Expert or Non-Expert: Educational Psychologists' Narratives of Writing Statutory Advice for Children and Young People with Needs with Which They Feel They Are Less Familiar

Julia Kingsley

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Abstract

Educational Psychologists appear to be working within a context containing the contrasting discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' pertaining to their role (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). The statutory role, which commandeers much of the workload, construes Educational Psychologists as 'experts' (Anderson et al., 2020; Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). In contrast, the 'non-expert' discourse values collaboration, consultation, and working with others as equals (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000). The literature supports a sense of dissonance between Educational Psychologists' perceived professional role and the demands placed upon them in the statutory process, which then becomes more pronounced when the Educational Psychologists feel less familiar with the needs of the child or young person for whom they are writing statutory advice (Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

The current research explored the narratives of Educational Psychologists living in this culture of contrasting discourses supported by systems and practices. This study sought to explore the tension in this lived experience. Educational Psychologists described how they wrote statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar, exposing how Educational Psychologists are navigating these contrasting discourses. Individual interviews were conducted online with six Educational Psychologists using the general interview guide approach with elements of a narrative framework included (Butina, 2015; Cudworth, 2015; Kasper, 1994). The data was transcribed and analysed using Narrative Thematic Analysis (Butina, 2015; Riessman, 2008).

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Table of Contents

Introduction

This thesis examines the tension between the 'expert' and 'non-expert' discourses that Educational Psychologists experience when writing statutory advice for children and young people with special educational needs with which they feel they are less familiar (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). Statutory advice, which is explored more deeply in further chapters, is psychological guidance for a child's special educational needs (Crane, 2016). The Introduction sets the context of the thesis and introduces the reader to the origin of the research, beginning with my personal and professional interest in the area.

Research Inspiration

I will start by sharing a personal anecdote to provide context and explain the origin of my research idea. During the first term of my second year of doctoral training, I was tasked with writing statutory advice for a child with Down Syndrome and a range of complex medical needs. I felt overwhelmed and uncertain but also believed that since the case had been assigned to me, I should be capable of writing the statutory advice independently. However, due to my lack of confidence, I relied heavily on the support of other Educational Psychologists in my Educational Psychology Service, my supervisor, school staff, the child's parents, and other professionals to guide me in writing the statutory advice. This topic became even more important to me when I investigated the literature further in relation to the statutory process and Educational Psychologists' perception of their role.

I wondered if my insecurity was due to being a Trainee Educational Psychologist. Nonetheless, from my experience, it was common practice to email the team and ask if anyone had faced a similar need or situation before and could share examples of statutory advice they had previously written for inspiration. These instances clarified that the experience of feeling unfamiliar with a child's or young person's needs is not exclusive to those in training; it seems to occur even among qualified Educational Psychologists. Of course, during training, Trainee Educational Psychologists learn to discuss and reflect on these situations. I questioned whether these discussions were occurring within Educational Psychology Services among qualified Educational Psychologists.

Inevitably, these experiences and the feelings that surfaced have impacted me and, therefore, will have influenced the research process. In hindsight, this was my first experience of feeling uncomfortable being positioned as an 'expert' within the statutory system due to my lack of familiarity with the needs of the child for whom I was writing the statutory advice. I also reflected that I had presumed I knew enough about the presentation of children and young people with Down Syndrome to write statutory advice; however, upon arrival, the case was much more complex than I had appreciated, which, I think, made me feel an increased sense of discomfort. Exploring the narratives of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar could expose the tensions and dilemmas that exist and surround the role of an Educational Psychologist within the statutory process.

Historical Context

To understand the role of an Educational Psychologist within the statutory process, one must first appreciate the historical context, which has led to the current circumstances. The

Educational Psychology profession arguably had an uncomfortable starting point just over one hundred years ago (Arnold & Leadbetter, 2013; Farrell & Woods, 2015; Maliphant, 1997). Cyril Burt, the first Educational Psychologist, needed to provide evidence to decide whether certain children and young people ought to be educated in schools for the 'mentally deficient' or remain in mainstream education (Billington et al., 2017; Mackintosh, 2013; Maliphant et al., 2013). Presiding narratives at the time were eugenics and measuring intelligence through psychometric assessments; individuals were categorised into groups such as 'subhuman' or 'subnormal', which led to some undergoing compulsory sterilisation (Hill, 2005; Norwich, 1995).

There were concerns about cultural and linguistic biases towards certain groups, which emerged through, and were produced by, this way of working and the potential generation of an intellectual caste system through inappropriate labels and miscategorisation; nevertheless, psychometric assessments became Educational Psychologists' main tool when assessing children and young people, which was a major influence in the role's development (Deary et al., 2000; Hill, 2005; MacKay, 2007). Educational Psychologists sought to protect the profession by developing psychometric assessments, namely the British Ability Scales and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, that could only be used by Educational Psychologists (Love, 2009). Hence, the profession grew a workforce and status (Farrell & Woods, 2015). There has also been the suggestion that the development of special education was not only assisted by but in a large part made possible by the technology of Educational Psychologists, for example, psychometric assessments (Quicke, 1984). It is therefore interesting to consider the role of Educational Psychologists in creating the very population they seek to support. The perception of Educational Psychologists, at this time, seemed very much in the 'expert' domain.

Then, Albee (1968) emphasised that psychology's most vital contribution is not direct service delivery, but the development and dissemination of its models and methods to others. His article highlighted challenges in accurately estimating manpower requirements due to the diversity of psychology roles and the evolving nature of the field. Albee (1968) called for ongoing refinement of these models to improve workforce projections and meet the growing demand for psychological services. This relates to 'non-expert' constructions of the role of Educational Psychologists as the focus was on making psychology accessible to all, rather than it being held and distributed by an 'expert'.

Historical legislation reflects a progressive shift towards greater inclusion and support for children with special educational needs. The Warnock Report was published in 1978 (Warnock, 1979). This report reframed the approach to children with special educational needs by moving away from labelling children as handicapped to focus instead on their individual educational requirements. The Warnock Report introduced the concept of special educational needs as a broad and inclusive category, advocating for the integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools wherever possible (Warnock, 1979). The report also recommended individualised assessments and support plans to address each child's unique needs, laying the groundwork for subsequent legislative action and consequently writing Educational Psychologists into the legislation.

Following the Warnock Report, the Education Act 1981 incorporated many of its recommendations, establishing a statutory duty for Local Education Authorities to identify children with special educational needs and to make appropriate provisions for their education (Hannon, 1982). Statements of Special Educational Needs were introduced as formal documents outlining the support a child should receive. During this period, Educational Psychologists emerged as key professionals supporting children with special educational needs, providing essential assessments, guidance, and intervention strategies.

Evidence suggests that subsequent legislation, further discussed in the critical review of the literature later in this thesis, has solidified Educational Psychologists' statutory role within Local Authorities (Lucas, 1989; Vivash & Morgan, 2019). These statutory responsibilities have protected the role of Educational Psychologists, giving them status, but this has also led to difficulties within the profession. Educational Psychologists are finding that they are dedicating an increasingly large amount of time to completing statutory work (Fallon et al., 2010; Osborne et al., 2009). They report challenges such as high caseloads, time constraints, and the emotional toll of working with complex cases (Boaler & Sherwood, 2024; George-Levi et al., 2022). This arguable reduction of the role has led some Educational Psychologists to feel less confident in the range of their psychological skills although a change in the role might also be feared as Educational Psychologists may then lose the identity and status the statutory role provides (Crane, 2016; Farrell & Woods, 2015; Lyons, 1999). As a result, the statutory role protects the profession's existence, but Educational Psychologists also seem to have become gatekeepers for children and young people being able to access provision through the statutory process. Appreciating this historical context allows for understanding why the profession has perhaps resisted change away from the 'expert' role because of the fear of losing its statutory role and responsibilities.

Another development within Local Authorities, following financial cuts introduced by successive recent governments, is the restriction of their role in providing public services (Buser, 2013; Winward, 2015) and the devolution of funding to schools. This has resulted in many Local Authority Educational Psychology Services adopting a partially or fully traded model of service delivery, intending to generate income to meet some or all service costs (Woods, 2014). At the time, Educational Psychologists raised concerns about whether their contribution is valued enough to be purchased by schools and other contractors (Fallon et al., 2010). Despite this, Winward (2015) found that the impact of trading on the role and contribution of Educational Psychologists has been largely positive and has allowed for the opportunity to extend the type and range of work being completed. In contrast to this way of working, some Educational Psychology Services have become statutory-only to manage the increase in statutory advice requests (Marsh & Howatson, 2020). Additionally, more Educational Psychologists have opted to work privately, and in some cases, earn more money writing statutory advice than they would through a Local Authority, affecting the professional landscape of expertise even further (Atfield et al., 2023).

Rationale
As a result, discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' appear to exist for Educational Psychologists and may be in tension with one another (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). This research assumes that these discourses exist, as evidenced by the literature and my experiences, and I am curious about how Educational Psychologists

navigate this tension (Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). One area where this tension might be exposed is the experience of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which Educational Psychologists feel they are less familiar. This is a liminal space where Educational Psychologists are positioned as 'experts' within the statutory process but feel disconnected from this role due to their feelings of being less familiar with the needs of the child or young person for whom they are writing the statutory advice (Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

Asking Educational Psychologists to recall a case where they felt less familiar with the child's needs allows for an understanding of what happens when something is missing, which could uncover hidden inequalities and issues within the statutory process and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system (Davis, 2016). In this instance, the Educational Psychologist feeling they have expertise about the needs of the child when writing statutory advice is what is missing, which highlights issues within the system and feelings of discomfort with the job role more readily. This concept is supported by literature from various fields, such as health, and a common theme is that inequalities are exposed when the system is viewed from a different perspective and will generally remain hidden until someone experiences the limitations firsthand (Conrad, 2005; Davis, 2016; Harvey, 2015). Moreover, Freire's (1996) work highlights that by pressuring the system to become more inclusive, the structures of inequality become clearer (McCoy McDeid, 2020; Witten, 2021).

Of course, this is a premise of the current research, and there will be other ways to explore this documented tension between the 'expert' and 'non-expert' discourses within Educational Psychology (Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). One way to explore this liminal space is to ask Educational Psychologists to recall a case where they felt less familiar with the child's needs. The assumption is that Educational Psychologists hold these discourses of 'non-expert' and then arrive at a statutory assessment, where they are construed as 'experts' but they will need to draw on the 'non-expert' role. This liminal space is a niche within Educational Psychologists' practice, which is interesting as it is a specialised segment of practice with unique characteristics. Additionally, the Standards of Proficiency for Educational Psychologists, set by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), support both discourses as there is mention of professional expertise alongside empowering consultees and working collaboratively, further exemplifying the tension that exists (Atfield et al., 2023; Birch et al., 2015; Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010).

Educational Psychologists' practice is diverse and involves many different areas of focus, for example, training, consultation, and systemic work (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Conducting a statutory assessment whilst drawing on the 'non-expert' discourse is a particular practice that exposes how Educational Psychologists straddle the two discourses and reveals the tension between those two opposite poles (Yates & Hulusi, 2018). Researching this liminal space links to synthesis, exploring if a third concept or discourse unifies or transcends both the 'non-expert' and 'expert' discourses (Maybee, 2016). For the individual Educational Psychologist, this tension could manifest itself in disillusionment with the job role and a preference for non-statutory work due to more freedom in how they practice and the discourses they embody (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

This research is based on the premise that Educational Psychologists work within this multi-layered culture, which involves the discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert', and would like to explore the narratives of Educational Psychologists navigating this culture of contrasting discourses through individual interviews (Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). Furthermore, Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which they feel they have less familiarity, and what they do in this instance illuminates the ambiguity and tensions within the profession and systems surrounding it (Atfield et al., 2023; Conrad, 2005; Davis, 2016; Harvey, 2015).

For the remainder of this thesis, when I refer to the discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert', I will be referring to a body of literature that mentions these discourses existing within the context of Educational Psychology, which is informed by journals such as Atfield et al. (2023), Gutkin (1999), Wagner (2000), and Yates and Hulusi (2018). An 'expert' will be understood as an individual possessing advanced knowledge or skill in a specific subject or activity and a 'non-expert' will be defined as a person who does not apply or demonstrate a high level of knowledge or skill in a particular area (Díaz & Smith, 2024; Nordin, 2000).

Importantly, one must understand what a 'less familiar' need means in this context. A significant portion of an Educational Psychologist's work focuses on areas with which they are well-acquainted, such as needs related to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech, Language, and Communication difficulties, and Social, Emotional, and Mental Health challenges (Special educational needs in England, academic year 2022/23, 2023). However, I have found through my experience that some needs are not specifically covered in university training and arise infrequently within statutory work. This raises the question: What does an Educational Psychologist do in such cases? They have not received targeted training, and they have no experience in writing statutory advice for a particular need. Examples of such needs include those associated with conditions such as cerebral palsy and brain injuries, which affect education in unique and individualised ways (Michelsen et al., 2005).

In summary, the definition of 'less familiar' as it pertains to this research is the Educational Psychologists' subjective understanding of 'being less familiar' in comparison to being 'familiar' and feeling they have the necessary acquired knowledge to write statutory advice. This is a definition that refers to the subjective state of feeling 'less familiar' rather than an objective and concrete criteria. This definition is intended to be purposely subjective to the participant and allows potential participants to decide for themselves whether they meet the criteria, as this research focuses on the internal perception of lacking sufficient knowledge or not having encountered a particular need before, which is subjective and not measurable.

Research Aims and Questions
This study aims to enhance existing knowledge about the perception of Educational Psychologists' role within the statutory process (Anderson et al., 2020; Farrell & Woods, 2015). It will achieve this by exploring the narratives of Educational Psychologists who write statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar within a context that contains discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' (Atfield et al., 2023; Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

The narrative methodology employed sought to explore the possibilities within individual experiences rather than generalise to a wider population (Butina, 2015; Riessman, 2008). The wider profession and I might benefit from exploring this area as it could illuminate how to effectively navigate or ease tensions within the role of an Educational Psychologist, which links to current predicaments within the profession (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024).

This research was guided by the following questions:
1. What are Educational Psychologists' narratives surrounding writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar?
2. What can we learn from these narratives concerning writing statutory advice and the perceived role of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process?

Critical Literature Review

Introduction
The current literature review discusses the role of the Educational Psychologist within the statutory processes and the prevalence of the discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). The profession's context is also explored to allow for an understanding of the current predicament of Educational Psychologists (Atfield et al., 2023; Farrell & Woods, 2015; Mackintosh, 2013; Maliphant et al., 2013). This critical literature review presents previous research on the perception of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process, demonstrating discrepancies in role perception and understanding from both within and outside the profession (Leadbetter, 2017; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). It suggests that future research should gain the narratives of Educational Psychologists navigating the tensions and dilemmas of the profession when writing statutory advice (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024).

The way this literature review was written aligns with the narrative methodology (Riessman, 2008). The assembled story integrates contextual information relating to the Educational Psychology profession that was beyond the focus of the perception of the role of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process (Allen, 2017; Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Therefore, this critical literature review is not limited to how Educational Psychologists are understood in statutory processes; it also considers their broader contributions, functions, and challenges. This process involved critically engaging with many sources and developing a subsequent argument. Additionally, it has been shaped by the principle of 'verstehen', which refers to an interpretative, subjective understanding formed through critical reflection (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2018; Holder, 2022).

Educational Psychology Context
Educational Psychologists are a professional group that provide support to children and young people with SEND (Norwich, 1995). An Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) is designed for children and young people up to the age of 25 who require more assistance than what is provided through special educational needs support within schools (Adams et al., 2018). The Local Authority draws it up after an Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment of the child or young person determines that an EHCP is necessary (Adams et al., 2018). This occurs after consultation with relevant partner agencies, children, young people, parents, and carers. The Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment is also known as a statutory assessment (Bentley, 2017). An Educational Psychologist writes statutory advice, as mentioned previously, as part of this assessment (Crane, 2016).

EHCPs, and the needs assessment process through which they are constructed, were introduced as part of the Children and Families Act 2014 (Adams et al., 2018). The Act and an accompanying updated SEND Code of Practice dictate how Local Authorities must deliver EHCPs (Adams et al., 2018; Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). EHCPs identify educational, health, and social needs and stipulate the additional support and provision needed to meet those needs (Adams et al., 2018). Educational Psychologists have a statutory role in the EHCP process (Capper, 2020). While Educational Psychologists are not the only contributors to the statutory assessment process, they are typically

regarded as key contributors, with their statutory advice receiving heightened attention during the creation of the final document (Anderson et al., 2020; Capper & Soan, 2022). However, criticisms have arisen suggesting that the growing demand for EHCPs has led to a system that is ill-prepared to support all students (Rhodes, 2024).

There are concerns regarding the quality of reports produced by Educational Psychologists due to time constraints (Cameron & Monsen, 2005; Crane, 2016). While Educational Psychologists should aim to write statutory advice that leads to better outcomes for children and young people, it is noted that this advice should be confined to areas where they have expertise (Anderson et al., 2020). However, within this process, different identity perceptions have emerged, with Educational Psychologists viewing themselves more as facilitators of diverse perspectives rather than as 'experts' as they have traditionally been portrayed within the statutory process and historically (Leadbetter, 2017). This highlights the complexities surrounding their areas of expertise and the perception of their role (Billington et al., 2017; Mackintosh, 2013; Maliphant et al., 2013).

Educational Psychologists are pressured to tailor their statutory advice to the available provision while navigating the challenges that emerge when provision is unavailable (Norwich, 1995; Richards, 2024). Additionally, there are practical demands and it is necessary to write statutory advice efficiently within statutory timelines, which Educational Psychologists must consider during statutory assessments (Atfield et al., 2023; Buck, 2015; Crane, 2016). As noted, Educational Psychologists have historically faced several challenges when drafting statutory advice (Leadbetter, 2017). The employment landscape has also shifted significantly, with Local Authorities struggling with recruitment and retention (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024). These challenges have contributed to the increased workload for Educational Psychologists within Local Authorities, with many opting for private practice (Atfield et al., 2023). This shift is likely to impact both the process and the pressures surrounding the writing of statutory advice, particularly within Local Authorities (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024).

In this time-constrained system, Educational Psychologists are required to write statutory advice for needs they may not have encountered before within a timeframe that may not provide sufficient opportunity to fully understand a need or condition before providing statutory advice (Woods, 2014). Yet, Ashton and Roberts (2006), in their paper, concluded that Educational Psychologists are uniquely positioned to make significant contributions to the educational system due to their specialised knowledge, holistic approach, collaborative skills, advocacy efforts, and commitment to research and innovation. The value and uniqueness of Educational Psychologists lie in their ability to integrate psychological principles with educational practices to support the overall development and well-being of children and young people and promote systemic changes (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

I wonder if some of the discomfort associated with writing statutory advice for certain populations could be explained by Competence Motivation Theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in activities where they feel competent or capable (Elliot et al., 2017). Ensuring one feels competent must feel even more relevant within a system that positions Educational Psychologists as 'experts' (Anderson et al., 2020; Farrell & Woods, 2015). Feeling less familiar with a need when writing statutory advice may feel

particularly uncomfortable for Educational Psychologists when working within this system (Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

Key legislation has cemented Educational Psychologists' statutory role within Local Authorities (Lucas, 1989; Vivash & Morgan, 2019). While these statutory responsibilities have safeguarded the role and provided status, they have also introduced challenges within the profession (Atfield et al., 2023). Educational Psychologists are increasingly dedicating significant amounts of time to completing statutory work (Atfield et al., 2023; Fallon et al., 2010; Osborne et al., 2009).

Educational Psychologists face challenges such as high caseloads, time constraints, and the emotional strain of working with complex and often severe cases (Atfield et al., 2023; Boaler & Sherwood, 2024; George-Levi et al., 2022). This narrowing of their role has led some Educational Psychologists to perhaps feel less confident in their broader psychological skills (Atfield et al., 2023). Additionally, there is a fear that changes to the role might result in the loss of the identity and status granted by the statutory position (Crane, 2016; Farrell & Woods, 2015; Lyons, 1999). While the statutory role ensures the profession's continued existence, Educational Psychologists have also become gatekeepers, determining access to provisions through the statutory process for children and young people (Billington et al., 2017; Mackintosh, 2013; Maliphant et al., 2013).

Tensions Between 'Expert' and 'Non-Expert' Discourses
According to the literature, there appears to be controversy around the discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' pertaining to Educational Psychologists (Anderson et al., 2020; Cameron, 2006; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). It could be argued that the statutory role construes Educational Psychologists as 'experts' with suggestions that they should limit their statutory advice to areas in which they have expertise, such as provision, placements, and funding (Anderson et al., 2020; Farrell & Woods, 2015). Studies indicate that parents and carers appreciate the Educational Psychologists' expertise in formulating an understanding of their child or young person and the provision and interventions that will support them (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006). This indicates that Educational Psychologists are viewed by parents and carers as 'experts' (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006). In addition, Educational Psychologists have been praised for using their 'specialised knowledge' to effect change, indicating an expected level of expertise (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

Moreover, Educational Psychologists being construed as 'experts' is particularly evident during SEND Tribunal hearings, where Educational Psychologists are described as 'expert witnesses' to issue impartial and independent advice (Yates & Hulusi, 2018). Within Yates and Hulusi's (2018) research, an overarching theme indicated a sense of dissonance between Educational Psychologists' perceived role as co-creators of solutions and the pressures imposed by the adversarial appeals process, highlighting feelings of unease around the perception of the role of Educational Psychologists.

There is also literature relating to Educational Psychologists extending their practice to support post-16 young people with SEND and the training and experience required, which assumes that a certain level of expertise is needed to work with this population (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Differing messages exist about where the profession should focus its

efforts, with some literature suggesting that the field should focus on expertise in teaching and learning, further exemplifying the 'expert' discourse (Sternberg, 1996).

Different studies portray Educational Psychologists as 'experts' and seek their advice for this reason (Lohse-Bossenz et al., 2013). For example, in Lohse-Bossenz et al.'s (2013) study, 'experts' from different fields of education, including psychologists, were asked to evaluate psychological topics concerning their importance to teaching. The results were discussed, and the results focused on the acquisition of psychological knowledge for teachers and the need to foster practices from Educational Psychology within teacher training (Lohse-Bossenz et al., 2013). These results highlight that it appears to be felt that Educational Psychologists have specific knowledge that is useful to others and should be imparted, placing their role more in an 'expert' domain rather than as co-constructors of solutions (Leadbetter, 2017; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

In the United Kingdom (UK), the pathway to becoming an Educational Psychologist is a doctoral course; previously, a master's degree was necessary (Cameron et al., 2008). The doctoral training programme further defines Educational Psychologists as 'experts' due to its rigour and competitive nature, especially in the UK, where all Educational Psychologists are 'Doctors', a protected title, if they qualified after 2006 (Hill et al., 2015; Jones, 2008).

The 'expert' discourse, potentially, appears to be in contrast with the 'non-expert' discourse, which values collaboration, consultation, and working with others as equals (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000). Some Educational Psychologists do not position themselves as 'experts' and prefer to use a 'not-knowing' and curious approach to their practice (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). Furthermore, Center and Ward (1989) found that school psychologists saw their role as consultative, and Leadbetter's (2017) research found that Educational Psychologists see themselves as a means of integrating various perspectives, indicating that differing role perceptions are widespread among psychologists and those they work alongside.

In terms of a consultative approach, which values everyone's contribution, O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018), using case studies of children and young people who were presenting to teachers with social, academic, behavioural, or emotional difficulties, found possible advantages of consultation particularly for children, young people, parents, and carers. O'Farrell and Kinsella's (2018) research demonstrated the advantages of Educational Psychologists embodying a 'non-expert' and consultative approach to practice. However, notably, the results from this study are hard to generalise because of the small sample size of nine (Butina, 2015; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018).

Farrell and Woods (2015) explored why Educational Psychologists may be hesitant to embrace a consultation approach. The influence of the profession's history was discussed as a contributing factor (Farrell & Woods, 2015). Educational Psychologists were described as 'experts' in psychometric assessment, which may be a barrier to adopting alternative practices (Deary et al., 2000; Farrell & Woods, 2015; Hill, 2005; MacKay, 2007). The paper discussed the skills and abilities required to perform efficiently as a school-based consultant and suggested that these necessary prerequisites present difficulties for newcomers to the profession who aim to work in this manner (Farrell & Woods, 2015; Rhodes, 2024). This

perhaps suggests a confusing tension, that one must be an 'expert' to act as a 'non-expert' to co-construct meaning and solutions (Yates & Hulusi, 2018). The social context within which Educational Psychologists exist has also been noted to be a barrier to adopting a wholly consultative approach to their practice (Farrell & Woods, 2017).

Despite this, research has found benefits of Educational Psychologists facilitating group consultations in their practice (Chadwick, 2014). For example, Doveston and Keenaghan (2010) promoted more effective interpersonal relationships between school staff and Educational Psychologists by recognising what is already effective in the classroom, highlighting the class teacher as the 'expert'. O'Shea (2019) illuminated the ability of consultation models to make sense of the phenomenon on which much of Educational Psychologists' practice is based.

Along the same lines, Underwood (2022) focused on Educational Psychologists' use of language in facilitating collaboration during consultations. Collaboration was identified when the consultation group seemed to collectively understand the situation and strategies for supporting a young person were jointly developed and co-created (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Wagner, 2000). The analysis revealed the impact of the Educational Psychologists' application of a solution-focused approach, which helped contain and scaffold interactions (Underwood, 2022). This approach seemed to result in changes in how events and individuals were described, fostering a shared understanding and leading to agreements on subsequent steps, including strategies to support the individual and exemplifying the 'non-expert' discourse (Underwood, 2022).

Additionally, professional competence is defined as the ability to handle job-related tasks effectively, integrating knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Mulder, 2014). It entails not only technical skills but also cognitive and interpersonal abilities. Mulder's (2014) paper underscores the complexity and dynamic nature of professional competence. The perception of this could be a compounding factor for Educational Psychologists to consider when writing statutory advice for needs that they feel they are less familiar with when they are perceived to be the 'expert' within the statutory process (Anderson et al., 2020; Farrell & Woods, 2015; Mulder, 2014).

Another situation where the 'expert' and 'non-expert' discourses are exposed is the debate surrounding dyslexia (Bird, 2024). Although the term 'dyslexia' is widely recognised in educational settings, the literature suggests it is often misunderstood (Bird, 2024). Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate about using labels for literacy difficulties (Bird, 2024). The role of the Educational Psychologist is associated with the individual assessment of children's needs, suggesting that Educational Psychologists are diagnosing dyslexia, which promotes the 'expert' discourse (Bird, 2024). However, in practice, this is not always the case. Bird's (2024) findings provide an understanding of educational professionals' differing expectations regarding educational psychologists' involvement, especially in relation to labelling literacy difficulties, and an emphasis on issues that require further exploration to promote effective collaboration between teachers and Educational Psychologists.

In terms of narrative theory, I am positioning the 'expert' and 'non-expert' discourses as opposing poles, which act in contrast to each other within Educational Psychology (Puckett,

2016). Moreover, Personal Construct Psychology suggests that individuals develop core constructs that are key to their sense of identity and influence all decisions (Beaver, 2011). I suspect, in a way, that an Educational Psychologist adopting a 'non-expert' approach is an identity construct they use to guide their practice (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000). The current research then aims to investigate the situation where an Educational Psychologist's identity construct is not supported by the systems and processes in place and the tension this could bring up for them personally and professionally (Leadbetter, 2017; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

Epistemological and Ontological Tensions
Importantly, in addition to the statutory pressures and the challenges of navigating a complex system, the role of Educational Psychologists has been influenced by the intricate historical, political, cultural, and social context, as well as changes in our current society (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024). For instance, some Educational Psychology Services becoming traded, shifts in statutory responsibilities, and changes in ontological and epistemological perspectives have fundamentally transformed the profession and reshaped expectations regarding the involvement of Educational Psychologists, both at the service and individual levels (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Burnham, 2013; Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018; Lee & Woods, 2017; Vivash & Morgan, 2019).

Like the 'expert' versus 'non-expert' discourse, there is also tension between evidence-based practice, having a clear link between professional practice and its research base, and the importance of Educational Psychologists' epistemological position (Fox, 2003). There is a conflict between Educational Psychologists who prefer to ground their professional practice in subjective experience and self-reflection and those who advocate for a more objective approach (Fox, 2003). Fox (2003) has suggested that the way this tension is resolved will be a crucial factor in maintaining the profession's public and political credibility.

Burnham (2013) interviewed seven Educational Psychologists, exploring issues related to epistemological and ontological positioning. The study revealed that most participants were uncertain about the scientific foundation of their work and the role of peer-reviewed research in shaping their practice (Burnham, 2013). These Educational Psychologists placed greater value on the practical or social benefits of their work rather than its alignment with a recognised evidence base (Burnham, 2013). This perspective aligns with the philosophical approach of pragmatism, which questions the assumptions of realist perspectives and challenges the dominance of scientific methodology and methods in establishing knowledge claims (Burnham, 2013).

I believe the statutory process is creating epistemological and ontological tensions among Educational Psychologists. They operate within a predominantly positivist system that does not always prioritise the co-production of meaning. This aligns with Leadbetter's (2017) research, which found that Educational Psychologists perceive themselves as a means of integrating various perspectives (Farrell & Woods, 2015; Tolman, 1992; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). Moreover, the dominance of the medical model holds significant power (Clough & Corbett, 2000; Farrell, 2006; Farrell & Venables, 2009; Kershner, 2016; Rieser, 2012). This may further influence Educational Psychologists' feelings of familiarity with particular needs.

Furthermore, diagnosis and assessment relate to the 'expert' discourse and a positivist ontological position, where there is a universal 'truth' that can be applied to individual circumstances (Manjikian, 2013). Conversely, the 'non-expert' discourse embodies the social constructivist ontological stance, understanding that knowledge is co-produced; therefore, there is no objective truth of which to be an 'expert', or it is to be questioned if everyone is an 'expert' (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

The 'non-expert' discourse relates more readily to consultation and the power threat meaning framework, which is an alternative to conventional models that rely on psychiatric diagnosis and focus on how individuals make sense of difficult experiences (Boyle, 2022; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). While the 'expert' discourse relates to cognitive assessments and rating scales (Hill, 2005; Norwich, 1995). The statutory assessment process seems to require an Educational Psychologist to work as an 'expert' and follow more positivist ways of working, which may not feel comfortable for all Educational Psychologists who may prefer to work in a more 'non-expert' and social constructivist manner (Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

Epistemological and ontological tension resolution could inform how Educational Psychologists navigate this complex statutory process (Yates & Hulusi, 2018). This tension becomes more pronounced when they are asked to write statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which they feel they are less familiar (Freire, 1996). Therefore, the narratives told during this research could inform how Educational Psychologists negotiate these contrasting discourses and what their perceived role is within the statutory process, considering the current landscape of the profession (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024).

Summary
Educational Psychologists operate within a landscape of diverse discourses, encompassing both 'expert' and 'non-expert' perspectives (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). Understanding these discourses and acknowledging that they exist is crucial for comprehending the dynamics between Educational Psychologists and various stakeholders, including parents, carers, teachers, and policymakers (Farrell et al., 2006). There is a need to understand how Educational Psychologists navigate this tension, building and developing on the concepts introduced in the literature discussed previously (Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). An exploration into this topic area will allow for an understanding of Educational Psychologists' perception of their role and the reality of existing within this landscape, perhaps illuminating areas for change, increased support, and training (Atfield et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2024).

The narratives of Educational Psychologists have been collected previously around the topics of the experience of working therapeutically, personal experiences of bullying affecting perception and professional behaviour, the experiences of white Educational Psychologists related to race and racism in South Africa, and the connections between distressing events and career choice (Abramovitz, 2017; Anderson, 2012; Huynh & Rhodes, 2011; Prescott, 2014). The narratives of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar within a context that contains discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' have yet to be explored (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

At the beginning of this chapter, I set out to explore the context of Educational Psychology, the statutory process, and the documented tension between the 'expert' and 'non-expert' discourses (Gutkin, 1999; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). I would argue that there is a sense of dissonance between the role of the Educational Psychologist and the pressure placed upon them during the statutory process concerning these contrasting discourses (Yates & Hulusi, 2018). There is a narrative around Educational Psychologists being 'experts' in addition to evidence that Educational Psychologists themselves prefer to practice in a manner that positions them as 'non-experts' (Gutkin, 1999; Leadbetter, 2017; Wagner, 2000; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

The results in the literature, as reviewed in this chapter, place significant focus on how school staff, parents, and carers perceive the role of Educational Psychologists (Farrell et al., 2006). Additionally, the landscape of Educational Psychology and the statutory process has changed drastically and is predicted to continue to evolve, along with calls for a reform of the education system (Atfield et al., 2023; Marsh, 2023; Rhodes, 2024). I would argue that the available research does not capture the complexity of the experience concerning individual Educational Psychologists managing these contrasting discourses and epistemological and ontological tensions within the statutory process. I believe that more research is essential to consider the narratives of Educational Psychologists. I hope to deepen my understanding of how to navigate these tensions and the perception of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process. This research is necessary and fills a research gap as it holds the possibility of further supporting the understanding of the role of Educational Psychologists in the current and future landscape, which may be of relevance to the training, recruitment, and retention of Educational Psychologists (Rhodes, 2024).

Methodology

Introduction
The current chapter describes the methodological and procedural choices of this study and how they developed during the research process. I wanted to work directly with Educational Psychologists and wondered what exploring their narratives would indicate about the future of the profession in relation to statutory assessments. In this chapter, I have explained the actions I took and offered a justification for the choices made throughout the research process.

Qualitative Research Paradigm
I sought the flexibility that would be allowed by following a qualitative approach rather than a more prescriptive method as would be expected within quantitative research (Marecek et al., 1997). Qualitative research methods have also become more popular and accepted within the social sciences (Hammersley, 1990). There is literature on how qualitative research meets quality requirements and how concerns regarding generalisability, ethics, and subjectivity, impact all researchers, which is explored further later in this chapter and in the Discussion chapter (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Bryman, 1984; Butina, 2015; Gergen, 1985; Marecek et al., 1997; Riessman, 2008; Yardley, 2017).

A qualitative method was congruent with my aim to develop my findings inductively in an exploratory manner (Marecek et al., 1997). My research was exploratory as I did not set out from the beginning with an idea I wanted to prove right or wrong. I prioritised exploration and immersion, which allowed me to concentrate on the participants' narratives and prioritise their voices. I was mindful of my role as a qualitative researcher to create a 'world' through my interpretation, emphasising the constructive and interpretive nature of qualitative research (Mertens, 2005). As I sought to understand how my participants construct stories from their personal experiences, a narrative research methodology, which is located within the qualitative paradigm, was chosen.

I recognise that my values and experiences have influenced the research process, especially the experience shared during the Introduction (Fox et al., 2007). Through my chosen narrative methodology, co-construction and co-production were accepted elements of making meaning. Within this, I have made my assumptions explicit, continued being reflexive, and always considered my position. I have also included reflective boxes throughout the Analysis to reveal when I felt my subjectivity was impacting the research.

Ontology and Epistemology
Selecting research paradigms has been described as a critical decision within research (Maxwell, 2012). Research paradigms situate the study, which includes the researcher's assumptions about ontology, the nature of the world itself, and epistemology, which is how this can be understood. The methodological approaches for this research are linked to these assumptions within the research paradigm adopted for this study. The current methodology was supported by the research's relativist ontology and interpretivist epistemological stance (Howell, 2013; Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). In this way, reality is positioned as subjective (Burr, 2003). Nevertheless, as with all qualitative research, there will be elements of co-construction, with the language and researcher-participant dynamic being crucial to creating

meaning in line with the epistemological underpinnings of this study (Burr, 2003; Mertens, 2005).

Hybridity in research paradigms has been described by other researchers (Mertens, 2005). Within my research, I originally described it as social constructivist; however, the ethics panel raised that I needed to be clearer about social constructivism and interpretivism, which I had not considered previously. Researchers who adopt both epistemologies understand that there are numerous realities and that reality is created through experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Burr, 2003; William, 2024). These paradigms differ in how they seek to understand these realities.

Constructivists are curious about how realities are constructed, while interpretivists are interested in how these individual realities are experienced (Hay, 2015; Potrac et al., 2014). Interpretivism understands that people's interpretations affect their understanding of their social world, and the aim is to understand individual lived experiences (Schwandt, 1994). Reflexivity is important within interpretivism and privileging the voices of participants. My focus is to understand people's social worlds, not to change them, which fits with my research aims, meaning the current research follows an interpretivist epistemological stance (Howell, 2013; Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). Nonetheless, I must be transparent in stating that, as with all qualitative research, there will be elements of co-construction within this research, with some blurred lines between constructivism and interpretivism (Burr, 2003; Mertens, 2005).

In this research, I explored how Educational Psychologists felt, perceived, and experienced their reality (Howell, 2013; Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). I recognised that individuals' interpretations of their reality shape their understanding of the social world (Howell, 2013; Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). I saw people as experts in their own experiences, and I aimed to understand individual lived experiences. I wanted to privilege the voices of my participants and understand the subjective meaning individuals have attached to their lived experiences. Of course, this data collection method may not sit comfortably with everyone due to the lack of generalisability of the findings owing to the prominence placed on individual experiences.

I used Narrative Thematic Analysis to analyse the interview transcripts (Butina, 2015; Riessman, 2008). I constructed the overarching themes and subthemes based on my interpretation of the interviews at that time; therefore, my chosen analysis was based on an interpretivist epistemology. I analysed each interview independently, rather than merging the transcripts, to prevent bias toward certain narratives in particular interviews and ensure that the individual narratives remained intact. Furthermore, I did not engage in a back-and-forth dialogue with the participants but rather facilitated them to tell their stories, which was congruent with an interpretivist standpoint. Further details of my analysis method are included later in this chapter.

Moreover, as this research was fully qualitative, it was understood that meaning is not objectively determined, but instead subjective, with interpretations varying based on context and individuals (Mertens, 2005; Willig, 2008). The methods and approaches were selected based on the paradigms and epistemologies discussed above. The foundations of

these philosophical frameworks resonated with my experiences and beliefs regarding the human experience, which links to how I view the world (Reason, 1998).

Importantly, the very assumption upon which this research was based is congruent with this research's ontological and epistemological stance, which is that Educational Psychologists do not work in a vacuum and exist in a liminal space where socially constructed discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' preside. The narratives collected and studied as part of this research were constructed within this context of contrasting discourses and were subjective, relativist, and co-constructed.

Positionality
As a qualitative researcher, addressing the issue of positionality is crucial. Researchers must recognise the values they bring to the research process (Marecek et al., 1997). Therefore, it is essential to clarify my position, which involves being a proactive participant in the interpretation and creation of meaning from the participants' narratives based on my own experiences, culture, positioning, theoretical assumptions, and ideologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I perform multiple roles and responsibilities. I am a doctoral psychology student, and I am on placement at a Local Authority Educational Psychology Service. I have also secured a position with this Educational Psychology Service, where I will begin working as a qualified Educational Psychologist upon completing the doctoral course. Furthermore, most of my participants were Educational Psychologists working for the same Educational Psychology Service, whom I had met previously. It is essential to clarify that I do not hold a neutral position. I have written statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which I have felt less familiar, which inspired the current research. My experiences will have influenced the research process.

I am a member of, or training to become a member of, the group and organisation where I am conducting this research, which offers me an insider approach (Saidin, 2016; Unluer, 2012). I believe that my approach, though described as an insider approach, also incorporates some outsider elements because I am still in training to become an Educational Psychologist, and I am not an employed member of staff at the Educational Psychology Service (Bridges, 2001). Although I am somewhat an insider, there are still elements of difference; therefore, one could consider the research to contain outsider elements (Breen, 2007). There are advantages, disadvantages and ethical considerations for both approaches, which I have considered whilst conducting this research.

Conducting insider research offers significant advantages, including better access, richer insights, and enhanced rapport with the participants, but it also carries risks such as bias, ethical challenges, and difficulties in maintaining objectivity (Breen, 2007). To minimise the risks and maximise the quality of the research, I have engaged in reflection on my role, used transparent methods, and maintained ethical rigour by adhering to established principles such as informed consent and protecting confidentiality. I had to balance my insider knowledge with a commitment to objectivity and ethical principles.

Moreover, I have contemplated Nakata's (2015) opinion about the unhelpfulness of viewing research as simply insider or outsider. Researchers should reflect more deeply on their positioning and background, position their study within a wider research context, and critically examine their research, which is what I have endeavoured to do within the current study.

Similarly, although I considered an auto-ethnographic approach, which is where the researcher is embedded within the system they are studying, this was not feasible, as my participant pool extended beyond just my own Educational Psychology Service (Chang, 2016). This broader recruitment strategy did not align with the aims of an auto-ethnographic approach, which typically focuses on a more narrowly defined group.

Methods

Individual Interviews
Individual interviews were chosen as the data collection method to capture the unique and detailed narratives of Educational Psychologists. Despite the risks of limited perspectives, interviewer influence, and potential biases, individual interviews were deemed the most appropriate for gathering in-depth, personal insights that other methods, such as focus groups or surveys, could not provide (Baillie, 2019; Roulston & Choi, 2018). This method allowed participants to share their stories uninterrupted, avoiding group dynamics or feelings of shame that could arise when discussing potentially vulnerable topics, such as cases where the Educational Psychologist felt uncertain (Janis, 1972).

Additionally, individual interviews were aligned with my qualitative approach, which aimed to explore the depth and nuance of participants' experiences (Marecek et al., 1997). The method also offered the flexibility to capture the individuality of each participant's narrative, especially given the diverse ways Educational Psychologists practice (Gutkin, 1999). Research by Guest et al. (2017) supports that individual interviews are more effective than focus groups in providing a wide variety of insights, further justifying the choice of this data collection method.

Interview Content
I followed the general interview guide approach as stipulated by Butina (2015), with narrative framework elements included (Cudworth, 2015; Kasper, 1994). I chose this approach because it fitted the research aims and allowed me to conduct interviews in my preferred style, with a level of flexibility whilst still ensuring information around general topic areas was collected (Butina, 2015; Gall et al., 2003). The general interview guide approach that was used within the individual interviews was more structured than the informal conversational interview, although there was still a significant amount of flexibility in its structure (Gall et al., 2003).

The general interview guide approach lies between informal conversational interviews and standardised open-ended interviews (Butina, 2015; Patton, 2002). An informal conversational interview involves spontaneously creating questions within the organic progression of a conversation. Standardised open-ended interview questions are developed in advance, with each participant being asked the same questions in a set sequence. The

general interview guide approach occupies a middle ground between the two methods, using an outline of questions to ensure that all relevant topics are addressed (Butina, 2015; Patton, 2002).

The way questions were phrased depended on my preferences as the researcher. The use of flexibility in my questioning approach allowed for an informal interview environment, which supported my rapport-building with the participants. I was subsequently able to ask follow-up questions based on their responses. McNamara (2009) states that the strength of the general interview guide approach lies in the researcher's ability to "...to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee" (p. 1).

To gather the narratives, the interview process incorporated the storytelling techniques recommended by narrative researchers (Butina, 2015; Cudworth, 2015; Kasper, 1994). These strategies involved using open-ended questions in everyday language, designed to encourage detailed responses, asking questions specifically framed to elicit narratives, and structuring the interview with a few broad primary questions complemented by probing follow-up questions. My interview guide, therefore, included a single broad primary question, accompanied by a list of possible probing questions, ensuring consistency in soliciting narratives and addressing relevant topics.

I was the only active interviewer in each interview (Butina, 2015). My role was to lead with the main orientating statement, "I am interested in hearing your personal experience of writing a piece of statutory advice for a child or young person with needs that you felt you were less familiar with," which allowed the participants to share their narratives (Cudworth, 2015; Kasper, 1994). Clear boundaries were set regarding the topics to be covered in the interviews, and the Educational Psychologists were instructed not to disclose any identifiable information related to children, young people, or families.

To provide a sense of the experience participants had during their interviews, some of the prepared questions and prompts have been provided here: "Walk me through that journey," "How did you feel when you first received the advice request?" "What did it bring up for you?" I remained adaptable during the interviews. The questions and prompts following the opening statement were driven by the participant's narrative and did not require rigid planning, although I had the prepared questions and prompts to hand for inspiration during the interviews.

Methodological Considerations: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, or Narrative Thematic Analysis?
For my research, I was drawn to methodologies that offered flexibility rather than rigid instructions. This led me to choose Narrative Thematic Analysis (Butina, 2015). While Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis might have been thought by some to be a fitting choice for exploring Educational Psychologists' narratives, I preferred my chosen method due to its flexibility and my desire to avoid being constrained by predefined theoretical positions (Alase, 2017). Narrative Thematic Analysis also enabled me to reflect on my preconceptions and values rather than adopting a position such as 'bracketing', which is

central to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This flexibility was important for me, as it allowed for a more nuanced approach to data interpretation (Alase, 2017). Moreover, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis places an emphasis on the detailed, present-tense lived experience of individuals (Alase, 2017). Many of my participants offered reflections not only on recent experiences but on professional trajectories spanning decades, often contextualised within systemic and policy shifts (Griffin & May, 2012). These accounts extended beyond moment-to-moment phenomenological descriptions, instead taking the shape of life narratives that situated meaning within a wider temporal and sociocultural frame.

Similarly, Reflexive Thematic Analysis does not inherently preserve the temporal, structural, or storied nature of the data in the same way Narrative Thematic Analysis does (McAllum et al., 2019). Whilst Reflexive Thematic Analysis is strong in identifying themes across participants, it does not attend to the sequencing, coherence, and identity work embedded in how individuals tell their stories (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In contrast, many participants in the current research offered accounts that unfolded over time, often tracing their journeys into and through the profession in ways that constructed meaning across the lifespan of their careers.

By adopting a Narrative Thematic Analysis, this research honours both the individuality of participants' accounts and the shared themes that emerge across them (Bengtsson & Andersen, 2020). It allows for an understanding of how Educational Psychologists construct meaning across time, how their professional identities have been shaped by historical and systemic forces, and how their narratives reflect broader shifts in the history of the profession.

Narrative Thematic Analysis
Narrative Thematic Analysis was selected after reviewing various narrative analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gee, 2004; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Kim, 2015; Murray, 2000; Parker, 2005). This method highlights the most significant themes and meanings within the data (Joffe, 2011). The steps in Butina's (2015) approach to Narrative Thematic Analysis were manageable in terms of time. It was also an inductive approach, using the data to explore thoughts on a situation, aligning with exploratory research.

A Narrative Thematic Analysis is particularly well-suited to this study, as it honours the centrality of storytelling both within the profession's historical evolution and in the accounts provided by participants (Bengtsson & Andersen, 2020). Educational Psychology as a profession has a rich and evolving history, as recounted in the Introduction chapter, shaped by shifting paradigms, policy changes, and cultural narratives. By choosing Narrative Thematic Analysis, this research acknowledges that the development of the Educational Psychologists' role itself can be understood as a story.

Many participants have offered more than just current reflections; they have taken me on historical journeys, tracing their careers through different educational and social landscapes. Their stories are embedded within, and reflective of, wider systemic changes. These accounts do not merely describe events; they construct meaning, identity, and professional purpose across time (Ross & Green, 2011). Narrative Thematic Analysis therefore allows for

the preservation of these temporal and contextual layers while also identifying themes that resonate across individual stories.

My research journey taught me the importance of 'flirting' with the data, allowing me to embrace my 'not knowing' and remain open to ideas beyond my expectations (Phillips, 1994). Josselson (2006) noted that narrative research requires interpretation at every stage, while Chase (2003) warned against excessive interpretation, as it may suggest a lack of reflexivity toward one's own biases. I also explored different interpretive approaches, like 'narrative smoothing' and the development of 'narrative meaning' (Polkinghorne, 1988; Spence, 1986).

Kim (2015) cautioned against 'narrative smoothing' as it can lead to subjective interpretation. Therefore, I analysed the transcripts line by line, focusing on individual words. Additionally, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasised the importance of 'broadening', which involves considering the larger context surrounding the narratives. Maintaining the relevance of the narratives shared during interviews required attention to the context of this research. For instance, the increase in EHCPs is a crucial contextual factor to consider (Atfield et al., 2023).

The analysis followed a mainly inductive approach. However, considering positionality, it is recognised that a completely inductive approach to data analysis is not feasible. Meaning is created from data "... within the framework(s) of theory and interpretation imposed by researchers" (Marecek et al., 1997, p. 632). It is also necessary to be aware of the debate surrounding the use of the term 'emerge' versus 'emergent' for overarching themes and subthemes, as this could downplay the researcher's role in actively working with the data to generate these themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Framing themes as 'emerging' from the data suggests they exist independently and are merely uncovered, whereas in qualitative research, themes are shaped through the researcher's analytical lens, decisions, and reflexive engagement with the data.

Critiques and Support for Thematic Analysis
Thematic Analysis, including its variations, has faced criticism for its perceived lack of sophistication and complexity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite this, Thematic Analysis remains a widely accepted and suitable method for qualitative research, including doctoral-level studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is evidenced by its extensive use and citation in academic publications (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2018; Dawadi, 2020). Some researchers have argued that the method's simplicity is counterbalanced by the researcher's contribution to the analysis, emphasising the interpretative role of the researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

While there is debate about its depth, the creators of Thematic Analysis defend its validity, suggesting it should be considered a standalone method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They note, however, that some scholars recommend combining Thematic Analysis with other interpretative frameworks for richer analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I did not feel combining analysis methods was necessary for the scope of this doctoral thesis, but it could be considered in future research.

Procedure

This section outlines the procedural elements of the research process, including information on participant recruitment, data collection, and the subsequent transcription and analysis.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

In terms of inclusion criteria, Educational Psychologists needed to have been qualified for at least two years and registered with the HCPC. These participants will have had access to regular supervision as required by the HCPC. Participants must have been qualified for at least two years to ensure they had written statutory advice and understood the needs they were familiar with and those with which they felt less familiar.

The potential participants were identified through purposive sampling, and they were Educational Psychologists who met the inclusion criteria as described above (Obilor, 2023; Willig & Rogers, 2017). Purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research, where researchers intentionally choose participants based on the study's objectives, expecting each individual to offer distinct and insightful information. I used this approach because I hoped to gain the narratives of Educational Psychologists' experiences writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar.

I contacted the potential participants by email. I emailed ten Local Authority Educational Psychology Services across the UK, including where I was on placement. The email contained the information about the study, my Participant Recruitment Flyer (Appendix 1), and what participation would involve. The Educational Psychologists were given three weeks to express their interest via email, as stipulated in the Participant Recruitment Flyer.

In selecting participants, I prioritised those I knew the least, ensuring a more diverse and impartial perspective. Eight Educational Psychologists initially expressed interest in the study in response to my Participant Recruitment Flyer. However, I did not send the Information Sheet (Appendix 2) or Consent Form (Appendix 3) to two of them, as I had regular daily interactions with them during placement, and, therefore, it felt unethical for them to be participants in this study. I thanked them for their interest.

The remaining six Educational Psychologists, whom I had only met briefly at team meetings or training days, were invited to participate and ultimately agreed to take part. The participants were all female Educational Psychologists employed by two different Educational Psychology Services. Five participants were employed by one service, while the sixth participant worked for another service. These two Educational Psychology Services were geographically close and sometimes worked collaboratively or attended training days together.

I was aware that there were advantages and limitations to having participants who I already knew (Vuorinen, 2002). For example, limitations could have included the feeling of 'betrayal' when publishing the personal stories of individuals the researcher knows, the matter of prior knowledge shared between the researcher and the participants, and the ethical concerns surrounding the representation of those stories in research along with the

"possibility of reducing friends to little more than paper stereotypes, objectifying them in our writing so that their individuality is stripped away" (Brewis, 2014, p. 850).

Conversely, the benefits are thought to include the ability to establish rapport and trust more effectively, a more profound understanding between the participants and researcher due to shared knowledge, and the participants' openness to sharing honest narratives and reflections with a familiar person (Brewis, 2014; Hodkinson, 2005). There was no exclusion criterion for participants I knew as I did not want to take away the opportunity to participate from those who have expressed an interest in being involved in my research.

The participants gave their consent by signing the Consent Form and returning it to me. I then added my signature and sent the Consent Forms back to them for their records. All participants consented to participate in an individual interview through Google Meet, which is a video conferencing service. Based on participant availability, I arranged their interviews and sent them the Google Meet link they would need to access the online platform on the day of their interview.

The advantages of online interviews include geographic flexibility, increasing convenience, time, and cost efficiency (Kvale, 2012; Novick, 2008; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Furthermore, participants may feel more at ease in familiar environments, and conducting interviews online increases the accuracy and speed of data processing due to the ability to more easily record, transcribe, and analyse the data (Archibald et al., 2019). Disadvantages range from technical issues, which could disrupt the interview process, limited non-verbal cues, and reduced ability to build rapport (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hewson et al., 2003; James & Busher, 2009). On balance, online interviews were the most convenient for the participants and, therefore, became the chosen data collection method for the current research.

Sample Size Considerations
Determining the appropriate sample size for qualitative research is not straightforward. As Butina (2015) notes, "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 192). The sample size in qualitative research depends on various factors, such as the research questions, data collection methods, theoretical framework, and time constraints.

This study follows an idiographic approach, aiming to enhance understanding of Educational Psychologists' perceptions of their role within the statutory process. The goal is not to generalise findings but to deepen existing knowledge. Therefore, a sample size of four to six participants was deemed appropriate, in line with qualitative Thematic Analysis guidelines (Butina, 2015). Research supports this choice, with studies suggesting that six participants are sufficient for studies that use narrative interviews and Thematic Analysis (Anderson & Felsenfeld, 2003; Avidan, 2017).

Additionally, Guest et al. (2006) found that metathemes often emerged by the sixth interview, reinforcing the adequacy of this sample size for qualitative research. A metatheme is a large theme encompassing several smaller, related themes, acting as an overarching concept that summarises the core message of the analysis (Armborst, 2017).

Furthermore, when using Narrative Thematic Analysis, the researcher must gather in-depth information about participants to understand their context fully (Butina, 2015). This process can be slow and meticulous, demanding a high level of immersion in the data. Consequently, narrative approaches are often unsuitable for research involving large groups of anonymous participants (Riessman, 2005).

Data Collection
The interviews lasted around one hour each and were conducted during standard working hours. All interviews were held via Google Meet and recorded and transcribed using Google Meet. Data files were stored securely as indicated in this research's ethical approval. The interview guide allowed the participants' narratives to develop organically.

Transcription
I cleaned the transcripts provided to me by Google Meet by reading them whilst listening to the interview recordings (Butina, 2015). In terms of cleaning, I ensured the verbal content was correct, and I omitted non-essential elements, such as repeated and filler words that could have cluttered the transcripts and impeded the analysis. I did this several times to ensure my transcripts were accurate and that the narratives were clear. Participants were assigned a letter to ensure anonymisation, and any participant identifiers within the transcripts were replaced or removed. Although the Google Meet transcripts were not perfect, I felt using this transcription software was time effective. I also felt I was still able to appropriately immerse myself in the data due to the number of times I needed to listen to the recordings while reading the transcripts to ensure their accuracy.

Approach to Narrative Thematic Analysis
The initial analysis began during the interviews, during which I identified emerging insights, which directed me to probe further and follow certain tangents when questioning the participants (Butina, 2015). Once data collection was finalised, a more thorough analysis began. I needed to immerse myself in and consolidate the data, concentrating on those sections that may have provided insight into the research questions. These segments were then compared, searching for themes in the data. I interpreted what was said and made meaning from these themes, which became the findings of the research (Butina, 2015).

As described, I took a mainly, though not exclusively, inductive approach to handling the raw data. I aimed to start with a data-led perspective when identifying and developing themes. During this approach, I also acknowledged my "theoretical and epistemological commitments" and that analysis does not occur within an "epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

I used Butina's (2015) approach to Narrative Thematic Analysis, which is the most common approach to narrative analysis in which the primary focus is the content of the text.

The steps are as follows (Butina, 2015):
- Stage One - Organisation and preparation of the data
- Stage Two - Obtaining a general sense of the information
- Stage Three - The coding process
- Stage Four - Categories or themes

- Stage Five - Interpretation of the data

This was enacted, in the current research, as follows:

Stages one and two: The organisation and preparation of the data stage began during data collection, involving many re-listenings and re-watchings of the recorded interviews (Butina, 2015). I made preliminary notes on each interview and reflected on my initial observations. These rudimentary patterns or themes were noted through comments in the transcript margins (Appendix 4).

Stage three: The data was coded manually. This was a purposeful decision, as I wanted to engage with the data directly to increase my familiarity with it. Glesne (2006) described coding as the process of organising and categorising collected data to align with the research objectives. This process involved revisiting the transcripts and identifying repeated words, themes, or patterns emerging from the data (Butina, 2015).

I re-read the narratives, highlighting key ideas and any recurring words or themes within each one (see Appendix 5 for an example). I then assigned a corresponding code, a shorthand label, to easily identify the recurring words or ideas in each passage and placed it in the margin. After completing the coding of the first transcript, I created an initial master code list. As I moved on to the next transcript, I applied relevant codes from the master list or developed new ones, adding them to the list (Butina, 2015). By the time all six transcripts were coded, my master code list contained 63 codes, which can be found in Appendix 6. Some of the codes are small, containing only one or two quotes; however, the language used by the participants felt so relevant and poignant, meaning that a distinct code was justified.

The codes within the master code list evolved over time and through multiple re-readings of the transcripts. For example, on some occasions, I needed to merge similar codes or separate codes where I felt there were distinct quotes within a single code. I went through the code list multiple times, considering the quotes within each code and ensuring I felt the code name effectively summarised the quotes.

Stage four: The codes were then assigned to a logical category, or a phrase was used to describe a data segment. Categories indicated the themes that had become apparent and represented the study's core findings. For the current research, the codes were condensed into six main themes including (a) Facilitating Factors (b) Hindering Factors (c) the Role of the Educational Psychologist (d) Contextual Factors (e) Emotional and Ethical Tensions in Statutory Advice Writing, and (f) Narratives and Background Information.

Many codes seemed to naturally group into categories. There was a logical divide between facilitating and hindering factors along with contextual factors, which needed to be considered but did not necessarily impact the participants in positive or negative ways. Codes relating to the role of the Educational Psychologist were distinct from the discussion around the emotional and ethical tensions involved in writing statutory advice. The final overarching theme relates to the information that participants provided to communicate their narratives.

Each overarching theme represented a central organising concept, which provided structures and comprised multiple codes clustered around the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2018). Data that I felt was related has been grouped sensitively (Braun & Clarke, 2021), grouped in a manner that remained attentive to context and participant meaning. The six main themes are distinct; however, I noticed a natural overlap between the codes and themes, and some segments of the data pertained to multiple themes. I have strived to make clear decisions and provide reasoning regarding positioning the data excerpts and codes. Some of the overarching themes and subthemes are common to all the narratives, suggesting similarities between the narratives shared within the interviews.

After conducting a thorough analysis, a decision point emerged regarding the presentation of the data. Initially, my attempt to present the data in its entirety proved to be overwhelming (see Appendix 7 for an example). Despite this, the analysis process was effective and manageable for two of the overarching themes, and those that were relatively smaller in scope. I have chosen to use the term 'code cluster' to refer to these themes, as they are characterised by a minimal number of codes associated with the theme, requiring no further analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Individual decisions were necessary for each overarching theme, as I aimed to avoid a uniform approach across all themes. Some overarching themes were more intricate, containing more associated codes. Given the narrative nature of my research, I have remained acutely aware of the narrative I am co-constructing, as I am conscious of my active role in shaping the story that emerges from the data, and the aesthetic qualities it entails.

To create a coherent and accessible narrative, I have extended the analysis for four overarching themes by identifying subthemes. This approach, I believe, facilitates a more nuanced and compelling representation of the participants' narratives. I view this as a critical step in the evolution of my research, as it has brought me closer to the data and allowed for a more coherent and elegant presentation that effectively conveys the narratives.

Stage five: The final stage of Narrative Thematic Analysis involves interpreting the data or deriving meaning from it. This stage was not entirely separate and occurred concurrently with the coding and categorising phases of the analysis (Butina, 2015). Interpretation entailed examining the categories and their associated codes to identify any broader themes or theories that could offer insights into the perception of the role of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process. The key themes previously outlined represent the overarching themes derived from the narratives. These themes contributed to a deeper understanding of the professional identity of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs they felt less familiar with, within a context containing discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert'.

The analysis was approached inductively and included predominantly the words spoken by the participants during their interviews. However, deductive elements have been included as pre-existing literature contributed to later stages of the analysis and interpretation. A

critical examination of the data, considering its implications for theory and literature, begins during the analysis and is further developed and deepened in the Discussion chapter.

Quality Measures

I took action to guarantee the validity and reliability of my findings. Creswell and Poth (2016) recommended that qualitative researchers use at least two strategies to enhance the consistency and credibility of their research. I ensured adherence to the correct analysis method by sense-checking my coding and themes with my research supervisor and reflecting on any previous experiences or subjectivity that could have influenced the analyses.

As discussed more deeply in further chapters, themes generated from the analysis of individual transcripts resonated with experiences across the other narratives (Willig, 2008). However, due to the small sample size and the individualist nature of the narratives, the research findings were not generalisable to other contexts and could not be used to make conclusions. Additionally, the ontology that underpins this research posits that multiple truths exist, further illustrating the lack of generalisability of my findings. Gergen (1985) highlights that seeking objective truth undermines the significance of the narratives being researched, which would have conflicted with my research aims. Nevertheless, in the Analysis and Discussion chapters, I address similarities and differences between the narratives, acknowledging that readers might construe my findings as generalisable. I was conscious of this and sought to maintain transparency.

Yardley (2017) highlights that the criteria for high-quality qualitative research are meant to be adaptable. Qualitative analysis should be attuned to the data and take into account the meanings participants have constructed. A qualitative researcher must show thorough involvement with the subject matter throughout data collection and analysis. Furthermore, it should be evident how the interpretation has developed from the data. Riessman (2008) cautioned that "fixed criteria for reliability, validity, and ethics developed for experimental research are recommended and misapplied; they are not suitable for evaluating narrative projects" (p. 185).

Moreover, Butina (2015) suggested there are no distinct techniques defined as best suited for the narrative approach. Nonetheless, I was mindful of risks to reliability, such as variations in the participants' 'experienced meaning' and their storied descriptions, which could have resulted from language limitations, reflection, or social desirability biases. I ensured my interpretation stemmed directly from the data (Polkinghorne, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

Consent

Participation was voluntary, and this was made clear in the Information Sheet and Consent Form. No reimbursement was provided, and participants could exit the study at any time if they chose not to proceed. Details about the research and participation were provided to the participants. Participants were allowed to have a conversation and ask questions before agreeing to participate. The Information Sheet contained information about what participation in the research would entail, the aims of the research, information about

consent and confidentiality, details regarding data management, how they should raise concerns, risks, benefits, and an expected timeline of the research.

The subsequent agreement was formalised through the signing of the Consent Forms, providing informed consent, with consent being reaffirmed at the start of each interview. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. I remained attentive to any signs of unease during the interviews and was ready to refer participants to additional support, if necessary. The details of my supervisor, head of the department, and safeguarding lead were also provided. After participating, the participants received a debriefing through a Debrief Sheet (Appendix 8).

Participants were entitled to have their data deleted upon request. The Information Sheet clearly stated a three-week window between participation and the ability to withdraw data. As mentioned, participants' names remained confidential and were only referred to by a single letter. I do not describe the participants in the Analysis chapter as I was concerned that because they worked for a limited number of Educational Psychology Services, they could be identifiable; hence, the narratives and quotes have not been assigned to a particular participant.

Potential Harm
A potential risk to participants was psychological harm and emotional discomfort, as they might have become distressed by recounting potentially upsetting experiences related to writing statutory advice. They could have also been concerned about exposing themselves as poor practitioners. Participants' well-being was safeguarded through sensitive questions and prompts, allowing them to decide what they wished to discuss and share.

The Debrief Sheet contained my contact information should the participants have wanted to contact me to arrange supervision. I had been trained in supervision through the university, and I would have been able to offer them supervision should they have wanted to discuss their feelings about the research, their practice, or the statutory process in general. Furthermore, as the participants were HCPC registered, they would have had regular supervision as part of their role.

I needed to consider the ethical issue of recruiting participants within the Educational Psychology Service within which I was on placement at the time of completing this research. My colleagues could have felt obligated to participate, they could have talked about mutual colleagues that we both knew, and they could have felt inhibited or regretful about what they shared. I added a specific disclaimer for participants who knew me: "Even if you know me personally or we work together, you are not obliged to participate in my research. It is worth considering that you may feel inhibited or regretful about what you share during the process of this research. You can request that your data be deleted. I must ask that you respect the confidentiality of colleagues that we may both know."

Regarding participant numbers, I communicated in advance that I might not be able to include everyone who expressed interest, given the limitations of my doctoral research. Those unable to participate were assured access to the final thesis and a research

presentation after its completion, with information about this clearly stated on the Information Sheet.

Data Processing
All information was saved in accordance with the ethical approval of this research. Participants consented to video and audio recordings. I have watched and listened to the interviews exclusively. After transcription, anonymised interview transcripts were stored securely. All video and audio recordings were permanently deleted afterwards.

The other information saved in this manner included Information and Debrief Sheets, Consent Forms of all the participants, my interview guide, and data analysis. I ensured the security of the data processed. The planned deletion of all this information was in September 2026. This was in case the information was needed for publication.

Analysis

Introduction
I have carefully considered the presentation order, striving to produce a sense of flow, with the overarching themes and subthemes building upon one another to form a developing narrative that, in my view, tells the story of each experience. The overall map of overarching themes and subthemes can be found in Appendix 9, together with individual maps for each overarching theme, which depict the codes relating to each subtheme for four of the overarching themes (Appendix 10). The code names will be presented in **bold** throughout the narrative of the analysis and in the explanation of the overarching themes and subthemes. This is to demonstrate that the code names have been derived from the data. The participants' quotes have been presented in *italics* throughout the Analysis and Discussion chapters to differentiate them from the text in the main body of the thesis.

As mentioned previously, throughout this section, I have used reflective boxes to explore when I felt my subjectivity was impacting the research. The reflective boxes offer another perspective and critical thoughts; they contain personal reflections in response to what was said by the participants. Within my reflective boxes, I also aimed to draw attention to certain quotes or stories that moved me or felt particularly relevant to the research questions. As I conducted narrative research, I drew on White (1995) when creating my reflective boxes; for example, I thought about what struck a chord with me and the power of language.

Additionally, as outlined in the Methodology chapter, the first four overarching themes required further analysis, resulting in the development of subthemes. The last two overarching themes were smaller; therefore, no additional analysis was necessary. Consequently, there are no subthemes for these final two overarching themes, only codes. The first four overarching themes contained rich narratives that could not effectively fit into a single overarching theme; thus, they are divided into subthemes to illustrate nuance. I deemed further analysis unnecessary for the final two overarching themes, as refining these overarching themes into subthemes did not enhance the coherence of the narrative. As previously mentioned, there was natural overlap and connections between some codes and subthemes. Decisions regarding the placement of these codes and subthemes are discussed throughout this chapter.

List of Overarching Themes
Facilitating Factors
This overarching theme relates to factors that facilitate Educational Psychologists being able to write statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they feel less familiar. The subthemes encompass what supports them to write the advice and what motivates them to do so.

Hindering Factors
This overarching theme relates to factors that hinder Educational Psychologists from being able to write statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they feel less familiar. The subthemes encompass what makes it difficult to write the statutory advice and the pressures the participants considered, which impact the situation negatively.

Role of the Educational Psychologist
This overarching theme relates to the role of the Educational Psychologist and the different perceptions that exist. Having a clear remit around the role of an Educational Psychologist within a statutory assessment felt especially important when the Educational Psychologists were being asked to write statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which they felt less familiar. There was discussion around the discourses of 'expert' versus 'non-expert' concerning the Educational Psychologists' role and how the statutory advice is perceived.

Contextual Factors
This overarching theme relates to the contextual factors that Educational Psychologists recognise and may encounter when writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they feel less familiar. This theme differs from the factors that either hinder or facilitate an Educational Psychologist's ability to write statutory advice. The subthemes associated with this overarching theme include environmental factors that Educational Psychologists consider during the writing of all statutory advice. Discussing cases where the Educational Psychologists felt less familiar with a child's needs highlighted the significance of these contextual factors.

Emotional and Ethical Tensions in Statutory Advice Writing
This overarching theme relates to the feelings and reflections the Educational Psychologists had after writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar. This overarching theme encapsulates the complex emotions, ethical dilemmas, and professional frustrations experienced by Educational Psychologists when writing statutory advice for children with less familiar or more complex needs. Participants reflected on the emotional burden of their work, particularly when engaging with children facing life-limiting conditions, as well as the dissatisfaction with the broader statutory process. There is a palpable sense of disconnect from the outcomes of their statutory advice, as many Educational Psychologists are unaware of the impact of their recommendations on a child's education or well-being.

Narratives and Background Information
This final overarching theme relates to the information that the Educational Psychologists had to provide to effectively relay their narratives. This information was important for the participants to consider when building their narratives of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which an Educational Psychologist feels less familiar within a context that contains the discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert'.

Overarching Theme One: Facilitating Factors

Figure 1: Overarching Theme One, Facilitating Factors, and the Corresponding Subthemes

Subtheme 1: Engaging with Parents
Participants spoke about their engagement with the parents and carers of the children for whom they were writing the statutory advice, hence the name of this subtheme. They discussed how helpful the parents and carers were and how they provided information that was required about their children and their situation for the statutory assessment. This facilitated the Educational Psychologists to write the statutory advice. When I refer to 'parents' within this subtheme and for the remainder of the thesis, I am referring to all those with parental/caring responsibilities.

When the participants discussed writing statutory advice for a child with needs with which they felt they were less familiar, there was a conversation around being **open about being less familiar** with the needs of the child. The Educational Psychologists found it helpful to be open and honest with the parents and not pretend to know everything about the needs of their child. This allowed for open communication and co-construction of outcomes and provisions, which an Educational Psychologist must include within their statutory advice and be unique to each child (Crane, 2016).

I certainly would not have a problem with being open. So, I probably would have been very open but I probably didn't need to be because she probably would know that it's a very rare condition so she was probably aware that a lot of people wouldn't know much about it but it wouldn't surprise me at all if I'd said, you know I haven't come across this before and you know she might have even sent me some stuff on it…I wouldn't have a problem with saying this is new to me. Can you tell me... how it is for you and how it affects her?

The participants spoke in very emphatic and moving ways about the parents and families of the children for whom they wrote the statutory advice. They expressed **sympathy and praise for parents** in terms of their situation, how they handled it, and admiration for how far they were willing to go to ensure that their children were appropriately supported in their educational setting. There was a sense of allegiance with parents and families and wanting to write statutory advice to help them and their situation.

Sympathy was expressed in the following ways:
It seemed very sad for the parents.

She was in an incredibly difficult position... real sense from the parent that this is incredibly complex, and no one is acknowledging how complex and how difficult this is.

Praise was given to parents in terms of how they handled their child's circumstances, especially in relation to certain conditions or diagnoses of their children, some of which were life-limiting. There was also discussion about how the parents' ability to handle their child's circumstances supported the Educational Psychologist in gathering the necessary information to write the statutory advice and cope with the situation's emotional impact.

I think because her mother was so kind of sensible and sort of had somehow... she was dealing with it really well, and I think that just... helped me to deal with it really.

Feeling impassioned about the results of the case following a statutory assessment facilitated the participants to write statutory advice, as the Educational Psychologists wanted their statutory advice to lead to positive outcomes for children and young people.

One participant spoke about the results of the case and the feelings it brought up for them:
When the plan came out…it went to the parents for a mainstream setting, and I was heartbroken…but the parents went to appeal, and they won, and she did get a specialist place, but they shouldn't have had to do that.

Admiration was expressed by this participant for these parents for what they went through for their child:
... but the parents went to appeal, and I admire them because…I don't know if I would have had the courage or the energy to do it. But anyway, they did, and they won.

I felt this participant was imagining themselves in the place of the parents when discussing the outcome of this case, which led to some of the most poignant words of this research:
But this is not why I came to be an EP.

EP is an abbreviation for Educational Psychologist within this and subsequent quotes. Although dissatisfaction with the role of Educational Psychologists and the current SEND system is touched upon within this subtheme regarding sympathy felt for parents, it is explored further in a subsequent subtheme, titled **anger and dissatisfaction**.

The participants explained how they approached **speaking to parents,** further exemplifying their engagement with parents and how this facilitated their ability to write statutory advice:

I look at the basics, and then I go to the parents, and I try and understand what's their understanding... because they're often on a journey themselves, particularly if it's a chromosomal disorder, and so I need to meet them where they are at the moment and focus on next week at school. How can we help and make it a bit more concrete?

The participants talked about parents' expertise about their children and shared that the best way to understand a child is through talking to the adults who support them and know them best.

... the best way to get information about her was by speaking to the adults who knew her best.

One participant described a mother as an... *expert on her son.*

Subtheme 2: The Need for Strategies and Support

This subtheme relates to participants describing different strategies they used to write the statutory advice and avenues of support they could draw upon, such as **using supervision.** The participants sought supervision to facilitate their ability to write statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar.

... through the discussions with my line manager.

One participant also discussed bringing feelings of uncertainty to supervision:

... I've had these kinds of conversations in supervision... and I have sort of I know I've said to my past line manager, you know, well who am I to say?

Participants considered the benefit of **peer supervision**, **including the EHC panel**, especially for cases with needs with which they felt less familiar as they were able to talk to other Educational Psychologists to find out if they had experienced this need previously and how they had managed to write the statutory advice. The participants also talked about how attending the EHC panel and witnessing this has improved their writing of statutory advice as it has allowed them to hear about different needs and what other Educational Psychologists are suggesting for these needs. The Education, Health, and Care (EHC) panel is a multi-agency group of professionals from education, health, and social care that reviews requests for Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessments, making decisions about whether a statutory assessment is needed, and the issuance of EHCPs, among other matters related to SEND (Spivack et al., 2014).

I did consult colleagues. I said, has anybody done anything, any piece of work like this, and how did you...how did you cope with getting the advice right?

I found going to panel meetings quite helpful for that because…when you go to panel you get to see other people's advice, which is quite useful… almost to kind of widen what you're used to saying because I think you can get into a bit of a rut always recommending the same things…

One participant talked about seeking peer supervision to manage the emotional impact of working with challenging situations and circumstances:
...to colleagues... that little bit of a… this poorly boy you know and just wanting to release a little bit of the upset if you know what I mean.

Participants discussed the **co-construction** of outcomes and provisions during a statutory assessment, which was sometimes done using a **Joint Assessment Meeting (JAM)**. JAMs are a new method of providing statutory advice, which allows for a more inclusive and efficient advice process, involving parents and those who are familiar with the child in developing a joint assessment document (*Joint Assessment Meetings (JAMs) | Sheffield*, 2023). JAMs place a focus on devising these shared outcomes as a collective.

Co-constructing the outcomes and provision with the adults who support the child was found to be particularly helpful, especially in cases where the Educational Psychologist felt less familiar with the needs of the child, and this has allowed them to feel comfortable to submit their advice as they knew it has been co-constructed and there was a shared understanding. This also appeared to reduce the time it was taking for Educational Psychologists to complete their statutory advice in addition to supporting others within the process to feel a sense of being valued through their joint contribution.

But if anything, these days I'd say they're a bit quicker, particularly with the co-construction of outcomes.

So now I might be more inclined to do that since we've been doing the JAMs and the sort of co-constructing with parents…

…we kind of worked on this together. This is what we agreed. These are the needs, so it's not a surprise to anyone, and I think people value that and value yes feeling like... they've been part of this process and therefore they're invested in... what's happening.

Co-constructing the outcomes and provision with the adults that support the child has helped decrease the time taken on writing statutory advice:
... and that's where the co-construction has really helped.

The participants discussed other ways, outside of co-constructing outcomes, they could write their statutory advice more quickly. Finding a **time-efficient** way to write statutory advice is important for all statutory work; however, it is particularly important when the Educational Psychologist feels less familiar with the needs of the child, and they are spending time researching these needs and considering the outcomes and provision more than usual in comparison to when they feel more familiar with the needs of the child.

There was a conversation about when and where it was best to meet parents to be strategic around time efficiency:
I think I used to find it more time-efficient to meet them in school actually because then you sort of did the whole thing all in one go and if things cropped up with the parents, you could check them out with school staff and vice versa and so on and often you know school staff would be in the meeting as well…so in some ways that was probably easier or just more time-efficient…

One participant talked about the amount of time they used to **research** the needs of the child when they felt less familiar; however, as their confidence has grown, they have found they do not need to do this as much and instead they focus on the impact of these needs on the child and what the parents want:
I used to research for hours and hours to try and find out much more about them.

The participants described what they did to make themselves feel more familiar with the needs of the child, which allowed them to feel confident to submit the statutory advice after initially feeling less familiar.

I remembered looking up Rett syndrome, and I knew I'd already got a little thing on my computer about Rett Syndrome, so I knew I'd looked it up before…

... because I'd done then quite a lot of research as to what it was, and actually there was lots of other difficulties as well learning difficulties and other things, which were much more within my comfort area.

Subtheme 3: Novelty and Purpose in Statutory Advice Writing
This subtheme relates to feelings that Educational Psychologists have experienced in the process of writing statutory advice. For example, the sense of motivation, interest, and purpose that drives them to approach these cases with engagement and determination. The participants discussed that although they felt less familiar with the child's needs, the fact they were unfamiliar with the child's needs made the piece of work **novel and interesting**. Feeling interested in the work and wanting to research it, facilitated the Educational

Psychologist to feel inspired to write the statutory advice for a child with needs with which they felt less familiar.

…and it wasn't EBSA. So…that made it novel this year.

One participant expressed that Educational Psychologists need to remember that **we can make a difference** even when we feel less familiar with the needs of a child or we feel that factors are working against us. Keeping this in mind supported this participant to approach every case positively:
We need to remember the difference we can make in that moment to that family in that school... yes, sometimes it's harder than others... where you can walk away feeling that you've done a good job, then that's a good day, isn't it?

The participants expressed the need to have **motivation and purpose**. Motivation to write statutory advice, and a need to feel the work is purposeful and engaging for them. It was discussed that this is a better way to work and experience job satisfaction in contrast to feeling a lack of purpose or engagement.

It just felt so much more... I don't know doing a purpose... it just felt much more satisfying, much more sort of engaging, much more sort of purposeful.

A participant working in more of a managerial role wanted the Educational Psychologists working with her to:
... feel motivated and fresh to take on the next case.

One participant mentioned that writing statutory advice for a child with needs that she felt she was less familiar with was a... *particularly engaging piece of work because... [she] found out stuff.*

There was a conversation about how the school and parents value statutory advice. It was felt that if the Educational Psychologist invested time and effort into their statutory advice, the time spent would be worthwhile. Knowing this facilitates an Educational Psychologist to write statutory advice for children with needs with which they felt they were less familiar as they would be aware of how important it is to schools and families. Furthermore, becoming familiar with a wide variety of needs is good for the continuing professional development of Educational Psychologists.

*But I hope that if we invest in them that they will still be **valued pieces of work**.*

The participants discussed that although they felt less familiar with the child's needs, the statutory advice still needed to be written, and they needed to find a way to move forward. I called this code '**Keep Calm and Carry On**' as this was the phraseology used by the participants.

You know I'm here to do a job for them. To make that part as much of that part that I can…manageable, make better, make, well, not better, you know, but make manageable…try and think of all the things…that would be helpful in terms of that part that

they wanted me to you know…to look at which was for what…he still needs to be educated. He still needs to learn something. He still needs to engage with activities, and what sort of activities can we help him to be engaged with that he will enjoy as much as possible...take his perhaps take his mind off, you know and so forth so kind of you know get on with the job as it were so.

So, I thought just get on with it.

There was a discussion emphasising that an Educational Psychologist must overcome any discomfort stemming from unfamiliarity with the child's needs and focus on fulfilling their responsibilities to support the child's educational development:
But once you've kind of got over that, I think it's about really trying to utilise the information from the relevant professionals that you have…make sure you've got as much information as is available in those areas but then just kind of keep calm carry on and think but what's my role in all this? Because however much information they have around the impact of deafness or…the understanding of needs relating to that. You've still got that angle around…how are they engaging in school? How are they with their friends?

One participant was particularly **positive about statutory work**; however, she acknowledged that as she was taking on a more managerial position, she did not have to complete much statutory work and found herself conducting school visits less often. Feeling positive about statutory work could facilitate Educational Psychologists to manage more complex situations and write advice for children with needs with which they feel they are less familiar.

I think it's a unique…I really like them. I just think as long as there aren't too many, and I guess I'm in a privileged position in that I don't have a huge number, I do lots of other things. So, it's probably one of my rewarding jobs…I love going in schools. That's my favourite day when I'm in a school, so it's very much, oh good I've got another case.

It was also expressed how interesting she finds statutory work:
I think statutory work is fascinating.

Subtheme 4: Engaging with and Understanding the Child
The participants spoke about engaging with the child and understanding their needs and their current situation. The participants shared reflections about originally feeling less familiar with the needs of the child for whom they were trying to write the statutory advice but concluded that statutory advice ought to be **unique and specific to each child and** stressed the importance of **not reducing a child to their diagnosis**. The participants felt that statutory advice needs to be specific to each child and would not necessarily be the same for two children with the same diagnosis. Coming to this conclusion has perhaps allowed Educational Psychologists to feel more confident to write statutory advice for children with needs with which they felt less familiar. Within the following quotes and throughout the remainder of this thesis, FASD stands for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. FASD is a condition resulting from prenatal exposure to alcohol (Kalberg & Buckley, 2007).

So even if FASD was an element of her presentation or explains to some extent some elements of her presentation. There were always going to be the other factors. There was always going to be the trauma that she'd experienced. There was always going to be the fact that she was separated from her caregivers.

Do I need an in-depth understanding of FASD to be able to say where a child currently is? I don't think so…could have read every book there is on FASD and every journal article there is an FASD and still met the child and been surprised by some of her strengths but also some of her needs…

But again, it's not you know there's the phrase about autism isn't there… you meet one autistic child, then you've met one autistic child. You know that it doesn't tell you anything that you can generalise about autistic children in general.

So, I think it's also not being blinded by a diagnosis that... takes you down one path, but actually we need... to think about the whole child…

… in my view, the child and family should be at the heart, and it should be unique and personable to them, so I'm very sceptical of big lists of pre-conceived outcomes and pre-written provision.

Reflective Box 2: Important Code
This code felt particularly important throughout the research. The participants would often come back to not reducing a child to their diagnosis and looking at the whole child. I felt this was how the Educational Psychologists managed their feelings of being less familiar with the needs of the child by focusing on the impact on their learning and the whole picture rather than on a diagnosis they had not encountered previously.

The participants spoke passionately about everything they do being in the **child's best interest**. They did not want to do anything that would harm the child or cause them distress. Remembering that they were working for the child's best interest could make the Educational Psychologists feel more able to submit statutory advice for a child with needs with which they felt less familiar as they could focus on what would be best for that child.

… we want the child's best interest, don't we…

But my loyalty in the sense of loyalty has to be to the child.

The participants expressed **sympathy for the child** for whom they were writing the statutory advice. Feeling this way towards the child supported the Educational Psychologist to write the statutory advice despite feeling less familiar with the needs of the child as they wanted to do the best job they could do, which would support the child.

… this poorly boy, you know, and just wanting to release a little bit of the upset if you know what I mean.

The participants also expressed how they felt when they learned about the needs of the child:
I was distressed about the needs of the child.

There was sympathy expressed when the results of the case were discussed:
…it was a tragedy really.

Reflective Box 3: Sympathy for the Child
It was quite difficult to hear some of the stories that the Educational Psychologists told concerning this topic. They described challenging conditions and diagnoses, some of which were life-limiting. The participants compared these children to their own and could not even fathom this happening to their own children. I was moved by how much emotion was expressed by these participants. One might think that Educational Psychologists may become used to hearing about circumstances such as this, but this made me think that one never gets used to situations like this or hearing terrible stories. I wondered about the impact on their well-being and if supervision is always used effectively to manage the emotional impact of the job. I also wondered if it was appreciated how emotionally draining some of these situations could be for an Educational Psychologist. Of course, this is linked to the Educational Psychologists' competency in managing the emotional burden of working in a pressured environment. However, I perhaps did not appreciate until now the true importance of this competency.

The participants spoke about how they **speak to the child and understand their views** when writing statutory advice. Gathering their views and understanding what they wanted from their education facilitated the Educational Psychologist to write the statutory advice despite feeling less familiar with the needs of the child as they could be led by the child's wants and wishes.

... and you know the lad himself, he would have told me what his hopes were and all around what he likes doing all of that sort of a thing.

The participants discussed how they approached gathering the voice of the child:
…is there any different way of communicating with this young person? I mean often there isn't is there, because any child…can freeze and find it hard to so I always have visuals with me anyway because it's yeah it's an easier…but you always try and be prepared that you've got the right level of activity…and pictures so that they're gonna engage and find it quite well, you know not too alien a concept to come and talk to you about things.

One participant described facilitating meetings and, if the child could not attend, supporting the adults in the room to imagine how they might be feeling or what they might be thinking:
... we would try and have the young person present, but it wasn't always possible but we often... like have an empty seat. So okay, let's imagine they're sitting there, and we're all saying that we would like them to, yeah, do whatever it is. We've decided they're gonna learn their times tables. How would they feel about that? Is that something they would want to do, or how can we make it something that would be relevant to them?

Subtheme 5: External Support and Contextual Factors in Statutory Advice Writing
This subtheme relates to external factors such as the relationships with schools, colleagues, and other professionals and situational elements such as workload balance and school support, which facilitate the writing of the statutory advice. It reflects how these external influences help Educational Psychologists navigate situations where they feel less familiar with the child's needs, providing them with the resources, motivation, and context to carry out the work effectively.

The participants discussed the **relationship that they had with the school and children** and how potentially being the **link Educational Psychologist** for the school facilitated the writing of statutory advice. This was especially pertinent in situations where they felt less familiar with the needs of the child, or it was a particularly emotive set of circumstances. There was also an appreciation that this is not the norm currently within their Educational Psychology practice, but this is more how it would have been in the past. A link Educational Psychologist is designated to a particular school or setting and would be the first point of contact (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Educational Psychology Services practice differently, so having allocated educational settings may only be relevant to certain services.

I look back fondly on those years when I would meet a youngster, do all of that initial work, make suggestions... come back and review with them... you know in the plan, do, review cycle.

…the conversation was easier because it was in one of my schools with a SENDCo who I knew…it adds to the challenge when you're in a school where you don't know the school and you don't know the SENDCo writing advices, which obviously we're doing a lot of but this one I did.

One of the participants described leaving one of her schools and being able to reflect on the work they had done together and the progress the children had made:
One of my proudest moments was leaving one of my primary schools that I've been with for a very long time and... just reflecting on the progress children have made…

Educational Psychologists who wrote statutory advice for children with less familiar needs felt that the **involvement of other professionals** was particularly important. They could refer to the advice given by these professionals and, in doing so, learn more about the child's needs.

I think... with discussions with... everybody because obviously I would have been speaking with the clinical psychologist.

…also, the Physiotherapy service were key because you know a lot of her needs were physical, and so it was difficult for me.

The participants discussed reaching out to other teams for support:
We had a physical disabilities team in that authority, so I reached out to them.

One participant talked about contacting another Educational Psychologist who had worked with the child previously to gather as much information as possible:
I actually contacted the EP about that, and then if I felt there was information missing, I might sort of get that from school as well.

The participants talked about how school staff and parents are just so **pleased and grateful to see an Educational Psychologist** and to continue with the EHCP process. It appears these feelings facilitated the Educational Psychologists to write statutory advice for children with needs with which they felt less familiar. This was because the adults supporting the child were just grateful that the Educational Psychologist could be there, and it appeared to feel like anything that the Educational Psychologist did was supportive, which perhaps alleviated feelings of discomfort of being less familiar with the needs of the child.

…just grateful that you're in the room.

There was also discussion that schools would make arrangements quickly to have an Educational Psychologist come into the school to see the child, which supported the participants in writing the advice:
It's the EP. Yes, you can come; we'll move heaven and earth. We'll make sure you know this child, he/she is not going to be off sick, or you know they're just pleased... and parents are just so you know they're delighted as well.

There was a conversation about the contextual considerations of having a **balanced workload** with lots of different types of work that allows an Educational Psychologist to feel motivated to take on the next piece of work. Feeling they have a balanced workload and that they have time to complete their statutory advice facilitates Educational Psychologists to feel able to write statutory advice for needs with which they feel less familiar as they have the time and motivation to engage in this work in a manner that feels comfortable.

We need to look at that balance and make sure there's enough other interesting work as well that is maintained.

... it's getting the right balance, so people aren't burnt out with the number of cases they are given and feel motivated and fresh to take on the next case.
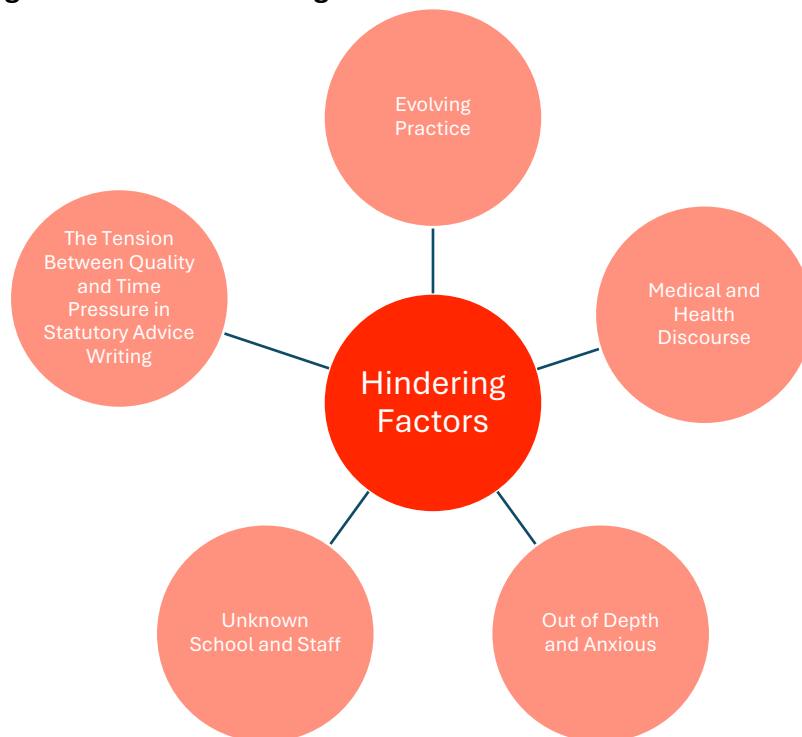
Overarching Theme Two: Hindering Factors

Figure 2: Overarching Theme Two, Hindering Factors, and the Corresponding Subthemes

Subtheme 1: Evolving Practice

This subtheme relates to the conversation around practice changing and evolving along with the statutory advice itself. Participants discussed the importance of staying up to date with best practices and evidence-based practice; however, it was also expressed that it is **hard to stay up to date** within the time allocated to Educational Psychologists to complete statutory assessments. Being unable to keep up to date with best practices could have impacted Educational Psychologists completing statutory advice for children with needs with which they felt less familiar as time will need to be spent to get up to date.

I think you can get into a bit of a rut always recommending the same things and of course then time passes and obviously, you know some things now are getting quite old and it's trying to get up to date and it's how you maintain being up to date as well as really trying to make sure you're sort of as evidence-based as possible. And that's something I think when you're doing the job day in... day out... it's hard to know how best to…

The participants expressed that they experience **difficulties with the specificity** required for provision and outcomes within statutory advice. This difficulty is then exacerbated by the Educational Psychologist feeling less familiar with the needs of the child.

... specific as one possibly can, but there are certain things that I just feel…I don't know how often he needs a break. He needs regular breaks…I haven't the faintest idea how often and how long…

A difficulty that is experienced is justifying the need for the specific provision that the Educational Psychologist has stipulated:

If I'm totally honest, can I always justify, like what am I trying to say? You know, where is the evidence for me saying an hour of literacy intervention a day is going to be exactly the right amount for this child to make progress and if you give them 45 minutes, it's not enough and if you give them an hour and 15 minutes, it's overkill, it's not necessary…

One participant discussed wanting to seek support from the school with their specificity:
I was sort of writing about handwriting, and I was like, oh you know…how often do they need to do handwriting and it's a bit like well I don't know, and I tried to ask the school and didn't really get much back from them which was frustrating because I thought they might help with that.

Reflective Box 4: Specificity
I have also been struggling to increase the specificity of my statutory advice. I have been having similar reflections around how I know how many breaks the child needs, and how I know how long their literacy intervention needs to be. Who am I to say such things? It felt quite validating to hear that qualified Educational Psychologists are feeling the same way.

Subtheme 2: Medical and Health Discourse
The needs of the children with which the Educational Psychologists felt they were less familiar were discussed. **Medical and health discourses** and needs were talked about specifically, and the involvement of medical professionals. It appeared that medical and health needs felt less familiar to Educational Psychologists, which impacted their ability and confidence in writing the statutory advice.

The presenting need was Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which I hadn't heard of at the time…and when I looked it up, it seemed to be quite medical.

… the needs were around sort of medically related factors... specifically around a treatment the chemotherapy that the boy had received so obviously I saw that on the original request so I was aware that that's what school potentially were saying is we've been alerted by the medics that this might be an issue.

One participant talked about the difference between a diagnosis or condition that can be tested for versus one that cannot and the impact on parents and carers:
…it's very different to a kind of a condition or a disorder that can be tested for and I think this parent was finding that difficult, you know there are other kind of conditions or needs where we will work with children where you know a doctor can do a blood test and find out about chromosomal abnormalities or do other things that medics do to kind of say yes, 100% this is happening for this child…this is something that's kind of provable almost and I think this parent understandably was struggling with the fact that FASD didn't come with that.

Subtheme 3: Out of Depth and Anxious
Educational Psychologists discussed feeling **out of their depth and anxious** when receiving a request for statutory assessment for a child with needs with which they felt less familiar.

Feeling this way was described as hindering participants from being able to complete statutory advice such as this.

…feeling a bit out of my depth, not understanding the syndrome or the impact and what it would mean…

… because at the beginning with the anxiety, I'd be thinking…I would definitely be feeling out of my depth. Oh my gosh. What am I going to do? How am I going to deal with this?

One participant mentioned feeling anxious when they receive a new statutory assessment and the level to which the anxiety remains or reduces:
…but I'm always anxious when I get a new case.

…and so yes, when I get a new one, I do…I always have that slight anxiety in the beginning, and…yeah, it goes away in varying degrees depending what the nature of the needs are, and how easy it is to get in and get the information.

Related to this code, the participants discussed feeling anxious because the child's parents were also anxious:
So, you know, if I go in to write an advice and if the parent is incredibly anxious, then you can guarantee I feel a little bit more anxious when I'm doing the assessment and when I'm subsequently writing it up because you know rightly so. Mum was desperate to get it right for this little girl and then in turn I think that, you know, creates an element of pressure…I'm not saying that's a bad thing…there should be some pressure on me to get it right and to do the best job I possibly can.

Reflective Box 5: Anxiety
I was surprised to learn that the participants feel anxious when they are assigned a new case and not just when they feel less familiar with the needs of the child. I thought this was unique to being in training rather than something that might follow me throughout my career. There appears to be a spike of anxiety when they are assigned a new case which then lessens when they read the information and can think about how they will approach the statutory assessment.

Subtheme 4: Unknown School and Staff
The participants talked about being **unknown to the school and staff** and not being the link Educational Psychologist for the school and how this impacted their ability to complete a statutory assessment. Being unknown to and unfamiliar with the educational setting exacerbated the Educational Psychologists feeling uncomfortable with being less familiar with the needs of the child. It was discussed that this is becoming more common.

…a lot of the work would be in schools that I've only just met up with, so I don't know them at all what they do what they don't do, that's sort of stuff.

The context was that we were allocated statutory assessments that weren't necessarily from our schools. So, this piece of work was in a school that I hadn't been to before.

This was also discussed concerning an Educational Psychologist's engagement with parents:
It was just like right, I'm gonna meet with you twice, and I've got you know an hour to tell you everything that I'm worried about and everything.

Subtheme 5: The Tension Between Quality and Time Pressure in Statutory Advice Writing
This subtheme relates to issues within Educational Psychology Services, which hinder Educational Psychologists from being able to write their statutory advice, particularly how the pressure to produce statutory advice quickly conflicts with the time and effort needed to ensure the advice is thorough and appropriate, especially when the needs of the child or young person are complex or unfamiliar. It also touches on the unpredictability of case assignments, the lack of sufficient supervisory support, and the underlying tension between the demands of the statutory system and the goal of providing high-quality, well-considered statutory advice for each case.

A participant said that she wanted to use supervision to support her in writing statutory advice for a child or young person whose needs felt less familiar to her; however, her supervisor was not available, which meant she was **not able to use supervision**, which had an impact on her ability to write this statutory advice. Potentially, when the next opportunity for supervision arises, the statutory advice deadline might have passed, further limiting Educational Psychologists' abilities to use supervision effectively.

Well, I was going to, but he was on leave, so…I didn't.

The participants talked about the **time it takes** to write statutory advice, and they were also aware of the **time pressure** to write them in a certain amount of time. This felt like an additional pressure, especially when they were writing statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which they felt they were less familiar as it was going to take them more time to write, which was not always available to them.

…it takes a certain amount of time…you can't do it any quicker…needs you to invest that time in it.

…they just take me a long time to write because I want to get it right…and also all the reading that you have to do beforehand…it takes me probably at least half a day to go through all the information…

But we were under a lot of restriction from the powers above to get everything in on time…there was a vast increase in the number of statutory requests for statutory assessment.

It was discussed that some cases simply take longer, and that was an accepted part of the process for this participant:
…my experience to date that if It's a particularly complicated piece of work, my line manager isn't going to get upset or you know…be commenting on the time…because I think it's recognised that occasionally there are some that do take a bit longer.

The participants explained that statutory assessments are **randomly assigned** to their name with seemingly limited appreciation that certain children's needs are more complex than others and could take an Educational Psychologist longer to complete. This felt particularly pertinent when the Educational Psychologist felt less familiar with the needs of the child, and there was no way to predict the needs of the child they would be next assigned.

…it was just randomly assigned to my name.

Yes, and that is just the luck of the draw, I suppose…

The **tribunal and appeals** processes were discussed by the participants, related to writing statutory advice. There was a feeling that statutory advice needed to be of a certain quality despite the Educational Psychologist feeling less familiar with the needs of the child. There was a conversation that Educational Psychologists should not fear the tribunal process, and they expressed dissatisfaction that parents had to go through the process at all.

... not being too afraid of the old tribunal process.

But the parents went to appeal, and they won, and she did get a specialist place, but they shouldn't have had to do that.

Overarching Theme Three: Role of the Educational Psychologist

Figure 3: Overarching Theme Three, Role of the Educational Psychologist, and the Corresponding Subthemes

Subtheme 1: Educational Psychologists' Perception of Their Role
This subtheme relates to Educational Psychologists' perception of the role of an Educational Psychologist within the statutory process. The participants discussed that they felt their

statutory advice was being used to **reassure school** staff that the provision they were putting in place for a child was helpful or to make them feel more comfortable about how to support a child.

... to enable the school to kind of feel more comfortable.

I think that they did want that reassurance.

There was conversation around the **role of the Educational Psychologist from the Educational Psychologist's perspective,** which could be different from or in contrast with others' perception of the role. The participants discussed the need to explain their role to parents and school staff and make this clear when completing a statutory assessment.

…this is the chance from an objective professional to say hmm, I wonder if they're not interacting socially because they can't understand language? Or I wonder if that's rooted in something else that we can go on from a different path and support them with that?

I think I see the statutory assessment process as more about identifying where a child currently is with particular skills, where they might reasonably be expected to get to in the coming kind of year or key stage, and what support they need. So, it kind of felt like me and the parent were coming with slightly different views of what my job or what my role was.

Gathering the voice of the child was described to be a key part of the role of an Educational Psychologist within the statutory process:
You know also the kind of the voice of the child, I guess, is a key part of what we can add to it and just in terms of their engagement... in school... the hopes for the future. They're all the sorts of things that the other professionals perhaps wouldn't seem to add, I would say, and so I know we've got a unique bit that we can bring.

It was also discussed how Educational Psychologists sometimes need to explain about their role in the process:
I'm quite happy to have that conversation with people that that's not... we're not going to be looking at the type of provision but more what they need when they get there.

So, I always spend ages describing... discussing that and what the next part of the process is and who they can go to with queries.

Related to the role of the Educational Psychologist, the participants said that they are interested in the **impact** the needs have on a child in their education, which is what they need to understand to write the statutory advice. Understanding the impact of the needs of the child seemed to be a main part of the role of the Educational Psychologist within the statutory process.

The impact of it so therefore, the impact on his schooling where he's, you know, it was so variable.

Concerning feeling less familiar with the needs of the child, one participant discussed recognising their role within the statutory process in relation to the impact the child's needs were having on their education:
…hang on there's an opening here because they're saying how it's affecting him in school, and it's like I can do that bit.

Subtheme 2: Parent Perception of Educational Psychologists' Role and Advice
This subtheme relates to the **parent's perception of the Educational Psychologist's role and the statutory advice** itself. There was discussion around what the parents expected the Educational Psychologist to do and what the parents wanted from the statutory advice.

…I think they come into it thinking that the EP is going to take my child into a room and assess them and come up with a solution and phrase or a word to describe them...but that isn't how we work anyway, so and I think it just possibly accelerates that change of perception of what we do.

The parent very much saw the statutory assessment process as something that would provide her with some answers in terms of where some of her child's needs came from…I'm talking to an expert, and then I think I was like, oh I'm not an expert... she was like, oh that's what I thought an EP was…Yeah, I think quite often we have that don't we people assume that we know a huge amount about all different types of what we might have previously called like atypical child development, and I don't know if we do, and I also don't know if we need to…

Subtheme 3: Psychological Skills and Formulation
This subtheme relates to participants discussing how they use their psychological skills, knowledge, and formulation within statutory assessments and the subsequent statutory advice that is written. There was a conversation around whether they feel **psychology** is still a part of the statutory advice, and this seemed to have changed over time.

... and I don't know if it does massively come into an EHC advice anymore...use my psychological skills to gather information for the EHC but am I doing what I would call a psychological formulation for an EHC, no.

I think I did in the sense of looking for if you're thinking brief therapy terms when you're talking to somebody who tells you I've got this horrible problem, blah de blah and so in brief therapy terms…you might say well what's one thing that would help you to feel better about it or one thing that could make it different…I could use psychology there.

There was a conversation around having hypotheses and testing them using assessment materials and in consultation with parents and school staff:
I suppose I wanted to direct my assessment, particularly to the hypotheses.

The participants discussed their psychological **formulation** within the statutory advice. The participants talked about how they formulated the case and whether they think the psychological formulation is a big part of statutory advice currently.

… so I always go back to all my…interactive factors and thinking what different spheres and how they would all link up and how I would do my little diagrams but in a much more sort of informal fluid way, so…you just check out your hunches, don't you…and then then it will kind of falls into place and it's like that triangulation.

…because I think it does come down to…what is the purpose of psychological advice versus what is the purpose of statutory advice if that makes sense. So I suppose, for me, there was a time when it felt like actually I don't know if I'm explaining this in a very clear way, but for me, there was a time when advice that I wrote for statutory assessment did feel like it had a psychological formulation and maybe then it would have felt really important to kind of understand where a child's needs came from. But I think rightly or wrongly there has been a shift in more recent years where actually what we're being asked for is advice that informs the EHC and that actually what people need is a really clear sense of where a child is at where a child is likely to get to and what support or not get to…but get to in the coming whatever marker we put to it three terms key stage and what support they need to be able to get there…it's really interesting that your question about psychological formulation has kind of thrown me a little bit because I guess I kind of think I'm not sure if I do that in my statutory advices.

Subtheme 4: Negotiating and Refining Statutory Advice
This subtheme relates to participants discussing changes they have made to statutory advice once it has been submitted. They talked about conversations they had with parents and the EHC panel about their advice, what needed to change, and how comfortable they felt when **negotiating and refining statutory advice**. There was also a conversation, again, about the specificity of outcomes and provision. This subtheme speaks to the dynamic process of refining statutory advice to best serve the child's needs while balancing the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. It underlines the value of clear communication and mutual understanding in this process. This all seems to be part of the role of an Educational Psychologist.

It's usually been when parents have obviously if it's gone through…to draft plan gone to parents and if parents are being you know very particular which is absolutely fine and quite right too you know and if they want clarity about well how much time, how long and how often…

I quality assure lots of other EPs' advices…so I have had lots and lots of queries from parents and the EHC team…sometimes asking for provision, well often asking for provision that is outside our field of competence…so they would like us to recommend an OT or some speech and language therapy or something that isn't something that we can offer and one of the biggest requests is around group size and whether we can specify the group size and that's always a bit of a challenge because there is evidence out there but again…it's context dependent and depends on who's in that group and the level of difficulty of the work and you know so many different elements. So, trying to summarise that in succinct ways is a little bit of a challenge, but often we usually well most of the time we'll find something that Is acceptable to others but sometimes we just have to draw a line and say that is my professional opinion…I won't be changing my report.

One participant talked about making parents feel able to contact them with queries about the statutory advice:

I do find myself saying that to parents quite often when you receive my report if there is anything in that at all that you're not sure about, you don't agree about, that you feel I've not kind of adequately explained give me a ring and we can have a look at it together and sometimes parents do and kind of 99% of the time we can come to an agreement…

Subtheme 5: Perception Differences and Individuality

The participants discussed that there is a **perception difference** in the role of the Educational Psychologist within the **statutory** process when compared to commissioned or **non-statutory** work in schools. This relates to the 'expert' and 'non-expert' discourses as they are positioned as 'experts' within the statutory process but are more able to work in a 'non-expert' manner when they are completing non-statutory work. There was also consideration that all Educational Psychologists practice in unique ways.

Well, I suppose that depends whether you're asking me about my statutory role or…my non-statutory role…because yeah, there's a massive difference.

So, for me day to day in schools, how do I perceive my role is a facilitator that helps people to problem solve and helps people to think of their next steps. Not saying I always do that but if I was being like the best EP I could possibly be then that's what I would hope to be doing. Yeah, so I do think now my role in the statutory process is please describe where the child is currently. Please set some outcomes, and please tell us what provision the child needs.

Reflective Box 6: Different Roles and Perceptions

I thought it was interesting to hear a participant talking about how they feel there is a stark difference in the perception of their role when they are completing statutory work versus when they are being commissioned by schools. I wonder if schools appreciate this clear distinction. It is interesting to think that within one job role, an Educational Psychologist can feel that there is a massive difference between the work that they do. I have found in my work that sometimes the work that is requested by schools is to support a statutory assessment; therefore, the distinction does not yet feel as distinct or apparent to me at this stage in my career.

There was discussion about an Educational Psychologist being a '**non-expert**' and what that means concerning the statutory assessment process:

... it's getting away from the expert model... we provide a little element of the picture and it's about shaping that and knowing that's where they're heading... so we know of a helpful intervention or a helpful way forward, it's guiding them through that process really.

One participant explained why it is important to work in this way:

…it's that ability to leave it more malleable and flexible and hear what's relevant and what's possible both in the setting and at home and where their ambitions are…because, you know, yes, it might well be that this is the very best form of intervention for a young person but if no one's invested in it or buying into or able to do it, then it's not…we're not the direct

agents of change are we. So, we have to facilitate change with the people that are going to be there.

In contrast to the previous code, the participants discussed Educational Psychologists being construed as 'experts' in the statutory process, what this means to them, and how it impacts their ability to write statutory advice, especially for children with needs with which they feel they are less familiar.

*... well, the **expert** model being I know best, and I've researched this, and this is the strategy for this type of situation, and that's what we're going to apply regardless of the context.*

I think what fuels that is a perception that I think lots of EPs, no, that lots of other people have in relation to EPs as a perception of us as experts.

The participants then discussed what Educational Psychologists need to be 'experts' in:
... you know if you pushed me to say no, come on, you trained for a long time you must have some area of expertise then my expertise is in asking questions leading people to find their own solutions like kind of models of consultation.

I don't think I kind of come at it from the point of view of I need to be an expert in this because what I am…that sounds arrogant, you know but what…if I need to be an expert in anything I need to be an expert in child development, and you know good teaching and learning. I don't think I necessarily need to be an expert in every possible condition that a child might have…

Reflective Box 7: 'Expert' vs 'Non-Expert'
These quotes exemplify the discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' in society regarding the role of an Educational Psychologist. It was interesting to hear the participants talking about what they feel they have expertise in, which is consultation, and the skills involved in making consultations collaborative and solution-orientated, rather than being an 'expert' in a vast range of different diagnoses. This made me think about the importance of consultation and facilitating the adults who support children to come up with solutions but also how this is perceived by schools and if it contrasts with their original perception of the role of an Educational Psychologist.

It was discussed that all Educational Psychologists have **different practices**. Educational Psychologists will all have a slightly different understanding of their role and will engage with families, children, and school staff in unique manners, which will inevitably impact the perception of the role of an Educational Psychologist to varying degrees.

But then it depends how you work doesn't it?
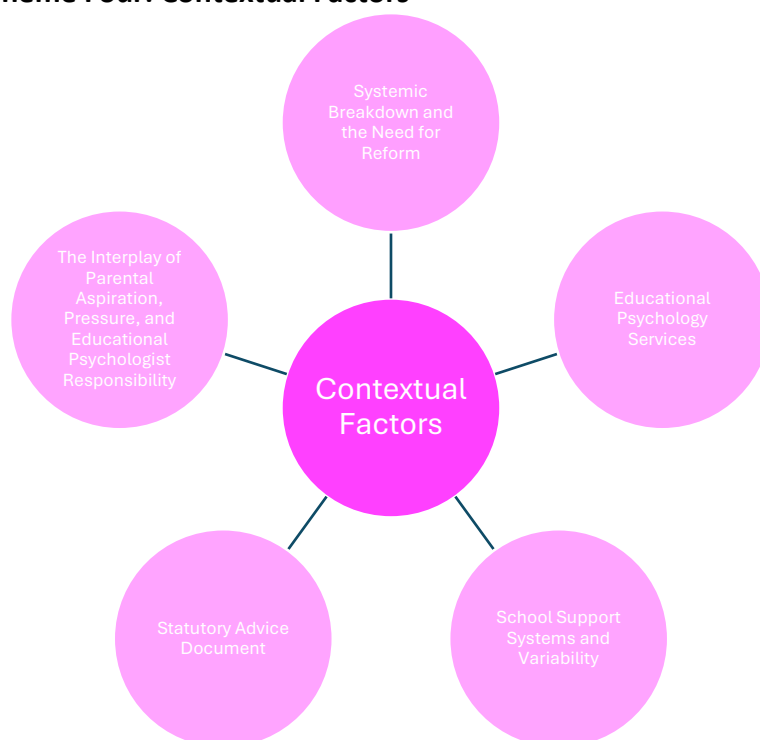
Overarching Theme Four: Contextual Factors

Figure 4: Overarching Theme Four, Contextual Factors, and the Corresponding Subthemes

Subtheme 1: Systemic Breakdown and the Need for Reform
This subtheme relates to a conversation about systemic issues and how these have changed over time. Factors such as time constraints, underfunding, and reduced professional involvement are discussed. The subtheme also highlights the need for systemic change to make the statutory process more effective for both schools and parents, with a focus on addressing the disconnect and lack of trust between parents and schools, as well as the need for a more holistic, collaborative approach to SEND support.

The participants talked about **changes that are needed to the system**. There was a discussion that the current system is complex and time-consuming.

... a simpler mechanism to provide what the school needed in order to deliver... what they felt that they needed to deliver…

…it was not all this vast process that just took so much time...and it's just not working.

The participants mentioned that they feel the **system is not working** appropriately. There was mention of **changes to the context surrounding EHCs and issues with the process itself.**

Yeah, and it is within the wider context of that…SEND is so poorly funded. I mean, I know it's hugely expensive and there is vast billions spent on it, but…it's still not meeting needs…the sort of the flexibility within schools seems to have shrunk on the availability of a range of alternative resources either within mainstream schools or without, you know…just so it's all just kind of congealed into one…mess really…

I'm hoping it's being noted that it's an unworkable system currently and the and the proportion of work is in the wrong place.

I think it's a national thing, I think parents feel let down and I think parents feel that everything is a fight.

What fuels it all? An education system that's kind of creaking at the seams, isn't it?

The impact on schools was discussed:
... lack of funding to schools. I think there's been a huge impact over the last 10 or so years as to what schools can access…difficulties recruiting TAs…I think it's very challenging and schools are in a very difficult position and then that gets fed up, so you know the chain so then parents think oh well they can't get anywhere with the school because they're really…they're doing the best they can but they're struggling so now I need to get an EHCP. That's the only option available to me…there is a huge systemic issue, and something needs to change with the legislation and the funding to SEN in schools really for that to change.

... and I have noticed a trend in the last couple of years of I guess SENDCos being very busy but SENDCos not even really giving time to the EP for the assessment and it almost being very process-led.

There was a conversation that parents have **low expectations of the system and schools** being able to provide support for their children. The participants explained that parents have had negative experiences with schools and seem unable to rely on them. The participants also discussed that the parents seemed to have low expectations of professional involvement entirely.

I think they have a really low bar, that sounds awful and as soon as you take an interest and you listen, you can sometimes see anxiety disappearing when it's very much over to you and especially if you've got a clear remit for being there.

... they're asked for that because they have experience of a school not following professional advice or a school…not making reasonable adjustments.

Reflective Box 8: Systemic Issues

I expected there to be some conversation about the SEND system and about how it is creaking at the seams; however, I did not expect this level of emotion and passion in terms of expressing that the SEND system is not working and the impact this is having on schools, children and their families. I wonder if asking participants to recall a case where they felt less familiar with the needs of the child, especially in the cases where the diagnosis was life-limiting, highlighted to the Educational Psychologists further issues within the SEND system that may not have been brought to light if they were asked to discuss a more straightforward or familiar case.

Subtheme 2: Educational Psychology Services
This subtheme relates directly to Educational Psychology Services, the differences between them, and changes over time. The participants discussed that there have been **changes within Educational Psychology Services**. Particular attention was given to **recruitment and retention difficulties** and the impact this has had on the role of an Educational Psychologist within a Local Authority and in general.

…this was actually before we had such difficult times with…the numbers of EPs in our service.

…the situation changed over time. So going back say 10 years…EPs would have children…referred to them they could do some non-statutory work... it might develop into statutory work at which point you've probably got all your advice anyway, and it wouldn't take you long to write.

The COVID-19 pandemic was discussed to be a changing point in some Educational Psychology Services:
I think a lot of it changed in COVID when a lot of services went virtually only, and people thought oh this is a possibility and I think it has carried on since then that it was okay during COVID and I think certain people thought well it can be okay longer term…

Reflective Box 9: Educational Psychology Services
I did not anticipate a discussion around recruitment and retention difficulties to arise during this research. During my literature review, I had thought about it and considered it as a contextual pressure that could be impacting the role of an Educational Psychologist, but I was surprised that it was mentioned when talking about a case where the participants felt they were less familiar with the needs of the child. It felt as though talking about a case where perhaps the participants felt they needed more support, or they felt less confident, highlighted issues within the service, or made them feel more prominent.

The participants made **comparisons of different Local Authorities**, discussed moving between them, and the differences between their ways of working. The participants had an awareness that some Local Authorities had different approaches to the statutory process.

In my previous authority, the statutory assessments that I wrote were for my schools that were in my patch.

In my previous authority, we worked really closely with the EHC team.

Subtheme 3: School Support Systems and Variability
This subtheme relates to the **school support systems and their variability**, which could be both positive and negative. Participants discussed holding this in mind when writing their statutory advice and being aware of what the school could reasonably be expected to provide.

... you know the sort of the flexibility within school seems to have shrunk on the availability of a range of alternative resources.

It depends on the school and the situation and the support within their senior leadership team... their staffing levels... so many different factors. Every school is very unique.

One participant mentioned being aware of the differences between primary and secondary schools:
But another issue with provision is when they move from primary to secondary because…I am a bit left thinking gosh is that really tricky for secondary schools to actually implement?

Subtheme 4: Statutory Advice Document
This subtheme relates to the statutory advice document itself, for example, the **specificity of statutory advice**. **SMART** stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound and is a common framework used to support outcome production (Adeoye & Adong, 2023). The participants discussed that a lot of emphasis is placed on the outcomes and provision being very specific and SMART in general.

I would have really tried to make it much more sort of, you know SMART and all the rest of it.

So as long as it's specific enough for the school to be able to see what they need to do.

…on the one hand, you've got to write the document that informs the people who make decisions and if appropriate write a plan and inform the plan to that level of specificity.

There was a discussion that specificity has changed over the years:
… my advices have got much better. Yeah, when I look back years ago at advices when we didn't have any specificity and you know some of our outcomes were bad.

…if I look back on advices that I wrote 10 years ago, like they are not specific in the slightest, you know it's the sort of thing that frankly, if someone was submitting it now it would rightly be torn apart by the EHC team and by parents. I think specificity is important. I think we have got to bear in mind that the advice we're writing is informing a legal document.

There was a conversation about the **complexity of the document itself**. Statutory advice is a complex document for Educational Psychologists to write. It was said that the statutory advice informs a legal document and that it also needs to inform schools on how to make a difference for the child.

The psychological advice I feel…is expected to provide all the answers.

…they're complicated…on the one hand, you've got to write the document that informs the people who make decisions and if appropriate, write a plan and inform the plan to that level of specificity. But on the other hand, you want to write a document that schools will actually refer to, use to make a difference to the child and for the child and their parents really to

have a handle on what you're saying and I find that quite…it's hard to do both in the document that currently is our advice format.

Subtheme 5: The Interplay of Parental Aspiration, Pressure, and Educational Psychologist Responsibility

This subtheme relates to Educational Psychologists having awareness of the parent's situation and the pressure they feel when writing their statutory advice. Educational Psychologists must balance these expectations to provide accurate, supportive statutory advice for a child's education (Anderson et al., 2020). There was discussion that the Educational Psychologists are aware of the **wants of the parents** of the child for whom they are writing the statutory advice concerning the outcome of the EHCP process. Particular attention was given to whether the parents wanted a mainstream or special setting for their child.

So, I always like to start with parental aspirations because, and it's interesting because you often find there's a common thread in parental aspirations and then it's drawing that out.

So, I sort of took the lead from her as to what they were hoping for from the school situation…

I want my daughter to have a special school place. We don't know how long she's going to live. I want her to be in the best place possible. I don't want her to be stuck at the back of a mainstream classroom where people will forget her.

There was discussion about the parents of the child for whom the Educational Psychologist is writing the statutory advice and the **parent's fear and anxiety** around their child's needs not being met in school, which impacts the statutory assessment.

... because they're fearful that if they say anything good... good in inverted commas, you know positive, they're fearful that... well everything's fine then isn't it, and they or their child would be left high and dry.

... a panic that needs aren't being met, and then there's also the worry that the statutory assessment is the answer.

…a justified, I think, anxiety from parents about their child's needs not being met.

The participants discussed the pressures that Educational Psychologists feel when writing statutory advice. There was a conversation around **pressure from parents** but also the **pressure they put on themselves** to produce statutory advice that will support a child in their education.

I have never felt that the pressure I put on myself when I'm writing EHC advices comes from other members of the Local Authority or other professionals. For me, the pressure absolutely comes from parents and I mean that…in a positive way. I'm not being negative about parents at all there, I am so acutely aware how important these things are to them…that I absolutely want them to read my report and to think ah you know what that kind of

summarises my child…that feels about right it feels like it reflects my child. So, if I feel any pressure and I do feel pressure when I'm advice writing, then I think that comes from a you know what...I don't want is a parent to read it and think that doesn't capture the complexity of that child or that doesn't capture my child's strengths or that doesn't capture my child's needs.

Overarching Theme Five: Emotional and Ethical Tensions in Statutory Advice Writing

Figure 5: Overarching Theme Five, Emotional and Ethical Tensions in Statutory Advice Writing, and the Corresponding Codes

The participants discussed that they **do not know the outcomes**, as in the results, of their statutory cases. They are unaware of what setting the child ultimately attended or how they are progressing.

…I don't know the outcome of any of them unless they have a problem.

I might go and find out what's happened to this poor child…

The participants said that they wanted to get their statutory advice right. The participants talked about feeling their advice was **good enough** and how they discerned they were **getting it right** and that it was good enough to submit.

I want to get it right.

…just sort of a judgement…my own judgment about is this good enough?

I want to write something that I'm happy with and I think is helpful to the child.

I was content that what I had written was probably the best I could given the information I'd received and the information from the parents and nursery and my own observations.

One participant talked about what she would have done in **retrospect**.

I wish I could go back and rewrite this report because I don't know.

The participants discussed feeling **anger and dissatisfaction** with the EHCP process in general and with the job role. There was a conversation that the participants did not want to write statutory advice and that it was not a satisfying or fulfilling part of their role. This contrasts with the subtheme about some statutory cases being novel and exciting.

…much less satisfying…just as a one-off activity. It's extremely unsatisfying.

…parachuting in and then clearing off and right tick off the list, on to the next. Which is what it is now.

I don't find it a particularly rewarding part of my role. I don't find it a part of my role where I have a significant amount of impact in terms of actually changing outcomes for children and their families and schools.

There was a sense from some of the participants that they were almost writing the statutory advice in bad faith, and they did not believe that schools would implement their advice:
…if someone said to me you never have to write any EHC report ever again, I would be absolutely delighted at the suggestion. It is not an element of my job that I enjoy at all. Do I hand on heart believe that provision changes as a result of the things I write in my EHC? I don't know…maybe it does maybe I'm being unfair sometimes. I'm worried that schools just carry on doing what they're doing anyway…maybe I shouldn't be that cynical…maybe that's not the case…just feels a bit tick boxy, doesn't it?

One participant expressed anger and dissatisfaction when discussing the results of their case:
... Anger... because the powers that be, the people working above me seemed to be, I could be wrong but seemed to be insensitive to the fact that this was not straightforward, and ideally, I would have liked to have had months to observe this child.

This led to an expression that this is not why they wanted to be an Educational Psychologist:
But this is not why I came to be an EP.

Some of the children for whom the Educational Psychologists wrote statutory advice had **life-limiting** conditions. Discussing these conditions seemed to evoke the most emotive response from the Educational Psychologists and led to a conversation about the **appropriateness of the EHC procedure** for conditions such as this.

He might not get to adulthood, or he might get into young adulthood.

I do recall thinking at the time it didn't…why do this big legal…what I would have wished was... simply a discussion…I mean rather than having this huge bureaucratic process.

You might think what is the point in doing an EHC possibly…you just feel like the child needs as much support as they can get to make…the remaining years of their life as good as possible and you know if that requires an EHC, which perhaps it shouldn't…

…why should they have to go through this clunky process…this lengthy drawn-out process when they're in such a you know dealing with such…huge difficult issues in their family life…it's a lengthy complex process isn't it, to go through, that's stressful for the families at a time when they really could do without it.

Overarching Theme Six: Narratives and Background Information
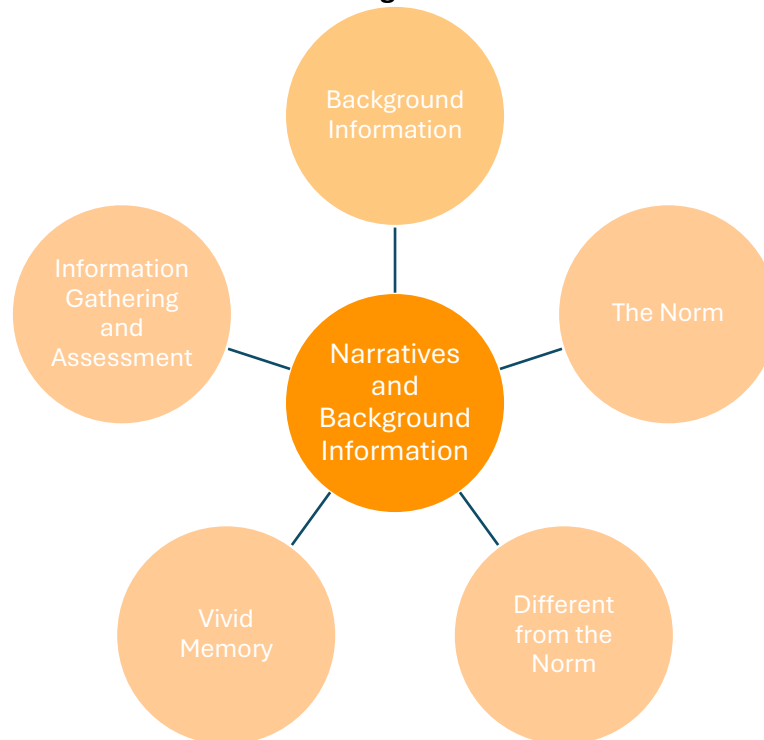
Figure 6: Overarching Theme Six, Narratives and Background Information, and the Corresponding Codes

The Educational Psychologists needed to provide **background information** to describe their narrative of writing statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which they felt they were less familiar.

So, one of my earlier cases, and it was a child in a primary school... the presenting need was Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which I hadn't heard of at the time…

…so what comes to mind is when I was working with a primary aged child a little girl…not a huge amount of time ago…the child was at the time was, at the beginning of my involvement, was in foster care but by the end of my involvement had been adopted by her foster carer.

The participants discussed the needs that they experience the most in their statutory work, which has become **the norm** in their practice.

…we have a lot of ASD diagnosis…

…typically, over the last year or so I've had an awful lot of EBSA and children not actually in school probably in their teenage years.

Related to the previous code, the participants discussed needs that were **different from the norm** in their statutory work.

…it was different in that respect.

A participant reflected that they had a **vivid memory** of feeling less familiar with the needs of the child and how they navigated that situation.

I remember it so vividly.

Reflective Box 12: Remembering the Case Vividly
This quote was important to highlight as many participants talked about cases from many years ago, yet their memory of what they did and how they approached the case was incredibly detailed. I feel this highlights that cases they feel less familiar with have not only been rare but have also stayed with them throughout their career. This could perhaps be for emotive reasons due to the condition or needs of the child or because of how they felt as professionals navigating that situation and the SEND and statutory system.

The Educational Psychologists explained how they gathered the information and what assessment tools they used during the statutory assessment with the child or young person with needs with which they felt they were less familiar as part of their narrative.

*So that was the **information gathering...** how were things for him? How did he manage? What was he good at... how was he managing academically, you know all of that sort of thing and met with parents well the mum... to find out you know... what were her worries and concerns around the education?*

*... we're trying to get the clearest **assessment** possible…*

…yeah, so checked out with staff if she'd be happy to meet with me…observed her first in lots of different environments…then with her, took her views pupil views and then as I said, she has some learning difficulties so carried out some standardised assessments…to put a bit of detail on that…

Discussion

In this section, I have revisited the data and re-introduced the theory to develop an understanding of what the data might suggest concerning the research questions. I also consider where the analyses fit within the understanding of the perception of the role of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process. During this research, the narratives of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar were explored with consideration given to the wider context that contains discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert'. Throughout this Discussion chapter, I have presented the overarching themes and subthemes from my analysis in **bold** and colour (see key below) to highlight when they are being explicitly referred to and demonstrate clearly how the analysis process has allowed me to arrive at my conclusions and answer the research questions.

Key:

Facilitating Factors	Hindering Factors	Role of the Educational Psychologist	Contextual Factors	Emotional and Ethical Tensions in Statutory Advice Writing	Narratives and Background Information
Subthemes	Subthemes	Subthemes	Subthemes	Subthemes	Subthemes

Research Question One: What are Educational Psychologists' narratives surrounding writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar?

The narrative focus of this research prompted varied discussions, which included advantages and disadvantages concerning Educational Psychologists' narratives surrounding writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt less familiar. The participants did not shy away from discussing feelings of anger and dissatisfaction with the system and the job role itself. Fitzgerald et al. (2003) have found that increased work-related anger was linked to high levels of job dissatisfaction in service-sector workers. Additionally, Sankar and Mohanraj (2014) found that employees within a public sector company in India who were not satisfied with their jobs experienced displaced aggression. The findings of the current study, corroborated by prior research, highlighted the importance of experiencing job satisfaction and its impact on well-being.

Moreover, an Educational Psychology Workforce Insights 2024 report found that only 35% of Educational Psychologists surveyed say they are very satisfied with their role (Cutts et al., 2025). Findings from the current research support this statistic as it was demonstrated that the satisfaction surrounding completing statutory work varied among the participants. One participant said, "*It's extremely unsatisfying.*" Seeing children being disadvantaged in their education appeared to lead the participants to question their job role and the impact they can have on the lives of children and young people. Many individuals who become Educational Psychologists want to make a difference and embody their virtues, as highlighted by Stringer's (2001) research. If this is not happening, this perhaps leaves

Educational Psychologists not experiencing job satisfaction and wondering why they chose this career, which is supported by the findings of the current research and links to the **anger and dissatisfaction** subtheme (Lyonette et al., 2019; Stringer, 2001).

Within their **narratives**, the participants described the **background information** of the case and why they felt less familiar with the child's needs. They also described the **information-gathering and assessment** process. The participants described having a **vivid memory** of a case in which they felt less familiar with the child's needs, which allowed them to recount their narrative in detail. The participants described needs that are **the norm** within their work, such as those associated with ASD and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), as demonstrated in the following quote, "*I've had an awful lot of EBSA*" (Special educational needs in England, academic year 2022/23, 2023). Examples of needs that were **different from the norm**, with which the participants felt less familiar and were asked to assess, included needs associated with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and FASD (Parapia & Jackson, 2008; Riley et al., 2011).

There were multiple examples of participants describing **contextual factors** related to the Local Authority and the SEND system, which has changed over the years and is documented to be failing many children with additional needs (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Burnham, 2013; Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018; Lee & Woods, 2017; Rhodes, 2024; Vivash & Morgan, 2019). The Educational Psychology Workforce Insights 2024 report found that Educational Psychologists believe there is a lack of funding within the sector, especially within Local Authorities, and 35% of Educational Psychologists surveyed state that the demands of their role always exceed the time and resources available to them (Cutts et al., 2025). These findings illuminate the perceived pressures impacting Educational Psychologists, supported by the current research.

The journey of considering narratives where the participants felt less familiar with the needs of the child or young person seemed necessary to unpick universal issues related to writing **statutory advice documents**. Such difficulties are also highlighted in previous literature (Conrad, 2005; Davis, 2016; Harvey, 2015). Participants felt that their statutory advice "*…is expected to provide all the answers…*" which places pressure on the Educational Psychologists. As discussed in previous chapters, exploring these complex and less familiar situations revealed inequalities within the current SEND system more readily. This became particularly apparent when the participants discussed cases where the child had a **life-limiting condition**, and they considered **the appropriateness of the EHC procedure** to such conditions (Freire, 1996; McCoy McDeid, 2020; Witten, 2021).

The emotive element of describing the **life-limiting** needs of these children perhaps led to more information being shared as the Educational Psychologists seemed to want it understood why the situation felt so unjust. The **anger and dissatisfaction** with the current SEND system was described concerning the impact on the child and their family rather than the impact on the individual Educational Psychologist (Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Sankar & Mohanraj, 2014). This highlights that the Educational Psychologists felt that their role was to support children and their families beyond the remit of the EHCP process. Related to this, particularly poignant words from the research were "*…this is not why I came to be an EP,*" which was said following the discussion of the outcomes for a child whose condition was

life-limiting. This quote reflects the frustration and sense of moral dissonance Educational Psychologists feel when their statutory advice fails to meet the needs of children and young people. Along these lines, Golan (2025), in their article, concluded that the needs of children with **life-limiting conditions** and their families remain under-explored. One could extend this to exploring **the appropriateness of the EHC procedure** for children with **life-limiting conditions**.

As I listened to the narratives of the participants, it felt as though the current statutory advice process is not appropriate for all special educational needs, as the participants discussed that it is difficult to write outcomes, as required in statutory advice, for children whose abilities may deteriorate or change quickly. This then results in Educational Psychologists trying to manipulate their statutory advice into the format asked of them as this is currently the only option available. This led to feelings of discomfort and disillusionment with the statutory system for the participants. Reflecting on the **emotional and ethical tensions in statutory advice writing** links to previous literature, which postulates that inequalities and access issues are brought to light when a system is pushed to accommodate a child with needs that do not conform to be supported within the current systems (Conrad, 2005).

Placing pressure upon an established system can also highlight more nuanced or previously hidden crises (Conrad, 2005). For example, **contextual factors** and service issues such as recruitment and retention difficulties within **Educational Psychology Services** were mentioned because a participant tried to access supervision to support them in writing statutory advice for a child with needs with which they felt less familiar. Their supervisor was on leave and the appropriate cover was not provided as exemplified in the following quote, "*Well, I was going to, but he was on leave, so…I didn't.*" This contextual pressure may not have surfaced if they had not needed to access supervision because they felt familiar with the child's needs. Dunsmuir et al. (2015) argue there is an ongoing need for professionals to receive high-quality supervision to support their personal professional growth, and well-being, and to ensure the provision of safe and effective services.

The participants also mentioned managing **the tension between quality and time pressure in statutory advice writing**, the **systemic breakdown** of the SEND system **and the need for reform**, a lack of flexibility in schools, and low expectations of schools meeting the needs of their students as issues that impact their practice (Cutts et al., 2025). These findings support previous research discussing the pressures faced by educational professionals (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Burnham, 2013; Cameron & Monsen, 2005; Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018; Lee & Woods, 2017; Vivash & Morgan, 2019). Therefore, the narratives of the Educational Psychologists within this study align with prior research on the challenges faced by educational professionals, illuminating practical issues of writing the statutory advice itself alongside systemic concerns.

Moreover, Self-Determination Theory, a theory of motivation, understands that autonomy, competence, and relatedness promote high-quality motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). This theory challenges the idea that rewards motivate individuals; therefore, if Educational Psychologists do not feel they are being rewarded in their job role, especially considering the participants' narratives demonstrating that they **seldom know the outcomes** of their

cases, then they must facilitate autonomous motivation and intrinsic aspirations in another manner. One participant expressed that they "…*might go and find out what's happened to this poor child…*" after relaying the narrative of the statutory assessment and being unaware of the outcome. Educational Psychologists' level of autonomy may be restricted because the constraints of the SEND and statutory system may make it challenging to work in a completely autonomous manner (Cutts et al., 2025).

Similarly, based on the narratives, Educational Psychologists do not always feel competent in writing statutory advice in a constantly evolving system for a wide variety of needs (Elliot et al., 2017). Competence could also be impacted as Educational Psychologists may want to build knowledge and skills around aspects of their work that they find enjoyable or that are important to them, which may not be statutory work. Despite working within an Educational Psychology Service, I have found that Educational Psychologists generally work in independent and flexible ways, which could impact their sense of relatedness. Van Mierlo et al. (2006), in their research, suggest that in highly autonomous teams, individuals who received moderate support from co-workers and supervisors reported greater individual autonomy compared to those who received either low or very high levels of support. The literature demonstrates that multiple factors seem to impact the job satisfaction of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Elliot et al., 2017). This links to the findings of the current research, particularly the overarching theme of the **emotional and ethical tensions in statutory advice writing**.

Describing their narratives seemed to allow participants to reflect upon what they would have done differently in retrospect and how their practice has evolved over the years. Practice evolving within Educational Psychology has been highlighted by Graesser et al. (2022) especially concerning technological advances. Within the current research, six narratives were shared overall. The needs of the children were different; however, three of the cases shared involved children or young people with life-limiting conditions, which was a common theme among some of the narratives. An overarching message from the narratives shared was that the participants sought to see each child or young person as an individual, independent of their diagnoses, which relates to the power threat meaning framework mentioned previously (Boyle, 2022; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). They also wanted their statutory advice to be "…*right*" and "…*good enough*," which appeared to be a gauge that was unique to each Educational Psychologist, dependent on previous experience and the time allowed to submit the statutory advice (Cutts et al., 2025). This sentiment is evidenced by the following quote, where a participant said they use their "…*own judgment about is this good enough*?"

In summary, the narratives of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt less familiar, comprised stories of how they approached the statutory assessment, their interactions with and sympathy for the children and their families, and a wider discussion around the SEND and statutory system and frustrations with the job role. The Educational Psychologists spoke in emotive and moving ways about wanting the best for children and young people and the realities of working within the SEND and statutory system as it currently stands.

Research Question Two: What can we learn from these narratives concerning writing statutory advice and the perceived role of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process?

Within their narratives, the participants discussed **factors that facilitated** them to write the statutory advice and **factors that hindered** their ability to write statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which they felt less familiar. The participants spoke in very pragmatic and logical ways about how they approached a statutory assessment for a child or young person with needs with which they felt they were less familiar, allowing for an understanding of what is important to consider when writing statutory advice such as this. Related to this, Anderson et al. (2020) have guided Educational Psychologists in writing statutory advice and the principles that ought to be embodied in their work. This included being holistic, collaborative, and person-centred, which are supported by the findings of the current research.

Facilitating factors included **engaging** openly and honestly **with parents**, discussing **the need for strategies and support** such as using supervision, co-constructing the outcomes and provision, and feeling that their work is valued and worthwhile. One participant felt that if Educational Psychologists invest in their statutory assessments, "…*they will still be valued pieces of work.*" In terms of being valued at work, Hall et al. (2024) found that when Allied Health Professions support workers felt valued, they flourished in their roles and appreciated the opportunities the position provided. This highlights the importance of Educational Psychologists feeling valued at work, as found in the current research. The participants also discussed **factors that hindered** them from being able to write the statutory advice; this included being **unknown to the school and staff**, **practice evolving**, and issues within the **Educational Psychology Service**. Practice evolution has been described by Marsh (2023) and Rhodes (2024). Additionally, Cutts et al. (2025) have demonstrated the factors impacting Educational Psychologists and service delivery.

The emotion and sympathy felt for the child and their families, including an appreciation of **the interplay of parental aspiration, pressure, and Educational Psychologist responsibility**, was a key consideration during the participants' narratives. The participants compared the situation of the child for whom they were writing the statutory advice to their family circumstances and expressed genuine sympathy. I would have thought that hearing of challenging life circumstances would become commonplace for Educational Psychologists within their job role; however, the impact these cases have continued to have on the participants became apparent during this research. The emotional impact of the job felt vital to consider when Educational Psychologists are expected to produce a certain number of statutory advice reports per year. Mann (2004) argues that emotion management is a vital skill within professions that support other people, but one that can also be a major source of work stress, which has been illuminated by the current research.

Engaging with and understanding the child or young person, seeing them as a unique individual, and not reducing them to their diagnosis was an important part of the Educational Psychologists' narratives when writing statutory advice for children with needs with which they felt less familiar. Practicing in this way appeared to remove some of the discomfort around feeling less familiar because it was accepted that the Educational Psychologists were unfamiliar with the child's needs because they had not met them before.

I feel this sentiment is particularly well articulated by one of the participants in the following quote where they said that they could have "*…still met the child and been surprised by some of her strengths but also some of her needs…*" Dunkin (2023) exemplifies this view further in their paper about teaching students to become familiar with the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing. The importance of honing this skill has been supported by the narratives collected in this research.

Remembering that each child is unique and cannot be reduced to their diagnosis, which could initially spark feelings of being less familiar, was significant within the narratives of writing statutory advice for all children and young people. This links to the dilemma faced by parents when pursuing diagnoses for their children, as they want to access support but do not want to lose an appreciation of the individuality of their child in the process (Russell & Norwich, 2012). Related to this sentiment is the power threat meaning framework, rejecting diagnoses and Educational Psychologists embodying social constructivist principles in their work, as touched upon previously (Boyle, 2022; Harper & Moss, 2003; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Applying the power threat meaning framework implies rejecting traditional psychiatric diagnoses because distress would be seen not as a disorder but as a response to life experiences, especially those involving power and threat. In doing so, the framework embodies social constructionist principles by valuing individual meaning-making, recognising the impact of social context, and resisting fixed or medicalised definitions of mental health (Boyle, 2022; Harper & Moss, 2003; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). The participants alluded to preferring to work in this manner as they wanted to engage with and understand the child and focus on the individual impact of the child's needs on their education rather than their diagnosis.

The Educational Psychologists wanted the best for the children and young people for whom they wrote their statutory advice. This is corroborated by Anderson et al. (2020) as one of the aims of statutory advice is to improve outcomes for children and young people. When aiming to engage with and understand the child, the child's best interests were crucial when writing statutory advice. One participant stated, "*...we want the child's best interest, don't we…*" Additionally, collecting and understanding the child's views was important to understand what would be in their best interest. The Educational Psychologists discussed different ways that they could collect views and ensure this is accessible for all the children for whom they write statutory advice. They felt that gathering the child's voice was a unique part of the role of an Educational Psychologist. However, Adams et al. (2017) carried out a survey, which revealed that only 44 percent of children and young people were consulted about their desire to participate in the EHCP process and Cochrane and Soni (2020) found that the views of children and young people continue to be marginalised within the statutory process.

The participants' narratives included discussing feeling out of their depth and anxious when they receive a request for statutory advice with needs with which they feel less familiar. This was especially prevalent when the needs related to medical and health discourses or life-limiting conditions. However, there was also discussion that participants often feel a level of anxiety when they receive a new statutory case, regardless of the child's needs. This anxiety could be attributed to the time pressure of producing statutory advice, awareness of the waitlist that exists, and understanding the importance and complexity of the statutory

advice document itself (Cutts et al., 2025; Rhodes, 2024). Linden and Muschalla (2007) found that 14 percent of their participants suffered from work-related anxiety and did not report experiencing any other anxiety disorders outside of the work environment. These findings illuminate the prevalence of work-related anxiety, as discussed in the current research and demonstrated in the following quote: "*I'm always anxious when I get a new case.*"

The narratives also included a discussion around difficulties with the level of specificity necessary when writing outcomes and provisions within statutory advice, especially when the Educational Psychologist feels less familiar with the needs of the child. This relates to the **evolving practice** subtheme and talks to the 'expert' discourse as Educational Psychologists are expected to write to a certain level of specificity within their statutory advice (Anderson et al., 2020; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). The dilemma is explained by a participant in the following quote: "*You know, where is the evidence for me saying an hour of literacy intervention a day is going to be exactly the right amount for this child to make progress and if you give them 45 minutes, it's not enough and if you give them an hour and 15 minutes, it's overkill, it's not necessary.*" The results of the current research are supported by findings in Capper's (2020) study where it was found that Educational Psychologists report needing to create more specific and measurable outcomes as part of their statutory assessment, which was seen to be a challenge.

Experiencing **novelty and purpose in statutory advice writing** and feeling their work makes a difference seemed to have a big impact on the Educational Psychologists within the current research. There was a discussion around Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice in bad faith, not believing the advice is followed or that it makes a difference for the child or young person. In existentialism, bad faith is a psychological occurrence in which individuals behave inauthentically by succumbing to societal pressures (Detmer, 2008; Hymers, 1989). It is a form of self-deception that involves avoiding one's freedom and acting in regard to oneself, rather than others. I felt bad faith was exemplified by the following quote within this research: "*Do I hand on heart believe that provision changes as a result of the things I write in my EHC? I don't know…I'm worried that schools…just carry on doing what they're doing anyway…just feels a bit tick boxy, doesn't it?*" Moreover, it was felt by the participants that the statutory assessment process is overly bureaucratic and complex and does not necessarily create lasting changes for the child or young person, leading to **anger and dissatisfaction** with the job role.

The Educational Psychologists spoke more positively about their non-statutory work in schools where a relationship has been built, and they feel they can work in more systemic and lasting ways. The narratives included comparisons between how Educational Psychologists worked in the past compared to how they work now in terms of the number of statutory assessments that need to be completed. This has altered the **role of the Educational Psychologist**, with less emphasis being placed on non-statutory work. Marsh (2023) confirms this development in the role. One participant mentioned that they felt Educational Psychology work currently is prioritised in the wrong area, with less of a focus on preventative measures in schools. The participants ruminated on what needed to change within the statutory process and their job roles, corroborated by Rhodes's (2024) and Cutts

et al.'s (2025) papers describing the impact systemic changes are having on Educational Psychologists.

The participants discussed that there are differences in the way they are perceived by parents compared to how they would perceive themselves and their role within the statutory process. This is exemplified by the following quote: "*The parent very much saw the statutory assessment process as something that would provide her with some answers in terms of where some of her child's needs came from…people assume that we know a huge amount about all different types of what we might have previously called like atypical child development and I don't know if we do and I also don't know if we need to…*" The analysis demonstrated that these differing perceptions magnified feelings of discomfort about being less familiar with the needs of the child when writing statutory advice, as parents seemed to think they were "*…talking to an expert,*" which was not necessarily how the Educational Psychologist wanted to be perceived. Chiu et al. (1997) introduced the job perception discrepancy index and found that larger discrepancy values had negative implications for job satisfaction and staff turnover. Chiu et al.'s (1997) research highlights that differences in role perception for Educational Psychologists could be having a negative impact.

Moreover, the perception of the role of an Educational Psychologist seemed particularly distinct between the statutory and non-statutory roles. One participant explained this clearly in the following quote: "*So, for me day to day in schools, how do I perceive my role is a facilitator that helps people to problem solve and helps people to think of their next steps… my role in the statutory process is please describe where the child is currently…please set some outcomes and please tell us what provision the child needs.*" Managing these differing perceptions within a single job role, which could alter day-to-day, felt particularly challenging and seemed to make it difficult for the participants to always experience a sense of job satisfaction. The narratives in this research support a sense of dissonance between the contrasting perceptions of the **role of an Educational Psychologist** (Atfield et al., 2023; Yates & Hulusi, 2018).

There was also discussion that the participants felt that their psychological skills and formulation are not a large part of the statutory assessment process currently. Furthermore, discussions around negotiating and refining statutory advice based on conversations with the EHC panel or a parent could alter the perception of the role as this could call into question the distinct contribution of an Educational Psychologist if statutory advice can be altered by parents and other professionals. This distinct contribution is impacted by the evolving context in which Educational Psychologists work, which is supported by the findings of the current research (Farrell et al., 2006).

The participants accepted that every Educational Psychologist practices differently and with a degree of individuality, which could confuse the perceived **role of Educational Psychologists**, as it does not appear to be homogeneous. The narratives exposed a difference between how participants would prefer to practice within schools day-to-day in comparison to how they must practice within the statutory process, which could be influencing job satisfaction. The impact of systemic issues on Educational Psychologists felt important; additionally, the low expectations of schools being able to meet children's needs are perhaps facilitating the situation to continue because it is felt that everyone is doing the

best they can with the resources they have in the circumstances (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Burnham, 2013; Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018; Lee & Woods, 2017; Rhodes, 2024; Vivash & Morgan, 2019). One participant articulated these feelings in the following way as they mentioned that parents and carers "…*have experience of a school not following professional advice.*"

There appears to be a yearning for more of a joined-up approach where the Educational Psychologists are involved with the child from earlier in their educational journey. Through this involvement, they would follow the case for several assess, plan, do, and review cycles, which would allow for relationships to be built with the child, family, and school. This relates to the **external support and contextual factors in the statutory advice writing** subtheme. One participant said, "*I look back fondly on those years when I would meet a youngster, do all of that initial work, make suggestions…come back and review with them…you know in the plan, do, review cycle.*" It was accepted that the way of working had changed but that the current model was not the preferred way of working for Educational Psychologists. Greenwood and Kelly (2017) found that the assess, plan, do, and review cycle supports an understanding of what is helping pupils to make good progress. The Educational Psychologists seemed to prefer to work in this manner. Moreover, the assess, plan, do, and review cycle is also discussed in the SEND Code of Practice as a graduated response showing that it is recognised to be good practice, but **contextual factors** prevent its use (Adams et al., 2018; Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015).

The narratives mentioned that many Educational Psychologists **do not know the outcomes** of their statutory cases, which could make the process feel never-ending and pointless. One participant mentioned that they do not like writing statutory advice and would not mind if it was removed from their role, which felt poignant as this was a significant portion of their workload. The sense was that the participants did not necessarily feel that writing statutory advice made a difference for children and young people and did not bring them job satisfaction. The results of the current research are corroborated by findings from an Insights from the Educational Psychologist Workforce survey that found that 53% of Educational Psychologists indicated that they do not feel able to support young people effectively with their current workload and most respondents indicated that consultation was part of the role that they enjoyed the most (Walecka, 2024).

The identity of Educational Psychologists has shifted over the years, with more of an emphasis being placed now on aspirations of having a role to support teachers, pupils, and parents, which contrasts with their stereotype as psychometricians, and later as gatekeepers to specialist settings (Love, 2009). The narratives of the current research support a shift in the identity of Educational Psychologists, as articulated by one of the participants, "…*I think they come into it thinking that the EP is going to take my child into a room and assess them and come up with a solution and phrase or a word to describe them...but that isn't how we work anyway, so and I think it just possibly accelerates that change of perception of what we do.*" There was an acceptance that Educational Psychologists must spend time explaining their role to parents and teachers as there is often confusion surrounding their role within the statutory process. Furthermore, **parents' perception of Educational Psychologists' role and advice** appears to be contrasting with **Educational Psychologists' interpretations of their role**.

Related to this, Ashton and Roberts (2006) found that Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators valued 'traditional' Educational Psychologists' roles while Educational Psychologists themselves saw a significantly broader array of services as valuable to schools. Ashton and Roberts (2006) highlight that there are **differing perceptions** around the **role of Educational Psychologists**, which was in symmetry with the findings of the current research. Additionally, Cameron's (2006) research highlights Educational Psychologists' distinct contribution was not to be an 'expert' but rather to bring a psychological perspective, share ideas, and promote change, which seemed to feel more comfortable and natural for the participants within non-statutory work.

A recent British Psychological Society survey presented outcomes that suggested that the current state of the SEND system means Educational Psychologists cannot deliver their work when dealing with unreasonably heavy workloads related to writing statutory advice, creating significant retention concerns that need to be addressed (Rhodes, 2024). One participant, when describing their narrative, said that they completed the statutory assessment "*…actually before we had such difficult times with…the numbers of EPs in our service.*" In addition, there is an immediate crisis where Educational Psychologists are considering leaving the profession (Rhodes, 2024). If Educational Psychologists leave their statutory roles, this will cause a gap that cannot be quickly filled as recruitment and training takes time (Rhodes, 2024). In short, the findings of this research, although disappointing, are part of and will contribute to a wider narrative that is already happening around the **role of the Educational Psychologist** within the statutory process and the wider SEND system.

In summary, the narratives revealed key insights into the **role of Educational Psychologists** within the statutory process. Educational Psychologists face systemic pressures that hinder their ability to fully meet the needs of children and young people, especially when they feel less familiar with a child's needs. This creates discomfort when writing statutory advice, revealing complexities in the role and the wider SEND system. The research highlights a tension between how Educational Psychologists are expected to practice and how they would like to, impacting their job satisfaction and well-being. Educational Psychologists often find themselves justifying their role within the statutory process, and the emotional toll of the work is significant.

Specifically, the study underscores the need to rethink statutory advice for children with **life-limiting conditions** and, more broadly, the overall framework within which Educational Psychologists work. As highlighted in the literature, the profession is grappling with a crisis of 'expert' versus 'non-expert' (Gutkin, 1999; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). The findings suggest that resolving these tensions is crucial for the profession's future.

Additionally, external factors, such as the structure of the **Educational Psychology Service**, changes in EHCPs, and **school support systems and their variability**, play a significant role in shaping the statutory advice process. One participant described that "*...the flexibility within school seems to have shrunk on the availability of a range of alternative resources.*" Support from supervisors, staying updated with best practices, and the pressures of time constraints also influence Educational Psychologists' ability to write statutory advice. Therefore, it would be advised, based on this research, that Educational Psychologists receive regular

supervision as stipulated by the HCPC. This requires sufficient funding to recruit and maintain Educational Psychologists and ensure that supervision time is allocated.

On balance, individual Educational Psychologists should seek support when writing statutory advice, avoid reducing children to a diagnosis, and aim to understand the whole child. At a broader level, services should address recruitment and retention issues and consider assigning Educational Psychologists to schools where they have established relationships. Universities should provide stronger training in writing statutory advice, ensuring **psychological knowledge and formulation** remain central to the process.

Conclusions

The current research explored factors relating to the narratives of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar within a wider context that contains discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert'. This research has been conducted with the understanding that there appears to be controversy around these discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' pertaining to Educational Psychologists, particularly within the statutory process where Educational Psychologists are construed as 'experts'; however, it appears that Educational Psychologists perceive their role more as co-constructors of solutions, demonstrating a dissonance between how Educational Psychologists are perceived within the statutory process (Anderson et al., 2020; Cameron, 2006; Yates & Hulusi, 2018). It was necessary to gain a deeper understanding of what can be learned from these narratives concerning the perceived **role of Educational Psychologists** within the statutory process and what is important to consider when writing statutory advice for a child or young person with needs with which an Educational Psychologist feels less familiar.

I aimed to enhance existing knowledge about the perception of the **role of Educational Psychologists** within the statutory process. The analysis produced overarching themes relating to the individual **narratives** of the Educational Psychologists, **factors that facilitate** Educational Psychologists and **hinder** them from being able to write statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar, the **role of the Educational Psychologist**, and **contextual factors**. A further overarching theme, relating to reflections around the **emotional and ethical tensions in statutory advice writing**, included expressions of **dissatisfaction** with the job role and comments on the **appropriateness of the EHC procedure for children and young people with life-limiting conditions**.

Findings support the view that Educational Psychologists cannot deliver preventative and systemic work with schools, families, children, and young people in the face of unmanageable workloads and significant recruitment and retention concerns (Rhodes, 2024). It was expressed that the SEND system is currently not meeting the needs of children and young people in education, which fits with the current literature (Rhodes, 2024). Findings align with previous research, which has identified that school staff, parents, and other professionals do not understand or necessarily value the wide range of work that Educational Psychologists can deliver and instead appreciate a more 'traditional' Educational Psychologist work remit, which includes advice-giving and individual

assessments, highlighting differing perceptions of the role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Love, 2009).

Particularly interesting was the description of contextual factors that impacted the role of the Educational Psychologists especially concerning the Educational Psychology Services and pressures to produce statutory advice which creates the best outcomes for children and young people, within a certain time frame. These results echo findings shared by Rhodes (2024) who highlights the number of children awaiting an Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment in England and the difficulties that the profession is having in retaining Educational Psychologists within Local Authorities to meet this need.

Future work relating to understanding the perception of the role of Educational Psychologists within the statutory process must consider the context within which Educational Psychologists are working. The contextual changes and subsequent alterations to the role of an Educational Psychologist were important within the narratives told during this research (Farrell et al., 2006; Love, 2009). Furthermore, there was a lot of emotion expressed by the participants concerning the SEND system's failure to meet the needs of children and young people, especially when the children for whom they were writing the statutory advice had life-limiting conditions, leading to wider reflections about who benefits from the statutory process.

Considerations of Quality
As discussed in the Methodology, the criteria for defining high-quality qualitative research are meant to be adaptable (Riessman, 2008; Yardley, 2017). It has been suggested that there are no clearly defined strategies that are considered most suitable for the narrative approach (Butina, 2015). I demonstrated in-depth engagement with the narratives of the participants by watching the full recordings of the interviews multiple times and re-reading the transcripts during my analysis. I ensured I followed the correct analysis method by sense-checking my coding, subthemes, and overarching themes with my research supervisor and considering any previous experiences or subjectivity that could have affected the analyses, as evidenced by using reflective boxes throughout the Analysis chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I demonstrated that the interpretation arose from the data by ensuring my code names were derived from the words spoken by the participants. Furthermore, explanations were given as to how the names of the overarching themes and subthemes arose from these codes to further aid transparency.

Flexibility was needed during the research period, as most of the data was collected during the summer holidays and interviews needed to be arranged around annual leave. As individual interviews were the chosen data collection method, the interviews were arranged when it was most convenient for the participants, to ensure their voices were included in the research. There was a collective understanding that the interviews needed to take place during the summer holidays before the busy start of term in September, which added some pressure to the process of arranging the interviews. As was explored previously, there were advantages in interviewing participants whom I knew, for example, in being able to create a high level of trust and a deeper level of understanding (Brewis, 2014; Hodkinson, 2005).

This research aimed to explore the lived experience of Educational Psychologists living in a culture of the contrasting discourses of 'expert' and 'non-expert' supported by systems and practices. The narratives of Educational Psychologists related to this topic had not yet been explored in research but there was evidence of the tensions between the discourses and the practice of Educational Psychologists, which felt important to explore through a narrative methodology (Abramovitz, 2017; Anderson et al., 2020; Anderson, 2012; Gutkin, 1999; Huynh & Rhodes, 2011; Prescott, 2014). Due to the small sample size, I was able to explore their narratives in depth, which was the primary aim of the research. I also hope the current research can act as a starting point for further research.

Limitations

This was a small-scale study; therefore, limitations involve aspects pertaining to the participant group and the format of the interactions. The participant group was relatively narrow, which included Educational Psychologists working for two Educational Psychology Services. Without a larger and more diverse involvement from Educational Psychologists, the findings are not generalisable to all Educational Psychologists, which is considered a limitation. However, conducting a small-scale study with an in-depth analysis was in line with the aims of my research, which is based on my ontology and epistemology.

It is challenging to argue that the analysis from this small-scale research study can be easily generalised to the broader population and situation. Given that only a limited number of participants, each with specific roles within a small selection of Educational Psychology Services, were involved, their perspectives may be seen as exclusive and context-specific. Caution should be exercised when applying the analysis to a wider context or other Educational Psychology Services, even if they may appear contextually similar. I had intended to conduct interviews with a diverse range of Educational Psychologists from various Educational Psychology Services nationwide. However, this proved unfeasible due to procedural and methodological challenges that arose during the research, despite repeated attempts to contact multiple Educational Psychology Services.

There was also the limitation that I was acquainted with all the participants to various degrees. A specific disclaimer was given to the participants, and they were aware that they could have their data removed and that they did not have to participate (Brewis, 2014; Vuorinen, 2002). Participants may have felt uncomfortable if they said something that they felt may have damaged their reputation or relationship with the Educational Psychology Service, as I was aware of where they worked. This is a limitation of this research and should be viewed in consideration of the associated strengths and weaknesses of 'insider' versus 'outsider' research discussed earlier in this thesis.

Dissemination

I provided initial findings to the participants who expressed interest informally. I plan to disseminate the findings to my colleagues at my Educational Psychology Service, to my peers and tutors at the university through a presentation, and formally to the participants who participated in the research and those who expressed interest in participating but were prevented from doing so. There is also the potential to publish my research and share it with other Educational Psychology Services and universities.

Further Research

The differing perceptions of the role of Educational Psychologists have been emphasised in previous research and reiterated in this study (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Participants in the current research expressed dissatisfaction with the SEND system and the job role itself. There was also discussion about the appropriateness of the EHC procedure for children and young people with life-limiting conditions. Further research could investigate this issue, as an extension of Brunt's (2018) research that explored teachers' experiences of supporting children with life-limiting conditions in special schools. This feels especially important in light of Golan's (2025) article, which concluded that the needs of children with life-limiting conditions and their families remain under-explored.

Research to further understand the job satisfaction that is experienced by Educational Psychologists is important as highlighted previously by Willdridge (2013) and supported in the current research, especially discussing the emotional burden that comes with this job role. This relates to the retention of Educational Psychologists within Local Authorities, which is a current stressor within the profession (Rhodes, 2024).

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

As addressed through the second research question, it is becoming more widely recognised that the workloads of Educational Psychologists are unmanageable, that there are retention and recruitment problems within Local Authorities, and that Educational Psychologists do not feel they have sufficient time to fulfil their full roles due to the need to undertake an increasing number of statutory assessments and write statutory advice for EHCPs (Rhodes, 2024). Educational Psychologists are under too much pressure, which must be removed to ensure the safe and effective delivery of services. One participant expressed that they are *"…hoping it's being noted that it's an unworkable system currently…and the proportion of work is in the wrong place."* Local Authorities must be better resourced because this would enable more Educational Psychologists to continue to work within Local Authorities as there would be more preventative work and increased capacity for supervision. It is worth bearing in mind that this piece of research has been carried out at a particular point in time for the profession of Educational Psychologists, following financial cuts and changes to service delivery models (Lee & Woods, 2017).

Considering this research and having collected the narratives, when writing statutory advice, I have learned that individual Educational Psychologists should seek to understand the whole child and the impact of their needs on their education and seek support when necessary. Educational Psychologists could also revisit guiding principles and theories of Educational Psychology to ensure psychological knowledge and formulation are still at the forefront of their practice. The Principal Educational Psychologists of Educational Psychology Services must consider the emotional impact of the role and strive to improve staff well-being and job satisfaction. They should ensure Educational Psychologists receive regular supervision and consider pressures and workload. However, to implement this, Local Authorities require increased funding, as touched upon above. The British Psychological Society has already urged the government to commit to providing Local Authorities with allocated funding for Educational Psychologists (Rhodes, 2024).

There are continuing challenges around the perception of the **role of an Educational Psychologist** within the statutory process and there seems to be a need for time to be spent explaining the role to school staff, parents, and other professionals to make sure that there is a shared understanding. Local Authorities should focus on disseminating correct and current information about the **role of the Educational Psychologist**, including the range of work that can be undertaken, to avoid misconceptions and allow for more preventative and systemic work, which would benefit all children and young people, schools, families, and the wider community. This could extend to those who make decisions around statutory assessments, such as the EHC panel, but also those who create the statutory process and need to consider if it is fit for purpose for all (Hammond, 2024).

Furthermore, allowing Educational Psychologists to build relationships with schools, children, and families will improve service delivery and make the job feel more worthwhile as they will follow a child's progress and know the outcome. When training prospective Educational Psychologists, universities should consider providing a balanced perspective of the role as it currently stands, considering positive and negative, to ensure Educational Psychologists are prepared for the reality of the role in the current climate (Rhodes, 2024).

Much of what has been found through my research speaks to the term 'adaptive expertise' (Carbonell et al., 2014). Adaptive expertise enables individuals to excel in the face of evolving job tasks and work methods, distinguishing it from routine expertise, which is becoming increasingly important. It encompasses efficiency and innovation (Kua et al., 2021). Within the medical field, adaptive expertise is sought to excel in a changing healthcare context. The goal is for individuals to apply their broad knowledge base while also generating new insights based on needs and context (Mylopoulos et al., 2018). Croskerry's (2018) review of the literature suggests that 'classic' expertise is insufficient and that adaptive experience, achieved through adaptive reasoning, leads to enhanced expertise.

Moreover, tolerance of uncertainty is imperative (Hillen et al., 2017). This skill has been associated with emotional well-being (Strout et al., 2018). Despite this, Reis-Dennis et al. (2021) have warned against extreme tolerance or intolerance of uncertainty. Rettie and Daniels's (2021) findings suggest that the general public is battling with uncertainty more than usual, which has been connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. In summary, following the completion of this research, I suggest that the Educational Psychology profession focuses on tolerance of uncertainty and adaptive expertise, which should improve their ability to write all statutory advice as well as for children and young people with needs with which they feel less familiar, and adapt to new situations. The goal would be to move away from more traditional and dichotomous understandings of 'expert' and 'non-expert'.

Other critical implications for practice have also been illuminated, especially in the context of working with children and young people with life-limiting conditions. As one of the most significant findings has been the recognition that uncertainty is not a weakness or sign of insufficient professional expertise, but rather a valid and necessary professional stance, embracing feelings of uncertainty allows Educational Psychologists to remain open, reflective, and responsive to the complexity and individuality of each case. These qualities are essential when working in ethically complex situations.

The findings of the current research therefore challenge the conventional understanding that Educational Psychologists must provide definitive answers and practice as 'experts'. In contrast, uncertainty has been positioned as a space for ethical deliberation, collaborative meaning-making, empathy, and compassion, especially when managing emotionally charged contexts. This shift has the potential to reduce professional burnout and emotional and moral distress by legitimising reflective, collaborative, and consultative practice over definitive and defensive certainty.

Additionally, the current research advocates for training and supervision that support Educational Psychologists in navigating and articulating uncertainty confidently. Universities could play a crucial role by reframing uncertainty as a mark of professional maturity rather than deficiency, and Educational Psychology Services can create cultures where open discussions of doubt and complexity are encouraged.

In brief, this research explored the narratives of Educational Psychologists writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt less familiar, highlighting tensions between their role as 'experts' and their view of themselves as co-constructors of solutions while emphasising the emotional, ethical, and systemic issues that impact their ability to provide effective support within the current SEND system. Strengths within the research include that it provided in-depth, qualitative insights into Educational Psychologists' narratives and a deeper understanding of the **role of Educational Psychologists**. Limitations included that it was based upon a small, context-specific participant group and potential biases due to the researcher's prior acquaintance with participants. Based on the narratives collected, suggestions for the Educational Psychology profession include focusing on emotional well-being, providing regular supervision, improving staff retention and job satisfaction, fostering relationships with schools, children, and families, and adopting an adaptive expertise approach to handle the evolving challenges in statutory advice writing with a focus on ensuring psychology is always at the forefront of Educational Psychologists' practice.

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Appendix 1: Participant Recruitment Flyer

The University Of Sheffield.

Are you an Educational Psychologist?

Doctoral Research Flyer

Project Title

The Elephant in The Room: Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Writing Statutory Advice for Children and Young People with Needs with Which They Feel They Are Less Familiar

Aims & Value

This project aims to hear your experiences of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which you felt you were less familiar. Whilst a lot of your practice concerns needs that are associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Speech, Language, and Communication needs, and Social, Emotional, and Mental Health needs, I am particularly interested in cases where you feel you have less familiarity and how you write statutory advice in this instance. The potential value of this research is that it could make a useful contribution to the knowledge exploring the distinct contribution of Educational Psychologists to the statutory process, whilst further understanding what Educational Psychologists' perception and understanding is of their role.

I am looking for participants

The project will involve a 1-hour online individual interview with a researcher from the University of Sheffield

You are not obligated to participate even if you know me

REQUIREMENTS

- Must be a HCPC qualified Educational Psychologist who has been qualified for at least two years and who understands what needs they are familiar with and those with which they feel they are less familiar

Contact Me If You're Interested
By Friday June 28th 2024

Julia Kingsley
jrkingsley1@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read the above information

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: *The Elephant in The Room: Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Writing Statutory Advice for Children and Young People with Needs with Which They Feel They Are Less Familiar*

This project aims to hear your experiences of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which you felt you were less familiar. Whilst a lot of your practice concerns needs that are associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Speech, Language, and Communication needs, and Social, Emotional, and Mental Health needs, I am particularly interested in cases where you feel you have less familiarity and how you write statutory advice in this instance. I would like to start a conversation about this experience. The potential value of this research is that it could make a useful contribution to the knowledge exploring the distinct contribution of Educational Psychologists to the statutory process, whilst further understanding what Educational Psychologists' perception and understanding is of their role.

This research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education department.

The researcher involved will be a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist: Julia Kingsley.

As an Educational Psychologist who has been qualified for at least two years, is HCPC registered, has written statutory advice, and understands what needs they are familiar with and those with which they feel they are less familiar, you are invited to participate in this study. Before you decide, you must understand how the study will work, what this means for you, and what your rights are as a participant. Please take time to read this information form carefully before you decide.

➤ **If you do decide to participate in the study, you will need to sign and date the consent form.**
➤ **It is important to remember that you can contact me, as the researcher, at any time to ask further questions or to withdraw from this project. Contact details have been provided below.**

About this research project
The project will involve a **1-hour online individual interview** with **a researcher** from the University of Sheffield. This interview will explore the narrative of your experiences of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which you felt you were less familiar. This will be an individual interview; we may explore themes of importance to Educational Psychologists in general as they arise in discussion, but we should aim not to discuss specific details (names, school, location, etc) of cases relating to children and their families; just your experiences. I will be following the general interview guide approach with elements included from a narrative framework.

There will be explicit boundaries around what will be explored in the interviews and Educational Psychologists are asked not to share any identifiable information surrounding particular

children and families. The interview will begin with a main orienting statement such as, "I am interested in hearing your personal experience of writing a piece of statutory advice for a child or young person with needs that you felt you were less familiar with." The researcher has prepared some possible questions and prompts that could be used following the main orientating statement to support you in telling your story and to allow for an understanding of the experience you will have during the interview: "Walk me through that journey," "How did you feel when you first received the advice request," "What did it bring up for you," "What happened next," "What did you do next."

Your narrative will be used to start a conversation about the commonalities and differences between these experiences. During the study, I will record the online interview as we speak, and participants' names will be anonymised during transcription and analysis to ensure confidentiality. This will allow the researcher to analyse what was said more in-depth. I aim to draw out themes from the discussion rather than specific points of what was said.

What are my rights if I decide to participate?
You have been chosen because you are an Educational Psychologist who has been qualified for at least two years, is HCPC registered, has written statutory advice, and understands what needs they are familiar with and those with which they feel they are less familiar. This does not mean that you must participate. Firstly, you deserve to be treated with dignity and respect - this study does not use any deception. At all times you have '**ongoing consent**' – that is the right to always withdraw even if you sign and date the consent form. If you change your mind at any point, you can leave the study (with all your data), you will not be pressured into staying and can leave freely without having to give a reason. You are also able to do this once the study has been completed – you can request that your data is not used or included in the study after the interview. This would need to be by the **1ˢᵗ of October 2024.**

You have the right to find out more information and ask questions before and after the study. You have the right to remain anonymous as well as have any information related to you kept securely.
You also have the right to **anonymity & confidentiality** (*please see the data section below for further information*).

The Importance of Confidentiality: What will be discussed?
Confidentiality in this interview will extend to people who may not be present. I hope to discuss **your experiences** of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which you felt you were less familiar, you do not need to recall specifics of cases, names, or events. In participating, you may need to think of specific cases to 'jog your memory' but you must not refer to children, their families, or other individuals by their names or any other identifiable information. The focus is very much on your experience as an Educational Psychologist.

The focus of the discussion will centre on:
- **Your experience of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which you felt you were less familiar.**

What will happen to my data?
- The only personal information that will be required is your consent form which will contain your name and signature and chosen email address. The visual information and audio will be recorded via Google Meet as part of the interview too.

- You have the right for your data to be stored safely and for it to remain confidential. This will be safely stored on the University of Sheffield U Drive which only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access. All the information relevant to you will only be available to the researcher and all of it will be deleted after the project. (*Planned deletion September 2026).* All information, including email communication, will be stored in this folder securely throughout the project.
- According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'
- The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.
If you have any concerns that your data is not being maintained appropriately, please contact me (see below).
- After the project, there is a possibility that this research will be published, with its data and analysis being reported by other researchers. It may draw interest to other researchers who wish to look at the 'data' but at this point, any information personal to you will be completely anonymous.
- Furthermore, due to the nature of this research, other researchers may likely find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

Accessing help and support/working in an office
- I appreciate that you are likely to access this interview from an office. There may be incidents that occur during the interview that you need to urgently attend. You can leave and come back.
- If any of the topics discussed are distressing, involve safeguarding, or other matters, I, as the researcher, can be available to assist in signposting you to the appropriate services and I can provide supervision.

Raising worries and concerns
If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact my project supervisor, Sahaja Davis, at t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled satisfactorily, you can also contact the directors of my course, Sahaja Davis at t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk and Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk or The Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

This may be related to how:
   a) **You think your data, and other people's data were handled,**
   b) **If you have any worries about the study and/or conduct of the researcher,**
   c) **If you think you or other people were exploited at any point,**
   d) **If you have concerns about how the findings will be used,**

e) If you believe the study, you participated in was different from what was described throughout this information form.

If you wish to make a report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse, or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the project's Designated Safeguarding Contact [Sahaja Davis t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk]. If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this Contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of the Department [Professor Rebecca Lawthom; r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk] and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager [Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk].
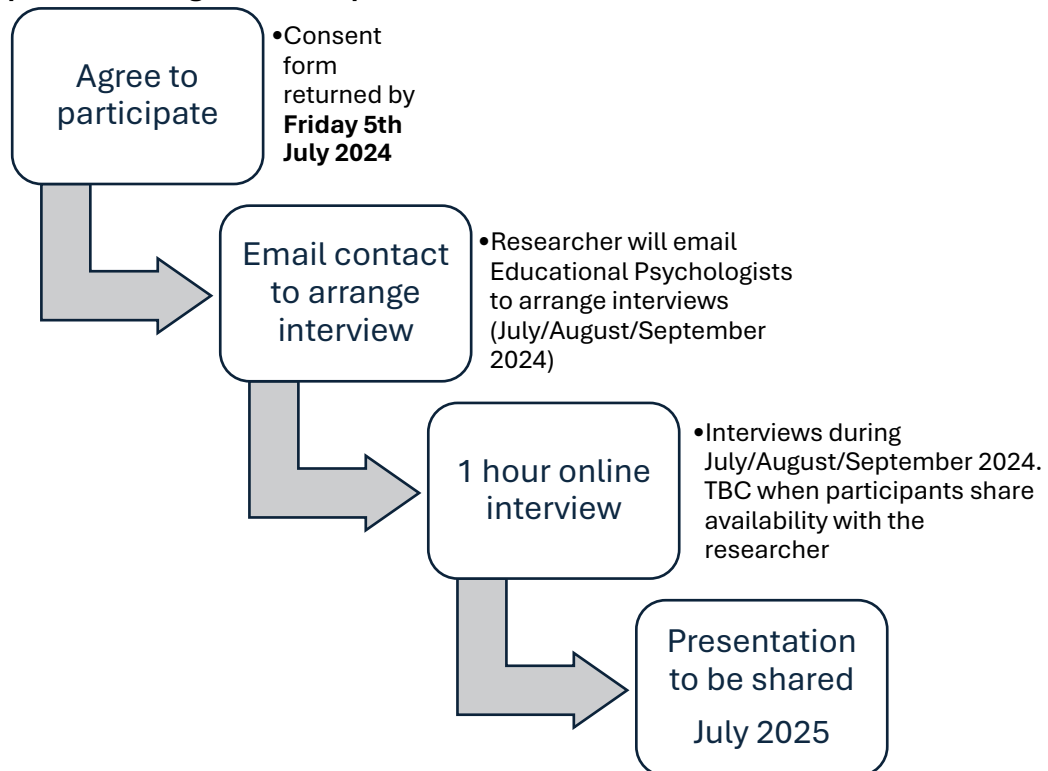
Are there any risks or disadvantages to taking part?
- Whilst we will not be talking about specific cases of challenging professional circumstances relative to children and families you may have worked with, we will talk about instances that may have been related to moments of stressful working. I respect that everyone is different and remembering stressful events can be discomforting and bring unwanted thoughts and feelings that can last longer than your hour-long involvement in the study.
- We will be talking about professional ways of working. People may share things that they later consider 'paint them in a bad light' and think that may reflect badly upon themselves or their service.

Are there any benefits to taking part?
- This project will provide an opportunity for Educational Psychologists to reflect on their practice and experiences of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which they felt they were less familiar. Sharing and reflecting on your own experiences may help form new ideas and ways of working for future practice.
- A research presentation will be shared with participants. This will be an opportunity for Educational Psychologists to see the impact of their involvement in the study.
- This aims to start a conversation about this experience and the future of Educational Psychologists' practice in general, especially in relation to statutory processes.

What happens when I agree to take part?

Agree to participate
- Consent form returned by **Friday 5th July 2024**

Email contact to arrange interview
- Researcher will email Educational Psychologists to arrange interviews (July/August/September 2024)

1 hour online interview
- Interviews during July/August/September 2024. TBC when participants share availability with the researcher

Presentation to be shared July 2025

Thank you for taking the time to read the above information. *If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the participant consent form – thank you in advance. If you express interest in the research but for whatever reason you are prevented from participating, I will contact you following the finalisation of the thesis with a research presentation and access to the final thesis.*

Even if you know me personally or we work together, you are not obliged to participate in my research. It is worth considering that you may feel inhibited or regretful about what you share during the process of this research. You can request that your data be deleted. I must ask that you respect the confidentiality of colleagues that we may both know.

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form: The Elephant in The Room: Educational Psychologists'

Experiences of Writing Statutory Advice for Children and Young People with Needs

with Which They Feel They Are Less Familiar

Consent Form (please delete responses 'YES' or 'NO')	
*I have read and understood this consent form dated 27/06/2025 **OR**, on request, the project has been fully explained to me. (If 'No' please do not proceed with the rest of this form)*	*Yes/No*
I agree to take part in this project. This will include: • ***Email contact & correspondence,*** • ***1-hour interview (online individual interview/ discussion),*** • ***The opportunity to access feedback with the researcher,*** • ***Recording of the interview (capturing video and sound).***	*Yes/No*
I understand and agree that my personal information can be saved and used. This includes: • ***Email address & email correspondence,*** • ***The recording of the interview (Google Meet visual and audio)*** *This will be saved and stored electronically on the password-protected University of Sheffield U Drive. Access will be limited to **only the researcher and my research supervisor**. It will be deleted in September 2026.*	*Yes/No*
I have had the opportunity to ask further questions about this project by using the email information below	*Yes/ No*
I agree for the video of the interview to be transcribed and stored safely on the secure, password-protected drive (above). This transcription will be anonymised and may be used for future learning and research	*Yes/No*
*I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study by the **1st of October 2024**. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw*	*Yes/No*
*I understand that if I withdraw or participate fully in this project, I can still request that my data and information be removed from the study and not used in analysis after the interview up until the **1st of October 2024.***	*Yes/No*
I agree to be represented by an assigned letter during the transcription and analysis.	*Yes/ No*
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield	*Yes/No*
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	*Yes/No*
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research output. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	*Yes/No*
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form	*Yes/ No*
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form	*Yes/ No*

I give permission for the online meeting to be recorded, transcribed and its files to be saved onto the University of Sheffield U drive, with access limited to the researcher and my supervisor (before being deleted when the study is complete, September 2026)	Yes/ No
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield	Yes/ No

(See further information on the next page)

Name of Participant (Please Print):	Signature	Date:

Name of Researcher:	Signature	Date:

On return of your consent form, you will receive a copy that has been signed by the researcher, this will be for you to keep for your own records. A copy of this will also be saved and stored electronically on the password protected University of Sheffield U Drive.

Contact Information:

Researcher: Julia Kingsley jrkingsley1@sheffield.ac.uk
Supervisor: Sahaja Davis t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk

You can also contact the directors of my course, Sahaja Davis at t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk and Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk and the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk.
University Address: Sheffield S10 2TN

Please return this completed form to Julia Kingsley, researcher, at jrkingsley1@sheffield.ac.uk

Participants can contact the researcher or their supervisor at any time if they have concerns about the research.

Further Project Information: The Template of this consent form has been approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee and is available to view here: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy/further-gu

Appendix 4: Initial Notes Example

Initial Notes Example

A: No, so I had to write everything in, I felt, in minute detail…taking into account that we didn't know how…I did consult colleagues. I said, has anybody done anything any piece of work like this and how did you...how did you cope with getting the advice right and one colleague said he had seen a young child with multiple complex needs and he had kept putting into his advice the fact that he didn't want to say we don't know how long this child is going to live and I didn't want to say that either it's offensive and cruel to the parents. They know that. I want…but he said it was useful to say they didn't have evidence about how the child would progress and therefore her needs at the moment in these categories appear to be this, but it must be reviewed in 12 weeks time. But I mean if it's a preschool child, they have to review them in six months anyway, but to take to bring that forward and say it must be reviewed in 12 weeks. And that seemed to be helpful because I could structure what I wanted to say seeing her today, this is what is happening, this is what she would need to make progress. and then I was stuck over my keyboard for half an hour. How do I know she can make progress? What would be the tiniest thing? That might look like progress. And try and find something. And sometimes it was progress might be that she would be quiet in a certain situation where at the moment she's shown distress or rejection in as much as she could. She couldn't really reject things but there was definitely some things that she seemed to relax like the hand washing in the water as she relaxed and she might even smile. A sort of automatic response so we knew she could do that at a very basic level. So then could she do that if she was holding or they put her hands around the soft toy. Could she do that if when they gave her something and shook her hand and it made a noise, so it was looking at that level of in-quotes progress. Because I read up about Rett syndrome, but it was obviously that she got more. As the parent said there were additional problems.

B: And you got two days to do this.

A: Yeah, I took more than two days. But…And I can't remember if I'm absolutely honest if it was in on time. But if it wasn't I would have got reminders. When is it going to be in, when is it going to be in? And it it it was just a horrible time. It's the same with any piece of advice at that time. Huge pressure.

B: Why were the pressures so as they were then is it different now, or is it?

A: It's not much different now, its…the situation changed over time. So going back say 10 years. EPs would have children, well in [x] anyway, children referred to them they could do some non-statutory work. It might develop into statutory work at which point you've probably got all your advice anyway, and it wouldn't take you long to write. What happened Nationwide I suppose around. I don't know when it started but before covid anyway there was a vast increase in the number of statutory requests for statutory assessment and then the key performance indicators of the powers above us suddenly became very important to them and they had to know that advices were being provided on time and they… were getting plans issued if plans were to be issued on time. That was very important for their key performance indicators and I probably for the purposes of this interview ought not to say anything else it because it was very very pressurized. colleagues left and we weren't at that point our service was not allowed to appoint locum EPs or associate EPs.

Comments
Commented: Seeking support from colleagues
Commented: Multiple participants have mentioned life-limiting conditions. Appropriateness of EHC procedure?
Commented: Really thinking about the parents. Sympathy
Commented: Information about process
Commented: Taking a long time
Commented: Being unsure
Commented: Needing to do research
Commented: Time taken
Commented: Not enjoying it
Commented: Feeling pressure
Commented: Situation has changed
Commented: Context
Commented: Needed to be on time
Commented: Pressure
Commented: Retention

Appendix 5: Example Stages of Analysis

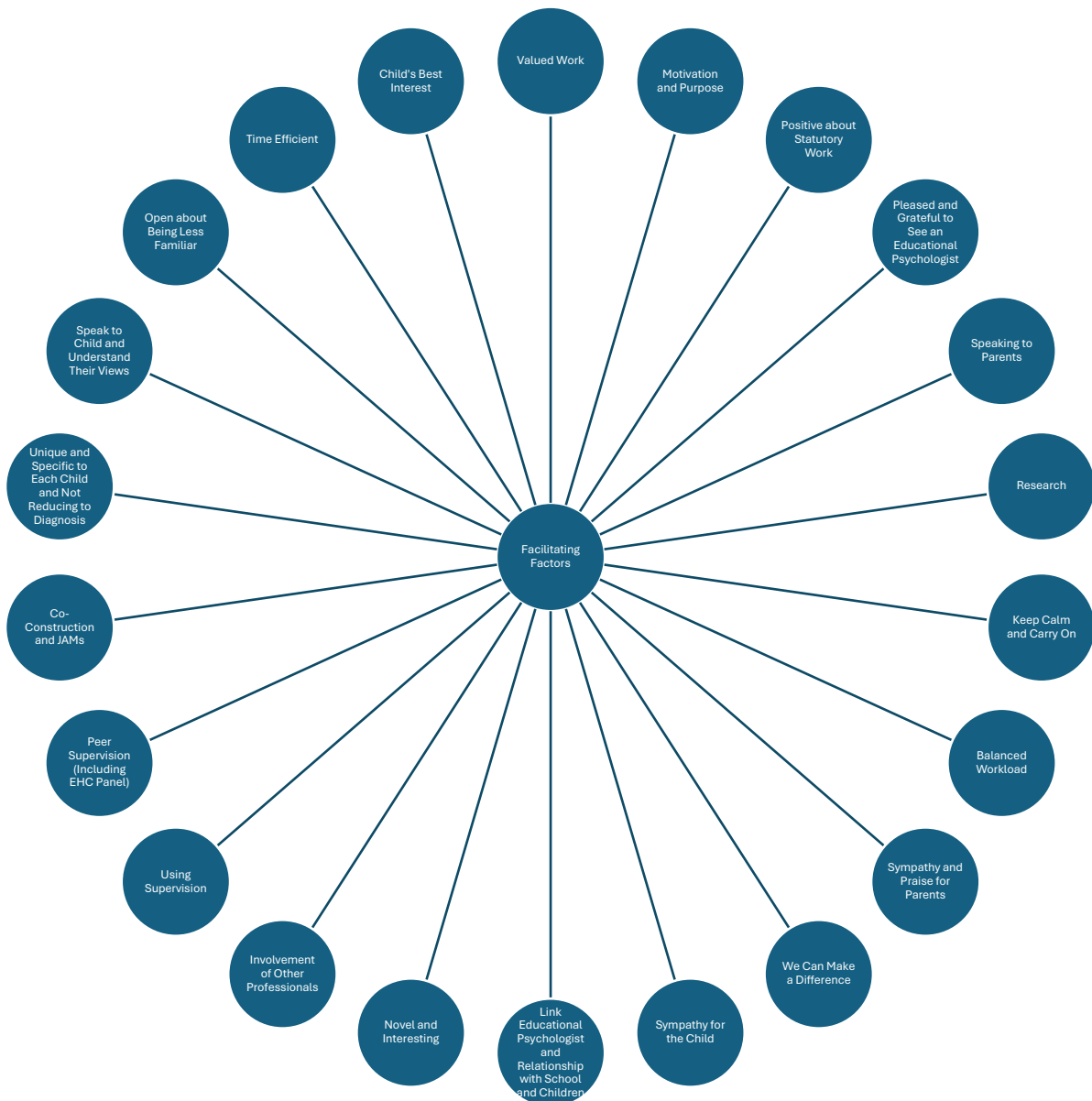| Data Extract	Code	Overarching Theme (Subtheme)
…so, what comes to mind is when I was working with a primary aged child a little girl…not a huge amount of time ago. The context was that we were allocated statutory assessments that weren't necessarily from our schools. So, this piece of work was in a school that I hadn't been to before. The piece of work was obviously a statutory assessment, and it transpired that the child's parent was a teacher at the school that she attended. The child was at the time was at the beginning of my involvement was in foster care but by the end of my involvement had been adopted by her foster carer. So it was the same person that was her kind of carer or guardian, but they became her adoptive parent towards the end of my involvement and in some ways on paper things looked to be reasonably straightforward as in she had experienced she was in foster care obviously she had experienced a huge amount of adversity in early childhood having been removed from her parents I think when she was around four or five years of age and reading the information submitted by school it very much felt that her needs kind of could probably or possibly be understood through a kind of awareness of the impact of adversity and trauma on child development. When I met with mum though mum very early on in our consultation raised the possibility of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and explained that her daughter was being assessed by CAMHS to see whether she met the criteria for that diagnosis and so that was the bit where it kind of felt like actually this is relatively new to me, perhaps had some input at University but was kind of struggling to recall a huge amount about it if I'm honest because I don't think maybe we do come across FASD, but maybe we	1. Background Information 2. Unknown School and Staff 3. Medical and Health Discourses 4. Out of Depth and Anxious	1. Narratives and Background Information 2. Hindering Factors (Unknown School and Staff) 3. Hindering Factors (Medical and Health Discourses) 4. Hindering Factors (Out of Depth and Anxious)

don't come across diagnosed FASD that often if that makes sense. So maybe I have worked with children who…have been impacted by kind of alcohol consumption or substance misuse when they were in utero, but I don't think I've had to think about that particularly explicitly if that makes sense. I'm at risk of waffling now, but that's kind of the gist of it. So, mum very early on mentioned that FASD was being considered as a possibility and in the context of our first meeting kind of said, oh it's been so frustrating meeting with professionals and teachers and working with people who know nothing about FASD, which kind of in me triggered a slight oh gosh I could fall into that category. I think it obviously for mum for whatever reason I say mum but her adoptive parent for whatever reason it felt really important that she worked with a professional who understood FASD and the implications of that…	5. Parent Perception of Educational Psychologists' Role and Advice	5. Role of the Educational Psychologist (Parent Perception of Educational Psychologists' Role and Advice)

Appendix 6: Master Codes List

1. Anger and Dissatisfaction
2. Background Information
3. Balanced Workload
4. Changes Needed to System
5. Negotiating and Refining Statutory Advice
6. Child's Best Interest
7. Co-Construction and JAMs
8. Comparison of Different Local Authorities
9. Complexity of the Document Itself
10. Different from the Norm
11. Difficulties with Specificity
12. Do Not Know Outcome
13. Educational Psycholgy Service Changes (Recruitment and Retention Difficulties)
14. Expert
15. Formulation
16. Getting it Right and Good Enough
17. Hard to Stay Up to Date
18. Impact
19. Different Practices
20. Information Gathering and Assessment
21. Involvement of Other Professionals
22. Keep Calm and Carry On
23. Life Limiting and Appropriateness of EHC Procedure
24. Link Educational Psychologist and Relationship with School and Children
25. Low Expectations of System and School
26. Medical and Health Discourses
27. Motivation and Purpose
28. Non-Expert
29. Not Able to Use Supervision
30. Novel and Interesting
31. Open about Being Less Familiar
32. Pressure from Parents and Pressure They Put on Themselves

33. Out of Depth and Anxious

34. Parent Perception of Educational Psychologists' Role and Advice

35. Wants of the Parents

36. Parent's Fear and Anxiety

37. Peer Supervision (Including EHC Panel)

38. Perception Difference (Statutory vs Non-Statutory)

39. Pleased and Grateful to See an Educational Psychologist

40. Positive about Statutory Work

41. Psychology

42. Randomly Assigned

43. Reassure School

44. Research

45. Retrospect

46. Role of Educational Psychologist (Educational Psychologists' Perspective)

47. School Support Systems and Variability

48. SMART (Advice Becoming More Specific)

49. Speak to Child and Understand their Views

50. Speaking to Parents

51. Sympathy and Praise for Parents

52. Sympathy for the Child

53. System Not Working and EHC Contextual Changes and Issues

54. The Norm

55. Time Efficient

56. Time Pressures and Time it Takes

57. Tribunal and Appeals

58. Unique and Specific to Each Child and Not Reducing to Diagnosis

59. Unknown School and Staff

60. Using Supervision

61. Valued Pieces of Work

62. Vivid Memory

63. We Can Make a Difference

Appendix 7: Initial Attempt to Present Overarching Theme One

Valued Work

Child's Best Interest

Motivation and Purpose

Time Efficient

Positive about Statutory Work

Open about Being Less Familiar

Pleased and Grateful to See an Educational Psychologist

Speak to Child and Understand Their Views

Speaking to Parents

Unique and Specific to Each Child and Not Reducing to Diagnosis

Research

Facilitating Factors

Keep Calm and Carry On

Co-Construction and JAMs

Balanced Workload

Peer Supervision (Including EHC Panel)

Sympathy and Praise for Parents

Using Supervision

We Can Make a Difference

Involvement of Other Professionals

Novel and Interesting

Link Educational Psychologist and Relationship with School and Children

Sympathy for the Child

Appendix 8: Participant Debrief Sheet

<u>Participant Debrief Sheet</u>

Project Title: *The Elephant in The Room: Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Writing Statutory Advice for Children and Young People with Needs with Which They Feel They Are Less Familiar*

Thank you for completing my research that will go towards my doctoral thesis.

This study aimed to hear your experiences of writing statutory advice for children and young people with needs with which you felt you were less familiar. Whilst a lot of your practice concerns needs that are associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Speech, Language, and Communication needs, and Social, Emotional, and Mental Health needs, I was particularly interested in cases where you feel you have less familiarity and how you write statutory advice in this instance. I would like to start a conversation about this experience.

If you have any further questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or their supervisor. You are free to withdraw your data up to three weeks following participation and can do so by contacting the researcher. For general concerns or questions please contact the researcher's supervisor or the Head of the Department. See the contact details provided below.

Furthermore, if you feel you have been negatively affected by the content of this research, please contact the researcher, who will be able to offer supervision.

Contact Information:

Researcher: Julia Kingsley
jrkingsley1@sheffield.ac.uk
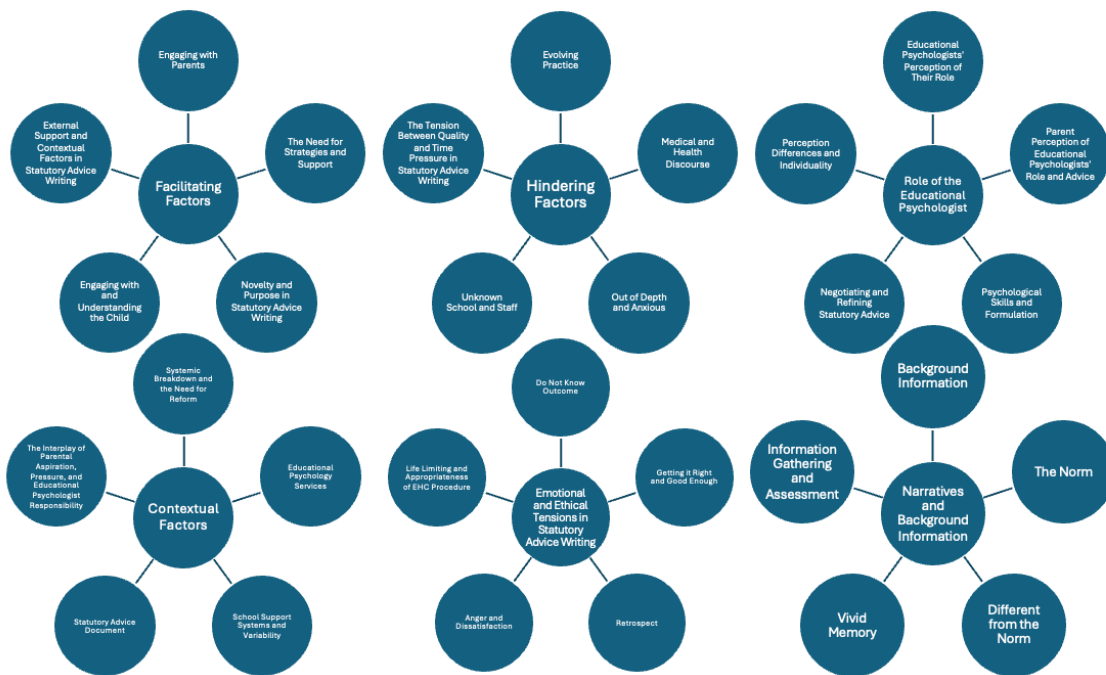*Supervisor: Sahaja Davis t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk*

You can also contact the directors of my course, Sahaja Davis at t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk and Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk and the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk.
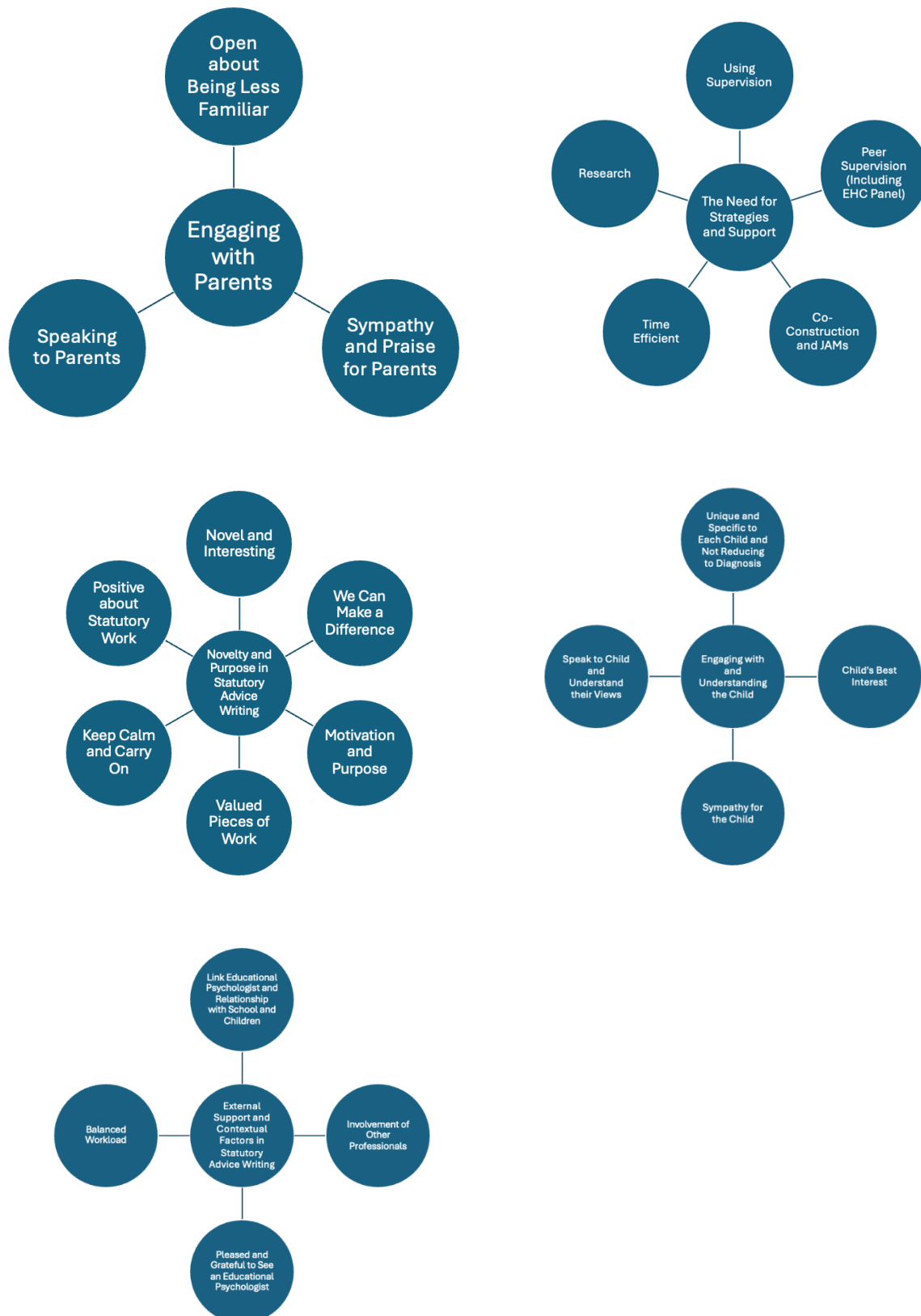*University Address: Sheffield S10 2TN*

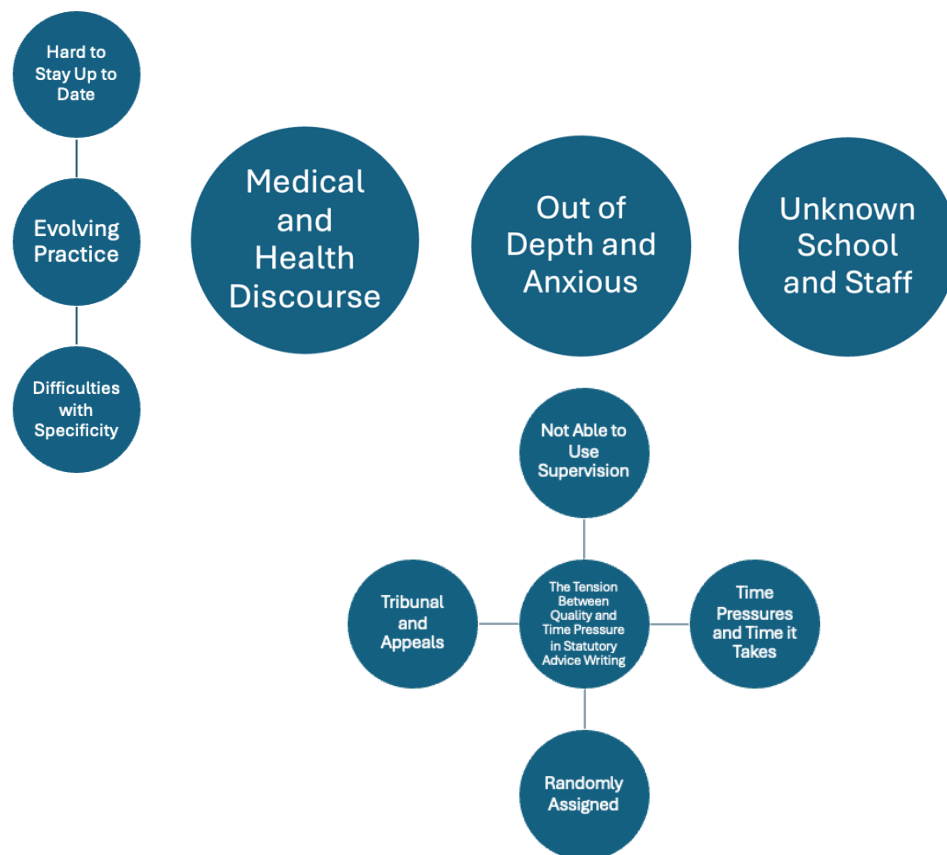# Appendix 9: Overall Map of Overarching Themes and Subthemes
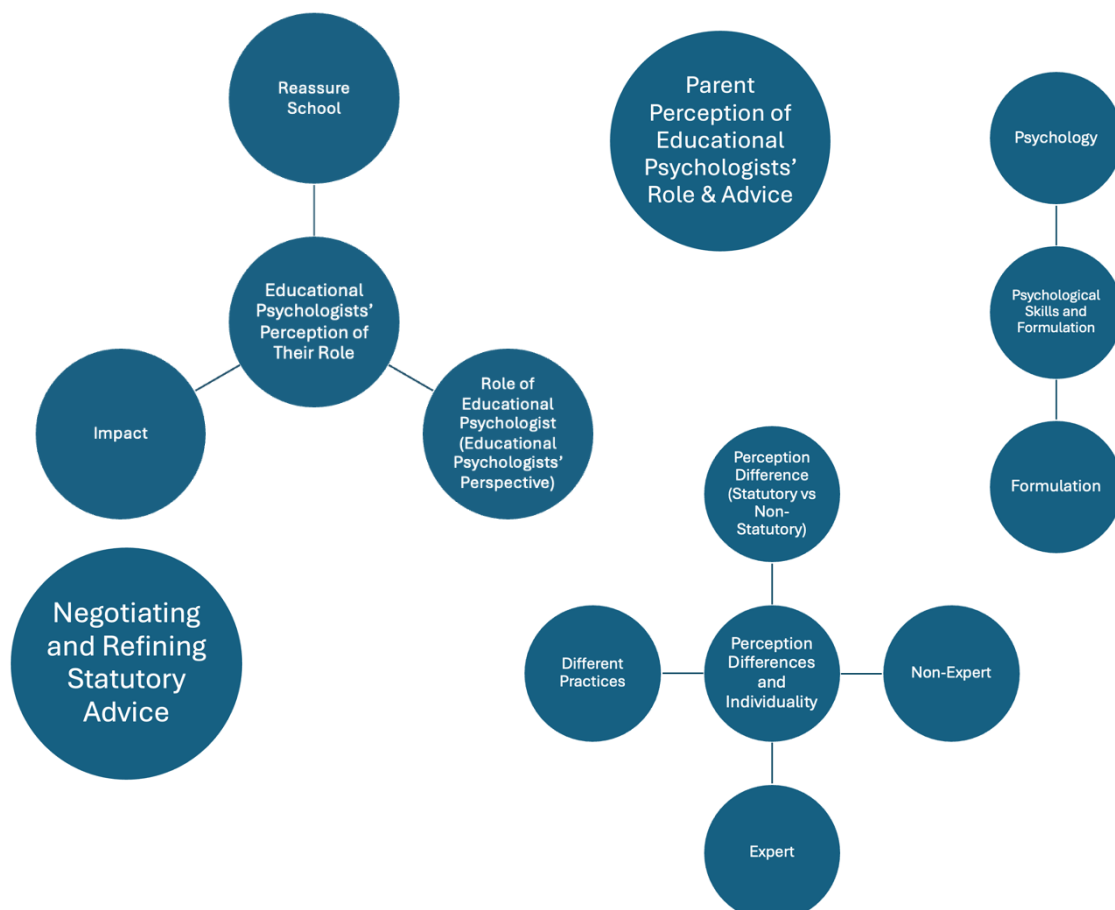
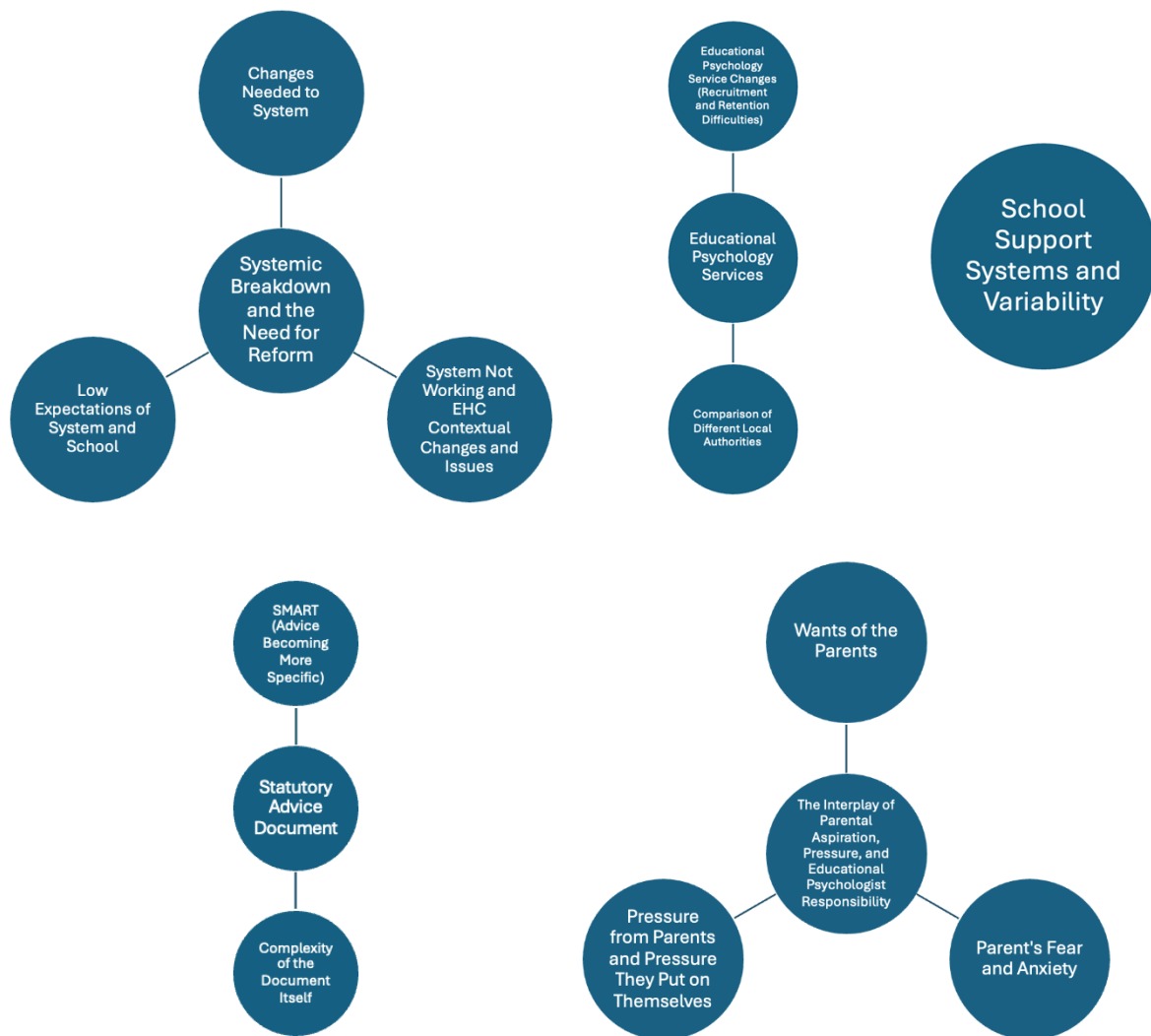# Appendix 10: Individual Maps for Overarching Themes

Facilitating Factors:

Hindering Factors:

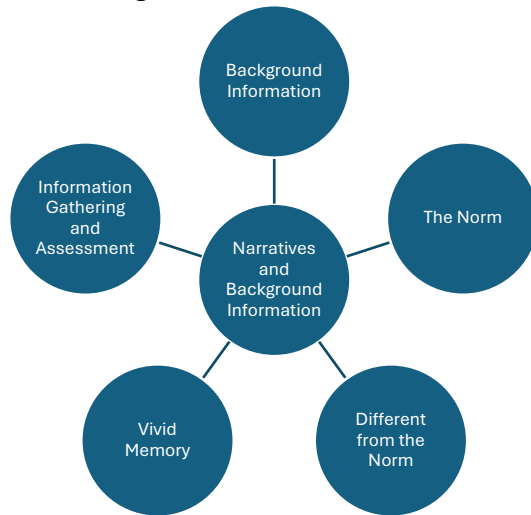Role of the Educational Psychologist:

Contextual Factors:

Emotional and Ethical Tensions in Statutory Advice Writing:

Narratives and Background Information:

Appendix 11: Ethics Approval Letter

The University Of Sheffield.

Julia Kingsley
Registration number: 220110389
School of Education
Programme: DEdCPsy

Dear Julia

PROJECT TITLE: The Elephant in The Room: Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Writing Statutory Advice for Children and Young People with Needs with Which They Feel They Are Less Familiar
APPLICATION: Reference Number 059787

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 17/05/2024 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 059787 (form submission date: 10/05/2024); (expected project end date: 30/05/2025).
- Participant information sheet 1135968 version 2 (10/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135967 version 2 (10/05/2024).

The following amendments to this application have been approved:

- Amendment approved: 26/06/2024

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.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Lauren Powell
Ethics Admin
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Admin (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.