



**An Appreciative Inquiry into the Annual Review Process for Education, Health and
Care Plans**

By Josephine Murray

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Abstract

In England, Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are reviewed through the Annual Review process as stipulated in the Children and Families Act (2014) and the most recent SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). These legislations have person-centred and collaborative underpinnings; however, these aims appear to be shrouded in contextual barriers leading to inconsistent experiences (Capper & Soan, 2022). Whilst some existing research considered the initial assessment of an EHCP (e.g. Roa, 2020), few explore the Annual Review process directly (e.g. Boorman et al., 2025; Cooper, 2019). This current study aimed to fill this research gap and contribute towards an understanding as to what may support positive experiences of Annual Reviews moving forward.

The current research took an Appreciative Inquiry approach which consisted of six focus groups. Participants included: Parent/Carers; Children and Young People (CYP); health practitioners; a social worker; SENCOs; SEND team practitioners and an Educational Psychologist. A Critical Realist Thematic Analysis (Fryer, 2022) approach was used to explore focus group data. 'Possibility Statements' and a 'Design Planning Document' were generated to support consideration of what 'should be' (or could be) in future Annual Reviews.

This study aspired to achieve a better understanding of current practice, hopes for the future and consideration for future practice moving forward. Key themes included: collaborative working (Griffiths et al., 2021); CYP participation (Fox, 2016; Lundy, 2007); a person-centred approach; and improved accessibility to the process. Additional considerations, such as epistemic oppression and contextual factors, including competing resources, were also evident in impacting individuals' experiences. Moving forwards, it is vital that Annual Reviews are viewed as a priority to make them meaningful and accessible processes that support CYP with EHCPs. Future research and recommendations for practice is also considered, in addition to the research's strengths and limitations.

Keywords: Annual Review, Education Health and Care Plan, Appreciative Inquiry, Critical Realist Thematic Analysis

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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List of Acronyms Used

CLA	Children Looked After
CoP	SEND Code of Practice
CQC	Care Quality Commission
CR	Critical Realism
CYP	Children and Young People (0-25)
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan (sometimes referred to as an EHC plan in wider literature/policy)
EP	Educational Psychologist
LA	Local Authority
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SENCO	Special Educational Needs (and Disability) Coordinator (sometimes referred to as SENDCO)
SEN(D)	Special Educational Needs (and Disability)
SENDIASS	Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

Additional notes on the language used:

Whilst not an abbreviation, I wish to comment here that I used the term 'Parent/Carer' to represent a diverse range of people and family situations including biological or adoptive parents, grandparents, family members, kinship carers, legal guardians, foster carers, social workers and others who may hold a caring role/responsibility (Sewell, 2023, p. 44).

The term 'practitioners' refers to individuals who have a role concerning CYP through their jobs. This is used in place of 'professionals' to reduce hierarchical implications and is a personal preference.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to Chapter 1

This research investigated, through an Appreciative Inquiry approach, the experiences and hopes of those involved in the Annual Review process of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This research included participants from the following groups: Children and Young People (CYP) who have EHCPs; Parents/Carers; health practitioners; a social care practitioner; Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs); an Educational Psychologist (EP); and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) team Officers.

This chapter will introduce the context for this research and outline the layout of the thesis. I will also discuss my personal background, my interest in the topic and the reasons I have chosen this area for research.

It should be noted that the current doctoral research was conducted and written during a specific time and within a certain context. This should be kept in mind whilst reading this thesis, especially when considering those such as Butler et al. (2025), who appear to be indicating that substantial changes within SEND legislation in England are imminent.

Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews

EHCPs are statutory documents used to outline a CYP's (aged 0-25) SEND by describing their educational, health and social care strengths and needs, highlighting what support they require and stating what outcomes they are working towards. EHCPs were introduced to replace previously used 'Statements of Special Educational Need' (commonly referred to as Statements or Statements of SEN) and were introduced by the Children and Families Act (2014) which was accompanied by the most recent Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education [DfE] & Department of Health [DoH], 2015) (hereafter CoP). In this legislation which applies to practice in England, CYP are determined as having SEND if they have "significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others the same age" or have "a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of

facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age” (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 16). An EHCP needs assessment applies these criteria and determines whether a CYP requires such special education provision in the form of this document. A CYP’s EHCP comes to an end when: the student enters higher education; or enters the academic year they turn 25; or gains employment and requires no more education; or when the local authority (LA) concludes that an EHCP is no longer required (DfE & DoH, 2015).

The Annual Review process aims to ensure that each EHCP remains relevant and continues to support the CYP to whom it relates. Annual Reviews, legally, should occur at least once a year and involve relevant practitioners, to help inform any decisions to be taken concerning the EHCP being reviewed. The CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015 p.194) mandates that the overall Annual Review process should: gather assessment information; review provision; including that of health and social care; consider target/outcomes; and consider whether the EHCP remains appropriate or if it should be ceased. Whilst individual LAs hold accountability for Annual Reviews, the responsibility for conducting Annual Review meetings and completing paperwork are often delegated to maintained educational settings and their Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) (Boorman et al., 2025).

Recent statistics show that 4.8% of CYP (over 575,000) have an EHCP. The number of CYP with an EHCP has increased by 140% since 2015 and increased by 11.6% alone between 2023 and 2024 (Butler et al., 2025; DfE, 2024; National Statistics, 2024). The Number of requests for assessments for an EHCP has also increased, with data highlighting that there were 138,242 initial requests made for assessments for an EHCP during 2023 (which is an increase of 20.8% from, the 2021-2022 calendar year) (DfE, 2024). With current statistics in mind, in theory, over 400,000 Annual Reviews should have occurred in the last academic year (National Statistics, 2024).

Researcher Context and Inspiration

Throughout my career I have worked with CYP and their families in various contexts. This has included working in a LA SEND team. When I first joined the team, a core part of my role was to support the ‘conversions’ of Statements of SEN to EHCPs in accordance with the Children and Families Act (2014) and CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015). Here, I became very aware that the initiation and maintenance of EHCPs created significant complexities and challenges for those involved. Families and educational staff would often share their dissatisfaction. SENCOs would be especially frustrated by “hoop jumping” and the processes involved when asking for additional input for CYP. Parent/Carers would often say that they had to continually “fight” for what they felt their child needed. After working in the LA SEND team for over two years, I retrained to support CYP more directly, with a reduced focus on SEND processes. Nevertheless, I remained interested in SEND in general.

I later became a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and found myself returning to a profession that is more directly concerned with the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015). My work as a TEP and how I fit professionally into current English SEND processes differed from my previous role in the SEND team. As a TEP, I developed an awareness that the theoretical aims of the legislation, which can be associated with various psychological theories and practice (such as those based on systemic practice (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995) and that involved in CYP participation (e.g. Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007) were not always achieved and I became more conscious of this. Gaining CYP voice is a core principle of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and as a TEP, I have developed an understanding of how it can be used to support social justice and reduce oppression (Sewell, 2023).

After attending several emotive and challenging Annual Reviews as a TEP, having had a few years away from them, I perceived from those who engaged in the Annual Reviews with me, that sometimes the Annual Review process was a chore, or a “tick box” exercise. I felt that the Annual Review process was being underused, which led me to explore research around how to make an Annual Review a person-centred, collaborative and empowering process. I

was surprised by the lack of literature which focused on Annual Reviews, and I felt that the process, with some research and investigation, could be used more effectively as a tool to help CYP, which in turn would help Annual Reviews to be more supportive and inclusive. I, therefore, decided to focus on this topic for my thesis.

To provide transparency, I should state here that my philosophical position is that of a critical realist. This is further explored in Chapter 3, however, it is important to recognise my approach at this stage, as my philosophy is reflected throughout this thesis. As a critical realist researcher, I hoped to gain insight into participants' experiences of Annual Reviews within the context of the current English SEND system and wider overlapping

Research Rationale, Research Questions and Overview

Rationale for Researching Annual Reviews

EHCPs were introduced in the most recent SEND reforms, under the Children and Families Act (2014) and CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and are statutorily required to be reviewed yearly, through the process of an Annual Review. Within the current English SEND system, LAs are experiencing a growing number of EHCP assessment requests, which has resulted in an overall rise of EHCPs. This has increased pressure on LAs and has required the allocation of significant resources in order to perform the required and requested processes associated with EHCPs (DfE, 2022b). This has also had an impact upon Annual Reviews, which have escalated as the numbers of EHCPs continue to grow (DfE, 2022a, 2024).

Cadman (2021) asserts that due to the pressures within the current SEND system, following yearly rises in requests for EHCPs, there is little opportunity or capacity for LAs to allocate time and resources on monitoring and reviewing existing plans to ensure that CYP are making progress and receiving the correct support. I have also noticed this within my own practice, finding that Annual Reviews are often given reduced priority when compared to EHCP initial assessments. For example, I have found that timescales and content of EHCP initial assessments are often prioritised, and information is more readily shared during this

process from various practitioners in comparison to Annual Reviews. I found this to be interesting as I consider Annual Reviews to be at least as important to EHCP initial assessments, if not more so, as they ensure that CYP with SEND that requires special educational provision, identified through an EHCP assessment (Section 36(8,9) Children and Families Act, 2014), continue to receive appropriate support in consideration of their ongoing development and other contextual factors which may be impacting their education, health and care.

One criticism of these legislations is that they do not outline how those involved in EHCPs can utilise the Annual Review process effectively and consistently, due to limited guidance on the process (Boorman et al., 2025). Because of this, I have often found that Annual Reviews can lead to feelings of frustration for those involved. For example, I have often had discussions with Parent/Carers and SENCOs, who have shared that their requests for further provision for a CYP through an Annual Review have been 'ignored' or 'dismissed', leading to the process being a missed opportunity to support CYPs in a meaningful way. My experience of this led me to reflect upon why some Annual Reviews fall short of the theoretical underpinnings of the current English legislation that created them (such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015)), which were intended to support CYP with SEND throughout their educational career in a person-centred and collaborative way (see Chapter 2 where these underpinnings are discussed further). This made me consider Annual Reviews as being a relevant topic to research.

Overall, there is limited research which directly considers Annual Reviews (e.g. Cooper, 2019; Boorman, 2025) and the process itself has often been raised by Ofsted and the CQC (through their local area SEND inspection reports) as not being of sufficient quality, not meeting statutory deadlines, and not being consistently attended by the correct individuals (Ofsted & CQC, 2018, 2021a, 2022a). Such challenges in a statutory process, which has the potential to support CYP outcomes, highlights a rationale for research which can deepen our understanding of Annual Reviews and can build on this by exploring best practice for the future. For example, through an action research approach.

Rationale for an Action Research Approach Using Appreciative Inquiry

Action Research is a participatory and collaborative approach to inquiry which aims to develop practical knowledge to support new understanding and outcomes (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). My reasoning for using such an approach to research Annual Reviews was to gain understanding of experiences of the process, in addition to support social change and improved Annual Review processes moving forward (Mackenzie et al., 2012). I found that discussions I had in my role as a TEP, around EHCP processes, were largely negative and appeared 'stuck'. I decided that an action research approach to this thesis would not only help new understanding in the area of Annual Reviews but also support the generation of next steps to improve future practice in a collaborative and participatory way (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). I also thought that an action research approach to research on Annual Reviews would help in considering how to make the processes become more aligned to the theoretical underpinnings set out in the CoP and support more consistent experiences for those within the current English SEND system (DfE & DoH, 2015). Action research and the extent of which this thesis could be considered as a piece of participatory action research is further discussed in Chapter 3.

When considering what type of action research to use in this thesis, I found Appreciative Inquiry to be appropriate. This is because, whilst some research is available as highlighting individuals' experiences of processes within the current English SEND System (e.g. Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2018; Sales & Vincent, 2018), there appears to be little understanding around what makes a positive Annual Review experience and what individuals involved in the process would like to see in future Annual Reviews. Appreciative Inquiry is a generative process for facilitating positive change in human systems and helps to focus attention on what is already working well (Armstrong et al., 2020). This is something which I found to be missing in my conversations around Annual Reviews more generally within my practice as a TEP, as the individuals I spoke to often focussed on their negative experiences of the English SEND system. Appreciative Inquiry not only focusses on the best

of what is but also asks participants to re-imagine what could be in the future (Bushe, 2012). I therefore felt that this consideration of what could be in the future would help those involved in Annual Reviews move forwards and make the most out of these processes in a collaborative way (Cooperrider et al., 2008), which echoes a core principle underpinning the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015).

The idea of conducting action research, using Appreciative Inquiry, is also supported by an increase in dissatisfaction with EHCP processes through tribunal data (Ahad et al., 2022; Ministry of Justice, 2024). Reducing such appeals would not only indicate an increased satisfaction with EHCP and Annual Review experiences, but it would also reduce the resources used by LAs on such expensive and adversarial processes, by considering what is best practice for maintaining low rates of tribunal appeals (Marsh, 2023).

Research Questions and Overview

Based on the rationale for the current research discussed above, the overall aim of the research is to answer the following research questions:

1. 'What is' and 'what gives life' to the Annual Review process?
2. What are CYPs', Parent/Carers' and practitioners' dreams and hopes for Annual Reviews?
3. What can we learn from previous experiences and hopes for the future in relation to Annual Review processes moving forward?

To fulfil the aim of this thesis and explore the research questions set, I recruited various participants from groups which often engage in the Annual Review process. Participants of this research included: three CYP; three Parent/Carers; three SENCOs; three Health Practitioners; a Social Worker; an EP; and three SEND Officers (practitioners who work within the LA SEND team). The breadth of participants was to gain a holistic understanding of experiences and hopes for future Annual Reviews from various perspectives, in order for these to be built upon to support future experiences of Annual Reviews. To do this, the research took place in two stages. The first stage explored the 'Discovery' and 'Dream'

phases of the Appreciative Inquiry 4D Cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This stage took the form of six focus groups which explored what practices (including positive experiences) are already occurring that can be built upon and what participants' hopes for future Annual Reviews are. The second stage considered the 'Design' phase of the 4D cycle, through the creation of Possibility Statements (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Eobaina, 2012). This stage, in line with this thesis' action research aims, supported the initial stages of considering what actions needed to be put in place to make participants' hopes for Annual Reviews come to fruition.

Outline of Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is arranged into four further chapters. Chapter 2 is a critical literature review, which aims to provide relevant background including: the context of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015); the psychological underpinnings of the CoP; and what an Annual Review is. Available literature is critically reviewed and current practice including barriers to Annual Reviews and similar processes are also discussed. Chapter 3 then outlines the methodological considerations applied to this thesis. This includes the philosophical positioning of the current research, as well as a fuller consideration of Appreciative Inquiry and the research methods chosen. Finally, the analysis approach and ethical considerations are summarised.

Chapter 4 sets out the findings from the critical realist thematic analysis (Fryer, 2022) following the focus groups. Meta Concepts and Possibility Statements are also outlined in the chapter to support the design of 'what should be' for Annual Reviews. Chapter 5 then considers the findings of this research, relative to other relevant literature, before concluding with key implications and limitations of this thesis, in addition to suggestions for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

Introduction to Chapter 2

This chapter considers the background and context around the Annual Review process. I discuss the key themes of the most recent CoP (DfH & DoH, 2015), upon which current Annual Reviews are based. I also examine the relevant literature and psychological theory concerning Annual Reviews and EHCPs before summarising the rationale for the current research and my research aims.

Findings and information from multiple sources have been explored in this literature review including: published articles; peer-reviewed journals; government policies and guidance. The style of this literature review can be described as 'critical' and aimed to consider available literature, rather than to establish an evidence base for clinical practice, which is the aim of systematic reviews (Nightingale, 2009). Relevant research was identified using a combination of keywords, which included: Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs); Statements; Annual Reviews; SEND reviews; and SEND Code of Practice. These keywords were used on the following libraries and databases: StarPlus (The University of Sheffield online library platform); Google scholar; and White Rose Etheses. Boolean operators such as 'AND' were used to hone the search.

During my investigation of the literature available, references that appeared in relevant literature were also explored. Previous joint SEND inspections carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and the Care Quality Commissioners (CQC) were also considered. The purpose of joint SEND inspections are to evaluate how well local area partnerships support CYP with SEND. These inspections, which often mention Annual Reviews, result in reports which highlight good practice and recommended improvements (Ofsted & CQC, 2023). The National Audit Office (2024) stated that 31% of the SEND inspections completed between January 2023 and March 2024 found 'widespread and/or systemic failings' within the LAs reviewed.

SEND Legislative Background and the Introduction of EHCPs

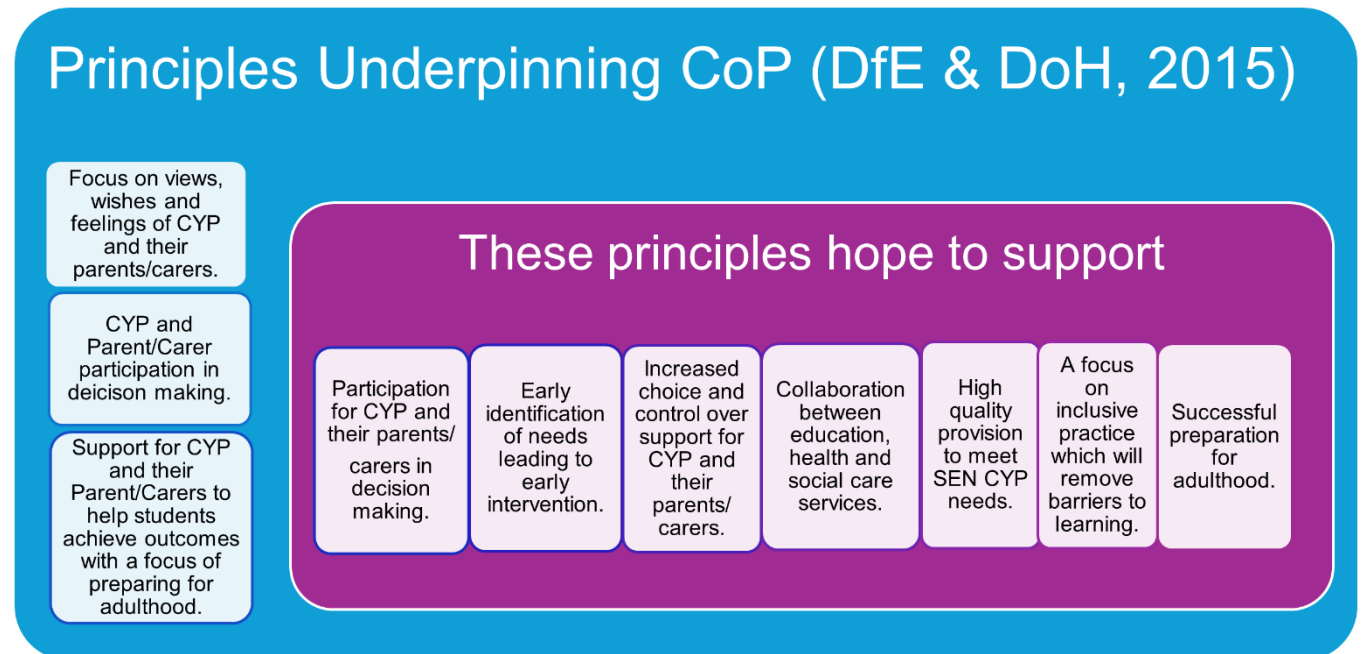
To understand the context of Annual Reviews, it is important to consider the modern history of legislation regarding the education of children with SEND in England. Historically, legislation (such as the Education Act of 1944) described children with SEND as 'handicapped' and 'ineducable' (Roa, 2020). It was not until the Warnock report in 1978 that a more inclusive approach started to appear (Strogilos & Ward, 2023). Following the Warnock report, the reformed Education Act of 1981 introduced 'Statements of Special Educational Needs' for CYP who required additional support to help meet their needs. These statutory documents paved the way for the current statutory processes we have today (Lamb, 2019; Robinson et al., 2018).

Whilst Statements of SEN offered valued support for some, growing concerns were raised. Variations in the number of CYP with Statements of SEN was noted and thought to be a result of a lack of consistency in how legislation was interpreted and applied across LAs (Sales & Vincent, 2018). Such criticism resulted in significant legislative changes, in the form of the Children and Families Act (2014) and an updated SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). When considering the context leading up to these changes, it is crucial to remember the political climate at the time within England, and the dissatisfaction with the previous SEND system. Gillie (2010) describes how the newly appointed Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of the day announced a review of the SEND system in 2010. This SEND review was based on recommendations such as the Lamb inquiry (2009) and was also in response to other feedback such as that from Parent/Carers who expressed frustration about the system (e.g. Tuckey, 2010).

The introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014) and the most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) highlighted the need for collaboration between: practitioners; education providers; CYP; and Parent/Carers, to promote children's development and to support them to achieve the best possible outcomes (Roa, 2020; Robinson et al., 2018). The overall hopes and principles underpinning the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Principles and Hopes Underpinning the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015, pp.19-20)



Whilst some praise the newest CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) for its inclusive underpinnings and person-centred aims (e.g. Robinson et al., 2018), others state that the legislation continues to be based upon medical model views of disability, which focus on deficit-based approaches towards CYP with SEN, rather than adopting a social model (Castro & Palikara, 2016). For example, Hunter et al. (2020), asserts that the idea of having 'plans' attached to CYP, is another form of pathologising children with SEND. It was also argued at the time of its introduction that, despite the new government's claims of wanting a 'revolution' to support CYP through an approach that empowers Parent/Carers and teachers, its educational policy and approach was actually grounded in neoliberalism (Wright, 2012). Therefore, despite the apparent aim of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and Children and Families Act (2014), to move towards a more holistic, inclusive and person-centred approach, the concept of EHCPs and the legislation attached, can be argued to work contrary to these hopes and still displays a medical model approach with market-driven principles (Hunter et al., 2020; Wright, 2012).

Collaboration is another theoretical underpinning highlighted in Figure 1. However, a review conducted by the Education Committee (DfE, 2019), that aimed to provide post-legislative scrutiny, found limited input from health and social care practitioners within the EHCP process. This review also found that CYP and their Parents/Carers had inconsistent experiences of SEND processes. These challenges are also repeated in the more recent SEND review: 'Right support, Right place, Right time' (DfE, 2023), which notes several challenges to the implementation and upkeep of EHCPs. One worrying criticism from the most recent SEND review (DfE, 2023) is that the responses they received highlighted that the current English SEND system is not equally accessible, meaning that Parent/Carers with access to financial and social resources are often better placed to navigate the system and secure support for their child. Such findings emphasise the need for reform and change within the SEND system if it is to remain as currently stipulated.

The premise behind the introduction of Statements of SEN and then EHCPs, was that only those with complex needs who required additional support would need one. In 2017, 2.5% of the CYP population had an EHCP (Marsh, 2023) and in June 2024, this increased to 4.8% (National Statistics, 2024). The prediction for 2042 is that 10% of the CYP population will have an EHCP (Marsh, 2023). The increase in EHCPs, in addition to the increase in requests for EHCPs (DfE, 2024), is thought to be influenced by a variety of factors including: a reported increase in levels of SEND need in schools; the COVID-19 pandemic having an impact on children's development and access to education without additional support; austerity within LAs resulting in reduced resources (with recent data highlighting a total deficit of £1.6bn across LAs for school budgets), meaning that educational settings are having to request funding and support through the EHCP process, and a reduction in services readily available to support CYP with SEND (Marsh, 2023; Nye, 2024; Robinson et al., 2018).

Purpose, Procedure, and Types of Annual Reviews

The current law requires all EHCPs to be reviewed by the LA at least annually (more frequently in early years). The CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) also encourages additional reviews if

appropriate. An interim review may be held if an educational setting is struggling to meet a CYP's needs. Phased transfer Annual Reviews (moving from one educational period to another) must occur in time to follow transition timescales meaning that although they are not necessarily additional, they may result in an Annual Review occurring earlier than usual (DfE, 2022a; DfE & DoH, 2015).

The idea of reviewing change over time due to a child's context and development is not new in theory, nor legislation (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1986b, 1995; Robinson et al., 2018). For example, systemic psychological theory recognises that situations are not static, and that outcomes for children are influenced by various factors such as: their close relationships; community; wider contexts such as those linked to policy; and CYP development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1986b, 1995). Within English legislation, a Statement of SEN was reviewed annually to ensure that it remained relevant to the CYP (Robinson et al., 2018). In 2001, the previous SEND CoP (Department for Education and Skills, 2001a) was published alongside a SEN toolkit (Department for Education and Skills, 2001b). This toolkit aimed to provide schools and LAs with detailed advice on day-to-day practice and gave examples of how to support Annual Reviews. Neither the updated CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) nor the Children and Families Act (2014) provided such guidance, possibly leading to confusion and differing practice as a result. In the absence of a government toolkit to support the current practice, charities and organisations such as IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) have published information themselves to support individuals engage in the Annual Review process (IPSEA, n.d.)

Annual Reviews are generally thought to be most effective when led by the educational setting the CYP attends (DfE & DoH, 2015). This is because it is viewed that staff at educational provisions know the CYP best, will have the closest contact with their family and will have the most current information about progress (North Somerset Council & Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, n.d.). The overarching process is centred around an Annual Review meeting, where those in attendance discuss the EHCP, and whether it is reflective of the CYP's needs and provides

appropriate support. Before this meeting, information is gathered to feed into the discussion itself. After the meeting, paperwork is sent to LA SEND teams, setting out whether any changes are needed and, if so, what (Cadman, 2021). Decisions relating to the EHCP are finalised at the end of the Annual Review process and whilst there are ultimately three outcomes (to maintain, amend or cease the EHCP) local processes such as funding allocation and school placements are also considered. These decisions can be challenged through mediation and SEND tribunal processes (Hellowell, 2015). Data around appeals shows that dissatisfaction with EHCP processes has increased by 570.67% since the introduction of the most recent CoP (Ministry of Justice, 2024). This suggests that research around improving experiences of SEND processes could reduce the number of appeals, reduce time and other resources spent on tribunals, and show an overall increased satisfaction within the current English SEND system.

Whilst the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) provides some guidance as to the use of Annual Reviews (such as statutory deadlines and timescales as seen in Figure 2), the procedure varies widely across the UK (Boorman et al., 2025).

Figure 2

Annual Review Process as Stated in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015)

Before Annual Review meeting

The school (or LA if attending other institution) must seek advice and information about the student prior to the meeting from all invited and send any advice/information gathered to all those invited **at least 2 weeks** before the meeting.

The following **must be invited 2 weeks** prior to the Annual Review meeting: students parent/carers or young person, school representative (or alternative), LA SEN officer, Health service representative and an LA social care representative.

During Annual Review meeting

The meeting must:
Focus on the students progress towards achieving the outcomes in the EHCP.

Consider what changes might need to be made to support what is provided to help them achieve outcomes.

Consider whether changes are needed to the outcomes themselves.

Children, parent/carers and young people should be supported to engage fully in the review meeting.

Following Annual Review meeting

The school must send the meeting report to all invited **within 2 weeks** of the meeting.

Within 4 weeks of the Annual Review meeting, the LA must decide on whether the EHCP is to be amended, ceased or maintained and notify the student's parent/carer and the school.

If the plan is to be amended the LA should start this process **without delay** and the amended EHCP should be issued **within 8 weeks** of the amendment notice.

If the LA agree to maintain or cease the plan they must inform parent/carers of their right to appeal.

The most recent SEND review (DfE, 2023), mentioned earlier, which had just under 6,000 responses, found that, despite the presumed best intentions and inclusive aims of those who designed the system, in practice, experiences are mixed. In response to these challenges, the review stated that the government would standardise the Annual Review process and implement new standards concerning the documentation and celebration of progress achieved towards milestones and outcomes. Within the same review, the 'Change Programme' initiative was introduced which planned to work with "regional expert partnerships" to: support; co-produce; test; and refine key reforms (DfE, 2023). Keer (2024) has highlighted in an update about this initiative, that findings of this programme have not been made transparent to the public and that the impact and outcome of this work remains unclear.

In addition, a government consultation was released in June 2022 regarding the EHCP process, with a focus on the timescales of Annual Reviews (DfE, 2022a). At the time of writing this thesis, the results of this consultation have not been published, and it is unclear if this will be further pursued as the official webpage indicates that feedback is still being analysed. It also states that the consultation was held under a previous government (DfE, 2022b). Despite this, the initiation of the consultation process shows a recognition at government level of the need for changes to SEND processes, including the Annual Reviews.

Experiences of the National Statutory SEND Process

One area of research highlighted in this review of the literature, is that of the experiences of individuals who have engaged in the English SEND system (e.g. Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2018; Sales & Vincent, 2018). Palikara et al. (2018) explored the views of 349 practitioners (including EPs, SENCOs, and school staff) to understand their perspectives on changes introduced by the most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and the Children and Families Act (2014). This study used online questionnaires and showed that 67% of practitioner participants agreed with the intentions behind changing Statements of SEN to

EHCPs. Practical challenges in implementing these reforms, such as limitations of resources and time, has meant that the aims, of increasing inclusion through collaborative approaches, have not been easily achieved (Palikara et al., 2018). Similarly, Boesley and Crane (2018), gained further insight into the experiences of SENCOs and the procedural changes from Statements of SEN to EHCPs. In this study, 16 SENCOs were interviewed and shared that they struggled with variations in practice and design of paperwork across LAs. This disparity was found to increase uncertainty and to undermine effective joint working in cases involving more than one LA. Whilst these studies by Boesley and Crane (2018) and Palikara et al. (2018) provided insight into the views of practitioners about the introduction of EHCPs, Parents/Carers, CYP and social workers were not consulted, showing a missed opportunity to gain the views of key individuals.

Sales and Vincent (2018) conducted research around the EHCP assessment process, using a focus group of parents and interviews to gain the perspectives of parents, young people, SENCOs, medical practitioners, social workers, and EPs. This research found that EHCP assessments have been effective in some areas, particularly in achieving greater parental involvement and a more person-centred approach. However, important issues remain unresolved, such as the need for greater consistency in interpreting and applying legislation across England (Sales & Vincent, 2018). This study, whilst helpful in providing insight into experiences of EHCPs, did not explore Annual Reviews directly.

Kendall (2019) gained information from five parents of pupils with Down Syndrome. Whilst this research was concerned with inclusion more generally, participants did discuss their experiences of Annual Reviews as part of this study. One participant stated that due to her son's complex needs, a review every six months would be most appropriate, and expressed dissatisfaction with the overall process (Kendall, 2019). This is an interesting point and the notion of an Annual Review for an EHCP can be viewed in comparison to the review of those who receive SEN support outside of an EHCP (as part of the Graduated Response). These students, who in theory present with less complex needs than those with an EHCP, have support which is reviewed at least three times a year, as stated in the CoP (DfE & DoH,

2015, p.104). Whilst this discrepancy is not commented on within legislation, I suspect that it may be partly driven by considerations around the use of resources such as SENCO time and LA funding that would be required to facilitate additional reviews.

More specifically related to Annual Reviews, research commissioned by the DfE but conducted by Adams et al. (2017), asked parents and CYP (13,643 overall) to complete a survey about their experience of the EHCP assessment process. The results of this survey found that 54% of parents and CYP asked were aware of how the EHCP would be monitored and reviewed following the initial assessment for an EHCP (Adams et al., 2017). As this research occurred several years ago, it may be that this has changed. More recently, an area of concern highlighted within joint inspection reports, is that Annual Reviews are not always effective in ensuring that a CYP's needs, in relation to their EHCP, its provision and progress, are kept up to date (e.g. Ofsted & CQC, 2019b, 2021b, 2022b). This is further demonstrated by Strogilos and Ward (2023), who established that the targets agreed and put into the Annual Review paperwork are not always transferred and adapted into the CYP's EHCP. This could potentially lead to difficult transitions and a lack of understanding by those considering an EHCP as current, when it is not. Cooper (2019) also found that Annual Review paperwork was often not returned within the expected timescales and that amendments suggested during the Annual Review process were not implemented, leaving the EHCP out of date. Having an outdated legal document leads to further consequences, as a CYP's needs are not accurately assessed and represented, meaning that the support in place may not be appropriate (Cadman, 2021).

Collaboration

The idea of collaboration is based upon person-centred and systemic theories that value socially constructed actions from various systems to support CYP outcomes (Hellowell, 2017). Collaboration is not a well-defined term, with other words such as multi-agency being used interchangeably (Castro-Kemp & Samuels, 2022). The CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and Children and Families Act (2014) highlight the need for services to work together to promote

better outcomes for CYP but does not provide a clear definition of this. This lack of clarity is a common criticism of the most recent CoP (Tucker, 2023). For clarity, in this thesis, I am using the term collaboration according to the definition provided by Griffiths et al. (2021), who, following their systematic review, define collaboration through 'the building blocks framework' which consists of the following concepts: open communication; trust; mutual respect; shared goals; common understanding; shared responsibility; active participation; shared decision making; and implementation. These concepts are built upon each other, highlighting that collaborative working is founded on relationship building, then shared values and active engagement before collaboration can occur (Griffiths et al., 2021).

This definition of collaboration features aspects such as shared responsibility and goals, which in turn lend themselves to considering power (Griffiths et al., 2021). Power exists in all social contexts and those who have power hold it by varying degrees which differs in every situation (Erchul et al., 2004). Those with power are privileged in that they have more impact in the shaping and directing of educational contexts and practices (Sewell, 2023). True collaboration has reduced power influences, meaning that in collaborative Annual Reviews, all involved should hold influence within the process (Griffiths et al., 2021).

A common theme in the literature on Annual Reviews is the negative experiences of participants due to a lack of successful collaboration between services, resulting in an increased reliance on staff from educational settings and increased frustrations from education staff and parent/carers (e.g. Crane et al., 2021; Starkie, 2024). Joint inspections have found that inadequate collaboration results in: lack of attendance at Annual Review meetings; an inaccurate picture of the CYP's needs; and inaccurate EHCPs (Ofsted & CQC, 2021b, 2021c). This is echoed in research such as Crane et al. (2021) who talked to special school staff (n=41) to obtain their thoughts on supporting students with autism in post 16 transitions to adulthood. Participants of this study stated that other practitioners, such as social workers and health practitioners, did not always attend appropriate meetings. The lack of attendance led to crisis points and showed the importance of collaboration for the

prevention of the breakdown of educational placements (Crane et al., 2021). This leads to the question of, when it is appropriate and considered a priority for various practitioners to attend Annual Reviews? Such direction is not present in the most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) nor in the Children and Families Act (2014).

Cadman (2021), who gave questionnaires (n=40) and conducted interviews (n=18) with SENCOs and LA SEND Officers, to gain an understanding around ceasing EHCPs, found that representatives of LAs gave lack of capacity as a reason for failing to attend review meetings. This meant that practitioners were unlikely to attend Annual Reviews unless the meeting was a priority (Cadman, 2021). Renton (2023), whilst exploring the role of an EP in supporting children with acquired brain injury, found that some participants completing a survey (n= 100), stated that EPs attending Annual Reviews in these circumstances was appropriate. It should be noted that this was specifically researching acquired brain injuries, and in such cases an injury with a journey to recovery could present differently a year later, showing a changing need (Renton, 2023).

Castro-Kemp and Samuels (2022) assert that for collaboration to be successful, those involved need to prioritise it as a value of their practice. They further state that collaborative approaches can be enhanced by individuals who hold collaboration as a value even when the appropriate infrastructure is not there. For example, Ofsted and CQC (2018) has reported that Lincolnshire County Council is promoting good attendance of practitioners at reviews for CYP who are educated out of the area.

Starkie (2024), who interviewed five Parent/Carer participants who had engaged in the current SEND system, found that whilst parents were able to highlight some positive experiences of collaboration, they all experienced difficulties and frustrations relating to a lack of communication across services. Similarly, Ahad et al.'s (2022) systematic literature review, found a key theme was a lack of integration with health and social care services. It is important to put this in context, which is that the English SEND system is working with significant funding and resource constraints, alongside an increase in SEND need. Tucker

(2023) highlights that the issue of resources is notable, as social care and health services have had significant budget cuts in the last decade or so. This reduces the amount of health and social care time available and therefore Annual Reviews may not be viewed as a key priority. This can be considered alongside the lack of clarity that exists around expectations as to how practitioners ought to engage in Annual Reviews (Boesley & Crane, 2018).

CYP Voice and Participation Through a Person-Centred Approach

An EHCP should be a person-centred document that considers a CYP's wishes and feelings, as well as needs and this should occur through an underpinning of principles related to CYP participation and joint decision making (DfE & DoH, 2015; Sharma, 2021).

Therefore, CYP voice and participation are vital to SEND processes. Here, the use of the term 'voice', is the view that voice can be expressed via different mediums and means to encompass an individual's unique opinion and perspective (Sewell, 2023). CYP participation is based on theory and models which consider aspects, such as power and how to engage children in various activities (Sharma, 2021). Hart (1992) developed the ladder of children's participation, which is comprised of eight levels. The three lower levels involve situations where the child is manipulated, decorated, or tokenized. These three levels represent false participation. Hart (1992) understood the five upper levels as 'genuine participation', where CYP increase their participation in a meaningful way.

The ladder has been criticised, with even Hart stating that it addresses only a narrow range of ways in which children can participate in their communities (Hart, 1992, 2008). Therefore, other models can be viewed as more helpful. For example, Lundy's Model of Participation (2007), can also be helpful in considering whether a CYP's participation is properly supporting a child's right to participate in education, in line with Article 12 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (in Lundy, 2007, p.927). Lundy's model highlights a child's right to express views and the right to have their views be given due weight (Kennan et al., 2019; Lundy, 2007). The model comprises of four chronological steps in the realisation of a child's right to participate: space, voice; audience, and; influence (Lundy, 2007). Most

specifically, Fox (2016), also proposed a three-dimensional pyramid of participation which was initially produced to support EPs in ensuring pupil participation in their psychological advice, further to fulfil the hopes of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and the Children and Families Act (2014). The three dimensions of this being: the degree of participation; the areas of participation; and the depth of participation (Fox, 2016).

The area of gaining CYP voice and encouraging participation in SEND meetings and processes, is the most saturated of relevant literature for this review (e.g. Cooper, 2019; Roa, 2020; Sharma 2021). Pearlman and Michaels (2019) found that the use of augmentative and alternative communication aids increased CYP's ability to share information about their lives, which could be fed back into their EHCP via an Annual Review. Available research, whilst highlighting that gaining voice and encouraging CYP participation is good practice, shows that this is not yet applied consistently in SEND processes (Roa, 2020). Sharma (2021) conducted a survey with SEND practitioners working within LAs and schools, to consider various barriers to eliciting CYP voice. This research highlighted that the jargon used within the EHCP and Annual Review processes, in addition to a heavy reliance on adults, can lead to marginalising CYP voice. One participant stated that CYP were only present at 10% of Annual Reviews that they had attended, with no further opportunities outside that meeting to hear their views. This reduced opportunity for participation and meaningful voice is linked to epistemological oppression. Epistemological oppression occurs when the views of an individual with more power and knowledge are valued and prioritised over the views of others (Sewell, 2016). A key limitation of the study by Sharma (2021) is that they did not use CYP participants. This could be considered to further increase both the adults' power and CYPs' epistemological oppression.

One study, which did ask CYP about their experiences of engaging in Annual Reviews, was conducted by Cooper (2019). In this study, a student reported that, whilst their views were gathered, they were accurately shared and truthfully represented. That student described power imbalances in relation to how her opinion was considered and depicted, believing this had an impact upon how she was treated in college. This is another example of

epistemological oppression and shows that research needs to consider how CYP should best participate in Annual Reviews, including how they can be a part of decision making and action planning (Cooper, 2019). Additionally, Whitby (2021), interviewed four CYP. None of the participants were aware of taking part in their Annual Review process, despite them having had one within the most recent academic year.

Looking more specifically at how to enable a person-centred approach to Annual Reviews, Power (2019) conducted a doctoral study with participants including: autistic pupils; Parent/Carers; and school staff. The study recommends the use of tools such as “planning alternative tomorrows with hope” (PATH) in Annual Reviews due to their person-centred planning approach which encouraged CYP to be seen as experts in their own lives through increased participation (Power, 2019). The person-centred planning approach embraces a humanistic perspective and emphasises choice and growth to allow for empowerment and collaboration (Hughes et al., 2019).

Most recently, Boorman et al. (2025), explored the experiences of person-centred planning Annual Reviews of two SENCOs and five EPs through semi-structured interviews. This study’s findings highlighted the importance of child-centred practices and how this being present in person-centred Annual Reviews resulted in participants sharing that pupils had positive experiences. However, concerns around person-centred planning Annual Reviews not being aligned to current Annual Review paperwork and requiring additional meetings and preparations were also considered (Boorman et al., 2025). This research limited its participants to primary SENCOs and EPs, meaning that the views of pupils and others involved in Annual Reviews were missing.

Finally, some good examples of CYP participation has been commended within joint SEND inspection reports. For example, in Blackburn with Darwen, stakeholders, including parents’ and children’s voices were thought to be well represented and their views considered. This resulted in Annual Reviews being valued and Parent/Carers being able to contribute fully to the process (Ofsted & CQC, 2019a).

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Introduction to Chapter 3

In this chapter I will outline the methodological considerations relevant to this research. I will start by considering reflexivity, before moving on to the philosophical underpinnings and design of this study. I shall also consider Appreciative Inquiry, including its strengths and limitations, and outline why this approach was chosen over other methods. After describing the process of how data was collected, I will summarise the key ethical considerations of the project.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the active acknowledgement of the influence of one's own assumptions and beliefs on research (Jamieson et al., 2023; Lazard & McAvoy, 2020; Mortari, 2015). There are various understandings of reflexivity. In this thesis, I have adopted Willig's (2013) approach to reflexivity which applies two categories to the concept. Firstly, personal reflexivity requires one to reflect on the ways in which one's values, experiences and assumptions impact upon the research. Secondly, epistemological reflexivity encourages consideration of how one's assumptions about how we gain knowledge has influenced the research (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020; Willig, 2013).

Reflexivity within this thesis has been multifaceted and has included highlighting my background (Chapter 1) as a form of personal reflexivity (Jamieson et al., 2023). The use of a reflexive journal throughout the process has also been instrumental in helping provide insight and clarity on my thoughts and decisions throughout the research (Gough, 2017; Jamieson et al., 2023). Reflective Vignettes, which have been generated with the help of my reflexive journal, have been referred to and embedded throughout the body of this thesis.

Research Philosophy

Khanna (2019) poses two central questions for researchers in consideration of research philosophy. The first being: 'What is there to know about the world around us?' and the

second: 'How can we gain this knowledge about the world?'. The first question relates to ontology and the second to epistemology and provide a framework to a researcher's philosophical beliefs, which shapes the research (Botha, 2021).

Willig (2013) states that ontologically, one can be described at either end (or more likely somewhere within the middle) of a continuum with the endpoints being a realist or relativist. Realists' views are based on the presumption that there is a reality (Willis, 2023), whereas relativists deny that there is an objective truth. Instead, they posit that individuals hold their own realities (Hugly & Sayward, 1987). One's ontological position influences one's epistemology. Built on a realist ontology, the view of positivists is that there is one reality (Willig, 2013). An alternative stance to positivism, based on ontological relativism, is the epistemological position of Interpretivism. Interpretivists view all knowledge as grounded in our experience (Hiller, 2016). Consequently, interpretivist research does not seek to provide absolute answers but instead aims to provide insights into individual realities (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

Within this research, I used a critical realist philosophical stance, more on my philosophical stance can be seen in the Reflective Vignette 1. Critical Realism (CR) is an overarching approach to both ontology and epistemology (Lauzier-Jobin et al., 2022). CR bridges the divide between positivist and interpretivist research paradigms (Qu, 2022). The critical realist position accepts that, whilst experiences are constructed and interpreted by the individual (akin to interpretivism), the experience is 'real' to the person having the experience in addition to the acceptance that there is an overall reality (comparable to positivism) (Willig, 2013).

Reflective Vignette 1. My Experiences of Ontology and Epistemology (Epistemological Reflexivity)

Throughout my higher education and career, I have found that my understanding of ontology and epistemology, and my stance towards them, has been influenced by those around me and my knowledge at the time. For example, during my undergraduate and master's degrees, I found that lecturers favoured positivist views. Whereas, during my doctoral course, I found the change in philosophical views to be noticeable. This led me to consider myself as a social constructionist. Social Constructionism asserts the view that there is no one truth, and that our realities are constructed through our interactions with others. True constructionists take the view that all knowledge is social constructed (Taylor, 2018).

After becoming more familiar with the contrasting philosophical stances, I quickly felt that the ontological underpinnings of true constructionism were not aligned with my positionality. The difference between critical realists and social constructionists is that the view of the former is that there is an overall reality, whilst the view of the latter does not (Easton, 2010). I therefore now consider myself to be a critical realist.

Bhaskar (2008) holds CR as unique in its ontological development, as he stated that reality exists outside our perception of it. He further differentiated reality into three domains: the empirical; the actual; and the real. These domains of reality have recently been critiqued by Elder-Vass (2022), who suggests that a two-domain approach might be more appropriate (the actual and the non-actual real). Fryer and Navarrete (2022) further label the domains of reality to be redundant. Regardless of this dispute over the domains of reality, it is generally agreed upon by critical realists that reality is influenced by three core concepts introduced in the foundational text relating to CR (Bhaskar, 2008; Fryer & Navarrett, 2022; Garner, 2023). These three concepts being: experiences; events; and causal mechanisms. Table 1 highlights Fryer's (2022) explanation of these CR concepts and how they can be considered in relation to the current research.

Table 1

Fryer's (2022) explanation of critical realist core concepts with contextual examples

Concept	Definition	Example
Experiences	The perceptions and feelings of individuals as they go through the world.	An individual experiencing what it is like to be a part of the English SEND system including the processes.
Events	Things that individuals experience (can be general or a more specific single event).	<i>Specific Event:</i> How a particular Parent/Carer experienced a particular Annual Review meeting. <i>General Event:</i> How individuals experience Annual Review meetings.
Causal Mechanisms	What produces/causes the events. In relation to causal mechanisms, it is important to note that within the social world, many causes can occur at once and interact. Causal tendencies do not impact all in the same way.	How various SEND structures and processes (such as national legislation, individual school staff practices, or local LA processes) might influence an individual's access to Annual Reviews.

Epistemologically, CR highlights that our understanding of the world is based on subjective interpretations that are socially constructed (Hood, 2012; Lawani, 2021). However, critical realists ultimately take the view that there is a reality that we can strive towards understanding, albeit rhetorically and therefore provisionally (Easton 2010; Mertens, 2015). Critical realist research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the external world and

is able to suggest recommendations to address social problems through understanding and changing the impact of various causal influences (Fletcher, 2017; Lawani, 2021).

Research Method

Action Research

In consideration of the critical realist philosophy underpinning this research and the overall aim of critical realist research being to gain causal understanding and facilitate change (Lawani, 2021), action research was considered as an appropriate form of research for my thesis. Pearson (2021) states that although little critical realist action research in education has occurred, action research and critical realist educational research share the same morals and focus.

Action research is designed to generate knowledge about a process (such as Annual Reviews) by gaining insight into lived experiences of individuals and using this understanding to change the process for the better, which is in line with critical realist research aims (Lawani, 2021; Willig, 2013). This can lead to new understanding and direct researchers to innovative areas of inquiry (Mackenzie et al., 2012; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017).

In the last few decades there has been a notable shift towards greater collaboration in research, and specifically using participatory research (Aldridge, 2014). Action research becomes participatory action research depending on who participates in each stage and their level of participation. At its most participatory, researchers engage with participants as collaborators, who inform the project at various stages. This results in a redistribution of power between the researcher and participants (Mackenzie et al., 2012; Squirrel, 2012; Vaughn & Jacque, 2020).

Mertens (2015, p. 252) (adapted from Doe, 1996) presents researchers with seven questions to consider the practice of Participatory Action Research. Please see Appendix 1

which considers how I have managed each question during this research and this has also further been considered in Reflective Vignette 2.

Reflective Vignette 2. Consideration of Participatory Action Research (Epistemological Reflexivity)

True participatory research, where the community identifies a concern and works with others to support positive change, is something I am interested in. However, doctoral theses are not compatible with allowing for true participation. This is because, to satisfy ethical requirements, the researcher must devise the project and submit research proposals before participants are recruited. Timescales and competing priorities also means that true participatory action research is not feasible.

With this in mind, I consider this current research to be participatory informed with transformative underpinnings. However, I do acknowledge that the research is not as participatory or transformative as I would have liked if I was if I were to devise my 'dream research'.

Whilst true participatory action research was not practicable in this instance, a future research project, for those wishing to support social justice through action research, could easily build on this and could put co-production at the heart of its work.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry Background.

With the critical realist and action research aims of the current research in mind, the next consideration to be made was around which action research method to implement. As highlighted within Chapter 2, flawed experiences have largely been shared, with little focus on what is working well within the Annual Review process including in joint SEND inspections (e.g. Ofsted & CQC, 2019b, 2021b, 2022b). Therefore, Appreciative Inquiry is appropriate to consider real life experiences of individuals who have taken part in Annual Reviews and build upon these to support future involvements.

Appreciative Inquiry is viewed as an inclusive and relational approach to participant guided action research (Whitney et al., 2019). Cooperider and Srivastva (1987) created and

developed the concept of Appreciative Inquiry as a response to limitations of existing problem-solving frameworks prominent in action research, which they found to be deficit-based (Clouder & King, 2015; Gebhard et al., 2023). Appreciative Inquiry is built on a positive core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and Gergen's (1978) concept of generative theory. Appreciative Inquiry views that curiosity leads to learning and growth, whilst also deepening relationships and understanding amongst those who are connected to the focus of the inquiry (Armstrong et al., 2020; Bushe, 2012). It assumes that every human system has something that is working well which can be built upon (Armstrong et al., 2020; Whitney et al., 2019). Consequently, Appreciative Inquiry has been successfully used to support meaningful change in education settings across the world (e.g. Allen & Innes, 2013; Govender & Horn, 2019; Gray et al., 2019).

Whilst there is no set design for Appreciative Inquiry research, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) highlight some common approaches, such as the Appreciative Inquiry summit. Whichever specific method is used, there remain the five core principles of Appreciative Inquiry developed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) which can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Five principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001).

Constructivist Principle

- This asserts that language shapes our understanding of the world and it is therefore vital to support change (Reed, 2007). 'Words create worlds' (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010 p.51).

The Principle of Simultaneity

- This is based on the idea that the process of inquiry itself brings about change (Reed, 2007), allowing the exploration of new ways of thinking provides a generative space to support change (Bushe, 2012).

The Poetic Principle

- This draws on narrative ideas. This principle emphasises that individuals are constantly engaged in authoring their world (i.e. through the uses of narratives and metaphors) (Reed, 2007).

The Anticipatory Principle

- This is based on the opinion that systems move in the direction of their views for the future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), therefore, positive hopes for the future lead to positive actions meaning that anticipation allows for new possibilities (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The Positive Principle

- Appreciative questioning and productive processes achieve change (Reed, 2007). Therefore, building and sustaining momentum for change requires positive affects such as hope, excitement and inspiration (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Independent of the core principles listed above, the '4D' cycle is a common framework for shaping Appreciative Inquiry research (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Farquharson et al., 2018). Figure 4 shows the original and widely utilised 4D cycle. The four stages are:

The Discovery Phase –looks at the best of what is and what has been (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This stage allows organisations to assess what is already working well (Hakkari et al., 2022).

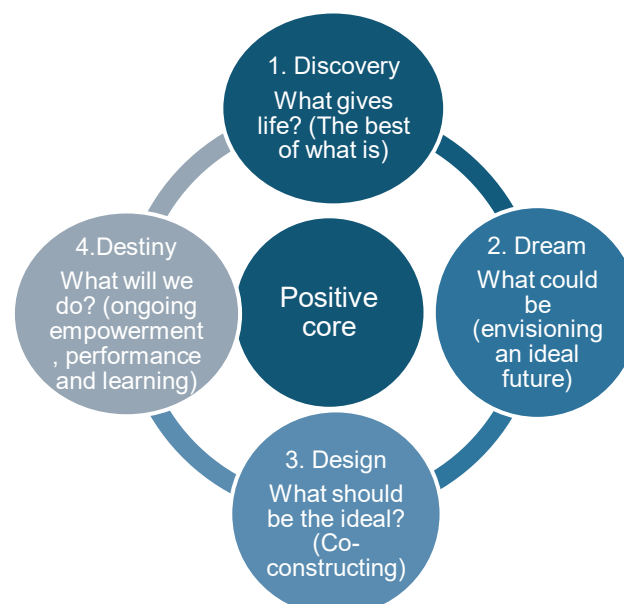
The Dream Phase- is linked to the poetic and anticipatory principle of Appreciative Inquiry. Individuals are asked what they wish for in the future (Vitello-Cicciu, 2015). When considering the Dream phase, collaborative generation is used to foster creativity (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

The Design Phase – a practical phase which considers what is already working well and how that may be incorporated into the dream ideas for the future to outline 'what should be' (Hakkari et al., 2022; Farquharson et al., 2018).

The Destiny (sometimes known as delivery) Phase –builds upon action planning and considers what needs to happen to establish/maintain actions (Farquharson et al., 2018).

Figure 4

Appreciative Inquiry 4D Cycle Based on Seminal Works, Such as Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) and Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010).



Critique of Appreciative Inquiry.

Despite Appreciative Inquiry being popular, it has faced criticism. For example, the 'Positivity Principle' of Appreciative Inquiry asserts that it is crucial to support change through understanding individuals' positive experiences (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Some critics argue that overuse of the positivity principle may inadvertently silence and marginalise the voices of those who wish to be critical or share negative experiences, creating a bias within Appreciative Inquiry research (Bushe, 2007; Haji, 2024; Jones & Masika, 2021). The censoring of undesirable experiences in Appreciative Inquiry has been referred to as the 'shadow', which draws from Jung's psychoanalytic concept of the same name (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). This censoring can be a conscious or unconscious regulation (Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2012).

In response to this criticism, Fitzgerald et al. (2010) present 'authentic appreciation' as an approach that recognises and includes the 'shadow'. Ridley-Duff et al. (2015) have expanded on this. They suggest that during the Discovery phase of the 4D cycle, researchers ought to ask, 'what depletes life?' in addition to asking 'what gives life'. When considering my approach to this research, I had concerns about placing too much emphasis on the positive experiences of individuals, as I was aware from the literature available on experiences of SEND processes, in addition to my own lived experience, that Annual Reviews could be challenging and poignant for individuals. I therefore adapted the original 4D cycle with suggestions from Ridley-Duff et al. (2015) in mind. See Figure 5 for this adapted cycle and Reflective Vignette 3 for more detail on this.

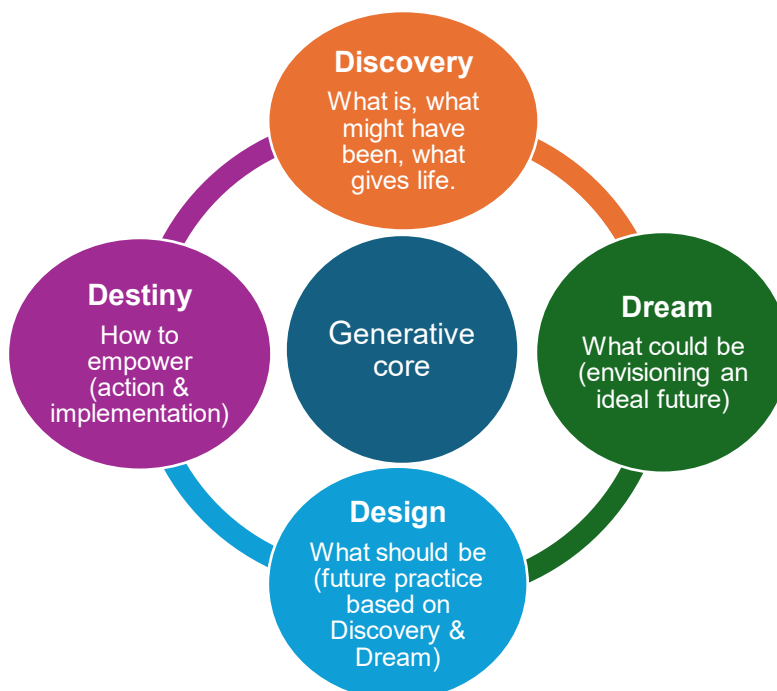
Reflective Vignette 3. Reflection on Adaptations of the 4D Cycle (Epistemological Reflexivity)

Watkins et al. (2011), highlight that variations or alternatives to the 4D model will emerge as each system makes it their own. Consequently, the 4D cycle used in my research has been adapted to allow for the 'shadow side' of Appreciative Inquiry to be accounted for in the 'Discovery phase'. In relation to the shadow side, in more traditional 4D cycles, the 'Discovery phase' often states this as 'the best of what is' (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 6). However, more critical individuals, such as Ridley-Duff et al. (2015), view that asking 'what depletes life' is more appropriate. I found this language somewhat insensitive and possibly difficult to understand. I therefore adapted the 4D cycle to ask: 'what is', 'what might have been' and 'what gives life?'. The process of this involved reflecting on the original 4D cycle in addition to the 'shadow side', considering how these two aspects of a continuum of experience (positive and negative) could be presented in a more neutral way to generate understanding of individuals experiences whilst also considering the appreciative concept of Appreciative Inquiry. The adapted 4D cycle above therefore allows all experiences to be shared without being oppressed through ignoring negatives but also encourages generative thinking around what lies behind less positive experiences which can support clearer understanding of causal explanations and in turn, shape future practice.

Within the 'Design phase', language around 'co-construction' (Cooperider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16) has been amended to reflect slight philosophical differences between CR and Appreciative Inquiry. CR does not consider our understanding of the world to be co-constructed but instead views it to be construed (Eston, 2010).

Figure 5

Adapted 4D Appreciative Inquiry Cycle Used in the Current Research



Another criticism of Appreciative Inquiry is that its ontology arguably fails to take full account of the complex systems we live in, such as power and political contexts, by dismissing the notion of a truth (Taylor, 2018). Therefore, implementing Appreciative Inquiry as a generative tool from a CR position allows for a more holistic approach. This is becoming increasingly common within research (see Brooks, 2015; Imanian & Thomas, 2019; Owen-Hughes, 2020; Suddards, 2023).

Focus Groups

Critical Realist Danermark (2019) asserts that all research methods can provide the explanatory power to help us understand reality. Appreciative Inquiry research also take on various guises and this has meant that I have had the flexibility to choose a method design most appropriate for my purposes (Whitney et al., 2019). In an ideal world, I would have conducted an Appreciative Inquiry summit over several days (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), however, this would be impractical due to the short timescales imposed on this research. I therefore considered other methods which seemed more appropriate, such as focus groups or interviews.

Mertens' (2015) view is that focus groups provide a quick and reliable way of obtaining the views of multiple participants. In relation to critical realist research, focus groups allow for collaboration to occur, which supports transformative knowledge production and emancipatory actions as a result (Easton, 2010). I decided that the use of focus groups with an Appreciative Inquiry approach would be best rather than interviews.

As with all methods, the use of focus groups does pose some challenges. Whilst focus groups provide the opportunity for collaboration and generative conversations, participation may be inhibited if the group dynamics are not supported (Vogl et al., 2023). Another challenge of focus groups is the logistical obstacles involved in planning, to get several people together at the same time and place (Mertens, 2015). I was concerned about this issue, given that the participants were from an LA which covered a large geographical area, and I did not want to deter participants by asking individuals to travel long distances. I decided to conduct virtual focus groups as they can increase participant attendance, through

reduced time and resource demands when compared to in-person focus groups (Boydell et al., 2014; Zwaanswijk & Van Dulmen, 2014). I remained cautious of the challenges that are faced with developing rapport and providing equal space for those present within online interactions (Gill & Baillie 2018). To mitigate these challenges, the use of a check-in and time taken to establish group rules was implemented at the beginning of all groups (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). My facilitation skills also supported the focus groups through: building rapport by creating warm and comfortable dialogues; having good active listening skills; and being flexible within the discussion, to ensure flow and comfort (O.Nyumba et al., 2017). I made an exception to using online focus groups when meeting with pupil participants. I felt having an in-person focus group for pupils would support understanding, communication, help maintain attention and overall rapport building to increase participation and make the experience safe, comfortable and enjoyable (Gill & Baillie, 2018; Vogl et al., 2023).

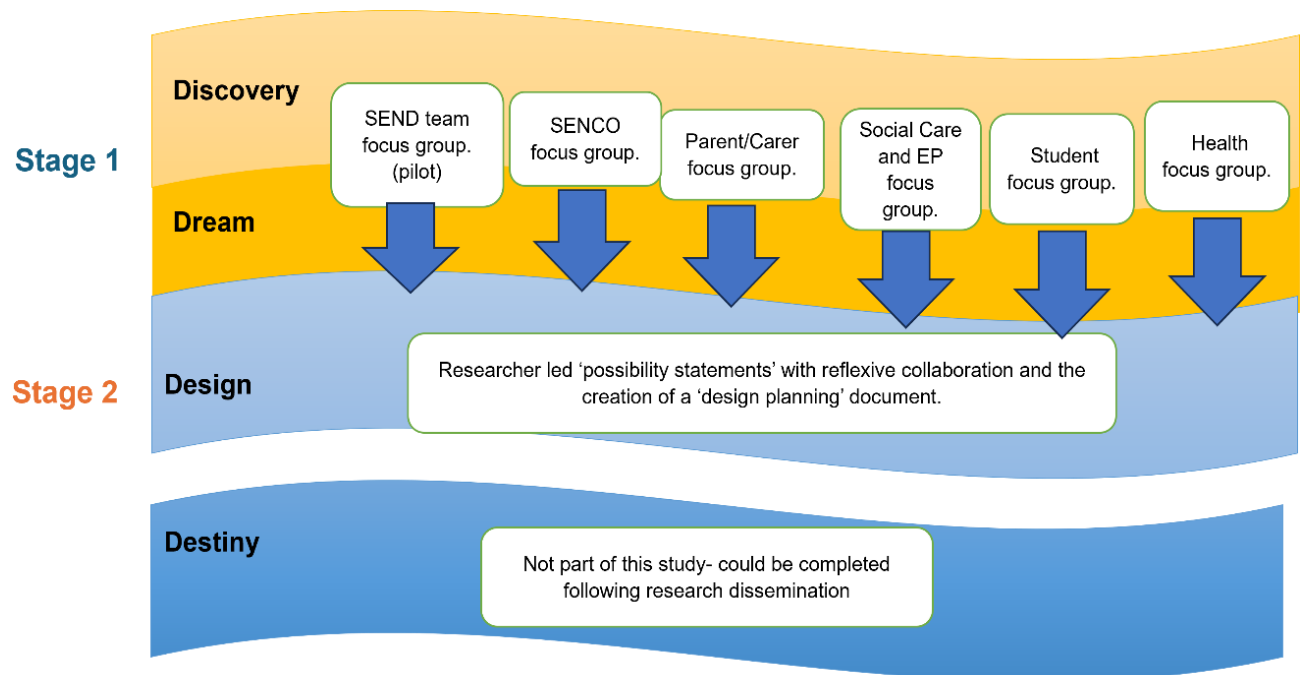
Design and Procedure

Overall Study Design

In this study, I used a two-stage approach. Figure 6 outlines this and Table 2 highlights how the research questions of this thesis are answered in consideration of the studies design. Please also note that my research design changed, and the original research design can be found in Appendix 2 and further explored on in Reflective Vignette 4.

Figure 6

Research Design

**Reflective Vignette 4. Reflection on Changes in Research Design (Personal Reflexivity)**

Initially, I had a different plan for Stage 2 (see Appendix 2 for original design). This was changed during Stage 1 data collection for several reasons.

Firstly, the Stage 1 recruitment took longer than anticipated and I was concerned that arranging another focus group with such a range of participants would delay the study. Next, an 'external agencies' focus group was planned with two EP's, a social worker and three health practitioners. Unfortunately, the health practitioners were unable to join due to technical difficulties, and one EP was also unable to attend last minute. This meant an additional Stage 1 focus group had to take place to ensure that Health practitioners were involved in Stage 1. This generated more data to analysis in Stage 1 which delayed Stage 2.

Finally, the focus groups which had already occurred in Stage 1 provided a large amount of data. I was concerned that having another focus group (for Stage 2) would mean that valuable contributions already provided would be diluted in the write up of the study. I therefore adapted the design of Stage 2 with these considerations in mind.

Table 2

Stage of research and aspect of 4D cycle in relation to research questions asked.

Stage of Research	Part of 4D Cycle	Research Question Addressed
1	Discover	1. 'What is' and 'what gives life' to the Annual Review process?
	Dream	2. What are CYPs', Parent/Carers' and practitioners' dreams and hopes for Annual Reviews?
2	Design	3. What can we learn from previous experiences and hopes for the future in relation to Annual Review processes moving forward?

Participants and Recruitment

When determining participants for this study, I considered the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015, p.196), which asserts that CYP, Parent/Carers, LA Officers, Health Practitioners and Social Care Practitioners are vital within the Annual Review processes and must (statutorily required) be invited to Annual Review meetings. Education settings (via their SENCOs) are also viewed as being appropriately placed by the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) to arrange the Annual Review meeting.

Whilst the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) does not consider it to be a mandatory requirement that EPs be invited to every Annual Review meeting, it is thought by some to be good practice (e.g. Renton, 2023). As a result, EPs can often be invited to participate in Annual Reviews, however, this approach varies between LAs and there is little research into EP roles within Annual Reviews and when it may be appropriate for them to contribute. Nevertheless, Stanbridge (2024) stresses that EPs are the only professional group working across every level of the SEND system across England. With this role of EPs in mind, and my own experience as a TEP, I decided that EPs could provide some relevant and valuable insight

and should form part of the focus groups in the current study, despite there being no legal obligation to invite them to Annual Reviews. Consequently, the recruits of this study included: CYP that have an EHCP; Parent/Carers; SENCOs; health practitioners; social care practitioners; EPs; and LA SEND Officers (who work for the LA to create and amend EHCPs). For most participants, I used their job title/role as identifiers throughout this thesis. A reflection on my use of pseudonyms can be seen in Reflective Vignette 5 and a summary of participant pseudonyms and labels can be seen in Table 3.

Reflective Vignette 5. The Use of Pseudonyms (Personal Reflexivity).

The use of pseudonyms here was a key consideration. As this research consisted of 17 participants, I felt that referring to each participant by pseudonyms would be confusing to readers. I instead only gave the pupils a pseudonym and the rest of the participants were given a generic label such as 'SENCO 1'. For Parent/Carers especially this is somewhat uncomfortable to me as I like to use a Parent/Carer's name to highlight their voice and that they are not simply 'X's mum' for example. Nevertheless, in this case I did this due to pragmatic considerations. It should be noted here for clarify that the EP participants role was that of an Area Senior EP and that the SENCOs had various official titles. The terms EP and SENCO however will be used to identify them for ease.

I decided to use pseudonyms for pupil participants to help them recognise themselves within the research and pupils chose their pseudonyms at the point of consent.

Table 3*List of Participant Labels/Pseudonyms*

Send Officer focus group (pilot) participants	SENCO focus group participants	Parent/Carer focus group participants	Pupil focus group participants	EP/Social Care focus group participants	Health Practitioner focus group participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistant SEND Officer 1 Assistant SEND Officer 2 SEND Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SENCO 1 SENCO 2 SENCO 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/Carer 1 Parent/Carer 2 Parent/Carer 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K (Year Eight) Bob (Year Nine) Tommy (Year Nine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EP Social Worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner Specialist neuro-disability Nurse Associate Designated Clinical Officer (ADCO)

The sampling method used for the research is a purposive one, as participants had to meet clear criteria which can be seen in Appendix 3 (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). Purposeful sampling is a commonly used approach in qualitative research, which recruits participants who can provide information-rich data to meet the research aims (Haji, 2024).

The participants in this study were approached by myself, with support from gatekeepers. Mertens (2015) considers a gatekeeper as an individual who has power within the organisation and can support researchers in accessing various participants. Barriers to using gatekeepers outlined in research include that gatekeepers may explicitly refuse to engage or that they may have their own motives for their involvement (Gřundělová et al., 2024).

Gatekeepers were limited in their influence of this study, as their principal role was simply sharing information about the research to possible participants. Even in this restricted role, there still exists the risk that the recruitment process could have been affected by the use of gatekeepers, due to their assumptions or misunderstandings around the aims of the research (Rankin & McFadyen, 2016). I tried to reduce this risk by offering to meet with gatekeepers, before they reached out to possible participants, to share information about the research. In this study, one such gatekeeper was the principal EP, who after meeting with me to discuss this research, invited me to meetings with suitable SENCO participants and allowed me to share information about the study to recruit. That same principal EP put me in contact with others (such as the Designated Clinical Officer) who helped me to recruit participants for the health practitioner focus group.

As with all research, voluntary informed consent was fundamental and only participants who confirmed their interest in the research directly with me were approached to seek formal consent (Mertens, 2015). For pupil participants, a SENCO gatekeeper was identified, who provided information to Parents/Carers and pupils to help to recruit. For Stage 2, I contacted Stage 1 participants (apart from CYP) and asked for their feedback and contribution towards Stage 2 and regained consent for this phase of the research.

When considering how many participants would need to be recruited, I held in mind that the optimal size for a focus group to be between six and eight (Gill et al., 2008). The initial aim to recruit this number of participants proved more challenging than expected which meant that the focus groups were smaller than I had originally planned. Most of the groups had three participants and a technical difficulty meant that one focus group only had two participants present (see Reflective Vignette 6 for more consideration of this and my overall difficulty with recruitment).

Reflective Vignette 6. My Experiences of Recruitment (Personal Reflexivity)

I found the recruitment aspect of the research challenging and I struggled to recruit enough participants for the focus groups. I also found it awkward to find dates which would suit everyone. This meant that the recruitment process for Stage 1 participants took five months overall.

I found it most challenging to recruit social worker participants, which took several rounds of seeking volunteers. This is consistent with my previous experiences of working with social workers, who have a high workload and can be difficult to contact. This high workload and demand is reflected in recent literature, such as Binks et al. (2024), who highlight time and logistics as resource barriers to social work practice within schools. This difficulty in recruiting social worker practitioners did make me reflect on how this may be a similar challenge that SENCO's have when arranging Annual Reviews or other SEND meetings with social workers involved.

In relation to the technical difficulties I faced within my planned external agencies focus group, this also made me reflect on how the different technologies, systems and processes used across services can be a barrier to joint working. I felt that this technical difficulty could have been something which the EP and Social Worker were used to or at least understanding of as they did not appear to be discouraged. At the time, myself, the EP and the Social Worker gave some time to wait in case the health practitioners were able to join, however, after a while we jointly agreed that we would go ahead. Luckily, the EP and Social Worker appeared happy to continue and this led to some interesting discussions. If this were not the case, I could see how the focus group may have been uncomfortable and lacking good discussion. Nevertheless, I was disappointed that the focus group did not go as planned as I felt that the discussion between the three areas (EP, health and social care) could have been generative and interesting. I am overall grateful to all participants for their support and perseverance meaning that even though the focus groups did not occur as planned, I was able to meet with all participants and gain their experiences.

Pilot Study and Implications

A pilot study was used to improve my questioning skills and to practice using Appreciative Inquiry as an approach. The pilot study included participants from the SEND team within the LA, as they are a large team who are integral to the Annual Review process. Due to their role within EHCPs, SEND team practitioners have a core contextual understanding of the Annual Review process. This allowed me to focus on their responses to the Appreciative Inquiry questions without wondering if they answered in a certain way due to a lack of contextual information.

After the pilot, I reduced the core questions to ask the focus groups from those prepared for the pilot. I did this as I found that the pilot group were able to discuss freely and openly from just the initial questions posed (see Reflective Vignette 7 for commentary on the pilot process).

Reflective Vignette 7. The use of a Pilot (Personal Reflexivity)

Initially, when planning the research, I had some ethical concerns about implementing a pilot study for action research. It did not feel comfortable for me to ask participants to use their time and engage in research if the information provided was not to be used in the research itself. Nevertheless, I did find the process helpful in ensuring competent and ethical practice within the research. Had the pilot study not gone well, I had planned to invite another member of the SEND team to attend the planned external agencies Stage 1 group. However, I decided to use the focus group within the analysis of the Stage 1 as I had obtained consent of the participants for this prior to conducting the focus group.

After the pilot, I discussed with my research supervisor how I had asked some of the questions to the SEND team practitioners, about how a dream Annual Review would make the participants feel. I noted at the time that the participants found this difficult to answer and instead focussed more on the practical aspects of the process. I wondered if this was due to their role within the Annual Review process meaning that they did not have emotional attachments to the outcome of a positive experience in comparison to other practitioners. This was also put forward in the Parent/Carer focus group who stated that SEND officers were less invested in the Annual Review process than the Parent/Carers themselves as to them it is "just a job".

Data Collection Overview

Stage 1, Discovery and Dream Phase Data Collection Summary.

Stage 1 data collection took place between 8th July and 9th December 2024. This included six focus groups with 17 participants which were conducted online (except for the CYP focus group) and were roughly an hour long. Each focus group followed the same structure, which can be seen in the PowerPoint used to support online focus groups in Appendix 4. I arranged the groups so that the participants were joined by those who held similar roles in the Annual Review process. Grouping those with similar experiences together allowed for a more detailed consideration of the issues relevant to each specific group. This also reduced the effect of hierarchies, as participants may have felt less able to speak freely when in the presence of those in or perceived to be in a position of power (BPS, 2021).

Informed consent was gained prior to the focus groups (Appendix 5). The focus groups were semi-structured using Appreciative Inquiry questioning based on the 4D cycle, which participants were introduced to at the beginning of the focus group. The focus group questions were generated in line with guidance from Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010, pp150-151) who outline what makes a good appreciative question, for example, those that invite stories and suggest action. In Appendix 6 I have set out a list of core questions and further prompts that I had prepared for the focus groups. Ad hoc questions, which were informed by AI, were also asked, in line with semi-structured focus group formats (see Appendix 7 for examples and see Reflective Vignette 8 for reflection on the pupil focus group).

Following each focus group, I went through the transcripts, to ensure that they were accurate, before deleting the recordings of the focus groups, in line with ethical approval. This included anonymising the transcripts by allocating the practitioner and Parent/Carer participants with a label/pseudonym as outlined in Table 3.

Reflective Vignette 8. Reflection on the Pupil Focus Group (Personal Reflexivity)

Here, I feel it is important to reflect on the pupil focus group. I am very grateful to them for meeting with me and for sharing their thoughts and ideas about Annual Reviews. However, I felt that they initially found it very difficult to share their memories and appreciation of previous Annual Review experiences within the focus group setting. This may provide insight itself, showing that students found it difficult to remember such experiences.

Unfortunately, the limits of this research study on time was a barrier and if I had more time, perhaps I would have returned to the CYP to ask if they had any further thoughts having had some time to think about this. Perhaps if I were to conduct this research again this would be something I would consider more, potentially asking CYP who had very recently had an Annual Review their experiences on their experiences or making a more creative and focussed task of this aspect of the 4D cycle.

Nevertheless, the pupils remained engaged and were more easily able to share their thoughts and views on what their dream Annual Review would be. This is reflected within the analysis chapter, where pupil participants voice is more prominent within the dream phase of the analysis due to them being more vocal on this aspect.

Stage 2, Design Phase Data Collection Summary.

For Stage 2, all Stage 1 participants (apart from pupils) were sent Possibility Statements, that I had drafted following the focus groups and analysis. Possibility Statements are commonly used in the Design stage of Appreciative Inquiry research and bridge the best of “what is” highlighted in the Discovery phase of the 4D cycle and “what might be” from the Dream phase (Eobaina, 2012). The language around these statements varies across projects and organisations. Originally coined ‘provocative propositions’, other terms used include Possibility Propositions and Vision Statements (Bushe, 2012; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Eobaina, 2012). I chose to use Possibility Statements as this language was accessible and provided a sense of hope. I also held in mind the limitations of this study and that actions could not be guaranteed or maintained and therefore the term possibility was deemed to be more transparent. Each Possibility Statements was connected to a ‘Meta

Concept' which were generated from the focus group analysis and hoped to represent the overall ideas of 'what should be' (Design phase of 4D cycle).

Participants were asked to provide feedback and comments so that Possibility Statements could be finalised. Once finalised, I created a 'Design Planning Document' which summarised the Possibility Statements and provides possible actions to support these statements. These actions were collated based on experience and hopes for the future shared by participants in the focus groups. More information on this can be found later in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

Stage 1, Discovery and Dream Phase Analysis.

Thematic Analysis.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is a qualitative research method that aims to identify patterns and meanings within data collected. TA is widely used when the aim of the researcher is to explore the points of view expressed on a social practice (such as Annual Reviews), meaning that it is an appropriate tool for this study (Christodoulou, 2024). TA is not without criticism, with some suggesting that the approach lacks structure and is not distinctive. Defenders of this method point out that TA is meant to be a flexible approach, and that implementing a more rigid structure would limit the outcomes of the analysis (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017).

I considered various other analysis methods before settling on TA, such as narrative analysis. Narrative analysis ontology disputes any notion of truth, which does not align entirely with my critical realist perspective (Willig, 2019). I also considered discourse analysis but decided that its focus on understanding the meaning of participants' language was not in line with the aims of this research (Mertens, 2015). Finally, I considered grounded theory. Whilst grounded theory focusses on social processes, Fletcher (2017) points out that it is not ideal for CR research as it does not acknowledge known theories. Consequently, I decided that TA was the most appropriate choice, as the aims of this research are to consider

individuals' thinking and experiences about Annual Review (a social phenomenon) (Willig, 2013).

Fryer's Critical Realist Approach to Thematic Analysis.

TA is not a set analysis and can take multiple forms (Finlay, 2021). I initially considered using Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2022) Reflective TA. However, I decided on a critical realist model of TA, as Braun and Clarke's approach is thought by some to be less compatible with critical realist research (Fryer, 2022).

For this study I have chosen Fryer's (2022) approach, which is heavily influenced by both Braun and Clarke's reflexive TA (2019), and Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) CR TA. Fryer's model (2022) was chosen over Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) as the latter approach emphasises the use of domains of reality, which, as stated earlier, has been contested in recent literature. Fryer's (2022) critical realist TA aims to develop causal explanations, making it appropriate for the current research, which hopes to gain understanding of what makes Annual Review processes work and how that may support future practice. Fryer's (2022) analysis has a five-step approach which I used in this study in a flexible way, by moving back and forth between steps as recommended.

Fryer (2022) recommends the use of software to support researchers where possible. I used the programme NVIVO to manage my analysis. NVIVO can be used for organising the analysis of information, as well as for the analysis of the data itself. The use of NVIVO to conduct the analysis itself, is not without criticism, as it has been suggested rigour and reflexivity cannot be created through 'a touch of a button' (Braun & Clarke, 2022 p.69). With this in mind, I only used NVIVO as an organisational tool during stage 3 and 4 of the analysis to make the collation of the large amount of data collected during the focus groups more manageable (see Appendix 8 for analysis step examples).

Step 1- Develop Your Research Questions.

Fryer's (2022) view is that having appropriate research questions is the first important call in one's analysis. Having causal research questions, which refer to experiences of events, is

required in this stage, although this is considered by some not to add methodological value by some i.e. Christodoulou (2024). The overall research questions for the current study have causal elements, as they aim to consider which causal mechanisms impact upon the Annual Review process.

Step 2- Familiarise Yourself with the Data.

The second step within this analysis was to familiarise myself with the data which initially took the form of going through the transcripts to ensure that they were correct. Once that was completed, further familiarisation took place by skim reading the transcripts several times, whilst also making notes on any initial thoughts or questions I had in my research diary (Fryer, 2022).

Step 3- Apply, Develop and Review Codes.

The third step involves applying initial codes, then developing those codes before reviewing them. This occurs through three sub-steps which ensure the codes' validity and movement occurs between the sub-steps rather than the process being linear (Fryer, 2022).

The first subset within this stage (3.1) is about applying initial descriptive codes to data, to capture initial thoughts. This stage is data-led as the aim is to present the true findings of the data, rather than trying to fit it into pre-existing theories and concepts (Fryer, 2022).

Generally, long code names are provided at this point. For example, an initial code was 'A robust understanding of the local and statutory processes leads to effective paperwork to support the process'. This stage also created many codes due to its descriptive nature with initial analysis of the pilot study focus group resulted in 85 codes. These codes were then reduced and refined as the analysis progressed.

The second sub-step in this phase (3.2) moved to a more theory-led approach, which allowed the codes to be developed further. When developing codes, standardisation and consolidation are core processes. Standardisation refers to the process of bringing together codes that say the same thing (Fryer, 2022). In this research the codes 'Not enough time in the school day to complete paperwork' and 'Annual Reviews are creating work for SENCOs

outside of school hours to complete paperwork' were similar, so the latter code was used for both. This process of standardising also allowed for a systematic structure to be in place for the coding. In this instance, I labelled the codes corresponding to 'Discovery' or 'Dream' which allowed for them to be grouped into the part of the 4D cycle with which they were aligned. Following standardisation, consolidation occurred and refers to the process of thinking about whether there are any general or theoretical terms that could be used in the descriptive codes (Fryer, 2022).

The final sub-step (3.3) focussed on reviewing the codes to ensure descriptive validity (do the codes accurately describe the data?) and interpretive validity (do the more general codes continue to reflect the experiences in the data?) (Fryer, 2022). Once descriptive and interpretive validity was deemed apparent across all the data, I moved onto step 4.

Step 4- Develop and Review Themes.

Within this step, Fryer (2022) considers a theme to be a causal explanation of experiences/events, so the development of a theme is a development of a causal explanation. The use of retroductive reasoning supports this by asking 'what best explains this event?'. Once causal explanations (in the form of themes) are set, they are reviewed to consider their validity, by asking whether the claims used to develop the themes have a logical basis (Fryer, 2022). Although NVIVO was used to support the organisation of codes, at this point I printed out my codes to support theme development (see Appendix 8).

Step 5- Generate Conclusions and Report.

The final step of this analysis is to generate conclusions and create a report. For the current study, I used thematic maps and diagrams to help to explain the findings of this research (see thematic maps in Appendix 9).

Dissemination can also be considered in this step of the analysis. The dissemination of research results is not only thought to be important to share the lessons learned, but it is also thought to support participants' sense of ownership and importance (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Good practice suggests that those involved in the process should be aware of the

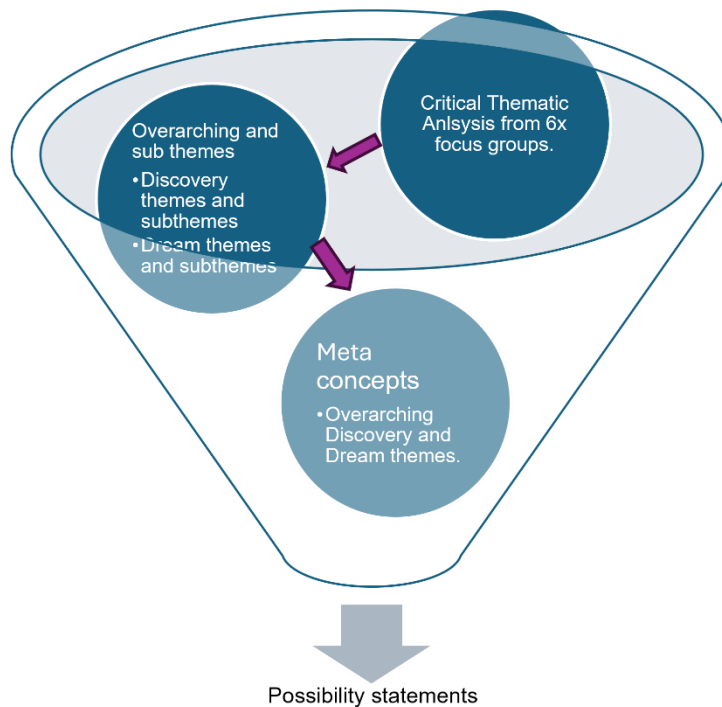
findings of the study (Squirrel, 2012). All who attended Stage 1 gained experiential feedback. Following Stage 1 focus groups, all participants (apart from pupils) were given the opportunity to contribute their thoughts on the Possibility Statements I created following Stage 1 analysis. Finally, participants will receive a copy of the finalised thesis, as will the LA (via the principal EP) in which the research took place to support future actions.

Stage 2, Design Phase Analysis.

Although this stage does not follow a 'formal' analysis method, it was generated following the TA conducted in Stage 1 of the research design. Therefore, the methodology of how Stage 2 analysis was conducted is outlined here for clarity.

As highlighted in Figure 7, Possibility Statements were construed following the Stage 1 critical realist TA, which resulted in five overarching Discovery themes and four overarching Dream themes. Appendix 10 highlights and connects these themes into five 'Meta Concepts'. These Meta Concepts were researcher generated and with these concepts in mind, I created seven initial Possibility Statements (see Appendix 11 for an excerpt of my research diary showing the creation of these). I drafted the Possibility Statements as directed by Hammond (1998, p42):

1. Find examples of the best.
2. Determine what circumstances made the best possible.
3. Take the stories and envision what might be. Write an affirmative statement that describes the idealised future as if it were already happening.

Figure 7*Creation of Possibility Statements.*

Once created, I shared the Possibility Statements with all participants from Stage 1 (except for CYP participants) as a form of ‘member checking’ (See Appendix 12 for updated information sheet sent to participants). Member checking is the process of soliciting feedback from one’s participants about data or interpretations, and is thought to support validity (Mertens, 2015). Member checking has a somewhat contentious history, with some viewing it as gold standard practice (e.g. Madill & Sullivan, 2018) and others stating it to have no impact on research quality (e.g. Thomas 2017). Due to the research aims and action research focus, the term ‘reflexive participant collaboration’ as proposed by Motulsky (2021) is more fitting and will therefore be used instead of member checking. This reflexive collaboration used in this phase hoped to reduce researcher bias and contributes to the emancipatory aims of the study through sharing power and providing voice. The purpose of this reflexive collaboration was an ethical consideration and used to share power and to promote epistemic privilege in line with social justice aims (Motulsky, 2021).

The practicalities of this reflexive collaboration was that I sent a document with additional information around Possibility Statements (see Appendix 13) for participants to comment and contribute towards. Birt et al. (2016) state that member checking can waste participants' time if it is not considered properly. Therefore, I highlighted that engagement in Stage 2 was entirely voluntary and asked participants to consent if they wished to participate in this aspect of the research. Overall, two participants contributed towards this (see Reflective Vignette 9 on this) which was used to finalise the Possibility Statements

Following the finalised Meta Concepts and Possibility Statements, I was then able to create a document with suggested actions to support each of these statements to conclude the Design phase of this research. I did this through returning to the transcripts and (with the support of NVIVO) coded the data using a deductive approach. In this case, the Meta Concepts created in phase 1 of the analysis provided a lens through which I viewed the focus groups transcripts and found 'codes' that were providing practical suggestions (from previous good experiences of future Dreams) that could support the Possibility Statements generated. The majority of these were extracted directly from the data, however, at some points my interpretation was also used to suggest actions which could support this. For example, where Parent/Carers shared their experiences of working with LA practitioners who they considered as lacking an understanding of the process, although not explicitly stated, I took this to suggest training at a local and national level would be helpful, as they previously shared how training opportunities benefitted practitioners such as SENCOs. Please see Appendix 14 for the final Design Planning Document.

Reflective Vignette 9. Reflection on Reflexive Participant Collaboration (Personal Reflexivity)

In relation to the hopes of receiving feedback on the drafted Possibility Statements, whilst four participants consented, only two participants sent feedback on the statements. Urry et al. (2024) recognise that research which uses reflexive collaboration may encounter acts of non-responding. I was disappointed in this response rate as I wanted to encourage collaboration within this research project as much as possible. This hope was due to my own ethical views, in addition to the ideas of epistemological oppression and power raised throughout the stage 1 analysis highlighting that this is an area needed to be developed in future Annual Reviews. Nevertheless, the feedback which was provided was helping to consider wording of the Possibility Statements and where we are now in comparison to the statements.

I have spent some time considering how I would have supported this reflexive collaboration more. If time wasn't a concern, I perhaps could have set up several 'drop ins' for participants to join and discuss the statements. However, due to recruitment difficulties and concerns with finding times suitable in Stage 1, I feel that this may have taken a long time to organise and ensure that sufficient participants would have been able to attend.

Given the limited feedback provided on the Possibility Statements, my perspective on 'who owns this research' has shifted. Since the research, particularly in Stage 2, was primarily led and produced by the researcher with minimal reflexive collaboration, it can be seen as researcher driven. This ultimately means participants have less ownership over the research process and its outcomes than originally planned. Therefore, future research should be considered in relation to more transformative and collaborative action research which is based on true co-production.

Although researcher produced Possibility Statements are not the ideal, they are present within other doctoral theses due to such limits on timescale. For example, Brooks (2015) drafted Possibility Statements to them be finalised by a steering group in their thesis. Suddards (2023) also generated a list of Provocative Propositions which were discussed in a focus group to amend. Coates (2017) also generated this themselves as the researcher due to time constraints.

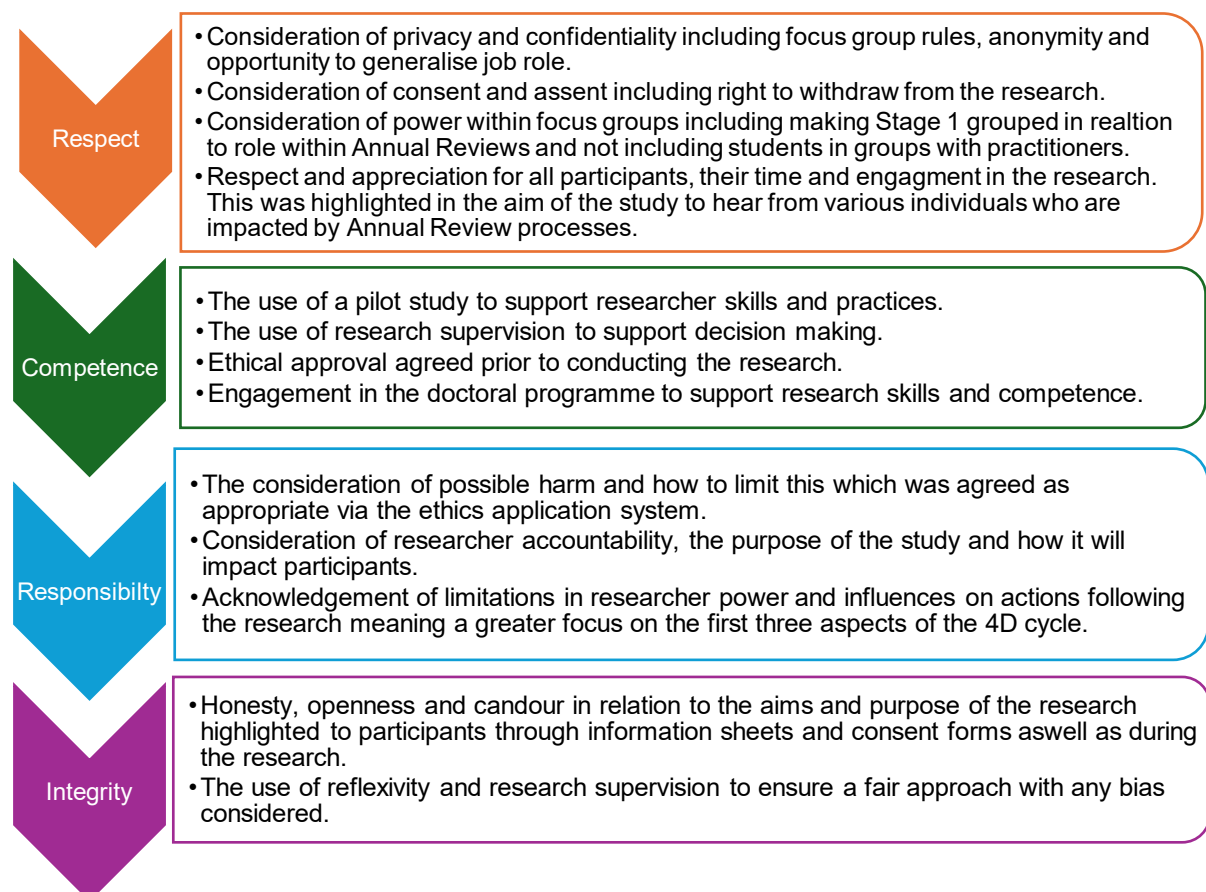
Ethical Considerations

Before any research was conducted, a research proposal was submitted and approved. An ethics application to the University of Sheffield's ethics application system was also granted (ethics letter of approval can be seen in Appendix 15). Ethical approval was also re-sought following the design change of Stage 2.

Throughout this research, the four ethical principles outlined in by The British Psychological Society (BPS) code of ethics and conduct were applied (BPS, 2021), to ensure the ethical integrity of the project. These four principles are: respect; competence; responsibility; and integrity. For a summary of the operation of the four principles in this study see Figure 8. Some ethical considerations, such as reflexivity and the use of a pilot study, have already been discussed. Remaining important aspects of ethical practice will now be considered.

Figure 8

BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct four Core Principles and the Current Research.



Informed Consent/Assent, Confidentiality and Ownership of Research

Consent is a central ethical concern in research and is thought to be especially important for focus groups (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Informed consent was gained at Stage 1 and Stage 2 through the completion of a google form (Appendices 6 and 13). For health participants, these were sent via a word document due to access issues. The consent included confirmation of having read and received the information sheets provided (Appendix 16). Within the consent forms and information sheets, participants' right to withdraw and other ethical information was provided. Consent to record was also confirmed at the beginning of each focus group.

For CYP participants, informed consent was provided from pupils' parents/carers, in addition to informed assent from the CYPs themselves, before the focus groups commenced. This was to ensure that pupil participants fully understood what was being asked of them before confirming that they were happy to continue (Aldridge, 2014).

Regarding confidentiality, I included in the group rules that participants must not disclose the identity of those others who also attended the focus groups, to preserve group confidentiality. I was also aware that the participants of the study, especially those who had distinctive job titles, may be at risk of having partial anonymity. This risk was outlined within the consent form and practitioner participants were provided with the opportunity to supply a more general role title, to minimise this risk.

I also considered ownership of the research as an ethical issue. Although social change outcomes are prioritised in this research, I cannot claim that it is an emancipatory piece of work as the research was not participant led (Aldridge, 2015). Therefore, I was transparent with the participants in disclosing to them that this research project was part of a doctoral thesis.

Working with CYP and Minimising Harm

As I conducted a focus group with CYP who had EHCPs, it was important for me to consider how my work with them was ethical, beyond gaining consent and assent. It is widely thought

that ethical practice within research must be sensitive to power dynamics and should consider whether there is a risk that any existing vulnerabilities may be exacerbated (Aldridge, 2015; BPS, 2021). I therefore decided to have CYP as a single focus group and not to have them participate within Stage 2 of the study.

I also considered Appreciative Inquiry would be an ethically appropriate approach to use with CYP. Shuayb et al. (2009) found that Year Seven pupils were able to understand and follow the Appreciative Inquiry process. I had come across research such as that of Lewis (2016), who had used CYP participants in Appreciative Inquiry research and found that it was an enjoyable experience for them. I therefore found that Appreciative Inquiry was an appropriate way in which to gain CYP's voice.

I conducted the focus group with CYP in person to support rapport building and to help me recognise more easily whether any further support was needed (Gill & Baillie 2018). Prior to the focus group I sent the CYP a one-page profile of myself (Appendix 17). This included a photograph and some key information about me. By sending this, I hoped to encourage the CYP to feel comfortable with myself. I also asked the pupils to complete a similar one-page profile (see Appendix 18) and asked the school to help with this. The information gained from this was used to support the pupils and helped me to assess how best to engage with them in the focus group. This use of a one-page profile for practitioners is thought of as good practice in EP work (Boswell, 2021).

Finally, as I was working with CYP, it was important that I consider safeguarding. Although I considered this project to present a low risk of causing harm to participants, as I was working with pupils in a school, I ensured that I followed my professional safeguarding standards as usual. This included: being aware of any safeguarding concerns; knowing who the safeguarding lead in the school was; and to contact them if I had any concerns; in addition to providing the school with my details - including a copy of my enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Ensuring Quality Qualitative Research

There are various methods which can be used to assess whether qualitative research is of good quality (Willig, 2013). For the current thesis, I utilised Yardley's (2000) characteristics of good qualitative research: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. How these properties are exhibited in the current thesis can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Yardley's (2000) Characteristics of Good Quality Qualitative Research Considered in the Current Research Project

Characteristic	Way in which demonstrated within the current study
Sensitivity to context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of context within previous research (see Chapter 2). • Awareness of relevant theory (see Chapter 2). • Diverse participants in relation to role within Annual Review to contribute to wider understanding of their experiences within Annual Reviews. • Consideration of 'shadow side' within Appreciative Inquiry method to be sensitive to experiences and not limit voice. • CYP focus group occurred in person to support participant comfort. • Consideration of power relations within focus groups and Stage 1 focus groups in 'groups' to support this.
Commitment and Rigour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged engagement in the topic through previous roles and hopes to support future practice. • Use of pilot study to support skill in Appreciative Inquiry.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion in data to conduct in-depth analysis which produced multi-layer consideration to support the production of Meta Concepts, Possibility Statements and a Design Planning Document. • Use of reflexive collaboration to provide a chance to comment and contribute further towards Possibility Statements.
<p>Transparency and Coherence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations of study discussed throughout and concluded in Chapter 5. • Use of reflexivity and reflections throughout (see Reflective Vignettes). • Transparency around aims and limits of the transformative aspect of the study throughout, including towards participants. • Clear and transparent methods used in line with research aims and questions. • Data analysis methods clearly shown and presented in appendices. • Consideration of philosophical perspective and appropriateness of study topic and design. • Generalisation/resonance aims and limitations disclosed. • Use of reflexive participant collaboration.
<p>Impact and Importance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research in an area that is under-researched (i.e. Annual Reviews) to support insight into this topic.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relevance of Annual Review as a topic evident through increasing numbers of EHCP assessment requests and overall increase in EHCPs.• Practical suggestions put forward through the Design stage of the research which can be built upon within different contexts (see Design Planning Document Appendix 14).• Research analysis conducted through critical realist method to support contextual understanding and support causal explanation development.• Participatory hopes and action research design supports emancipatory aims of the critical realist research and puts forward steps to implement positive change.
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Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings

Introduction to Chapter 4

This chapter outlines my analysis and findings, which occurred in 2 stages. Stage 1 of the analysis was conducted using Fryer's (2022) critical realist TA following focus groups which concentrated on the Appreciative Inquiry Discovery phase and Dream phrase. Fryer's (2022) view of critical realist TA is that the: "experiences of people remain in the data itself, the codes consolidate these experiences to talk of events, and themes consider the causal explanations that produce these events and make experiences" (Fryer, 2022, p.10). Therefore, within this research, causal explanations can be thought of as themes, however, for ease of reading this research will reference both labels interchangeably.

It should be noted that this analysis is subjective and if another researcher had the same data, different themes and understandings could have been generated (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Throughout my analysis, I noticed that causal explanations and experiences often overlapped (Appendix 19 for thematic maps links). This 'messiness' is reflective of the social world where multiple causes occur simultaneously and interact in complex ways (Bhaskar, 2008; Fryer, 2022). In line with Fryer's (2022) approach, the causal explanation (theme) titles are lengthy in this analysis due to the descriptive, latent, and theory-led approach used.

I have included participant quotations in this chapter to help demonstrate the themes, however, due to word count restrictions other relevant quotes can be seen, sorted by theme, in Appendix 20 (see also Reflective Vignette 10). Quotations are presented in the words of participants, with some minor amendments for ease of reading, for example, reducing 'erms,'. The use of an ellipsis (...) illustrates where a part of the text has been omitted to be concise.

The second stage of analysis considers the Design phase of the 4D Appreciative Inquiry cycle (what should be). Identified Meta Concepts are explained before sharing the finalised Possibility Statements. I then introduce the 'Design Planning Document' (Appendix 14).

Reflective Vignette 10. Consideration of Participant Contribution and Voice (Personal Reflexivity)

One aim of this research was to give voice to those who are influenced by and participate in Annual Reviews. I did this by providing them with space to express their views, so that their insights could be analysed and considered when providing suggestions for improvements to the system.

When it came to my analysis, I found it challenging to provide each individual participant with enough space without preferring one over another. One practical difficulty was that the numbers of participants in each type of role, varied. For example, only one EP contributed, compared to three SENCOs. Therefore, I took a long time to draft this aspect of the research to ensure that I was representing all the core ideas and the important experiences of all participants. This process was helped by taking breaks between analysis and writing up and by returning to the data several times. I took care to make sure that I valued what was said and the experiences shared, rather than the quantity of any given contribution. Whilst my approach has resulted in a high number of themes, I felt that the focus groups provided some good insight which I did not want to diminish or ignore in anyway. This is also why I decided to attach Appendix 20, to highlight other relevant quotes outside of the chapter itself.

Stage 1 Analysis (Discovery and Dream Phases)

Discovery Phase Analysis and Findings

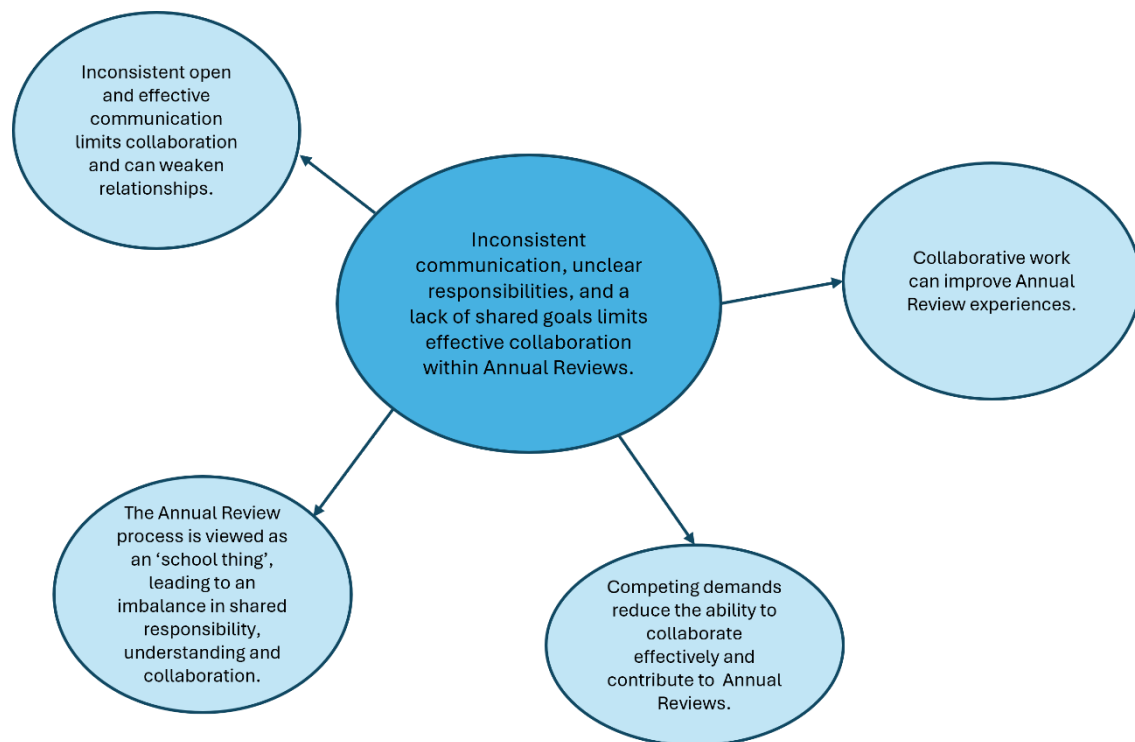
The aim of the Discovery phase was to outline participants' experiences of Annual Reviews, highlighting: 'what is'; 'what might have been'; and 'what gives life'. At times, participants found it difficult to appreciate their Annual Review experiences, "Yeah, really difficult when you say to pick out the positives" (Parent/Carer 1). The Discovery analysis resulted in five overarching causal explanations, all of which have four-five sub themes (see thematic map in Appendix 9). I will now summarise each theme before expanding on the sub-themes within them.

Discovery Theme 1- Inconsistent Communication, Unclear Responsibilities, and a Lack of Shared Goals Limits Effective Collaboration Within Annual Reviews.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the 'building blocks framework' (Griffiths et al., 2021), which states that lower-level aspects of collaboration (i.e. open communication, trust, and shared goals) must be evident before collaborative working can be effective. This resonated with my consideration of this theme, which can be seen depicted in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Discovery Theme 1



Discovery Theme 1.1 Inconsistent Open and Effective Communication Limits Collaboration and can Weaken Relationships.

The experience of inconsistent communication was a central concept within the focus groups. Participants from the Parent/Carer and SENCO groups expressed their frustration about the lack of information sharing between services to support Annual Reviews, “we don't

have the capacity to keep chasing ... I couldn't tell you the last time I had a health report” (SENCO 2).

Interestingly, from a healthcare point of view, Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner indicated that a lack of procedure in requesting information limited their ability to share information with schools, “there isn't an actual streamlined process. We'll often get bombarded from nurseries, from schools ... sometimes the families maybe don't give consent to pass that to them”.

SENCO 1, shared that communication systems between education settings and other services appear to be a barrier to successful Annual Reviews. This has resulted in SENCO 1 seeking support from Parent/Carers, which they appeared to feel uncomfortable about:

“I have to say to parents ‘Please could you provide a copy of what you last received because we don't get anything now’ ... I think some of our parents are quite vulnerable themselves and it's a lot to ask.” (SENCO 1)

This is also something which Parent/Carer 1 expressed frustration about, “I am the person still who chases up the reports from health and social care”. This highlights that the collaborative values of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) are not present at a basic communication sharing level. This challenge appears to result in a reliance on Parent/Carers and ultimately reduces trust towards some services.

Some participants were able to share positive experiences of effective communication between individuals/services. For example, “we have SEND Officer and SENCO meetings sporadically. ... we can also use that opportunity to, I want to say train but maybe sort of say any changes that have been made” (Assistant SEND Officer 2).

Discovery Theme 1.2 Collaborative Working can Improve Annual Review

Experiences.

Throughout the focus groups, examples of positive experiences which supported CYP outcomes often occurred when a joint approach across services was obvious:

“I had a little boy diagnosed with an incurable brain tumour ... his Oncologist came, and they were part of it, and they were really positive. In terms of they had a really big impact on the plan and on the Annual Review.” (SENCO 2).

Throughout similarly valued experiences of collaborative working, an underlying facilitator of positive relationships was continuously mentioned, “I would say my experience is this kind of positive relationships and rapport that we have with settings” (Assistant SEND Officer 1).

Supportive and positive relationships across services was also evident, with ADCO sharing how having good working relationships with adult services supports Annual Reviews for older students at transition points within their services:

“We would have like multi-agency professionals around the table and then we would have a transition plan for kind of what they wanted and their aspirations ... So that was always really positive to ensure that the child was going to get the correct support” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner).

The point of transition, in my experience, can be difficult for those involved, as it is a time of change and uncertainty. This may be why spending special attention to creating collaborative transitions appear to be helpful to those involved.

Discovery Theme 1.3 Competing Demands Reduce the Ability to Collaborate Effectively and Contribute to Annual Reviews.

One influence on experiences of reduced levels of collaboration within Annual Reviews, mentioned by participants, was the idea of competing demands, “Your workload is through

the roof. There's not enough hours in the day... especially when it's a face-to-face review and you've got travel time" (Social Worker).

It was also discussed how it's not recognised that those providing input into Annual Reviews require time to collate and prepare information, "people from the local authority, they're heavily relying on the health information, but not kind of understanding what the clinicians kind of have to go through to create the health reports." (ADCO).

This suggests that practitioners want the information they provide to be meaningful to CYP rather than just create a report for the sake of it. I wondered here if the LA staff seeking health advice understood the work involved for practitioners. Reflecting on how collaboration and the capacity of practitioners has changed over time, SENCO 1 recognised a change since the Covid-19 pandemic:

"I find we've had a big swing since Covid ... before, if I had somebody need the diabetic clinic or epilepsy, they were very good, either providing a report or trying to come to a review. And since Covid, we don't have any of that" (SENCO 1)

This suggests that previously, engagement and collaboration was more evident, possibly due to fewer demands on services.

Discovery Theme 1.4 The Annual Review Process is Viewed as a "School Thing", Leading to an Imbalance in Shared Responsibility, Understanding and Collaboration.

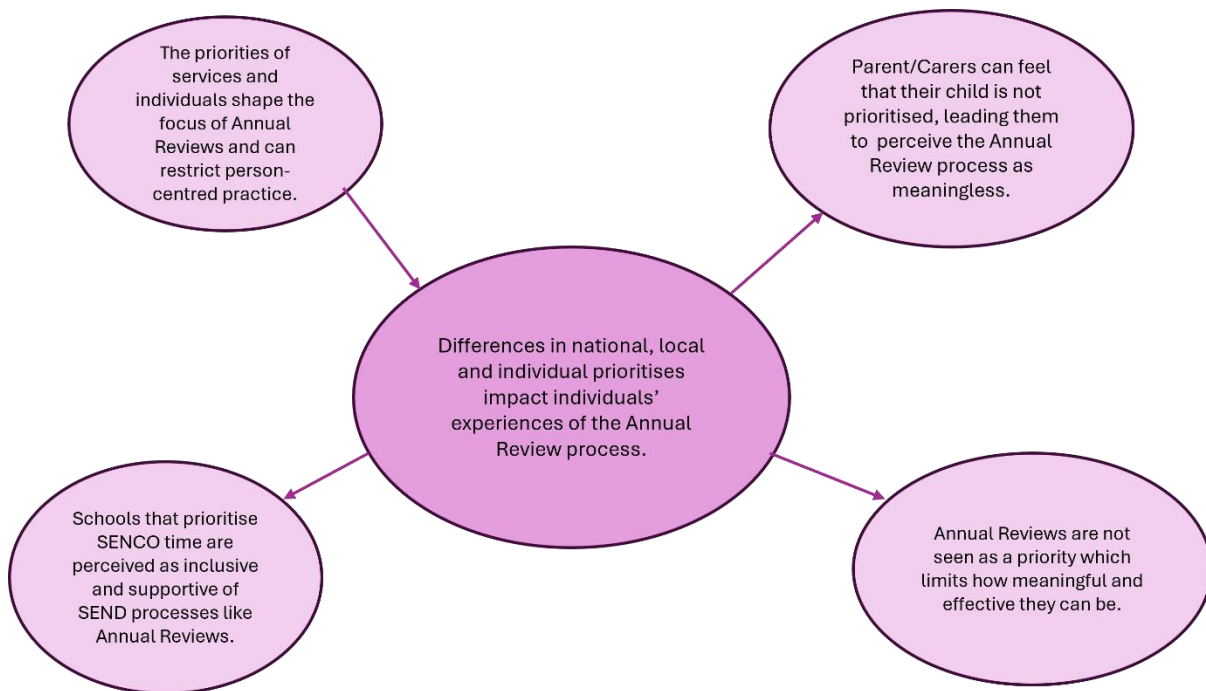
Another factor, which participants felt contributed to a lack of collaboration was a sense that non-educational services did not accept proportionate responsibility for their part in the Annual Review process:

“I do think the whole code of practice was about bringing accountability to all services. I still feel health don't have that accountability. They don't provide the reports, they think that you are asking for something that is completely alien.” (SESCO 2)

The ADCO suggested that one factor leading to a lack of collaboration from health practitioners was a feeling that they had been told to focus on their own role, “we always kind of got taught as well to kind of just focus on our health provisions ... just focus on the provision and service that we provide” (ADCO). This might suggest a view from health services that joint working is not to be encouraged, possibly due to workload demands or differing values around joint working. I also wondered how health and social care practitioners' workloads were determined and if time for contribution towards Annual Review meetings and other collaborative opportunities were accounted for within this, as is the case within some EP services.

Discovery Theme 2- Differences in National, Local, and Individual Priorities Impact Individuals' Experiences of the Annual Review Process.

Several participants raised the concern as to whether their priorities aligned with others at various levels (Figure 10). Positive experiences occurred when individuals and services had joint aspirations and priorities. Lesser experiences lacked shared understanding and demonstrated competing aims. This, at times, led to experiences of tokenistic practice and reduced opportunity to engage in Annual Reviews fully.

Figure 10*Discovery Theme 2*

Discovery Theme 2.1 The Priorities of Services and Individuals Shape the Focus of Annual Reviews and can Restrict Person-Centred Practice.

National statutory timescales appeared to influence the timings of Annual Review meetings, which can lead to a non-person-centred approach, “They wanted to do the review of my child on 10th of September, and he was just going to the new class ... no teacher knows him” (Parent/Carer 3). This suggests to me that adhering to the statutory timescale and following the process is being prioritised over making the Annual Review meaningful to CYP. Some other examples of tokenistic practice were raised which were linked to priorities within teams/services:

“We did the PEP combined with the Education Health and Care Plan review ... the person doing the PEP bit was like, ‘can we have a social, emotional target outcome?’ And you know, we're not actually that concerned about that ... it's box ticking.” (EP)

This highlights that at times, individuals are being asked to create targets to appease certain criteria within services, rather than allowing a person-centred approach to lead CYP outcomes. Conversely, examples were also given about how team level priorities ensured good practice. For example, pupil participation and transition/preparing for adulthood were named as priorities within services which led to positive experiences, “for us it’s a real, quite a big push of giving them the voice that we are encouraged by management to let them advocate for their self” (Social Worker).

Regarding how individual priorities can influence an Annual Review directly, Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner shared a recent example of a Parent/Carer who, in an Annual Review meeting, focussed on concerns about adaptations to their property:

“it’s not always helpful for the parents to be there actually because sometimes they’re so focused on their agenda ... mum had been promised for years and years, apparently for like adaptations to her property. And she kind of focused on that throughout the whole of the meeting. So, we wasn’t really looking at the EHCP review.” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

This was an interesting addition to the idea that individual priorities can also influence the Annual Review meeting and provided insight into what some may view as the purpose of an Annual Review, and how this might differ to others. For example, in this quote, it was suggested that the Advanced Paediatric Nurse practitioner felt it important to focus on the CYP EHCP in the review meeting, however, the Parent/Carer felt that their child’s housing needs was a priority (see Reflective Vignette 11).

Reflective Vignette 11. Reflection on the use of 'Professional Meetings' (Epistemological Reflexivity)

Originally, I found this input from the Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner uncomfortable as they initially shared that ideally, Parent/Carers might not be present for the entirety of the Annual Review meeting due to this experience:

“Perhaps if you invited parents at the end or you know ... but you could have like a professional side and then the parent come at the end and then you can kind of feedback to the parent what was discussed. And if they want to add anything else.” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

This goes against my ethical view and epistemological position that Parent/Carers ought to be part of all conversations they choose to join to construe joint understanding. However, when explored further in the focus group, it became evident that in this instance, what had happened was that the Parent/Carer experienced a general lack of communication and action from services, who had in fact attended the Annual Review meeting. This meant that the Parent/Carer had used the opportunity to ask questions about their child and the service and therefore chose to prioritise this as the focus of the Annual Review meeting. This to me reflected an overall lack of opportunity for the Parent/Carer to discuss with practitioners outside of the meeting. This was confirmed by Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner (and discussed further in Dream Theme 1), who concluded that better communication and collaboration in practice outside of the Annual Review, in this case would have allowed for a more effective Annual Review meeting.

Discovery Theme 2.2 Parent/Carers can Feel That Their Child is not Prioritised, Leading Them to Perceive the Annual Review Process as Meaningless.

Within the Parent/Carer focus group, it was particularly evident that they felt that their child was not a priority within Annual Reviews, “they think I'm overanxious or I am fussy or I think it's all about me and my son and no one else. But his EHCP Annual Review is about my son and no one else” (Parent/Carer 1). This led some Parent/Carers to feel that felt that their child's Annual Review and EHCP were not purposeful, “the experience is not great you know, and I just see it as a piece of crap paper, and they just do it for the sake of doing it” (Parent/Carer 3). This suggests that the Annual Review experience, for some, can appear to

be a bureaucratic process, focussing on the paperwork rather than making meaningful change.

Parent/Carer 1 shared an example of a meaningful and positive experience. Here, they sensed that their child's needs were considered as a priority by a practitioner and how this felt, "Amazing. Honestly. She actually knew all about him before she came to visit us, and she made accommodation for [him] ... That's all you need" (Parent/Carer 1). This instance appeared to be a core positive memory for Parent/Carer 1 due to the rarity of having their child prioritised. Showing that a child-centred approach which views the CYP and their family at the heart of it, facilitates positive experiences for Parent/Carers.

Discovery Theme 2.3 Annual Reviews are Not Seen as a Priority, Which Limits how Meaningful and Effective They can be.

The concept of Annual Reviews not being a priority was key within the focus groups, which I feel, ultimately impacts upon many other aspects of the Annual Review process such as attendance at Annual Review meetings (see more in Reflective Vignette 12). Some practitioners who would provide valuable input are not able to attend the Annual Review meeting due to competing demands. Consequently, attendance at Annual Reviews is only common when situations are at crisis or decision points, "It does feel that we either attend at the point of transition or unfortunately the point where something isn't going so well, whether it's a placement breakdown or at risk of exclusion" (SEND Officer).

Assistant SEND Officer 2 suggested available time, and competing priorities as contributing factors to reduced Parent/Carer attendance at Annual Review meetings, "I guess it's working lives, isn't it? It's a challenge for that." (Assistant SEND Officer 2). The issue of time available was also raised by SENCOs, who felt that they monopolised individuals' time for Annual Review meetings, "my Annual Reviews probably go on too long" (SENCO 1). I wondered if this sense of guilt for taking up individuals' time might be reduced if Annual

Reviews, or even more generally SEND, were viewed as a priority, as the time spent would be viewed as worthwhile.

Another competing priority discussed was the initial assessments for EHCPs. A focus on these appears to have resulted in a better understanding of the initial assessment process in comparison to Annual Reviews, especially for health practitioner participants. This was reflected in the following statement, where Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner revealed that they did not consider Annual Reviews as being statutory:

“Annual Reviews kind of get put on the back burner a little bit ... there's not sort of that statutory element to it and because we are so inundated with the new assessments that's where our effort and our work kind of goes.” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

This emphasises that a decade after the publication of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and the Children and Families Act (2014), practitioners working within the English legislation remain unclear about its remits and consequently, their roles within it. This shows systemic issues such as a lack of clear guidance, training and the necessary infrastructure to support the effective implementation of the system in place.

Reflective Vignette 12. Reflection on Annual Reviews as a Priority (Personal Reflexivity)

In my previous role within the SEND team, I attended some training run by the DfE. The facilitator shared at the time that, if we were to consider the EHCP assessment process as a party, then health care were late to the party and social care didn't even know they were invited.

Now a decade on from the Children and Families Act (2014) and most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) it appears that the EHCP initial assessment party is now somewhat up and running, with attendees involved. However, the Annual Review process isn't even recognised as happening. This highlights to me an obvious lack of priority in the Annual Review process, which is frustrating, as it can have a real influence on individuals, as highlighted through this research.

Discovery Theme 2.4 Schools that Prioritise SENCO Time are Perceived as Inclusive and Supportive of SEND Processes like Annual Reviews.

Whilst the experiences shared above suggest a general lack of priority given to Annual Reviews, more positive examples were given when school staff demonstrated inclusivity and a priority for SEND. In the SEND team focus group, participants recognised that the Annual Review process requires time and consideration from SENCOs. If resources are provided to SENCOs to do this, it can suggest overall inclusive practice within an educational setting:

“They're the more positive experiences with regards the Annual Review paperwork to the ones that we can have quite a regular change within SENCOs ... they may be not that inclusive as a setting with regards to making reasonable adjustment and things like that. So, you definitely have different experiences dependent on the culture of the school.” (Assistant SEND Officer 1).

It was also suggested that this ethos of inclusivity, allows SENCOs to engage in wider CPD to improve CYP outcomes.

SENCO 1 put forward that, whilst they themselves were lucky enough to have administrative time, it was not sufficient for them to complete the Annual Review paperwork within school time, “I know I'm lucky, I've got admin, but ... there isn't capacity, so my Sundays are generally writing up Annual Reviews” (SENCO 1). This idea was echoed by other SENCOs and those in the SEND team, highlighting that SENCOs are often putting in a significant amount of their own time into supporting the Annual Review process.

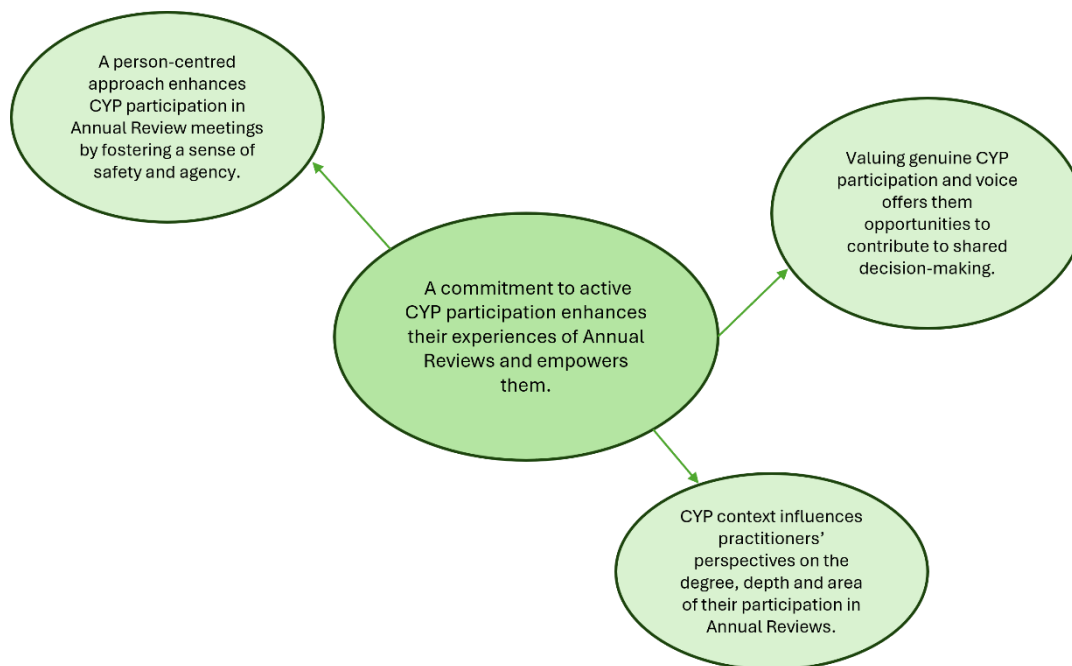
Discovery Theme 3- Commitment to Active CYP Participation Enhances Their Experiences of Annual Reviews and Empowers Them.

CYP participation was another key discussion throughout the focus groups (Figure 11). The opportunity for CYP to participate in a meaningful way within the Annual Review process

was widely thought of as important. Another element discussed was consideration of CYP contexts, to ensure that participation was relevant and purposeful.

Figure 11

Discovery Theme 3



Discovery Theme 3.1 Valuing Genuine CYP Participation and Voice Offers

Them Opportunities to Contribute to Shared Decision-Making.

Participants reflected on the importance of CYP participation in the Annual Review process across all focus groups. In relation to the CYP themselves, K spoke about his latest Annual Review, “I kind of had to step in a little bit ... I wasn't going to leave it all to my mother” (K).

The EP participant discussed their concern around tokenistic practice and the importance of making sure that CYP can contribute successfully and meaningfully, “I'm always in two minds about whether we do it. We need to do it properly and not very tokenistic and not making it an additional or different thing because you've got an additional need” (EP).

Participants voiced that CYP are often absent from Annual Review meetings, “I know they complete their one-page profile but actually in the Annual Review meeting, it's quite rare for children to attend” (Assistant SEND Officer 2). This was further discussed in the SEND team

focus group, where CYP participation was emphasised as being vital to supporting students be involved in decisions about their education and life:

“If a child's got an EHCP and they are in primary school, they're likely to have an EHCP for a good 10 years, possibly longer and it's good to get them used to the process and understand the process because post-16, those letters then go to them ... so by the time they are 18 or 17, they might be able to give some better insight.” (Assistant SEND Officer 2)

Discovery Theme 3.2 A Person-Centred Approach Enhances CYP Participation in Annual Review Meetings by Fostering a Sense of Safety and Agency.

In line with Lundy's (2007) model of participation, where CYP have access to a safe space to share their voice and participate is vital, participants shared positive experiences of CYP participation which involved a sense of agency and safety. With the current research, this came in various forms, including allowing CYP to choose their favourite snack to have at the meeting and being more considerate to the CYP about the environment that is chosen for Annual Review meetings:

“I know SCHOOLNAME do really nice Annual Review invites where they get their young people to create an invite ... they're beautiful some of them, and it just means that young person or that child is part of that process from the beginning, and they are often more likely to then attend” (Assistant SEND Officer 2)

The choice and ownership given to pupils appears to support their participation. However, I considered that this engagement should not be taken for granted as it can be a challenge, “[it] feels a bit weird when I talk about myself” (Bob). Showing that CYP need to feel safe and secure if they are to participate meaningfully within their Annual Reviews.

When talking about what might help them engage in Annual Reviews, pupils shared that having a key worker present to help them express their views was beneficial:

“I personally can't think of a better way to do it than someone helping you, because sometimes it is hard to actually get an answer that you want. But if you've got a trusted key worker, it's going to come out easier.” (K)

Discovery Theme 3.3 CYP Context Influences Practitioners' Perspectives on the Degree, Depth, and Area of Their Participation in Annual Reviews.

Whilst it was widely perceived that CYP participation is valued within the Annual Review process, discussion about the appropriateness of this was also present. Views on attendance at Annual Reviews varied depending on age, “we are a primary school so generally our children don't come into our sessions; the older ones have started now. So maybe Year Five, Six” (SENCO 3). Other factors may also have an impact upon the appropriateness of a CYP's participation at Annual Reviews. It was recognised that children who are looked after may be experiencing change, “it depends really, where you are with the child and sort of what they're going through but the majority of mine do like to attend and I always think it's better” (Social Worker).

Regarding gaining contribution outside of the Annual Review meeting, it was recognised that direct CYP input may be more difficult, depending on their needs. Utilising creative methods and having good relationships with CYP were shared as facilitating CYP contribution, “for the children who cannot communicate for themselves, their key support will have put lots of pictures in, or videos” (SENCO 3).

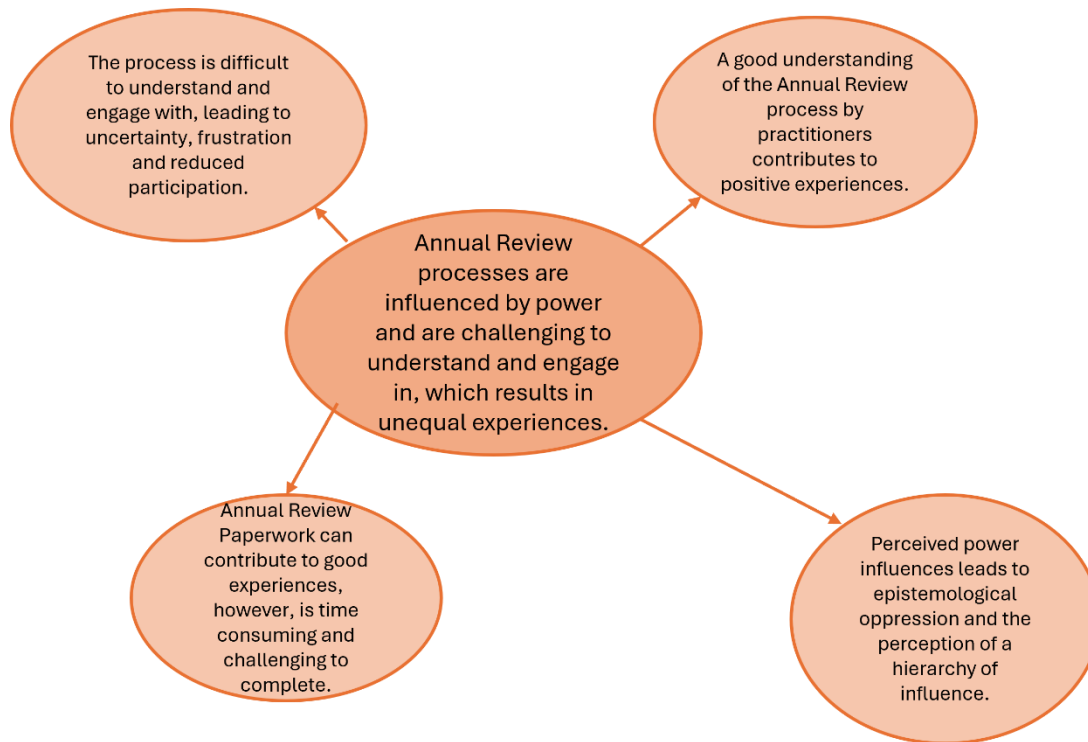
Discovery Theme 4- Annual Review Processes are Influenced by Power and Are Challenging to Understand and Engage in, Which Results in Unequal Experiences.

As highlighted within Chapter 2, all interactions hold power (Erchul et al., 2004). Throughout the focus groups, especially the SENCO and Parent/Carer groups, frustrations and

challenges around perceived power dynamics were expressed. The Annual Review process overall was also emphasised as being difficult to understand and engage in (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Discovery Theme 4



Discovery Theme 4.1 The Process is Difficult to Understand and Engage with, Leading to Uncertainty, Frustration, and Reduced Participation.

Parent/Carers reflected on their experiences and shared that they found the Annual Review process difficult to engage in, “In spite of trying to be on top of things, I find it very difficult still to understand” (Parent/Carer 3). One suggestion for contributing to the inaccessibility of the Annual Review process related to the language used, “I struggle to understand the terminology used sometimes. So, parents and carers, and the young person must not always be clear” (Social Worker). This further illustrates how participants’ experiences are

... serving as a criticism of the current English SEND system and its legislative processes and procedures.

Parent/Carers felt that there was a lack of support and training to provide them with the knowledge to enable them to fully access the Annual Review process without seeking support from others, “the SEND code of practice it's so complicated to understand ... whatever learnings I've had, is through parent and carers” (Parent/Carer 3).

Annual Review processes are further complicated by other processes that may run alongside the EHCP, especially for children who are looked after, “we've got PEPs, we've got CLA reviews, we've got Transitional review ... It's so confusing” (Social Worker). This made me reflect on how CYP with various needs and circumstances are often placed into multiple processes and systems, which can seem disjointed and confusing, rather than supportive and flexible.

Parent/Carer participants shared that they thought that they were some of the few Parent/Carers who felt somewhat informed of the SEND system. There was a discussion in this focus group about other Parent/Carers who were not as knowledgeable in the process and what the impact would be, “the children that don't have parents that can get involved, the impacts on their lives must be massive” (Parent/Carer 1). I feel that this is further insight to suggest that the Annual Review process is not consistently being used in a way that ensures a robust and fair process that supports CYPs' needs.

Positive experiences occurred where various adaptations were put in place to support Parent/Carers access the Annual Review process. A discussion in the SENCO focus group highlighted how reducing the amount of written material for Parent/Carers was found to increase engagement and accessibility:

“Anything involving a lot of reading, or even asking parents to write things on Post-it notes just as an absolute, no ... Some felt really uncomfortable writing anything down and some of them I am aware struggle, particularly with reading” (SENCO 1)

Discovery Theme 4.2 A Good Understanding of the Annual Review Process by Practitioners Contributes to Positive Experiences.

Assistant SEND Officer 1 discussed how a SENCO's knowledge of the process supports the statutory requirement of Annual Reviews:

“A good experience is probably that we would send the Annual Review reminder, and the setting comes back and says, ‘yeah that's booked in for that date’. And it's keeping in with the statutory time scales” (Assistant SEND Officer 1)

In comparison, Parent/Carers highlighted how a lack of knowledge within LA staff can result in disagreeable experiences. This ultimately reduced their trust within the process, “there's lots of things I've pointed out to the local authority that should be on my plan that they're going ‘no it shouldn't’ and I go ‘Yes it should’ and that's where I show them the code of practice” (Parent/Carer 1). I was struck by this response as it suggested to me that the foundational understanding of the Annual Review process and procedures within it was not apparent within teams who come across Annual Reviews every day.

Discovery Theme 4.3 Annual Review Paperwork Can Contribute to Good Experiences, However, is Time Consuming and Challenging to Complete.

It was proposed that paperwork can support positive experiences throughout most of the focus groups, “[a good experience would be] That you read the Annual Review paperwork and it's the same message in Section A as it is when you get down to Section F” (Assistant SEND Officer 1). However, the actual completion of the paperwork appears to be challenging, time consuming and repetitive, proving itself to be a barrier, “it's a lot of repetition I find as well ... we have a ‘child's plan’, a ‘needs plan’, an ‘assessment plan’, it all just churns the same rubbish” (Social Worker).

In an attempt to streamline Annual Review paperwork, at the time of the focus groups, the LA was trialling a pilot project. Those with experience of this had found it difficult. For

example, the way in which it suggested SENCOs run the meeting appeared to restrict the person-centred approach preferred due to a focus on the content of the EHCP:

“The whole point of the pilot was you make the amendments within the meeting. I find doing that takes that personalisation almost away from that meeting because I want to be present and talking about the child and celebrating their strengths ... But actually, when you are just focused on what is on the screen and ‘do we agree with this statement or not?’ ‘Have we moved on?’ actually really de-personalises that meeting.” (SENCO 2)

How the amendments were to be made also appeared confusing, “it’s hard to read. Like I said, it’s all crossed out and yellow highlighted” (Parent/Carer 2).

Outside of the pilot system, what also appears to complicate the paperwork is that it differs between LAs:

“The main local authority that I work with, their paperwork is much more set up to that person focused discussion. I work with another local authority; I only have one or two students from there and I find its very outcome driven.” (SENCO 1)

These challenges and conflicts between their practice and what is asked of them in terms of paperwork, ultimately results in SENCOs feeling uncertain as to whether they are completing the documentation correctly to support the process and their CYP, “the paperwork, I just feel I never know if I’m filling it in correctly or not” (SENCO 3).

Discovery Theme 4.4 Perceived Power Influences Leads to Epistemological Oppression and the Perception of a Hierarchy of Influence.

It was also shared that a perceived hierarchy was viewed within the Annual Review process due to power influences. Parent/Carers and SENCOs particularly, felt that their views and experience were not considered equal. For example, SENCOs shared their frustration about

not being trusted in the decision-making process and felt that other practitioners were asked to contribute unnecessarily:

“It’s absolutely that bit about us not being deemed to make professional judgment, I think we, as SENCOs, we know our young people and I get frustrated where I’m having to ask, and I suppose waste time in a way, our professionals including EPs to come and tell me something that I already know or confirm that I’ve done everything...for any decision for panel it has to have that EP report or that whoever report.” (SENCO 1)

Similarly, Parent/Carers felt that their contribution is not considered to be equal, despite them having valuable lived experiences, “I don’t feel, again, at the local authority that the parental contribution is as important as a professional’s report.” (Parent/Carer 1). This feeling, that their voices and opinions are not fully valued, can result in Parent/Carers questioning their input:

“At that meeting with the school, you’re often on your own and that can feel real isolating. Thinking ‘I daren’t say that’ or ‘what am I entitled to say and not say’ and fear of judgment and getting it right.” (Parent/Carer 2)

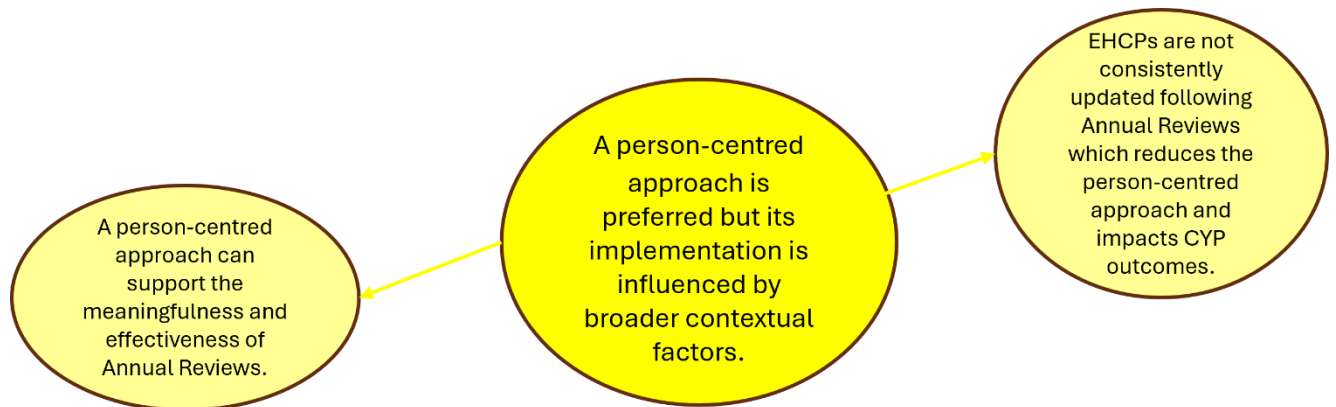
These experiences highlight a perception that decision makers view external practitioner input as more valuable than that of SENCOs and Parent/Carers. This appears to lead to frustration and a lack of trust, which negatively impacts relationships within the process.

Discovery Theme 5- A Person-Centred Approach is Preferred but its Implementation is Influenced by Broader Contextual Factors.

This final overarching Discovery theme emphasises how various causal explanations impact upon the effectiveness and influence of Annual Reviews (Figure 13). The key aims of the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), appear to remain idealistic and not fully achieved due to wider contextual factors, ultimately limiting the meaningfulness of Annual Reviews overall.

Figure 13

Discovery Theme 5



Discovery Theme 5.1 EHCPs are not Consistently Updated Following Annual Reviews Which Reduces the Person-Centred Approach and Impacts CYP Outcomes.

As a process, Annual Reviews are used to evaluate and revise EHCPs, however, disagreeable experiences were considered to occur when EHCPs were not updated following the Annual Review. This appeared to cause frustration as the time and effort put into the process did not bring about change:

“I find it a very frustrating system ... the amount of time and effort that goes into an Annual Review, or an EHCP application, and then for it to be met with, ‘it’s been maintained’ even though you’re asking for amendments.” (SENCO 2)

With some insight into this, EP shared their experience of differing views around how often an EHCP should be updated, and how the reality of the current SEND system is not in line with the ideology highlighted in the CoP (DfE & CoP, 2015):

“We’ve got too many plans ... the whole idea is that somebody would pick up the plan read it and know the child. Well, you know, a year later they’ve changed ... the ideal and the process do not fit together nicely.” (EP)

Parent/Carer 1 further expanded on this, saying that even if EHCPs are amended, the quality of the documents are not consistent. Instead, timescales are being prioritised:

“My current feedback I'm getting from a lot of people is that things are maybe being done in the timescales but at the quality level ... they're not getting good plans.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Discovery Theme 5.2 A Person-Centred Approach can Support the Meaningfulness and Effectiveness of Annual Reviews.

Positive experiences were expressed in situations where a person-centred approach was used to provide flexibility within the Annual Review process. The EP participant shared how merging meetings for a child who is looked after, resulted in a positive Annual Review experience, “the one where I've said it was really positive one. It was looked after child. And we did the PEP combined with the Education Health and Care Plan review” (EP). SENCOs also shared that they preferred a more person-centred approach to meetings:

“I enjoy running my review as a real discussion and very person-centred, generally as much as I can with the young person as well, where we start with what they feel is going well, what they feel could be going better.” (SENCO 1).

This person-centred and strength-based approach was also discussed by Assistant SEND Officer 1. They shared that whilst Annual Reviews which result in a recommendation for the EHCP to cease are a sign of a positive experience, they are rare:

“There's ones that you see that the EHCP has served its purpose and then we can cease ... I think those are really positive because the EHCP ... It was set out to serve a purpose, help that child reach the targets and then cease and those that we get in and they are a rarity.” (Assistant SEND Officer 1)

It was further considered by Social Worker as to why ceasing EHCPs through Annual Reviews was so uncommon:

“We know that once they've got an EHCP, funding kicks in and they want to crack on and parents get more support, but that's wrong isn't it. Really, it's not about the needs of the child. It's about the needs of the school and the families.” (Social Worker)

This shows that the person-centred approach to reviewing and amending EHCPs is limited by wider influences, needs, and contexts. Funding was also discussed by Parent/Carer 1, “I've sat in a meeting where I've heard someone say, ‘well you can't have that in an EHCP because we haven't got the funding to fulfil the need, to meet the need’” (Parent/Carer 1)

Experiences like this can cause Parent/Carers to lose trust in others and in the process.

When combined with other outcomes, such as the EHCP not being updated, the overall EHCP and Annual Review process can be viewed as meaningless, “I see the EHCP as just a piece of paper and sometimes I say, ‘why do they even do it?’” (Parent/Carer 3).

Dream Phase Analysis and Findings

In this phase, I asked participants to share with me their visions of perfect Annual Reviews in the future. Four overarching causal explanations were produced, with each having two-four subthemes. These themes are written in the future tense, as they relate to the notion of an ideal future.

Dream Theme 1- Strong Relationships Promote Collaborative Experiences of Annual Reviews Through Increased Trust, Open Communication, and Shared Responsibilities.

This Dream causal explanation (Figure 14) is linked to the first theme discussed in the Discovery phase around the idea of collaboration. The building blocks framework (Griffiths et al., 2021) can be drawn upon with a sense of trust, respect, and open communication all supporting collaborative working in participants' dreams for Annual Reviews.

Figure 14

Dream Theme 1



Dream Theme 1.1 Open and Effective Communication Between Services/Individuals Will Promote Positive Annual Review Experiences.

When participants shared their visions of an ideal Annual Review, common ideas included: open and effective communication, the sharing of reports, prompt responses to emails/telephone calls and adherence to the timescales set out in the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), “you would get the reports from everybody two weeks before, you wouldn’t have to chase them up yourself” (Parent/Carer 1).

Open and transparent communication, as a foundation, appeared to be valued above everything else by Parent/Carers:

“I'm not asking for a perfect EHCP. I'm saying a flawed EHCP. In bold letters flawed. And as long as we are communicated [with], what's happening around that EHCP, and things are being met ... it would be a lot of relief for us” (Parent/Carer 3)

In the dream situation, this type of effective communication would also occur outside of the Annual Review process. The Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner considered their previous experience, where a parent discussed housing concerns in an Annual Review meeting. Originally, they suggested that Parent/Carers might attend only part of the meeting to keep it more focussed. However, after reflecting on this, Advance Paediatric Nurse Practitioner felt that the experience was influenced by a lack of communication outside of the Annual Review meeting and therefore in an ideal world, “there should be other opportunities that she could have, you know, done that in rather than the EHCP review” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner).

Dream Theme 1.2 Trust, Mutual Respect, and a Perception of Balanced Power Between Individuals Will Facilitate Successful Collaborative Experiences.

Parents/Carers also mentioned that they do not always trust the Annual Review process and individuals within it. However, they were of the view that an improved level of trust within the dream Annual Review situation would support better Parent/Carer wellbeing and perhaps reduce anxieties:

“I struggle with having this thing where I'll reread things and rewrite things and reread because I'm so frightened that I missed something that is vital to my son's future. If I had faith in the professionals involved, they would take a lot of that away.” (Parent/Carer 1)

With this trust and mutual respect in place, participants hoped to be equally valued and respected within the dream Annual Review, “They need to make sure the views, the points, of what the Parent/Carer is saying, they need to be taken into account ... they should be trusted for that, that is very important because they are the expert.” (Parent/Carer 3).

This sense of being valued was also echoed in the SENCO focus group, with SENCO 3 sharing that in their dream Annual Review, “we are listened to” (SENCO 3). Building on this, an important aspiration for the dream future, was that epistemological privilege for all would be evident, “I think for like the parents, for the child and for school to have their voice heard and be valued” (SENCO 2).

Dream Theme 1.3 Increasing Parent/Carer Knowledge Through Information Sharing and Practitioner Support Would Encourage Their Active Involvement in Annual Reviews.

In the dream Annual Review situation, Parent/Carers would be provided with a good level of understanding, to help them engage in the process. Examples of action points to support this included sending out the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) to Parent/Carers. However, underpinning these actions was the idea of pro-active information sharing in an accessible way, allowing for a more equitable experience, “There should be a pack of information ... some type of self-help guide given out about the SEND code of practice” (Parent/Carer 2). Technology and time was also raised as a barrier to some Parent/Carers, “People assume that you've got a laptop, that you sit and you look things up all day and it's not like that in real life. You need to send a Parent/Carer the information they need” (Parent/Carer 1).

SENCO 3 also shared that SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service), an impartial service to support Parent/Carers available across LAs, would support Parent/Carer access to Annual Reviews, “SENDIASS can be amazing at an EHCP [review] just to have that outside view and opinion. And also, they're really good at knowing their legalities. And so, having them there, sometimes really helps a review” (SENCO 3). This idea of having someone to provide Parent/Carers with knowledge of the process was also put forward in the Parent/Carer focus group:

“You get a bit anxious thinking, should I feel bad for asking the SENCO that whereas, if an Education Health and Care Officer was with the parents at the meeting, you could have that little debrief with them before saying ‘I really want to know this but I daren’t ask the question.’” (Parent/Carer 2)

Dream Theme 1.4 Attendance at Annual Review Meetings by all Involved Will Demonstrate Shared Responsibility and Active Participation Across Services.

Within this sub-theme, the idea that when trust, mutual respect and open communication was improved in the dream, attendance at Annual Review meetings would increase. This would reflect a shared understanding and priority of the process, allowing for the active participation of all individuals, “it [the dream Annual Review] would be, when I turned up to work, invited everybody and that my colleagues from health and social care had turned up, and were wanting to have a positive discussion” (SENCO 1). This comment by SENCO 1 further suggests that, in the dream scenario, time and priority would be given to the Annual Review process. This would also support a more holistic and systemic approach, “I think that people who are actively involved in the child’s care ... I think they would still be there [in the dream Annual Review]” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner).

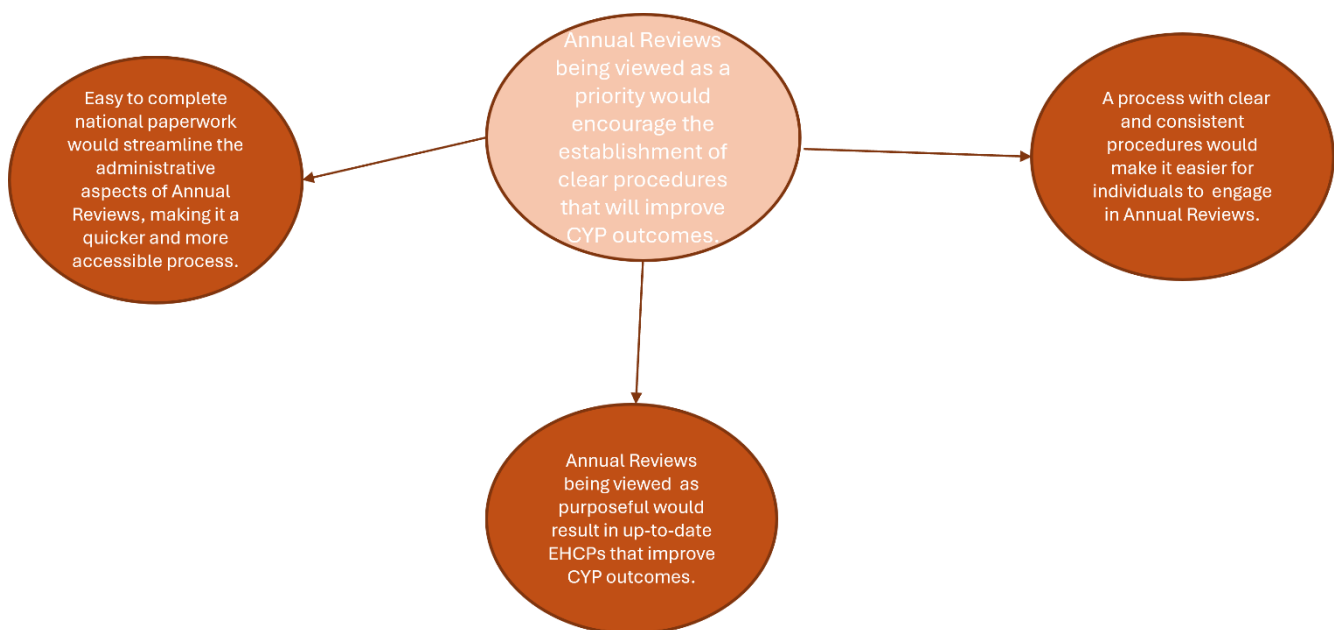
Consideration was also given as to how technology could be used to provide more opportunity for practitioner engagement, given the inevitable existence of competing demands and scarcity of time, “You would hope that education health and care representatives are there when needed. So, in the ideal world that would happen. And one of the good things I found, is the fact that we can do teams meetings now and we have more of a hybrid way of working.” (EP)

Dream Theme 2- Annual Reviews Being Viewed as a Priority Would Encourage the Establishment of Clear Procedures That Would Improve CYP Outcomes.

The idea of a uniform process, implemented both nationally and locally, was thought to be something that would be particularly helpful for the practitioners in the dream Annual Review system (Figure 15). My understanding of this aspect of the dream is that, if a clear procedure was in place, the Annual Review process would be more efficient and straightforward to engage in. Within this theme, participants hoped for simple procedures and paperwork to enable EHCPs to be updated, which would ultimately support CYP outcomes.

Figure 15

Dream Theme 2



Dream Theme 2.1 A Process With Clear and Consistent Procedures Would Make it Easier for Individuals to Engage in Annual Reviews.

Participants shared that they found their experiences of the Annual Review process difficult, due to a lack of clear procedure, when compared to the initial assessment process for EHCPs. These procedures in the initial assessment process could be echoed in the dream

Annual Review, “perhaps similar [to the initial assessment process] ... earlier notifications around that because sometimes we literally find out about those the week before or even a few days before” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner). A core component to this smooth procedure would be open communication and sharing of reports:

“Just having all the information there would be amazing and having the report all lined out for us ready just makes everyone’s lives a little bit easier again, it stops that kind of chasing back and forth with settings and families and health information in particular and social care would be brilliant.” (SEND Officer)

The Social Worker participant, built upon the dream of a streamlined and embedded process, which would provide practitioners with an update on the CYP prior to the Annual Review, so that they could support the Annual Review process meaningfully rather than just ‘winging it’ which (as they mentioned in the Discovery phase) often happens:

“But even if something pops in your inbox from the SEND team with something about what the main worries were, what we will be discussing. Just so you arrive at the meeting, and you’ve got more indication about where it’s going to go.” (Social Worker)

This dream process, assisted by open communication, would provide more transparency and would help practitioners know whether their input was needed and to what extent.

Dream Theme 2.2 Annual Reviews Being Viewed as Purposeful Would Result in Up-to-Date EHCPs That Improve CYP Outcomes.

Another aspect of the dream was that Annual Reviews would result in updated EHCPs. This would not only allow for a document which reflected the CYP, it would also support them to access relevant support, “The EHCP would be relevant for that child. It would be a good EHCP that would help the child’s needs, and everyone’s aware of the child’s needs” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner).

Parent/Carer 1 also shared that in the dream world, an up-to-date EHCP would be meaningful in that it would be used to support CYP, “then afterwards, everybody who was involved in my son would perhaps read it. And follow what was in it” (Parent/Carer 1). One suggestion put forward to support this concept was for EHCPs to be ‘live’ documents, “it would be a live, current, up to date document that would be accessible and could be easily updated with current information that reflects where the child is and that they are making progress” (SENCO 2).

Dream Theme 2.3 Easy to Complete National Paperwork Would Streamline the Administrative Aspects of Annual Reviews, Making it a Quicker and More Accessible Process.

Building on the idea of a national approach, the standardisation of paperwork between LAs was discussed, “It would be great if we had the same templates so when a child moves from area to area ... Essentially the laws are the same. So why any of this paperwork is any different?” (Assistant SEND Officer 2).

This clear, simple and jargon free paperwork would improve the Annual Review process and would enhance an individual’s ability to access the process, “it’s about thinking about how can we just make it clear and concise but quite basic” (ADCO).

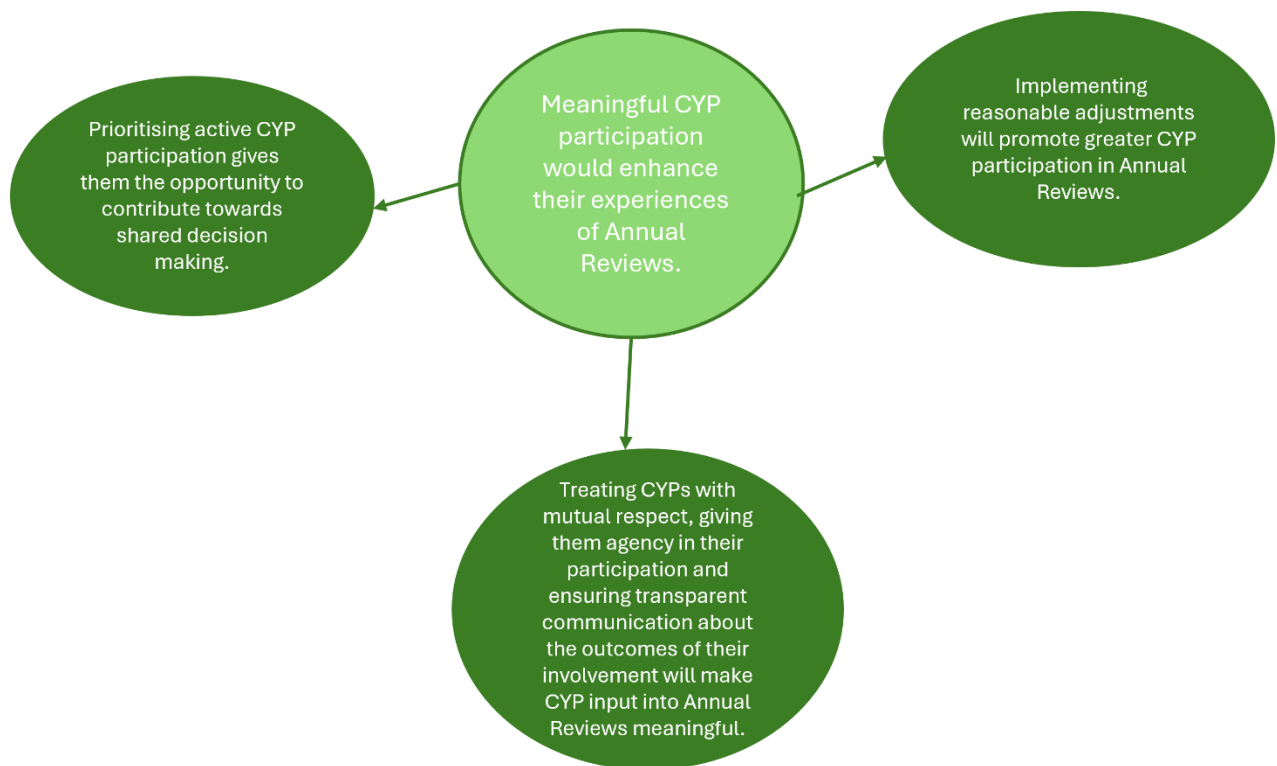
Streamlining the Annual Review procedure and paperwork in this way would show that the process, and the CYP affected by it, were being given priority, which is not apparent at present. It was also stated that this would improve wellbeing, “the result of which would be improved wellbeing in addition to a more efficient process. We’d see amazing paperwork and less stressed SENCO’s” (Assistant SEND Officer 2). I found it interesting that paperwork and wellbeing here was thought to be linked and I took this to mean that if more time and resources were available to those involved, then their levels of stress would be lower.

Dream Theme 3- Meaningful CYP Participation Would Enhance Their Experiences of Annual Reviews.

As within the third Discovery theme, meaningful CYP participation was another core component of the dreams participants shared. Factors considered included how to best promote and prioritise CYP participation, to ensure the greatest outcomes (as seen in Figure 16).

Figure 16

Dream Theme 3



Dream Theme 3.1 Prioritising Active CYP Participation Gives CYP the Opportunity to Contribute Towards Shared Decision Making.

Within the dream Annual Review process, the value of purposeful CYP participation was evident:

“We shouldn't be the voice of our young people, even if they're nonverbal, there are certainly ways that we can present their views to other people... all these adults make these decisions around them, but actually they should be part of that.” (Social Worker)

This perception highlights that giving CYP epistemological privilege is a core value of practitioners. From a CYP perspective, the purpose and outcome of such participation was recognised, and it was proposed that if CYP engaged in the Annual Review process, joint decisions would be made, “you'd realise what would be best ways to help and what like to do if you do need help with anything else” (Bob). An understanding that participation in Annual Reviews would support CYPs' wider skills was also evident, so much so that encouraging CYP participation more generally was discussed, “I guess I'll say, normalising children attending meetings for all children. So, parents evening and that kind of thing that would be better” (EP).

Dream Theme 3.2 Implementing Reasonable Adjustments Will Promote Greater CYP Participation in Annual Reviews.

Whilst contemplating CYP participation, various reasonable adjustments were put forward to ensure that in dream Annual Reviews, CYP could fully participate. Preparation prior to the Annual Review meeting was discussed, “saying ... about the stuff what we'd be discussing so we could have time to think about it” (Bob). To support this, pupils shared that time to spend either on their own or with a key adult prior to the meeting would be helpful, depending on how they felt at the time, “Parents and Key workers [As key people pupils would like to talk to before a meeting about what will happen]” (Tommy).

Similarly, SENCO 1 shared this view and acknowledged that, currently, sufficient time is not available for them to help CYP prepare for Annual Review meetings, however, this would be the case in the dream scenario, “it would be lovely to be able to do more direct work with the young people leading up to the review as well and prep them” (SENCO 1).

K shared their thoughts on the size of a meeting they would feel comfortable in, “so, with this [size of group] I'm comfortable ... I mean five would be fine but six or more just, no” (K).

Regarding this concept of safety and feeling comfortable to engage in meetings, prior to the pupil focus group, I sent a one-page profile of myself to the CYP (see Appendix 17). I asked if this was a good thing for practitioners to consider for their dream Annual Reviews, “I mean it could be a waste of time if I end up being ill, hopefully, that won't happen. But apart from that, It's a good strategy” (K). Further consideration was also given as to what might enhance CYPs' sense of safety in meetings:

“For a child with anxiety, for example, is it the location? I think it depends on the individual and it's about the social worker and the staff knowing that child, to see to know what we could come up with, that'll make them more comfortable and more likely to attend.” (Social Worker)

This again, as discussed in the Discovery section, to me highlights how individuals within the Annual Review process consider the humanistic approach that places an emphasis on CYPs' choice and control as something that is present in ideal Annual Reviews, allowing a sense of safety and security can support participation.

Dream Theme 3.3 Treating CYP With Mutual Respect, Giving Them Agency in Their Participation and Ensuring Transparent Communication About the Outcomes of Their Involvement Will Make Their Input Into Annual Reviews Meaningful.

Whilst it was widely discussed that CYP participation should be present in the dream, there was also some consideration as to how to provide agency to the students if they did not wish to attend Annual Review meetings, “some kids are gonna say ‘absolutely not, I don't care if you put on a party or a rave. I'm still not coming.’ That's fair enough.” (Social Worker).

Within the pupil focus group I asked about the extent to which they would like to be involved within the Annual Review process. K shared that they would want information following the

Annual Review to be shared, “[in relation to what CYP might want following the Annual Review meeting] Meeting notes and what's going to happen in the future. But what's planned for the future” (K). Reflecting on this, I view this agency and option to receive meeting notes to be something which may be helpful to K, however, may not be as valued by other CYP so should be considered on an individual level.

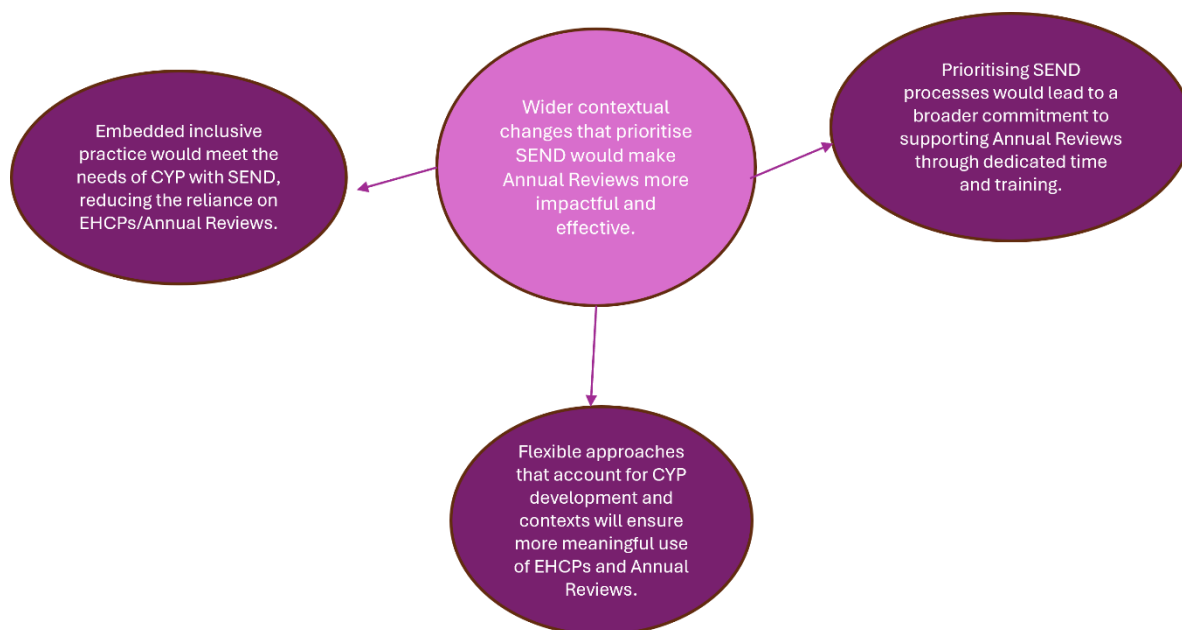
With this suggestion of providing CYP some agency and choice about what they may wish to engage in, I further considered the issue of being transparent about the type of information likely to be discussed in an Annual Review meeting. K found it difficult to know whether talking about the past and challenges would be helpful, “It's not exactly the greatest but it's also good because then you can actually see, you can actually hear your own strengths and weaknesses and how you can improve them weaknesses to become your strengths” (K). This suggested to me that K was highlighting an overall value in experiencing transparency around the Annual Review meeting and agency in what they might want to participate in. This individualised approach would enable CYP to make informed decisions and participate in a way that feels comfortable for them.

Dream Theme 4- Wider Contextual Changes That Prioritise SEND Would Make Annual Reviews More Impactful and Effective.

As highlighted in the Discovery phase analysis, the experiences of participants were often not in line with the objectives of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015). Contextual factors such as competing demands, scarcity of time and a lack of joint understanding, often influenced the effectiveness of Annual Reviews (Figure 17). Therefore, in the dream, these contextual factors would be reduced. Participants' input into the dream led me to infer that person-centred inclusive practices and an overarching prioritisation of SEND would result in better experiences in their dream Annual Review scenario.

Figure 17

Dream Theme 4



Dream Theme 4.1 Embedded Inclusive Practice Would Meet the Needs of CYP

With SEND, Reducing the Reliance on EHCPs/ Annual Reviews.

Within discussions around dream Annual Reviews, it was felt that inclusive practice generally would support CYP outcomes outside of the EHCP process, “if education was much more inclusive, they wouldn't need a plan. That would be my dream situation” (EP). This could allow for pro-active and preventative support to be put in place outside of Annual Review processes, which would support CYP earlier, “having to watch a young person fail before anything happens is key so yeah, can I add that to the wish list? It's just the don't let them fail” (SENCO 1).

On this issue of wider contexts, funding was again discussed as a barrier that would not be a concern within the dream Annual Review process, “money to spend on the facilities, money to spend on people and time for those children” (SENCO 3).

This more inclusive approach, with sufficient funding, would improve CYPs’ outcomes by making appropriate provision and giving suitable support to improve CYP experiences, “it’s all about getting appropriate provision, isn’t it? So, with a good EHCP, the child should be able to access the right provision” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner).

Dream Theme 4.2 Prioritising SEND Processes Would Lead to a Broader Commitment to Supporting Annual Reviews Through Dedicated Time and Training.

The idea of SEND processes being prioritised was also discussed in the dream:

“I think it’s going back to basics ... on a whole teacher training I think I’ve done like three days on SEN, but you’ve got to be a teacher to become a SENCO and so again, it’s things like that that I think sometimes it’s not always fit for purpose.” (Assistant SEND Officer 1)

From this it could be considered that increased training for Teachers and SENCOs would demonstrate that SEND was a high priority and could help those working in schools to adopt a more inclusive approach. This wider priority would also expand towards other practitioners who would be given time to focus on Annual Reviews as they would be viewed as a priority demand, “in an ideal World, we’d have the time ... every review should be given the same amount of time, that same dedication” (SEND Officer). I was drawn to the idea that this would also allow for the Annual Review process to be person-centred and meaningful to CYP, as time and resources would be more readily available. For example, rather than having ‘blanket’ procedures within LAs for amending and processing Annual Reviews, they would be considered on an individual basis using a person-centred approach, “I would like it that somebody took what I did [suggested amendments in Annual Review paperwork] ...

Rather than it being the blanket ‘Year Sevens don't get updated because they've just been done in Year Six’ (SENCO 1).

Dream Theme 4.3 Flexible Approaches That Account for CYPs' Development and Contexts Will Ensure More Meaningful use of EHCPs and Annual Reviews.

Within the dream, consideration of flexibility in the Annual Review process was also shared, as a creative way of allowing EHCPs to be person-centred:

“Children's needs change over time and how can we say that a plan that a child got at two that's going to last them to 25 is right, it's not, is it? So, the Annual Review, it is as important, if not more important than the initial assessment.” Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner

This view implies to me, again, that Annual Reviews and CYP with SEND should be prioritised through a move away from ‘blanket’ approaches. One way to do this was discussed in the SEND team focus group, “what would the paperwork look like? it would be very much different compared/depending on the child. It would be different depending on a primary school age child or a college-age young person ... it would reflect that individual” (Assistant SEND Officer 2). This somewhat contradicts the previous dream of a nationalised approach to paperwork; however, I took this to mean that within a structured national framework, the ability to allow for a more person-centred approach would be available.

Another suggestion was to make the review process itself more flexible and person-centred:

“It's about thinking about children's development and milestones. So, for example, a child from the age two to well the age five, from age five to seven, like the development milestones change quite often” (ADCO)

This made me wonder if the term ‘Annual Review’ is limiting practice as sometimes more frequent reviews would be helpful, and in other cases less frequent reviews may be appropriate. The EP participant considered this by suggesting a creative approach in the dream:

“I think for some parents, for some children, when they've got the EHCP and they are the ticking along nicely, even going to one Annual Review must be, if they're working or they've got other commitments and, sometimes you might be able to combine if it's going well with the parents evening.” (EP)

They also shared in the dream that ceasing EHCPs through Annual Reviews would become more common through a more flexible approach to the SEND Graduated Response:

This highlights how a flexible approach to the EHCP and Annual Review processes would make them more meaningful and supportive for CYP rather than them being stuck within a system.

Stage 2 Analysis-Design Phase

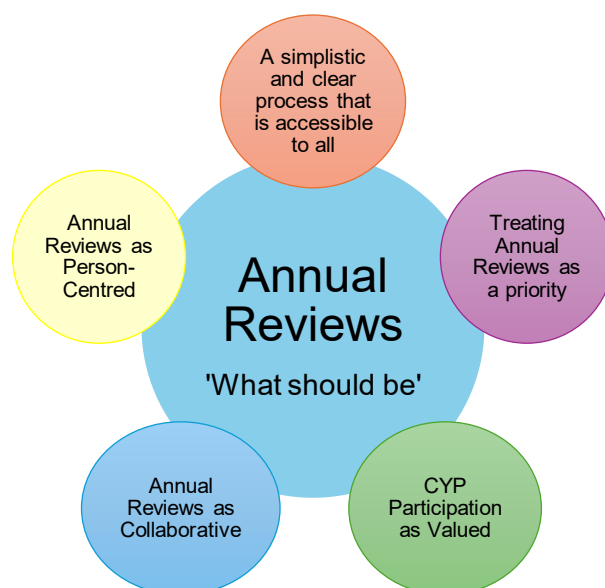
Once the critical realist TA (Fryer, 2022) was completed, I then focussed upon the Design Phase of the 4D Appreciative Inquiry cycle. This was mostly completed by myself as the researcher, with some reflexive participant collaboration. This Design Stage resulted in the creation of Possibility Statements and a 'Design Planning Document' (Appendix 14). Overall, these aspects of the analysis are in line with the participatory and transformative aims of this thesis.

Meta Concepts

Following Stage 1 TA analysis, 'Meta Concepts' were generated by linking overarching causal explanations from both the Discovery phase and the Design phase of the analysis. Appendix 10 visualises these connections and the five Meta Concepts which 'should be' in future Annual Reviews are shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18

Meta Concepts

***Possibility Statements***

As described in Chapter 3, Possibility Statements were drafted following the generation of Meta Concepts. The adaptation of draft Possibility Statements (Appendix 21) following collaborative participant reflections (see Appendix 22 and Reflective Vignette 13) resulted in seven finalised Possibility Statements, which can be seen alongside their relevant Meta Concepts in Figure 19.

Figure 19

Meta Concepts and Their Link to the Final Possibility Statements.

Meta Concept	Final Possibility Statements
A simplistic and clear process that is accessible to all.	1. The Annual Review Process is understood by all those involved. Training, support, and information is regularly provided to all, meaning that understanding and implementation is consistent and accessible.

	<p>2. Annual review processes and statutory outcomes are consistent with the aims of the Code of Practice (2015). EHCPs as a result are up to date, meaningful and ensure that CYPs needs are met.</p>
<p>Treating Annual Reviews as a priority.</p>	<p>3. Annual reviews are prioritised on a wider scale and are consistently perceived as important as EHCP needs assessments. Sufficient commitment and time are given to make them relevant and support students.</p>
<p>Student participation is valued.</p>	<p>4. Active CYP participation is given priority so that practitioners (including school staff) are given sufficient time and resources to increase CYP participation through a person-centred approach. CYP feel a sense of safety and empowerment, they believe their participation is meaningful which motivates them to engage.</p>
<p>Annual Reviews as collaborative.</p>	<p>5. Consistent collaboration is evident between individuals and services who have shared ownership of the Annual Review process. Open and effective communication supports this collaborative working towards shared goals.</p> <p>6. Individual's voices and input within the Annual Review process are perceived to be equally valued by all.</p>
<p>Annual Reviews as person-centred.</p>	<p>7. The process is flexible and person-centred. Students can progress and get the support they need without having to 'fit' local/national benchmarks and procedures.</p>

Reflective Vignette 13. Reflection on Participant Feedback (Personal Reflexivity)

As previously highlighted, unfortunately only two participants provided their feedback on the Possibility Statements (EP and SENCO 1). This meant that I did not change the draft statement much overall, however, it did help me reflect on the statements. One statement which was changed was Possibility Statement 4, as the EP did feel that CYPs voices are valued and therefore the Possibility Statement did not seem 'provocative' enough. The overall reduced input on these statements is a limitation of this thesis and therefore the overall design section of this analysis should be considered in relation to researcher bias due to limited participant reflections to mitigate this.

I found the comments provided by the participants interesting. It was good to see that they were mainly 'provocative' and relevant. I also found it thought-provoking that SENCO 1 shared that although they currently run their reviews in line with Possibility Statement seven (in a flexible and person-centred way), they stressed that moving forward this can need to change due to finances being stretched and plans being review on 'value for money'. This made me reflect that it is not just less positive experiences which needs to change practice, but in fact, positive practice needs to be preserved.

Design Planning Document

I then created a 'Design Planning Document' (Appendix 14) which I have placed within the Design aspect of this study as it was researcher-led. Participants were not asked to prioritise implementation and therefore, this aspect of the study is not able to be considered as the Destiny aspect of the Appreciative Inquiry 4D cycle.

The final 'Design Planning Document' can be seen in Appendix 14 and is aimed to be a tool with which to help the Possibility Statements become reality. To do this, I returned to the transcripts, with the Meta Concepts as deductive themes, to support the assembly of actionable examples in line with each Possibility Statements (Appendix 23 shows the process). I viewed something as actionable within the transcripts, when participants gave a clear example of good practice or a value that appeared be present (or missing) that

impacted on experiences (e.g. open communication systems). At times, these actions appeared conflicting. For example, participants shared that they hoped for both a standardised and flexible approach. To ease this conflict, I returned to the analysis findings to help identify what the value behind and purpose of these suggested actions were. For instance, 'standardised Annual Review paperwork that is simplistic' is put forward as a national level initiative within the Design Planning Document to support a sense of competence and understanding for administrative purposes. However, 'a flexibility in how Annual Reviews are conducted, to allow for a person-centred approach', is also put forward to allow for the acknowledgment that CYP have different strengths and areas of focus, showing an overall hope for a more flexible and truly person-centred system.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction to Chapter 5

In this final chapter, I will further consider this thesis' findings alongside wider literature and theory in consideration of each research question. The implications of this, and recommendations, are explored alongside research question 3, due to its focus on future Annual Review practice. I then move on to consider the study's strengths and limitations before concluding the thesis.

Tracey and Hinrichs (2017) explain that resonance is a consideration of quality qualitative research that considers contexts and experiences in an in-depth way. It follows that readers can reflect on the study's findings and intuitively apply or transfer those findings to their own situations. The following discussion has this concept in mind (as opposed to generalisability), hoping that the insight and suggestions put forward, may resonate with others to support future Annual Review implementation.

Research Question 1: 'What is' and 'What Gives Life' to the Annual Review Process?

By using an Appreciative Inquiry approach, which recognised both positive and undesirable experiences, I was able to gain a more holistic understanding of the experiences of the participants in this study. Core themes raised by participants included: collaboration; competing priorities; CYP participation; Annual Reviews being difficult processes to understand and engage in; and Annual Reviews being affected by how well person-centred approaches can be implemented.

The most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) highlights collaboration as a key value that supports the EHCP and Annual Review processes. Whilst this CoP does not define collaboration, or provide examples of how it can be facilitated, the ideology of collaboration, as valued by participants in this thesis, can be understood to be in line with the previously discussed building blocks framework (Griffiths et al., 2021). Within this framework, relationships built on mutual respect, open communication and trust, support the generation

of shared goals and understanding, which encourages active engagement and shared decision making (Griffiths et al., 2021). This idea of positive relationships being the foundation of collaborative working was evident in relation to the 'what gives life' to Annual Review experiences, "the real positives for me are when you've built strong relationships with parents" (SENCO 2).

Less positive experiences were reported, both in the current study and in the wider literature, when collaboration was less apparent. Practitioner attendance at review meetings has previously been found to be uncommon and there are reports of limited collaboration in SEND processes more generally (Boesley & Cane, 2018; Kendall, 2019; Ofsted & CQC, 2021a). Cadman's (2021) SENCO and SEND Officer participants highlighted that capacity issues meant that representatives from the LA were unlikely to attend Annual Reviews unless meetings were contentious, which also was confirmed by SEND team members in the current study. Such experiences has led participants in the current study to feel that CYP are not valued and that there is an overall reduced priority given to supporting individuals through a collaborative Annual Review process.

Open and consistent communication was clearly valued, both in the current study and in other literature research. Such open communication supports the perception that individuals are working together in the best interests of the child (Kendall, 2019, Richards, 2024). When not present, this can reduce collaborative relationships and overall trust in the process, "communication's a massive problem and I would rather somebody rang me or reply to my email and said 'Look, we're really struggling'... then ignore [me]" (Parent/Carer 1). Examples of good collaboration put forward, was when practitioners from other services understood and valued their contributions to the process and worked with Parents/Carers and the education setting to achieve common understanding, shared responsibility and shared decision making (Griffiths et al. 2021). In contrast, Annual Reviews and EHCPs being seen as 'a school thing' reduced collaboration, "I think that's the frustration because it feels very much like it is just a school thing" (SENCO 1).

Other opposing expectations and priorities were also evident which could, at times, produce tokenistic practice. For example, experiences that included generating unsuitable outcomes for CYP appeared to make the Annual Review process more of a 'tick box' exercise. At other times, the higher prioritisation given to various components of Annual Reviews from services/teams led to good practice, such as a focus on supporting CYP at transition points and encouraging CYP to attend Annual Reviews. This highlights how wider contexts and priorities can influence individuals' experiences and need to be considered to ensure that Annual Reviews remain meaningful and productive. This reflection, on various priorities within Annual Reviews and how this can impact experiences, appears to be something which other literature has not yet explored.

Another area considered to be valued, both in experiences shared this study and in the most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) is meaningful CYP participation. However, as with collaboration, this statutory document does not explicitly outline how CYP 'should' participate. The EHCP itself has a section (part A) that is dedicated to CYP voice, however, without a standardised national Annual Review template or guidance on practice, this could easily be missed and given diminished importance within the Annual Review process. This can be compared to the approach of the Welsh Government (2015) which provides examples of worksheets and discussion points to support person-centred practice, and a previous SEND code of practice which was published alongside the previous SEN toolkit (Department for Education and Skills, 2001a, 2001b). As current guidance is not present, a discrepancy exists as to how CYP experience their voice being shared and participate within Annual Reviews (Cooper, 2019; Heasley, 2017). The pupils who took part in the current research all valued the ability to provide input and shared that they wanted to be a part of the process. They further stated that they found the support of key trusted adults to assist in their participation to be helpful. Within this study, examples of good experiences of CYP participation included when they were provided with agency and support to encourage meaningful participation. I considered this to be an example of Fox's (2016) pyramid of

participation, where degree, depth and areas of participation are considered. Similarly, in consideration of Lundy's (2007) model of participation, students within Annual Reviews who have positive experience are given the right and opportunity to express their views to an audience, in addition to these views being given weight (Kennan et al., 2019; Lundy, 2007).

Practitioners in this study found that CYP participation through attendance at Annual Review meetings was often missing and experienced various barriers resulting in inconsistent CYP engagement. This is echoed in wider literature, for example, language was specifically discussed by Robinson (2023) regarding CYP experiences of EHCPs, where jargon and prioritising adult versions of pupil voice over true pupil voice were found to be barriers.

Rao (2020), when speaking to EPs, reported concerns about ensuring that CYP participation was genuine and meaningful. Such concerns were also expressed by participants of this thesis, "we need to do it [gain CYP voice] properly and not very tokenistic" (EP). There were also discussions as to whether it was always appropriate to invite CYP to Annual Review meetings. This issue was discussed by Rao (2020), who found that, whilst there were some drawbacks when CYP participated in their EHC needs assessment, they concluded overall that the positive experiences of participation often outweighed the negative. Furthermore, they viewed that factors which caused CYP stress were mitigated by the presence of familiar and trusted adults. It was evident to the participants of the current study when an Annual Review was not putting the CYP at the centre of the process, "really, it's not about the needs of the child. It's about the needs of the school and the families" (Social Worker). These findings suggest that a shift needs to occur to support a more person-centred approach that truly puts CYP with SEND at the heart of the processes to make sure they are not an add-on but in fact are central to the whole process.

Another difficulty highlighted was that the Annual Review process and general SEND system, at times and for some, can be difficult to access. This is echoed in literature concerning EHCP needs assessments (Boesley & Cane, 2018; Keville et al., 2024). Ahad et al. (2022) found that a lack of parity within the EHCP process existed and that resulted in an

inequality of outcomes and provision. This view was endorsed by Parent/Carers in the current study and practitioner participants further expressed concern over accessibility to the process for Parent/Carers, naming difficulties such as: jargon; timescales; and changes in procedures as confusing factors.

Concern was also expressed that practitioners lacked a full understanding of the Annual Review process. Health practitioners appeared to be unaware of the statutory aspect of Annual Reviews, and Parent/Carers reported experiences with SEND team practitioners who had varying levels of understanding of aspects, such as personal budgets. Similarly, Cadman (2021) found that SENCOs and SEND Officers expressed that they had, at times, been confused due to the lack of information provided about EHCP procedures. A SEND joint inspection also highlighted the lack of a secure and well-understood process for Annual Reviews (Ofsted & CQC, 2021b).

Further examples, of Annual Reviews being a difficult process in which to engage, included that of paperwork and how sufficient time is not always given to SENCOs to allow them to ensure that the administrative aspect of the Annual Review process is completed properly within working hours. This is echoed in literature such as Curran and Boddison (2021), who found that 15% of the SENCOs asked stated that they did not have access to regular administrative support and consequently labelled the SENCO role as 'problematic'.

Furthermore, SENCO input and effort appears not always to be constructive, in that some EHCPs were not updated following Annual Reviews in the experiences of the participants of this thesis. This is echoed in SEND inspection reports (e.g. Ofsted and CQC, 2018) and has resulted in CYP having out of date EHCPs. SEND tribunal data from 2023/24 highlights that 238 appeals to tribunals were submitted due to a refusal to amend an EHCP after an Annual Review, with hundreds of other appeals registered due to the overall contents of EHCPs (Ministry of Justice, 2024). Even without knowing whether these appeals were upheld or withdrawn, this still highlights significant levels of dissatisfaction within the current English SEND system.

It is viewed, in this current thesis and wider literature, that an up-to-date EHCP benefits CYP outcomes due to improved decision making, which also helps foster trust in the process (Cadman, 2021; Strogilos & Ward, 2023). The EP in this study suggested that a reason why many EHCPs are not kept up to date, is that there are many more of them now than when the system was implemented, “the way the law was written...was very idealistic and seen for a very small portion of people ... But [now] we've got too many plans” (EP). Last and Su (2025) assert that if documentation (e.g. EHCPs) is not up to date and does not reflect CYPs’ needs, then it is not guaranteed that the correct provision will be put in place, ultimately preventing CYP from engaging in the process. This could be considered in context of recent data which suggests that since 2019, there has been no consistent improvements in outcomes for CYP with SEND (National Audit Officer, 2024).

Frustration was apparent from Parent/Carers and SENCOs in this study, who felt that their contribution towards SEND processes was not as valued as that of others, “when it comes down to the Annual Review ... we are not seen as a professional” (SENCO 2). This highlights an inequity of intelligence which implies that different forms of knowledge are not being viewed as equally valuable (i.e. that of lived experience in comparison to formal training) (Monforte et al., 2023). This increases the perception of a power imbalance and appears to damage the relationships which could support collaboration (Griffiths et al., 2021). Parent/Carer participants shared that they were labelled as “overanxious” or “fussy” for trying to share their views in Annual Reviews. Similar experiences have been reported by Runswick-Cole et al. (2024), who found that Mothers whose children have been labelled as having SEND were positioned as “unreasonable” and “demanding”. This view of inequity of intelligence highlights how the aims of the system (being collaborative and giving parent/carers voice) is not in unison with current reality. This is also highlighted by Hodkinson (2023a) who states that the most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) failed to challenge Parent/Carer/CYP/Practitioner dynamics, due to the system being framed within strict procedures, deadlines and budget priorities.

The current thesis found that there were examples of positive experiences which helped individuals better understand the Annual Review process. For example, one participant said that the attendance at LA workshops increased understanding of the system:

“She used to run workshops ... we invited people from the local authority, and I think there was five or six of them and we got a mix of people, and the SENCOs just couldn't believe what they were learning because they had no knowledge of it.” (Parent/Carer 1)

To summarise the findings of research question 1, I have found that behavioural integrity is pertinent. Behavioural integrity is described by Sewell (2023) as being concerned with the alignment of daily work in relation to values. Incoherent behavioural integrity inhibits the development of trust between stakeholders, whereas when coherent behavioural integrity is present, trustworthiness increases and relationships improve. Incoherent behavioural integrity can be seen when one compares the aims and values of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), with the working of the system in practice. This incoherent behavioural integrity appears, in part, to be caused by wider contextual factors, such as a lack of resources and the presence of competing demands (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986a, 1986b, 1995; Palikara et al., 2018). Contextual factors which are limiting the behavioural integrity of system are abundant. There are ever increasing demands on public services, and this, coupled with year on year funding reductions, is having an impact upon the ability of educational settings to implement and embed the aims of the current English legislation (Hodkinson, 2023b; Kerr & Ainscow, 2022; Last & Su, 2025). An increase in EHCP needs assessments and EHCPs, together with a lack of placements within specialist schools, with around two thirds of specialist settings reported to be over capacity, has led to higher levels of SEND within mainstream settings, making it more challenging to embed the ideology set out in legislation (Butler et al., 2025; DfE, 2025; Last & Su, 2025). The issues raised in the current study are aligned with previous literature and SEND inspection reports, which describe the current SEND process as being difficult for some and not being effective in supporting CYP outcomes (Keville et al., 2024; Ofsted & CQC, 2021a; Palikara et al., 2018; Sales & Vincent, 2018).

Research Question 2: What are CYPs', Parent/Carers' and Practitioners' Dreams and Hopes for Annual Reviews?

Considering an ideal future of Annual Reviews through an Appreciative Inquiry lens is novel to this research. Key considerations were: collaboration; Annual Reviews being given priority; CYP participation; and how wider contextual factors would strengthen future Annual Reviews.

The idea of collaborative working across systems is evident in theory (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986a, 1986b, 1995, Griffiths et al., 2021), SEND and education policy (Children and families act, 2014; DfE & DoH, 2015), wider literature around education and SEND processes (e.g. Castro-Kemp & Samuels, 2022) and the current research. Whilst Parent/Carers mentioned their disappointment in a lack of attendance at meetings by practitioners (Boesley & Crane, 2018, Sales & Vincent, 2018), this would be prioritised within the dream Annual Review and would provide CYP with SEND and their families with the knowledge that their needs were being addressed with the care and attention required. Whilst collaborative working is considered to be valuable in assisting decision making for CYP with SEND (Cadman, 2021), in this study it was apparent that collaborative dream Annual Reviews were built upon positive relationships between individuals and services (Griffiths et al., 2021). This can be considered alongside Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological systems Theory (1979, 1986a, 1986b), later Process, Person, Context and Time Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Specifically, we can view how 'mesosystems' can be strengthened by open communication and trust, to support collaboration through this model. A clear focus on relationships and communication between individuals and services was pivotal for individuals' ideal Annual Review situations to support a sense of trust and recognition: 'as long as we are communicated [with], what's happening around that EHCP ... it would be a lot of relief for us' (Parent/Carer 3).

Within this concept of collaboration, in line with the building blocks framework (Griffiths et al., 2021), is the idea that all voices are valued and heard, ultimately promoting mutual respect.

This issue was also considered by Capper and Soan (2022) who highlighted an over reliance on practitioner input (such as EPs) when decisions in SEND procedures (such as placement decisions and funding) were required. This dependence on practitioner voice, was reduced in the dream Annual Review scenario. Instead, there would be a feeling of more balanced epistemological privilege across all individuals and systems, to reduce oppressive practice and support social justice, 'I think for like the parents, for the child and for school to have their voice heard and be valued' (SENCO 2). Runswick-Cole et al. (2024) stated that practitioners within the current SEND system must acknowledge the injustices shared by Parent/Carers and also pay attention to the operations of power within the system which can lead to 'mothers' being drained of power as their knowledge is dismissed (Runswick-Cole et al., 2024). To do this, Sewell (2023) asserts that it is important to build trust and show that the perspectives of others are both valued and valuable, finding ways of listening and advocating for these views is important to support this. This idea of feeling listened to and heard was apparent within the dream for participants of the current study. In this thesis, participants hoped that in the future there would be more weight given to CYP voice, participation and person-centred practice more generally. This view is also shared in wider research, with Boorman et al (2025) stating that the use of person-centred Annual Reviews enhances open communication between individuals, and effective working relationships support a collaborative approach. When considering person-centred practice, participants of the current study shared suggested ways to encourage CYP participation, such as by encouraging their autonomy and sense of safety. It was also suggested that unfamiliar practitioners could introduce themselves to CYP by using one-page profiles, and that key workers could give CYP autonomy over attendance at meetings and provide CYP with clarity about what may be discussed, to help them make decisions and provide input. This thesis has, therefore, added some insight into mitigating concerns raised in other research about CYP having too much exposure to professionals (Roa, 2020; Sharma, 2021). Robinson (2023) highlights how CYP participation in EHCP processes can be considered alongside self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Self-determination theory provides

a framework in which to support intrinsic motivation and wellbeing. This means that if this framework were implemented for CYP participation, CYP wellbeing and motivation to engage in the process would be improved. The three aspects of this theory are: belonging; autonomy; and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the current study, CYP provided their thoughts about various issues which could support their input in a way consistent with self-determination theory. CYPs' sense of belonging would be supported if they were asked to engage in and to contribute towards their Annual Reviews, and did so with the help of a trusted adult. It was felt that CYPs' sense of competence would be improved if they were supported to contribute to their own Annual Review. These hopes for the future are therefore in line with recommendations from Robinson (2023) around supporting CYP involvement with their EHCPs.

The CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) has been criticised for its lack of clarity and set procedures (Sales & Vincent, 2018). Therefore, in the dream scenario, the Annual Review process would be prioritised, and sufficient time and resources would be provided at different levels, to ensure that the procedures were standardised, accessible, and meaningful. Also, participants' hopes for the future included a move towards Annual Reviews being given the same prioritisations as the original EHCP assessment process: "obviously we've got the local forms for the initial EHCP, but we don't have anything similar for the reviews. I think all our time and focus goes into the initial assessments" (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner).

In an ideal world prioritisation of Annual Reviews would be evident at multiple levels and would include the creation of a standardised approach, in the hope of reducing levels of inconsistency and confusion across the country, whilst also increasing knowledge about the process, as is apparent from literature concerning the initial EHCP process (Sales & Vincent, 2018). The desire for more priority to be given to Annual Reviews and for a more standardised approach will always conflict with wider contextual factors in addition to the scarcity of time and how that may affect CYP development (i.e. chronosystem,

Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1986b). This was discussed by a parent participant in Kendall's (2019) research, who maintained that due to their child's complex needs, six monthly reviews would be more appropriate. Similar views were raised by EP and health practitioner participants in this study, who recognised that time and contextual factors impacted upon CYPs' needs. They discussed how in their ideal Annual Review, reviews would take place either more or less often than annually would allow for a more flexible approach and would promote a more person-centred approach. Flexibility within the Annual Review and EHCP process was also discussed with EHCPs being a 'live' document. Being able to review EHCPs more easily and 'pausing' EHCPs in the dream Annual Review highlights how the current system appears to be too rigid in its current format. This idea of a 'live' EHCP which could be reviewed less formally appears to be a new concept not yet discussed in wider literature.

In the current research, the desire for a more inclusive education was evident. For example, focussing on SEND within teacher training was put forward as desirable in the dream Annual Review process. Hodkinson (2023a) highlights that teacher training/guidance has not been implemented in consideration of the Children and Families Act (2014), the newest CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), or the increase in SEND need more nationally. This has resulted in only 56% of teachers asked feeling that they were equipped to effectively support CYP with SEND (National Audit Office, 2024). This would change within the dream Annual Review situation and support more inclusive practice and fewer EHCPs more generally. This echoes ideas published in the most recent SEND review, 'Right support, Right place, Right time improvement plan' (DfE, 2023). In order for such dreams to be a reality, trust within the system is required, with the SEND review highlighting that Parent/Carers are requesting EHCPs as a way of guaranteeing support they are sceptical of (DfE, 2023). Therefore, in the dream, trust in the education system would result in fewer EHCPs to review overall. This was also thought to be reflected in "less stressed SENCOs". It is viewed that SENCO workload can be unseen and undervalued which, if not managed through workload, training

and support will result in burnout (Karkavandi et al., 2022; Richards, 2024). Parent/Carer wellbeing was also highlighted as being improved if trust within the system and better Annual Review processes were apparent, highlighting how impactful Annual Reviews are to CYP and their families.

To summarise findings of research question 2, the overall dream envisioned was that of an inclusive system that valued, and provided space for, collaborative working and CYP participation. At the centre of participants' dreams, were the CYP, "the children would be happy making the progress that they need to be making ... delighted to be in school. That it's a positive experience for all" (SENCO 3). As these values are those (or are similar to those) aspired to in the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), this shows that participants do not disagree with the aims of the system but instead find that the system itself does not in fact foster a viable environment for such practices to thrive, build trust, and create positive experiences.

Research Question 3: What can we Learn From Participants' Previous Experiences and Hopes for the Future, in Relation to Annual Review Processes?

Designing what should be

In line with this final research question, this part of the research had the goal of interpreting, and building upon, participants' experiences and dreams for Annual Reviews, to design the Annual Reviews of the future. To do this, I will first discuss the findings of the current study alongside other research, in line with each Meta Concept generated, as they each highlight a core concept that participants valued and hoped for in future Annual Reviews. I will then set out my research recommendations and the implications for practitioners, including EPs more specifically. To consider 'what should be' for Annual Reviews in the future, please also see the 'Design Planning Document' which can be found in Appendix 14 and highlights more specific actions that can be implemented rather than values and broader principles identified which will now be further explored. The Possibility Statements outlined in Chapter 4 can also be viewed as a summary of 'what should be'.

A Simplistic and Clear Process That is Accessible to all.

As discussed throughout this thesis, experiences of Annual Reviews differ vastly, which can result in the process being inequitable. Laverick and Baron (2024) found that SEND Officers raised concerns about the inequity at the heart of the system they work within. Moving forward, this inequity must be addressed, and reduced, by simplifying the process and by providing individuals with opportunities to gain better knowledge and understanding of it.

Ahad et al. (2022) highlight the need for parents and professionals to be better informed of the EHCP process, including being given clear expectations, thereby reducing discrepancies across and within LAs. Atkinson et al. (2024) also recognised that training on SEND more generally is limited and highlighted the need for professional and family SEND training, including the use of online co-produced resources. This is similar to the current study into Annual Reviews, where specific Annual Review and CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) knowledge was reported to be inconsistent. This was an issue that was emphasised by Parent/Carers, who felt that other Parent/Carers who did not understand the process as well as themselves, would be left with reduced support for their child, leading to oppression.

The National Audit Office (2024) reported that between early 2023 and March 2024, 31% of SEND inspections identified “widespread or systemic failings”. This suggests that with nearly a third of inspections reporting such challenges, that the system itself is not facilitating effective and positive support and requires national changes to allow the process to be equitable and accessible across the country.

Treating Annual Reviews as a Priority.

As shared by participants in this study and demonstrated by the lack of research in this area more generally, Annual Reviews are not sufficiently prioritised. Other competing demands, including initial EHCP assessments, are being prioritised instead of Annual Reviews, thereby limiting their impact. Ahad et al. (2022) state that the EHCP process has placed increased demands on professionals, including by adding to the administrative burden. This increased

workload in other areas appears to have resulted in the Annual Review process taking a back seat, or resulting in 'tick box exercise' practice, where individuals go through the motions of an Annual Review without any meaningful outcome. Participants in the current study agreed. Additionally, Cadman (2021) stated that one reason for the prioritisation of EHCP assessments is the cost of legal challenges in tribunals associated with these assessments. This focus on initial assessments means that Annual Reviews are not being used to their full potential. However, as highlighted in recent data, Annual Reviews are also adding to tribunal workloads (Ministry of Justice, 2024).

It is important to note that meeting statutory timescales alone does not equate to positive experiences. For Annual Reviews to be meaningful, the prioritising of the required time and resources is necessary. For example, after a SEND inspection, Essex LA showed commitment to the prioritising of Annual Reviews by appointing 'Annual Review Coordinators'. Which were put in place with the LA's SEND team to address the backlog of Annual Reviews (Ofsted and CQC, 2022c). Participants in this study recalled occasions when Annual Reviews were given sufficient priority, and this resulted in positive experiences and generated hopes for the future. When this occurred, relevant practitioners attended Annual Review meetings, SENCOs were provided with sufficient administrative support, Parent/Carers felt that their children were put first, and adaptations were considered to support a person-centred approach, which meant that CYP participation was evident.

It should be clear that prioritising Annual Reviews relies on the prerequisite that CYP with SEND are themselves the priority and at the heart of the English SEND system. This approach would therefore naturally enforce greater importance to processes such as Annual Reviews.

CYP Participation is Valued.

In the current study and in wider literature, the need for meaningful CYP participation was found to be key (Fox, 2016; Lundy, 2007; Sewell, 2023). Not only does accurate CYP voice enhance social justice, but it also reduces the epistemological oppression experienced by

CYP with SEND and helps CYP make meaningful contributions towards their lives (Kagan, 2020). Recent research, concerning EHCPs and CYP participation, advocates for effective CYP voice (e.g. Robinson, 2023) and puts forward practical suggestions as to how this can be achieved, such as using a person-centred approach (Boorman et al., 2025). Sharma (2021) stated that barriers, such as workload and a lack of methods to elicit voice, were discussed by professionals when considering how to improve CYP voice in EHCP needs assessments and Annual Reviews. They proposed putting mechanisms in place to allow for the continuous recording of the views of CYP, so that there was not a rush to seek the views of CYP shortly before the meeting. Participants in this study agreed that CYP participation and attendance at meetings should be encouraged more widely in education. This issue is linked to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), who highlighted that motivation for CYP to engage would be increased by an enhanced sense of belonging, agency and competence.

Whilst not raised by participants in the current study, other research (e.g. Power, 2019) has considered person-centred planning approaches such as PATHs (see Chapter 2) as something which could support CYP participation and therefore ought to be viewed as something which 'should be' evident in future Annual Review practice if appropriate.

Annual Reviews as Collaborative.

Whilst collaboration is thought of as being integral to the Children and Families Act (2014), the most recent CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), and in systemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986a, 1986b, 1995), collaboration within Annual Reviews is not consistent. This was considered by Pellegrini (2009) who highlighted barriers to systemic working such as the prioritisations of other work due to imposed time limits. Nevertheless, the importance of supporting mesosystems is vital to making efficient and transformative changes to CYP outcomes (Kagan, 2020; Sewell, 2023).

A lack of joint responsibility is also impacting upon collaboration in Annual Reviews, which can result in Annual Reviews being seen as a 'school thing'. Griffiths et al. (2021) proposed

that good collaborative experiences occur when individuals work jointly to achieve shared goals. The implementation of basic communication procedures is not consistently applied in current Annual Review practice. For example, Health Care Practitioner participants in the current research found that requests for receiving input and attendance at Annual Reviews was not conducted in a set way across educational settings and could lead them to question whether GDPR and consent procedures were carried out.

Parent/Carers and SENCOs, felt that they were not given epistemological privilege, instead feeling that other practitioners were prioritised by decision makers. Similar experiences of 'mothers' who were perceived to be 'mad' is also echoed in literature highlighting stories of Parent/Carers who have engaged in the current SEND system (Runswick-Cole et al., 2024). Such experiences highlight that, moving forward, targeted attempts to support the rebuilding of collaborative relationships based on mutual respect and trust will be vital (Griffiths et al., 2021).

Kagan (2020) highlighted that for change to occur we should work together to support individuals' sense of belonging, respect and commitment to each other, to move forward from potentially difficult histories. That view is consistent with those expressed in this study. However, Laverick and Baron (2024) found that over a third of SEND Officers had not received training on: how to communicate with parents; co-production; and person-centred planning. This suggests that training in these areas is necessary to support experiences of Annual Reviews and other SEND processes in the future.

Ahad et al. (2022) specifically highlighted the lack of integration between practitioners from health, social care and education when supporting students with EHCPs. They proposed that: additional funding; greater clarity of roles; and a change of culture is required to improve this. The current study suggested that the Annual Review process would be improved by increased prioritisation of Annual Reviews and a focus on making the Annual Review process simple and accessible. This would clarify role boundaries and expectations and would promote clear procedures which, in turn, would increase open communication.

This idea that better processes improve collaboration is echoed by Atkinson et al. (2024) who state that connected services improves open communication and information sharing, and that better understanding of CYP's needs, and having appropriate provision in place, allows for problem-solving to occur quickly and effectively.

Annual Reviews as Person-Centred.

Lastly, the view that SEND processes work better when person-centred approaches are used, is becoming more prominent within literature (Boorman et al., 2025; Kusi, 2017). Kusi (2017) describes a person-centred review as one which uses structures and techniques that ensure that the young person is fully at the centre of the review and that the actions identified would make a difference to their lives. In the current doctoral research, experiences shared that were not as positive, included where decisions were made based on timescales and other priorities and did not hold the CYP at the centre. Power (2019), who considered person-centred Annual Reviews, shared that these reviews rely on engagement from all practitioners in a continuous cycle of listening and learning, to support CYP who are at the centre. This type of review can support a shift in power, allowing for CYP to be recognised as experts in their own lives, again reducing oppression and supporting social justice aims. In the current study, SENCOs in particular, valued person-centred approaches, as they felt collaborative and supportive of CYPs' and Parent/Carer's needs. This highlights how a person-centred approach can support a holistic and collaborative environment, which improves relationships between individuals and enhances student outcomes. However, it should be highlighted that resources need to be made available to facilitate this. Cadman (2021) found that participants stated that they were 'mis-sold' EHCPs described as "person-centred", as in practice, issues over capacity do not allow this aim to be achieved.

Finally, the use of a person-centred approach may also shift the view of Annual Reviews being 'tick box' exercises which simply happen every year. Boorman et al. (2025) found that the use of person-centred Annual Reviews resulted in participants experiencing positive feelings and viewing the review meeting as an intervention in contrast to previous negative

feelings associated with Annual Reviews which viewed them as bureaucratic “paperwork exercise”. Whilst matching a person-centred planning approach to Annual Review paperwork was recognised as an initial concern, the graphic note taking that occurred in the review meeting was simply “lifted” into the Annual Review paperwork, which reduced the need for any further administrative work for the SENCO (Boorman et al., 2025). This appears to be a way in which Annual Reviews could be improved in the future, however, I wondered how the SEND team colleagues who received the paperwork with images from the meeting may have felt receiving this and if it was able to be married into their system. This could possibly be something to consider in future research. Furthermore, Boorman et al. (2025) do not clarify what made the reviews ‘person-centred planning Annual Reviews’ and therefore further research into what values or specific person-centred planning tools are best place to support Annual Reviews would be beneficial.

Recommendations

General Recommendations and Implications

Whilst recommendations in the Design Planning Document (Appendix 14) must be considered in the context in which they were shared, I believe that the suggestions within it are transferable and could be considered when trying to enhance the effectiveness of Annual Reviews moving forward. As highlighted, I am of the view that Annual Reviews deserve to be given a higher priority, and I would urge bodies such as LAs and the DfE to consider the recommendations that I have set out in the Design Planning Document to make meaningful change. If the Design Planning Document is to be beneficial and collaborative, it should be considered in a co-produced way with a variety of individuals involved.

In addition to the Design Planning Document (Appendix 14), I have summarised below, some suggestions which I feel are worth considering, having reflected on the experiences of participants in the current doctoral research and the views set out in wider literature.

1. A person-centred approach that has the CYP at its core is essential to ensure that Annual Reviews and EHCPs are meaningful. Decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, and a reduction of bureaucracy should occur. Person-centred Annual Review meetings, which encourage collaborative working and CYP participation, should be encouraged to help the Annual Review process to be meaningful, rather than going through the EHCP line by line. Further research and development of guidance should be created to support person-centred Annual Reviews which have been found to support Annual Reviews become meaningful and to move away from the perception of Annual Reviews being paperwork exercises which do not support CYP.
2. At the heart of a person-centred approach, CYP participation should be encouraged as much as possible. Consideration as to how best support true CYP voice and depth of participation is needed, to ensure that CYP have meaningful input into their Annual Review process. Reasonable adjustments and strategies that increase CYPs' sense of safety need to be common practice to ensure CYP feel able to engage. Preparation prior to any meeting and discussion following any Annual Reviews, to clarify next steps, should also be universal and CYP should also be provided with information as to how their participation influenced change. This is based on models of participation which assert that providing voice is not enough, CYPs' voices require a willing audience, to be viewed across a wide range of topics and be influential to a meaningful degree (Fox, 2016; Lundy, 2007).
3. Annual Reviews would benefit from being renamed, perhaps to 'EHCP reviews' (or similar) to encourage a person-centred and flexible approach. At present, Annual Review timescales are too rigid and therefore unhelpful. Statutory timescales should be reconsidered, to acknowledge that CYPs' development and contexts will need varying support at different points in time. Whilst I appreciate that mandatory benchmarks are required, to ensure that EHCPs are being reviewed cyclically, these statutory duties do not appear to be being met in the current format. Therefore, this

system should be reviewed. One idea could be that an EHCP is required to have a minimum of one 'major review' every two years, with several 'minor reviews' occurring at points in-between, in line with SEN support students (DfE & DoH, 2015, p.104). These more minor reviews could be less formal and merge with events such as a parents evening meetings, as suggested by the EP participant. The logistics and planning of an overhaul of the current EHCP review system is beyond the scope of the current research and would require more targeted research and consideration to fully form this idea.

4. Annual Reviews and the current SEND system need to be more accessible, meaningful and equitable. As a system that supports some of the most vulnerable CYP and families in England, it is too difficult to engage with. It should not be necessary, to have the needs of their children met, for Parent/Carers to spend lots of time becoming specialists in the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and associated systems. If the SEND system is to remain as it is, though some state that it should be revolutionised (Stanbridge, 2024), attention ought to be given to amending the current CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) to provide clarity about the process and to highlight good practice. Alongside this, input into generating a toolkit to support the application of the legislation should be generated, along the lines of the previous SEN toolkit (Department for Education and Skills, 2001b). It should be noted that Butler et al. (2025) report that major changes to the current English SEND system is imminent, due to concerns over LA debts, resulting in a reported white paper to be published in late spring of 2025 which hopes for a "complete recalibration". I hope that the next review recognises criticism to the effects that such reviews (and legislation) are increasingly long and complex, and are not readable or accessible, leading to dissatisfaction and poor outcomes (Pluqualiec & O'Connor, 2023). Furthermore, updates and changes should be made transparent to those involved unlike the previous review (DfE, 2023) which has implemented the 'Change programme' without fully being clear about its findings and suggested changes thus far.

5. Collaboration and joint accountability needs to be made a priority within statutory guidance. This will not only help the collaborative aims of the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) to become more of a reality, but it will ultimately support CYP. Funding and resource allocation will need to be provided to allow for this. This would include funds to give practitioners time in their schedule to prepare for and engage in Annual Reviews and for training as to how to engage in Annual Review from a collaborative view. Systems and procedures need to be put in place to support information sharing and build working relationships.
6. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to set out how the education system ought to be funded, I believe that SEND funding at various levels needs to be re-evaluated, to make sure that EHCPs and Annual Reviews are meaningful. It is important to note that the need for further resources and time is evident if Annual Reviews are to be made meaningful and effective. Even seemingly small changes require funding, such as giving SENCOs time to consider which rooms to use and which snacks students may like for Annual Review meetings. That is apart from the consideration needed for creating additional capacity to services and teams to support practitioners' engagement and move away from the bureaucracy that currently influences the process.

Implications for Educational Psychologists

EPs are in a good position to develop relationships across systems to support collaborative processes and bring about change for CYP (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). As EPs work at various levels, including conducting research, they could be used as a resource to provide suggestions to help develop Annual Review practice, on an individual, community and national level. For example, with a background in research, EPs can support the LAs they work in, by considering the 'Design Planning Document' (Appendix 14) to bring about effective organisational change within their area.

EPs could provide training and workshops to upskill SENCOs (and others) to support their approaches to Annual Reviews, including how to consider theories and approaches such as Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) and person-centred planning to support a CYP centred approach to Annual Reviews locally (including how to gain meaningful CYP voice). At a national level, EPs could use their research and practice-based skills, to provide an analysis of changes that are needed in the system as well as co-producing the changes that are needed concerning Annual Reviews. EPs could also be used to share their practice and philosophy, to help bring about a move away from the medical model, which remains dominant within SEND processes, and to provide training, facilitation and decision making based on real life practice.

Considerations of Research Quality

This thesis has strengths and limitations. Within Chapter 2, I presented some of these in relation to: focus groups; Appreciative Inquiry; and the choice of TA. Here, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the research more generally.

Research Strengths

Most notably, I feel that this research has provided insight from individuals across different groups concerning their experiences of Annual Reviews. Not only has there previously been minimal research about Annual Reviews, but available research has often lacked variety in the range of perspectives provided (e.g. Boorman et al., 2025; Cooper, 2019). Whilst I am aware that the participants in this study did not cover all individuals who participate in Annual Reviews, I was able to include participants from the following areas: CYP; Parent/Carers; SENCOs; SEND team; EP; Social Care; and Health. Had I had more time and capacity to conduct a larger scale study, I would have perhaps invited more participants from a wider background within education, health and care, such as virtual school staff, teaching staff (including specialist teachers in areas of autism, SEMH needs, hearing and vision) and wider health care practitioners (such as those in mental health, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy).

This research is the first, to my knowledge, to have considered Annual Reviews through an action research methodology. The research had a transformative aim which was fulfilled to a certain extent. I have created a Design Planning Document which can be used to help others engage in practice and behaviours which are new, improved or to do so in a more informed manner (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

Research Limitations

Despite the strengths mentioned above, the current study has various limitations that I would change were I to conduct the research again. In an ideal situation, I would have taken the time to arrange a mixed focus group to consider and co-produce Possibility Statements for the Design stage (Stage 2) rather than create these myself, as originally planned. I would also have asked participants to categorise these statements into priorities so that I would have known which they felt to be most important. This would have allowed for a more collaborative approach to the Design phase, which instead was more researcher led, reducing the participation in this phase significantly. Another limitation to the transformative aims of this study, is that I am not a part of the senior leadership team in the LA, and so I cannot guarantee action. To encourage the uptake of the practical suggestions mentioned within the Design phase, I will disseminate the information in hope that the LA will take on board the information collected from this research.

Regarding participation and recruitment, it is important to note that participants were self-selecting and therefore may have felt more strongly or confident about their Annual Review experiences in comparison to others who chose not to highlight their interest in engaging in the study. This was discussed in the Parent/Carer focus group, where concerns were raised about the experiences of other Parent/Carers who were less knowledgeable in the Annual Review process. I agree with Parent/Carer 1 who wondered:

“I'm interested as to if you've got three people who weren't actively involved, they wouldn't even know what you meant by some of the questions you're asking about an EHCP. And that's the majority of people and that's eye opening and scary.” (Parent/Carer 1)

If I could complete some further research, I would perhaps consider ways in which I could have asked those with less understanding of the process (i.e. Parent/Carers less familiar with Annual Reviews).

Finally, I wish to comment on how the CYP found the Discovery aspect of this study particularly difficult to engage in. This meant that conversations in the CYP focus group dealt more with the dream situation. I feel that were I to conduct the research again, I would have considered a more creative way to conduct the Discovery aspect of this research or used an entirely different method for CYP. Perhaps using in-depth interviews, photographs/objects or other creative methods would have been useful in supporting CYP participation in action research (Aldridge, 2014). Or, even more in line with co-production aims, I could have asked a group of CYP to design a method of engagement.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several areas in need of further exploration to improve knowledge about, and experiences of, Annual Reviews, which could ultimately support future practice. Key research which I feel would be beneficial includes:

- Future research could explore the implementation of the 'Design Planning Document' (Appendix 14), as this could not be delivered in this current thesis. An LA, school or other system could use and adapt the Design phase of this study, using an action planning approach (such as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) or PATH (see Kagan, 2020)) to assess their own priorities and devise an action plan.
- Specific research about issues that occur at transition points and at points of challenge in Annual Reviews should also be explored. For example: how preparing for adulthood is considered in Annual Reviews; how the transition between settings/key stages/ LAs are experienced; and how Annual Reviews that are at a point of placement breakdown are for those involved, especially CYP.

- Specific research into the experience of Annual Reviews at specialist settings would also be beneficial. This was briefly mentioned by some participants in this study, however, further consideration as to how to manage Annual Reviews when all CYP in a setting have an Annual Review, may lead to further understanding of facilitators and barriers to Annual Reviews.
- This research took place in one LA. As discussed, by participants and in wider research (i.e. Boorman et al., 2025), procedures and processes differ across LAs. To facilitate a more national and standardised approach, as suggested by this research, further studies to consider best practices across LAs would be beneficial. It may be helpful to consider how local practices differ across SENCOs, schools, and LAs to further consider appreciative practice and build upon this. This could also be more widely considered in relation to other systems, such as that in which the Welsh government review their 'Individual Development Plans' as an equivalent to EHCPs.
- One area that this research did not consider, was that of intersectionality, which considers how different types of discrimination intersect to oppress individuals in multiple and simultaneous ways, contributing to systemic inequality and systemic injustice (Butler, 2015). Whilst power and epistemic oppression was viewed in relation to Parent/Carer and SENCO experiences, this was not considered alongside other social contexts which may impact upon individuals' experiences (i.e. in consideration of 'Social Graces' (Burnham, 2012)). This has recently been considered by Brar (2025) who explored South-Asian and Indian-Punjabi Sikh Parent/Carers' experiences with SEND-support in England. However, this did not specifically consider Annual Reviews. Therefore, further exploration of Parent/Carers' or CYPs' experiences, who may have intersecting contexts, would be beneficial to consider how power and oppression are influencing Annual Review processes.

Final Conclusions and Reflections

This thesis added to an area in which previous research was relatively limited. It was the first to use an action research design, with a varied combination of participants to improve understanding of Annual Reviews. This research had the goal of gaining further insight into the experiences of a variety of individuals who had been involved in Annual Reviews. Core concepts of: collaboration; prioritising CYP participation; person-centred approaches; and allowing for accessible; and equitable experiences, were evident across the focus groups. Whilst some of these themes may not be new, the findings in this study show that these core ideals are vital and are not always implemented across SEND processes, reducing the perception of behavioural integrity (Sewell, 2023). Participants also shared experiences where they felt the Annual Reviews were just a bureaucratic ‘tick box’ process, which is not given appropriate prioritisation. Whereas positive experiences occurred where individuals felt valued, and collaboration occurred. When a person-centred approach was adopted, this resulted in a joint approach, which supported students and resulted in a meaningful experience. Regarding participants’ hopes for the future of Annual Reviews, behavioural integrity was more evident.

The present thesis has found that Annual Reviews remain challenging and emotive processes within the current English SEND system and are influenced by various factors. This is echoed in literature, which has highlighted challenging experiences within Annual Review processes (Cooper, 2019; Ofsted & CQC, 2021b). The challenges faced in the Annual Review process, and inconsistencies in good practice, can mean that CYPs’ needs are not met. This has been highlighted in SEND inspection reports (e.g. Ofsted & CQC, 2021a). However, unlike these inspections, which do not appear to provide clear guidance on how to make improvements, the current study was able to put forward suggestions for better practice in the future, by providing answers to the third research question and through the creation of a Design Planning Document (Appendix 14). Further systemic input is needed to make sure that the aims outlined in English legislations (such as the Children and

Families Act (2014) and the CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015)) are present in real life situations, such as increasing CYP participation and collaboration. For this to occur, Annual Reviews need to be viewed as a priority, so that meaningful change can occur to support CYP outcomes.

Recommendations, implications and future research suggestions were highlighted to promote the continued development around Annual Review practice.

What stood out the most to me was that, whilst the system was discussed as being “broken” and “frustrating”, there was an overall idea of meaningfulness and hope that Annual Reviews and EHCPs could support CYP in the right circumstances. Were this the case, participants would be “ecstatic” and “relieved”. CYP at the centre of these processes would benefit and this is a clear aim for all involved.

I would like to thank all the participants once again for the time and consideration put into this thesis. I hope that this will provide insight and support helpful change to the Annual Review process moving forward. I would like to end this thesis with the following quote, “The Annual Review, it is as important, if not more important, than the initial assessment.”

(Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

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Appendices

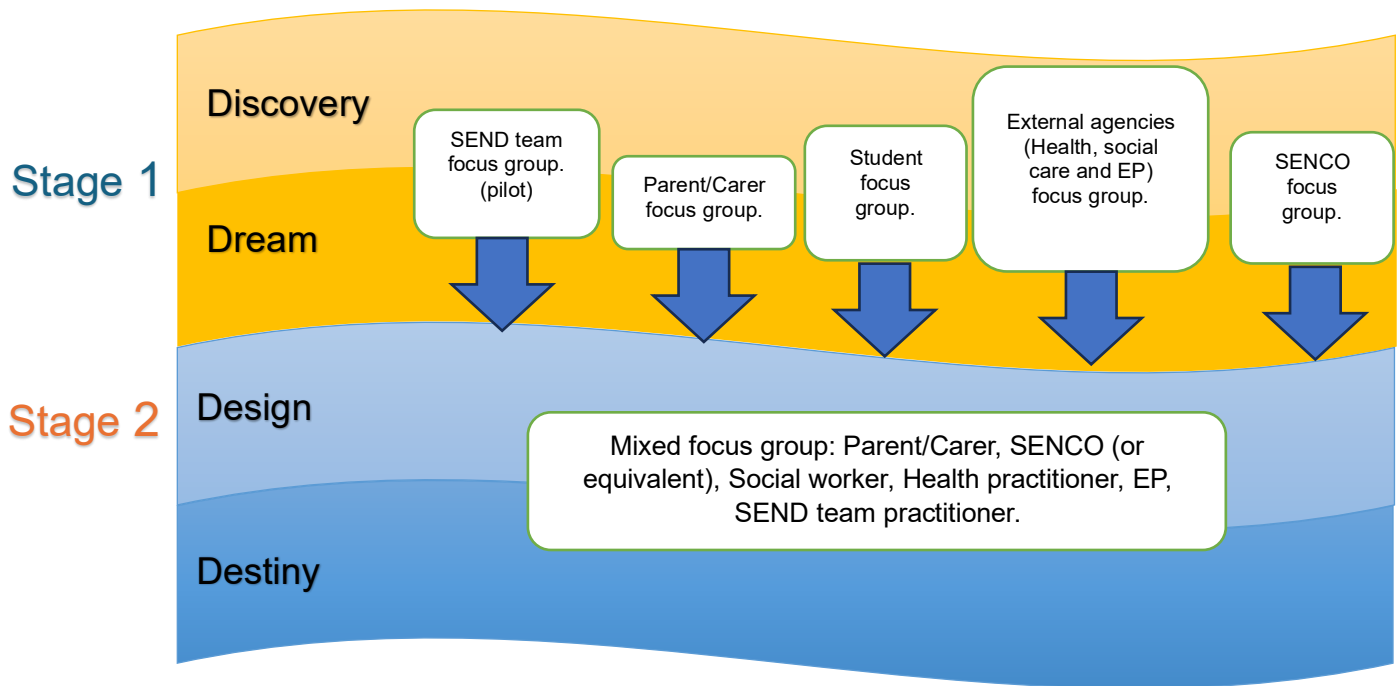
Appendix 1 Consideration of Participatory Action Research

Consideration of participatory action research within the current research in line with questions posed for researchers by Mertens (2015, p. 252) as adapted from Doe (1996 as cited in Mertens, 2015).

Question	True for this Research?	Comments
1. Was the problem addressed by the research originally identified by the community who experienced the problem?	No	Ultimately, this research was identified by myself as the researcher and chosen due to my background. The topic was identified by myself without involvement from participants.
2. Was the goal of the research to fundamentally change and improve the lives of people with disabilities (or other marginalised, oppressed groups?)	Yes	The aim of the research was to support CYP with EHCPs, their families and those who work closely with them. However, going into the research I knew that the extent to which the research could be implemented in the future would be limited due myself not being in a leadership role within the LA to ensure any changes.
3. Did the research give power to participants?	Yes	Power was given through the opportunity to share their experiences and hopes for the future. I aimed to allow all participants to feel like their voice was important, however, power was ultimately reduced due to the nature of the research and myself being the main researcher. In an ideal world more power to participants would have been given and co-production increased.
4. Did the research participants belong to the group, usually a marginalised or oppressed population, who experiences the problem being studied?	Yes	Participants of this research were from cohorts who are impacted by Annual Reviews. This includes CYP with SEND, their families and practitioners who work closely with them. Some participants within the SENCO and Parent/Carer focus group shared their experiences of feeling oppressed within the system.

5. Will the participants experience increased consciousness, skill development and resources?	Yes	I hope that participants gained something from engaging in the focus groups through incidental learning opportunities. Formalised skill development and resource production following this are not guaranteed due to limitation of the research.
6. Do researchers and participants share a peer relationship?	No	I aimed to provide a non-hierarchical experience for participants, and I valued their input. However, due to the nature of the research I was the researcher, and the participants had limited researcher influences.
7. Can the results be used by and benefit participants?	Yes	Yes, they <i>can</i> , however, this is not guaranteed.

Appendix 2 Original Design



Appendix 3 Participant Criteria

Focus group	Requirements	Justification of criteria
Stage 1 SEND team (Pilot) focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have been engaged in at least one Annual Review process as a part of the SEND team • Be over 18 • Have given consent • Currently work in Placement LA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of engaging in at least one Annual Review was required in their current role so that the participants could consider the focus group questions in relation to their role. • Age of 18+ and consent were requirements in line with ethical approval for practitioner participants. If under 18, parental consent would also have been needed. • It was also important that participants worked within the same LA. This is because practice varies between authorities and the Appreciative Inquiry approach used for this study was based on supporting future practice within one organisation (i.e. one LA).
Stage 1 pupil focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary school age mainstream pupil • Must have provided assent • Must have parental consent • Have an EHCP and be aware of this • Live in Placement LA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil participants were sought in mainstream secondary schools. This was in consideration of age and ability to consent to participating in a focus group led to this consideration. • It was important that students were aware of their EHCP so that they could understand the concept that it would be reviewed and why. • Assent and parental consent was vital to be in line with ethical guidelines. • It was also important that participants worked within the same LA. This is because practice varies between authorities and the Appreciative Inquiry approach used for this study was based on supporting future practice within one organisation (i.e. one LA).
Stage 1 Parent/Carer focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a child with an EHCP • Must have been engaged in at least one Annual Review process as a Parent/Carer • Be over 18 • Have given consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification for Parent/Carer participants is highlighted in main body of thesis. To summarise, Parent/Carers of students with EHCPs are vital in understanding experiences of Annual Reviews. • It is important that they had personal experience of at least one Annual Review as a Parent/Carer

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in Placement LA 	<p>so that they could draw on their lived experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of 18+ and consent were requirements in line with ethical approval for practitioner participants. If under 18, parental consent would also have been needed. • It was also important that participants lived within the same LA. This is because practice varies between authorities and the Appreciative Inquiry approach used for this study was based on supporting future practice within one organisation (i.e. one LA).
<p>Stage 1 external agency focus group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be currently working in one of the following roles: EP, Health practitioner, Social Care practitioner, SEND team, other LA education practitioner (e.g. autism team) • Must have been engaged in at least one Annual Review process as a practitioner • Be over 18 • Have given consent • Currently work in Placement LA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification for external agency participants is provided in main body of thesis. To summarise, external practitioners, including those from health, social care and educational psychology hold important roles within Annual Reviews and EHCPs. • Experience of engaging in at least one Annual Review was required in their current role so that the participants could consider the focus group questions in relation to their role. • Age of 18+ and consent were requirements in line with ethical approval for practitioner participants. If under 18, parental consent would also have been needed. • It was also important that participants worked within the same LA. This is because practice varies between authorities and the Appreciative Inquiry approach used for this study was based on supporting future practice within one organisation (i.e. one LA).
<p>Stage 1 education setting (SENCO) focus group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a SENCO (or equivalent) who is responsible for chairing Annual Review meetings in their school • Must have been engaged in at least one Annual Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification for SENCO participants is given in main body of thesis. To summarise, SENCOs (or equivalent) were recruited as they 'run' the Annual Review meetings and have a seminal part to play in Annual Reviews. • Experience of engaging in at least one Annual Review was required in their current role so that the

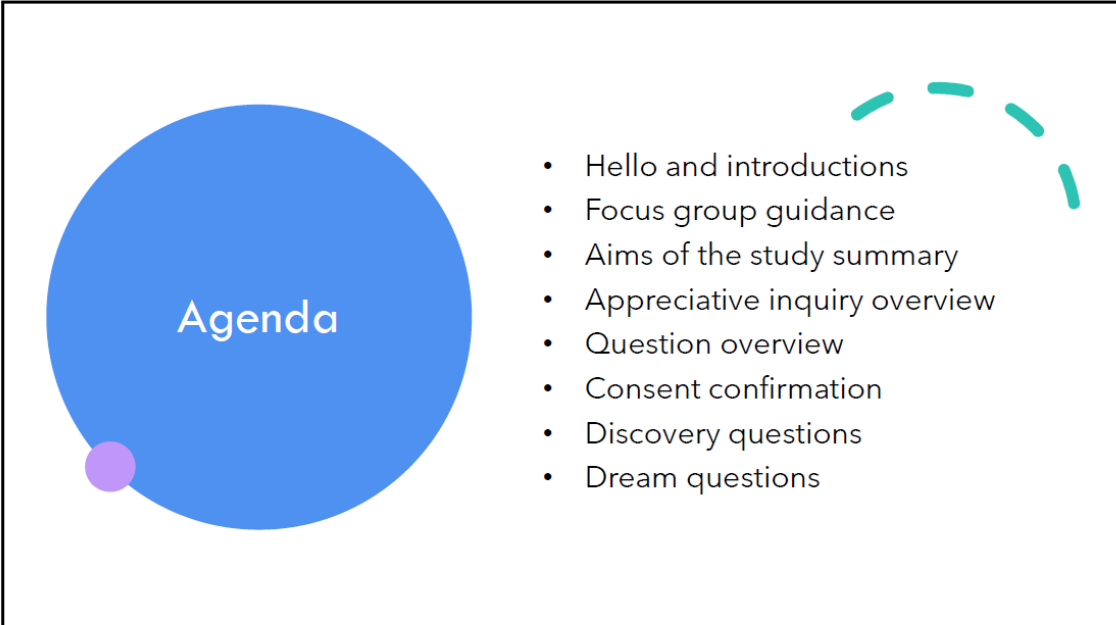
	<p>process as a school staff member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be over 18 • Have given consent • Currently work in Placement LA 	<p>participants could consider the focus group questions in relation to their role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of 18+ and consent were requirements in line with ethical approval for practitioner participants. If under 18, parental consent would also have been needed. • It was also important that participants worked within the same LA. This is because practice varies between authorities and the Appreciative Inquiry approach used for this study was based on supporting future practice within one organisation (i.e. one LA).
<p>Stage 2 (original plan) mixed focus group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be one of the following: Parent/Carer of CYP with an EHCP, EP, SEND team practitioner, Health care practitioner, social care practitioner, SENCO (or equivalent) • Must have been engaged in at least one Annual Review process prior to this focus group • Be over 18 • Have given consent • Currently work in Placement LA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification for group of participants highlighted in main body of thesis and is due to their role within Annual Reviews. • Experience of engaging in at least one Annual Review was required so that the participants could consider the focus group questions in relation to their lived experience. • Age of 18+ and consent were requirements in line with ethical approval for practitioner participants. If under 18, parental consent would also have been needed. • It was also important that participants worked/lived within the same LA. This is because practice varies between authorities and the Appreciative Inquiry approach used for this study was based on supporting future practice within one organisation (i.e. one LA).

Appendix 4 Focus Group Stage 1 PowerPoint



An appreciative inquiry
approach into annual
reviews

Josie Murray Trainee Educational Psychologist



Agenda

- Hello and introductions
- Focus group guidance
- Aims of the study summary
- Appreciative inquiry overview
- Question overview
- Consent confirmation
- Discovery questions
- Dream questions

Introductions and check in

On this sheep-scale,
how do you feel today?



3

Focus group guidance

- Be respectful over others' views and experiences.
- Allow all to have a space to talk. It is ok if there is a difference of opinion- it is good to share these as well as when we agree.
- Mute yourself when you are not speaking but please have your camera on if possible.
- Try and make sure you are in a confidential space. Please do not name colleagues etc. directly in anecdotes.
- Be respectful of others confidentiality- do not share who else was in the project outside of the focus group.
- You can have a break or leave the research at any point.

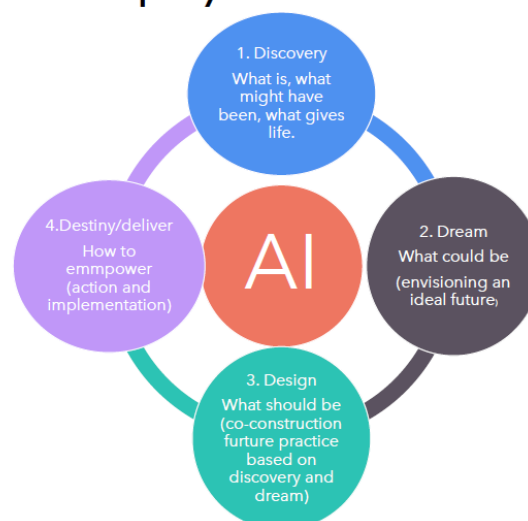
4

Aims of the study summary

- The overall aim of this research is to consider the annual review process. This process is the annual procedure in which an Education Health and Care Plan is reviewed.
- The purpose of this research is to explore what is already working well in relation to annual reviews, in addition to thinking about what could be expanded on to improve the annual review process.
- This will be done through Appreciative Inquiry which focus' on how to build on what is already working well.

5

Appreciative Inquiry overview



6

Question overview

Discovery questions

- Can you share your experiences of being a part of annual reviews?
- Can you tell us what the 'best parts' of your annual review experiences have been that you would like to experience again?

Dream questions

- If a miracle happened which meant that we all went to sleep tonight and from tomorrow all annual review processes were good- How would we know this was the case?
- Can you tell me about what you think would help this dream come true?
- I am wondering how you might finish this sentence 'The annual review process could be better if.....'

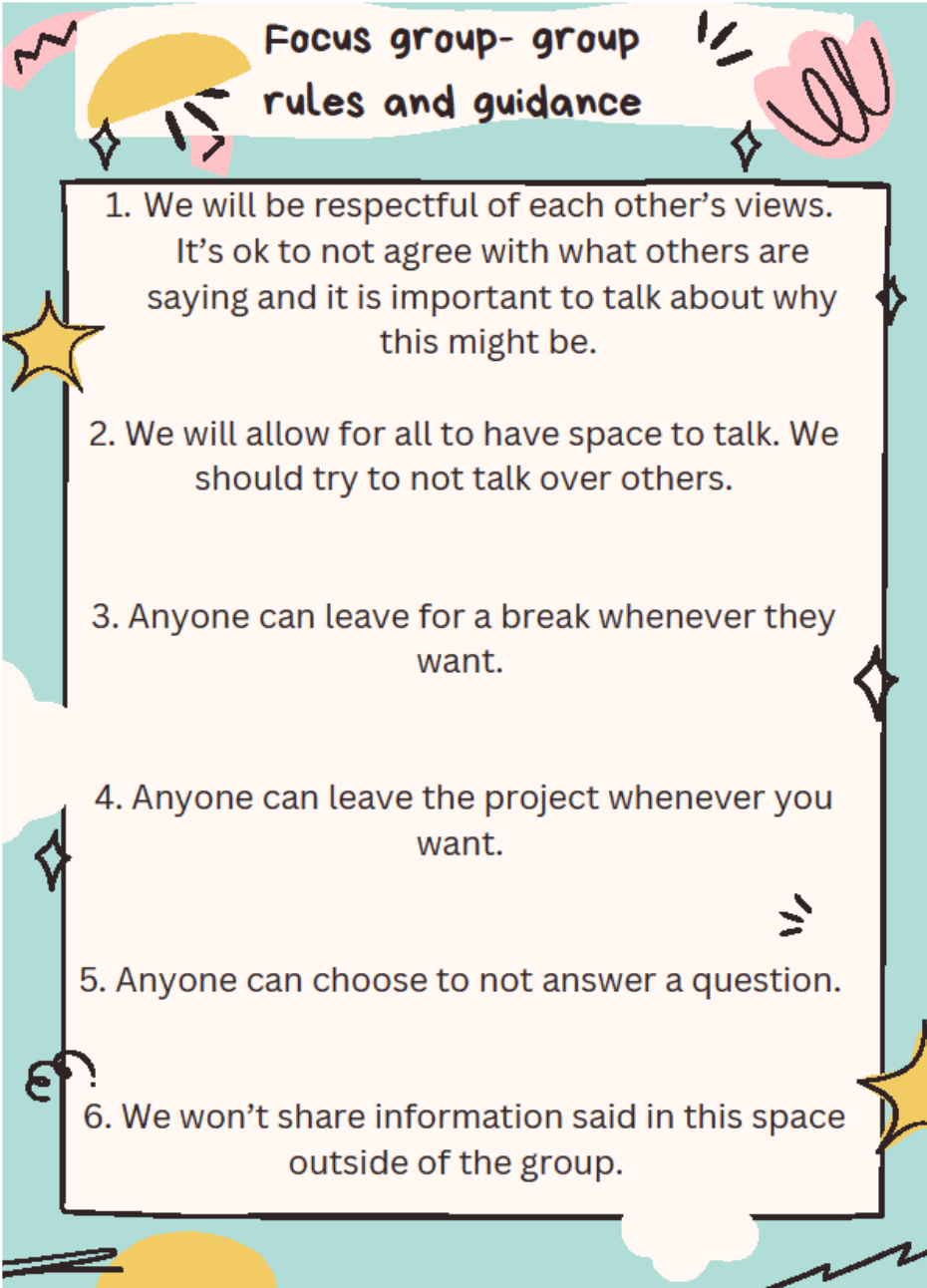
7

Consent to record

We will be recording the focus group from now- let's get started.

8

Please note that the pupil focus group did not have a focus group as it was in-person. Therefore, please see below the pupil focus group rules which was used instead of the above PowerPoint to support the introduction to the session.

A decorative graphic with a light teal background. At the top, a yellow semi-circle with radiating lines is on the left, and a pink scribble with radiating lines is on the right. The title 'Focus group- group rules and guidance' is centered in a white banner. Below the banner is a large white rectangular box with a black border, containing six numbered rules. The box is decorated with a yellow star on the left, a yellow starburst on the right, and a yellow starburst at the bottom right. There are also some white cloud-like shapes at the bottom of the page.

Focus group- group rules and guidance

1. We will be respectful of each other's views.
It's ok to not agree with what others are saying and it is important to talk about why this might be.
2. We will allow for all to have space to talk. We should try to not talk over others.
3. Anyone can leave for a break whenever they want.
4. Anyone can leave the project whenever you want.
5. Anyone can choose to not answer a question.
6. We won't share information said in this space outside of the group.

Appendix 5 Participants Consent Form

An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews

Please tick the appropriate boxes in order to provide consent for participant in this research.

This form should take you no more than 5 minutes. If you have any questions, please refer to the information sheet you have already been provided with or feel free to contact myself on: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

* Indicates required question

Taking Part in the Project

1. I have read and understood the project information sheet, or the project has been * fully explained to me.

If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

3. I agree to take part in the **first stage of this** project. I understand that taking part in the project will include attending one online focus group with other stakeholders to discuss Annual Reviews and how to improve them moving forward. This focus group will take no longer than an hour and a half.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

4. 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.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

5. I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the * study at any time 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.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

6. I agree that whilst I am participating in this focus group, an audio and video * recording will be made. I agree to being recorded and for transcripts of these anonymised recordings to be used in the research.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

How my information will be used during and after the project

7. I understand my personal details such as name and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

8. I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this. *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

9. 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.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

10. 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.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

11. I understand that full anonymity cannot be guaranteed (see information sheet for more information). I will provide my preferred job title within this consent form if I wish for this to be altered.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers

12. I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this * project to The University of Sheffield.

Tick all that apply.

Yes

No

Participant information

13. Name of Participant *

14. Email address I wish for correspondence to be sent to *

15. Please confirm your job role (if participating as a Parent/Carer please state this) *

16. Please list here the job title you wish to be used in the write up of this research (if different to actual title)

17. **Signature**- please type your name here to confirm your consent in participation *

Project contact details for further information Researcher:

Josie Murray Researcher

jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

Trainee Educational Psychologist

The School of Education
The Wave
Faculty of Social Sciences
2 Whitham Road
Sheffield
S10 2AH

Project contact details for further information Thesis supervisor:

Lynne Mackey

Thesis supervisor

I.Mackey@sheffield.ac.uk

The School of Education
The Wave
Faculty of Social Sciences
2 Whitham Road
Sheffield
S10 2AH

Project contact details for further information programme co-director:

Penny Fogg, MA (Psy), PGCE, MSc (EdPsych)

Co-Director DEdCPsy course

P.Fogg@sheffield.ac.uk

School of Education

The School of Education
The Wave
Faculty of Social Sciences
2 Whitham Road
Sheffield
S10 2AH

Thank you!

Thank you for completing this form.

Appendix 6 Prepared Focus Group Questions

The following is a list of questions based on Appreciative Inquiry were used in a semi-structured way in the focus groups. These were submitted and approved as part of the ethics procedure prior to the research.

Please note that the below questions were proposed prior to the changes in design.

Therefore, the Design and Destiny questions listed below were not used within the study following changes to the design.

Pupil Interview Questions

Stage of Appreciative Inquiry	Questions
<p>1) Discovery- What is, what might have been, what gives life.</p> <p>What gives life- meaning, what is helping things grow and continue to develop. Things that are helping us grow and thrive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you know about Annual Reviews? • Can you tell me about a time when you joined in with an Annual Review? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What happened? ▪ How did you feel about this? ▪ What was the best bits about this experience? What happened to make you think ‘that went well?’ ▪ What were not so good bits about this experience? What happened to make you think ‘this shouldn’t be like this’. <p>If no or few pupils have experience of Annual Reviews, I may ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you share with us an example of a time you have felt that your opinion mattered? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What happened? ○ Who was involved? ○ How did this make you feel? ○ What helped you feel like this? • Can you tell us about a time when you have met with a practitioner or member of staff in school, and you felt that it was a good experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What made it good?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What happened? ○ How did you feel about this? ● Can you share an example where you felt that your opinion was really listened to and helped change something? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What happened? ○ How did you feel about this?
2) Dream- what might be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If I had a magic wand that could make Annual Reviews amazing and the best they could be- what would this look like? How would people feel? How would pupils be a part of them? ● Can you share what you think should happen in meetings about pupils in relation to their education? Should pupils be involved? What would this look like? How would this make you feel?

Parent/Carer and Practitioner Questions

Stage of Appreciative Inquiry	Questions
<p>1. Discovery- What is, what might have been, what gives life.</p> <p>What gives life- meaning, what is helping things grow and continue to develop. Things that are helping us grow and thrive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can you share your experiences of being a part of Annual Reviews? ○ Can you tell us what the 'best parts' of your Annual Review experiences have been that you would like to experience again? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How were you and others involved in this? ▪ How did these best bits make you feel? ▪ What wider influences supported this positive experience? ▪ What/who made these good experiences possible? ▪ What helped you feel like you were important in this process (including wider contextual factors)? <p>If negative experiences are brought up in this section, I will ask questions to gain more information which might include:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What were the ‘not as good parts’ of this experience you do not want to be repeated? ▪ How did these not so good experiences make you feel? ▪ What wider influences were involved in this negative experience? ▪ How did this effect how you engaged in the process?
<p>2. Dream- what might be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a miracle happened which meant that we all went to sleep tonight and from tomorrow all Annual Review processes were good- How would we know this was the case? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who would be involved? ▪ What would happen? ▪ How would you feel? How would others feel? ▪ What would the knock-on effects be? ▪ Would wider contexts/influences also have changed? • Can you tell me about what you think would help this dream come true? • I am wondering how you might finish this sentence ‘The Annual Review process could be better if...’
<p>3. Design- what should be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about what has been shared about what is working well already and what the dream is- what <i>should</i> be happening to make the dream a reality? • What changes could be put in place to support Annual Reviews be <i>good</i>? • What needs to be in place to support the dream in reality? How would we know that these were working and helping us make our dream come true? • What <i>needs</i> to happen to make our dream come true. What would be nice extra’s?
<p>4. Destiny/deliver- what will be?</p>	<p>Thinking about what people who this is important to have already said about Annual Reviews and what they like and what they dream:</p>

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ what <i>will</i> be happening within every Annual Review process to make the dream come true?○ What could we do today? Who needs to help with this?○ What could we do in the next three months to help the dream? Who do we need to help? What actions need to happen? Is there anything that might stop us doing this?○ What could we do in the next six months to help the dream? Who do we need to help? What actions need to happen? Is there anything that might stop us doing this? |
|--|--|

Appendix 7 Example of Appreciative Inquiry Questioning Used

This table highlights examples of how additional Appreciative Inquiry questions were used to support the focus groups in addition to the core Appreciative Inquiry questions prepared and used within the focus groups.

Stage of research	Part of 4D cycle	Core question	Additional question examples
1	Discover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you share your experiences of being a part of Annual Reviews? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Do you think there's any particular kind of individuals or processes or wider context that make that more likely to happen and more positive?” “Do you find that that is like a culture within the school or particular individuals that are good at certain things?” “Can you think of an example where you thought all that whole process went really well. Is there kind of a few that stick out?”
	Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a miracle happened which meant that we all went to sleep tonight and from tomorrow all Annual Review processes were good- How would we know this was the case? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “And how would you feel like if you went to an Annual Review where everyone was invited everyone had the time everyone prepared everything, the CYP was invited. They had it in their favourite room with their favourite snack with their teacher. Paperwork came in afterwards and you knew exactly whether that needed amending or that needs a funding request. How would you feel if kind of all of that had gone well?”

Appendix 8 Excerpts of Analysis Process

Step 1 Develop Research Questions

Final research questions

- What values, experiences, and involvements 'give life' to the Annual Review process?
- What are pupils', Parent/Carers' and practitioners' dreams and hopes around the future practice of Annual Reviews?
- What can we learn from previous experiences and hopes for the future in relation to Annual Review processes moving forward?

Step 2 familiarise yourself with the data

Example of extracts of anonymised transcripts.

Example 1- Pilot Stage 1 Focus group extract:

Assistant SEND Officer 1: Yeah, I think the only thing I would probably add is there's ones that you see that the EHCP has served its purpose and then we can cease. We have had in the East where we have had settings come to us and by Year Seven or Year Eight, for example, we feel like this EHCP has been amazing throughout primary however now that we've got them and in Year Seven, we feel like we'd like to do a year on zero funding to see... and so I think those are really positive because the EHCP was realistically when you look at the background research, it was never set out to be a 25 year long process. It was set out to serve a purpose help that child reach the targets and then cease and those that we get in and they are a rarity but you're like, oh my God, you can see that that child has come from that, Nursery kind of shadow, kind of, real struggle and complicated child, to now you would just not recognize them from that first plan to where they are now and that is a rarity, I mean as a SEND TEAM PRACTITIONER and I think overall we have had 2, I mean we had one of yours S didn't we in the west when I was in the west and we put it on a zero funding for a year and then we cease to and now I've had one and in the East but I mean, I've been here three years and that's only two and I think it's that much....

Assistant SEND Officer 2: I've seen one it just GCSE and he had done brilliantly in his GCSE's, and they decided he didn't need it in place for a level. And so, we ceased it after his results in August, I think they held a review early September and said this child, he feels he doesn't need the support and the provision that set out in F anymore. He's done really well. I think he was still having TA support throughout GCSEs, but actually not really needing it but.erm... that's really good.

TEP: And what you think I was just gonna say do you think there's a context or values that are held in situations like that that can make that happen. Like in the school or do you think they feel confident in themselves as a school or anything like that?

Assistant SEND Officer 1: Yeah. Yeah.

Assistant SEND Officer 1: And I think it could again it's down so that experience because them SENCO have kind of looked and have gone, now we can meet these needs with just reasonable adjustment the funding that we get from our element like one and two anyway without needing anything extra and I think sometimesit comes down to some settings don't really know how to effectively put that support in place. So then you have that velcro effect of a TA and then they never want to lose that but then other schools that are really quirky in their way of using the EHCP, you can

really see those ones that are really adaptive kind of use their initiative and those are kind of things that you then look at and you go over they've actually asked for a decrease in funding or they've asked for a zero level or you can see where they've done that and then you can see the settings that I really stuck in their ways and just go we've got this we don't ever want to lose it and they won't really try anything new or anything different. So again, I think it's that sometimes EHCPs, although it's like parents and they are that voice for that child and their amazing sometimes in those situations like they can maybe sometimes be seen as they do inhibit that progress because the school become so reliant on it ..or they have the funding and that's how they pay their TAs or so again, I think it's those kind of we've had three probably like I say don't know maybe in three years and when we've got 3,500, education healthcare plans in our Authority.... it's massive init. you think what that purpose was for but those tiny wins or there's ones that we get that are going off to university and we end up ceasing, they are becoming more frequent. But again, I would say they probably are from the same settings? You wouldn't yeah, and I think.... there's a common theme it's the settings and the SENCO's that then kind of influences how effective or not effective the EHCP and the paperwork is so then whether outcomes are met and whether it's a positive or... you get those reviews that every year they come in the want amendments and I think it's a common theme with regards to the actual setting the SENCO themselves and how they want to use their initiative or their training or you know, maybe if they're more stuck in the way, so I would definitely say that we do have those small wins, and it's definitely again, those settings that we know are a bit more and imaginative and a bit more inclusive and a bit more.. that we would get those requests from rather than some of our more needy settings that just need that funding forever.

TEP: Yeah, sorry Assistant SEND Officer 2, I feel like I cut you off before. Did you want to add anything?

Assistant SEND Officer 2: And no no I'm alright.

TEP: okay, so if we move on to the dream bit then so if I was to cast a miracle overnight, but you didn't know about it and this miracle meant that all Annual Review processes were the dream, they are exactly what we want and exactly what we needed from the individual level to the whole National level if you wanted you can change anything and I'm just wondering how would we know because I've not told you this miracles happen. So how would we know that this miracle would be a thing? What would we be seeing a lot? how would we be feeling and how would others be acting things like that?

Assistant SEND Officer 2: I'd like to think we saw dramatic progress in young people given that the correct provision was in place and they. you know.... That's what I'd like to see.

TEP: Yeah...what would make that happen? Do you think? how would we make sure that the provision was in place through the Annual Reviews?

Assistant SEND Officer 2: it's accurately and inclusively and assessing what that child actually needs and yeah, I guess it's comes down to lots of things like a very skilled teacher and an accurate assessment by an EP. you know...in your training you will have seen this but that EPS can come in one day in a child behaves very differently and that they come in another day or depending on what's occurring in child's life that given time but yeah, I mean we'd see amazing paperwork and less stressed SENCO's.

TEP: What would the paperwork look like?

Assistant SEND Officer 2: What would the paperwork look like? it would be very much different compared, depending on the child. It would be different depending on a primary school age child or a college-age young person. I guess it would reflect that Key Stage it would reflect that individual and.... You know... people would be attending meeting and would have all the time in the world, so they wouldn't be rushed to finish or to get through process. They would be.... I mean I'm talking in a completely idealistic way. But if you're a SENCO and you've got two Annual Reviews booked for your one afternoon of SENCO time in a given week then there is a time restriction, and you haven't got time to.... let's take a break because James needs, a brain break. Let's go and have a look around

the playground and give them a break and then we'll come back in and look at the next thing and I don't know....

TEP: So, students would be at annual reviews?

Assistant SEND Officer 2: Definitely. Certainly, for part of it and they'd be there with someone probably with a TA that works closely with them or class teacher. You don't always have the class teacher in the Annual Review despite the fact that the class teacher is with that child day in day out and that just feels ludicrous to me I come from a teaching background. I had two children in my class with EHCPs, and I never got invited to the Annual Review. And neither did the TA because they couldn't afford to have us out of the classroom because of the other children there. So, the SENCO would go and the SENCO did know the children, but it's not the same

TEP: So, you getting the right people in the room as well as important in this dream.

Assistant SEND Officer 2: Parents don't always turn up. Yeah, I see that quite a lot. And when it comes to transition, it becomes quite stressful because it's like 'well you're going to have to hold it without them because if they're not engaging, we've got to hold it without them' but pretty important people to be at that review.

TEP: Yeah, so if we were thinking about our dream and parents, what do you think we could do to make parents feel more able to attend?

Assistant SEND Officer 2: I guess it's working lives, isn't it? It's a challenge for that. I guess you could, hold it outside of working...day, but that's tricky for the SENCO or other professionals. It's that flexibility. I mean work, any employer should be allowed should be giving parents time off to attend things like that. They are sort of carers time, but whether they do or not, whether if you've got a child with severe needs for example, that's going to put pressure on your employment generally, so then asking to take time out for a review which might take two three hours out of your working day.

Example 2- SENCO Stage 1 Focus group extract:

SENCO 1: I think for me, it would be, When I turned up to work, invited everybody and that my colleagues from health and social care had turned up, and were wanting to have a positive discussion about what they were doing. As well. So, I think because I think there are two bits really to it. I'd like to see that really positive student focused, understanding the family, with an eye on the future and that planning side of it to be really cohesive with everybody. And then I would like it that it wasn't down to the SENCO to make the decisions about what needed to change in a local authority plan. I feel that I just, like SENCO 2 said, get frustrated with erm where I think there needs to be change, particularly in Year Seven. I've spent a lot of time changing what was very primary based support. And outcomes, not so much, don't worry me so much because we would use our termly support plans anyway for that. And I think outcomes are a little bit more flexible in the EHCP with how they are used. But certainly, some of the interventions that we would do differently, we have a discussion parent and say 'well it won't like that here but it will look like this' and they say 'Yeah, that's great. That's absolutely fine. Well actually, I'd like that in the plan'. So, I'm fed up with saying, 'well we have to just take the Annual Review as an appendices to the plan and then we'll read them both in conjunction'. I would like it that somebody took what I did and go actually, 'I can see that this is more appropriate this young person, that it sounds as if they've gone through and obviously considered in taking a professional advice from other people. And this section is no longer relevant, and it should be this that's put in' and then that happens. Rather than it being the blanket 'Year Seven's doesn't get updated because they've just been done in Year Six so why would we update them again, it's only been a year?', 'because they're not relevant to our setting that's why', and then not everybody needs an update at the end of Year Nine, It might be more appropriate for them to have an update at the end of Year 10. Just because of where they are with their progress and things. SoI can completely understand why they do it like that, but it takes away that personal centred approach, doesn't it? It's like 'I'm sorry. We can't update your plan for you for another two years because you don't hit the marker that the

authority are working on.' So yeah, I just love it. If I submitted all my paperwork and everything came back.

TEP: What do you think the knock-on effects would be for student... parents...you...if that happened.

SENCO 2: I think.

SENCO 1: Sorry, I think for our students, they would see that they're making progress. I shy away little bit in the reviews from going through the actual document because some of the students, obviously... some of it's quite brutal, isn't it? Because it's your child's worst day that's recorded. No parent and child want to sit there and hear all that, they already know that they're struggling, by the time they get to us they know that they're finding X, Y and Z difficult. So I think if there was a way that the local authority could take some of the information from the discussion but also some of our recommendation and look at it and update it, it would be a document that is more appropriate for the young person to have ownership of... I think for parents, it would make it feel as if it was a live document rather than something, I mean, even where we photographs in and we cut and paste them on the photographs aren't updated. So, we have the joke with the Year 10's 'oh look that's the picture when you were in Year Four' and 'haven't you grown? You've now got beard'. And so, I think those little sort of things that would make a huge difference for young people to having ownership of that document.

TEP: Yeah.

SENCO 2: And I think for like the parents, for the child and for school to have their voice heard, and be valued, because actually, when it comes down to the Annual Review, we're not seen as a professional... school. We are not and it's my biggest argument I have with the local authority, probably on a weekly basis at the moment is, we are not seen as a professional, but we are the one that spending six and a half hours a day with this child yet, the Behavior Support team and the Education Psychologist team are fantastic and we couldn't do our jobs without their support, but they drop in and might see them for 20 minutes, half an hour, and have an hours discussion with the parent. But yet, that is what the plan is written on. That's what the provisions written on, that's what the funding is based on. But yet, we are not included as a professional. I spent hours, as will SENCO 3 and SENCO, 1 writing an application for it to just be ignored, but I'll get off from my soap box now, because.... I said all this to the local authority last week too.

TEP: Yeah, rightly so....so in our dream, it shouldn't be a dream, it should be reality. You'd be.... felt that you were valued and...

SENCO 2: Yeah.

TEP: your time and influence and that it's because you are experts in these children and you spend a lot of time with them, what happens every day, what they need and what's working, what's not working. So, you a whole shift in you being more valued, but would be a thing?

SENCO 2: Yeah, definitely. And the outcomes we've always been trained to write SMART outcomes, but yet now we're getting a plan going in a Year Two, and you've got to set outcomes for the end of Year Six. But yet, I'm not allowed to look at my crystal ball, even though I know a child without a plan, who probably needs a plan is going to really struggle, but I can't sit, I can't apply for a plan yet because they aren't at that point of our level of struggle, they've got to fail before we can go for the plan. We need to be proactive. We need to change the way the systems are, and I will stop now.

Example 3- EP and Social Worker 1 Focus group extract:

TEP: Yeah, yeah, super thank you. What would be a good experience of a review or generally your experiences on your reviews?

Social Worker: EP really, there very varied, it depends entirely on the school. I mean, some are I really good. Send you the paper beforehand. And some you are walking into others and just sort of wing it to be honest and often that I find... From a social care perspective, because its obviously very education based, I sometimes wonder what my role is in turning up. I mean it's fine if we've got concerns or something in terms of, living arrangements, placement breakdown, then that's fine. But again, like I'm sure like you guys, your workload is through the roof. There's not enough hours in the day so to be. Especially when it's a face-to-face review and you've got travel time to include and have you got any updates from Social care? 'No, same as last time.'

TEP: Yeah. Yeah.

Social Worker: I think I could have sent you that an email and save three hours. I mean, but don't get me wrong, some are really lovely. And it's wonderful to hear how well the kids are doing academically. But I work really closely with my foster carers and schools anyway. So, I always know where my kids are at and I mean if time wasn't an issue, I would love to go to all the kids reviews and all the face to face PEPs. But yeah, I think again and often like EP said, I don't always understand the reason that I'm there. It's almost like when it's a review we invite every professional for the sake of it being a review and really, we need to look drilling down 'Okay what we're coming together for what are the issues who's best adding to this discussion really'

TEP: Yeah, and what kind of? Conversations or who do you think should be thinking about those things? Who is it like SENCO's? Is it people in the local authority?

Social Worker: I mean, I think it's obviously, from an education point of view. You've got obviously the EWO and the SENCO, I think they certainly need to be there from education that... I think again, foster carers, you would like them to be there, but they're not always there. The same with birth parents, unfortunately, two three of my 16 kids on roll, parents attend, birth parents. I mean obviously they're in care for a reason and not all parents are sort of interested really in education. I think it's a professional discussion maybe that with the education side of it really. Again, it's difficult for me because from I work with SENCOs and EP and things like that, but don't really know who's responsible. We have virtual school it's sort of such an umbrella. I don't actually know which person.... my first, but I've got a school issue. I'd go to an EWO but then they might send me to somebody in the SEND team, so I don't really know myself, to be honest I just turn up when I'm needed to.

TEP: Yeah.

TEP: Sometimes I guess people don't always turn up maybe parents or professionals that you think they can contribute to this on Annual Review. Have either of you got kind of good experiences when actually everyone's been there that needed to be there and kind of what led, what good things kind of came out of that.

EP: I think I've had a recent one where there is a question mark about whether she'll maintain in mainstream or whether this is the right time to consider a special school placement, and everybody was there. and that.... she had health needs, some social care needs and that was a really good one because it was just everyone was in the picture then and. Parents could because kind of see everybody involved, I suppose and gather everybody's opinion about the situation so that was a good one. And then I've had another again, where it's really nice. It's the young person's doing very, very well but I really didn't need to necessarily be there.

TEP: And on the ones where you think everyone did need to be there. What was the outcome of that for the kind of I guess you might not know...if it's a recent one. Would processes did the kind of changes and requests and things like that go through, okay?

EP: I think they.... After parents have had a proper look of all the schools. There will be, decision that they're going to make about whether they're requesting at this time or not. So, I think it was good to sort of, get everybody's different opinions of the situation for parents to hear that and Yeah.

TEP: Yeah. Social Worker. Have you got an example when kind of maybe parents or foster careers did manage to attend and where that was positive.

Social Worker: As I say, in my experience doesn't often happen. I think again, there are a lot of reasons but I think for me a lot of it is we have our children with kinship carers, but they don't always have positive relationships. So, I've got several who are living with family members, but the relationship between birth parents and family members has broken down. So foster careers will say I'm not going if they're going and vice versa and then it's like right who should get priority because foster carers, it's their day today. But these are birth parents with PR. and unfortunately, I've got a lot of mine like that, so, I also invite, whichever party's coming. I mean, obviously you try and explain this, need to be amicable for the sake of the child, but don't always work like that. But trying to get everybody's views to sort of represent them and I've got the odd couple where both have turned up but again, I think it's difficult because foster care is because they're there today. They've got a lot of feedback to add to professional meetings, whereas birth parents' majority, see them for an hour and a half once a month. and they're outside of school. So, I do question, what context they can add to a meeting about education when the not often involved in education. That's my experience in the CLA team, it could be obviously different from other professionals.

EP: There was a good one I went to recently where parents were thinking of something a bit more special, enhanced resource provision. And actually, that young person probably will be okay mainstream. That was quite a good one where you think it was good that school invited me to that one because we were able to reflect on what is it, they actually want from and their secondary school education. And the parents were saying, we do want them to access after school activities, because that's where he gained his self-esteem and things like that. And that the enhanced resource, we looked at finishes quite early. So, they won't be able to do that. And actually, is really good with his peers. So, we're able to drill down what actually the young person would actually benefit from for a secondary environment and parent and parents had only gone down one route because they haven't been able to see the other school and hadn't been able to have a conversation. Because the school hadn't returned their call... so it was like actually if you had a proper, look at the other alternative and then you can make that decision based on everything you've said today. But that was quite good, actually that one because we were able to address what could be a sticky point further down the road. If we're saying that they shouldn't go to an enhanced resource because they can access mainstream it was good to have conversation.

TEP: Yeah, I'm just thinking about what kind of Values there help that not become a sticky situation, where actually parents felt that actually, they did know to do that route or maybe there weren't feeling like there what their concerns were being voice. So, I guess maybe the SENCO or like yourself, that kind of making sure that everyone felt valued, that they could contribute and openly discuss different options, maybe help that happen.

EP: I think a lot of parents because it's another year, they don't realize that processes have to be started earlier. And, you know decisions made about secondary school choices or primary school choices. I've had another one recently whether what do you mean We have to go around and look at this point like, It's October a decision needs making relatively soon. And so, I think, we're so in the system of things we know, when decisions have to be made and particularly parents with when their child's got additional needs, they don't realize is that added element of making a decision sooner because if a child doesn't have those additional needs there is, January can be a deadline for primary school, meaning it's earlier.

Example 4- Pupil Stage 1 Focus group extract:

TEP: So, if we think about maybe a time when you've talked to a teacher or MRS. X or your parents about how anyone can support you in school or your information to help you. Can you think of any positives that you felt, yeah, that was really fun or that was really helpful to and helped me in school?

Can you any just general conversations, chitchats, anything like that? Has anyone got any experiences of that?

K: I did, but I don't remember at the moment.

TEP: You don't remember? That's okay. There's lots of questions coming at you, isn't there? What about if we imagine an Annual Review meeting? And let's maybe think about the dream bit for a bit and what would the perfect Annual Review meeting go Think about during, and the after.

TEP: think about before the Annual Review meeting. What would happen in the best dream situation? If I have a magic wand and I think this is going to be a perfect Annual Review meeting for you, what will happen?

Bob: you'd realize what would be best ways to help and what like to do if you do need help with anything else. That's what I can really think of.

TEP: That's a really good one though. So, if we think about that, thinking about the best ways to help, who might we ask to be involved in that?

Bob: People you trust. Maybe parents and teachers.

TEP: Mhm. Do you think you'd be involved in that conversation? Yeah. how would you like to be involved in that conversation?

Bob: Yeah. I don't really know.

TEP: It's quite tricky, isn't it? Cuz, I know sometimes if I go to a meeting and I'm asked something in a meeting kind of like what I'm doing now, it's really hard to think on the spot, isn't it? So sometimes I like things questions being sent to me beforehand or I like talking in a smaller group beforehand before going to a bigger group. Do you think anything like that might be helpful? Yeah. What do you think? Do you think being asked beforehand because you were nodding there? Who do you think it would be good to talk to?

Tommy: Parents and Key workers. (talk before a meeting about what will happen)

TEP: And would you like them to just have a conversation with you? Do you think it would be good if they brought an activity? What sort of Got a nod at an activity. What sort of activities would you think?

K: If you're not in it, in the conversation, you could have a certain device like next to the chair. So that if you're not in it, you can just go on it until you're asked a certain question, then you'll be back in the conversation.

TEP: Do you mean you're playing on a game or something until they have a question for you? Yeah. So, if we're thinking about being in the meeting, do you think it's worth being in the whole meeting or then do you think maybe part of a meeting then?

K: For the ones I've been in, I've only been in for half of the meeting. But if you wanted to be in the full meeting, I think that would be a perfect idea. If you're not in the conversation, you're doing something instead of just sitting there.

TEP: Okay. And what's it like being in a room with people talking about you and your EHCP?

K: It's all right cuz I know what it's like to be autistic since I've had it for 10 years now. I say that I don't know when I got it.

Bob: you're born with it.

K: No, I got it when I was two.

Bob: So, you've had your whole life after you diagnosed.

K: Diagnosed. Yeah.

TEP: So, you're used to conversations about that are you?

K: Yeah, I'm used to it (having conversations about autism). I say I know how to control it. It's hard to control autism at the best of times and at the worst of times, it could just be a full-on flare up. So, you're just sitting there and not being involved, you're getting quite bored. So, you're going to need entertainment. So that's why if you're not in, you can go on a little game.

Bob: Just fidgeting. You could use a fidget toy.

K: Yeah. Yeah.

TEP: Do you all find fidget toys helpful? Yeah. It depends. What do you find helpful? Yeah.

Bob: Lego

K: To be honest, I built an 18 plus in just under three hours.

TEP: my gosh, that's impressive.

Bob: I really want to get the huge death star build but cost too much.

K: It was the centre 1988 World Championship car. That was under 3 hours. So easy. It was the most amount. And it said 18 plus.

Bob: The most number of pieces I've done for one set was around a thousand.

TEP: Wow, that's so many. How do they fit in your house?

Bob: They weren't big pieces. It was just smaller pieces. It was like a Star Wars one. dego bar when Luke was getting trained. Yeah. Yeah.

K: I think my brother's got that one

TEP: So, thinking about dream Annual Reviews, would LEGO go be there?

Tommy: I mean, yes, if you really wanted it, then yes. But if you just wanted more entertainment, then a device wouldn't hurt.

TEP: And has anyone cuz sometimes if people talk about me in a room when I'm there, I can get a bit shy, and it makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. Has anyone had that?

K: I get like that as well.

Bob: Feels a bit weird when I talk about myself.

TEP: Yeah. Yeah. Does anything help with that? Don't really know. No. Or has anyone had any good or bad experiences of that?

Bob: Probably. I can't remember.

K: I can't remember my own self.

Example 5- Parent/Carer Stage 1 Focus group extract:

TEP: Can you tell me about your experiences of being part of the Annual Review? Whether that's before, can talk about during or after the meeting. Does anyone to go first? Parent/Carer 1's.

Parent/Carer 1: Yeah, really difficult when you say to pick out the positives.

TEP: Yes.

Parent/Carer 1: So, I'll just give you it as it is So before the reviews, I don't think that even my son's setting, which is brilliant with him, can't fault them. But I don't think they understand the EHCP process because they'll send an invite out, they'll dictate the time, they tell you that there's only an hour which, I challenged once. And I don't think they understand... I think it's getting better, but they don't understand about when it's preparing for adulthood. I think they just need more knowledge on the whole process because for my sons I had to tell them when it was a preparing for adulthood one and had to tell them who... they say, 'who do you want to invite?' But I am a parent who knows who to invite. The majority of parents won't know who they're supposed to invite, who they can invite. They'll have never seen the code of practice, they might never have come across the support that I've had through all the Parent/Carers I've met, and all the meetings have been to. So, I think before, it's really lacking in giving a parent what they need so they know what it's about. Some parents would just get a letter from the school, and they won't know that that is even something in the code of practice and what should be done. So, I think there's a massive gap there that schools and settings should be able to.... So, my experience has got better at that because I've done some education along the way, which isand then your made to feel like 'that parent'. Which...I like that expression. I have occasionally been made to feel a little bit like. they think I'm overanxious or I am of a fussy or I think it's all about me and my son and no one else. But his EHCP Annual Review is about my son and no one else. So, that's before, during, I've had some good experiences but only because again, these are only because I've known what should be in them. So, if I'd never gone to that parent carer forum coffee morning, eight years ago, and then gradually got involved with the group and been to meetings on their behalf and been involved with people in the local authority, like asked to take part in workshops by the SENDART team and things like that, the 0-25 team. I wouldn't know how it should go, and I would say I'm the minority, I would imagine Parent/Carer 2 and Parent/Care 3 would probably, maybe think the same, I don't know, but most people don't know what should be included. So, I feel like I go in and I know what should be included, so I can sort of guide that meeting a bit. And I also know that my parental comments don't have to be in before the meeting because there's a lot of pressure, they said they need to see your parental comments two a weeks before and I know in the Code of Practice it says you should see everything before, but I've never ever had a report from anywhere two weeks before to look at. I am the person still who chases up the reports from health and social care and then ensures school have got them all and then ensures the local authorities got them all.... this sounds really negative but it's just if somebody,...

Parent/Carer 1: if somebody can't do that, if they haven't got the time to do that, if they can't understand it, if they've got a learning disability or problem themselves or if they've just had enough because one year, I just had enough couldn't cope with it and I actually employed somebody to do it. So that's like...sad init, really? And very fortunate for me, but, you know what I mean? So, I think that during and also, I have had cases where I invite, I always invite people from the local authority, and again, I think it's dependent on the staff. I think Parent/Carer 2 will understand this, because she's a Parent/Carer but others just don't get it. They've got no idea that it's about a whole young person's life. And they will say they are coming but not turn up. No apologies. And then can't get in touch with them to ask them why they didn't come, no replies. Quite often it's the same staff member over over again which I feedback over again over the last few years and nothing changes. So, what I do is I've been in contact the senior SEND TEAM OFFICER and so in my situation, I've had three complaints over the years because I knew how to do one because been to a meeting about them. I employed someone and she rewrote mine. She ripped it to shreds years ago. Rewrote it and we had to put a complaint in, because we're asking for certain things, like a social care assessment, and my SEND TEAM OFFICER didn't know that I was entitled to that, and that's a basic thing. They said, 'no, you can't have one'. So, we had to fight for that. Then the other compliment when my son's...I had discovered second hand that my Son's EHCP had been outsourced because they didn't have the staff at the local authority to an admin company down South somewhere, who just copied and pasted everything and nobody knew what happened to all his data and that was a big complaint. And then...I sound so negative I'm just telling you what it's like and then the last one, what I had to do was, again

contact the senior SEND TEAM OFFICER just to get a reply from my SEND TEAM OFFICER to get it done within the time scales. My current feedback I'm getting from a lot of people is that things are maybe being done in the timescales but at the quality level...it's...they're not getting good plans. And again, a Parent/Carer wouldn't know that they're not getting a good plan.

TEP: Yeah.

Parent/Carer 1: There's lots of things I've pointed out to local authority that should be on my plan that they're going 'no it shouldn't' and I go 'Yes it should' and that's where I show them the code of practice. And I'm desperate for other Parent/Carers to have that knowledge because I feel like those that shout the loudest are getting the greatest benefit and that is really gutting.

TEP: Yeah.

Parent/Carer 1: There's been some good practice is where you get that one.... It so much is dependent in this local authority I believe on the quality of the staff and the understanding of the staff. And if you get allocated that good one, you're on. If not.... No. And I feel quite strongly about parental guidance because you get given a little form from, my college give us a little form to fill in. There's no way I can fit everything on there. My views for my whole Son's future and his views etc. So, I write my own using a parental guidance that I got from contact and I was thrilled to let them know. 'No, I'm entitled to listen to what's discussed in the meeting first and then put my parental comments in'. And I don't feel, again, at the local authority that that is the parental contribution is as important. It is a professional's report. Right... I'll shut up now because that's a lot of the main things, I think you get the same things over again.

Example 6- Health Practitioner Stage 1 Focus group extract:

TEP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's great. Thank you, anyone else, want to share your experiences?

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: Yeah, I can go next.

TEP: Thank you.

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: So thinking about the job role that I'm in now and it's probably going to be a little bit similar for Specialist neuro-disability nurse, while we do try and attend the Annual Reviews, I think because we have such an emphasis on like time frames and there is sort of like a statutory.. more of a response with the initial assessments our, the majority of our work go into the initial assessments and I think that's something that means that the Annual Reviews kind of get put on the back burner a little bit like we do get sent the invites, but because, when we do try and attend where we can, but it's not always the case, and because there's not sort of that statutory element to it and because we are so inundated with the new assessments that's where our effort and our work kind of goes into more than the reviews and I think because of that, the reviews can be somewhat... not the best for the children, because what we end up doing is just maybe sending the last clinic letter, which isn't always... It's open for interpretation and it's not in layman's terms, obviously. So, it can be difficult to put that into a report if you know you're a SEN worker that's not familiar with the health terms.

But yeah, it's just obviously like capacity, capacity and demand and we don't obviously always have the capacity to be able to, to really do reviews. And that is because of the. all the statutory sort of guidance that goes in with the initial assessments.

TEP: Yeah, yeah. There's only so much time you have, isn't there? You've got to prioritise, yeah.

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I mean, in terms of positives, I mean, it is always good the way that you know the leads, the key worker does can kind of get the right

professionals there. And you know, we do get invited. And and that always seems to be really good. And we do get lots of documents. But yeah, I do. When I've seen reviews, I've, I've often thought that it's, they're not always the best. They're not always up to date. And I don't know if that's because the information hasn't been gathered because of the. You know, because of the lack of requirement in terms of statutory input. Does that make sense?

TEP: Mm hmm. Yeah, so there's not always the resources there to get all the information. Is that what you mean?

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: Yeah. Yeah. Because obviously, like we have time frames with the initial assessments and they're kind of you know. We have KPI's don't we and we have, you know, we have to work towards for those, but the review does not the same process and I think like we keep being told that there is going to be some sort of process coming in, but that's not the case as yet.

TEP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry ADCO I can see your hand up.

ADCO: Yes, I used to previously work within the same setting that Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner and Specialist neuro-disability nurse work at and.

Although I'm in a different organisation now. Even though, we did get invites and things like that... It was not always in a timely manner and things that was for the Annual Reviews, they became on a back burner.

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: Yeah.

ADCO: And also the difficulty that the clinicians have is they may see a child once a year. Or six monthly, whereas...so they have a disadvantage about a child's needs throughout an EHCP, like yeah, they can say about the health needs, but they may not have seen a child for six to 12 months.

So, and they're heavily relied on because of the setting they working, because they work within community paediatrics. So, for caseworkers and people from the local authority, they're heavily relying on the health information, but not kind of understanding what the clinicians kind of have to go through to create the health reports, if that makes sense.

TEP: Yeah.

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: And sometimes the children with them complex needs, their health needs does do change so rapidly that it's it's hard to keep up to date. You know, it's hard to say that this is the latest thing because two weeks down the line that could have completely changed. And I think obviously when we're thinking about people's time and capabilities, it's not always the right appropriate people at those review meetings because sometimes it is sort of like the senior consultant that knows the information, but they don't have time to attend these meetings.

TEP: And can you think of an example where you like? Oh, yeah, all the right people were at that Annual Review or. Oh, yeah, everything I had the time to attend that and that was beneficial. Like a good example of when it's been worth... good one. I don't know if that makes sense.

ADCO: Yeah, I've....

Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner: Yeah, definitely. When you get the right people there. Sorry. Carry on ADCO.

ADCO: Yeah. So for example, if a child was within a learning...like within a special school, and there may be transitioning from, I don't know.... because we used to have a college built on. So, if there was like transitioning from like secondary school to college, we would have like multi agency

professionals around the table and then we would have a transition plan for kind of what they wanted and their aspirations for going in the future and that would include like the teaching staff, the nursing staff.

Speech and language, the therapies. So that was always really positive to ensure that the child was going to get the correct support moving forward.

Step 3 Apply, Develop and Review Codes

3.1 Descriptive Codes Applied to the Data by Using Data-Led Approach.

List of sample examples of initial descriptive codes from Discovery phase from NVIVO

Name
A robust understanding of the local and statutory processes leads to effective paperwork to support the process.
Adjustments to support engagement without literacy skills needed.
Admin support for SENCOs supports the administration tasks and paperwork for Annual Reviews.
Annual Reviews are creating work for SENCOs outside of school hours.
Annual Reviews can be used to cease plans and celebrate success.
Child-centred and collaborative meetings which a reduced focus on note taking is supported by preparation of the paperwork prior to the meeting.
Class teacher attendance is as important as others also but not always prioritised.
Co-produced outcomes which were considered from each practitioner and are measurable is good practice.
Differences in approaches between LA's.
Difficult in having the CYP attend for the whole meeting when discussing them.
Difficulty in getting time and date that works for all involved to attend.
Focussing on the plan in the meeting means it is less personal, and the SENCO is less present.
Frustration over asking for changes to be made through the process and they not being accepted.
Having a consistent thread and joint, clear decision making throughout the paperwork allows paperwork to support the process.
Health attending meetings led to better outcomes and provision for school to support CYP due to gaining clarity and understanding from health input.
Lack of social care information being passed onto schools.

Name
Opportunities for joint working build rapport and support communication which positively impacts the process in relation to timescales.
Parents do not always attend Annual Review meetings and statutory processes mean decisions around if it must go ahead without parental involvement is needed.
Protective SENCO time allows SENCOs to attend training and spend time on admin which improves paperwork and that has a knock on effect to decisions linked to Annual Review paperwork.
Pupil input to Annual Review meetings and understanding of the process when they are younger will empower them later on and help them engage in the process when they are older allowing for them to improve their voice and participation in decision making
Pupil voice is an important part of the process and pupils should feel like the EHCP is supporting them
Services which are a big part of CYPs lives are not attending review meetings or contributing whereas others do.
Unfairness for parents to chase up information from other services.

Sample examples of initial descriptive code of extract from focus group:

Name of code: A robust understanding of the local and statutory processes leads to effective paperwork to support the process (Discovery).

Assistant SEND Officer 1	So just with regards to the actual erm . experience part of an Annual Review, I would say my experience is this kind of positive relationships and rapports that we have with settings. Erm because obviously, it's our job to remind them of those Annual Reviews that are dueand a good experience is probably that we would send the Annual Review reminder and they setting comes back and says yeah that's booked in for that date. And it's keeping in with the statutory time scales that are kind of set out in the send code of practice, so probably an experience for me would be ... I'll probably link to <i>LA Secondary School</i> because they're one of my more established schools and their review process is quite robust. It's very effective and if they're making a request from the Annual Review with regards like an increasing funding or something like that, they will always submit erm kind of a breakdown of the increase in funding that
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	<p>they want, what provision they'll be putting in section F, and so I guess yeah my experience is that working with the schools and having the schools that understand their statutory process and our statutory process.</p> <p>And I would say that it's more effective when the school understands that kind of abide by the guidelines that are set out and as well as has everything, they're ready to submit alongside the Annual Review paperwork and So yeah, that would probably be an experience that I would say is huge to my role.</p>
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Name of code: A clear checklist sent in the post would allow Parent/Carers to know what should be happening at what point.

Parent/Carer 1:	<p>I think it gives you confidence that if I get a list of things or a lot of the things, or a lot of the things I've got via Support groups or national ones and if I get a list that tells me what should be happening One, two, three, four. And I cross them off. I know I'm doing it right, or It's happening, If I had to go look it up and I couldn't find it on the local offer. I might be such a tizzy with myself. I'm just gonna give up. And then again, the young person's gonna lose out in the long run. Because they're not going to get the process they deserve.</p>
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Name of code: CYP would find attending an Annual Review meeting with a larger group of people hard.

K:	<p>It is hard for me cuz my autism it's hard. So, with this I'm comfortable. But if it was five or more...no. I mean five would be fine but six or more just No. Yeah. So, if there was and what about this room now I'm fine with. Because there's five people.</p>
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3.2 Developing Codes

Sample of early examples of developing codes through standardisation and consolidation:

Please note that stages 3.2 and 3.3 were repeated several times and occurred flexibility throughout the analysis stage of this research and therefore the examples above may not have been the final code as seen at the end of 3.3 due to the development of the codes.

3.2 developed codes which have been standardised and consolidated	Previous 3.1 Descriptive codes	Data
SENCOs have a large admin role within this process including completing paperwork. (Discovery).	Annual Reviews are creating work for SENCOs outside of school hours to complete paperwork (Discovery)	SENCO 2: I haven't physically got the time to do that at home and I am fortunate that I don't teach.... but there is always something happening in school isn't there for you to be taken away from me desk and to actually think 'no this is the one chance in a year I get to make a difference to that plan and change and be as reflective as it possibly is of the child'. But actually, sometimes it might take me all week to get one finished and that's difficult and...
	SENCOs have a large admin role within this process including completing paperwork (Discovery)	SENCO 1: I think, and I would say as part of this picture which isn't maybe the positive bit, is we are becoming just really expensive admin assistants
Room consideration would support CYP access to the meetings through an improved sense of safety and agency (Dream).	CYP would be pre-occupied if there were in a room they did not like (Dream)	Bob: I don't really know. But all I'd think about if I was in a room that I didn't really like just, all I'd be able to think about is getting out of there. Or when I'd be able to.
	CYP would be able to engage if the Annual Review meeting was in the best room (Dream)	K: that's actually a good idea because room. school...because if it's if it's a favourite room in school, then you're calmer, relaxed. But if it's set in a place that you don't exactly want it, then it's just ...can't think of anything cuz it's not the best room.
Accountability and input is not consistent across services and school are	SENCO feels that health lack accountability in relation to their input in	SENCO 2: I still feel health don't have that accountability. They don't provide the reports,

putting in the most contribution (Discovery).	comparison to education (Discovery).	they think that you are asking for something that is completely alien and yet it was quite clear back in 2014 when the Code of Practice was introduced what their role was a stakeholder and I just feel like we still arguing the same point, ten years down the line.
	Input is not consistent across services and is reliant on education (Discovery).	SENCO 1: So, I think that's the frustration because it feels very much like it is just a school thing, everything is very school and education based and the rest of it is not a part of that.
Transparency and communication is valued and appreciated by Parent/Carers above other things (Dream).	Parent/Carers value getting a response to communication (Dream).	Parent/Carer 1: I think that would be in the dream section, responding getting a response to any question or email or return phone call. Yeah.
	Parent/Carers would prefer practitioners being transparent to them over receiving things within timescales (Dream).	Parent/Carer 1: I would rather somebody rang me or reply to my email and said 'Look, we're really struggling. We've got no staff' or 'We've got loads of changes' or 'We've got someone...', I'd rather they told me that and it's not gonna get done on time them ignore.
	Parent/Carers being communicated with would provide a sense of relief and should be prioritised (Dream).	Parent/Carer 2: even with the flawed EHCP let me put it that way. Okay, I'm saying a flawed EHCP even if those things which we mentioned there were done and communicated to the parents, 'look we are doing this and that' it would make a massive difference. I'm not asking for a perfect EHCP. I'm saying a flawed EHCP. in bold letters flawed. And as long as we are communicated, what's happening around that EHCP and things are being met, even what's mentioned in that it would be a lot of relief for us, So yeah, ...

3.3 Reviewing codes to ensure descriptive and interpretative validity

Sample of reviewed codes

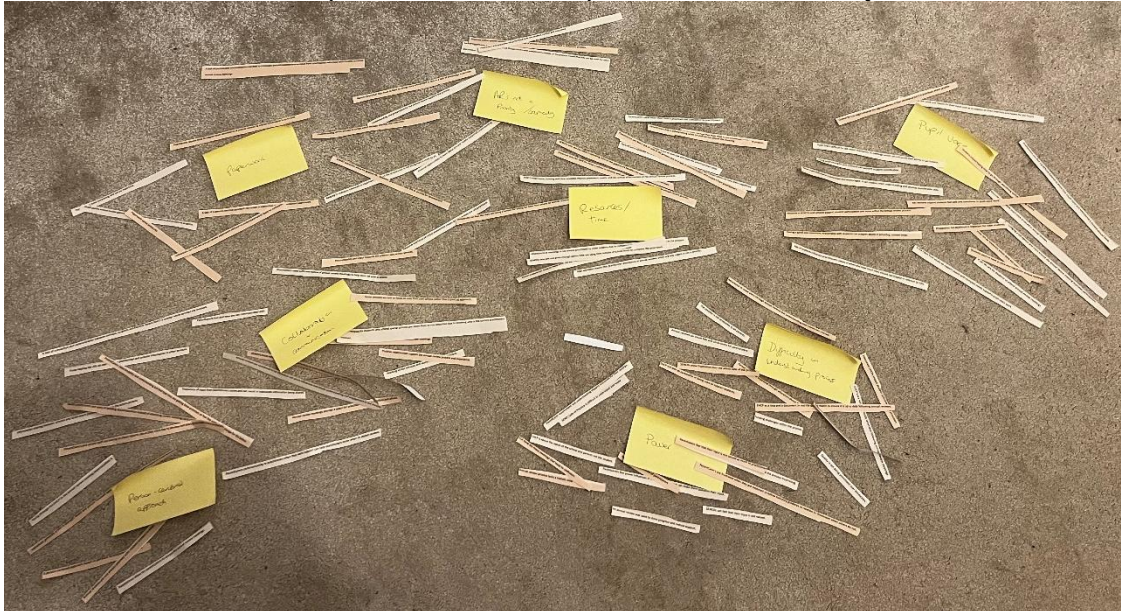
Discovery final code list sample	Dream final code list sample
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Reviews can lack a holistic view which limits influence. • A person-centred approach based on personal development is favoured. • Annual reviews are not always planned with CYP context in mind. • Going through the EHCP in the annual review meeting. depersonalises the experience. • Individuals generally prefer a strength based and person focussed approach to the meetings to support actions moving forward. • EHCP is not often being considered as purposeful or being used to support CYP. • A hierarchy of practitioner input viewed by the wider system can make the process frustrating to SENCOs. • Parent/Carer's are frustrated when they are expected to follow statutory guidance in relation to timescales when others do not. • Pupils find it difficult to talk about themselves in meetings which can influence their ability to participate. • Using pupil strengths and interests can support CYP contribution. • Genuine and creative pupil voice is valued in Annual Review process'. • Practitioners question the appropriateness of discussion CYP in front of them. • Parent/Carers feel that the process is just an exercise and does not prioritise their child. • Admin support for SENCOs helps with the administration tasks and paperwork for annual reviews. • Frequency of input from practitioners varies and can result in inaccurate information being shared. • Health practitioners are wary of sending documentation instead of attending review meetings as it can lead to misinterpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A robust and inclusive education system would result in fewer Annual Reviews as CYPs' needs would be met without an EHCP. • Adequate funding would support individual needs of CYP appropriately. • A more robust SEND support level would reduce need for EHCP. • SENCO input would be prioritised so that training, resources and allocated time is sufficient. • A person-centred and flexible approach would reduce bureaucracy and instead meet the needs of the CYP. • Pupil voice and participation allows CYP to contribute towards shared decision making. • CYP feel fidget toys and Lego may support their engagement in the Annual Review meeting. • CYP strengths and interests can be used to consider how their participation is supported. • CYP have their own opinion on how they can engage in meetings of different sizes. • CYP value the opportunity to gain information and meet unknown practitioners prior to Annual Review meetings to support their sense of safety. • CYP value preparation before the Annual Review meeting to consider what might be discussed. • Clear internal processes for Annual Review would ensure information was up to date and allow for the SEND team to know who was involved. • SENCO wellbeing would be improved if the annual review process was improved and simplified. • An EHCP as a live, up-to- date document would support CYP and make SENCO's feel like their work is worthwhile.

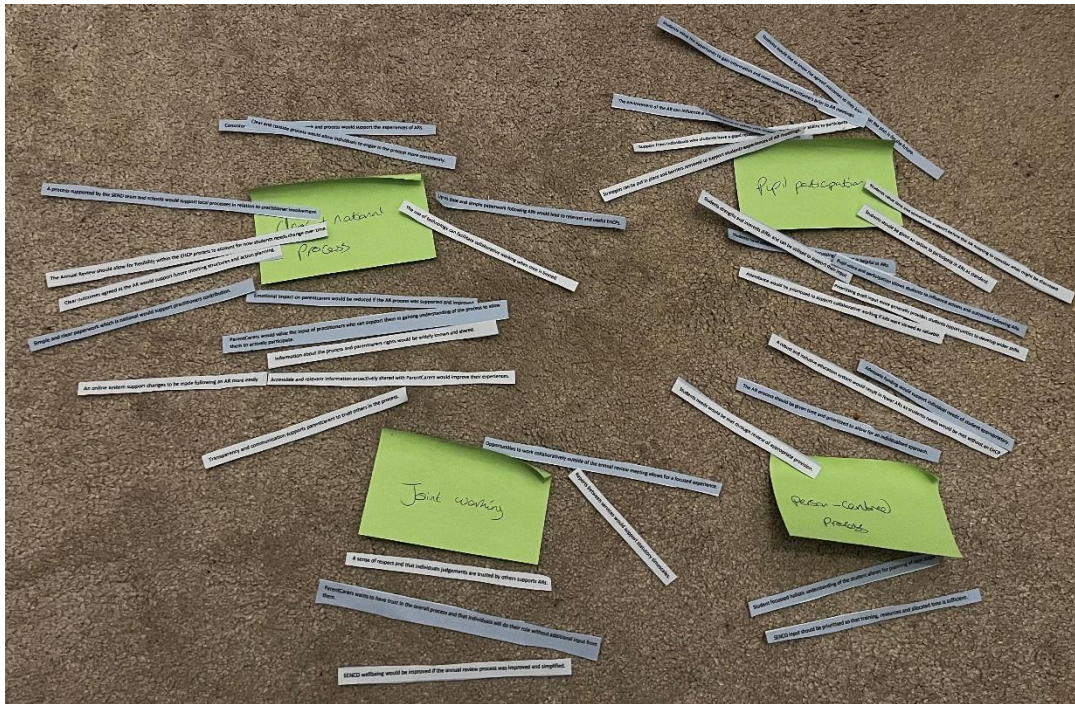
- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working across services and teams can support transitions. • High workload means that practitioner attendance at Annual Reviews which are less urgent is not a priority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review paperwork would be submitted and the EHCP updated showing respect in individuals input and CYPs' progress. • Up to date EHCPs would support the CYP and ensure it's relevant. • Consistency through national paperwork would support the experiences of Annual Reviews. • A sense of mutual respect and that individuals' judgements are trusted by others supports experiences of Annual Reviews. |
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Stage 4 develop and review themes

4.1 Developing themes

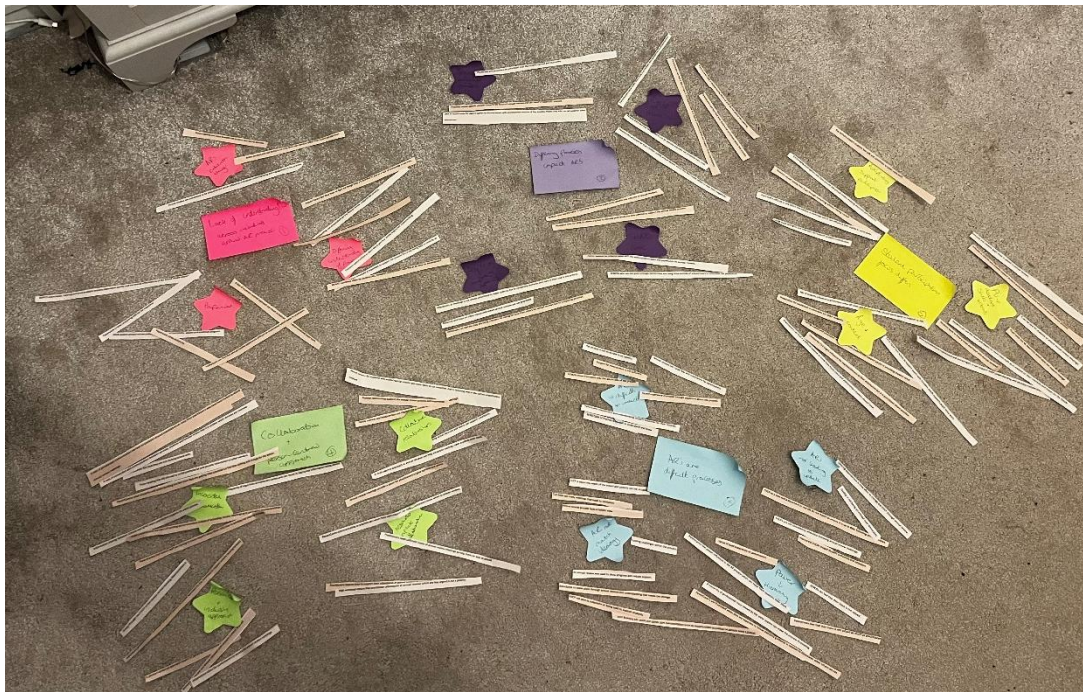
Please see below development of themes separated into Discovery and Dream themes.





4.2 Reviewing themes

Please see below further development of themes and subthemes, separated into Discovery and Dream themes.



Step 5- Conclusions and Reporting

Example of casual explanation summary (Discovery)

Overarching causal mechanisms	Causal Mechanisms	Events	Experiences
<p>3. A commitment to active CYP participation enhances their experiences of Annual Reviews and empowers them.</p>	<p>3.2 A person-centred approach enhances CYP participation in Annual Review meetings by fostering a sense of safety and agency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging pupil agency and input around the Annual Review meeting improves participation. 	<p><i>I know school name do really nice Annual Review invites where they get their young people and children to create an invite with... I don't know someone who works closely with them, the TA or something and they get to choose a snack that's going to be at the Annual Review and they invite people with...often drawings that they've done and we get sent these invites, they're beautiful some of them, and it just means that young person or that child is part of that process from the beginning and they are often more likely to then attend if they know there's going to be whatever... Wotsits or something, and so yes.</i> Assistant SEND Officer 2</p> <p><i>Just if it's gonna be held in the school. Where does the child want it to be what snacks that they want, just trying to view it in a positive way</i> SEND Officer</p> <p><i>'And whereas obviously for that, the good point would be that thing where the older children have started to come in and you're sort of like, they'll pick up a chocolate biscuit type thing or they'll have their sweet at the end of it. But they come in and beam and obviously Mum and Dad are sitting there listening to them and laughing at them saying, 'I need to have a good job, so I get lots of money' or when they're putting their book that they help lots at home, Mum and dad are obviously going 'That's an interesting story that you're telling' type thing. So, it's those things just such sharing. I think works really well.</i> SENCO 3</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key workers support CYP feel safe and contribute to pupil voice work. 	<p><i>Because you don't know if you're just going to go and rattle on about your life or if you're rattling something that you don't need to rattle on and then it gets shared to the world.</i></p> <p>K</p> <p><i>Key worker.</i></p> <p>Bob</p> <p><i>Yeah. because you had a good relationship with them, do did they help you out answering some of the boxes or did you do it all by yourself?</i></p> <p>TEP</p> <p><i>They helped out.</i></p> <p>Bob</p> <p><i>I personally can't think of a better way to do it than someone helping you because sometimes it is hard to actually get an answer that you want. But if you've got a trusted key worker, it's going to come out easier.</i></p> <p>K</p> <p><i>When I get asked stuff, my mind just goes blank on that topic and just when I'm not asked questions involving that I can easily just think about that.</i></p> <p>Bob</p> <p><i>Yeah. So that's just why it's hard for me like to think about it on my own. When I'm filling it in on my own.</i></p> <p>Bob</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils find it difficult to talk about themselves in meetings which can influence their ability to participate. 	<p><i>Feels a bit weird when I talk about myself.</i></p> <p>Bob</p>

- Using pupil strengths and interests can support CYP contribution.

So, for her, an effective Annual Review for her was, she was absolutely, she's an artist. She was an artist and is an artist in the making so for her we sensed it around what rooms did she feel comfortable in the school? She loved art. So, we set the Annual Review in the art room, and we started it by she would come, she would show us her work and it was all kind of child-centred and person-centred around her. It was in the room that she felt the most comfortable with in the school and with regards to professionals.

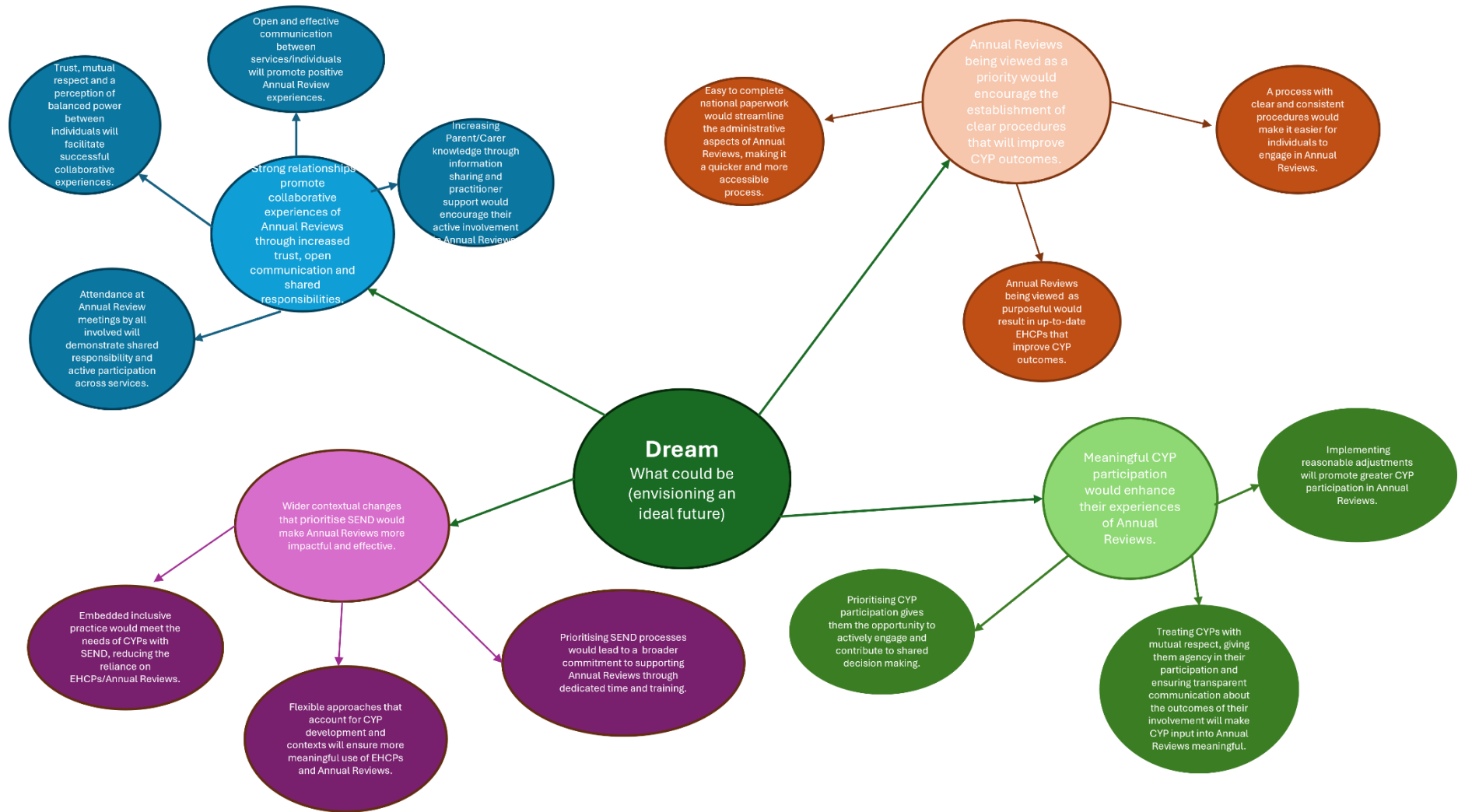
Assistant SEND Officer 1

Overarching causal mechanisms	Causal Mechanisms	Events	Experiences
<p>4. Wider contextual changes that prioritise SEND would make Annual Reviews more impactful and effective.</p>	<p>4.1 Embedded inclusive practice would meet the needs of CYP with SEND, reducing the reliance on EHCPs/ Annual Reviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A robust and inclusive education system would result in fewer Annual Reviews as CYPs' needs would be met without an EHCP. 	<p><i>I think if you say funding wasn't an issue, if we had sufficiency a placements and things like that</i></p> <p>EP</p> <p><i>And I think if education was much more inclusive, and they wouldn't need a plan that would be my dream situation. We'd have a much more inclusive and valuable, different routes of education. Vocational routes, it's not all about academics. And so, in my ideal world, there would be a lot less plans anyway.</i></p> <p>EP</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate funding would support individual needs of CYP appropriately. 	<p><i>And the schools are funded appropriate for the provision</i></p> <p>SENCO 2</p>
			<p><i>But money as well, money to spend on the facilities money to spend on people and time for those children to get. So, when we're seeing an EHCP, 'they need this, they need this, they need this'. Now I'm probably slightly cautious in the sense of, 'but will I be able to deliver all of those things knowing that different things are happening?' So, if you were delivering an EHCP, it would be able to have all of those times, all of those interventions and everything else on top of... but obviously that has an impact doesn't it within the school setting as well.</i></p> <p>SENCO 3</p>

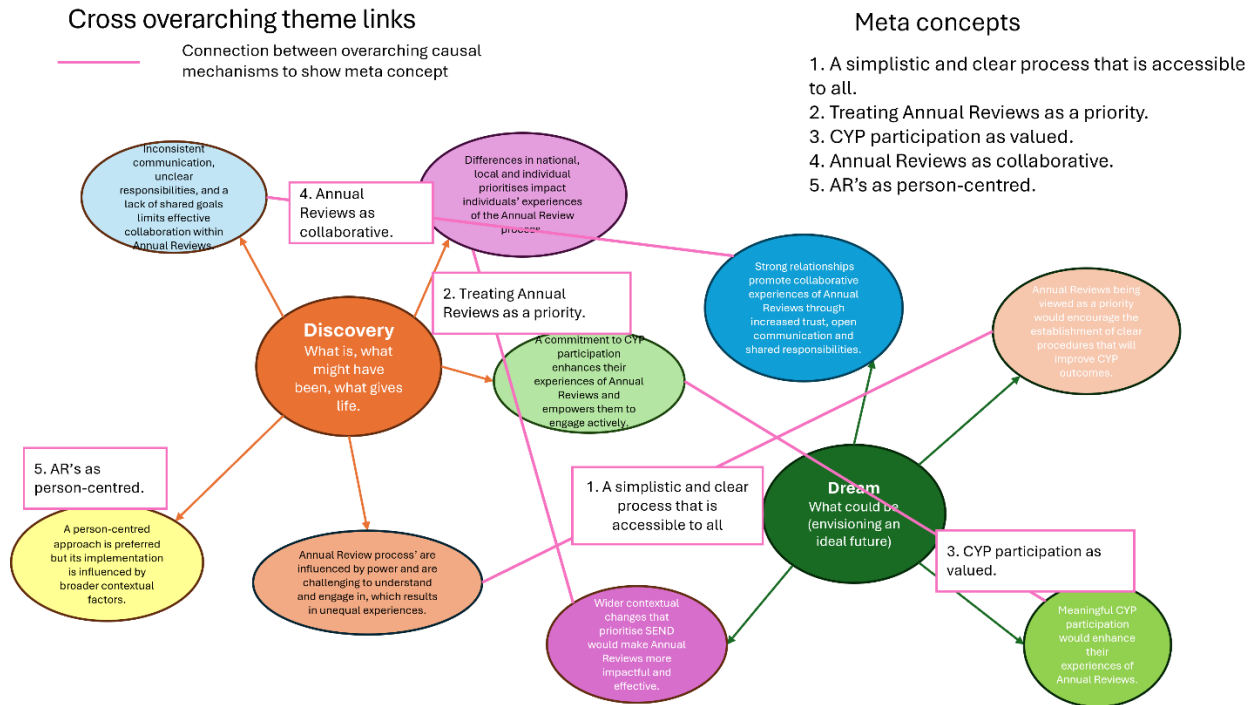
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYPs needs would be met through review of appropriate provision. 	<p><i>The children would be happy making the progress that they need to be making, that they are, delighted to be in school. That it's a positive experience for all. And that everybody's needs are met, isn't it?</i></p> <p>SENCO 3</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive SEND practice would allow for pro-active approach to support CYP. 	<p><i>Yeah, because it's all about getting appropriate provision, isn't it? So, with a good EHCP, the child should be able to access the right provision.</i></p> <p>Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner</p> <p><i>but that thing about having to watch a young person fail before anything happens is key so yeah, can I add that to the wish list? It's just the don't let them fail.</i></p> <p>SENCO 1</p>

Appendix 9 Final Thematic Maps





Appendix 10 Links Between Discovery and Dream Overarching Themes to Form Meta Concepts



Links between Discovery and Dream causal explanations	
Meta Concept	Overarching Discovery and Dream Themes
A simplistic and clear process that is accessible to all.	<p>Discovery 4. Annual Review processes are influenced by power and are challenging to understand and engage in, which results in unequal experiences.</p> <p>Dream 2. Annual Reviews being viewed as a priority would encourage the establishment of clear procedures that would improve CYP outcomes.</p>
Treating Annual Reviews as a priority.	<p>Discovery 2. Differences in national, local, and individual priorities impact individuals' experiences of the Annual Review process.</p> <p>Dream 4. Wider contextual changes that prioritise SEND would make Annual Reviews more impactful and effective.</p>
CYP participation as valued.	<p>Discovery 3. A commitment to active CYP participation enhances their experiences of Annual Reviews and empowers them.</p> <p>Dream 3. Meaningful CYP participation would enhance their experiences of Annual Reviews.</p>
Annual Reviews as collaborative.	<p>Discovery 1. Inconsistent communication, unclear responsibilities, and a lack of shared goals limits effective collaboration within Annual Reviews.</p>

	Dream 1. Strong relationships promote collaborative experiences of Annual Reviews through increased trust, open communication, and shared responsibilities.
Annual Reviews as person-centred.	Discovery 5. A person-centred approach is preferred but its implementation is influenced by broader contextual factors.

Appendix 11 Possibility Statement Notes and Drafting in Reflexive Log



- Possibility Statement Initial thoughts
1. Collaboration and joint working is prioritised so that communication + trust across individuals is improved.
 2. All individuals views and opinions are ~~are~~ heard and considered equally.
 3. Parent/carer will have support and knowledge so that the AR process is accessible to all.
 4. The process, including the paperwork, will be standardised, simple and easy to understand + amend.
 5. The AR process will be person-centred and consider pupil context to ensure it is a meaningful and worthwhile process.
 6. Pupil voice and participation will be given consideration and time to ensure it is a priority in the process.
 7. The AR (and CUP) will ~~the~~ practice will be more in line with its ideals as stated in the Cop.

Appendix 12 Amended Participant Information Sheet Example

Participant Information Sheet

An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do feel free to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information (contact details below).

What is the project's purpose?

The overall aim of this research is to consider the Annual Review process. This process is the annual procedure in which an Education Health and Care Plan is reviewed. The purpose of this research is to explore what is already working well in relation to Annual Reviews, in addition to thinking about what could be expanded on to improve the Annual Review process.

This research is being undertaken as part of my doctoral training at the University of Sheffield.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you have valuable experiences to share in this research project as either a Parent/Carer or practitioner who has experience of being a part of an Annual Review before. The participant criteria is as follows:

- Be currently one of the following within the LA NAME: EP, Health practitioner, Social Care practitioner, SEND team, other LA education practitioner (e.g. autism team), SENDCO or Parent/Carer of a CYP with an EHCP.
- Must have engaged in at least one Annual Review process as a practitioner or Parent/Carer.
- Are 18 years and above.

Please note that pupil participants have different criteria and will receive a different information sheet. Pupil participants will engage in a separate focus group without Parent/Carer or practitioner participants.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to make this decision. If you decide to take part, please note that this is entirely voluntary, and you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can withdraw your consent at

any time up until the point that the information from the focus group you participated in has been transcribed and anonymised (Likely to be by October 2024 for Stage 1). You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact myself (details at the end of this document).

By choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

If you are happy to participate it is important that you provide informed consent via the consent form which I will provide you with prior to any data collection.

Following this you will be asked to take part in at least one online focus group (if not two). This research project will be conducted in two stages. Stage 1 will be made up of several online focus groups (1 hour 4-6 participants) where participants will be grouped together in the following categories: pupils, Parents/carers, external agencies (including health, social care, and educational psychology), education setting focus groups (i.e. SENCO's).

These focus groups will explore the group's positive experiences of Annual Reviews and how we can learn from these experiences to improve Annual Reviews moving forward. Stage 1 focus groups will concentrate on positive experiences and the dreams of what could be. Questions asked in these focus groups will be open and encourage conversations to take place.

For Stage 2, you will be asked to share your thoughts on some 'Possibility Statements' which have been formed following Stage 1 focus groups. These statements will be shared with you via email. You will be asked to comment on them via a word document which, once completed, can be returned the following email address: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

If you are asked to participate in Stage 1 and 2, you will be asked to complete separate consent forms.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no identified discomforts or risks of participating in this study. However, if any unforeseen discomforts arise during the research, please do let me know immediately.

I appreciate everyone's time and therefore have chosen to conduct the focus groups online to reduce travel time and expenses to reduce this possible inconvenience. This should also allow for more flexible timetabling.

Changes to Stage 2 have also been considered in relation to participant time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project (i.e. no monetary reward), it is hoped that this work will support the development of positive practice around Annual Reviews.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I will collect during the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to myself as the researcher. All transcripts from the focus groups will be stored in a secure way in line with university guidance. An exception around confidentiality is if any safeguarding or malpractice issues arise. Although this is unlikely, in the case of this occurring the appropriate procedures with the local authority will be followed.

Please note that every effort will be made to ensure anonymity upon publication of the study results. For example, all names/organisations will be replaced with pseudonyms. However, some information that is expressed during the focus groups may indicate where the information has come from as some within the local authority may be aware that research project is happening and be aware of previous experiences. This means that, although unlikely, some individuals may be able to guess where the information within the finish thesis has come from. In order to reduce this risk as much as possible, if you are a practitioner and have an identifiable job title which may reduce your complete anonymity, you will have the opportunity to share what you wish your job title to be described as within the written-up project as a more general job title may increase your anonymity if you so wish.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio and video recordings made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. The recordings will be destroyed once the data has been transcribed. Anonymised excerpts will be used in presentations and potentially academic publications.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order 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>.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The results from the research will be made available as a final thesis and a copy will be made available to you (expected summer 2025). You will not be identified in any reports or future publications as pseudonyms will be used to protect your autonomy. The local authority you live/work in will also be anonymised.

Due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that others may find the data collected to be useful in answering future questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way through the consent form.

Who is organising and funding the research? Who is the Data Controller?

This research is organised by myself with the support of LA NAME and the University of Sheffield.

The University of Sheffield/other 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.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

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

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact Lynne Mackey (Thesis supervisor)- l.mackey@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the programme co-director Penny Fogg (p.fogg@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>.

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 Professor Rebecca Lawthom, r.lawthom@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 University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk).

Contact for further information

If you have any questions, please contact myself through the below email address, please also find my supervisor's contacts should I not be available:

Researcher	University Supervisor
<p>Josie Murray</p> <p>jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>Trainee Educational Psychologist</p> <p>The School of Education</p> <p>The Wave</p> <p>Faculty of Social Sciences</p> <p>2 Whitham Road</p> <p>Sheffield</p> <p>S10 2AH</p>	<p>Lynne Mackey</p> <p>l.Mackey@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>The School of Education</p> <p>The Wave</p> <p>Faculty of Social Sciences</p> <p>2 Whitham Road</p> <p>Sheffield</p> <p>S10 2AH</p>

Thank you for your time and consideration

If you wish to participate in this research, please do email Josie Murray (Trainee Educational Psychologist), jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk to arrange a focus group date and to receive a consent form.

Appendix 13 Possibility Statement Email and Documents Sent for Stage 2

Stage 2 Email

Re Stage 2- An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews.

Good afternoon,

I hope you are well.

I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in my doctoral research.

You may remember from the information I sent over originally that this research has two stages. The focus group you attended was part of Stage 1 of the project. I originally had planned to conduct a final focus group as the second stage of my research. After reflection, I have changed my planned approach. For more information on this please see the document attached entitled 'Changes to research project- Stage 2'.

For Stage 2, I am now asking for individuals who attended the Stage 1 focus groups to consider if they would like to provide comments and thoughts on drafted 'Possibility Statements'. These statements aim to highlight what we wish for in relation to future Annual Reviews and were created based upon what was shared in Stage 1 about what is already happening and what our 'dream' reality is.

The Possibility Statements themselves and information on what Possibility Statements are, can be seen in the document entitled 'Stage 2-Possibility Statements'. I would very much welcome any feedback you have on the attached Possibility Statements and there is space for you to do so in the attached document. Your participation in Stage 2 is completely voluntary. If you do wish to contribute, I would ask that you complete the Stage 2 consent form. This consent form can be found here (<https://forms.gle/kek81Xmt59BdeVLA6>).

Once you have completed the consent form and provided feedback in the word document titled 'Stage 2-Possibility statements', I ask that you return this document to myself via email: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk. Once I have received feedback, your comments will be considered before the final statements will be written up in the final thesis.

I am asking that comments on the attached Possibility Statements are returned by Friday 21st February 2025 to ensure that they are received in time to be considered. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Kind regards,

Josie

Josie Murray

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy)

The University of Sheffield

Stage 2 Possibility Statement Reflection Document

An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews

Name	Click or tap here to enter text.	
I am completing this document as a:	Choose an item.	
I have completed the Stage 2 consent form: (If you have not done this and wish to contribute to Stage 2, please do not proceed until consent is confirmed)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Stage 2- Possibility Statement development

You are being invited to participate in Stage 2 of the research study titled: An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews. Your participation in this Stage of the research project is entirely voluntary.

Within this document, I have drafted some Possibility Statements following the Stage 1 focus groups. Possibility Statements are affirmative sentences/paragraphs which aim to bridge the gap between our experiences and the dreams that we discussed in Stage 1 of this project. These statements are written in the present tense and capture our hopes as if they are already in place.

For Stage 2 of this research project, I am asking for feedback on the drafted 'Possibility Statements' within this document. Feedback produced at this stage will support the creation of the final Possibility Statements which will be reported in the final write up of my thesis. You should have received an updated information sheet, consent form and additional document explaining further what is being ask of you in this stage. If you have not received this information or have any questions, please contact me on: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk.

Before you provide feedback on the drafted Possibility Statements, please confirm the following information:

Possibility Statements

Please look at the drafted Possibility Statements below and provide any comments you may have to support the development of these. There are 7 statements overall, please note that these are in no particular order.

Possibility Statement 1: The Annual Review Process is understood by all those involved. Training, support and information is provided to all meaning that understanding and implementation is consistent and accessible.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Possibility Statement 2: Annual Review processes and statutory outcomes are consistent with aims of the Code of Practice (2015). EHCPs as a result are up to date, meaningful and ensure that students needs are met.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Possibility Statement 3: Annual Reviews are prioritised on a wider scale. Sufficient commitment and time are given to make them relevant and support students.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Possibility Statement 4: Active pupil participation is given priority to ensure that student voice influences decisions across education, health and care. Students are given choice and support to enable their participation.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Possibility Statement 5: Collaboration is evident between individuals and services who have shared ownership of the Annual Review process. Open and effective communication supports collaborative working towards shared goals.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Possibility Statement 6: Individuals' voices and input within the Annual Review process are equally valued.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Possibility Statement 7: The process is flexible and person-centred. Students are able to progress and get the support they need without having to 'fit' local/national benchmarks and procedures.

Comments:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Thank you!

Please return this completed document to: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

Stage 2 Changes to Stage 2 One Page Information Sheet

Changes to research project- stage 2

Thank you!

Hello! Firstly I wanted to thank you for your time and input into my research around annual reviews so far.

For stage 1 of this research, there have been 6 focus groups which included: Pupils, Parent/Carers, SENCO's, a social worker, an Educational Psychologist and Health practitioners. These have been very interesting and I have learnt a lot about current experiences and what our 'dream' annual reviews might look like.

What has changed about this research?

You may remember that I initially had planned to conduct a stage 2 focus group to consider the 'design' phase of the appreciative inquiry cycle.

I have now changed this plan. This is partly due to time constraints I have in relation to this project. I also value your time and hope that this change will be more convenient for individuals to engage in.

Instead of attending another focus group, I am now asking for individuals to provide feedback on 'possibility statements' I have created.

What are possibility statements?

Possibility statements are sentences or paragraphs which highlight what we wish for now. These statements are based upon what already is happening and what our dream is (as discussed in our focus groups). These statements, although they are still what we realistically wish for, are set in the present tense. They hope to summarize what we want to be happening in relation to annual reviews now.

I have drafted several possibility statements having analysed the discussions from all the focus groups in stage 1. These can be seen in the document named 'Stage 2- possibility statements'.

What does this mean to me?

You are being invited to have a look at the possibility statements in the document named 'Stage 2-possibility statements'. I am asking you to provide any comments or thoughts you might have on these statements. You are then asked to return the document to myself via email: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

These comments will then be considered to form finalised possibility statements which will be shared in the final write up of this thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me on:
jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 14 Design Planning Document

Annual Review Design Planning Document -Making a Design Into a Destiny

This document outlines how the Meta Concepts identified in this research link to Possibility Statements generated to highlight the design of future practices for Annual Reviews. To help make these statements a reality, the document shares actions and considerations based on the collective experiences and future aspirations of individuals involved in this study and shared during focus groups. These suggestions serve as a starting point, building on positive past experiences and hopes for the future. They are categorised into three levels (individual, local team/LA and national) and are written in the present tense to provide an affirmative picture.

Whilst practitioners can implement some of these actions on an individual level, achieving larger systemic changes cannot be done in isolation. Collaboration across all levels is necessary for meaningful change. To make the most of these suggestions, it is recommended that a systemic approach be taken which: considers priorities; allows for joint action planning; and includes regular reviews to ensure progress.

Meta Concept (overall ideal and dream values for Annual Reviews)	Possibility Statements (what should be)	Suggestions/actions to consider (what can make our design into our destiny)
A simplistic and clear process that is accessible to all.	The Annual Review Process is understood by all those involved. Training, support, and information is provided to all, meaning that understanding and implementation is consistent and accessible.	Individual level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of accessibility to the Annual Review process are considered for all individuals involved (including Parent/Carers, CYPs, and practitioners). I.e. is an interpreter/scribe needed to support access to the meeting or documentation provided. • Annual Review statutory deadlines are communicated and met.

	<p>Annual review processes and statutory outcomes are consistent with the aims of the Code of Practice (2015). EHCPs as a result are up to date, meaningful and ensure that CYP needs are met.</p>	<p>LA/Local service level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is clear guidance for all (CYP, Parent/Carers, schools, SENCOs, LA staff, health practitioners, social care practitioners etc.) to support understanding of the process including: statutory timeframes; what paperwork to complete; expectations of involvement, what can be requested in an Annual Review (e.g. personal budget and transport). • Local training and procedures are in place to ensure a consistent approach to all Annual Reviews is provided across the LA. • There is a clear process and procedure for updating EHCPs following Annual Reviews which is understood by Parent/Carers, SENCOs and LA staff completing the process. • Summaries of the last Annual Review are sent to key individuals, prior to the next Annual Review meeting to support understanding, preparation and focus of the next Annual Review. • Parent/Carers are sent the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) at the start of their child's SEND journey, as part of an information pack. Following receiving an EHCP, Parent/Carers are sent the Annual Review section of CoP every year in addition to a checklist of the process, a list of where to go for support/information, what will occur in the Annual Review, the outcomes of Annual Reviews, what transition points for CYP look like, and how Parent/Carers can request changes in placement. • Parent/Carers are given opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding about what an Annual Review is and what it entails. This could include: workshops; guides etc. • LAs seek preferences for Parent/Carers as to whether they would like paper copies or electronic versions of information and guidance. Consideration of access to email, internet and computers etc. should be considered to ensure accessibility. <p>National level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EHCPs are 'live' online documents which are easily accessible and amended. • EHCP/ Annual Review paperwork is simplistic, jargon free and nationalised. • SEND training (including focus on Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015)) is to be provided nationally to ensure consistent understanding and support CYP with SEND. This is to be targeted at various levels including: SEND teams; health and social care practitioners; SENCO's; teachers' Parent/Carers. Training and guidance to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to complete paperwork. ○ How to write outcomes. ○ Expectations of how often to amend EHCPs following Annual Reviews. • Priority of funding to support training and creation of guidance.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The creation of roles that support Parent/Carers as a designated practitioner either through the generating new roles or expansion of existing services e.g. SEND team member or SENDIAS. This support with help parents throughout SEND processes.
<p>Treating Annual Reviews as a priority.</p>	<p>Annual reviews are prioritised on a wider scale and are consistently perceived as important as EHCP needs assessments. Sufficient commitment and time are given to make them relevant and support students.</p>	<p>Individual level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient time is provided for the Annual Review meeting to ensure it is not considered as 'rushed'. All relevant individuals are actively engaging in the Annual Review process, including attending an Annual Review meeting. <p>LA/Local service level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SEND teams time allocation is sufficient to ensure that all Annual Reviews are provided with adequate time to be considered and actioned, as necessary. The LA has a streamlined and consistent procedure to support the Annual Review process which includes an established communication system between teams/services and educational settings to support report/information sharing. Educational settings provide SENCOs with dedicated time and administrative support to allow for the completion of work within their working hours. Services (including schools) are given time allocation for engaging in the Annual Review process, including attending meetings. Regular opportunities (such as termly meetings) for schools and SEND teams are available to share good practice, ask questions and get updates on the process. School staff are also given dedicated time to allow time to share good practice between educational settings. Team level agreements to agree which Annual Reviews are a priority and are 'must be attended' as a starting point on which to build upon. <p>National level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate funding provided to ensure needs of CYP with SEND are met. Adequate funding provided to LAs to ensure SEND teams are sufficiently resourced. Paperwork is nationalised, standardised, and streamlined. Parent/Carer employers are understanding and flexible in allowing Parent/Carers to engage in SEND processes. For example, they allow attendance at Annual Review meetings without penalty.

<p>CYP participation as valued.</p>	<p>Active CYP participation is given priority so that practitioners (including school staff) are given sufficient time and resources to increase CYP participation through a person-centred approach. CYP feel a sense of safety and empowerment, they believe their participation is meaningful which motivates them to engage.</p>	<p>Individual level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP are provided the opportunity to attend Annual Review meetings and engage in the process. CYP are told who will be attending the Annual Review meeting and are given opportunity to consider if they wish to attend all/part of the meeting. • CYP are told prior to the Annual Review meeting what will be discussed. They will be given the opportunity to ask questions and consider what the content of the meeting may be. A trusted adult will support this. • CYP are provided information on agreed actions following the Annual Review process. They will have access to the meeting notes and reports if appropriate and wanted. • There is flexibility and creativity in the way in which pupil voice is gained is provided e.g. through video, photos etc. As a minimum, a pupil views book/worksheet will be created that accurately represents the CYP's voice. • CYP are given support to gather their views. • CYP are given opportunities to provide input into the meeting and paperwork, invitations etc. • Unfamiliar practitioners provide CYP the opportunity to introduce themselves to CYPs prior to the annual review meeting. They also provide CYP their one-page profile. • The Annual Review meeting is adjusted in line with the CYPs' needs. For example, movement breaks, fidget toys etc. • CYP participation, including attendance at an Annual Review meeting, is considered in relation to the environment. For example, asking CYP what room would be preferable. • CYP agency is increased through them having the opportunity to influence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who is invited to the Annual Review meeting ○ Who participates in the process more widely. ○ How much and which parts of the Annual Review meeting they wish to attend. ○ The Agenda of the Annual Review meeting. ○ How CYP want to share their views. ○ The environment of the meeting including: if there are certain snacks at the meeting; what time of day they may prefer the meeting to occur; where the meeting occurs etc. • CYP age and context is considered and adaptations made to ensure participation is relevant and appropriate. • CYP voice is used to influence actions, outcomes, and provision. <p>LA/Local service level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP voice and participation are prioritised more widely. • LA strategy and training to support pupil participation and voice within Annual Reviews.
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		<p>National level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research, training and guidance to support CYP voice, participation, and engagement in SEND processes.
<p>Annual Reviews as collaborative.</p>	<p>Consistent collaboration is evident between individuals and services who have shared ownership of the Annual Review process. Open and effective communication supports this collaborative working towards shared goals.</p> <p>Individual's voices and input within the Annual Review process are perceived to be equally valued by all.</p>	<p>Individual level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration over the involvement of and signposting to SENDIAS. • The time, date and location of the Annual Review meeting is collaboratively agreed to ensure convenience for all. This is shared in advance to support attendance. • All relevant individuals have been invited to engage in the Annual Review process and have been provided with the opportunity to contribute if they are unable to attend the Annual Review meeting. • Individuals involved in the Annual Review are aware of the main discussion points and the purpose of their contribution. • Consideration of needs of those involved in the process and how they can engage actively in the process e.g. is an interpreter or translator needed, reduce expectations of needing to read and write, is a scribe etc. needed, do Parent/Carers have access to a laptop? If paperwork versions more accessible, is there time to go through the paperwork before/after the meeting to support understanding etc. • Virtual meeting platforms are used to support practitioner attendance at meetings in a hybrid way. • A person-centred approach to the Annual Review meeting is used to support collaboration. For example, big piece of paper used for all to contribute on. • Paperwork is approved by Parent/Carer and others as appropriate, prior to it being sent to the LA. • All practitioners involved will have access to and have read the CYP's EHCP and any other relevant documentation prior to engaging in the Annual Review process. <p>LA/Local service level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between SEND teams and schools occurs, to decide which practitioners need to be involved in each review. • Communication systems and procedures are set up between services to allow for clear communication with built in consent. • Invitations to Annual Review meetings is provided in advance with a clear understanding of the purpose of Annual Review and why various practitioners are being asked to be involved.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and consistent procedures are in place at team level to clarify what is expected if invited to support an Annual Review e.g. procedures on expectations of production of reports in various circumstances. • LA systems and procedures (such as decision panels) are built on mutual respect and values all voices equally. • There is clear priority given to transparent and clear communication between services, schools, and Parent/Carers. Emails and phone calls are responded to/returned in a timely fashion. • Collaboration between services and individuals is a priority within the LA. Relationships are good and built upon trust and open communication. Individuals are met with empathy and mutual respect. • Collaboration between education, health and care is evident and helpful to CYP. <p>National level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is clear guidance and training to support expectations for education, health and care practitioner input into Annual Reviews including collaborative working. • Resources are available to ensure that practitioners have time to engage in the process.
<p>Annual Reviews as person-centred.</p>	<p>The process is flexible and person-centred. CYP can progress and get the support they need without having to 'fit' local/national benchmarks and procedures.</p>	<p>Individual level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Reviews are held at times within the academic year which are appropriate for the CYP and consider contextual factors e.g. time is given to settle following a transition etc. • Annual Reviews are held more/less frequently when needed to support the CYP e.g. if younger or have complex and quickly changing needs. • Annual Reviews are used to celebrate success and cease/reduce support as and when needed. This could be supported through a trial period or a 'pause' to ensure that the CYP's needs remain met within a SEND support level. • Meetings such as parent's evening and PEPs are merged with Annual Reviews to support efficiency and joint working. • Annual Review meetings are strength-based and person-centred. The CYP is at the centre of the meeting. Discussions, outcomes, and provision discussed throughout the Annual Review process including meetings are relevant and supportive of the CYP in question. <p>LA/Local service level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Reviews are provided sufficient time to be considered on an individual level to allow actions to be based on CYPs' needs rather than other priorities etc. • Decisions following the Annual Review process are made based on the CYP's strength/needs rather than that of others.

		<p>National level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sufficient resources (such as SEND team Officer funding) is provided so that Annual Reviews can be processed and result in amended EHCPs as and when required rather than fitting in with SEND team needs.• The EHCP and Annual Review processes are restructured so that they are more flexible and person-centred. For example, an EHCP will be able to be 'paused' or there will be a quick way of re-issuing an EHCP following the ceasing of a plan, to make moving on/off EHCPs more fluid. Annual Reviews can be held more/less frequently if required and can be merged into already established review formats, such as through a parent's evening.• Sufficient funding provided to support CYP with SEND (with and without EHCPs) is available so that EHCPs and Annual Reviews can be effective and support CYP, as necessary.
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Appendix 15 Ethical Approval Letter



Downloaded: 21/05/2024

Approved: 21/05/2024

Josephine Murray

Registration number: 220110404

School of Education

Programme: DEdCPsy Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Josephine

PROJECT TITLE: An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews

APPLICATION: Reference Number 059666

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/05/2024 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 059666 (form submission date: 06/05/2024); (expected project end date: 31/07/2025).
- Participant information sheet 1135775 version 2 (06/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1135774 version 2 (06/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1135776 version 3 (06/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1135765 version 3 (06/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1136811 version 1 (06/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1136812 version 1 (06/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135782 version 2 (06/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135777 version 1 (12/04/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135778 version 1 (12/04/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135779 version 1 (12/04/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135783 version 2 (06/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135780 version 1 (12/04/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135781 version 1 (12/04/2024).

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

James Bradbury
Ethics Administrator
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 Administrator (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.

Appendix 16 Original Participant Information Sheets

Practitioner and Parent/Carer Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

An Appreciative Inquiry approach into Annual Reviews

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do feel free to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information (contact details below).

What is the project's purpose?

The overall aim of this research is to consider the Annual Review process. This process is the annual procedure in which an Education Health and Care Plan is reviewed. The purpose of this research is to explore what is already working well in relation to Annual Reviews, in addition to thinking about what could be expanded on to improve the Annual Review process.

This research is being undertaken as part of my doctoral training at the University of Sheffield.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you have valuable experiences to share in this research project as either a Parent/Carer or practitioner who has experience of being a part of an Annual Review before. The participant criteria is as follows:

- Be currently one of the following within the LA NAME: EP, Health practitioner, Social Care practitioner, SEND team, other LA education practitioner (e.g. autism team), SENDCO or Parent/Carer of a CYP with an EHCP.
- Must have engaged in at least one Annual Review process as a practitioner or Parent/Carer.
- Are 18 years and above.
- Are willing to attend at least an hour online focus group with a total of 4-6 participants or attend a second 1 ½ hour focus group.

Please note that pupil participants have different criteria and will receive a different information sheet. Pupil participants will engage in a separate focus group without Parent/Carer or practitioner participants.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to make this decision. If you decide to take part, please note that this is entirely voluntary, and you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can withdraw your consent at any time up until the point that the information from the focus group you participated in has been transcribed and anonymised (Likely to be by October 2024 for Stage 1 and December 2024 for Stage 2). You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact myself (details at the end of this document).

By choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

If you are happy to participate it is important that you provide informed consent via the consent form which I will provide you with prior to any data collection.

Following this you will be asked to take part in at least one online focus group (if not two). This research project will be conducted in two stages. Stage one will be made up of several online focus groups (1 hour 4-6 participants) where participants will be grouped together in the following categories: pupils, Parents/carers, external agencies (including health, social care, and educational psychology), education setting focus groups (i.e. SENCO's). The Stage 2 focus group will be one larger online focus group (1 hour 30 mins) which will have representatives from the stakeholders listed above except for pupils who will only participate in Stage 1 of this research.

These focus groups will explore the group's positive experiences of Annual Reviews and how we can learn from these experiences to improve Annual Reviews moving forward. Stage 1 focus groups will concentrate on positive experiences and the dreams of what could be. Whereas the Stage 2 focus groups will have a greater action on planning for future practice. Questions asked in these focus groups will be open and encourage conversations to take place. If you are asked to participate in Stage 1 and 2, you will be asked to complete separate consent forms.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no identified discomforts or risks of participating in this study. However, if any unforeseen discomforts arise during the research, please do let me know immediately.

I appreciate everyone's time and therefore have chosen to conduct the focus groups online to reduce travel time and expenses to reduce this possible inconvenience. This should also allow for more flexible timetabling.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project (i.e. no monetary reward), it is hoped that this work will support the development of positive practice around Annual Reviews.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I will collect during the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to myself as the researcher. All transcripts from the focus groups will be stored in a secure way in line with university guidance. An exception around confidentiality is if any safeguarding or malpractice issues arise. Although this is unlikely, in the case of this occurring the appropriate procedures with the local authority will be followed.

Please note that every effort will be made to ensure anonymity upon publication of the study results. For example, all names/organisations will be replaced with pseudonyms. However, some information that is expressed during the focus groups may indicate where the information has come from as some within the local authority may be aware that research project is happening and be aware of previous experiences. This means that, although unlikely, some individuals may be able to guess where the information within the final thesis has come from. In order to reduce this risk as much as possible, if you are a practitioner and have an identifiable job title which may reduce your complete anonymity, you will have the opportunity to share what you wish your job title to be described as within the written-up project as a more general job title may increase your anonymity if you so wish.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio and video recordings made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. The recordings will be destroyed once the data has been transcribed. Anonymised excerpts will be used in presentations and potentially academic publications.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order 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>.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The results from the research will be made available as a final thesis and a copy will be made available to you (expected summer 2025). You will not be identified in any reports or future publications as pseudonyms will be used to protect your autonomy. The local authority you live/work in will also be anonymised.

Due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that others may find the data collected to be useful in answering future questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way through the consent form.

Who is organising and funding the research? Who is the Data Controller?

This research is organised by myself with the support of LA NAME and the University of Sheffield.

The University of Sheffield/other 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.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

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

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact Lynne Mackey (Thesis supervisor)- l.mackey@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the programme co-director Penny Fogg (p.fogg@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>.

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 Professor Rebecca Lawthom, r.lawthom@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 University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk).

Contact for further information

If you have any questions, please contact myself through the below email address, please also find my supervisor's contacts should I not be available:

Researcher	University Supervisor
<p style="text-align: center;">Josie Murray</p> <p style="text-align: center;">jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Trainee Educational Psychologist</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The School of Education</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Wave</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Faculty of Social Sciences</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2 Whitham Road</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sheffield</p> <p style="text-align: center;">S10 2AH</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Lynne Mackey</p> <p style="text-align: center;">l.Mackey@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The School of Education</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Wave</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Faculty of Social Sciences</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2 Whitham Road</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sheffield</p> <p style="text-align: center;">S10 2AH</p>

Thank you for your time and consideration

If you wish to participate in this research, please do email Josie Murray (Trainee Educational Psychologist), jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk to arrange a focus group date and to receive a consent form.

One Page Practitioner and Parent/Carer Information Sheet

1 page summary
Information about the
research for participants

Hello!

Hello! My name is Josie and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Sheffield University. As part of my training I am doing some research. This information sheet is to help you decide if you would like to join in with this research.

What is this research about?

The research I am going to do is going to look at annual reviews. Annual reviews are the yearly process of reviewing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's). EHCP's are legal documents which support some students by highlighting their strengths, needs and what they need to support them in school.

The hopes of this research is to see what good things are already happening around annual reviews. It will also ask people what they think should happen with annual reviews in the future.

I will be asking lots of different people about what they think including students who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), parent/carers and practitioners who have experience of supporting annual reviews. .

Why am I being invited to join and what will it mean to me?

- You are being invited to join in this research as you have experience as a practitioner or parent/carers in engaging in the annual review process.
- You will be asked to join a focus group (or 2 if you are asked to participate in both stages of this research) to share your experiences, thoughts and dreams for annual reviews.
- Depending on what stage of the research you are being asked to join will mean your experience will be slightly different.
- In **stage 1** focus groups- you will be in a focus groups with individuals from a similar background to yourself (i.e. health care practitioners, parent/carers, school staff etc.). In this group you will discuss your previous experiences and hopes for the future in relation to annual reviews. This will take an hour and will be online.
- In the **stage 2** focus group, you will be with individuals from various backgrounds to help action plan and consider next steps following information shared in stage 1. This will take an hour and a half and will be online.

If you would like to join this research please let me know and I will send you further information. My email address is: jmurray8@sheffield.ac.uk

One Page Parent/Carer of Pupil Participants Information Sheet

**1 page information about
the research for parents
of student participants**

Hello!

Hello! My name is Josie and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Sheffield University. As part of my training I am doing some research. This information sheet is to help you decide if you would be happy for your child join in with this research.

What is this research about?

The research I am going to do is going to look at annual reviews. The hopes of this research is to see what good things are already happening around annual reviews. It will also ask people what they think should happen with annual reviews in the future.

I will be asking lots of different people about what they think including students who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

What is an EHCP and what is an Annual review?

An EHCP is a legal document some students have to help them in school. This document talks about the students strengths, things they find more difficult and says what support helps them in school.

An annual review is the process that happens every year to make sure that this document is still correct. Lots of different people are a part of an annual review and have different jobs to make sure that students get the best support they can.

Why is my child being invited to join and what will it mean to them?

- Your child is being invited to join in as they have an EHCP.
- If you and your child wish for them to take part, they will be asked to attend a focus group (a group conversation). A few other students will join them to do this in school. This will take about an hour.
- In this conversation I will ask your child about annual reviews and how they think students should be involved in them moving forward.
- What is discussed in the focus group will be put into research, however, their name will be changed so that people will not know it was them who took part.
- Your child won't have to answer any questions they don't want to and they can leave at any point.

If you would like your child to join this research please let me know and I will send you further information. My email address is: jmurray@sheffield.ac.uk

One Page Pupil Information Sheet

Information about the research for students

Hello!

Hello! My name is Josie and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Sheffield University. As part of my training I am doing some research. This information sheet is to help you decide if you would like to join in with this research.

What is this research about?

The research I am going to do is going to look at annual reviews. The hopes of this research is to see what good things are already happening around annual reviews. It will also ask people what they think should happen with annual reviews in the future.

I will be asking lots of different people about what they think including students who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

What is an EHCP and what is an Annual review?

An EHCP is a legal document some students have to help them in school. This document talks about the students strengths, things they find more difficult and says what support helps them in school.

An annual review is the process that happens every year to make sure that this document is still correct. Lots of different people are a part of an annual review and have different jobs to make sure that students get the best support they can.

Why am I being invited to join and what will it mean to me?

- You are being invited to join in as you have an EHCP.
- If you do want to take part, you will be asked to do a focus group (a group conversation). A few other students will join us in school to have this chat which will take about an hour.
- In this conversation I will ask you about annual reviews and how you think students should be involved in them moving forward.
- What is discussed in the focus group will be put into research, however, your name will be changed so that people will not know it was you that took part.
- You won't have to answer any questions you don't want to and you can leave at any point.

If you would like to join this research please let the adult who gave you this information sheet know.

Appendix 17 Researcher One Page Profile

Meet the researcher

JOSIE MURRAY (SHE/HER), TRAINEE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST



People describe me as....

- Kind
- Funny
- Caring
- Clumsy


My favourite....


Colour **Pink**

Animal **Dog**

Things to do in my spare time
See my friends Watch netflix

My likes and dislikes

- Spending time with my friends 
- Cooking and going out for food
- Anything on netflix

-  Jellyfish
- Having to walk my dog in the rain
- Being tired

What I need help with/helps me

- Geography (I am not very good at this!)
- Having questions repeated if I am unsure
- Knowing what is happening in advance

What we might will talk about together

When we meet, I will be asking you about if you have ever attended or been involved in an annual review meeting.

I will be asking you what you found good about this experience (do not worry if you have not had any experience).

I will also be asking you about what you think would be good in future annual reviews.

I will be sending you information about what an annual review is and a bit more about the research before we meet.

Appendix 18 Pupil One Page Profile Blank

Tell me about you!

NAME:
YEAR GROUP:
PRONOUNS:

My favourite...

Colour
Animal
Thing to do in my spare time

My likes and dislikes

✓
✗

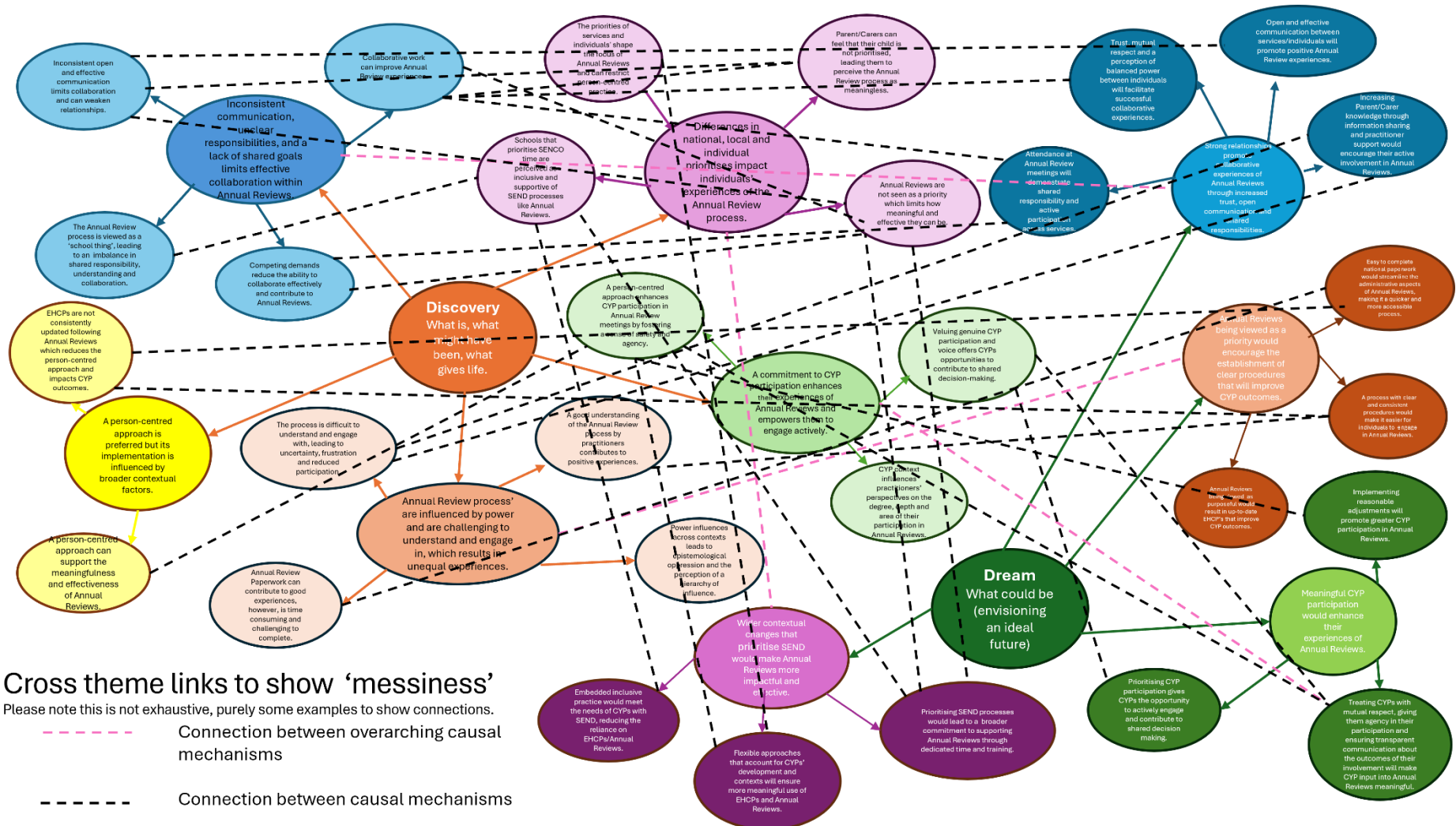
People describe me as....

What I need help with

Any questions about the research Josie can answer beforehand?

The form is decorated with a rainbow, stars, hearts, and a hand-drawn figure. It features a light blue background with various colored boxes (white, yellow, pink) and decorative elements like stars and hearts.

Appendix 19 Thematic Map Showing Overlap and ‘Messiness’



Appendix 20 Stage 1 Additional Quotes

Please see the below quotes from participants during the focus groups. They are categorised into their relevant themes/subthemes, which should be viewed alongside Chapter 4. These quotes provide further insight into the causal explanations discussed in the Stage 1 analysis.

Discovery Phase Quotes

Discovery Theme 1 -Inconsistent Communication, Unclear Responsibilities, and a Lack of Shared Goals Limits Effective Collaboration Within Annual Reviews.

Inconsistent Open and Effective Communication Limits Collaboration and can Weaken Relationships.

“Communications a massive problem and I would rather somebody rang me or reply to my email and said “Look, we’re really struggling” ... I’d rather they told me that and it’s not gonna get done on time than ignore.” (Parent/Carer 1)

“you kind of get a feel for those ones [SENCOs] that will always bounce back questions and they’re quite open with you and they will contact you direct” (Assistant SEND Officer 1)

“So if it's some early help involvement, or even if it's this social worker involvement, we're just not getting that information. And they're not coming to review and they're not completing reports and I'm relying on our SEND officer's to chase that up at their end.” (SENCO 1)

“I also think that sometimes a little bit of a challenge for young people, the students that at secondary, in knowing who's still involved and who isn't because if you don't have people responding from either social care or mainly health, then you don't know whether they're still involved, they're not involved ... Parents, can sometimes be really confused about who's still involved and who isn't.” (SENCO 1)

“I have had cases where I invite, I always invite people from the local authority, and again, I think it's dependent on the staff.... And they will say they are coming but not turn up. No apologies. And then can't get in touch with them to ask them why they didn't come, no replies.” (Parent/Carer 1)

“But yeah, I think again and often like EP said, I don't always understand the reason that I'm there.” (Social Worker)

Collaborative Work can Improve Annual Review Experiences.

“Parents were thinking of something a bit more special ... we were able to drill down what actually the young person would actually benefit from for a secondary environment and parents had only gone down one route because they haven’t been able to see the other school and hadn’t been able to have a conversation, because the school hadn’t returned their call ... we were able to address what could be a sticky point further down the road.” (EP)

“So, I've got several who are living with family members, but the relationship between birth parents and family members has broken down. So foster carers will say I'm not going if they're going and vice versa and then it's like ‘right who should get priority? Because foster carers, it's their day today. But these are birth parents with PR.’” (Social Worker).

“I’ve got quite a good relationship with them” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

“When it has happened it's been really really helpful, so a few years ago, had a young person who had epilepsy that was absolutely adamantly wanted to do a construction course, and they didn't meet the health and safety requirements so about being on a construction site. So actually, we got and specialist nurse to come through and be part of the meeting. And that was really, really helpful in terms of they then understood, the young person understood just the pathway of how long they had to be free of seizures and to be able to do this, be very responsible taking their medication. And that was a great outcome. So when we can get them, it can work brilliantly.” (SENCO 1)

“There's a little boy at the moment who's got really complex Health needs ... but they [nursery] did spot on really I can't kind of speak highly enough of them. They got all professionals there who needed and it was helpful as well because it was parents views that the child wasn't able to attend a setting whereas the health professionals who have got that knowledge and expertise and understanding, were actually encouraging and promoting, you know, the setting had a lot of training and they were speaking from the same hymn sheet. It was just lovely to hear that kind of reassurance for the family and for the setting.” (SEND Officer)

Competing Demands Reduce the Ability to Collaborate Effectively and Contribute to Annual Reviews.

“it's not always the appropriate people at those review meetings because sometimes it is sort of like the senior consultant that knows the information, but they don't have time to attend” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

“And then you get the other end, where it may not even be that appropriate for you to be there. It's sometimes nice, it's going all positive, but actually we're often there, if there's a particular change of need, change provision question and with us all having tight time, sometimes you thinking- this is lovely to hear how positive this is coming on, but we are not needed at this Annual Review.” (EP)

“But again, it's highlighting that when it is that high-end change of need, change of provision and the conversations that need to take place can take a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of preparation. So it's really important we go to the right Annual Reviews views so that we've got that ability to deal with that.” (EP)

The Annual Review Process is Viewed as a “School Thing”, Leading to an Imbalance in Shared Responsibility.

“So, I think that's the frustration because it feels very much like it is just a school thing, everything is very school, and education based” (SENCO 1)

“Going back to the reports and the whole process, it's still too education focused.”
(Parent/Carer 1)

“Often that I find... From a social care perspective, because it's obviously very education based, I sometimes wonder what my role is in turning up.” (Social Worker)

“I do feel like people see it very much ‘as an education, you have them there in your school all the time to therefore really the education is the key thing’.... It's meant to be we are all meant to be doing this together type things. And yeah, so I feel that's maybe why education it just feels like, it's just very much ‘on us’ type thing, if that makes sense.” (SENCO 3)

Discovery Theme 2 Differences in National, Local, and Individual Priorities Impacts Individuals Experiences of the Annual Review Process.

The Priorities of Services and Individuals Shape the Focus of Annual Reviews and can Restrict Person-Centred Practice.

“Yeah, I've noticed a lot of schools asking that question actually. It's almost like they've been given an email that has it set up as a target.” (Social Worker)

“I feel that because there's an emphasis on transition within children's services at the moment ... So, from the age of like 14 and onwards, like Year Nine, they are focusing on that at the end of the Annual Reviews.” (ADCO)

Parent/Carers can Feel That Their Child is not Prioritised, Leading Them to Perceive the Annual Review Process as Meaningless.

“I think it’s the whole EHCP system and it’s just not looked at the right way ... it’s a tick box exercise.” (Parent/Carer 1)

“[a lack of] Priority, understanding, the needs of the parent, they just see it as an exercise. And for example, the people who are working in the local authorities it’s just a job for them, nine to five job.” (Parent/Carer 3)

“If you're having to try and write this all yourself, basically because a professional can’t write it right about your own child...sometimes you can sit bloody crying over it.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Annual Reviews are Not Seen as a Priority, Which Limits how Meaningful and Effective They can be.

“It’s that flexibility. I mean work, any employer should be giving parents time off to attend ... that’s going to put pressure on your employment generally” Assistant SEND officer 2

“Maybe I run over time. So, when I’ve gone into an hour, an hour, and a half I’m thinking, at least it’s not two hours” (SENCO 3)

“You don’t always have the class teacher in the Annual Review despite the fact that the class teacher is with that child day in day out and that just feels ludicrous to me I come from a teaching background. I had two children in my class with EHCPs, and I never got invited to the Annual Review. And neither did the TA because they couldn’t afford to have us out of the classroom because of the other children there. So, the SENCO would go, and the SENCO did know the children, but it’s not the same” (Assistant SEND officer 2)

“I think the other services have got it right. They do make the time; they do genuinely want to support and it’s probably down to capacity, but I really think health don’t play enough of a part for some of our children.” (SENCO 2)

Schools That Prioritise SENCO Time are Perceived as Inclusive and Supportive of SEND Processes like Annual Reviews.

“it’s also that protected time needed to prepare effectively for the meetings. So, if you don’t have sufficient time, there are a lot of things or people that need to be invited, or it needs to be thought through doesn’t it in terms of even the basics of filling in the paperwork beforehand so that you are sort of ahead of yourself and you know what your discussing” (Assistant SEND officer 2)

“I imagine, based on the timings that some of these emails come in it falls on SENCOs to complete in their own time, you know they are often sending them really late at night ... in terms of positives. It is experienced SENCOs; it's SENCOs that aren't too jaded by the paperwork.” (Assistant SEND officer 2)

“And whereas, I suppose...if I do that at home, I know I can focus on it but with 41 education, health and care plans, I haven't physically got the time to do that at home and I am fortunate that I don't teach ... but there is always something happening in school isn't there for you to be taken away from me desk and to actually think 'no this is the one chance in a year I get to make a difference to that plan and change and be as reflective as it possibly is of the child'. But actually, sometimes it might take me all week to get one finished and that's difficult” (SENCO 2)

Discovery Theme 3 Commitment to Active CYP Participation Enhances their Experiences of Annual Reviews and Empowers them.

Valuing Genuine CYP Participation and Voice Offers Them Opportunities to Contribute to Shared Decision-Making.

“If it's like your favourite subject they know that you listen more in that so you wouldn't need as much support. They'd know what you need more support in. Because for me it's I don't really concentrate as much as in lessons I don't like.” (Bob)

“Sometimes the paperwork can be quite basic, some of the one-page profiles, maybe doesn't get the full message across ... they might not give their full view depending on who's filling it in with them. Or you get the odd one where “what do people like and admire about them” and they've written nothing. And then that's their opinion and situation but it'd be nice for them to have gone “other people have said this about you” and put that into paperwork” (EP)

“I think again where the child's voice has been captured in creative ways as well... and obviously we do have that one-page profile document but I think it's given schools that kind of autonomy to know if you want to capture the child's voice in a different way go for it ... but then it becomes not the child's voice maybe so much” (SEND Officer)

“We got a specialist nurse to come through and be part of the meeting. And that was really, really helpful in terms of they then understood, the young person understood just the pathway of how long they had to be free of seizures and to be able to do this, be very responsible taking their medication. And that was a great outcome.” (SENCO 1)

“Yeah, I think when you've had a really open and honest discussion and where students have really been able to articulate what they're proud of. That's really hard for them. So if they're able to say I'm really pleased that 'I've given this a go' or 'I'm really enjoying this' and for the parents to hear as well that there is some enjoyment because I think quite often a lot of our young people go home, like I do, and they go home and they kick off about everything that's gone wrong during the day and they don't ever talk about the nice bits. And I know as a parent, I accept that my kids did that quite often and I think some parents never hear their children say anything nice about... or anything they enjoy. So, I think that's really, really positive.” (SENCO 1)

A Person-Centred Approach Enhances CYP Participation in Annual Review

Meetings by Fostering a Sense of Safety and Agency.

“She was an artist and is an artist in the making so for her we sensed it around what rooms did she feel comfortable in the school. She loved art. So, we set the Annual Review in the art room, and we started it by she would come, she would show us her work and it was all kind of child-centred and person-centred around her.” (Assistant SEND officer 1)

“When I get asked stuff, my mind just goes blank on that topic ... So that's just why it's hard for me like to think about it on my own.” (Bob)

CYP Context Influences Practitioners' Perspectives on the Degree, Depth, and Area of Their Participation in Annual Reviews.

“I'm always in two minds with young people attending. Like you say, it's good for them sometimes to advocate but sometimes it can add that kind of pressure for some young people and again it's like a child without additional needs ... How much information, knowledge do they have versus other children who go to these meetings ... We need to do it properly.” (EP)

“[In relation to experiences within special schools] We used to try and get the voice of the child throughout the document and try and focus on how it was kind of looking at the child perspective of who they were ... So, if a child for example was nonverbal, we used to kind of know their cues or we knew what they was happy with or not.” (ADCO)

“For my age group actually to talk about what it's like to be in a room with lots of other people. I mean they have key workers and our key workers a wonderful, but they're trying to cover so many of the things with them, you know, over learning, pre-learning, all those things that we need to do, which would be really nice if I could spend time with groups of students and prep them for this Annual Review. Because to me it's important, but it's also a really

important life skill, isn't it? To be able to be in a room with people, talk about yourself it's almost like having a mini interview but you've got quite safe people in there. You've got your mum, maybe with you or people that are cheering you on. So yeah, I'd like that." (SENCO 1)

"Definitely say we have seen more looked after children than I would other children with additional needs in their Annual Reviews" (EP)

"And I think it's a really had balance of talking about a child in front of a child and actually them being a part of that meeting. And I think that's maybe easy for SENCO 1 at secondary then primary" (SENCO 2)

Discovery Theme 4 Annual Review Processes are Influenced by Power and are Challenging to Understand and Engage in, Which Results in Unequal Experiences.

The Process is Difficult to Understand and Engage With, Leading to Uncertainty, Frustration, and Reduced Participation.

"I've only had three Annual Reviews with CHILD NAME And every time you get a bit fearful" (Parent/Carer 2)

"I've had someone recently that has had an EHCP and half the stuff in it isn't right really for that child anymore, you know? And it causes a lot of stress and anxiety to the parents" (Specialist neuro-disability nurse)

"I think a lot of parents because it's another year, they don't realise that processes have to be started earlier" (EP).

"We had to really take into consideration because parents were both deaf as well. We had an interpreter, the teacher of the deaf came, the private speech and language came like they were really robust and effective Annual Reviews" (Assistant SEND officer 1)

"So, we've tried to do it just as a spoken thing ... I read through paperwork with them before, read through the paperwork, with them afterwards so that they're happy with it". (SENCO 1)

"Yeah, definitely. And the outcomes we've always been trained to write SMART outcomes, but yet now we're getting a plan going in at Year Two, and you've got to set outcomes for the end of Year Six. But yet, I'm not allowed to look at my crystal ball, even though I know a child without a plan, who probably needs a plan is going to really struggle, but I can't sit, I can't apply for a plan yet because they aren't at that point of our level of struggle, they've got to fail before we can go for the plan. We need to be proactive. We need to change the way the systems are, and I will stop now." (SENCO 2)

“And you've got things for them, they've got personal budgets, they've got all the time for adulthood things, that some of them find really...” (EP)

A Good Understanding of the Annual Review Process by Practitioners

Contributes to Positive Experiences.

“The setting didn't understand about if you tick the boxes where there's no significant changes, on the form in each section that it won't be changed ... he [senior LA officer] said, “they need to be ticking yes on that box, yes on that box. Because there is a significant change because he's going into a different transition, and he probably wouldn't have gotten into that sixth form college if you don't get the EHCP written correctly.” And I do believe that a lot of young people don't get the provisions they should because they haven't got an EHCP that is accurate.” (Parent/Carer 1)

“I've had some good experiences but only because again, these are only because I've known what should be in them. So, if I'd never gone to that parent carer forum coffee morning, eight years ago, and then gradually got involved ... I wouldn't know how it should go, and I would say I'm the minority.” (Parent/Carer 1)

“I have come across parents and carers, who say, they've never been asked about having a personal travel. When I go you can get that in a review and they go “no School or SENDART or whoever said no, that can't be any review,” but it can” (Parent/Carer 1)

“I have come across and parents' carers, who say, they've never been asked about having a personal travel budget because they found out I've got one also that also they don't know that Certain things should be written in the review. When I go you can get that in a review and they go ‘no School or SENDART or whoever said no, that can't be any review’, but it can be in your review. In your document.” (Parent/Carer 1)

“It's interesting that the whole concept of outcomes like I say we almost put too many in because we don't quite know what to write for what we want them to do in three four years time. And I just don't know what the answer is to that kind of process ... Outcomes. I think is a whole big area that we need to work on. The local authority, schools and everything.” (EP)

Annual Review Paperwork can Contribute to Good Experiences, However, is Time Consuming and Challenging to Complete.

“Especially for the new pilot system, where you make the amendments in yellow and you highlight anything, you put a line through anything that is no longer relevant, if that is then

maintained and you pull up the same document next year then it's just a hashed mess.”
(SENCO 2)

“Doing quite a big write up of the conversation proves to be really helpful when parents have come back and queried what's been said.” (SENCO 1)

“In terms of reviews, there isn't particularly any review paperwork. It's kind of fill it well... It's kind of some people might say, fill in the initial one again and that is tiresome. Sometimes we just send the clinic letters. I think we're meant to fill in the the initial paperwork and yeah, it's very area dependent like the initial LA form is really, really long, whereas the NEIGHBOURING LA initial form isn't particularly onerous. To be fair, it's if I see if a child is in NEIGHBOURING LA, I think oh, that's going to take me. That's going to be quicker.”
(Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

“Yeah, it's definitely, you definitely know your settings and what kind of quality of paperwork you're going to get it dependent on maybe how long the SENCO has been there and whether the SENCOs attended the SENCO forums that we put on.” (Assistant SEND officer 1)

Perceived Power Influences Leads to Epistemological Oppression and the Perception of a Hierarchy of Influence.

“When it comes down to the Annual Review ... we are not seen as a professional, but we are the one that spending six and a half hours a day with this child yet, the Behaviour Support team and the Education Psychologist team are fantastic and we couldn't do our jobs without their support, but they drop in and might see them for 20 minutes, half an hour, and have an hours discussion with the parent. But yet, that is what the plan is written on.” (SENCO 2)

“That's why I love to listen to parents and their experience. How they managed it, what is required of an EHCP. Because if you get any EHCP expert, that EHCP expert, would not be as good as Parent/Carer 1 because she has gone through the process. She has felt it.”
(Parent/Carer 3)

“And I also know that my parental comments don't have to be in before the meeting because there's a lot of pressure, they said they need to see your parental comments two weeks before and I know in the Code of Practice it says you should see everything before, but I've never ever had a report from anywhere two weeks before to look at.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Discovery Theme 5 A Person-Centred Approach is Preferred but its Implementation is Influenced by Broader Contextual Factors.

EHCs are Not Consistently Updated Following Annual Reviews Which Reduces the Person-Centred Approach and Impacts CYP Outcomes.

“I do feel that sometimes, Annual Reviews can sometimes be not up to date documentation.” (ADCO)

“It can become very problematic about the idea that you need to change the review outcomes and things like that. And it becomes a very bureaucratic process” (EP)

“Because he hasn't achieved 50% of them but we can't keep changing it. It's going to become a much more, it's a cumbersome process for the local authority to keep updating and changing plans. So sometimes the outcomes they're not sitting right because we've either underestimate or overestimate of them and that's highlighted at an Annual Review, but we didn't necessarily change. And then you do get some expectations from parents where the actual needs have change in the fact that they can do something, they couldn't do, when the plan was written. So, we need to change the whole plan, and it sort of sometimes SENCOs. And they've been up front that things do change in the plan, but the actual plan doesn't necessarily need to change every year.” (EP)

“So, we have the joke with the Year 10's 'oh look that's the picture when you were in Year Four' and 'haven't you grown? You've now got beard'. And so, I think those little sort of things that would make a huge difference for young people to having ownership of that document.” (SENCO 1)

A Person-Centred Approach can Support the Meaningfulness and Effectiveness of Annual Reviews.

“I think a TOP FUNDING LEVEL is 73% of a one-to-ones wage, but yet we put over and above in and it's just not recognized and we're getting to the point, now I think a bit like the NHS, education is broken, and something's got to give because we financially cannot continue the way we are going.” (SENCO 2)

“Yeah, I think the whole process isn't holistic, is it? It doesn't look at everybody and everything and the whole child life's.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Dream Phase Quotes

Dream Theme 1 Strong Relationships Promote Collaborative Experiences of Annual Reviews Through Increased Trust, Open Communication, and Shared Responsibilities.

Open and Effective Communication Between Services/Individuals Will Promote Positive Annual Review Experiences.

“I think that would be in the dream section, responding, getting a response to any question or email or return phone call.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Trust, Mutual Respect, and a Perception of Balanced Power Between Individuals Will Facilitate Successful Collaborative Experiences

“I would go to sleep peacefully, being less anxious if everything went right. My health would be fine I would not be stressing out and I would not be fighting with my wife.” (Parent/Carer 3)

“That we’re listened to” (SENCO 3)

Increasing Parent/Carer Knowledge Through Information Sharing and Practitioner Support Would Encourage Their Active Involvement in Annual Reviews.

“There should be somebody for the parent...who is an expert in EHCPs.” (Parent/Carer 3)

“But the SEND Code of Practice, that should be handed out even in an email version to parents as they start that process” (Parent/Carer 2)

“I think it's because in a corporate environment in the local thoughts everywhere else people assume that you've got a laptop that you sit and you look things up all day and it's not like that in real life you need to send a parent/carer the information they need for each process, I've been asking about this for years for the EHCP process and people go 'well we can refer them, we can put a link onto the local offer.' No, I'm asking you to send a piece of paper with the invite or with the letter. Explaining it a bit more.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Attendance at Annual Review Meetings by all Involved Will Demonstrate Shared Responsibility and Active Participation Across Services.

“People would be attending the meeting and would have all the time in the world, so they wouldn't be rushed to finish or to get through process.” (Assistant SEND officer 2)

“I’d like to see that really positive student focused, understanding the family, with an eye on the future and that planning side of it to be really cohesive with everybody.” (SENCO 1)

“I have had medical professionals dial in to some meetings. Previously, they wouldn’t do. So, I think if we continue to have Hybrid meetings, I still prefer being in the person if I can. But they’re having the capacity to just jump in and dial in to some meetings when you can’t afford the time to travel just for one meeting.” (EP)

Dream Theme 2 Annual Reviews Being Viewed as a Priority Would Encourage the Establishment of Clear Procedures That Would Improve CYP Outcomes.

A Process with Clear and Consistent Procedures Would Make it Easier for Individuals to Engage in Annual Reviews.

“The process definitely needs to be streamlined. You know, who are we sending the Annual Reviews to? Who’s requesting the information? What do they want the information to look like?” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

“Just simple again. We make everything so complicated. If there’s almost like a change of need or a change of provision, we all love the set way. We don’t go through every little bit. I mean the process was sending out a professional’s report for people to update. We never do that in our team. We’ll write something maybe after the fact in a consultation record that gives our opinion but almost like you need very quick process of people can write the key issue rather than lots of box fill in.” (EP)

“So maybe a bit of a summary from the last time about what the main worries were, again it’s time consuming it’s about somebody having the time to do that into. But in an ideal world, I suppose, I could get out the last years EHCP and read that, but realistically, I don’t but even if something pops in your inbox from the SEND team with something about what the main worries were, what we will be discussing. Just so you arrive at meeting, and you’ve got more indication about where it’s going to go. Because a lot of the times we’ll literally share a screen if it’s online and just read to through the whole thing. And I think that’s the same as before nothing’s changed or why we’re going over again.” (Social Worker)

Annual Reviews Being Viewed as Purposeful Would Result in Up-To-Date EHCPs That Improve CYP Outcomes.

“If you’re saying about the miracle thing, it would be that everyone’s EHCP reflected (the student)” (Parent/Carer 2)

“So, to me, it would be a live, current, up to date documents that would be accessible and could be easily updated with current information that reflects where the child is...and that they are making progress. And then I'll be ecstatic.” (SENCO 2)

“Then it would be written accurately. I wouldn't have to change anything in it. I wouldn't be told you can't amend anything because I didn't know you could, for years down the line ...then afterwards, everybody who was involved in my son would perhaps read it. And follow what was in it.” (Parent/Carer 1)

Easy to Complete National Paperwork Would Streamline the Administrative Aspects of Annual Reviews, Making it A Quicker and More Accessible Process.

“I would like to have the form changed but I don't know how, that's another thing. It's really difficult to understand” (Parent/Carer 1)

“And I think if we are looking at standardising the paperwork, we need to make sure that it isn't exhaustive so like instead of having these reams and reams of you know” (Advanced Paediatric Nurse Practitioner)

Dream Theme 3 Meaningful CYP Participation Would Enhance Their Experiences of Annual Reviews.

Prioritising Active CYP Participation Gives CYP the Opportunity to Contribute Towards Shared Decision Making.

“Because to me it's important, but it's also a really important life skill, isn't it? To be able to be in a room with people, talk about yourself it's almost like having a mini interview but you've got quite safe people in there. You've got your mum, maybe with you or people that are cheering you on. So yeah, I'd like that.” (SENCO 1)

Implementing Reasonable Adjustments Will Promote Greater CYP Participation in Annual Reviews.

“Sometimes I'd like it on my own cos if I'm stressed, I don't want anyone in there, but if it's good day, someone's allowed in.” (K)

“And imagine how daunting it is for a little seven-year-old walking into a room full of strangers, all sat around a table and yeah, I'd feel intimidated as an adult, so these kids must do. So, let's say, I think that's a really good point EP if they're doing their parents evening, the normally would in a familiar environment. not, obviously in the middle of the hallway, everybody's meeting, but use it as part of that evening to plan. They would need to think

more about the environment when we're doing this. I mean we all do it with squeeze in a room in a school that we're all on a little tiny chair it's wherever we can be put into it. But is that enough for the kids? Or could you do better with that? I'm not sure." (Social Worker)

"It really depends if I'm concentrating enough on a certain day because some days I'm concentrating enough and other days I'm like no, blank." (Bob)

"They would need to think more about the environment when we're doing this. I mean we all do it with squeeze in a room in a school that we're all on a little tiny chair it's wherever we can be put into it. But is that enough for the kids? Or could you do better with that? I'm not sure." (Social Worker)

"If it's if it's a favourite room in school, then you're more calm, relaxed." (K)

Treating CYP With Mutual Respect, Giving Them Agency in Their Participation and Ensuring Transparent Communication About the Outcomes of Their Involvement Will Make Their Input into Annual Reviews Meaningful.

"It is hard to talk about EHCP if you're a really shy person. Yeah. or if you couldn't talk and you had something embarrassing in that past that's about EHCP and you can't exactly say it and you don't want to." (K)

Dream Theme 4 Wider Contextual Changes That Prioritise SEND Would Make Annual Reviews More Impactful and Effective.

Embedded Inclusive Practice Would Meet the Needs of CYP with SEND, Reducing the Reliance on EHCPs/ Annual Reviews.

"We'd have a much more inclusive and valuable, different routes of education. Vocational routes, it's not all about academics. And so, in my ideal world, there would be a lot less plans anyway." (EP)

"The children would be happy making the progress that they need to be making, that they are, delighted to be in school. That it's a positive experience for all. And that everybody's needs are met" (SENCO 3)

Prioritising SEND Processes Would Lead to a Broader Commitment to Supporting Annual Reviews Through Dedicated Time and Training.

"I think it's taken all back to basics and just making it kind of a national approach but SENCOs being trained on that having SENCO time, you're employed as a SENCO as

nothing else. And so yeah, but that would be the ideal world. That would be the dream. That would be all wake up tomorrow and ...yeah." (Assistant SEND officer 1)

Flexible Approaches That Account for CYP Development and Contexts Will Ensure More Meaningful use of EHCPs and Annual Reviews.

"And what I'd love to see, in an ideal world is some Annual Reviews where we go, right! Excellent, we don't need the plan. You know wild thinking, some children, they need a plan for a very small, limited amount of time and they've met their outcomes." (EP)

"Yeah, a pause, they are off it and we know they had that high level of need; situations change. We started again that I would love to see something like that rather than. Because you wouldn't, would you if this is the trouble, we have so many transitions for that young person. They might be doing really well in Year Five, but we think all they're gonna go secondary school soon. Better not get rid of the plan, because we know secondary school's problematic for a lot of children, and we'll keep it for that and then get into Year Seven.... ooh we're gonna get a bit more pressure. There's always something so it would be nice for children to come off them. And then if they do need it again, it's a quicker process to start it." (EP)

"I'd hate then for a kid to not have the support needs because then, school would be saying, we can't give him a one-to-one because they're having a wobble this week because they haven't got an EHCP anymore and it's more the bureaucracy around it into rather than meeting the needs of the kid. It's the process that needs looking at, I think there." (Social Worker)

Appendix 21 Draft Possibility Statements

The table below highlight how the Dream and Discovery themes link to Meta Concepts which in turn connect to the initially drafted Possibility Statements.

Links between Discovery and Dream causal explanations and Possibility Statements		
Overarching Discovery and Dream Themes	Meta Concept	Initial drafted Possibility Statements
<p>Discovery 4. Annual Review process' are influenced by power and are challenging to understand and engage in, which results in unequal experiences.</p> <p>Dream 2. Annual Reviews being viewed as a priority would encourage the establishment of clear procedures that will improve CYP outcomes.</p>	A simplistic and clear process that is accessible to all.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Annual Review Process is understood by all those involved. Training, support and information is provided to all meaning that understanding and implementation is consistent and accessible. 2. Annual review processes and statutory outcomes are consistent with aims of the Code of Practice (2015). EHCPs as a result are up to date, meaningful and ensure that CYPs needs are met.
<p>Discovery 2. Differences in national, local and individual prioritises impact individuals' experiences of the Annual Review process.</p> <p>Dream 4 Wider contextual changes that prioritise SEND would make Annual Reviews more impactful and effective.</p>	Treating Annual Reviews as a priority.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Annual reviews are prioritised on a wider scale. Sufficient commitment and time are given to make them relevant and support CYP.
<p>Discovery 3. A commitment to CYP participation enhances their experiences of Annual Reviews and empowers them to engage actively.</p> <p>Dream 3. Meaningful CYP participation would enhance their experiences of Annual Reviews.</p>	CYP participation as valued.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Active pupil participation is given priority to ensure that CYP voice influences decisions across education, health and care. CYP are given choice and support to enable their participation.
<p>Discovery 1. Inconsistent communication, unclear responsibilities, and a lack of shared goals limits effective collaboration within Annual Reviews.</p>	Annual Reviews as collaborative.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Collaboration is evident between individuals and services who have shared ownership of the Annual Review process. Open and effective communication supports collaborative

<p>Dream 1. Strong relationships promote collaborative experiences of Annual Reviews through increased trust, open communication and shared responsibilities.</p>		<p>working towards shared goals. 6. Individuals' voices and input within the Annual Review process are equally valued.</p>
<p>Discovery 5. A person-centred approach is preferred but its implementation is influenced by broader contextual factors.</p>	<p>Annual Reviews as person-centred.</p>	<p>7. The process is flexible and person-centred. CYP are able to progress and get the support they need without having to 'fit' local/national benchmarks and procedures.</p>

Appendix 22 Possibility Statements and Participant Reflexive Commentary

Meta Concept	Draft Possibility Statements	Participant Reflections	Final Possibility Statements
<p>A simplistic and clear process that is accessible to all.</p>	<p>The Annual Review Process is understood by all those involved. Training, support and information is provided to all meaning that understanding and implementation is consistent and accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently settings and professionals who are consistently involved in the Annual Review process, do have a good understanding to a degree. This appears less so with Parent/Carers. There is a need for parental understanding of the process. • A better understanding more generally is held within the meeting part of the Annual Review process and lacking in aspect beyond this (i.e. timescales). Educational settings have been informed about timescales, so this is getting better. • Training opportunities are not regularly offered and there is not a consistency because of this. • Opportunities to share best practice would be welcome. 	<p>The Annual Review Process is understood by all those involved. Training, support, and information is regularly provided to all, meaning that understanding and implementation is consistent and accessible.</p>

	<p>Annual review processes and statutory outcomes are consistent with aims of the Code of Practice (2015). EHCPs as a result are up to date, meaningful and ensure that students needs are met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the LA is working towards CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) deadlines, tight timescales influence this. • The volume of EHCPs is a barrier to this statement being met currently. • Practitioner capacity is also a barrier to ensure that they can contribute towards Annual Reviews when needed. • There is conflict between the need for an EHCP to be specific for the child at a point in time, and the amount of work it takes to do this. • Currently plans are updated at Y9 and Y11 in secondary school but there can be a need to rewrite at Y7 to reflect how students present in their new secondary setting. • Annual Reviews that are not used to update the plan are presented as appendices to the EHCP. • This statement being true would be a dream. 	<p>Annual review processes and statutory outcomes are consistent with the aims of the Code of Practice (2015). EHCPs as a result are up to date, meaningful and ensure that CYPs needs are met.</p>
<p>Treating Annual Reviews as a priority.</p>	<p>Annual reviews are prioritised on a wider scale. Sufficient commitment and time are given to make them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LA timescales are very good for new assessments. Annual Review data is improving, and the aim is 	<p>Annual reviews are prioritised on a wider scale and are consistently perceived as important as EHCP</p>

	relevant and support CYP.	<p>to prioritised transition Annual Reviews next.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Reviews are not as high priority as new assessments, and this needs more work to make this statement reality. • EP services prioritise attending Annual Reviews where settings highlight a change in need or setting, especially at transition years. • This is particularly difficult for larger secondary schools due to time and resource limits. 	<p>needs assessments. Sufficient commitment and time are given to make them relevant and support students.</p>
Student participation is valued.	Active pupil participation is given priority to ensure that CYP voice influences decisions across education, health and care. CYP are given choice and support to enable their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most settings appear to provide CYP the opportunity to attend Annual Review meetings and complete one-page profiles. However, not many CYP choose to attend. • CYPs voice, aspirations and wants are considered currently. • Opportunities and choices around how CYP engage is important e.g. providing a written statement instead of attending a review meeting. • Having CYP voice gathered prior to the 	Active CYP participation is given priority so that practitioners (including school staff) are given sufficient time and resources to increase CYP participation through a person-centred approach. CYP feel a sense of safety and empowerment, they believe their participation is meaningful which motivates them to engage.

		<p>Annual Review meeting helps set the tone of the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP participation is absolutely key, and they need to know that it is their education/life (rather than being 'done to'). 	
Annual Reviews as collaborative.	<p>Collaboration is evident between individuals and services who have shared ownership of the Annual Review process. Open and effective communication supports collaborative working towards shared goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between practitioners that should be involved is not always present currently. This includes attendance in meetings in addition to report production. • Although this is improving, it is still at only educational practitioners attend Annual Review meetings and mostly only school practitioners and families attend the actual Annual Review meeting. • For the most complex situations, attendance from all agencies involved is more likely to occur and this is most helpful. • It is difficult to get input from health and social care and this appears to have reduced, in the past copies of letters were sent to school but this is not as common now. 	<p>Consistent collaboration is evident between individuals and services who have shared ownership of the Annual Review process. Open and effective communication supports this collaborative working towards shared goals.</p>

	Individuals' voices and input within the Annual Review process are equally valued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the case in theory, however, depends on the case and this depends on the individual professionals and the most prominent issue to be discussed. • This is difficult currently but is being worked towards as much as possible. • This is important and can be supported through referring to parental contribution provided prior to the meeting to form part of discussions naturally. Also giving individuals opportunities to add to anything written at points supports this. 	Individual's voices and input within the Annual Review process are perceived to be equally valued by all.
Annual Reviews as person-centred.	The process is flexible and person-centred. CYP are able to progress and get the support they need without having to 'fit' local/national benchmarks and procedures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is in theory but not in practice currently. • The Annual Review process feels bureaucratic and takes away the flexible person-centred ideals that the process was based on. • The fact that the Annual Review is a legal process means that it does not lend itself to being flexible. So again, there is conflict here and it requires a balance between two competing elements. • This is currently how some Annual Review meetings 	The process is flexible and person-centred. CYP can progress and get the support they need without having to 'fit' local/national benchmarks and procedures.

		<p>are being ran, however, this may need to change due to financial cutbacks. Finances continue to get stretched and plans are reviewed on 'value for money'. It is increasingly difficult to get additional funding and the LA want professionals reports, stating 'proof' is needed e.g. by EP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Currently in some LAs, paperwork is especially challenging to complete and review and can feel that it is form filling for the sake of it. The really important stuff often can feel like it is contained in a box at the end for 'anything else relevant' and can feel like it isn't being given enough attention.	
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Appendix 23 Design Planning Document Creation

This image shows how I returned to my transcripts to code actionable points via NVIVO.

The screenshot displays a transcript with several paragraphs of text. Some text is highlighted in yellow, indicating it has been coded. On the right side, there is a 'CODE STRIPES' panel with a list of codes. The codes include:

- Clear communication around purpose and aim of parent/practitioner/educance staff prior to meeting
- Meeting ARs as a priority
- Practitioner development around outcomes
- Practitioner development around outcomes
- Transparent and pro-active information sharing around changes in processes e.g. transition phases
- Consider meeting meetings for students
- Consider meeting meetings for students
- ARs as collaborative
- ARs as person-centred
- ARs as person-centred
- A simplistic and clear process that is accessible to all
- Student participation to be prioritised by all

The transcript text includes:

understand how things are and when you change the system, a bit more like decisions and stuff. It is difficult, isn't it?

EP: And I think again, when some parents are wanting a school say like LOCAL SPECIALIST SCHOOL and they're in the catchment, they're in the vicinity of that special school. They might think it's a very simple process of 'oh, it's my local school, it's around the corner.' And you have to go, it's not like that. And you've got to explain sometimes about processes and that's what it could be really helpful to be present there. But again, it's highlighting that when it is that high-end change of need, change of provision and the conversations that need to take place can take a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of preparation. So it's really important we go to the right annual reviews so that we've got that ability to deal with that.

TEP: Yeah, definitely. Thank you. And I'll just wondering about both of your experiences around and students like people voice or if have you ever had any good experience or not as good experiences about them contributing to either, the meeting itself or the paperwork

Social Worker: Most of mine to be fair do like to come, I always advocate that, this is your opportunity to tell people what you want. I mean, it guess it depends on the age range. I've got kids from four to 16, excuse Typically teenagers alone, 'I'm not going to that. It's crap,' but the odd. One, if I can get them out of the moody phase face for long enough. Once they come, I think so quite enjoyed being listened to and sort of, giving their views. Because often, certainly for teenagers who don't want to engage. I can be their voice and I feel bad I can ask them to tell something and pass it on but it's never better than if the young person can be part of the meeting and say things themselves. For my little ones, you sort of direct work tool so that can always go into a meeting. And sort of say this is what this young person's told me. But it depends really where you are with the child and sort of what they're going through but the majority of mine do like to attend and I was think it's better if we can get them to go.

TEP: Yeah, and EP?

EP: Yeah, I think sometimes from the paperwork can be quite basic some of the one page profiles, maybe doesn't get the full message across what that young person sort of thinking about or depends on who fills it in with them as well. And you they might not give their full view dependa on who's filling it in

The below table shows sample examples of initial codes following returning to transcripts for Design Planning Document.

NVIVO codes for Design action document

Accessibility needed through interpreters.

All contribution welcome treated equally and considered.

All have knowledge and understanding of the process.

Annual Reviews should consider CYP age and context as needed.

Can SENDIAS be signposted to

Celebrating CYP progress through ceasing the EHCP.

Clear parental guidance on the process provided to all proactively.

Clear transparent and consistent communication. E.g. phone calls and emails answered.

Cluster meetings between SENCOs and SEND team to support training, support, and open communication.

Code of Practice knowledge is accessible and consistent.

Education, health, and Care attend and engage in Annual Review meetings and processes when required.

EHCP as a live document which is accessible.

Key person support gathers views prior to the meeting.

Limit on requirements of writing for parent carers.

All should understand local procedures to ensure equity. E.g. training on how to complete paperwork.

Nationalised paperwork to support understanding.

New practitioners provide opportunity to meet CYP prior to Annual Review.

One page profile of practitioner to be given before Annual Review meeting.

Online live EHCP documents easy to update.

Opportunities for breaks and adaptations within the meeting.

Points of transition especially are supported by a collaborative approach.

Provide parent carers with a copy of the Code of Practice.

Pupils create invites.

Reduce use of jargon

School staff having an understanding of paperwork and local procedure.

SENCO and teacher training focus on SEND to support processes.

SENCO training on paperwork.

CYP having someone they trust in the room.

Time and duration of the meeting to be discussed collaboratively rather than dictated.

Transparent and pro-active information sharing around changes in processes e.g. transition phases.

Workshops to support understanding of the CoP and Annual Reviews.