenter or a builder in the future. On his days off from FE College William attends a youth group in the community, which is run by an autistic charity.

William had difficulties expressing himself during his interview and spoke in one to three word phrases, William required visual aids and he preferred to draw during his interview.

Sam

Sam is a 16-year-old boy who has a diagnosis of autism. Sam is of Latin American descent and moved to England when he was 12. Sam attended a local specialist secondary school before moving to FE College. Sam is currently studying a personal and social development course in FE College, once this has finished Sam wants to complete further courses at this college. Sam also aspires to become a footballer and plays in a team within the community. Sam enjoys playing X Box and Nintendo Wii on his days off from FE College.

Sam is a fluent English speaker and was happy to talk during his interview.

Tom

Tom is a 16-year-old boy who has a diagnosis of autism with mild Learning Difficulties. Tom is White British and attended an out-of-borough mainstream secondary school before transitioning into FE College. At the time of his interview Tom was studying a personal and social development course. Tom mentioned that he enjoyed this course because he wanted to learn to read and write as well as develop his personal skills, such as using his bankcard at the cash machine. On his days off from FE College, Tom enjoys meeting with the friends he has made whilst attending FE College. In regards to the future, Tom seemed to be unsure of what area of work he wanted go into and he mentioned that he fears not being able to get a job. Tom was happy to speak without drawing during his interview, although emotion cards were used for relevant questions.

Marvin

Marvin is an 18-year-old boy, he has a diagnosis of autism with mild learning difficulties and he is White British. Marvin attended a local school specialist sixth form before enrolling on an employment preparation course at FE College. Marvin is now completing a work placement with a charity that maintains the gardens owned by the council. On his days off from FE College, he has been training a guide dog, which has given him the confidence to go out into the community independently. Marvin finds spending time with animals both calming and therapeutic. After Marvin completes the employment and preparation course, he hopes to join an Agriculture and horticulture course within a local autistic charity.

Marvin enjoyed drawing during his interview and frequently answered questions by impersonating a cat.

Appendix 4

Original Ethical Approval Form

DEdPsy (Y2) STUDENT RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FORM Psychology & Human Development

This form should be completed with reference to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct – available online from www.bps.org.uk

On which course are you registered? Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

An exploration of the views and experiences of young people with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) transition from secondary school into further and higher education college.

Name of researcher(s): Danielle Greenidge-Scott

Name of supervisor/s (for student research): Diana Tsokova and Karen Majors

Date: 17.03.2014 Intended start date of data collection (month and year only): April 2014

- 1. Summary of planned research** (please provide the following details: project title, purpose of project, its academic rationale and research questions, a brief description of methods and measurements; participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria; estimated start date and duration of project). It's expected that this will take approx. 200–300 words, though you may write more if you feel it is necessary. Please also give further details here if this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee.

Project title:

An exploration of the views and experiences of young people with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) transition from secondary school into further and higher education college.

Purpose of project:

To gain an understanding of young people's experiences of their transition from secondary education into further education.

Academic rationale:

Within the last ten years, it has become increasingly an area of interest to explore associated difficulties with transitions from childhood to adulthood, for young people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) (Chown and Beavin, 2012). However, there is a lack of qualitative studies, which provides in-depth exploration of the experiences of young people, parents' and

transition services experiences of this transition process. It is therefore a key objective of this research to elicit the voice of young people diagnosed with ASD. In addition, the perspectives will be sought from their parents and transition services to gain an understanding of the systemic factors that support or hinder successful transition by the following research questions.

Research questions:

1. What are the views and experiences of young people with ASD around their transition into further and higher education college?
2. What are the views of parents regarding this transition?
3. What supports or hinders access and the transition of young people with ASD into further and higher education?
4. What are the roles of transition services in supporting young people with ASD in their transition into further and higher education?
5. What are the views of transition services on national and local initiatives that exist in relation to the access and transition of young people with ASD into further and higher education?

Brief methodology:

This research project will be a qualitative, exploratory study. A longitudinal research design will be employed by carrying out one-to-one semi-structured interviews with young people and their parents before and after their transition into a further and higher education college. First data will be collected during the last term of school (between May and July 2014) and again in the autumn term when they start college (between October and January 2015). A focus group will be held with transition services in borough X that support young people that are post 16 into further education and adult services. The data will then be analysed thematically.

Participants:

All young people from the ages of 16-19 who are transitioning into the local further and higher education college will be interviewed before and after their transition.

Parents

Interviews will be held with parents before and after their child's transition.

Transition services

In total, 9 statutory and non-statutory services that support the transition process from school to college or adulthood and will be invited to participate in this study.

Recruitment methods:

The sample for this research will consist of young people identified by a purposive sampling strategy. A further and higher education college within one local authority (LA) has signed up to the Ambitious about Autism (AaA) two year transitions project which ends in 2015. A working group was formed that the researcher is part of, who meet monthly. Within this working group all the young people who plan to transition to this college will be discussed in April/ May when all applications are received. All young that meet the inclusion criteria listed below will be invited to participate in this study.

All young people identified for this project will need to meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. Received a clinical diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder (including what is formally known as Asperger's syndrome)
2. Had received a statement of Special Educational Needs, with ASD or social communication difficulties specified as their primary need
3. School leavers that are in year 11 or year 13 in September 2014

Recruitment of transition services for the focus group

The job title of a member of the AaA working group is 16-25 Commissioning Manager. This practitioner will act as a gatekeeper for identifying further contacts from the other transition services.

Estimated start date and duration of project

Carry out pilot by April 2014 and actual data collection to commence by May 2014 - January 2015.

Pilot

A pilot study will be conducted in order to develop appropriate methods of accessing the voice of the young person and to revise questions accordingly so that they are meaningful and appropriate for participants with ASD (Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee and Sloper, 2004).

The value of the study:

Considering the changes made to the Draft Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, 2013 and the new reforms in the Children and Families Bill, 2013, this study aims to add to paucity of qualitative research by eliciting the voices of young people with ASD. In addition, there is clear relevance to the profession of educational psychology, in terms of the need to gain a greater understanding of how best to support young people with ASD post 16 with their successful transition into further education. An additional aim is to gain a better understanding of the systemic factors that support or hinder transitions, by involving transition services within this research study. Research findings may help facilitate multi-disciplinary work to support this vulnerable group of young people that we will be working with in the near future. Furthermore, it is felt that EP profession is well placed to inform and disseminate best practice and knowledge to support the LA, schools, colleges, young people and their families regarding transitions.

- 2. Specific ethical issues** (Please outline the main ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research, and how they will be addressed. It's expected that this will require approx. 200–300 words, though you may write more if you feel it is necessary. You will find information in the notes about answering this question).

Ethical approval

Once ethical approval has been granted by the Institute of Education (IOE) Psychology and Human Development department, information sheets will be sent to the participating schools and college outlining this research. Following this, the researcher will obtain informed and written consent from all participants, which will continue throughout the interview process by explaining to participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point (BPS, 2009). If the young person indicates that, they no longer want to be interviewed by verbal or nonverbal cues the interview will be terminated immediately.

Informed consent/ assent

Further consideration is needed to ensure that children and young people are able to give informed consent, particularly when working with young people with an ASD who might have learning difficulties or complex needs. For this reason, the researcher will send simplified age appropriate information sheets to each young person, based on principles from Carol Gray's (1994) social stories and the example given in Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee and Sloper's (2004)

study. This is aimed to support parents with informing and preparing their child about my visit. Since it is questionable whether a researcher can truly gain informed consent from young people with complex needs and depending on their mental capacity, the researcher will request written consent from each parent. In addition, parents will be given the option to have a telephone conversation with the researcher to discuss the research study further.

Working with young people/ adults (16-19)

As discussed previously, although official consent will be retrieved from every parent before embarking on this interview process, all of the young people will be given the respect and the opportunity to decide whether they would like to participate in this study (Skelton, 2008). In addition, the researcher will continually engage in personal and professional reflexivity throughout this study. With a particular regard to the power relations between herself and each of the young people, for example, by balancing the necessity of building rapport in order to encourage participation within this study whilst remaining in the position of a researcher (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Observations

The researcher intends to spend time in all of the participating schools to observe and to meet the young person prior to carrying out any interviews for the following reasons as advocated by Thomas and O’Kane (1998). Firstly, this will provide contextual information about the young person that will help the researcher to be responsive to their specific needs during their interviews. Secondly, this will give the researcher the opportunity to build rapport with the young person in order to alleviate any possible anxieties before any interview takes place.

Accessing the voice of young people with an ASD

The researcher intends to make sure the research questions are flexible and non-threatening by taking into consideration the young person’s strengths and interests. The researcher will adapt the following strategy, suggested by Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee and Sloper (2004). The young person will be given the option to talk about their experiences or to create a poster as a shared activity by drawing pictures on the poster that have meaning and personal relevance in relation to their transition. In addition, the researcher intends to sit next to the young person to avoid eye contact, which might be uncomfortable for some and promotes shared working. This activity will form a basis for interviewing the young person; for some it will be possible to

provide verbal prompts to explore their answers further, others may need assistive technology or symbol writer in order to support direct participation of young people with varying levels of need in this research study. In addition, young people will be given the option to have a familiar teaching assistant to join them during the interview to reduce their anxiety levels. However, the TA will be briefed before the interview that they should not participate during the interview process. Interviews will take place in a quiet room within school or college, which is in a familiar environment for them. This will also ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality

The researcher will assure participants of their anonymity and confidentiality. Within subsequent transcripts and within the write up of the study, participants will be referred to by a pseudonym of their choice (BPS, 2009). However, the researcher also intends to notify young people of her safeguarding duties as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and as a researcher if anything is disclosed which is of any concern about their wellbeing or of others this would need to be reported (BPS, 2009).

Debriefing

Participants will be debriefed at the end of each interview and they will be reassured that the audio tape recordings and manual data will be kept secure under lock and key.

Dissemination of research findings

Within the informed consent form, participants will be given a tick box option as to whether they would like to receive the research findings. In addition, the research findings will be adapted to ensure that is accessible to the young people that participated in the study.

3. Further details

Please answer the following questions.

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the exactly what is involved in the research to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked **No** to any of Q1-8, please ensure further details are given in section 2 above.

		YES	NO	N/A
9	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If Yes , give details on a separate sheet and state what you will tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Will your project involve human participants as a secondary source of data (e.g. using existing data sets)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked **Yes** to any of 9 - 11, please provide a full explanation in section 2 above.

		YES	NO	N/A
12	Does your project involve working with any of the following special groups?			
	• Animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	• School age children (under 16 years of age)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• Young people of 17-18 years of age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• People with learning or communication difficulties	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• Patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	• People in custody	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	• People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked Yes to 12, please refer to BPS guidelines, and provide full details in sections 1 and 2 above. **Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students).**

Revised Ethical Approval Form

DEdPsy (Y2) STUDENT RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FORM
Psychology & Human Development

This form should be completed with reference to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct – available online from www.bps.org.uk

On which course are you registered?

Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

Name of researcher(s): Danielle Greenidge- Scott

Name of supervisor/s (for student research): Diana Tsokova and Karen Majors

Date: 04.10.2014 Intended start date of data collection (month and year only):
April 2014

- 2. Summary of planned research** (please provide the following details: project title, purpose of project, its academic rationale and research questions, a brief description of methods and measurements; participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria; estimated start date and duration of project). It's expected that this will take approx. 200–300 words, though you may write more if you feel it is necessary. Please also give further details here if this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee.

Project title:

An exploration of the views and perspectives of young people (with ASD), their parents and practitioners on the transition from secondary education into further education.

Purpose of project:

To gain an understanding of what supports or hinders successful transitions from secondary education into further education.

Academic rationale:

Within the last ten years, there have been a number of studies exploring the transition process from childhood to adulthood, for young people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) (Chown and Beavin, 2012). However, there are little

qualitative studies, which provide an in-depth exploration of young people's experiences of transitioning into further education; it is therefore a key objective of the current research study to elicit the voice of young people diagnosed with ASD. Additional information will be sought from their parents and transition services who may add to the understanding of the systemic factors that support or hinder successful transitions.

6. What are the views and experiences of young people with ASD transitioning into further education?
7. What are the views of parents regarding this transition?
8. What supports or hinders access and the successful transition of young people with ASD into FE College?
9. What are the roles of practitioners in supporting young people with ASD with their transition into FE College?
10. What are the views of parents and professionals on national and local initiatives that exist in relation to this transition process?

Brief methodology:

This research project will be a qualitative study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews will be carried out with young people with ASD once they have transitioned into one further education college, within one local authority. Additional interviews will be carried out with the parents of these young people and with practitioners that support this transition process. All of the collected data will be analysed thematically.

Recruitment methods:

The sample for this research study will consist of young people identified by using a purposive sampling strategy. All young people identified for this project will need to meet the following inclusion criteria:

4. They had received a clinical diagnosis of an ASD, including what is formally known as autism and Asperger's syndrome.

5. Where applicable they possessed a statement of Special Educational Needs under Section 324 of the Education Act 1996 or an Education Health Care Plan under Section 36(1) of the Children and Families Act 2014, stating ASD or social communication difficulties as their primary need.
6. They had transitioned into FE College at the end of year 11-14 with chronological ages ranging from 16-18 in the year September 2015.

This inclusion criteria has been entered into the college database by the college administrator to identify appropriate participants. All of the identified young people that match this criteria will be invited to participate in this study.

Recruitment of transition services for the focus group

The job title of a colleague that works in the same local authority as the researcher is a 16-25 Preparing for Adulthood Commissioning Manager. By using snowballing sampling method, this practitioner has helped to identify other professionals that support this transition process. All 8 practitioners have been invited to participate in this study.

Estimated start date and duration of project

A pilot will be carried out in April 2014 and further data collection will commence between October and December 2014.

Pilot

A pilot study will be conducted in order to develop appropriate methods of accessing the voice of the young person. It is also hoped that the pilot will help to inform the final interview schedule so that the questions posed are meaningful and appropriate for participants with ASD (Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee and Sloper, 2004).

The value of the study:

Considering the changes made to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP), 2014 and the new reforms set out in the Children and Families Act, 2014, this study aims to add to the paucity of qualitative research by eliciting the voices of young people with ASD. This study has a clear relevance to the profession of educational psychology, in terms of the need to gain a greater understanding of how best to support young people with ASD post 16 with their successful transition into further education and ways of supporting them to achieve positive life outcomes. Furthermore, it is felt that educational psychologists are best placed to inform and disseminate best practices and knowledge to support the LA, schools, colleges, young people and their families regarding this transition phase.

- 2. Specific ethical issues** (Please outline the main ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research, and how they will be addressed. It's expected that this will require approx. 200–300 words, though you may write more if you feel it is necessary. You will find information in the notes about answering this question).

Ethical issues arising in research

The reason for resubmitting this ethics form is due to having to change the focus of this research study due to two ethical challenges that have arisen in the planning stages of this research project. The first ethical challenge is gaining access to participants. In borough X there is one further and higher education mainstream college. Permission was granted by individuals in authority (gatekeepers) within the college to carry out this research project, in October 2013. However, since then the gatekeepers within this college have informed the researcher that they are not permitted to give out the contact details of parents, due to the college's confidentiality and data protection policy. Initially the researcher wanted to carry out interviews with young people and their parents at two points of time, pre and post the young person's transition. However, due to difficulties in gaining direct access to participants, in May 2014 the administrator of the college's inclusion team was asked to send out invitation letters that were prepared by the researcher. However, the administrator sent these letters out in the middle of July 2014. As a result, out

of 35 parents and young people, only one parent responded to the invitation letter and by this point, their child had already left their secondary school. The second ethical challenge is whether young people with ASD who are over 16 have the mental capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study without gaining consent from their parents. According to SEND CoP (2014) and the Mental Capacity Act (2005) both legal documents assert that young people over compulsory school age (post 16) with SEN should be viewed as having the mental capacity and capability to make decisions pertaining to their own lives (unless proven otherwise), and should be supported to do so. However, laws regarding informed consent are often contradictory. On one hand, some policies treat young people (post 16) with SEN as capable to make their own decisions whereas others claim that they are vulnerable adults and therefore require support and consent from their guardian.

Access to participants

In order to overcome these presenting ethical challenges, in accordance with the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct 1.3 (i) additional time will be spent to ensure that each of the young people have been given many opportunities to understand the nature, purpose and consequence of participating in this study. Once ethical approval has been granted by the Institute of Education (IOE) Psychology and Human Development department the researcher intends to hold two briefing meetings. One meeting will be held in with young people in the mainstream section of the college and again with young people in the Learning Living Work Skills section of the college. This will give the young people the opportunity to opt-in the study prior to gaining consent from their parents. The briefing meeting will be an opportunity for the young people to meet with the researcher and to learn in accessible terms about this research study. The briefing meeting will be held within the college the young people currently attend with the support of their Learning Support Assistant's (LSAs). The LSAs will be fully briefed on the purpose of this research study and will be able to explain the study to the young person in their preferred communication style.

The following information will be covered during the briefing meeting:

- what the research is about.
- when the interview will take place and who with.
- the duration of the interview and what lesson they will miss if they take part.
- the types of activities that they might be involved in during the interview.
- what the research will be used for and what impact it might have.
- the young people will be asked to take their information sheet and a parent letter home to their parents to read, sign and return.
- the young people will be told that their parents will be invited to take part in this study.
- they will also be told that will not be able to participate in the study unless their parent signs their consent form and agrees for them to take part in this study.
- to close this session the young people will be given the opportunity to ask any questions.

In addition to this, the researcher has also prepared a simplified age appropriate information sheet/ consent form based on principles from Carol Gray's (1994) social stories and the example given in Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee and Sloper's (2004) study. The purpose of this information sheet/ consent form is to aid the understanding of the young people in regards to this research study, to gain their consent and to prepare them for their interview. At the end of the information sheet/ consent form, each young person will be able to tick the yes/ no box to either opt in/out of the research. Each young person will be asked to tick their chosen box independently, to ensure that they have made an unpressured informed decision. Following this, the researcher will ask each of the young people to take their parent letter and information sheet to their parents. The purpose of this letter is twofold; firstly, it will give parents the opportunity to notify me whether they are happy for their son/ daughter to take part in the study. In addition, gaining their parents signature will ensure that they have received the letter. Secondly, the letter will invite parents to participate in this study themselves. Parents will be asked to notify the researcher directly via email or by telephone to book an interview date/time or to discuss the study further. Parents that agree to participate in this study will then be asked to complete their own consent form at the point of their interview.

To follow up non-responders a reminder letter will be sent to parents with a new response date.

To determine whether young people are able to give informed consent will be assessed on an individual basis by the following checklist adapted from Lewis and Kellett (2004):

- Able to understand information relevant to their decision- this will be determined by asking the young people about what they are required to do.
- Able to communicate a decision- verbally, by pointing or ticking the yes or no boxes on their consent form.
- To ensure that they are able to retain what is asked of them. In addition to this they will be reminded of their rights prior to starting their interview. Although the researcher intends to give each young person the opportunity to opt in and express their decision as to whether they would like to take part in the study. In instances where the young person and their parent do not agree, for example, the young person would like to participate in the study. However, their parent would prefer for them not to. In order to address this ethical dilemma if the young person's parent has provided their contact details on their return slip, the researcher will be able to contact the parent to discuss this study and their concerns (mediation). If the parent has not provided their contact details, the young person will not be able to participate in this study.

Right to withdraw

Once the researcher has obtained informed and written consent from all participants, this process will continue throughout the study. For example, all participants will be made aware that they have the right to withdraw at any time during the interview (BPS, 2009). In addition to this, the researcher intends to give each young person a stop card, which they can use to notify the researcher if they want to stop the interview at any time. The researcher will also observe the young person to keep watch of any nonverbal cues that may indicate that they no longer want to be interviewed and will gently check how they are feeling using visual aids. If it is felt that any of the young people do not want to continue with their interview, the interview will be terminated immediately.

Working with young people/ adults (16-19)

The researcher will continually engage in personal and professional reflexivity throughout this study. With a particular regard to the power relations between herself and each of the young people, for example, by balancing the necessity of building rapport in order to encourage participation within this study whilst remaining in the position of a researcher (King and Horrocks, 2010). In accordance to 1.1 (i) of the BPS (2009) the young people that participate in this study will be viewed as competent and capable of communicating their views and their views and wishes will be respected.

Observations

The researcher intends to spend time in the college to meet the young people prior to carrying out any interviews for the following reasons as advocated by Thomas and O’Kane (1998). Firstly, this will provide contextual information about the young person that will help the researcher to be responsive to their specific needs during their interviews. Secondly, this will give the researcher the opportunity to build rapport with the young person in order to alleviate any possible anxieties before any interview takes place.

Accessing the voice of young people with ASD

The researcher intends to make sure the research questions are flexible and non-threatening by taking into consideration the young person’s strengths and interests. The researcher will adapt the pace of the interview to accommodate the young person’s communication style. The following strategy, suggested by Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee and Sloper (2004) will be adapted, the young people will be given the option to talk about their experiences or to create a poster as a shared activity between the researcher and the young person for example, by drawing pictures that have meaning and personal relevance in relation to their transition. In addition, the researcher intends to sit next to the young person to avoid eye contact, which might be uncomfortable for some and will promote shared working. This activity will form a basis for interviewing the young person; for some it will be possible to provide verbal prompts to explore their answers further, others may need assistive technology or symbol writer in order to support direct participation of young people with varying levels of need in this research study. In addition, young people will be given the option to have

a familiar LSA to join them during the interview to reduce their anxiety levels. However, the LSA will be briefed before the interview that they should not participate during the interview process. Interviews will take place in a quiet and familiar room within their college, which will also ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality

The researcher will assure participants of their anonymity and confidentiality. In interviews where the young person is accompanied by a LSA, the LSA will be asked to sign a consent form which declares that they will keep the information shared in the interview confidential. Within subsequent transcripts and within the write up of the study, participants will be referred to by a pseudonym of their choice (BPS, 2009). However, during the interviews the researcher intends to notify young people of her safeguarding duties as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and as a researcher if anything is disclosed which is of any concern about their wellbeing or of others this would need to be reported (BPS, 2009).

Debriefing

At the end of each interview, participants will be given an opportunity to ask questions and to add to their responses. They will be reassured that the audio tape recordings and manual data will be kept secure under lock and key. Participants will be reminded of the purpose of the study and how the data collected will be used. In addition, participants will be reminded that they can contact the researcher at a later date to discuss the study further.

Dissemination of research findings

Within the informed consent form, participants will be given a tick box option as to whether they would like to receive a summary of the research findings when completed. In addition, the research findings will be adapted to ensure that it is accessible to the young people that participated in the study.

3. Further details

Please answer the following questions.

Will you describe the exactly what is involved in the research to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?

Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?

Will you obtain written consent for participation?

If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?

Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?

With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?

Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?

Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?

If you have ticked **No** to any of Q1-8, please ensure further details are given in section 2 above.

Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?

Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If **Yes**, give details on a separate sheet and state what you will tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help).

Will your project involve human participants as a secondary source of data (e.g. using existing data sets)

If you have ticked **Yes** to any of 9 - 11, please provide a full explanation in section 2 above.

Does your project involve working with any of the following special groups?

- Animals
- School age children (under 16 years of age)
- Young people of 17-18 years of age
- People with learning or communication difficulties
- Patients
- People in custody
- People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)

If you have ticked Yes to 12, please refer to BPS guidelines, and provide full details in sections 1 and 2 above. **Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students).**

There is an obligation on the Student and their advisory panel to bring to the attention of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

4. Attachments

Please attach the following items to this form:

- Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee, if applicable
- Where available, information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research.

5. Declaration

*This form (and any attachments) should be signed by the Trainee, Academic and EP Supervisors and then **submitted to Lorraine Fernandes in the Programme Office**. You will be informed when it has been approved. If there are concerns that this research may not meet BPS ethical guidelines then it will be considered by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. **If your application is incomplete, it will be returned to you.***

For completion by students

I am familiar with the BPS Guidelines for ethical practices in psychological research (and have discussed them in relation to my specific project with members of my advisory panel). I confirm that to the best of my knowledge this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Signed 

Date.09.10.2014

Print Name Danielle Greenidge-Scott

(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

For completion by supervisors/ advisory panel

We consider that this project meets the BPS ethics guidelines on conducting research and does not need to be referred to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Signed.....Print Name
.....Date.....

(Academic Research Supervisor)

Signed.....Print Name
.....Date.....

(EP Supervisor)

FREC use

Date considered:_____ Reference:_____

Approved and filed Referred back to applicant
 Referred to RGEC

Signature of Chair of
FREC:_____

Appendix 5

Young People's Consent Forms:

My name is: _____

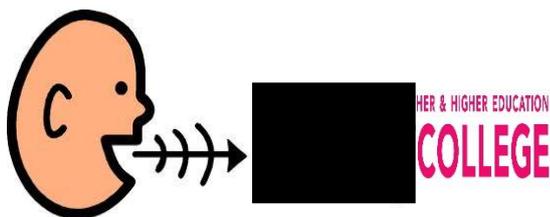
(first name)

(surname)

I am _____ years old

I like (interests): _____

Danielle wants to speak with you at xxxxx College

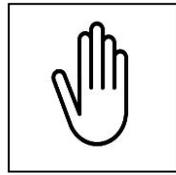


For 20 minutes

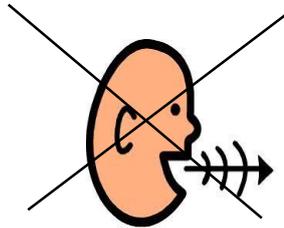
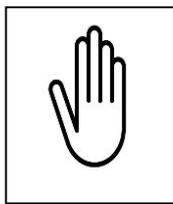
About what you like and don't like at college



Danielle will bring a Stop card with her.



You can stop talking with Danielle at any time



Is it OK to meet Danielle? Please tick



Yes



No

My name is: _____

(first name)

(surname)

I am _____ years old

I like (interests): _____

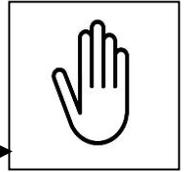
Who is Danielle?

Danielle is interested in what you think about college. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist, Danielle works with teachers, parents and with different groups of children and young people. Sometimes Danielle works with or observes children and young people in their class to find ways to help them learn.

Danielle will visit me at college and this is what will happen during my visit:

- Danielle will come to my classroom to meet me and to see what activities I enjoy.
- I will then go with Danielle into a quiet room at college.
- My learning support assistant can come with me if I want them to.
- Danielle will ask me some questions about how I am feeling about going to college.
- I can just speak to Danielle about this or I can make a poster with Danielle using drawings or pictures.

- If there are any questions that I do not want to answer, then I can tell Danielle and that will be OK.
- Danielle will bring a Stop card with her. It will look like this.
- I should be finished within 20-30 minutes, although it may take a few minutes more or a few minutes less.
- If for some reason I want to stop talking to Danielle, I can hold the Stop card up to stop talking or to have a break. I am free to go back to my classroom at any time. Danielle won't mind!
- If there are any changes or new instructions, Danielle will explain what will happen next when Danielle meets me again at college.
- Danielle will meet with my mum/ dad at college if they chose to speak to her about my learning and about going to college.



Is it OK to meet Danielle? Please tick

Yes

No

Appendix 6

Invitation (email) sent to services that support transitions

Dear colleagues,

I am currently employed by xxxx Local Authority as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, as part of my doctoral training at the Institute of Education. This research project aims to explore the views and experiences of families and services on what factors supports or hinders young people with an autistic spectrum disorder with their transition from compulsory education into further education and essentially into adulthood.

In accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014 and Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice 2014, which stipulates that we must all provide a co-ordinated service to families in order to support young people in achieving their fullest potential. To support this process, **you are invited to participate in a focus group discussion with 6-8 professionals that will represent different teams within the borough from health, education, social care and the voluntary sector. You will be given the opportunity to share your honest opinion and expertise on the following topics: transition planning, assessment processes and ways of including the voice of young people during decision-making. This will take place within a casual environment and with complete confidentiality. Light refreshments will also be provided.**

The focus group will last approximately 1 ½ hours and will take place at the Civic centre ([REDACTED]). Further details will be provided once you have confirmed your attendance.

Please choose from one of the following dates/ times:

Friday 31st October from 10.00 to 11.30am

Friday 31st October from 3.00 to 4.30pm

Wednesday 4th November 10.00 to 11.30am

Wednesday 4th November 3.00 to 4.30pm

If you are able to participate in this focus group, please reply to this e-mail message as to which of the dates/ time you are able to attend. Please note that the focus group will run on the date that is convenient for the majority of respondents. In addition to this, **please complete the quick questionnaire that is attached to this email and return to me via email by Friday 10th October.**

Your views and experiences are extremely valuable and it is hoped that your participation will lead to improvements in how young people and families are supported in the future.

Regards,

Danielle Scott

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Consent Form for transition services

Please tick the relevant statements of consent:

I have read the attached email and I am happy to take part in this research study. please tick

I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary and I am able to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. please tick

I understand that that my interview will be voice recorded and these recordings will be transcribed and analysed. All names of participants will be anonymised in the transcripts and within the write up of the research. please tick

I understand that the interview data will be treated as confidential and no one will have access to it except for the researcher and her research supervisor. please tick

I understand that anonymised quotes from the raw data may appear within the write up of this thesis. please tick

I understand that I can contact Danielle Scott by email danielle.scott@xxxxxxx.gov.uk or by telephone on [REDACTED] to discuss this research study. please tick

Once this research is completed, I would like to receive feedback on the findings of this research. please tick

Name (Capital letters): _____
(forename) (surname)

Signature: _____ Today's date: _____

Appendix 7

Services that support transitions demographic questionnaire

To aid in the analysis of data that will be collected from your interview, I would appreciate if you could share a little more information about yourself.

1. Current Position Title:

2. Number of years working in this role (please circle the item which best reflects your situation):

0 to 5 years

6 to 10 years

more than 10 years

3. Please provide a brief description of your role:

4. What age group do you provide this service for?

Appendix 8

General areas to cover during interview with young person

All that you say is very important to me and there are no right or wrong answers. Please tell me as much as you can.

Here is a sign for you to hold up if you don't want to answer any more questions. Remember you can stop at any time.

I will record what we discuss today, I will keep the recording with me and no one else will know that it was you who said it. If you like you can choose a pretend name for yourself.

If you tell me something that might be of harm to you or to others then I will need to let your teacher or another adult know.

General interview prompts:

That's interesting, please tell me more

Is there anything else?

How does that make you feel?

Ok, what do you mean by?

Ok, can you give me an example of this (at home, school or college?)

End of interview:

Is there anything else you would like to add/ to tell me?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Debrief for parents and professionals:

I would like to thank you for taking part in my research. It is hoped that your participation will help inform the development of local policies and practices that currently support or hinder the transition of young people with ASD into further education.

This voice recording will be transcribed and then analysed and then this will be included in the write up of my research. I would like to assure you

that the interview data will be kept confidential and your name will be anonymised within the transcripts and write up of this research.
If you would like to speak to me about this research project or about your participation at a later date, please contact me on my work number or email provided.

End of interview/ debrief for young person:

Thank you for meeting with me today and telling me about what you like and don't like about going to college.

Talking with me today will mean I will be able to tell adults how to help other young people when they are leaving school and when they start college.

When I have finished writing my research would you like me to tell you about what I found out?

Young person's interview schedule

Before starting FE College

1. Can you tell me about the secondary school you used to go to?
 - a. Prompt: what is the name of the school you went to? What did you like/ dislike about school?

2. How did you feel when you were finished at school?
 - a. prompt: if they have difficulty describing their emotions show emotion cards (ask young person to choose an emotion and to describe)
 - b. worries

Since starting FE College

3. How did you feel when you first started college?
 - a. Prompt: if they have difficulty talking about emotions show emotion cards (ask young person to choose an emotion and to describe)
 - b. Prompt: likes/ dislikes/ worries
 - c. who helped you

4. What is the name of the course you are studying at college?

5. How did you chose this course?
 - a. Prompt: who helped you choose this course
 - b. Prompt: parent, services, future aspirations

6. How are you finding college?
 - a. Prompt: are things better/ worse than school/ sixth form

b. prompt: friendships, common room, canteen, lessons

7. How do you travel to college?

a. prompt: public transport, lift with parent, community bus

b. who do you travel with? parent, friends, learning support assistant, mentor

8. What do you do in college?

a. prompt: lunch time, break time, after college

9. How are you helped in college?

a. Prompt: who helps you?

b. Prompt: when are you helped? in lesson or at break time?

10. What would make college better for you?

In the future:

11. What do you want to do when your older?

a. Prompt: when leave college?

b. Prompt: work role, training, further studying

c. who can help you with this?

Parent interview schedule

Before starting FE College

1. Can you tell me about your son's/ daughter's transition into college?

2. How did you decide which college was appropriate for your son/ daughter to attend?
 - a. Prompt: open day, link course, taster sessions, course options, location, travel

3. How did you chose his/ her chosen course of study?
 - a.Prompt: availability, access criteria, future aspirations

4. How did services involve your son/ daughter in the decision making process?
 - a.Prompt: post 16 provisions or course
 - b. prompt: support received when making this decision e.g. advocate, transitions worker, school SENCo

5. When did you start to prepare your son/ daughter for their transition to college?
 - a. Prompt: at what age? what services were involved at this point?

6. In your opinion, what services were important when planning your son's/ daughter's transition to college?
 - a. Prompt: services from health, education, care or within the community

7. How could your son/ daughters transition to college be improved?
 - a. Prompt: plans to support him/ her with friendships, anxiety and unstructured times of day.

Since starting FE College:

8. How do you think your son/ daughter is coping in college?
 - a. Prompt: making friends, course demands, break times, days off

9. Have you noticed any changes in your son/ daughter since starting college?
 - a. Prompt: in their behaviour, sleep routine, mood

10. Is your son/ daughter accessing any support in college?
 - a. Prompt: in lesson, social skills, communication skills, life skills,

travel training

11. How does college staff keep in contact with you about your son's/ daughter's progress?

12. What does your son/ daughter do on their days off from college?

a. Prompt: activities in the community, meet with friends, attend another course

In the future:

13. What are your future hopes and aspirations for your son/ daughter?

a. Transition into adulthood, work, training, independent living

Transition services Interview schedule

1. Can you tell me about your role?
 - a. prompt: describe duties, children or adult services, age group work with

2. Can you describe what changes will be made to your role in relation to the new Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice and the Children and Families Act?
 - a. prompt: assessments (Statements/ Learning Difficulty Assessment/ Education Health Care plans), working with other services, age range, service thresholds, local offer

Pre-transition

3. How do you support young people with ASD with their transition from secondary school into further education (college)?
 - a. prompt: what other factors supports this transition process
 - b. at what point do you get involved with the young person

4. What prevents young people with ASD from accessing or transitioning into further education (college)?
 - a. prompt: can you describe these barriers and give examples

5. How do you involve young people with ASD in the planning stages of their transition into further education (college)?
 - a. Prompt: assessments, decision making, in meetings or reviews
 - b. Prompt: give example

6. How do you involve parents in the planning stages of their young person's transition into further education (college)?
 - a. Prompt: give example

7. How do you co-ordinate with other services in order to support the transition of young people into further education (college)?
 - a. prompt: services from education, health, care or voluntary sector
 - b. prompt: from children or adult services

Post-transition

8. How do you support young people with ASD once they have transitioned into further education (college)?
 - a. prompt: assessment of their needs, review of EHC plans, support within the community, transition into adult services

9. How do you support young people with ASD with their transition into adulthood?
 - a. prompt: independent living, work, training
 - a: prompt: give examples

Appendix 9

Zane transcript

Q Can you tell me about the secondary school that you used to go to?

A I went to (names school) (pause) uhm

Q so you went to (names school), what did you like or dislike about (names school)?

A Ahh what did I like, very little I disliked the GCSE's to say the² least they were the worst two years of my life I don't feel that I learned⁴ anything and I doubted myself many times the class I hated the most¹ during the GCSE's was probably Resistant materials⁵ which was the closest thing that would come to Engineering but I did not like it at all I did not think that I learnt anything and I did not think my project was very good at all it was long and tedious and it didn't suit me other than that I disliked¹ Geography which is a shame because I had a really lovely teacher but I would fall asleep in most of the classes I did not necessarily hate it but just did not like it. From year 7 to 9 was German it was the only language I had to take, I did not have to take French and most people had to take at least 2 languages but I stayed in the same set for three years⁴ I learned nothing and somehow I got an effort grade 2 which is the second best but I think it's just because I didn't draw⁷ any attention to myself like the other idiots in the class and that is what they were idiots they did not know much at all either, that was that. What classes did I like?³ I quite enjoyed physics I've always loved physics, maths I liked maths it rarely got difficult but⁶ when it did I liked the teacher, I had the same teacher for two years (names teachers). What else Chemistry this is a difficult¹ subject I did not really like Chemistry in year 10 it was apparently⁴ my strongest

subject in year 9 come into year 10 I felt that I learned absolutely nothing and it was a complete waste of time not waste of time but yeah i did not feel that I learned anything in year 11 did not get much better I did look forward to it ironically quite a few times but that's because I thought i was adamant to learn I thought this is what I need to improve on so I really need to pay attention and really get used to it and I did not really take it seriously I just sort of went with it, you know if it does or if it doesn't that kind of an attitude.

Q so was it just your subjects that you did not like at school?

A yes it was my subjects

Q was there anything thing else you liked in secondary school?

A Not really no

Q How did you feel when you were I school?

A hard to say i'm not really good with, I'm not usually very ecstatic about anything I can't I'm not good at telling my way round positive emotions generally when I am feeling positive I won't act excited I¹⁰ was pleased I guess just because I felt slightly less pressure to do well because the GCSE's.

Q You said you were pleased can you tell me more about that?

A yes results day all I cared about was ok yes you got this you got this I have enough to get in. It was more clarification than anticipation that I wanted and I was just yes ok I can go here so that means I can leave (laughs) ¹²I had initially wanted to go to school sixth form I was quite adamant that I definitely wanted to go to sixth form but after I looked at the options there did not seem to be anything for me and I got given the options that got rolled into three options instead then I had to eliminate more of them because ¹³teachers said no it's going to be really difficult and you might not enjoy it and that stuff and I ended up just calling it a day and saying I am not going to do this and then taking a BTEC course on Mechanic Engineering and that's how I ended up here.

Q so how did you feel when you first started college?

A ¹⁴ briefly nervous and actually it felt like this because it was new and then maybe after a week it was easy and then at the end I actually felt quite excited I was thinking it was definitely going to be great doing ^{15/35} engineering and for the most part a lot of it was connected to the subjects I enjoy but a lot of it is just background noise and there still traces of things that ¹⁶ I thought I had left behind like assignments and revision, tests and all this that I didn't want to do I really hated exams.

Q and how are you finding your Mechanic Engineering course now?

A It's hard to ¹⁷ say what I am doing here it's very very disorganised, very random and I don't feel I'm learning much more here either. ¹⁰ I am glad that I am here and I am not in sixth form ¹⁷ but I feel that they give us too much freedom at times because I do not feel I am really learning anything or contributing, ⁴ I frequently doubt myself here as well which is really disappointing because here I thought I would pass with flying colours I was actually quite naive ^{15/35} about that because long story short I thought I thought I was signing up for mechanical and then now we've ended up doing electrical as well incorporating other things but it's false advertising and that's probably a phrase that I can use.

Q Can you tell me more

A I ¹⁶ thought the course was going to be more practical but its ended being more theory I only have one practical lesson a week in the workshop and all I'm doing there is machining a piece of metal and my fondest memory so far of that was a week ago I cut myself when I was drill filling that is it.

Q Oh dear sorry to hear that, so how did you chose this course?

A I think it was an opening evening early year 11 and we just went around and decided a course got to pick options or enlist here or something like that.

Q Did you get to go to Mechanics department before starting college in September?

A Not I did not

Q Is there anything you enjoy in FE College?

A ¹⁴ mixed emotions really ¹⁸ I enjoy the fact that I get to leave slightly later and I get to leave earlier from home which is the good side of three I never leave the same time as everyone else like schools so that's good the timing is good ¹⁵ but again in term of learning they said it's supposed to be higher education and I am trying to take some it seriously but at times I feel like I am not contributing enough or learning anything significant.

Q Can you tell me more?

A contributing arrh for example electrical I dislike electrical I like to learn about electrical ¹⁶ there is a whole list of things that I would like to learn to build but we had one practical lesson in there and in that I don't remember what it was and I don't think I particularly learnt anything, it is complicated the way I work I don't like to be told these are the steps you have to take to do something I immediately have I guess a complicated idea and I want to work down to break it apart and see how it it works and then learn how to build it. I think about all kinds of things, i want to design a camera a infrared camera and I might have an idea and I think if I said to my teacher "how do you make an infra red camera" he would say "oh it's too complicated" I want to get to the basics of it and then look how to do that and with that I will have more motivation to learn the seemingly useless tasks to get there.

Q So how do you travel to college?

A By bus

Q Do you travel with anyone?

A I go on my own.¹⁹

Q So would you say things are better or worst at college than school?

A ²⁸Better because the course is almost connected to my field of interest²⁰ but it's the same story.

Q What do you mean by same story?

A Actually on the contrary, I would like to retract that statement not the same story I feel maybe now I have more questions I would like to ask. Not sure I can't remember where I am going with this, I think I have diverted off.

Q Ok that's fine, can you tell me more about your experiences at college for example, friendships?

A Friends arrh I have been ²⁵meeting with several people from my class recently not much can be said about them we have a lot in common well a decent amount in common to talk.

Q and what do you do in college for example, at break time?

A I ²⁹never go into the common room nor do I intend to go in, I have gone in a few times but just to use their vendor machine which sells Pringles I frequently go into the canteen the small one I am given to believe that there is a larger one but I only go to the small canteen or I hang around the technology block. ¹⁷Initially I had went into (names town centre) because I had an hour ((emphasis)) lunch break when I went there I did not do much I did not have a lot of money and then I would be back with still 30 minutes to go.

Q why don't you go into the common room?

A It's too noisy in there

Q Is there anything else you do in your break time?

A Break time, I don't work that's for sure, I do not use my free time productively, I never revise for anything and I have never revised for anything or maybe I have a bit that's how I was able to pass some GCSE's but I wouldn't say I do that intentionally. I eat, that's what I do in my free time because I am usually hungry or thirsty I spend whatever money I have but I still try to keep within the limit. I buy panni's which I think is a ridiculous price they are £2.50 and I have to calculate whether I want to really buy one as they can drain my cash. That is the extent of what I do in my spare time.

Q So how are you helped in college?

A How am I helped?

Q Do you get support in any of your lessons?

A Not no I don't.

Q Do you need any support?

A No, ²³ I don't know whether support is the answer to me progressing in this field and actually learning things that I may find interesting or useful.

Q So what do you do on your days off from college?

A Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday Thursday's are the longest day, Monday is usually from 9.15am to 1pm excluding the breaks in between Tuesday around the same time Thursday longest day goes onto 5pm and Friday is fairly standard compared to the other two. Wednesday I am not in. ³² Wednesday's I am working in my dad's shop I also work there on Sunday's I open up and on Friday's after school.

Q So what would make college better for you?

A I don't know, I am sure there are things but there is nothing immediately obvious to me at this moment.

Q That's fine, so what do you want to do when your older?

A I want to make weapons

Q Ok weapons can you tell me more?

A ³³ I would like to work for BAE's a really big multinational defence co-operation everything from assault rifles to missals all kinds of weaponry or develop tank armour but I would not be opposed to working for Dyson I am a big fan of his and the way he approaches engineering and technology also i would like to very much own an energy company I would like to be the first person to build a successful fusionary reactor and although, if I could build a empire on nuclear fish then that would be just as fine. I would like to have a lot of money but that's how I believe you solve the problems with society people say if you ever want to save the environment then you have to get involved with law and help the people in this country and I completely disagree the correct way to solving the environment this sounds very cynical however if you think about it, is to you need to develop new technology you need to build new tools and this led me to trying to form a quote I have not quite got there yet but it's saying "if you want to do this you have to use this, if you want to do that you have to use that and so on." You can only do so much with what you've got If you want to progress you have to develop new tools.

Q That sounds really interesting, so do you think your mechanics course will help you reach that goal?

A ²¹ I think the experience will help me reach the goal the piece of paper to wave in peoples face to say yeah I am qualified to do that will probably be just a bonus but then again I believe it's more about the experience did I learn anything because GCSE's I can wave in peoples faces but I have forgotten almost everything from there.

Q We have come to the end of the questions I wanted to ask you is there anything you would like to tell me.

A I wish I could of been more sharper more quicker, I am always trying be clever and this can be a hindrance at times I am always trying to be cleverer than everyone else that is the kind of the extent I wish I could of done better

Q when you say you wish you could be quicker what do you mean?

A I wish I could respond to things quicker and know the different answers without thinking oh I wish I could of changed that I do that with almost everything I usually say no can I change that I want to get things right first time, I am a perfectionist and again that is a hindrance.

Q ummm we all have our strengths and difficulties, thank you for sharing that with me. Is there anything you would like to tell me about College?

A No

Q Thank you so much for speaking with me it has been very interesting hearing about your experiences in College.

Initial codes developed during thematic analysis – for young people’s data

1. Subjects did not like in secondary school
2. Found GCSE's difficult
3. Favourite secondary subjects
4. Young person does not feel confident in their academic ability
5. Secondary subjects did not match interests
6. Teacher qualities affected school experience
7. Social interaction difficulties
8. Being bullied
9. Did not understand the relevance of secondary subjects
10. pleased about leaving secondary school
11. Sad about leaving secondary school
12. Options after school
13. Support received from teachers when making decisions about post school options
14. Mixed emotions about starting FE College
15. Disappointed with their chosen FE college subject
16. Lack of practical application of subject
17. Difficulties coping with the lack of structure in FE College
18. Prefer FE College staggered start times
19. Learned independent travel skills
20. Chosen FE College subject matches interest
21. Young person does not see the relevance of qualifications
22. Support received in college
23. Young person no longer feels they require support/ in their lessons
24. Developing friendships
25. Share common interests with peers in FE College
26. Difficulties experienced at college/ things worried about in college
27. Difficulties finding things to do during longer breaks
28. Preference of college over school
29. Do not use all of the facilities/ venues available in FE college
30. Activities/ interests outside of college
31. Days off are opportunity to explore interests
32. Work on days off from FE College
33. Preferred job
34. Worries about the future
35. Young person does not understand broader context of chosen FE College subject

Parent 1- transcript

Q Can you tell me about Zane's transition to college?

A We ¹ made the decision not to do A-levels, based more on the fact that ⁴ Zane is quite literal. He finds exam taking A, very, very stressful; and B, I didn't ever feel that it was reflecting his ability. I thought that where he will remember facts he doesn't always know how to use those facts in a practical manner. Whereas if you do something like a BTEC you've got the theory, but that theory is very much put into practice. ⁹ Working at an FE college myself I knew what kind of support he was going to get in that environment, which is not to say that I was dissatisfied with the support he had at secondary school; but I felt from that point of view his disability would be supported. I know nothing about the engineering department so I wanted to know about the support provided there, although I actually studied engineering at that college myself when I was younger. So, I had a bit of a history. So, ¹⁰ partly we chose B----- because we felt it would be a safe place for him to be; ¹ partly for the services; and partly because I just didn't think A-level was going to be his way forward. I thought waiting till the end of two years it was going to be too late, if he hadn't got it two years would have been wasted. ³ Whereas with a BTEC you know how you're going; you're being monitored; your progress is monitored intermittently, so you always know whether you need to put your foot on the accelerator or whether you can float for a little bit. With an A-level it was too invisible. So, that was the reason behind the choice.

Q was there anything else that helped you decide which college would be appropriate for your son?

A ² Mostly it was A, B----- college was easy for him to get to. You can get there on a bus. Had friends he could potentially – he would never have taken a lift off them – but potentially. K----- College was the only other nearby college that would have done the same course. Financially he

wouldn't have got his Oyster Card to cover that, so financially it would have cost a lot more for the travel to get him there because it's K-----; whereas we're in B----- borough we get an Oyster Card. And I believe there is travel kind of... It's 16 in education. 16-18 you get a 16-18 Oyster Card. But I think that's a London Oyster Card and not a K----- one. So, there was a bit of a financial implication.² But as much as anything B---- is really nearby. At this stage, what he used to do when he went to school is he would get to school potentially 30 minutes before everyone else so that he would avoid the crowds. And then he would kind of circle the school until the library opened and he would wait there. So, being at B----- it just meant that where he was going to have to get used to being on public transport very crowded, school run, it wouldn't be so far. Whereas again if we were going to K----- that's quite a big distance to travel. So, yes, it was based on that.

Q How did you go about choosing his course?

A⁷ It was him. From a very young age that was his obsession. He wants to be a weapons designer. He wanted to be a Lego designer at one stage, which I thought was a bit nicer. He is a mechanical engineer; it's in his blood and that's his obsession.⁴ There are certain things that he likes. Part of the problem with a lot of his courses is he doesn't understand the big picture. He sees the part that he likes and doesn't accept all the time that in order to achieve that you have to have this, this, this and this. But yes it was his DNA really: he was always going to be an engineer of some sort, so that's the reason why.

Q How was he involved in that decision making process?

A I think he had obviously gone to careers at the school. I have an engineering background, my father has an engineering background; we have a lot of this, again, in our family. A lot of our friends tinker, either informally or formally, with engineering. That's what he was surrounded by in a sense. So, he knew what he wanted to do. And we did discuss the options. Maths, funnily enough, is not necessarily one of his strongest points. So, in order to go onto a degree in engineering you'd have to have

maths, physics and chemistry probably. So, ⁷ again, where he had these visions of what he wanted to do, he's very clear about what he wants to do, you have to see what do you need in order to get there. ⁵ So, he was I suppose guided by us, supported by us, whichever way you want to look at it. I think probably we persuaded him in that direction. Probably me more than anything if I'm honest. ((Laughter))

Q So, when did you start to prepare him for this transition to FE college?

A Pre-GCSE. We had talked about different options. So, obviously there was always the sixth form option. Initially sixth form was quite a big... ⁶ At the schools they want you to stay on; they want their sixth form filled. But by the same token they're very strict about the criteria for going onto an A-level. And I don't think the school really promoted the college very much. But since from ⁷ a very young age he's known what he wanted to do, so from a very young age we have had this view that he would go into engineering. So, when it came down to GCSE time I think he literally burned his bridges at one stage and said to the A-level department, "No, I'm not going to go. I'm going to college" and that was it. We didn't have a choice then because your place is withdrawn; you're going to college.

But he knew there were options available, and that was definitely pre-GCSE. So, yes I would say from Year 10 onwards really.

Q You said there was a course criteria to get into the sixth form; what was that?

A You had to get a B in your chosen subject. And he got his Bs. For the chosen subjects that he would have needed to do A-levels in he did get Bs. But my experience at the college is that there's a huge jump from a GCSE to an A-level. ⁴ And if you're just scraping it – when I say scraping it I don't mean any disrespect to Zane but he's not an exam taker. So, a B doesn't actually reflect his ability but that's all he got. So, if he can only get a B and to do an A-level, friends' kids who are at grammar school, and they're very bright kids – again no disrespect – but they're doing a B at an A-level. I'm thinking if they can't get an A at A-level how is he going to get a grade at A-level that would give him the opportunity of either going on

to degree if he wanted to or something else? So, that's why we made the decisions as we did.

Q In your opinion what services were important when planning your son's transition into college?

A Again, ⁹ I had insider knowledge so it made it slightly different. I needed to know he was going to get exam arrangements. I wanted to know that he had some kind of mentoring system, because again for Zane he becomes very literal about things and he doesn't always understand what's being said. I wanted to know there was going to be some differentiation made for him. I think more the mentoring was more important in that sense.

And ¹⁰ I also wanted to make sure he was going to be safe. The engineering department has got a bit of a reputation at the level one age. There are a lot of guys with testosterone walking around at level one. Some of them don't have the best education or backgrounds and they don't have the best chances in life. It's quite a rough environment. Whereas Zane went to D-----, it's a very middle class school; it's quite safe. That was a bit scary deciding to leave that environment. It hasn't been scary. Zane is more confident or competent than I gave him credit for, in fairness. But the main thing was that I was going to get mentoring for him and that I would feel that he was going to be safe in that environment. Since I know FE college's I felt as safe as I could.

Q And were there any services that supported Zane's transition from secondary school into FE College?

A Yes. ⁸ (mentions name- autism outreach worker) came in once a year. We'd do a class observation. Once he was at secondary we would go in once a year and update what his requirements might be. It was part of that and also assessments in school that allowed him to get his access arrangements for his exams. People have to explain things to Zane a little bit. ¹² He's very quick to say yes to a suggestion and not understand the impact of it. So, sometimes I think suggestions were made and he

flippantly responded without understanding the impact. And I had to get involved. It was things like not using a laptop. Zane's got illegible handwriting, "You need to use a laptop. You weren't given one for your controlled assessment; you should have had one". Just silly little things like that that get passed. He was given a small group to work in. It wasn't just about nerves or being distracted but because he was meant to have a laptop. But he didn't necessarily want to be in that room. But when you explain that actually in order to use the laptop because your handwriting is not very clear for other people to read – he just needs the explanation.

¹² I felt sometimes they were a little bit quick to take his response and sometimes he was a bit quick to be guided. But yes, the borough would come in once a week to observe. I don't think it made any difference to his intervention. The only thing that he really got from secondary was that he had exam arrangements. He was fiercely opposed to having a TA class support. I think there were TAs in a lot of his classes for other learners and they just kind of share themselves around a bit and that way he wouldn't feel so self-conscious about it.

Q Did any services attend Zane's annual review meeting?

A ¹⁶ No, not that I'm aware of. We weren't invited to a annual review meeting.

No, we weren't invited into one. ¹² He said, "I'm not going into sixth form" and they just took him off the list and that was it. But prior to that it was a yearly meeting that (mentions name- autism outreach) attended as well.

Q How would you say that Zane's move to college could have been improved?

A A Actually it was okay. They had open events. What could have been better

¹³ though is the open events led for the college were general open events, so it was level one, level two, level three for engineering. So, all the engineers were invited in. He was invited in quite a few times over the summer. Letters were – it would be wrong to say they were threatening – but they implied that you were obliged to attend these sessions; which is fine. However if you're on holiday, for someone like

Zane to get any kind of obligation in a letter would make him quite nervous. So, they could think about rewording those. ¹⁴The thing that I would say is it wasn't only the level threes that went in on that day, so he could have really benefited from that small group time in the summer holidays only meeting the guys on his course. And he's not very good at socialising anyway. He knows who people are; he might remember their names – but that's it. He's not going to take them home with him; he's not going to socialise; he's not going to do any of that with them. I think it was an opportunity then that they could have gelled before the start of term when there are going to be a couple of thousand students there. To go when there's just a few hundred, and these are small group that you're going to be with, I think that would have been a better transition for him, in hindsight. It probably doesn't work that way. Lecturers going in on their days off or through the summer holidays, they're just going to get who they can in. This is actually a ploy by the college to keep their membership high. You can see what it is: it's just trying to keep their student numbers up. But it would have been better I think had they just had merely his course there.

Q How do you think he is coping in college?

A ²²I think he's doing really, really well; far better than I anticipated. ¹³I'm not overly happy with the engineering department, I don't think they're inclusive. He is getting particularly good care from the learning support department. Whereas the engineering department, we've had a few letters out that were inappropriate, and a couple of ASD kids have been affected by it, where they haven't looked at group profiles properly. Through, not the engineering department's fault, it's the college's fault, timetables haven't been set properly. It's just been quite irregular. Zane needs a very clear timetable; you stick to that timetable. If you think the school is very rigid, the college is being very fluid. It's not easy to stay on board in that kind of change; everything is changing all the time. No, no, no. Read your group profile: this is a lad that we have said, 'Give prior warning of major changes' and they haven't been successful in doing that. Where they've had heads of department send letters out that head

of department has just seen a name on the list; they haven't seen the alert next to that name or any diagnosis next to that name. That's why I've had to go in to the College to get things sorted, I should have got involved a lot sooner and kicked up a much bigger fuss. It's only because I know the internal workings of the college that I have a slight amount of empathy. But it's my son's future. What they have done though, again I found the engineering – you know engineers they're just a bunch of blokes, it's all a bit put up and shut up and it's very macho. That's the area where he'll be working and he's got to get used to it. He does have a mentor from the learning support department and what she ended up doing was arranging a meeting for him and his tutor so that Zane could find out if he was on target. ¹⁵ Because he'd submitted work and he's not had any feedback. You know we're almost towards the end of term two; to have no feedback on anything you've submitted he just feels like he's average. And actually he's one of the top in the class. So, he's not average. Zane needs to know: you're working to this guideline: you've achieved it; you haven't achieved it; what do you need to do; what criteria. I don't think it would have been better if he'd done A-levels; don't get me wrong. I think we've made the best decision for him. But I think that the department have not done everything they could have done, put it that way. They're all stretched; that's what it comes down to.

Q Absolutely. Have you noticed any changes in Zane since starting college?

A Yes. ^{17/ 22} He is much braver than he was before. He's a lot more thick-skinned than I thought he was. Where he's very rule bound if he does something to upset if I raise my voice he'll be like a deer in the headlights: what have I done wrong; I don't know how to react. ²² They've changed the syllabus for him a few times, so now very often he has to go through the school run. Where I thought he was going to be really intimidated by these kids he just looks at them with disdain as if they're an annoyance to him. And actually it's far better to have that arrogance about you. Sometimes he does look like a thief because his eyes, he's very alert all the time. But he's just braver. Yeah, he is not sociable; he's still not going

to give his phone number to anyone or play Xbox or something like that. My husband started a business a couple of years ago, it's a shop, and Zane will help out in there. ¹⁸And I think a combination of the college and working in the coffee shop you know is really socialising him. It's a very safe environment for him, but he's really transformed. He's really blossoming you know. You know if you're doing GCSEs you're just doing a load of stuff you don't necessarily want to do? ¹¹He does want to do engineering. So, there are parts of it that he doesn't like, but now he's found part of his education that fulfils him. It's like materials, he loves materials. He's got a list of his favourite elements, Cesium you name it, it's in there somewhere. So, from that point of view he really likes it. And I think he feels more masculine. He's in a male environment and I just think he feels more manly and more with it. I think he feels far more fulfilled now. It was definitely the right move.

Q Have you seen changes with his behaviour at home?

A ¹⁷Zane is compliant; it's just in his nature to be that way. ¹⁸I think he's got a better relationship with his sister now. He's more talkative. Because I'm in education he will always do some work with me. But he'll come out and show me stuff now. ¹⁷Yeah, I suppose he is definitely more talkative, which is quite a good thing. He's maturing as well. He still likes to go in his room and he'll spend hours in his room on his own because that's what he needs to do. But then he has to come out and purge, and then it's like ((makes drilling noise)); he's got an awful lot to say. But yes, I think he's really good fun now you know. Well, he's always been good fun, but it's blooming into something quite good. I'm happy.

Q Is he accessing any support at college? You mentioned something about a mentor.

A ²¹Yes, he sees my equivalent over there. So, he sees a lady called (mentions name). She's done his access arrangements for him. And she sees him once a week. Sometimes that's been because she needs to sort out the engineering department. Like I said, she's the one who organised the

meeting with his tutor. Sometimes it's managing his anxiety. ³⁶ They've changed his course a couple of times; they wanted to put this one course on. He needs to re-sit his English Language GCSE. He got a D, so he has to re-sit it. It's very important. They wanted him to do this other maths thing, which was additional. There was a big hoo-ha about it. It's an initiative that the college had that has nothing to do with engineering. But it all got a bit confusing and Zane was at the centre of that. Like I said, there were some inappropriate letters, or what I feel were inappropriate.

Q In what way?

A Inappropriate in the sense that they were threatening disciplinary action. And it was nothing that Zane had done. These were arrangements that he'd made with head of departments. The head of department obviously hasn't passed those messages on. What's happened is two weeks in he was asked to go onto this maths course. Fine, do the maths course. ¹⁵ We still haven't heard anything about the English – I've emailed – anything about the English GCSE. Nothing from engineering. Emailed head of English: anything about the GCSE? Nothing from English. So, now we're into week four or five, I finally emailed some English lecturers, found an English lesson for him to do. Spoke to his engineering guy, my husband did with Zane at the open evening, "Forget the maths; you'll go to English then instead". They didn't pass that message on to anyone else. So, of course this maths person is saying, "This lad never turns up. He's just not coming". But he should have been taken off the register. So, this was an administration error; nothing to do with Zane. He got this letter home. I knew we'd got this new initiative at the college: everyone is going to get a bravo letter if they do well. I thought oh, this is a celebration. Open it up: threaten disciplinary. Well, Zane's in meltdown, "What have I done wrong?" you know. He doesn't want to be in trouble. And that's when I had to put the oar in and start talking to people and say, "Look, I'm not having this. If you'd have looked on..." ¹³ Apparently she pulled him out of the lesson to say something. When I went to see this woman she said, "I knew as I opened my mouth something wasn't quite right". You can

see immediately. The way that Zane walks, there's a lot of things you know that he's Aspie and they still sent a letter regardless. You met him in person; you'd already told him he's got to change lessons; then you send this letter out. It's a highly inappropriate letter to send to the student and to the parent. I was really ticked about it; I just didn't think it was right. Subsequently there are about three kids with Asperger's on his course and at least one of the others has also received a letter and has also gone into meltdown about it. I'm like look at your group profile; word this differently. Come and talk to me about this; we need to resolve the issue. Don't threaten disciplinary. That's for a kid that, you know.

Q Was this letter addressed to you or Zane?

A There was one addressed to Zane, Zane had his letter, and a second letter was sent to us as the parents. So, it was a double letter and we both got exactly the same one. I wasn't happy. Considering that this conversation had taken place so many times, it wasn't a first time, I just thought they'd got that really wrong, big time. I wasn't happy about that at all.

Q Can you tell me more about the maths initiative?

A What happened with the maths is anyone, I think it's college wide, who got a B or higher in their GCSE maths – it's to kind of do something to do with OFSTED – so it's an OCR or whatever level three maths qualification. It's not an A-level. Imagine it's like a BTEC maths of a level three standard. So, yes if you're going to uni you could say you've got this in addition. I'm not against the maths module at all; it wasn't that. Yes, it would have really supported the maths that you do on this engineering course. Fine. But it wasn't just for engineering; it's for all the year groups. My issue was that he hasn't got his English GCSE English Language. He's got the English Lit but not the language. So, he needs this for whatever he does. It so happens that the English language takes place at the same time as core maths, and there wasn't anywhere else on the timetable that he could have the English or the core maths, because they only run it in engineering on that day at that time. And they weren't flexible to say, 'Another department is doing it on this day at that time'. Zane doesn't give a monkeys. He doesn't interact with his classmates, so it could be Johnny sitting next to him or Theresa; he doesn't care. Maybe they're

being sensitive, but from his point of view it makes no difference to him.

¹⁵ So I sent a email to the head of engineering. Heard nothing. I know people are very busy, but I was talking about a student. The fact that he's my son is irrelevant in some ways. Just a courtesy, 'I'm busy at the moment; send me an email back'. So, I sent it to the head of English – still nothing back. Whereas two lecturers I emailed within ten minutes I got a response from. So, from a work point of view I'm ticked. From a parent's point of view this is totally unacceptable. I felt it was quite gentle maybe it was too gentle I should have come in quite a lot firmer than I did. My husband has a saying: you get more bees with honey than you do with vinegar. You kind of keep things as sweet as you can. It's not really about getting people into trouble; it's about getting the right things in place. ²⁰ I'm still happy. It's still definitely the right choice that we've made. But you get hiccups along the way. It's only because I work in a College I'm quite sensitive to those hiccups. Sometimes it's just easier – I should have sent him to K-----. ((Laughter))

Q That ties into the next question. How does college staff keep in contact with you about Zane's progress?

A ¹⁵ Well, week four or five they had a parents' evening, which I wasn't able to attend so Carl my husband went with Zane instead. ²³ That was quite early on. And of course it's all very positive and lots of promises. But you're four weeks in then. Since then the only thing we've had is that letter threatening disciplinary, and we haven't had anything other than that. But I understand that we've got parents' evenings coming up again.

Q Do you know when that will be?

A ¹⁵ I would have thought sometime around about Easter. I would have thought there's going to be another one. I know my husband Carl has phoned a couple of times, because when we did have this issue and they hadn't necessarily spoken to me Carl phoned up, ²³ and again we got second confirmation that things were going to change. So, there had

been a lot of things going in place before that letter turned up; which made me even more angry. But never mind. So, they haven't actively sought us out. But again Zane sees (mentions name), and quite often once she's seen him she's phoned me up and said, 'Look we did this today. He needs to have a try at this'. So, the engineering people no; learning support department yes, slightly different. And I suppose in many ways that is how it would be, because that's what this department does.

Q And what does Zane do on his day off from college?

A ²⁴He works at my husband's coffee shop, which is doing quite nicely, because that obviously makes him more independent. He's a bit of an Xbox fan, so he'll do Xbox. He's not obsessed with that. He does spend a lot of time on the computer. He's very much into his weaponry, so he will spend a lot of time researching guns. I don't know where he gets it from but that's his thing. He watches films a lot. And he will go backwards and forwards into Orpington if he wants to buy something. If he knows what it is he wants to buy he will do that. But socially a lot of his friends are also ASD of some sort. If they have to see each other they'll see each other, but he wants to go to the cinema; I think next week he's off to see a film. He has these lists; he has films that he wants to see.

Q Are these friends that he's made at college?

A ²⁵No, he's got no friends at college. He went to secondary school with friends from primary school and he will say that they are his friends, but he doesn't socialise with anyone. From that point of view the only socialisation he gets is with us and working at the shop. It's not that he doesn't want to. He doesn't need it and he doesn't want it. Yeah, we can set stuff up and he'll see people and that would be fine; but he wouldn't initiate that. ³¹I do say to him, "One day you'll want to have a girlfriend". "Yeah, okay, maybe." "So, you have to get used to phoning people up and making arrangements". I think at this stage he's really... Interestingly he'll go – I would be interested if he'll go to any college events – he will go to a disco. He went to an end of year disco; he went to the prom when

he left (names school). Actually he bumped into people he knew there and said hello and he hung out with them. But he didn't arrange any of that. He wanted a tux and everything and bought the suit. He did all the stuff that he was meant to; but he will go there and he won't care that he's not talking to anyone. He'll sit in a group where everyone else is talking and he'll just sit there next to them. He won't interact with them but he will sit there and he will feel that that's his contribution to it. So, he's furniture rather than, you know. ((Laughter)) I'll just sit here and keep your chair warm.

Q What are your future hopes and aspirations for Zane?

A ²⁸I've heard of an organisation called the Sure Trust. I heard of that through an ASD student we've got at my College. I'm quite interested in hooking up with them. ²⁷I don't think university is necessarily the right thing for Zane. I'm not against him going at all. I concern myself that his interests are so niche that he won't be able to cope with the breadth that he needs. It's just a concern of mine. Whilst he can apply for DSA and get mentoring support there universities are notoriously: you're independent; this is a group; if you can't do it you're out. So, I have to kind of consider that and the financial implications of that. ²⁸This lad here was telling me about the Sure Trust which apparently supports ASD learners, helps find them apprenticeships or work. It works almost as a mentoring for work finding. If someone will give Zane an interview they will understand that he totally knows his subject. He's very, very knowledgeable in his subject. ²⁹So, I really want him to try and get an apprenticeship of some sort, you know like a degree apprenticeship or whatever it is after level three. ³¹And I think once he gets into the work market by default people will say, 'We'll go for a beer after work', by default he will become – not sociable; he will never be totally sociable – but he will go out rather than be in all the time. He's always said, he doesn't drink, but he'll say "It's not that I want to drink beer. I want to be able to drink more than one and not get drunk". He's got a very

practical viewpoint about things. I don't ever want him to start smoking because he would be obsessive about it. It's funny little things. ²⁹ That's what I hope for him: I hope that we can somehow get an engineering apprenticeship for him. I think people are coming more round to the advantage of having an Asperger's candidate in your office because they'll do everything you ask them to do – like I said, he's so rule bound – and they will take obsessive beyond obsessive. So, he would be a really good contribution to an engineering design team. And that's what I hope will happen for him. I'm not going to worry about it now; it's too far ahead. ³⁰ We will look at universities. My dad lives in G----- and S----- University take a D star and two Ds for a BTEC to do mechanical engineering. I think you have to have an interview for that, but I think he'd pass the interview. I think that's the point: he needs the interview. I think he could get a D star D, D, in his BTEC. From what his tutor is saying that definitely sounds like the way he's going. And I met some other lads during enrolment who were on the second year and they were a distinction and distinction start students. And I thought yeah, you seem like really sensible guys, genuine guys. So, there is that potential for a degree, but the university would have to be really honest with us as well. We'd have to give some serious thought about what kind of support he would get there. I only look at S----- because my dad's in G-----; engineering background – I know he's out of date – but it's just having that family safety. He wouldn't live with him but they'd be nearby. Might get dinner occasionally, ((Laughter)) and have the washing done. Just get some of the practical skills in place. So, I think that's what I'm looking at at this stage.

Q And when you said that you feel he needs an interview to get him to university place can you tell me a bit more about that?

A I just think that ⁴ Zane is much better in person than he is on paper. His GCSE grades he got Bs and Cs, which is great; for him that was great. But he's not a B, C student; actually he's an AA star student. He's a very bright boy. He's just not good at taking exams because he's too literal. So, if he was to get an interview somewhere they would see that his subject knowledge of his chosen subject – he's like a Mastermind guy –

his chosen subject is very high-end knowledge. I know some of it is just facts, because he's very much into his facts. What I think the BTEC is showing him is how to apply those facts. That's where he lacks the GCSE: he wasn't applying those facts. His writing is superb. He got a D on his English language because he doesn't know how to tick the boxes for an English language. His writing is superb. I say a second language learner is getting a C; why has he not got the C? He's not got the C because he's not ticking the right boxes to get that C. He interprets the question incorrectly, so he goes off track. That's where he's limited. He's much better at factual report writing to interpret a document, especially if he's got to infer anything from it. Why didn't you say that then? That's his difficulty. If he does well enough he should get some interviews. Maybe he'll write a cover letter, I don't know. In the end a lot of things are just who you know. So, we just need to start networking a bit more. How many weapons designers do you know? ((Laughs)) He knows what companies he wants to work for; he's done his research there. Once you give him the target and say, "That's the company you want to work for. You need to start making contact with them and finding out what the next step is". That shows initiative, and if they can show initiative that starts becoming more appealing. They do say engineers we're crying out for them. I know quite a few graduates who haven't got a job though. So, you do wonder, don't you?

Q Absolutely. Have you thought about independent living?

A Yes. I think his house will stink! ((Laughter)) I think Zane will be okay. We're not kind of mollycoddling in the house. He's the eldest; we've got a daughter as well. They know how to cook; they know how to clean. They've got all those skills. In fact he's better.²⁴ My husband has got this coffee shop, in fact it's a multi-stand bakery coffee shop, so on Sundays Zane does all the bread rolls. It's only bake off, but he does that. He can make Danish pastry; he can make croissants. He's actually picked up a load of skills in the kitchen from my husband. He's quite interesting actually; he eats because he has to eat but he really listens to his body, "Oh, I don't want to eat anymore". He eats crap quite a lot of the time, but he does know he's got to have a vegetable. He knows there are

certain things he has to do. He's a big water drinker. It's just things like cleaning; that will seem to, unless I say, "Are you going to change your sheets on your bed?" they'd be there rock solid; they've gone crispy now, they need to come off. ((Laughter)) Just things like that. But I think he would be quite good. He's got very good routines. He's not OCD but we used to call him our health and safety monitor. He's very much aware there's a fire alarm there, you do this and there are certain things you should take care of. So, I'm quite confident from that point of view.

Q We've come to the end of the questions now. Is there anything you'd like to add to your responses?

A I think FE college, ²⁰ I know engineering I'm a bit disappointed with, but I think as whole this college is a good place to be. And for him it has been very, very good. And he's much happier here than he would have been at sixth form, and he recognises that. He'll say, "Thank goodness I didn't go to sixth form". I think it gets very scary leaving the safety of the school, and people don't understand what a college has to offer. Certainly I didn't do sixth form because I didn't want to do sixth form. I still went on to higher education straight from college. It set me up very nicely, because college is like a stepping stone: it's a natural progression to uni; it's far more independent learning. ¹⁷ And he feels much more of a man now. He feels much more of an adult. Whereas when you are at school you're attached to all those Year 7s who are ten and 11. Well, when you're 16, ¹⁷ that's a big age gap. So, when you come to college 16 plus – I know you've got these 14 to 16, but they're locked away in a little prison somewhere on the campus – ²⁰ really it's a much more grownup atmosphere. For him it's all about what things look like and his perception. So, I think it's been really, really good for him. ³¹ Maybe he will become more sociable; that would be lovely. But long ago I learned don't aspire for him what I aspire for myself. We've got different paths that we walk. I like a crowded room; he doesn't. I shouldn't want that for him if that's not what his thing is. Everyone's got their own thing. I think where as a family, it's not that we've pulled back, but we don't interfere

as much anymore. That's why I said it's so shocking: he's quite happy and looks with disdain at those kids that are misbehaving on the bus. They're not intimidating him; they're just annoying to him.

Initial codes developed during thematic analysis – for parent’s data

1. Chose FE College because young person has experienced difficulties with academic learning
2. Parent wanted young person to be educated locally
3. FE College offers more suitable course options
4. Young person’s typical ASD characteristics affected academic performance
5. Parent provided young person with support when deciding on post 16 provisions
6. Families feeling under pressure to keep young person at school sixth form
7. Young person chose/ able to communicate preferred (post-16) provision/ subject
8. Family received support from services during the planning stages of the transition
9. Parent wanting to know the support/ arrangements available in FE College
10. Parents wanting to ensure young person’s safety in FE college
11. FE College offers subjects linked to young person’s interests
12. Young person agreeing to decisions without fully understanding consequences
13. College staff have made minimal adaptations to meet ASD young person’s learning needs/ difficulties
14. Young person would have benefited from small group open days.
15. Lack of feedback/ communication from FE College staff outside of formal meetings
16. Lack of support/ planning from services in preparing for young person’s transition
17. Parent has noticed positive changes in young person’s behaviour/ attitude
18. Young person has developed social skills in FE College
- ~~19. Difficulties experienced by young person in college~~
20. Parents pleased with their decision to enrol young person on FE College course
21. Young person receives support in FE college for learning/ social emotional needs
22. Young person has adapted well to FE College environment
23. FE College making promises that have not been fulfilled
24. Young person uses days off from FE College to work/ explore interests
25. Young person has not made friends in FE College
26. Young person has started attending social events or activities outside of FE College
27. Parent does not think young person will cope with higher education
28. Parent hopes that young person will get support with transition into other areas of adulthood from voluntary/ statutory services
29. Parent hopes young person will get a job/ apprenticeship
30. Parent hopes young person will go onto higher education after leaving FE College

31. Parent hopes young person will develop relationships
32. Parent hopes young person will go into supported living
33. Young person has developed independent skills since transitioning into FE College
34. College staff lack of ASD awareness
35. Lack of communication/ feedback from young person
36. There is a lack of structure in FE College

Professional 1 transcript

Q Can you tell me about your role?

A Right, uhm we're now called, obviously, Preparing for Adulthood Coordinators.

¹The role, previously I was a careers advisor working specifically with special needs and we were brought into the local authority gosh about five years ago, and then the position that I'm in now, sort of morphed from the previous role that I was doing, so it's still similar in some ways so what the main role is of the team is to work with young people from the ages of 14 up to the age of 25 uhm ²we're allocated to specific schools within the borough but we tend to focus on the more complex special needs so I currently work in xxxxx, which is my main school within the borough, which is for sort of complex and profound multiple learning difficulties, and then I also cover some of the out of borough schools, which tend to be sort of allocated on a needs basis, so what (mentions name) would do is allocate to who she felt would be the most appropriate.

²And we also work with young people that are in independent specialist placements, xxxx College, we cover the specialist schools like xxxxxxx, we've got xxxxxx, xxxxx, all within borough, but we also do all of the out of borough as well so ⁶the main role is to work with young people and families, from the age of 14 to 25, supporting them with transition, so ⁵working closely with the Transition Team, the Children's Disability Team, all of these sort of professionals that are working with young people, and it is to provide, as well, sort of information, advice and guidance in terms of education and transition, but we also complete the Education, Health and Care Plans for young people approaching transition so we sort of work with the whole range of professionals, the families, the young people, in order to gather the relevant information to complete the documents. So we do ⁶work closely with school leavers, identifying appropriate provision with the family and the young person and some young people will be looking at independent specialist placements, in which case we would do the Education, Health and Care Plan that would form our ability to really sort of assess what exactly they need in order to progress to the next stage, and we would then present that to a panel for a decision

regarding the funding for that placement if we're working with a young person that's applying, for instance, to a mainstream provision, what we would do, for those that it's appropriate, ⁵ do the Education, Health and Care Plan, but again, support that transition to the college and we work closely in schools as well and I know ⁷ we're looking at providing opportunities for those that we know struggle with transition, especially young people with autism, potentially looking at having some link courses set up with the college, so we're currently identifying young people for that. So it's really sort of identifying and supporting the transition, but equally, if we know that there are likely to be barriers to the next placement, putting in support and resources to enable us to overcome that.

Q That sounds great, and so when you said that you work mainly with young people with complex needs, what is the inclusion criteria of your service?

A We don't necessarily have an inclusion criteria, because ⁸ (mentions name), who was in post, who did the Connexions role for the statemented mainstream, her post was deleted gosh about six months ago, so we are picking up more of what we wouldn't normally, because there were discussions around would we only work with those that would be FACS eligible, so for those that would be entitled to services from the Transition Team, the Complex Care Team, in the future. However, we are tending to sort of pick up more mainstream young people with statements, so there isn't and I know that (mentions name) doing some work now in the Youth Offending Teams, we're covering schools like xxxx, which we know wouldn't necessarily be FACS eligible.

Q What's FACS, sorry?

A Someone that would be entitled to services in the future as an adult from potentially Adult Services, and I don't know exactly what the abbreviation is of, ⁸ but it's for those that we know would be complex enough to be entitled to ongoing services from Adults in the future, but we are tending to work with young people that don't necessarily fall into that criteria, so there isn't a definite cut-off in terms of they need to have x amount of points to be able to work with us.

Q But do they need to have a statement?

A ⁴⁹ Usually they will have had a statement we've done some work with young people that have had - is it SEN note in Lieu - for those that were not quite eligible for a statement, but they were given something in lieu. So I've worked with the odd one that has presented with that particular case. We are also working with young people that have got some mental health issues, so they wouldn't necessarily have had a statement in the past, because obviously this is something that has come much later in life. So they don't necessarily need to have a statement but the majority of the young people that we work with would potentially have one, unless they're referred from somewhere else because of things that have happened later on.

Q So can you describe what changes will be made to your role in relation to the new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice?

A ¹⁰ We've been obviously a pilot for the last few years so uhm, I think were clearly we're now no longer working with statements and we're no longer working with what was the Section 139A, the Moving on Plan. So that's one of the big significant changes, is that we are now dealing ⁵ with the Education, Health and Care Plan. It will result in a lot more multiagency working. However, we were still working quite closely with Children's Disability, Transition, various professionals, before the legislation. ¹¹ Clearly, in terms of the young person, there's ¹² much more focus on person-centred planning, so where we can, work with the young people directly and obtain their views, and it's essential that this is happening, but obviously that is again something that we were familiar with doing. ¹³ I think often a lot of the young people that I work with, you would question do they have the mental capacity in terms of making those decisions, in which case, you do rely very heavily on the professionals and the family members. ¹⁴ I know with the new SEN Code of Practice, obtaining the family's views is a crucial part of the process, and that can sometimes be a difficult one to manage because xxx have issued what's called the Statement of Intent, which is where we have to sort of follow various different stages

before we come to the conclusion in terms of where a young person would progress on to, and sometimes we do work with families that have got very definite views as to what they want for the young person, but doesn't necessarily follow what xxxx see as the Statement of Intent that we work with. So sometimes, although with the SEN Code of Practice it is essential that we are understanding what the family's views are and what their preference is, it can be quite challenging to manage that.

Q uhhm can you tell me more about this?

A Well, sometimes I will work with families that have been researching from way back, so when I'm actually working with them they've already sort of got their ideas as to where they want that young person to go. ¹⁵ So I think it's essential that obviously early involvement is crucial, so around the Year 9 Review, when they're turning sort of 14-years of age, that's really where we need to start delivering the message and ensuring that the message is clear, so that when families do decide, 'Right, we're going to start looking at potential placements for our young person,' they're mindful of the process that they have to go through. So ¹⁶ it's essential that we have ruled out mainstream options before we can look at an independent specialist placement. If we do establish mainstream xxxx College discrete courses would not be the right provision, you've then got the grounds to look at more specialist placements. We would explore, always, if there is a barrier to going to xxxx College, what is that barrier, are we able to deal with that barrier? ¹⁶ If we realise that actually their needs are more complex, are we able to set up potentially a programme where they're doing some of the delivery within a mainstream FE College, but they've all got access to the specialist course but again, if you feel no, even with that programme it wouldn't necessarily work, then you've got the grounds to start looking at the independent specialist placements. We would ideally want that placement to be as close to their home borough as possible in order to support sustainable outcomes for the future in terms of community access, friendships, engagement in various different activities in the borough, so we would look to places like xxxx, initially, and we've got xxxxxx, which is at Lxxxxx, so again, there can be some sort of close working relationships with the borough. However, if it is felt that they're not appropriate placements, then we've got

places that are further afield, so we've got xxxx, which is in xxxx, we've got xxxx which is in xxxx, we've got the xxx which is in xxxx, which is sort of xxxx way. So there's a whole variety of different colleges that we can consider out of borough. ¹⁷ However, we need to be thinking about what is the long term plan for this young person, what support is needed, and why would it then be essential for them to access a placement that didn't necessarily support the Statement of Intent, but equally, the long term plan of the young person ¹⁶ but so to get it to Panel and to present it to Panel, I have to be very clear in my mind that all of the exploration had been done, that there are valid reasons for the application, and in terms of ensuring that their educational needs can be met and it's essential that they possibly go out of borough. But then saying that, colleges are getting much better at working with the home local authorities. ¹⁸ I mean there's the plan that (mentions name) produced which is to do with preparing for leaving college from the day that you start college, so it is really working much more closely with providers and ensuring that they are developing links with the home community, the professionals in the home community, so that we can enable that smoother transition. And we also ensure that placements are monitored, but equally, any work that they're doing at the college, ¹⁶ it's essential that that's then being reinforced when they're coming back home to borough during the holidays. So although we ideally want them within borough, if that's not possible then we're working as closely as we can with the providers to ensure that that smooth transition can still be established.

Q You've touched on this a little bit, but I was just wondering, how do you support young people with autism with their transition from secondary school into further education college?

A ¹⁹ Again, that will be sort of looking at what the potential barriers will be, and for young people with autism it's often that changes in their routine is extremely difficult, building up relationships with key professionals can be quite challenging, settling into a whole new environment so what we would aim to do, where possible, is try to get that young person as familiar as possible with the potential placement that they're going onto. It's often good if you're able

to use professionals that they've already built good relationships with to enable that transition to happen through supporting them with visits to the new placements, so they've got that familiarity with them whilst they're getting to know the new placement, getting to know the new staff. I mean you would support families in terms of advice upon how they can support the young person with that transition.²⁰ It might be like photographs, regular visits, so that they're building up, and equally, some of the complex autistic young people that I work with can't even cope with the change like one boy in particular, if there are road works and the family know they can't go through a road because there are road works and they have to take another route, if they take that other route it can then lead to a huge breakdown and with the young person and potentially lashing out. So the family have to physically take him to where the block is, and say, 'We can't go through because of this, so what we now need to do is then go around.' So for somebody whose routine is so crucial, to then move to a new placement. We had one leave xxxthis year that's gone on to xxxx and, touch wood, no problems and I think that was to do with a lot of the work that went on whilst he was still at school that would then support that placement.¹⁹ They then had opportunities to visit xxxx College; the family were taking him to the college on a regular basis, looking at what routes they would be taking. So it's all about sort of building up a picture of what the next stage will be like to enable that transition to be as smooth as possible really.

Q Is there anything you think could prevent or hinder young people with autism from accessing or transitioning into further education college?

A I mean I suppose²¹ it sort of depends on the sort of impact of the transition in terms of their behaviour I mean some placements could be at risk if that transition into the new placement isn't smooth. I mean we've had²² one placement break down because of a young person who lashed out on two separate occasions. The first occasion, the police were involved, which was really awful, because the boy doesn't have capacity. And then there was then a further incident that happened after that one and the young person was excluded, and it was handled, I think, really badly by the college. Basically, the incident happened on a Friday, he was sent home; the parents were informed

that the incident had happened. He returned to college on the Monday morning, as planned, and was basically told, 'Your placement's come to an end and you're gone.'²³ And he was returned to the family home, and mum has got two other children, one with mental health, and the family just went into absolute meltdown crisis and when we sort of looked into how did this happen, it was really clear that although the college had been presented with all of the information regarding what the triggers are for this young person, they hadn't followed the rules of that. Because there is a concern as well, and obviously colleges are run as businesses, so they're keen to obviously accept as many people as they possibly can and you do worry that do they sometimes accept young people that they haven't really planned for how complex potentially that student might be, and how well informed they are of all of the information. Although it's given to the college in advance, how much do they actually really read that information and then ensure that things are put in to prevent? And some of our young people, again, they become so dependent. Like at (secondary school) we've had one young man who attended there and had one main keyworker, and that was the person that the school felt, 'You're the only one that can actually manage and control this young person,' so he worked intensely with this one member of staff for the last remaining years at (secondary school).²³ So when he left (secondary school) and that main person was taken away from that support, he was then placed in a college, where again we made it quite clear, 'You need somebody very firm, he works better with males, he works better with somebody that physically looks strong,' and when the placement had a horrendous breakdown – it was awful – you feel parts of that were to do with the fact he'd become so dependent on one individual that knew him inside out, and then equally, when we had provided all the information in terms of what this young man needs for his support, it wasn't listened to. Mum said some of the support workers were quite timid, very small built, and as soon as this young man saw them he thought, 'I'm going to run rings round you,' and he did. It was really awful and the placement broke down. So we're dealing with very, very complex young people, who potentially may have come from a school that didn't necessarily provide the support in the way that it should have done in terms of him becoming more

familiar with working with different members of staff, ²³ college not really taking on board all of the information that they're given prior to the placement being set up. And that one in particular, ¹⁶ mum searched for years looking and identifying a placement and we weren't really wanting to fund him to go there, because it was all the way over in Devon and we were thinking how is he going to transfer the skills that he learns? But we looked at it so carefully, we recognised there were few other places that could meet his needs locally, but even with all of that work, that background, sharing of information, it still didn't work out. So it's one of those situations, if they are a very, very complex young person, it has to be managed so carefully to make it right.

Q And the last scenario you talked about, was that pertaining to xxxx FE college or specialist setting?

A No. specialist setting in Devon, but I can't think of the name. They were independent residential specialist placements. ²⁶ Do you know, we've had less breakdowns in mainstream colleges than we have independent specialist provision's, and it's interesting because ²⁵ families come to us with, 'We don't want xxxx College,' heard awful stories about the college, people being excluded, and you say if you actually looked at the figures, we potentially have more breakdowns in the independent specialist provisions, where they are the all-singing and dancing specialists at everything, than we necessarily do within the mainstream.

Q Why do you think that might be?

A ²⁶ I think clearly the independent specialist provision are obviously taking more complex young people because it was recognised that the needs couldn't be met within mainstream, but equally, huge changes for young people being taken out of the family home, moved to a complete new area, all of the impact of that is very difficult to manage. I know specialist provisions are exceptionally good at helping to settle young people into new placements and they're really experienced at that, but for some, and especially the one that was in Devon, he had just one member of staff that he'd only ever really worked with closely and was really the only member of staff that seemed to be able to manage

him, and take him away, you then a young boy that just absolutely just couldn't handle it. He physically assaulted staff, smashed up property, smearing, horrendous, throwing stuff on train tracks, the member of staff going on the track to retrieve it, stupid stuff. I've never known anything quite like it, so he now has gone off to a residential non-educational Social Care placement, mum just said, 'That's it, I just can't manage him at home.' I don't know how its working for him, I've not really had much of an update since, because it's obviously now managed by Social Care. The other young man left that college and went off to another – the xxxx placement that broke down – and he's now at xxxx and that seems to be going really well. The support levels are extortionately high and the cost is very high, but he's got a review coming up that we're looking to see how we're able to start slowly reducing the support, because he is absolutely fine, but a trigger like that, and he's a big lad and he could just lunge, which is what happened in the previous placement on two occasions and two people were injured. So it's just one of those situations that you think it's actually calm now, but could that change? But I think the more you understand, because his previous placement, Helen Allison School, there was never an incident, they knew him inside out. So it's just really getting to know and understand the young person and the triggers really.

Q And are there any factors specifically hinder young people with ASD transition into FE college in terms of course criteria, course options?

A xxxx²⁸ FE College offer a whole range of fantastic courses, and they would be restricted in terms of some of the medical support that they can offer. They do now offer and have speech and language going in to the college, they've got nice therapy rooms now, so they've come a long way from where they were.³¹ However, they don't have onsite medical nurses should there be a crisis, so someone with very complex medical needs wouldn't be appropriate.²¹ I think for some young people who can present with very challenging behaviour and requires a very, not a controlled environment, but an environment where they're able to actually really manage that, I think for xxxx FE College it could be a barrier.³⁰ For young people that do require intensive support with, for instance, communication, you wouldn't necessarily refer to

xxxx FE College, you would be more thinking of xxxx, which is a specialist college which specialises in communication. So somebody that required a lot of PECS, signs, symbols, communication aids, intensive support, potentially ongoing physio, with complex needs, you may not necessarily feel xxxx FE College would be the right environment.²⁹ However, if it was felt that the college could deliver the right curriculum, but they needed ongoing therapy, then you could look to see could that be sourced externally and put in to support the placement. Are they receiving that support from medical professions currently, and can that continue and work alongside the college placement? Would they benefit from a joint placement where the curriculum is delivered at xxxx but a lot of the therapy input is delivered, for instance, from xxxx, as an example? So you would sort of look at what is the barrier and are we able to resource that externally to support the placement, or are we in agreement that actually the needs are too complex for where xxxx are at this moment in time and would be better served within a more specialist placement. There were two parts to that, weren't there? There was the curriculum offer and the-

Q anything else that might hinder a young person's transition into FE College.

A I mean²⁸ xxx FE College offers a whole range of specialist courses, and clearly if you're looking at the more mainstream then you've got expectations in terms of entry requirements. A lot of the young people that I work with would be working within the P-levels, which is pre-entry, as well as entry level, so usually I would be working with those that would be more classed as severe learning difficulties. However, we've got some at xxx that do achieve Entry Level 3 on leaving, and could, potentially, be looking at some of the mainstream courses. However, they do tend to go for the more specialist courses within xxx FE College as opposed to some of the mainstream. If they required support on a mainstream course, it could be put in, but it's whether or not they'd actually cope with that type of environment.²⁸ So, FE Xxxx College offer a whole range of courses right from high achievers down to those that are achieving P-entry, so often the criteria for the courses wouldn't necessarily cause too much bother, unless³¹ you were looking at an employment preparation course, which does

have the criteria for travelling independently, which can cause a barrier for some. In the past, xxxx FE College used to state that you need to be able to travel independently to apply to all courses, and they no longer do that.

Q When did that stop?

A ²⁸ That stopped a while back now, because I think, as well, it was discriminatory, because how many A-level students are dropped off by their parents in cars and don't travel anywhere on their own or on buses? So that's gone on some courses. In terms of personal care, that used to be an issue for xxx FE College, which no longer is, and they've now got the all-singing and dancing toilets, Clos-o-Mat, or whatever they're called, that does it all for you. So they've come a long way in terms of the needs of the young people that they can meet now as opposed to a few years back.

Q And so what supports young people's access or transition of young people in further education?

A ⁵ It's obviously a lot of multiagency working. I mean with some placements the driving force for an educational placement is clearly you're looking at what the educational needs are. However, we do have some young people who sometimes the driving force may be more to do with a social care reason. So I've had two, as an example, and they were potential xxxxx College students and there's no reason why they wouldn't have been able to access xxx. However, both families were in a situation that they were saying, 'We can no longer manage our young person at home.' So with the way that we work now and with the introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan, it's working much more intensely with families and young people and really identifying what's going on with the young person, the education, but equally, what's going on within the family, the home community. ³² All the types of potential barriers that they might be experiencing due to lack of provision: after school clubs, holiday clubs, activities that they can engage in. ⁵ So we now look at everything, right from health, the education, the family, the community, we look at all of the areas of that young person's life, so we are in a position now to be able to identify where there are difficulties within the family and what the

possible reasons for that are. And then what we would then do is work closely with the professionals that are working, so we've got very close working relationships with the Transition Team, who are often the allocated social workers to the young people that we work with. So if you do identify potential barriers, what we would do as a team is look at, 'Okay, how are we able to resolve what some of these issues are? And as a local authority, are we able to do that? Are we able to offer what's needed for this young person?' If we do, we do sort of pick up if families are not happy with the provision that's available, we're able to feed that back to commissioners to ensure that they're aware of where there are shortfalls within the borough, which might be a driving force for people going out of borough to more expensive residential placements. So it is trying to sort of really pick out what are the issues and likewise with providers that we work with, if there are issues that we're hearing about from within xxxx FE College or any independent specialist provision, that we're sensing that things aren't necessarily right, or the young person is not making the right progress, or the young person's not settling, it's then trying to establish what is the root cause of that, and then how are we able to actually resolve what might be going on for that young person. ⁵⁰ But you can sometimes feel that your hands are tied. I mean one example, I've got a boy at the moment who should be at xxxxx and mum's keeping him at home because he's developed epilepsy, and it's being investigated, but she's reluctant now to send him into college, but the college are saying, 'We can manage it,' but mum doesn't want to take that risk. So although you want to sort of try to intervene to, if possible, get him back into college, if families are not willing to consider that, you can't force. And likewise, if families say, 'We're not applying for certain places,' you can't physically make them. So your hands are tied in some respects, but I think in terms of the barriers, it's just identifying what they are and are we able to resolve. ³² There are a lot of families that aren't happy with the provision that's available during the holidays, they don't feel that there are any clubs or any real opportunities for the young people to engage with other young people and access the community, so there is a risk of isolation and not being able to really establish good community links and friendships. But I think, as well, ³³ I feel like sometimes a real inequality in

terms of services that families do receive. You look at some care packages and you think, 'Wow, they're getting x amount of hours,' and then you look at other family situations and you think the family situation is so desperate, but the family aren't necessarily picking up on that or addressing it, and then they're getting nothing. And that can be difficult, because you think sometimes the barrier might be the family

Q ok can you tell me more?

A ³³ Just not accepting support or help or wanting to do it all themselves, or some families that have got learning difficulties themselves and you're trying to ensure the best outcomes for the young person, but they're just not proactive. And to be honest, if you're not on that phone making demands, nobody's going to be necessarily throwing services at you, so you do sometimes feel that there are some families that get so much because they are far more knowledgeable, experienced, potentially a legal background, they know their rights, they know their entitlements. So there are lots of barriers from everywhere and it's just trying to chip away at them to achieve the best outcomes really.

Q That's really interesting. So how do you involve parents in the planning stages of the young person's transition into further education college?

A ¹⁵ What we do is obviously we attend the annual reviews, usually from Year 9 onwards unless we've got valid reasons why we can't, so it's about making contact very early with the families, giving them the relevant up to date information at those opportunities. ³³ Some families are very proactive, they're on the phone, they want to have those meetings, and others aren't. Others just sort of plod along and you pick them up. ³⁵ So it's really, for us, it would be around the annual reviews, getting to know the families, offering appointments to meet with the families outside of the review meeting uhm we would work very closely with the families when it comes to completing the Education, Health and Care Plan, providing families with the information, advice and guidance in terms of future provision and trying to sort of steer them in the right direction. I think some families, I mean we did a home visit yesterday and it's for a young person that's at an independent specialist provision, and when

he moves on from there, mum is very particular on where she wants him to go.

¹⁴ She doesn't want him at home, but she doesn't quite know what she wants, and it's very difficult to manage because you think it's a local authority's budget that we're talking about, yet you get the impression that some families feel that it is their right to tell us how to spend that money. And I know that sounds harsh, because it's really important ¹⁷ that we work with young people and families and really support them in moving forward and achieving the best outcomes for that young person and that supports the long term plan, ¹⁴ however, it is being mindful that it's still a local authority's budget, it's not their own private budget that they can say, 'I'm not interested in what you have to say. I've done my research and this is what I'm having and you're paying for that.' So it is about trying to work with families and steering them towards the best outcomes for the young person. And when you look at the legislation, it's about providing what's deemed to be a reasonable education and it isn't deemed to be a gold service, it's what is legally, and I know that's up for interpretation, but you do sometimes have to remind families that it's not their money. And I've got one at the moment who's saying, 'No, he's not going to xxxx,' and xxxx would be perfect. And she's saying, 'I'm not having him assessed there because he's not going there.' And I said, 'Well, I can see the reasons why, you've explained to me why you don't feel it is appropriate,' and I explain to her how those barriers could be overcome. I think it's important that the assessment happens so that we know exactly what they could potentially offer, but I had to sort of remind her that, 'If you're planning to privately fund something, it's your right to look and decide exactly where your son wants to go. However, if you want the local authority to be funding the placement, clearly we want to achieve the best outcomes. However, we've got a process that we have to follow.' So it can be a difficult message and I don't think that all families necessarily understand

Q mmhm, so how do you involve young people with autism in the planning stages of their transition into further education?

A Again, we have a presence within the schools. I will regularly, at xxxxe in particular, ³⁵ go in and do a lot of classroom observation and sit with the young

person, meet with the teachers, that we know them very well, go to the family home, meet with the family.¹³ Where we are able to establish their views, we will clearly get that view from the young person. However, when we have young people that don't have the mental capacity, very limited communication, severe learning difficulties, it can be very difficult to establish what their view is, so you do rely heavily on those that know them best. But for a young person with autism, if it is about building relationships with that young person, because you know that they have got that ability to engage with you, then what you would do is work under the guidance of those that know him in order to try to establish what that view is, and that might be just through regular presence in the room, trying to establish a relationship, home visits, where they feel more comfortable, taking those sorts of approaches really.

Q And would the young person attend the annual review/ transition meeting?

A Yeah, they attend. I mean at xxxx,³⁷ if some are quite complex and where they know that they can't handle those situations, then possibly not, but where they do feel it is appropriate, they do have them in the room, even if it's just for a short space at the beginning. They'll often show a nice video of the young person and the progress they've been making, so they'd invite them in for that part of the meeting. But some of them can find it quite distressing, because they see their parents as their home life and all of a sudden their parents are now in their school life, and it's like, 'You shouldn't be here, this is like a different part of my world.' So it can be sometimes quite difficult for that to be managed, but where we can we will obviously try to do that.

Q have you received training in ASD and accessing their views?

A¹ No, I mean it's just really sort of the years of experience that I've had and we don't have any certain training- I know that within schools they use what's called the Teach Practice or PECS and things like that, but I personally just really get the advice from those that know best in terms of how to go forward with the young person.

Q And so how do you coordinate with other services in order to support the transition for young people into further education or college?

A ⁵ We often do joint home visits and if I know that I'm going out to a family to start the Education, Health and Care Plan, it's informing the worker that that document is underway. We use the Community Care Assessment. We will meet with many professionals at the annual reviews and when I do home visits, if I walk away from the family home and I think they've raised certain things that I'm now concerned about, that I need to pass on that information, so we do work very closely together. And in terms of the two last year that were driven by social care issues in the family home, we worked very closely with the Transition Team and the social workers and Trevor, the manager there, because it was important that it was established that it was a social care reason for driving the placement, in which case, funding had to then be jointly funded through Social Care and (mentions name) educational budget, whereas if it is an educational driving force, it would be (mentions name) budget that would fund the whole placement. ⁵ So you have to be really sort of all singing from the same hymn sheet. We're now trying to get a better understanding, because in the past we've always said to Transition, 'Leave education to us and we'll leave the rest to you,' but because of the EHC plan now, we are having to have more frank discussions about where they see the young person living in the future and we've not often had much information regarding what type of placements are out there and are there any supported living placements, residential. So we're now slowly getting a bit of a better understanding of the housing situation, so that we're able to inform families with current up-to-date information as opposed to always just referring back to Transition. Health is more difficult because I don't think there are long established relationships with Health, it's always been a little bit of Health's out there, but Social Care and Education have always sort of worked closely. I know (mentions name) is doing a lot of work with Health and trying to break down some of the barriers that have existed, but it's still an area that I'm not 100% sure about when it comes to the funding of certain Health things and I'm just mindful that there's work going on that's potentially sort of paving the way for more holistic working.

Q And what services from Health do you think would normally be involved during this transition stage?

A It depends on what the young person's currently receiving and assessed as needing, but quite often you're working with young people that have got speech and language going on, you've got Physio, you might have OT, there might be ongoing medical issues, epilepsy, heart conditions, operations on spines, and there's a whole range of professionals. Some young people that I work with have got a list as long as my arm of professionals that have been involved, medication, and then you've got the community nurse and you've got Doctor xxxx and xxxx they're names that I see all the time, and I know there's a number of professionals based at xxxx House, which is where Transition are based. So quite often, if there were health concerns, or if I did think, 'Actually, the family have mentioned an issue with a shower or a wet room,' or whatever it might be, I would, at the moment, refer back to the care manager, who has then gone on to the relevant medical profession. So I'm aware of who's out there, but I don't necessarily have a great deal of contact with them myself, and so that's possibly more through the Care Manager.

Q So how do you support young people with autism once they have transitioned into further education?

A ¹⁷ That would be just to ensure that the placement is working well, that the placement is mindful of what the long term plans are and what the outcomes are, and to be reinforcing that, and where possible, attend annual reviews, because in independent specialist provisions they have a six-week baseline assessment, which is where prior to starting they've had a snapshot of the young person and then from that they've determined what they feel that they will require. Then they have a full six-week baseline assessment where they actually really get down to the nitty-gritty and decide exactly, 'Yeah, this is the amount of hours for this, this, this. This is the programme they need to follow.' So it's ensuring that that six-week baseline assessment happens, that we're confident and comfortable with the recommendations of that. If we do realise that there are some teething problems, there are some issues that haven't yet been resolved, it's looking at well 'What are they and how are we able to support you with that?' So it's just really monitoring the placement, being aware of potential difficulties that might occur, and ensuring that if there are things happenings that we try to catch them as early as possible before it actually gets to a huge meltdown.

Q And so how do you support young people with autism with their transition into adulthood?

A Again, we work closely with all professionals that are known to the young person, we work closely with the colleges. We would support young people if, for instance, like we've got one at the moment that's out at (out of borough), and I know (mentions name) recently had a meeting with (out of borough) to look at how can we support the transition back into their home local authorities, how are actually going to do that? So it's ensuring that key professionals within the college are aware of all the key professionals that are on the outside working with the young person. If there is, for instance,¹⁸ I don't know, now if it's the young person returning back to the family home, it's ensuring that they've got a whole range of activities in terms of supported employment options, if we're looking at apprenticeships, traineeships, work experience, leisure activities. So it's working closely with the young person and the family to ensure that they're coming out to meaningful activities that supports what they've actually been doing.³⁸ It's ensuring that the college, I mean FE College are in a prime position to build up those relationships whilst they're still at the college, and again, if they were looking at potential housing options, Social Care would currently be looking at the provision for that and the support that's needed, but it's about joint working to ensure that the housing or home life is sorted, but equally, there are those meaningful activities that the young person can engage in when they finish. Some go into fulltime Social Care provision, places like xxxx Day Centre, you've got Shaw Trust, we've got Job Match, we've got xxxx Adult Education, some return from independent specialist provisions back into FE College. There are lots of different leisure activities that they can be accessing through sort of xxxy My Time.¹⁸ It would be around building in time for them to continue to develop the independent living, so potentially accessing a personal assistant that would go shopping with them, help them plan a meal, cook that meal. So just really ensuring that they've got a whole package that supports their health, their housing, community engagement, friendships, relationships, and work opportunities.

Q And does your service support with all of those pathways into adulthood?

A ¹⁸ Yes, we would be looking at all of those outcomes, and when we complete an Education, Health and Care Plan, they're the key outcomes that we would be focusing on for the young person and ¹⁷ it's ensuring that whilst they're in education that they're mindful of these are the outcomes we want to be delivered, and that smooth transition in preparation for that will be part of the college's role, as well as all the professionals working with the young person, to ensure that those links are being established in advance of them moving on.

Q we have now come to the end of my questions, is there anything else you would like to add?

A No I don't think so.

Initial codes developed during thematic analysis – for professionals data

1. Professional has experience in working with young people with SEN/ ASD
2. Threshold for service involvement: work with young people in specialist provisions
3. Professional has not received ASD awareness/ training
4. ~~Role: supporting families with transition into post 16 provisions~~
5. Role: using EHC plans supports multi- agency working in order to support transitions
6. Role: support families by providing advice or information on post 16 provisions
7. Support transitions by providing taster sessions in FE College
8. Increase in caseload due to cuts to services
9. Limited staff capacity due to cuts to services
10. Changes in legislation: no longer using statements/ LDA's
11. Involving young person in decision making
12. Changes in legislation: using person centre planning to support transitions
13. Difficulties accessing the young person's voice when they have a limited mental capacity
14. Difficulties acting upon the views of families/ young person due to policy/ budget constraints
15. Professionals early involvement supports transition planning
16. LA policy: promote young person's participation in local post 16 provisions
17. Changes in legislation: professionals are now focussed on young person's long term outcomes
18. Changes in legislation: professionals are now focussed on young person's transition into other areas into adulthood
19. Young person's transition into FE College is improved when they are given the opportunity to become familiar with the new setting
20. Young person's transition into FE College is improved when they have been prepared by visuals/ extended visits
21. Young person's behaviour can hinder their transition into FE College
22. Young persons behaviour leads to placement breakdown
23. FE College enrol young people on courses without planning or preparing for their learning or behavioural needs
24. Parents not wanting young person to transition into FE College because worried about their safety
25. Parents not wanting young person to transition into FE College because they have heard negative stories
26. Young people who transition into specialist out of borough/ residential provisions leads to poor outcomes
27. young person's learning/ behaviour needs affects transitions
28. Recent improvements made to FE College- offers courses that suit a wider range of needs
29. Barriers to young people with complex needs transitioning into FE College can be resolved by dual placement

30. Young people who have complex communication or medical needs may hinder their access or transition into FE College
31. Young people who are not travel trained prevents them from accessing some of FE College courses
32. Lack of activities in the community for the young person to engage in for rest of week/ holidays
33. Parents affect their young person's transition when they are not proactive
34. Lack of services to support young people when exiting FE College
35. Encourage parent or young person in decision making by developing rapport
36. Parents disagree with young person or professionals on post 16 placement options
37. Involving young people with their own transition plan/ annual review meeting
38. Importance of preparing for young person's transition into adulthood in the early planning stages
39. Lack of time and resources to implement policies
40. Discrepancy in services received by young people in mainstream schools/ specialist schools
41. Implementation of local offer
42. Young people with Asperger's receiving less support than young people with complex needs during transition
43. Parents are an expert of their child
44. Use of an independent advocate when young person has limited capacity
45. Use of communication aids when young person has limited capacity
46. Access to local mainstream FE college
47. Encouraging parent participation
48. ASD training needed
49. Services offered to young people with a statement of SEN
50. Young person not able to transition into FE College because parent wants to protect them

Appendix 10

Table: Transition checklist for young people

	Choosing FE provision	Yes	Not sure	No	Comment
1	I want to go to my schools sixth form				
2	I want to leave school				
3	I want to go to College				
4	I have looked at courses on the internet				
5	I have gone to look at colleges				
6	I have gone to the classroom of my chosen course				
7	I want to attend my annual review meeting				
5	I want _____ to attend my annual review meeting with me				
6	I want to speak in my annual review meeting				
7	I want _____ to speak for me in my annual review meeting				
8	I find _____ difficult (include: learning, emotional, social and sensory difficulties)				
9	I am good at _____				
10	I can travel on the bus/ train on my own				
11	I know what train or number bus I need to take to college				
12	I want support from a LSA in my lessons in college				
13	I want a student to show me around the college				
14	I want help with _____ in college				
15	I want _____ to help me in college				
16	I want help with making friends				
17	I want to be on my own				
18	When I am older I want to work at _____				
19	When I am older I want to live at _____				
20	I need help with using money				