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Educational Psychologists' experiences of implementing guidance for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments in the current professional and systemic context.

Katie Roden

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Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

University of Essex

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Abstract

Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) and requests are increasing yearly, and a record number of plans are being granted. Educational Psychologists (EPs) are the only professional named within the SEND Code of Practice (2015) statutory guidance. The Joint Professional Liaison Group (JPLG) generated guidance incorporating key principles to support the assessment process. However, despite the statutory requirement and guidance there is little investigation of EPs' experience of its application.

This thesis examines the literature for Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) and Local Authority (LA) professionals' experience of the EHCP process through a systematic informed process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven EPs, in one LA, and a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was applied to analyse the data. The RTA identified eight main themes: Skills of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes, Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics, From information to insight: The EP's approach to support holistic understanding, Collaboration and relationships with the EHCNA process, Speaking the same language: Inclusive and accessible practice, Towards holistic and inclusive engagement, Creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA, and Outcomes and provision: Aligning aspirations with practical realities. The research situates itself amongst a context of SEND that is being consistently noted as underfunded, not meeting statutory deadlines, difficulties with EP recruitment and retention. The implications for EPs, LAs and at a national level are considered with suggestions for future research recommended.

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Table of Contents

Abstract **2**

Acknowledgements **3**

Table of Contents **4**

List of Tables **13**

List of Figures **14**

1. Introduction **15**

1.1 Chapter Overview 15

1.2 Legislative Reform 15

1.3 EP Role and Demands 16

1.4 Current Context 18

1.5 National Context 19

1.6 Local Context 20

1.7 Guidance Document 21

1.8 Researcher's Position 22

1.9 Terminology 23

1.10 Research Aims 23

2. Literature Review **24**

2.1 Chapter Overview 24

2.2 Literature Review Purpose and Questions 24

2.2.1 Researcher Positionality 25

2.3 Review Method 26

2.3.1 Search Strategy 26

2.3.2 Literature Selection 28

2.4 Literature Overview and Appraisal 32

2.4.1 Trustworthiness 32

2.4.2 Aims and Methodology 34

2.4.3 Participants and Sampling 35

2.4.4 Methods of Data Analysis 37

2.4.5 Reflexivity 38

2.5 Literature Review Themes 38

2.5.1 Best Interests of the Child 39

2.5.2 Whose Plan Is It? 41

2.5.3 Multi-Agency Working 42

2.5.4 Outcomes 44

2.5.5 Legislation 45

2.5.6 Bureaucratic Process 47

2.6 Summary: What are the views of SEND and LA Professionals on the EHCNA process? 49

2.7 Implications for Educational Psychology 50

2.6 Links to Current Study 52

3. Methodology 53

3.1 Chapter Overview 53

3.2 Research Aims and Purpose 54

3.3 Research Question 56

3.4 Research Philosophy 56

3.4.1 Researcher's ontological position 56

3.4.2 Researcher's epistemological position 57

3.4.3 Researcher's positioning 59

3.5 Research Approach 62

3.6 Research Strategies 63

3.6.1 Research Choices 63

3.7 Time Horizon 64

3.8 Data collection 64

3.9 Research Design 65

3.9.1 Participants' inclusion/exclusion criteria 65

3.9.3 LA description 66

3.10 Procedures 68

3.10.1 Recruitment 69

3.11 Data analysis 70

3.11.1 Reflexive thematic analysis....70

3.11.2 Link to research....70

3.11.3 Critique of reflexive thematic analysis....72

3.11.3.2 Participants' narratives....72

3.11.2 Potential alternatives....73

3.12 Data Analysis Process....73

3.12.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the dataset.....76

3.12.2 Phase 2: Coding....76

3.12.3 Phase 3: Generating initial themes.....77

3.12.4 Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes.....78

3.12.5 Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming the themes....78

3.12.6 Phase 6: Writing the report....79

3.13 Support for the researcher....80

3.15 Research Quality....80

3.16 Ethical issues....81

3.15.1 Informed Consent....82

3.15.2 Data protection and storage of data....82

3.15.2 Right to withdraw....82

3.15.3 Anonymity....83

3.15.5 Risks....83

3.15.6 Benefits to participants....83

3.15.8 Debriefing and feedback....84

3.15.9 Ethical Approval....85

4. Findings....86

4.1 Chapter Overview....86

4.2 Theme 1: Skills of the Educational Psychologist to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes....89

4.2.1 Subtheme: Facilitating....90

4.2.2 Subtheme: Changes in narratives....91

4.2.3 Subtheme: Building rapport and overcoming systemic barriers....92

4.2.4 Subtheme: Being present to experience and perspectives....94

4.3. Theme 2: Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics....95

4.3.1 Subtheme: Bureaucracy and systemic constraints....95

4.3.2 Subtheme: Power dynamics and stakeholder influence....96

4.3.3 Subtheme: Equity, accessibility and the child's voice....98

4.3.4 Subtheme: Professional tensions and systemic pressures....99

4.4 Theme 3: From information to insight: The Educational Psychologist's approach to support holistic understanding....100

4.4.1 Subtheme: Gathering and collating information 100

4.4.2 Subtheme: Formulation and analysis 101

4.4.3 Subtheme: Contextual and relational understanding 103

4.4.4 Subtheme: Process of the written report 105

4.5 Theme 4: Collaboration and relationships in the EHCNA process 106

4.5.1 Subtheme: Collaboration between systems and professionals 106

4.5.2 Subtheme: School as a key player in the EHCNA process 107

4.5.3 Subtheme: Challenges in professional expectations and multidisciplinary working 109

4.6 Theme 5: Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice 110

4.6.1 Subtheme: Clarity and jargon-free communication 110

4.6.1 Subtheme: Tailoring communication to diverse audiences 111

4.6.3 Subtheme: Bridging understanding across stakeholders 112

4.7 Theme 6: Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement 113

4.7.1 Subtheme: Amplifying voices and building relationships 113

4.7.2 Subtheme: Centring the child in the process 114

4.7.3 Subtheme: Challenges and barriers to engagement 115

4.8 Theme 7: Creating a joint understanding of the Educational Psychologist's role in the EHCNA 116

4.8.1 Subtheme: Transparency and professional role 116

4.8.3 Subtheme: Challenges in the processes for families 119

4.10 Theme 8: Outcomes and Provision: Aligning Aspirations with Practical Realities ... 120

5. Discussion 124

5.1 Chapter Overview 124

5.2 Research Question: 'What are EPs' perspectives of applying the principles from the JPLG guidance for EHCNAs within practice?' 124

5.2.1 Statement of principal findings 124

5.2.2 Skills of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA process 125

5.2.3 Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics 127

5.2.4 From information to insight: The Educational Psychologist's approach to support holistic understanding 130

5.2.5 Collaboration and relationships in the EHCNA process 132

5.2.6 Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice 136

5.2.7 Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement 138

5.2.8 Creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA 141

5.2.9 Outcomes and Provision: Aligning Aspirations with Practical Realities 143

5.3 Limitations 145

5.4 Self-reflection 147

5.5 Implications for practice 150

5.5.1 Implications for EPs 150

5.5.2 Implications at an LA level 151

5.5.4 Implications at a national level 152

5.6 Suggesting future directions 153

5.7 Dissemination strategy 155

5.8 Concluding Comments 155

6. References 158

7. Appendices 175

Appendix A 175

Appendix B 187

Appendix C 217

Appendix D 230

Appendix E 252

Appendix F 253

Appendix G 259

Appendix H 262

Appendix I 263

Appendix J 264

Appendix K 270

Appendix L 271

Appendix M 282

Appendix N 294

Appendix O 306

Appendix P 307

Appendix Q.....309

Appendix R.....310

Appendix S.....314

List of Tables

Table 1: *Literature Review Search Terms*

Table 2: *Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Table 3: *Participants included in qualitative / mixed-method studies*

Table 4: *Description of the six phases of RTA*

Table 5: *Thematic Table*

List of Figures

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow diagram

Figure 2: Literature review themes

Figure 3: Adaptation of Saunders, Lewis, and Thorndike (2019), research onion

Figure 4: The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)

Figure 5: Defined themes and subthemes

Figure 6: Image of relationships between themes and subthemes

Figure 7: Interprofessional collaboration framework

Figure 8: The degree of participation

1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the legislative framework relating to the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP), providing an overview of the legislative reforms and the purpose and structure of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). I also explore the current national and local context, consider the socio-political influences, and present my positionality as a researcher alongside the research aims. In addition, I provide an overview of the key guidance document that informs EP practice in relation to Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs).

1.2 Legislative Reform

The role of the EP has expanded over the years in line with laws that defined EPs' statutory requirements. The 1944 Education Act allowed more children and young people (CYP) to access secondary education, with local education authorities (LEAs) ensuring this education was suitable. The concept of educational sub-normality and educational maladjustment was introduced under the Act, which increased the categorisation, labelling and selection for psychologists to complete as part of their work (Leadbetter & Arnold, 2013). The 1981 Education Act introduced a statutory requirement for all children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to undergo a complete assessment by a range of professionals, but in all cases, an EP employed by the LEA (Leadbetter & Arnold, 2013).

The Warnock report (Department for Education and Science, 1978) and the 1981 Education Act introduced the terms 'special educational needs' (SEN) and 'special educational provision', granting parents/carers increased rights through an appeals process. These changes also introduced the statements of SEN and the annual review processes. Subsequently, the 1993 Education Act and 1994 Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) established a legal requirement for the government to produce a 'code of

practice' to support LEAs and educational settings in identifying, accessing and making provision for CYP with SEN. The term 'tribunals' was introduced to provide specific terminology. The 1994 Code recognised key SEN categories for identifying need and implemented five assessment and intervention stages. The 2001 SEN and Disability Act and 2001 Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) integrated disability policy into SEN policy, reduced the SEN categories to four and simplified the graduated assessment to 'school action' and 'school action plus'.

The Children and Families Act (2014) and Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP; Department for Education [DfE] & Department for Health [DoH], 2015) introduced reforms to the support provided to CYP in England with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This included the introduction of EHCPs for CYP up to 25-year-olds, who require more support than is ordinarily available within their educational setting. The EHCP outlines the needs of the CYP and includes outcomes and provisions that must be provided. The reforms highlighted that multi-agency working, and person-centred planning were a statutory requirement, focusing on outcomes to prepare children for adulthood (Tomlinson & Oland, 2023). The reforms highlighted the unique and statutory role that the EP plays in an EHCNA.

1.3 EP Role and Demands

EPs working for a Local Authority (LA) in England have a statutory duty to contribute psychological advice to EHCNAs (Atfield et al., 2023). Alongside the ongoing statutory requirement for EPs, the context that EPs operate within, and their job demands have shifted over the years. EPs' roles and ways of working have shifted over time. All approaches can be seen as valid, but are influenced by the broader societal and contextual factors present at the time. Throughout the years, a consistency is that each EP is autonomous in their practice for creatively employing psychology and relating to theories and practices whilst

enacting the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards.

From the 1970s onwards, a shift took place in educational psychology practice, resulting in a move from the medical model towards a conceptualisation of the role of the EP employing systemic and preventative approaches (Burden, 1978). During the 1990s and 2000s, the need for consultation was highlighted, gaining popularity in England (Wagner, 1995; Wagner, 2000). The change to EP practice resulted in working together with schools and a move away from an expert model of practice. These changes in practice were due to the psychological assessment function being increasingly focused on, due to the introduction of national testing, increased school financial independence and parental choices (Thomson, 1996). The breadth of the individual EP has been identified as an area that may create challenges to be an effective scientific practitioner (Fallon, Kevin, & Rooney, 2010). The introduction of various psychological frameworks has influenced EPs' use of psychological knowledge, skill, and understanding, while also promoting an interactionalist and systemic focus that includes a consideration of ethical practice (Fallon et al., 2010; BPS, 1999; Woolfson, Whaling, Stewart, & Monsen, 2003).

The role of the EP has been conceptualised as a systemic model to target staff development, management and support of learning and behaviour, influencing organisational structures and altering people's beliefs and values (Norwich, 2005). Regarding safeguarding, the EP's role has shifted in recent years towards discrete practice areas. This shift has narrowed the range of work and potentially detached the EP from the child protection systems (Allen & Bond, 2020). The shift within practice has also been noted through safeguarding guidance (British Psychological Society, 2018), highlighting the importance of ecological systems, practice grounded in social justice principles, and community psychology approaches to be adopted to support the most marginalised members of society.

The role of the EP continues to prioritise and capture the voices of CYP to understand their needs, wishes and views on their educational provision and future outcomes whilst also including parental voice (Fox, 2015). EPs have highlighted the importance of creating an understanding of the CYP through contextual observations to actively take this holistic view of a CYP to minimise intrusiveness (Leatherbarrow, Woods, Thomas & Tyldesley, 2021).

The importance of the EP in being a reflective practitioner is highlighted in training and practice (Rowley et al., 2023) with competencies and proficiencies, highlighting the broader awareness to ensure that anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice principles are embedded into practice (BPS, 2023; HCPC, 2023). Social justice principles within Educational Psychology Services (EPS) are becoming prominent with EPs acknowledging the profession-wide commitment to social justice (Kuria & Kelly, 2023). Kuria and Kelly (2023) highlighted the importance of reflective practices to recognise the impact of power, privilege and diversity to strive towards equality across EPS contexts. The reflective practice principles and a focus on relationships between people to support professional practice can also be seen in models such as the Relational Model of Consultation (Kennedy & Lee, 2021). Additional research has also been identified on the need for self-reflective frameworks for culturally responsive educational psychology practice to ensure that EPs consider the increasingly diverse school population they support (Sakata, 2024).

1.4 Current Context

The introduction of the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) improvement plan (DfE, 2023) highlighted the critical role that EPs play for CYP with SEND in the EHCP assessment and review system. It also identified the role of early identification and intervention to support needs and prevent escalation. The guidance focuses on improving the ordinarily available provision to CYP so that the number of those needing support through an EHCP will be reduced. Reforms are being undertaken to work with stakeholders to deliver a standardised EHCP template with supporting processes and guidance from 2025. It will include testing the

impact and decision-making through multi-agency panels. The hope is that these changes can restore trust for parents of CYP with SEND and reduce parental experience of adversarial, costly, and lengthy processes. The guidance recognises the challenges around the system. As more CYP receive EHCPs, more resources and capacity are pulled to the specialist end, resulting in fewer resources available to deliver early intervention and adequate, timely support in mainstream, resulting in a vicious cycle.

Since the introduction of EHCPs in 2014, there has been a rise in requests and plans issued year on year. In January 2024, EHCPs were at 576,474 cases, an 11.5% rise from 2023, in requests for new plans (Department for Education, 2024). The number of initial requests for an EHCP during 2023 was 138,242, an increase from 114,482 in 2022 (Department for Education, 2024). These figures highlight the number of children who may experience statutory involvement from an EP to provide an assessment.

Previous research has attempted to systematically review the literature on EHCPs within the current context (Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Ahad, Thompson & Hall, 2021). However, it has been identified that professional groups such as EPs and social workers' experiences of the EHCP process are under-represented within research (Ahad et al., 2022). As the exploration of EPs' experience is scarce within the literature, the current research aims to explore the experience of providing advice for an EHCNA whilst applying principles from a guidance document.

1.5 National Context

This research is taking place in a socio-political context that is currently highlighting the systemic failings of the systems supposedly in place. The National Audit Office (2024) report has highlighted that the government has no clear SEND plan and that a whole-system reform is needed to support CYP, families, and the school systems. Parents are continuing to experience blame and discrimination with media narratives highlighting that the rise of CYP needing EHCPs is the response of poor parenting (Filmer, 2024). These myths not only

stigmatise families but also undermine the work of professionals and contribute to systemic barriers, making it harder for families to access appropriate care and support, and ultimately hindering meaningful reform. LAs fail to meet statutory deadlines with only 50.3% of LAs meeting the 20-week deadline (DfE, 2024). The media narrative also highlights that SEND needs are bankrupting authorities (Burbidge, 2024), placing the blame within CYP with SEND and their families, rather than looking into the systemic failings of the system and what has currently led to this point in time.

The British Psychological Society (BPS; 2024) provided insights from the EP workforce (249 surveyed), highlighting that 70% felt CYP in their LA did not have fair and equal access to an EP. 44% felt unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their current workload, and 53% did not feel able to support CYP effectively with their current workload. 62% of those surveyed highlighted issues with EHCPs. Some of the issues identified by respondents were an over-reliance on EHCP and statutory assessments, which was linked to mismanagement of funding within the system. This provides insight into the current socio-political context for SEND and EHCPs.

1.6 Local Context

In August 2024, the LA where the research took place identified that around 13% of CYP have identified SEND without an EHCP. This is similar to the national average (13.6%) with around 4.6% of CYP having an EHCP which is around the national average (4.8%) (Anonymised LA, 2024). The LA have reviewed their processes for EHCNAs to ensure consistency across the LA for all professionals who may contribute to an EHCNA or provide a report on involvement with a CYP. The SEND and AP improvement plan (DfE, 2023) formed the foundations of changes to the EHCNA paperwork processes, and the guidance provided by the Joint Professional Liaison Group (JPLG; 2020). Therefore, the research surrounding the process of EHCNAs has been an organisational change task within the LA,

focusing on service day content and has remained in the awareness of EPs within the service.

1.7 Guidance Document

In June 2020, the JPLG formed with representatives from the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP), the British Psychological Society (BPS), Division of Educational and Child Psychologists (DECP) and the Programme Directors for Initial Training created a task and finish group. The purpose was to produce guidance based on EP services implementing and evaluating their practice concerning contributions to EHCNAs. The principles developed within this guidance apply to all EPs who are involved in EHCNAs regardless of their employment status (JPLG, 2020 pg. 4). The purpose of the document is to support professionals and to inform service users of the standards the EP operates within alongside HCPC and BPS standards.

The document has eight guiding principles grouped into five key areas:

Person centred, holistic and fair: This area highlights the importance of keeping CYP and families at the heart of the process while fairly representing their views. The EP needs to demonstrate that a holistic assessment has been undertaken within the contexts in which CYP live and learn. The EP should provide a balanced and informed opinion of the CYP, encompassing their views, needs and strengths.

Reflective of best practice: The EP will ensure they include knowledge and current thinking within educational psychology. The EP uses critical and reflective approaches to use psychology in original or creative ways. The EP involvement should ideally form part of the assess, plan, do, review (APDR) cycle of support as outlined in the SEND CoP (2015).

Collaborative: The EP must ensure that they involve the CYP, parents/carers and all relevant professionals during the EHCNA process.

Transparent and accessible: The EP should clearly state the information gathered and the sources used for this information. Any information and evidence obtained will inform a psychological formulation and result in a rationale for outcomes and recommendations. The EP's reports can be verbal or written and must use concise, clear language. Any psychological perspectives will include an explanation of terminology.

Compliant: The EP will follow any relevant legislation and professional codes of ethical practice.

The guidance highlights the importance of professional judgment and the uniqueness of each professional. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore EPs' experiences of implementing this guidance.

1.8 Researcher's Position

To acknowledge my position as a researcher, I am inclined to work systemically as a practitioner due to my previous career in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Through this experience, I witnessed firsthand the importance of the coordination between health, social care, and education, with the EHCNA being one of the statutory occasions for all these services to come together to provide evidence and support for a CYP. Despite statutory requirements, there is often a lack of collaboration with a predominant focus on educational information for the plan (Boesley & Crane, 2018). I was genuinely interested in hearing how EPs found this experience and was aware that aspects such as 'collaborative' in the guidance document would provide an opportunity to hear how EPs interact and experience multi-disciplinary working.

I am also interested in the psychological aspects of material support and how access to resources affects outcomes for CYP. These interests stem from my own experiences of growing up in a low socio-economic status and witnessing teachers' explicit low expectations across those in my class cohort. These structural barriers to education have shaped my

perspective and fuelled my passion for this area. This interest can often conflict with the gatekeeping role of EP, despite EPs recognising and desiring to move away from this aspect. Given my lack of prior experience within school settings, I also had an interest in understanding the experiences of EPs in the process and how they perceive their role within the broader system of the responsibilities they must fulfil.

1.9 Terminology

In this research, "parent" and "family" will describe any caregiver or guardian responsible for a CYP. This recognises the diverse individuals who can fulfil the role of a parent through various guardian roles. Additionally, "educators" refers to various school-related professionals supporting CYPs' learning and social-emotional well-being. The introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014) advocated using the term SEND to refer to CYP with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The SEND Code of Practice expresses that a CYP has SEND if they have a learning difficulty or disability that requires additional educational provision than is typically provided for others of the same age (DfE, 2015).

1.10 Research Aims

The current research aims to explore EPs' experiences of applying principles from the JPLG guidance document, which outlines aspects of best practice, to the participants' most recent EHCNAs. The research aims to fill the gap in research surrounding EPs' views being underrepresented within the EHCP process. The research also seeks to understand any barriers in everyday practice, through the following research question, 'What are EPs' perspectives of applying the principles from the JPLG guidance for EHCNAs within practice?'

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the purpose of the literature review and the key review question under examination. I describe the review approach, including the search strategy, specific search terms, and the process for selecting relevant literature. I then provide an overview of the literature and appraisal methods, followed by a discussion of the methodology. Key findings are thematically synthesised, and I conclude by reflecting on the implications of these findings for the EP profession and discussing how the current research addresses the literature review question.

2.2 Literature Review Purpose and Questions

A literature review offers a comprehensive overview of the scope, nature, and quality of evidence related to a specific review question and/or topic, identifying any gaps that may require further exploration (Aveyard, 2014; Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). The literature review approach was designed to provide a comprehensive and contextually grounded exploration of the topic, focusing on enhancing knowledge, deepening understanding, and/or shifting perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021), rather than delivering an exhaustive overview of the EHCP process. The purpose of this literature review was to provide a context and rationale for the current study by exploring existing research into the views of SEND and LA professionals on the EHCP process. A recent review (Ahad, Thompson, & Hall, 2022) did not include the perspectives of LA staff, as there is limited research examining their role and experiences in the process. However, it is crucial to explore their experiences, given their statutory responsibility and the ability to influence the process and its outcomes. Therefore, the literature review aimed to answer the following question:

- What are the views of SEND and LA professionals on the EHCNA process?

2.2.1 Researcher Positionality

As a TEP, my interest in the EHCNA process is grounded in both professional practice and my values around inclusive, child-centred work. My experiences within LA settings have shaped how I understand systemic challenges and the roles different professionals play in the EHCP process. These experiences influenced how I engaged with the literature, particularly in valuing perspectives that reflect real-world complexity, inter-agency working, and child voice. I approached the review with a critical realist lens, acknowledging both the reality of systemic structures and the subjective perspectives of professionals working within them.

In defining the scope of the literature review and the professionals considered within this research, I drew heavily on my own experiences of which professionals are typically involved in the EHCNA process. My focus primarily centred on EPs and SEND professionals, as these roles are prominent in my professional experience and the available literature. On reflection, I recognise that including a broader range of voices, such as doctors and other allied health professionals, may have provided a more comprehensive perspective. However, my review of existing literature revealed that medical and allied health perspectives tend to be less explored, often limited to brief overviews that do not explore the lived experiences of these professionals. This reality created a balance needed between the inclusion criteria I applied and the availability of robust literature, which inevitably shaped the professional voices represented in this review.

Furthermore, my positionality influenced the methodology and synthesis of the literature review. I engaged reflexively with the literature, aware that my background, interests, and experiences shaped which studies I prioritised and how I interpreted key themes. For example, my systemic viewpoint led me to value studies that highlighted multidisciplinary collaboration and systemic barriers, while my interest in equity emphasised the importance of literature addressing social factors affecting CYP outcomes. This reflexivity also guided

my language choices, and at times those identified during the literature review reflect the emotive underpinning when I engaged with this literature review.

In summary, my positionality as a researcher, informed by prior professional experience, personal background, and a systemic lens, has directly shaped the focus, scope, and interpretation of this literature review. Recognising this influence is critical in understanding the choices made throughout the research process and in situating the findings within a broader context.

2.3 Review Method

A systematic, replicable, and transparent approach was employed to review the literature. This method facilitated the synthesis of evidence, the development of comprehensive and reliable conclusions and implications related to the topic of interest (Siddaway et al., 2019). A literature review with a systematic, informed method needed to be undertaken by formulating inclusion and exclusion criteria and critiquing the nature and quality of the evidence available to address this review question (Siddaway et al., 2019).

2.3.1 Search Strategy

A scoping review took place to isolate key terms and understand the area's current research. A systematic informed search was undertaken on 5th August 2024, across psychology, education, and open dissertations databases (APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, APA PsycTests, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), E-Journals, OpenDissertations, ERIC and Education Source). Table 1 shows the search terms below.

2.3.1.1 Search Terms. Keywords were selected to capture the review question and identify a wide range of relevant research (Aveyard, 2014). The keywords related to 'EHCNA' 'Professional', and 'View' can be seen in Table 1. Truncation symbols enabled all endings for the key search terms included in the review (Aveyard, 2014).

Advanced searching was conducted to allow Boolean operators within the databases to identify relevant literature related to ‘EHCNA’ and ‘professional’ in the title and abstract, and ‘view’ in the full text. The Boolean operator then connected these through the use of ‘AND.’ When searches were initially carried out with all items in full text, this led to a high number of irrelevant articles. Therefore, the abstract was chosen to ensure the articles met the review focus, as the abstract provides a concise summary of the study and provides the main objectives.

Table 1

Literature Review Search Terms

Subject mapping terms	Key word search terms	Field
1. “Education Health and care needs assessment” AND	OR educational health and care needs assessment process* OR “EHCNA” OR educational health and care plan* OR EHC Plans* OR EHCP* OR “educational health and care process” OR EHC process* OR EHC assessment or EHCN assessment or SEND provision* or SEND policy.	Title / Abstract
2. Professional AND	Educational Psychologist OR Educational Psycholog* OR EP* OR Professional OR Local Authority OR LA* OR EHCP worker OR SEND worker* or “Speech and language therapist*” OR “SALT” OR “Occupational Therapist*” OR OT*.	Title / Abstract
3. View*	OR perception* OR perspective* OR experience* OR opinion* OR voice* OR attitude* OR report* OR review* OR rating OR satisfaction	Full Text

2.3.2 Literature Selection

2.3.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified to demonstrate the review's scope and the most relevant articles to the review questions being answered (Aveyard, 2014) as detailed in Table 2. The criteria were set following a scoping review. They were adapted during the process following reflections to include criteria that had not been considered or to ensure the articles were of relevance.

Table 2

Literature Review: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion	Reasoning
Publication Date	Published between 2014 to present	Published before 2014	To reflect the changes to the SEND CoP (2015)
Research Quality	Published in a peer reviewed journal or a thesis	Not published in a peer reviewed journal	To confirm that the research quality has been evaluated and reviewed or has undertaken a VIVA process.
Language / Location	English language only and England research	Not published in English or the research carried out in England	To reflect in line with the SEND CoP (2015) requirements.
Participants	Educational Psychologists, LA workers, EHCP worker, Speech and Language Therapist	School staff, educators, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-	To understand the experiences of professionals that make contributions to the evidence for an EHCNA and EHCP that are not school based.

	or Occupational Therapist	ordinators (SENDCos), children, young people, and their families	
Subject of interest	Research focused on SEND and LA professionals' experience on the EHCP process.	Study topics that are not relevant to the literature review questions Research that focuses only on the experiences of CYP, parents, or teachers or SENDCos	Ensure that the literature is appropriate for answering the literature review questions e.g., gaining an understanding of the views of professionals outside of the school setting that are involved in the contribution of the evidence or creation of the EHCP.
Type of literature	Research journal article, thesis, or literature review	Policy, opinion piece, editorial or theoretical literature	To ensure that the literature is relevant to answering the literature review questions e.g., gathered and analysed data about the experiences of SEND and LA professionals experience on the EHCP process. Literature reviews were included to provide a context of the area which may include relevant participants.
Research Methodology	Qualitative methods or mixed methods	Quantitative methods	To allow the research to explore and emphasise subjective experiences and provide depth over generalisability.

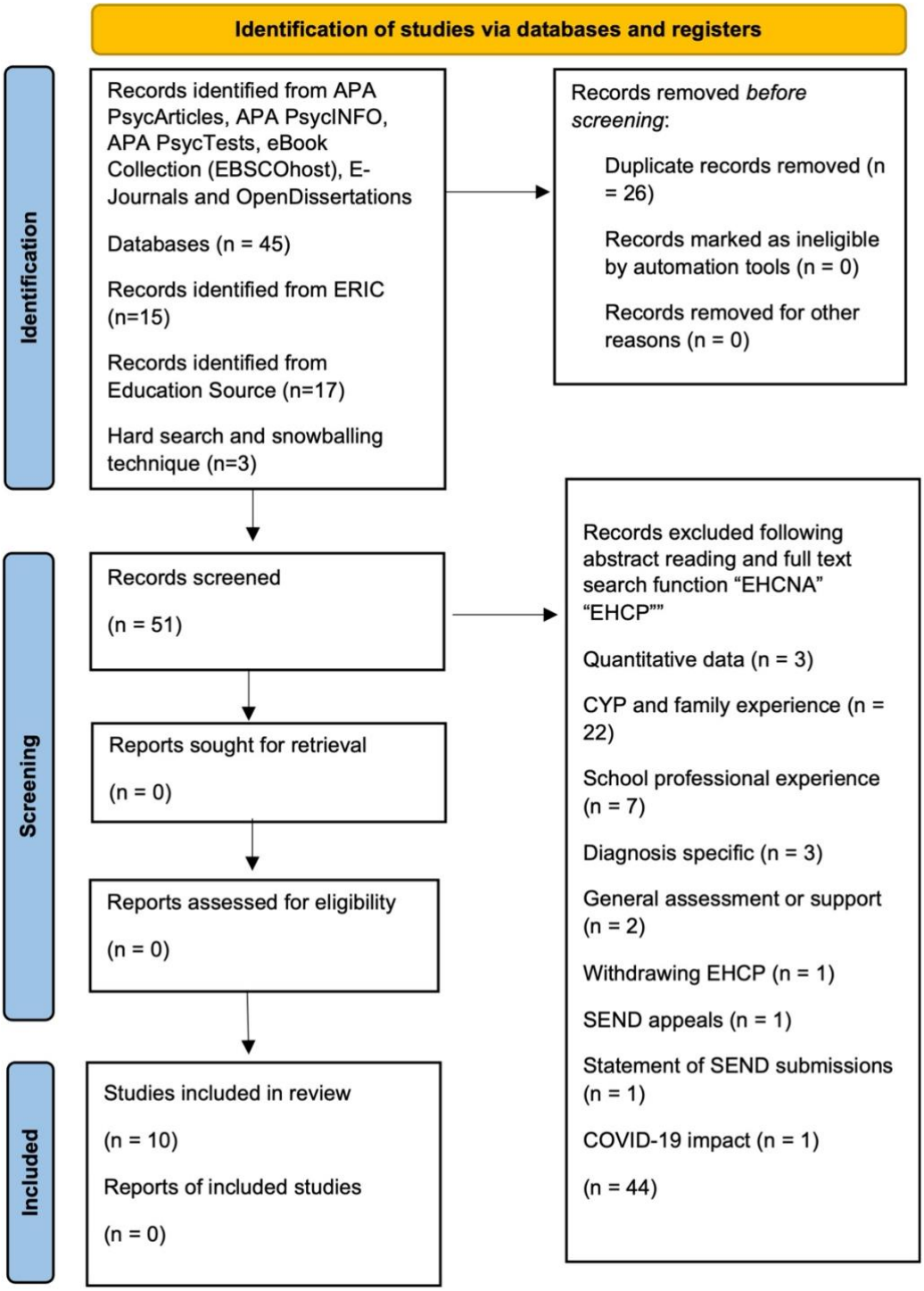
2.3.2.2 Selection Process. The literature review followed a series of systematic steps outlined in Figure 1. The initial database search was conducted in August 2024 using EBSCOhost, which included APA PsycArticles, APA PsycINFO, APA PsycTests, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), E-Journals, and OpenDissertations. This search returned 45 results, with two duplicates removed, leaving 43 unique articles. A separate search was then conducted on ERIC, returning 15 results; after removing duplicates, 3 unique articles remained. Finally, Education Source was searched, yielding 17 results, from which 5 unique articles were retained after duplicates were removed. This resulted in a total of 51 unique articles identified across the three databases.

Titles and abstracts were screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix A), followed by full-text reviews to assess relevance to the literature review question. From this process, 7 articles were included, and 44 were excluded. A snowballing technique was then used, involving reviewing the reference lists and citations of the included articles. This identified 3 further studies that met the inclusion criteria. In total, 10 articles were included in the final literature review.

Where theses (three in total) were included, the abstract, aims, methodology, relevant findings, and discussion sections were reviewed. A data extraction table (see Appendix B) was created to capture key information from each study, and a critical appraisal was conducted for each using a structured tool (see Appendix C), discussed further below.

Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



2.4 Literature Overview and Appraisal

The identified articles were critically appraised using different tools in line with their adopted methodology:

- The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Systematic Reviews Checklist
- The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Studies Checklist
- Framework for Critiquing Quantitative Research Articles (Holland & Rees, 2010) to incorporate the mixed methods research

The three included theses did not undergo a critical appraisal tool due to only reading the previously stated research sections. The theses will be approached critically with the understanding that they have been conducted as part of a doctoral study and completed alongside a professional placement.

2.4.1 Trustworthiness

An overview of the information gathered from the CASP and approaching the literature critically with prompts (Wallbank, 2022) for each included study will be provided.

Ahad et al.'s (2022) literature review was motivated by the rise in appeals against local authorities' EHCP decisions. The findings emphasise the system's shortcomings and suggest potential next steps. However, there may be some bias, as the increased appeals prompted the study, indicating an expectation of systemic issues limiting the authenticity of multiple realities to be explored (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

While the authors Cosma and Mulcare (2022) were members of an interest group, given the lack of existing research, they aimed to explore EPs' experiences with the EHCP process for young people who offend. By focusing on the views of individuals within the interest group, there is a possibility of bias, as personal investment and the limited scope of

interviewing only members may create an echo chamber of results. However, the findings were reviewed by both authors and university research supervisors to mitigate this risk.

Sharma (2021) explored the experiences and challenges of amplifying CYP's voices. Using a multimethod approach that included questionnaires and interviews, the study emphasised authenticity while noting the influence of social desirability bias in the questionnaire responses, contrasting with the barriers identified in the findings. The research advocates for the inclusion of children in decision-making processes, recognising that this is often restricted within school settings and may create challenges for professionals seeking to implement their preferred practices.

Palikara, Castro, Gaona, and Eirinaki (2019) were all authors who worked at the same university, and the research was funded by a charity exploring the principles of early childhood education. The study does not clearly define the key concepts under investigation, making it challenging to determine how these will be measured and complicating policy impact evaluation.

Hellawell (2017) examined the views of parent-partnership working amongst professionals to identify key themes through a grounded theory approach. The open interview questions allowed participants to reflect on their experience of working under the new SEND CoP. From this research, multiple themes and papers have arisen, highlighting specific areas for professionals (Hellawell, 2017; 2018). The researcher's ability to provide a clear statement addressing the research question appears absent.

The included thesis research was conducted in the author's LA placement with a small sample size (Redwood, 2015; Cochrane, 2016; Rao, 2020). Redwood (2015) completed the research at a time when the EHCP process was in its infancy. The research was based on a realistic evaluation framework to explore the context, mechanism, and outcomes. The other authors used semi-structured interviews to explore the EHCNA process involving children through a case study design (Cochrane, 2016; Rao, 2020). The research to date highlights

examining EHCP processes on a smaller scale, potentially due to variations in how each LA operates (Redwood, 2015; Cochrane, 2016; Rao, 2020).

2.4.2 Aims and Methodology

The literature reviewed encompassed a variety of aims and data collection methods. Three of the articles incorporated literature reviews, which ranged from systematic to thematic approaches (Ahad et al., 2022; Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Hellawell, 2017). The objectives included contributing to a thematic review of the challenges associated with parent-partnership working within the framework of the current SEND CoP (Hellawell, 2017). Additionally, they aimed to summarise existing research on implementing SEND reforms and EHCP through a narrative literature review (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Building on this, the review systematically examined service users' experiences with the EHCP process (Ahad et al., 2022). The literature reviews provided an overview of the current context and highlighted the gap in examining the experiences of practitioners involved in the EHCP process, e.g., EPs and social workers (Ahad et al., 2022). Reviews were included because they synthesise information, and their absence would result in missing key recent insights into the process. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that not all references appeared in the literature review results due to the specific inclusion criteria applied.

The remaining literature pursued varied aims but employed similar qualitative methodologies. Notably, due to the inclusion criteria, some studies examined the views of SEND professionals and educators (e.g., SENDCos, headteachers). These studies were retained in the review as they primarily focused on the review's target population. Several studies in the literature aimed to explore professional experience working under the SEND CoP (Cochrane, 2016; Hellawell, 2017; Palikara et al., 2019; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018), (Redwood, 2015) also including the views of CYP and parents of the process. Additional aims focused on children's involvement and the use of participatory methods to elicit their voices (Rao, 2020; Sharma, 2021). One study specifically aimed to

investigate EPs' experiences of the EHCP's role in supporting the educational inclusion of young children who offend (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). This study highlighted EP's direct experiences and reflections on the EHCP process, identifying strengths and barriers (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). Three studies utilised mixed methods approaches to gather participant views employing a survey tool (Palikara et al., 2019; Redwood, 2015) and Likert scales (Sharma, 2021). Collectively, the literature addressed various aims to explore experiences with the EHCP process.

2.4.3 Participants and Sampling

There was a range of participants' views collected across the literature, shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants included in qualitative / mixed-method studies

Role	Studies
Educational Psychologist (including trainee)	(Cochrane, 2016; Cosma & Mulcare, 2022; Palikara et al., 2019; Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018; Sharma, 2021)
Local Authority Professional	(Palikara et al., 2019; Redwood, 2015; Sharma, 2021)
SEND Caseworker / Officer	(Hellawell, 2017; Redwood, 2015; Sharma, 2021)
Social Workers / Social Care	(Hellawell, 2017; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018)
Psychiatrist	(Hellawell, 2017)
Medical Professionals	(Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018)

Speech and Language Therapists	(Palikara et al., 2019; Redwood, 2015)
School professionals (SENDCo, Headteacher, class teacher)	(Cochrane, 2016; Hellawell, 2017; Palikara et al., 2019; Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018; Sharma, 2021)
Parent	(Cochrane, 2016; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018)
Child / Young person	(Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018)

When evaluating the studies using critical appraisal tools, many scored lower in areas related to participant recruitment and engagement. Most of the research did not sufficiently address the relationship between researchers and participants or consider how this relationship influenced the data analysis process (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022; Sales & Vincent, 2018; Sharma, 2021). Research included acknowledging that the participants were personal contacts, and snowballing methods were used, but provided little explanation of how this would be managed and how selection arose (Hellawell, 2017; Palikara et al., 2019).

In considering the theses, acknowledgement was given to the researchers' role in contributing to the data analysis process and the impact of co-construction. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were used for this reason (Cochrane, 2016; Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015). However, the methodology did not address the impact of researchers working professionally with potential participants during their placement. All research adhered to the university's ethical requirements and reflected on this process. However, there are concerns regarding the consent of professionals within the team, CYP, and their families. Recruitment often relied on monitoring information related to the EHCP process, which may not have been the original purpose for obtaining consent to store this information.

A limitation of all the research and participant use is the lack of longitudinal response, selection bias within the network of professionals and the geographical representation of the EHCP process across the UK (Cochrane, 2016; Hellawell, 2017; Palikara et al., 2019; Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015). Sharma (2021) contacted potential participants from across six LAs; however, it does not explain the opt-out process for participants and leaves questions unanswered regarding the potential barriers to participation. However, the research has acknowledged this as a limitation and highlighted that the findings are not supposed to be definitive or generalisable, but to outline the current understanding of the process.

2.4.4 Methods of Data Analysis

The data analysis methods demonstrated a rigorous approach by providing thematic maps and clear explanations of the analysis process for both data and literature reviews (Ahad et al., 2022; Cochrane, 2016; Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015; Sharma, 2021). However, many qualitative studies scored low in the CASP assessment due to a lack of justification for their chosen methods and insufficient explanation of the analysis process (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). Reflecting on Hellawell (2017) using the CASP framework, the article addresses its two aims through a thematic literature analysis and an empirical study. However, this approach lacks essential reflective elements related to the data analysis method and a clear statement of findings concerning the research question. Hellawell (2017) did not explain how grounded theory approaches were implemented, nor did they critically examine the author's role. Additionally, the literature was presented thematically without an overview of the methodology used or describing how the themes were developed. Sales and Vincent (2018) referenced thematic analysis, creating a table to show how each participant aligned with each theme; however, they did not explicitly outline this process or consider their role in the analysis. In completing the CASP for systematic reviews by Cochrane and Soni (2020), several areas were rated low due to an absence of a focused question, with no defined inclusion or exclusion criteria. The authors grouped studies thematically but did not

explain how these themes were formed. This lack of detail about the research in the review limits the ability to draw clear conclusions.

2.4.5 Reflexivity

A significant weakness identified through the CASP process was the lack of examination of the authors' role, perspective, and connection to the research project. In thesis projects, researchers' affiliations are mentioned, as each conducted their study within the LA where they were on placement (Cochrane, 2016; Rao, 2020; Redwood, 2015). However, there is minimal reflection on how these affiliations might influence their interpretations of the research, or it is discussed positively rather than critically as providing valuable context to understand participants' perspectives. Despite many studies, including the theses, being conducted by EPs, the researchers' insights, reactions, and opinions regarding the EHCP process are notably absent, even though this area was a focus of their research and a key aspect in their professional role (Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Cosma & Mulcare, 2022).

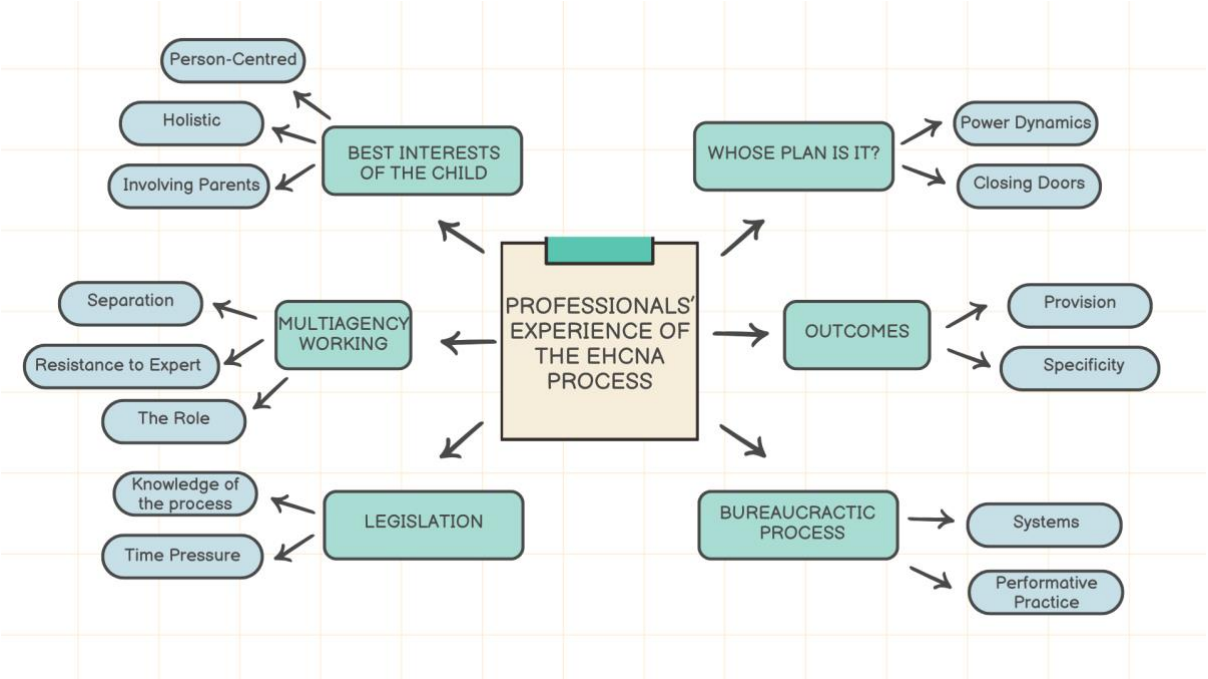
2.5 Literature Review Themes

To provide an overview of knowledge identified across the literature about SEND and LA professionals' experiences of the EHCNA process, a meta-synthesis of the studies was conducted to identify and synthesise key themes and concepts to explore an understanding of the review question (Siddaway et al., 2019). Themes were identified through coding the findings from each study, and they were then grouped into main themes with several subthemes. This analysis was completed through NVivo software (see Appendix D).

Please note that the literature search was repeated in April 2025. Once the inclusion and exclusion criteria were examined, no additional papers were considered for this literature review.

Figure 2

Literature review themes



2.5.1 Best Interests of the Child

The ‘best interests of the child’ theme was identified during the literature review. This theme was generated from the subthemes: person-centred, holistic, and involving parents. It is important to recognise the ethical obligation to uphold the best interests of the CYP through collaborative efforts, as outlined in the Code of Practice (Hellawell, 2017).

2.5.1.1 Person-Centred Professionals have highlighted that child-centred assessment and planning are important to families and can help ensure the EHCP is realistic and relevant (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Person-centred approaches have been identified as a strength and important facilitators within the process (Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Palikara et al., 2019). The child's aspirations are often included in the plan and play a crucial role in fostering and elevating their ambitions (Sharma, 2021). However, care needs to be taken, as this is sometimes completed through gathering the views of adults rather than directly from the child (Redwood, 2015). Professionals agreed that the EHCP process has facilitated a

child-centred approach, providing greater opportunity and prominence to the views of the child, though shortcomings are acknowledged (Sales & Vincent, 2018). SEND professionals have a duty of care to enable the participation of CYP during an EHCP, and the process should be underpinned by pupil participation and joint decision-making (Sharma, 2021). The literature identified EPs as an important facilitator in applying their knowledge and resources to elicit the child's voice and develop their autonomy (Sharma, 2021). Additionally, EP participants believed that child involvement is not just a legal requirement but that children play an important part in the process, and gaining their views helped learn about the children (Rao, 2020). Professionals emphasise the importance of a person-centred approached in the EHCP process, highlighting the need for genuine child involvement and acknowledging both the strengths and limitations of current practices.

2.5.1.2 Holistic. Professionals have identified holistic practice as an important part of ensuring that the child's best interests are represented. It was identified that increased participation from CYP allows for more practice collaboration between agencies to address needs and educational factors (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). A strength seen in the EHCP process includes being more holistic in support of the child and better describing the child's needs compared to Statements of SEN (Palikara et al., 2019). Creating a shared understanding was identified as a key role of professionals within the EHCP process, as well as the ability to reframe needs and provide an opportunity to reconceptualise the child's needs by considering the whole child and system (Cochrane, 2016). Holistic practice and increased participation from CYP are important for ensuring the child's best interests and providing a comprehensive understanding of the child's needs within the EHCP process.

2.5.1.3 Involving Parents Regarding the involvement of parents, the literature highlights the importance of professionals overcoming difficulties in the process to ensure that families experience good working relationships. Professionals should be provided with more time to develop these relationships (Ahad et al., 2022). It was found that, although parents are involved in the initial stages of the EHCP, their views are often not fully incorporated. Despite

their physical presence in meetings, their perspectives risk being overlooked, limiting their role as key stakeholders within the EHCP process (Ahad et al., 2022). The EHCP process allows professionals to work successfully in partnership with parents (Cochrane, 2016; Palikara et al., 2019; Redwood, 2015) and discuss the ethical implications of using these approaches (Hellawell, 2017). The literature highlights the importance of professionals to overcome challenges involving parents in the EHCP process to foster strong working relationships and represent their views.

2.5.2 Whose Plan Is It?

The theme of “whose plan is it?” was identified by exploring subthemes such as power dynamics and closing doors. This theme emerged from professionals’ reflections on the limited involvement of children in the EHCP process (Cochrane, 2016). This involvement is often restricted to the ‘child’s view’ section of the paperwork (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Additionally, children face challenges such as not understanding the jargon and complexity of the process (Palikara et al., 2019) and being unaware of the EHCP’s existence (Ahad et al., 2022). Factors such as a child’s characteristics (i.e. age, readiness, capacity, understanding) also influence the extent of their participation (Rao, 2020). These findings emphasise the significance of considering “whose plan is it” when the child’s voice is not adequately included and reflected on.

2.5.2.1 Power Dynamics Parents often reflected that the process was dictated to them by professionals, thereby undermining their voice (Ahad et al., 2022). The literature identified the limited nature of their power to effect autonomy, especially for CYP with SEND, leading to potentially greater adverse outcomes (Ahad et al., 2022). The literature highlights power dynamics between adult-child relationships, which are reinforced by EHCP meetings based on professionals' requirements rather than being child-centred (Sharma, 2021). Parents demonstrated higher levels of collaboration than their children, raising questions about the supposed person-centred approach of the EHCP process (Cochrane, 2016). Professionals

can influence the child's views of the situation due to the inherent power imbalance (Sharma, 2021). Given that EPs frequently only meet a child once during the EHCNA process (Rao, 2020), and often have no prior relationship with the CYP or family, that single meeting holds significant weight. It must simultaneously serve to build trust and reduce any inherent power imbalances in order to authentically gather the child's voice. Establishing a prior relationship has been noted to support the child's needs being understood and promote collaborative working with the family (Ahad et al., 2022; Redwood, 2015). The literature emphasises the need for professionals to examine the power dynamics to overcome challenges involving CYP and parents in the EHCP process to ensure their views are adequately represented.

2.5.2.2 Closing Doors An examination of the literature revealed a theme centred on the impact of barriers within the EHCP process. For example, EHCPs were found to perpetuate marginalisation rather than achieve their intended inclusivity (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). The role of professionals was highlighted as contributing to the issue by continuing to recommend individual deficit-based interventions, which hinder efforts to dismantle the systemic barriers affecting children (Hellawell, 2017). Furthermore, professionals identified parents as gatekeepers, noting that parents often fail to provide space for CYP to express themselves, thereby overshadowing the CYP's needs (Sharma, 2021). Additionally, professionals were seen as frequently not allowing children to choose the location or duration of meetings, which reduces CYP's sense of control and collaboration (Redwood, 2015). The literature highlights barriers within the EHCP process, including systemic marginalisation, deficit-based practices, parental gatekeeping, and a lack of opportunities for children to collaborate meaningfully.

2.5.3 Multi-Agency Working

The literature identified the multi-agency working theme, encompassing subthemes such as separation, resistance to expert, and role clarity. The revisions to the SEND CoP emphasised the importance of multi-agency collaboration, leading to the introduction of

EHCPs to ensure a holistic understanding and support for the child. Research highlights that the success of supporting CYP with an EHCP or navigating the process depends on effective multi-agency working and information sharing (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022).

2.5.3.1 Separation The literature highlights little evidence of the involvement of social care and health services in the EHCP process (Ahad et al., 2022) , with an ongoing perception that the process remains education focused (Palikara et al., 2019). Professionals have expressed frustrations stemming from conflicting service priorities and time constraints, which hinder their ability to attend meetings and effectively share information (Ahad et al., 2022; Cochrane, 2016; Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Redwood, 2015). The literature highlights the separation between services due to conflicting priorities, time constraints and challenges in effective information sharing, resulting in frustration for those involved in an EHCP.

2.5.3.2 Resistance to expert The literature frequently references the confidence levels of professionals involved in the EHCP process. Healthcare professionals often feel incompetent to discuss health-related matters in an educational context (Ahad et al., 2022). Contrastingly, EPs acknowledge their expertise in the EHCP process but not children's lived experiences, emphasising the need for collaborative working (Rao, 2020). Additionally, professionals find it challenging to balance stepping in and out of the expert role, as this skill is often absent from training and relies on personal qualities (Hellawell, 2017). The literature suggests that many professionals, including EPs, lack confidence in formulating SMART targets. As a result, they often defer this responsibility to social care professionals, who are perceived as having greater expertise due to their regular use of SMART targets in contexts such as Child in Need Plans (Hellawell, 2017). This disparity in confidence and perceived expertise can present challenges to the EHCP process, particularly in relation to defining roles, fostering effective collaboration, and developing meaningful and measurable outcomes.

2.5.3.3 Role Clarity The literature highlights the unclear definition of individuals' roles in multi-agency working (Ahad et al., 2022). Each professional approaches the EHCP process from their perspective and responsibilities (Sharma, 2021). Variations in professional practice often resulted in aspects such as parent voice being heard but not always acted on (Sales & Vincent, 2018; Redwood, 2015). However, the SEND CoP provides a framework for professionals to discuss an ethical middle ground between espoused values and practice (Hellawell, 2017). The literature highlights the importance of consistency being created amongst professionals to provide CYP and their families with a consistent experience of the EHCP process.

2.5.4 Outcomes

The 'outcomes' theme identified within the literature includes the subthemes of provision and specificity. Professionals agree that specifying outcomes is beneficial and leads to an improved document (Sales & Vincent, 2018). It has been noted that SEND professionals may formulate more modest, within-child outcomes that are more likely to be achieved rather than ambitious ones, which could potentially expose professional practice (Hellawell, 2017). Clear descriptions of needs and unambiguous provisions were noted in a quality review of eighteen EHC plans when conducted by a panel of professionals (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Additionally, plan quality varies between the affluence of the LAs and between CYP attending mainstream and specialist provision. However, Cochrane and Soni (2020) did not clearly state the differences in this quality. Professionals acknowledge that gathering CYP voices on outcomes is beneficial. Examining professional involvement in the EHCP process reveals a strong positive relationship between the plan reflecting professionals' views and their sense of active, meaningful participation in writing the outcomes (Redwood, 2015). Redwood (2015) also discussed that the child's desired outcomes and hopes for collaborative efforts should guide the focus of an EP's work, embodying an ethos centred on the value provided and the actual client served. However, these priorities can easily be overshadowed by the demands of the system. The literature highlights the importance of

specifying outcomes in the EHCP with clear descriptions of need and the inclusion of children's voices, despite the plan quality variations across the system.

2.5.4.1 Provision and specificity Various areas have been discussed regarding the provision and level of specificity needed. Some professionals expressed that the purpose of the EHCP is to enable access to additional resources, funding, or specialist provision (Rao, 2020). The EHCP was seen as particularly focused on the 'what' instead of the 'how', making it difficult for effective implementation and impacting a CYP's progress (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Concerns from LAs about funding impacted professionals' ability to align provision with the CYP's primary needs (Sales & Vincent, 2018). The plan aims to facilitate effective planning and support, ensuring schools are held accountable for providing and implementing support for children with SEND through the provisions offered (Rao, 2020). The literature discusses the need for specificity in the EHCP to ensure effective implementation and progress for children.

2.5.5 Legislation

The theme of legislation was identified through various subthemes, including knowledge of the process and time pressure. It is important to note that the SEND Code of Practice does not specify how professionals from different disciplines should collaborate to create a cohesive EHCP (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). It was also noted that while plans met statutory requirements, they did not represent principles such as participation and accessibility (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). There are difficulties in the legislation and its interpretation by professionals, meaning that aspects such as distributive justice play a key role, but are often not communicated to parents, which can create a divide (Hellawell, 2017). Additionally, changes to the EHCP process were implemented without sufficient consideration from the government and lacked adequate local support, leading to delays and rarely meeting the 20-week legal deadline (Palikara et al., 2019). The literature highlights that while EHCPs meet statutory requirements, participation and accessibility can be absent, legislative

interpretation and insufficient government support can create delays and communication gaps between parents and professionals.

2.5.5.1 Knowledge of the process Despite changes to the process as part of the SEND CoP (2015), it was identified that professionals' knowledge about the EHCP process and their ability to communicate this to CYP, their families and other professionals can sometimes be limited. It was noted that services outside of education can lack knowledge of the EHCP process (e.g. CAMHS; Redwood, 2015), or there is a varied level of knowledge between professionals (e.g. educators, specialist services; Cochrane, 2016). The understanding of health and social care responsibility in the process is limited further due to a lack of funding for additional training (Ahad et al., 2022; Palikara et al., 2019). It has also been noted that professionals may have received less training regarding the EHCNA process, leading to varied expectations and purposes of the assessment and role (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). Additionally, parents have reported a lack of knowledge around the system and the initial stages of the process (Ahad et al., 2022), which impacts collaboration between professionals and parents. Professionals and parents often lack sufficient knowledge of the EHCP process, impacting their roles, responsibilities, and collaboration.

2.5.5.2 Time pressure The impact of time pressure and competing demands has been highlighted in the literature. The main aim of the SEND CoP was to implement a person-centred approach. However, professionals often lack the knowledge to involve families actively in the process, further hindered by the limited time available to build good working relationships (Ahad et al., 2022). High caseloads and a lack of resources and capacity among LA and other professionals can result in a lack of person-centred understanding for CYP (Sharma, 2021). Professionals have identified that the increased expectations placed on them by parents for the EHCP process are unrealistic and demanding, and that services should be provided with time and knowledgeable staff to support these demands (Ahad et al., 2022). Additionally, factors such as funding, cultures, service priorities, time pressures and habitual work practices create additional barriers for professionals with the EHCP

process (Ahad et al., 2022). There is also a moral burden due to the high caseloads and insufficient support and time to manage them, particularly for those in SEND caseworker positions (Sharma, 2021). Professional rhetoric focuses on the lack of time due to statutory deadlines and standards, leaving professionals uncertain about how to achieve time-bound person-centred meetings (Sharma, 2021) appropriately. Time pressures, high caseloads, and limited resources hinder professionals' ability to implement a person-centred approach in the EHCP process, leading to barriers and unrealistic expectations.

2.5.6 Bureaucratic Process

A theme identified in the literature is the bureaucratic process, which includes the subthemes of systems and performative practice. Bureaucratic complexities and processes overwhelm frontline professionals, who often feel undermined by local government officials (Hellawell, 2017). There is a lack of parity in the EHCP process, frequently leading to inequality in outcomes and provision. LA procedures and paperwork can result in EHCPs with inconsistent information (Ahad et al., 2022). Additionally, LAs have different interpretations of how the legislation is applied, resulting in varied outcomes for CYP with similar needs, which can also vary regionally (Ahad et al., 2022). Professionals wish for clearer, standardised guidelines independent of LA information and a model of an EHCP to provide guidance (Ahad et al., 2022; Redwood, 2015). The EHCP, regarding educational inclusion for young people who offend, is often not implemented, making it feel like a 'piece of paper' (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). There is a lack of mechanisms to redress and repair for parents who have experienced failure by the LA (including meeting statutory timeframes). This highlights the need to hold individuals and services accountable for failures to comply with the SEND CoP (Ahad et al., 2022). It has been noted that the outcomes of the process often reflect how the provision will be funded rather than the child's needs (Sales & Vincent, 2018). The ability for professionals to elicit the child's voice is inhibited by assessment deadlines and the high number of requests received by the LA (Sharma, 2021). Professionals face the unrealistic task of balancing bureaucratic requirements tied to

EHCPs, including setting specific targets and meeting paperwork deadlines, while maintaining a person-centred approach that prioritises the voices of CYP. The obstacles of limited capacity, insufficient resources, difficulties in gathering input, bureaucratic demands, and the role of gatekeepers illustrate the disconnect between policy and practice as reported by those on the frontline (Sharma, 2021). Bureaucratic complexities and inconsistent interpretations of legislation can hinder the EHCP process, leading to inequality in outcomes and challenges for professionals in balancing administrative demands with a child-centred approach to practice.

2.5.6.1 Systems Aspects of the system impact the support and adherence to legislation, resulting in children being given higher priority by LAs due to factors that draw their attention, rather than the severity or complexity of their SEND (Sales & Vincent, 2018). However, patterns of difficulty have continued to exist since the implementation of the Children and Families Act (2014), which highlights systemic issues in structural features and policy (Ahad et al., 2022). The impact of working within a structured legal process, while also working with people who are, by definition, distressed, demands flexibility to each family's needs (Hellawell, 2017). However, this flexibility is limited as there is no way to repair any damages or poor experiences that families face (Ahad et al., 2022). Existing structures and systems have increased exclusions for vulnerable and SEND children by privileging accountability over inclusion. There are calls for structural reform to change stakeholder actions and ways of working considered at a micro and macro level (Ahad et al., 2022). The importance of reform was highlighted, including a single accountability system and funding being ring-fenced for SEND systems (Ahad et al., 2022). Systemic and structural issues in the EHCP process create inconsistent prioritisation of CYP's needs, identifying the need for reforms to improve inclusion, flexibility, and compliance.

2.5.6.2 Performative Practice. Reasons for professional shortcomings include imbalanced power dynamics between parents and professionals, excessive bureaucracy, mismatched work cultures and systems, as well as weak leadership and insufficient

practitioner skills (Hellawell, 2017). SEND professionals are aware of the barriers to including children's views and offering the ability to participate, which is often difficult in a meeting format. A tokenistic approach may be taken to elicit their voice when the evidence is required (Sharma, 2021). CYP with SEND are identified as service users but are often left unable to participate and make meaningful choices about the support they receive (Sharma, 2021). The EHCP process continues to reinforce the adult-centric nature of formal meetings, resulting in a lack of commitment from professionals to reduce the power dynamics between adult-child relationships (Sharma, 2021). The impact of performative practice, which is shown through imbalanced power dynamics and insufficient practitioner skills, hinders the inclusion of children's views and meaningful participation in the EHCP process.

2.6 Summary: What are the views of SEND and LA Professionals on the EHCNA process?

This literature review explored professional perspectives on the EHCNA process, focusing on those supporting CYP with SEND. Much of the literature refers to a broad range of professionals including, SEND coordinators, EPs, local authority officers, and other multi-agency practitioners, though it often does not clearly distinguish their roles. Based on the inclusion criteria, the review aimed, where possible, to prioritise the voices of professionals. However, during analysis, some studies also included perspectives from families or educators. These views have been presented collectively as part of the professional voice, with any notable differences highlighted where relevant.

Across the literature, there is a shared recognition of the EHCNA process as an important way of identifying and coordinating support for children with SEND. However, professionals also describe several significant challenges. These include the bureaucratic nature of the process, delays that impact timely intervention, and inconsistencies in how decisions are made. Many express frustrations around vague eligibility criteria for a EHCNA to take place

or an EHCP to be granted, as well as concern for the emotional impact the process can have on families.

Limited resources were highlighted as a key theme, with professionals pointing to high caseloads, staffing issues, and budget constraints as ongoing barriers to effective practice. These pressures often result in a reactive rather than proactive approach, which undermines the goal of early intervention. The process is also described as feeling adversarial at times, particularly when tensions arise between families and professionals, affecting trust and collaboration.

Despite these difficulties, professionals across the literature share a strong commitment to improving outcomes for CYP. There is widespread acknowledgement for greater inter-agency collaboration, clearer national guidance, and more training to ensure consistency and fairness in the assessment process. Professionals also call for a more child-centred and transparent system that truly prioritises the needs and voices of CYP and their families.

In summary, while professionals value the purpose of the EHCNA process, their collective reflections highlight the need for wider systemic change. Addressing these structural barriers is essential to achieving a more equitable, timely, and collaborative approach to supporting children with SEND.

2.7 Implications for Educational Psychology

Many implications for EP practice have been identified through the completion of this literature review. EPs are recognised as key facilitators in eliciting the voice of the CYP's and support the development of their autonomy (Sharma, 2021). EPs view this as both a legal requirement and an important part of the EHCP process, reinforcing the need to maintain genuine child involvement. However, despite EPs valuing this professional standard, the CYP's voice is often not adequately included or reflected on. This highlights the need for EPs to continually reflect on the alignment between their espoused values and their actual

practice. Increased participation of CYP and a more holistic approach are essential to ensuring that the CYP's best interests are upheld. One key implication for EPs is the need to foster interagency collaboration to create a comprehensive understanding of CYP's needs. Prioritising multi-agency working remains a key focus for LAs.

EPs must remain mindful of the power dynamics inherent in the EHCP process and actively seek ways to mitigate these by involving both CYP and families in representing their views. Ongoing communication with CYP is essential to ensure their voices are genuinely heard and adequately represented, helping to reduce perceptions of parental gatekeeping. EPs should continue to develop their ability to move fluidly between roles of expert and active listener (Hellawell, 2017). One way to support collaboration and reduce power imbalances is by ensuring that all stakeholders attending an EHCNA meeting have sufficient understanding of the EHCP process.

Within the EP profession, there is a need for greater specificity in EHCPs to support effective implementation and meaningful progress for children. A focus on "what" is being provided, rather than "how," through the use of clear, measurable, and quantifiable provisions, can help ensure that support is better aligned with the CYP's primary needs.

Although outside the direct control of EPs, consistent concerns are raised regarding the impact of time pressures, high caseloads, and limited resources. These factors hinder professionals' capacity to apply a person-centred approach, often resulting in unrealistic expectations and systemic barriers. Additionally, the bureaucratic complexity of the EHCP process and inconsistent interpretations of legislation can contribute to inequality in outcomes and create further challenges for professionals striving to balance administrative demands with child-centred practice.

2.6 Links to Current Study

The need for an external document providing examples of an EHCP was highlighted as an important progression to support EP practice and consistency across LAs. Therefore, the current study examines the experience of EPs applying the principles from the JPLG document to their most recent EHCNAs.

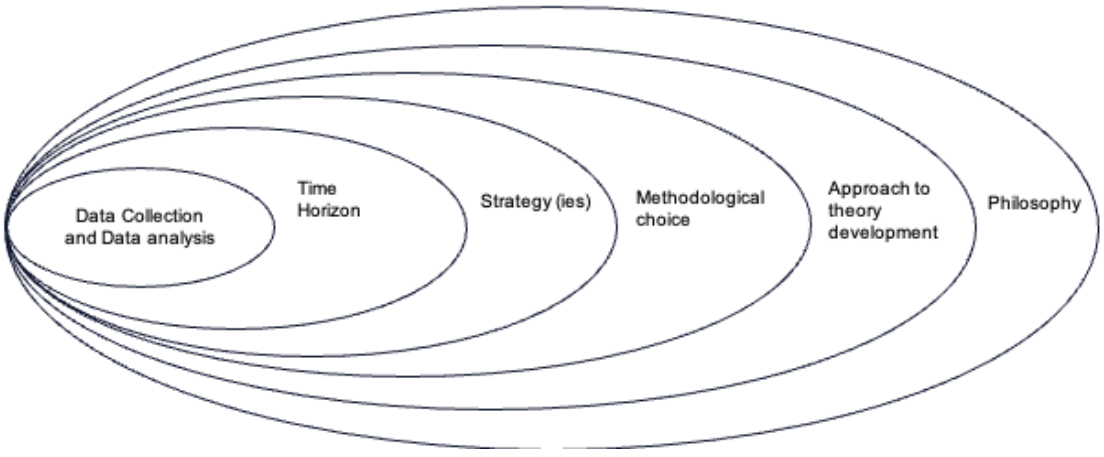
3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology used in the current study. I begin by outlining the aims and purpose of the research and provide an account of the research process I followed. I also include a rationale and justification for the decisions I made throughout. To structure the chapter, I draw on the 'research onion' model proposed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), which helped me organise and develop the design of the thesis step by step. I used this model as a reflective tool to ensure that all aspects were considered in addressing the research aims (see Figure 3). I go on to describe my philosophical stance, followed by an explanation of the research design and data collection methods, including the reasoning behind these choices. I then consider the trustworthiness of the research, and finally, I discuss the ethical considerations relevant to the study.

Figure 3

Adaptation of Saunders, Lewis, and Thorndike (2019)



3.2 Research Aims and Purpose

EPs are currently operating within a context where the government have created an Education Committee for an ‘Inquiry: Solving the SEND Crisis’. The current context includes an increased demand for SEND support across the 0 to 25 age range and an exploration of how mainstream schools and other educational settings can be more inclusive to children with SEND (House of Commons committee report, 2025). The inquiry is in addition to the previous Government’s Education Select Committee inquiry, which created the SEND Review (DfE, 2022) and the SEND Change Programme (DfE, 2023a) that highlighted the need for a single national EHCP system by 2025 (Worcestershire County Council, 2024). This context is coupled with year-on-year rises in the numbers of EHCNA requests where EPs are a statutory professional within the identification of needs and proposed provision and outcomes for CYP (SEND CoP, 2015).

The literature review I conducted for this research provided an overview of the experiences of various professionals involved in the EHCNA process. However, I found that the views and experiences of EPs were largely underrepresented in the existing literature. Through this research, I aim to address that gap by exploring EPs’ experiences of applying principles from the JPLG guidance document to their most recent EHCNAs. I also seek to understand any barriers EPs may encounter in their practice when completing EHCNAs. There are multiple layers of purpose to this research:

The LA: The research will provide feedback to the LA within which the research is situated. The feedback is important and relevant for creating a new EHCNA template to be used with all professionals within the LA. The template has been informed by the eight principles of the JPLG guidance document and other guidance from the BPS and HCPC. The research highlights the experience that EPs face when incorporating the principles into the EHCNA process, which the document is informed by. The research will then provide

qualitative information for the LA on the process to support local policies and decision-making.

Educational Psychology Profession: The research will provide an evaluation of the experience of EPs in carrying out the guidance recommended by the JPLG document. The research will also provide practice-based research to highlight the incorporation of the guidance in practice. The research can facilitate conversations amongst the profession to consider how these experiences can be harnessed into the role of the EP. The research will provide experience with the JPLG document and consider whether additional principles must inform the document within the current context. The research allows the profession to consider their experiences within their LA and plan how the principles can be harnessed, or any barriers can be overcome within their LA. The nature of this research allows EPs to consider structural factors that can influence how guidance documents and policies influence practice.

Trainee EPs (TEPs) currently carry out an average of 12 EHCNAs per year during their Year 2 and 3 placement practice as outlined in the Practice Placement Partnership Framework (PPPF; DfE, 2022). The research will help TEPs see the application of practice guidance in the real world. It will provide practice insights into how experienced EPs interpret and implement the guidance and allow TEPs to connect theory to practice. As the research captures EPs' experiences it will allow TEPs to acknowledge potential barriers and plan how to overcome them within their LA.

Nationally: As a review of SEND and standardisation of the EHCP process occurs, the research will provide insights into how existing guidance documentation supports the everyday practice for EPs in contributing to EHCNAs. It will also contribute to the literature surrounding the EHCNA process and the experience for EPs, which is currently scarce. The research would provide a start of evidence for national policy makers, particularly for those involved in the JPLG document (Association of Educational Psychologists; AEP, British

Psychological Society; BPS). The research also highlights gaps in existing research and could support further studies taking place across England. This research could also support the profession, considering the outcomes and experiences for CYP and families currently engaging in an EHCNA. 576,000 CYP had a plan in January 2024 (DfE, 2024); this number does not reflect those that received input from an EP for EHCNA but were not granted a plan.

3.3 Research Question

What are educational psychologists' perspectives on applying the principles from the JPLG guidance for Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessments within practice?

3.4 Research Philosophy

As a researcher, I must actively reflect on my own assumptions and beliefs about what constitutes reality and how we can attempt to understand that reality through research (Creswell, 2014). It is important for me to clearly express my philosophical position both ontological and epistemological as these underpin and influence my research methodology, as well as the choices I make regarding my research questions and methods of data analysis.

3.4.1 Researcher's ontological position

My first consideration in this research was my ontological position. Ontology is the study of being, exploring the nature of existence (Gray, 2022). Ontology often embodies the understanding of what is. For this study, I adopted a critical realist stance. Critical realism recognises that knowledge is historically situated and that social facts are social constructions agreed on by people rather than existing independently (Bhaskar, 1989). This position believes a pre-social reality exists, but we can only partially access it. As a researcher working within this ontological position, I aim to remain aware of how my own

socio-cultural background and experiences might influence the research process. This means studying situations in depth, considering historical, geographical, and socio-cultural contexts, in order to understand how realities are experienced. With this in mind, I conducted a literature review to explore the existing knowledge and context surrounding the topic prior to analysis.

The critical realist stance aligns with the current research as EHCNAs are an observable and measurable entity offered to families and provided via written means. In addition, the JPLG guidance is accessible to all through a web browser search outlining the process's expectations (the “real”). However, the EHCNA process is often shaped by wider systemic constraints within the LA (the “actual”) and influenced by the personal practice of individual EPs (the “empirical” level; Fletcher, 2017). Each EP holds professional autonomy, which affects how they interpret and apply psychological theory, engage with the principles of the JPLG guidance, and relate these to the ethical standards of the HCPC and BPS. Due to the belief that multiple truths exist, the role of the research is to begin to explore the foundation of the knowledge that can be accessed, to begin to produce knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.4.2 Researcher’s epistemological position

My epistemological position must also be considered alongside ontology when research is conducted. Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge, its origins, limits, and justification (Hofer & Bendixen, 2012). Epistemology tries to understand what it means to know. Epistemology explores acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge and how we can communicate knowledge to others (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and the researcher, and it provides a basis for deciding what kind of knowledge is possible to gather (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In this research, I adopt a contextualist epistemological position, which is often associated with critical realism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994) and situated between the polar ends of

positivism and interpretivism (Gray, 2014). Contextualism enables me to consider people within their environments and rejects the assumption of a single, fixed reality (Tebes, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2013). I view knowledge as inherently influenced by context; therefore, I recognise that no single method can uncover absolute truth, and findings will vary depending on the circumstances under which data is collected and interpreted (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000). This aligns with my belief that, while a sense of truth and knowing can exist, language is ambiguous, and meaning is always shaped by context, interpretation, and political and ideological influences (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I also accept that multiple accounts of reality can exist, although some may be more persuasive or useful than others (Madill et al., 2000). Within this framework, I understand the relationship between myself and participants as central to meaning making, with knowledge co-constructed through our interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2021). By adopting a contextualist position, I acknowledge the variation in how EPs, apply the JPLG guidance within a specific local authority, shaped by their interpretation and enactment of the guidance in practice. I asked participants to focus primarily on their two most recent EHCNAs to root their responses in recent, concrete experiences, rather than broad reflections on their overall practice. This approach supports an understanding of their experiences within context and allows for insight into how these contexts influenced their responses during the interviews.

This position enables me to explore participants' perceptions and the realities they construct around completing EHCNAs, allowing for a range of viewpoints. As discussed earlier, the role and demands on EPs have evolved over time, and a contextualist approach enables me to account for these shifts without assuming a uniform interpretation or application of guidance. It also supports my understanding that EPs' interpretations and practices are shaped by their lived experience, local policies, and the professional cultures within their LA.

Reflecting on my own experience as a TEP, I noticed variation in how EHCNAs are approached both within my cohort and among TEPs from different training providers within the same LA. These differences highlight how the experience of completing an EHCNA is shaped by individual context and timing.

I acknowledge that the timing of the interviews likely influenced the accounts participants gave regarding their experiences of EHCNAs and the guidance document. Recruitment took place during the summer holidays, which may have shaped responses, as EPs were reflecting at the end of a term after fulfilling their traded service commitments. Each participant's account is therefore situated within that specific social and cultural context. I can only speculate how responses might have differed had interviews taken place at another point in the academic year. As such, the data analysis will inevitably be partial and subjective, but it aims to uncover the underlying social practices (Braun & Clarke, 2021) that shape how EPs apply the JPLG guidance in their work.

3.4.3 Researcher's positioning

As a researcher, I believe it is important to clearly express my positioning and motivations for conducting this study to ensure transparency around my experiences. Throughout my career, I have worked across three LA EPSs and have engaged with professional online forum discussions. During this time, I observed a potentially harmful narrative emerging around the EHCNA process. This observation sparked my curiosity about EPs' experiences of EHCNAs, particularly through the lens of professional guidance that is accessible to all EPs. I developed several hypotheses about why this narrative might exist, including the impact of increasing workloads due to the rising number of EHC plans (there was an 11.4% increase from January 2023 (DfE, 2024)). The number of initial requests for an EHC plan increased by 20.8% in 2023 compared to 2022 (DfE, 2024). This rise, along with a widening of the assessment threshold to include CYP who may have SEND, has led to a further increase in the number of assessments.

Additionally, 93% of Principal EPs surveyed highlighted that their LA experienced more demand than could be met (Lyonette, 2019). The change in commissioning and the growth in the number of academies increased the demand for statutory work (Lyonette, 2019). These figures highlight the ever-growing pressure on the EPs' workload, with a large proportion occurring as part of the statutory process.

When considering the timeliness rate of EHC plans for 2023, it was at 50.3%, highlighting potential difficulties within the SEND systems that EPs are operating within. This could further exacerbate the EPs' negative view of EHCNAs due to the systemic and organisational pressure for EPs to meet this deadline. It also highlights the impact of the higher need for EHCNAs on an EP's workload thus taking their time away from other aspects of practice such as early intervention.

A key aspect of the Warnock Report (1978) highlighted the importance of the EP in assessing learning needs and advising inclusive education and early intervention alongside conducting statutory assessments to determine SEN support. The statutory requirements of the EP have remained to the present day and remain a substantial part of the EP working week, with full-time equivalent EPs being allocated one EHCNA per week. There are also ongoing struggles within the retention and recruitment of EPs in LAs due to the perceptions of high workload and pay levels (Lyonette, 2019). This can also highlight the perceived discrepancy between earning as an LA versus a locum or agency (pay rate per day is between £350 - £750 depending on region), EP positions (AEP, 2024).

In addition to experiences of interacting with qualified EPs, I found this to be an important area to explore as a TEP for my own professional development. Writing EHCNAs was a new experience for me, and I was keen to explore what works well for those with more knowledge and how they experience the process. I had no prior involvement in contributing to EHCNAs, as my previous career offered minimal opportunities to work with CYP who had

an EHCP. This lack of direct experience further motivated me to understand how other EPs in the field engage with the EHCNA process.

As previously highlighted, the EHCNA is a statutory part of the EP role and is a high proportion of the working role. However, the experiences that TEPs gain during placement years are limited. The transition from TEP to Newly Qualified EP brings a substantial increase in the number of EHCNAs conducted, often without the continued support and input of a placement supervisor. This awareness further motivated me to explore the experiences of those who are already familiar with the system and regularly provide EHCNAs to CYP and their families.

As part of my role as the researcher, it was important for me to acknowledge the nature of my interactions with participants and to remain aware of any potential biases that could influence data analysis (Gough & Madill, 2012). All participants were colleagues I had interacted with, either in service meetings or as members of the same team. Those who volunteered to take part in the research had generally interacted with me more frequently than those who did not. During the initial icebreaker question, many participants shared their motivations for volunteering. Several reflected on their status as newly qualified EPs or having completed the doctorate in recent years, suggesting that their ability to relate to the thesis process may have influenced their willingness to support the research. Others expressed a desire to contribute based on their commitment to improving the EHCNA process for service users or their involvement in developing EHCNA templates within the service. As such, I recognised the importance of maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process, continually reflecting on my motivations and the nature of my interactions with participants during interviews (see 5.4 Self-reflection).

Taking a reflexive psychological stance was important throughout this research, as my subjectivity could be understood and used as a resource when engaged with reflexively (Gough & Madill, 2012). The knowledge I generated is inherently subjective and situated

within the context of the LA, as outlined through my epistemological positioning. Given the qualitative nature of the research, I was particularly interested in participants' assumptions about the topic and aimed to gain insight into their individual experiences of completing EHCNAs, as well as how aspects of the JPLG document either supported or hindered the process. Within the LA, several working groups focus specifically on EHCNAs and EHCPs, which has led to additional CPD opportunities and service days aimed at developing EP practice. I have taken part in service day discussions around the information generated for EHCNAs, and these discussions have shaped some of my views and ideas. As a result, I recognise that my prior involvement may influence how I interpret the interviews, especially as some of these discussions occurred outside the formal interview setting (see 5.4 Self-reflection).

3.5 Research Approach

I adopted an inductive research approach, as outlined in the literature review, given the limited existing knowledge about EPs' perceptions of the EHCNA process. Inductive approaches are commonly used in qualitative research and allow the research focus to emerge from the data itself, rather than being shaped by pre-existing theories (Flick, 2011). My research explores how EPs apply the JPLG guidance in practice, a topic not yet examined. As such, themes and patterns were drawn from participants' responses, rather than imposed from existing literature. This approach aligns with a contextualist epistemology, which emphasises the importance of the specific LA context in shaping understanding. It also sits within a critical realist ontology, enabling insights into practice while recognising the role of broader structural influences. However, because the interviews included discussion around the JPLG guidance document, some elements of the study also reflect a deductive approach, as participants responded directly to a framework grounded in existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

My research is exploratory due to its position to investigate under-researched areas, especially those where little is known (Stebbins, 2001). Qualitative exploratory research allows professional perspectives to be captured (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and is useful within applied settings (Robson & McCartan, 2016), aligning with educational psychology. Exploratory approaches support a contextualism epistemological position as it seeks to understand how context shapes knowledge (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000).

3.6 Research Strategies

I chose interviews as the primary strategy for data collection. As an exploratory piece of research, qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews were appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach aligned with my ontological position of critical realism, as I aimed to explore a particular context and understand the personal practices of EPs through their own accounts. It also aligned with my contextualist epistemology, as it allowed meaning and understanding to be shaped by the specific contexts in which participants work (Madill et al., 2000). Interviews provided the space to capture these nuanced perspectives. I used semi-structured questions in the interviews, focusing on the eight guiding principles offered in the JPLG document. The semi-structured nature also allowed EPs to steer the focus of the interviews to allow the reflection on their own experiences and interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.6.1 Research Choices

I employed a mono-method using qualitative methodology. ‘Big Q’ underpins the methodology as interviews will be viewed as a resource rather than a problem (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The meaning constructed is contextually situated per the ontological and epistemological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I used qualitative tools to explore the process and meaning developed by EPs when applying the JPLG guidance to EHCNAs.

3.7 Time Horizon

The time horizon for this research was cross-sectional, allowing data to be collected within a defined timeframe. This was necessary due to the time constraints of the doctoral study and aligns with my epistemological position, which recognises the importance of the current professional context for EPs and the LA. This research focused on exploring a specific phenomenon at a particular moment in time, current practices around developing EHCNAs within the framework of the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND CoP (2015). While I acknowledge that the findings may not be applicable to future legislative contexts, they may still offer valuable insights to inform and improve EP practice.

3.8 Data collection

Building on the research strategy, I used the data collected through interviews as primary data. This was completed using semi-structured interviews, which were conducted online. Participants were given the option to meet either face-to-face or online to accommodate their preferences and minimise any additional demands on their time.

While the primary method of data collection was interviews, I considered other sources that could have added depth to the research, such as analysing the JPLG policy document or observing participants as they completed an EHCNA. These methods might have contributed to triangulating the process and reducing the potential influence of social desirability present in interviews. However, I chose to use semi-structured interviews because of my ontological position, which prioritises honouring participants' experiences and narratives around applying JPLG principles to their most recent EHCNA. From a critical realist perspective, I believe that knowledge is shaped by participants' interpretations, and therefore, exploring their experiences was more important than seeking an objective truth. Through semi-structured interviews, I aimed to access participants' perceptions of reality and explore the underlying structures influencing their practice.

I also hoped that participants would carry forward their reflections on the guidance document into their future work with CYP and families. From a contextual epistemological stance, I was particularly interested in understanding how participants' experiences of the EHCNA process were shaped by political, societal, and local authority influences.

3.9 Research Design

3.9.1 Participants' inclusion/exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were for qualified EPs due to TEPs needing to have their work countersigned and the impact of a supervisory relationship on the type of EHCNA that the practitioner conducts. In addition, TEPs currently carry out an average of 12 EHCNAs per year during their Year 2 and 3 placement practice (PPPF, DfE, 2022). Given the aims of the research, I felt it was important to gather insights from EPs who practise autonomously and regularly contribute to EHCNAs, in order to better understand the practice context. Due to the contextual epistemological stance of the research, it was essential that participants were employed within the LA. I sought and received permission from the Interim Principal EP to conduct the research within this setting (see Appendix E). I was also aware that EPs within the LA were already engaging with the JPLG document, as it had been discussed during service days and had informed the development of the new EHCNA template.

3.9.2 Participants and recruitment

Using the phrase 'sampling' in non-experimental research is problematic (Thomas, 2017). Therefore, the following discussion will refer to 'participants' and 'recruitment' to remove the view that participants represent the wider population. The recruitment procedure for participants was convenient and purposive. I recruited participants using my existing placement contacts within the LA. My aim was to involve between eight and twelve EPs in the study. The number of participants was guided by Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora's (2016) model of information power, which is particularly relevant when using a Reflexive

Thematic Analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This model considers factors such as the study's aim, the specificity of the sample, use of theory, quality of dialogue, and depth of analysis. In line with this and comparable studies exploring EPs' perceptions, which have included between eight and fourteen participants (O'Hara, 2021; Willdridge, 2013; Milligan, 2022), the sample size was deemed sufficient. This number also allowed some diversity within the population to be expressed; it considered the time constraints and allowed the depth to be expressed within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The approximate participant number was needed for planning and was continually evaluated during the research process (Malterud et al., 2016). From the outset of recruitment, I included information in the participant information sheets about the approximate number of participants required and clearly stated that to participate would be on a first-come, first-served basis (see Appendix F). In total, I interviewed seven out of the fifteen practising EPs employed at the time of recruitment. Invitations to participate in the research were sent to the entire EPS mailing list on three separate occasions, as the initial invitation resulted in a limited number of volunteers.

3.9.3 LA description

This study took place within a mid-sized LA in England, supporting a diverse population of CYP with SEND. As of 2023, the LA maintained over 6,000 EHCPs and just under 13,000 CYP were receiving SEN Support (Anonymised LA SEND training and briefing session, 2023). These figures reflect a continued year-on-year increase, consistent with national trends, and have placed considerable pressure on statutory services.

The EPS sits within the wider SEND structure and operates under a traded model. EP time is typically split between statutory EHCNA work and commissioned support for schools. As a full-time equivalent EP is expected to complete approximately 45 EHCNAs per year, approximately one per week, there is a clear prioritisation of statutory work over early

intervention, consultation, or wider systemic support. This echoes national pressures on EPS capacity.

To meet the demands of rising numbers and EP shortages, the LA has increasingly turned to locum and agency EPs, many of whom undertake remote assessments. These assessments are typically conducted via virtual platforms, engaging with CYP, families, and education settings online. Although this approach has helped reduce delays and enabled compliance with legal timeframes, concerns have been raised about the depth, relational quality, and consistency of assessments. These tensions are frequently acknowledged in EPS service meetings, and a quality assurance process has been implemented to monitor work across both employed and agency EPs.

The LA and its health partners have recently been subject to external reviews, which highlighted ongoing systemic challenges within the SEND system. As part of the response, there have been leadership changes, restructures, and a stated commitment to reform, including strategic planning, accountability processes, and stronger co-production with families. However, systemic challenges remain around delays accessing support, inconsistent multi-agency working, and variability in the quality of EHCPs. These issues continue to impact CYP and their families, often resulting in a reliance on independent advocacy and a sense of distrust in the system.

Recent internal findings from the LA highlight how family experiences of SEND provision are often shaped by which professionals they happen to encounter. While many practitioners demonstrate care, skill, and collaborative values, others are constrained by systemic pressures and structural limitations. This variation contributes to a lack of consistency and reinforces feelings of uncertainty and inequity among families navigating the system.

As a trainee EP, I have observed and reflected on the complexities of working within this environment both the relational opportunities and the systemic barriers. The EPS, like many services within the LA, is negotiating the tension between maintaining statutory duties and

holding on to psychologically informed, child-centred ways of working. This context underpins and shapes the study, which is grounded in a contextualist epistemological stance. I have aimed to provide sufficient contextual detail to support interpretation of the findings while maintaining the ethical commitment to anonymity.

3.10 Procedures

Interviews were conducted online due to a combination of factors, including my location, the geographical spread of participants, time constraints, participant convenience, and limited availability of office space. As the interviews took place during the summer holidays, most EPs were working from home, making online meetings the preferred option. I sent participants a password-protected Zoom link from my Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust-issued Zoom account one week before their scheduled interview.

All interviews were audio and video recorded, and participants were informed of this when consent was obtained. Recordings were made using the Trust-issued Zoom account to ensure secure transcription, and the files were then uploaded to the Essex OneDrive secure system. At the start of each interview, I confirmed that participants were in a quiet, confidential, and distraction-free space for the duration of the session. Transcriptions were generated using Zoom's transcription function and then manually edited to ensure accuracy. I also noted any pauses or significant mannerisms during this process, as part of the initial stage of data analysis. This step helped enhance the transcripts and supported a deeper understanding of participants' responses.

An interview schedule was developed (see Appendix G), which included a focus on an icebreaker question to ease the participant into the interview through exploring their expectations and initial responses to the research question. This provided insights from the

participants and highlighted their motivations for participating in the research. All the research questions were based on the eight principles from the JPLG document.

To ensure a shared understanding of each principle being explored, I provided a verbal definition during the interview and also placed it into the chat. This helped establish clarity between me and the participant. As I followed a semi-structured interview format, there were opportunities to ask follow-up questions to deepen my understanding of each participant's experience. The flexibility of this approach also allowed me to follow the natural flow of participants' responses rather than adhering strictly to the order of the principles. For example, if a participant began discussing a later principle early in the conversation, I would adapt by linking and following up on that related principle at that point in the interview.

I also prepared a range of prompts in advance, which I had discussed with my research supervisor. These included:

- Tell me more about that…
- What does that make you think about…
- Where did that understanding come from?

3.10.1 Recruitment

Once ethical approval had been granted, I introduced the thesis project during a service day to ensure EPs were aware of the upcoming invitation to participate. I then sent an email to the EP mailing list during the half-term break to reach all EPs across the service (see Appendix H). This initial email did not receive any responses. In reflective conversations with other TEPs and Senior EPs within the service, there was some surprise at the lack of initial interest.

After a week, one participant had consented to take part. I followed up with a second email three weeks later, this time including potential interview dates and times to make it

easier for EPs to sign up (see Appendix H). This resulted in four participants consenting. A final email was sent during the last week of term, requesting three additional participants. This led to two more sign-ups, bringing the total to seven participants, just one short of my minimum target of eight.

The interviews were conducted during the last week of term and into the summer holidays, when traded work demands on participants had eased. The relatively low participation rate may reflect the broader service pressures at the time, including a limited number of practising EPs, fifteen in total due to staff turnover, sickness, and maternity leave.

3.11 Data analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2021) is the method of analysis for my study and will be outlined and reflected on.

3.11.1 Reflexive thematic analysis

I used thematic analysis as a qualitative analytical approach to identify patterns (‘themes’) of meaning across a dataset and describe and interpret the meaning of the importance (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). I adopted RTA, which emphasises the importance of the reflexive position of the researcher. This approach allowed me to recognise and value the role of my subjectivity while critically examining the ways in which my perspectives and experiences may have influenced the research process and outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.11.2 Link to research

RTA was decided for the research design's analysis method due to its grounding within the ‘Big Q’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes generated from a given data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA aligns with the research goal of exploring meaning in context and is open to multiple ways of making

sense and observing how people use language to create meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA aligns with research seeking to understand participants' perspectives and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021), thus allowing my research question to be explored. I felt it was important to hear participants' experiences of applying the JPLG document to their EHCNAs, recognising that their individual experiences shape how they approach their work with CYP and their families. I've always been curious about people's 'why', and I believe that creating reflexive spaces for individuals to explore and make sense of their practice is fundamentally important, not only for their development but also for my own. RTA supported this aim by allowing me to explore participants' experiences while also acknowledging and holding my own values and perspectives throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA reflects that data is co-constructed by the participant and researcher in a particular context, highlighting the importance of the context within which the researcher and participant exist (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, my subjectivity is an essential resource for RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021), thus aligning with my critical realism ontological and contextualism epistemological positions. When considering my position as the researcher, I recognised that controlling for bias is not a requirement within RTA, due to its emphasis on ongoing reflexivity. This approach allowed me to reflect critically on my role in the process of knowledge creation, using tools such as a research journal and regular reflective practice throughout the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA acknowledges that participants are subjective, situated producers of meaning, and their unique experience is important and will be different at different times and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This position aligned with the epistemological position of contextualism and allowed for the fluency that EPs' positions could change. In addition, it recognises that the participants who engaged in the interviews may make changes and adaptations to their practice due to the opportunities to reflect.

3.11.3 Critique of reflexive thematic analysis

3.11.3.1 Researcher's impact

Within RTA my experiences, expectations, and subjective awareness are not only acknowledged but valued as part of the research process. RTA moves away from the notion of researcher bias often rooted in positivist thinking and instead embraces subjectivity as an integral part of knowledge creation, rather than something that distorts reality (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

During data analysis, I recognised that I would naturally move further away from the raw data through processes such as coding and theming, which can result in losing sight of participants' original words. However, within RTA, this distancing is seen as a valuable part of the process. It encouraged me to reflect on my own values, experiences, and skills, enriching the analysis. It also required me to explicitly acknowledge my positioning, as well as the ontological and epistemological assumptions that shaped how I interpreted the data.

3.11.3.2 Participants' narratives

As previously outlined, I became increasingly aware during the data analysis process that I was moving further away from participants' narratives and experiences. This shift is a natural consequence of my subjectivity and the process of identifying patterns across the dataset. RTA is not designed to explore individual narratives or personal stories in depth, as its focus is on identifying broader themes rather than preserving the full detail of each participant's account (Braun et al., 2016).

3.11.3.3 The role of language

RTA provided me with the opportunity to examine the data on both a semantic and latent level. At the semantic level, the analysis was more descriptive and closely aligned with participants' own words and meanings. At the latent level, I was able to explore deeper, more

abstracted conceptual meanings that were shaped by my interpretations and reflections as the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.11.2 Potential alternatives

The decision to use RTA was made after I had explored other methodologies. Consideration was given to Constructionist Grounded Theory as it aligns with my epistemological position, acknowledging the research's humanness and the interrelationship between the researcher and the participant (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). However, it was an inappropriate method as the research question aimed to be exploratory rather than create a theory; thus, RTA was decided to be used.

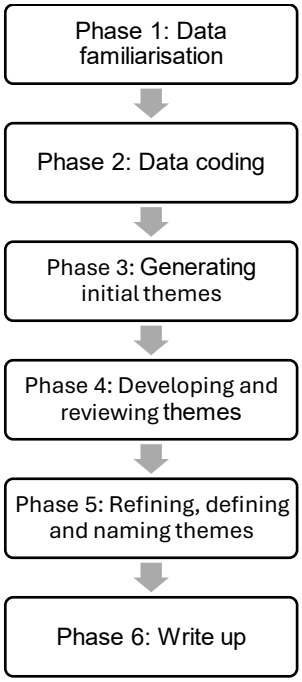
Discourse analysis (DA) was another analysis method I considered. However, DA is often used to analyse language material such as talk or written texts and looks beyond the individual person (Taylor, 2013). Therefore, this method would be more suited to an analysis of a team meeting discussion surrounding EHCNAs or a focus group to explore the language specifics of EPs' experiences of applying the JPLG guidance. With regard to my current research question, I felt RTA would be more appropriate.

3.12 Data Analysis Process

The guidelines provided for RTA were used flexibly, with a focused coding approach as part of the process to meet the aims of the analysis. This will be explored in phase two. The six phases and the process engaged with are outlined below (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Figure 4

The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)



Note Adapted from (Braun & Clarke, 2021)

Table 4

Description of the six phases of RTA

Phase	Description
Phase 1: Familiarisation with the dataset	This phase involves becoming deeply familiar with the content of the dataset through a process of immersion. The researcher reads the data multiple times, listens to audio recordings more than once, and makes preliminary notes on any analytical ideas that emerge in relation to individual data items or the dataset as a whole.
Phase 2: Data Coding	In this phase, the researcher systematically works through the dataset to identify segments of data that are relevant to the research question. These segments are labelled with codes analytical tags that capture single meanings or concepts. Codes may be semantic, reflecting surface-level meaning, or latent, focusing on underlying assumptions or implicit ideas. Once the

	entire dataset is coded, the labels are collated and organised into categories for further analysis.
Phase 3: Generating initial themes	The focus in this phase is on identifying shared patterns of meaning across the dataset. The researcher clusters related codes that appear to reflect a core idea relevant to the research question. These initial groupings are known as candidate themes broad patterns of shared meaning that require further development and refinement before being confirmed as final themes.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes	This phase involves reviewing the candidate themes in relation to the coded data extracts and the dataset as a whole. The researcher revisits the full dataset to ensure that the themes accurately reflect the data and maintain internal coherence. Candidate themes may be revised, split, or merged depending on their relevance and fit. This stage also involves considering how the emerging themes relate to existing literature, professional practice, and the wider context of the research.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes	The researcher clarifies the focus and scope of each theme and assigns each a name that meaningfully captures its content. Definitions are refined to ensure that each theme tells a distinct part of the overall story in relation to the research question.
Phase 6: Write-up	The final phase involves producing a coherent narrative that integrates the themes and data extracts. This narrative illustrates how the analysis answers the research question and is situated within the broader theoretical and contextual framework of the study

3.12.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the dataset.

To support familiarisation with the dataset, I engaged in a process of immersion. I watched the recorded video and listened to the audio of each interview. Transcripts were generated using the transcription function within the software I used. While listening to the recordings a second time, I read through the transcripts, making corrections and adding details such as body language, pauses, mannerisms, and tone such as indications of sarcasm.

Once I felt the transcripts accurately reflected each participant's account, I listened again while making notes on analytical ideas and insights that emerged both within individual interviews and across the dataset as a whole. During this familiarisation process, I noticed that I experienced a range of emotional reactions to participants' accounts. I documented these responses and discussed them in supervision to ensure they did not influence the data analysis process in a detrimental way.

3.12.2 Phase 2: Coding

I initially completed the coding process using Microsoft Word, highlighting sections of text and adding comments to indicate potential codes (see Appendix I). At this stage, I generated semantic codes by focusing on the participants' language and using their expressions to interpret the explicit meanings in the data. I shared this initial coding process, using a rich extract from one interview question, with my research supervisor to support the reliability and validity of the early codes (see Appendix I). This provided an opportunity for feedback through questions and comments, which helped refine my coding approach.

After incorporating this feedback, I transferred the data into NVivo to complete the full coding process across all seven transcripts. I chose NVivo for its capacity to support the organisation, retrieval, grouping, and visualisation of coded data. It also enhanced my reflexivity by allowing me to add memos and notes throughout the analysis.

I decided to code across transcripts by question, rather than working through each transcript in full. RTA offers the flexibility to tailor the process to the needs of the research, and this approach allowed me to examine each JPLG principle and interview question in focused detail, identifying patterns and commonalities across participants. NVivo also made it easier to move between transcripts and questions during coding.

Although I initially intended to code each transcript independently, I began to feel a sense of reluctance and concern during the second interview question of the first transcript. I was worried about missing key elements of each principle across participants, especially given the number of principles under consideration. As a result, I decided to code across transcripts per question, which enabled me to hold the definition of each principle in mind and observe how participants engaged with these principles in their practice.

After coding by question, I re-coded each transcript in full to re-immerse myself in each participant's experience and ensure that no contextual elements were overlooked. This second round of coding also supported the development of latent codes and allowed me to identify more implicit meanings in the data.

Across the seven interviews, the coding process generated a total of 1,228 codes: 152 for the first interview, 168 for the second, 224 for the third, 168 for the fourth, 148 for the fifth, 196 for the sixth, and 172 for the seventh (see Appendix J).

3.12.3 Phase 3: Generating initial themes.

The development of themes was an active and iterative process that I led, grounded in the data, my research question, insights recorded in my research journal, and knowledge gained through the systematic, informed literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To begin identifying initial candidate themes, I exported the 1,228 codes into an Excel document (see Appendix J). I sorted the codes by the number of references across all interviews, and those that appeared most frequently informed my decision to begin forming candidate themes.

I then returned to the coded data to support the clustering process, ensuring that the codes grouped were meaningfully connected around a central concept. These groupings were then transferred into NVivo, where I began organising them into potential candidate themes. After reviewing all the codes, I identified fourteen initial candidate themes within NVivo (see Appendix K).

3.12.4 Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes.

Initially, I became quite fixated on Braun and Clarke's (2021) suggestion that a thesis chapter typically includes six themes. However, after discussing this in supervision, I was able to let go of the idea of a 'magic number' and reduced the candidate themes from fourteen to eight. To support this process, I created a table in Microsoft Word listing all potential codes under the eight emerging themes (see Appendix L). I then revisited the full transcripts to ensure that the grouped codes aligned with the overarching themes.

Within each candidate theme, I used a colour-coding system to sort the codes into potential subthemes (see Appendix M). This process was iterative and involved several adjustments, which I discussed in supervision. For example, one group of codes initially placed under the theme of EP facilitation skills was later developed into a separate theme focused on outcomes and provision, as this better aligned with the literature reviewed in the thesis. Similarly, the theme 'role of the EP' was merged with 'contracting' to better reflect how participants understood and communicated the EP's role.

I recognised that this process could continue to evolve, but I accepted the current structure in order to move forward with the next phase of analysis (see Appendix N).

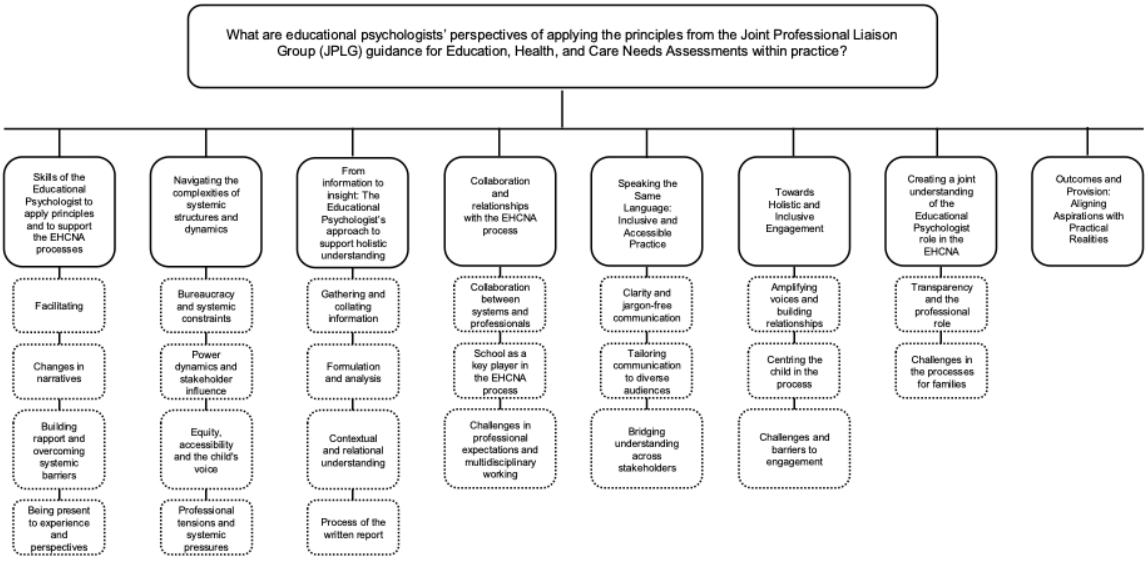
3.12.5 Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming the themes

Due to overlaps and similarities, the themes underwent several refining processes, and cuts were made to subthemes. After refining the initial fourteen themes into eight themes and 23 subthemes, I defined these with the labels shown in Figure 5. The task of writing a

theme definition was discussed in research supervision to ensure that a short overview of a few sentences could clarify and illustrate the meaning of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These can be seen within 4.1.

Figure 5

Defined themes and subthemes



3.12.6 Phase 6: Writing the report

The final phase of the analysis involved writing up the report. Once I had finalised the themes, I began drafting the next two chapters of the thesis. The 'Findings' chapter presents the themes and subthemes identified through the RTA, supported by direct quotes from participant interviews. The final chapter, the 'Discussion', draws on relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to situate the findings within the broader research and professional context, forming the basis for the overall analysis.

3.13 Support for the researcher

I had access to research supervision, which was provided as minimal monthly sessions. However, I was able to negotiate additional reflective space to coincide with the interview phase of the project. This created opportunities to reflect on my practice and troubleshoot any challenges that arose (see Appendix O). I also received monthly personal supervision for approximately ten months of the year, which is a standard provision across all three years of the course.

During my 130 placement days, I had access to weekly supervision. However, I chose not to use placement supervision to discuss this research due to ethical concerns, as the participants were colleagues within the service and had not given consent for their involvement to be discussed in that context. All supervision was provided by HCPC-registered Educational Psychologists.

3.15 Research Quality

In conducting this qualitative research, I was guided by assumptions and principles that support the idea of trustworthiness in research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Trustworthiness refers to the confidence in the data, the interpretation, and the methods used (Polit & Beck, 2014). I considered the criteria outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) throughout the study:

Credibility: To ensure credibility, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) principles of RTA. I documented each phase of the process to demonstrate how I engaged with the data. I kept a reflective journal and recorded voice memos to capture key decision points and reflections. During coding, I added annotations and reflective passages, which I discussed with my supervisor. I also shared initial codes from one participant and discussed thematic maps to explain how and why themes were developed (Connelly, 2016).

Dependability: As previously noted, the research was conducted within the framework of current legislation related to EHCNAs, which limits generalisability over time. I used reflective logs and engaged in discussions with my supervisor and peer groups to support the stability of the data (Connelly, 2016). Since contextualism underpinned my epistemological stance, I asked participants to reflect on their two most recent EHCNAs. This meant their responses were grounded in specific experiences rather than generalised practice.

Confirmability: To support confirmability, I provided a detailed methodological description and included the semi-structured interview questions to allow for replication. After each interview, I completed process logs to document my evolving thinking. During analysis, I used NVivo to collate all codes and maintain a clear record of the quotes associated with each code. These were then grouped into themes, ensuring a transparent and traceable process. I discussed key decisions in supervision and explored them further in peer supervision groups to encourage critical reflection (Connelly, 2016).

*Transferability***:** While statistical generalisation is not a goal of qualitative research, I provided an overview of the participants and the research context to support transferability. Although confidentiality was maintained, I aimed to present a narrative that reflected the diversity of EPs' experiences, while acknowledging that these accounts were not representative of all EPs (Connelly, 2016).

Authenticity: Using a qualitative approach allowed me to explore and present multiple realities. I aimed to convey these experiences through rich, detailed descriptions drawn from the interviews and the wider dataset (Connelly, 2016).

3.16 Ethical issues

The guidance from the BPS (2021) code of ethics and conduct has been followed and elaborated on to ensure that ethical issues are addressed within the research.

3.15.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent was sought from all participants (see Appendix P). I provided participants with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research, what would be expected of them, the time commitments involved, and any potential risks and benefits. The information sheet also explained the process for withdrawing consent, including any limitations to this. Before taking part, participants were asked to sign a consent form. I offered a debrief to all participants at the end of their involvement, whether they completed the study or chose to withdraw.

3.15.2 Data protection and storage of data

Data protection was explained to participants, including how their data would be stored and the duration for which it would be retained. In line with the fifth Data Protection Act (1998) principle, personal data will not be kept longer than 6-10 years. The research data was stored in the University of Essex OneDrive system and has restricted password access. All data was anonymised using pseudonyms.

3.15.2 Right to withdraw

Participants were informed of the disclaimer from the information sheet (see Appendix F). This highlighted that participants were not obliged to participate in the study and were free to withdraw at any time during the interview. Participants were informed they could withdraw their data up to three weeks after the interview. Following this time boundary, it was explained that the data would be anonymised, and withdrawal would not be feasible due to the nature of the analysis process. This was described to participants before agreeing to participate and during the interview.

3.15.3 Anonymity

At the end of the interview, participants were provided with a pseudonym (an alternative name) to protect their anonymity. This pseudonym was used throughout the interview and for all stored information, including the labelling of the audio recording. The data was then anonymised to minimise the risk of direct identification. All quotes included in the research were presented anonymously through the pseudonym provided. It was outlined to participants in the information sheet that, given the small number of participants, individuals may recognise their contributions; however, any identifying details have been removed or altered to prevent recognition by others. The LA where recruitment occurred has not been named, and all identifying information from any documentation has been removed.

3.15.5 Risks

There were no anticipated risks associated with the research. However, it was acknowledged that exploring systemic factors could potentially evoke uncomfortable feelings. If participants experienced any distress, they were encouraged to discuss their concerns with their supervisor, line manager, or peer supervision group for further support. Additionally, participants could contact myself for further discussion if needed, with contact details provided at the bottom of the information sheet. The information sheet included further information for emotional wellbeing services that participants may wish to access. Given my role as the researcher in interpreting the data in alignment with RTA, I aimed to understand participants' experiences from their own perspectives. However, I was aware that this interpretative approach carried a potential risk, as participants might not agree with how their views were represented in the final write-up.

3.15.6 Benefits to participants

The research allowed participants to reflect on their practice and potentially contribute to their continued professional development. A further benefit was the contribution to

knowledge, offering a platform for the educational psychology profession to engage in relevant discussions about the role of EPs within the EHCNA process. The aim was to generate new insights and perspectives on EPs' experiences conducting EHCNAs. This knowledge could support a broader narrative concerning the national shortage of EPs and the increasing number of EHCNA requests.

The anticipated benefits for the wider community included the knowledge gained on how to apply key principles and formulate recommendations to enhance inclusivity for children within learning environments, such as schools, alternative provisions, and community settings. Additionally, identifying collaborative approaches to capturing a child's voice was expected to have applications beyond education, including in social care and health, which are critical aspects of the EHCNA process.

Developing a clearer understanding of the information gathered by EPs during an EHCNA could impact the education system by informing SENDCos, schools, and parents about the key details required in an application. With this guidance, SEND EHCP workers could refine how they develop advice for EHCPs, ensuring that provisions and outcomes were more precisely tailored to individual needs. Implementing good practice was expected to contribute to a more effective EHCNA process and improved outcomes for children and young people.

3.15.8 Debriefing and feedback

At the end of each interview, I asked participants about their experience of the process and gave them the opportunity to ask any further questions or seek clarification. I also reiterated the key points from the information sheet, including their right to withdraw and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

3.15.9 Ethical Approval

The research adhered to the BPS (2021a; 2021b) code of ethics and conduct. Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) on 7th May 2024 (see Appendix Q). Consent was obtained from the Principal EP within the participating local authority (see Appendix E).

4. Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines eight themes and 23 subthemes. These themes will be illustrated through thematic maps alongside direct quotes from interviews. The themes are considered in relation to how EPs experience applying the JPLG document in their most recent EHCNAs.

Table 5

Thematic Table

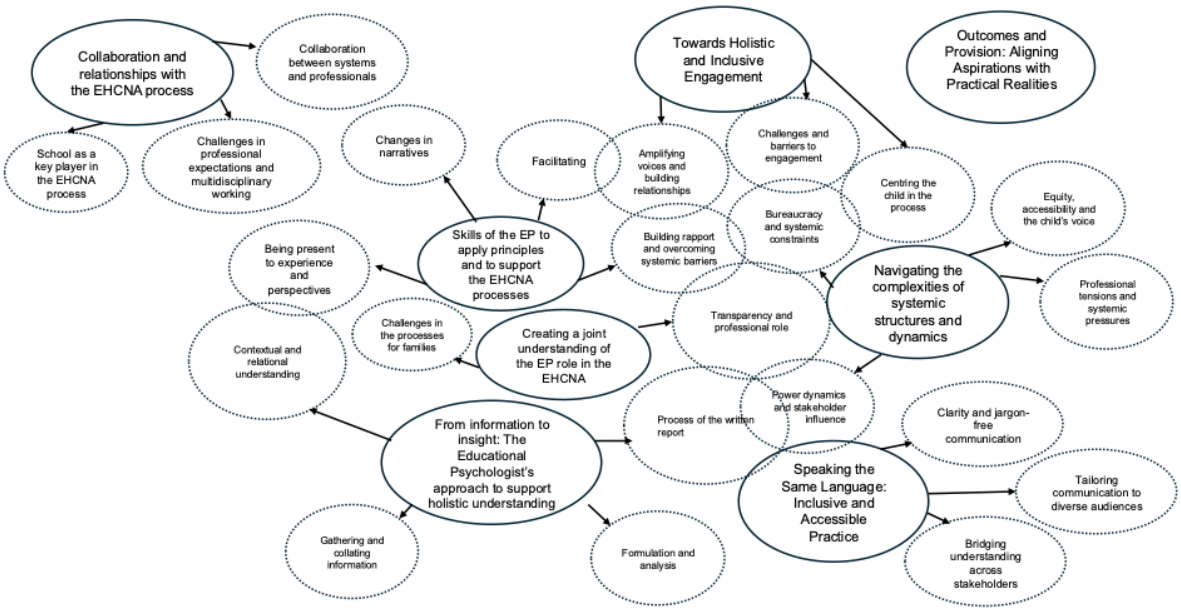
Theme	Characteristics
Skills of the Educational Psychologist to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes	Skills of facilitation, using questions, listening, understanding and allowing feedback. Changing narratives within the system, building rapport and overcoming the barriers linked to the positioning of the EP. The subtheme of 'facilitating' has a relationship with the subtheme 'amplifying voices and building relationships' in the 'Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement' theme. The subtheme 'building rapport and overcoming systemic barriers' links to the subtheme 'bureaucracy and systemic constraints' in the theme 'navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics', the subtheme of 'transparency and professional role' in the theme 'creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA' and the 'amplifying voices and building relationships' subtheme in the 'Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement' theme (see Figure 5).
Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics	Influences of systemic factors such as LA frameworks, policies and legislation and stakeholder involvement on the role of EPs. The equity and accessibility in the processes for CYP and families.

	As previously outlined the subtheme ‘bureaucracy and systemic constraints’ overlaps with the subtheme ‘building rapport and systemic constraints’ in theme ‘Skill of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA process.’ The bureaucracy and systemic constraints’ also overlap with the subthemes ‘challenges and barriers to engagement’ and ‘centring the child in the process’ in the ‘Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement’ theme and the subtheme ‘transparency and professional role’ in the theme ‘creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA’ The subtheme ‘power dynamics and stakeholder influence’ overlaps with the subtheme ‘transparency and professional role’ in the theme ‘creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA’ and the subtheme ‘process of the written report’ in the theme ‘from information to insight: The Educational Psychologist’s approach to support holistic understanding.’
From information to insight: The Educational Psychologist’s approach to support holistic understanding	Creating a holistic understanding of a CYP within their context. Through gathering and collating information, formulation and analysis, contextual and relational understanding, and the process of the written report. As previously outlined the subtheme ‘process of the written report’ overlaps with the subtheme ‘power dynamics and stakeholder influence’ in the theme ‘navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics.’ It overlaps with the subtheme ‘transparency and professional role’ in the theme ‘creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA. It also overlaps with the theme and subthemes in ‘Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice’. The subtheme ‘contextual and relational understanding’ overlaps with ‘being present to experience and perspectives’ in the theme ‘skills of the EP to apply principles and support the EHCNA processes.’

Collaboration and relationships in the EHCNA process	Relationships that participants build as part of the EHCNA process and collaboration between systems and professionals.
Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice	EHCNAs need to be accessible to all involved and communicated appropriately. This theme and subthemes overlap with the subtheme 'process of the written report' within the theme 'From information to insight: The EP's approach to support holistic understanding' and the subtheme 'Power dynamics and stakeholder influence' from 'Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics.
Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement	The child voice needs to be amplified and centred in the process through creative means and building relationships. As previously outlined the subtheme 'Challenges and barriers to engagement' overlaps with the subtheme 'Bureaucracy and systemic constraints' in the 'Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics' theme. The subtheme 'Amplifying voices and building relationships' overlaps with the subthemes 'facilitating' and 'building rapport and overcoming systemic barriers' in the theme 'skills of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes.'
Creating a joint understanding of the Educational Psychologist role in the EHCNA	The transparent nature of the EP to explain the process to all stakeholders and to begin a relationship to support the understanding of processes for families. The subtheme 'transparency and professional role' overlaps with the subtheme 'power dynamics and stakeholder influence' and 'bureaucracy and systemic constraints' in the theme 'navigating the complexities of the systemic structures and dynamics.' It also overlaps with the subtheme 'building rapport and overcoming systemic barriers' in the 'skills of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes' theme.
Outcomes and Provision: Aligning Aspirations with Practical Realities	The requirement as part of an EHCNA based on shared aspirations of the CYP and family, while acknowledging systemic factors.

Figure 6

Image of relationships between themes and subthemes



4.2 Theme 1: Skills of the Educational Psychologist to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes

Skills and principles used by participants to support the EHCNA process particularly those that helped facilitate effective conversations were identified across the dataset. Participants discussed the importance of creating opportunities to shift narratives among those involved in the process. Key skills included the EP's ability to build relationships quickly and navigate the dynamics of being an external professional. Participants also highlighted the importance of being fully present in their work, demonstrating listening skills, showing understanding, and engaging in reflective practice to better understanding others' experiences and perspectives.

4.2.1 Subtheme: Facilitating

The subtheme of facilitating highlighted the various skills that EPs use to enable an EHCNA to take place successfully. This subtheme included asking the right questions and facilitating communication in the CYP's support network. Six out of seven participants expressed the importance of the EP "asking the questions to parents…so I think, a lot of the questions that you ask is able to demonstrate…the context" (Participant 5). Through asking these questions, participants could develop an understanding of the CYP's unique circumstances. Participants highlighted questioning as a key skill, with one noting, "But actually, that's our skill asking questions in the right way for people to feel comfortable to answer them…to be open…you don't know lots of stuff, so they need to help you" (Participant 2).

Five participants highlighted the importance of asking the right questions within the school setting, particularly during the information-gathering stage and throughout the assess, plan, do, review process. As Participant 3 explained "Some of that questioning that we do through information gathering can sometimes help…almost reviewing some of their provision and strategies." This was further emphasised through the creativity that the participants described using to gather this information:

> I guess the creativity of how I approach the information gathering, the direct work and using the kind of joint meeting as an opportunity to support the graduated assess, plan, do review…the meeting might prompt…new things happening that are outside of the needs assessment process. (Participant 6)

Participants described asking the right questions as essential for enhancing communication within the CYP's support network and for initiating conversations that had previously been absent. As Participant 6 shared, "They'd like me to specifically tell people like their key adults in the meeting", highlighting the EP's role in opening up important lines of communication. Similarly, Participant 3 reflected on the emotional impact of this, stating,

“Just for that young person, I think to feel able to share that…haven't really been able to share that with their parent either”, illustrating how EPs can help create safe spaces for discussions that may not exist elsewhere in the CYP’s network.

The EP is important in ensuring that the process of EHCNA is meaningful for the adults who surround the CYP. “When you have that as a shared conversation, it just helps. I think everyone leaves that meeting and even if it doesn't become a plan, they've had that conversation” (Participant 2).

EPs’ ability to facilitate conversations with the CYP and their support network was highlighted across the dataset. Participants expressed the importance of making it meaningful for those involved, representing the CYP’s views through previously unexplored avenues and their direct skill of questioning across the system.

4.2.2 Subtheme: Changes in narratives

Six participants identified that they could change the narratives and offer interventions by offering a different perspective. The participants offered a ‘punctuation point’ by entering the CYP system. This was identified by allowing reflections for adults to access a different perspective to see a CYP’s needs.

> You don't just want hone in on all the things that young person is finding challenging within school…what do they do well, and I think that helps to provide balance and becomes almost an intervention in itself, sometimes having those conversation with staff, getting them to reflect…I don't think they often have that chance to stop and think about that. (Participant 4)

Participants highlighted the importance of offering an alternative view to support understanding. “Sharing their views for other people from a different perspective is, is helpful and helps other people then sometimes change their view about what they know…different way of thinking about that child” (Participant 2).

In addition, two participants emphasised the importance of acknowledging the educators' experience, particularly when they feel stuck or are finding it difficult to support the CYP. The role of the EP in validating these feelings and offering support was evident:

> It's quite an ordeal to go through…feeling quite stuck now so wanting that meeting to feel productive. So not just setting outcomes, but thinking, you know, if there are strategies that might be helpful, and they wouldn't count as provision, because they're not over and above the ordinarily available provision, kind of picking out some of those. (Participant 6)

> Had been…difficult with the school feeling like they weren't able to find something that really did work for that young person as well. So maybe they hadn't had the experience of success to be able to reflect on in terms of what worked well to help with that provision. (Participant 3)

Six participants highlighted that the EP also changes the narrative by bringing the system together in a way that previously has not happened. "And then, if there's any interesting or difficult messages…my role to kind of go have you thought about? You know this isn't the way that that mum or dad is perceiving the, this situation" (Participant 5). Four participants highlighted the need to provide aspects of difference in a way that will be tolerated by those within the system, "in that joint meeting, being able to gently challenge" (Participant 6). EPs can create a difference within the narrative to help shift the perspectives of CYP, families and educators around the EHCNA experience.

4.2.3 Subtheme: Building rapport and overcoming systemic barriers

The participants frequently identified themselves as external individuals to the CYPs' context. Therefore, they possessed a skill in facilitating a working relationship quickly with all the stakeholders for an EHCNA. "Don't necessarily have that ongoing relationship with families and with schools…young people, so obviously like building rapport quickly is a really important thing" (Participant 3).

Participants described the importance of building rapport with the CYP using a range of creative methods to help them express their experiences and views. “I used…a talking map that was sorting scenarios into likes and dislikes and then sort of indifference pile so she could communicate the parts of school that [CYP] liked or didn't like” (Participant 1). Similarly, “It's always sentence starter cards and trying really hard to obtain their view” (Participant 7).

Participants identified several barriers to building rapport, particularly linked to the snapshot role of the EP and the time-limited nature of EP role. They reflected on the potentially daunting nature of an EP meeting for both CYP and families, often placing themselves in their shoes to better understand these challenges and respond with empathy. As Participant 7 shared, “Whereas when you're just rocking up as like a stranger to an anxious child, and then suddenly trying to get all of their view out of them,” highlighting the difficulty of forming meaningful connections on a single or brief encounter.

One participant reflected on the challenges of forming a meaningful connection within the limited time available, highlighting the pressure both EPs and participants may feel during such interactions:

> We put people on the spot as EPs quite a lot. Bring them into a room. We've got an hour or so to chat with them. I think, trying to really gain a rich insight into that young person's world in that short space time can be quite tricky. (Participant 4)

All participants highlighted challenges of being external to the child’s context and the need to be creative in their ability to create working relationships. However, participants could also identify strengths around being an external person, which is linked to the changing narratives subtheme previously stated. Participants expressed their ability to overcome systemic barriers through facilitating repairs after ruptures within the system. “Coming in…externally…had…issues with school, and then…rebuild the relationship…So the process actually supported getting the family's views…what the next steps in other areas

that school could support [family] with" (Participant 5). The external aspect of the EP can also provide opportunities to provide a unique perspective "as someone who is external to that situation, to try and unpick the strength as well as the barriers. So, I think that is where we provide a fair and balanced picture" (Participant 4).

The external nature of the EP was also highlighted to provide opportunities to provide a unique perspective, support the systems to change narratives, and create an accessible next step to support the CYP, family, and school network.

4.2.4 Subtheme: Being present to experience and perspectives

Three participants highlighted the importance of listening to ensure that an understanding of the unique experience of the CYP can be understood and supported through the purpose of the EHCNA. "Because if you've listened really carefully, you can come up with the outcomes…it should be a sort of a very shared process without them feeling like they're doing all your job' (Participant 2). Participants emphasised that active listening is key to developing understanding, "for young people and families to feel like you, as an individual, have understood and got the key parts of… their views and experience" (Participant 6). This deeper understanding was seen as essential in providing meaningful support as reflected by Participant 5, "coming in with a very clear focus of how can we support you as a family? How can we support you in a non-judgmental way".

Three participants highlighted the importance of the EP opening and welcoming feedback from the CYP, family and educators once a written report had been created. This supported the experience of building a shared perspective between the participants and the CYP's support network. This level of open feedback allowed a mutual understanding and allowed families to be heard. "I always invite parents…to ring me if they don't understand anything" (Participant 5). "They can feed back on those [outcomes] so that actually to check that they are representative" (Participant 4).

The skills of listening to the experience to create a shared perspective were highlighted as an important aspect for developing an understanding of the CYP. Opening feedback and creating a space to allow a shared understanding were used.

4.3. Theme 2: Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics

This theme explores the influence of systemic factors such as LA frameworks, policies, legislation and stakeholder involvement on the role of EPs. It highlights how they continuously navigate these structures, balancing professional tensions while striving to uphold equity, accessibility and the child's voice. These aspects impact the EPs' workload and approach to EHCNAs which all participants acknowledged.

4.3.1 Subtheme: Bureaucracy and systemic constraints

All participants valued the principles within the JPLG document. However, all highlighted that the constraint in the current system impacts their ability to achieve these principles in their purest form.

> You're given two days…all of that paperwork…to meet with the young person with parents with school staff. I think in terms of timing, it's difficult to really look completely holistically and have those conversations with the professionals who are involved because of time constraints. (Participant 1)

Time emerged as a significant barrier identified by participants, further intensified by broader systemic constraints. This challenge often operates at an unconscious level, making it difficult for individuals within these systems to fully recognise its impact. Regardless of how long they have been in practice, all participants felt the pressure of these overarching systems. As one participant explained, "We have all this training about person centred, and obtaining the child's voice, and yet we're squashed by the system that is just quickly get on with it" (Participant 7).

> It does sit there in the back of your mind [hand gestures behind head and loops hand] when you're doing things as well that you know we are [1 second pause, looks above] yeah, we're working in a wider system that has those constraints. (Participant 3)

> You're in a tribunal…You can imagine the kind of questioning…it's a rare thing, but it is often in the back of my mind you know, and I've been doing the job a long time I should be more confident, but it doesn't stop it being present. (Participant 2)

4.3.2 Subtheme: Power dynamics and stakeholder influence

This subtheme highlighted the impact of the audience and was mentioned by all participants. “It's written for a range of audiences, so I wanted to be respectful in terms of the family and their cultural nuances” (Participant 1).

Within the participant’s narrative, at times it felt that the audience would trump the CYP, with the report's commissioner being the primary audience. The panel that will agree whether the EHCNA meets the criteria for a plan were also considered as a live part of the process, and the impact of time pressures on how the EHCNA is produced was also highlighted. “Who is my audience? Yes, the parents are going to read it. Do I write for the child? Absolutely not” (Participant 7). The varied audience included: it is “for a commissioner for your local authority” (Participant 5). “The person who's commissioning that report is kind of the main audience” (Participant 3). Additional professionals were also identified as an important aspect that the participants considered, “Primary audience should be the…casework officers, because they're the ones who've got to translate into a possible plan” (Participant 2) and “understand that in terms of casework officers not effectively muddying the waters of the need section with too many strength” (Participant 6).

Participants reflected on the time pressures involved in the EHCNA process and how the presence of the panel as a live decision-making body influenced their reporting “I'm mostly writing it for the professionals on the panel, making decision…written in a very psychological,

academic…But that's the reality of quickly getting through them, writing for other professionals" (Participant 7). Participants illustrated the significant influence of the audience on their reports with the stakeholders such as commissioners, casework officers and panel members holding the power through the prioritisation made by the participants.

However, four participants also considered the person-centred aspects of an EHCNA while making it accessible for educators and families.

> The different audiences that we're writing to…be reflective of that young person and…their parents…fit within that system within a school, so that it's something that can be implemented and practically used whilst, also fulfilling the criteria of the statutory assessment from a local authority standpoint. (Participant 4)

> Writing for a range of audiences…represents their child and their family and is so person-centred equally schools should feel…clear and accessible to them in terms of what they should be doing to help with those next steps and help those young people to be the most successful versions of themselves. (Participant 1)

> Clear descriptors of the difficulties…what will that feel like to a young person or their family to read...keep them central to my thinking, when I'm writing. That is potentially a barrier…I don't want it to contribute to this kind of deficit presentation of a young person, and what that might feel like to the family. (Participant 6)

> We're trying to be the piece of paper for the local authority. But we're also trying to make it a really worthwhile experience for the parents as well, and I think that's where the equity part is, is making sure that everybody has an equal voice. (Participant 5)

Four participants were able to maintain the duality of their role by representing the CYP in a way that felt representative for the family and ensuring the EHCNA would support their ongoing development.

4.3.3 Subtheme: Equity, accessibility and the child's voice

This subtheme discusses the impact of equity within the system regarding the process of the EHCNA. It also encompasses the accessibility of the EHCNA process and how a child's voice is encompassed in the final document.

Five participants highlighted the inequity across the system, which was highlighted through children being missed within the EHCNA process and the role of parental advocacy impacting provision. "I'm sure there are groups of young people that we are missing in the process…schools aren't putting in the applications, or parents don't know about putting in an application so it's not an equitable process" (Participant 5). "Who I'm not seeing and that sort of thing, and just that kind of wider thing of the meaning in your job" (Participant 3).

> There's quite a distinct difference between families where they've shouted really loudly and will get legal involved…when it comes to the families who aren't like that, I try really hard to empower them to understand that there's a tribunal process if it doesn't go the way they want. (Participant 2)

This was further acknowledged by Participant 7, highlighting that parents' needs will be met if they use their voice in order to advocate for their child:

> But the whole system is unfair. Those parents who shout loudest get what they want. Those ones that use the tribunal system get what they want. The ones with an education and able to advocate for their child you know their plans are stronger.

These reflections highlight systemic inequities in one LA's EHCNA processes, noting how access is influenced by parental advocacy, awareness, and socio-economic factors. They raise concerns about fairness both within the LA and wider society.

Four participants highlighted accessibility within the processes across the LA when considering aspects of diversity.

> It probably would have felt very inaccessible to parents because of levels of literacy for them to have been involved in the process…school specifically wrote on one of the forms…call wherever possible but that was handwritten so thinking about there wasn't an option within that process to highlight how best to communicate with family. (Participant 1)

> If I've had an interpreter…I'm always mindful of how will this translate? And I don't want to…give less information…to this child…deserves a thorough piece of advice. How can I write this in a way that won't get lost in translation? (Participant 6)

These two participants both expressed difficulties with accessibility in the processes. However, they provided actions and steps to ensure that CYP and parents accessed the process as much as possible.

In addition, participants highlighted how the processes can diminish the child's voice and are linked directly to the audiences and processes that took place within the EHCNA process.

> Writing our needs assessments, you get a good feeling of a young person…later on in the process, where it maybe doesn't feel so person centred when…case officers need to fill in, and sometimes it loses that focus sometimes on that young person. (Participant 1)

The multiple layers and procedural requirements of the EHCNA, shaped by policy, often result in the CYP's perspective being overshadowed by competing agendas and viewpoints.

4.3.4 Subtheme: Professional tensions and systemic pressures

This subtheme illuminates the systemic pressures of being resource-driven and the professional tensions this brings. "Am I giving my professional opinion or am I kind of thinking about what's actually available in terms of like the provision that's out there…knowing that there are finite resources [laughs]" (Participant 3).

The impact of the resources on the EPs' presentation of a child and the awareness of systemic pressures results in differences in how the EHCNA report provided by the EP can vary across the system. "Let's not look at the strengths on a panel he'll be…compared to other children…as resources get tighter in places…there is that conflict between I really need to highlight the level of need" (Participant 5).

One participant described how EPs are trying to compensate for gaps caused by limited resources elsewhere in the system:

> EP report is…high quality, fantastic, and the school report is a sentence in each section. So, I think as the stress and the strains on schools have got more as EPs, we've almost kind of gone we've got to fill this gap. (Participant 5)

All participants highlighted the systemic pressures of resource-driven decision-making, navigating tensions between professional judgments and the impact of resourcing at a wider level while compensating for the strain felt across systems.

4.4 Theme 3: From information to insight: The Educational Psychologist's approach to support holistic understanding

This theme presents the participants' process of creating a holistic understanding of a CYP within their context. The subthemes that were demonstrated as key to this process include gathering and collating information, formulation and analysis, contextual and relational understanding, and the written report process.

4.4.1 Subtheme: Gathering and collating information

All participants expressed satisfaction with the amount of information available through the LA, as part of the EHCNA application, highlighting how this accessibility supports a more comprehensive understanding of the CYP. For example. Participant 3 noted, "We do have access to quite a lot of information" and Participant 1 added, "Local authority that we're in

there's a lot of information that's held electronically that can be accessed". Participant 2 emphasised the importance of this access by stating, "Really because it's about first of all, reading everything about that young person". Participants viewed these digital resources as fundamental to developing an initial, holistic understanding during the assessment process.

All participants highlighted that they cannot be all-knowing and therefore use information from others. "You are reliant on family insights as to what happens at home…family experience…key part of my information gathering process" (Participant 6). "You're using lots of different pieces of evidence and information…bring about a picture of that young person and trying to understand what they're like in different contexts" (Participant 4). The barriers of this were also highlighted "Maybe if you haven't had…ongoing involvement with the chid…seeing this snapshot of information and a sort of short amount of time to do that" (Participant 3).

Four participants used the information gathered during all interactions to help support their thinking.

> I love to go to schools…where can I park? What, what welcome do I get from the reception? What's on the walls? Do I get offered a cup of tea…What does it feel like for the parent going into the environment, what does it feel like for the child to be into that environment. (Participant 5)

This illustrates how every interaction and observation contributes to understanding a child's context and provides valuable insight, helping shape their thinking and formulation process.

4.4.2 Subtheme: Formulation and analysis

All participants explored the process of formulation and analysis, each describing their approach differently, expressing that often a hidden and individualised process takes place. The process was described as psychologically informed; however, it needed to be provided

tentatively due to the uncertainty within the discipline of psychology. “Thinking contextually about things that are going on and viewing that through a psychological lens to help us to understand…but ultimately what we're formulating is a hypothesis we can only ever say what it could be” (Participant 1). Participant 3 described how all their work is approached from a psychological perspective, “psychologically while we're working…when we do kind of share that perspective, if we're thinking about kind of explaining how things interact in terms of like our formulation or our summary of all…trying to be really clear”. This shared psychological framework was seen as crucial in providing CYP, families and systems with a clear understanding of potential hypotheses.

The participants expressed a reluctance to use the word formulation due to the need to maintain a curious stance when considering the potential hypothesis and considering a holistic understanding of the CYP and their family. A particular section of the written advice template (the name has been removed to protect the participants’ confidentiality) was expressed as a place where psychological thinking was accepted and expressed. “We don't explicitly have a psychological formulation which is something that other…local authorities do…[I] have a psychological formulation in my mind…and that might come through in my [section]” (Participant 6).

> The word psychological formulation in the report…I never use it…it's more about trying to make me feel or us feel…like we are offering something better…it's about saying I wonder why that's happening. I wonder what that's about. I wonder where that came from and some of our role, I think is to demonstrate that sort of open thinking really. (Participant 2)

> Pull in the context, the needs, the strengths, the views, the aspirations and try and create this picture of a young person and where appropriate I guess try and explain that through a psychological lens but without using, I guess such overt theory. (Participant 1)

> I think we're doing that as psychologists, but it isn't explicit. It's sort of and I think, like my managers have talked to me about…we trust that you're doing that you don't need to kind of like justify your thinking within this…advice that you're writing. (Participant 3)

One participant reflected on the challenges of conveying their psychological formulation in EHCNAs, through the need to balance the clarity for professionals with sensitivity to parents.

> One person is saying I think we're looking at [diagnosis] and I'm thinking…social factors…how do I write that I think there's a lot of attachment and trauma response needs going on without upsetting the parent but also being clear enough for the professionals reading it. (Participant 7)

The use of subtly integrating frameworks available to support their analysis could create an imbalance of power towards professionals due to the inaccessibility this would have for CYP and parents.

Participants also acknowledged the subjective nature of formulation, recognising how their personal views and biases could influence how they communicate their understanding of the CYP in written reports. “No, everything's subjective. Obviously, my formulation is my view of that young person it's my view of that circumstance” (Participant 7).

4.4.3 Subtheme: Contextual and relational understanding

This subtheme illustrated the importance of the participants demonstrating the broader influences on a child, integrating multiple perspectives and holistic understanding. The participants highlighted the importance of articulating their understanding of the CYP through a written format.

> Those wider context for them as well as acknowledging…there's different systems and layers interact upon and within each other and that's going to therefore be impacting upon them at different points in time and try to sort of show that within my [section of written

> advice] of pulling everything together to be able to show sort of how the needs relate to the provision and all of that contextual stuff is linked together to create that picture for that young person. (Participant 1)

Six participants discussed the importance of the application of contextual understanding of CYPs' needs:

> Context specific or actually across different situations and scenarios…does it look different, depending on where they are, who they're interacting with…pulling together lots of different evidence in order to bring about a holistic picture, including their views [CYP]. (Participant 4)

These participants highlighted the need to consider how different systems interact and how a CYP's needs may vary across situations, as well as ensuring that their written EHCNA reflects a comprehensive and interconnected picture alongside the CYP's views.

The role of observations and educators with a relationship with the CYP was expressed as a particular area that develops contextual understanding. This was highlighted by three of the participants explicitly. "What we've seen in our observations can be evidence it's what people say in those meetings…young person themselves, and observing them, but I think staff often have a really good insight…teaching assistants who are working with the young people" (Participant 4). "Go into the classroom…access to the teaching assistant…class teacher as well…when I'm doing my observation, oooo have you got 5 mins" (Participant 5). "Not ruling out different sources of information, TA [teaching assistant] notices at break time that this is something that they're able to do, nobody else has observed right well, that's really important contextual information" (Participant 6).

The role of the EP illustrates the need to use different elements of information through relational dynamics and observations to develop a contextual understanding of all staff members who may hold differing opinions.

4.4.4 Subtheme: Process of the written report

All participants highlighted the written report as a crucial tool for communicating their understanding of the CYP as part of the EHCNA process, despite a reluctance from some participants to acknowledge this as a sole task of the EHCNA. “That's holistic bit for me and I find the…section in the report, and I said it's not about the report, but actually if you got to communicate within that section, that's where you join it all together” (Participant 2). The written report must balance the need for clarity, directness, and sensitivity for different audiences. “I think it's quite difficult…sometimes I verge on being quite direct and blunt…like, in terms of what this child needs, I'm just gonna be really direct…then I go back and try and soften it down for the family” (Participant 7).

All seven participants reflected on the impact on practice after introducing a template EHCNA advice document. All participants emphasised explicit and succinct articulation of the evidence underpinning their formulation of a child’s needs. Participants recognised that this was due to external constraints impacting this process. “I think the barrier…is just space…we're trying to be a bit briefer…but actually, we're not always…saying this is where I got this information from…which I probably would have been writing more so before” (Participant 4).

> I'm really working very hard at the moment to make sure…clear statement, and I know where the information and the evidence that I've got to make my formulation, but I think sometimes that succinctness actually takes a lot of effort. (Participant 5)

All participants reflected on the template provided as part of the EHCNA process, which highlighted the individuality of the EP in ensuring the statutory requirements are met. “Our template is set up; we've got the background information…I try, where best possible, to use direct quotes…so that words aren't misconstrued…I try to yeah use exact phrases and put that in italics…for that not to be misinterpreted” (Participant 1).

The ability to be clear and succinct for participants was illustrated as being met through the LA processes and templates that had been created. “In terms of it being quite clear…and quite transparent in…writing needs and provisional outcomes…that feels quite…OK to do…our model works well to support that…like the structure of the reports…the source of information…that's quite clear” (Participant 3).

As seen through the quotes, all participants recognised the template's positives in supporting the conveying of information to make it accessible to a range of audiences. However, it feels there is a desire not to be restrained to the extent they are with the succinctness and need to clearly state the needs while creating a holistic picture that accounts for humans' unique and multifaceted complexities.

4.5 Theme 4: Collaboration and relationships in the EHCNA process

This theme highlights the relationships that participants build as part of the EHCNA process. The subthemes are collaboration between systems and professionals to highlight the importance of working collaboratively with parents and educators. As a key player, the school was illustrated as one of the most important advice providers when examining the information provided as part of the EHCNA. Finally, the challenges in professional roles and expectations are discussed, including the impacts of joint understanding between the existing systems, individuals' expectations on the EHCNA process, and how the participants navigate these expectations.

4.5.1 Subtheme: Collaboration between systems and professionals

All participants explicitly referenced the importance of creating collaboration between parents and the school system, which is achieved through joint meetings. This meeting allowed shared understanding and inclusive decision-making. By bringing together perspectives from home, school, and the CYP, a nonjudgmental, supportive approach to co-developing outcomes that align with both systems is fostered.

> I really like doing a joint home and school meeting…feel like that collaborative approach where parents are getting to hear ideas from school, school are getting to hear ideas from home…I've explicitly asked the young person so I can share that, and we can think about how to incorporate those into outcomes. (Participant 1)

Another participant highlighted the importance of recognising that “I think it also is very helpful for schools to see that parents are at the heart of the process as well” (Participant 5), noting how valuable this perspective is for schools.

All participants recognised this as an important aspect of their work, which they prioritised. “I really push for at least having a meeting all together” (Participant 7) as “bringing people together is the best way to be collaborative” (Participant 4). These meetings were seen to improve the process for the CYP through creating a shared understanding, “all the key people are part of a joint discussion about what the future would look like” (Participant 6).

4.5.2 Subtheme: School as a key player in the EHCNA process

All participants emphasised schools' important role in the EHCNA process, highlighting their insights, expertise and accessibility in providing information about the CYP. “School have built up with her over time because she's been at the school since reception…had a really good understanding of her” (Participant 1).

All participants saw educators' knowledge and expertise as a valued resource. They also emphasised the school’s role as a consistent and ongoing presence for the CYP and their family. “Privileging teacher observations over time and speaking to…a TA [teaching assistant] …that knows that young person” (Participant 6). “I think staff often have a really good insight…needs look like day to day…it’s those teaching assistants who are working with the young people quite a lot” (Participant 4).

Educators frequently offer varied narratives and facilitate the involvement of multiple professionals, providing valuable insights for participants during the EHCNA process. However, four highlighted the challenges schools face in accessing an EP and the inequities across the system, where CYP may have greater access to an EHCNA if their school has sufficient resources and information available. “Schools providing good applications, and then does that mean that people get requests that other people don't…do people kind of have access to the same…information around…the assessments” (Participant 3).

> If you're lucky and have a SENCo, who knows what they're doing, and has written a really good piece of information great for the child. But if they're in a school where they don't buy any time. There's no relationship with the EP service, new SENCo, has no clue what they're doing…they don't know how to make a request for an EHCP they don't know what they need to put in, the child is losing in that situation. (Participant 7)

Participants expressed the EHCNA process can serve as a mechanism for holding schools accountable for SEND provision, while also acknowledging the pressures schools experience in supporting CYP with SEND. Concerns were raised that schools might sometimes present narratives about families that could be unhelpful and potentially hinder a CYP’s progress. In addition to the lack of resources schools have in terms of time, four participants highlighted the availability of staff and the understanding of the process.

> Some schools…don't understand the process, or they don't have the time…When I asked them in the email, right we have to have a meeting, I'll come and observe, I'll meet the child, and then we have to have a meeting…sometimes this comes across as a great big shock. (Participant 7)

> I really want to speak to the teaching assistant, but if the school comes back and says no, we're not making them available. They are running interventions…working within a system which is made up of people…it can be a bit messy and doesn't always run as smoothly as you'd like it to. (Participant 4)

4.5.3 Subtheme: Challenges in professional expectations and multidisciplinary working

Participants with longer experience in the LA (three participants) reflected on the evolving challenges in professional collaboration, noting a shift away from co-production meetings and multidisciplinary teamwork.

> Used to do co-production meetings, then we'd invite people like [various professionals names] and we'd all sit around a table and produce the outcomes. Now, that's not so easily done…I've got very positive relationships with…service within my area…it's very easy…to email, or to have a quick conversation. (Participant 5)

The sense of professional isolation for EPs was highlighted by four participants, with limited opportunities for joint writing and engagement with other specialists. “You'll be lucky if you've got another professional writing, I mean obviously the schools are writing as well, but school, and EP usually aligns, and coming at it from an academic perspective” (Participant 7). This was often met with disappointment from participants, illustrating that they are often not best placed to offer advice regarding ‘Sensory and Physical’ needs.

While efforts were made to connect with professionals, this often felt unpredictable and dependent on chance. Significant barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration include availability constraints and a perceived lack of integration across education, health, and care services. “I try, wherever possible, to speak to other professionals if they have been involved” (Participant 4). “Just chancing my luck, sending an email in case I might be able to have a quick chat with them” (Participant 6).

Participants often mentioned time as a significant barrier, and the pressures felt within the LA as to why the prioritisation of multi-agency working was not emphasised. Four participants also identified the wait list for other services, potentially highlighting a rhetoric of a similar stretched and limited resourced position.

> Whole idea of the EHCP being us working with health and care…never seeing any other professional…Is there a speech language service…they're on the waiting list. Is there you know a social worker around? No, not really…the lack of joined up working around the child, I think, is absolutely appalling. (Participant 7)

Participant 6 speculated that reduced informal interactions, particularly post-COVID, have further weakened interprofessional links. “The links that exist with other professionals…possibly as a function of COVID and not having that overlap informally in shared office space anymore...I think people are much less likely to send a cold email effectively.”

Participants may unintentionally favour maintaining the EHCNA writing process as an academic task, influenced by an underlying, self-deprecating view of the EP role. As Participant 7 expressed, “I'm just going and doing some admin and sitting for a whole day just writing that…it's deskilling EPs, I think, deskilling us from what we're trained to do”.

4.6 Theme 5: Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice

This theme portrays the role participants experienced the EP plays in ensuring that EHCNAs are accessible to all those involved and that this is communicated appropriately. The subthemes include clarity and jargon-free communication, tailoring communication to diverse audiences and bridging understanding across stakeholders.

4.6.1 Subtheme: Clarity and jargon-free communication

All participants reflected on the importance of explaining all acronyms and psychological concepts to ensure transparency with CYP, families and stakeholders is achieved. Participants highlighted the importance of peer review as a key stage to maintain clarity in EHCNAs. “But even when we've got like abbreviations and things, I think I'm quite good and I do spot this in other people's…can you just explain this?” (Participant 3).

Participants reflected on the need to make psychology accessible through adopting visual aids and follow-up discussions to support parent's understanding. The process was described as one of open inquiry rather than expert knowledge, reinforcing the role of EPs in fostering collaborative and reflective thinking.

> Psychology is really accessible, it should be and it's not mystical and it's not all knowing, it's almost the opposite. It's about saying I wonder why that's happening. I wonder what that's about. I wonder where that came from and some of our role, I think is to demonstrate that sort of open thinking really. (Participant 2)

4.6.1 Subtheme: Tailoring communication to diverse audiences

All participants highlighted the number of audiences for which the EHCNA is written and the importance of ensuring it meets all the different processes that the assessment accesses. They also highlighted their responsibility to ensure their writing was clear, intentional, understandable, and applicable across different stages of the process. All participants illustrated the need for person-centred reports to represent the CYP and family while providing clear guidance to schools.

> Written for a whole range of audiences so thinking that, sort of within the local authority that we're in, this will go to parents this psychological advice and it will also go on to the next stage of the process where it will go to the panel it will then produce, if it is a yes to an education health care plan it will form part of that plan so thinking about what we have written to be accessible to all. I know that within educational psychology…where we know what they mean but how accessible is that to other people. (Participant 1)

Participants confidently described and held the awareness of the multiple audiences present within the EHCNA process. Participants were able to discuss the implications for each audience, and it felt as though this was a process that came easily to them. This could be explained by the frequency of EHCNAs within the EP's workload.

Additionally, participants acknowledged that the EHCNA report follows the child throughout their life, and the CYP may read it in the future. The participants highlighted intentionality around this, hoping that families never feel at fault for any needs that are presented, ‘I don't want…the parent to feel…they've done something really wrong’ (Participant 7). This awareness reinforced the importance of balancing honesty with sensitivity, ensuring that the narrative supports the young person’s self-perception and well-being if they revisit the document later in life. “I think that providing that balance and presenting a narrative of a young person that they would feel comfortable and supported, and if they were ever in a position to read it in the future” (Participant 6).

4.6.3 Subtheme: Bridging understanding across stakeholders

The subtheme highlights that with the awareness of the range of audiences, the EPs’ role is often to bridge the understanding across stakeholders to create a clear and holistic picture of the CYP. All participants emphasised the importance of providing psychological advice that truly captures the complexity of the child, helping others who have not met the CYP to understand their unique strengths and needs. One participant reflected on a fear many EPs may share, that if the advice does not resonate with the family, it could undermine the purpose of the work: “I don't even know what [the EP’s] talking about. [They] don’t know my child. If that happens, I've failed” (Participant 2). This highlights the ethical and relational responsibility EPs feel to ensure their contributions are authentic, meaningful, and grounded in the lived experience of the child and family.

> We’re talking about a human being like it's complex…you want to really like bring that person to life, to someone picking up that report who doesn't get to meet…knows them and has a sense of them as a person. (Participant 3)

Participants reflected on their responsibility to support decision-making by presenting an accurate and balanced portrayal of the CYP. While some participants highlighted the ongoing need for sensitivity, others emphasised the importance of transparency to ensure

appropriate support and resources are allocated fairly. “I’m going to highlight what your child can't do…a little bit of a shock factor” (Participant 5), in addition to, “I've got to really help the panel, like part of the purpose, is me really writing a report…so that they can make those decisions and hopefully it's easier to make fairer decisions” (Participant 3).

> I've met EPs in the past…soften it so much…the type of school does not align to the severity of the need of what you've seen…you have to be quite transparent and quite blunt in some way, and what you're saying, so that they get the support they need. (Participant 7)

This theme highlighted the nuance of the EP’s role in managing the experiences of potentially being perceived as a gatekeeper. This narrative is reinforced due to being one of the only professionals encountering the CYP and presenting their needs to unknown professionals. The EPs held different opinions regarding how to articulate the needs of the CYP due to the diverse audience they had in mind. All participants acknowledged that, ultimately, the CYP will access the written reports at one point. EPs varied in terms of length of time in the service and the purpose of EHCNA, and three participants explicitly noted the change in how they view the purpose since their experience as trainees.

4.7 Theme 6: Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement

The towards holistic and inclusive engagement theme highlighted the centrality that participants placed on CYP and families within the EHCNA process. The theme includes the subthemes of amplifying voices and building relationships, centring the child in the process and addressing barriers to engagement.

4.7.1 Subtheme: Amplifying voices and building relationships

All participants illustrated the importance of building strong working relationships with families and amplifying their voices within the EHCNA process. They highlighted the need to create opportunities for parents and CYP to express their experiences, concerns, and

aspirations, ensuring their perspectives are central to decision-making, which is a part of their practice. Participants reflected on the significance of providing dedicated space for families to share their views independently of schools, identifying that parental and CYP perspectives may differ from academic priorities. Participants recognised the challenge of working within a resource-driven system but remained committed to making the assessment process as positive and inclusive as possible.

> The process seems more resource driven process rather than child focused child centred process…I think we make that this bit as nice as possible for parents. And I think we do a really good job of doing the assessments and working with families and making sure that children's voices and young people's voices are heard. (Participant 5)

Additionally, participants discussed their role in bridging communication between families and schools, ensuring that schools understand what matters most to parents beyond academic outcomes. Four participants described going beyond standard procedures to gather deeper insights into family perspectives, sometimes feeling responsible for advocating for parents and CYP when their voices might otherwise be overlooked. “I guess, coming back to the family views for school to hear what might be important to the family. That's different from what you know if they're focusing on academic attainment” (Participant 6).

> To reflect that back to their family I think was helpful and that feeling from the family that their situation is then best understood because they did really feel like their child had been given a platform where they were able to share some of their thoughts and feelings towards things. (Participant 1)

4.7.2 Subtheme: Centring the child in the process

All participants highlighted the CYP's central role in the EHCNA process. They expressed the need to discover a holistic view of the child, focusing on the CYP's agency to identify

areas of change and inform their provision. The participants identified creative methods to ensure that the CYP's voice was gathered and actively contributed to the development of the EHCNA.

> I will always try to do direct work with the young person, even if there is extensive information gathered already…I might use like visual card sorting activities to help structure things…sentence completion cards, the school well-being cards…broken the ice with some games…co-creating this little picture of the key things about them together. (Participant 6)

Participants highlighted the tension between meeting statutory deadlines and maintaining a child-centred approach, with this challenge often shaped by the EPs' values. One participant reflected on feeling pressure from the wider system to work within statutory timescales, sometimes being directed to proceed using only the information available. In contrast, Participant 6 emphasised the importance of prioritising the representation of the CYP, even if this meant flexibility was needed around compliance over meeting statutory deadlines.

> Work within the statutory timeframes…if that came at the cost of doing a good piece of work, I'd been allocated a piece of work, and I wasn't able to see the child. I think realising where flexibility is needed in terms of compliance.

4.7.3 Subtheme: Challenges and barriers to engagement

This theme highlighted a range of challenges and barriers to CYP and family engagement. Six participants identified the impact of time as a barrier that feels heightened during the pressure of building a rapport with a CYP and to engage them and support their voice effectively. "Time is obviously a barrier…trying to get a really clear picture of what that young person thinks and wants urm can be pretty tricky if they struggle to build up relationships with external professionals" (Participant 4).

In addition, three participants highlighted that if adults decide that the CYP is not likely to engage with professionals, this can promote reluctance in the CYP to engage in the process. “Barrier when maybe adults have already decided that the young person won't meet with you, and there's no, no hope trying” (Participant 6).

Two participants highlighted the careful balance of representing the parental views of a CYP’s difficulties that are at odds with how an EP would perceive the difficulties. This can often result in tension that the participants experienced needing to manage to reflect the views of the family effectively, but not to reinforce a deficit narrative further. “I've got to represent the family views, and the family views are in some way…problematic…you're sort of mindful of what that might feel like…equally for the young person to read” (Participant 6).

4.8 Theme 7: Creating a joint understanding of the Educational Psychologist’s role in the EHCNA

Six participants highlighted this theme, which has since been discussed within team meetings as discussion points for how the EP is beginning their involvement with families and the features of this process. The theme includes the subthemes of transparency and professional role, and the challenges in the processes for families.

4.8.1 Subtheme: Transparency and professional role

The ability to create a beginning as the EP in the EHCNA process was highlighted by participants through the importance of transparency. This included information about the process and likely outcomes for parents. Five participants explicitly highlighted the importance of building a common understanding of the process with family around information that must be gained and the process to ensure that expectations are managed. “Being transparent…being really clear about the parameters of my work and again being clear about the process” (Participant 2).

> Information will be shared, and whether that might not then fit within the bounds…need section for example, sometimes I'm trying to be really transparent…if people feel like I've heard them…But they understand why it might not kind of be as front and centre, perhaps as something that was happening in school, for example. (Participant 3)

A range of variations in EP practices was identified, which meant that each EP would approach the beginning stage of the EHCNA differently depending on their communication preferences. However, six participants expressed the importance of setting expectations and assumptions to ensure schools and families understand the process. Participants also highlighted the importance of open dialogue between the EP and parents to ensure that any questions that arise can be answered.

> Make the process as a whole feel accessible to them and being able to sort of explain my role before going in, what the process will look like before I went in, again meeting with them in school repeating all of those messages and making sure there were chances to answer these questions. (Participant 1)

> Sending the letter, I'm being transparent with the child. I'm not saying I'm coming to secretly look at you. I'm saying, and sometimes I'll be in your classroom as well because I like to see how the classroom is that you're operating in. (Participant 2)

Six participants reported that they clearly understood how they fit within the system, where their role boundaries end, and the confusion families experience. Participants felt it was important to highlight this with parents and educators to set a clear expectation of how the process works.

> I have done that psychological advice to contribute towards the process but I'm not the person who holds that process which I think can be really confusing at times for families because we are the person that they see face to face. (Participant 1)

> Although I want to produce this report, that is holistic and is child friendly, and I also know what it else it's for and I want to make sure that parents see where that report sits within the whole process. (Participant 5)

Five participants reflected on how the role of the EP in the EHCNA is often dictated by how others position their role. This includes navigating the multiple purposes and expectations while being aware of how the EP is viewed.

Additionally, participants reflected on how their understanding of the EP role within the EHCNA process has evolved over time. They described a shift towards adopting more realistic expectations, shaped by awareness of systemic constraints and the tension created when others view the process as a means of providing definitive answers. “You know, I often feel a pressure to be the person to do an assessment which is going to provide the answer [finger quotations]” (Participant 2). “Needs assessment, to not just be a box ticking exercise where that is certainly how some schools can see it, and it can probably feel to some parents. So really emphasising what is…point of this process” (Participant 6).

However, two participants highlighted that within the system, there are professionals who are not effectively supporting the understanding of the process, which leads to an increased workload on the EP. These misunderstandings and confusions within the system can result from the school’s ability to communicate the process or the role of the caseworker.

> We might think that it's a casework officer's job to have explained the needs assessment process and what the outcomes are…I will come in and I get the sense that that hasn't been explained, or people aren't clear on it. (Participant 6)

> No denying they have additional needs. They've got SEND. But they don't meet that second criteria for issuing a plan. So, yeah, I think the awareness and understanding of what the process is, for what the different roles are and what the timelines are when all the timelines are out the window, I think that is a huge barrier or challenge. (Participant 6)

This lack of clear understanding can lead to parental dissatisfaction and parents feeling as though they have not been heard if the EHCNA does not progress to a plan. The lack of understanding led to one participant beginning to be curious about consent within the process, and despite this being gathered, if parents/carers fully understand what they are consenting to.

Four participants discussed specific practices they follow to ensure fairness and consistency in the EHCNA process for children across the system. These included standardising their approach to school visits, ensuring equal time allocation for observations and discussions with key staff and maintaining consistent communication methods. All participants highlighted the importance of meeting parents face-to-face to foster understanding and engagement. “I always meet parents face to face. If, unless you know there is a very particular reason” (Participant 5). **“**How much time I'm in school, what activities I'm doing…I always set that out as being the same for everyone…have like a blanket email that goes out in terms of my expectation…try to be really fair” (Participant 7).

However, three participants began to raise concerns about inconsistencies in assessment practices, particularly regarding the use of locum or agency EPs. Participants noted that the reliance on remote assessments to gather information could create disparities in the quality and depth of assessments, highlighting a broader systemic challenge in ensuring equitable support for CYP. “Obviously the fairness of me going to a school, seeing a child spending the whole morning there, writing one as best I can and our use of locums which is a problem nationally” (Participant 7).

4.8.3 Subtheme: Challenges in the processes for families

Five participants highlighted the difficulties experienced by families due to the process being on an individual deficit basis. Participants acknowledged taking the time to ensure that families were aware of the process and its purpose, and how it can often be a complex document to comprehend. This aspect is also heightened for families due to the impact of

the EP being unknown to the CYP and family. Participants highlighted the impact of bureaucratic processes for families to go through these experiences to access funding and support within an educational context, which led to a defeatist response and a reduced amount of motivation to impact the system. “Well, it's a bit rubbish, isn't it? Like I'm having to write it in quite a harsh way in order to get the funding that the child needs…but that's the system that we live in” (Participant 7). “I'm really sorry, but I'm going to highlight what your child can't do, and that doesn't feel comfortable…have a cup of coffee…when you get my report… I'm very open and honest and have always been about that” (Participant 5).

Three participants expressed the challenges families face when being a part of an EHCNA process due to parental experience with other professionals, which could create a blueprint for the preconceptions that families hold when interacting with professionals, leading to difficulties in building rapport. It is also important to note that many parents will hold their own experiences and perceptions of a school environment, which will influence the outcomes for the CYP.

“The perceptions that a parent or family might have of you as a professional. Sometimes I've worked with families where social care involvement has been… And they're worried that that child's gonna be taken away as a result of speaking to another professional so that can sometimes be a barrier is the perception that families hold of professionals the local authority, what our agenda might be in speaking to them” (Participant 6).

4.10 Theme 8: Outcomes and Provision: Aligning Aspirations with Practical Realities

All participants discussed outcomes and provisions regarding their importance within the EHCNA process. Five participants highlighted the importance of outcomes linked to aspirations to ensure that there is meaning for the CYP while completing an EHCNA that is relevant. These participants discussed the need to incorporate the CYP’s views alongside those of others to ensure that their voices can be reflected in the provision. Participants highlighted the importance of considering a broader perspective on what matters to the CYP

rather than focusing on the outcomes set by school which tend to be academic based. “I really want the kind of outcomes…to reflect I suppose their aspirations, as well as wider people’s aspirations for them...make it really clear what they think and weave that into my provision” (Participant 4).

> Bring that young person's voice into the meeting. If they're focusing, for example, on outcomes around academic attainment. And I'm sort of asking that question…think about the young person, and what's a fair representation of what's important to them…really motivated by friendships, you know, should we think a little bit more about that. (Participant 6)

It is important to note that despite participants discussing the importance of the CYP’s views and aspirations, none of the CYPs were present at the school and parent meeting. This was true for all participants when reflecting on their two most recent EHCNAs.

Five participants highlighted the joint school and parent meeting as a key part of the EHCNA process. The meetings provide the opportunity to create collaborative outcomes with families and professionals, with the role of the EP to facilitate these discussions to agree on a sense of direction and the areas of importance. Participants illustrated the importance of creating outcomes that can be reviewed over time to ensure that CYP can experience a sense of achievements they work towards their goals and outcomes. “Introduce at the start of the joint meeting, although we're here to co-construct some outcomes together, and that's the main priority for the meeting” (Participant 6).

> Setting targets and monitoring that over time…we will suggest things that are based in evidence or knowledge, but we are not the ones to be implementing…being clear in what that should look…school staff feel skilled and able to deliver the provision and it doesn't feel overwhelming and daunting when they receive our advice. (Participant 1)

Five participants also highlighted the importance of their role in ensuring that outcomes are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. Participants reflected on the importance of not making people do their job for them, despite it being collaborative and having a basis for the outcomes set as part of the discussion. Three participants reflected that there is flexibility to achieve this outside of the meetings and to spend time thinking and reflecting following the information that has been gathered.

> Part of my role is to make those. Maybe a little bit SMARTer. So that we can see what it is, that, that young person will be doing. And sometimes there isn't time for that in the meeting, so I might go away and do a bit more thinking myself, and then bring it back to, to parents and to school staff or to young person, if that's appropriate. (Participant 4)

However, one participant highlighted the difficulty in supporting families with the outcomes due to not having an ongoing relationship or involvement with the CYP and their family. These aspects were highlighted as a barrier they encounter.

> But we just don't have that time to take them on that journey…Sometimes we'll get to the outcomes…you're just gonna have to say, thanks very much, and then sort of move on with the process, and hope they don't complain once they see the outcomes that might not be exactly as they would have worded them. (Participant 7)

Another participant explicitly specified the importance of providing care that is focused on the child's needs rather than the broader political challenges within the systems.

> I guess the fairness of my report…provision that she needs…to be successful without…lens of more specialist places are fewer…long waiting lists…not enough…spaces…It's not thinking about that political context…but thinking specifically what it is that the young person needs and being fair to them in outlining exactly what [they] need…to be the most successful version. (Participant 1)

Many participants emphasised the importance of fairness when specifying provisions and described using creative strategies to ensure that CYP receive equitable support, despite external systemic constraints.

5. Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore my research question 'What are EPs' perspectives of applying the principles from the JPLG guidance for EHCNAs within practice?' The themes I identified during the RTA will be explored in relation to the research question.

In this discussion, I will explore my findings in relation to the previously reviewed literature, current policies, and relevant legislation. I will also revisit the literature introduced earlier to position my findings within the existing body of knowledge. I will examine the implications for EP practice and provide a critical evaluation of the study's limitations. This chapter will also outline my plans for dissemination, offer a self-reflection on my research journey, and consider potential directions for future research.

5.2 Research Question: 'What are EPs' perspectives of applying the principles from the JPLG guidance for EHCNAs within practice?'

5.2.1 Statement of principal findings

The skill of the EP is fundamental for their ability to apply principles, facilitate the EHCNA processes, and develop a holistic understanding of CYP and their families. The EPs' ability to contract their involvement in the EHCNA process supports the collaboration and relationships built with CYP, families and professionals, with the importance of accessibility and communication with the CYP and family being highlighted. However, the wider systemic barriers and complexities (such as time constraints, access to resources and LA procedures) influence how feasible this is in practice. The importance of incorporating practice-based principles into EHCNAs for CYP, and the implications for EP practice within one LA, highlight the skills required to create a holistic image of a CYP and to centre them within a complex process influenced by varied stakeholders and purposes. The findings from the RTA process

align with previous literature and provide insight into the EPs' experience of applying practice-based principles. Each theme will now be discussed in turn.

5.2.2 Skills of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA process

This theme summarised the different skills that EPs utilise to apply the principles of the JPLG document. These include facilitating the process of the EHCNA through the questioning style used, and the function of changing narrative through tentatively challenging views. EPs described drawing on skills such as building rapport to navigate systemic barriers, emphasising the importance of being fully present with the CYP and their family. This presence was seen as key to fostering open communication, enabling feedback, and encouraging questions to support shared understanding.

This aligns with two key studies identified within the initial literature review, Hellawell (2017) and Cochrane (2016), which highlighted the professional's personal qualities and the importance of working successfully in partnership with parents. Hellawell (2017) highlighted the importance of ensuring that EPs develop their skills in moving between active listening and expertise. The EP also supported ethical thinking around partnership approaches, drawing attention to how these aligned with and were shaped by the wider systemic processes. This was facilitated through open communication and opportunities to ask questions within the current findings (this will be discussed further in 5.2.8). Furthermore, Cochrane (2016) identified the importance of reframing and reconceptualising the needs of the child through considering the whole child and system. This relates directly to the current study's findings, reflecting on the EP's role in facilitating conversations within the system and providing opportunities to change the narrative and focus on the strengths of the CYP.

Within the initial literature review, Rao (2020) highlighted the expertise that EPs hold within the EHCP process, but not CYP's lived experiences, emphasising the need for collaborative working. This reflects the findings, highlighting the value of EPs using purposeful questioning to deepen their understanding of the CYP's experience and explore

the interventions and perspectives of educators. These findings align with the JPLG document, which highlights the importance of EPs providing a collaborative process through their facilitation skills and knowing how to use problem-solving, mediation, and other techniques to resolve differences of opinion. This directly relates to the findings in the subtheme ‘changes in narratives’, which allow educators to reflect and explore different strategies and provide difficult messages.

These findings can be interpreted through solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) as it has been used to help people develop the life they want (Ajmal, 2004). It is guided by the belief that people are experts in their own lives, have the capacity and resources to resolve their difficulties, and benefit from a focus on the person rather than the problem, while exploring their preferred future and what is already working. These assumptions align with the findings heavily as there is an overlap in educational psychology and solution-focused approaches to work systemically and with the underlying aspects of SFBT originating in family therapy (Simmonds, 2019). These principles are reflected in the subtheme of changes in narratives, where EPs emphasise highlighting CYP’s strengths, reflecting on times when the system has felt stuck, and planning next steps that contribute to productive conversations. This includes creating space to share aspects that may previously have gone unspoken. The questioning style can link to multiple aspects of systemic theory, including SFBT and circular questions (Fleuridas, Nelson, & Rosenthal, 1986).

The skills outlined within this theme mirror the relational process skills identified as an important aspect within the consultation literature for effective consultations (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Dunsmuir, Kennedy, Lang, & Monsen, 2022). Consultation underpins all aspects of the EP's role in working at multiple levels of practice, e.g., individual, group, and organisational (Dunsmuir et al., 2022). Demonstrating empathy, listening, wondering, challenging, focusing, refocusing, and suggesting were identified as strategies used in EPs’ practice during consultations (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). The relationships built within consultations resonates with the current findings regarding rapport building in the EHCNA,

which were successful when warmth and empathy were identified (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). TEPs are also supported through training and supervision to develop relationship-building skills and foster relational trust, regardless of the consultation model adopted (Dunsmuir et al., 2022). As the EP has identified, using the underpinning focus of consultation throughout the levels of work, these skills may, therefore, relate to the experiences that EPs have during statutory assessments.

In applying theory, the changes in narrative and the use of facilitation, particularly questioning style, align with systemic theory. The understanding that levels of communication are circular, rather than linear, allows the complexities of communication and interaction between individuals and within systems to be acknowledged (Bateson, 1958). Systemic theory, including concepts such as punctuation (Burnham, 1986), focuses on identifying patterns of interaction within systems rather than locating difficulties within individuals. It supports the use of alternative perspectives and encourages the reconceptualisation of beliefs (Briggs & Gonzalez, 2017). This concept highlights EPs' role in joint meetings with the adults supporting the CYP, as the EP offers feedback to collaborate and change the perspectives of those supporting the CYP. The involvement of the EP allows an intervention that may interrupt the cycle to punctuate the communication by offering alternative perspectives or ways of relating and supporting CYP who are identified as needing an EHCNA.

5.2.3 Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics

This theme summarised that EPs experience systemic influences on their involvement in EHCNAs including frameworks, policies, legislation, bureaucratic processes and stakeholder involvement. These factors influenced the EPs' workload, their perceptions of equity across the system and the diminishing of the CYP's voice. Furthermore, they impacted how EPs viewed themselves, as reflected in comments such as, "It's in the back of my mind" (Participant 3) and "I should be more confident, but it doesn't stop it being present"

(Participant 2). Systemic factors also shaped how EPs interpreted questions around the JPLG document. This resonates with the initial literature review, which found that systemic issues impacted the process. Barriers included time constraints, working practices, service priorities, challenges in effective information sharing between services, insufficient resources and funding (Ahad et al., 2022; Sharma, 2021).

The current study reflected the importance of the CYP's voice and of remaining family-centred. However, the system often inhibits the CYP's voice due to the assessment deadlines, the high volume of requests, and the role of other professionals in the process, e.g., caseworkers. This finding aligned with the initial literature, as CYP are often provided with few opportunities to collaborate meaningfully (Redwood, 2015), resulting in the diminishing voice of the CYP as the EHCNA process progresses.

The disconnection between practice and policy is highlighted within the initial literature review by Sharma (2021). Legislation such as the SEND CoP (2015) and Children and Families Act (2014) emphasises the need for the CYP and their families to have meaningful involvement in an EHCNA/EHCP. Participants illustrated the significant influence of the audience on their reports with the stakeholders such as commissioners, casework officers and panel members holding power through their prioritisation. The multiple layers and procedural requirements of the EHCNA, shaped by policy, were recognised as often resulting in the CYP's perspective being overshadowed by competing agendas and viewpoints. The potential conflict of interest faced by EPs employed for an LA has been discussed (House of Commons and Skills Committee, 2007). It remains a concern, as EPs must balance the centrality of the CYP with the commissioning role of the LA, procedural complexities and limited resources. However, recent guidance by the AEP (2022) outlines that "the person receiving psychological involvement must always be centred, no matter who has commissioned the work" (pg. 7). An EP has a primary duty of care to any CYP when advice is requested. This position is also highlighted through ethical competencies by BPS (2022) and HCPC (2023). This finding highlights the need to explore further how EPs centre

the CYP while meeting the demands of the LA as a commissioner. Ahad et al. (2022) expressed the need for structural reform to align stakeholders' practices and policy priorities under a single accountability SEND system across health care, social and educational services. I align with this position, as the postcode lottery of SEND and associated poor outcomes are evident at an LA level for children with SEND as early as Key Stage 1 (Azpitarte & Holt, 2024). This view is further supported by recent BPS (2024) recommendations for a holistic review of the positioning of SEND, with the aim of increasing focus of early intervention and support for CYP and their families to create an inclusive education system.

The subtheme of equity, accessibility, and the child's voice highlighted the impact of parental advocacy and how it can affect a family's entitlement to legal processes. This relates to initial literature research by Sales and Vincent (2018) that highlighted that the EHCP system favours educated and wealthy parents. In the wider literature, Cullen and Lindsay (2019) found that SEND complaints from parents were primarily driven by stress arising from delays and role dissonance when seeking to have their child's needs met. An implication of the research was to ensure that all school and LA SEND staff treat parents with empathy, compassion, and understanding. Concerning the current study, EPs identified these skills in themselves; however, some perceptions towards parents could require further elaboration or self-reflection to ensure that all parents are not positioned into rescuing a child who is a victim and the persecuting LA.

Participants highlighted social graces (Burnham, 2012) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), noting that some families face significant barriers when navigating the EHCNA processes. Participants expressed concern that those with access to greater resources are more likely to secure their desired outcomes, while others, unaware of their entitlement, are excluded. Considering the wider literature and the narratives within the findings about parental resources, the Children's Commissioner for England (2022) report emphasises that parents often have to advocate for their child's educational support, as current systems are

not designed to facilitate this for all children. Skipp and Hopwood (2016) reported that families felt confused during the initial stages of the EHCNA process and wanted more help and information. The lack of knowledge about procedural aspects of the EHCP process for parents has been highlighted in wider literature (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Sales & Vincent, 2018).

5.2.4 From information to insight: The Educational Psychologist's approach to support holistic understanding

This theme summarised the approaches that EPs follow to understand and communicate the needs of a CYP through the EHCNA. Participants expressed how gathering and collating information from multiple sources was important to the role. Participants highlighted formulation and analysis, and how the EP needs to consider the contextual and relational understanding, with the final aspect of creating a written report, providing information to offer insight to others. The written report was highlighted as a strength due to the new template guidelines issued within the LA. However, the amount of information the EP must convey created difficulties.

This theme aligns with the initial literature review, which emphasises the importance of the EP sharing an understanding of the child and being able to reconceptualise their needs through understanding the whole child and system (Cochrane, 2016). Wider literature by Dunford (2024) has identified that traditional meetings are important in gathering and collating information for the EHCNA process.

Participants described being curious, forming tentative hypotheses, and being trusted by the EPS that formulations were taking place but were not explicit. They felt the psychological understanding was best integrated into the written advice to support a holistic view of the CYP and family. There is limited research within the educational psychology literature surrounding how EPs understand and carry out formulations (Milligan, 2022), despite psychological assessment and formulation being highlighted as a key competency for EP

practice (BPS, 2022). James (2019) found that psychological formulation makes a report fit for purpose and brings the information together in everyday language. Looking towards research within clinical psychology for psychological formulation, a qualitative systematic review highlighted the importance of developing a therapeutic relationship, the potential impact of a formulation on a client and systemic factors that impact the ability to create a collaborative formulation (Thrower, Berry, Johnston, & Morris, 2024). These findings highlight the reluctance that EPs held regarding explicitly naming a formulation due to the limited nature of EP involvement as part of an EHCNA. Participants also noted the subjective nature of formulation, viewing it as individual to the EP's perspective that often serves a function for the EP more than benefiting the family.

This theme emphasised the importance of understanding the context and relationships surrounding the CYP and the ability to integrate and explore the various factors that influence the CYP and their family. The initial literature review highlighted the strength of the EHCP process, which is more holistic in supporting the child and creating an improved description of the CYP's needs when compared to statements of SEN (Palikara et al., 2019).

Wider research by Leatherbarrow, Woods, Thomas, and Tyldesley (2021) found the importance of the EP using observations to gather the contextual understanding of a CYP. As EPs need to consider CYP's varied environmental contexts throughout an EHCNA assessment to investigate the four areas of need, they can provide comprehensive information relevant to the SEND CoP (2015). Speed (2019) discussed the importance of CYP being observed by adults who know them well, so that the information from these observations can be provided to professionals seeking further assessment and exploration around a child's needs.

Participants highlighted the written report process as an important place for the holistic understanding to be shared and to provide the CYP's needs succinctly. The JPLG guidance highlights that LAs may provide templates for EPs and would be produced following

discussion and negotiation. EPs in the research highlighted that the LA's EHCNA template shapes how information is gathered and shared as part of the assessment process. Attard, Mercieca, and Mercieca (2015) highlight that the EP's work involves building relationships with various stakeholders, and the production of a report results from an assessment, which can be viewed as an economy of exchange. Participants emphasised the importance of adapting the template to include subheadings to ensure that information gathered from other professionals was not misconstrued. Participants valued the contextual and relational understanding of the CYP and valued the input from educators to understand a CYP and to create a representation of their experience. Similarly, Buck (2015) emphasised the importance of EPs in maintaining a unique psychological contribution and providing a holistic and systemic view of the child.

5.2.5 Collaboration and relationships in the EHCNA process

This theme highlighted collaboration between systems and professionals during the EHCNA process. All participants emphasised the importance of fostering a collaborative meeting between educators and families to align home and school perspectives, ensuring a supportive approach for the CYP and recognising "that parents are at the heart" (Participant 5). EPs were often viewed as the primary facilitators driving these meetings forward, with one participant stating, "I really push" (Participant 7). Educators and school systems were noted to hold extensive information about the CYP and provide valuable insights into their school experience. However, limitations in the wider resources available to schools, including time constraints often resulted in less information being gathered during the EHCNA assessment. The influence of EPS trading arrangements, accessibility issues, and the relationship between SENDCo and the EP service also played a significant role. This aligns with wider literature Lee and Woods, (2017) which highlights the "limited access to EPSs for children within non-commissioning settings as a potential ethical concern" (pg. 122). Finally, the theme summarises challenges related to professional expectations and multidisciplinary work, reflecting a cultural shift within the LA's EHCNA process. This includes

a shift away from co-production meetings, limited interaction with professionals outside the EPS, and the impact of the EHCNA writing process on EPs' professional identity.

Variations in school practices were noted in the quality of EHCNA applications, with the role of SENDCOs and educators being crucial. Their understanding of the process and ability to advocate effectively ensures that the right professional contributes valuable insights into the CYP's current needs and outcomes. The literature review highlights inconsistencies in how the legislation is applied. Schools need to be provided with clearer information and guidance on the assessment to reduce inconsistencies in practice (Sales & Vincent, 2018). In line with this research, reforms need to take place to ensure schools have consistent information on how an EP may gather information and the importance of releasing staff members to create a holistic understanding for the CYP. Rosen-Webb, (2011) noted that SENDCos feel that they have not been shown how to do their job, describing it as an ongoing development and 'a state of becoming'. Participants emphasised the role of the SENDCo, and the quality of information provided by schools. Given their fundamental role within the EHCNA, there is a need for further training and liaison between EPSs, especially those from non-commissioning settings, to ensure that CYP are not disadvantaged due to gaps in system knowledge.

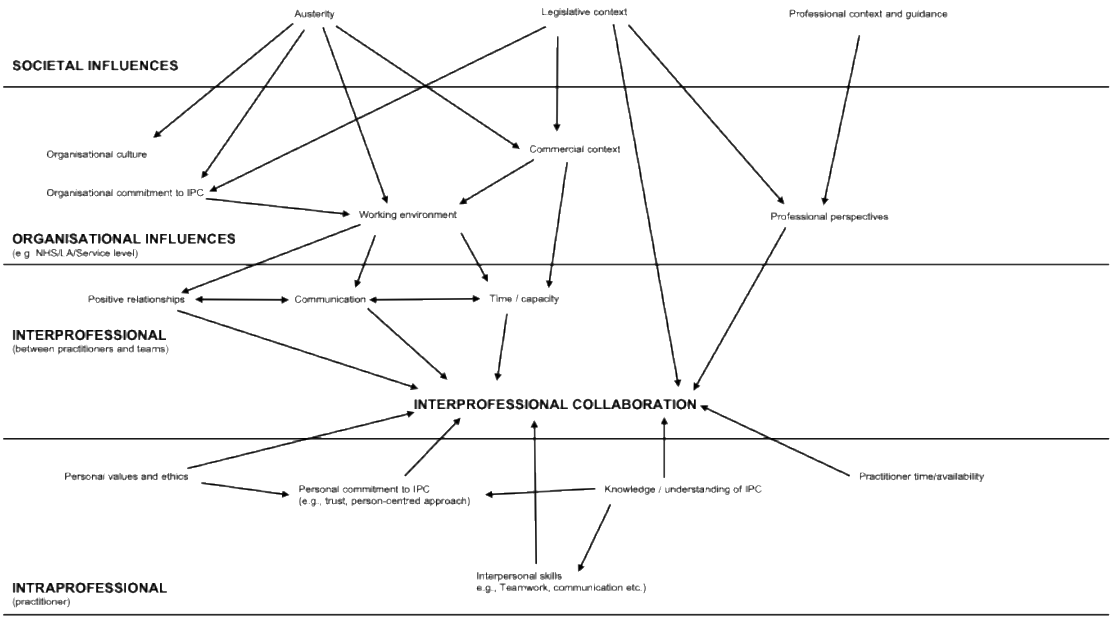
The literature review highlighted the separation within multi-agency working, with little social care and health services involvement in the EHCP process (Ahad et al., 2022). This is also highlighted within the current LA. The perception also existed that the process remains educationally focused (Palikara et al., 2019), limiting the amount of alternative professional expertise contributing to understanding the CYP and informing their provision and outcomes. Participants reflected that they were often 'trying where possible' and emphasised the aspect of 'luck' in receiving communications from professionals who may be working with the CYP and their family. Similarly, research emphasised time constraints and service expectations, which hinder effective information sharing (Ahad et al., 2022; Cochrane, 2016; Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Redwood, 2015). The findings highlighted that aspects of the SEND CoP (2015)

continue to be absent within the current structures despite legislation change, including “bringing together relevant professionals to discuss and agree the overall approach” (paragraph 9.22) participants who had experienced previous ways of working missed on the aspects of previously liaising with other professionals.

Birch, Bow, Lang, and Dunsmuir (2023) provided a framework examining the factors identified as impacting interprofessional collaboration, as detailed below.

Figure 7

Interprofessional collaboration framework



Note: Adaptation of Birch, Bow, Lang and Dunsmuir (2023)

The figure highlights the societal, organisational, interprofessional, and intrapersonal influences that impact interprofessional collaboration.

Participants highlighted interprofessional skills, as some found the process “very easy” (Participant 5), whereas Participant 6 outlined this as “just chancing my luck.” Similarly, the participants’ time and availability were highlighted regarding interprofessional collaboration and interprofessional relationships, as existing relationships were highlighted as important and the existing lines of communication. The participant spoke to their values and ethics, “the lack of joined-up working…is appalling” (Participant 7).

The organisational aspects were highlighted due to changes in the commercial context and working environment as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, which led to the decline of co-production meetings. The societal aspects include the austerity measures that have led to a “postcode lottery” of support (BPS, 2024). This was highlighted within the study by participants expressing the impact of missing children and the relationships with schools that do not buy into the service. The impact of resources and funding was highlighted to outline

the societal influences on interprofessional collaboration. Resourcing and working environments were identified as a barrier to collaboration (Birch et al., 2024).

5.2.6 Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice

This theme presented the importance of ensuring that psychology is accessible to diverse audiences, reading and implementing an EHCNA. The importance of making sure reports were jargon-free was highlighted, including specific LA practices such as peer review, as an effective process for increasing reflection on the written document. Through tailoring the assessment to diverse audiences, participants discussed the importance of keeping the CYP in mind, who will access the report one day. When considering the need to bridge an understanding across stakeholders, participants reflected on the complexities of portraying a CYP, and the impact of appropriate support and resources was present for participants. Although not explicitly stated, it seemed that participants felt a strong sense responsibility for the process of the EHCNA, especially in effectively communicating the CYP's needs to the various stakeholders and panels. They expressed that when parents read the report and feel it does not accurately represent their child, it can lead to a sense of failure reflected in the belief, "I've failed" (Participant 3).

Participants were aware of the importance of explaining psychological concepts and moving away from jargon and abbreviations for CYP and their families. The initial literature Palikara et al. (2019) highlighted that CYP will often experience challenges in understanding the jargon used by professionals and the complexity of the process. Within the current LA, EPs are aware of this difficulty, thus ensuring that no further barriers are implemented for the CYP and family by avoiding jargon.

As discussed earlier, the systemic complexities, power dynamics and stakeholder influences shape the written report, often focusing on the commissioner as the primary audience. The findings reflect participants' views on the importance of ensuring that writing is clear and purposeful for schools, families, commissioners and other audiences. Literature

indicates that the EP's client is often ambiguous, making it challenging to determine whose interests the EP role should primarily serve. EPs may face conflicting demands (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). The findings highlight the importance of portraying the CYP with sensitivity and balance, recognising that the report may be read by a range of stakeholders, including the CYP themselves.

In comparison, James (2019) emphasises how the report will play a part in the CYP's life and influence the child's future learning experiences. Therefore, the EP must provide transparency around a child's needs to ensure they access the support they need when a CYP is discussed at a panel to decide whether an EHCP should be granted. It also highlights the sensitivity for the CYP who will one day access their report.

As discussed in navigating the complexities of systemic structures (see 5.2.3), creating a holistic picture that captures an understanding of the CYP and enables access to appropriate support and resources is important. This experience places EPs as gatekeepers due to the high expectations placed on themselves subconsciously through the language used when ensuring the CYP is represented to a panel of people that will never meet them. In the wider literature, James (2019) highlighted that EPs must make decisions based on assessment information collected through activities and consultation. They must determine what information to include in the written reports and how to interpret and present a CYP's needs and capabilities. This takes place alongside carefully considering the language used and the report's structure. This reflects the complexities involved in the process of the EHCNA and aligns with the participants' discussion that decisions may not always align with the severity of need seen, but instead in how effectively a CYP's needs have been portrayed. Goodfellow and Burman (2019) discussed how the role of the EHCNA process and the processes associated with the SEND CoP (2015) have discourses formulated within a deficit focus and reproduced in policy and practice. This is further held with the EPs being positioned as the 'experts' to identify 'needs' and hold a political position to be a key route to resources (Goodfellow & Burman, 2019). These continued individual deficit-based

interventions will also hinder the effort to dismantle the systemic barriers affecting CYP (Hellawell, 2017). Kuria and Kelly (2023) highlighted a profession-wide commitment to social justice and reflective practice for power, privilege and diversity, and this is a starting point for EPs to reflect upon while being in a role trying to meet demanding and differentiating agendas and being placed within a gatekeeper position. I believe that greater reflection and engagement with wider policy, along with a clear acknowledgment and awareness of the political position we hold as EPs, are essential.

5.2.7 Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement

The findings highlight the role of EPs in amplifying voices and fostering relationships with CYP and their families. Strong working relationships ensure families' perspectives are heard, valued, and integrated within a complex system. Additionally, EPs play a key role in bridging communication between families and schools, extending beyond academic outcomes to recognise the goals and priorities of both CYPS and their families.

Existing research indicates that children with SEND are often described using deficit-based language, which is rooted in the dominant Western medical model (Browne et al., 2024). This model can reinforce negative stereotypes, making it essential to adopt anti-oppressive practices that help educators critically examine and move beyond deficit-based, within-child perspectives (Browne et al., 2024).

Participants emphasised the importance of putting the child at the centre of the process and ensuring a holistic view is incorporated into the EHCNA. Providing CYP with a voice allows them to influence and shape the provisions designed for them, particularly through creative means. Increased participation from CYP promotes collaboration across agencies, including education providers, to better address their needs (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). This aligns with existing research advocating for person-centred approaches that prioritise CYP's ambitions, encourage pupil participation (Sharma, 2021), and ensure the child remains at the heart of decision-making (Sales & Vincent, 2018).

Furthermore, there is an ethical obligation to uphold the best interests of CYP through collaborative practices, as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (Hellawell, 2017). EPs recognise that CYP plays a vital role in this process (Rao, 2020) and are well-positioned to provide the knowledge and resources needed to elicit their voices and foster autonomy (Sharma, 2021).

Challenges and barriers for engagement for CYP and families were identified, with time being a frequently referenced barrier. It is important to note that a professional rhetoric focuses on the lack of time due to statutory deadlines, which can leave professionals uncertain on how to achieve time-bound person-centred meetings (Sharma, 2021). It has also been highlighted in research and the recognition that professionals should have adequate time to develop relationships with families (Ahad et al., 2022).

The findings also highlighted the need to balance how parental experiences of difficulties are represented, as these can sometimes lead to a deficit-based model shaped by societal perceptions and understandings. It was also noted that, at times, adults around the child may have already formed assumptions about the CYP's likelihood of engaging in the assessment. Moreover, it was found that adults' views are more frequently sought than those of the CYP (Redwood, 2015). In addition, factors such as the child's characteristics, such as readiness, age, capacity and understanding, can influence their participation (Rao, 2020). However, within the current study, participants highlighted that these were views held by adults surrounding the CYP, and most often, participants wished to meet directly with the CYP, highlighting the importance of the EP to contract their role.

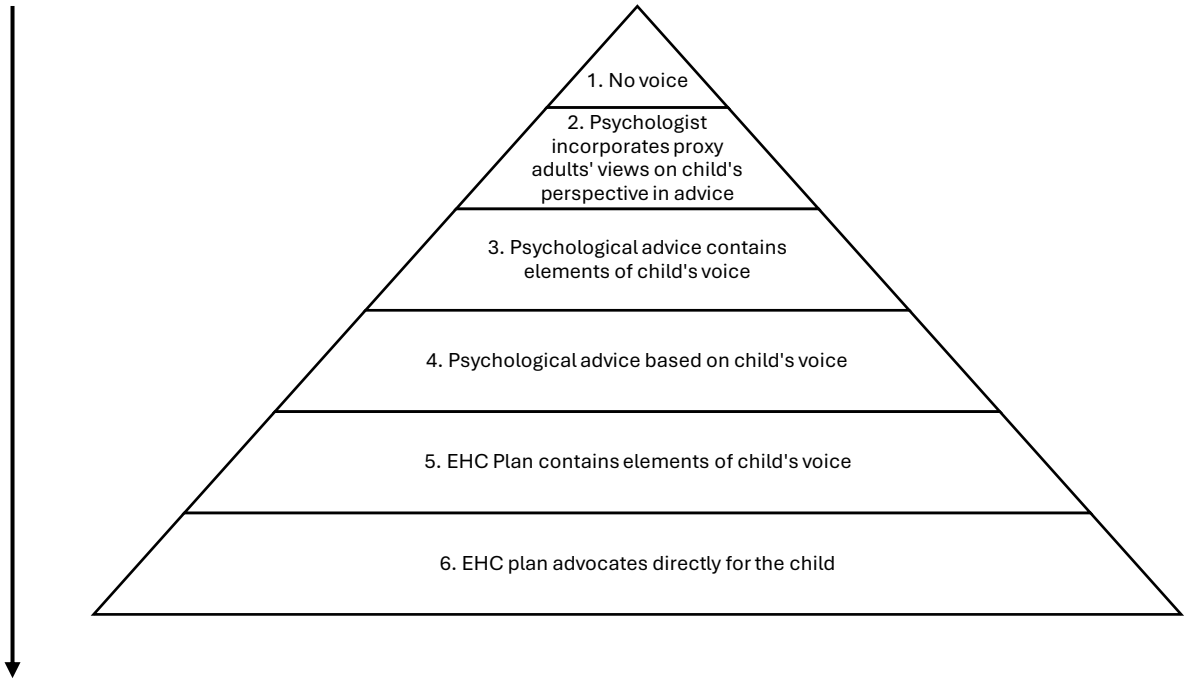
Participants highlighted the importance of collaboration and joint meetings with school and family, presenting an opportunity of working successfully in partnership with parents by centring their experience within meetings, similarly to the literature review (Cochrane, 2016; Palikara et al., 2019; Redwood, 2015). However, most participants expressed the importance of involving the family in these meetings rather than focusing on the CYP being

included in these conversations. Similarly, to Cochrane's (2016) research, parents are seen to demonstrate higher levels of collaboration than their children within the EHCNA process, and so reinforcing the power imbalance that the process is based on the requirements of professionals (Sharma, 2021) rather than focusing on the CYP being placed at the centre.

Within broader research, Fox (2016) proposed the pyramid of participation to represent the child's voice in EHCNAs. The pyramid provides three dimensions relating to the participants' experience within the current study. The degree of participation is based on adaptations of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

The Degree of Participation



Note reproduction of Fox (2016) Pyramid of Participation

In light of the current research, the participants reflected predominantly on the collaboration of family members and the CYP. This suggests that participation largely remains at Level 2, with the prominence of the family's perspective often overshadowing or replacing the child's own voice within the process. However, participants did acknowledge

the importance of the CYP's voice and would attempt to gain this through creative methods and incorporate this information into joint meetings. Therefore, the advice may be reaching levels three and four. However, a common thread highlighted expresses the contextual impact of each involvement rather than being a one-size-fits-all EHCNA.

5.2.8 Creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA

The theme summarised the importance of transparency in helping families understand the process and clarifying the role of EPs. EPs must explore their role with families and professionals with whom they collaborate. The findings revealed variations in how EPs approach the initial stage of the EHCNA. However, all participants who discussed the initial stages outlined transparency as a key principle and agreed on the importance of initiating dialogue and ensuring the process and parameters of the role remain accessible to all involved. Parents were reported to have limited understanding of the system during the early stages of the process (Ahad et al., 2022).

Broader research around the initial stages of EP involvement aligns with the study's findings, particularly in relation to the early clarification of the EP's role in the EHCNA process. Within the Relational Model of Consultation (RMC; Kennedy & Lee, 2021), these early stages such as building relationships, scouting and entry and contracting are recognised as essential components. The beginnings allow a space to be contained and establish a relationship with the various stakeholders in the process (McLoughin, 2010). It then provides an opportunity to explore expectations, assumptions, and roles (Newman & Rosenfield, 2019) regarding the EP process that began the EHCNA involvement. Creating a joint understanding of the EP relates directly to 'Professional Practice Guidelines' by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (2002). This highlights the importance of relationships between client and professional, and power issues with aspects such as open communication and confidentiality need to be explored. Further reference is made to professional behaviour, including conduct, honesty about services and clarity about roles.

Participants acknowledged their understanding of their role in the process but reflected on how this awareness could sometimes shape their perception of their position. The system within which participants operate often leads to misunderstandings about their role, primarily due to unclear explanations of previous steps in the process or the need to better define the implications of the deficit-based model for parents. Previous research identified in the initial literature review highlighted that aspects such as distributive justice are often not effectively communicated to parents, which can create divisions (Hellawell, 2017). However, the current study found that participants frequently strive for transparency with families, helping them navigate the complex processes and panel decisions, which may sometimes result in a plan not being issued. Additionally, participants highlighted the challenge for parents in understanding and engaging with the process, given the substantial amount of information they are required to review.

In the current study, participants reflected on their level of knowledge and emphasised how they frequently communicated this information to parents. Considering literature from the review, each professional tends to approach the process based on their perspective and responsibilities (Sharma, 2021), with the EP being involved across the system and having access to training to explore the expectations and interpretation of the assessment and roles of others (Cochrane & Soni, 2020). This then leads to them being best positioned to answer parental concerns due to others within the system having a limited understanding of professional responsibilities in the process, which is seen as being further exacerbated by insufficient funding for additional training (Ahad et al., 2022; Palikara et al., 2019).

The EPs in the current study strived for transparency with families and built positive working relationships with families during the early stages of EHCNA work. This can be understood through the lens of attachment theory, first developed by Bowlby (1969) and later expanded by Ainsworth (1989), who proposed that attachment patterns extend beyond infancy and shape interpersonal relationships across the lifespan. Although traditional attachment theory focused on enduring caregiver-child bonds, Ainsworth and Bell (1970)

distinguished between long-term attachment and attachment behaviours which occur in specific contexts. These behaviours such as seeking proximity, responsiveness and trust have been seen to translate across professional contexts including education and therapeutic settings.

In the context of Educational Psychology, the RMC (Kennedy & Lee, 2021) provides a useful framework for applying attachment-informed practice within brief or one-off meeting due to its underpinning principles. The model emphasises the importance of establishing psychological safety, beginning with the end in mind, exploring and clarifying through shared understanding even in short-term interactions. EPs although often working with families in time-limited ways, may consciously draw on these attachment informed principles to foster trust and collaboration. For example, Krolikowska and Kuenzel, (2024) explored the role of attachment theory and social bonds in professional and client relationships and found the importance of closeness, sharing understanding and empathy, responsiveness, and availability. These findings align with the current study's findings that EPs aim to be transparent and empathetic, sharing information while also acknowledging the emotional and systemic pressures that families are navigating.

5.2.9 Outcomes and Provision: Aligning Aspirations with Practical Realities

This theme emphasised the need for outcomes to align with the aspirations of CYP to ensure the EHCNA remains relevant and reflects their voices in the provisions identified by the EP. Participants highlighted specific functions of the LA to ensure that EHCNA outcomes were developed collaboratively, allowing key areas to be explored through EP facilitation. However, barriers to creating collaborative outcomes were acknowledged, including the snapshot role of the EP and a lack of time to dedicate to outcomes. In line with the initial literature review, Redwood (2015) expressed that the CYP's desired outcomes and hopes for collaborative efforts should guide the focus of an EP's work, embodying an ethos centred

on the value provided to CYP. However, these priorities can easily be overshadowed by the system's demands (Redwood, 2015), as seen within the current research.

The findings also highlighted the importance of incorporating specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) outcomes as a crucial aspect of the EP's role. In the initial literature review, research aligns when specifying outcomes, which is beneficial and improves the document (Sales & Vincent, 2018). While collaboration was recognised as essential in the current research, EPs also need time outside meetings to consider and finalise outcomes carefully. Literature highlights that SEND professionals may formulate more modest, within-child outcomes that are more likely to be realised than ambitious ones (Hellawell, 2017). The participants did not explore modest within-child outcomes. However, care may need to be taken and ongoing awareness around this likelihood when EPs finalise outcomes individually, especially as participants highlighted that parents may not feel the outcomes fit that child.

When considering further research, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) offers a useful framework for interpreting participants' reflections on collaboratively setting outcomes for the CYP. Participants described an intention to support autonomy by centring the CYP's voice and aligning outcomes with their needs, wishes, and interests. This was often highlighted as a hoped-for practice which reflects the EPs aspirations to empower CYP and ensure that outcomes are meaningful. Competence was promoted by encouraging the development of SMART outcomes, enabling adults to notice and celebrate CYP achievements. Relatedness was seen in the collaborative process of bringing families and schools together to co-construct outcomes that reflect care and connectedness across the systems.

However, participants also described a tension between these values and what is sometimes possible in practice. In particular, the absence of CYP from discussions about their own outcomes was acknowledged as a limitation, often due to time constraints,

systemic pressures or the logistics of statutory processes. This gap between espoused values and actual practice highlights the challenges of consistently upholding self-determination principles in time-limited, adult-led contexts. It provides the opportunity to further explore and reflect on how EPs can better facilitate the presence and participation of CYP in line with their intentions.

5.3 Limitations

When considering the limitations of the research, this was a small-scale study due to a sample size of seven participants. For a small-scale research project, Braun and Clarke (2013) recommend the use of between six and ten participants. This reduces the generalisability of the results within the study; nevertheless, in line with exploratory research, this was not the aim of the research project. This criticism can also be countered by acknowledging that there were only fifteen EPs within the LA who could have been interviewed.

In addition, as the research was located within one LA, it may not be generalisable due to the variations in how each LA operates. However, due to the epistemological position of the research being contextualism, the findings were found to be specific and provide anecdotal research for how the EHCNA template that has been created and informed by the eight principles of the JPLG guidance document and other guidance from the BPS and HCPC. Furthermore, by situating the discussion with the current literature, using theoretical frameworks and having commonalities in previous research, the findings may support the transferability of findings to EP practice due to their ongoing involvement in EHCNAs.

The recruitment strategy I used was purposive and voluntary, with participants choosing to participate, which may have influenced the response rate and the sample. Since I cannot know the participants' motivations, I assume that they agreed to take part due to an interest in applying the JPLG principles or in sharing their experiences of the EHCNA process. It is

also important to acknowledge that all participants who volunteered had direct relationships or prior communication with me, while those without such interactions did not volunteer.

I acknowledge the potential for social desirability bias within the data provided. Participants may have shared examples of their best practice, aware that this research would form part of a thesis and could be published in an academic journal relevant to educational psychology. As all participants are members of the profession, they may have been motivated to present their most positive experiences. Additionally, my position as a trainee EP may have influenced power dynamics, potentially affecting how participants chose to present themselves and their practice. I did not collect demographic details such as job title, length of service, gender, race, age, or specific roles within the LA, so I cannot determine the extent to which these characteristics may have impacted how participants engaged with the practice-based principles.

As the research focused on participants' reflections of their most recent experiences, I cannot verify the accuracy or consistency of their accounts. While the findings are not intended to be generalised, I acknowledge that the sample may reflect the views of EPs who were particularly motivated or interested in the topic, which could have influenced the data collected. To address the influence of my own perspectives and interpretations, I employed a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I engaged in research supervision and peer discussions to support reflexivity throughout each stage. Additionally, I maintained a reflexive log alongside records of transcripts (Appendix I), codes, subthemes, and themes (Appendix R), as well as field notes taken during and after the interviews (Appendix S).

A further limitation relates to the research being situated within a single LA, which may limit the transferability of findings to other LAs. While the EPs in this study demonstrated in-depth awareness of the JPLG principles, supported by recent CPD and the introduction of a new report template, this level of familiarity may not be consistent across different LAs.

Variation in local practices, priorities, and implementation approaches could influence how the EHCNA process is experienced elsewhere. However, this limitation is partly mitigated by the research being embedded within a real-world context, guided by practice frameworks and literature that are broadly relevant to EPs across England.

CYP, families, and other stakeholders were absent from the process. Therefore, their perceptions of the principles applied in practice were not gathered. However, this is novel research exploring EPs' perceptions of the practice principles and is the start of exploring the research within this area.

Finally, all interviews took place online, which is a strength for making the research convenient for participants and reducing the time required to volunteer. However, it can be difficult to read any body language and to provide body language feedback to the participants to support that their answers were appropriate or to open up further communication. There is also uncertainty on an online platform due to whether the participant could be heard by others, which may have led to participants holding back on what they wished to say. It can also require additional effort to build rapport and to gain honest responses (Flick, 2014). As noted earlier, I had an existing relationship with all participants and made a conscious effort to build rapport and check in with them throughout the interviews, aiming to foster an environment of ease and honesty.

5.4 Self-reflection

Using RTA, I recognise that reflexivity is central to how I develop understanding, interpret, and make meaning from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I acknowledge that reflexivity is often overlooked or addressed only superficially (Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio, & Kahlke, 2022). As a researcher, I am aware of the inherently subjective nature of this process, and I accept that another researcher might identify different themes or interpret the data differently. Therefore, I have taken care not to overgeneralise the findings or draw conclusions beyond what the data can support. However, I view reflexivity as an opportunity to embrace and

value my subjectivity, through a conscious process of critiquing, appraising, and evaluating the contexts that have shaped this research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

In the following section, I reflect on the experiences as a researcher, drawing on records I have kept throughout the process since the conception of the research idea. I used various methods to capture my thoughts, feelings, and decision-making processes through voice memos, handwritten notes, digitally recorded diaries, and images.

During the early development of my thesis topic, there were changes within managerial systems and senior leadership that led to shifting priorities and processes. Since this transition, it has not felt easy, despite my research being conducted within the LA, for the work to be acknowledged, discussed, or followed up on. This was also reflected in the limited number of EPs volunteering to participate, alongside wider challenges such as increased workload and ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties across the service. There appears to be a recurring pattern of recognising that this is a significant statutory aspect of the EP role, yet EPs seem reluctant to reflect on their relationship with it or how they fulfil this part of their role.

This then impacted my interpretation of the data, as throughout the research process, I constantly found myself reflecting on how the participants would find the process of being a participant. I wanted the interview to be valuable for them, hoping it would be reflexive and beneficial. This added a layer of pressure to my thought processes before beginning an interview and thoughts following the experience. I noted within my reflexive diary that there were participants I became excited to interview and to hear from, as I believed they shared values similar to mine. Within research supervision, I explored my role as a researcher, including using soft skills such as summarising their experiences instead of remaining in a researcher's role of asking questions and clarifying. During my interviews, I also reflected on the ladder of inference (Argyris & Schön, 1978) and how often I was operating from my

biases due to being a member of the same service and experiencing this common understanding.

Going into the interview process, I was naïve about the EHCNA process, especially believing that EPs can view this process and the principles individually and think about how the principles are met. When participants reflected on their development of understanding of an EHCNA, the audiences, and their purposes, I could relate to my growth and experience while undertaking this research project. Throughout the interview schedule, EPs were asked about each principle directly. However, throughout this system process, the wider system role of the EP in the wider service was referenced and became a part of the understanding and application of the principles. However, I also wish to relate this to what happened organically throughout the process and my understanding of the context, as highlighted with team dynamic shifts and changes in leadership. Part of my interpretation hoped to maintain a systemic view to add any further pressure to EP practice whilst they operate within a complex system.

As the research progressed, the application of being within a specific LA became even more apparent, especially with how I related to the research and considered further implications for practice. When reflecting on the principles of assess, plan, do, and review, processes such as traded packages and the allocation of the service model were highlighted due to the lack of time and ability dedicated to review. Some EPs were more creative in approaching these aspects, whereas others held a pessimistic view of unmet principles. When a pessimistic view was held, I found engaging in the transcribing and analysis process was particularly difficult. This was because it challenged my preconceived ideas of satisfaction levels within the EP profession and their values for meeting the principles, an area I had not accounted for.

While completing the written aspect of the research, further reflections have taken place, including renaming themes to reflect best the meaning I wanted to create and show. One of

the quotes that will stay with me is “I'm just going and doing some admin and sitting for a whole day just writing that…it's deskilling EPs, I think, deskilling us from what we're trained to do” (Participant 7). The reflection that, as EPs there are so many different ways that we can support CYP and families and that the aspect of the written EHCNA can lead individuals in the profession to feel deskilled and as though anyone can complete the job that we are trained to do reflected for me the impact of the current context for EHCNAs.

5.5 Implications for practice

The research explored EPs’ experiences applying the JPLG guidance document to their most recent EHCNAs. The implications of the findings from this study will be presented to explore proposed next steps relevant to EPs, LAs, and the national level.

5.5.1 Implications for EPs

The principles were seen as a valuable and important part of EP practice. Participants reflected that many of the principles naturally occurred in their practice, although they had not always explicitly referred to the guidance. EPs may benefit from further opportunities to consciously revisit and apply the eight principles in practice. A key area for supporting EP practice in the EHCNA process is appreciating, building, and maintaining the skills they already use. These include the questioning style used, changing narratives and tentatively challenging views, which can facilitate more meaningful engagement with CYP and collaboration across the wider system. This may result in EPs identifying additional CPD or training to support their ongoing development of these skills.

Establishing a relationship with CYP and their families from the outset is an important area that EPs can embed into their practice. EPs often bridge communication between systems, resulting in the need to amplify voices to ensure the child is at the centre of the process. EPs gather the child’s views using creative measures and find that the joint meeting

between home and educators provides valuable opportunities for these discussions to maintain a child-centred approach.

A final implication for EPs is the role of contracting their role within the EHCNA process. The transparency provided to parents and the ability to carefully create a joint involvement focus can help parents understand the process. The ability to initiate the dialogue around the process ensures that it remains accessible to all involved and highlights the multiple purposes. The subtheme of transparency and professional role highlights this. Participants expressed that they do this by explaining their role and the process before meeting the family, meeting with the family in person to repeat these messages and providing opportunities to answer any questions.

5.5.2 Implications at an LA level

The participants highlighted the benefits of using peer review processes to maintain consistency and to have opportunities to reflect on how others conceptualise the EHCNA process. Providing all LAs with a peer review process would allow consistency across the LA and support EP engagement in reflexive practice when considering a quality assurance document based on the principles.

The findings highlighted how the bureaucratic and systemic factors can impact the EPs' ability to apply the eight principles. Therefore, it would benefit EPS to target training and support at the systemic and procedural level, rather than individual EP practice. Supporting wider understanding of the LA's bureaucratic processes and systemic challenges could be more effective than addressing skill development in isolation. Otherwise, there is a risk of reinforcing a deficit model that places responsibility on individual EPs, rather than recognising and addressing broader systemic influences, thus mirroring the deficit model of the EHCNA at a wider level.

Further implications may include training and exploring EPs' beliefs around parental advocacy and accessing resources. LA staff need to treat parents with empathy, compassion and understanding. If opportunities are allowed to elaborate and self-reflect, it will support EPs in directing any frustrations with the system in the appropriate place rather than being directed towards those advocating for their child. These conversations could take place with line managers or into the broader system to ensure that the service and LA understand the individuals in the community they serve. It is important to determine whether there is a universal belief about CYP, and families or if this varies by LA or individual practice.

Findings from Kagan et al., (2020) show that schools are described as community providers and key local institutions. However, schools rarely define precisely what constitutes the community they refer to or who it includes. Since EPs have raised awareness about individuals being overlooked in the EHCNA process, the LA must consider who is included in its community rather than assuming a homogenised group. Clearly defining and understanding this community is essential (Theara, 2024).

5.5.4 Implications at a national level

Outside of the EPs' control but consistently documented is the impact of time pressures, high caseloads, and limited resources on professionals' ability to implement practice-based principles, leading to unrealistic expectations and barriers. The bureaucratic complexities and inconsistent interpretations of legislation can hinder the EHCNA process, leading to inequality in outcomes and challenges for professionals in balancing implications at the LA and national levels.

At the national level, legislation and policies must be considered to minimise bureaucratic processes. Support systems are also needed to help EPs manage their workloads effecrtively, ensuring that the CYP's voice remains central to the process. Legislation should better reflect the complexities of the EHCNA audiences and procedural requirements, including the need for transparency with parents about possible outcomes. This would

support families to feel informed and involved, rather than feeling outside of processes due to unclear systems.

Systemic changes must also focus on addressing issues of equality and equity, Access to the EHCNA process should not depend on the knowledge or language skills of parents or SENDCos. When access is relaiant on knowing how to communicate a child's needs effectively, the system becomes a gatekeeper, privlllihgeing those with insider knowledhge, To reduce these barriers, national guidance could help clarify expectations for teachers and SENDCOs, particulatly regarding the time and support needed to work effectively with external professionals during an EHCNA.

5.6 Suggesting future directions

There is a notable absence of CYP, families, and other stakeholders in the current research. I chose to focus solely on EPs in this research due to time constraints and ease of access to this stakeholder group. Therefore, future studies should aim to incorporate these missing perspectives. Families, in particular, would offer a valuable perspective to include to determine whether they felt the principles were present during the EHCNA process and to explore the distinction between intent and impact from their perspective. Research has highlighted the difference in questionnaires for parental experiences of EHCNA meetings vs what the EP viewed as more helpful from meetings (Dunford, 2024).

Future research could explore the perspectives of individuals working at higher levels within the service, such as those involved in broader processes like decision-making panels. Their insights could provide valuable perspectives on how different audiences engage with the key principles. This is particularly relevant given the LA's role as the commissioner for the EHCNA. Additionally, such research could enhance cohesion by clearly defining each person's role in the assessment process and by addressing the training needs identified in the literature (Cochrane & Soni, 2020).

The participants identified various groups of CYP they felt were missing from the EHCNA process within the LA. However, since these groups were not explicitly named, and the research did not specifically focus on them, future studies may wish to explore underrepresented groups within the EHCNA process but may be overrepresented in alternative systems. Participants also reflected on how the training and experiences of key school professionals influence the identification of these CYP. Given this impact, further research could examine this issue in more detail.

As this study was conducted within a single LA with its socio-political context, it may be beneficial to extend research across different LAs or a broader geographic area to explore how these principles are integrated into the daily work of EPs. Additionally, workloads and demands vary between LAs; for instance, a full-time equivalent EP is allocated 45 statutory assessments per year in this particular LA. This variation should be considered in future research.

The current research has explored experiences across all the principles, providing depth rather than breadth. Exploring each principle individually for future direction could examine how it is implemented in practice.

In this research, participants alluded to the impact of the increased use of locum EPs to meet the demand for EHCNA. Using locums within the participant sample highlighted the lack of in-person assessments and equitable practice for CYP at a national level. While my research did not aim to explore this, I believe it would benefit from further exploration. Miller (2025) notes that the locum EP can be marginalised due to systemic and economic factors, often facing stereotypes such as being undervalued, a financial burden, less committed to the profession, or incapable of driving systemic change. These stereotypes were seen to be reinforced within the LA. Personally; I hold a neutral stance on the use of locums. I recognise their role in ensuring CYP are seen and do not remain on waiting lists therefore reducing the

number of EHCNAs missing statutory deadlines, as is the case for 49.7% across England in 2023 (DfE, 2024).

5.7 Dissemination strategy

At the beginning of this research, I was aware of the limited research that explored EPs' experiences of the EHCNA process, particularly applying practice-based guidelines to the process. I aim to produce research that can be disseminated to the research community, to the EPS and the LA in which the research was conducted. A summary sheet will be produced, including the implications for EPs. This will be shared within the EPS and can be presented to the team. This will provide the LA with feedback on how team members are taking up the new template and processes and will enable reflection and highlight understanding for future practice.

Furthermore, I presented a summary of my research as a poster at the university research event. This fostered dialogue among trainee EPs regarding their practice and highlighted areas for future research within the academic community. I would like to take up opportunities to present at conferences or through virtual outlets such as webinars, video discussions, and social media formats on wider platforms. I am also considering the publication of the research findings in professional journals related to Educational Psychology. Additionally, I may also present the findings to the EPS where I will be employed to generate discussion within the team around effectiveness and to explore similarities and differences in their experiences of applying guidance principles to their EHCNAs.

5.8 Concluding Comments

In conclusion, this research explored EPs' experiences applying the JPLG guidance document to their most recent EHCNAs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven EPs, and an RTA was applied to analyse the data. The research identified eight main themes:

1. Skills of the EP to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes
2. Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics
3. From information to insight: The EP's approach to support holistic understanding
4. Collaboration and relationships with the EHCNA process
5. Speaking the Same Language: Inclusive and Accessible Practice
6. Towards Holistic and Inclusive Engagement
7. Creating a joint understanding of the EP role in the EHCNA
8. Outcomes and Provision: Aligning Aspirations with Practical Realities

This is the first study to examine EPs' experiences applying practice-based principles to their EHCNAs. The findings emphasised that despite the principles being discussed within individual practice, the systemic factors influenced the EPs' perspective on their ability to apply the principles within EHCNAs successfully. The EPs' skill set facilitated the practice-based principles in ensuring that the EHCNA was not just a tick box exercise but a meaningful experience for all involved. The influence of the stakeholders and the various audiences of the EHCNA and processes impacted the EPs' ability to remain child centred. The EPs reflected on contracting the EP's role and the document's purpose within the processes to families and educators to highlight the deficit model that can impact the presentation of the CYP within the EHCNA. EPs are developing a holistic presentation of the CYP through information gathering strategies, formulations, and presenting an image of the CYP to various stakeholders.

This research poses several implications, including reflecting on legislation and the impact of the EHCNA purpose within the SEND CoP (2015), ensuring that the CYP and family are at the centre of the experience. It was apparent that the stakeholder influence impacted the purpose of the EHCNA and the centring of CYP's voice and engagement in the process. Despite EPs' desires to move away from gatekeepers and work at a consultation, a systemic approach that focuses on community psychology principles and principles of equity,

diversity and inclusion. It is clear that there is a long way to go until this is the case for EHCNAs in practice.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A

Literature Review: Rationale, Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

45 Search Results	(UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX DATABASES) APA PsycArticles, APA PyschInfo, APA PsycTests, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), E-Journals, OpenDissertations (2014 - to present)			
Title	Year		Included	Rationale
Real-World Impact of Research Feedback Reports on CYP Mental Health for Families of Children With Rare Genetic Disorders and Intellectual and Developmental Disability	2024		No	CYP caregivers

“It was tough making sure it happened”: SENCo experience of the reality and risk of education and health care plan implementation	2024		No	SENCo
A holistic approach to assessment for students with severe learning difficulties.	2024		No	Assessment based
Education health and care plans (EHCPs) and statements in England: a 20 year sustainability review	2023		No	A quantatative study does not explore views or experiences of professionals
A narrative orientated inquiry exploring the Key Stage 2-3 transition experiences of young people with SEMH needs in mainstream schools	2023		No	Transitions child perspective
'I'm not just a doll on a shelf' : a qualitative study investigating post-16 students' experiences of having an Education, Health and Care Plan during their education	2023		No	Child perspectives https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.888229
Points from the SENCo-Forum: The SENCo role in reviewing support for pupils with SEND.	2022		No	SENCo views

Presenting Symptoms of Undiagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Young Boys and Girls in Community CAMHS Between 2018–2019	2022		No	Child perspectives
EHCPs: A help or a hinderance to the inclusion of young people who have offended? An exploration of EP's perceptions of the facilitating factors and barriers of EHCPs and the SEN processes involved in Youth Justice.	2022		Yes	
Identifying service users' experience of the education, health and care plan process: A systematic literature review	2022		Yes	

'I'm always up against a brick wall with them': Parents' experiences of accessing support for their child with a newly recognised developmental disorder	2022		No	Parental Perspective
An exploration of the views and experiences of autistic young people on a Supported Employment Programme and the implications for Educational Psychologists	2022		No	Child perspectives
'Once they've got it, it's very hard for them to let it go': Exploring the experiences of professionals when a young person's education, health and care plan (EHCP) is ceased.	2022		No	ending EHCP rather than process
Barriers faced when eliciting the voice of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities for their Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews.	2021		Yes	
Using 'I am' Digital Stories to facilitate autistic young people to have a voice in their transition to adulthood	2021		No	No reference to EHCNA / EHCP within the abstract or full text through a search function
EHCP implementation in the Early Years: Constrictions and possibilities.	2021		No	SENCo views

Young people’s right to appeal to the English First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability): learning from the first two years	2021		No	Exploring young people's experiences of when to appeal after an EHCP has taken place and the experience of this method
An exploration of the experiences of children and young people (CYP) considered to have additional educational needs (AEN) in taking part in decision making processes in an English educational context	2021		No	Child perspectives
Understanding Pakistani parents’ experience of having a child with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in England.	2020		No	Parental Perspective
Education, health and care plans and tribunals in England: A statistical tale from 2019.	2020		No	A quantative study does not explore views or experiences of professionals
Participatory research exploring the school experiences of secondary school students with EHCPs for social emotional mental health	2020		No	Child perspectives

Exploring children's and education professionals' views on children's involvement in the Education, Health, and Care process	2020		Yes	Thesis https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.819796
Parental narratives around decision-making regarding secondary educational provision for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan	2020		No	Parental Perspective
"It depends on the individual" : a psycho-social exploration of designated teachers' and virtual school advisory teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children in education	2020		No	EHCP rather than assessment process
A Gallbladder-Based Enterohepatic Circulation Model for Pharmacokinetic Studies	2019		No	Medical EHC
Hearing the voice of children and young people with a learning disability during the Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP).	2019		Yes	Focused on how to gather voice and using video clips to explore this - child experience and SALT not around the process of an EHCP
Leadership issues in the current educational climate.	2019		No	ASC specific

An Illuminative Evaluation into how a post-16 setting accesses and uses the voices of learners with EHCPs to inform their Annual Review	2019		No	Child perspectives / Annual Review process https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.794539
Moving on up : using Q-methodology to explore what is important to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability in their transition to post-16 education	2019		No	Child perspectives
"You'll get used to it" : pupils' with Speech, Language and Communication Needs experience of readiness for secondary school	2019		No	Child perspectives
Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator perceptions of practice and potential : investigating Education and Health Care Plan implementation in Early Years and Primary Education	2019		No	SENCo views
‘Forget the health and care and just call them education plans’: SENCOs' perspectives on education, health and care plans.	2018		No	SENCo

Strengths and limitations of the Education, Health and Care plan process from a range of professional and family perspectives	2018		Yes	
Pupils' experiences of authentic voice and participatory practices in a special school	2018		No	Child perspectives
What meaning do children with special educational needs assign to academic progress and what do they think makes them get better? : an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	2018		No	Child perspectives
School and classroom strategies for the teaching and management of children with ADHD.	2019		No	ADHD specific
Exploring children's views and experiences of having a learning difficulty and the support they receive at school	2017		No	Child perspectives
Exploring perceptions and experiences of the education, health and care process	2016		Yes	Thesis

"We're one side of the wall and they're the other" : an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring parents' and young people's experiences of family engagement during the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process	2016		No	Family's experiences
"Working together ... it doesn't go far enough actually for what the relationship becomes" : an IPA study exploring the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process	2016		No	SENCo
G467(P) Audit of the quality of medical reports for children with special educational needs	2015		No	Excluded as its 2014 data examining information submitted as part of a statement of SEND and will inform the EHCP process rather than a reflective account on the EHCP process
Insider perspectives of education, health and care plans	2015		Yes	Thesis http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.668060
MARSH Statements of special educational needs and tribunal appeals in England and Wales 2003–2013 – in numbers	2014		Yes	Provides backdrop of SEND appeals and quantative data rather than professionals views and experiences s

15 Search Results Duplicates removed = 3	(TAVISTOCK & PORTMAN DATABASES) ERIC			
Title	Year	Notes	Included	Rationale
Four Things We Learned about the Impact of COVID-19 on Mainstream Schools and Special Education Settings in 2020 and 2021. Research Summary: Public	2022		No	Context of the impact of lockdown on children with an EHCP and those with a social worker and the impact it has on learning generally rather than the impact on the EHCP process
Exploratory Study of the Inclusion of 'Future-Selves' as Part of Transition Preparation in to and out of Further Education for Young People with Learning Difficulties	2020		No	Child perspective
'I'm Ready for a New Chapter': The Voices of Young People with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Transition to Post-16 Education and Employment	2019		No	Child perspective

17 Search Results Duplicates removed = 5	TAVISTOCK AND PORTMAN DATABASES Education Source			
Title	Year	Notes	Included	Rationale
Parental experiences of accessing assessments for special educational needs.	2024		No	Parental Experience
We have to carry on'. A participatory research project with young people enrolled on a supported internship programme during the Covid-19 pandemic.	2022		No	Child experience
Points from the SENCo-Forum: England's SEND Review and the role of the SENCo.	2021		No	SENCo experience

The Underreporting of Vision Problems in Statutory Documents of Children with Williams Syndrome and Down Syndrome.	2020		No	Report analysis, specific focus on eye care and analysing recommendations that are included for vision problems associated with Williams syndrome and down syndrome rather than being based on professionals experiences of views
Politics Page.	2017		Yes	Exploring EHC additional funding and the role of mediation across local authorities rather than examining opinions of professionals 10.1111/1467-8578.12170

Appendix B

Critical Review of Literature

Paper for appraisal and reference: **Ahad, A. Thompson, A. M. & Hall, K. E. (2022). Identifying service users' experience of the education, health and care plan process: A systematic literature review.**

Section A: Are the results of the review valid?

1. Did the review address a clearly focused question?

Yes	X
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: An issue can be 'focused' In terms of

- the population studied
- the intervention given
- the outcome considered

Comments:

The current review provides a detailed systematic review of the literature looking at service users' experience of the EHCP process. Service users are defined as children, young people, par- ents and professionals from education, health and social care services. The review aims first to identify the extent to which the involvement of education, health and social care services in the EHCP process is collaborative; secondly, to identify the extent to

which children, young people and their parents are at the centre of the EHCP process; and, finally, to understand whether satisfaction with the EHCP process differs by service user.

2. Did the authors look for the right type of papers?

Yes	X
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: 'The best sort of studies' would

- address the review's question
- have an appropriate study design (usually RCTs for papers evaluating interventions)

Comments:

Systematic review process is reported so replication can take place and key terms are defined and relate to the review questions

Inclusion criteria:

- Written in the English language
- Published between 2014 and 2020

• Reported qualitative research

• Explored service users' experience of the EHCP process

Is it worth continuing?

3. Do you think all the important, relevant studies were included?

Yes	X
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Look for

• which bibliographic databases were used

• follow up from reference lists

• personal contact with experts

• unpublished as well as published studies

• non-English language studies

Comments:

Figure 1 illustrates the study selection process. The systematic search for literature was carried out on 28 June 2020 using the EBSCOhost research platform. The databases included were Academic Search Complete, PsycInfo and Education Source. Details of the search terms and Boolean operators used are presented in Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 2. The initial search identified 186 studies. A further search was also conducted through Google Scholar and the Electronic Theses Online Service (EThOS). In Google Scholar, the advanced search option was selected, and the search terms used were 'experiences OR perspectives AND education health and care plans'. This search identified 482 records. In EThOS, 'education health and care' was entered as a search term, resulting in 20 studies. All records were imported into EndNote to remove duplicates which were also checked for manually (*N* = 130). This resulted in a total of 558 records.

4. Did the review's authors do enough to assess quality of the included studies?	Yes	X	HINT: The authors need to consider the rigour of the studies they have identified. Lack of rigour may affect the studies' results ("All that glisters is not
	Can't Tell		

	No		gold" Merchant of Venice – Act II Scene 7)

Comments:

All papers included in the review were high quality, as assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme qualitative checklist (see CASP, 2018). Utilising this checklist permitted a greater focus towards understanding the validity and value of findings, subsequently proving their quality. An interpretive decision was made on whether a paper was of a high standard while also adhering to the checklist strategy.

5. If the results of the review have been combined, was it reasonable to do so?	Yes	X	HINT: Consider whether • results were similar from study to study
	Can't Tell		• results of all the included studies are clearly displayed
	No		• results of different studies are similar

- reasons for any variations in results are discussed

Comments:

Included a table with key findings from the research and then included combined the research into themes through a narrative synthesis

Section B: What are the results?

6. What are the overall results of the review?

HINT: Consider

- If you are clear about the review's 'bottom line' results
- what these are (numerically if appropriate)

- how were the results expressed (NNT, odds ratio etc.)

Comments:

Not applicable as qualitative

7. How precise are the results? HINT: Look at the confidence intervals, if given

Comments:

Not applicable as qualitative

Section C: Will the results help locally?

8. Can the results be applied to the local population?

Yes	
Can't Tell	X
No	

HINT: Consider whether

- the patients covered by the review could be sufficiently different to your population to cause concern
- your local setting is likely to differ much from that of the review

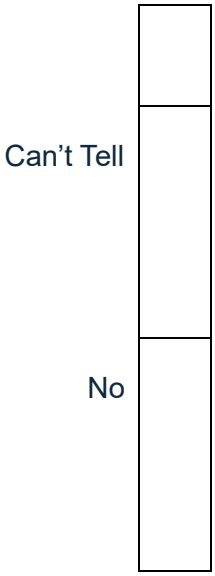
Comments:

Range of service users discussed but no reference to population that the individuals have been abstracted from just the types of services users e.g. parent, young person, professional role. Highlight that the current review focused on the experiences of SENCOs rather than other professional groups which could limit the conclusions drawn.

Yes	X

HINT: Consider whether

9. Were all important outcomes considered?



- there is other information you would like to have seen

Comments:

Nothing noted on geography despite noting the disparity across LAs

Not expressed how the findings were found within each article but highlighted that a CASP was carried out for the inclusion papers

Range of publications was highlighted which was useful

Feel there is a gap in the process from key findings to working to the themes - narrative synthesis of the key themes based upon research questions: (The review aims first to identify the extent to which the involvement of education, health and social care services in the EHCP process is collaborative; secondly, to identify the extent to which children, young people and their parents are at the centre of the EHCP process; and, finally, to understand whether satisfaction with the EHCP process differs by service user) mention of using Braun and Clarke's 2006 but little details on how these themes were discovered.

10. Are the benefits worth the harms and costs?

Yes	X
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- even if this is not addressed by the review, what do **you** think?

Comments:

It's discussed existing literature within the field to explore what this means for service users involved within an EHCP process.

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Paper for appraisal and reference: **COSMA & MULCARE 2022**

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider
- what was the goal of the research
- why it was thought important
- its relevance

Comments: **The aim of this study was to explore EPs' perceptions of the role of EHCPs in the educational inclusion of YPwO.**

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider
- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
- Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: **Aims to explore perceptions as what are the supporting factors or barriers for YPwO and inclusion and the role of the EHCP used to maximise the educaitonal inclusion**

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider
- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: **an in-depth survey using an interview method. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the method of data collection as they are regarded as important sources of qualitative data.**

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments: **7 participants were commissioned to offer EP support to YOTs and worked 1–1.5 days per week within the YOT alongside their main grade EP responsibilities.**

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes Can't Tell ✔ No

HINT: Consider
- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
- If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
- If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
- If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments: **Unsure about the questions asked as they are not included all other choices are justified**

CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☑

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: No reflection has been made regarding the researchers participation in the group and their own interests and how that would impact on the analysing of the data

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes ☑
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments: Highlighted ethical approval was sought and the need to follow BPS code of ethics and conduct

CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☑
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: Outlines the main themes and subthemes but there is not an in-depth description but there is a recognition of the involvement of both researchers and university research supervisors

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes ☑
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider whether
- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: A table outlines and how they relate to the research questions

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments: Implications for EP practice are considered and outlined

CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Paper for appraisal and reference: [illegible]

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ / Can't Tell / No

HINT: Consider
- what was the goal of the research
- why it was thought important
- its relevance

Comments: Aimed to identify what was working well and areas of concern with the SEND reforms

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes ✔ / Can't Tell / No

HINT: Consider
- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
- Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: To include the views of CYP, parents and a range of health, education and social care professionals that has not been conducted stated the need to document the views to contribute to the SEND reforms.

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ / Can't Tell / No

HINT: Consider
- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: Included participants how they collected where it took place and the way in which they have included. However, no alternative ways of completing the research was discussed.

CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ / Can't Tell / No

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments: Included a range of stakeholders and explicit expressed who they recruited, how and why

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes ✔ / Can't Tell / No

HINT: Consider
- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
- If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
- If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
- If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments: Used a range of methods to gather information this is outlined including the form of data that was collected

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6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes / Can't Tell / No ✔

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: Not expressed at all

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes ✔ / Can't Tell / No

HINT: Consider
- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments: Ethical considerations were included

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8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes / Can't Tell ✔ / No

HINT: Consider
- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: Included Braun and Clarke reference and each theme explains the number of participants that met the theme

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes / Can't Tell ✔ / No

HINT: Consider whether
- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: A table is included to express the findings but there isn't much of a discussion regarding the research question and how the findings answer it

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Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments: It includes a discussion and where new areas if research could take place and expresses limitations, transferred findings are limited due to small sample of 2 LAs.

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Paper for appraisal and reference: Sharma (2021) Barriers faced when eliciting the voice of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities for their Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews.

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- what was the goal of the research
- why it was thought important
- its relevance

Comments: **The aim of this study is to explore the barriers experienced by a wide range of SEND professionals within some local authorities and specialist schools in England when eliciting the voice of children and young people for EHCP assessments and for Annual Reviews.**

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
- Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: **Follows on previous research**

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: **Following previous research and including semi-structured interviews on top of a questionnaire being sent out**

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4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments: **Reached out to 152 LAs and 20 different specialist settings within England, it was then on the participants to decide to take part, discussion around recruitment was limited**

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes ✔ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
- If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
- If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
- If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments: **All outlined within the methodology section of the research and the form of data was clear and how themes had been generated**

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6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☑

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: No mention between researchers own role and the potential bias

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes ☑
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments: Granted from the university

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8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes ☑
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: Data analysis included maps of the themes generated and the steps followed to gather information

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes ☑
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider whether
- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: Reflected on the research question for both quantitive data gathered from questionnaire and then answered the question regarding the semi-structured interview

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Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments: Generalisability is limited due to the amount of responses however it did reach out to a large number of LAs, 6 semi-structured interviews took place due to the opt-in questions regarding the barriers of why people did not wish to opt-in not explored.

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Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Paper for appraisal and reference: Cochrane & Soni (2020). Education, health and care plans : What do we know so far?

Section A: Are the results of the review valid?

1. Did the review address a clearly focused question?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☑ No ☐

HINT: An issue can be 'focused' in terms of
- the population studied
- the intervention given
- the outcome considered

Comments: The purpose of this literature review is to outline current research regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms and use of EHC plans within England five years on. Lack of clarity on exclusion and inclusion criteria and determining what implementation and SEND reforms me no inclusion of search terms used so replicability is difficult

2. Did the authors look for the right type of papers?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☑ No ☐

HINT: 'The best sort of studies' would
- address the review's question
- have an appropriate study design (usually RCTs for papers evaluating interventions)

Comments: Areas explored for the search strategy were outlined as BEI, Proquest social sciences and web of science and snowball search, GOV.UK and Google scholar due to the breadth of the question of implementation of the reforms these will cover a range of areas

Is it worth continuing?

3. Do you think all the important, relevant studies were included?

Yes ☑ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Look for
- which bibliographic databases were used
- follow up from reference lists
- personal contact with experts
- unpublished as well as published studies
- non-English language studies

Comments: As outlined above, explored published and non-published due to the inclusion of thesis

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4. Did the review's authors do enough to assess quality of the included studies?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☐ No ☑

HINT: The authors need to consider the rigour of the studies they have identified. Lack of rigour may affect the studies' results ("All that glisters is not gold" Merchant of Venice – Act II Scene 7)

Comments: No exploration around studies included pure thematic and no evaluation of the processes

5. If the results of the review have been combined, was it reasonable to do so?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☑ No ☐

HINT: Consider whether
- results were similar from study to study
- results of all the included studies are clearly displayed
- results of different studies are similar
- reasons for any variations in results are discussed

Comments: Thematically grouped due to themes but no overview provided of how these themes were grouped together

Section B: What are the results?

6. What are the overall results of the review?

HINT: Consider
- If you are clear about the review's 'bottom line' results
- what these are (numerically if appropriate)
- how were the results expressed (NNT, odds ratio etc.)

Comments: The research is around the experiences of those involved has been a key focus of the literature. However, it feels as though there is not an overall result of the review of what it has shown

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7. How precise are the results?

HINT: Look at the confidence intervals, if given

Comments: Nothing provided

Section C: Will the results help locally?

8. Can the results be applied to the local population?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☑
No ☐

HINT: Consider whether
- the patients covered by the review could be sufficiently different to your population to cause concern
- your local setting is likely to differ much from that of the review

Comments: No exploration of participants included or geography

9. Were all important outcomes considered?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☑

HINT: Consider whether
- there is other information you would like to have seen

Comments: I would like to see a table of the overview of the included studies the inclusion and exclusion criteria

10. Are the benefits worth the harms and costs?

Yes ☑
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- even if this is not addressed by the review, what do you think?

Comments: No harms or costs noted

CASP Checklist:
For Qualitative Research

Reviewer Name:	Katie Roden
Paper Title:	A review of parent–professional partnerships and some new obligations and concerns arising from the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice 2015
Author:	Hellawell, 2017
Web Link:	https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-8578.12185
Appraisal Date:	21/10/2024

During critical appraisal, never make assumptions about what the researchers have done. If it is not possible to tell, use the "Can't tell" response box. If you can't tell, at best it means the researchers have not been explicit or transparent, but at worst it could mean the researchers have not undertaken a particular task or process. Once you've finished the critical appraisal, if there are a large number of "Can't tell" responses, consider whether the findings of the randomised controlled trial are trustworthy and interpret the results with caution.

Section A Are the results valid?	
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? My second aim is to report on aspects of an empirical project which explored early experiences of professionals working under the new Code, and to contribute some new insights gained into the challenges and opportunities of parent- partnership working.	[X] Yes [ ] No [ ] Can't Tell Particularly focus on the personal qualities of individual professionals and in-built structural limitations, not yet been explored previous reviews focus on disempowered parents organisational shortcomings, inadequate resources or unskilled professionals, relevance in line with the introduction of the new SEND CoP
CONSIDER: • *what was the goal of the research?* • *why was it thought important?* • *its relevance*	
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? The project asked participants about their early experiences of intensified partnership working under the new Code; to reflect more generally about the enablers and barriers to partnership working; to identify specific new challenges encountered; and to discuss ethical concerns that arise	[X] Yes [ ] No [ ] Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants* • *Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?*	
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? The exploratory interpretive interview study draws on single, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, lasting for approximately one hour each, which were conducted between October 2014 and February 2015.	[X] Yes [ ] No [ ] Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g., have they discussed how they decided which method to use)*	
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? The 16 participants occupied a range of professional roles relating to SEND from across education, health and social care agencies in four local authorities in England. The voluntary participation of three class teachers, three SENCos, four SEND caseworkers, three advisors and commissioners, two social workers and a child psychiatrist was secured by a snowballing system of recommendations following on from the first three participants, who were personal contacts.	[ ] Yes [ ] No [X] Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected* • *If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study* • *If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)*	

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? Clear semi-structured one hour interview No justification for the method used. No explanation of saturation of data explained constructivist grounded theory approaches and initial coding through NVivo but no further information	[ ] Yes [ ] No [X] Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If the setting for the data collection was justified* • *If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)* • *If the researcher has justified the methods chosen* • *If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)* • *If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why* • *If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)* • *If the researcher has discussed saturation of data*	
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? Acknowledges they are known to the research and remaining are recruited through snowballing but no consideration of the impact of this and the buy in from participants and the impact on data, 4 LAs are discussed but no further information provided	[ ] Yes [ ] No [X] Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location* • *How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design*	
Section B: What are the results?	
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011).	[X] Yes [ ] No [ ] Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained* • *If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)* • *If approval has been sought from the ethics committee*	

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? No clear in-depth description of analysis process the themes are highlighted in sub headings but just described, no critical examination of own role, feels as though the article tries to do too much a thematic analysis of the literature and the empirical reseacrch	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process* • *If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data* • *Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process* • *If sufficient data are presented to support the findings* • *To what extent contradictory data are taken into account* • *Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation*	
9. Is there a clear statement of findings? No explicit findings, provides an overview for each theme and how that relates to what participants state to provide an overview. Information has shown three specific concerns related to the research questions and aims	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If the findings are explicit* • *If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments* • *If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)* • *If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question*	
Section C: Will the results help locally?	
10. How valuable is the research? Professionals need better tools and support to manage the ethical & practical tensions that arise from these partnerships. This includes finding ways to discuss and negotiate conflicts with parents more constructively. A potential for professionals to adopt a "middle way" in their partnerships with parents, balancing individual preferences with broader ethical considerations. However, this requires moving beyond a prescriptive interpretation of the Code and developing skills in moral reasoning and emotional intelligence.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell
CONSIDER: • *If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g., do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature* • *If they identify new areas where research is necessary* • *If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used*	

APPRAISAL SUMMARY: *List key points from your critical appraisal that need to be considered when assessing the validity of the results and their usefulness in decision-making.*

Positive/Methodologically sound	**Negative/Relatively poor methodology**	**Unknowns**
Ethical considerations, clear considerations of the aims. focus for future research and how it applies, the qualitative method chose aligns with the gaps	The reason why grounded theory was used and an exploration around this process	Data method, relationship to participants, how analysis took place, the key themes identified, clear statement of findings, addressing the research question

Holland & Rees: Nursing: Evidence-Based Practice Skills

A framework for critiquing quantitative research articles

Palikara et al (2019) Quant review

Aspect	Review
Focus	Ideology vs implementation
Background	First of its time to be completed explicitly highlighted in the aims below. It is widespread within England and reflects on controversy caused in Germany and Portugal to recognise it happens across European counties. Thorough literature review to state what is currently within the knowledge. Key concepts are not defined for how they will be measured, nature of professional role is outlined and the perception of role is not outlined fully to what that means.
Aim	this is the first study which aimed to provide novel data concerning different professional groups in education and their views on the implementation of the new SEND framework in England. To our knowledge, this is the first larger scale study providing evidence from a more representative sample of professionals regarding the implementation of the new SEND policy in England. Additionally, the study examined whether different groups of professionals have different

	perceptions on various aspects of the SEND policy because of the nature of their professional role.
Methodology or broad approach	It is a survey, seems suitable given the aims to look at professionals' views.
Tool of data collection	To our knowledge, this is the first larger scale study providing evidence from a more representative sample of professionals regarding the implementation of the new SEND policy in England. Additionally, the study examined whether different groups of professionals have different perceptions on various aspects of the SEND policy because of the nature of their professional role. covered all the necessary dimensions of change in the most adequate form and format, the survey was piloted with a number of professionals (educational psychologists, headteacher, SENCos); this helped to answer questions, clarify options and confirm their appropriateness; hence the construct validity of the instrument. Following the completion of the pilot study, minor modifications were made to some of the questions of the survey and the wording was adapted accordingly. The survey comprised three sections. Section one concerned participants' demographic characteristics and information about their work experience and professional role. Section two included information on the training that professionals received in relation to the introduction of the SEND reforms. Section three asked professionals to rate their position in relation to some of the main changes introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice, and to comment.

Method of data analysis and presentation	how they position themselves in face of the various policy changes were analysed through descriptive statistics. qualitative comments that were added to the ratings by the respondents were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. One way-ANOVA analysis was performed to test differences between professionals' groups in regard to how they rated the 5-point Likert scale items assessing their views on various aspects of the new policy; Post Hoc tests Tukey and GH were used to establish the differences between groups, dependent on whether the variables under analysis showed homogenous variance or not. A power analysis was conducted to calculate the minimum number of participants that should be recruited in each professional group, in order to be able to make valid comparisons between groups; for a power of .90 the minimum sample size required is 12 per condition. Chi-square analyses were also run to test the difference between professionals in relation to items rated as categorical variables.
Sample	The views of 349 professionals were ascertained using a semi-structured online survey. Certain professional groups. Lack of longitudinal response. Geographical representation, sample bias as using purposeful sampling from the research teams network of professionals, selection bias and not representative of all professionals

Ethical considerations

A link to the survey was sent to schools and education establishments, educational psychology services, speech and language services and their relevant professional organisations. The completion of the survey took between 15 and 20 min. Three reminders were sent before the survey was closed. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymised. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Roehampton, which adheres to the British Psychological Society ethics guidelines.

Main findings

Professionals' ratings and comments regarding the implementation of the new SEND policy

- ***Extension of age range for service provision (0–25) 86% agreed and reasons why***
- ***Assessment of SEND involving education, health and care 92% agreed with the intention but the divide between what happens in practice***
- ***Replacement of statements of SEN with EHCPs 67% agreed long delays***
- ***Transition process to the new system for SEND provision: challenges 54% rated transition as smooth***

Differences between the views expressed by professional groups

significant differences between educational psychologists and SENCOs in their ratings regarding *widening the range of service provision for children and young people with SEND, from birth to 25*

years of age (F (5,249) = 3.516, p = .004), with psychologists rating this change less positively (M = 2.7, SD = 1.2) than SENCOs (M = 2.1, SD = 1.0). These two groups of professionals also differed significantly in relation to the extent to which the EHC Plans describe better the children's and young people's needs when compared to the Statements of SEN [χ2 (2, n = 216) = 13.167, p = .001] and in relation to the extent to which their requirements as a professional differed under the EHCP process when compared to those under the Statementing process [χ2 (2, n = 216) = 11.365, p = .003]. Educational psychologists were significantly less positive when compared to SENCos concerning whether the EHC plans better described the children's needs when compared to statements and also thought that the requirements of their role differed more in the EHC process .

Conclusions and recommendations

The gap between ideology and implementation

As presented above, the views of professionals have shown their agreement in principle with the changes introduced by the new legislation, and have highlighted the existence of a gap between ideology and implementation with regards to the new SEND framework in England. While acknowledging this particular gap, Eccles (2012) highlights a series of tensions occurring between policy-making and implementation, suggesting that implementation led by front-line professionals risks the submergence of policy under bureaucratic inertia and professional vested interests, while at the same time policies with

implementation designed by policy makers risk being unworkable for front-line professionals (Eccles 2012).

To our knowledge, no previous study has examined specifically the differences between professional groups concerning the changes introduced by the new SEND framework in England. Our findings suggest that the different professional groups overall had similar views on the changes introduced by the new SEND framework. However, significant differences were identified between the views of educational psychologists and SENCos regarding the extension of provision age range; how well the children's needs are described in the newly introduced education, health and care plans, which replaced the statements of SEN; and whether the requirements presented to professionals in light of the EHC

the requirements presented to them in the old system. These differences between educational psychologists and SENCos may reflect fundamental changes required in the nature of their professional roles following the introduction of the reforms. For example, the extension of the educational psychologists' role now required to work directly with young people aged up to 25 years has been described as the biggest change in the profession over the last 30 years, adding an entirely new facet to their current professional role (Atkinson et al. 2015). These changes necessarily trigger the need for acquiring new competencies in relation to post-school provision.

This study provides the first set of evidence that there is a hiatus between political ide- ology and service provision in England, which is preventing some ideologically sound principles (such as multi-agency

working and holistic service provision) from being smoothly and adequately implemented. Clear guidelines and systematic, standardised training are needed on transdisciplinary problem-solving and role-sharing for a more effective collaborative partnership between disciplines; on universal participation-focused child assessment and classification procedures for a holistic evidence-based education health and care assessment procedure; and continuous professional development within specialist professional groups in order to support the adjustment and extension of the boundaries of their professional realm of action in more standardised ways, which conform to specific professional standards but also to policy requirements.

Overall Strengths and limitations

Really like this paper and what it sets out the limitations can be seen here:

- Survey methodology
- Focus on certain professional groups
- Lack of longitudinal perspective
- Limited exploration of multi-agency collaboration (very negative as a predictive of what will come the views of those completing the survey burnt out tendencies)
- Challenges in assessing the policy impact

Appendix C

Data Extraction Table

Article	Method (design, data collection, analysis)	Participants	Focus	Findings
Cosma & Mulcare, 2022	Semi-structured interviews	7 Educational Psychologists	The aim of this study was to explore EPs' perceptions of the role of EHCPs in the educational inclusion of YP who offend.	Three main themes were generated, positives of the EHCP process/EHCP as a facilitating factor to educational inclusion for young people who offend Challenges of the EHCP/EHCP as a barrier to educational inclusion for young people who offend

				Future developments for EHCP to maximise educational inclusion for young people who offend.
Ahad, Thompson & Hall, 2022	Systematic literature review	N/A	Aims to identify the extent of the involvement of education, health and social care services in the EHCP process is collaborative. Secondly identify the extent to which children,	Five key themes were identified lack off integration with health and social care, insufficient knowledge and understanding, involvement of children young people and parents, increased expectations and demands for professionals and need for greater parity and clarity.

			young people and their parents are at the centre of the EHCP process differs by service user	
Sharma, 2021	Questionnaire Likert scales, semi-structured interview semantic level using thematic analysis and coded through NVivo12	52 responses (36 local authority professionals and 16 school professionals) 6 Interviews (2 SEND Officer, EP, SENCo, Assistant	The aim of this study is to explore the barriers experienced by a wide range of SEND professionals within some local authorities and specialist schools in England when eliciting the voice of children and young people for EHCP	Two distinct categories of barriers; the barriers relating to CYP that prevent expression of their views meaningfully and the barriers related to professionals that impeded on their ability to gain CYP's views meaningfully within their role.

		Headteacher, Headteacher)	assessments and for Annual Reviews.	
Rao 2020	Case study design, semi structured interviews, thematic analysis method of data analysis.	Participants from one London local authority included 5 children. 3 SENCos and 4 EPs	To understand the perspectives of SENCos and EPs on the reasons behind the difference between being identified as facilitators of children's involvement in policy but not being identified by children in practice. Further explore EPs', SENCos' and children's attitudes towards involvement in the EHCNA process.	The findings reflected the importance of valuing children's involvement, genuineness of this involvement. The Children's individual characteristics can impact on their ability to engage. The EPs' unique role in gathering children's voice and supporting the system, systematic challenges and collaboration in the EHCNA process.

Sales & Vincent, 2018	Semi-structured interviews were used in one city and one county local authority.	11 interviews took place. Adult sample include parents, independent parent support workers, SENCos, medical professionals, social workers and Educational Psychologists. 5 parent focus group.	Contribute to research about the effectiveness of SEND reforms in achieving a better process and outcomes for CYP and their families. Identifying what was working well and what was a concern.	EHC assessments and planning process have been effective particularly in achieving parental involvement and a person-centred approach.

4 young

people aged

between 10 to

17 years

Cochrane, 2016	Case study including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was conducted.	3 Subunit existed, 1 – Parents, SENCo, EP 2 – Parents, SENCo, Headteacher and EP 3 – Mother, SENCo and EP	Explore a range of perspectives regarding the EHC process.	The findings included developing a shared understanding of the child or young person's needs as a key purpose of the EHC process. The planning and allocation of additional support was perceived as a key purpose of the EHC process. Protecting children with complex SEN was a key purpose of the EHC process. The purpose is to support the child and those around the child through the process of assessment and planning. The views of participants around collaboration differed and the perceptions of outcomes. Key factors influencing perceptions of the EHC process' success were; expectations and values, knowledge and access to support and resources.

Redwood, 2015	Thesis including a realistic evaluation framework and links context, mechanisms and outcomes. Phase one questionnaire sent to professionals' descriptive statistical analysis for quantitative data and NVivo for	31 questionnaire responses 12 Educational Psychologists / 2 Trainee EPs, 1 advisory team manager, 1 Portage Home Visitor, 2 SENCo Primary, 1 Children's centre Leader, 1 school counsellor, 1	Research seeks to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders (parents, children and professionals) about their experience of taking part in an EHC assessment.	Experiences of face-to-face multi-professional collaboration were positive with the EHC assessment group. Some professional expressed frustrations with colleges not attending meetings due to time constraints and service capacity. Parental and professional experience of the process was positive. Person-centred support was seen as realistic and achievable.

coding qualitative. Phase two case study perspectives, semi-structured interviews and card sorting tasks, focus group.	Education Welfare officer, 1 1:1 support worker early year's, 2 Family support worker/learning mentor, 1 Nursery Nurse, 1 Health Visitor, 1 Speech and Language Therapist, 1 CAF officer, 1 Social Care Occupational Therapist, 1

		Adoption Support Social Worker.		
		Phase 2 5 parents, 5 professionals and 1 child.		
Hellawell. 2017	Two phase research.	16 participants;	Two aims first are to contribute a thematic	Highlighted key themes including:

	Thematic literature review Semi-structured interviews	three class teachers, three SENCos, four SEND caseworkers, three advisors and commissioners, two social workers and a child psychiatrist	review of literature of the challenges of parent-partnership working. Second aim is a project explored early experiences of professionals working under the SEND CoP	Challenges in parental-professional partnerships Impact of the Codes use of words and the impact of this on parental expectations and professionals New obligations under the code of 2015 practice Ethical and practical implications including engaging in moral questioning.
Palikara, Castro, Gaona & Eirinaki 2019	Semi-structure online survey	349 professionals working in SEND services majority are	Study aimed to gather views from various professionals involved in SEND service delivery and assess opinions on the	Professionals' ratings and comments regarding the implementation of the new SEND policy • Extension of age range for service provision (0–25) 86% agreed and reasons why

Educational Psychologists and SENCos also included Speech and Language Therapists	new policies looking at the gap between ideology of policy changes and real-world implementation	• Assessment of SEND involving education, health and care 92% agreed with the intention but the divide between what happens in practice • Replacement of statements of SEN with EHCPs 67% agreed long delays • Transition process to the new system for SEND provision: challenges 54% rated transition as smooth

Differences between the views expressed by professional groups

The gap between ideology and implementation

Cochrane & Soni, 2020	Literature review	No information on inclusion, exclusion criteria, search terms or papers included and the rationale for why	Outline current research regarding the implementation of the SEND reforms and use of EHC plans within England five years since the introduction of the SEND CoP.	Findings were synthesised into three key themes. Experiences of the EHC needs assessment process. Reflections on the EHC Plan and outcomes of the EHC needs assessment process.

Appendix D

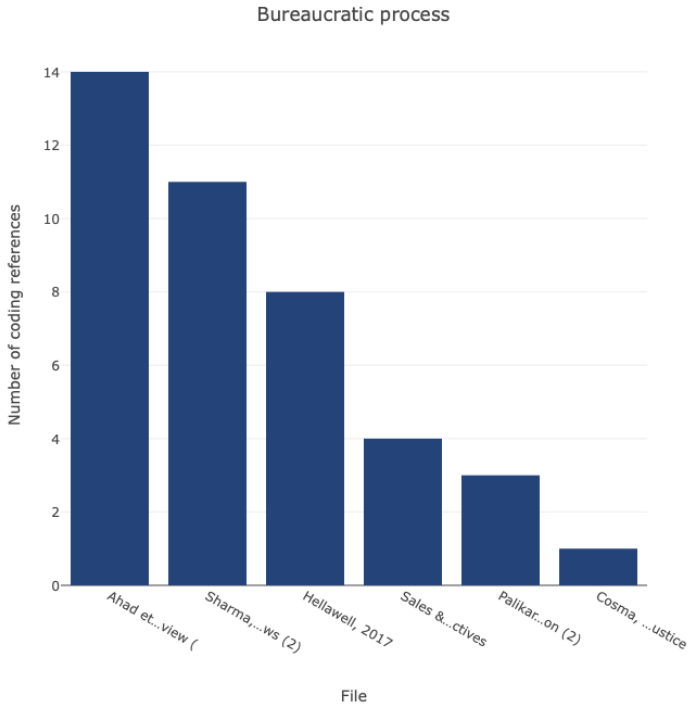
Literature Review Analysis on NVIVO

NVIVO - Literature review

Name	Description	Sources	References
Best Interests of the Child		7	16
Holistic		5	16
Excluding children		2	6
Involving parents		1	3
person-centred		1	4
Bureaucratic process		6	41
Performative practice		2	4
systems		2	9
Legislation		5	8

Name	Description	Sources	References
Knowledge of the process		5	15
Time Pressure	Moral impact	3	12
Multiagency working		6	21
Complexity		2	2
Resistance to expert		2	3
Separation from health	Lack of MDT and Multiservice support	3	7
Lack of integration with health and social care		2	2
The Role		4	6
Educating the system		3	5
outcomes		3	8
Provision or Specificity		3	10

Name	Description	Sources	References
Who's plan is it		5	15
Closing doors		4	5
Power dynamics		3	5



Bureaucratic Coding Process

Files\\Ahad et al 2022 Identifying service users' experience of the education, health and care plan process A systematic literature review (- § 14 references coded [5.09%

Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.30% Coverage

Service users, particularly special educational needs co- Ordinator's (SENCOs), highlighted the challenge in bringing together professionals from different services for meetings, due to time pressures (Sales & Vincent, 2018; Tysoe, 2018). Multi- agency working aims to reduce pressure on families by removing the need to repeat
information to different services (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015), but this is not being realised. Parents often report having to repeat information, concerning

Reference 2 - 0.42% Coverage

the need for more training resources, more understanding of individual roles and responsibilities, and better communication between services, is repeatedly highlighted. The fact that some settings report improvements, raises questions of where, when and how the EHCP process is being applied from setting to setting. There is widespread agreement from stakeholders that the 2014 Act used to introduce EHCPs, was the right approach but that it failed on implementation (House of Commons, 2019). However, seven years after implementation, patterns of difficulties are persisting. This suggests problems that extend beyond implementation and administration, and into a system of structural features including policy

Reference 3 - 0.40% Coverage

Moreover, SENCOs have also reported a difficulty in managing parental expectations as they were often perceived as unrealistic and demanding from within the context they were working in (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Plender, 2019). Similar findings were reported by Gore (2016), where SENCOs also reported needing to remind parents to retain realistic expectations. Similar experiences of dealing with demanding requests by parents were reported by SENCOs in Curran et al.'s (2017) study. However, it can be argued that these

expectations in most cases may be only unrealistic in regard to resource pressures, but legally and morally realistic with respect to the individual child.

Reference 4 - 0.20% Coverage

A lack of parity within the EHCP process has been expressed by service users, leading to inequality in outcomes and provision. Professionals have highlighted inconsistencies among LAs regarding the procedures followed and paperwork produced, which has resulted in EHCPs containing inconsistent information (Palikara et al., 2018).

Reference 5 - 0.31% Coverage

likewise, Sales and Vincent (2018) revealed that LAs had different interpretations of how the legislation was to be applied, resulting in different outcomes for children with similar needs (Sales & Vincent, 2018). The issue of inconsistency was not only found between LAs but also within (Sales & Vincent, 2018; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). Professionals have highlighted a need for more coherent guidelines for the EHCP procedure (Gore, 2016; House of Commons, 2019) and a desire for a model EHCP to provide guidance (Gore, 2016; Redwood, 2015).

Reference 6 - 0.32% Coverage

A lack of clarity regarding the progress of individual EHCPs was also highlighted. Adams et al. (2018) found that many parents were unclear about the progress of their child's plan even though it had exceeded the 20- week statutory timeframe for issuing a plan. This caused the child and parents to experience a great deal of anxiety and distress (Adams et al., 2018; Cullen & Lindsay, 2019). Similarly, parents expressed feelings of disempowerment due to the lack of clarity about whether paperwork had been completed and submitted (Bentley, 2017

Reference 7 - 0.25% Coverage

SENCOs have also reported a lack of clarity regarding refusals, often feeling they were unwarranted (Boesley & Crane, 2018). Cullen et al. (2017) found that refusals could be reduced if LAs clearly communicated what information was required to meet the threshold for issuing an EHCP. However, SENCOs have acknowledged the difficulty of making thresholds transparent as the needs of each child differ greatly (Boesley & Crane, 2018).

Reference 8 - 0.39% Coverage

Overall, a lack of parity within the EHCP process has impacted on children and young people's needs being met, and this is within the context of regional variability in educational outcomes. Professionals should be provided with clearer standardised guidelines that are independent of LA information, and service users should be given greater transparency about the progress of their plan as well as refusals. For instance, the threshold for a statutory assessment is relatively low— it is only that a child may need provision supported by the LA not that they will need it. Moreover, clearer roles for individual professionals and whole services should be established

Reference 9 - 0.45% Coverage

This review revealed that overall service users had similar views regarding satisfaction with the EHCP process. Both parents (Franklin et al., 2018; Holland & Pell, 2017; Thom et al., 2015) and professionals (Cochrane, 2016) reported feeling uninformed and unsupported through the process and expressed concerns regarding the lack of involvement and collaboration from health and social care services in the process. Professionals spoke of the administrative implications and increased responsibility they felt the EHCP process had caused (APPGA, 2017; Gore, 2016; House of Commons, 2019; Palikara et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). Additionally, both parents and professionals reported the lack of clarity within the EHCP process.

Reference 10 - 0.30% Coverage

Professionals were particularly dissatisfied with the lack of standardisation across LAs regarding the procedural aspects of the process (Palikara et al., 2018; Sales & Vincent, 2018), as well as the lack of clarity in their roles (Gore, 2016; Pearson et al., 2015). Parents were dissatisfied with the lack of clarity regarding the progress of their child's plan (Adams et al., 2018; Bentley, 2017). Taken together, these findings reveal that satisfaction with the EHCP process does not differ by service user grouping

Reference 11 - 0.61% Coverage

his review highlights several ways in which the EHCP process can be improved. In common with other inquires, more funding or allocation of resources is required for health and social care services to meet obligations within this framework (Boesley & Crane, 2018; House of Commons, 2019; Redwood, 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). However, funding alone is insufficient, as funding was provided by the government at the legal transition from Statements of SEN to EHCPs but the lack of ring- fencing meant that the transition was not optimised or seemingly prioritised, as the Education Select Committee noted: 'However, decisions by the Department for Education to allow local authorities to spend their implementation grant with little or no oversight or safeguards was at best naïve, if not irresponsible' (House of Commons, 2019, p. 11, point 19). As such, funding should be ring-fenced to allow for more allocation of resources to individual services that are child focused and consistent with the legal framework of the Children and Families Act (2014).

Reference 12 - 0.30% Coverage

There is a need for nationally standardised guidelines to reduce discrepancies across and within LAs (Gore, 2016; House of Commons, 2019; Palikara et al., 2018; Sales & Vincent, 2018; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). More specifically, a template EHCP for professionals, which also lays out the legal framework, is required (Gore, 2016; Redwood, 2015). Greater clarity is also essential for the responsibilities of individual professionals and service groups within the EHCP process (Gore, 2016; Pearson et al., 2015).

Reference 13 - 0.30% Coverage

A critical issue is the mechanisms and level of redress and repair for parents who have experiences of failure, by the LA or school, of complying with the CoP, including statutory timeframes within the EHCP process, and inadequate, failed or even non- provision of access to education. The current system for remediation has many gaps in its coverage and does not match the costs of meeting need and repairing damage sustained in a timely manner (House of Commons, 2019), thus conferring an advantage to non- compliance.

Reference 14 - 0.53% Coverage

Despite this observation, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSC) was reluctant in their evidence for the Education Select Committee report to seek penalties against LAs above a nominal level (House of Commons, 2019). In contrast, parent advocates disagreed with this and felt that financial penalties would be effective (House of Commons, 2019). It would now seem to be essential for the professional and administrative framework to have mechanisms to hold individuals and services accountable, effectively with respect to forms of service failure, to avoid the potential unintentional rewarding of poor practice. This latter point of problems around accountability was highlighted by the Education Select Committee, with evidence from the LGSC Ombudsman and others highlighting that significant gaps in accountability frameworks had occurred (House of Commons, 2019, p. 41).

Files\\Cosma, P., & Mulcare, R. (2022). EHCPs A help or a hinderance to the inclusion of young people who have offended~ An exploration of EP’s perceptions of the facilitating factors and barriers of EHCPs and the SEN processes involved in Youth Justice - § 1 reference coded [0.14% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.14% Coverage

ness of the EHCP in the educational inclusion of YPwO is dependent on what is done with

the information in the plan, otherwise it can just become a ‘piece of paper’

Files\\Hellawell, 2017 - § 8 references coded [4.07% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.83% Coverage

The preceding Support and Aspiration consultation document (DfE, 2011) pointed out that the legitimate expectations of parents and the wider public are undermined by professionals in local governments who are unresponsive to the needs and wishes of parents and keen to protect their own interests, as well as
412 British Journal of Special Education ~ Volume 44 ~ Number 4 ~ 2017 ©2017 NASEN
front-line professionals in schools who are overwhelmed by bureaucratic complexities. The stated aim of the SEND reform was, therefore, to ‘challenge any dogma, delay or professional interests which might hold children and young people with SEND back’ (DfE, 2013), and with this, suggests that professionals working in the field may be directly responsible for the reported lack of progress (Lamb, 2009) that has been made in realising effective partnership working. T

Reference 2 - 0.41% Coverage

professionals, for example, are expected to continue to recommend and oversee individual deficit-model based interventions, rather than being enabled to focus on dismantling external barriers (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008), while parents are required to respond simultaneously to the newly introduced expectations for strategic (at commissioning level) as well as individual case-related participation (DfE & DoH, 2015).

Reference 3 - 0.51% Coverage

Explanations for professional shortcomings suggested in the literature include uneven power relationships between parents and professionals, excessive bureaucracy, and incompatible working cultures and systems between agencies in which parents get caught up. They are

also explained by weak leadership, conflicting demands arising from the policy layers of successive governments, and the inadequate skills sets of practitioners (Barnes, 2008; Frost et al., 2005; Harris, 2005; Milbourne et al., 2003; Nind, 2002).

Reference 4 - 0.80% Coverage

professionals need to reengage with moral enquiry which does not simply ask what ‘should’ be done (in accordance with the Code), but rather whether it ‘ought’ to be done. Moral enquiry may, for example, argue for the denial of a parental preference on the grounds of distributive justice, thus offering a tool for establishing and articulating a basis for adopting values beyond individual preference (Murray, 2013). The Code’s insistence that parents have the right to ‘express a preference’ without framing this right by moral considerations such as distributive justice means that Lilly and others may not have sufficiently developed the capacity to articulate values and justifications that look beyond individual preference and to the common good. It leaves her exposed to allegations of being either uncaring or incompetent.

Reference 5 - 0.49% Coverage

Beyond acknowledging that parents may need support to engage effectively with decision making (DfE & DoH, 2015), and thereby implying that they may have different needs, the Code treats parents as a homogeneous group who are assumed to be able to participate in the partnership project as private consumers and public citizens by simultaneously securing the best for their

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own child, and also at a commissioning level for all children

Reference 6 - 0.40% Coverage

Some participants openly discuss the challenges of ‘non-compliant’ parental participants in the partnership process, which are not acknowledged and addressed in the Code:

‘You do have this really structured, legal process, but we are also working with people who are distressed by definition, really, and there is all sorts of other stuffdriving things, and that tends to be different for each family or person.’

Reference 7 - 0.47% Coverage

Front-line professionals walk a fine line between illustrating that they have already secured relevant provision and interventions for children with SEND, and have in fact done a good job but will nevertheless need additional resources to maintain the same level of support; and focusing on the needs and problems of the child that release additional funding but might also suggest that they have simply not provided competently, or are unsympathetic to parental hopes and aspirations:

Reference 8 - 0.17% Coverage

The language of choice and preference in the Code has increased the potential for conflict, and professionals need better tools to address arising conflicts constructively.

Files\\Palikara et al. (2019) Professionals views on the new policy for special educational needs in England ideology versus implementation (2) - § 3 references coded [1.61% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.68% Coverage

This position was frequently based on the impression that EHC plans were not different to previous statements, and therefore professionals did not find a strong rationale for their adoption and development. Furthermore, respondents referred to the administrative implications of this change, suggesting their development as time and resource consuming. Just a change of format. (P364, SENCO) At the end of the day, it is a change of paperwork and administration - what is important is that what is written on the piece of paper is relevant for the individual, and that those targets/ support packages are put into place and upheld by

the professionals/councils that are involved with the individual. (P310, SLT)

Reference 2 - 0.60% Coverage

although professionals fundamentally agree with the idea that assessments should involve the concerted efforts of education, health and social care (in the overall rating), further comments show disappointment that in practice the final plan is still very much solely education-focused. This paradox between agreeing with the ideology but disagreeing with its practical implementation is consistent across most of the issues rated and commented by the participants, and illustrates the gap between political ideology and practical provision that has been previously pointed out in the literature (Castro and Palikara, 2016).

Reference 3 - 0.34% Coverage

synchrony with the professionals' comments obtained through this survey, Norwich (2014) highlighted that many of the changes introduced by the SEND reforms are not actually new but rather extensions or the integration of existing principles. The major changes concerned the funding allocation, the governance and accountability model introduced.

Files\\Sales & Vincent, 2018. Strengths and limitations of the Education, Health and Care plan process from a range of professional and family perspectives - § 4 references coded [1.86% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.70% Coverage

Professionals expressed concern that

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outcomes of the process do not necessarily reflect the child's needs but rather are influenced by factors such as the extent to which the child is considered 'high profile', the ability of a parent to advocate on behalf of a child, and concerns about how provision will be funded

Reference 2 - 0.37% Coverage

generality of the guidance available in the Code of Practice (Norwich, 2014) and variations in how this is interpreted and enacted by schools and local authorities (Curran et al., 2017) may go some way to explaining inconsistent outcomes, it is clear that issues related to funding, family resources and some cases being viewed as 'higher profile' also work against the aim of ensuring a consistent and transparent process

Reference 3 - 0.41% Coverage

Five professionals and some parents thought that the methods of collecting views from children and young could be improved. Both local authorities used a set 'All About Me' template to assist with ascertaining the views of children and young people. While some participants saw this as a strength, others suggested that a more flexible and personalised approach that took account of a child's age, developmental level and communication skills would be more appropriate.

Reference 4 - 0.38% Coverage

It was clear that inconsistencies in how legislation is interpreted and applied have not yet been fully addressed by the new system. Factors such as the extent to which a child is considered 'high profile', the ability of a parent to advocate on behalf of a child, and concerns about how provision will be funded influenced not only whether or not the needs assessment process resulted in an EHC plan, but also the content of the plan.

Files\\Sharma, P. (2021). Barriers faced when eliciting the voice of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities for their Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews (2) - § 11 references coded [5.08% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.61% Coverage

SEND professionals have a duty to incorporate inclusive practice when eliciting the voice of children and young people. Good practice involves providing continuous opportunities to elicit voice that go beyond gathering the preferences of children and young people. However, local authorities are often criticised for encouraging a ‘tick list culture’ (Bradwell, 2019), where voice is only heard when evidence is required. This seemingly tokenistic approach to eliciting voice suggests SEND professionals need to show a commitment to inclusion and person- centred approaches (Skipp & Hopwood, 2016).

Reference 2 - 0.27% Coverage

Hellawell (2015) describes the ‘moral burdens’ that exist among the structures of local authorities, resulting in high levels of ‘moral stress’ within local authority roles such as those of SEND caseworkers, who report high caseloads with little support to manage

Reference 3 - 0.30% Coverage

SEND professionals acknowledged barriers that relate to children and young people, which then inhibit the child’s or young person’s ability to share their views with others. The barriers affecting children and young people included the ‘ability’ to participate, and the nature of the meetings.

Reference 4 - 0.80% Coverage

The barriers affecting the professionals who attempt to elicit voice included: professionals’ reluctance to engage in an effort to comply with the rights of the child; power dynamics between children and young people and adults; and the strain on resources, including the

capacity of SEND professionals.

The language used within both meetings and reports tends to focus on the negative aspects of a child or young person's special educational needs, as opposed to a solution- based approach: 'narrative has become a bit fixed on the difficulties they have … it's all deficit-based language' (EP).

Additionally, the reports and paperwork required for assessments and reviews are not pupil-centred: 'our report is very lengthy, very wordy … I just think it can mean very little to the young person' (EP).

Reference 5 - 0.29% Coverage

Caseloads were often described by SEND officers as 'not realistic' (SO1), which adds to the body of literature highlighting the strain and workload stress within this role (Hellawell, 2015): 'it's not realistic the amount of work that we have based on what needs to be done as a service' (SO

Reference 6 - 0.18% Coverage

During assessments, professional capacity to spend time eliciting voice is limited by the deadlines for assessments and the sheer number of requests received by local authoritie

Reference 7 - 0.22% Coverage

oice. Many reported not meeting children and young people as they did not feel it was their role, and relying

on other professionals to do so.

Reference 8 - 0.71% Coverage

eople, and barriers experienced by professionals. Participants reported barriers to ensuring a person- centred approach due to high caseloads and lack of time to meaningfully elicit

voice. Despite professional rhetoric about the importance of consulting with children, in practice this proves to be problematic and may not be at the forefront, given the statutory deadlines and standards professionals are required to meet (Cremin et al., 2011; Curran & Boddison, 2021). This does not necessarily reflect an unwillingness to change practice, but rather reflects the uncertainty professionals face about how resources can be allocated appropriately to achieve time- bound person- centred meetings.

Reference 9 - 0.62% Coverage

people. The child or young person acts as the service user, but the point has been made, over a considerable period of time, that the individual with SEND is not empowered to make meaningful choices about how and when those services will be provided (Finkelstein, 1993; Parry- Jones & Soulsby, 2001). This may be the reason why some children and young people do not fully participate during ‘formal’ meetings and would benefit from sharing their views in an environment in which they feel comfortable. The formal EHCP planning meeting or Annual Review therefore often holds little to no value to children and young people.

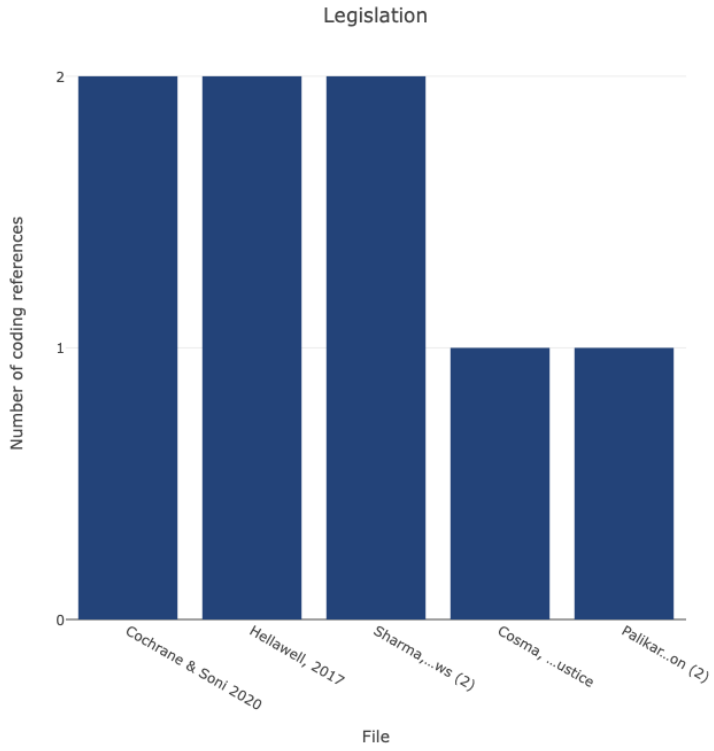
Reference 10 - 0.39% Coverage

The power dynamics that exist between adult– child relationships further reinforce the adult-centric nature of formal EHCP and review meetings. The EHCP and Annual Review process are expected to fit into the work patterns of those most distanced from the children and young people, such as a local authority representative, rather than being based on the choice of the children and young people

Reference 11 - 0.70% Coverage

Despite the professional rhetoric on the importance of person- centred approaches to assessment, the cumulative barriers mentioned in this study result in professionals struggling to manage an impractical task of meeting both the bureaucratic expectations associated with EHCPs, such as specifying targets and completing paperwork based on

deadlines, alongside ensuring a person- centred approach throughout the meeting with children's and young people's voice at the centre. The barriers of lack of capacity, resources, and methods to elicit voice, bureaucratic burdens and the role of the gatekeeper exemplify the gulf between policy and practice reported by those on the 'frontline'



Legislation Coding Process

Files\\Cochrane & Soni 2020 - § 2 references coded [0.93% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.27% Coverage

Norwich and Eaton (2015) propose that the "easy-going pragmatism" (p. 127) of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) does not address how professionals from differing disciplines will work together to formulate a cohesive EHC plan.

Reference 2 - 0.67% Coverage

Quality review of 18 EHC plans, conducted by a panel of ten professionals working with SEND, indicated that most plans had been able to include the statutory requirements (Adams et al., 2018). They were found to be less successful at achieving accessibility and in representing the principles of

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the Children and Families Act and the SEND Code of Practice (i.e., participation, clear description of strengths and needs and unambiguous provision), which has been echoed through young person-led research (RIP:STARS et al., 2018a).

Files\\Cosma, P., & Mulcare, R. (2022). EHCPs A help or a hinderance to the inclusion of young people who have offended~ An exploration of EP's perceptions of the facilitating factors and barriers of EHCPs and the SEN processes involved in Youth Justice - § 1 reference coded [0.23% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.23% Coverage

custodial sentence. However, legislation exists for young people who have formally identified SEN and who are up to the age of 18, excluding those over 18, despite the fact the EHCP provides support up to age 25. Similarly, research has found that services a

Files\\Hellawell, 2017 - § 2 references coded [1.29% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.80% Coverage

professionals need to reengage with moral enquiry which does not simply ask what 'should' be done (in accordance with the Code), but rather whether it 'ought' to be done. Moral enquiry may, for example, argue for the denial of a parental preference on the grounds of distributive justice, thus offering a tool for establishing and articulating a basis for adopting values beyond individual preference (Murray, 2013). The Code's insistence that parents have the right to 'express a preference' without framing this right by moral considerations such as distributive justice means that Lilly and others may not have sufficiently developed

the capacity to articulate values and justifications that look beyond individual preference and to the common good. It leaves her exposed to allegations of being either uncaring or incompetent.

Reference 2 - 0.49% Coverage

Beyond acknowledging that parents may need support to engage effectively with decision making (DfE & DoH, 2015), and thereby implying that they may have different needs, the Code treats parents as a homogeneous group who are assumed to be able to participate in the partnership project as private consumers and public citizens by simultaneously securing the best for their

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own child, and also at a commissioning level for all children

Files\\Palikara et al. (2019) Professionals views on the new policy for special educational needs in England ideology versus implementation (2) - § 1 reference coded [0.76% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.76% Coverage

The long delays experienced in the completion of the new EHC plans were another theme linked to the disagreement of professionals on the replacement of statements of SEND with these newly developed documents: Apart from TAC meetings, they are largely the same. They still unfortunately tend to focus on education and given how poorly thought out by the government and poorly supported at a local level (no increase in staff to account for the transfer of statements to EHCP for example). The legal limit of 20 weeks is rarely achieved. So, although the aim of the EHCPs was to have a quicker process it has turned into a much longer process. It feels like the same thing i.e. still a statement but with greater delay and higher rates of SEN departments' sickness and absence due to the inevitable overwhelm. (P108, EP)

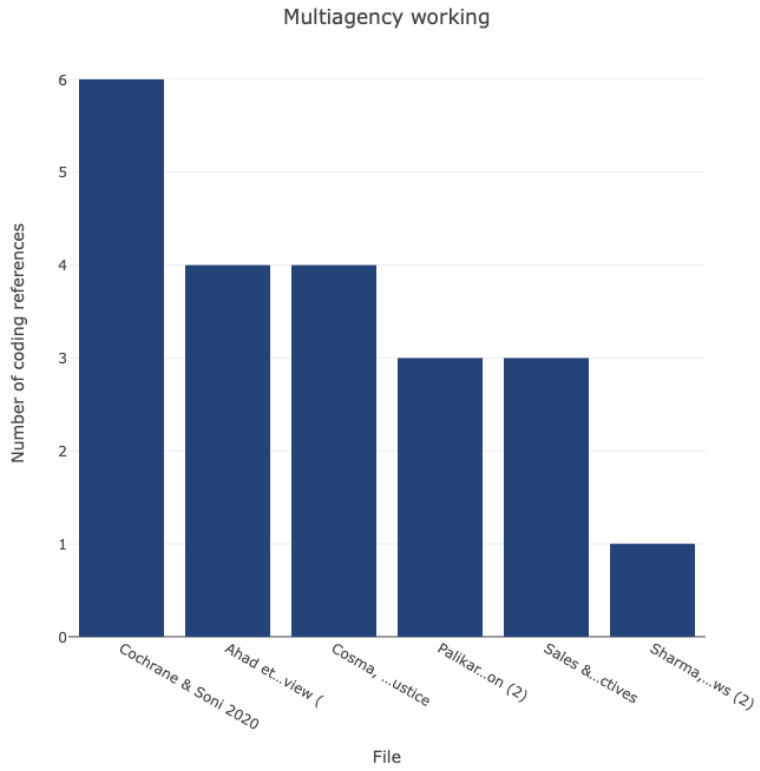
Files\\Sharma, P. (2021). Barriers faced when eliciting the voice of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities for their Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews (2) - § 2 references coded [1.31% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.62% Coverage

people. The child or young person acts as the service user, but the point has been made, over a considerable period of time, that the individual with SEND is not empowered to make meaningful choices about how and when those services will be provided (Finkelstein, 1993; Parry- Jones & Soulsby, 2001). This may be the reason why some children and young people do not fully participate during ‘formal’ meetings and would benefit from sharing their views in an environment in which they feel comfortable. The formal EHCP planning meeting or Annual Review therefore often holds little to no value to children and young people.

Reference 2 - 0.70% Coverage

Despite the professional rhetoric on the importance of person- centred approaches to assessment, the cumulative barriers mentioned in this study result in professionals struggling to manage an impractical task of meeting both the bureaucratic expectations associated with EHCPs, such as specifying targets and completing paperwork based on deadlines, alongside ensuring a person- centred approach throughout the meeting with children’s and young people’s voice at the centre. The barriers of lack of capacity, resources, and methods to elicit voice, bureaucratic burdens and the role of the gatekeeper exemplify the gulf between policy and practice reported by those on the ‘frontline’


Multiagency working
Number of coding references
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
Cochrane & Soni 2020
Ahad et...view (
Cosma, ...ustice
Palikar...on (2)
Sales &...ctives
Sharma,...ws (2)
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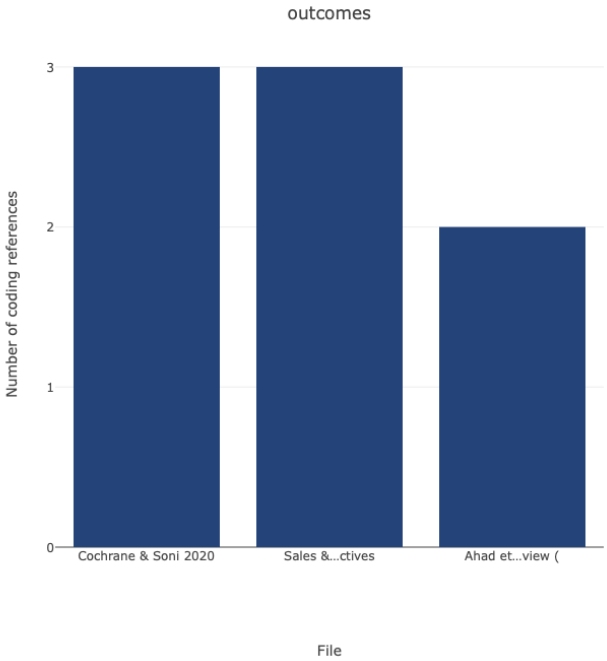
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Best Interests of the Child
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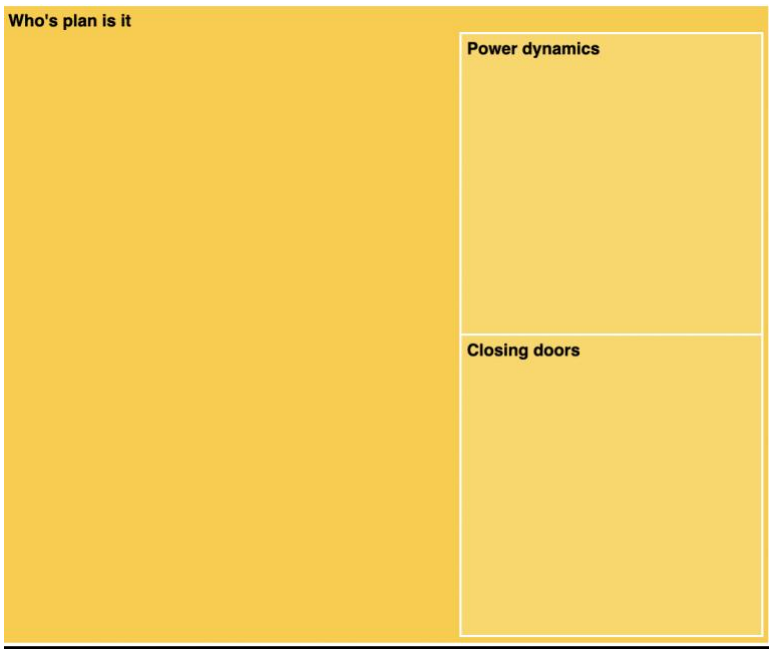
Excluding children
Involving parents


Who's plan is it
Power dynamics
Closing doors

Appendix E

Email from PEP

Hi Katie

Further to our discussion just now and I happy for you to undertake this work with EPs in the service, to offer individual interviews and/or run focus groups, which ever suits your research more appropriately.

I look forward to hearing the outcomes as it aligns very closely with the service priorities and our overall SEND transformation work in the local authority.

Best wishes

Appendix F

Participant Information Sheet

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study. This information will need to be thoroughly read and considered to provide informed consent for participation in the study.

Project Title

Exploring Educational Psychologists' views and experiences of applying guidance principles to their most recent statutory Educational Health Care Needs Assessment.

Who is doing the research?

The research is being carried out by Katie Roden; I am a Trainee Educational psychologist. This research is being conducted as part of my course Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4) Course DEdPsych at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I will be supervised by Educational Psychologist Dr Richard Lewis.

What is the aim of the research?

The aims of the research are to explore Educational Psychologists' experience of applying principles from the Joint Professional Liaison Group document of best practice into their most recent Educational Health Care Needs Assessment. The research aims to fill the gap that exists within research surrounding EPs views being underrepresented within the EHCNA process. Previous research has attempted to provide a systematic review of the literature on EHCPs within the current context (Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Ahad, Thompson & Hall, 2021). However, it has been identified that professional groups such as Educational

Psychologists experiences of the EHCP process are under-represented within research (Ahad, Thompson & Hall, 2021).

The research also seeks to understand any barriers that may arise within everyday practice both individually for practicing Educational Psychologists' and systematically regarding resources or other issues outside of the Educational Psychologists' control. These barriers will help to identify both strengths in practice but also barriers that may arise within everyday practice. The relevance and importance of the research will allow clarity on the experiences of Educational Psychologists involvement in the EHCNA process and to provide the Local Authority with themes that the research has identified. There is a hope that this learning can be used at a wider level rather than existing within the current Local Authority.

What consideration is there for my colleagues taking part?

This research is based on gathering the views of individuals about experience of Educational Psychologists in applying guidance principles to their advice for an Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment. The methodology of individual interviews protects disagreements in viewpoints arising between you and your colleagues and it upholds the principle of confidentiality. I will not refer to the interviews outside of the research. I acknowledge and recognise that all opinions are based your views, and these will be held within the context of the research and will not impact my interactions with you as a colleague.

Who has given permission for this research?

Anonymised LA Educational Psychology Service has given permission for this research to take place with Educational Psychologists employed by the local authority. In addition to this, the Ethical Review Board of the Department of Education and Training at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, where I am completing my training, have also provided ethical approval for this research to proceed. Prior to the approval a research proposal has

been completed and considered that the research project meets the necessary ethical standards to protect participants involved.

Who can take part in this research?

Anonymised LA Educational Psychologists who are registered with HCPC.

What will be involved in taking part?

You will be expected to partake in a one-hour interview if you consent to the research. You are welcome to bring your most recent EHCNA advice for your own reference, but I will not view this report. A semi-structured oral interview will take place focusing around the

principles of the guidance.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It allows you a space to reflect upon your practice and may contribute to your continued professional development. The potential further benefit for knowledge is it provides a voice to the EP profession with relevant discussion to the role of the EP within the EHCNA process. The aim is for the research to provide new insight and new perspectives on EPs experience of undertaking EHCNAs. This knowledge may help support a narrative to exist alongside the national shortage of EPs and the increase of EHCNA requests.

The anticipated benefits for the community include the knowledge gathered on how to apply the principles and to formulate recommendations would support the impact of inclusivity for children within learning environments (e.g. school, alternative provisions, within the community). The identification of how to collaboratively gain a child's voice may be applicable across settings including social care and health as these are key areas explored within the EHCNA.

If an understanding is developed around the information that Educational Psychologists' gather during an EHCNA this could in turn impact the education system providing SENCos, schools and parents with an awareness of the information they may need to include within an application. With the guidance available this may impact on how SEND EHCP workers then create the advice for plans and allow an understanding of how it can be specific for provisions and outcomes. The good practice would in turn hopefully contribute to a better EHCNA and more effective outcomes for Children and Young People.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no perceived risks to the research. However it is noted that exploring systemic factors may lead to uncomfortable feelings. If this is something you experience it would be beneficial to discuss this with your supervisor, line manager or peer supervision group for further exploration. You are welcome to contact me for further discussion if you feel necessary my contact details are at the bottom of this information sheet. If you feel it is necessary Further support can be sought from national wellbeing support services:

CALM https://www.thecalmzone.net Helpline 5pm – Midnight 365 days a year 0800585858, webchat

Anonymised LA mind: Phone: Text: Email: info@Anonymised LAmind.org.uk

Samaritans call 116 123 24/7, email address jo@smaritans.org, online chat

Better Health: NHS Every Mind Matters – https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/

Rethink https://www.rethink.org

What is the location of this research?

The interviews can take place within a quiet room within an office space within the Local Authority or online using Zoom. The decision to offer in person or online is to outweigh any

costs of the interview on your time resources and meeting in a convenient way for you. If online, it will be conducted using a laptop rather than a mobile phone to ensure a secure connection. The interview will take place in a quiet location to allow the interview to be recorded. A zoom link that is password protected will be sent to the participant from my Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust issued zoom account a week before the interview is due to take place.

Confidentiality of the Data

If you decide to take part in the research your involvement will not be shared with anyone. The only time confidentiality surrounding your involvement of the research would be if I felt you were at risk of harm from someone, or harm caused to others or any legally obliged disclosures. If this is the case, I will inform you who will be told and the nature of the disclosure.

When the interview ends, you can choose a pseudonym (an alternative name), to protect anonymity. The pseudonym will be used within the interview and on any stored information (for example the name will be used for the storage of the audio recording).

The interviews will be audio recorded. They will be recorded using Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust issued zoom accounts for transcribing securely. The audio recording will be retained in a password protected location and after the audio recording has been transcribed the recording will be deleted. Any records related to your participation in the research will be stored and handled appropriately for 6-10 years in line with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Data Protection Policy. https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/

The findings from this research will be written up as part of a thesis and may be published in academic journals relevant to educational psychology. The data will be anonymised to

reduce the chance of people linking data directly to you. Any quotes included in the research will be quoted anonymously. Due to the small number of participants, you may recognise your own comments in the research, but I will remove or change details that would allow other people to identify you.

Disclaimer

Recruitment for this study is a first come first serve basis, between eight and twelve participants are required. You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time during the interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason within 3 weeks after your interview.

Further information and contact details:

If you have any questions about any part of the research, please get in contact with me.

Email: kroden

Phone Number:

Supervising Educational Psychologist email: RLewis

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram

Appendix G

Interview Schedule

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule:

The following interview questions will be based upon the Joint Professional Liaison Group (JPLG) Guidance for Educational Psychologists providing advice and information for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments.

Bringing to mind your most recent or two most recent Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs). During the interview, please consider the strengths of what went well but also any barriers that may have impacted the fulfilment of this principle.

Prompts / Exploration:

- What are your hopes in that?
- Were any of these realised?
- How would you know that would happen?
- How does that make you feel?
- What does that feel like for you in your role?
- Statutory role and there are principles that they're striving for, and they are unable to meet?
- Tell me more about that…
- What does that make you think about…
- Where did that understanding came from….
- Unmeasurable – self as an EP and a person in a context and service and the school system and those aspects…

Initial Icebreaker question what was your initial response when you heard the research topic?

Can you explain how you felt the principle of person-centred was demonstrated in the advice?

- Definition: CYP and families will lie at the heart of the process, with their views fairly represented.

How do you feel the principle of holistic was achieved within the advice?

- Definition: Able to demonstrate a holistic assessment of the CYP and the contexts in which they learn and live.

Can you explain how the principle of fair was incorporated into your advice?

- Definition: Provide a balanced and informed opinion of the CYP, their strengths, views, and needs.

How was the principle of reflective of best practice demonstrated within the advice?

- Definition: Underpinned by current thinking and knowledge of educational psychology, approached with a critical and reflective attitude, demonstrating an ability to use psychology in original and creative ways. Ideally EP involvement should form part of an ‘Assess, Plan, Do, Review’ (APDR) cycle of support for the CYP as outlined in the CoP.

Can you describe how the principle of collaboration was shown within the advice?

- Definition: Involve CYP, parents/carers and all relevant professionals.

How was the principle of transparent shown within the advice?

- Definition: Present a clear statement of the information gathered and sources. The evidence will inform a psychological formulation, which in turn results in an underpinning rationale for the outcomes and recommendations produced.

Can you explain how the principle of accessible has been demonstrated within the advice?

- Definition: Report (whether verbal or written) in clear, concise language, sharing psychological perspectives such that they can be understood by all, with explanation of terminology.

How was the principle of compliant shown within the advice?

- Definition: Conform to all relevant legislation and professional codes of ethical practice.

Is there any other strengths or barriers regarding the process of the EHCNA that you haven’t had an opportunity to express.

Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix H

Email Sent to LA

Hello all,

I hope you're well and have had a restful bank holiday. To follow up from the information I provided on the service day, I am seeking Educational Psychologists from within the authority to share your experiences of applying the Joint Professional Liaison Group (JPLG) 'Guidance for Educational Psychologists providing advice and information for Education Health and Care Needs Assessments' to your most recent Educational Health Care Needs Assessments. This is to fulfil the requirements of the course and I have attached an information sheet for if you are interested in participating. I've also attached the JPLG document for your reference. The hope is for interviews to take place during the summer term and over the summer holidays. The recruitment will be on a first come first serve basis with a minimum of 8 EPs required.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me,
Best wishes,

Good morning all,

I hope you are well. I'm still recruiting participants for my thesis.

The 1-hour interview will be to explore EPs views and experiences (strengths, barriers, and feelings) of EHCNAs with questions focused on the nine principles within the JPLG document (holistic, fair, person-centred, transparent, reflective of best practice, collaboration, accessible and compliant).

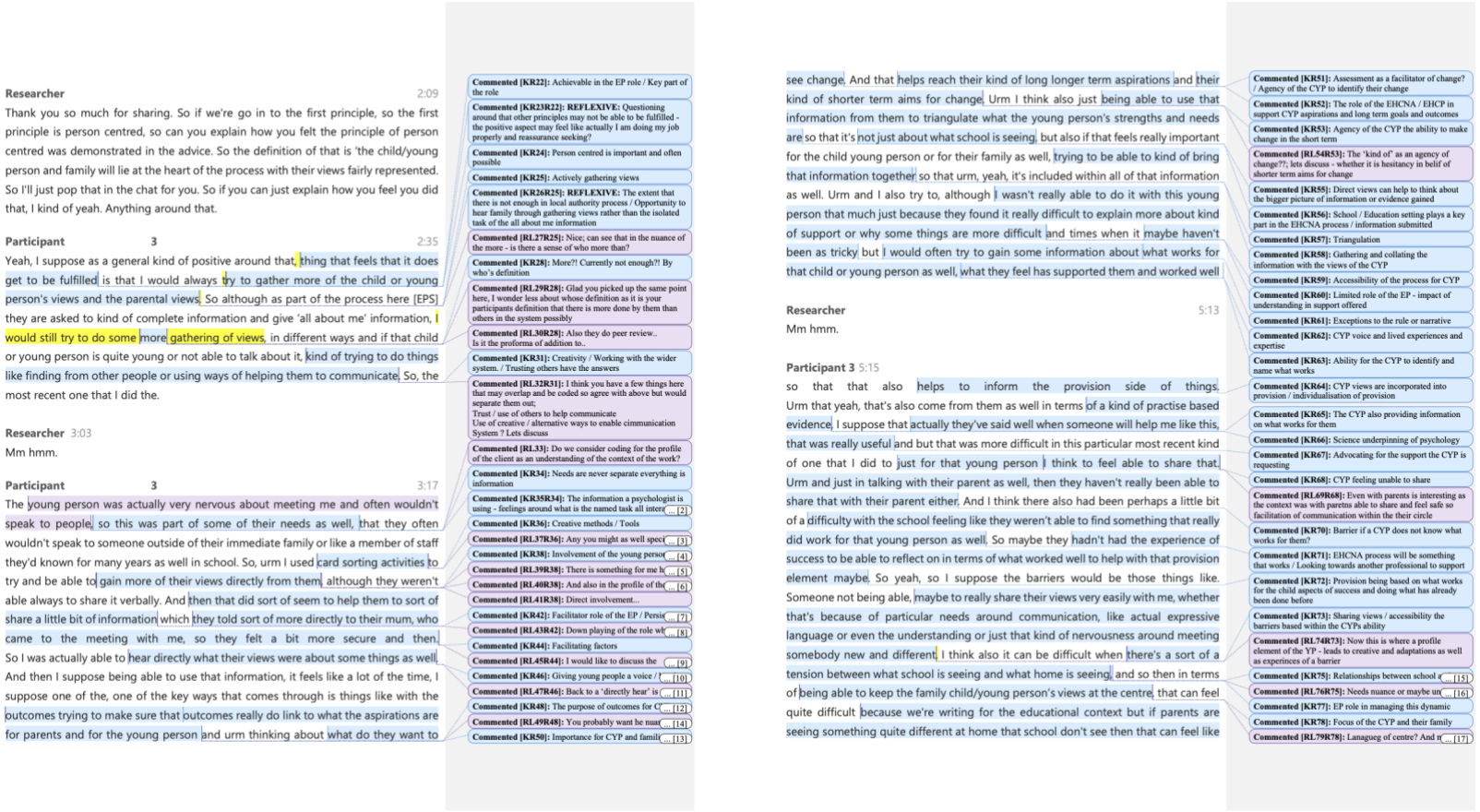
I have created a scheduling link with potential dates and times to make the process easier for booking an interview,
https://www.needtomeet.com/meeting?id=yj4udl9wV

Please reach out if there is a date/time you can do that may not be covered on the meeting link or if you require any further information.

Best Wishes,

Appendix I

Shared Coding with Researcher and Transcript Example



Appendix J

Phase 3 Codes Exported to Excel

Name	Case Count	Code Count
accessible for all audiences	7	15
assess plan do review	7	15
panels and processes	7	19
bigger picture of information or evidence gathered	7	24
CYP and family importance	7	13
CYP Context	7	31
CYP views	7	13
EPS Context	7	31
joint meetings	7	24
multi-agency working	7	18
process of the written report	7	19
report writing	7	14
template	7	13
Bureaucratic process	6	26
Clarity surrounding needs	6	7
Code of Practice	6	10
Contracting the EP in the EHCNA	6	16
CYP active role	6	8
CYP voice	6	18
EHCNA report	6	12
EP asking right questions	6	15
EP facilitating	6	28
hidden dialogue and formulation for the EP	6	17
Importance of language	6	8
local authority as the audience	6	19
Parental and family perspective	6	11
peer review process	6	12
Polictical external wider system	6	14
psychological role of the EP	6	15
Purpose of the EP role	6	13
Role of adults in the system	6	21
school key part in the EHCNA process	6	8
stating sources of information	6	16
Statutory role of the EP	6	10
statutory time frames	6	12
the context of children's needs	6	8
a report that follows a CYP	5	8
Advocating the support for CYP	5	8
best practice	5	6
Commonality in values of an EP	5	5
CYP and families understanding process	5	15
CYP at the centre	5	14
Different perspectives	5	9
Different purposes of the EHCNA	5	9
EHCNA more than a report	5	14
EP creating a picture of the CYP	5	18
EP having an understanding about the CYP	5	6

EP values strengths based and successes of CYP	5	11
equity in the processes	5	8
evidence based practice	5	7
Family Context	5	12
holding multiple perspectives and view points	5	8
impact of wider system pressures	5	18
Joint understanding between parents and school	5	8
local authority expectations placed on the EP	5	11
Outcomes	5	10
pressure on the EPs time	5	16
Punctuation point	5	5
Purpose of an EHCNA	5	11
range of audiences	5	14
reading information	5	8
Relationships between home and school	5	8
school information submitted	5	7
Shared understanding	5	8
snapshot role of the EP	5	11
The importance of the adults available to provide the view	5	10
Time	5	15
Transparency and explanation	5	7
Who is the audience	5	13
Wider system pressures	5	8
Working relationship	5	8
Accessibility of the process of the CYP	4	8
All about me	4	6
Allowing families to be heard	4	10
assessment of needs	4	4
assessment tools and standardised measures	4	4
bringing together information	4	5
changes in narrative	4	6
changes in perceptions	4	4
constraints and expectations on the system	4	11
Creative methods	4	10
EHCNA in support CYP aspirations and long term goals and outcomes	4	7
ep as expert	4	7
EP bringing together aspects to make it accessible and understanding	4	6
EP knowledge	4	4
EP role in facilitating understanding of the EHCNA process	4	9
EP role in sharing	4	4
EP to highlight strengths	4	7
Everyone aware of the process	4	5
Everything is information	4	5
expectations on the purpose of the assessment	4	5
Facilitation of communication in their own circle	4	6
Facilitator role of the EP	4	10
holistic whole view of child	4	8
Information already available	4	6
information gathering	4	6
local authority context	4	8
needs reported by other professionals	4	7
observation as a key to understanding the child	4	7
outcomes meeting	4	11
Overview brings together all elements	4	6
panels and processes	4	6
parental voice	4	4
Pressure on the EP to deliver it ALL	4	5
psychological formulation	4	7
Relationship building	4	6
School Context	4	5
school time provided	4	6
sen case worker	4	7
SENCo	4	4
shared outcomes	4	8
teacher knowledge and expertise	4	5
teaching assistants	4	6
The commissioner is the audience	4	12
the lack of support from multi-agency services	4	5
time scale requirements	4	6
working with the wider system	4	4
Absence of research	3	4
advisory teachers	3	3
agency of the CYP to identify their change	3	4
Amount of information EPs have access to	3	9
assessment activities	3	5
background information	3	4
case work officers	3	6
clear expectations	3	3
CPD element of the EP role	3	4
CYP expertise	3	6
CYP feel heard	3	3
CYP informing provision	3	4
CYP interests	3	4
CYP participation	3	4
Daughting nature of meeting an EP	3	3
Demands of keeping the family at the centre	3	3
Educational context importance	3	7
EP beliefs around technology	3	3
EP conflict of strengths based vs what is needed	3	6
EP experience and reflections	3	4
EP individual practice	3	3
EP length of time in career informs preferences	3	3
EP opening and welcoming feedback and questions	3	5
EP reflections	3	4
EP task of collating all the information	3	5
Equality Act	3	3

equity for children across the local authority	3	7
explaining terminology	3	3
External role of the EP	3	3
family as the audience	3	5
focys of the CYP and their family	3	5
Funding processes	3	3
gathering and collating the information with views of the CYP	3	3
giving psychology away	3	5
HCPC requirements and guidelines	3	4
hearing the voice	3	4
Impact of prior relationships with schools	3	4
inaccessible understanding or jargon	3	3
individualisation of provision	3	7
Level of knowledge and expertise of the EP	3	6
locum use	3	3
making the EHCNA more concise focused and less repitive	3	7
multi agency working to have equal weighting	3	7
Multiple demands	3	3
observations as opportunity to liaise with staff	3	3
opportunities to review	3	3
outcomes linked to aspirations for CYP and family	3	3
prioritsation of the adults	3	4
Providing families with time and space	3	3
Provision	3	9
provision being based on what works	3	3
psychological hypothesis	3	3
rapport building	3	3
relationship between home and school	3	4
reporting CYP views	3	3
Role of the EP	3	4
School	3	4
School perspective is readily more easily	3	3
Secure place	3	7
self depricating the knowledge of the EP	3	5
shared strengths	3	3
Societal context	3	8
specificity	3	3
strengths based to support access to education	3	5
Supervision	3	8
the audience trumps the CYP	3	7
the role of the EHCNA	3	3
triangulation	3	5
voice of adults	3	5
written person centred	3	3
Achievable in the EP role	2	2
Acknowledgment that EPs can't know it all	2	2
Actively gathering	2	2
adults decision making on behalf of a child	2	3
Agreed outcomes explored	2	2
assessment as a facilitator of change	2	4
Assumptions around EP practice	2	3
Balance of hearing voice and views and the role of the EP	2	2
Balance of research evidence and the CYPs presentation and needs	2	3
Balancing act	2	4
Becoming the EPs information	2	2
beliefs around change	2	2
bringing all the adults togther	2	3
Card sort	2	3
central aspect	2	2
children that are missing	2	2
collaboration between systems	2	3
Conflict between the EP view of the role vs higher systems	2	2
context of the CYP and family influencing provision provided	2	3
Creativity	2	6
CYP ability	2	2
CYP attending family and school meetings	2	3
CYP providing information on what works for them	2	4
CYP unable to share	2	2
deficit base impact on CYP and family	2	4
Direct involvement	2	4
Drawing and writing outcomes	2	2
education setting role	2	2
EHCNA focus on needs and challenges	2	3
EHCNA process something that works	2	2
EP advocating parental voice	2	2
EP being unknown to CYP and family	2	2
EP clearly stating provision accessible to school staff	2	4
EP flexibility in the role	2	3
EP joining systems	2	2
ep knowledge of the CYP	2	2
EP offering reflection	2	2
EP perspective	2	5
EP perspective vs family perspective	2	6
EP understanding while on waiting lists	2	3
EP using assessment tools that worked previously	2	2
EP vs the system	2	2
Equitable provision	2	2
Exceptions to the narrative	2	4
explaining abbreviations	2	3
Facilitation of the EP	2	3
Family cultural aspects	2	4
Family School dynamic	2	3
Games	2	2
giving CYP a voice	2	3
Health services role	2	5
holding school accountable	2	2

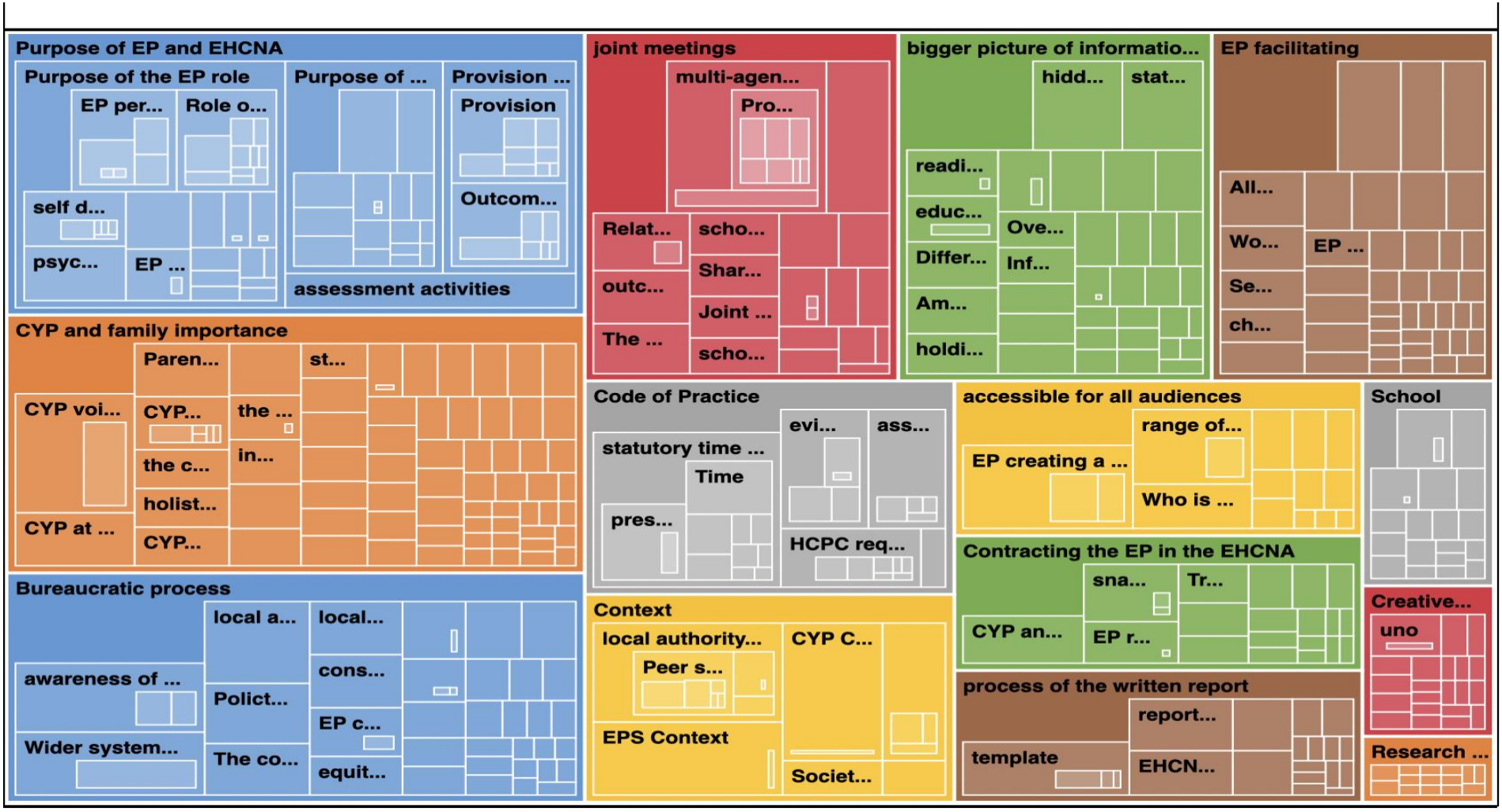
how the EP approaches the purpose of the EHCNA	2	3
Idealised view	2	3
Impact of scientist model	2	2
impact of time pressure on what the EP enjoys doing	2	4
importance of social aspects	2	2
importance of the viewpoint	2	3
Importance to see goals and aspirations	2	2
Important principles	2	3
Information sharing	2	2
legislation vs EP wishes for practice	2	2
Liasing with those in the system	2	4
Limited role of the EP	2	2
limits to evidence provided by others	2	2
loss of the childs voice	2	2
meeting or seeing the child	2	3
More nuance	2	3
multiple agendas	2	2
need focused	2	2
Negative narratives	2	6
One Page Profile	2	2
Outcomes linked to change	2	2
Perception of the EP role and remit	2	2
Person centred is important	2	2
Person centred is important and often possible	2	2
Planning next steps	2	2
practice based experiences	2	4
Priority areas for change	2	2
Professional view of the CYP	2	4
Providing CYP opportunities	2	3
provision is quantifiable and able to be implemented	2	2
Purposes of the EHCNA	2	6
Readiness of information	2	2
Reflective outlets for EPs	2	2
Resources	2	7
role of the EP to move strategy to provision	2	3
school interventions	2	2
school involving multiple professionals	2	2
school narrative around family	2	2
school offering perspectives	2	2
school understanding process	2	4
Science underpinning of psychology	2	2
Self deprecating the value of the EP	2	3
system processes	2	4
systems not set up for family needs e.g. literacy difficulties	2	3
Tension	2	5
the role of the father	2	6
theory vs practice	2	2
time at school a bariier vs time at home means more flexibility	2	2
time pressure on schools	2	6
To know the process for EPs	2	2
uncertainty in the profession	2	3
Use of ambigious language	2	3
Voice of the EP	2	2
Whos priority is it	2	3
Workload pressures	2	2
16 word memory	1	1
Absence of psychology from statutory	1	1
Absence of reflection towards the EHCNA process	1	1
achievable for the school	1	3
adaptability within the templates and processes	1	2
Agenda	1	1
Alternative methods	1	1
Aspects of success	1	1
Assessment to provide an answer	1	1
attainment levels	1	1
Awareness of the guidance	1	1
balance of information shared and stating the needs	1	1
barrier CYP does not know what works for them	1	1
Barriers to shared outcomes	1	3
being a local authority professional	1	1
Belief that someone has the answer	1	1
Blob tree	1	1
changes in the role of the EP	1	1
changes to models of delivery	1	1
changing family makeup	1	1
clear about the EPs view and what it means for the CYP	1	1
Closure from the process	1	1
collaboration as a positive	1	1
commonality in EP practice	1	1
communication between EPS and families	1	1
Complexity of holding perspectives	1	1
confidence level	1	1
conflict in systems	1	1
Considering the influences on the CYP	1	1
contension	1	1
cultural view of education	1	2
CYP ability to meet EP tasks or assessment tools	1	1
CYP and families priorities	1	1
CYP consent	1	1
CYP family views of support vs it being a need to appear in the plan	1	1
CYP lived experience	1	1
CYP opportunity	1	2
CYP to identify and name what works	1	1
CYP understanding	1	1
CYP vs Family	1	1
Delicate balance of representing CYP views and the extent to the detail shared	1	1

Demotivated	1	1
deskilled feeling from the EP	1	1
diagnosis and what the means to a young person	1	1
Difference in professions	1	1
Difference of task seen in EHCNAs	1	1
Difficulties and needs for families	1	1
Direct work with CYP	1	2
Distrubtive justice	1	1
Dobble	1	1
Doing what has already been done before	1	1
doubt around application	1	1
Drawing activites	1	1
Education legislation	1	1
EP aligns provision across their previous involvements	1	1
EP decision	1	1
EP doesn't have their own understanding of the child	1	1
EP ensuring families understand	1	2
EP expressing school views in a sensitive way	1	1
EP focusing on the CYP	1	1
EP holding ownership	1	1
EP internal conflict	1	1
EP juggling the multiple demands	1	1
EP not providing anything new	1	1
EP offering alternatives	1	1
EP perception of schools	1	2
EP personal feelings towards a family impacting how the advice is written	1	1
EP plugging a gap in the system	1	1
EP providing information school are unable to provide	1	1
EP providing school with opportunities to reflect	1	1
EP providing schools with a level of autonomy	1	1
EP role in evidence and further understanding	1	1
EP role in inviting members of staff and highlighting this	1	1
EP to play an active role in supporting schools in implementation	1	1
EP understanding	1	1
EP using awareness of school systems of support	1	1
EP view of the EHCNA process	1	1
EP wanting to support vulnerable families	1	1
EPs perspective should be heard	1	2
EPS processes	1	1
Ethical Practice	1	1
Exceptions to the rule	1	2
Expectations on the CYP	1	2
expertise	1	1
Familiarity in practice for EPs in EHCNAs	1	1
families frustrations in repeating	1	1
Family are not in the country	1	1
family as expert	1	1
family consent	1	2
family perception of professionals	1	1
family previous professional involvement	1	1
family understanding of the CYP while being on waiting lists	1	1
Fitting a certain box	1	1
Frequency of EHCNAs	1	1
golden thread	1	1
Guidelines and procedures are absent	1	1
Hesitancy in short term change	1	1
Hidden knowledge	1	3
highlighting intervention and needs	1	1
Hopelessness	1	1
Ice breakers	1	1
ideal school	1	1
ideological differences	1	1
Impact of a standardised format	1	1
Impact of understanding	1	1
impact on EP and feelings around professional ability	1	1
importance of conversations	1	1
Importance of listening	1	3
importance of professional guidelines	1	1
Importance of psychology in other functions of the EP role	1	1
important information vs the activity at hand	1	1
Important research	1	1
Important to hear the EP voice	1	2
inaccessible processes	1	2
Individuality of EP practice	1	1
individuals needs and provision is the focus of the assessment	1	2
information provided	1	2
Key part of the role	1	1
lack of EP involvement long term	1	1
Laptop impact	1	1
legislation	1	1
Limited awareness of support offered	1	1
Limited nature of the EHCNA	1	1
Limits or expectations posed by others	1	1
Listening and understanding	1	1
Looking towards another professional to support	1	1
loss of person centred	1	1
making an EHCNA come alive	1	1
meeting face to face	1	1
missing needs not highlighted for CYP	1	1
models of practice	1	1
More done by others in the system	1	1
more than just form filling	1	1
moving forwards and actions to meet principles	1	1
Needs are never separate	1	1
no consistency in the advice between EPs	1	1
Non judgemental role of the EP	1	1

Not able to share verbally	1	1
obtaining views does not happen easily	1	1
Opportunities for all stakeholders to be heard	1	1
Parental confidence	1	2
parental engagement is limited	1	1
PATH	1	2
Peer support	1	1
Persistence	1	1
Person centred planning	1	1
person centred value	1	1
Personalised letter	1	2
Physical and sensory needs	1	1
Positives from the process for CYP	1	1
Practicalitites in engaging the family	1	1
Practicing to the best of ability rather than being pressured by time frames	1	1
Presenting the best aspect of practice	1	1
Previous experience	1	1
Principle Transparent	1	1
prior relationships with family	1	1
Professional registrations HCPC BPS AEP	1	1
professional vulnerability	1	1
provision to meet needs	1	1
Questionning around the research	1	1
relational aspects important for information gathering	1	1
Research informed provision	1	5
safeguarding aspects	1	1
school and EP perspective align	1	1
school perspective is different to CYP views	1	1
school pressure to support CYP with SEN	1	1
school view as needs	1	4
school view the EP	1	1
school wellbeing cards	1	1
Schools difficulty in accessing an EP	1	1
Sense of safety	1	1
sentence completion	1	2
sentence starter cards	1	1
Shared understanding of the systems	1	1
Sharing information	1	1
sharing the purpose of the role	1	1
sharing views	1	2
signposting where information is gathered	1	1
SMART targets	1	1
Space to reflect as a professional	1	1
Specific purpose	1	1
staffing levels	1	1
Stuck in the system	1	1
subjectivity of the needs	1	1
summer holidays	1	1
Support available in the EPS	1	1
support for family	1	2
supporting schools within the process	1	1
Talking Map	1	1
The importance of the EP in the EHCNA	1	2
The multiple layers of professional practice, legislation and guidelines EPs work within	1	1
the opposing system vs the CYP	1	1
The plan should represent the young persons needs across contexts	1	2
the whole context and understanding around a CYP is limited	1	1
the work of the school prior to an EHCNA request	1	1
tokenistic	1	1
traded time	1	1
traingulation	1	2
Training to central the child	1	2
translation	1	1
tribunal processes	1	1
True essence of the value	1	1
Trust	1	1
Trusting others have the answer	1	1
understanding of the impact of multiple aspects on CYP	1	2
understanding support offered	1	1
understanding the CYPs journey and experiences	1	1
Unique contribution of the EP	1	1
uno	1	1
Unspoken aspects	1	1
Unspoken doubt or hesistancy	1	3
use of EP time	1	1
use of locums	3	1
Use of others to help communicate	1	1
use of virtual assessments	1	2
Using familiarity to support CYP enagagement	1	1
values of the EP	1	1
Various guidance that EPs need to follow	1	1
viewpoints	1	1
visual cocreted	1	1
what change will look like	1	1
what the process could look like	1	1
who are the needs important to	1	1
who do the needs impact	1	1
Who's voice holds weight	1	1
Wide scope of the EP	1	1

Appendix K

NVivo Candidate Theme Image



Appendix L

Cluster Code Map on Word RTA Phase 4

Cluster 1: Facilitation of the Educational Psychologist	Cluster 2: Wider context and system	Cluster 3: What the EP does with the information	Cluster 4: Liaising	Cluster 5: Audiences	Cluster 6: CYP and family	Cluster 7: Supporting understanding	Cluster 8: Role of the EP and EHCNA

EP facilitating Facilitation of the EP Facilitator role of the EP EP asking the right questions Facilitation of communication in their own circles Punctuation point Changes in narrative changes in perceptions Allowing families to be heard Working relationship Obtaining views doesn't happen easily	Bureaucratic Process Awareness of wider panel and processes Panels and processes Working with the wider system Local authority as the audience Political external wider system The commissioner is the audience Constraints and expectations on the system	Bigger picture of information gathered Hidden dialogue and formulation for the EP Stating sources of information gathered Holding multiple perspectives and viewpoints Different perspectives Reading information Considering the influences on the CYP	Joint meetings Role of adults in the system Joint understanding between parents and school Multi agency working Multi agency working to have equal weighting Professionals Case work officers Teaching assistants Health services role SENCo	Accessible for all audiences Range of audiences Family as the audience A report that follows a CYP EP bringing together aspects to make it accessible and understanding EP role in sharing Ep creating a picture of the CYP Ep having an understanding about the CYP	CYP and family importance Parental voice CYP voice CYP views CYP at the centre Parental and family perspective Accessibility of the process of the CYP CYP active role Holistic whole view of the child The context of the child's needs EHCNA in support CYP aspirations and long	Contracting the EP in the EHCNA CYP and families understanding processes Snapshot role of the EP EP being unknown to CYP and family Prior relationships with family EP role in facilitating understanding of the EHCNA process – Shared understanding of the systems Transparency and explanation	Purpose of the EP role Psychological role of the EP Statutory role of the EP EP to highlight strengths Importance to see goals and aspirations EP perspective vs family perspective Level of knowledge and expertise of the EP EP perspective EP knowledge EP experience and reflections EP reflections Commonality in values of an EP

Allowing families to be heard Creative methods Working relationship Secure place Changes in narrative Creativity Negative narratives Relationship Building EP opening and welcoming feedback and questions Assessment as a facilitator of change Changes in perceptions	Local authority expectations placed on the EP The audience trumps CYP Tribunal processes Resources Equity in the processes Equity for children across the local authority Subjectivity of needs Resources EP conflict of strengths based vs what is needed Balancing act	Information already available Everything is information Bringing together the information Understanding of the impact of multiple aspects on CYP EP as expert Information gathering Psychological formulation XXXXX brings together all elements	Advisory teachers – difference in professions Limits or expectations posed by others Physical and sensory needs Outcomes meeting Relationships between home and school Relationship between home and school The importance of adults available to provide the view	EP values strengths based and successes of CYP Who's voice holds weight Who do the needs impact Who are the needs important to Who is the audience EP bringing together aspects to make it accessibke and understanding Giving psychology away EP role in sharing	term gaols and outcomes Individualisation of provision CYP expertise The role of the father – changing makeup of family Focus of the CYP and their family Strengths based to support access to education Agency of the CYP to identify their change CYP informing provision CYP interests	Everyone aware of the process School understanding process Clear expectations Daughting nature of meeting an EP Unspoken doubt or hesitstancy EP individual practice Expectations on the CYP Information sharing To know the process for EPs Communication between EPs and families	Self-depricating the knowledge of the EP Self-depricating the value of the EP Uncertainity in the profession Deskilled feeling from the EP Impact on EP and feelings around professional ability Presenting the best aspects of practice Professional vulnerability Role of the EP Advocating the support for CYP EP flexibility in the role Role of the EP to move strategy to provision

Exceptions to the narrative External role of the EP Imporance of listening Beliefs around change EP joining systems EP offering reflection Exceptions to the rule Information provided Planning next steps Conflict in systems EP not providing anything new EP offering alternatives	Wider system pressures Impact of wider system pressures The lack of support from multiagency services Assessment of needs Deficit base impact on CYP and family System processes EP understanding while of waiting list Funding processes Multiple demands Systems not set up for family needs e.g. literacy difficulties	EP task of collating all the information Triangykation Voice of adults Background information Assumptions around EP practice Hidden knowledge Observations as opportunity to liaise with staff Psychological hypothesis Actively gathering Becoming the EPs information	Joint understanding between parents and schools School key part in the EHCNA process -School Time pressure on schools Teacher knowledge and expertise Impact of prior relationships with school School view as needs – Expertise School perspective is readily more easily	Explaining abbreviations Explaining terminology Inaccessibke understanding or jargon Who's priority is it	CYP participation CYP providing information on what works for them Direct involvement Hearing the voice Adults decision making on behalf of a child – EP doesn't have their own understanding of the child Context of the CYP and family influencing provision provided CYP attending family and school meetings CYP feel heard Demands of keeping the family at the centre	EP view of the EHCNA process Fitting a certain box Individuality of EP practice Sharing the purpose of the role Understanding support offer Family experience of the systems Being a local authority professional families' frustrations in repeating family perception of professionals	Achievable in the EP role EP role in evidence and further understanding Missing needs not highlighted for CYP Models of practice Safeguarding aspects EP beliefs around technology Laptop impact EP length of time in career informs preferences More nuance – more done by others in the system Acknowledgement that EPs can't know it all Limited role of the EP

EP providing school with opportunities to reflect EP to play an active role in supporting schools in implementation Ep wanting to support vulnerable families Ideological differences Importance of conversations Listening and understanding More than just form filling Non-judgmental role of the EP	Children that are missing Translation Conflict between the EP view of the role vs higher systems EP vs the system Inaccessible processes Loss of the child's voice Multiple agendas Contention Demotived Distributive practice EP plugging a gap in the system	Education setting role Educational context is important Importance of social aspects Limits to evidence provided by others Needs focused Readiness of information The importance of the EP in the EHCNA Importance of social aspects The whole context and understanding	EP perception of schools Holding schools accountable School interventions School involving multiple professionals School narrative around family School offering perspectives Looking towards another professional to support School and EP perspective align		Gathering and collating the information with views of the CYP Giving CYP a voice Importance of the viewpoint Meeting or seeing the child Outcomes linked to aspirations for CYP and family Providing CYP opportunities Providing families with time and space Rapport building Reporting CYP views Shared strengths	Family previous professional involvement Family understanding of the CYP while being on waiting lists	Perception of the EP role and remit EP aligns provision across their previous involvements EP internal conflict Unique contribution of the EP Purpose of an EHCNA EHCNA more than a report Different purposes of the EHCNA Purpose of the EHCNA Expectations on the purpose of the assessment Tension EHCNA focus on needs and challenges

Not ale to share verbally Obtaining views does not happen easily Persistence Relational aspects important for information gathering Sense of safety Trust What change will look like	Hopelessness Loss of person centred No consistency in the advice between EPs The opposing system vs the CYO Tribunal processes **Process of the written report** Report writing EHCNA report Template Making the EHCNA more concise	around a CYP is limited The plan should represent the YP needs across contexts Understanding the impact of multiple aspects on CYP Clear about the EPs view and what it means for the CYP Complexity holding perspectives EP role in inviting members of staff and highlighting this Principle Transparent	School perspective is different to CYP views School pressure to support CYP with SEN School views the EP Schools' difficulty in accessing an EP Stuck in the system The work of the school prior to an EHCNA request Shared understanding Needs reported by other professionals		Central aspect CYP ability CYP unable to share EP advocating parental voice EP ensuring families understand EP knowledge of the CYP Parental confidence Person centred is important and often possible Sharing views Support for family Barrier CYP does not know what works for them		How the EP approaches the purpose of the EHCNA Idealised view – supporting schools within the process – what the process could look like Role of the EHCNA EHCNA process something that works Individuals needs and provision is the focus of the assessment Assessment to provide an answer Difference of task seen in the EHCNAs Important information vs the activitiy at hand Limited nature of the EHCNA

	focused and less repetitive Adaptability within the templates and processes Provision to meet needs m Clarity surrounding needs. Importance of language Use of ambiguous language Written person centred Balance of information shared and stating the needs		School information submitted School time provided Liaising with those in the system Prioritisation of the adults Professional view of the CYP – Use of EP time – Viewpoints Bringing all the adults together Collaboration between systems Family school dynamic		CYP and families' priorities CYP understanding CYP vs family Delicate balance of representing CYP views and the extent to the detail shared Diagnosis and what the means to a young person Difficulties and needs for families EP focusing on the CYP Family as expert Opportunities for all stakeholders to be heard		Assessment activities – observation as a key to understanding the child – assessment tools and standardised measure – EP using assessment tools that worked previously – attainment levels – CYP ability to meet EP tasks or assessment tools – meeting face to face Provision and Outcomes Outcomes – shared outcomes – barriers to shared outcomes – agreed outcomes explored – outcomes linked to change – priority areas for change – hesitancy in short term change – SMART targets

	EP expressing school views in a sensitive way EP holding ownership EP personal feelings towards a family impacting how the advice is written EPS processes Golden thread Highlighting intervention and needs Impact of standardised form Making an EHCNA come alive		Collaboration as a positive Use of others to help communicate School perspectives School information submitted		Parental engagement is limited Positives from the process for CYP Practicalities in engaging the family Sharing information Signposting where information is gathered Understanding the CYPs journey and experiences Using familiarity to support CYP engagement Values of the EP		Provision

	Moving forwards and actions to meet principles						

Resources/Creative Methods:

Resources
16 word memory test
Blob tree
Card sort
Dobble
Drawing activities
Drawing and writing outcomes
Games
Ice breakers
Ideal school
PATH

Person centred planning

Talking Map

One page profile

Sentence starter cards

Sentence completion

School wellbeing cards

UNO

Appendix M

Colour Coded Potential Themes Phase 4

Cluster 1: Facilitation of the Educational Psychologist to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes	Cluster 2: Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics	Cluster 3: From information to insight: The EP's approach to support holistic understanding	Cluster 4: Collaboration and Relationships with the EHCNA process	Cluster 5: Accessibility and Communication	Cluster 6: CYP and family	Cluster 7: Contracting the Educational Psychologist in the process during the EHCNA	Cluster 8: The Role and Professional Identity of the EP

Facilitating	**Bureaucracy and Systemic Constraints**	**Gathering and collating information**	**Collaboration between systems and professionals**	**Clarity and Jargon-Free communication**	**Amplifying voices and Building Relationships**	**Building Relationships and Transparency**	**Core values and professional identity of the EP**
EP facilitating	Bureaucratic Process	Reading information	Joint meetings	Explaining abbreviations	Allowing families to be heard	EP ensuring families understand	Values of the EP
Facilitation of the EP	Awareness of wider panel and processes	Information already available	Multi agency working	Explaining terminology	CYP and family importance	CYP and families understanding processes	Purpose of the EP role
Facilitator role of the EP	Panels and processes	Everything is information	Outcomes meeting	Inaccessible understanding or jargon	Parental voice	Prior relationships with family	Psychological role of the EP
EP asking the right questions	Tribunal processes	Bringing together the information	Multi agency working to have equal weighting	**Tailoring Communication to Diverse Audiences**	Parental and family perspective	EP role in facilitating understanding of the EHCNA	Statutory role of the EP
Information provided	Funding processes	Information gathering	Professionals		CYP active role		EP to highlight strengths
Facilitation of communication in their own circles	Constraints and expectations on the system		Health services role		Importance of the viewpoint		Importance to see goals and aspirations
Obtaining views doesn't happen easily	Local authority expectations placed on the EP						EP reflections
	Inaccessible processes						
	Systems not set up for family needs e.g. literacy difficulties						

EP providing school with opportunities to reflect EP to play an active role in supporting schools in implementation EP not providing anything new Planning next steps Not able to share verbally Obtaining views does not happen easily	- Translation The opposing system vs the CYP Demands of keeping the family at the centre More nuance – more done by others in the system **Power dynamics and stakeholder influence** Political external wider system Local authority as the audience	Actively gathering Becoming the EPs information EP task of collating all the information Readiness of information **Formulation and Analysis**	Advisory teachers – difference in professions Bringing all the adults together Collaboration between systems Collaboration as a positive Shared understanding **School as a Key player in**	Accessible for all audiences Range of audiences Family as the audience Who is the audience **Bridging understanding across stakeholders** A report that follows a CYP EP bringing together aspects	Providing families with time and space EP advocating parental voice Parental confidence Reporting CYP views Shared strengths Support for family CYP and families' priorities	process – Shared understanding of the systems Transparency and explanation Everyone aware of the process School understanding process Clear expectations Sharing the purpose of the role	Commonality in values of an EP Unique contribution of the EP Models of practice Safeguarding aspects EP beliefs around technology Laptop impact Acknowledgement that EPs can't know it all **Knowledge, expertise and**

Using familiarity to support CYP engagement Use of others to help communicate EP role in inviting members of staff and highlighting this **Changes in narratives** Punctuation point Changes in narrative	The commissioner is the audience The audience trumps CYP Conflict between the EP view of the role vs higher systems EP vs the system Multiple agendas Contention Adults' decision making on behalf of a child – EP doesn't have their own understanding of the child Opportunities for all stakeholders to be heard Whose voice holds weight	Hidden dialogue and formulation for the EP EP as expert Psychological formulation XXXXX brings together all elements Triangulation Hidden knowledge Psychological hypothesis Limits to evidence	**the EHCNA process** Relationships between home and school Relationship between home and school School key part in the EHCNA process -School Time pressure on schools	to make it accessible and understanding EP role in sharing Giving psychology away	CYP understanding Family as expert Assessment activities – observation as a key to understanding the child meeting face to face Advocating the support for CYP Ep creating a picture of the CYP	Understanding support offer **EP specific practices and professional role** Contracting the EP in the EHCNA Snapshot role of the EP EP individual practice Expectations on the CYP	**professional challenge** Level of knowledge and expertise of the EP EP perspective EP knowledge EP experience and reflections Presenting the best aspects of practice Role of the EP EP flexibility in the role

changes in perceptions Changes in narrative Negative narratives Changes in perceptions Exceptions to the narrative Beliefs around change Exceptions to the rule EP offering alternatives	Who do the needs impact Who are the needs important to Whose priority is it **Equity Accessibility and the Child's voice** Equity in the processes Equity for children across the local authority Subjectivity of needs	provided by others The importance of the EP in the EHCNA Clear about the EPs view and what it means for the CYP Principle Transparent **Contextual and relational understanding**	Teacher knowledge and expertise Impact of prior relationships with school School view as needs – Expertise School perspective is readily more easily EP perception of schools Holding schools accountable		Ep having an understanding about the CYP **Centring the Child in the Process** CYP voice CYP views CYP at the centre Holistic whole view of the child	Information sharing To know the process for EPs Communication between EPs and families EP view of the EHCNA process Fitting a certain box Individuality of EP practice	Role of the EP to move strategy to provision Achievable in the EP role EP role in evidence and further understanding EP length of time in career informs preferences Limited role of the EP Perception of the EP role and remit EP aligns provision across their

EP wanting to support vulnerable families Ideological differences What change will look like Assessment as a facilitator of change EHCNA more than a report Strengths based to support access to education Positives from the process for CYP	Children that are missing Loss of the child's voice Deficit base impact on CYP and family Needs focused Assessment of needs Delicate balance of representing CYP views and the extent to the detail shared Missing needs not highlighted for CYP Accessibility of the process of the CYP	Considering the influences on the CYP Holding multiple perspectives and viewpoints Different perspectives Understanding of the impact of multiple aspects on CYP Bigger picture of information gathered	School interventions School involving multiple professionals School narrative around family School offering perspectives SENCo Teaching assistants Joint understanding between parents and schools		The context of the child's needs EHCNA in support CYP aspirations and long-term goals and outcomes Focus of the CYP and their family Agency of the CYP to identify their change CYP informing provision CYP interests	**Challenges in the processes for families** Family experience of the systems Being a local authority professional families' frustrations in repeating family perception of professionals Family previous professional involvement	previous involvements **The role of the EP in the EHCNA process** Purpose of an EHCNA Different purposes of the EHCNA Purpose of the EHCNA Expectations on the purpose of the assessment Tension

EP values strengths based and successes of CYP **Relational Aspects / Systems** Working relationship	**Professional Tensions and Systemic Pressures** Working with the wider system Resources EP conflict of strengths-based vs what is needed Important information vs the activity at hand Balancing act Wider system pressures Impact of wider system pressures The lack of support from multiagency services System processes	Complexity holding perspectives Observations as opportunity to liaise with staff Voice of adults Education setting role Educational context is important Importance of social aspects The whole context and understanding	School and EP perspective align School perspective is different to CYP views School pressure to support CYP with SEN School views the EP Schools' difficulty in accessing an EP The work of the school prior to		CYP participation CYP providing information on what works for them Direct involvement Hearing the voice CYP expertise CYP attending family and school meetings CYP feel heard Gathering and collating the	Family understanding of the CYP while being on waiting lists EP being unknown to CYP and family Daunting nature of meeting an EP Unspoken doubt or hesitancy	EHCNA focus on needs and challenges How the EP approaches the purpose of the EHCNA Idealised view – supporting schools within the process – what the process could look like Role of the EHCNA EHCNA process something that works

Relational aspects important for information gathering Working relationship Secure place Relationship Building External role of the EP EP joining systems Conflict in systems Looking towards another	EP understanding while of waiting list Multiple demands Demotived Distributive practice EP plugging a gap in the system Hopelessness Loss of person centred No consistency in the advice between EPs Self-deprecating the knowledge of the EP Self-deprecating the value of the EP	around a CYP is limited The plan should represent the YP needs across contexts Importance of social aspects	an EHCNA request School information submitted School time provided School perspectives School information submitted **Challenges in professional roles and expectations**		information with views of the CYP Giving CYP a voice Meeting or seeing the child Providing CYP opportunities Central aspect CYP ability CYP unable to share EP knowledge of the CYP		Individuals' needs and provision is the focus of the assessment Assessment to provide an answer Difference of task seen in the EHCNAs Limited nature of the EHCNA assessment tools and standardised measure – EP using assessment tools that worked previously – attainment levels – CYP ability to meet

professional to support Stuck in the system Rapport building **Listening, understanding and reflection** Sense of safety Trust Non-judgmental role of the EP Persistence	Uncertainty in the profession Deskilled feeling from the EP Impact on EP and feelings around professional ability Professional vulnerability EP internal conflict **Process of the written report** Report writing EHCNA report Template		Case work officers Family school dynamic Role of adults in the system Joint understanding between parents and school Professional view of the CYP – Use of EP time – Viewpoints		Person centred is important and often possible Sharing views Understanding the CYPs journey and experiences EP focusing on the CYP **Challenges and Barriers to Engagement** The role of the father –		EP tasks or assessment tools

Importance of conversations Listening and understanding EP offering reflection Importance of listening EP opening and welcoming feedback and questions More than just form filling	Making the EHCNA more concise focused and less repetitive Adaptability within the templates and processes Provision to meet needs m Clarity surrounding needs. Importance of language Use of ambiguous language Written person centred Balance of information shared and stating the needs EP expressing school views in a sensitive way EP holding ownership		Needs reported by other professionals Liaising with those in the system Prioritisation of the adults Physical and sensory needs Limits or expectations posed by others The importance of the adult available to provide the view		changing makeup of family Barrier CYP does not know what works for them CYP vs family Parental engagement is limited Practicalities in engaging the family EP perspective vs family perspective		

Supporting change through assessment Provision and Outcomes Outcomes – shared outcomes – barriers to shared outcomes – agreed outcomes explored – outcomes linked to change – priority areas for change – hesitancy in short term change – SMART targets	Ep personal feelings towards a family impacting how the advice is written EPS processes Golden thread Diagnosis and what the means to a young person Highlighting intervention and needs Impact of standardised form Making an EHCNA come alive Moving forwards and actions to meet principles Signposting where information is gathered						

Outcomes linked to aspirations for CYP and family Individualisation of provision Context of the CYP and family influencing provision provided Creativity Creative methods	Difficulties and needs for families Sharing information Stating sources of information gathered Assumptions around EP practice						

Appendix N

Edited Colour Coded Potential Themes Phase 4

Cluster 1: Facilitation of the Educational Psychologist to apply principles and to support the EHCNA processes	**Cluster 2: Navigating the complexities of systemic structures and dynamics**	**Cluster 3: From information to insight: The EP's approach to support holistic understanding**	**Cluster 4: Collaboration and Relationships with the EHCNA process**	**Cluster 5: Accessibility and Communication**	**Cluster 6: CYP and family**	**Cluster 7: Contracting the Educational Psychologist in the process during the EHCNA**	**Cluster 8: The Role and Professional Identity of the EP**	**Cluster 9: Outcomes**
Facilitating EP facilitating Facilitation of the EP	**Bureaucracy and Systemic Constraints**	**Gathering and collating information**	**Collaboration between systems and professionals**	**Clarity and Jargon-Free communication**	**Amplifying voices and Building Relationships**	**Building Relationships and Transparency**	**Core values and professional identity of the EP** Values of the EP	Provision and Outcomes Outcomes – shared outcomes –

Facilitator role of the EP EP asking the right questions Information provided Facilitation of communication in their own circles Obtaining views doesn't happen easily EP providing school with opportunities to reflect	Bureaucratic Process Awareness of wider panel and processes Panels and processes Tribunal processes Funding processes Constraints and expectations on the system Local authority expectations placed on the EP	Reading information Information already available Everything is information Bringing together the information Information gathering Actively gathering Becoming the EPs information	Joint meetings Multi agency working Outcomes meeting Multi agency working to have equal weighting Professionals Health services role Advisory teachers – difference in professions	Explaining abbreviations Explaining terminology Inaccessible understanding or jargon **Tailoring Communication to Diverse Audiences** Accessible for all audiences Range of audiences	Allowing families to be heard CYP and family importance Parental voice Parental and family perspective CYP active role Importance of the viewpoint Providing families with	EP ensuring families understand CYP and families understanding processes Prior relationships with family EP role in facilitating understanding of the EHCNA process – Shared understanding of the systems	Purpose of the EP role Psychological role of the EP Statutory role of the EP EP to highlight strengths Importance to see goals and aspirations EP reflections Commonality in values of an EP	barriers to shared outcomes – agreed outcomes explored – outcomes linked to change – priority areas for change – hesitancy in short term change – SMART targets Outcomes linked to aspirations for CYP and family

EP to play an active role in supporting schools in implementation EP not providing anything new Planning next steps Not able to share verbally Obtaining views does not happen easily Using familiarity to support CYP engagement	The opposing system vs the CYP Demands of keeping the family at the centre More nuance – more done by others in the system **Power dynamics and stakeholder influence**	EP task of collating all the information Readiness of information **Formulation and Analysis** Hidden dialogue and formulation for the EP EP as expert Psychological formulation	Bringing all the adults together Collaboration between systems Collaboration as a positive Shared understanding **School as a Key player in the EHCNA process**	Family as the audience Who is the audience **Bridging understanding across stakeholders** A report that follows a CYP EP bringing together aspects to make it accessible and understanding	time and space EP advocating parental voice Parental confidence Reporting CYP views Shared strengths Support for family CYP and families' priorities	Transparency and explanation Everyone aware of the process School understanding process Clear expectations Sharing the purpose of the role Understanding support offer	Unique contribution of the EP Models of practice Safeguarding aspects EP beliefs around technology Laptop impact Acknowledgement that EPs can't know it all ***All below moved to core values and professional identity as many of the codes only represented***	Individualisation of provision Context of the CYP and family influencing provision provided

Use of others to help communicate EP role in inviting members of staff and highlighting this **Changes in narratives** Punctuation point Changes in narrative	Political external wider system Local authority as the audience The commissioner is the audience The audience trumps CYP Conflict between the EP view of the role vs higher systems EP vs the system Multiple agendas Contention	XXXXX brings together all elements Triangulation Hidden knowledge Psychological hypothesis Limits to evidence provided by others The importance of the EP in the EHCNA Clear about the EPs view and	Relationships between home and school Relationship between home and school School key part in the EHCNA process -School Time pressure on schools Teacher knowledge and expertise	EP role in sharing Giving psychology away	CYP understanding Family as expert Assessment activities – observation as a key to understanding the child meeting face to face Advocating the support for CYP Ep creating a picture of the CYP	**EP specific practices and professional role** Contracting the EP in the EHCNA Snapshot role of the EP EP individual practice Expectations on the CYP Information sharing	***one participants experience and were highlighted better there than within professional challenge*** *Level of knowledge and expertise of the EP* *EP perspective* *EP knowledge* *EP experience and reflections* *Presenting the best aspects of practice*	

changes in perceptions Changes in narrative Negative narratives Changes in perceptions Exceptions to the narrative Beliefs around change Exceptions to the rule EP offering alternatives	Adults' decision making on behalf of a child – EP doesn't have their own understanding of the child Opportunities for all stakeholders to be heard Whose voice holds weight Who do the needs impact Who are the needs important to Whose priority is it	what it means for the CYP Principle Transparent **Contextual and relational understanding** Considering the influences on the CYP Holding multiple perspectives and viewpoints Different perspectives	Impact of prior relationships with school School view as needs – Expertise School perspective is readily more easily EP perception of schools Holding schools accountable School interventions		Ep having an understanding about the CYP **Centring the Child in the Process** CYP voice CYP views CYP at the centre Holistic whole view of the child	To know the process for EPs Communication between EPs and families EP view of the EHCNA process Fitting a certain box Individuality of EP practice **Challenges in the processes for families**	*Role of the EP* *EP flexibility in the role* *Role of the EP to move strategy to provision* *Achievable in the EP role* *EP role in evidence and further understanding* *EP length of time in career informs preferences* *Perception of the EP role and remit*	

EP wanting to support vulnerable families Ideological differences What change will look like Assessment as a facilitator of change EHCNA more than a report Strengths based to support access to education	**Equity Accessibility and the Child's voice** Equity in the processes Equity for children across the local authority Subjectivity of needs Children that are missing	Understanding of the impact of multiple aspects on CYP Bigger picture of information gathered Complexity holding perspectives Observations as opportunity to liaise with staff Voice of adults Education setting role	School involving multiple professionals School narrative around family School offering perspectives SENCo Teaching assistants Joint understanding between parents and schools		The context of the child's needs EHCNA in support CYP aspirations and long-term goals and outcomes Focus of the CYP and their family Agency of the CYP to identify their change CYP informing provision CYP interests	Family experience of the systems Being a local authority professional families' frustrations in repeating family perception of professionals Family previous professional involvement Family understanding of the CYP	*EP aligns provision across their previous involvements* **The role of the EP in the EHCNA process** Purpose of an EHCNA Different purposes of the EHCNA Purpose of the EHCNA Expectations on the purpose of the assessment	

Positives from the process for CYP EP values strengths based and successes of CYP **Relational Aspects / Systems**	Loss of the child's voice Deficit base impact on CYP and family Needs focused Assessment of needs Delicate balance of representing CYP views and the extent to the detail shared Missing needs not highlighted for CYP Accessibility of the process of the CYP	Educational context is important Importance of social aspects The whole context and understanding around a CYP is limited The plan should represent the YP needs across contexts Importance of social aspects	School and EP perspective align School perspective is different to CYP views School pressure to support CYP with SEN School views the EP Schools' difficulty in accessing an EP		CYP participation CYP providing information on what works for them Direct involvement Hearing the voice CYP expertise CYP attending family and school meetings CYP feel heard	while being on waiting lists EP being unknown to CYP and family Daunting nature of meeting an EP Unspoken doubt or hesitancy	Tension EHCNA focus on needs and challenges How the EP approaches the purpose of the EHCNA Idealised view – supporting schools within the process – what the process could look like Role of the EHCNA	

Working relationship Relational aspects important for information gathering Working relationship Secure place Relationship Building External role of the EP EP joining systems	Inaccessible processes Systems not set up for family needs e.g. literacy difficulties - Translation **Professional Tensions and Systemic Pressures** Working with the wider system Resources	**Process of the written report** Report writing EHCNA report Template Making the EHCNA more concise focused and less repetitive Adaptability within the templates and processes	The work of the school prior to an EHCNA request School information submitted School time provided School perspectives School information submitted **Challenges in professional**		Gathering and collating the information with views of the CYP Giving CYP a voice Meeting or seeing the child Providing CYP opportunities Central aspect CYP ability CYP unable to share		EHCNA process something that works Individuals' needs and provision is the focus of the assessment Assessment to provide an answer Difference of task seen in the EHCNAs Limited nature of the EHCNA assessment tools and standardised measure – EP using assessment	

Conflict in systems Looking towards another professional to support Stuck in the system Rapport building **Listening, understanding and reflection**	EP conflict of strengths-based vs what is needed Important information vs the activity at hand Balancing act Wider system pressures Impact of wider system pressures The lack of support from multiagency services System processes	Provision to meet needs m Clarity surrounding needs. Importance of language Use of ambiguous language Written person centred Balance of information shared and stating the needs	**roles and expectations** Case work officers Family school dynamic Role of adults in the system Joint understanding between parents and school Professional view of the CYP – Use of EP time – Viewpoints		EP knowledge of the CYP Person centred is important and often possible Sharing views Understanding the CYPs journey and experiences EP focusing on the CYP **Challenges and Barriers**		tools that worked previously – attainment levels – CYP ability to meet EP tasks or assessment tools Limited role of the EP	

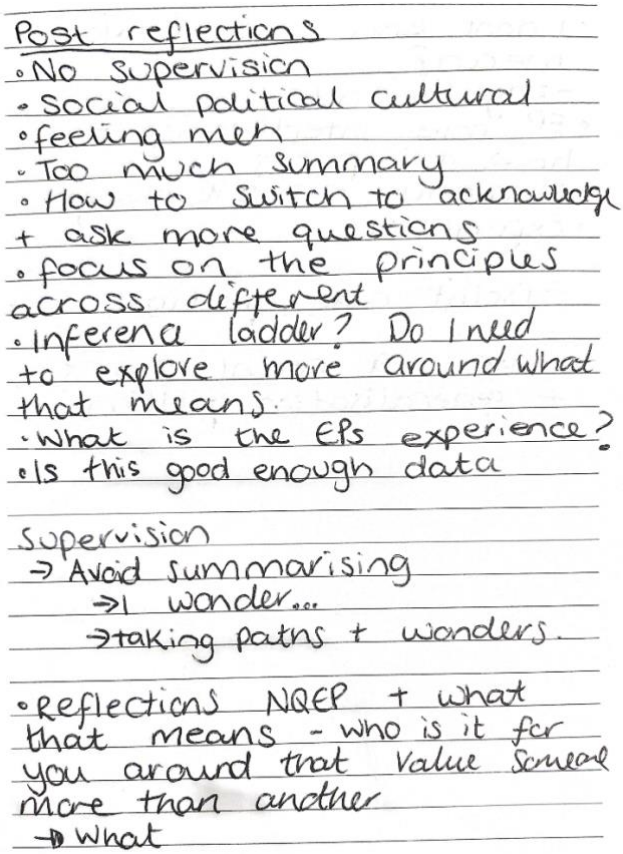
Sense of safety Trust Non-judgmental role of the EP Persistence Importance of conversations Listening and understanding EP offering reflection Importance of listening EP opening and welcoming	EP understanding while of waiting list Multiple demands Demotived Distributive practice EP plugging a gap in the system Hopelessness Loss of person centred No consistency in the advice between EPs Self-deprecating the knowledge of the EP	EP expressing school views in a sensitive way EP holding ownership Ep personal feelings towards a family impacting how the advice is written EPS processes Golden thread Diagnosis and what the means to a young person	Needs reported by other professionals Liaising with those in the system Prioritisation of the adults Physical and sensory needs Limits or expectations posed by others The importance of the adult		**to** **Engagement** The role of the father – changing makeup of family Barrier CYP does not know what works for them CYP vs family Parental engagement is limited Practicalities in engaging the family			

feedback and questions More than just form filling Creativity Creative methods	Self-deprecating the value of the EP Uncertainty in the profession Deskilled feeling from the EP Impact on EP and feelings around professional ability Professional vulnerability EP internal conflict	Highlighting intervention and needs Impact of standardised form Making an EHCNA come alive Moving forwards and actions to meet principles Signposting where information is gathered	available to provide the view		EP perspective vs family perspective			

		Difficulties and needs for families Sharing information Stating sources of information gathered Assumptions around EP practice						

Appendix O

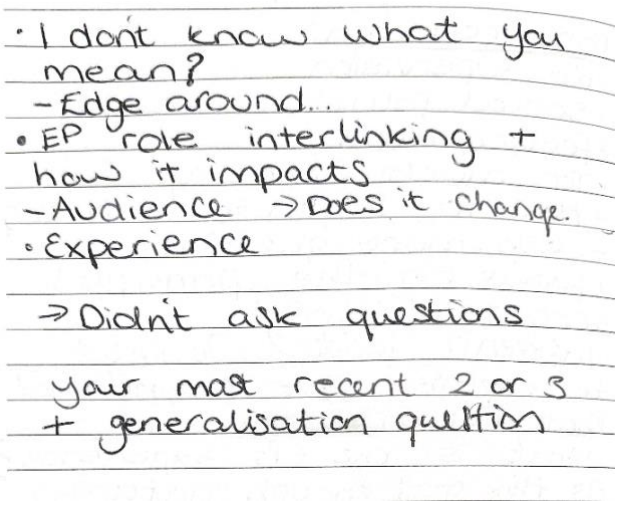
Research Diary: Interview Reflection Supervision



Post reflections
- No supervision
- Social political cultural
- feeling meh
- Too much summary
- How to switch to acknowledge + ask more questions
- focus on the principles across different
- Inferena ladder? Do I need to explore more around what that means.
- What is the EPs experience?
- Is this good enough data

Supervision
→ Avoid summarising
→ I wonder...
→ taking paths + wanders.

- Reflections NQEP + what that means - who is it for you around that value somewhat more than another
→ What



- I dont know what you mean?
- Edge around..
- EP role interlinking + how it impacts
- Audience → Does it change.
- Experience

→ Didnt ask questions

your most recent 2 or 3 + generalisation question

Appendix P

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Consent Form

Title: An exploration of Educational Psychologists' experience of applying guidance principles to their advice for an Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment.

- I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep.
- The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information.
- I understand what it being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.
- I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. Limits to confidentiality for safeguarding or legal reasons have been explained.
- It has been explained to me how long this data will be saved for and what will happen to it after this time.
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time until 3 weeks after their interview without giving a reason.
- I understand my interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- I understand the findings from this research will be written up as part of a thesis and may be published in academic journals relevant to educational psychology.
- I understand my data will be anonymised to reduce the chance of people linking data directly to me, I will be anonymously quoted in the research.

- I understand due to the small number of participants I may recognise my own comments in the research, but the researcher will remove or change details about me that would allow other people to identify me.

This research is being undertaken as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. Please read the attached information sheet before signing this consent form. The researcher will be happy to answer any questions you have.

I hereby freely and fully consent to my participation in the study which has been fully explained to me.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……

Participant's Signature

……

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……

Investigator's Signature

……

Date: ……

Appendix Q

TREC Ethical Approval Confirmation

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Katie Roden

By Email

07 May 2024

Dear Katie,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'An exploration of Educational Psychologists' experience of applying guidance principles to their advice for an Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment.'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Academic Governance and Quality Officer
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix R

Table Showing the Relationship Between Theme, Subthemes, Codes, and Quotes

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Quote
From information to insight: The EP's approach to support holistic understanding	Formulation and analysis	Hidden dialogue and formulation	But when I'm getting to that point, I will have lots of thoughts about. What other people believe about them, which might inform their beliefs about themselves? How urm different agendas are working and how I might have to think about that (as I'm [holds hands towards self] going through that process. And sometimes having in mind, some of those wider questions, so I think I do try to take the information that's given in the request and kind of go through it and pick out what seems to be like the main themes from that. But then I might still ask that question of, oh, this wasn't talked about

XXXXX brings elements together	we deliberately not called it psychological formulation for the reasons I outlined earlier about language and not being like I have a psychological formulation and it means this actually just saying it's a summary really it's pulling it all together we don't explicitly have a psychological formulation which is something that other. Some other local authorities do have. So I guess I might have a psychological formulation in my mind of, yeah, okay, I think attachment needs an attachment. Lens is how I would approach this whole piece of work. And that might come through in my XXXXX
Psychological Formulation	Yes, I can make a clear statement, and I know where the information is the evidence that I've got to make my formulation. But I think sometimes. That succinctness actually takes a lot of effort. thinking contextually about things that are going on and viewing that through a psychological lens to help us to understand what might be happening because I think you've used the words psychological formulation. So we are we are formulating something but ultimately what we're formulating is a hypothesis we can only ever say

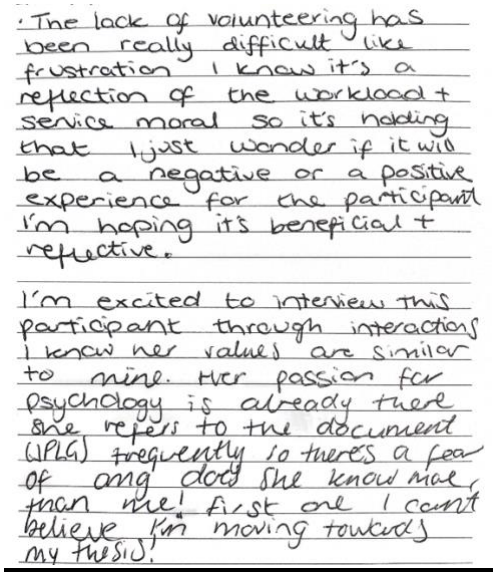
		what it could be, so making sure that that's really clear that this is what we understand could be going on for the young person to help better understand them as a whole
Contextual and relational understanding	Bigger picture of information	What we've seen in our observations, can be evidence. It's what people say in those meetings, it is what the young person tells us. I think yes, those numbers can be useful urm to provide a a clearer picture of of certain needs but actually, evidence looks different, depending on yeah, your viewpoint of it, and I think you can. You can gain evidence and information from lots of different means. So I find speaking to the school staff and parents. Really really helpful and the young person themselves, and observing them, but I think staff often have a really good insight as to what what that, those needs look like day to day. Particularly a lot of the time it's those teaching assistants who are working with the young people quite a lot. Where it is often just a snapshot, you know, morning that we're that we're in school. I will sort of encourage additional information sharing, so particularly for, for example, for early years cases the developmental levels they've often submitted

	you know Bronfenbrenner, like we were fully trained in Bronfenbrenner and looking at all aspects around the child's life
Holding multiple perspectives and viewpoints	Before this EHCNA process thinking, about when writing my psychological advice I, I sort of read the reports from those professionals thought about the things that they had recommended or I guess what I would call hypothesis and what they were wondering about what was going on for the young person where they thought the behaviours were coming from or what the behaviours were trying to communicate I think that balance is the different perspectives. So, trying to hear, from not just using one. Just not just hearing what the teacher thinks of that young person, and you know in that particular environment. It's trying to get a balance of pulling on different strands of evidence to try and provide a balanced view. Think there was some cultural narratives around sort of solutions to that, fixes to that and where that might sit at odds with my own professional view. It's important to reflect that the family's view

Appendix S

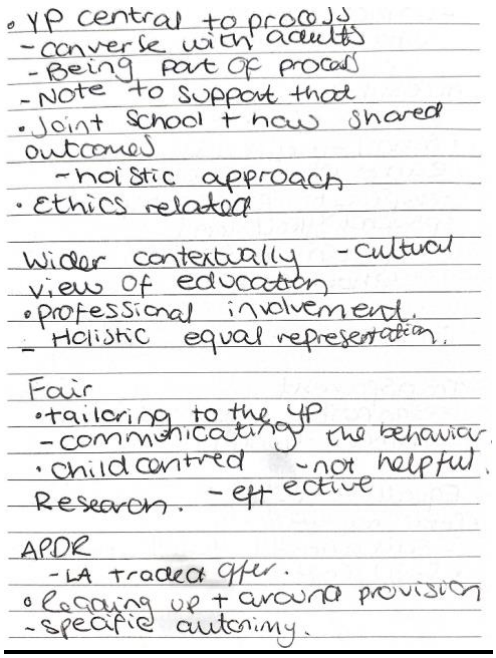
Research Diary: Notes Before, During and After Interviews

Before


• The lack of volunteering has been really difficult like frustration I know it's a reflection of the workload + service moral so it's holding that I just wonder if it will be a negative or a positive experience for the participant I'm hoping it's beneficial + reflective.

I'm excited to interview this participant through interactions I know her values are similar to mine. Her passion for psychology is already there She refers to the document (UPLG) frequently so there's a fear of any does she know more than me! First one I can't believe I'm moving towards my thesis!

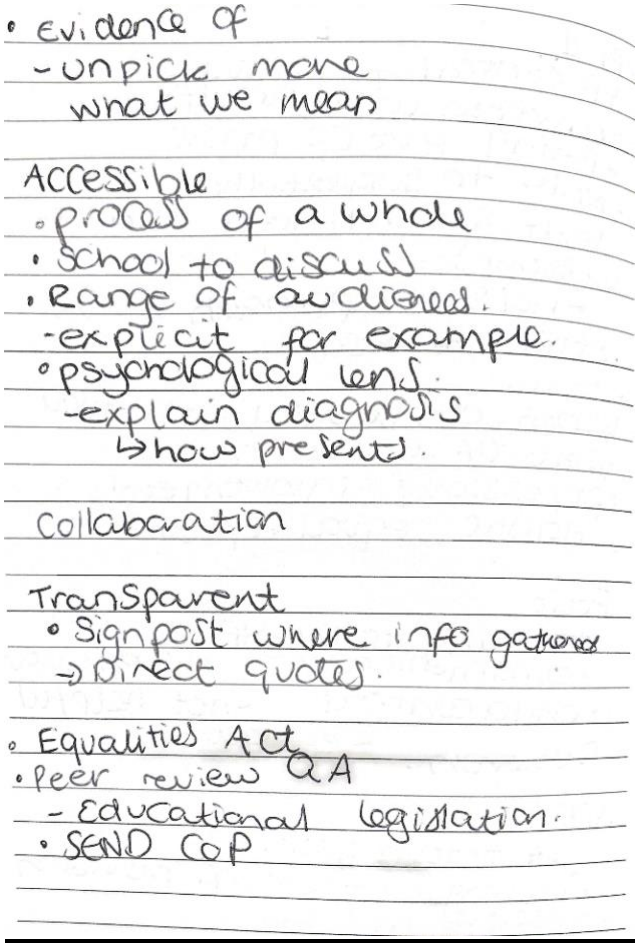
During


• YP central to process
- converse with adults
- Being part of process
- Note to support that
• Joint school + how shared outcomes
- holistic approach
• Ethics related

Wider contextually - cultural view of education
• professional involvement.
- Holistic equal representation.

Fair
• tailoring to the YP
- communicating the behaviour
• child centred - not helpful.
Research. - effective

APDR
- LA traded offer.
• Ongoing up + around provision
- specific autonomy.



Analysis Phase:

Second time listening reflections:

- Thoughts around an unknowing
- Trust that they are completing the principles
- Own links to their thesis topic
- Big part of the EP role
- Psychology behind EHCNAs

Person centred

- Is an achievable principle
- EP as an additional task to the LA
- Alternative means to find voice: through others; help to communicatee; visuals etc.
- Using key adults
- Outcomes and aspiration links
- The change they want to see
- Triangulation of the CYP views and bringing it together
- Helps inform provision
- School not finding what works feeling of stickiness

- Barriers - expressive language and understanding and nervousness
- The splitting between family and school
- Difference of perceptions
- Systems fulfilling the needs of the LA rather than CYP
- Equal weight to those involved
- Purpose of the mind - write educational context
- Contracting and transparency
- Where the information goes if it is a problem at home
- Using supervision to reflect
- Evolve the purpose of an EHCNA
- Evolving and developing views
- Commission is the main audience

Holistic

- Background and four area of need
- Formulation through the process
- Key themes from information submitted
- School environment learning environment
- Context of the schools and not going into link schools
- Including families and other professionals
- MDT - report who has submitted
- Medical needs and the role of the EP in getting into that context
- Barriers - snapshot
- No time
- Gaining a rich picture is hard
- Right questions
- Right information
- Challenging being a person dropping in
- How open can they be?
- Relationship - building rapport
- MDT hard to facilitate
- Timescales and deadlines impacting meeting
- Going to each individual person
- Children on waiting list
- Asking the right questions
- Important psychological information

- Why they were referred what does that look like - when do you see that when do you not see that
- Meeting together with school staff and family

Fair

- Including voice
- Triangulated
- Informed through different means
- Evidence based (multi-layered) informed opinion
- Strengths, views and needs
- Highlighted strengths and when are those exceptional times
- How we write things
- Constrained by how were expected to write in this local authority
- Finite resources
- Provision aware of
- Not to worry about the big picture
- Pay grade
- System constraints
- Focus on that child
- Triangulation and different contexts
- Then grouping into a theme of a need
- Fairness and equity who is getting to see us
- Are schools providing good applications
- Information given to CYP
- Remotely
- Panel and decision-making processes and impact on the child
- Who I'm seeing and not seeing
- Purpose to help the panel
- Holistic picture and making decisions and its all clear to them

Reflective of best practice

- Quite a reflective person
- Wording and changing things continually developing
- Supervision
- Feedback and taking that on
- Peer review process
- Developing practice - why have I don’t that why have they done it like that
- APDR - no reviews within the LA and not within traded

- Ask questions around the impact or schools not done that
- Reviewing strategies through questions
- Not sure if what I have said for that application has it been useful
- No creativity for time in stat process
- Go to what works for YP using dynamic assessment
- Harder to keep up with CPD
- Can't do all of things
- CPD time on advices and information
- All areas within the stat can never be a specialist

Collaboration

- Child voice and parent voice directly
- Facilitation
- Working with school to plan the meeting
- Parental there
- Writing
- Professionals present and the right ones there
- Not case always not always the person with the best knowledge of the CYP
- Private and having those conversations
- Availability and time
- This feels like the most important, so I need to talk to them
- The bigger pragmatic
- Collaboration with school to think about strategies would be a better use of time but because of commissioning its focusing on needs and what the LA wants
- What school and family hope and need out of those processes and collaboration would be
- Time and short space
- Identifying an individual profile for this child
- Greater joined up with SALT or social care
- Work with school why, what would they actually need not funding, or legal accountability will you be able to put those aspects in place
- Should it be in the plan if it's a child's hope but not a special educational need
- Transparency
- Feels possible to do
- Psychological formulation was highlighted and named and being explained in accessible language
- Accessible

- Structure of report is helpful
- Gained additional information that others may have seen
- Who reported is often lost more often is then triangulated
- Where is the line in being who said this
- Template is helpful
- Summarise information
- Psychological formulation is it transparent because were thinking about it or is it a barrier
- Is it naming all the psychology and some things we use without realising
- Accessible
- Using jargon and words that we use
- Psychology always comes through
- Sharing the information and this is interacting with this and that
- Not sharing the formulation within the report
- Sharing enough?
- The system different requests and expectations in each local authority
- Complexity of a human being
- Balance and tension over time
- Sharing everything
- Is that meeting the needs for that young person

Compliance

- COP - principles and working in those ways
- Categories of need
- Could go in different and thinking about COP
- Working in competencies
- HCPC guidance
- Impact of what MH support they need
- Equality Act
- Knowledge and capabilities of the role