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**Moving on Up: Using Q-Methodology to Explore What is Important to Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disability in their Transition to Post-16 Education.**

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**Abstract**

Previous research has suggested a number of factors are important to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) in their transition to post-16 education. However, such research has been limited by focusing on participants with specific types of SEND, using methodologies that limited the exploration of the detail and richness of the young person’s experiences, or being conducted at a time which pre-dates legislative changes to the SEND Code of Practice and compulsory post-16 education. Of the research that has been conducted since the change in socio-political context, this has focused on the transition experiences of young people with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and so the experiences of young people with SEND, more broadly, and especially those young people transitioning from a mainstream school to college, have not been explored.

Consequently, the aim of the research was to explore what young people identified as having a range of SEND have found to be important in their transition from a mainstream school setting to a mainstream post-16 educational setting, within this new socio-political context, with a view to this helping inform the support received. As a result of the desire to access the voices of young people as to what has been important to them in their transition and look at the commonalities and differences between their viewpoints, Q-methodology was chosen as the most appropriate methodology to achieve this.

31 participants from two mainstream post-16 colleges (one in the East Midlands and one in Yorkshire) took part in the study; sorting 50 statements into a forced choice distribution grid. By-person factor analysis was used to analyse the completed Q-sorts to identify shared viewpoints. This resulted in a five factor solution.

The research findings are discussed in relation to emergent themes, the existing literature and the nature of the participant group, followed by consideration of the implications for schools, colleges and Educational Psychologists (EPs). Reflections on the limitations of the study and areas of possible future research are presented.

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

The transition from secondary school to post-16 education, training and employment can be seen as a crucial period in the development of all young people and their progression towards the next stage of their lives (Cullen, Lindsay & Dockrell, 2009). For young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), who represent 14.4% of the school population (DfE, 2017b), it is extremely important that they are well supported at this time to help facilitate a successful transition to post-16 education, training and employment as part of a longer developmental transition to adulthood.

My interest in this topic stems from my previous role in supporting young people with SEND in a large mainstream secondary school, which included supporting and preparing them for transition to post-16 education. My specific interest in transition experiences emanates from my work with one young person, with whom I had developed a very positive relationship with over the five years I supported her in school. She experienced school as particularly challenging and so when she visited me at school, a number of months after she had left, I was delighted to hear of the extremely positive experience she was having at college. I was struck by how different this was to her experience of school. This fuelled my interest in exploring what aspects of the transition experience had facilitated the transition from school to college being experienced as positive and supportive. As such, this focused my research interest on exploring what young people with SEND consider are the important features of their transition. I am also passionate about empowering young people and supporting as many young people as possible to have their voices heard. Therefore, I was keen for my research to access a range of voices and look at the commonalities and differences between their viewpoints.

As a result of my interest in this area I began to explore the existing literature around the post-16 transition experiences of young people with SEND. This small body of research identified a number of key areas to be important in the transition to post-16 education. However, through my reading, it became apparent that the majority of the research pre-dates recent legislative changes in post-16 education and in SEND practice, as well as highlighting a number of further gaps. This is discussed fully in the Critical Literature Review chapter. Consequently, I was struck by a research need to elicit the voice of young people with a range of SEND as to their viewpoints on what had been important to them in their transition to post-16 education, within this new socio-political context.

The following chapter is a critical review of the existing body of literature around the post-16 transition and educational experiences of young people with SEND, commencing with a discussion of the political and legislative context of the research. A detailed justification of the rationale for my research is also presented. The methodology chapter describes the background to Q-methodology, how it was applied in the current study, the epistemological and ontological position of the research and the rationale for adopting Q-methodology. A discussion of ethical and quality considerations, in relation to the research, is also included within this chapter.

The results chapter outlines how the data was analysed, how the elicited viewpoints were interpreted and presents pertinent data on the SEND status of the participants. This is followed by the discussion chapter which explores the viewpoints in the context of emergent themes and how they relate to the existing literature. The implications of the SEND characteristics of the participants are then considered, followed by a summary of the key research findings and the implications of these for schools, colleges and Educational Psychologists (EPs). My reflections on the limitations of the study and possible areas of future research are also discussed in this chapter. Finally, my overall conclusions on the study and its findings are presented.

**Chapter 2**

**Critical Literature Review**

This chapter firstly considers the current political and legislative context of post-16 education, with particular reference to the Education and Skills Act (2008) and the subsequent Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), as well as the statistics for young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The research literature into the post-16 transition and educational experiences of young people with SEND will then be critically reviewed, followed by a summary of key areas and an exploration of gaps in the literature from which the current study emerged.

**2.1 The Legislative Context**

Prior to the implementation of The Education and Skills Act (2008) young people could leave education on the last Friday in June if they would be 16 years of age by the end of the summer holidays. However, the Act increased the age at which young people in England must remain in education; to 17 years of age with effect from September 2013 and 18 from September 2015. This can take the form of full-time education or training at school or college, work-based learning, such as an Apprenticeship or traineeship, or part-time education or training combined with employment, self employment or voluntary work of more than 20 hours per week.

As part of the education agenda of the previous Labour government, the aims of increasing the age of participation were outlined in the Green Paper ‘Raising expectations: staying in education and training post-16’ (DfES, 2007). These aims were to increase the qualifications and skills of the workforce, thereby enabling the country to compete more effectively in an increasingly competitive international economic market, and enable young people to earn more, develop the skills for a successful and productive adult life, be less likely to commit crime and be physically and mentally healthier.

Despite the Green Paper acknowledging that post-16 participation rates were already increasing, the government wanted to increase participation much faster and so legislative change was deemed necessary.

**2.1.1 Key Areas of The Education and Skills Act (2008)**

In addition to raising the participation age to 18, this Act included a number of measures to support young people in remaining in education or training post-16 and so achieve higher levels of skill and qualification.

2.1.1.1 Financial Support

One such measure was the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, consisting of the Vulnerable Student Bursary and the Discretionary Bursary, which was developed to provide targeted support to help young people overcome any specific financial barriers to participation. Under the Vulnerable Student Bursary scheme, students aged 16 to 19 can receive up to £1200 if they have recently left local authority care, receive Income Support or Universal Credit, receive Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and either Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit, or are in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and either ESA or Universal Credit.

If students are not eligible for the Vulnerable Student Bursary then they may qualify for the Discretionary Bursary. Education/training providers devise their own eligibility criteria for this but it usually includes family income. Discretionary Bursaries can also be awarded to post-19 students.

These bursaries were devised as a replacement to the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which ceased in 2010, and provided up to £30 per week to support low income students in sixth forms and colleges. It was intended that this new 16-19 Bursary Fund would provide targeted support to those most in need and remove barriers to learning faced by the most vulnerable. However, it was argued that this new scheme meant that a significant number of vulnerable students still missed out on vital financial support (Coughlan, 2011).

2.1.1.2 Careers Guidance

Another measure was that the responsibility for careers guidance and support was transferred from the Connexions Service to schools, as detailed in ‘Participation of young people in education, employment or training: Statutory guidance for local authorities’ (DfE, 2016a). This stated that schools and colleges must work in partnership with other education and training providers and local employers to develop independent and impartial guidance for young people on the range of training and education options available to them, including apprenticeships. This may be considered a response to previous criticisms of the Connexions service. For example, Cullen et al. (2009) found that issues with the variability of training and practice of personal advisers and Connexions services meant that the support received by young people with SEN differed greatly in its effectiveness.

With particular reference to young people with SEND, the importance of personalised careers guidance, individually tailored to the young person’s needs and aspirations was emphasised, incorporating details of the local authority’s SEND Local Offer. This should include opportunities to gain qualifications leading into further or higher education, traineeships and apprenticeships. Additionally, if the young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), previously known as a Statement, then a supported internship should also be presented as an option, according to the statutory guidance (DfE, 2016a).

**2.1.2 The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b)**

The statutory guidance in relation to young people with special educational needs and disability, as detailed above, can be seen to reflect the content of the most recent SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), which resulted from the Children and Families Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 2014). Indeed, the Code of Practice has a clear emphasis on young people with SEND making successful transitions to adulthood, with a focus on aspirational life outcomes, encompassing employment, independent living and community participation.

Although a focus on preparing for adulthood is integral to the Code of Practice, the crucial time when more detailed and explicit transition planning for young people with an EHCP commences is in Year 9 at the young person’s annual review. One of the central features of this planning is the active participation of young people and their parents in exploring the young person’s aspirations and ambitions for the future and how best to support the achievement of these.

In addition to the careers guidance detailed previously, the Code of Practice is clear in its requirement that if a change in education setting is planned for post-16 then schools should share key information with further education/training providers to facilitate the development of appropriate study programmes and the provision of appropriate support. Provisions should also work together to provide the young person with opportunities to familiarise themselves with their potential new educational environment, such as visits and taster days, to enable the young person to make informed choices and facilitate a positive transition and post-16 experience.

It is also important to consider how this fits with the longer term outcomes of the young person’s transition to adulthood, as the Code of Practice now supports young people with SEND up to the age of 25.

In addition, the Code of Practice also indicates that preparation for adulthood, and more immediately the transition to post-16 should be a fluid plan, with the potential and capacity to change and develop over time depending on the needs, wishes and experiences of the young person. It stresses the importance of developing a contingency plan during Year 11 in case plans should change.

However, the new Code of Practice does not detail who specifically has responsibility for managing the transition (a lead professional), which may previously have been a Connexions adviser and is unclear on the nature of contingency planning. This lack of explicit clarity also extends to how transition planning will be managed for young people with SEND but who do not have an EHCP. There is no statutory requirement for these young people to have annual reviews incorporating planning for adulthood from Year 9 onwards, as is the case for young people with an EHCP.

**2.1.3 NEET Statistics**

At this point it is important to consider the current NEET statistics. As post-16 education became statutory it could be expected that NEET figures for the 16-18 age group would decrease.

The national picture for England (DfE, 2017b) would seem to suggest that this was initially the case as NEET rates for the 16-18 cohort fell from 9.1% in the period from April to June 2013 to 8.1% during the same period of 2014 and to 7.5% in the same period of 2015. However, the period of April to June 2016 saw a rise to 8.0%, with this increasing further to 8.4% in the same period of 2017.

More alarmingly within this data, there also seems to be an almost doubling in the proportion of 16 year olds classified as NEET (from 2.3% in 2015, to 4.2% in 2016 and 4.4% in 2017), perhaps implying that statutory legislation has not been as effective in increasing participation as would have been hoped. Although, there was a less dramatic increase for 17 year olds (7.6% in 2015 to 8.0% in 2016 to 8.3% in 2017) and a slightly erratic picture for 18 year olds (12.6% in 2015, 11.8% in 2016 to 12.2% in 2017). Whilst the change in figures for 17 and 18 year olds are less dramatic than for 16 year olds, it must be acknowledged that the baseline NEET figures for 17 and 18 year olds are considerably higher then those for 16 year olds. Indeed, more than twice as many 17 year olds as 16 year olds were classified as NEET and three times as many 18 year olds as 16 year olds.

Trends in the NEET statistics for the 16-18 cohort can also be compared to those for the 19-24 age group (DfE, 2017b). Although figures for this 19-24 cohort are higher, there has been a consistent downward pattern between 2013 and 2017. For the period April to June, this has declined annually from 18.2% in 2013, to 16.0% in 2014, 15.7% in 2015, 13.9% in 2016 and 12.7% in 2017.

It must also be acknowledged that NEET statistics may mask regional differences, in that northern English regions (North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside) seem to have the highest NEET rates, whereas London and the South East have the lowest. For example, according to the DfE NEET data by local authority published in October 2017 (DfE, 2017a), for the period from November 2015 to January 2016, the NEET rate for 16-18 year olds in the North East was estimated at 5.7% and 4.8% for the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside. In contrast, the figures for London and the South East were 3.1% and 3.9%, respectively.

In terms of young people with SEND, 12.6% of 16 and 17 year olds were recorded as NEET in June 2017 (DfE, 2017c), compared to 8.5% of this age group without SEND. Although for young people with SEND this has fallen from 15.2% in June 2015 (DfE, 2015a) to 13.2% in June 2016 (DfE, 2016b) it is still proportionately higher than for young people without SEND.

Consequently, there seems to be a significant and increasing proportion of young people classified as NEET, despite government efforts to address this by increasing the age of compulsory participation in education to 18 and the supportive mechanisms to promote this, as detailed in The Education and Skills Act (2008). This rate would also seem to be proportionately higher for young people from the North, those with SEND and for older young people. Indeed, it may be argued that a governmental focus on the participation of 16 and 17 year olds in education only serves to mask the issue of young people classified as NEET which then emerges when they are a little older (Maguire, 2013).

**2.2 Transition and its Significance**

As the legislative and statistical context of post-16 education has been outlined, it is now important to consider the experience of transition to post-16 education, what is meant by ‘transition’ and the significance and impact of this for young people with SEND.

Firstly, there is a need for clarity on what is meant by the term ‘transition’. A rather simplistic view may consider it to be a transfer from one educational setting to another. However, such a view risks diminishing the complexity of what is involved, what it encompasses and the challenges it brings (Polat, Kalambouka & Nelson, 2001), including adapting to and managing new and unfamiliar environments, changes to teaching style and content and changes to the nature of relationships with adults and peers, which may be experienced as more challenging to young people with SEND due to their additional vulnerabilities and needs (Cullen et al., 2009; Hickey, 2016). Indeed, the need for a more complex view of transition is acknowledged in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), in that planning for transition to post-16 begins for young people with an EHCP in their Year 9 Annual Review. Therefore, transition can be conceptualised as an extended process commencing in Year 9 but with a fluid end point, perhaps defined by the young person’s own meaning of this, and without a clear-cut or definitive conclusion (Polat et al., 2001).

Such an extended process, along with the aforementioned supportive mechanisms and structures described in Section 2.1, suggests that the enormity, significance and challenges of transition to post-16 are recognised and understood. Moreover, from within a developmental perspective, the importance of such a transition could be framed as being an integral part of the young person’s transition to adulthood as defined by purposeful occupation, meaningful personal relationships, and independent living (Dewson, Aston, Bates, Ritchie & Dyson, 2004). It may, therefore, be a reasonable proposition that for all young people, a well supported transition is important for continued progression to a successful and productive adulthood, with an inadequately supported transition risking jeopardising this (Polat et al., 2001). These support needs may be viewed as particularly acute for young people with SEND due to their increased vulnerability and additional needs compared to other young people (Cullen et al., 2009). Consequently, the successful transition to adult life for young people with SEND may be contingent on and a measure of the adequacy of support received during transition, with their needs being met (Clark & Hirst, 1989).

However, the limited research literature on this topic suggests that the adequacy of transition support is experienced as variable. For example, in the largest scale survey of its kind involving 1876 young people with SEND who had undergone post-16 transition, Dewson et al. (2004) found that 20.5% of young people with SEND reported that they had not received enough support during their transition to post-16 education, employment or training and one-tenth felt that things were currently not going well for them. Although this was somewhat tempered by the finding that four-fifths reported that they felt things were going well, it does not detract from the finding that, for a significant number of young people with SEND, transition support was lacking, with this impacting on how their life was currently being experienced. Additionally, 20% of the sample was currently NEET, which, although other factors may impact on this such as poor health, does suggest that there are issues with the adequacy of transition support. Indeed, when explored further, only two-thirds of the young people with a Statement could recall having any form of transition planning, which is an alarming figure considering this is a basic statutory requirement for all young people with a Statement/EHCP and again points to inadequacies in transition support.

Subsequent research in this area also paints an inconsistent and variable picture. For example, a study by Palikara, Lindsay and Dockrell (2009) found that most of the 54 young people with SEND interviewed considered the transition support they received to be sufficient and helpful and acknowledged the positive role this support had played in relation to their educational progress. However, almost half had experienced some problems during transition and nine were able to make detailed suggestions as to how support could be improved.

Similarly, a study by Hewett, Douglas and Keil (2014) found that the majority of the young people with SEND interviewed were positive about their post-16 transition experience, with only eight of the 47 reporting that it could have been improved. However, this figure does represent nearly a fifth of the sample feeling some aspects of their support was inadequate. Worryingly, and in line with the findings of Dewson et al. (2004), a significant number of young people with Statements could not recall having any statutory transition planning meetings, with over half saying they had not received a written copy of their transition plan. Again, this suggests inadequacies in the delivery of statutory post-16 support structures for young people with SEND.

At this point, it also pertinent to remind the reader that young people with SEND but not an EHCP are not entitled to statutory transition support and so do not necessarily have access to extended and enhanced transition support. This may have implications for their successful transition to post-16 opportunities and their developmental progression to adulthood and is an issue discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Additionally, although not focusing on the adequacy of transition support, a study by Carroll and Dockrell (2012) was able demonstrate that young people with SEND are able to identify the enablers and challengers of successful post-16 transition. These specific features of support identified as being important for transition and so contributing to the adequacy of experienced transition support will be discussed fully in Section 2.3, in the context of the views of particular groups of young people with SEND.

To summarise, therefore, transition is a complex, challenging and extended process which begins some time before the actual transfer from school to post-16 education. Such complexity implies that receiving adequate support is extremely important, both to facilitate a successful transfer to college but also as part of a broader developmental progression to a successful adulthood. However, research with young people with SEND, who may be considered to be of increased vulnerability due to their additional needs, suggests that such support is variable and often experienced as inadequate. Such inadequately experienced support, with their needs not being met, may lead to transition being experienced as problematic, present as a barrier or obstacle to their success in college and so risk disrupting a young person’s continued progression to a successful adulthood. This may help account for the aforementioned statistical data showing higher rates of young people with SEND being NEET, than their non-SEND counterparts and may also be seen to impact on progression to adulthood as the NEET figures for young people with SEND are higher (DfE, 2017b) at the ages of 18 years and over than for ages 16 or 17.

Consequently, it would seem that transition is not currently consistently well supported, with this impacting on the young person’s progression to adulthood. It is, therefore, extremely important and worthy of research to further explore such support and the important features of this from the perspective of the young person with SEND as a means of supporting them to experience success in college and make successful developmental progressions to adulthood, as well as ameliorating the risk of such a progression and adaptation to adulthood being disrupted or jeopardised.

**2.3 Research Evidence**

**2.3.1 Research Strategy**

The following section critically reviews the literature around the views of post-16 transition in more detail, with a particular focus on the features of their transition that young people with SEND identified were important to them. The section concludes with a discussion of the gaps emerging from the literature which adds to the rationale for the importance of further research in this area.

However, prior to reviewing the specific research evidence, I will now outline my research strategy for achieving this. Firstly, an advanced search of StarPlus(the University of Sheffield’s online library catalogue) was conducted using the following search terms:

‘Educational Psychology’ and ‘16-25’;

‘Post 16’ and ‘Education’;

‘Post school’ and ‘Transition’;

‘Post 16’ and ‘Transition’;

‘Post 16’ and ‘Provision’;

‘Educational Psychology in practice’ and ‘Post 16’.

A search of Google Scholar was also conducted using the search terms ‘Special education 16-25’ and ‘Special educational needs post 16.’

Finally, a search of the White Rose eTheses repository using the search terms ‘Transition from school to college’ was conducted.

These searches yielded the research referenced below.

It should be noted that much of the research outlined below was conducted within the legislative context of the 2001 SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) and so the children and young people studied are referred to as having SEN. It pre-dates the current SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), which includes guidance on supporting children and young people with disabilities, as well as those with special educational needs. As such, the terms SEN and SEND are used below in accordance with the terminology used in the particular research studies.

**2.3.2 Specific Language Impairments (SLI)**

On reviewing the literature on this topic, it seems that a significant amount of research has centred around the experience of young people with SLI. For example, Palikara et al. (2009) studied young people with SLI in their first year of post-16 education, as part of a longitudinal study which began when the group was eight years old. Most of the young people voiced a positive view of their post-16 course and the support offered to them. Some of the reasons given for their positive views and enjoyment of their course were achieving success, making new friends, being able to experience the practical side of learning, the support of tutors/supervisors, a greater sense of freedom compared with secondary school and the sense of being recognised as an adult.

However, half of the participants had experienced problems, which were mainly related to the increased academic demands of post-16 study but some had also experienced difficult peers. The young people were also able to identify ways in which they thought the support could be improved, such as breaking questions down into small steps, more information about course requirements, providing more support assistants and access to specialist support assistants who were knowledgeable about the particular curriculum area.

Furthermore, although the support of educational staff was important, family support was viewed as extremely important. The role of the extended family, such as siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, was considered to be particularly valuable, with this second tier of familial support used more frequently than at earlier ages. It may be that the emotional closeness of the extended family enabled trust, whilst the greater relational distance than parents allowed the young person to express their feelings more freely. Similarly, friendship was found to be of key importance, in terms of providing support, as a social network or to avoid loneliness.

This study also provides support for one of the core tenets of the Code of Practice, in terms of the importance of listening to the young person’s voice. It highlights the centrality that this should occupy in identifying what support is most beneficial and recognises the role of the young person, themselves, in making decisions and future planning.

However, the findings of this study may be overly optimistic about the post-16 experience of young people with SEN. A study by Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara and Cullen (2007) found that the views of a matched group of young people with other SEN were significantly more negative about their post-16 experience than this group of young people with SLI, suggesting post-16 SEN provision still requires development.

It must also be acknowledged that the aforementioned research was conducted at a time when post-16 education was not compulsory. It seems intuitive to propose that young people are going to consider their educational experience to be positive when attendance has been a choice, as if their experience was negative then they would be less likely to continue attending. As such it may be considered problematic to consider these findings as transferable to the current socio-political context, in which post-16 education is compulsory. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the importance and value of listening to the young person’s voice, regardless of whether their voiced experiences are positive or negative.

In a more recent study, Carroll and Dockrell (2012) explored the perspectives of young people with a history of SLI with regards to the factors they considered had enabled and presented a challenge to their post-16 education and transition experiences to date. Through interviewing the young people and analysing their responses, five main themes emerged. The role played by parents in providing emotional, financial and practical support and acting as advocates was a key enabler for all the young people, in accordance with the previous research of Palikara et al. (2009) and much other research in this area in the UK (e.g. Aston, Dewson, Loukas & Dyson, 2005) and internationally (e.g. Landmark, Ju & Zhang, 2011). The personal characteristics of the young people was also identified as an enabler of successful transition, in terms of their self-determination, awareness of their skills and talents and ability to respond positively to challenges. Being able to see themselves as key agents of change and active participants in their transition was very important.

However, two themes were experienced as enablers and challenges. Professional advice from tutors was seen as an enabler in assisting with the completion of course requirements and supporting decision making, whereas the support received from other professionals was more variable. Some received helpful and informed advice, whilst others felt the support was tokenistic, inappropriate, or demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the young person’s needs or even a lack of expectation. Similarly, perspectives of education and qualifications were mixed, in that learning support provision for life and social skills training was perceived as positive but a lack of qualifications and academic challenges had been a barrier to some. Additionally, the fifth theme, relating to the young person’s experience of SLI was identified as a challenge, in terms of specific associated difficulties, such as with speech, reading and memory.

However, as with the previous research of Palikara et al. (2009), this study only explored the perspectives of young people with SLI and so the findings may not be transferable to young people with other SEND. Additionally, all the young people interviewed had attended the same residential special school and the participants were predominantly male (80%) which undermines the possibility of transferring the findings to other more diverse groups. Furthermore, this study has been critiqued on the basis that young people were interviewed two to three years after their initial transition to post-16 education or employment and so relied on the young person reflecting on past experience, which may not be an accurate representation of their experiences at the time. However, it does provide a useful insight into how their past experiences are currently constructed and allowed the young person to reflect on their experience of transition as a continuing process rather than focusing solely on the initial transition to post-16 education.

**2.3.3 Visual Impairment (VI)**

In addition to SLI, research has also been conducted into the transition experiences of young people with other specific additional needs. For example, Keil and Crews (2008) explored the post-16 and post-18 transition experiences of young people with visual impairment. Their main finding was that the continuing support of the Qualified Teacher of children and young people with Vision Impairment (QTVI) was key, in terms of advising mainstream teachers, help with problem solving, acting as mentors and supporting in post-18 transition planning. Similarly, Hewett et al. (2014) found that support from the Visual Teaching Service was important but also that having someone to help mentally prepare them for the change, careers guidance, course information and ensuring exchange of support arrangements information between settings were all highly significant in the transition experience.

**2.3.4 Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)**

There has also been a recent focus on the transition experiences of young people with SLD. For example, Hickey (2016) interviewed five young people with SLD about their initial transition experiences. She found that friendship was a key experience and supportive factor for the young person, with support from families and college staff also identified as important factors. Other areas of positive experience for the young person were around the available learning and social opportunities which gave a sense of belonging and the opportunities for greater independence and autonomy. However, some young people experienced an initial sense of loss, in terms of missing their friends from their previous school, although this was superseded by the importance of making new friends in most cases. Feelings of tiredness were also cited as a further challenging factor.

**2.3.5 SEND**

Rather than being limited by focusing on a particular SEND or point in a young person’s post-16 transition, Lewis, Parsons and Robertson (2007) interviewed and observed sixty-six young people described as having a SEN and/or disability and in the pre- or post-transition phases of education (Year 6, Year 7, Year 11, Year 12 or Year 13 of the English education system). Through these interviews and observations, as well as interviews of parents and teachers, this study aimed to explore the educational experiences of young people and their families. In addition to within-class observations, they employed a variety of techniques to elicit the voice of the young people, such as drawings, photographs and preference ranking, within individual and group interviews. Such a flexible and creative approach enabled the voice of the young people to be heard and a rich understanding of and insight into their experience to be gained, supplemented by the views of the key adults around them.

The questions asked of the young people and adults were based around five main themes decided upon through previous pilot work by the Disability Rights Commission. These were independence and autonomy (including questions around support), knowledge and assertion of rights, experience of accessible/inaccessible educational services, curriculum and environments, attitudes and behaviours of peers, staff, family and external professionals and ambitions and aspirations (including support for these). By having these pre-determined themes and a semi-structured interview schedule it was possible to ask key questions, yet provide the opportunity to convey more detailed and individual aspects of particular experiences, and present the qualitative data gathered in clear topic areas.

However, the participants in this study were all chosen by the schools and so it is unclear how representative the sample was. It could also be argued that by focusing on pre-determined themes to guide the questioning some of the uniqueness and individuality of the young person’s experiences may not be fully captured.

With a similar focus on SEND more broadly, a more recent study by Manning (2016) used semi-structured interviews to elicit the transition experiences of three young people with EHCPs. The main emergent themes were around the importance of self-determination and agency, supportive relationships, the positive college environment and personal characteristics of the young person.

However, this study only focused on young people with EHCPs, who constitute 2.8% of the school population (DfE, 2017b). It did not elicit the experiences of young people with SEND but without an EHCP, who constitute 11.6% of the school population (DfE, 2017b). It can also be considered limited in that only three participants were interviewed and they all attended the same college. As such, the themes may not reflect the transition experiences of other young people with SEND attending different post-16 provisions.

**2.3.6 Longitudinal Research**

As the research outlined above, with the exception of Lewis et al. (2007) and Manning (2016), could be criticised for focusing on one particular SEND or age point in the post-16 transition process, it is important to review a three wave longitudinal study conducted to explore the experiences of young people with a range of SEN and the strengths, weaknesses and barriers to the transition process. This study also sought to explore the perspectives of parents, carers and other professionals involved in post-16 transition.

2.3.6.1 Wave One

Wave One of the study (Polat et al., 2001) entailed semi-structured interviews with over 5000 participants and was conducted when the young people were in Year 11 at mainstream or special school settings. As such, it can be considered to illuminate transition planning experiences for young people and adults.

The majority of young people (70.4%) felt that school had helped them to plan for the future, although only 59.3% felt school had given them the confidence to make decisions. Most young people said their school had invited them to their transition planning meeting (60.6%) but interestingly 32.6% stated they had not been invited, 6.7% were unsure and one in ten said they felt they could not express their views in the meeting. Additionally, only 56.4% of parents said that an annual review with a transition plan had been held. It would, therefore, seem that at this time, schools could have done more to fully involve and hear the voices of young people and parents in the transition planning process.

Due to its large number of participants, this research was able to explore the transition experiences of young people and key adults and imply the significance and generalisability of these to the given population. However, the methods used involved mainly closed questions with succinct answers. This may be considered to limit the richness of the data and restrict the opportunity to elicit a detailed understanding and elaboration of the participants’ experiences. This may be considered antithetical to the new SEND Code of Practice’s (DfE, 2015b) central tenet of listening to pupil voice.

2.3.6.2 Wave Two

The second wave of longitudinal research revisited the participants from the initial study two years later (Dewson et al., 2004). It adopted a mixed-methods approach of quantitative surveys and qualitative case studies to explore the experiences of young people, parents, carers and other professionals involved in post-16 transition. It found that just over 80% of young people were involved in education, training or employment but that almost 20% were unemployed or inactive. This was compared to only 6% of young people without SEN being out of work at this time. Although some of the young people with SEN may have been unemployed or inactive due to reasons, such as ill health, this highlights the importance of robust transition planning and continued support, in line with the study by Keil and Crews (2008), to enable young people with SEN to engage in successful and sustained education, training and employment.

Some of the factors that were found to support young people with SEN during this transition process were support from parents/carers, school staff and tutors, friends, and to a lesser extent careers advisors, as also highlighted by Palikara et al. (2009), Carroll and Dockrell (2012) and Hickey (2016). The availability of transport was also found to be a key supportive factor.

The case studies also indicated that experience of a smooth transition seemed to be the exception. One of the reasons given for this was, although there was some evidence of effective multi-agency working to address the young person’s transition needs, there was rarely one professional who had a good overview of the young people and was actively involved in sourcing appropriate options to meet their needs. This exemplifies the issues over lack of clarity in this area which continues to be present in the current Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), as previously discussed. Some also reported that they had received conflicting advice from staff working in different services. Overall, it seems that a lack of formal support and advice mechanisms or services to assist in decision making was seen as a major disruptive factor to transition, a finding shared by later research from Carroll and Dockrell (2012). Such issues with support and advice may be seen to undermine the capacity of parents to effectively support the young person’s transition. Additionally, although this case study sample illustrated the transition experiences of young people with SEN in a more detailed way than the previous quantitative Wave One study (Polat et al., 2001), the case study sample was of young people with severe and profound SEN and so may not represent the transition experiences of young people with less complex SEN.

2.3.6.3 Wave Three

Following from this, the third wave of the study (Aston et al., 2005) revisited the participants when they were aged 19 or 20. At this time, 71% of young people were in education, employment or training, with 29% classed as NEET. This represents a decrease in the former and increase in the latter, since the last study. Therefore, although this study predates Maguire’s (2013) aforementioned work and assertion that Government policies merely mask problems which emerge later, it does provide support for the view that education, employment and training for young people aged over 18 are significant areas of concern.

Within this, young people who had had Statements of SEN were more likely to be in education than those with SEN but without Statements. However, those young people with SEN but without Statements were more likely to be in employment and less likely to be NEET than those young people with Statements. This suggests that the transition for those young people with Statements who wished to continue into post-18 education and for those with SEN who wished to enter employment had been successful but for a significant number of young people the transition to a productive early adulthood had been less successfully supported. The long term impact of this has been demonstrated in research by Clegg, Hollis, Mawhood and Rutter (2005) who found that issues of high unemployment were still prevalent in those with SEN when they were in their mid-30s. However, it must be noted that this sample was small, had very severe SLI and were born at a time when there was less support for young people with SEN (Palikara et al., 2009) which may help explain the high unemployment levels found.

In terms of successful transition to education and/or employment, the young people identified the support of family, friends and professional support services and agencies as being important, with parents being the major source of support, as in the previously reviewed studies. Most said the professional support they had received since leaving school was useful or better than that they had received at school, although 14% perceived it as worse. This suggests once again that there is variability and inconsistency in professional support for transition. For a number of more independent young people in the research, it seemed the support systems offered mainly reactive advice and guidance on a somewhat ad hoc basis, with no particular organisation or system taking responsibility for providing support through transition. In contrast, more dependent young people seemed to be supported by a particular system and have more clearly defined transition pathways, thereby implying that the young people’s capacity for independence is an important factor in the transitional support received. Interestingly, though, those with the highest level of need were more likely to report that their needs were currently not being met.

However, this third wave of the study is limited, not only by issues around the use of closed questions and the use of interviews only, but more significantly by the high attrition rate of almost 20% from the previous wave of the study.

Moreover, the whole longitudinal study predated The Education and Skills Act (2008) and so explored transition experiences from within a different socio-political context.

**2.3.7 Summary of Key Findings from the Literature Review**

From the previous research it would seem that the following key areas have emerged as important in the transition to post-16 education:

1. The role of others:
2. Family support, including the extended family (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Dewson et al., 2004; Hickey, 2016; Landmark et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009).
3. Friends and peers, in terms of support (Aston et al., 2005; Dewson et al., 2004; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009), loss (Hickey, 2016) and difficult peers (Lewis et al., 2007; Palikara et al., 2009)
4. Professionals, such as school staff, college tutors, specialist staff/assistants and careers advisers (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Dewson et al., 2004; Hewett et al., 2014; Hickey, 2016; Keil & Crews, 2008; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009; Polat et al., 2001)
5. Characteristics of the young person, such as self-determination to succeed and ambition (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009) and tiredness (Hickey, 2016)
6. Freedom, independence and autonomy (Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009)
7. Previous education and qualifications and experience of the new course (Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009)
8. The young person’s experience of SEN (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Lewis et al., 2007)
9. Practical issues, such as transport (Dewson et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2007) and accessibility of educational environments (Lewis et al., 2007)

**2.3.8 Gaps Emerging from the Literature Review**

From critically reviewing the research literature some gaps have emerged. For example, most research has focused on the transition experiences of males, with females with SEND being under-represented (with the exception of Lewis et al., 2007).

However, more significantly, although there has been some previous research into young people’s experience of transition to post-16 education, there is very limited research into this within the current system. With the exception of Manning (2016) and Hickey (2016), research within the socio-political context in which participation in education or training up to the age of 18 is now compulsory, transition planning is the responsibility of schools (rather than Connexions advisors) and a new SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b) which extends the potential role of the Educational Psychologist from birth to 25 years and considers pupil voice in planning for adulthood to be core, is lacking.

Furthermore, although Manning (2016) and Hickey (2016) have conducted research within the current context, they have focused solely on the transition experiences of young people with EHCPs. The views and experiences of young people with SEND, more broadly, have not been sought or explored.

Consequently, from identifying a gap in the research literature, in terms of exploring the transition experiences of young people with a wide range of SEND within the current system of compulsory post-16 education, changes in responsibility for transition planning and a new SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), my research focus emerged.

Moreover, such gaps strengthen the justification for and importance of conducting research in this area as identified in Section 2.2, in that transition support for young people with SEND is often experienced as inadequate, with their needs not being met, which may then detrimentally impact on experienced success in college and their long-term developmental pathway to a successful adulthood, as demonstrated by the worrying statistical picture of NEET statistics for young people with SEND highlighted in Section 2.1.3.

Therefore, through research to identify the features of support that are important to young people with a range of SEND in their transition to post-16 college within the present context (which is currently under-researched), it may help better inform those around the young person in how to meet their transition needs and so support transition to be positively experienced, thereby enabling them to experience success in college and so support a successful progression to adulthood, as well as potentially contributing to reducing NEET statistics.

This rationale led to the formulation of my research question:

**What do young people with SEND find important in their transition to post-16 educational placements?**

Further details on the development of the research question is provided in Section 3.3.1.

**Chapter 3**

**Methodology**

The following chapter outlines the background to Q-methodology, before going on to discuss the epistemological and ontological positions of this research. The phases of a Q-study and how this was applied in the current research are then discussed. A discussion of ethical considerations and quality considerations in relation to the research will follow. Finally, the alternative approaches that were considered for this research will be presented along with the rationale for deciding upon Q-methodology as the most appropriate methodology to explore this research area and address the research question.

**3.1 The Background to Q-Methodology**

Historically, psychological research endeavoured to study and measure human traits, characteristics and abilities based on the Newtonian logic of ‘testing’ using objective procedures (Watts & Stenner, 2005). However, as a challenge to this, William Stephenson’s letter to the journal ‘Nature’ in 1935 proposed Q as a methodology designed to systematically capture and reveal subjective viewpoints on a particular subject through the use of factor analysis (Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2008). This is based on the assumptions that subjectivity can be communicated and so shared with others (McKeown & Thomas, 2013) and that it has “structure and form” (Brown, 1986, p.58), which can be extracted by Q-methodology, allowing it to be studied.

The emphasis on eliciting subjective viewpoints suggests Q-methodology could be aligned within the qualitative research paradigm. However, analysing subjective viewpoints by statistical means has led some to argue that is it a mixed-methods design (Ramlo, 2016). Consequently, Q-methodology has been differentially described as a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method (Ramlo & Newman, 2011). Furthermore, it could be argued that Q may be described as a ‘qualiquantilogical’ methodology (Ramlo, 2016) as this recognizes that Q is more distinctive than a simplistic combination of qualitative and quantitative designs (Stenner & Stainton-Rogers, 2004) as it allows researchers to quantify qualitative information (Stenner, 2011).

Following this brief discussion of the origins of Q-methodology and its philosophical underpinnings, the ontological and epistemological position of the current research will now be considered.

**3.2 Ontology and Epistemology**

Ontology can be defined as “assumptions about the nature of reality” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.3). It, therefore, considers questions around what we can know and what exists (Thomas, 2009).

Epistemology refers to how we can know what exists. It relates to knowledge and “ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and nature of things” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.3).

To summarise, ontology is concerned with questions around ‘what’ exists and what is reality, whereas epistemology is concerned with questions around ‘how’ we know something (Guba, 1990).

**3.2.1 The Ontological Position of this Study**

This study adopts an ontological position of critical realism. This is because a critical realist ontology asserts that mechanisms and structures, such as economic and social structures, exist which underpin and impact upon human experiences (Willig, 1999). However, it does acknowledge elements of constructionism, in that events and reality are understood through human interpretation (Fletcher, 2017). This is in contrast to pure realism which holds that a universal, objective ‘truth’ exists and pure relativism which assumes that knowledge is wholly constructed (Fletcher, 2017).

To clarify, the critical realist ontological position has been depicted as an iceberg (see Figure 1 below), with three distinct layers (Fletcher, 2017).



Figure 1: Critical Realism (Fletcher, 2017)

In this visual representation, the ‘empirical’ level is that which has been experienced and understood through our interpretation. The ‘actual’ level suggests that some events may not be observed but still affect events at the empirical level. The ‘real’ level incorporates events that it is not possible to observe, including causal mechanisms, which cause events observable at the empirical level to occur.

With regards to the current research, all the young people have experienced the underlying reality of a move from school to college, within the context of the reality of compulsory post-16 education. However, this reality can be considered socially constructed as compulsory post-16 education (and so the transition to it) is a relatively recent socio-politically constructed reality implemented by the political structure within England. As critical realism acknowledges socially constructed structures (Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013) and their causal impact on perceptions, this can be seen to align my research with a critical realist ontology. The currently experienced reality of socially constructed socio-political mechanisms and structures impacts upon human experiences and are understood through our interpretations. Such socially constructed interpretations form the subjective viewpoints held by the participants around their transition experience.

**3.2.2 The Epistemological Position of this Study**

The epistemological position of this study is one of relativism, in line with the view that “the same object may be known under a number of different descriptions” (Scott, 2010, p.44) and that knowledge is “socially constructed through discourse” (Burr, 2015, p.113). I believe that the participants’ ‘knowledge’ as expressed through their viewpoints is constructed through their experiences. Through social interaction, shared viewpoints and versions of knowledge are constructed and emerge which reflect the shared social meanings of experiences held by the social group.

As relativism holds that humans are part of social groups and systems, located within broader societies and influenced by language and discourse (Gough & McFadden, 2001) and I assert that the participants’ knowledge and viewpoints on what is important to them in transition are constructed in this context then the epistemological position of this study is aligned with relativism. Additionally, relativism espouses that research within this paradigm should aim to promote social change and challenge dominance (Gough & McFadden, 2001). As my research focuses on empowering young people through seeking their views around important factors in transition and promoting their voice, it seems to be clearly aligned with relativist assumptions.

**3.3 The Phases of a Q-Methodological Study**

This section will outline the phases involved in a Q-study and how this was applied in the current research.

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that there exists some diversity within the Q approach, in terms of its phases and how each phase is conducted. This will be discussed within this section along with the reasoned rationale for decisions made as to how the Q approach was applied in my research.

For example, Stenner, Watts & Worrell (2008) proposed a Q-study to be a six step process. These steps are:

1. Formulating the research question
2. Generating the Q-set
3. Selecting a P-set
4. Collecting the data (the Q-sort activity)
5. Analysing the Q-sort data
6. Interpreting the Q factors

Alternatively, Combes, Hardy & Buchan (2004) outlined a Q-study as having three distinct phases:

1. Developing the concourse and the Q-set
2. The Q-sort activity
3. Statistically analysing the data

On reflecting on these two Q-study models, I felt that reducing the study into only three phases would not adequately reflect the stages and level of detail involved in the research procedure. I also felt that the six stage model represented a more rigorous and transparent research process and would allow the reader to more clearly follow and understand how the study was conducted. Consequently, the six phase model (Stenner et al., 2008) was adopted. A description of the first four phases and how they were applied in the current study can be found below. Discussion of the data analysis and interpretation phases can be found in Chapter 4.

**3.3.1 Formulating the Research Question**

As highlighted in the critical literature review, navigating transition can be a challenging experience for young people with SEND, with the adequacy of support in relation to their needs potentially impacting on their future success. Although there has been some previous research exploring the transition experiences of young people with SEND from school to post-16 educational placements, the majority of this was conducted at a time when this transition was not compulsory for all young people. Of the research that has been conducted since the change in socio-political context, this has focused on the transition experiences of young people with EHCPs, and so the experiences of young people with SEND, more broadly, and especially those young people with SEND transitioning from a mainstream school to college, have not been explored. As such, I was keen for my research question to encompass seeking the views of young people with a variety of SEND to ensure a wide range of voices was represented in my research.

As a piece of educational psychology research, I also felt it important for my research question to be aligned with the current SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b). This practice framework considers pupil voice to be central in planning for adulthood and places a high value on listening to the young person’s views in planning for their future, as part of a person-centred planning process. Personally, I also feel passionately about empowering young people to have their voices heard.

These considerations led to the development of a research question which emphasised hearing and exploring the experiences of young people with SEND in their transition from mainstream school to post-16 education, in terms of what was important to them at this time, and for a range of voices to be represented within this.

The research question was:

**What do young people with SEND find important in their transition to post-16 educational placements?**

This question was developed with a view to informing and enhancing the support for young people with SEND during their transition from school to college through identifying their retrospective viewpoints on what had been important to them during this time.

**3.3.2 Generating the Q-Set**

In this section I will discuss how the final Q-set was generated. In writing this section, I was very mindful of it being sufficiently detailed so as to demonstrate and ensure that the final Q-set was developed in a clear, transparent way.

The Q-set is the collection of items that the participants are asked to sort in the Q-sort activity. To generate this, it is firstly necessary to develop a concourse. This is a collection of the range of views on a subject and aims to reflect the full range of views on the area of study (Angelopulo, 2009). It is possible to collect the items for the concourse in a number of ways. For example, Cross (2005) suggests that sampling approaches using individual interviews, group interviews, focus groups, literature reviews, media output on the topic, or experiences of the researcher can be utilised to develop the concourse. It is also possible to draw on a combination of sampling methods to develop the concourse, known as a hybrid approach. Similarly, the items for the concourse can be presented in a number of different ways, such as statements, pictures, photographs, smells, posters, music and advertisements (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

A focus group was used in the current study as the sole method for developing the concourse. It consisted of 15 participants who had transferred from a mainstream setting to one of the mainstream colleges involved in the study. The 15 participants included three participants who indicated that they only wanted to be part of the focus group and 12 participants randomly selected from the other volunteer participants. The group consisted of eight female participants and seven male participants, with a range of identified SEND, including learning difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Conditions and sensory needs. More specifically, seven of the participants experienced general learning difficulties, five had a diagnosis of Autism, one had speech and language difficulties, one had physical difficulties and one had a hearing impairment. Further details on how the needs of the young people were accommodated in the focus group to facilitate it being a fully inclusive process are discussed below.

This sampling approach was chosen over those outlined above as the study was concerned with eliciting the first hand, current and ‘live’ views of a group of young people who had recently experienced transition. Directly discussing what had been important to them was felt to be a more authentic way of achieving this aim than other methods. I also felt this sampling approach was the most ethical as it accessed the voices and experiences of the young people directly, rather than relying on views expressed previously in literature or the media. I also felt it to be a more ethical method as by accessing the young persons’ voices directly, the potential power differential between the researcher and participants was diminished as it did not rely on the researcher selecting the concourse from literature reviews, media output or their own experiences. Similarly, this method provided the young people with the opportunity to express their views and so develop the concourse without being influenced by the researcher. The direct sampling approach can be considered a respectful way of eliciting the young people’s viewpoints and capturing their subjective experiences (Hughes, 2016).

Approaching the development of the concourse in this way was felt to be empowering for the young people and gave them agency within and ownership of the research, whilst still balancing the need to develop a concourse considered to be representative of the area under study (Darwin & Campbell, 2009). Nevertheless, if the young people seemed to be struggling with the focus group task outlined below, I feel it would have been ethical to share some of the findings from previous research to stimulate discussion and facilitate the task. This, however, was not necessary.

Linked to this, a focus group was chosen as it was felt that a group situation would encourage the young people to express their views more openly, whereas a researcher-led one-to-one interview may have created a power differential and affected the information the participants felt comfortable discussing. Additionally, I chose to develop the items for the concourse as written statements as I found it difficult to imagine how it might be possible to present many of the ideas in a different form, such as pictures.

Although, I have chosen to use the term ‘focus group’ to describe my approach to developing the concourse and Q-set, it is important to clarify that the process adopted was based on some of the principles of focus groups, rather than strictly adhering to all the defining features of a focus group. For example, a focus group style was chosen as it is described to be suitable for exploring issues of shared importance, to share and compare experiences and to develop and generate ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This aligns with the aims of the group in the current study in that a group of young people with SEND who had all experienced transition from mainstream school to mainstream college were brought together to share and explore their experiences of transition and generate statements as to what they had found to be important in their transition. However, unlike a focus group, the group was larger than the recommended five-ten participants as I wanted to elicit a wide range of viewpoints which may not have been possible with a smaller group. Also, the group were asked only one question (about the important aspects of their transition) rather a series of questions, as the purpose of the group was to elicit views on one specific issue only. Finally, the focus group was not tape-recorded as I felt this may be intimidating for some young people and I wanted to ensure the views of all the young people were elicited, including minority viewpoints, rather than just those who felt comfortable verbalising them or who were dominant voices in the group. Producing written responses seemed to meet this aim.

To structure the focus group I firstly welcomed the group and introduced myself. I gave an overview of the purposes of the research and the nature of the task, through reiterating the contents of the information sheet. I then asked the young people to think back to the time when they began thinking about leaving school and what they were going to do next, such as coming to college, and all the time from then until they had been at college for a couple of months. I asked them to think about the things that had helped them with this and the things that had been important to them in their move from school to college. I provided post-it notes and paper for the young people to write their views on, as well as offering to write for them, if they would prefer.

Some of the young people found this easier than others and so for those who were struggling to engage with the task, in my role as mediator/facilitator, I made suggestions based on what some of the other young people were discussing and encouraged them to work with others in small groups, if this would help. I also used the skills I had developed as a Teaching Assistant to help scaffold the task, such as by supporting them to think about the details of their transition and the ‘what, when, who and how’ of what had supported this experience. I was also able to secure the support of three Learning Support Assistants from the college to support the students in writing their views or scribing for them. I felt this was important as the students may have felt more comfortable with a familiar person supporting them rather than myself, as a stranger. This also allowed me to encourage and facilitate discussion and collaboration between the young people in their construction of the statements. However, I also made it clear that I wanted all possible factors that had been important to them to be recorded and it did not matter if they thought no one else would think it was important. This was to try and ensure a range of voices, including minority viewpoints, were heard and represented (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

I was also conscious of not wanting the presence of the Learning Support Assistants to influence or skew the views of the young people and so had a discussion with them prior to the focus group to clarify their role in terms of facilitating the young people in being able to record their reflections on transition by using their skills in supporting student engagement, such as by breaking down, chunking and explaining the task in a way that they knew would be more accessible to the young people (as they knew the young people and their needs best) and to record the young person’s ideas if asked. Additionally, through speaking to the college SEND manager at the point the details of the focus group were finalised (approximately a week before the focus group) I was able to ensure that arrangements were in place to support the focus group to be a fully inclusive process, in that the engagement support needs of the young people in the group could be met. For example, one of the students with Autism experienced anxiety around new people and so I was able to ensure that a familiar Learning Support Assistant was available to support him, two of the students experienced significant literacy difficulties and so a Learning Support Assistant and myself were able to support them to record their views, and one student experienced physical issues which made writing difficult and so he was given the option of dictating or typing his views (he chose to type them).

It should be noted that it had initially been proposed to conduct two focus groups, one at each college involved in the subsequent study, to increase the diversity of voices heard. Due to time constraints and issues in recruiting a second college for the study, I was unable to do this and so the concourse was developed from the views expressed in one focus group. However, it has been argued that a range of diverse ideas can be elicited without participants being randomly selected (Darwin & Campbell, 2009). The young people in this group were selected strategically on the basis that they had an identified SEND, had transitioned to the mainstream college from a mainstream school and this transition had occurred at least three months previously. Further details on participant recruitment can be found in Section 3.3.3 below.

The focus group was conducted in a private room in college time and lasted for approximately one hour. The focus group yielded 98 post-it notes and pieces of paper containing the views of the young people (see Appendix 3). These were then taken back to the focus group (on a separate date, a week later) in order to refine the number of statements to a more manageable number, which still reflected the array of views on the topic. This is usually suggested to be between 40 and 80 items, in order to include a range of views but without the subsequent sorting task becoming too unwieldy or over-facing, and because there are conventionally more items than participants (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

The refinement process involved the group, with myself as facilitator, firstly working through the statements to identify duplicated views to ensure the final statements were distinct. Following this, the additional quality criteria for Q-statements developed by Watts and Stenner (2012) were applied. This involved ensuring the statements were short, easy to read and clearly expressed in everyday language but that it was also possible for the participants to impress their own meaning onto them, the statements were ‘stand alone’ and only included one idea, and that the wording of the collected viewpoints was preserved.

This was achieved by firstly arranging all 98 statements on four desks in the room we had been allocated, prior to the arrival of the 15 young people. When the young people entered the room, I re-introduced myself and reminded them of what we had done at the previous meeting. I told them that they had generated lots of ideas, which was fantastic, but that there were so many of them that we needed to try and reduce them down to make the next task a bit easier. I said that we would be doing this by firstly looking for statements that said the same or almost the same thing as I had identified that there was some duplication. However, although not verbalised to the young people, I was aware that this may be daunting for some and so by arranging the statements on four tables I asked the young people if they could work together in small groups to complete this first task, with the support of one adult per group (the three Learning Support Assistants and I). The Learning Support Assistants provided initial support in encouraging the young people to organise themselves into these groups.

Once in groups, the young people were asked to put those statements together which they felt were the same or very similar. Following this, one person from each group was asked to be the spokesperson and each was asked in turn to tell the other groups the ideas that were contained in the statement groups on their desk. Through this the groups were able to bring together the statements pertaining to the same ideas from the four tables and put them into piles/sets.

The next task was to finalise the wording of the statements so they may be more applicable to more young people. This was achieved by myself as facilitator asking the young people, as a whole group, how each set of statements pertaining to each idea could be re-worded into one statement, through verbalising this to the group. As I was aware that some of the group may find this challenging, I started the task with a more obvious example from one of the sets. This was “Not everyone has a Mrs T, so how could we word this one so more young people would understand or relate to it .....?” Each set of statements was worked through in this way with ideas being generated for the final wording of them which the group were asked to verbally confirm they were happy with. The young people seemed to really engage with this part of the task, and perhaps through their growing familiarity with myself and the rest of the group, the majority of the group were able to verbalise some ideas for this task. For those young people who, through previous discussion with the college SEND manager and Learning Support Assistants, were identified as potentially struggling to engage with this, then the Learning Support Assistants were strategically placed near to them to support their engagement. The result of this process was that the 98 statements were refined to the 50 final statements of the Q-set (see Appendix 3). Once the final 50 statements were developed, I read them back to the group to ensure everyone was happy with them. Participants were also asked if they felt any statements were missing so as to try and ensure all possible viewpoints were included. None were identified.

As with the initial focus group, the Learning Support Assistants were spoken to prior to the task to instruct them on their role in this task, which was to support the young people to engage in the small group task, using their well-developed mediation skills, and to refrain from voicing their views on which statements should be grouped or how they should be worded. This was important so as to contain the risk of them transcending their facilitation role and potentially influencing the final Q-set.

In the spirit of the collaborative and empowering approach to my research, and Watts and Stenner’s (2012) assertion that there is no right or wrong way to develop the Q set, I was keen for the participants to be central to the development process. However, I was also aware that the final Q-set needed to be “comprehensive, exhaustive and representative” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.384) of a wide range of viewpoints. As such, whilst collectively refining the statements, I reflected on the themes around transition experiences that had emerged as part of my literature review, as summarised in Section 2.3.8. Through this reflective checking process, I was able to ensure and feel confident that the participant-devised statements demonstrated as full a coverage of these themes as possible and reflected a wide range of viewpoints, thereby ensuring the quality of the final Q-set. For example, the role of others can be seen in statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 34, 36, 37, 39, 45, 46, 48 and 49, characteristics of the young person can be seen in statements 26, 42, 43 and 50, freedom, independence and autonomy can seen in statements 18, 30, 31 and 47, previous education and experience of the new course can be seen in statements 10, 11, 15, 23, 33, 38, 40, 41 and 44, the young person’s experience of SEN can be seen in statements 7, 8 and 29 and practical issues can be seen in statements 14, 32 and 35. However, it must also be noted that, despite this full coverage, especially of the role of others, there were certain professionals within this group who were omitted from the statements generated by the young people, such as careers advisers. Some of the possible reasons for this, related to the current socio-political context are reflected upon in Section 5.10.2.

I believe such fluidity in developing the Q-set was important for two main reasons:

1. It minimised the potential for researcher bias which may have emerged as a result of my acknowledged positionality in terms of my previous experience in supporting transition
2. Through the participants’ voices remaining at the heart of the process it ensured that the final Q set met the quality assurance requirement of being “tailored to the requirements of the investigation and to the demands of the research question it is seeking to answer” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.57).

As a result of the refinement process, the number of statements for the final Q-set was reduced to 50 statements (see Appendix 3). Each of the statements was printed on a separate 6.8cm by 6.8cm piece of white card in Comic Sans size 28 font. Each statement card was then assigned a random number from 1 to 50 (see Appendix 3).

In addition to refining the statements, this stage of the study was utilised to increase the inclusivity of the Q-sort task, in that I recognised that some of the participants may struggle with the concept of positive and negative numbers which is used in the Q-sort task (see Section 3.3.4 below) to indicate agreement and disagreement with a statement. As such, I felt it important to adapt the Q-sort grid to include symbols of increasing size to represent increasingly positive and negative numbers. I considered thumbs up/thumbs down, ticks/crosses and smiley/sad faces to be possibilities and so asked each of the focus group members which they felt best represented agreement and disagreement with a statement. The majority decision was that ticks and crosses were the most appropriate symbols and so these were incorporated into the distribution grid (see Appendix 4).

This stage also involved seeking the participants’ views as to whether they would like to complete the Q-sorts individually or in small groups and whether they would like to have adults from the college present whilst they completed the Q-sorts. The majority decision was that they would feel more comfortable if they had peers present in the room, with three others being proposed as the optimal number. They also said they would like Learning Support Assistants or the SEND manager present as this would make them feel more at ease and to provide support if they needed it, for example, in reading the statements.

Following this, two participants from the college were asked to pilot the Q-sort with the final Q-set of 50 statements and the devised instructions for the task. This was to check understanding of the task instructions (these instructions are outlined in 3.2.4 below and included as Appendix 5), comprehension of the statements and ascertain an idea of how long the task may take to aid with the planning of the data collection stage. The participants were also asked if they felt any statements were missing from the Q-set. The pilot study was an important opportunity to gain feedback on the final Q-sort process and the Q-set statements. From this, I learnt that it was necessary to slightly amend the instructions to improve their clarity and the pilot participants reported that it was helpful for me to read the full instructions to them and then re-iterate the stages of the process before they began the Q-sort task.

**3.3.3 Selecting a P-Set**

The P-set is the descriptor given to the participants who complete the Q-sort activity, with these participants being the variables within the Q-study. Although Watts and Stenner (2005) argue that a relevant viewpoint can be elicited from a single participant, for this study which aimed to elicit shared, multiple and distinct viewpoints then a larger sample needed to be recruited. However, it must be acknowledged that one of the purposes of Q is to identify and understand the range of key viewpoints of a participant group, not to make claims about how many people or what percentage of a population express a particular viewpoint, and so the exact number is not important. It is also generally recommended that there are not more participants in the study than items in the Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

It can also be problematic to have a participant group that is too large as it may impact upon the identification of subtleties and complexities in the data.

Consequently, it is important for the participant group to be a size that allows the range of viewpoints to be represented and emerge and the qualitative detail to be preserved. Taking all of this into account it was decided that, ideally, this study should involve 30 to 40 participants.

3.3.3.1 Participant Recruitment

In order to recruit the participants that constituted the P-set and for the focus group, I firstly identified mainstream colleges within a 25 mile radius of my address and made email contact with the member of staff responsible for supporting students with SEND. Of the four colleges I identified and contacted, one did not respond to my repeated emails or telephone messages, and a second was initially very keen to be involved but after several meetings and sharing of my research proposal, information sheets (see Appendix 1) and consent forms (see Appendix 2) they did not respond to my subsequent emails or telephone messages. Of the two remaining colleges, one was immediately very supportive. This college was located in the East Midlands of England. It is a general FE (Further Education) college over three sites, with a student population of just under 15,000. Currently, 198 students were identified as High Needs learners with 194 supported through EHCPs. It is located in a relatively rural, predominantly white-British town and serves a catchment area of a number of surrounding small towns and villages. It specialises in technical and career focused training and education from entry level to level 3, with the largest areas of study being Health and Social Care and Construction. A high proportion of students also study Land Based studies due to its more rural location. More generally, the unemployment level of the local community is around the national average and educational attainment is slightly higher than the national average.

After meeting with the lead member of staff for Student Services and Additional Support, information sheets and consent forms were distributed to all students who met the selection criteria (see below). This recruitment process yielded 22 volunteer participants. Of the 22, three reported to the college staff member that they only wanted to be part of the focus group and so along with 12 other participants randomly selected from the remaining 19 participants, these 15 participants formed the focus group. The two participants who completed the pilot study of the final Q-set were randomly selected from the 19 participants who had volunteered to participate in the full study. The remaining 17 participants formed the P-set from this college.

The fourth identified college, located in Yorkshire, expressed an interest in being involved in my research but felt unable to commit at the point I contacted them. However, their SEND Support Manager contacted me in October 2018 to ask if they could still be involved. This member of staff distributed the information sheets and consent forms to all students who met the selection criteria (see below). From this, 14 young people volunteered to participate. As the focus groups and piloting of the final Q-set had already been completed by this date, all 14 participants were asked to be part of the Q-study. As such, the final P-set consisted of 31 participants.

This second college differed from the first, in that it was a large, general city-based FE college, serving a large multi-cultural city and the wider city region, with four sites across the city. The 1600 students here, of which 241 were identified as High Needs learners, study a wide range of courses, with the local economy based on manufacturing (although most employment is within the Service industry). The area has above average levels of unemployment and educational attainment in Maths and English is below the national average.

3.3.3.2 Selection Criteria for Participants

As the aim was to access the voice of young people with SEND who had transitioned from a mainstream school to mainstream college and their views on what had been important to them during this transition, the P-set was purposively selected on the basis that they were relevant to the topic area of the study. The selection criteria for the participants were:

1. Identified by the college as having a Special Educational Need and/or Disability (but not necessarily having an EHCP) as defined by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b)
2. Had previously attended a mainstream school
3. Currently attending a mainstream college
4. Had transitioned from school to college at least three months (equating to one term) previously and so the participant had some perspective on their transition

To maximise the diversity within the P-set, participants could vary in terms of the nature of their SEND, the school previously attended, course and level of course currently being studied and length of time since they had transitioned from school to college (from a minimum of three months). Demographic information on the P-set can be found as Appendix 6.

**3.3.4 Collecting the Data (the Q-Sort Activity)**

The data is collected through participants completing the Q-sort activity. In this, the participants are provided with the set of statements cards (the Q-set) and instructions on how to complete the Q-sort task. These instructions include the condition of instruction which informs the participant how to sort the Q-set, and is based on the research question. For this study the condition of instruction was:

**Important things in my transition/move to college were......**

Participants were also given a forced choice quasi-normal distribution grid. This type of grid asks participants to rank a certain number of statements under each specific value, usually from most agree to most disagree, in relation to each other (Stenner & Marshall, 1995). It also ensures that participant responses are standardised, with all participants placing the same number of statements on each place value on a continuum from -5 (strongly disagree) to +5 (strongly agree), in this case.

In contrast to the forced choice distribution grid, it could have been possible to provide participants with a free distribution grid, instead (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Such a grid would have allowed the participants to rank as many items as they had wished to under each value and may be considered to give participants the opportunity to freely provide their views, without it being determined or potentially restricted by the researcher imposed grid (Brown, 1971). However, it has been found that a similar number of factors are generated when participants are given free choice as when their sorting is forced choice (Nimmo & Savage, 1975). Additionally, it has been asserted that a fixed distribution grid may be the most pragmatic method for participants to sort the Q-set as it reduces ambiguity in the sorting task and removes additional choices they need to make around how to sort the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Based on this, I felt the forced choice distribution grid to be the most appropriate type of sorting grid. Furthermore, the appropriateness of this decision was reinforced during the pilot study as the participants made comments indicating that they wanted to put the majority of the statements on strongly agree, whereas I wanted them to really think about which of the statements were more important to them in their transition rather than having a generalised viewpoint of agreeing with a lot of them. I felt the forced distribution grid encouraged the participants to engage in deeper reflection on their transition and their feelings about the statements, in relation to each other. I feel such deep relational reflection is a core aim and strength of Q-methodology.

Participants completed the Q-sort on separate tables in small groups (of up to four participants). The statement cards, task instructions and forced choice distribution grid were present on the desks when the participants entered the room. I asked the participants to look at the instruction sheet (see Appendix 5). I also read it aloud to the small group to support their understanding, as it had been identified in the pilot study that this was useful.

Once the instructions had been read and I checked if any of the participants had any questions or needed clarification on the task, I verbally reiterated that the first task was to sort the statement cards into two piles: ones they agreed were important to them in their transition to college, and ones they disagreed were important to them (or were unimportant). They were then asked to choose the two statements from the ‘agree with’ pile that were the most important to them and to put them on them on the +5 distribution marker (with the biggest green tick) and then the two statements from the ‘disagree’ pile that they most disagreed with/were the most unimportant in their transition and to put them on the -5 distribution marker (with the biggest red cross). The participants were asked to work back and forth in this manner (+4, -4, +3, -3, +2, -2, +1, -1) until the Q-sort grid was completed with the required number of statements in each distribution marker. Those under the 0 distribution marker were the statements remaining once the ‘most agree with’ and ‘most disagree with’ statements had been chosen and assigned. The participants were repeatedly reminded that they could change the positioning of any statement at any point during the task. The reason for asking participants to firstly sort the statements into two categories and then work between them in this way was to facilitate the participants in reflecting upon the significance of each statement in relation to the other statements.

Figure 2 below depicts a participant completing a Q-sort activity from +5 to -5, with Appendix 4 being the forced choice distribution grid used by participants to complete the Q-sort.

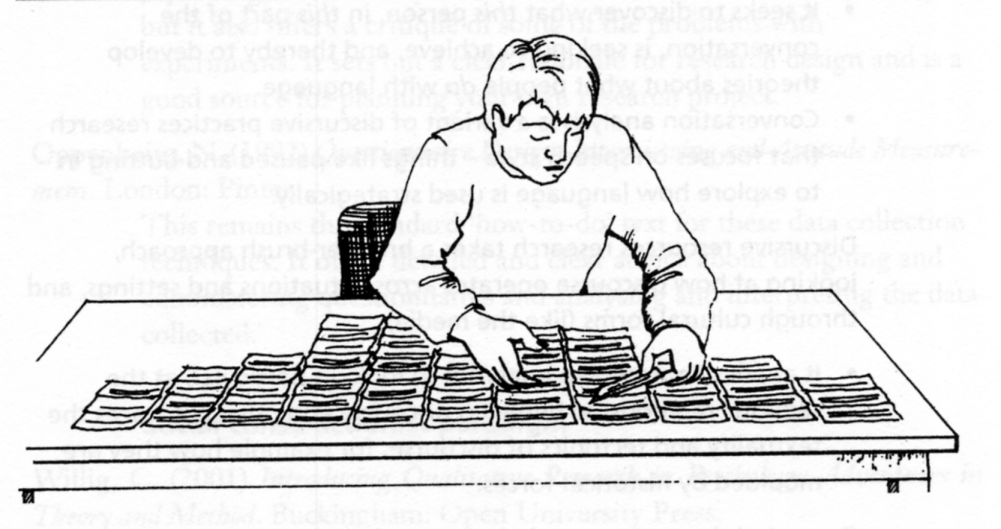


Figure 2: A participant completing a Q-sort from +5 to -5

It was made clear to the participants that if they needed any support in reading the statements then I could provide this. Additionally, each college was able to provide three Learning Support Assistants to support in this, which, in being familiar to the participants, may have made them feel more comfortable in seeking support. I also reiterated at the beginning of each Q-sort session that I would like to note any of the comments the participants made during their Q-sort as this may help in interpreting their viewpoints and confirmed that participants were happy with this.

The participants were given as much time as they needed to complete the task as “Q methodology seeks to encourage the active engagement of its participants, rather than to capture their passive responses” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.65). The pilot study indicated that the Q-sort could take up to an hour to fully complete and so the participants were informed of this. Once they had completed the Q-sort they were asked to give it a final review to ensure they were happy with the positioning of the statements and give them a final opportunity to reposition any statement cards. The participant’s Q-sort was then recorded by the researcher by writing the statement numbers on a blank copy of the distribution grid (Appendix 4).

Following this, a short post-sort interview was conducted to gather information, including the participant’s age, gender, type of SEND, how long they had attended the college for and the level and course they were studying (see Appendix 6). This was done to identify characteristics of the participants which may then aid factor interpretation and allow identification of whether certain participant characteristics load onto particular factors. It was also used as a method to discuss any noted comments the participant made during completion of the task to further aid factor interpretation. I also asked participants if they felt any statements were missing from the Q-set as this may be an interesting point of later reflection on the study. It was re-iterated that even though this additional information was being sought, any information they gave would remain anonymous as it could not be traced back to them.

Participants from College 1 completed the Q-study in June and September 2018.

Participants from College 2 completed the Q-study in November and December 2018.

Details on how the Q-sort data was analysed and interpreted can be found in Chapter 4.

**3.4 Ethical Considerations**

In addition to the aforementioned ethical reasons for choosing Q-methodology, in terms of it accessing the young people’s voices directly, other ethical considerations were also taken into account.

In accordance with the British Psychological Society’s Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), which states that participants should be provided with adequate information in order to consent to data being gathered about them, all prospective participants were provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the research project and what participation would entail (see Appendix 1). Participants were provided with a consent form to sign to indicate their consent to participate (see Appendix 2).

Although all participants were aged 16 years or over and so parental consent is not an ethical requirement (BPS, 2014), the participants could be considered a vulnerable group as they were all described as having a special educational need or disability. Therefore, I also sought the informed consent of the participants’ parents, through asking them to read the information sheet and sign the consent form.

At the start and end of each Q-sort session, participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any point (as outlined in the information sheet) and to contact me if they wished to do so at a later date. They were also reminded that all information would be kept confidential and that the data would be anonymised by participants being allocated a number based on the order their data was collected (the first participant was ‘1’, the second ‘2’ etc.) and a code based on the information gathered after the Q-sort, including age, gender, type of SEND, how long they had attended the college for and the level and course they were studying. These codes were used only for analytical purposes to identify whether certain participant characteristics loaded onto particular factors characteristics and to potentially aid factor interpretation. Participants could not be identified from these codes.

Additionally, following findings from the pilot study, the Q-sorts were completed in small groups of up to four participants and familiar Learning Support Assistants were present to support participants in feeling at ease, with the latter also providing support in reading the statements, if necessary.

The research project was also subject to ethical approval by the University of Sheffield’s ethical review process. Ethical approval for the project can be found as Appendix 7.

**3.5 Quality Considerations**

In conducting any form of research it is important to consider how to ensure it is of a high standard. With regards to quantitative research, it is generally held that the concepts of validity, reliability, generalisability and objectivity are the key areas through which the quality of the research can be assessed (Tracy, 2010). However, the situation is more complex for qualitative research. Firstly, quantitative quality criteria may not be appropriate for qualitative research due to differences in ontological and epistemological assumptions. For example, the concepts of reliability, generalisability and objectivity may be inappropriate if the researcher has adopted a social constructionist perspective and is aiming to offer subjective interpretations of a phenomenon at a specific point in time with a specific participant sample (Yardley, 2000).

Additionally, although, there is broad agreement that qualitative research should have quality criteria (Yardley, 2000), there is less of a consensus as to what should constitute such criteria (Willig, 2001). This may reflect the immense diversity in qualitative methodologies and associated epistemologies. Such diversity implies that qualitative research may be incompatible with the notion of fixed, universal quality criteria (Yardley, 2000) espoused by quantitative researchers.

On reflecting on this complexity, it has been argued that a more flexible quality assurance approach could be applied to qualitative research. For example, Yardley (2000) proposed a framework based on four key dimensions of:

* 1. Sensitivity to context
  2. Commitment and rigour
  3. Transparency and coherence
  4. Impact and importance

It should be noted that these criteria were not proposed by Yardley (2000) to be applied rigidly or prescriptively but to be open to flexible interpretation based on the nature of the qualitative research. Such flexibility enables it to be applied to a diverse range of qualitative methodologies and helps researchers to reflect on and justify the methods they use (Yardley, 2017).

Support for this framework was provided by Cohen and Crabtree’s (2008) review of criteria for good qualitative research which found that, although there is diversity between different qualitative approaches, there is general agreement amongst qualitative researchers on the underlying principles for producing high quality qualitative research. These are based on carrying out ethical research, the importance of the research, the clarity and coherence of the research report and the use of appropriate and rigorous methods, and so can be seen to clearly align with Yardley’s (2000) framework. The flexibility of Yardley’s (2000) quality criteria framework and the support for it formed the rationale for choosing to apply it to my research. How my research adhered to this framework will now be discussed. However, it should be noted that the qualitative criteria of impact and importance will be referred to in Chapter 5 as the discussion section was felt to be the most appropriate area for this.

**3.5.1 Sensitivity to Context**

With regards to sensitivity to context, through extensive reading I ensured that I had a good understanding of previous research literature in the area of post-16 transition. This can be seen in Chapter 2. Through this, I developed an increased sensitivity and awareness of the context in which my research was to be conducted and was able to develop my research question and approach from this. I also demonstrated sensitivity to the socio-cultural and political setting of the research, in that part of the rationale for my research was to elicit the views of young people on what had been important to them in their transition to posr-16 education from within a changing socio-political context (as referred to in Section 3.3.1 and Chapter 2).

My research also demonstrated sensitivity to the participants’ perspectives and the differences between them. For example, in the focus groups I made it clear that I was interested in all the things that had been important to them, regardless of whether they thought anyone else would feel this way. This ensured sensitivity to all viewpoints and voices. Similarly, within the Q-sort procedure, I highlighted the importance of the participants sorting the statements in a way that reflected what they felt was important/unimportant to them from their personal perspective. Thus the research was highly sensitive to the participants’ subjective perspectives. Linked to this, the research also demonstrated sensitivity to the potential power differential between researcher and participant and so steps were taken to minimise the impact of this. For example, the focus group and subsequent Q-sorting activity were actively participant led, rather than researcher led, and the concourse and Q-statements were derived directly from the words expressed by the participants.

Further sensitivity was demonstrated by consideration of ethical issues as detailed in Section 3.4.

**3.5.2 Commitment and Rigour**

The quality criteria of commitment was demonstrated through my prolonged engagement with the topic, in that I began exploring and reading the literature around the topic in June 2017 with the thesis not being completed until May 2019. Commitment to developing competence and skill in Q-methodology was demonstrated through engaging with a range of key texts and articles on this approach (such as Watts & Stenner, 2005; 2012) and applying what I learnt to my research. This commitment was then extended to the data, in terms of being fully immersed in it and committed to rigorous data collection and analysis.

The rigour of the research, in terms of the “resulting completeness of the data collection and analysis” (Yardley, 2000, p.221) was achieved through a number of means. Firstly, the participants were purposively and strategically selected on the basis that they were relevant to the subject area, as outlined in Section 3.3.3.2. This enabled a full range of viewpoints to be elicited which could then be comprehensively analysed. Secondly, the quality of the final Q-set was ensured via the application of the quality criteria for Q-statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012) and reflective checking of the thorough coverage of previously identified themes and viewpoints to ensure the final Q-set was comprehensive and representative of a wide range of viewpoints, as detailed in Section 3.3.2. Thirdly, rigorous data collection was ensured through the production of clear, detailed instructions for participants, allowing them to fully engage with the task, including encouragement of deep relational reflection. This was further supported through the use of a pilot study to refine the instructions and procedure and so ensure rigorous high quality data was collected, as detailed in Section 3.3.2. Finally, the data was rigorously analysed through the application of the ‘PQMethod’ software (Schmolck, 2014), with clear guiding criteria for the inclusion of factors in the final solution and a subsequent holistic and rigorous approach to factor interpretation. This is discussed fully in Chapter 4.

**3.5.3 Transparency and Coherence**

Transparency of the research was achieved by applying the six stage Q-sort model (Stenner et al., 2008) to this study, thereby allowing the reader to clearly follow the procedure followed in developing and conducting the research. Within this, each step was thoroughly detailed and so the entire research process can be considered to have been conducted in a transparent way. Raw data is included in Chapter 4 and the Appendix to this study, with detail as to how the data was analysed being clearly outlined in Chapter 4.

Transparency was further achieved through my reflexivity as a researcher. This is in terms of being open, honest and acknowledging my positionality resulting from my previous experience in supporting transition and my motivation for conducting research in this area.

The research can be considered coherent in that there is a clear fit between the research question and the perspective and methodology adopted. Section 3.2 outlines my ontological (critical realism) and epistemological (relativism) position and how this fits with the research.

In terms of methodology, as the aim of my research was to explore the range of viewpoints on what has been important to young people with SEND in their transition to post-16 education, this coherently aligns with Q-methodological aims of eliciting subjective viewpoints on a topic and then associating them with other viewpoints to allow shared viewpoints to emerge. Further discussion in relation to adopting Q-methodology and why it was felt to be the most appropriate to meet the aims of this research is presented in Section 3.6 below.

**3.6 Consideration of Alternative Methodologies**

In this section I will outline my rationale for choosing Q-methodology and indicate the reasons alternative methodologies, whilst considered, were rejected.

Firstly, much previous research in this area has employed surveys and questionnaires with closed questions. The resulting data may be considered to lack the richness required to understand the detail of what the young person feels is important and does not allow for different holistic viewpoints to be elicited. They have also focused on the questions the researcher deems to be important rather than eliciting the voice of the young person. In Q-methodology, the young people, themselves, decide on what is important and the language used to describe this through the construction of the statements used in the study. Consequently, this approach minimises researcher bias by allowing the young people to give their own, personal views, with the views and ideas of the young people being explored and elicited by the researcher.

As previously indicated, this approach can also be considered empowering for the young person and can be seen to address the power disparity that may be present between the researcher and participant. The young people are involved as active participants and have agency in the study. They are actively engaged in the construction of the statements used in the study, via the focus groups, and so can be viewed, to some extent, as co-researchers and having ownership of the research. In this way, the participants were integral to the development of the concourse and Q-set but their position as co-researchers was limited to their involvement with these elements as they were not involved in the analysis or interpretation stages of the Q-study. This centrality of the participants’ voices was a very important deciding factor for me as I feel this is key to authentically understanding the young person’s experience and demonstrates respect for their viewpoints, in line with the position of Hughes (2016). It also aligns the ethos of this research with the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b), which has the importance of the young person’s voice at its core.

Participation in a Q study may also be perceived as less intimidating and intrusive and more enjoyable and accessible than other types of research as the young person is not faced with a researcher asking them lots of questions and they are not expected nor required to talk for extended periods of time to someone they are not particularly familiar with. There is less pressure on the young person to articulate their thoughts and feelings than in other methods. This lack of reliance on expressive language also means that the study is not affected or restricted by the young person’s language abilities. Additionally, the results are recorded anonymously which may also contribute to reducing any potential anxiety a participant may experience.

Surveys and questionnaires, whilst potentially being able to access the views of a large number of participants, may also be considered limited in that their findings may often be based on the responses of a much smaller number of participants than was initially invited to be involved in the research. Careful consideration must be given to whether those who chose to participate may hold particularly strong views and so minority views are over-shadowed or excluded from the study. The value of Q is that it elicits individual viewpoints and then associates it with the views of others so as to allow a wide range of shared viewpoints to emerge. Through this process, and the selection criteria for participants being such that it allows the full range of viewpoints to emerge, all voices can be heard and are encompassed within the shared viewpoints, rather than just a majority view being represented.

As an alternative to surveys and questionnaires, some previous research studies have used interviews as a method to elicit the views of young people, with the data then being analysed to identify the shared viewpoints. For example, such data was analysed using thematic analysis in the study by Hickey (2016) and Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis in the study by Manning (2016). Although it could be equally possible to analyse the interview data using content analysis or narrative analysis. However, all these methodologies may still be viewed as researcher-led as the questions asked and ideas presented are controlled by the researcher. Additionally, these studies also tend to be fairly small scale and so may not reflect the wide range of viewpoints on a topic. As exploring a range of viewpoints was a key aim of this study, such methodologies were rejected.

Alternatively, Discourse Analysis was also considered as an approach which could elicit a rich understanding of the young people’s views. However, the detailed nature of the required analysis and the limited time-scale of this research meant that it would not be possible to work with many participants if this approach was adopted. This, again, may restrict the number and range of shared viewpoints that could be elicited.

Furthermore, I was not able to identify any research into the views of young people on their transition into post-16 education using Q-methodology. Therefore, this study can be considered both innovative and original in its approach to exploring a topic that has previously only been studied using other methodologies.

**Chapter 4**

**Results: Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In line with Stenner et al.’s (2008) six-stage model outlined in Section 3.3, this chapter outlines the final two stages of the Q-study process:

1. Analysing the Q-sort data
2. Interpreting the Q-sort factors

**4.1 Data Analysis**

To analyse the data, the PQMethod software was used (Schmolck, 2014). This was chosen as it is freely available online and is tailored to the requirements of a Q-study, in that it allows for individual Q sorts to be entered and then, through by-person factor analysis, enables the identification and extraction of factors which can then be explored further through factor rotation (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Each emergent factor characterizes a shared viewpoint, in that it represents an exemplifying pattern of how the Q-sort statements were sorted which is shared by a number of the participants.

**4.1.1 Factor Extraction**

Once the raw data had been entered (the individual Q-sorts), it was then necessary to decide which method to use for extracting the factors, with the two options being Centroid Factor Analysis (CFA) or Principal Components Analysis (PCA).

The main relevant difference between the two is that PCA results in a single “mathematically *best* solution” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.99), whereas CFA allows the researcher to more fully explore the data and engage with factor rotation to produce a more meaningful and informative solution. Consequently, PCA may be considered restrictive and incongruous with the critical realist perspective of there being many possible subjective interpretations of reality. In contrast, CFA acknowledges subjective interpretations and the interpretative influence of the researcher, rather than relying on a mathematical ‘best fit’ solution. Its openness and potential to offer an infinite number of rotated solutions allows the data to be viewed from various perspectives before deciding which solution to select (Watts & Stenner, 2005). It is for these reasons that CFA, as well as being the method of choice for Q methodologists, was chosen as the factor extraction method for this study.

The customary Brown Centroid option for CFA was chosen (Schmolck, 2014), with it then being necessary to decide how many factors the software should be asked to identify and extract. As the aim of this research was to maximise voice and so identify as many significant factors (shared viewpoints) as possible, guidance provided by Watts & Stenner (2012) was followed as an initial starting point. This is summarised in the table below (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Factor Extraction Guidance

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of Q sorts | Number of factors to extract |
| <12 | 1 or 2 |
| 13-18 | 3 |
| 19-24 | 4 |
| 25-30 | 5 |
| 31-36 | 6 |
| >36 | 7 |

(Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.197)

As the P-set consisted of 31 participants and so 31 Q-sorts, a CFA was initially run on six factors. This resulted in six unrotated factors being initially extracted.

**4.1.2 Factor Rotation**

Following extraction, factors can be rotated. In this process, factors are rotated around a central axis point so that, in effect, they ‘point’ at clusters of Q-sorts. These clusters reflect the shared viewpoints which the factors correspond to.

There are two options for factor rotation within PQMethod. Varimax rotation is a statistical method which aims to both maximise the extent to which sorts correlate with (load onto) only one factor and the amount of study variance explained (Watts & Stenner, 2012). By-hand rotation, as the name suggests, involves the researcher manually rotating pairs of factors and has been argued to result in a factor solution that may “more accurately reflect the reality of a particular situation” (Addams, 2000, p.29). It also maximizes the number of participants whose Q-sorts are included in the groups of sorts associated with the factors and so increases the inclusivity of the study. However, these two methods are not mutually exclusive and it has been argued that they can be usefully and effectively used together within the same analysis (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In line with this view, varimax rotation was used as an initial rotation technique, followed by by-hand, manual rotation as a method to fine tune the rotation.

**4.1.3 Final Solution**

Through a process of running the analysis, with differing numbers of factors being extracted and rotated, a five factor solution was considered to be the most appropriate. The final rotated solution can be seen in Table 4.2 below.

This decision was made on the basis that a five factor solution (after varimax and by-hand rotation) met all of the following criteria:

1. All factors met the Kaiser-Guttman criterion (Guttman, 1954; Kaiser, 1960) of having an eigenvalue (EV) of more than 1.00. Meeting this criterion indicates that each factor explains more of the study’s variance than one sort and so has a level of explanatory power. See Table 4.2 for full details.
2. All factors followed Humphrey’s rule which “states that a factor is significant if the cross-product of its two highest loadings (ignoring the sign) exceeds twice the standard error” (Brown, 1980, p.223). The standard error was calculated using the following equation (Brown, 1980) (all figures are rounded to 2 decimal places):

1 ÷ (√ no. of items in Q set)

= 1 ÷ (√50)

= 1 ÷ 7.07

= 0.14

Twice the standard error in this study was 0.28. See Table 4.2 for full details of the cross-product for each factor.

1. Cumulatively, the factors accounted for as much of the study’s variance as possible. A figure of at least 35-40% of the total study variance is considered to be a sound solution (Kline, 1994). In this study, the five factors explained 40% of the variance. See Table 4.2 for details of the variance accounted for by individual factors.
2. All factors had at least three significant factor loadings. This is in line with Watts & Stenner’s (2012) advice that including factors on which three or more participants significantly load “is probably safer” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.131) for a factor to be considered a shared viewpoint. Although, Brown (1980) suggests a factor can be based on two or more significant sorts, I felt applying the criterion of three or more sorts maximised the retention of marginalised voices, without the viewpoints being too individualistic.

In deciding on the significance value to indicate a significant factor loading (at the <0.01 significance level), Brown’s (1980) equation, as suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012) was calculated (all figures are rounded to two decimal places):

2.58 x (1 ÷ √ no. of items in Q set)

= 2.58 x (1 ÷ √50)

= 2.58 x (1 ÷ 7.07)

= 2.58 x 0.14

= ± 0.36

The decision was made to raise this to ±0.43 to maximise the number of sorts loading onto a factor and so maximise voice. The significant sorts, also known as defining sorts, are highlighted in Table 4.2. These sorts may be considered typical of that particular factor and no other factors.

1. The factors did not significantly correlate with each other (at the <0.01 level), in the context of this study, in that all correlations were below 0.43. Full details of this can be found in Table 4.3.
2. As many of the sorts as possible significantly loaded onto a factor, with the number of confounding sorts (those that loaded significantly onto more than one factor) and non-significant sorts (those that did not load significantly onto any factor) being minimised, whilst still meeting all of the above criteria. This approach met the study’s aim of being inclusive through maximising the voices represented within the shared viewpoints and minimizing the exclusion of voices. In this study, there were 24 significantly loading sorts, no confounding sorts and 7 non-significantly loading sorts.

Table 4.2: Final rotated factor matrix

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participant number and Participant code | Factor 1 (F1) | Factor 2 (F2) | Factor 3 (F3) | Factor 4 (F4) | Factor 5 (F5) |
| 1 17ML11B | -0.0220 | 0.2638 | 0.0787 | -0.1368 | 0.5189X |
| 2 17ML11B | 0.0777 | -0.1808 | 0.0479 | 0.4452X | -0.1191 |
| 3 22MA61L | 0.1160 | 0.0524 | 0.3971 | -0.1381 | 0.0512 |
| 4 \*19MA3EL | -0.0485 | 0.4270X | 0.1418 | 0.1355 | 0.1379 |
| 5 \*24FD51L | 0.2495 | 0.5122X | 0.4042 | -0.0890 | 0.1110 |
| 6 20FL41L | 0.1995 | 0.5389X | -0.3067 | 0.0829 | 0.3001 |
| 7 20FL51L | 0.0812 | 0.2001 | 0.0188 | -0.0326 | 0.2947 |
| 8 \*20ML4EL | -0.0066 | 0.2517 | 0.4771X | 0.1469 | 0.0627 |
| 9 \*22FA6EL | 0.1412 | 0.5717X | 0.1324 | -0.0857 | -0.1282 |
| 10 \*17FA1EL | 0.7025X | 0.2112 | 0.0757 | 0.2395 | 0.0532 |
| 11 18FA2EL | 0.1026 | 0.4453X | 0.0730 | 0.2594 | 0.1820 |
| 12 \*17ML12I | 0.4970X | 0.0581 | 0.0834 | 0.2068 | -0.0574 |
| 13 \*17MH11I | -0.1266 | -0.0366 | -0.0125 | 0.0413 | 0.2758 |
| 14 \*17FL11C | 0.1351 | 0.0230 | 0.0672 | -0.0744 | 0.5693X |
| 15 \*17ML11A | 0.3097 | 0.0069 | 0.2000 | 0.3063 | 0.0888 |
| 16 \*19FP32F | 0.1112 | 0.1931 | 0.0948 | -0.0329 | 0.5126X |
| 17 \*18ML23I | 0.3378 | 0.1511 | 0.1982 | 0.1865 | 0.1129 |
| 18 \*19FP13H | -0.0179 | 0.1011 | 0.0163 | 0.6694X | 0.0319 |
| 19 \*18FL21K | 0.0602 | -0.1272 | -0.1951 | -0.3107 | 0.2269 |
| 20 \*18MA22H | 0.4927X | 0.4190 | -0.0957 | 0.1549 | 0.3122 |
| 21 \*20FD4EK | 0.6356X | -0.0516 | 0.0646 | 0.0447 | 0.2366 |
| 22 18MV23I | -0.0135 | 0.3000 | -0.2611 | 0.1131 | 0.1814 |
| 23 18MA13H | 0.2110 | 0.1678 | -0.0270 | 0.7980X | -0.0184 |
| 24 20FA23U | 0.1789 | 0.5792X | 0.0702 | 0.0051 | 0.0523 |
| 25 19FS23H | 0.1817 | -0.0397 | 0.6153X | 0.3830 | -0.0276 |
| 26 18FA22H | 0.1865 | -0.1170 | 0.4203 | 0.3550 | 0.4604X |
| 27 17FL11C | 0.0488 | 0.1064 | 0.6163X | 0.3550 | 0.3757 |
| 28 \*21FA32P | 0.4953X | 0.2822 | 0.4093 | 0.3169 | 0.0772 |
| 29 \*20ML31K | 0.5327X | 0.0425 | 0.0737 | -0.1186 | -0.0551 |
| 30 \*20ML31K | 0.6407X | 0.1424 | -0.0254 | 0.0287 | -0.0179 |
| 31 17FP12H | 0.4014 | 0.1712 | 0.1115 | 0.6212X | -0.0221 |
| Eigenvalue (EV) | 3.10 | 2.48 | 2.17 | 2.79 | 1.86 |
| Cross-product | 0.45 | 0.33 | 0.38 | 0.53 | 0.30 |
| Explained Variance | 10% | 8% | 7% | 9% | 6% |

NB: The participant codes are explained in Appendix 6: Demographic information about the P-Set

Key:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Significantly loading onto the factor (a defining sort) | X |

Table 4.3: Final rotated correlations between factors

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
| F1 | 1.0000 | 0.4044 | 0.2751 | 0.3966 | 0.2758 |
| F2 | 0.4044 | 1.0000 | 0.2578 | 0.2446 | 0.3022 |
| F3 | 0.2751 | 0.2578 | 1.0000 | 0.4144 | 0.3920 |
| F4 | 0.3966 | 0.2446 | 0.4144 | 1.0000 | 0.0257 |
| F5 | 0.2758 | 0.3022 | 0.3920 | 0.0257 | 1.0000 |

It should be noted that other rotated factor solutions were carefully considered and analysed in arriving at the five factor solution. For example, a six factor solution was considered but this decreased the number of significantly loading sorts, increased the number of confounding sorts and not all of the factors had three or more significantly loading sorts.

A four factor solution was also considered but in this solution only 20 of the sorts significantly loaded onto a factor and so marginalised viewpoints may have been overlooked, six sorts were confounded and only 34% of the study’s variance was explained. Consequently, a five factor solution was decided to be the most satisfactory.

**4.1.4 Factor Arrays**

Once the data had been analysed, the next stage was to create factor arrays for each of the factors. A factor array can be considered a Q-sort that exemplifies the factor and represents the viewpoint of that factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It is configured on how the statements were ranked by the participants who significantly loaded onto that factor, based on their Z-scores, with a weighted average being used so that participants correlating more highly with a factor have more influence on the array.

Table 4.4 below shows how each statement (item) was ranked in each factor array. Individual factor arrays for each factor presented in the Q-sort distribution grid format can be found in Appendix 8. These factor arrays are then used to form the basis of the interpretations of each factor.

Table 4.4: Ranking of each item in each factor array

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
| 1. College staff listen to my ideas | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| 2. Help from family members, other than my parents | -3 | 0 | -2 | -1 | 1 |
| 3. Support staff to help me understand the work | 3 | 1 | -1 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. Being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons | -1 | -4 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. Making new friends | 5 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 5 |
| 6. Support staff to check I understand the work | 4 | 3 | -1 | 1 | 2 |
| 7. Help with my reading | 2 | -2 | -2 | -4 | 0 |
| 8. Help with my writing | 0 | -3 | -3 | -3 | -4 |
| 9. Adult support in college for emotional issues | 1 | -2 | 3 | 5 | -1 |
| 10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper) | -4 | -5 | -4 | -1 | -4 |
| 11. Giving me extra time to do my work | 1 | -3 | -2 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. Adults help me with practical work | 1 | 0 | -4 | -1 | -1 |
| 13. Being with friends from school | -1 | -2 | 1 | -2 | -3 |
| 14. College is close to where I live | -4 | -5 | 1 | 0 | -3 |
| 15. Going to an Open Event/Day to see what college is like | 0 | -3 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 16. Adults in college were friendly | 5 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 17. Other young people in college were nice to me | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| 18. Being able to choose what I study | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 19. Other students help me with my work | 0 | -2 | -1 | 0 | -1 |
| 20. I can get counselling | 0 | -3 | 2 | 1 | -5 |
| 21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | -2 |
| 22. Adults help me with my learning | 4 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -1 |
| 23. I was able to visit college a few times before I started | 1 | -2 | 1 | -3 | 3 |
| 24. Adults help me with exam revision | -3 | 2 | -3 | 1 | -1 |
| 25. Meeting staff before I started at college | 0 | -1 | -2 | -1 | -1 |
| 26. Being able to discuss my needs with staff before I started | 0 | 3 | -1 | 4 | -2 |
| 27. Getting support at college for my mental health | -2 | 0 | 3 | 5 | -2 |
| 28. Bullying dealt with by college staff | 3 | 1 | -1 | 3 | 0 |
| 29. Help for my physical needs | -2 | -4 | -5 | 1 | -5 |
| 30. Being able to go to the toilet when I want | 0 | 2 | -1 | -4 | 0 |
| 31. I feel respected by the staff | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 32. Good food choice at lunch time | -1 | -4 | -5 | -5 | -3 |
| 33. Taster sessions before I started college | -1 | -1 | 0 | -2 | 0 |
| 34. Help from school to do the college application | -3 | 2 | -4 | -1 | 3 |
| 35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) | -4 | -1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| 36. Support staff to explain information in a different way | 4 | 4 | -3 | 3 | -1 |
| 37. An adult came with me on my first visit | -2 | 0 | 0 | -3 | 0 |
| 38. Having more access to computers | -2 | 1 | 0 | -2 | 2 |
| 39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available | -3 | 5 | -2 | -2 | 3 |
| 40. I get to do more practical work | -1 | 1 | 1 | -1 | -2 |
| 41. Learning new things | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 42. Getting closer to having the career I want | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| 43. College days are longer | -5 | -1 | -3 | -4 | -4 |
| 44. Not having to go to college every day | -5 | -1 | 0 | -3 | 2 |
| 45. I feel like college staff care about me | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 46. Knowing people who had been to this college | -1 | -1 | 1 | -5 | 2 |
| 47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff | 1 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| 48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available | -2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | -2 |
| 49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | -3 |
| 50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school | -1 | -1 | 0 | -1 | 0 |

**4.2 Factor Interpretation**

Following creation of the factor arrays, it was necessary to consider how to use them to meaningfully inform factor interpretation. Watts and Stenner (2012) advocate the use of a ‘crib sheet’ as a system for organizing the statements to ensure all items are engaged with and potentially important information is not overlooked. As such, this method was adopted in the study (see Appendix 9).

The crib sheet is based, initially, on identifying items under four categories, namely those given the highest ranking (+5), those given the lowest ranking (-5), those ranked higher in the current factor than in any other factor and those ranked lower in the current factor than in any other factor. This process is a useful starting point for interpretation as it allows the researcher to identify the issues about which the factor is polarized and how it is polarized relative to the other factors. Within this, I chose to also indicate the statements polarized in an equally high or low position by more than one factor as this identified polarized areas for the factor but also those polarized issues that were not distinctive of a particular factor’s viewpoint.

Following this, a second pass was made through each factor array to identify any other potentially important and relevant items that it might be helpful to add to the crib sheet to aid interpretation of the factor. This included items that were not ranked highest or lowest by that factor but were still ranked in a relatively high or low position and so may clarify or add detail to the context and interpretation of the factor. Significant distinguishing statements were also included in this part of the process, as this indicated items ranked in a significantly different way in the factor, compared to how they were ranked in all other factors. This thorough and rigorous process helped ensure that the factor arrays were engaged with in their entirety to produce interpretations that captured the holistic viewpoint of the factor. Crib sheets for all the factors can be found in Appendix 9 to ensure transparency of the interpretative process, in line with the aforementioned quality criteria in Section 3.5.3.

I will now outline the final interpretations of each factor, based on the information detailed above and included in the crib sheets in Appendix 9. The numbers in brackets found within each factor interpretation indicate the statement being referred to and the ranking given for it within this factor, with an asterisk indicating the statement is a distinguishing statement for that factor. The statistical and contextual information reported below can be found collectively in Table 4.2 and in Appendix 6.

I chose to present each factor interpretation in the first person. This is because the aim of the study was to capture the voice of young people with SEND and so I felt presenting the factor interpretations in the first person was the most authentic way of meeting this aim and conveying the viewpoints and voices of the young people in a way that ’brought them alive’ for the reader.

For clarity, each factor interpretation is presented in the following format:

* Factor title
* Statistical and contextual information
* Full factor interpretation

As a reminder, the condition of instruction for the Q-sort task was:

**Important things in my transition/move to college were......**

**4.2.1 Factor One (F1) Interpretation**

4.2.1.1 Factor Title

People in college were friendly, helpful and caring.

4.2.1.2 Statistical and Contextual Information

F1 has an eigenvalue of 3.10 and explains 10% of the study variance.

Number of significantly loading participants: 7 (participants 10; 12; 20; 21; 28; 29; 30)

Average age: 19 years (range 17-21 years)

Gender: 4 male; 3 female

EHCP: All 7 significantly loading participants

Primary SEND: 3 Learning difficulty/disability; 3 ASD; 1 Down’s Syndrome

Average number of years of college attendance: 2.4 years (range 1-4 years)

College course level: 2 at Entry level; 2 at Level 1; 3 at Level 2

College course title: 3 Catering; 1 Land-Based Studies; 1 ICT; 1 Public Services; 1 Health and Social Care

4.2.1.3 Full Factor Interpretation

Adults in college being friendly (\*16, +5) was one of the most important things to me when I moved from school to college.

As well as being friendly, it was important that adults were helpful, in that they helped me with my learning (\*22, +4), reading (\*7, +2), practical work (\*12, +1) and gave me extra time to do my work (11, +1). I also think it was more important for me to have help with my writing (8, 0) than it probably was for my friends. I did not need help with exam revision (24, -3), though, as my course does not have exams. It was nice being able to choose what I study (18, +2) and learn new things (41, +2).

Support staff were also an essential part of my transition, through checking I understood the work (6, +4), explaining information in a different way (36, +4) and so helping me to understand the work (3, +3).

Although, adult help was really important to me, I also needed college staff to listen to my ideas (1, +2), but needing to feel like I’m seen as an adult (47, +1) or being respected by the college staff (31, +1) were less important.

As well as being friendly and helpful, it was important that the adults in college were caring towards me. I needed to feel that the college staff cared about me (45, +3), listened if I had a problem (21, +3), checked I was feeling OK (49, +1) and dealt with any bullying issues that I may experience (28, +3). Linked to this, meeting staff before I started at college was kind of important (25, 0), as was support for emotional issues (9, +1) but not as important as them being caring. However, providing support for mental health (27, -2) or counselling (\*20, 0) were not as important for me as they possibly were for other people.

As important as adults being friendly, making new friends was of equally high importance in my transition (5, +5). Similarly, as was the case with the adults in college, students being nice to me (17, +2) was important. Other students helping me with my work (19, 0) was more important to me than it seemed to be for other young people I spoke to.

In contrast to help with learning being important, help for preparing for the transition from school to college was not so important for me. Help from school staff (39, -3) and parents (48, -2) for looking at what courses were available, help from school to complete the college application (34, -3), general help from family members, other than parents (2, -3) and an adult being able to come with me on my first visit to college (37, -2) were not important. Neither was it particularly important that the transition to college got me closer to having the career I want (\*42, 0).

The practicalities of college were not important to me. Not having to go to college every day (44, -5) and the college day being longer (43, -5) were the least important of all the issues for me. College being close to where I live (14, -4) and being able to get to college by public transport (35, -4) were also not important considerations.

Similarly, the practicalities of being at college were not important to me, such as having more access to computers (38, -2) or getting materials that help them (10, -4). However, having a good food choice at lunchtime was a little bit more important to me (32, -1) than these other areas.

**4.2.2 Factor Two (F2) Interpretation**

4.2.2.1 Factor Title

Adults helped me prepare for the new

4.2.2.2 Statistical and Contextual Information

F2 has an eigenvalue of 2.48 and explains 8% of the study variance

Number of significantly loading participants: 6 (participants 4; 5; 6; 9; 11; 24)

Average age: 20.5 years (range 18-24 years)

Gender: 1 male; 5 female

EHCP: 3 participants (50%)

Primary SEND: 4 ASD; 1 Learning difficulty/disability; 1 Down’s Syndrome

Average number of years of college attendance: 3.7 years (range 2-6 years)

College course level: 3 at Entry level; 2 at Level 1; 1 at Level 3

College course title: 5 Land-Based Studies; 1 Business Administration

4.2.2.3 Full Factor Interpretation

Adult help to look at what courses were available, from school staff (39, +5) and parents (\*48, +5), was very important to me in my transition from school to college.

I also valued help from school to complete the college application (34, +2). General help from family members, other than parents (2, 0) also seemed to be more important to me than a lot of my friends. Having the opportunity to meet college staff to discuss my needs before starting at college (26, +3) was also important but it was a bit less important than this that I could choose what I studied (18, +1). Having the opportunity to attend an Open Event/Day (\*15, -3), being able to visit college a few times before starting (23, -2) and have taster sessions (33, -1) were less important to me, overall.

Having had this preparatory support, I really valued being able to learn new things (41, +4). Being able to do more practical work was good too (40, +1) and it wasn’t that important that the college day was longer than what I was used to at school (43, -1).

Adults being friendly (16, +3), feeling like college staff cared about me (45, +4), support staff checking I felt OK (49, +1) and listening to me if I have a problem (21, +2) were all important. It was also important that staff respected me (31, +3), for example, by letting me go to the toilet when I wanted to (30, +2). Although, having my ideas listened to (1, 0) or feeling like I was seen as an adult by college staff (47, 0) were less of a concern.

Within lessons, having support staff to explain information in a different way (36, +4), check I understood the work (6, +3), and adult help with revision (24, +2) were important. However, more targeted support, such as getting materials that may help me (10, -5), being given extra time do work (11 -3), help with reading (7, -2), writing (8, -3) and physical needs (29, -4) were less important. Similarly, being able to access support outside of lessons, such as for emotional issues (9, -2) and mental health (27, 0), to receive counselling (20, -3) or, especially, in the form of 1 to 1 help (\*4, -4) were less important.

Being around other young people was not so important to me. Continuing to be with friends from school (13, -2) and other students helping me with my work (19, -2) were not very important. Making new friends (5, +1) and other young people in college being nice (17, 0) were a little bit more important but not particularly important when I think about my transition, overall.

Finally, the location of college was of little importance to me, especially in terms of college being close to where I live (\*14, -5) but also in college being easily accessible by public transport (35, -1). When at college, a good food choice at lunchtime was also of little importance (32, -4).

**4.2.3 Factor Three (F3) Interpretation**

4.2.3.1 Factor Title

I was respected, seen as an adult, my emotional needs were supported but I did not need help.

4.2.3.2 Statistical and Contextual Information

F3 has an eigenvalue of 2.17 and explains 7% of the study variance

Number of significantly loading participants: 3 (participants 8; 25; 27)

Average age: 18.7 years (range 17-20 years)

Gender: 1 male; 2 female

EHCP: 1 participant (33.3%)

Primary SEND: 2 Learning difficulty/disability; 1 Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs

Average number of years of college attendance: 2.3 years (range 1-4 years)

College course level: 1 at Entry level; 1 at Level 1; 1 at Level 3

College course title: 1 Land-Based Studies; 1 Health and Social Care; 1 Catering

4.2.3.3 Full Factor Interpretation

When I moved from school to college, it was most important to me that I felt respected by staff (31, +5) and that I was seen as an adult (47, +5), such as college staff listening to my ideas (1, +2).

It was also important that my emotional needs were supported by the adults in college (9, +3), I felt that college staff cared about me (45, +4), adults listened to me if I had a problem (21, +3), I could access counselling (20, +2) and support for my mental health (27, +3) and support staff checked if I was feeling OK (49, +1).

Friendship was also important to me, in respect of being able to make new friends (5, +4) and that the other young people in college were nice to me (17, +3). Being with friends from school (\*13, +1) was quite important, too. Although, it was less important that bullying was dealt with by college staff (28, -1). The adults in college being friendly to me (16, +1) seemed less important to me than it was for some of my friends.

In terms of thinking about transition, it was important that I was getting closer to having the career I want (42, +4), through being able to choose what I studied (18, +2), learn new things (41, +2) and do more practical work (40, +1). It was also important that I knew people who had been to this college (46, +1). However, it was less important that I was able to meet staff (25, -2) or discuss my needs with staff before starting college (26, -1).

It was also quite important that college was close to where I live (14, +1) and easily accessible by public transport (35, +2). Thinking about when I got to college, though, having a good food choice at lunch time was really not important (32, -5). The college day being longer than my school day was also not important to me (43, -3).

Aside from support for my emotional needs, getting help was not an important part of my transition. This included help for physical needs (29, -5), help with practical work (\*12, -4), getting materials that may help (10, -4), help with learning (22, -1), help with reading (7, -2) and writing (8, -3), help with exam revision (24, -3), being given extra time to complete work (11, -2), help from family members, other than parents (2, -2) and help from support staff to explain information in a different way (36, -3), help me understand (3, -1) and check I understood the work (6, -1). This also extended to me not feeling help with preparing for transition was so important, such as help from school staff to look at what courses were available (39, -2) and help me do the college application (34, -4). Help from parents (48, 0) to look at what courses were available was also not that important. I wanted to be seen as an independent adult.

**4.2.4 Factor Four (F4) Interpretation**

4.2.4.1 Factor Title

Emotional and mental health support was key

4.2.4.2 Statistical and Contextual Information

F4 has an eigenvalue of 2.79 and explains 9% of the study variance

Number of significantly loading participants: 4 (participants 2; 18; 23; 31)

Average age: 17.8 years (range 17-19 years)

Gender: 2 male; 2 female

EHCP: 1 participant (25%)

Primary SEND: 2 Physical Impairment; 1 ASD; 1 Learning difficulty/disability

Average number of years of college attendance: 1 year (all 1 year)

College course level: 1 at Level 1; 1 at Level 2; 2 at Level 3

College course title: 3 Health and Social Care; 1 Bricklaying

4.2.4.3 Full Factor Interpretation

The most important element of transition for me was to have support in college for my emotional (\*9, +5) and mental health needs (27, +5). This included having adults who listened to me if I had a problem (21, +4), support staff to check if I was feeling OK (49, +2), being able to access counselling (20, +1) and having bullying dealt with by college staff (28, +3). It was also important for me to have the opportunity to discuss my needs with staff before starting at college (26, +4). However, it was less important that I felt as if the college staff cared about me (45, 0).

It was also important that the adults were friendly (16, +3), I felt respected by the staff (31, +3) and was seen as an adult (47, +2) but less important that the college staff listened to my ideas (1, 0). Transition was also important for getting me closer to having the career I want (42, +4).

It was also relatively important to have some degree of help, such as 1 to 1 help outside of lessons (4, +2), extra time to do work (11, +2), help with exam revision (24, +1), and help for my physical needs (\*29, +1). It was also important that support staff were available to help me understand the work (3, +2) through explaining information in a different way (36, +3) but a bit less important that they checked I understood the work (6, +1). Having materials that helped me (\*10, -1) and help with my work from other students (19, 0) were not that important but seemed to be more important to me than to some other young people. Other kinds of help, such as help with my learning (22, -2), reading (7, -4) or writing (8, -3) were not important.

Although relationships with adults were important to me, social relationships with my peers were not particularly important in my transition, especially in terms of continuing to be with friends from school (13, -2). Making new friends (5, 0) and other young people in college being nice to me (17, 0) were also not very important.

Preparing for transition was not very important to me, either, in terms of knowing people who had been to this college (\*46, -5), or school staff (39, -2) or parents (48, 0) helping me to look at what courses were available. Help from family members, other than my parents was not that important, either (2, -1). Having the opportunity to visit college a few times before starting (23, -3), having taster sessions (33, -2) and an adult being able to come with me on my first visit (37, -3) were also not important. Being able to choose what I study (18, +1) and learn new things (41, +1) were a little bit more important but not as important as support for my emotional and mental health.

The practicalities of college were also not very important to me, such as having a good food choice at lunchtime (32, -5), being able to go to the toilet when I wanted to (\*30, -4), having more access to computers (38, -2), not having to go to college every day (44, -3) nor the college day being longer than I was used to at school (43, -4). Although, it was slightly more important than this that I could get to college by public transport (35, +1) and college was close to where I live (14, 0).

**4.2.5 Factor Five (F5) Interpretation**

4.2.5.1 Factor Title

Out with the old and in with the new: It was a fresh start

4.2.5.2 Statistical and Contextual Information

F5 has an eigenvalue of 1.86 and explains 6% of the study variance

Number of significantly loading participants: 4 (participants 1; 14; 16; 26)

Average age: 17.8 years (range 17-19 years)

Gender: 2 male; 2 female

EHCP: 2 participants (50%)

Primary SEND: 1 ASD; 1 Learning difficulty/disability; 1 Hearing Impairment; 1 Physical Impairment

Average number of years of college attendance: 1.8 years (range 1-3 years)

College course level: 2 at Level 1; 2 at Level 2

College course title: 1 Bricklaying; 1 ICT; 1 Functional Skills (English and Maths); 1 Health and Social Care

4.2.5.3 Full Factor Interpretation

When I think back to my transition from school to college, it was all about embracing the new. This was in terms of being able to choose what I study (\*18, +5), learn new things (41, +3), have more access to computers (38, +2) and not have to go to college every day (44, +2). The fact that the college day was longer did not matter (43, -4). I was so excited by the new opportunities that I didn’t really think about it in relation to it getting me closer to the career I want (42, +1). Having the opportunity to do more practical work (40, -2) was not something that mattered to me. My excitement also meant that the proximity of college to my home was of little importance (14, -3) as long as it was easily accessible by public transport (35, +4).

As well as new educational experiences, making new friends (5, +5) was extremely important to me, as was the other young people in college being nice to me (17, +2). I wasn’t bothered about being with friends from school (13, -3). Transition to college was a fresh start for me so it wasn’t important that I could discuss my needs with staff before starting (26, -2).

Having the opportunity to plan and prepare for transition was also important for me, such as being able to go to an Open Event/Day to see what college is like (\*15, +4) and being able to visit college on a few occasions before starting (23, +3). It was also important that school staff helped me to look at what courses were available (39, +3) and complete the college application (34, +3). Knowing people who had been to this college (46, +2) was also quite important as talking to them helped me prepare for college and reassured me that it was going to be OK. However, my parents weren’t that important to me, in terms of helping me to look at what courses were available (48, -2). Help from family members, other than parents was more important (2, +1).

Once at college, the opportunity for emotional support was of little importance. Support for mental health (27, -2), emotional issues (9, -1), support staff to check if I was feeling OK (\*49, -3), access to counselling (20, -5), adults to listen to me if I had a problem (\*21, -2), bullying being dealt with by college staff (28, 0) and feeling like college staff cared about me (45, 0) were of little importance.

Help from adults for my college course was also not an important aspect of my transition, such as help for physical needs (29, -5), adult help with learning (22, -1), getting materials that helped me (10, -4) and help with writing (8, -4). I wanted to prove myself as being able to be independent within this new environment and wanted to feel like I was seen as an adult by college staff (47, +4) but I was less concerned about feeling respected by staff (31, 0) or adults in college being friendly (16, +1).

Thinking about it, though, being able to access some types of support was a bit important, such as being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons, (4, +1) and being give extra time to do work (11, +1). Help with reading (7, 0) was also a little bit more important to me than it possibly was for some of my friends.

**4.3 The SEND Status of the Young People**

As previously mentioned, following each Q-sort, a range of demographic information was gathered (see Appendix 6), with this included above in Section 4.2 as the statistical and contextual information for each factor. One of these areas was the SEND status of the participants holding each viewpoint, as I thought this might be an interesting point of comparison between the viewpoints. For clarity, this data is summarised in Table 4.5 below. It will be discussed fully and its implications reflected upon in Sections 5.8 and 5.10 of the Discussion chapter.

Table 4.5: SEND status of participants holding each factor viewpoint

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Factor | Number and percentage of loading participants with an EHCP | Number and percentage of loading participants without an EHCP | Total number of loading participants |
| F1 | 7 (100%) | 0 (0%) | 7 |
| F2 | 3 (50%) | 3 (50%) | 6 |
| F3 | 1 (33.3%) | 2 (66.7%) | 3 |
| F4 | 1 (25%) | 3 (75%) | 4 |
| F5 | 2 (50%) | 2 (50%) | 4 |

**Chapter 5**

**Discussion**

The previous chapter outlined the final stages of the Q-study procedure, in terms of analysing the Q-sort data and interpreting the extracted and rotated factors. The factors were interpreted and presented as distinct viewpoints on what had been important to young people with SEND in their transition from school to college. In interpreting the factors, however, it became apparent to me that certain themes seemed to emerge around the relative importance of aspects of transition within the different viewpoints. Therefore, this chapter will begin by exploring the viewpoints more holistically, through comparing and contrasting them based on the identified key themes and in relation to the literature outlined in Chapter 2. The implications of the SEND characteristics of the participants will then be presented. This will be followed by a summary of the key areas of importance for each factor viewpoint and consideration of the impact and implications of these findings for schools, colleges and EPs. The limitations of the research study will then be reflected upon, before recommendations and suggestions for possible future research are made.

**5.1 Practical Support from Adults**

**5.1.1 College Staff**

The value placed on practical support offered by college staff was variable. For example, for young people holding the view of F1, such support was of high importance, with help with learning, reading and practical work being distinguishing features of this viewpoint. Help with writing, support staff to check they understand the work and explain information in a different way to help them understand the work were also more highly valued in this viewpoint than in the other viewpoints. Being given extra time to complete work was also quite important. However, help with exam revision was not highly valued, nor was access to differentiated materials. Such help with practical work but not exam revision may be related to the young people sharing this viewpoint being enrolled on courses with a significant practical component, such as catering and land–based studies, which do not have formal exams. This implies the importance of specific support tailored to the needs of the young person.

Linked to this, F4 valued the support of college staff in being able to provide 1 to 1 help outside of lessons and being given extra time more highly than other factors, with help for physical needs and being provided with the required differentiated materials being distinguishing statements for this factor. Support staff to help them understand the work by explaining it in a different way and help with exam revision were also rated relatively highly. Again, this may reflect the specific needs of the young people holding this viewpoint, such as a significant proportion of young people with physical impairments expressing this viewpoint. This is further supported by the lack of importance placed on more generalised help with learning and specific support for reading and writing which may not be required by those holding this viewpoint.

The importance of the specificity of support, dependent on the needs and wishes of the young person, was also supported by F2, in that adult help with revision and the role of support staff in explaining information and checking understanding of the work were highly valued, yet getting differentiated materials, being given extra time to complete work and help with reading, writing and for physical needs were of relatively low importance. Moreover, being able to access 1 to 1 help outside of lessons was a distinguishing statement for F2, in that it was felt to be of particularly low importance, thus further highlighting the importance of the specificity of support in this factor’s viewpoint.

The importance of specificity was also held by F5, in that help with writing, differentiated materials, general help with learning and help for physical needs were relatively less important, whereas help with reading, being given extra time and access to help outside of lessons were more important. This, again, highlights the need for support to be specifically tailored to the needs of the young person.

Consequently, the value placed on the support of adults in college may be seen to be aligned with the findings of previous transition research. For example, the research of Carroll and Dockrell (2012), Dewson et al. (2004), Hickey (2016), Lewis et al. (2007), Manning (2016) and Palikara et al. (2009) all found support from tutors and college staff to be of great importance.

Furthermore, the current study emphasises the importance of the nature of the support offered being tailored to the specific needs and wishes of the young person and that such support can take a variety of different forms, based on these self-identified needs and wishes. This is supported by the previous research of Hickey (2016), Manning (2016) and Palikara et al. (2009).

In contrast, young people holding the viewpoint of F3 did not feel any practical support from college staff to be particularly important. The role of support staff in helping and checking the young people understood the work through explaining information in a different way, help with exam revision and help for physical needs were ranked particularly low. General help with learning, having access to differentiated materials, help with reading and writing and being given extra time were also viewed as less important. Furthermore, the low value placed on help with practical work was a distinguishing aspect of this viewpoint. As will be discussed more fully in Section 5.5 below, it is possible that the lack of importance placed on practical support from college staff may reflect this viewpoint’s emphasis on the young person’s developing identity as an independent adult.

**5.1.2 School Staff**

The relative importance of school staff in transition was highly variable. For example, young people holding the viewpoint of F2 placed the highest possible value on school staff helping them to look at what courses were available and also highly valued school helping them to complete the college application. A high value for the role of school staff in supporting transition was also held by young people expressing the viewpoint of F5.

This supports the literature around the important role of school staff in supporting transition, such as the research by Dewson et al. (2004), Hewett et al. (2014), Lewis et al. (2007) and Manning (2016). It provides particular support for the research of Polat et al. (2001) who found that the majority of the young people they interviewed felt school staff had helped them to plan for the future.

In contrast, the viewpoints of F1, F3 and F4 did not place high importance on the role of school staff, with F1 regarding help to look at what courses were available and F3 regarding help to complete the college application as being of particular low relative importance. This implies that the role of school staff in supporting transition is of little relative importance compared to other areas, which is inconsistent with the aforementioned research (Dewson et al, 2004; Hewett et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Polat et al., 2001).

However, these viewpoints may be associated with the SEND status of some of the participants (see Table 4.5). Much of the previous research, which found school staff to have an important role in supporting transition, was conducted with young people with a Statement of SEN (e.g. Carroll & Dockrell, 2012) or EHCP (e.g. Hickey, 2016; Manning, 2016), whereas those young people with SEND but without an EHCP do not have a statutory entitlement to enhanced transition support. It is possible, therefore, that the lack of importance placed on school support may reflect the lack of school support for transition for this group, particularly in the viewpoints of F3 and F4.

Yet, even for those young people with an EHCP, for which statutory processes are in place, the legislative changes (DfE, 2015b) resulting in a lack of clarity over the identity of the lead professional responsible for transition, as discussed in Section 2.1.2, may have impacted on the role of school staff in transition and how they are perceived by the young people. This may help explain some of the differences in relative importance of school staff between this study and previous research (Dewson et al, 2004; Hewett et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Polat et al., 2001) predominantly conducted prior to the described legislative changes.

However, given that the legislative changes transferred the responsibility for careers guidance and support from Connexions to schools (DfE, 2016a), it is somewhat surprising and perhaps concerning that the role of school staff is now perceived as less important. Further discussion of the potential impact of the SEND status of the young person is presented in Section 5.8.

Nevertheless, it is possible that it is support from school staff in these specific areas that is of little relative importance. As will be discussed in Section 5.1.3, with regards to parents, it may be that the supportive role of school staff is reflected in more generic statements pertaining to adult support, as will be discussed in Section 5.1.5, rather than the specific areas presented here, or that their support is not valued as important.

**5.1.3 Parents**

The role of parents in supporting transition was a key element of F2, with parental help to look at what courses were available being a defining, distinguishing feature of F2. This is in line with previous research which highlighted the crucial part of parents in supporting transition (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Dewson et al., 2004; Hickey, 2016; Landmark et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009).

In contrast, F1 and F5 placed the role of parents to be of relatively low importance, with F3 and F4 viewing it rather ambivalently. This may imply that parental support was of little relative importance to young people holding the viewpoints of F1, F3, F4 and F5, which is inconsistent with the previous transition research referred to above. However, it is also possible that it was parental support in this specific capacity that was considered to be of less importance. Indeed the importance of general adult support discussed in Section 5.1.5 below may reflect some of the role of parents. Although caution in this attribution to parents should be heeded as the identity of the adults in these areas is unclear.

**5.1.4 Family Members**

The role of family members, other than parents was generally not regarded as particularly important in supporting transition. This was most notable for those young people expressing the viewpoints of F1 and F3. This may reflect the importance of support from adults in college, rather than family, in F1 and the need to be seen as an adult and so not wanting to access support from adults in F3.

In contrast, the viewpoint of F5 placed more relative importance on this type of support than the other factor viewpoints. This may reflect the openness to support from range of adults, including school and college staff and family members, but not so much from parents. Indeed, the importance of extended family members in transition is in line with the previous research of Aston et al. (2005) and Palikara et al. (2009). Palikara et al. (2009) attributed this to the dual effect of the emotional connection between the young person and their extended family in the context of a greater relational distance than parents which may foster feelings of being able to express themselves more openly, in terms of the support they require. It is also possible that seeking support from other family members is linked to the young person’s developing sense of freedom and independence from their parents or may reflect a closer, more supportive relationship with family members other than their parents.

Similarly, F2 implied some tentative support for the role of family members which may be associated with their regard for support from a broader range of adults, including parents, school and college staff.

**5.1.5 General Adult Support**

As discussed above, although the role of parents and school staff seem somewhat diminished in the young people’s viewpoints, in comparison to previous research findings (e.g. Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Dewson et al., 2004; Hewett et al., 2014; Hickey, 2016; Landmark et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009; Polat et al., 2001), it may be that some areas of importance were supported by these groups of adults but were not directly attributed to them due to the semantics of the relevant statements. For example, the viewpoint of F1 highly valued adult help with learning and F2 valued adult help with revision. It is unclear from the wording of these statements who these adults were and so it may be that such support was provided by parents, school staff or other adults.

Furthermore, some of the characteristics of the viewpoints, whilst not referring directly to adult support, may well have been facilitated by adults. For example, in the viewpoint of F5, being able to go to an Open Event/Day was of considerable importance, being a distinguishing statement of this factor’s viewpoint, as was being able to visit college a few times before formally starting. It is likely that having the opportunity for these experiences was facilitated by an adult. The importance of this echoes the views of one of the participants in the study by Hickey (2016). This also provides support for the assertion within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b) of the importance of provisions working collaboratively to provide young people with opportunities to become familiar with the new educational establishment in order to facilitate a positive transition experience.

In contrast, young people holding the viewpoint of F4 did not feel such potentially adult mediated support to be of great importance, in that being able to visit college a few times before they started, having an adult to accompany them on their first visit and having the opportunity to attend taster sessions were ranked of low importance. This may reflect the high priority placed on ensuring their emotional and mental health needs were met over all other aspects. Additionally, the viewpoint of F1 did not place a high value on an adult accompanying them on their first college visit. This suggests that help from adults may be important in supporting the learning requirements of transition rather than in the preparations for transition.

Similarly, those holding the viewpoint of F2 considered being able to attend an Open Event/Day, college visits or taster sessions to be of low importance, with the opportunity to attend an Open Event/Day being a distinguishing statement for this viewpoint. This may be considered surprising in light of the emphasis in this viewpoint on adult support for exploring course options. Although, it may reflect greater value being placed on adult preparatory support in the very early, preliminary stages of planning for transition, rather than when the young people were closer to the time of transitioning to college. However, this does not detract from the disparity between these findings and that of a core aspect of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b).

**5.2 Relationships with Adults at College**

Overall, the importance of relationships with adults in college in transition was relatively high. For example, young people expressing the viewpoint of F1 felt adults in college being friendly to be of the greatest importance in transition, with this being a distinguishing statement of this viewpoint. Feeling as though college staff cared about them, dealt with specific issues such as bullying, listened to their ideas and if they had a problem were also relatively important. Having the opportunity to meet staff before starting at college was also more important in this viewpoint than the other factor viewpoints, which may be associated with the value placed on developing friendly, caring and helpful relationships with the adults in college.

Similarly, the viewpoints of F2 and F4 valued adults in college being friendly, as well as being able to discuss their needs with college staff prior to starting at college. Although only F2 felt college staff caring about them to be of such high value, with F4 placing more weight on adults listening to them if they had a problem than feeling cared about. Interestingly, neither F2 nor F4 felt having their ideas listened to, to be of particularly high importance. This seems at odds with the value F4 placed on adults listening to their problems but may reflect the importance of listening in the context of providing emotional and mental health support (which is a dominant theme of F4’s viewpoint) and feeling secure that their needs would be met prior to embarking on their course, rather than listening to their ideas.

The importance of feeling cared about by the adults in college and having their ideas and problems listened was also reflected in the viewpoint of F3. Although, having bullying dealt with by college staff and meeting staff prior to starting college were rated lower than in the other viewpoints, with being able to discuss their needs prior to starting college also of low importance. This may be understood in the context of this group of young people wanting to be seen as developing into independent adults who can manage their own needs but for this to occur within the safe parameters of a caring environment. Interestingly, it was less important that adults in college were friendly in this viewpoint than in the majority of the other viewpoints. This may, perhaps, reflect their developing understanding of personal and professional boundaries within their evolving identity as an adult.

The importance of the interpersonal relationships between the young person and the adults in college in transition supports the findings of previous research by Hickey (2016), Lewis et al. (2007) and Manning (2016). Specifically, participants in the study by Lewis et al. (2007) and Hickey (2006) referred to the importance of staff being nice and friendly, with participants in the study by Manning (2016) valuing the importance of staff listening to them if they have a problem.

In contrast, young people holding the viewpoint of F5 placed much lower value on the importance of relationships with the adults in college during transition, such as being able to discuss their needs prior to starting at college, adults listening if they had a problem, adults in college being friendly, feeling as if adults in college cared about them and bullying being dealt with by college staff. This may reflect the emphasis within this viewpoint on new learning opportunities and new social relationships with peers, rather than the role of relationships with adults in college. Indeed, this is in accordance with the research of Palikara et al. (2009) who found that the young people interviewed valued new learning and making new friends, amongst other areas, with no mention of the interpersonal relationships with college staff.

**5.3 Relationships with Peers**

The importance of social relationships with peers and the importance of peers in general were highly variable across the viewpoints. For example, both F1 and F5 placed making new friends in the highest position of importance, with F3 also viewing this as a significantly important aspect of transition. Linked to this, these young people regarded their college peers being nice to them as relatively important, with F1 valuing other young people helping them with their work more highly than F3 and F5.

Additionally, the viewpoint of F3 also placed positive value on being with friends from school, with this being a distinguishing statement of this viewpoint.

This is in line with the previous research of Aston et al. (2005), Dewson et al. (2004), Hickey (2016), Lewis et al. (2007), Manning (2016), Palikara et al. (2009) who all found that having the opportunity to make new friends but also the support of old friends was highly important in transition.

However, with the exception of F3, most of the young people viewed being with friends from school less positively as part of transition. This is seemingly contradictory to previous research but perhaps reflects the importance of making new friends, especially in the viewpoints of F1, F5 and F3, over maintaining existing friendships, as was also found in the research by Hickey (2016). Within the context of F3’s viewpoint, it may be that having links with old friends as well as making new friends provided an emotional support network as they develop their identity as an adult.

Furthermore, on the whole, the viewpoints of F2 and F4 did not place a high value on social relationships with peers in transition, with F2 also not feeling peers helping them with their work to be of much importance. These findings are inconsistent with previous research (Aston et al., 2005; Dewson et al., 2004; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009) but may reflect the emphasis on adult support within these two viewpoints.

Related to this aspect of transition, the importance of knowing people who had been to the college was variable between the viewpoints. F4 ranked this as most unimportant, with this being a distinguishing statement for this factor. This may be associated with the value placed on them having access to personalised social, emotional and mental health support rather than hearing the experiences of past alumni which may not resonate with their own needs, and the general low value placed on social relationships with peers, as opposed to the support of adults, in this viewpoint. In contrast, F5 did place a relatively high value on knowing previous students. It could be that this viewpoint valued some level of reassurance and preparedness for college from those who had experienced a similar transition, within the context of the novelty of college and importance of transition representing a fresh start for this group of young people. Likewise, F3 valued knowing people who had been to the college, which may reflect a similar value placed on reassurance but within a broader context of a time of potential uncertainties, apprehensiveness and confusion in their developing sense of identity as an adult.

**5.4 Emotional and Mental Health Support**

There seems to be considerable divergence between the viewpoints on the importance of emotional and mental health support in transition. The young people holding the opinion of F4 placed the highest value on this kind of support, with being able to access support in college for emotional issues and mental health rated as the most important elements of transition. The positive ranking of support for emotional issues was a distinguishing aspect of this viewpoint. Linked to this, F4 highly valued adults listening to them if they had a problem, as well as support staff checking they were feeling OK, which may be associated with the value they placed on bullying being dealt with by college staff. The significance of bullying in transition was also reported in the research by Lewis et al. (2007) and Palikara et al. (2009).

Similarly, F3 viewed this type of support to be important in transition, with the exception of support around bullying issues. This difference may be explained by the comments made by two of the participants, in that bullying was not something they had experienced or considered and so support around this was not of significance for them. Interestingly, though, F3 viewed being able to get counselling as marginally more important than F4. This perhaps suggests that young people expressing the viewpoint of F4 valued more informal or different avenues for emotional and mental health support than that provided by a counselling service.

The importance of emotional support in transition was also found in research by Carroll and Dockrell (2012) in the context of parents providing this kind of support. However, the role of any other form of emotional and mental health support has not been identified as a specific emergent theme in any of the previous transition research discussed in this study. It is possible that the emphasis on the importance of emotional and mental health support in the viewpoints in this study reflects a raised awareness of their own Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs by young people and adults and the need for support around this. Indeed, this is currently at the forefront of political agendas and the media spotlight, as manifested in the recent ‘Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper’ (DoH & DfE, 2017). It may also reflect an increased socio-cultural acceptability and reduced stigmatisation of being open about your emotional and mental health issues and seeking support for them. Again, this is an area continuing to be addressed at a socio-political level through the continuing Government supported ‘Time to Change’ (2007) movement and more recent charitable campaigns, such as the ‘Heads Together’ (2016) initiative.

In stark contrast, support for emotional and mental health needs was of little importance in the viewpoint of F5, particularly in relation to being able to access counselling but also in more subtle forms of support such as support staff checking they were feeling OK or listening to them if they had a problem, with these two aspects being distinguishing statements for this viewpoint by virtue of their low importance. This may reflect this viewpoint’s emphasis on preparatory support for the new learning experiences of college and forging new social relationships with peers, rather than a need for emotional support.

The viewpoints of F1 and F2 on this topic were somewhat mixed. Both placed some value on the more subtle forms of support discussed above but this was less so for F2, with F2 also placing particularly low value on support for emotional issues, being able to access counselling and on support for mental health. F1, on the other hand, held a significantly ambivalent view on the importance of being able to access counselling (with this being a distinguishing statement for F1), some value on support for emotional issues but low value on support for mental health issues. It is possible that these views reflect the personal circumstances and characteristics of the young people in these groups, in that explicit support for emotional and mental health issues was not valued as it was not something felt to be required by the young people. However, it is also possible that these opinions were related to remnants of the historical stigma attached to seeking support for emotional and mental health issues, as referred to above.

**5.5 Being Identified as an Adult**

Aspects of being perceived as an adult were relatively important to most of the emergent viewpoints. This was especially the case in F3, with feeling respected and being seen as an adult being the most important elements of transition. Similarly, these areas were also of relative importance for F4, with being seen as an adult also important for F5 and feeling respected important to F2. This supports the importance of being recognised as an adult, and experiencing freedom, independence and autonomy as found in previous research (Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009). Although, being explicitly seen as an adult was less important in F2 and being respected less important in F5.

However, these features of transition experiences were of less importance to those holding the viewpoint of F1. This may reflect the different kind of relationships with adults represented in F1, in that adults were there to help, which may be viewed as akin to a parent-child relationship. This embraced and accepted power differential between adults and students may help explain the lower value placed on being recognised as an adult.

Associated with the freedom of adulthood, being able to go to the toilet when they want to may be thought of as an example of this. However, most, with the exception of F2, did not value this as important. This was especially the case for F4, with this being a distinguishing statement for this viewpoint. This suggests that, although being seen as an adult was important to most of the young people, this specific exemplification of the freedom of adulthood was not so important, in relation to other aspects.

**5.6 The Experience of New**

A further theme that emerged in the factors was one of the varying importance of new experiences. For example, all the viewpoints valued the opportunity to learn new things that the transition to college brought, especially F2. Although it was less important in F4. F2 and F3 also placed some positive value on being able to do more practical work, which may reflect the practical nature of the courses chosen for study. This value of new educational experiences supports the research of Hickey (2016), Lewis et al. (2007), Manning (2016) and Palikara et al. (2009). Additionally, the opportunity to make new friends was positioned highly for F1, F3 and F5, as was found in previous research (Aston et al., 2005; Dewson et al., 2004; Hickey, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016; Palikara et al., 2009) thus further emphasising the importance of new experiences.

Although presented separately in this discussion, there seems to be some overlap between this theme and elements of the previous theme, in relation to aspects of adulthood. For example, being able to choose what they study may be seen to reflect the freedom, autonomy and independence associated with adulthood, as well as presenting the opportunity for new experiences. This specific area was of particular importance for young people expressing the viewpoint of F5 and was a distinguishing statement for this factor, with all factors rating this positively. The importance of course choice supports the previous research of Lewis et al. (2007) and Manning (2016), in which this aspect of transition was specifically mentioned as being of high importance.

Interestingly, this strong feeling around study choice was not mirrored by particularly strong feelings around transition getting them closer to the career they want in F5 or F1, with it being a distinguishing statement in the latter. It is possible that, particularly for those expressing the viewpoint of F5, freedom over course choice was more about new experiences in the context of the preparation for and the ‘here and now’ of transition rather than being linked to thoughts around future goals.

Nevertheless, transition as part of forward planning for adulthood, in terms of progressing towards a career, was of high importance in F3 and F4. This may be associated with other aspects pertaining to adulthood, including freedom, autonomy and independence, being highly valued in the latter, such as having the opportunity to personally discuss their needs with staff prior to starting college. The importance of the transition to college representing progression towards a desired career is supported by the research of Carroll and Dockrell (2012), Hickey (2016), Lewis et al. (2007) and Palikara et al. (2009).

It is also important to note in the context of a discussion around choice that all the viewpoints held a similar mid to low opinion as to the importance of knowing what choices were available to them when they left school, with this being a consensus statement for the study. Although it could be the case that other areas provoked more of an extreme response from the participants, it is also possible that this is connected to a wider systemic issue in that it was ranked in this way due to a collective lack of awareness of the options available to them. This may reflect some of the aforementioned issues associated with the ambiguity over professional responsibility for transition and alterations to careers guidance and support, resulting from recent legislative changes (DfE, 2015b; 2016a).

**5.7 Characteristics of the College Environment**

The final theme to emerge from analysis of the viewpoints was around the importance of the college environment. On the whole, the relative importance of this was low. For example, all the factor viewpoints felt the college day being longer to be of little importance, with only F2 finding it marginally more important than the other viewpoints. This is inconsistent with the previous research of Hickey (2016) who found the longer day and its impact, in terms of the tiredness of the young people, to be an important part of transition.

The food choice at college was also felt to be of low importance in the viewpoints, with the slightly higher importance of food in F1 perhaps reflecting the number of young people holding this viewpoint studying catering. F1, F4 and F2 also did not regard not having to attend college every day to be of much importance, whereas F5 viewed this as being of some relative importance.

There was more variation in viewpoints on some other aspects of the college environment. For example, F5 and F2 felt having more access to computers to be of positive importance, whilst F1 and F4 did not concur with this. Similar variation was also expressed in terms of the relative importance of college being close to where the student lives. F1, F2 and F5 did not rate this as important, with F2 rating this to be the least important aspect of transition. Indeed it was a distinguishing statement for this viewpoint. It was of more importance in F3 and F4, which would support the research of Hickey (2016) who found the length of commute between home and college to be an important aspect of transition, having a significant impact on the tiredness of the young people.

The greatest variability within this theme concerned the relative importance of the ease of access to college by public transport. This was felt to be highly important by F5 and moderately important by F3 and F4. This supports the research of Dewson et al. (2004) and Lewis et al. (2007) who found issues around the availability of transport to be of significance in the transition of the young people studied.

In the viewpoint of F5 it may be that the lack of importance of the proximity of home to college can be understood in the context of the commute being acceptable if public transport is readily accessible. In contrast, both F1 and F2 placed a low value on the importance of access to public transport, as they did for the importance of the proximity of home and college. This suggests that these groups were not concerned about issues related to travel which may reflect a desire to attend that particular college regardless of the travel implications, the college is within walking distance but this was not a major consideration in deciding to attend this college, or the young person accesses college by means other than public transport. Indeed, this was the case for a few of the participants, with one commenting that they only lived a few minutes walk from the college but that this was not a deciding factor for them as it was more about what the college could offer in terms of new learning experiences. Additionally, three participants commented that distance and public transport were not important to them as they were escorted to college by college minibus, taxi and by parents, respectively.

**5.8 Implications of the SEND Characteristics of the Young People**

As referred to previously, a range of demographic information was gathered from the participants as part of the research process. This information is presented in its entirety as Appendix 6 and included as the statistical and contextual information for each factor interpretation (see Section 4.2). At this stage I felt it important to consider the implications of this for the study, as one of the aims of the study was to explore the viewpoints of young people with range of SEND.

As has already been noted in the factor interpretations in the previous chapter, certain characteristics of the participants holding each viewpoint may help explain the relative importance of various aspects of transition. For example, food choice was more important in F1 which may reflect the number of participants studying catering, increased opportunities for practical work was more important in F2 which may reflect the practical nature of the courses being studied by this group and physical support was more important in F4 which may reflect the number of young people with physical needs in this group.

However, it is also interesting to consider the SEND status of the participants holding each viewpoint to explore whether there are any qualitative similarities or differences between the viewpoints held by those with an EHCP and those without.

This information is summarised in Table 4.5 and suggests that, on the whole, the SEND status of the young person is not associated with holding a particular viewpoint. There is a combination of young people with and without EHCPs represented within most viewpoints.

The exception to this is F1 which was held wholly by young people with EHCPs. The complexity of need of these young people may help explain the emphasis on the importance of adult support in this viewpoint. There are also significantly more young people with SEND but without an EHCP in the group expressing the viewpoint of F4, which has a focus on the importance of emotional and mental health support in transition.

The implications of this will be reflected upon in Section 5.10 as part of the discussion around the broader implications of the research for schools, colleges and EPs.

**5.9 Summary of Key Areas of Importance in the Factor Viewpoints**

As demonstrated in Sections 5.1 to 5.7, the similarities and differences between the viewpoints in relation to the emergent themes seem to be quite complex. Thus, I felt it would be useful to summarize the key areas of importance of each factor viewpoint across the seven identified themes in order to highlight the main distinctive features of each factor viewpoint, prior to discussing the implications of the findings for educational professionals.

This is summarised in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Key areas of importance for each factor viewpoint

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Theme | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
| 1 | College: support for learning (especially ***help with reading, practical work, learning*** and understanding work) | College: preparatory e.g. explaining, checking understanding, exam revision  School: **look at available courses**; complete college application  *Parents:* ***look at available courses*** | Not important | College: explaining; ***physical support***; ***differentiated materials*** | School: look at available courses; complete college application  Support from family members  Other: ***Open Days***; college visits |
| 2 | ***Friendly***;  Caring;  Listened to (problems and ideas);  Meet staff beforehand;  Bullying dealt with | Friendly;  Discuss needs beforehand;  Caring | Listened to (problems and ideas);  Caring | Friendly;  Discuss needs beforehand;  Listened to (problems) | Not important |
| 3 | **Making new friends**;  Peers nice to them | Not important | Making new friends;  Peers nice to them;  ***Being with friends from school*** | Not important | **Making new friends**;  Peers nice to them;  Knowing previous students |
| 4 | Problems listened to | Not important | Support for emotional issues;  Support for mental health;  Counselling;  Problems listened to | ***Support for emotional issues***;  **Support for mental health**;  Feelings checked;  Problems listened to;  Bullying dealt with | Not important |
| 5 | Not important | Feel respected by staff;  Able to go to toilet when want to | **Feel respected by staff**;  **Seen as an adult by college staff** | Feel respected by staff | Seen as an adult by college staff |
| 6 | **Making new friends** | Learning new things | Making new friends;  Getting closer to career wanted | Getting closer to career wanted | ***Able to choose what to study***;  **Making new friends**;  Learning new things |
| 7 | Not important | Not important | Not important | Not important | Not every day;  Computer access;  Easy access by public transport |

Theme key:

Theme 1: Practical support from adults

Theme 2: Relationships with adults in college

Theme 3: Relationships with peers

Theme 4: Emotional and mental health support

Theme 5: Being identified as an adult

Theme 6: The experience of new

Theme 7: Characteristics of the college environment

**Statements in green are the most important features of the factor viewpoint (ranked at +5).**

Statements in ***italics*** are distinguishing statements for that viewpoint, through being significantly more important in that viewpoint than the other viewpoints.

**5.10 Implications of the Research Findings**

As outlined in Section 3.5, for qualitative research to be considered of high quality it should demonstrate impact and importance (Yardley, 2000). However, the aim of qualitative research is not to generate generalisable results but to elicit findings that may be transferable (Tracey, 2010) and so, in this case, may resonate with the important aspects of transition experiences for other groups of young people with SEND. In line with this aspect of Yardley’s (2000) quality assurance framework, the impact and implications of the research for schools, colleges and Educational Psychologists (EPs) will now be discussed.

However, firstly, it must be acknowledged that this research resulted in five distinct viewpoints emerging as to what was important in transition, which differ in terms of their views around seven key themes, as summarised in Table 5.1. This highlights that young people with SEND are not a homogeneous group and that there are different viewpoints as to what are the important aspects of transition. Consequently, the themes and support around them, presented below, may be considered to apply differentially to young people according to their distinctive viewpoint.

**5.10.1 Implications for Schools and Colleges**

Taking into account the differences in how young people might need to be supported in transition depending on their viewpoint, the research findings suggest that it would be helpful for schools and colleges to give careful consideration to the areas and holistic themes as discussed in Sections 5.1 to 5.7, namely practical support from adults, relationships with adults in college, relationships with peers, emotional and mental health support, being identified as an adult, the experience of new and characteristics of the college environment.

In relation to the detail of the particular viewpoints, as summarised in Table 5.1, this suggests that there are priority areas of support need identified by the young people that need to be supported by schools and colleges to support a successful transition to college and progression to adulthood.

One of the most significant findings of this research, due to it not being identified as an important transition factor in previous research, is the high value placed on support for emotional issues and mental health in the viewpoints of F4 and F3, with it being a defining feature of the viewpoint of F4. This has clear implications for schools and colleges in terms of ensuring the emotional and mental health needs of students are met. This could be through the provision of services, such as a Counsellor, but the study highlights the importance of support for mental health and emotional issues within the college system. This has implications for ensuring appropriate pastoral support systems are in place, staff have access to appropriate training and receive support for this aspect of their role.

In addition, young people holding the viewpoints of F1, F2 and F4 expressed the importance of support for learning from college staff, such as help with practical aspects, explaining and checking understanding. F2 also valued the support of school staff in preparing for the transition to college, with such preparatory support also of importance to young people holding the viewpoint of F5. This implies that school and college staff having a good understanding of their practical support needs is very important to a significant proportion of young people in transition.

Linked to this, the relationships with adults at college were important in the viewpoints of F1, F2, F3 and F4, especially in terms of the college staff being experienced as friendly and caring, listening to their problems or ideas and having the opportunity to meet staff beforehand to discuss their needs. This has important implications for college staff with regards to focusing on work to foster positive interpersonal relationships between staff and students and providing opportunities for pre-college staff-student discussions.

Relationships with peers was also an important feature of the viewpoints of F1, F3 and F5, with making friends being the most important part of transition for F1 and F5. This has implications for colleges in terms of their role in supporting young people to forge new friendships with peers, such as through supported group activities and ice breakers as part of visits/taster sessions and in the first few weeks at college. Ongoing support for this area should also be available, such as regular social activities, special interest clubs and timetabled social times. Interestingly, being with friends from school was only of importance for the viewpoint of F3 and, whilst colleges should support this for young people who value maintaining existing friendships, it is important that this is not to the detriment of providing opportunities to develop new friendships and supporting the development of friendship development skills, with this being an important skill for the young person’s progression to a successful adulthood (Dewson et al., 2004). This finding also questions the current transition practice of schools and colleges, as mentioned to me by the SEND managers at both colleges in this study and also experienced by myself in my previous role, who often strive to support the successful transition of young people with SEND by placing them in the same classes as other young people from their school.

Being seen as an adult and respected by staff were important for young people with the viewpoint of F2, F4 and F5 and were the most important aspects of transition for the viewpoint of F3. This has implications for schools and colleges, in terms of the nature of the adult-young person relationships but also implies the importance of further exploration of what this means for the young person and ways the young person can experience increased freedom, independence and autonomy in college, in the context of their transition to adulthood. This links with the importance of freedom over what is studied and being able to choose what to study expressed in the viewpoint of F5, with the relatively low importance of knowing what choices were available when they left school held by all the viewpoints implying a potential role for schools and colleges in raising awareness of the available options. It also suggests there is systemic work to be done on improving the post-16 information and guidance provided to young people by schools and colleges.

Finally, the viewpoint of F5 placed some value on the importance of the characteristics of the college environment in transition, especially the ease of getting to college by public transport. This has implications for schools and colleges in terms of supporting and preparing young people to access and manage the logistical aspects of college attendance, such as increasing familiarity and confidence with public transport, including, for example, travel training.

Consequently, through identifying and exploring what the young people themselves viewed as important in their transition, this will help inform best practice for schools and colleges in how best to support this group of potentially vulnerable young people. In light of the finding that the viewpoints of those young people with and without EHCPs are generally not qualitatively distinct, this implies the importance of schools and colleges considering the transition support they provide for all young people with SEND, based on their viewpoint. Equality of access to support may be particularly important in relation to support for emotional and mental health needs as support in this area was notably more significant for young people with SEND but without an EHCP.

In addition to an awareness that the research resulted in the emergence of five distinct viewpoints as to what was important in transition and the implications of this for the differential support that may be needed, it is important to acknowledge that seven of the participants did not significantly load onto any of the factors. This further exemplifies the diversity of opinions and implies that transition requires a very person-centred approach from both schools and colleges to ensure the specific needs and wishes of the young person are met and supported. Indeed the Q-sort task could be utilised within this as a transition preparation tool as part of a transition-planning approach for the young person to identify what might be important to them in transition. The outcome of this could then be used to facilitate proactive conversations around transition and so inform schools and colleges as to how best to support the transition experience of the young person in a way that is person centred and individually tailored to the young person. Such an approach would be clearly aligned with the focus within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b) of a person-centred approach to transition.

**5.10.2 Implications for Educational Psychologists**

Interestingly, explicit support or input from external professionals or outside agencies during transition was seemingly absent from the viewpoints held by the young people, perhaps with the exception of support for emotional and mental health from a counsellor. This is incongruous with previous research which highlighted an important role in transition for specialist services, such as Qualified Teachers of children and young people with Vision Impairment (Keil & Crews, 2008), careers advisers (Dewson et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2007) and other professional support services (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012). However, their absence may be partly explained by the aforementioned legislative changes to careers services (DfE, 2016a) but also by research which cited variability in the quality of professional support around transition (Aston et al., 2005; Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; Lewis et al., 2007; Manning, 2016).

Although, support from Educational Psychologists (EPs) was not explicitly referred to by the young people in this study, this does not necessarily imply that EPs do not have an important role to play in supporting transition. On the contrary, I believe the findings of this study indicate that EPs can make a significant contribution, thus further highlighting the potential impact and importance of this research, in line with Yardley’s (2000) quality assurance framework.

As discussed above, one of the most significant findings of this research was the importance of support for emotional and mental health issues for a number of the factor viewpoints. EPs could have vital role in this at a systemic, group and individual level. For example, EPs could provide training for school and college staff to ensure they have the necessary skills to provide emotional and mental health support to their students. Linked to this, EP skills could be utilised to facilitate supervision groups for staff to support them in meeting the complex needs of the young people and to support the staff’s own emotional wellbeing. Solution circles (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996) and reflecting team (Andersen, 1987) techniques are two evidence-based psychological frameworks which may be used to facilitate such supervision groups.

Additionally, EPs could have a key role in providing therapeutic support groups and individual support for young people who identified emotional and mental health support as being important. As support for this was a particularly salient feature of the viewpoint of F4, which consisted predominantly of young people without an EHCP, it is important that the opportunity for this level of support is made available to all young people with SEND.

Furthermore, as alluded to in Section 10.1, this study has resulted in a tool being developed, in the Q-sort task, which could be utilised as a way of gathering a young person’s views in preparation for transition. This tool could be used by EPs to facilitate transition planning conversations with young people and the adults around them as part of statutory transition planning for young people with EHCPs and, indeed, for all young people with and without SEND. Through their role as an advocate for the young person and skills in accessing voice, EPs can then ensure that the young person is empowered and their views and wishes are heard and incorporated into personalised transition plans. Alternatively, EPs could train school and college staff in how to use this tool effectively.

Consequently, the study has identified five distinctive viewpoints on the important aspects of transition for young people with SEND but also produced a tangible tool for accessing voice and supporting transition. The value and practical application of this is demonstrated above. It can also be seen in the Educational Psychology Service I am employed in now wanting to begin using this as a post-16 transition planning tool, in their practice, with the potential for this technique to be used to support other transition processes, such as from primary to secondary school.

This tool may also support EP services in being able to raise their profile in college systems which is often challenging (MacKay, 2009), especially in the era of traded EP Services, as I have also found in my Local Authority EP Service. The position of the EP within local authority systemic structures but outside the school/college system suggests they may be well-placed to serve as the link professional between schools and colleges. EPs could support both settings in understanding and meeting the needs of the young people and so support in facilitating a positive transition experience.

Furthermore, this implies EPs may have a role in supporting schools and colleges to develop transition policies and procedures for young people with SEND, based on the identified important aspects of transition. This seems particularly pertinent based on the current observation that transition policies are often quite different to what the majority of young people expressed as important, such as the opportunity to develop new friendships over maintaining existing ones.

It also suggests a role for EPs at a broader systemic and strategic level, in terms of informing government policy around transition support for young people with SEND. The finding that young people with and without EHCPs held shared viewpoints (with the exception of F1 which consisted wholly of young people with EHCPs) has particular implications, in that the former are currently entitled to specific statutory support around post-16 transition planning from Year 9 onwards, whereas there is no statutory obligation for the latter to receive such specialised support. This suggests that, as the viewpoints on what is important are shared between these groups, a similar level and type of support would be helpful for all young people with SEND. EPs could have a useful systemic role in informing this type of policy and then in providing transition support for all young people with additional needs.

Reflecting on this from a longer term, developmental perspective and in light of the finding that most of the young people placed a positive value on transition representing a step closer to their career goal, this suggests a potential role for EPs in building links between, for example, colleges, Higher Education provisions and local employers. EPs may be considered to be particularly well positioned for this work in the context of their newly extended role working with young people up to the age of 25 years (DfE, 2015b). Such a role in forward planning may be helpful in supporting young people in transition to a successful adulthood. This seems particularly pertinent in view of the assertion by Geiger, Freedman and Johnston (2015) that post-16 educational provision for young people with SEND “often falls short of what is needed to make a successful transition into adult life” (p.81).

**5.11 Limitations of the Research**

When discussing research it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The possible limitations of this research study will now be considered, along with reflections on how these limitations may have impacted on the research findings.

Firstly, as discussed in Section 3.3.2, I had initially proposed to conduct two focus groups, one at each college, to increase the diversity of voices heard when developing the concourse and Q-sort statements. However, due to time constraints and issues in recruiting a second college for the study, I was unable to do this and so the concourse was developed from the views expressed in one focus group. Despite Darwin & Campbell (2009) arguing that a range of diverse ideas can be elicited without participants being randomly selected, it is possible that the concourse only represented views that were relevant to the experiences of young people transitioning to one college. To address this, the post-sort interview was utilised to ask the participants if they felt any statements were missing from the Q-set. None of the participants identified anything they felt was absent and so I am confident that the Q-set was “comprehensive, exhaustive and representative” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.384) of the young people’s views.

Whilst completing the Q-sort activity a number of the participants commented that they found the task difficult because they felt the distribution grid restricted how they expressed their views. This usually took the form of wanting to put more than two cards on the +5 marker and, as a whole, wanting to put more than the permitted number of cards on the positive markers. However, on reflecting on this feedback, I felt that the forced choice grid encouraged the participants to engage in deeper reflection on their feelings about transition and the statements. This use of a forced choice grid is also supported by research which suggests that forced choice and free choice grids result in a similar number of elicited factors (Nimmo & Savage, 1975) and so do not restrict voice. Additionally, a forced choice grid has the advantage of reducing ambiguity and potential dilemmas around decisions as to how many statements to assign to each marker (Watts & Stenner, 2012) and so may be considered a pragmatically preferable option. Consequently, I felt reassured that my choice of distribution grid was the most appropriate for meeting the aims of the study, in terms of eliciting shared viewpoints.

It could also be argued that the research was limited by a number of the participants transitioning from school to college some time prior to their involvement in the study, with the average length of college attendance being 2½ years. As such, it relied on them remembering their initial transition clearly and reflecting back on a time they had experienced a number of years previously. However, I would argue that, rather than being considered a limitation, this provides an opportunity to gain a useful insight into how the young person currently constructs their transition experience, having had time to develop some perspective on it.

During the focus group and Q-sort sessions, as well as myself, support staff from the college were also present. This was to support the young people in recording their ideas in the focus group, which led to the development of the concourse and subsequently the Q-set, and to provide support for reading the statements in the Q-sort task, if required. It is possible that their presence may have influenced or biased the young people’s thoughts about transition and responses in the Q-sort. Support staff presence may have skewed their thoughts to focus on the support they received in transition when developing the concourse and Q-set, as well as impacting on how statements relating to support were ranked when completing the Q-sort. Whilst I feel this is something to be considered when designing future research, I believe that the presence of support staff was important to facilitate the accessibility of the focus group and Q-sort task, as well as their familiarity perhaps reducing any potential anxiety experienced by the young people and making them feel more comfortable and at ease with the tasks. As such, I feel the presence of a familiar adult promoted and supported accessing the voice of the young people, which was a central aim of the research.

Linked to the issue of accessibility, the items in the Q-sort task were written statements and so the task relied on the young people being able to read the statements. To address this, myself and familiar college staff were available to support the young people in reading the statements, as described above. However, I have reflected on whether the format of the Q-sort may have limited the voices accessed, in that the viewpoints held by young people who would have struggled to access written statements, even with support, were not represented in the data. This is an area I would give careful consideration to in future research using Q-methodology, especially as the items in a Q-sort can be presented in a number of different ways (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). I find it difficult to imagine how it would be possible to present many of the ideas in the written statements in a different form, such as pictures, but this is certainly an area for further creative reflection.

**5.12 Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research**

As alluded to above, a potential area for future research could be to explore the viewpoints of young people who were not represented in the current research. For example, a creative approach to Q-methodology could be designed and employed to elicit the shared viewpoints of young people with severe and complex SEND, as to what they had found to be important in their transition to post-16 education.

It would also be interesting to elicit the viewpoints of parents/carers and school and college staff as to what they feel is important to young people with SEND in transitioning from school to college. Whilst not accessing the voice of the young people, as was the aim of this study, it would be of interest to access the views of the adults around the young people and compare and contrast their viewpoints with those of the young people.

Additionally, the participants in this research study may all be considered to have experienced a positive, successful transition from school to college, as demonstrated by their continued engagement with college. It may, therefore, be interesting to explore the experiences of young people whose transition from school to college had been less positive and may now have embarked on a different path, such as placements at other colleges, apprenticeships or are NEET. Exploring the details of these experiences may be helpful in identifying the features of the transition that impacted on how it was experienced. The experiences of young people who experienced a less positive transition could be used as a learning opportunity to inform the practice of those who support young people during transition.

As the aim and contribution of this study was to explore the post-16 transition experiences of young people with SEND within a new socio-political context, it may also be interesting to explore the experiences of young people’s transition to other new post-16 contexts, which emerged as part of the recent legislative changes. This may include the experiences of young people with SEND transitioning to apprenticeships or supported internships.

Finally, a longitudinal study would also be interesting, in terms of exploring whether the positive initial post-16 experiences of these young people led to wider achievements and opportunities once they moved, potentially, into post-19 education and into adulthood.

**Chapter 6**

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, the research met its aim of gaining an insight into the important aspects of transition experiences for young people with a range of SEND when they moved from a mainstream school to a mainstream college. Through adopting a methodology which empowered young people, by virtue of them being integral to all aspects of the development of the Q-study, and elicited their voices, five shared viewpoints emerged.

As has been shown, these viewpoints shared similarities and differences with each other and the previous literature base around seven key, emergent themes. Most notably divergent from previous research, was the importance of support for emotional and mental health issues in transition held by a number of the viewpoints, and in particular the viewpoint of F4.

Due to the finding of multiple viewpoints and some young people who did not hold any of these viewpoints, the research also highlights the need for transition support to be specifically tailored to the needs and wishes of the young person. Such a person-centred approach seems vital for transition to be experienced as successful, with the use of the developed Q-sort technique perhaps representing a useful tool to facilitate such person-centred conversations and work.

The research also indicates that support from external agencies and professionals are not significant aspects of transition for the young people studied. Whilst perhaps reflecting the legislative changes that have devolved transition support to being a school-based responsibility, this implies that, more than ever, schools and colleges need a comprehensive understanding of what is important to young people in their transition in order to support their transition needs. This research goes some way towards helping to provide such understanding and a tool to support schools and colleges to explore this further. The role of the EP can be seen as considerable in supporting schools, colleges, young people and their families with transition to college and beyond.

Furthermore, the research findings demonstrate that young people with SEND, irrespective of whether they also have an EHCP, share a broadly similar range of distinctive viewpoints on what is important to them in transition. However, young people without an EHCP are not currently entitled to the same level of enhanced transition support as young people with an EHCP. The implication of this, in that all young people with SEND would benefit from such transition support, has significant ramifications, at a socio-political level for policymakers, as well as for schools, colleges, young people and their families. The research findings, therefore, have the potential to have a wide ranging impact on the transition support made available for young people with SEND, in the future. I would strongly advocate for further legislative changes to ensure equality of access to transition support for all young people with SEND. This might seem ambitious but it may be possible that such changes could contribute to addressing the discrepancies between the NEET statistics for young people with and without SEND (DfE, 2017c) and so support young people in a successful transition to adulthood.

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**Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet**

**The University of Sheffield**

**14/05/18**

**Participant information sheet**

**What is important to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in their transition to post-16 education?**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. My contact details are at the end of this sheet. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**What is the project’s purpose?**

The aim of this project is to explore your views on what has been important for you in your move from school to college. It is hoped that by speaking to young people about this it will help support colleges and schools in learning about what is important to young people with special educational needs and disabilities when they move from school to college and will help schools and colleges support young people during this transition.

**Why have I been chosen?**

The project will involve young people who attend college and have been identified as having a Special Educational Need or Disability (known as SEND).

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you do decide to you will be given this information sheet to keep, and you and your parent/guardian will be asked to sign a consent form. You can leave the project at any time, and you do not have to give a reason. If you decide to withdraw, your information will be taken out of the study. Please contact Michelle, if this is the case.

**What will happen if I take part?**

The whole project will last for nearly a year (from May 2018 to March 2019); however, you will not be required for all this time.

If you decide to take part you will be involved in up to 3 sessions of 1 hour each. You may not be involved in all these sessions but is important that you are aware that you might be asked to be involved in all 3 sessions and that you agree to this.

You may be invited to take part in a discussion group with some other young people from the college in which you will be asked to talk about and write down the things that have been important to you when you moved (also called your transition) from school to college. If you need support with this then I am more than happy to help. All activities are designed to find out your opinions so there are no right or wrong answers.

A few weeks later you may be invited to take part in another activity. In this you will look at all the views/things people have said to try and reduce the number of these to about 40 to 60. You will also be involved in checking that the wording of the views is easy to understand and that all the views are different.

A few weeks after this you may be invited to take part in an activity called a Q sort. This will involve you being given some cards and on each card is a statement. You will be asked the following question:

“Think about the things that were important to you during your transition from school to college and say how much you agree with the following statements.”

You will then be asked to sort the statement cards into two piles: those you most agree with and those you most disagree with. You will need to put the cards on a grid. The statements you agree with the most go towards the right side of the grid, where there is the biggest smiley face picture. The statements you disagree with most go to the left side of the grid, where there is the biggest sad face picture. The other cards will go on the spaces between these two faces depending on how much you agree or disagree with the statement. If you need some help with this activity then I can help you or we can organise for a member of college staff to help you, if you let me know in advance. It is OK to talk through what you are doing whilst doing the Q sort and I may write down some of your comments to help me later understand your sorting pattern. Afterwards, you will be asked some questions, such as your age, gender, type of SEND, how long you have attended the college for and the level and course you are studying. If you do not want to answer these questions, that is OK.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

These sessions will take place at college and I hope you will enjoy taking part. If for any reason any activities make you feel uncomfortable or upset you can speak to me or a member of college staff. We can arrange for you to have a break or leave the session if you want to.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those taking part in the project, it is hoped that this work will help support schools and colleges in learning about what is important to young people with SEND when they move from school to college and so it will help schools and colleges support young people in this transition.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy with any part of the project you can make a complaint to me, Michelle Longden, or the supervising tutor, Lorraine Campbell. Contact details for both can be found overleaf.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that is collected from you during the project sessions will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be anonymised, which means that you will not be able to be identified in any part of the work.

**What type of information will be sought from me and why is this information needed?**

The main part of the project is the card sort activity, known as the Q sort, and I am interested in the ways young people organise the statement cards. I will report on the patterns I find in the ways these cards are sorted. The comments you make during the card sorting activity and the information I collect on your age, gender, type of SEND, how long you have attended the college for and the level and course you are studying will help me to understand these patterns.

**What will happen to the results of the project?**

The project results will be shared with you at a meeting that you will be invited to attend once all the data has been collected and analysed. I will also send a letter outlining the results of the research and the patterns that were found in the viewpoints to all the participants, parents and the colleges.

The project results will be included in my Doctoral thesis (Spring 2019) and may be published in an Educational Psychology journal. If this happens I will give the college the information to share with you. You will not be identified in any publication as all data will remain anonymous.

**Who is organising, funding and ethically reviewing the research?**

The research project does not have any sponsorship or funding as it is part of the requirements for completing the Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology. My project has been reviewed by the ethics review procedures of The University of Sheffield.

**What happens next?**

Should you decide to take part you will be given the information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. Your parent/guardian will also need to sign the consent form.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this.**

If you have any further questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me:

Michelle Longden

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Tel: 0114 222 8119  
[l.n.campbell@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:l.n.campbell@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form**

**Participant Consent Form**

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project: **What is important to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in their transition to post-16 education?**  Name of Researcher: Michelle Longden  **This needs to be signed and returned to the college reception by 25th May 2018**  **Both student and a parent/carer need to sign for the student to be involved in the project**  **Participant Identification Number for this project: Please initial**  **each box**  **Student, Parent/Carer**   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 14.05.18explaining the above research project and I have   had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.   1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. 2. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.   I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my  anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with  the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.   1. I agree for the anonymised data collected from me to be used in future   research   1. I agree to take part in up to three activities (two discussion groups and a   card sorting activity) for the above research project.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Parent/Carer Date Signature  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies: Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and the information sheet. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location. |

**Appendix 3: Concourse and Q-Sort Statements**

The table below shows the 98 statements yielded from the focus group (the concourse statements) and the final Q-set statements they became through the refinement process.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Concourse statement** | **Q-set (final) statement** |
| * The teachers and support assistants in college listen to what I have to say and my ideas | 1. College staff listen to my ideas |
| * My older sister helped me when I came to college * My Aunty was really good. She helped me with anything I needed | 2. Help from family members, other than my parents |
| * Mrs T helped me to get the work when I didn’t understand it * Teachers and LSAs helped me to understand the work | 3. Support staff to help me understand the work |
| * Being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons | 4. Being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons |
| * I wanted to meet new people from other schools * Being able to make new friends * Having the chance to get some new friends | 5. Making new friends |
| * LSAs were there to check with me that I understood the work | 6. Support staff to check I understand the work |
| * Help with reading (x3) | 7. Help with my reading |
| * Help with writing if I was finding it hard | 8. Help with my writing |
| * Adults in college were there if I needed to talk about things that were upsetting me or if I was worried * Adults in college supported me with emotional issues | 9. Adult support in college for emotional issues |
| * I had the pink paper I needed * Mrs T enlarged my worksheets | 10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper) |
| * I didn’t feel pressured as I was given plenty of time to complete tasks * Extra time | 11. Giving me extra time to do my work |
| * LSAs helped me when we were working in the garden * They helped me mixing in the kitchen | 12. Adults help me with practical work |
| * I wanted to be with my friends from school | 13. Being with friends from school |
| * College is only 5 minutes away from my house | 14. College is close to where I live |
| * Being able to go to an Open Day was important because it helped me to see what college was like | 15. Going to an Open Event/Day to see what college is like |
| * Teachers were friendly and nice * Support staff were friendly * Staff were friendly | 16. Adults in college were friendly |
| * The other people in the class were nice * The other young people were nice | 17. Other young people in college were nice to me |
| * I got to learn what I wanted to learn about * I chose what I studied (x3) | 18. Being able to choose what I study |
| * My friends in the class helped me with the work if I was finding it hard * Help from my friends in class | 19. Other students help me with my work |
| * I can get counselling | 20. I can get counselling |
| * Adults listen if I have a problem (x2) | 21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem |
| * Teachers and support staff help me learn * Adults help with my learning * LSAs support me with my learning | 22. Adults help me with my learning |
| * I could come to college to see what it was like first * I was able to visit college for a couple of days to see what it was like * I was able to visit college a few times before I started in the September | 23. I was able to visit college a few times before I started |
| * Adults to help me revise for exams | 24. Adults help me with exam revision |
| * I was able to meet some of the teachers first * I was able to meet staff before I started | 25. Meeting staff before I started at college |
| * I was able to discuss my needs with staff before I started | 26. Being able to discuss my needs with staff before I started |
| * Getting mental health support * Getting support at college for my mental health (x2) | 27. Getting support at college for my mental health |
| * Bullying was dealt with by the college staff | 28. Bullying dealt with by college staff |
| * I got help for physical stuff that was hard for me | 29. Help for my physical needs |
| * Being able to go to the toilet when I want | 30. Being able to go to the toilet when I want |
| * I feel respected by staff (x3) * Feeling respected * Respected | 31. I feel respected by the staff |
| * The canteen was good. There was lots of choice * Good food at dinner time | 32. Good food choice at lunch time |
| * Taster sessions before I started college | 33. Taster sessions before I started college |
| * School helped me do the application for college * My TA helped me fill in the application form * School helped me to fill in the application form right | 34. Help from school to do the college application |
| * College is near the train station * There is a bus that stops right outside college. That makes it easier | 35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) |
| * If I didn’t get it, the LSAs would explain it differently so I could understand it * Support staff were there to explain information in a different way if I needed it * Staff explained it differently to help me understand | 36. Support staff to explain information in a different way |
| * I wasn’t on my own when I first came to visit. An adult came with me | 37. An adult came with me on my first visit |
| * There’s lots more computers here than there was at school | 38. Having more access to computers |
| * My TA helped me look on the internet at what courses there were that I might want to do * My tutor helped me look at what courses were available | 39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available |
| * I get to work outside in the garden all the time * I can do cooking nearly every day | 40. I get to do more practical work |
| * I can learn new things * Learn new things (x5) | 41. Learning new things |
| * It’s a step to me getting the job I want * I want to be a gardener. This course will help me | 42. Getting closer to having the career I want |
| * College days are longer | 43. College days are longer |
| * I only have to come to college for a couple of days a week | 44. Not having to go to college every day |
| * I feel like college staff care about me | 45. I feel like college staff care about me |
| * I knew people who had been here before (my cousin and my brother’s friend). They said it was OK | 46. Knowing people who had been to this college |
| * I’m seen as an adult (x2) * I think college staff see me as an adult * I’m treated as an adult | 47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff |
| * My Mum and Dad helped me look at courses * My Mum helped me look at what courses I could do at college | 48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available |
| * LSAs to check I’m OK * Staff to check I’m feeling OK | 49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK |
| * That I knew what I could do when I left school and what the options were | 50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school |

NB: A number in brackets after the concourse statement indicates that the statement was replicated, e.g. (x5) indicates that 5 young people wrote this statement

**Appendix 4: Forced Choice Distribution Grid**

Participant number:

**Important things in my transition/move to college were...............**

**Most disagree with Most agree with**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **-5**  **X** | **-4**  **X** | **-3**  **X** | **-2**  **X** | **-1**  **x** | **0**  **?** | **+1**  **✓** | **+2**  **✓** | **+3**  **✓** | **+4**  **✓** | **+5**  **✓** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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**Appendix 5: Instructions for the Q-sort activity**

This study is interested in:

**‘What is important to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in their transition from school to post-16 education?’**

* On your desk there are 50 cards. On each card there is a statement about something that may have been important to you when you moved from school to college. This move is also called transition
* Based on your experience of moving from school to college, I am hoping to find out what was most and least important to you. Please look at the cards and think about the following statement:

**Important things in my transition/move to college were......**

* Each card needs to be placed on the grid in front of you. The columns to the right of the grid are where the statements that you agree were important to you are to be placed
* The statements that were not important to you (and you most disagree were important) go on the left hand side of the grid
* The cards placed in the middle may be those statements you feel neutral about
* I’ll ask you to begin by first sorting the cards into 2 piles: those you agree with and those you disagree with as being important things in your transition/move to college
* Next I will ask you to pick which two cards you agree with the most and were most important to you. Place these on the +5 box where the biggest green tick is
* Next I will ask you to pick which two cards you disagree with the most and so were least important to you or not important at all. Place these on the -5 box with the biggest red cross
* The other cards need to go on the other boxes between these two columns depending on how much you agree or disagree with the statement. For example, the +4 box which has the next biggest green tick is for the 3 statements you agree with a lot but not quite as much as those you have put on the +5, biggest green tick box. The -4 box which has the next biggest red cross is for the 3 statements that you disagree with a lot but not quite as much as those you have put on the -5, biggest red cross box
* If you need some help with this activity then please let me know. It is OK to talk through what you are doing and I may write down some of your comments to help me later understand your sorting pattern
* You might change your mind about where you want to put the cards as you do the activity. You can move the cards around the grid at any time, and as often as you want to
* There are no right or wrong answers because I am really interested in what you think. It is quite normal that different people will have different views so do not worry where other people are placing their statements. No one else will see your grid except me and a University tutor. Your answers will be made anonymous after today (this means your answers will not be linked to you by name)
* Once you have finished moving the cards around and you are happy about where you have put them all you can leave them on the grid
* Please let me know when you have finished as I would like to ask you a few questions
* If at any point during the activity you would like to leave then that is fine
* If you decide after you have done the activity that you do not want your results to be included in the study then that is also fine and you can find information about how to withdraw on the information letter you received
* All the information you provide today is confidential. This means that your sorting pattern and what you say will not be shared with anyone other than myself and my University tutor. However if you say something that makes me worried about your safety, I will have to share what you say with another adult
* If doing the activity makes you feel uncomfortable or upset you can speak to me or a member of college staff. You can have a break or leave the session if you want to
* If you have any questions during the activity then please feel free to ask them

**Thank you for taking part and helping me with this study.**

**Appendix 6: Demographic information about the P-Set**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ID | Pt | Age | Gender | Primary SEND | Length of college attendance | Current course level | Current course title |
| 17ML11B | 1 | 17 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 1 | L1 | Bricklaying |
| 17ML11B | 2 | 17 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 1 | L1 | Bricklaying |
| 22MA61L | 3 | 22 | M | ASD | 6 | L1 | Land-Based Studies |
| \*19MA3EL | 4 | 19 | M | ASD | 3 | E | Land-Based Studies |
| \*24FD51L | 5 | 24 | F | Down’s Syndrome | 5 | 1 | Land-Based Studies |
| 20FL41L | 6 | 20 | F | Learning difficulties/ disability | 4 | 1 | Land-Based Studies |
| 20FL51L | 7 | 20 | F | Learning difficulties/ disability | 5 | 1 | Land-Based Studies |
| \*20ML43L | 8 | 20 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 4 | E | Land-Based Studies |
| \*22FA6EL | 9 | 22 | F | ASD | 6 | E | Land-Based Studies |
| \*17FA1EL | 10 | 17 | F | ASD | 1 | E | Land-Based Studies |
| 18FA2EL | 11 | 18 | F | A SD | 2 | E | Land-Based Studies |
| \*17ML12I | 12 | 17 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 1 | 2 | ICT |
| \*17MH11I | 13 | 17 | M | Hearing impairment | 1 | 1 | ICT |
| \*17FL11C | 14 | 17 | F | Learning difficulties/ disability | 1 | 1 | Child Care |
| \*17ML11A | 15 | 17 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 1 | 1 | Animal Care |
| \*19FP32F | 16 | 19 | F | Physical impairment | 3 | 2 | Functional Skills (English and Maths) |
| \*18ML23I | 17 | 18 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 2 | 3 | ICT |
| \*19FP13H | 18 | 19 | F | Physical impairment | 1 | 3 | Health and Social Care |
| \*18FL21K | 19 | 18 | F | Learning difficulties/ disability | 2 | 1 | Catering |
| \*18MA22H | 20 | 18 | M | ASD | 2 | 2 | Health and Social Care |
| \*20FD4EK | 21 | 20 | F | Down’s Syndrome | 4 | E | Catering |
| 18MV23I | 22 | 18 | M | Visual impairment | 2 | 3 | ICT |
| 18MA13H | 23 | 18 | M | ASD | 1 | 3 | Health and Social Care |
| 20FA23U | 24 | 20 | F | ASD | 2 | 3 | Business Administration |
| 19FS23H | 25 | 19 | F | SEMH | 2 | 3 | Health and Social Care |
| 18FA22H | 26 | 18 | F | ASD | 2 | 2 | Health and Social Care |
| 17FL11C | 27 | 17 | F | Learning difficulties/ disability | 1 | 1 | Child Care |
| \*21FA32P | 28 | 21 | F | ASD | 3 | 2 | Public Services |
| \*20ML31K | 29 | 20 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 3 | 1 | Catering |
| \*20ML31K | 30 | 20 | M | Learning difficulties/ disability | 3 | 1 | Catering |
| 17FP12H | 31 | 17 | F | Physical impairment | 1 | 2 | Health and Social Care |

**ID consists of up to 7 parts:**

1. \* = EHCP

2. Age (in years)

3. Gender (M or F)

4. Primary SEND

5. Length of college attendance (to nearest year)

6. Course level (E indicates Entry level)

7. Course title

Primary SEND codes:

L = Learning difficulty/disability

A = Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

D = Down’s Syndrome

H = Hearing impairment

P = Physical impairment

V = Visual impairment

S = Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs

Course codes:

B = Brick Laying

L = Land-Based Studies

I = ICT

C = Child Care

A = Animal Care

F = Functional Skills (English and Maths)

H = Health and Social Care

K = Catering

U = Business Administration

P = Public Services

**Appendix 7: Ethics Approval Letter**



Downloaded: 27/04/2018

Approved: 26/04/2018

Michelle Longden

Registration number: 160102419

School of Education

Programme: Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy)

Dear Michelle

**PROJECT TITLE**: Taking the next step: using Q methodology to explore what is important to young people with SEND in their transition to post 16 education

**APPLICATION**: Reference Number 018245

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 26/04/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

* University research ethics application form 018245 (dated 29/03/2018).
* Participant information sheet 1042120 version 1 (29/03/2018).
* Participant consent form 1042121 version 1 (29/03/2018).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

*See reviewer comments*

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt

Ethics Administrator School of Education

**Appendix 8: Factor Arrays**

**Please refer to ‘Appendix 3: Q-sort statements’ for the statements corresponding to each number in the following factor arrays**

**Factor 1 (F1) array**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **-5** | **-4** | **-3** | **-2** | **-1** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 43 | 10 | 2 | 27 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| 44 | 14 | 24 | 29 | 13 | 15 | 11 | 7 | 21 | 22 | 16 |
|  | 35 | 34 | 37 | 32 | 19 | 12 | 17 | 28 | 36 |  |
|  |  | 39 | 38 | 33 | 20 | 23 | 18 | 45 |  |  |
|  |  |  | 48 | 40 | 25 | 31 | 41 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 46 | 26 | 47 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 50 | 30 | 49 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | 42 |  |  |  |  |  |

**Factor 2 (F2) array**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **-5** | **-4** | **-3** | **-2** | **-1** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 10 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 25 | 1 | 3 | 21 | 6 | 36 | 39 |
| 14 | 29 | 11 | 9 | 33 | 2 | 5 | 24 | 16 | 41 | 48 |
|  | 32 | 15 | 13 | 35 | 12 | 18 | 30 | 26 | 45 |  |
|  |  | 20 | 19 | 43 | 17 | 28 | 34 | 31 |  |  |
|  |  |  | 23 | 44 | 22 | 38 | 42 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 46 | 27 | 40 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 50 | 37 | 49 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | 47 |  |  |  |  |  |

**Factor 3 (F3) array**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **-5** | **-4** | **-3** | **-2** | **-1** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 29 | 10 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 13 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 31 |
| 32 | 12 | 24 | 7 | 6 | 15 | 14 | 18 | 17 | 42 | 47 |
|  | 34 | 36 | 11 | 19 | 33 | 16 | 20 | 21 | 45 |  |
|  |  | 43 | 25 | 22 | 37 | 23 | 35 | 27 |  |  |
|  |  |  | 39 | 26 | 38 | 40 | 41 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 28 | 44 | 46 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 30 | 48 | 49 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | 50 |  |  |  |  |  |

**Factor 4 (F4) array**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **-5** | **-4** | **-3** | **-2** | **-1** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 32 | 7 | 8 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 16 | 21 | 9 |
| 46 | 30 | 23 | 22 | 10 | 5 | 18 | 4 | 28 | 26 | 27 |
|  | 43 | 37 | 33 | 12 | 14 | 20 | 11 | 31 | 42 |  |
|  |  | 44 | 38 | 25 | 15 | 24 | 47 | 36 |  |  |
|  |  |  | 39 | 34 | 17 | 29 | 49 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 40 | 19 | 35 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 50 | 45 | 41 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | 48 |  |  |  |  |  |

**Factor 5 (F5) array**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **-5** | **-4** | **-3** | **-2** | **-1** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 20 | 8 | 13 | 21 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 23 | 15 | 5 |
| 29 | 10 | 14 | 26 | 12 | 28 | 2 | 17 | 34 | 35 | 18 |
|  | 43 | 32 | 27 | 19 | 30 | 3 | 38 | 39 | 47 |  |
|  |  | 49 | 40 | 22 | 31 | 4 | 44 | 41 |  |  |
|  |  |  | 48 | 24 | 33 | 11 | 46 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 25 | 37 | 16 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 36 | 45 | 42 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | 50 |  |  |  |  |  |

**Appendix 9: Crib Sheets**

**Factor 1 (F1)**

Statements in red indicate distinguishing statements (at the P < .01 level) for that factor (i.e. statements ranked in a significantly different way to how they are ranked in other factors)

Statements in blue indicate items that are equally ranked by the factor and at least one other factor

Underlined statements indicate consensus statements (i.e. statements that are ranked statistically similarly across all factors, with the difference between their ranking being non-significant at the P < .05 level)

**Items ranked at +5**

5. Making new friends – same as F5

16. Adults in college were friendly

**Items ranked higher in F1 than in other factors**

1. College staff listen to my ideas (2) - same as F3

3. Support staff to help me understand the work (3)

6. Support staff to check I understand the work (4)

7. Help with my reading (2)

8. Help with my writing (0)

12. Adults help me with practical work (1)

19. Other students help me with my work (0) - same as F4

22. Adults help me with my learning (4)

25. Meeting staff before I started at college (0)

28. Bullying dealt with by college staff (3) - same as F4

32. Good food choice at lunch time (-1)

36. Support staff to explain information in a different way (4) - same as F2

**Items ranked lower in F1 than in other factors**

2. Help from family members, other than my parents (-3)

24. Adults help me with exam revision (-3) - same as F3

27. Getting support at college for my mental health (-2) - same as F5

35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) (-4)

38. Having more access to computers (-2) - same as F4

39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available (-3)

42. Getting closer to having the career I want (0)

48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available (-2) - same as F5

50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school (-1) - same as F2 and F4

**Items ranked at -5**

43. College days are longer

44. Not having to go to college every day

**Distinguishing statements (not included above)**

20. I can get counselling (0)

**Others: High ranking**

9. Adult support in college for emotional issues (1)

11. Giving me extra time to do my work (1)

17. Other young people in college were nice to me (2)

18. Being able to choose what I study (2)

21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem (3)

41. Learning new things (2)

45. I feel like college staff care about me (3)

49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK (1)

**Others: Low ranking**

10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper) (-4)

14. College is close to where I live (-4)

31. I feel respected by the staff (1)

34. Help from school to do the college application (-3)

37. An adult came with me on my first visit (-2)

47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff (1)

**Factor 2 (F2)**

**Items ranked at +5**

39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available

48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available

**Items ranked higher in F2 than in other factors**

24. Adults help me with exam revision (2)

30. Being able to go to the toilet when I want (2)

36. Support staff to explain information in a different way (4) - same as F1

40. I get to do more practical work (1) - same as F3

41. Learning new things (4)

43. College days are longer (-1)

45. I feel like college staff care about me (4) - same as F3

**Items ranked lower in F2 than in other factors**

1. College staff listen to my ideas (0) - same as F4

4. Being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons (-4)

9. Adult support in college for emotional issues (-2)

11. Giving me extra time to do my work (-3)

15. Going to an Open Event/Day to see what college is like (-3)

17. Other young people in college were nice to me (0) - same as F4

18. Being able to choose what I study (1) - same as F4

19. Other students help me with my work (-2)

47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff (0)

50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school (-1) - same as F1 and F4

**Items ranked at -5**

10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper)

14. College is close to where I live

**Others: High ranking**

2. Help from family members, other than my parents (0)

6. Support staff to check I understand the work (3)

16. Adults in college were friendly (3)

21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem (2)

26. Being able to discuss my needs with staff before I started (3)

31. I feel respected by the staff (3)

34. Help from school to do the college application (2)

38. Having more access to computers (1)

49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK (1)

**Others: Low ranking**

5. Making new friends (1)

7. Help with my reading (-2)

8. Help with my writing (-3)

13. Being with friends from school (-2)

20. I can get counselling (-3)

23. I was able to visit college a few times before I started (-2)

27. Getting support at college for my mental health (0)

29. Help for my physical needs (-4)

32. Good food choice at lunch time (-4)

33. Taster sessions before I started college (-1)

35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) (-1)

44. Not having to go to college every day (-1)

**Factor 3 (F3)**

**Items ranked at +5**

31. I feel respected by the staff

47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff

**Items ranked higher in F3 than in other factors**

1. College staff listen to my ideas (2) - same as F1

13. Being with friends from school (1)

14. College is close to where I live (1)

17. Other young people in college were nice to me (3)

20. I can get counselling (2)

40. I get to do more practical work (1) - same as F2

42. Getting closer to having the career I want (4) - same as F4

45. I feel like college staff care about me (4) - same as F2

50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school (0) - same as F5

**Items ranked lower in F3 than in other factors**

3. Support staff to help me understand the work (-1)

6. Support staff to check I understand the work (-1)

12. Adults help me with practical work (-4)

16. Adults in college were friendly (1) - same as F5

24. Adults help me with exam revision (-3) - same as F1

25. Meeting staff before I started at college (-2)

28. Bullying dealt with by college staff (-1)

34. Help from school to do the college application (-4)

36. Support staff to explain information in a different way (-3)

**Items ranked at -5**

29. Help for my physical needs - same as F5

32. Good food choice at lunch time - same as F4

**Others: High ranking**

5. Making new friends (4)

9. Adult support in college for emotional issues (3)

18. Being able to choose what I study (2)

21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem (3)

27. Getting support at college for my mental health (3)

35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) (2)

41. Learning new things (2)

46. Knowing people who had been to this college (1)

49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK (1)

**Others: Low ranking**

2. Help from family members, other than my parents (-2)

7. Help with my reading (-2)

8. Help with my writing (-3)

10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper) (-4)

11. Giving me extra time to do my work (-2)

22. Adults help me with my learning (-1)

26. Being able to discuss my needs with staff before I started (-1)

39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available (-2)

43. College days are longer (-3)

48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available (0)

**Factor 4 (F4)**

**Items ranked at +5**

9. Adult support in college for emotional issues

27. Getting support at college for my mental health

**Items ranked higher in F4 than in other factors**

4. Being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons (2)

10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper) (-1)

11. Giving me extra time to do my work (2)

19. Other students help me with my work (0) - same as F1

21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem (4)

26. Being able to discuss my needs with staff before I started (4)

28. Bullying dealt with by college staff (3) - same as F1

29. Help for my physical needs (1)

42. Getting closer to having the career I want (4) - same as F3

49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK (2)

**Items ranked lower in F4 than in other factors**

1. College staff listen to my ideas (0) - same as F2

5. Making new friends (0)

7. Help with my reading (-4)

17. Other young people in college were nice to me (0) - same as F2

18. Being able to choose what I study (1) - same as F2

22. Adults help me with my learning (-2)

23. I was able to visit college a few times before I started (-3)

30. Being able to go to the toilet when I want (-4)

33. Taster sessions before I started college (-2)

37. An adult came with me on my first visit (-3)

38. Having more access to computers (-2) - same as F1

41. Learning new things (1)

45. I feel like college staff care about me (0) - same as F5

50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school (-1) - same as F1 and F2

**Items ranked at -5**

32. Good food choice at lunch time - same as F3

46. Knowing people who had been to this college

**Others: High ranking**

3. Support staff to help me understand the work (2)

14. College is close to where I live (0)

16.Adults in college were friendly (3)

20. I can get counselling (1)

24. Adults help me with exam revision (1)

31. I feel respected by the staff (3)

35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) (1)

36. Support staff to explain information in a different way (3)

47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff (2)

**Others: Low ranking**

2. Help from family members, other than my parents (-1)

6. Support staff to check I understand the work (1)

8. Help with my writing (-3)

13. Being with friends from school (-2)

39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available (-2)

43. College days are longer (-4)

44. Not having to go to college every day (-3)

48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available (0)

**Factor 5 (F5)**

**Items ranked at +5**

5. Making new friends - same as F1

18. Being able to choose what I study

**Items ranked higher in F5 than in other factors**

2. Help from family members, other than my parents (1)

15. Going to an Open Event/Day to see what college is like (4)

23. I was able to visit college a few times before I started (3)

34. Help from school to do the college application (3)

35. I can get to college easily by public transport (bus or train) (4)

38. Having more access to computers (2)

44. Not having to go to college every day (2)

46. Knowing people who had been to this college (2)

50. I knew what choices were available to me for when I left school (0) - same as F3

**Items ranked lower in F5 than in other factors**

8. Help with my writing (-4)

13. Being with friends from school (-3)

16. Adults in college were friendly (1) - same as F3

21. Adults listen to me if I have a problem (-2)

26. Being able to discuss my needs with staff before I started (-2)

27. Getting support at college for my mental health (-2) - same as F1

31. I feel respected by the staff (0)

40. I get to do more practical work (-2)

45. I feel like college staff care about me (0) - same as F4

48. Parents helped me to look at what courses were available (-2) - same as F1

49. Support staff to check if I’m feeling OK (-3)

**Items ranked at -5**

20. I can get counselling

29. Help for my physical needs - same as F3

**Others: High ranking**

4. Being able to have 1 to 1 help outside of lessons (1)

7. Help with my reading (0)

11. Giving me extra time to do my work (1)

17. Other young people in college were nice to me (2)

39. School staff helped me to look at what courses were available (3)

41. Learning new things (3)

47. I feel like I’m seen as an adult by college staff (4)

**Others: Low ranking**

9. Adult support in college for emotional issues (-1)

10. Getting materials that help me (such as coloured paper) (-4)

14. College is close to where I live (-3)

22. Adults help me with my learning (-1)

28. Bullying dealt with by college staff (0)

42. Getting closer to having the career I want (1)

43. College days are longer (-4)