

**An Exploration of Young People's Experience
of Transition into Sixth Form**

by

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This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award

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Dedication

For my dad, Dr Malcolm Jones, for being my inspiration and advising me on the importance of never giving up whilst I negotiated my path through academic study. Thank you for being there for me.

For my children, Sophie and James. Thank you for being patient and understanding whilst I have been studying. I know that it has not been easy but you have both been brilliant. Thank you. I hope your own transitions into further education run smoothly, and may all your hopes, dreams and aspirations come true.

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Abstract

Transitions such as the one between primary and secondary education are viewed as having a significant impact, socially, academically and psychologically, however, transition to further education at 16 is an under-researched domain. The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how young people experience their transition into a school-based sixth form as incomers. This was addressed through analysing semi-structured interviews using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and, via this process, super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes were identified. Three emerging super-ordinate themes evolved from the analysis: the importance of social inclusion; intrapersonal factors; and academic demands relating to A Level study. The results from the study were found to be consistent with existing psychological theories and literature. This current study found that social connections were important, as well as the constructs of belonging and identity. It was also found, that in the sixth form, the academic workload and expectations imposed time constraints on extra-curricular activities and part time work, for the participants in the study. The findings of the current study suggest several implications for EP practice and for teachers at school-based sixth forms regarding supporting the transition for incomers, socially, psychologically and academically. Suggestions for further research are included.

List of Abbreviations

A Levels	Advanced Levels
AS Levels	Advanced Subsidiary Levels
BERA	British Education Research Association
BPS	British Psychological Society
CBT	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
CoP	Communities of Practice
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plans
EP	Educational psychologist
EPS	Educational psychology service
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
HE	Higher Education
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IWM	Internal Working Models
KS2	Key Stage 2
KS3	Key Stage 3
KS4	Key Stage 4
KS5	Key Stage 5
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
PSC	Psychological Sense of Community
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RPA	Raising of the Participation Age
SFBT	Solution Focused Brief Therapy
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SoB	Sense of Belonging
UK	United Kingdom
Y12	Year 12
Y13	Year 13

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Chapter 1

1.0

Introduction

1.1 Background

In the United Kingdom (UK) the education system is characterised by major educational shifts or transitions that occur at certain ages and stages as outlined in (Appendix 1).

In the UK, from the age of sixteen years, young people can choose to continue their education at general Further Education (FE) colleges, sixth form colleges or sixth forms attached to secondary schools.

Typically, the formal examinations that are sat in the UK are General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) at the age of 16 years and at end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) and Advanced Level (A Levels) at the age of 18 years and at the end of Key Stage 5 (KS5).

1.2 Transitions in Education

Within the last 60 years, research on the transfer from one stage of education to the next has been interested in the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school, at the age of 11 years (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 1999; Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Spittgerber, 2000). In the last decade, interest has expanded to include the transition from Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE) at the age of 18 years plus (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2005; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Kandiko & Mawer, 2013). However, to date there has been little research conducted on transitions at 16.

1.3 Recent Changes

Although in the UK the school-leaving age remains at 16 years, there is a governmental focus on Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) (as outlined in the Education and Skills Act, 2008) to encourage young people to remain in education, training or apprenticeships and achieve qualifications that will boost their prospects for life. RPA has been introduced in two phases, at the age of 17 years by 2013 and at 18 years by 2015 in England. The quality and duration of young people's educational participation (between the ages of 16-19 years) is particularly important in order to equip them for higher study or employment in a highly competitive labour market, as well as being a key measure of system success.

A study by Hodgson and Spours (2014) found that, in the same year, 92.3% of 16 and 17 years olds remained in education and training in London compared to the national average of 90.3%. The researchers found that strategies to support transition into FE such as taster days, booster sessions, early enrolment and guidance on study skills and course choices helped young people to make a positive transition. The researchers also identified risk factors which caused young people to fail courses or leave FE. These risk factors included: repeating studies, taking fewer than 3 A Levels, attaining low grades, changing courses and a lack of FE tracking of progress and support from FE institutions. Based on the Hodgson and Spours study, it could be argued that a successful or unsuccessful educational transition at 16 years old will make a significant difference to effective and sustained educational participation in academic attainment and future economic well-being. There is some evidence suggesting from the Department of Education (Statistical First Release, April 2016) that the percentage of 19 year olds obtaining level three qualifications (which equates to achievement of two or more A Levels or equivalent vocational qualifications) has risen from 60.0% in 2014 to 60.3% in 2015. There has been little empirical research specifically about the move from Year 11 into FE in the UK. Therefore, the literature pertaining to transfer from primary school to secondary school and from FE to HE, as well as a very small number of recent studies involving transition to FE looking at study skills, greater personal responsibility and social discontinuities from one educational environment to another (Craig, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009; Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2011; Deuker, 2014) informed the researcher's Thesis.

1.4 Relevance to Educational Psychologists

The most recent major review of Educational Psychology as a profession in England and Wales (Farrell et al., 2006) did not describe post school work as a current activity for educational psychologists (EPs) and importantly did not propose it as a future activity either. However, in light of new legislation, EPs are expected to have a greater role and work with young people up to the age of 25.

The Children and Families Act (2014) has extended the age of statutory protection for young people with special educational needs from birth to 25 years from 19 years, replacing Statements of Special Educational Needs with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). In relation to this, this legislation has highlighted the need for local areas

to ensure that young people with special educational needs (SEN) are prepared for adulthood. A chapter on preparing for adulthood is set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2014), which identified four outcomes; paid employment; good health; independent living and community inclusion as aspirations for the 14-25 age range and as a stimulus for improvement in post-16 options (Atkinson Dunsmuir, Lang & Wright, 2015).

Linked to post-16 options is the RPA (as discussed in the previous section). Hayton (2009) described EPs as having the skills to support young people for preparing for transition to further education at post 16 as well as having a significant role in working collaboratively with schools and post school services.

A paper which outlined a developing a competency framework for trainee EPs when working with young people aged 16-25 years old (Atkinson Dunsmuir, Lang & Wright, 2015) highlighted; “To begin with, understanding of the post-16 context incorporates not only knowledge of post-compulsory educational provision, but illustrates the need for EPs to be aware of the socio-political context in which they practise” (p.167). Although the authors have developed the framework for trainee EPs they suggested that it could be used by educational psychology services (EPSs) too. Their section on transitions for the profession offers a helpful insight in to what information EPs need to know and understand to help achieve positive outcomes for young people they are working with and this is highlighted in the following competencies; “Understanding issues that might arise within the context of young people aged 16-25 making transitions between educational and/or vocational institutions, or into employment”(p.169, 6.1a) and for EPs to understand “issues which might arise as a result of other life transitions (e.g. to independent living; parenthood; adulthood)” (p.169, 6.1b). This would suggest that EPs are well placed to incorporate psychological knowledge into transition planning and monitoring e.g., into FE and to support young people in achieving successful outcomes (concerning community inclusion, employment, health and independent living).

As highlighted in the article by Atkinson et al. (2015) life transitions are significant features in a young person’s life. It is helpful to understand what is meant by a transition and how the term is used in an educational context. The next section will look at this in detail.

1.5 Transition

Transition is the term used to explain “the process of changing from one state or condition to another” (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Educationally, the term is used to describe the move from one year to another within a school. Furthermore, cross-institutional transition describes the move from one school/educational environment into another.

Some students will experience problems adjusting to changes in educational environments, particularly at the transition point of Key Stage 2 (KS2) to Key Stage 3 (KS3), from primary to secondary education. Across transitions, changes in relationships with peers, parents and teachers are encountered, as well as a change in academic expectations which might be reflected in a loss of enjoyment, a low sense of belonging and a fall in motivation (Goodenow, 1993a; Sancho & Cline, 2012). It is these transitions that have interested teachers, policy makers and researchers, in order to understand the learning and social difficulties encountered by pupils and how they can be supported at transition points. Transitions are by nature complex and multi-faceted and create uncertainty for individuals (Crafter & Maunder, 2012). Furthermore, Zittoun (2006) described transition as a time of uncertainty which can cause significant rupture socially and academically. However, transition has also been defined as having “a variety of meanings that are not readily captured in a single definition” (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008, p.1). In contrast, the researcher found the following definition to be positive and unique:

“We understand the construct of ‘transition’ not as a moment of change but as the experience of changing, of living the discontinuities between the different contexts...the construct ‘transition’ is, in our understanding, a plural one. Transitions arise from the individual’s need to cope and participate in different contexts, to face different challenges, to take profit from the advantages of the new situation arising from the changes. Transitions include the process of adapting to new social and cultural experiences”. (Gorgorio, Planas & Vilella, 2002, p.24)

Gorgorio et al.’s (2002) construction of transition encapsulates the emphasis of the current study looking at educational transition for 16 year olds who face a number of academic and social changes at this stage in their lives, which can present them with issues and possibilities. Therefore, it is also important to recognise and understand the

perspectives of those who have made the transition at 16 years, to understand the positives as well as the challenges experienced during the transition phase.

1.6 Outline of the Remainder of the Thesis

This Thesis will report a research study on young people who have transitioned into a sixth form from another school to study A Levels, examining their reported academic and social experiences and their reflections on these. The Thesis begins with a literature review in Chapter Two, where selected psychological perspectives that underpin the theme of transition will be presented, followed by research on transitions at different points within the UK educational system, at 11 years, 16 years and 18 years plus (HE) and the consequential challenges that have been identified at each of these transitions. The third chapter will describe the research methodology of the study and will outline the ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher. This section provides details of the participants, the ethical considerations that the study raised and how these were dealt with. The chapter will also outline the procedure followed, including data gathering and analysis. The results of the research, as interpreted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), will be presented in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter provides a discussion of the outcomes of the research. The findings are discussed with reference to the literature review. The limitations of the study will also be identified. In addition, recommendations for additional research on assisting young people with transitions into FE are made. The chapter considers the implications of the research for the role of the EP in future work supporting young people in making the transition to FE (especially into sixth forms) as well as looking at the implications generally for FE educational establishments. Finally, a conclusion reflecting on the current study and its findings is provided in the final chapter.

Chapter 2

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

The literature review begins by identifying the key sources used to conduct the literature search and the areas to be covered. The importance of transition as a psychological concept is considered, along with psychological theories that could be relevant to transition in education. The current literature on educational transitions from primary to secondary school and FE to HE will also be reviewed since these two transitions have been covered in greater depth. Emerging key themes and challenges during transition will be highlighted and a critique of some of the research will be presented. By reviewing the current literature, the researcher will identify areas where the research is lacking and generate the research question to be examined.

2.2 Key Sources

The key sources used to conduct the literature review included a thorough and systematic database search of ERIC, PsychInfo and PsychARTICLES using the library catalogue and the electronic journal resource at Cardiff and Southampton Universities ending in May 2016. The literature on transitions to FE was sparse and the search was widened to include school transitions in the UK from primary to secondary and FE to HE. Search terms included: educational transitions and trajectories, primary, secondary, university, HE, belonging, identity, sixth-form, FE, psychology of community, educational psychology, college students, adjustment, young people, post-school, late adolescence, psycho-social, emerging adulthood and well-being.

However, because the Thesis is primarily concerned with exploring young people's experiences of transition into FE, the researcher will not be discussing some of the following issues (although it is acknowledged that these are key issues within transition). It is not the intention of the researcher to discuss the effects of transition across different types of educational institutions, such as comparing private school sixth forms with state sixth form schools and, likewise, single gender and co-educational sixth forms. Nor will the researcher make comparisons between colleges and/or sixth forms. Furthermore, there is no intention to present research regarding school transition in countries other than the UK, since other countries do not necessarily have educational

transitions at the age of 16 and therefore comparison is difficult, if not impossible. Finally, it is not the researcher's intention to make comparisons between variables such as social class or ethnic minorities.

A thorough literature search was also undertaken in order to find UK policy documentation, legislation and guidance at national level informing the role of EPs, school, FE and university transitions and the increased age of educational participation. Electronic sources, such as the World Wide Web, were also utilised using the same research terms.

2.3 The Psychological Aspects of Transition

According to Stringer and Dunsmuir (2012):

“Transitions are fundamental features of social life and represent periods of change and adaptation. However, change is situational, yet transition is psychological. It involves internalising and adapting to new situations brought about by change, and encompasses shifts in identity and agency” (p.5).

Psychologists have been interested in transitions because of the challenges involved and the potential impact on an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Transition is also a process where there is a necessity to adapt to change which can impact on learning and development (Stringer & Dunsmuir, 2012).

Some transitions in life are anticipated, such as educational transitions, yet others will be unpredictable for example, parental divorce or death. However, any type of transition can have the potential to be unsettling and harmful because there might be an interruption to continuity which can then impact on emotional and psychological well-being (Niesel & Griebel, 2005) leaving individuals in a vulnerable state.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) described transition as an interactive process which is reciprocal and dependent on the individual's characteristics and the transitional situation. To understand the concept of transition from a psychological perspective, theories of belonging, identity and community offer an interpretation of why some educational trajectories are challenging for some individuals but not for others.

2.4 Psychological Perspectives

This section proposes to discuss some of the psychological perspectives that help to provide a framework for the concept of transition. The next section will begin by introducing the concept of belonging, as it relates to educational transitions.

2.4.1 The concept of belonging

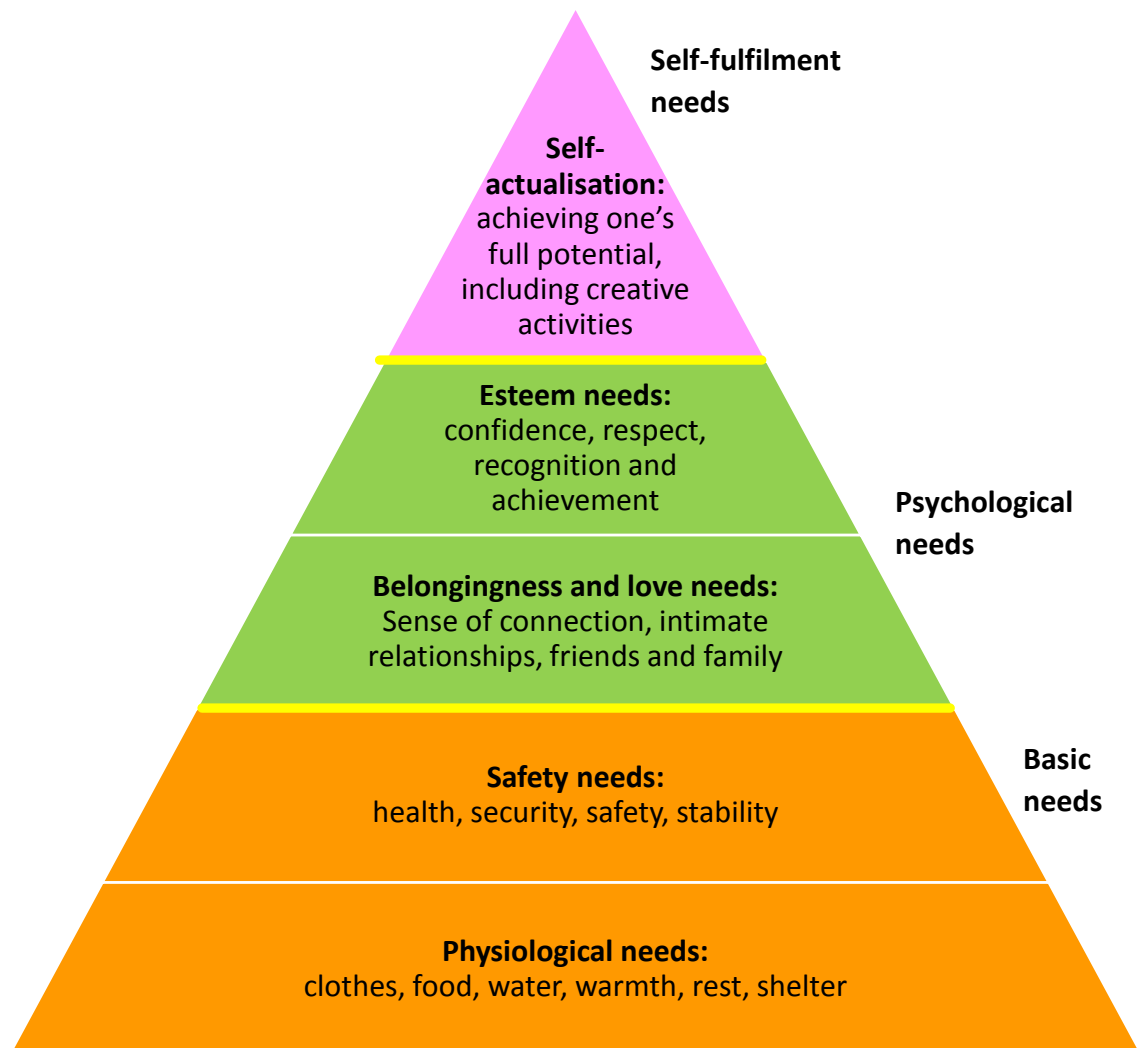
In the UK, government policy has increasingly recognised the status of belonging or connectedness in the accomplishment of positive outcomes for children and young people, with educational institutions being key in developing this aspect of young people's lives (Frederickson, Dunsmuir & Baxter, 2009). Three key perspectives that relate to the concept of belonging will be examined: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943); Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969); and the Belongingness Hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Each of these frameworks suggests that all human beings have a primary psychological need to belong, and that, when the need for belonging is met, individuals have positive social, behavioural and psychological experiences. The theories propose that individuals lacking a sense of belonging are likely to have poor emotional and mental health, referred to as maladjustment (Maslow, 1943) psychoneurosis (Bowlby, 1969), and potent negative feelings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). There is an agreement in all three theoretical perspectives that the need for belonging is constant, with the need for ongoing mutual relationships to be maintained to have a positive effect. However, unlike the other theories, Bowlby's Attachment Theory asserts the importance of the dyadic relationship between the child and its primary caregiver. A further distinction between the frameworks is that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs proposed a set of basic requirements needed for human development, amongst which was a sense of belonging. However, by contrast, Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Baumeister and Leary's Belongingness Hypothesis suggest that human relationships are paramount for individual growth and maturity.

2.4.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1943) saw belonging as a fundamental human need. He stated that humans need to feel belonging and acceptance within their social groups, regardless of the nature of the groups, because each individual has a need and a "hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group" (p.381). Maslow (1943) proposed that all humans have five basic needs, which are often represented in a

hierarchical pyramid (Figure 1), based on their relative importance, with lower level needs (human existence) needing to be fulfilled before the upper levels (motivation). Basic aspects of human existence e.g., for food and shelter needing to be fulfilled before the upper levels can be e.g., self-actualisation. The levels of need in order are physiological needs, safety, love and belongingness, esteem and self-actualisation.

Figure 1. Representation of Maslow's (1943, 1954) Hierarchy of Needs (author's own depiction).



This perspective proposes the social necessity for human beings to be allied with others and to be wanted and accepted by their social groups, including family, neighbours, colleagues, peers, friends and interest groups e.g., political, religious and hobbies. In terms of educational transitions, the implications would be that students need to feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted in a new environment and to be part of a social group in order for higher order needs such as achievement to be fulfilled (McLeod, 2014).

A criticism regarding this conceptualisation of needs in a hierarchy is that the theory does not take into account contextual variables such as the era or cultural, geographical and social class differences (Hofstede, 1984). However, Tay and Diener (2011) gathered data through the Gallup World Poll, conducted across 123 countries, and found consistent universalities of needs as Maslow had proposed, but argued that the fulfilment of basic needs did not impact on the higher level needs. They also found that increased income did not significantly contribute to increased well-being.

In recent times, others have refined Maslow's theoretical framework. Hagerty, Sauer-Lynch, Patusky, Bouwsema and Collier (1992) defined the concept of belonging as "the involvement in or being part of a system or environment" (p.172). The researchers highlighted from their study two essential characteristics of belonging: valued involvement or the experience of being valued and needed; and fitting in or being compatible with other individuals, groups or situations sharing similar features or qualities. Hagerty et al. (1992) suggested that these elements are essential for an individual to feel a sense of involvement and belonging in a group. This has relevance for the theme of educational transitions as young people would be hypothesised as wanting to feel a sense of 'fit' and being valued as well as being accepted within their new community, when they change schools (Sancho & Cline, 2012).

Critical evaluation of how Maslow developed his theoretical concepts and methodology has been offered. Neher (1991) scrutinised Maslow's theory and its components and argued that Maslow failed to consider the role of the social environment and the individual's gratification of needs. He argued that Maslow did not consider the "unique mix of genes and culture" (p.94) and its impact, but rather tended to emphasise the importance of innate needs being met and supporting healthy psychological development. Neher (1991) challenged Maslow's ideology and postulated that a moderate amount of deprivation can in fact stimulate and motivate individuals into fulfilling needs at the highest level of the hierarchy, and be necessary for healthy psychological development. Heylighten (1992) critiqued Maslow's definition of self-actualization as difficult to replicate empirically and challenged the notion that "self-actualization requires the gratification of all basic needs by the environment" (p.55), arguing that no model is able to order needs hierarchically, due to their complexity and subjectivity.

Maslow employed a biographical analysis using a sample of 18 made up of mostly eminent educated white males. McLeod (2014) argued that Maslow's qualitative study was subjective, open to researcher bias and less valid, as well as not being generalisable to females, lower social classes and ethnic minorities.

Maslow (1943) saw belonging as a fundamental need in human existence. Bowlby (1969) proposed that early human attachment is important for belonging and adaptation and his Attachment Theory will now be examined.

2.4.3 Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969) suggested that a child's early relationship and attachment to her/his caregiver impacts on the child's resulting social, emotional and cognitive development. Bowlby posited that a child initially forms one primary attachment (usually to the mother) and that this attachment figure acts as a secure base for exploring the world and forms 'internal working models' (IWM) which are used as templates for future social interactions, thus any interference with IWM could negatively impact upon and affect the child's development of other social relationships.

"The child of an attuned, emotionally available and supportive caregiver will be secure and have a model of self as valued and competent. However, the child of a neglectful or maltreating caregiver will be insecure and have a model of self as worthless and incompetent". (Grieg et al., 2008, p.14).

Ainsworth and Bell (1970) provided empirical evidence supporting Bowlby's assertions by using the 'strange situation' to assess the quality of early infant attachment styles when the parent left the room or a stranger approached. These attachment styles included: secure attachment and insecure attachment patterns with distinct characteristics identified; avoidant attachment; anxious attachment; and disorganised attachment. These patterns provide an understanding of interpersonal relationships between individuals.

Attachment style, IWM and the 'strange situation' have significant implications for young people within their educational communities. Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) described in their paper that positive qualitative relationships with teachers can help young people to foster a positive self-image and achievement: "Through the opportunity for emotional and physical proximity, the student-teacher relationship may provide for exploration from a secure base and a safe haven under stress" (p.251). They proposed

that the quality of the teacher-student relationship would be important for positive adaptation to school, especially as adaptation to a new context is influenced by the individual's IWM. A teacher's sensitivity and responsiveness are important qualities in facilitating a high quality relationship with the young person, by securing a positive attachment and acting as a secure base (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Fleming (2007) posited that the strange situation offers an explanation of how, when an individual joins a new group, she/he may feel a sense of loss, and how that person adapts or not will be consistent with her/his IWM and attachment style.

Attachment Theory is complex and has been the subject of debate. Slater (2007) argued that, although the theory offers an understanding of the origin of security and anxiety pertinent to change, it does not explain how attachment behaviours can change over time, especially if broken early attachments are ameliorated through positive interventions; nor can infant experiences determine adult behaviour. Although Bowlby (1969) highlighted that attachment is dyadic in nature, he has been criticised for not considering that individuals tend to have more than one attachment in a group and this can be seen in children's friendships (Field, 1996). Tizard (2009) raised the issue that Bowlby's work centred on the mother, with no discussion of the infant's relationship with the father. Bowlby's research was conducted in a patriarchal but father-absent era yet, as Holmes (1993) argued, in post-modern society and with more women in the workforce, children may now have a wide range of primary carers and early attachments.

Building and developing on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Attachment Theory, a more recent framework that focuses on belonging in particular is the Belongingness Hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

2.4.4 The Belongingness Hypothesis

Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed in their seminal paper that the need to belong is a fundamental need, that positive interpersonal relationships require "stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future" (p.500) and that "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (p.497). Therefore, individuals who are well-enmeshed in social relationships have their need for belonging met and experience positive emotions, for example, happiness and love. This is in

contrast to those who are deprived of belonging, and may experience feelings of social isolation, alienation and loneliness and negative emotions such as anxiety, anger and jealousy. Baumeister and Leary (1995) emphasised that paltry social contact is not enough to sustain a sense of belongingness, but that regular contact with a significant person is required. The authors acknowledged that the ability and motivation to belong will be found to some degree in all cultures although there will be individual differences in quality and intensity.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that the need for belonging and social bonding can be facilitated by shared unpleasant experiences, the avoidance of social isolation, protection from external threats and being within the proximity of others. They posited that belongingness in relationships is based on saturation (quality and not quantity) but these can be “limited in time by external transitions” (p.502) in education, the workplace and geographical movement, however, a social bond could be replaced with another well-enmeshed relationship (substitution).

Building on the Belongingness Hypothesis is the concept of a Sense of Belonging (SoB) that has been frequently linked to the educational environment. Goodenow (1993b) described the concept in educational establishments as the following:

“Students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of the feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking of warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual” (p.25).

Goodenow (1993a) argued that some adolescents do not have their need for belonging supported, and this can lead to a decrease in student academic motivation. Studies tend to support this view. Students who feel they have a greater sense of belonging within learning environments reported a higher level of positive feelings such as enjoyment, interest and confidence, whereas those feeling socially isolated reported greater anxiety, frustration and sadness and this directly affected their academic performance (Osterman, 2000; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). This is also supported by the research by Sancho and Cline (2012) which indicated that SoB was paramount during the process of school transition. The research centred on primary to secondary school transition and found that the teacher and peer support was imperative in sustaining SoB.

In addition to the theoretical perspectives on Belongingness, there are other psychological theories and models that can provide a framework for understanding educational transitions, which include: Psychological Sense of Community, Psychosocial Development Theory and Communities of Practice. These are described in the next section.

2.4.5 Psychological Sense of Community

McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed a model that could be used to examine locality-based and relational communities. Their definition of Psychological Sense of Community (PSC) consists the following four dimensions:

- Membership, which creates feelings of emotional safety and identification with a larger collective.
- Influence, which characterises the reciprocal relationship of the individual and the community in terms of their ability to affect change in each other.
- Integration and fulfilment of needs, which enables individuals to get their needs met through co-operative behaviour within the community.
- Shared emotional connection, which is the emotional support stemming from the struggles and successes of community living.

McMillan and Chavis (1986, p.9), had earlier advocated that PSC is “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.” This model identifies and emphasises the importance of belonging within communities. This is important especially at a time when new communities are entered through transition. Young people may feel especially vulnerable during transitions to new sixth forms (in particular a newcomer without a known peer group) and are more susceptible to feelings of isolation, loneliness and alienation which can potentially lead to difficulties with academic work and self-concept (Bone, 2015).

PSC could be described as a conceptual framework that encourages participation through a sense of belonging or community, similar to Finn’s (1989) Participation-Identification Model in education. Finn argued that those students who involve themselves with school-based activities will feel a greater SoB than those who do not. From his research, Finn (1989) suggested that feelings of belonging may help protect a student from the risk of alienation and wanting to leave the educational environment.

The PSC model is seen as a useful design when investigating factors, mechanisms, and structures that contribute to human group cohesion and the planning of prevention and intervention programmes (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Interestingly, Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm and Splittgerber (2000) underlined the need to create a sense of community and belonging via summer academic programmes to support educational transitions and by making future tutors accessible. Although their suggestions were in relation to transition to secondary school, they could have relevance for FE and HE transitions too. Creating smaller intimate sub-communities using summer programmes might help to alleviate initial feelings of marginalisation and rejection in the new school community.

Critical examination of PSC is rare. However, Christens and Speer (2006) critiqued the model for not addressing possibilities of disempowerment within the community via exclusivity or patriarchy as well as inequity.

In a Canadian study, using McMillan and Chavis' conceptualisation of community, Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler and Williams (1996) measured PSC amongst 12-18 year olds in their local community. They found it a relevant construct for the exploration of adolescents' self-perceptions of happiness, loneliness, academic competence and self-worth. This provides a link to the areas of adolescence and identity, which are linked in Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1959).

2.4.6 Psychosocial Development Theory

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1959) proposed an eight stage model of development over the lifespan which suggests a series of psychological stages through which an individual's personality develops. He asserted that the fifth stage, in which the psychological challenges relate to 'identity v role' confusion, coincides with adolescence (approximately the ages of 9-19 years). According to Erikson, this is a time when individuals develop their sense of self or individuality in the context of social relationships, especially with peers. Miller (2002) criticised the eight stage model as culturally relative, since culture influences the development of an individual's behaviour in response to a situation or stimulus and the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation should be taken into account.

Erikson posited that conflict of identity in a young person causes the individual to feel a low sense of belonging as she/he struggles to be accepted and affirmed within her/his environment. It might be argued that Erikson's ideas on the importance of 'identity'

formation and 'identity crisis' are particularly relevant in education, especially with cross-institutional transitions at the ages of 11, 16 and 18 years, at each of which young people are trying to adapt and to 'fit in' with new people and new educational environments. The introduction of RPA is significant for many young people who originally expected to leave school and go to work at the age of 16 years. For those individuals who struggled academically or disliked being in education, it might possibly be more of a personal challenge or a challenge to their identity to stay in education or training. Therefore, it is imperative that young people "stay on in a meaningful course of study not just for one year post-16, but for two or even three in order to equip them to progress to either higher study or employment" (Hodgson & Spours, 2014, p.1).

The concept of identity is important in transition periods and Erikson (1959) highlighted the confusion that adolescents encounter when establishing their sense of self in their surroundings. Coming into a new community and establishing an identity or role can be challenging. According to Wenger (1998), who devised the Communities of Practice model, there are particular types of trajectories or paths that individuals take when they enter new communities and these will now be considered.

2.4.7 Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) proposed a Communities of Practice (CoP) framework that proposes that identity is not a stable or static notion during transition into a new community. He highlighted different forms of trajectories, which can be related to transitions within education, as follows.

- Peripheral trajectory - a trajectory which does not lead to full participation but will be significant to contribute to an individual's identity.
- Inbound trajectory - an individual joins a community with the hope of being a full participant, even if peripheral initially.
- Insider trajectory - an individual is a full participant within the community although the individual's identity is renegotiated by new demands and changes.
- Boundary trajectory - an individual has an identity across a number of communities, with careful negotiation and coordination.
- Outbound trajectory - a participant leaves behind one identity to take up another one in another community.

Wenger (1998) suggested that the participation process in a community is central for learning and development since it, “shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (Wenger, 1998, p.4). However, a criticism of this framework is that Wenger does not explain what happens when people do not become members of a community, such as pupils or students who disengage from their school or college learning, or who do not want to identify with the community (Hodges, 1998).

Although Wenger (1998) saw transition as a two way process involving the individual and the community, other researchers have conceptualised transition as a process, with the emphasis being on the individual changing and undergoing an identity shift. This is apparent in the concept of consequential transition which “is the conscious reflective struggle to reconstruct knowledge, skills, and identity in ways that are consequential to the individual becoming someone or something new” (Beach, 1999, p.30).

Beach (1999) used a sociocultural framework to develop subdivisions of consequential transition in education which impact on an individual’s identity, as follows.

- Lateral transitions occur in a single direction with an affiliated developmental strand, such as the move from primary to secondary school or secondary school to FE, or FE to HE.
- Collateral transitions involve simultaneous participation in two or more related activities, such as the move between home and school and from FE to university.
- Encompassing transitions occur when an individual has to adapt to an existing or changing circumstance in order to participate in an activity. An example may include young people supporting an older cohort with technology or young people making the transition from General Certificate Secondary of Education (GCSE) to Advanced Level study (A Levels) at sixteen years.
- Mediational transitions involve education activities that simulate involvement in an activity yet to be experienced, for example taster ‘days’ at schools or colleges.

Beach (1999) offered a framework that is helpful and relevant in examining the different educational trajectories that impact of identity shift on young people within modern society.

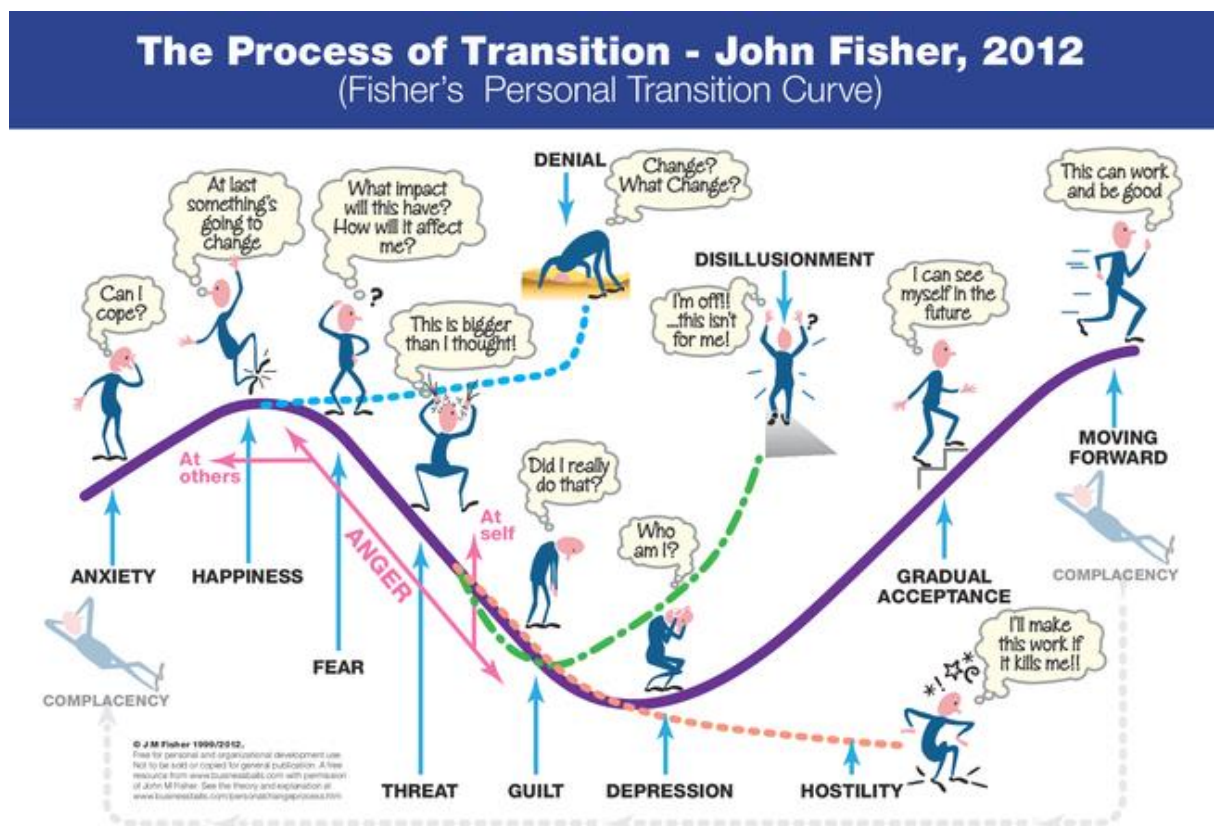
Psychological theoretical frameworks relative to belonging and educational trajectories have been outlined in this section. However, what has not been explored or discussed

are the thoughts and feelings that are evoked in an individual when coping with significant change such as educational transition. The Personal Transition Curve by Fisher (2012) provides a frame of reference using a staged approach and offering an insight into emotions and cognition.

2.4.8 The Personal Transition Curve.

In relation to significant change, a Personal Transition Curve (Figure 2) developed in 2003 and later revised in 2012 was advocated by Fisher.

Figure 2. Fisher's Personal Transition Curve (2012)



He developed the curve partially based on earlier studies by Kubler-Ross (1969), who proposed five stages in the Grief Cycle Model, and was also influenced by the psychological framework of Personal Construct Psychology devised by Kelly (1955). The Personal Transition Curve model is commonly utilised in the world of business but it has been used as a tool in other domains, to recognise and understand the emotions and cognitions that people experience when they go through change. Fisher believed that, to help people through transition effectively, it helped to understand the impact change has had on their thoughts and feelings, about perceived losses and gains.

The stages in the Personal Transition Curve are as follows.

- Anxiety - being aware that something is going to change outside one's control and not being able to anticipate the future.
- Happiness - a feeling of relief that there will be improvement and that others feel the same.
- Fear - being aware of having to make a change and how others will view this.
- Threat - having to make changes in a new or an alien situation.
- Guilt - a self-critical belief that past actions taken were inappropriate and a realisation of the impact of one's behaviour.
- Depression - characterised by a lack of motivation and confusion together with the inability to see a future vision.
- Disillusionment - recognition that personal values, beliefs and goals are incompatible with those of the organisation/placement.
- Hostility - an insistence that the old process still works and a determination to make this work and ignore the new system in place.
- Denial - a lack of acceptance of any change that there will be and any impact on the individual.
- Gradual acceptance - where upon a sense of the environment, acceptance and an internal locus of control helps to manage the change.
- Moving forward - having more control and a positive sense of self allows experimentation within the environment to be active and effective.

Fisher (2012) proposed that people transit through the phases of the transition curve in a linear or sequential path or could go through the initial phases simultaneously, with the subsequent direction dictated by circumstances as they change. He suggested that people may move through the phases unconsciously and the speed of transition will depend on the individual's self-perceptions, locus of control and other past experiences. Fisher (2012) held the view that if an individual is positive about the outcome and believes that she/he has control over the situation, then the process of moving towards a successful change will be easier. Critical examination of the Personal Transition Curve has been limited. Although such a model is helpful in defining phrases, how people might experience change can differ because some will show their emotions externally whilst others will internalise them and the latter might be difficult to ascertain (Hills, 2016).

Critiques of similar stage theories such as the Grief Cycle Model by Kubler-Ross (1969), which provided a framework for coming to terms for understanding the death and bereavement process, may be considered in relation to Fisher's model. Stage models may be criticised as simplistic in that they do not take into account that people respond differently to change, and that this might occur as a result of their differing types of personalities, their psychological resources and pressures within the immediate environment (Kastenbaum, 1998).

The psychological theoretical perspectives outlined in this section offer an insight into the importance of belongingness, identity and trajectories into communities as well as some indication of the emotions that might be experienced by an individual experiencing change. The next section will look at some of the challenges experienced by young people during educational transitions from primary school into secondary school, from FE to HE and, lastly, from secondary school to FE.

2.5 Transition to Secondary School

The move to secondary school from primary school marks a period for many 11 year olds that has the potential to be unsettling (Anderson et al., 2000, West, Sweeting & Young, 2010). Some pupils in their final year of primary schooling feel anxious about coping with the demands that a new school will bring, such as understanding new school systems, different academic expectations, and parting from friends and making new ones, as the research below will demonstrate.

2.5.1 Challenges

School transition at eleven years can be marked by a decline in grades and school satisfaction, as the transition interrupts the continuity of life, at an organizational and social level (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). Anderson et al. (2000) wrote that it is the environmental context that is likely to determine success or failure of educational transitions, rather than individual behaviour. They believed that worries about belonging might start at pre transition, together with worries about bullying, getting lost and feeling unsafe, as well as the concerns about academic expectation. Anderson et al. (2000) described the transition from the primary to secondary phase as characterised by an increased size of campus, increased heterogeneity of student population and a greater emphasis on ability and competition. The authors felt these institutional discontinuities can "interrupt the continuity of (a pupil's) life" (p.326).

Transition might also be affected by the introduction of new subjects, not feeling prepared academically, social maturity and emotional well-being (Anderson et al., 2000, Chedzoy & Burdon, 2005) and will involve a period of adjustment which will last until the individual can cope with the demands of the new environment (McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2004). The levels of parental interest and participation is also noted by Anderson et al. (2000) as having an impact on a student's transition, through encouraging student participation within the educational community to help foster a Sense of Belonging (SoB) and becoming a "worthwhile member of the community" (Anderson et al., 2000, p.336).

When questioned, many pupils transferring from primary to secondary school wanted to know and understand the routines in the new school and saw this as important for a successful transition (Evangelou et al. 2008). The researchers found that other pupils who were more experienced community members supported new pupils with school practices and facilitated their community membership via peer mentoring systems. This is a good example of a two way process in embedding the individual within an established community, which links with Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice framework, as outlined earlier.

2.5.2 The importance of belonging

More recently, Sancho and Cline (2012) conducted a qualitative study focusing on pupil experiences of transition and SoB, involving focus groups made up of Year Six pupils in their last term at three local primary schools. Ten of the pupils were then interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview schedule, towards the end of their first term at secondary school. The transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings were that pupils reported a stronger SoB at secondary school than at primary school and that tutor groups were key in supporting the development of a SoB. Relationships with teachers and peers were also seen as important. In the study, proactive behaviour, positive attitude to learning and emotional well-being were seen as key predictors of a good SoB. On the other hand, withdrawn behaviour, a negative attitude to learning and negative emotions demonstrated a lack of SoB. These findings reflect elements of the Belonging Hypothesis discussed earlier in the chapter.

Whilst the need to belong is a relevant concept when considering transition from primary to secondary school, it is likely to be pertinent to any type of educational transition or transfer. Sancho and Cline's (2012) study was small scale and looked at the transition into one particular secondary school, therefore it could be argued that the findings could only be attributed to that particular secondary school concerned, as no other comparison could be made. However, Sancho and Cline (2012) have highlighted the importance of examining the experiences and views of participants at the transitional stage, particularly with regard to belonging and relationships.

2.5.3 Vulnerabilities and emotional well-being

A longitudinal study on transition into secondary school and beyond by West, Sweeting and Young (2010) followed a cohort of 2000 young people through secondary school and into the post school stage. In Year eight (aged 12-13 years), participants were asked to reflect back retrospectively to their secondary transition. The majority recalled having difficulties adjusting to both school and peers; in particular this was more pronounced for those with issues of low self-esteem, those of lower ability and/or those who were unprepared for secondary transfer. By the age of 15, some of the participants were still finding it difficult to cope with the increased workload and being taught by a larger number of teachers in the secondary school than in primary school. The researchers argued that these vulnerabilities can have an enormous impact on self-identity and emotional welfare issues, even in the post school years. In the light of these findings the study raises questions about the impact of future transitions, especially into FE, following the extension of the RPA to eighteen in 2015, on some young people with certain susceptibilities.

West et al.'s study (2010) had the advantage of using a large sample over a long period and securing an extensive range of data. However, there is a possibility that, by using reflective accounts a year after the event, participants may have forgotten details. Yet, this piece of research accentuates the fact that transitions can have more profound and far-reaching consequences for some individuals. Furthermore, West et al. stressed that qualitative studies tend to provide deeper insight into the personal experience of transition than quantitative studies, which tend to offer a more general view of experiences.

The literature about the move into secondary school has highlighted some of the main issues regarding transition such as emotional well-being, differing school systems and personal challenges. Within the last fifteen years, research has also been undertaken to look at transition into HE, particularly as young people moving to university typically move away from home into another area and also face challenges within their new educational domain.

2.6 Transition into HE

The interest in the transition from FE to university has arisen from concerns that students are at their most vulnerable in their first year of undergraduate study. They undergo a developmental transition into adulthood as well as an ecological transition; most students move away from home, family and friends and need to take greater responsibility for their finances, learning and social welfare, unlike at other educational transitions and, therefore, require a period of psychosocial adjustment (Conley, Kirsch, Dickson & Bryant, 2014).

2.6.1 The unexpected and independence

Many students feel unprepared for more independent study (Smith & Hopkins, 2005). They may experience confusion over the expectations in relation to the amount of study that should take place and the engagement with the complexity and context of the subject studied, as well as the development of a range of new thinking styles including critical analysis (Koh, Tan & Ng, 2012; Deuker, 2014). An unsuccessful transition could prove costly for both individuals and the educational institutions. In relation to this, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) reported that university students reported issues with study skills and feelings of alienation on transfer to HE. They argued that, in these particular situations, young people come into a new community with no personal history or continuity and they are unsure of how to define themselves as participants in that community. These observations resonate with the Psychological Sense of Community framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) with its emphasis on belonging within a new community.

2.6.2 The critical first year

Yorke and Longden (2008), for the Higher Education Academy (HEA), elicited via questionnaire from 462 students, who did not enter their second year of studies, the

reasons for their non-continuation. Feelings of isolation and not belonging were cited as the primary reasons for disengagement.

Furthermore, Cunnane wrote in the Times Higher Education on the 16th February 2012 that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) identified the first year experience in university as being critical because of “learning how to cope with the demands of a new environment and personal responsibilities” (no date given). In Cunnane’s report, there was reference to universities within the United Kingdom (UK) wanting their first year students to feel as though they belonged in the community and the understanding that, if this is achieved, then those students are likely to stay and to do well academically. Kandiko and Mawer (2013) argued that students want to fit in with their university community and have a SoB. To be successful in this, they proposed that students needed a better understanding of what was expected of them.

2.6.3 Multiple transitions

Kandiko and Mawer (2013) raised the importance of multiple transitions for university students including the following challenges: greater responsibility; academic; independent living; managing accommodation; finances; new culture and new social lives. Students involved in Kandiko and Mawer’s (2013) research reported wanting more opportunities to interact with other students and staff within the class and beyond, as well as face-to-face support and feedback. Kandiko and Mawer (2013) emphasised that it is not only the student’s engagement with the institution that is important for positive outcomes but that the institution is engaging with the student too, by supporting her/him to develop autonomy and independent study skills.

2.6.4 Ways forward

The Flying Start Project (no date given) was piloted by Leeds University in response to some of the growing concerns about first year students not feeling a sense of belonging in a new setting characterised by new social and academic challenges. The online, interactive resource highlighted the differences between studying at school and at university and prepared students for those changes weeks before they joined the university. In order to determine the content and style of the project, 200 sixth form students and undergraduates were surveyed. Independent learning, how to be a successful learner and being able to ‘settle in’ were the major worries/ challenges cited by both groups. The resource was evaluated positively by the pilot cohorts and it was

recommended that it be used in future academic years. The Flying Start resource has continued to evolve since 2012 to promote a smoother transition into HE.

The charity YoungMinds launched a 'Stress at University' campaign for students in October 2015. Via blogs (a discussion or informational sites published on the World Wide Web consisting of updates and offering tips), current and former students can offer support to other students in the UK on issues including mental health, financial concerns, academic performance and living away from home.

Research into transition into HE has shown similar challenges for individuals to those found at primary to secondary school transfer. A significant difference is that many young people going to university leave home too and therefore experience multiple transitions simultaneously. In comparison, little research has been conducted into looking at transition for young people moving into FE. This section introduces current research in this area and identifies areas in which further research is needed.

2.7 Transition into FE

Although in America the education system is different to that of the UK, American academic Eccles (2004) suggested that for some young people the transition into high school (at 14-18 years) is just as traumatic and problematic as other school transitions. She proposed that older adolescents face particular psychosocial issues relating to identity, autonomy and achievement. Eccles (2004) also noted that high schools were perceived by some young people as impersonal environments and the larger the school, the greater the anonymity of students.

In the UK, there are two types of FE trajectories at the age of sixteen years, either from secondary school to a FE college or from secondary school to a sixth form attached to a school (as an insider or an incomer). Given that is the case and building on the observations of Eccles (2004), it would be interesting to know whether young people entering FE colleges or an external sixth form might equally describe their new environments as impersonal and feel anonymous in a new and large domain.

2.7.1 The importance of preparation

Earlier research into the transition of young people into FE has been carried out in Scotland. Mallinson (2009) conducted an exploratory and qualitative study. Interviewing young people (aged 15 to 18 years) and college lecturers in focus groups, she obtained

their views on preparation for college, as well as identifying other key issues. Using Grounded Theory to analyse the data collected, Mallinson (2009) found that the participants reported that good information, positive attitudes and the quality of learning and teaching were important for a good transition. Preparation before transition was seen as essential and this included having access to information, applying to courses on time and understanding expectations regarding learning. Positive tutor assistance and strong peer relationships were also seen as critical and acting as protective factors in the transition phase. It could be argued, based on Mallinson's findings, that without robust support during such an important life change, individuals could be left feeling vulnerable, which could have a significant impact on their resilience to cope with challenges and causing them to give up courses or discontinue with their academic studies altogether.

The study lacks representativeness because it was small scale, using only seventeen young people and five lecturers. Furthermore, only one college was used and it could be argued that the findings might not be valid for other comparable populations and contexts. The design of the study involved focus groups and the data was transcribed. This can be difficult, with a sizeable group. Consequently, the recording might not be accurate as to who said what and there is a danger of participants talking over each other as well, making it problematic to decipher and analyse. There is also the risk of researcher effects and bias when there is face to face contact between the researcher and participants, as well as the possibility that those partaking might have been concerned that their views could have been reported back to college officials, even if anonymity was guaranteed.

It was also noted that Mallinson's (2009) research appeared to lack triangulation, since no other data sources were used. Interestingly, the researcher asked questions about the reasons why peers had dropped out of college. The participants could only offer their opinions, however, a more robust approach might have been to have directly contacted and interviewed those who had left. Nevertheless, those in the sample were able to suggest that immaturity and/or financial issues could have been responsible for cohort departures.

Despite offering a critical review of Mallinson's (2009) study, it is acknowledged that she highlighted the issues relating to transition into FE and emphasised the key point that it

is young people's and their lecturers' attitudes that influence disaffection, confidence, self-esteem and connectedness, which in turn, determine a positive or negative educational experience.

2.7.2 Transition practices

Another Scottish study by Craig (2009) examined transition practices between schools and FE colleges. Participants' responses were analysed using Thematic Analysis and the themes that emerged included: relationships with adults and peers, the college systems and personal confidence. Parental and teacher support were seen as essential when deciding on courses and making applications. In agreement with Mallinson's (2009) study, Craig (2009) also discovered that levels of confidence increased when young people felt prepared for their FE studies (through visits and college information), as well as when they had positive relationships with teaching staff and peers.

Interestingly, in Craig's (2009) investigation, young people discussed the opportunities that college offered them, in terms of flexible learning, study periods and extra-curricular activities. The college system was viewed differently from that of the previous school. This prompts questions regarding whether many of the participants were exhibiting a level of maturity that comes with age, experience and confidence within the new educational establishment. A further question is that if flexible learning, study periods and extra-curricular activities are positives in the experiences of college students and are seen as different from the experience in schools, is this also the case for those attending school based sixth forms, or do they see the sixth form system as a continuation of school with little change?

In Craig's (2009) study, participants reported being worried about leaving school and attending college. Anxieties related to making new friends, feeling safe or not being respected. A question that could be posed is whether this is also the case for those young people who leave their schools at the end of KS4 and attend sixth forms attached to other schools. It could be argued that those young people are likely to be in the minority and may even feel at a disadvantage, compared to those who have been in the same school environment (in the lower school) previously. It would be of interest to compare their experiences.

As with Mallinson's (2009) study, Craig's (2009) study was small and exploratory, however, it raises important questions as well as themes relevant to young people

regarding the transition process and the support that is needed to ensure a successful trajectory into post sixteen education.

2.7.3 Social discontinuities

Within the UK, Hernandez-Martinez, Williams, Black, Pampaka and Wake (2011) examined the transition from school to FE of A Level students continuing with their mathematical education. Twenty five students were interviewed and their responses were analysed. They identified issues arising from transition, but also, for some students the transition was a chance to develop a new identity through challenge, growth and achievement. The social aspects of transition were deemed important by most interviewees and the prospects of meeting new students and teachers, and being in a different domain were anxiety provoking for many. This type of social discontinuity can impact on a students' SoB (Anderson et al., 2000). However, some participants spoke positively about the opportunities of meeting other people from different schools and being able to have new experiences. Making the choice to study at a college or sixth form near home was also commonly mentioned but it was not made clear to the researchers whether this choice had been made for social reasons, convenience or financial considerations.

2.7.4 Curriculum continuity

Valjataga and Fielder (2009) found that students were aware in advance that there would be a 'step up' in difficulty regarding the jump from GCSE to A Level. Most individuals felt the experience would be challenging due to the workload and the complexities of the advanced level subjects. For some students, the challenges helped them to mature and become more independent. Being autonomous and independent were recurring themes in this particular study. It was also noted that some students who had done well at GCSE (in this case, at maths) struggled at Advanced Subsidiary level (AS Level) and subsequently dropped the subject. Understandably, experiencing greater difficulty may impact on an individual's self-esteem and identity as a learner, causing the person to feel disconnected from the subject. In some cases, if this difficulty is overcome, then feelings of success and confidence are generated. This was particularly the case for those benefitting from extra support to help them make progress in their chosen AS Level subjects (Valjataga and Fielder, 2009).

Hernandez-Martinez et al.'s (2011) study revealed that the expectations of independent study by the sixth formers and the experience of difficulty in progression from GCSE to 'AS' Level can pose considerable challenges. Arguably, this can result in students dropping subjects or even leaving their educational institutions. This study illustrated that social and academic factors are important at this transition, which links well with Beach's (1999) encompassing transition concept because learning at AS and A Level is likely to be based on higher level of problem solving. Beach (1999) argued that all consequential transitions involve a process of development and personal progress and this involves a change in knowledge construction, adapting skills and a change in identity. Crafter and Maunder (2012) build on this idea. They believe that reflection on previous educational experiences can be purposeful in constructing ways of adjusting to a new educational phase.

2.7.5 A transitional period

Deuker (2014) conducted action research in a sixth form to gain an insight into the difficulties that exist at transition between GCSEs and A Levels. Focus groups comprised of Year 12 (Y12) and Year 13 (Y13) students (aged between 16 and 18 years). The data obtained from these groups were transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis. Views of teachers were also explored. Deuker found similar results to Valjataga and Fielder (2009) and Hernandez-Martinez et al., (2011) in that acclimatising to the leap from GCSE to A Level learning was problematic. Personal accounts suggested that some of those who did well at GCSE thought there would be little difficulty at the next stage of learning and had been over confident in their own abilities, but now acknowledged the difference between GCSE and A Level.

There was a view from the participants in the study that the A Level subject taster 'days' did not prepare them adequately for advanced study, especially the difficulty level and amount of work expected. Deuker discovered that some students and teachers agreed that sometimes students needed to 'fail' in order to become successful learners. Further investigation suggested that the students wanted practical advice regarding how to study and revise at A Level.

Deuker advised the importance of a transitional period to help students with study skills so that they can cope with the change and be more focused. Linked to this is the importance of students being able to manage their time independently and organise

tasks, as well as being aware of what strategies work best for them when learning and revising.

Although Deuker (2014) raised the importance of independence being highly valued in learning, arguably, it is also important that students ask for support and direction when this is needed. Stoten (2014) argued that some students are likely to be instrumentalist, in other words, they might prioritise acquiring qualifications over the deep learning of a subject. Therefore, arguably, there may be cases where students would prefer to be told what to do and have their learning organised for them in order to ensure that they get the desired grades.

Deuker's (2014) study is helpful in highlighting some of the experiences of change in learning when making the transition between GCSEs and A Levels. Key limitations of the study include that the research was conducted in one sixth form, so it is not possible to make generalisations from the study.

However, it would be interesting to investigate whether the findings will also hold true for young people in other post 16 settings. Deuker reported that she knew the participants who volunteered to take part in the research. This raises issues about possible bias, reliability and lack of objectivity. Although Deuker acknowledged knowing the subjects prior to the research, she argued that the participants were, nevertheless, happy to engage and talk about their experiences.

Furthermore, Deuker found it difficult to secure the views of Y13 students as the timing of the research coincided with preparation for A Level exams. Only the views of four Y13 students were obtained after the examinations had finished, compared with twenty three Y12 students. It could be argued that it is entirely possible that the recollections of the Y13 participants might not be as clear as that of the Y12 participants, who had been through the transition process more recently and would be in a better place to reflect accurately on their experiences.

2.7.6 Learner identity

Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2011) proposed that the young people in their research went through an affirmation of who they were after the transition experience. Taking on a new learner identity is seen as an opportunity as well as a risk during a time of change; with the correct support, the outcome can be positive. The researchers argued the

importance of listening to the voices of those who are experiencing transition, finding out what the change in the curriculum means to them and also to what they say about their sense of development and maturity which enables them to become active participants in society. A criticism of Hernandez-Martinez et al.'s (2011) research is that the focus was only on students who were studying mathematics. It would have been interesting to have interviewed students studying other subjects too. A future modification of this research would be to explore the students' personal experiences of transition and what could be learnt from this to support future cohorts. Nevertheless, the paper offers an insight into the issues and opportunities for young people moving into FE and the researchers acknowledged that this is an under-researched area.

2.7.7 The transition path and identity

Dietrich, Parker and Salmela-Aro (2012) offered a perspective on post-school transition and linked this to phase-adequate engagement, i.e., the benefits and costs of the transition path chosen. The researchers advocated that there is an element of identity assimilation during transition which involves the participant having to assimilate and accommodate conflicting information into her/his existing belief system whereupon other individuals adjust their beliefs; this is referred to as identity accommodation. It is, arguably, not unusual for individuals during a period of change to find some identity conflict resulting in an adaptive identity development, by making changes to accommodate and be accepted (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx & Zamboanga, 2012). A young person will transfer into a post-school institution with her/his own cultural background and value system and these will influence which types of engagement are most beneficial to the individual. Furthermore, Savickas (2011) offered the view that positive engagement and behaviours emerge from having a personal sense of control, whereupon an individual can influence and maximize opportunities and success during transitions.

2.7.8 Resilience through peer support

Bone (2015) acknowledged that many students feel lonely and isolated when they enter sixth forms. She advocated the use of study groups that include new and existing students, with the latter having the role of a more knowledgeable others (MKO), during the first half term of the transitional period. From her research, Bone posited that, as a result of sharing knowledge and ideas in the groups, the newer students reported "an

increased sense of belonging and wellbeing and lowered anxiety resulting in an improved academic attainment and academic self-concept” (p.859). Therefore, peer support via a MKO or a ‘study buddy’ (a peer studying the same subject who can offer support) might be the way forward to “increase academic buoyancy and self-concept” (p.859). However, Bone does note that a potential difficulty would be starting up and maintaining the peer groups.

2.7.9 Transition as a process

Hviid and Zittoun (2008) explained that the study of educational transitions has tended to focus more on outcomes, in relation to the well-being of youngsters going from the primary to secondary phase, than on the process of transition (whether that is experienced as negative or positive). Crafter and Maunder (2012) proposed that all educational transitions should focus on helping an individual to negotiate her/his way through change and to do this requires the individual to be central in making sense of the transition, reconstructing personal knowledge and also being empowered to make the transition positive.

2.8 Summary: Literature Review

This chapter has outlined some of the psychological perspectives associated with transition in general and in education in particular and has considered how researchers have interpreted transition across three key stages: primary into secondary, secondary into FE and FE into HE. The literature suggests that, across all three, transition is not an individual venture. It involves social interaction and active participation with other members in the community. For young people in education, transition encompasses the power to reconstruct identities and combine social and cognitive resources in order to make a major transition. Those young people who do not have adequate resources or effective coping mechanisms tend to experience more post transition adjustment problems (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009; Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2011; Deuker, 2014). Transitions are complex and multifaceted, involving a search for meaning and shifts in personal identity, and inevitably involve concern for the individual’s SoB. Although researchers have looked into transitions into secondary school and university in some detail, there is a paucity of research examining the experiences of young people transitioning into FE.

2.8.1 Rationale for the current study

To date the issue of transition into FE has been under-researched, especially regarding ‘incomers’ who have transitioned into a school attached sixth form from another school, to study A Levels. It would be interesting to investigate their transition experiences (socially, psychologically and cognitively) through personal reflection, allowing any issue to be raised, rather than following up specific issues or subject areas as previous research has done. The intention of the current study is to investigate this under-researched area by examining the experience of individuals in detail, to understand the issues that arose and how these could be addressed, and to consider these in relation to the role of the EP.

Within the few studies found to focus on FE transition, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach has not been previously used, as Thematic Analysis or Grounded Theory has been preferred. IPA is a qualitative methodology which aims to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.51). It is an approach that highlights the significance of language but, unlike other qualitative methods, IPA aims to investigate the thinking and experience of individuals and may provide more of an understanding of the processes occurring at this transition, for individuals. The decision to adopt an IPA approach is explained in further detail in the next chapter outlining the study’s methodology.

2.8.2 Aims and research questions of the current research

It is possible to hypothesise that young people at the age of 16 years will move into FE within their school or another educational institution as a natural progression and without difficulty. However, as cross-institutional transitions can be complicated at any stage of life and there is a gap in research concerning the transfer experiences of this age group, the researcher is interested in the experiences of transition for A Level students entering a school based sixth form having completed their GCSEs in an another school.

The aim of the current study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the reported experiences of young people transitioning into school-based sixth form, using IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Based on the examination of existing research, the key research question in this study will be:

How do young people experience transition into a school-based sixth form?

Chapter 3

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the methodology

In this chapter, a rationale for the research methodology used in this study is given. An outline of ontology, epistemology and methodology is provided. The section justifies why qualitative research was chosen and which alternative qualitative methods were considered but rejected. It provides a rationale as to why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to answer the research question, as the method of data collection method and analysis. IPA's three theoretical frameworks-phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography are outlined. The limitations of the methodology are also discussed. The second part of the chapter specifies details of the participants, ethical considerations, participant welfare, protocols and procedures for the collation and analysis of the data.

3.2 Theoretical Commitment

3.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

It is essential that thought is given to "the philosophical base of the chosen research to ensure coherence of the study design in terms of its ontological, epistemological and methodological levels of enquiry" (Proctor, 1998, p.74). In order to carry out an effective study and to be able to justify the research, it is important to understand the ontological and epistemological stance taken. Ontological beliefs are views that individuals have on defining the nature of reality, i.e., "What exists in the world, to the nature of reality" (Punch, 1998, p.170). There are two opposing philosophical frameworks. Positivism adopts an objective ontological view of reality, with the opinion that it is independent of human perception and cognition and that only a single reality can be researched through rigorous application of scientific methodology, to find a direct correspondence between events and objects in a definable way (Madill, Jordon & Shirley, 2000).

In contrast, constructionism has a subjective ontological stance, holding the view that knowledge, truth and reality can never be really known. Reality is seen as an interaction between the objective and the subjective (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, this framework advises that knowledge and meanings are based on the individual's perceptions yet can never be conclusive (Bryman, 2012). Constructionist methodologies highlight patterns

and meanings, which are built within interactions in the world, that draw attention to the view that human experience is predisposed by personal, historical and socio-cultural contexts (Willig, 2013), rather than universal truths.

Epistemology is theoretically related to ontology and is centred on assumptions of how an individual might acquire and interpret knowledge about the world and reality. The positivist approach has had a history of being embedded in the discipline of psychology, where psychological inquiry has looked for cause and effect connections through objectivity and validity via quantitative methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). By contrast, the epistemological allegiance of constructionism supports a relativist and interpretive stance, where qualitative research methods allow creativity, following the principles of working with participants and giving them a voice (Shaw & Frost, 2015). Therefore, within this philosophical framework, reality is perceived as subjective, and interpretivist research consequently assumes an inductive and theory-generating methodology.

The research question endeavours to explore the experiences of young people and their experience of the transition as incomers into a sixth form from another school. The researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs are constructionist and relativist. The research interest is in human perception and how people make sense of their experiences.

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach is consistent with the ontological and epistemological position of the research question as well as the researcher's own beliefs and standpoint. IPA is a qualitative research framework and it provides a viewpoint in understanding a personal lived experience. Within the constructionist framework, IPA focuses on an interpersonal relationship with a reflective and reflexive stance. Such a practice allows for what Smith (2004) described as learning something about the "important generic themes in the analysis, but also about the life world of the particular participants who have told their stories" (p.42). This is illuminative and relevant to this research in that those participants have an active role in describing and sharing their experiences, which can possibly help to contribute to positive outcomes regarding transition for future generations.

3.3 Methodological Approach

3.3.1 Qualitative research

Hiles (2014) argued that the formulation of a research question is of great significance and should guide decisions on research strategy, method, analysis and critical evaluation, rather than personal preference. The research question to be addressed in this explorative study focuses on the participants' personal experiences and world views and, therefore, a qualitative methodological approach was considered to be the most appropriate. Qualitative research is concerned with lived experience and individual realities with an emphasis on asking "bigger questions about the nature of human experience" (Shaw & Frost, 2015, p.639) and this is applicable since the research concentrates on the experiences of young people in their transitions into sixth form.

There has been an expansion of qualitative methods in psychological research in recent years, offering an in-depth insight into human experience which could not be obtained via quantitative methodology. Although research in the field of educational psychology has tended to favour quantitative designs, Miller, Billington, Lewis and Desoouza (2008) proposed that there is a place for critical qualitative methods for educational psychologists in research and practice: "Critical qualitative research methodologies can allow educational psychologists to grapple with the contests between knowledge and experience, overcome barriers between research and practice and better equip the practitioner to work with young people" (p.484)

This is particularly true of the current research, where examining challenges and successes within transition may offer an insight into future work related activities which may impact on the professional practice of educational psychologists.

Qualitative designs are often linked with an interpretative paradigm inspired by phenomenology (Brooks, 2015) which involves an interest in the individual and an attempt to understand her/his subjective world as well as seeing how she/he interprets her/his world, by examining language. Shaw and Frost (2015) advocate that attention to exploring the meanings of textual data promotes quality and an opportunity to work with participants, lessening power imbalances between them and the researcher. These epistemological and ontological perspectives are different to those of positivism or empiricism, which view reality and the validity of scientific knowledge as universal, objective and quantifiable via testing or observing participants and then statistical

analysis of numerical data. A limitation of quantitative research is that it often utilises structured reporting methods that can restrict responses, and this, arguably, may give a fragmented picture (Nevonen & Broberg, 2000). It can also be argued that traditional quantitative approaches attempt to support theories, whereas it could be argued that qualitative designs allow creativity and generate new insight (Shaw & Frost, 2015).

A criticism of qualitative research is that it is too subjective and therefore difficult to replicate, unlike quantitative research (Bryman, 2012). Another criticism is that qualitative research tends to utilise small sample sizes and therefore generalisations are more difficult to make. Yet the concept of saturation, described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which refers to the process of continuing to gather data until the theoretical insights gained are found to be repetitive, can be used to justify a small sample size (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). In addition, qualitative methods of generating and analysing data have produced rich detail and in-depth perspectives of events and experiences of individuals and groups (Smith, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Shaw & Frost, 2015).

Willig (2013) suggested that, through the interpretation of qualitative data, researchers can engage with and highlight significant aspects. Therefore, this enables them to make sense of, and gain a better understanding of, phenomena. Within interpretive thinking, theories are likely to emerge, as well as unanticipated findings, through data collection. This is relevant to the research question in this study as the aim is to access the subjective views and experiences of young people and, through this, draw out the salience of the salient themes in relation to the research question and related theories.

The importance of assessing the quality of qualitative research is paramount. The quality of methods, data and of data analysis need to be carefully considered when undertaking research (Silverman, 2004). In this case, the researcher used the guidelines set out by Smith (2011) in order to conduct IPA on the research undertaken and also to evaluate its quality. The researcher wanted to ensure that the data collected was of high quality and the views and experiences of the participants were depicted and defined in line with the guidelines for IPA.

3.3.2 Alternative qualitative methods considered

A number of qualitative methods were considered and then discounted for the purposes of this research study. The following will outline the methods, explain why these were deemed unsuitable and highlight why IPA was chosen.

Discourse Analysis emphasises the importance of language in the construction of social reality (Willig, 2013), which would seem relevant to the current study as personal meanings are “constructed by individuals in a social and personal world” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.54). However, the Discourse Analysis approach does not gain an individual’s account of what a person thinks or feels about her/his personal experience as it focuses on interaction rather than content. It was, therefore, deemed unsuitable for the current study.

In Grounded Theory, devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967), theories are grounded in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As part of Grounded Theory a literature review is completed post analysis, so that the developing theory is not influenced by prior knowledge and from the analysis, a theory is developed to give an explanatory account of a particular phenomenon. The researcher’s extensive reading on educational transitions excluded this method as the approach did not allow for the quality and texture of the individual experiences that the researcher wanted to examine and so did not fit with the research question.

Narrative Analysis can be described as a method of making sense of the world by uncovering the participant’s story and examining how she/he “imposes order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Riessman, 1993, p.2). The approach focuses on how narrative relates to sense-making, using genre or structure to tell an individual’s story, rather than using questions as prompts in this research to elicit details. It was felt by the researcher that the use of prompts would keep the focus on the research question to be explored and would allow for comparison of experiences between the participants. Therefore, Narrative Analysis was discounted as an approach.

Thematic Analysis is an approach for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method was considered to be too broad an approach for this study, not allowing for the depth of analysis that the researcher wanted to carry out on each participant’s responses, individually.

3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

“It is phenomenological in attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, but recognises that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavour for both participant and researcher. Without the phenomenology there would be nothing to

interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomena would not be seen.” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.37).

IPA is a contemporary approach to data analysis in qualitative methodology developed in the UK by Jonathan Smith (1996). The approach aims to provide an in-depth analysis of participants’ narratives of their personal lived experience. IPA has been used more commonly in the field of health psychology (Brocki & Weardon, 2006). However, more recently, it is increasingly becoming recognised as a valuable tool within the area of educational psychology (Sancho & Cline, 2012; Taylor-Brown, 2012). IPA aims to give a voice to participants, which fits well with the current agenda within the profession of educational psychology to consider young people’s views (Gersch, 2016).

IPA aims to explore the participant’s experience from her/his own perspective, therefore giving an “insider perspective” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.36). The accounts are co-constructed and shaped by the interaction between participant and researcher (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). IPA has a commitment to investigating how the participants and researchers make sense of an experience by the use of systematic procedures which involve detailed multi-level interpretation of transcripts of participant accounts. The assumption within this position is that the transcript will tell the researcher about each participant’s inner world. In addition, IPA employs a “double hermeneutic” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.35) in which the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant’s world, just as the participant is trying to make sense of her/his personal and social experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) describe IPA as a process that attempts to understand and describe the participant’s world and what it is like for her/him to experience it. A difficulty with this approach can be that to access all of an experience is very complex and whatever account is constructed is exclusive to the participant and the researcher. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to remain as close as possible to the participant’s narrative. IPA seeks to instigate an interpretative analysis by utilising the initial descriptive account and then arranging it in a social, cultural and theoretical context. It is at this point that the researcher may take a speculative approach to the data, “to think about what it means for the participants to have made these claims and to have expressed these feelings and concerns in this particular situation” (p.104). The purpose of IPA studies is to focus on the experience which has particular significance to

the person, which encourages reflection and possible change as a result (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Some of the features associated with IPA include it being idiographic, inductive and interrogative. These characteristics related well to the current study being undertaken. The “strongly idiographic” (Smith, 2004, p.43) nature of IPA is appropriate for very small scale studies, as in the current research. It reveals something about the experience that the participants have had and at a level of detail that involves painstaking analysis in order to delve deeper. The inductive nature of IPA is “flexible enough to allow unanticipated topics and themes to emerge during the analysis” (p.43). The researcher is aware that, in this particular study, it is entirely possible that unexpected themes might surface which require investigation. Smith (1997) described IPA as “an attempt to unravel the meanings contained in...accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the texts and transcripts” (p.189) and it is this in-depth analysis which might challenge psychological concepts and constructs by “interrogating or illuminating existing research” (Smith, 2004, p.43). Themes emerging from this study may add to or challenge certain elements of previous research and, therefore might make a contribution to the discipline of educational psychology.

A strength of IPA is that it draws on three main existing theoretical frameworks in the areas of philosophy (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005): phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

3.4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the study of human experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This concerns the ways in which human beings gain knowledge of the world around them and the phenomena that appear in individuals’ conscious engagement with the world. It involves the examination and comprehension of lived experience, the way things appear to people from their experiences or their experiential reality (Langdrige 2007; Eatough and Smith, 2008).

Phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl (1859-1938) were interested in direct and subjective human experience which has been grounded in everyday life. Husserl asserted that it was important to look at how, rather than what, people perceive their lived experience to be and the impact of phenomena on this. For Husserl, examining everyday experiences and being able to reflect on these with conscious thinking, helps

to identify the important features of human experience. To do this, he believed that it was important to 'bracket' (to suspend) presuppositions and judgements so that life experiences would clearly emerge during the analysis. Brooks (2015) described Husserl as keen to develop phenomenology as "a rigorous alternative to methods traditionally used for the sciences" (p.642).

Developing Husserl's philosophy further, phenomenological philosophers Heidegger, Merleau-Poty and Sartre believed that people exist in a world of objects and that sense is construed through interaction but from the perspective of the individual, through action and meaning making with the world via relationships, language and culture. Phenomenology has been described as having a significant role in the development of qualitative psychology because it gives a "philosophical rationale for focusing on the study of human experience" (Brooks, 2015, p.643).

Based on the principles of phenomenological philosophy, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) have described IPA as a process used to understand people's connection with the world and to make meaning from the things that are happening around them, using interpretation.

3.4.2 Hermeneutics

A second theoretical underpinning of IPA is hermeneutics, which is the theory of interpretation. This provides insights based on explicit or implicit meaning, with the researcher's role being to make sense of the participants' perceptions of phenomena.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) summarised the theoretical descriptions of interpretation by hermeneutic theorists such as Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer, which IPA embraces as part of its theoretical and methodological underpinnings. Building on the phenomenological approach, Heidegger (1889-1976) believed that the role of interpretation is central to understanding an individual's engagement with the world. He believed that appearance can have a dual quality, in that objects can appear as they are or have hidden meanings. Therefore, there is an emphasis on searching for the meaning beyond what is being presented. Thus the listener, during an exploratory conversation, may use her/his experiences to make sense of the speaker's world but essentially should not allow her/his preconceptions to be an obstacle to the interpretation.

For Schleiermacher (1998) a range of skills, including intuition, is needed for the process of interpretation, in order to engage in a full, complete and universal analysis. In addition, Gadamer (1990/1960) held the view that pre-conceptions emerge through the interpretative process and emphasised the need for openness during questioning and consideration of the speaker's opinion, bringing this to the forefront.

The Hermeneutic Cycle is summarised by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) as the dynamic relationship between the part, for example, the single word, and the whole e.g., the sentence in which the word is rooted; one cannot be observed without the other. It involves a non-linear style of thinking. Thus the process of IPA is iterative; the engagement with data moves forwards and backwards and is shifting and dynamic. Therefore, the meaning of the text can be interpreted at many levels, which link to each other and will involve various viewpoints.

As already mentioned, the role of the researcher is to understand what sense the participant makes of her/his experiences by exploring her/his cognitions and understanding; this is defined as a 'double hermeneutic' or dual interpretation process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher has a dual role in the process. Similar to the participant, the researcher has the same skills and capacities to make sense of the world yet accesses the participant's experience through listening to or reading her/his account and attaching meaning to the lived experience. The result is to provide an interpretation of how the researcher thinks the participant is thinking. Therefore, as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe it: "the participant's meaning-making is first-order, while the researcher's sense-making is second-order" (p.36).

3.4.3 Idiography

Within small homogeneous samples, idiography focuses on detailed and in-depth analysis, which is specific to particular individuals within a particular context. Individuals are linked to other people but hold unique perspectives of phenomena. Therefore, the emphasis is on the individual's experience: what it was like and what sense it made to that person. IPA uses a small sample because of idiographic inquiry, to allow detailed analysis of transcripts and to explore thoroughly and systematically similarities and difficulties between individual cases.

3.5 Methodological Approach

3.5.1 Phenomenology as a methodology

“If you want to know how human beings understand their world and their life, why not talk to them?” (Kvale, 1997, p.9)

Phenomenology is a research methodology as well as a philosophy. In research, the term refers to the study of phenomena, their nature and meanings. The perceptions, explanations and analysis of the explored experiences all depend on which phenomenological approach is used. “The purpose of phenomenology is to describe and understand the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon” (Lichtman, 2006, p.27).

A phenomenological approach pursues a rich and detailed description of the story from the participants (Van Manen, 1990) and is appropriate for this research. The current study’s purpose is to describe the experience of transition into FE (sixth form) as an incomer, and to understand and interpret the experience via the ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’ dual approach as described by Van Manen:

“...a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims there are no such things as interpreted phenomena.” (Van Manen, 1990, p.180).

This type of methodology aims to give a rich account of an individual’s experience (Smith, 1997) and it is the task of the researcher to describe and elucidate the lived world of others, which helps expand the understanding of human experience (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008).

3.5.2 Limitations of IPA

IPA, similar to other approaches that use interviews as a method for gaining information, may be susceptible to inaccuracies depending on the participant’s memory and perceptions and the way in which she/he presents her/his information to the researcher. These accounts are subjective and recall might be inaccurate and details forgotten.

The role of language in IPA is important because researchers analyse participants’ language so that they are able to understand how they are making sense of their

experiences. This reliance on language is affected by each participant's ability to articulate her/his experiences. This could be a limiting factor if a participant is not talkative, is not able to express himself/herself effectively or is reluctant to discuss an aspect of experience in further detail. The language that the participants use could tell the researcher more about the way they talk about a specific experience or phenomenon than about the actual experience itself (Willig, 2013).

A further consideration would be the suitability of individual accounts, for example, whether the material accrued is suitable for phenomenological analysis due to its richness and its capture of the "subtleties and nuances of the physical and emotional experiences" (Willig, 2013, p.95).

Brocki and Weardon (2006) argued that, because IPA is a subjective approach to data analysis, it would be difficult for another researcher to replicate the same analysis. Consequently, this prompts a question about reliability and validity. Yardley (2000) put forward the view that four principles should be used to assess the quality of qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance.

Arguably, linked to reliability is the notion that, because IPA utilises a small number of participants, there will be issues with the generalisations of findings (Brocki & Weardon, 2006). However, Smith (1999) had already argued the case that IPA research should be assessed on how well a case is clarified and that the "micro-level theorising should be richly informative of those particular individuals and may well be fairly modest in its claims to generalisation" (p.413). Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) argued that, unlike traditional scientific psychological research and its goal of generalisability, IPA studies, as with any qualitative method, will "focus on the possible transferability of findings from the group to group rather than generalisation" (p.758), and therefore, will look at dimensions via detailed analysis and interpretation within a purposively homogeneous sample, as opposed to making comparisons.

Lastly, IPA could be criticised as an approach that does not consider the cause or origin of the experiences described by individuals, therefore the explanation, it could be argued, might lie in past events, which, therefore restricts a researcher's understanding of phenomena (Willig, 2013).

3.6 Method

3.6.1 Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to look at the reported experiences of young people transitioning into a school-based sixth form from another school. A purposive sample of participants was used, in keeping with IPA requirements to have a small and moderately homogenous sample. Semi-structured interviews were utilised, which were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analysed using IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed a degree of structure to the interviews, where pre-identified areas informed by relevant literature could be explored and discussed. In contrast to surveys and structured questionnaires, this approach gave the researcher the scope to be flexible and allowed the interviews to evolve and develop in an interesting way, for example, participants were able to expand on their answers and the researcher could ask subsidiary questions. The semi-structured interview schedule contained main questions, with supplemental questioning and prompts to be used in the conversation developing with the participant (Table 1 and Appendix 7). The schedule was used flexibly, in order to allow probing of unanticipated areas that emerged.

Table 1 Main questions for the semi-structured interview schedule

Questions	Rationale
Please tell me something about your transition or move into this sixth form?	An introductory question to allow participants to start the interview by reflecting on their recent experience of transition into FE (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008; Hernandez-Martinez et al. 2011; Dietrich, Parker & Salmela-Aro, 2012).
What were your feelings during the time you moved into the sixth form? And now?	This question was generated to explore the thoughts and feelings of the participants during the transition period and at the current time with reference to The Personal Transition Curve (Fisher, 2012).

How important is it to you that you participate in the sixth form?	The inclusion of this question aimed to explore whether participation, integration and social connection are important factors for participant's SoB and inclusion (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Finn, 1989; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Wenger, 1998; Sancho & Cline, 2012; Bone, 2015).
What does being an independent learner mean to you?	This question sought to explore how the participants experienced academic change from GCSE to A Level e.g. independence and autonomy (Craig, 2009; Deuker, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009).
What advice would you give a student based on your own experiences?	This question was informed by research suggesting the importance of listening to the voices of those experiencing transition and how they make sense of it, focusing on what could be shared with peers (Hernandez-Martinez et al. 2011; Crafter & Maunder, 2012).
Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your transition into sixth form?	The last interview question was used as a standard question to end the interview, enabling participants to provide any other information of interest, which had not been covered, but was felt to be important or of interest regarding the transition process (West et al. 2010; Hernandez-Martinez et al. 2011; Crafter & Maunder, 2012).

The semi-structured interviews helped to explore the participants' experiences of aspects of the transition as positive or challenging, establishing what had helped or not helped in situations at that time. The role of identity, sense of belonging and participation within the learning and social community of the sixth form were also explored.

In addition to the interview, some contextual and demographic information was obtained including the participant's age, gender and subjects studied at A Level. (Appendix 6).

3.6.3 Recruitment of participants

Four co-educational comprehensive schools with attached sixth forms were contacted in three towns in England. Only two schools responded. From the remaining two schools, the researcher chose the school that offered a reasonable sized sixth form which could provide a range of possible participants to recruit from in order to procure a sufficient, small sample. Participants were sought who had previously done their GCSEs at another school and had joined the sixth form to start A Level studies.

The host school has approximately 1600 pupils on role with one fifth making the Sixth Form intake. Less than 10 % of pupils are registered for free school meals. Within the last three years, more than 70% of pupils achieved five A*-C grades in their GCSEs. Most of the pupils attending are from white British backgrounds.

The Headteacher of the school was contacted to gain approval and consent for the research study (Appendix 2) in January 2016. In liaison with the Headteacher and the Head of Sixth Form, the researcher attended a sixth form meeting to introduce and explain the study to potential participants. The researcher explained that a letter would be issued about the study and that participants would be selected at random from those who volunteered to take part. The invitation letter (Appendix 3) to take part in the study, with an information sheet (Appendix 4), was emailed to the potential participants by the Head of Sixth Form's Personal Assistant (PA) after the meeting. Participants were invited to register their interest within a two week timeframe, by emailing the researcher.

For those participants who agreed and volunteered to participate and were then selected randomly to partake in the study, the time to conduct the interview was negotiated during non-study periods within the sixth form timetable. The interviews took place on the school premises in a room organised by the Head of Sixth Form's PA.

At the interview, the contents of the information sheet (Appendix 4) and the consent form (Appendix 5) were discussed with the participant by the researcher. If the participant was deemed to have capacity to consent to taking part in the study, then she/he signed the consent form. The researcher explained that participation was voluntary, and that the participant's involvement could cease at any time prior to the audio recording being transcribed, the audio file being deleted and the data becoming anonymous. Participants were told that all transcriptions would be kept as password protected documents and would only be accessible by the researcher. They were also

informed that any direct quotes used in the Thesis and potential publications, would not be able to be linked with individuals, as pseudonyms would be used for participants. Participants were informed that once the transcripts had been analysed, data would be stored indefinitely by Cardiff University.

3.6.4 The sample

Fifty students had entered the sixth form from other schools, in Y12. From this group, twenty five volunteered to participate in the study. Six participants who had transferred into the sixth and were currently undertaking A Level studies were selected, aged between sixteen and seventeen years. The number of volunteers applying for the study exceeded the number required. Therefore, the researcher selected a sample of the first six names using a random number function in Excel.

3.6.5 Inclusion criteria

Participants had to be aged between sixteen and seventeen years old at the time of the interview. To keep the study homogenous, the participants had to have transitioned into the sixth form from other schools in order to be studying A Levels. It was also important that the participants had mental capacity to participate, understood what they were being asked to participate in and could provide consent themselves. The criterion used for determining this was that participants met the entry criteria to study A Levels (five GCSEs (graded A*-C)).

3.6.6 Exclusion criteria

A participant's inability to provide informed consent would exclude her/him from the study. This might have resulted from capacity issues such as intoxication, illness or not having the levels of understanding required to understand the purpose of the study. Due to the need for the capacity for understanding, participants who were non-English speakers and students with significant learning or communication needs would not be included. The use of language in the semi-structured interviews made demands on language skills and therefore, those experiencing these difficulties would have been at a significant disadvantage. Students who previously attended the lower years (years 7-11) within the school being used for the research, were also excluded. None of the participants that were chosen at random for the interviews were excluded, as none of them fell into the categories for exclusion. The researcher was vigilant in ensuring each participant's ability to give consent to take part in the study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations, Participant Welfare and Protocols

3.7.1 Capacity to give informed consent

The researcher clarified that the participants understood the information sheet (Appendix 4), which included information about the purpose of the research, what taking part would involve, who would have access to the data, the right to refuse to answer questions or to ask for data to be deleted until it was anonymised and how it would be stored. Informed consent to participate was ensured by the researcher providing and talking through the consent form (Appendix 5) with the participants to check their understanding before they were to sign if they wanted to continue being involved in the study. A signed copy of the consent form was given to each participant and a second copy was kept by the researcher.

The participant's ability to consent in the study was determined through informal assessment of their capacity in line with the Mental Capacity Act for England and Wales (2005) for those over the age of 16 years. Although the participants had five or more GCSEs (graded A*-C) and therefore would be considered not to have significant learning needs, the researcher spent the first part of the interview talking to the participants and checking their understanding of the research. This enabled the researcher to make an informed decision as to whether the participants met the inclusion criteria (section 3.6.5) or needed to be eliminated as outlined in the exclusion criteria (section 3.6.6).

3.7.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Participants were fully informed about confidentiality and its limits. They were made aware that professional transcription services might be used, and that any such services would have signed confidentiality agreements. Participants were also made aware that, although quotes would be used in the write-up for the Thesis and possibly a journal article, all identifying information about themselves (such as names) would be removed from the transcripts and the Thesis and pseudonyms would be used. They were also made aware that academic supervisors and examiners would have access to anonymised transcripts. The consent form (Appendix 5) explained the circumstances when confidentiality would be broken, such as when the participants or another individual was at risk of harm or any indication of illegal activity was disclosed. In accordance with the Cardiff University Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

Policy 2010, as soon as practical the researcher would then inform her supervisor and the named member of staff for safeguarding in the school.

3.7.3 Objectivity

To avoid any ethical conflicts, the researcher chose a sixth form in a county outside her employment where she had no professional or personal involvement with the sixth form and therefore researcher objectivity was promoted.

3.7.4 The right to withdraw from the study

The right to withdraw from the study was made clear to the participants via the consent letter (Appendix 5) and a further reminder was given at the start of the interview. "Researchers must recognise the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any reason or no reason, and at any time, and they must inform them of this right" British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011, p.6). It was emphasised to the participants that they were under no obligation to take part as participation was purely on a voluntary basis and that they could terminate the interview at any time. In addition, participants were also informed that they did not have to answer any question they did not want to and that they could have their data withdrawn from the research any time with immediate effect from the end of the interview up to a certain date (two weeks after the interview). If requested, it would then be erased and not used in the research. This was explained verbally before and at the end of the interview and afterwards via email.

Before the interviews were conducted, each participant was briefed regarding what to expect within the interview via the information sheet (Appendix 4) as part of the consent gathering process. The contact details of the researcher were also given in the original email so that participants could register their interest and have an opportunity to discuss the research or their involvement and the possibility of "stress, potential harm, or related questions or concern arises despite the precautions" British Psychological Society (BPS, paragraph 8.2, 2009). It was important that participants should not feel under duress at any point of the study.

3.7.5 Pseudonyms

Participants were notified of the protocol regarding the data collection and storage including the fact that pseudonyms would be used in the transcriptions and the Thesis.

3.7.6 Interview times and location

The researcher and the Head of Sixth Form agreed in advance that the interviews would be held in a quiet room on the school premises but not in the sixth form, to ensure privacy and confidentiality as recommended by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2008). The interviews were planned to last one hour, which is deemed to be an appropriate length of time for an interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The interviews were accommodated within the participants' timetable (free study periods as negotiated with the participant).

3.7.7 Named individuals

Participants were asked at the beginning of the interview not to use names of teachers, peers or anyone else, in order to protect their identities. Any specific information or name that was mentioned was removed from the audio tape before transcription.

3.7.8 Debriefing

It was also important that the researcher highlighted to participants the responsibility that the researcher had regarding their physical and psychological welfare, which could be affected during the research process, and prepared a protocol in advance and established an appropriate referral route, in case support was needed (BPS Code of Human Ethics, 2014). A protocol was agreed that, at the end of the debriefing session, a named teacher was given as a point of contact for the participant to go to, should there be a need to speak to someone or to access support. It was also imperative to explain to the participants that confidentiality could not be assured if, during the course of the interview, an issue arose that placed them or another individual at risk of harm or any indication of illegal activity was disclosed (BERA, 2011).

Following each interview, in the de-brief session (BPS, 2009) the participant was provided with time to reflect on the process and given an opportunity to request the removal of any material from the recording which she/he felt uncomfortable about. Within a final discussion, the research aims were shared and there was a chance for the participant to ask questions. A debriefing form (Appendix 8) was also provided supporting the verbal briefing and was discussed with the participant. The contact details of the researcher, research supervisor and the Ethics Committee were also included in the debriefing form (Appendix 8) in case the participants wanted to have an opportunity to discuss the research or their involvement.

All participants were thanked for their participation in the research verbally at the end of the interview and by email, with a reminder of the two week period given for requests for removal of recorded material. Those participants who expressed an interest in the research but were not chosen to participate were also thanked via email and informed that the study had been completed.

The Headteacher, Head of Sixth Form and all other school staff were also thanked for their cooperation and support.

3.7.9 Data protection

The data was gathered with permission of the participants (BPS, 2009) using audio recording and handwritten notes and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Transcriptions were kept as password protected documents accessible only by the researcher. Consent forms with signatures were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

3.7.10 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted for the study by Cardiff University Ethics Committee in January 2016. The research project commenced in April 2016 following receipt of ethical approval and finished in May 2016.

3.8 Data Collection

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.56) wrote that for a successful data collection method "IPA is best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences". Therefore, the current study used in-depth individual semi-structured interviews (Coolican, 2004). The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed a degree of structure to an interview where pre-identified areas could be explored and discussed. In contrast to surveys and structured questionnaires, it gave the researcher the scope to be flexible (Robson, 2002) and allowed the interview to evolve and develop in an interesting way, for example, participants were able to expand on their answers and the researcher was able to ask subsidiary questions.

The timing of the interviews was arranged so that they did not coincide with examinations and other important timetabled events happening in the sixth form. Initially, the interviews had been scheduled after the half term in February to allow time for the participants to adjust to their new environment and be able to reflect on and share their experiences about their transitions. The researcher considered that to have

conducted the interviews any earlier would have been premature and that the students might not have been ready to take part, or could still be adjusting to the transition and not be in a position to reflect and voice their experiences; with this mind, it was considered that the richness and detail of their accounts might have been limited and not suitable for phenomenological analysis. However, the interviews, due to timetabling issues, needed to be rescheduled to the early summer term and organised before the commencement of the exam season. This amendment was deemed to be acceptable as the participants could remember clearly and were able to discuss their earlier experiences. Interviews began in mid-April and were completed in the first week of May.

3.9 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in March 2016, with a sixth form student from the school in question who volunteered specifically to take part in the pilot interview, to trial the chosen method of data collection. An interview was used as the pilot study for this current research study. This gave the opportunity to check whether there were any issues with the questions being asked regarding ambiguity and clarity that meant that amendments were needed. In this case, the use of prompting and subsidiary questions was helpful as the participant only answered the initial questions briefly at times.

It was also helpful to gauge the length of time that the interview took in terms of both asking the prepared questions, discussing consent and also debriefing. In addition, the pilot study was a useful context for practising interview technique within an IPA framework to shape the researcher's approach for the interviews to follow. The process also helped the researcher to assess how the interview experience had been for the participant as well as to identify and make any changes or refinements necessary. In the pilot study, the participant was aware of the tape recorder, found it difficult to relax and wondered whether his responses had been slow. The researcher made a note to ensure that future participants were reassured to take as much time as they needed when responding and not to worry about the presence of the tape recorder. It was also important to reflect on the process after each interview to ensure that the consistency and suitability of the questions were maintained.

The data from the pilot study were not included within the study.

3.10 Trust and Rapport

Trust and rapport with the participants were built through the use of a clear explanation of the task and an assurance of confidentiality. The researcher was aware of the need to remain sensitive and empathetic to participants' verbal and non-verbal cues (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) and to monitor these for signs of discomfort (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher was careful to highlight to the participants before the start of the interviews that there were no right or wrong answers and that the interview would resemble a one sided conversation because of the interviewer's interest in the participant's experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As the interviewer, the researcher gave the participants time to process the questions and to formulate answers. It was felt important that the researcher showed interest in, and curiosity about, the participants by being an active listener. The researcher was also aware of the need to clarify the meaning of responses with the participant where necessary and to ensure consciously that there was not a feeling of power differential between the researcher and the participant (BPS, 2014), in order to establish trust and rapport.

3.11 Data Analysis

IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) was the approach used to analyse the data. Supervision was gained from the researcher's supervisor. Further discussions were also sought with qualitative researchers at Cardiff University. Furthermore, the analytic process was informed by guidelines for ensuring quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000; Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis & Dillon, 2003).

3.11.1 Individual case analysis

Following IPA's idiographic commitment, each of the six verbatim transcripts was analysed in-depth individually (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Each audio recording was listened to more than once, and the transcript read several times so that the researcher became immersed in and familiar with the content. Initial annotations were made in the right hand margin, which were exploratory comments describing initial thoughts about the descriptive content (what the participant said), linguistic use (specific use of language e.g., repetition, contradictions and metaphors), and more conceptual comments (interrogative and interpretative comments) from reading the transcript (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Each transcript was then re-read and the left hand margin was used to note emergent themes, which involved examining both the original transcript and the initial thoughts from the exploratory comments column and bringing these together. Each transcript was analysed in this way until all six transcripts had been examined to this in-depth level. (Appendix 9)

3.11.2 Emergent themes

The next stage of the analysis involved developing the emergent themes that were found and then moving these around to form clusters of related themes through establishing connections and patterns. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) detail how super-ordinate themes can be identified through *abstraction* (putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster); *subsumption* (developing super-ordinate themes); *polarization* (identifying oppositional relationships); *contextualization* (relate themes to life events); *numeration* (the frequency with which a theme is supported); or *function* (what themes serve as a function to the participant).

3.11.3 Cross case analysis

The next stage involved looking for patterns across cases. This was achieved by drawing up a list of themes for the group, and clustering these into master themes representing shared higher-order qualities. The master table of themes for the group is shown in Figure 2 in the Results chapter.

3.11.4 Validity and reliability

Assessing the validity and reliability of qualitative research requires different criteria to those for assessing quantitative work which is rooted in positivist and scientific processes (Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002). There are a number of available guidelines for carrying out this process for qualitative studies. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advocated the Yardley (2000) guidelines, and have described how they apply them to an IPA study, therefore the researcher elected to use Yardley's four guiding principles: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance.

3.11.5 Sensitivity to context

Sensitivity to context has been demonstrated in the study. The researcher considered her role and interaction with the participants via the sixth form meeting, the email contact and throughout the interviews conducted, with the emphasis on establishing

rapport and building trust. Ethical issues were also considered throughout the planning and execution of the study to ensure that the welfare of participants was a priority. Sensitivity was considered throughout the in-depth analysis of the data and verbatim extracts were used to support findings and to give the participants a voice in the study.

3.11.6 Commitment and rigour

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested the importance of attentiveness to participants during data collection in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the topic investigated and to develop competence and skill in the method used. The researcher was new to qualitative research and IPA, but sought to develop knowledge and skills in this area through supervision, reading and advice from qualitative researchers as well as attending an IPA workshop and data clinic at Cardiff University.

To ensure rigour in this study, two independent reviewers also generated themes from the data and these were compared with the themes found by the researcher to see whether there was consensus regarding the emergent themes produced from the transcripts.

3.11.7 Transparency and coherence

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advocated that transparency relates to how clearly phases of the research process are described in the process of writing the findings, with an emphasis on consistency between the research undertaken and the fundamental theoretical beliefs of the method being employed. Yardley (2000) postulates that reflexivity is an important aspect of transparency. This was achieved by the researcher keeping a reflective research diary.

3.11.8 Impact and importance

An important aspect of the research is whether it tells the reader something interesting and of value. In this case, the researcher will discuss the relevance of the findings and their potential future impact and implications for the EP profession in the Discussion section of the Thesis.

3.11.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is reflection on the impact of the researcher on the study (Yardley, 2000). Within qualitative research it is recognised that the researcher's beliefs and assumptions

will impact upon data gathered and examined. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to be honest about her personal perspective.

As part of conducting qualitative research, the researcher kept a research diary to reflect on her thoughts and findings during the process. This continual reflexive approach also helped the researcher to reflect on her role and data collection and the analysis process. Willig (2013) described two types of reflexivity: personal and epistemological.

Epistemological reflexivity involves questioning related to the design and analysis pertinent to the phenomenon being studied. In the case of the researcher, she noted the difficulties she had in the realisation that her research question led her towards qualitative research, of which she had no prior experience. Further concerns were understanding the principles of IPA as well as the practical implications of recruiting and interviewing participants. This led to considerable reflection and problem solving in order to feel confident with the choices being made.

“Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers” (Willig, 2013.p.10)

The researcher was aware of giving the participants the time and opportunity to elaborate on their responses, hence promoting quality in the research, encouraging rich and detailed answers, via the process of prompts and further questioning by the researcher. The researcher reflected often on whether she was doing this effectively and whether the participants understood what was being asked. Listening carefully and being mindful that the list of questions was a ‘road map’ but following the lead of the participant were sometimes difficult to balance, as well as making notes of things that were said by the participants and remembering to return and explore these points further.

The researcher also reflected upon the possible bias introduced due to the participants’ knowledge about the researcher’s status as an EP as well as being a researcher; and whether this might have influenced them in their answers. Through her role as an EP, she had an understanding of how personal belief systems, motivation and perceived power relationships, as well as her own assumptions, can impact on research findings. The researcher reminded the participants that there were no right or wrong answers

and reassured them that the research would follow appropriate ethical procedures as set out by the Ethics Committee and the BPS guidelines, which include protocols regarding anonymity and debriefing.

During the data collection and analysis stages, the researcher was aware of her own prejudgements and personal interpretations due to her immersion in these processes. Objectivity was promoted by eliciting the views of an independent psychologist and a qualitative researcher as a way of promoting inter-rater reliability in data analysis, to exclude the possibility of contradictions or ambiguities within the outcomes.

Taking into account the importance and relevance of reflexivity, the following section provides the researcher's self-reflexivity statement.

3.11.10 Self-reflexivity

The researcher was previously a teacher for four years, teaching in primary education. She trained to be an educational psychologist and has been in practice with a local authority in England for seventeen years.

The researcher has always been interested in school transitions. The curiosity about transition into FE is not just a professional interest in relation to recent changes in legislation in Raising the Age of Participation (as outlined in the Education and Skills Act, 2008) but has also has more personal relevance for the researcher.

At the age of 16 years, the researcher completed her O levels and moved to another secondary school which had an attached sixth form with only a few of her peers, to do A Levels.

The researcher made new friends from other schools and took part in school activities. However, she found the transition academically challenging in some subjects, and, because the staff were unknown and unfamiliar, found it difficult to access help. After completing a year, the researcher made the decision to leave and go to an alternative sixth form, completed her A Levels and subsequently completed an undergraduate Psychology degree at university.

Although it has been thirty years since the researcher has been in FE, her experience and hearing similar accounts from people in the past and currently have made her aware that transitions to FE are not without difficulties and that this can be a time of challenge

but also of positive change. The researcher is particularly aware that this is something that the EP profession could potentially pursue, to support young people, as they try to follow their individual trajectories through education at 16 years plus.

3.12 Summary: Methodology

Within this chapter, the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance has been identified as constructionist and relativist. IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) is a qualitative approach, which is consistent with the researcher's theoretical commitment and is consistent with the research question that is being examined. Alternative qualitative methods have been considered and rationales were given as to why these were deemed unsuitable. IPA and its theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography have been outlined as well as its methodological limitations. The method employed, including details of participant recruitment, has been provided. The researcher highlighted the importance of ethical considerations, participant welfare and protocols as outlined by referring to ethics and conduct policies devised for research by professional bodies such as the BPS. The data analysis approach that is adopted by IPA and guidelines to ensure quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000) was defined. The issue of reflexivity in qualitative inquiry was deliberated, finishing with the researcher's self-reflexivity statement.

The next chapter will provide information on the six participants whom took part in the study. The super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes generated from the data using IPA will be presented with supporting quotations from the participants to illustrate their experiences.

Chapter 4

4.0

Results

4.1 Introduction to the Results

In this chapter, an introduction is made to the participants who took part in the research (Table 2) as well as the findings from the transcript data from the semi-structured interviews, using IPA for the analysis. Super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes were identified for each participant as well as the group collectively. Data was examined to show both convergence and divergence of clusters and patterns within the group as well as to capture a detailed interpretative exploration via extracts of text. The linguistic and metaphorical analyses plus the uniqueness of the individual experience are also presented and discussed.

Table 2 Background information on the participants

Participant pseudonym	Age	A Levels
Alice	17	Arts A Levels
Harry	16	Arts A Levels
Jack	17	Arts and Sciences A Levels
Lucy	17	Arts A Levels
Marie	16	Sciences A Levels
Tom	16	Arts A Levels

Six participants were interviewed. They had all attended other local schools to complete their GCSEs, with the exception of Tom. He had previously been educated in another county and had recently moved into the area. In order to protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used.

For the purpose of the Thesis, the term 'stayer' will refer to students who have chosen to remain at the sixth form attached to the school and 'incomer' will be the term used to describe students who chose to come to the sixth form but had completed their Year 11 in another school. It is likely that the themes generated in this study might reflect the

experiences of both incomers and stayers, however, the purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of young people coming into the sixth form from elsewhere.

An in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts (Appendix 9, 10, 11 and 12) identified three main super-ordinate themes: Importance of social inclusion, focus on intrapersonal factors and academic demands of A Level study. These super-ordinate themes and their related sub-ordinate themes are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Master table of super-ordinate themes and sub-themes

Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes
Importance of social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making friendships • Peer support • Identity and belonging
Focus on intrapersonal factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional impact of transition • Motivation for choice of sixth form
Academic demands of A Level study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased workload • High expectations • Teacher support • Organisation, structure and time management

When analysing the participants' transcripts, it was important to relate themes to the research question being addressed and to take account of subject matter that was important to the participants. In order to identify superordinate themes, a structure was incorporated to consider these and any connections between each account which could be represented. At this stage, the researcher perceived that some emerging themes clustered together immediately whereas others did not. It was also at this point that the researcher needed to consider reducing the number of themes that had emerged from the group data, as guidance has illustrated that a more thorough and synthesised analysis is achieved with fewer themes (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

In relation to the individual themes with regard to experiences of transition, a summary table highlighting the super-ordinate themes, sub-ordinate themes and quotes from the

participants can be found in Appendix 12. This table shows samples of data relating to the themes and some of these extracts will be presented in the following text, alongside other supporting quotations.

4.2 Importance of Social Inclusion

Within the accounts given by the participants, social factors appeared to be a common theme linked to the experience of transition into the sixth form. Analysing this concept further, the participants made reference to their relationships with their peers, at an individual level and within a group situation. The super-ordinate theme of social inclusion was identified as a construct supported by the emergence of data creating three distinctive sub-ordinate themes which were making friendships, peer support, identity and belonging.

4.2.1 Making friendships

All participants highlighted initial concerns about being new to the sixth form and not knowing many people. All but one of the participants had come with a few pupils from their previous school; in some cases acquaintances, rather than friends. The major concern regarding transition was about meeting new peers, the need to make friends quickly during the first few weeks, to avoid the risk of social isolation and to sustain a personal social stability. In most accounts, there was urgency regarding, and priority attached to, making friends and yet there was a fear that this might not happen.

...God, no one, no one, I mean when I came into the room I was, like, no one is going to want to (laughs) no one's going to want to be my friend and then, of course, they did and that's a very rewarding feeling... (Tom p.8 lines 332-333)

...I've got to make friends with these guys-yeah, in a way, safety in numbers. You've got to get into that social group and you're (laughs) you're all right. (Jack p.3 lines 109-112)

Tom's extract highlighted a genuine anxiety about not being wanted as a friend and the repetition of "no-one" four times, as well as nervous laughter, emphasised this point. His anxiety might have been heightened by the fact that he was new to the area as well as new to the school and therefore felt at a disadvantage in terms that other peers are in established friendships. Jack's quote appeared to show his anxiety about joining a group, evidenced by the choice of words that he used, in particular "safety in numbers" highlighting the urgency of his wish to belong and feel safe within a group. Although

neither Tom nor Jack said it directly, it would appear that they were anxious about being left on their own and felt vulnerable. They both express a sense of relief when they are successful in securing friendships; they use simple phrases such as “a rewarding feeling” and “you’re all right” and then almost dismiss the situation as though there really was nothing to be anxious about in the first place.

Others, in particular Lucy, seemed more confident about making friends and prepared to be more positive about it. It is possible that Lucy had the added advantage of coming to the sixth form with other friends, so her experience would have been different.

So me and my best friends just set out and we’re, like, we’re going to make new friends... (Lucy p.1 lines 26-27)

...I knew I was going to make friends anyway so I wasn’t, it wasn’t, too much of a deal. (Lucy p.1 lines 43-44)

Lucy’s positivity about making friends is clear through her choice of words which includes the ‘I’ statements. She came with close friends and so was in an established friendship group; she was therefore, less concerned about making friendships compared to those who came in on their own or with fewer people. Lucy had social support already and did not feel the pressure to make more friends.

Alice spoke about the importance of making contact with peers in the initial period of transition, not necessarily with permanent friendships in mind, but to at least be acquainted with others.

I think in the first couple of weeks you’ve just got to try and make as many friends as you possibly can. You might – it might seem like you never speak to any of them again but you’d probably be surprised. (Alice p.9 lines 396-398)

The impression given by Alice is that her advice might be based on her own experiences. Although she does not use the first person in her account, her reference to when it might be helpful to know someone through a brief encounter at a later stage could be based on her own experience. Therefore indicating that Alice is aware of the importance of making friends within the first few weeks, so that a sense of social connection is maximised. Paradoxically, Alice made an earlier reference in her interview to not being particularly interested in making friends in the sixth form, suggesting that these

friendships have a tendency to be short term and therefore, did not merit her time and energy.

...I can tell that when some things have time limits some things don't, and I think that my attitude to coming here affects that. Because I didn't come here to make friends really. (Alice p.8/9 lines 381-384)

...I think that lack of drive to make new friends probably did affect my transition. (Alice p.9 lines 386-387)

Alice's lack of effort into making friends might have suggested that Alice found it difficult to initiate and maintain friendships. This time limit mentioned might be an excuse for not making and keeping new friends. Socially, within the sixth form, Alice's description of her experiences seemed to suggest that she was an introvert and also shy.

Opportunities arose to make friends in the tutor group or in subject classes.

So we all had to go as a tutor in there, so me and him sat together ...and now we're, like, really close friends. So I thought that was really nice. (Tom p.2 lines 78-81)

...I saw this girl, who looked a little bit lost in my class, and she was new as well and so I was new and so I just kind of stuck to her (laughs). Yeah, so we were friends because we were both new. (Alice p.5 lines 223-225)

Tom and Alice both expressed how finding individuals who were in a similar situation helped them to establish friendships, as though there was a mutual understanding. Alice's reference to being with her new friend gives the impression that Alice had now found someone and was not going to let her go, as she needed her. Her laughter might have indicated embarrassment at what she said. The final line regarding being friends with someone because of being new, but not saying anything more about the relationship, conveys the sense of a friendship of convenience rather than anything more, which could presumably be replaced by another.

The majority of participants as incomers drew attention to the fact that it was easier to make friends with others who were also 'new' within the sixth form because they were in a similar situation.

But I think that's something, which happened quite a lot, that all the new people kind of banded together and made like friends. (Alice p.2 lines 60-62)

...the other people that were also new, they made friends very easily and they are my close friends now. (Marie p.1 lines 23-24)

Alice and Marie indicated that many incomers naturally gravitated towards each other because of their status and their need to be accepted into friendship groups. “Banded together” suggested that the incomers could form their own group within the sixth form community.

Harry, in comparison with the other participants, knew some of the ‘stayers’ from external clubs and primary school.

...I had people from my primary school here that I knew but I hadn't seen them for a while, which helped because we sort of clicked instantly because we knew each other. (Harry p.2 lines 63-66)

...because I knew of lots of people from outside of school and they knew who I was but I think because they'd been together for so long they already had big friendship groups. So I thought it was quite hard to try and join in on these big groups of friends. Yeah. (Harry p.2 lines 42-46)

His major concern was about how to join their existing social groups and he emphasised the word “big” twice, which gave the impression that he was overwhelmed by the size of the groups. This suggests that, initially, Harry might not have felt confident about trying to become part of the established groupings. However, it would appear that Harry’s advantage, in already knowing people, actually helped him to re-establish these friendships with ease, hence providing a comfortable social transition for him. In his description regarding making friendships, he used the idiom “clicked instantly” which suggested that he experienced instant connections with old friends and acquaintances. For Harry, his experience suggests a positive reunion, despite his initial concerns.

Time within the sixth form enabled the participants to make more friends and to extend their inner circles to include different social groups.

But like as I've been here longer and I've got classes with different people I've become friends with people who are, were here before... (Lucy p.3 lines 134-135)

...I've still got the same friends that I met on the first day but then it's expanded to encompass different people... (Tom p.2 lines 91-92)

This suggests that over time, and during different social and academic experiences, participants found ways to integrate themselves and meet more people. Lucy was able to include the stayers as part of her new friendship groups and Tom used the terms

“expanded” and “encompass” which suggested that his friendships have grown in numbers and he has made diverse friendships.

4.2.2 Peer support

Peer support was considered to be an important aspect of transition into the sixth form for all participants. Social, emotional and physical support from peers, who were friends or older students in the year above, were emphasised as important during the transition experience in helping reinforce a sense of community and belonging. Friends were seen as key in offering support. Tom and Marie highlighted this, as well as making reference to the group size.

I think it's that sense of – from the first week, having to rely on your small close-knit friendship group. There was only like four of us and we each had to help each other and now that it's grown it's more easier but I think that may have helped because you could talk to them about different things that you were finding difficult. (Tom p.4 lines 170-175)

So there will almost be sort of a smaller group, and that smaller group is always the new people, and they are very supportive and it's very, it's a very nice group to be in. (Marie p.4 lines 145-147)

Tom used the term “close-knit” to describe his friendship group, suggesting that his positive experience of peer support was sustained by the intimacy or exclusivity of the group, which was important for a sense of belonging within the initial phase of transition. Marie also made reference to the small group of people in a similar position to herself, i.e., new to the school. The size of the group mentioned by both Tom and Marie suggested that they would not get ‘lost’ amongst their own small group compared to the other friendship groups that were operating within the sixth form community.

Peer support was deemed to be important for some participants, in a social context with other peers or staff.

...in my classes people were welcoming and they wanted to talk... (Lucy p.3 lines 130-133)

But I found that someone in my (name of A Level subject) in my tutor had (name of A Level subject) with me that I did meet on that day, so technically we'd just met that day and so we sat next to each other and so that worked out for everyone. (Alice p.5 lines 204-207)

...they've...introduced me to people and this... a lot of people in my classes who know me, they sort of help me make a good impression on the teachers because they say what I'm like and... what I – what my interests

are to sort of help me start talking to people. So they are sort of conversation helpers I suppose, which is good. (Harry p.4 lines 141-145)

Lucy and Alice seemed relieved that some of their peers in class were positive about wanting to make contact. In Alice's experience, the interpretation of "worked out for everyone" was that having the same peer in the tutor group and in a subject class met needs for both of them and provided a comfortable experience, in that they had each other to sit with and talk to without feeling socially isolated. In other words, it was reciprocally beneficial.

Harry appeared to rely on his peers to support him socially. There is a sense that his friends seemed to be aware that he needed them to speak for him and act as mediators or facilitators and he appreciated this by acknowledging how he was helped. Harry himself described his peers as "conversation helpers". This suggested that Harry was not confident about starting conversations or socialising with unfamiliar people; potentially, he was socially anxious. Therefore, Harry's experience of peer support helped him to integrate socially during the transition stage.

Peer support was also deemed important for offering emotional sustenance during times of stress, as indicated by Harry and Alice.

...my friends are good; they recognise if I'm stressed and they sort of tell me to calm down and organise things outside of school to take my mind off it. (Harry p.6 lines 279-281)

...I always like to make time to meet up with my friends from my old school. (Alice p.7 lines 304-305)

...I know like not having that face-to face- conversation stuff can be quite bad because you need to balance social life and school work and just everything. (Alice p.7 lines 316-318)

The impression given by Harry in his quote is that he is a very anxious person and this is easily communicated to, and interpreted by, his friends, who then calm him down. Similarly, Alice gets supports from seeing her old school friends. This gave the impression that Alice valued these relationships and therefore she prioritises time for them. There was a sense of frustration from Alice as she spoke about the "balance" of work and social life in the final sentence, and the interpretation of this was that it was difficult to manage.

Participants felt confident in asking peers to help them when they needed support and this appeared to be positively received.

...because I was friends with a few of them before I came, they introduced me to people, which helped, and showed me around the school. So if I ever got lost or confused I could ask them about things, which definitely helps. (Harry p.3 lines 123-128)

Um, (pause) friends have been-yeah, pretty supportive I would say, my closest friends. If-if I'm stuck on something I'd always ask them and they'd always help me, so-yes, that's fine. (Jack p.5 lines 226-227)

Using the word "I", Harry and Jack confidently spoke about the fact that they could directly ask for help from their peers. Harry's references to "lost" and "confused" indicated that perhaps he had not been confident about the physical or social environment of the school. Jack's pause at the beginning suggested that he needed to think about the question but then he emphasised the point that his "closest friends" had been supportive. Although he does not directly say how he is helped, the support seems guaranteed. Jack paused and stuttered on "if" and used the phrase "pretty supportive", possibly indicating that he might have needed to think about the question and might not have asked for much support to date. However, the fact he thought it would be "fine" suggested that he was confident in the support he would get from his friends.

Harry was the only participant who spoke in his interview about the benefits of peer support from the year above (Y13) on arrival into a new educational placement.

...everyone that moves school could probably do with someone in the year above to sort of guide them around I think (Harry p.3 lines 126-128)

(Interviewer) A bit like a buddying system?

Yeah, I think that would help. That would be good. (Harry p.3 line 130)

Harry's thinking might have centred on the fact that those who have been in the school for a year are now settled into the sixth form environment and routine and are therefore better placed to support Y12 incomers. Although not said directly, Harry might have been considering Y13s who had also been incomers in Y12 and could have added a valuable peer perspective on how to cope with the transition from outside into the sixth form. In Harry's experience, he appreciated the peer support offered by Y13s, during his transition phase.

...the people that have already been here make extra effort to make sure that you are happy and, especially the year above, they sort of guide you around the school, which helps. (Harry p.3 lines 118-121)

They did quite a lot of presentations at the start of the year to sort of inform you about the school, which I thought was helpful. Um, and they were really open about asking them things. They made you feel you could ask them anything about... questions about the school, which helped. (Harry p.3 lines 133-137).

This insight into Harry's experience demonstrated that this type of practical peer support was important to him and helped him to feel included. The impression given by the phrase "extra effort" was that the peer support was more than what Harry was expecting. This level of assistance appears interactive and empowering. There is a sense that Harry was pleased to have this support and he finished his final sentences by saying support was helpful.

4.2.3 Identity and belonging

A strong common theme that emerged throughout the analysis was the perception of identity within the sixth form. Participants who were new to the sixth form appeared to indicate that there were two distinct identities: those who were new to the sixth form, (described as incomers), and those who remained from the lower school, (defined as stayers). The perceptions of the incomers as they transitioned into the sixth form from other schools and their sense of belonging were examined. Participants felt there were noticeable differences between themselves as the incomers and those who were stayers. A sense of belonging was also identified as a significant factor, with participants highlighting variables such as the tutor group and participation within clubs or roles within the sixth form/school environment. Identity within the community will be examined first.

Some participants highlighted that there were different and very distinctive communities within the sixth form between the incomers and the stayers.

I would say between the people that have been here it's very strong but between the people that have been here and the new people it's very weak. So there's almost two separate communities. (Marie p.4 lines 141-143)

I don't know everybody in my year and I find that kind of weird because I knew every single person by name at (name of previous school). So I think – having that sense of community would just be difficult. I mean there is

one but it is definitely more centred around the people that have been here since Year 7... (Lucy p.2 lines 89-93)

Marie used adjectives such as “very strong” and “very weak” to describe the polarisation of the two groups and emphasised that there were two “communities”, hence conveying a feeling of limited social cohesion between the groups. The impression given is that Marie sees the stayers as a powerful and indestructible community whereas, in comparison, the incomers are perceived as fragile and powerless. In contrast, Lucy saw the “community” as one based around the stayers, only because they knew each other.

There is an indication within the interviews that the stayers, having been in the school for five years, are perceived as ‘full members of the establishment’ and have allegiance to their houses and a clear identity as to who they are. This is made obvious to the incomers.

And here it's very noticeable who has been here from Year 7 to Year 12 because they've all already sorted themselves out into groups. And you've got, like, the sporty jockey people, who are like the popular kind of people and then, yeah, it's hard trying to slot yourself in somewhere. (Tom p.3 lines 103-106)

...people who've been here the last five years, they've got into their house and probably become a lot more-I don't know the word-patriotic... (Jack p.7 lines 313-315)

The five year membership of the school on the part of the stayers is highlighted by Tom and Jack. Tom appeared to be thinking about where he fitted in to the various groups that existed and used the phrasal verb “slot” which gave the impression that, as someone who was unknown, he was faced with the challenge of easing himself into a group and having some sense of belonging. From his description of the students who were popular, the impression was that Tom did not identify with this particular group, from the pause and “yeah” that followed.

Jack used the adjective “patriotic” to describe the stayers, which gave an impression of the stayers being devoted and loyal to their house system, something that an incomer such as Jack might find difficult to understand and appreciate. Jack is reflective in that he can understand that length of time in the school has established this allegiance.

Lucy acknowledged that the longevity of the established 'stayer' friendship groups from the lower school might be perceived as a challenge, not only by the incomers but also by the stayers.

...I think a lot of people have had that same group from day one in Year 7, trying to then introduce someone who is completely different from a new school or like something would be quite difficult, just to sort of get to know a whole new person. (Lucy p.4 lines 143-147)

Lucy offered a reflective and empathetic interpretation as to why it could be difficult for the stayers to be accepting of incomers, who might change the group identity. Lucy's comprehension of this scenario might be based on her own personal experiences in her previous school, which therefore helped her to identify with how some of the stayers felt. There is an impression in Lucy's account that the incomer has an unfamiliar identity, from the phrase "completely different", and that the two year period in the sixth form does not allow sufficient time for others to become acquainted. Lucy's explanation might also mean that she personally is not concerned about becoming accepted by, or sharing an identity with, the stayers.

Some of the participants indicated that, from their experiences, they were the ones who had to adapt in order to fit in and be accepted by the stayers.

Like they've known each other for five years and they've got to know each other really well; whereas they don't quite know you and so you are in a way put under pressure to show certain aspects of your personality that they can get along with. So you've got to – I'm quite like introverted in a way. I don't like having to show too much but in a way I feel as though I have to show something otherwise I'll never get on, on with them all. (Jack p.2 lines 50-53)

Whereas if you go to the old students, as it were, their group... yeah, it's not supportive and you're not part of their group. The new people have to be accepting of the old people and the school...you know...making the effort and being friendly to fit in and be accepted. Segregating the old people would be good um but they wouldn't have liked to change because it's their school...and we are the outsiders, so we have to change. (Marie p.4 lines 145-153)

Jack described himself as "introverted" and felt "pressure" to show particular personality traits to feel accepted. This gave the feeling that he felt uncomfortable with the obligation to display a different side of his personality in order to be liked. An interpretation of Jack's extract is that he might be a quieter, shy character who was

anxious about what others thought about him. He might have felt the need to portray himself as someone he was not, in order to be accepted.

Marie distinguished that the two group identities within the sixth form as 'old' and 'new'. This is captured in the words she used such as "segregating the old people" and "we are the outsiders, so we have to change". There is a question here of whether Marie feels that she is part of the school or whether she feels that she is still an interloper. Her perception is that the incomers were put in a more challenging position and that the stayers should have been more receptive.

Although the identity theme involving the incomers and stayers was noted by all participants, Alice and Marie used the specific term "an outsider" to describe their personal experiences, unlike the other participants.

But because I've just moved here and feel like an outsider, in a way, because they've already got like set sports teams; people have like planned what they are going to be doing for house drama since they were like in Year 8 and so I just let them do it. (Alice p.4 lines 164-167)

...you feel like an outsider compared to all the people that have been at (name of sixth form) since Year 7. (Marie p.1 lines 14-16)

This gave the impression of Alice and Marie not feeling connected within their new community. They compare themselves to those who have been at the school longer, who are used to the environment and have established links. Their constructed identity as outsiders might arise from Alice and Marie being in the minority. Marie further emphasised this in describing the experience below.

...I was the only new person in that class and I was the only one that had sat a different exam board and a different course. (Marie p.2 lines 75-76)

Marie's experience of being an outsider extends from the general to the specific as she described how she felt in one of her classes: not only the aspect of being a newcomer to the school but the fact that she felt it academically and the differences isolated her. An interpretation of Marie's account might be that she did not feel worthy of being in the class because she did not have the same shared experiences as her peers and by default felt like an 'outsider'.

Although there is acknowledgement from the majority of participants that there is a noticeable difference between the stayers and incomers in identity, Lucy offered a positive outlook from her own experience.

But there are so many new people here you can form your own group so it's not an issue like, you-it's very easy just to make other friends and have your own group without anybody from (name of sixth form) already. (Lucy p.4 lines 152-155)

Lucy appeared less concerned about group identity and the making of friendship groups because there are “so many” new people and reinforced this, by repeating herself. An interpretation could be that Lucy was trying to convince herself and the interviewer that making friends had not been an issue for her.

Alice was the only participant to draw attention to the identity difference between Y12 and Y13 students as two distinct groups.

...it's quite cliquy so there is, like, the essence of yeah, we're all together. Like us Year 12s and then also the Year 13s, but then its cliquy. Alice p.4 lines 185-187)

...there's not like a 12 / 13 divide between the common room per se but it's just they're used to things, like, that that – like people, external people just don't pick up on but somehow there's an unspoken rule. (Alice p.3 lines 122-125)

She used the adjective “cliquy” to highlight the exclusiveness of the groups and possibly the difficulty of these groups mixing with each other. Alice used this word twice, which suggested that perhaps she felt uncomfortable as a result of this and she herself might find joining and belonging to social groups difficult. She also referred to the incomers not understanding the group dynamics. Alice's observations might have been based on her own experiences of perhaps finding the Y13s unapproachable and distant or becoming aware that the Y12s stayers tended not to gravitate towards the older cohort, which was observed by the incomers.

The roles of status and identity and the importance of them at this age are recognised by Marie and further supported by Lucy's observation of young people in the latter adolescent years who want to be liked and popular.

It's about your status or identity um for some people of our age it's a big deal. (Marie p.6 lines 275-278)

...kind of make myself a little bit more liked and popular in a way. I mean it's kind of like the thing every teenager wants... (Lucy p.1 lines 23-24)

It would appear from what Marie and Lucy said that identity, or how a person's position is perceived by others, is important to their age group. Being accepted and included are seen as key to young people, whether they are newcomers to an educational setting or not. However, it could be that achieving a personal identity in the new setting is an added pressure on those who are incomers. It is possible that that was also what Marie and Lucy felt.

The issue of being an incomer was something raised by all the participants, as part of their transition, not just as a group identity phenomenon but also linked to a sense of belonging within the sixth form. In particular, Marie and Alice made reference to not belonging.

...within probably the first month it was, it was just really horrible because you just feel like you were not part of anything and that you were always pushed aside and didn't belong here. (Marie p.1 lines 30-32)

Er, it kind of felt like I didn't belong. Like you really do feel like an outsider (laughs) Um, yeah, I think like there's – it's not hostile per se but because it's such a cliquy school and everyone just seems to know each other. Like with the girls who were from other schools, if they weren't there at the time I finished my lessons, because I didn't have lessons with them, I'd just feel awkward. (Alice p.3 lines 110-115)

Alice indicated that she identified with those in a similar situation to herself. She honestly and directly shared the fact that she did not belong. There is a sense from Alice's account that her discomfort centred on the fact she knew very few people and again she used the word "cliquy" to describe the school. Alice appeared to externalise her feelings of isolation and lack of belonging onto the school and others. She emphasised that "everyone" knew everyone else. Alice's experiences are suggestive of anxiety about being socially isolated when her friends were not there, giving the impression that Alice lacks confidence and might become anxious in social situations.

Marie's description of her lack of sense of belonging during the first month in a new school by the use of the adjectives "horrible" and "pushed aside" conveys strong emotion, giving the impression that she experienced being ignored and was unhappy. Marie's initial perceptions were of a need to feel empowered and have a greater sense of belonging. This was communicated in the following extract.

...it was quite hurtful really (laughs) just to come into a group of people and to feel that you're not wanted and not part of the school. So I thought I needed to make the effort to integrate myself and become included. (Marie p.1 lines 42-45)

Marie made the decision to do something positive about her perceived situation suggesting that she is a strong and assertive character, who was determined to change things, as she states that she needs to “make the effort to integrate myself” and become integrated within the community.

In contrast, Harry and Lucy tended to offer a more positive outlook on their own experiences during the transition and this suggests that they felt a sense of belonging.

I just think it's really welcoming. They make a lot of effort to make sure you're okay... (Harry p.3 lines 117-118)

Well I feel like there are so many of us but they still try to learn everybody's name and have a sort of personal relationship with every single student... they do try to make sure they know everybody and sort of have a more personal bond with every single person so no one kind of feels left out with them. (Lucy p.3. lines 107-113)

Harry indicated from his experience that his peers made him feel wanted. His experience might have been more positive due to the fact he already knew some of them. Lucy focused on how the teachers had played a positive part in supporting all students, in particular, new students. Lucy's choice of phrases e.g., “personal bond” and “personal relationship” acknowledged a sense of belonging that is promoted by the staff. Looking closely at Harry and Lucy's accounts, they use the present tense, which is suggestive that they feel that the support, that makes them feel a sense of belonging, remains ongoing.

In contrast, the role of the new tutor group and a low level of belonging were raised by Lucy and Jack.

...so I definitely feel like I've just stepped into somebody else's family. (Lucy p.5 lines 203-204)

...I feel like trying to bond with other people in my tutor group is just so difficult. They are so in their family. (Lucy p.5 lines 208-210)

...there's less of like a family feeling in the tutor like it used to be at my old school. (Harry p.4 lines 160-161)

They both used the word “family” when describing a lack of the affiliation with the tutor group. Their dialogues suggested a lack of affinity compared to their experiences with

their previous tutor groups. Lucy's quotes also indicated alienation because she did not know anyone else in the tutor group.

Some participants described their experiences of involvement or participation as being important in securing a sense of belonging and this was achieved through a range of activities.

Um, I've been in classes with people that I like, have met new people, um... the clubs like sports here is a good way of bonding with people who share common interests, which helps. (Harry p.3 lines 94-96)

This is something that helps me fit in with the school, because I'm taking part in something and being recognised. It has boosted my confidence. (Marie p.3 lines 135-137)

Marie and Harry were able to see the positive aspects of having a role or joining clubs to avoid social isolation, to boost self-esteem and to feel part of the new community.

In comparison, the level of involvement in the more communal aspects of school life for some participants was highlighted as not important, as they wanted to focus their time on themselves.

There are lots of things where I just kind of keep out of it because I just – I don't know, I think I rather focus on me and my lessons and sort of being comfortable... (Lucy p.2 lines 76-79)

...like when it comes to contributing to like house drama or whatever, it's just – well I'm not going to be here for long. (Alice p.4 lines 159-161)

Lucy made a reference to keeping out of things, which would suggest that she feels uncomfortable or even lacks confidence to join in. She says "I think" in reference to her focusing on her studies, which could suggest that she might want to be more involved but is unsure of how to do this, possibly due to shyness. Alice, on the other hand, is direct in her response and appears to indicate that she is unlikely to invest time and energy because she will not be in the sixth form for long. Indeed a number of the participants made reference of their time in the sixth form as a temporary situation as they would only be there for two years.

I feel like it's quite temporary, not like a – not settled as in like I've put my roots down here... (Alice p.5 lines 193-194)

...sixth form is only for two years... (Lucy p.4 line 147)

Besides...I'm only here for two years and then I hope to go to uni. (Marie p.4 lines 159-160)

This would suggest that perhaps, for some participants, taking part in clubs and events is not of importance and, therefore, the investment of time in such activities is not priority. However, some participants were clear about what their focus for the two years was, which was to secure their A Levels.

That's really all I'm looking for out of the sixth form is to get good A Levels rather than to make lasting connections or anything. So that was my mind set when I came. After all, I'm only here for a short time-two years and that is it-I move on again. (Alice p.5 lines 195-199)

I just want to get my A Levels and go. (Jack p.7 line 318)

Alice indicated that she was at the sixth form to work and achieve as a means to an end, which was to get her qualifications. Her use of the word "mindset" suggested a powerful incentive to achieve her goals without interruptions and then to move on to her next quest. Jack's brief one lined response indicated that he wanted to complete the process, collect his qualifications and then go.

Alice gave an interesting viewpoint on her experience of visiting her old school in the first term. She described feeling out of place there and experienced a similar feeling returning to the sixth form, later in the day.

And then after that I came to (name of sixth form) for like a rehearsal or something and then I did feel like quite out of place here as well because I just went back to my old school. So it was quite confusing and so there's still like some points where I do feel a bit out of place per se but it's not like it feels like a new school any more. I'm used to it but it just – sometimes it doesn't quite sink in that I still go here because like with sixth form lessons and stuff I'm not in school for like a whole school day; so I'll just come here to do my lessons and then I'll go. (Alice p.3 lines 138-145)

Alice's experiences suggested that she felt confused by her current placement, which does not feel real and is short term. This indicates that her sense of belonging is low in the new setting but this might have something to do with her previous experiences of moving schools and houses. This is supported by Alice's next extract.

...I move houses quite often. Like I said I've moved schools before so like I'm – it's kind of like I know that some attachments have like a time limit, whether it's places or people. (Alice p.4 lines 150-153)

The above illustration gives an indication that, for Alice, belonging is not necessarily an important construct.

4.3 Focus on Intrapersonal Factors

A theme generated from the interviews was that of intrapersonal factors. This related to the participants' self-perceptions and expectations and the impact that these have had on their transition experiences. The emotional impact of moving into the sixth form and the reasons for choosing the sixth form were the sub-ordinate themes constructed.

4.3.1 Emotional impact of transition

All the participants acknowledged the challenges associated with transition. The challenges associated with the move to a new school for some participants were apparent, particularly a sense of being lost.

...the physical move was quite hard and then, especially coming into the school and not knowing anyone... (Tom p.1 lines 11-12)

...the first kind of day was really like, paranoia... (Tom p.1 line 17)

And I got like um shifted upstairs and into the sixth form room and there was loads of people in there and there was just me, who didn't know anyone, and I walked in and I just didn't know where to go. (Tom p.2 lines 62-65)

So kind of coming into a school with a lot more people and just generally a bigger building was quite- intimidating in some ways... (Lucy p.1 lines 9-11)

...I got very lost with where I was supposed to be going and what I was supposed to be doing... (Lucy p.6 lines 278-280)

...I think sometimes the teachers forget I'm new and I still don't know like everything I'm doing.....' (Lucy p.6 lines 280-281).

Tom felt a sense of "like, paranoia" which gives the impression of confusion because of the unknown. This might be fuelled by the fact he was moving from a small school to a large school in a new area and had been unable to attend an open day or induction day. Tom used the term "shifted" which conveyed a sense of urgency and a mechanical and impersonal procedure. The interpretation is that Tom did not understand the process. Lucy was overwhelmed and confused as to where to go and what to do. There is an indication of Tom and Lucy feeling a sense of helplessness and needing support emotionally.

All participants make reference to a distinction between incomers and stayers, however Marie, in particular, raised this strongly and critically. Though she spoke calmly, her unhappiness was expressed via her choice of words and phrases. The interpretation is that Marie felt that the transition had evoked the making of choices for incomers but not stayers, with the sense that the incomers needed to adapt and mature in the process, whilst the stayers had it 'easy', reinforcing the view of an 'us and them' culture.

But I suppose looking back now you realise that they – they are still quite childish and that they haven't had to grow up unlike us and they haven't had to move schools and they haven't had to make decisions ... (Marie p.1 lines 45-48)

...I had to make all these separate choices and, you know, how would I get here and is this the right sixth form? What subjects am I taking? And the people that were here from Year 7, they didn't have to make any of those. It was just coming back to school again in September, so... and they knew all the teachers, they knew all their friends so it wasn't anything different really for them. (Marie p.2 lines 53-57)

Marie alluded to the fact that the transition involved multiple changes and decisions. She may have felt heavy responsibilities and might have been concerned about making the wrong choices. Therefore, this highlighted Marie's level of anxiety about the situation she was in.

Many of the participants reported mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety when they reflected on their emotions during the transition phase.

I think I was quite nervous but I think it was more excitement really. It's a massive opportunity to just have a fresh start and I think I was really – really more excited than anything. (Lucy p.2 lines 49-51)

Um before I came here there was like a taster day and I came in and I was really confident and I met some new people who were coming here and stuff that was good. And coming up to the first day I started to have a bit more nerves started building up and that's when a bit of anxiety sort of kicked in. (Jack p.3. lines 99-103)

I was definitely quite anxious but I think it helped that there's loads of new people at this school, more than most schools, so everyone is sort of in the same boat as you. (Harry p.2 lines 83-85)

Lucy's account suggested that she was experiencing feelings of excitement and nervousness simultaneously. However, she was positive about the move and seemed to describe an internal locus of control which is supported by the phrase a "fresh start". Whereas, Jack's account indicated how the taster day had boosted his confidence but

the nerves “kicked in”, probably due to the time lapse between that day and the start of term. Jack used the words “a bit” in reference to his feelings, suggesting that the impact was minor. However, Jack also talked about his nerves “building up” which gave the impression that the anxiety might have developed gradually and had more of an impact than initially predicted. In contrast, Harry highlighted that others would be feeling the same way too. He used the metaphor “everyone is sort of in the same boat as you” and therefore rationalised the feelings and emotions as temporary. He made it clear in his interview that he knew he was not the only one to feel this way and this was said directly and with confidence, suggesting that he had had conversations with others about this and had been reassured.

Many participants saw the transition as a positive opportunity for their sixth form career; Jack and Marie both referred to it metaphorically as being the “next chapter” in their lives, giving the impression that they were ready to move on into another phase of their education.

...it felt like a new chapter of my life being opened up... (Jack p.3 lines 104-105)

...the move was the next chapter of my life. (Marie p.3 lines 119-120)

Jack embraced the idea of the move as positive, even though he was worried about the social life in the new sixth form. Despite Marie finding the move challenging on a number of levels, it seemed to boost her confidence and made her a stronger person.

...I've come out a strong person. (Marie p.7 lines 295-296)

You get dropped in the deep end. And initially that was like overwhelming. (Marie p.7 lines 305-306)

But I've got this 'I can do this attitude' and that really helps. (Marie p.7 lines 310-311)

Marie described being “dropped in the deep end”. She stated “I’ve come out a strong person” suggesting that she was determined to make things work and to remain positive. She was able to identify her inner strengths and utilise these. It appears that, after a difficult start, Marie had successfully adjusted to her transition.

The adjustment to the sixth form was reflected on by all of the participants. Taking time to get used to the environment, plus establishing routines and relationships, helped them to feel comfortable and recognised. Many participants were able to reflect on their

transition, from initial feelings of uncertainty and being overwhelmed, to moving forwards and acceptance.

...I'm feeling quite happy and comfortable. I've got all my friends around me and we've all settled down and it's just getting back into that normal routine of a new school and stuff. It's – yeah, I'm really quite comfortable and happy now. (Lucy p.2 lines 56-59)

Um, I feel content I guess; not that worried about things anymore... well I know where the school is and I can work my way around the school and I've got a good group of friends now; so I've sort of just... I'm just happy I guess, I feel I belong now and that things are alright. Mm. It was difficult in the beginning... it took a while -the move here but now I feel more settled, yeah, definitely. Wasn't sure about things in the beginning but I've found my feet. (Harry p.8 lines 351-357)

Lucy and Harry acknowledged that friendships and routines had been important in supporting their transition experience. Lucy repeated the adjectives “happy” and “comfortable” to reinforce how she was feeling. Her use of the less emphatic word “quite” and her tone suggested that she was moderately happy. Lucy might have also used “quite” in a different sense, reflecting teenage speech. In comparison, Harry acknowledged that his transition had been difficult but finished by using the metaphor “I've found my feet”, which indicated that after a period of time he had become familiar and confident in the new situation.

It was acknowledged by participants that transition into a sixth form attached to a new school can be emotionally challenging and this is not always recognised. Tom and Harry emphasised how hard the move can be and that it can be underestimated because of the associated changes, which may include feelings of helplessness, due to not feeling in control.

I'm definitely nowhere near as confident as-as confident as I was and it's- it's definitely a massive confidence hit moving to a new school. (Tom p.3 lines 119-121)

It's hard moving schools even when you're older. Um, I guess people think it's easier...but it's not because so much is happening and you are trying to make sense of it all. (Harry p.8 lines 357-359)

Tom acknowledged that the transition had affected his confidence and the use of the phrase “a massive confidence hit” and the repetition of words illustrated the impact it had on him. Harry, in comparison, makes a general observation rather than speaking directly about himself. He makes the point that moving school at any age is challenging.

It is not clear who the people are that he is referring to but the reference to “so much is happening” could include the social, academic and personal challenges which come with the actual move for an incomer.

4.3.2 Motivation for choosing the sixth form

The motivations behind choosing the sixth form were mainly academic as well as an opportunity for a change. The majority of the accounts made reference to the sixth form’s reputation for good teaching and good exam results.

...it just had the best results for the subjects that I was taking. (Marie p.3 line 109)

...this school’s quite - quite known for its academics. It’s more of like a humanities school than the other one is so I decided to come here. (Tom p.1 lines 44-46)

...in terms of teaching style (name of sixth form) was better. And when I looked at results and stuff, (name of sixth form) had an edge in (name of A Level subjects). (Alice p.3 lines 95-98)

One of the reasons cited by Lucy was that the sixth form had a good reputation.

I think it’s a really, it’s a really good sixth form. I think it all works really well, yeah, it’s good; I know that the sixth form here is a lot better than where I was before and that was definitely a key selling point for this one. (Lucy p.3 lines 99-102)

The term “key selling point” gives the impression that initially Lucy’s experience had been that of a ‘customer’ and the sixth form had been successfully marketed and sold to her. Lucy repeated how good the sixth form was as though she might have needed to convince herself of this. Interestingly, Lucy was not specific about why the sixth form was good, except to directly say that the staff were caring. However, the fact that Lucy did not mention any negatives and compared the sixth form favourably than that of her previous school, suggested that she was satisfied with her current placement.

Some of the participants highlighted wanting a change or fresh start as the motivation for coming to the sixth form and desired different experiences in new surroundings. Alice wanted a complete change and linked this with starting a new subject.

...I just wanted something new and a change and – I know at (name of sixth form) that I won’t have any judgements about me from my last school – not that there were like bad ones per se but it’s just nice to have

a fresh start, especially when you are starting like a new subject. (Alice p.1 lines 24-28)

...I get a bit bored with doing the same thing over and over so I decided to move schools just for a change really. (Harry p.1 lines 9-10)

...it was just being a fresh start really and being able to sort of prove myself to new people I think. (Harry p.1 lines 32-33)

Harry's references to 'boredom' and the need to prove himself amongst new people suggested that he felt the need to reinvent himself elsewhere and be recognised more favourably by a new group of people. To reinvent one's self was also the impression intimated by Lucy below.

Um, I think the fresh start. Not many people came from my old school with me so I just kind of had my best friend and a couple of other people, so being able to start again having, like, no – no one before really was definitely a positive, so I could like reinvent myself or change stuff and just start again with completely different people, teachers, everything. (Lucy p.1 lines 14-18)

Lucy indicated in her extract that she wanted "to start again" but faltered as she began to explain. She stuttered on the word "no" and then changed what she was going to say midway through the sentence, before finishing with a positive. The use of words such as "reinvent", "change stuff" and "start again" suggested that Lucy was not happy in her last placement and wanted to 'put it all behind her'. An interpretation of Lucy's need to reinvent herself is that she went through a process of self-discovery influenced by other people and she needed to find a concordance between what was important to her and her goals. However, there was some conflict for Lucy in making her choice.

As much as I was excited for a new opportunity, leaving behind my friends and teachers that I was particularly close to and sort of that small comforting environment, that was quite difficult. (Lucy p.1 lines 32-35)

There is a paradox in what Lucy has said in her interview. On the one hand, she wanted to leave her past environment and the people associated with it yet she also recognised the difficulties of leaving familiar people and a comfortable environment. This would suggest, that on reflection, Lucy's move created some insecurity and she missed the familiarity of her previous placement.

4.4 The Academic Demands of A Level Study

All the participants made reference to experiencing changes from GCSE to A Level, which included issues such as an increased workload, high expectations, teacher support and

organisation, structure (e.g., established routine) and time management. These are experiences that the participants may share with other incomers and stayers too.

4.4.1 Increased workload

The participants all acknowledged that there is a shift from GCSE to A Level study in terms of expectations about academic work. The enormity of this and the high level of the expectations is described by Tom and Harry.

It's a massive step up. It is just so intense. (Tom p.6 line 269)

It's all... you are working a lot more than you used to be. You need to take more responsibility and that's a big step and can be overwhelming. It's a massive change. (Harry p.5 lines 227-229)

I thought it would be less stressful cos there were fewer subjects-but the workload of each subject's a lot so I feel quite stressed to get the balance for each subject... (Harry p.6 lines 238-240)

Harry's extract summed up the increased academic demands as he used words such as "big", "overwhelming" and "massive" as well as drawing attention to the need to become more responsible. This suggested that perhaps Harry was not expecting such a change. Equally, Tom used similar language and his use of the word "intense" suggested that he experienced considerable academic pressure. Harry made the assumption that fewer subjects would mean less work and less stress, although his reference is to the comparison between GCSEs and A Levels. However, despite the challenges, a positive outlook is highlighted as an effective way of tackling A Level study.

...there is a definite big jump in courses but if you really enjoy them and you are really wanting to do well then it's-it's not a chore. (laughs) (Marie p.5 lines 213-215)

It's definitely just mind over matter. It's like you think, okay, I'm tired. But no, I've still got (laughs) I've still got to do this work. (Tom p.6 lines 256-257)

Both Marie and Tom laughed as they talked, as though it was important to still maintain a sense of humour and perspective about the situation. Marie's point about enjoying the studying would suggest that she enjoys her courses and therefore does not view them as unpleasant tasks. Tom used the proverb "just mind over matter" which suggested that he saw the need for intellectual willpower to master the change from GCSE study to the increased academic demands at A Level.

One of the most important aspects raised by the participants was the increase in the quantity of the work at A Level and this was perceived as unexpected. There might have been an expectation from the participants that they were able to cope because of their recent GCSE successes.

...the workloads have increased a lot since my last school um a hell of a lot more homework, whereas I didn't get that much in GCSE stage. (Jack p.8 lines 353-355)

I remember through GCSEs one of the things I was looking forward to was I was done with taking eleven subjects; I can't wait to narrow it down to four, four subjects that I like and I can put all my effort into. But then when you start doing it and you realise how much work it is because the workload has not changed. If anything it's increased; even though I'm taking less subjects it's a lot harder now. (Alice p. 6 lines 267-272)

There appears to be some disappointment from Alice in that her expectation was that the workload would be different at A Level and that somehow her enjoyment of the subjects have been compromised, resulting in an anti-climax when she realised that the workload would be no different. There is a paradox in what Alice says about the workload not changing and then that it has increased, yet later in her interview she says the following:

But then they don't really prepare you for the change in your workload. But for me there wasn't that much of a change, yeah. (Alice p 6. lines 275-276)

This paradox could be interpreted as Alice seeing herself as a hard worker, who had done more work than was expected of her and therefore thinking that the "increased workload" is not a big change because she has made fewer adaptations to her work ethic. Alice also appears to indicate a lack of teacher support regarding the workload and there is a hint that that such support might have been beneficial as part of the transition.

The academic pace would appear for most participants to be pressurised, due to keeping up with a continuous workload and routine. This is supported by the metaphors used by Jack and Harry as they described their experiences.

I was having to like run onto the treadmill when it's already running. (Jack p. 9 line 393)

...definitely more pressure...bit like being on a hamster wheel. (Harry p. 5 line 232)

The impression from these quotes is that the pace is fast. The treadmill and the wheel represent apparatus associated with a relentless routine, with Jack and Harry trying to keep abreast. Jack makes reference to the speed of pace.

...I soon got the speed sort of figured out and sort of got along with it I suppose. Yeah. (Jack p. 9. lines 394-395)

The impression giving by Jack is that he eventually found an acceptable work pace, although his comments “sort of got along with it” and “I suppose” indicated that perhaps he was not entirely confident with this.

The number of A Levels and the choice of course also impacted on workload. Some of the participants had also chosen to drop an A Level within the year, because of the pressure and stress, in order to help the situation and feel more in control of their studies and reduce anxiety.

And getting rid of it at the moment, that was one of like the best choices I've made all year I think because just the lack of work and extra periods- I can leave earlier, so it just helps a lot; less stress, less pressure and so I would have been in like a completely different state now if I'd carried on taking it. (Alice p. 8 lines 333-337)

...that's why I ended up dropping a subject to try and er cope with some of the work in which I needed to catch up on. (Jack p. 2 lines 74-76)

Alice uses the words “getting rid of it” and Jack talks of “dropping a subject” which gives the impression that they felt the fourth subject was a burden. Throughout Alice’s quote, there is a sense of relief as she talks about what her life is like now and the recognition of how she might have been affected if she had not made that choice. This shows that Alice has insight and can reflect positively on her own decision to study three subjects and make the workload manageable. Jack’s initial extra workload with his fourth A Level reflected that he had to catch up and this became overwhelming and unmanageable. Unlike Alice, Jack seemed to find the decision difficult and gives the impression of not being at ease with it.

Um, I felt a little bad because er not everyone did three subjects and I did. Whereas yeah, everyone mostly did four subjects... (Jack p. 2 lines 81-82)

...you don't feel as normal as everyone else who had already, who has four subjects. (Jack p. 2 lines 85-86)

Um, I felt a bit stupid to be honest. (laughs) It didn't affect me too much I don't think. (Jack p. 2 lines 89-90)

Jack appears to feel in a minority and marginalised because he perceives that the majority of his peers are studying four subjects. He makes reference to not feeling “normal” and feeling “a bit stupid” and this would appear to indicate discomfort, despite him saying that it did not affect him too much. Jack might have been uncomfortable at admitting his feelings about this issue but became less concerned about it as time passed, as others might have also dropped a fourth subject during the year.

In comparison, Lucy claimed that she did not drop her fourth subject because of workload and emphasised this point more than once in her interview dialogue.

Yeah, well I think doing three A Levels is easier than when I started out with four; however, that wasn't why I dropped the subject and that wasn't really-like the workload wasn't anything to do with it and because of the subject I did before-my extra subject was (name of A Level subject) it was a relatively more easy subject. (Lucy p. 4 lines 177-182)

...the workload wasn't too much and I think having now -just three subjects just means I can focus on them a lot more and not have that-that extra subject...(Lucy p. 4 lines 184-186)

It would appear from what Lucy says that her fourth A Level was not of any significance to her as it was an ‘extra subject’. Described by her as an easy fourth subject, Lucy was keen to stress that the workload was not the issue and her emphasis might have indicated that she was concerned about being regarded negatively as someone unable to cope with the academic demands of four A Levels.

4.4.2 High expectations

The theme of high expectations featured within the data collected. Most participants talked about the high expectations from teachers, parents and themselves. Some participants also reflected on the perceived academic expectations amongst their peers and how this impacted on their sense of self-worth. Jack and Marie describe their experience of teacher expectations.

...there are high expectations and you are expected to know what to do and that's difficult at times, when you don't. You get a bit lost. (Jack p 7 lines 293-204)

So I have high expectations on me from the teachers because I did well at GCSE and that is...it's quite horrible really because you are expected to get all As at least, which lets you go to the top universities and perhaps that isn't what I wanted (laughs) but nobody seems to listen. (Marie p. 6 lines 253-257)

Jack's quote implied that he experienced some difficulty in understanding what was expected of him by the teachers. He spoke earlier about the workload and homework, and there is a sense that he is not certain of the parameters he is working under and so is perhaps uncertain of how to clarify this because he lacks the confidence and therefore gets "a bit lost". Marie uses the words "quite horrible" to demonstrate how uncomfortable she feels about the external pressure she is under, because of her previous success. She indicated in her quote that her future path is already directed by the teaching staff, who expect her to achieve top grades and to attend university. She appears to be a strong character asserting the fact she wants to exercise an internal locus of control and to make her own choices rather than being managed by others, with the words "perhaps that isn't what I wanted". The word "perhaps" implies that going to university is still a possibility but that Marie does not yet want to commit herself.

Target or grade setting by teachers can be a source of added stress for some students. Jack provides an illustration of this.

Um, er, I quite like the freedom to do-to work in-to work as hard as you want with no one pressing down on you in a way, like no expectancy. I'd rather just have out of the blue me just coming in and doing my work. I don't really like it when people set a target, like a 'C' grade or something. (Jack p. 4 lines 150-154)

Although Jack does not say this directly, his discomfort might signal that he feels he is unlikely to meet the target and does not want to take a risk and endure possible failure. Jack appears to want to be left alone, without the pressure being exerted on him, "with no one pressing down on you".

Harry, in particular, feels pressure as his elder brother did well academically in the same sixth form, some years ago.

I definitely feel pressure sometimes because I want to achieve the same that my brother did here because he...yeah, he was successful and I know that people would be disappointed if I didn't reach those expectations I think. (Harry p. 5 lines 210-213)

...my Mum has really high expectations so I sort of feel guilty if I don't do any work (laughs). (Harry p. 5 lines 207-208)

Harry's desire to do well is ignited not only by his brother's success but also by his awareness that "people would be disappointed". He substantiates this with another

quote that directly explains that his mother has “really high expectations”. This might be underpinned by the fact that Harry’s elder brother was successful and so there is a maternal expectancy that the younger sibling should do just as well. Harry may come from an academic family background or feels competition and a need to prove himself. This might explain why Harry feels guilty when he is not working because he is not meeting the expectations that his mother has of him. It would seem that Harry feels both internal and external pressure to achieve.

Alice spoke about her personal expectations in relation to her academic studies.

I would have been so stressed and I would be –I think I would be putting on quite a lot of expectations for myself and I think I would be failing in my expectations due to the work. (Alice p. 8 lines 347-350)

Yes, I’ve got quite high expectations of myself (laughs) Yeah, well- (Alice p. 8 lines 355)

Alice openly admits that she has high expectations of herself. She spoke within the interview about dropping an A Level in order to meet her personal expectations. An interpretation is that Alice fears failure and is very academically focused. There is an indication that she found the workload of four A Levels very demanding and stressful and therefore is defending her position by reinforcing why she gave up a subject. Although Alice laughed after admitting she had high expectations, she appeared embarrassed and then faltered after saying “Yeah, well” as though she was expressing ambivalence. There was a sense that Alice worried a lot about not achieving high enough grades for what she wanted to do.

Lucy reflected upon the academic standards and expectations within the sixth form and compared her GCSE results with those of the stayers.

I come here and, like, everybody got like, 700 A and I’m there with my one A thinking, oh, I’m not that smart am I? (Lucy p.8 lines 340-342)*

Lucy appeared shocked at how well she perceived that the stayers had done at GCSE level, at the current school. This was shown by her use of hyperbole (in comparing her one grade A to 700 A*s). It would appear from her comment that Lucy might feel inadequate and possibly uncomfortable about the academic expectations, not only for the stayers but for incomers too.

4.4.3 Teacher support

Teacher support was a theme emerged from the findings, mostly regarding academic work. However, some participants also spoke about teacher support in relation to their transition e.g., from their tutors. It was reported that the participants generally perceived that there was positive support from teachers. Email and face to face teacher support have been the most positively received.

But actually as a whole the teachers are very supportive. On a couple of occasions I've felt a bit overwhelmed with certain subjects so I've emailed the teachers and they've been like, yeah, come and meet me for half an hour and we'll go through it all. (Tom p. 4 lines 188-191)

And they're always available to contact by e-mail, which is helpful. (Harry p. 4 lines 155-156)

So I think that when the teachers actually make the effort to be here, to answer all the emails, like, if you need anything at notice just let me know. One of my (name of A Level subject) teachers is like that and he's always in his room whenever I've got issues I just stick my head round the door and just have a chat with him. (Alice p. 8 lines 371-375)

The above quotes suggest that there are teachers who are understanding of the workload encountered by A Level students and make themselves approachable. This would be particularly important for those who have arrived as incomers and do not have previous knowledge or experience of the teaching staff. Alice illustrated this point.

Because I remember at (name of A Level subject) they said, "Oh just find us at any time," but when I went to find them there was just no one there so it just felt a bit awkward then because I wasn't used to the (name of A Level subject) block, I didn't know who was a teacher and who wasn't so it was just a bit awkward. (Alice p.8 lines 366-370)

Alice portrays a sense of helplessness as a result of being an incomer and not knowing the staff and the layout of the subject block. Her awkwardness could be interpreted as resulting from shyness or lack of confidence in asking for help and guidance.

Similarly, Lucy talked in her interview about teacher support with homework.

Um-I think –I think some teachers are more open to talking about things and helping than others. I think some of my teachers are very much okay if you didn't do some of the homework and you actually need extra help on it; whereas some teachers are a little bit less-they are more reluctant I suppose and I think the independence thing again. But yeah, some teachers I do find more supportive with like helping you if you haven't

been able to do homework, for example, than others possibly. (Lucy p.5 lines 190-197)

Lucy repeats herself within the extract in saying that she perceives that some teachers are helpful and others are not. Specific concrete details are not given except in reference to homework.

Marie expressed a differing view with regard to teacher support by initially suggesting in the interview that a teacher had not been particularly supportive.

I was the only new person in that class and I was the only one that had sat a different exam board and a different course. So I didn't know...the same and I think that certain teacher felt that it was too much of an effort to try and get me up to speed with...the rest of the class. (Marie p.2 lines 75-78)

Labelling herself as a “new person”, Marie appeared to feel that this was an issue for the teacher; because of the different learning experiences in connection with the subject, between Marie and the stayers. Marie’s emphasis in using words such as “only” and “different” appeared to reiterate this, suggesting that being an incomer had been a disadvantage in getting teacher support. In this particular case. Marie appeared to feel isolated and believed that the teacher might have felt it “too much of an effort” to give her support, indicating a potential barrier for incomers, due to unfamiliarity with new teachers and curriculum. However, Marie later gave positive feedback on teacher support.

...other teachers are very supportive, they are always in their rooms, they are always happy to answer questions, they'll always reply to your emails very quickly. (Marie p. 5 lines 219-221)

Marie spoke more positively and stressed the word “always” when referring to the type of teacher support given. Marie had particular praise for her tutor.

My tutor was very helpful because she was also new this year so she understood the difficulties of not knowing where anything was or not knowing who people were or how the school worked. (Marie p. 4 lines 163-165)

The tutor was new too, and therefore could understand and relate to the predicament that Marie and other incomers were facing during their transition phase including the beginning of the academic demands of A Level study.

Negative comments on teacher support were minimal. Jack suggested that teacher support was something that he didn't need.

...there isn't anything they could have done or anything that could have helped even more; I just had to sort of battle through that stage to get to where I was now, I think. (Jack p. 6 lines 256-258)

The above quote suggested that Jack saw his academic struggle as more of a personal challenge; his choice of the word "battle" reinforced that concept. He might have been cautious, as he indicated earlier in the interview that he got the impression that his teachers did not think he had not worked hard and, therefore, got low grades.

4.4.4 Organisation, structure and time management

Organisation, structure and time management were important themes that emerged from the interviews with the incomers, although this may be a theme relevant for the stayers too. These elements impacted on the everyday workload of the A Level courses as well as activities outside the school such as socialising, extra-curricular activities and part-time work. This is potentially an added pressure for some incomers who are also coping with the social changes. Most of the participants found balancing school work and activities outside school a challenge.

...you need to balance social life and school work and just everything. (Alice p. 7 line 318)

Alice found it a struggle to balance personal social commitments, such as meeting up with friends from her previous school, with her academic study. Alice refers to "just everything", which indicated that there are other aspects within her life that she is trying to hold in balance.

There was a realisation by many of the participants that they were responsible for organising themselves now, with less adult direction than they had previously had during the GCSE learning and experience.

Um, a lot more time management's needed, even though I'm taking less subjects. (Alice p. 6 lines 264-265)

... you sort of always have to check over your work, which I think is why at sixth form you feel so pressured because it's not like you have a set schedule. (Harry p. 5 lines 225-227)

Both Alice and Harry acknowledged the need to take more personal responsibility for their own learning and time management. They would appear to feel this as challenging. Harry referred to feeling “pressurised” because there is no set schedule, which inferred that perhaps he would prefer to have more structure and therefore feel more in control of his learning environment. Alice appeared surprised as she referred to the need of greater time management guidance despite doing fewer subjects. This gives the impression that Alice had not anticipated this and may have thought there would have been more structure to learning in the sixth form.

Within the A Level working context is the notion of less direct teacher direction and contact and more self-directed study, which includes ‘free’ lessons or periods on the timetable. Tom, in particular, struggled with this idea, in understanding its purpose initially.

So in the sixth form we have like free lessons, free hours, which aren't timetabled. And I found the whole concept weird because you sit down and you are like, what do I do now? (Tom p.5 lines 202-205)

Whereas now that I'm living at home and I have no rules-it like when do I do homework? I hate not having that structure there and I find that I'm very reluctant to do it now. (Tom p. 5 lines 214-216)

I personally do a lot of work so I'll go home and do two or three hours every evening and on half days I'll do sort of four or five. But the weekends well I'll get up early and do work and it's –it's more enjoyable that way because you are never behind, you always understand things... (Marie p.5 lines 192-196)

The impression given from the use of the words “What do I do now?” and describing the free periods as “weird” is that Tom found the ‘free’ periods alien because he was used to a high level of directed and established routine and structure. Without it, Tom appears to be struggling and this is illustrated in the second quote, showing that he appears to lack self-discipline and motivation in relation to doing his homework. The use of the word “hate” signifies the strength of Tom’s feelings about not having a set structure which he can follow.

In comparison to Tom, Marie is organised in managing her studies and has a daily structure. The impression is that she is someone who enjoys her studies, is very self-motivated and wants to be in control. She acknowledged that “personally” this is what she does, as though to infer that other people may do things differently. The purpose of

Marie's self-imposed structure, time management and organisation appears to be so that she can keep abreast of her workload and meet her targets. Her long hours of working suggests that Marie has a lot of stamina and perhaps puts her studying high on her priority list.

A benefit of 'free' periods is to allow for independent study. Tom and Jack describe how they used their time efficiently and for maximum effect.

...I go into Starbucks and I do a load of work there (Jack p.4 lines 169-170)

...it's quite a nice atmosphere to work among professionals rather than you've got people here you talk a lot and it's kind of distracting. (Jack p. 4 lines 177-179)

...I think it's definitely more useful now because I sit down on a Wednesday, this period normally, I sit down and I'm like, oh wait, I've got homework in for tomorrow-need to do that. (Laughs) And so that hour saves you from staying up until 11 o'clock at night doing homework. I find that quite good. (Tom p. 5 lines 205-209)

Jack appeared to be organised and managed his time effectively. During the interview he explained how he used the free periods to work and to exercise, which helped to reduce his stress levels. As part of his routine, Jack preferred to use some of free periods for working away from the school. Jack appeared embarrassed as he explained that he studied in a café, possibly worried about disapproval. However, Jack had a clear purpose and this is supported in his second quote. Jack found the environment of the café less distracting and being away from the school environment seemed to help him to relax and to work at his pace in "a nice atmosphere". Jack indicated that there were benefits for him in working amongst professionals, which suggested that to Jack these people focused on what they needed to do and this had the same positive effect on Jack.

Tom has since learnt how to use the 'free' periods for homework. He has adapted to utilising the time effectively and managing the tasks that need doing. There appears to be a sense of relief from Tom in that he laughs as he explains that the forward planning can save him from having a late night of studying. Furthermore, there is evidence of Tom taking more responsibility for organising himself.

So last weekend I made myself a revision timetable; so I'm trying to stick to that as much as I can now. (Tom p. 5 lines 221-222).

With the build up to forthcoming exams, Tom's self-organisation has encouraged him to create a revision timetable. His use of the word "sticking" suggests that he is trying to tolerate or persist with tasks but finds this hard. This could be because Tom does not enjoy the revision aspect or because he finds it hard to organise himself.

Many participants talked about the ways they independently supported their own learning. Frequently cited was the need to keep up with the A Level subjects and to revisit what has been learnt at regular intervals in order to retain the information.

Um...always go over your work that you've done because there's so much to –to learn you sort of have to go over it because you sort of forget it really quickly because there's so much other subjects you have to learn as well. (Harry p. 7 lines 317-320)

So personally I just... sort of every week or so I just go over everything we've learnt and then if you-if you keep doing that you get a good understanding. (Marie p. 4 lines 187-189)

Both Harry and Marie make the important point that there is a wealth of information to organise and learn as part of being a competent learner at A Level. Harry indicated that the revision needs to be done with all the subjects and his quote suggested that, although he did not say it directly, he may not have done this initially but has only recently appreciated just how much there is to absorb.

The challenges of continuing extra-curricular activities including part time work were also raised by the participants. The issue of part time work impinging on the allocation of time for study was mentioned by Tom and Harry.

Because I've been doing a five day school week, not having time to do homework because of travel after school and then the homework that I should be doing at the weekend, I wasn't able to do that because I was working. (Tom p. 9 lines 416-419)

I think it's made working in terms of a job more difficult because... and so because I work on the weekend and I'm so exhausted by the time that I finish that I have... I don't really... because I used to use weekends as homework time and everything. But because I work... I have a job on the weekend, I find it hard to work and do school work at the same time. (Harry p.7 lines 323-327)

Tom stressed that work and travel impacted on his ability to continue to work part time. He uses the words "I should be doing..." which suggested that he realised that he was not doing the homework that needed to be done. In comparison to Tom, Harry is still

continuing his weekend job because he needs the money, and therefore, his available time for homework is limited. The pauses in his quote indicated that he struggled as he spoke about the impact, as though he was trying to find the words to express the difficulties. Harry repeats the fact that he is not able to balance the commitments and the repetition may indicate his concern about this.

Harry and Marie talked in their interviews about the impact that the studying had on their time and organisation regarding their extra-curricular activities, such as hobbies.

...you don't really have times in the evenings to go and do the hobbies you used to do because you've got so much work to do. (laughs) (Harry p. 8 lines 345-347)

And I know a lot of my friends have dropped all their hobbies to try and focus on school work... (Marie p. 7 lines 287-289)

...I still have two horses and this time last year I was riding a lot and competing. It's my stress outlet and they do take a lot of time, which I managed quite well up until probably January this year when exams started hitting it quite bad. (Marie p. 6 lines 281-284)

Harry laughed as he spoke about the effect and that might have been because he found the situation challenging, with the realisation that there appeared to be little free time available to do anything else but work. Marie openly admits that her riding is a “stress outlet” which suggested that she found the academic demands a challenge, and therefore needed an enjoyable pursuit to channel the pressure. Even Marie, who was highly organised, struggled to maintain her riding during the exam period and this is emphasised with the words “hitting it quite bad”. The verb “hitting” creates a sense of Marie quickly and forcefully having to reduce her time with her horses.

4.5 Summary: Results

The study aimed to explore the following research question:

How do young people experience transition into a school-based sixth form?

A total of six participants, three female and three male Y12 students, each took part in a semi-structured interview for an hour. All of the participants had transitioned into the sixth form, to do A Levels, from local secondary schools, except for one who had moved into the sixth form and the area from a different part of the country.

Using IPA, the analysis of the interview data generated three super-ordinate themes: the importance of social inclusion, a focus on intrapersonal factors and the demands of A Level study. Each of the sub-ordinate themes associated with the super-ordinate theme have been discussed in this chapter.

The results suggested that the six participants whom took part in the study initially found their transition into a different school-based sixth form a challenge. It was socially demanding for participants who came alone or with very few friends or associates. The need to make friends and be in friendship groups were highlighted; to have a sense of belonging, identity and protection was deemed important. Peer and teacher support were also considered beneficial and were appreciated. For some participants, initial difficulties as incomers included not knowing the teachers and not being able to find them due to the unfamiliarity of the school buildings. Teacher support via email and face to face contact was considered to be very effective.

Participants had tended to choose the sixth form for its academic status and although they experienced feelings of anxiety, confusion and excitement, the majority of those interviewed felt that, through time, established routines and social connection, they had a greater sense of belonging. The participants, because their stay in the sixth form would be limited to two years, perceived their time there to be short and, therefore, some of the individuals felt their priority was to focus on their studies rather than to participate socially within the educational environment. Other participants saw participation as a means of feeling included and avoiding social isolation.

Identity and community were raised in conjunction with discussion about the status of participants within the sixth form. Many of the incomers felt that there was a clear distinction and that some of the difficulty was in being accepted into the established 'stayer' groups.

The demands of academic study, although highlighted as issues experienced by most of the participants, could very possibly apply to stayers too. However, the anxiety of social demands and seeking to belong could make the overall transition experience more stressful for incomers.

Some individuals stressed how increased workload, organisation, need for structure and time management impacted on time for extra-curricular activities and part time work opportunities.

High expectations regarding effort and achievement were also raised by the participants. There was a particular emphasis that this came from the teachers. In the case of two individuals, they had high expectations of themselves. In one circumstance, parental expectations and sibling comparison were cited.

In the following chapter, the findings in relation to the literature review, plus the limitations and modifications for this current study will be discussed. Suggestions for future research are also outlined in relation to the findings of this study. Finally, implications for EP practice are considered, with an outline of the initiatives that could be employed by practitioners to support those students who make a transition into different school for their sixth form studies.

Chapter 5

5.0

Discussion

5.1 Introduction to the Discussion

The fifth chapter discusses the impact of the study's findings and its links to the psychological perspectives and research in the literature review, as outlined in chapter one. In addition to the findings, the chapter considers the implications of these findings for the role of the EP as well as for Y12 students entering an external sixth form and their teachers. Limitations and modifications for this current study are discussed as well as areas for future research.

The research focused specifically on the personal experience of transition for young people in Y12 who entered a school based sixth form having completed their GCSEs in another school. To date, there has been limited research available in this area.

The qualitative findings elicited from the IPA study are discussed in relation to the following research question:

How do young people experience transition into a school-based sixth form?

Ascertaining the voice of the participants (Hernandez-Martinez et al. 2011; Crafter & Maunder, 2012) as incomers, helped them to share some of the difficulties that prevailed as part of their transition into the sixth form, socially, psychologically and academically. Some of the findings about academic experiences are likely to be shared experiences for both incoming students and stayers (Craig, 2009; Deuker, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009). The findings raise implications for education and some practical suggestions to address the issues raised are outlined below.

In the case of educational transitions, EPs are able to impart psychological knowledge and advice to those involved in transition planning and monitoring, as well as demonstrating objectivity and an ability to problem solve (Atkinson et al., 2015; Stringer & Dunsmuir, 2012). Their unique position allows the possibility of promoting positive and informed change at systemic and individual levels within the sixth form environment and wider school community. EPs are able to work with sixth form staff at an organisational level through training or group/individual consultation work. Equally, EPs are able to provide group or individual support for young people (Hayton, 2009). A

number of practical suggestions can be generated from the findings of this specific study and these will be presented.

5.2 Importance of Social Inclusion

5.2.1 Making friendships

One of the major findings in the research was that all of the participants stressed the importance of making friends as there was an initial concern about not knowing anyone (as was the case for one individual) or not knowing many people. It was seen by participants as a priority to meet new people and to establish a network of friends. The fear of social isolation led to anxiety for some participants as found in Craig's (2009) study. There was an apparent need for the participants to feel safe. Jack described the need to get into a social group and make friends so that it was 'safety in numbers'; this highlighted how important it is to feel secure. This finding is consistent with the essential need to stay emotionally and physically safe (McLeod, 2014). The requirement to feel safe as a primary need reflects the psychological need to feel belonging was proposed in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. This would also involve having friends and establishing a social connection as necessities for being part of a social group, which would meet a psychological need.

For the participants who were incomers to the sixth form, there was an element of social discontinuity, as discussed by Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2011), because they had left one educational environment for another with the expectation of meeting new students and teachers. The new situation created anxiety for some of the participants such as Alice and this impacted on her sense of belonging (Anderson et al., 2000) but that might have also been compromised by the fact that Alice had been affected by her commitment to making time for old friends in preference to making new ones.

A key finding was that all the participants except Harry found it easier to make friendships with those in the mutual situation of being an incomer, finding it easier to relate to those in a similar situation. Tom, in particular, was able to identify with others in the same circumstances. Therefore, it could be argued that the incomers, being new, wanted to be in the proximity of, and bond with, others in the same predicament to avoid unpleasant experiences such as social isolation and negative emotions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Another factor which might have been significant is that the incomers were in the minority compared to the stayers because the sixth form was large,

physically and in terms of student numbers. Eccles (2004) advocated that bigger school domains can be impersonal environments, with the likelihood of greater anonymity of students. Therefore, the incomers, described by Marie as 'banded together' to make friends, might have done so in response to the anonymity that Eccles described. Linked to this, the increased heterogeneity within the new sixth form population might have also caused the incomers to feel the need to seek others in the same position because of the institutional discontinuities that they were facing (Anderson et al. (2000). A further explanation of the incomers forging strong friendships with each other might be seen as an essential protective factor during the transition phase, as Mallinson (2009) found in her study. Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2011) advocated that the social aspects of transition can be anxiety provoking, especially when coming from one setting into another and not knowing the other students. It is likely that the incomers are more likely to feel this way as they either came with few friends or no one at all, such as Tom.

5.2.2 Peer support

The importance of peer assistance was consistent with the findings of Mallinson (2009). Participants, in this study, found social, emotional and academic support from their peers to be crucial during the transition stage. Friends were often quoted as providing assistance. In the case of Harry, he was able to explain how his friends noticed when he became stressed and would provide emotional assistance. They also introduced him to other people and showed him around the school. It would appear that this type of strong peer support benefited him during his transition phase. Harry's experience appeared to relate to Maslow's perspective on the importance of having his basic needs met, such as safety needs e.g., friends giving him stability in order for him to have his psychological needs met and therefore to feel emotionally and physically safe within the new educational environment. This relates to Maslow's conception of the social necessity for humans to want to be accepted within social groups.

During the interview with Harry, he was able to pinpoint the valuable peer support that the older cohort of Y13s gave in the way of practical assistance which included presentations, guidance and answering questions. Mentor systems and peer subject representatives could be valuable in supporting incoming students to help them feel more empowered and reassured. This reflects the research by Bone (2015) who advocated that existing students can take on the role of the more knowledgeable other

(MKO) or study 'buddy' during the transitional period. This type of interactive support was valued by Harry and appeared to reinforce his SoB, emotional well-being, and lower his anxiety levels. Building on this analysis further, there are many studies that support the findings on the importance of how established peers within an educational community can support newer peers. Evangelou et al. (2008) argued that positive practices such as peer support facilitated community membership, which also complements Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice model of transition advocating the importance of a two way process involving the individual and the new community, and Beach's (1999) concept of an encompassing transition, which explains how an individual can adapt to a changing situation with the support of others.

Within the theme of peer support, there were elements that reflect McMillan and Chavis' (1986) Psychological Sense of Community (PSC) model. Aspects such as membership, influence, shared emotional connection and integration with the fulfilment of needs were reflected in the accounts of Harry and Tom. Their friends provided emotional support and identification within their groups. Harry's integration with his friends helped him to have his needs met because they understood his difficulties. Similarly, Tom's 'close-knit' friendships shared emotion connection and mutual support. This continued as the group grew bigger. These observations suggest, that for Harry and Tom, there was a greater feeling of belonging and positivity because their needs were being met within their own friendship groups. Similarly, Lucy and Alice's receptive peers in class and in the tutor group reflected aspects of the PSC model in relation to feeling a sense of membership and being able to get needs met through a shared emotional connection, which prevented the possibility of social isolation or alienation.

5.2.3 Identity and belonging

Young people entering the sixth form as incomers experienced more than one transition, as outlined in Beach's (1999) subdivisions of consequential transitions in education, unlike the stayers. These included a lateral transition i.e., the move from a secondary school to a FE provision, and an encompassing transition which would include the move from GCSE study to A Levels, which applies to all the incomers and stayers. In the case of the incomers, they have also experienced a collateral transition because they have experienced simultaneous participation in two or more transitions which include a

curriculum change, a move in an educational environment and a change in social identity. Some of the participants, such as Jack and Alice, experienced taster days during the summer, which would be described by Beach as a mediational transition (an educational activity that involves participation prior to the transition).

Within the transition process, the concept of community was explored. It was felt by the participants that within the sixth form community there were two clear identities, those who had been in the lower part of the school for KS3 and KS4 (the stayers) and those who have joined the school- based sixth form as incomers. Participants felt that it was easy to distinguish these two groups and that the sense of polarisation, described by Marie, suggested that there were almost two communities operating. This could potentially impact on the sense of belonging within the sixth form community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and the vulnerability of incomers, especially those without a known or established peer group, who are more susceptible to feelings of isolation, loneliness and alienation, which can create academic and confidence difficulties (Bone, 2015). Tom talked about the fact that the stayers were already in their social groups and Jack commented on the allegiance that the stayers had to their house system because of their long term involvement. This was something which Jack found difficult to relate to. Within this context of identity conflict, Jack and Marie talked about the feeling of needing to adapt and that the pressure was on them as incomers to change, which resonates with Erikson's (1959) concept of 'identity v role' confusion, during the stage of late adolescence where the young person is in the process of developing her/his sense of self and negotiating relationships with peers. This need to acclimatise through change is consistent with identity accommodation and may be seen as necessary in order to be accepted and to achieve the ultimate goal of A Level qualifications (Dietrich et al., 2012, Schwartz et al., 2012).

Wenger (1998) proposed within his Communities of Practice (CoP) framework that identity is not a constant construct during transition into a new community and might be characterised by different types of trajectories. Some of the findings in this study are consistent with Wenger's ideas. The participants in the study might have expected to have experienced an inbound trajectory as outlined in the CoP model. This would mean that the individual might have assumed that transitioning into the sixth form would have allowed her/him to be a fully accepted participant within the new community. The

reality is that the participants might have experienced different types of trajectories as described by Wenger. Harry would have been described as following a boundary trajectory because he appeared to belong to a number of communities within the educational setting e.g., having friends amongst the stayers and the incomer groups, as well as being involved in school clubs. Marie, on the other hand, might have been portrayed as having an insider trajectory. Despite an unsteady start, Marie eventually became a full participant after a period of time. Her tenacity and her internal locus of control helped her negotiate the new demands and adjust socially, psychologically and academically. In contrast, Alice's transition might be styled as a peripheral trajectory. Alice was not a full participant in the community and was focused on academic achievement for the short period she had in the sixth form. Tom, having been completely new to the area, appeared to have made a change in identity on many levels and is therefore likely to be described as making an outbound trajectory. Finally, in the case of Lucy, she appeared to be positive about the transition into a new community, especially in relation to making new friends, but tended on occasion, to remain on the fringe. Lucy's transition could be likened to an inbound trajectory.

Identity and status were mentioned by Marie and Lucy as being important for their age group. They talked about the need to be popular and be invited to social events e.g., house parties. This aspect would be important for most young people, whether they were identified as stayers or incomers. However, it could be argued that, for an incomer, there is probably an even greater emphasis on fitting in and be included in a new environment, especially if she or he is in the minority. The issues of identity and status relate to Erikson's (1959) Psychological Development Theory, which identified the psychological challenges relating to identity versus role confusion in late adolescence. Erikson asserted that, for adolescents, the development of the sense of self and the sense of belonging within social groups, especially within new communities, is crucial.

Building on the theme of identity within groups, Alice and Marie described themselves as feeling like 'outsiders'. Socially, they felt separate from the stayers because of feeling different in status and not being part of the established group. This highlighted the insecurity that was felt by some of the incomers and can be seen to reflect Erikson's identity versus role confusion concept. Marie's discomfort at feeling different was further emphasised when she stressed her status as being the only new person in one

of her classes and as the only one to have followed a different course and a different exam board. Marie's experiences and her perceived identity as an outsider seemed to impact on her sense of herself as being different or unworthy compared to her new peers. The desire to belong impelled Marie to make the effort to try to fit in.

The issues surrounding identity could be explored further by the EP eliciting the opinions and thoughts on the challenges of transition for incomers (Hernandez- Martinez et al., 2011; Gersch, 2016) by using creative approaches such as The Little Box of Big Questions (Gersch & Lipscomb, 2012), which is a tool that would enable an EP to listen to the views of a young person through a philosophical conversation. 'Identity' and 'important people' are subject areas covered for discussion by this instrument. Through the talking process, an action plan could be devised in order to support the young person.

Belonging was also a key theme associated with the experiences of transition. The importance of participation within the sixth form was noted by most of the participants. Harry made the point of joining school clubs so that he could bond with others, fit in and not feel isolated. In the case of Marie, becoming involved, (which led her to become a subject representative), gave her a positive sense of achievement and boosted her confidence. Her initiative in becoming involved contributed to her engagement and success. Harry and Marie's experiences of participating in school activities reflect elements of Finn's (1989) Participation-Identification Model. Finn's view was that students who took part in school based activities would feel a greater SoB and be at less of a risk of social alienation. Similarly, McMillan' and Chavis' (1986) Psychological Sense of Community conceptual framework also encourages participation through a sense of belonging or community. Therefore, the concept of developing links between the incomers and the lower years, and promoting participation, is consistent with these perspectives and could include the involvement of the Y12 incomers with the younger years in some type of pastoral or social role, which might develop a sense of involvement and belonging within the wider school community. Lucy, during the interview, suggested how having better links with the Y11s would have been desirable, so that there is a linkage with other years within the school.

In the case of other participants, participation outside the classroom was something that was not important and arguably was not an investment they were prepared to make, as they preferred to focus on studying, getting the qualifications and then moving on. This

did not seem to affect academic achievement or social connections but it did appear that some of the participants viewed their period within the sixth form as temporary, because they were only there for a short term period of two years.

As already discussed, many of the participants valued a connection with their peers and felt that it was important during their transition, especially into an unfamiliar setting. This is consistent with Bowlby's (1969) Attachment Theory and Baumeister & Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory suggesting that human relationships are essential for individual development. Alice appeared less concerned about making new friendships and her limited social contact appeared to impact on her SoB within the sixth form. This finding corresponds with Baumeister and Leary (1995,) who argued that limited social contact is not enough to generate belonging. They highlighted in their Belonging Hypothesis Theory that relationships can be limited in time by external transitions and this might explain the temporary position that Alice described. She described her need to meet up with a particular friend regularly for 'face-to-face conversation' to sustain the ongoing friendship, which resonated with the importance of the regular contact with a significant person, as proposed by Baumeister and Leary (1995).

Not feeling a sense of belonging in the initial stages of the transition was highlighted by Marie and Alice in the interviews, indicating a low SoB (Goodenow, 1993b). Goodenow (1993b) also reported that there was a correlation between low SoB and anxiety, and this might be the case for some participants who appeared anxious and lacked a strong of SoB in the sixth form such as Alice and Jack.

Most of the participants wanted to belong in their new educational setting as found in the research by Sancho & Cline (2012) and Kandiko & Mawer (2013) which emphasised the development of positive relationships with staff and peers as well as maintaining positive emotional well-being. Lucy and Harry raised the issue of not feeling a SoB within the tutor group and not being part of the tutor group 'family' and, although this type of social discontinuity can be detrimental (Anderson et al., 2000; Hernandez-Martinez, 2011), for Lucy and Jack it appeared not to be a major issue and did not appear to affect them socially or academically. Although the concept of belonging is proposed as a basic need by Maslow (1943), it may have been that, in the case of Lucy and Jack, they were proactive and had positive attitudes to their learning and emotional well-being and, therefore, did not let the tutor group experience affect them (Sancho & Cline, 2012).

In relation to the findings on SoB, the aspect of social adjustment is significant for some of those who are incomers into an external sixth form. Their sense of integration and belonging might be low and their sense of identity be in flux. It would therefore seem imperative that they are quickly and promptly encouraged to feel included in their new environment so that they want to participate in the enrichment activities that the setting offers. Building on some of the participants' feedback, pre-sixth form transition support could include, initially, an 'incomer- only' day, to help them familiarise themselves with the setting and staff. This could then be extended to the open days and summer camps, similarly to the Flying Start Project (no date given). EPs would be well placed to provide pre sixth form transition support during these days. This could involve 'drop in' consultation clinics with the focus of problem solving and offering advice, where appropriate.

A further implication could be that EPs could work in conjunction with Y12 students incoming into the sixth form from other schools, with the purpose of promoting adjustment and emotional well-being. The EP could plan, with the Head of the Sixth Form, to design and implement a questionnaire for incomers to monitor and gain feedback on their perspective on, and experiences of, transition. This could be administered around the autumn half term in October/November with a view to collating the results and identifying those students who are at risk of a challenging transition, with the aim of offering an intervention programme that will offer positive outcomes.

5.3 Focus on Intrapersonal Factors

5.3.1 Emotional impact of transition

Many of the participants were able to express a range of feelings and emotions about their initial transition into the sixth-form, which included: anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, confusion, helplessness and excitement. Lucy described mixed emotions such as excitement and nervousness simultaneously. Harry was aware that these feelings and the situation would be temporary and rationalised that everyone was in 'the same boat'. Reflections on transition for Harry and Lucy included initial feelings of uncertainty but these altered to gradual acceptance with the support of routines, socialisation and familiarity. Participants did not specifically talk about the stages outlined in Fisher's (2012) Personal Transition Curve but it could be, as Fisher argued, that participants have

moved subconsciously through the phases and therefore, have forgotten these over the passage of time.

Tom and Lucy described feelings of being lost and having a sense of helplessness during the initial stage of their transition, highlighting that in their cases, that there might have been a lack of information and support, hence the feeling of vulnerability, which impacted on their ability to cope, as found in Mallinson's (2009) and Craig's (2009) studies. Therefore EPs could offer a telephone contact line and bookable consultation clinics for students, teachers and parents during Y12 in order to problem solve (using a person-centred consultation) key issues, with the aim of focusing on constructive experiences and personal strengths to facilitate emotional well-being and positive outcomes. Such a proposal allows for the generation of strategies and signposting to other services, if required.

Marie felt that the transition had evoked many multiple changes and transitions for the incomers but not for the stayers, which resonated with aspects on the different forms of trajectories into a community as outlined in Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice* and the different types of consequential transitions into education which can impact on an individual's identity (Beach, 1999). Marie's view that the incomers needed to adapt and mature, whilst the stayers had it 'easy', were consistent with the findings from the research by Kandiko and Mawer (2013) which suggested that those students experiencing multiple transitions in one period are likely to feel a greater sense of responsibility.

Jack and Marie both described their transition as being the "next chapter" in their lives and viewed this as a positive opportunity. Marie also described her transition as challenging on a number of levels but felt as a result she was a stronger and confident person. These findings are consistent with the arguments put forward by Hernandez-Martinez et al., (2011) that some students have a chance to develop a new identity through challenge, growth and achievement via the new experiences that an educational transition can bring.

Harry made a general observation that moving school at any age is challenging because there is "so much is happening", which suggests that the challenges might reflect social, academic and personal changes, and have the potential to be unsettling, especially affecting the incomers (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009;

Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2011; Deuker, 2014). Based on this finding, it will be important for students to have help managing work balance, expectations, social relationships and intrapersonal feelings. EPs are well placed to offer direct therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). Alternatively, mentoring or coaching students through their transition might also be an option. Furthermore, it would appear important that teaching staff, tutors and the senior team are aware that some students, especially incomers, may experience emotional, social, and academic difficulties on transition and understand the impact of these. This could be done by arranging training via the EP on areas including sense of belonging, identity, anxiety, inclusion and academic challenges.

5.3.2 Motivation for choice of sixth form

Many of the participants chose the sixth form on the basis of its academic reputation and/ or the need for a fresh start or a change, as highlighted by Alice and Lucy. This was consistent with the findings of Hernandez-Martinez et al., (2011). They found in their research that their participants were looking for an opportunity for new experiences but also noted that the location of the school was important for participants in their study, but was not as significant in this study.

Some of the participants wanted a change of placement, because they wanted a fresh start or to reinvent themselves in a new educational placement. Alice, Harry and Lucy indicated social reasons for the change. These findings are in concordance with the suggestions by Gorgorio et al., (2002) that transitions can be positive and unique in that they can provide opportunities for individuals to engage in different challenges that can produce positive social and cultural outcomes. This would appear true in the context for some of the participants who had experienced transition into a school based sixth form as an incomer.

5.4 The Academic Demands of A Level Study

5.4.1 Increased workload

The academic gap between GCSE and A Level study has been documented by other researchers (Valjataga & Fielder, 2009; Deuker, 2014) and it was also observed by the majority of participants in this study that the A Level workload could be challenging. These challenges are likely to be experienced by both the incomers and the stayers and were discussed in the interview by the participants.

An expectation on the part of some of the participants in Deuker's (2014) study was that if a student was able to cope at GCSE level then the progression to A Level would be seamless. However, in the current study, there appeared to be a view from some of the participants, such as Alice, that in some way studying a smaller number of subjects could be easier with regards to workload, pace and content.

Some of the participants felt that they were not prepared for the difference between GCSEs and A Levels. Alice felt that the teachers did not prepare the students for the change in the workload at A Level, which was acknowledged as imperative by Craig (2009) and Mallinson (2009), whom advocated the need for good preparation before transition. The heavy workload, especially of homework, was highlighted by the majority of participants. Some of the participants had more than one teacher for a subject. This caused some difficulty in that the amount of work for one subject could double, which participants reported as stressful. This suggested that teaching staff might not have been aware of the total amount of homework being set across the subjects or that they had a high expectations of what needed to be completed by the students. In this study, some participants found studying four A Level subjects demanding and this caused them to reduce to three subjects to allow them to cope better. One participant perceived that studying one fewer subject would secure stronger examination grades in the other subjects. These findings are in accordance with the research conducted by Hernandez-Martinez et al., (2011) regarding the challenges experienced in moving from GCSE to 'AS' Level study. An implication from the findings would be the importance of staff support in preparing students for the change in pace and content as well as the challenge of difference teaching styles, independent learning techniques and expectations, as a result of the move from GCSEs to A Levels. This may involve supporting students with scaffolding and bridging techniques via the use of study skills aids, mediation or subject clinics as well peer/buddy subject support. Furthermore, EPs could offer support through consultation via 'drop in' sessions as a means of giving support or advice for students and parents/guardians during progress consultation evenings, to support the young person.

5.4.2 High expectations

The theme of high expectations was found to be a significant factor for the participants in relation to effort and achievement. Most of the high expectations were reported to

come from the teachers. Tom explained that one of the difficulties was feeling unprepared for the independence required at this level of study. This was a consistent finding in other studies (Smith & Hopkins, 2005; Koh, Tan & Ng, 2012; Deuker, 2014). High expectations from teachers also created a source of stress for some participants, namely, Alice and Jack, who talked openly about the pressure they were feeling.

Within this study, personal high academic expectations were discussed by Alice and Harry, but for different reasons. Alice wanted to do well because she needed to secure high grades for university. In the case of Harry, parental expectations were also reported to be high, influenced by the success of an elder sibling, creating an extra pressure. Like Alice, some of the other participants talked about the need to achieve and be able to move on to the next stage of their life e.g., university. Therefore, there may have been an emphasis on obtaining the qualifications rather than deep learning and enjoyment of the subject (Stoten, 2014).

Lucy compared her GCSE results with those of the stayers by using hyperbole (in comparing her one A to 700 A*s). This highlighted an important finding, because although Lucy perceived that the academic expectations within the sixth form were high amongst the stayers, these expectations could also potentially impact on the confidence of the incomers too, especially if an incomer had what she/he perceived as good GCSE results obtained in her/his last school. This is consistent with what was posited by Anderson et al. (2000), who argued that the academic expectation, which could be based on ability and an element of competition within an environmental context, can determine success or failure in educational changes such as at transitions. Furthermore, Lucy's realisation of the cultural expectations and how that made her feel related to the disillusionment stage in Fisher's (2012) Personal Transition Curve, as Lucy realised that her personal beliefs regarding her own academic achievement might not be compatible with those current in the new sixth form.

5.4.3 Teacher support

The findings indicated that the participants perceived a high level of teacher support to meet students' academic needs, with a few exceptions. This was consistent with the findings of Kandiko and Mawer (2013) who reported the importance of the educational institution staff engaging with the student and helping the student to develop autonomy and independent study skills. Methods of teacher support that were mentioned by the

participants in this research included email contact and face to face support. This suggested that there was evidence that many of the teachers understood some of the difficulties encountered by the young people studying A Levels and made themselves available to help. Alice highlighted a difficulty for an incomer, in finding it difficult to locate a teacher in an unfamiliar building during the preliminary period of her transition. Marie, as an incomer, who had previously studied a different syllabus unlike her peers (stayers), believed that the situation and the lack of teacher support made it a challenging experience. This could indicate a potential barrier for incomers due to unfamiliarity with new teachers and curriculum, which could impact on their ability to identify with a larger collective and to have their needs met within the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In Marie's case, the lack of perceived support impacted on her enjoyment of the subject and she was planning to give it up. This resonates with the argument that a lack of teacher support during an educational transition can leave students feeling vulnerable and deciding to discontinue with a subject (Mallinson, 2009). A consideration in connection with this difficulty is to ensure that teaching staff, tutors and the senior team are aware that some students, especially incomers, have had different curriculum and teaching experiences and that that might account for some academic differences and challenges. In addition to this support, EPs would also be able offer support to staff, which may include individual or team problem solving sessions through consultation.

Marie, however, described the role of her tutor, who was also new to the school, as positive, in that her tutor demonstrated empathy towards Marie and the other incomers in her tutor group because she understood their predicament. Tutor assistance was clearly important during the transition period, which benefited Marie. This finding is consistent with the research findings of Mallinson (2009), who advocated the importance of tutor support during the transition phase.

5.4.4 Organisation, structure and time management

Many of the participants found the change of educational placement a challenge, when also adapting to balancing social commitments, academic work, extra-curricular activities and part time work. These experiences are challenges that the incomers would have in common with their peers who were stayers. Participants found that organisation, structure and time management were key to sustaining an equilibrium.

There might have been an expectation that a school-based sixth form would be a continuation of what had gone before in school, yet participants became aware of the need to be more autonomous and independent in relation to the academic work as found by Kandiko and Mawer (2013). There was a requirement for greater personal responsibility, for example, in the use of free study periods. Some participants, such as Tom, had been used to greater structure and routine in their study, as well as teacher directed learning. Therefore, there was a need to try to adapt and use the study periods effectively, as Tom expressed in his interview. Tom expected the sixth form system to be a continuation of school to a degree, regarding the structure of the day, but quickly found the free study periods to be positive, which was also the case for the students in Craig's (2009) college study. On the other hand, Marie had few problems and appeared to be independent and organised in her learning. Many of the participants were aware of the need to stay abreast of their studies. Harry and Marie talked about the requirement to stay on top of the studying and accentuated that organisation and time management were key to this. This is consistent with the findings of other studies, which noted the necessity of being autonomous and independent at A Level study as well as the difficulties associated with this (Deuker, 2009; Valjataga and Fielder, 2009 & Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2011).

Within this particular study, the issues concerning organisation, structure and time management surrounding academic studies appeared to impact on extra-curricular activities and Marie remarked on the extent of this. Despite being highly organised, she found it difficult to manage, and had to reduce her extra-curricular activity time. Furthermore, in this study, Tom and Harry underlined in their interviews the difficulties of balancing part-time jobs with homework. Although this was not directly mentioned in relation to multiple transitions (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013), extra-curricular activities and part time work are factors that also need to be considered within the framework of transition into FE at 16. In order to help minimise feelings of anxiety and low confidence, the EP would be in a position to support students via workshop sessions on the areas of work organisation, independence, managing the life/work balance, social relationships, emotional wellbeing and general problem solving. These could be planned and/or presented with members of the senior staff, which might include the Head of Sixth Form. The delivery of these sessions could be timetabled during the summer taster days and the first part of the autumn half term.

As an implication for ongoing future work, EPs would be well placed to help prepare students for their next life transition (Atkinson et al., 2015) which may include the trajectory into HE or the workplace. This could involve workshops or presentations on academic and work stress, independent learning, revision and independent living, as well as establishing working and social relationships with HE staff and with peers.

5.5 Limitations of the Research Study

The current study used individual interviews to gather data and applied a qualitative approach for data analysis using IPA. The justification for using these methods has been outlined in the methodology section (chapter 3).

The limitations to the study include aspects of the study design and methodology, which may affect the reliability and validity of the findings. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the study will need to be considered with caution. The ways in which the researcher contemplated these limitations will be discussed in this section.

5.5.1 Sample population and generalisability of findings

A limitation of the research is that the study took place in one setting. This was influenced by the need to use a small homogeneous sample as required by the IPA methodology. The findings are not generalizable and the results are drawn from one small group of participants, and might be different in other sixth form settings. The sixth form involved in the study could offer the potential of six participants whereas other sixth forms within the locality were not able to offer the same. Therefore, the results obtained could arguably only be related to that particular setting. However, the researcher did not know the participants nor had she worked with the sixth form in a professional capacity, and therefore, objectivity was promoted.

Participants volunteered to take part in the study, which meant that they were ready to engage and had an interest in the study. The additional participants who volunteered, but were not selected for interview, might have had differing experiences and views on the transition to a different school. The remaining incomers into the sixth form might have also had a different perspective on their transition but did not volunteer and, therefore, their experiences remain unarticulated.

5.5.2 Reliability and validity

The concepts of reliability and validity are closely related but tend to be less pertinent in qualitative research as compared to quantitative research. Research is believed to be reliable if it can be repeated by different researchers using the same method to collect and analyse similar data and therefore, generate comparable results (Bryman, 2012). Validity reflects the extent to which the researcher is able to measure or explain the phenomenon being examined.

The researcher, in the chapter on Methodology, used the guidelines advocated by Yardley (2000) to determine that: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance were used as four guiding principles to determine the quality of this piece of qualitative research.

Although triangulation was not incorporated by using more than one data analysis method, the researcher did ensure thoroughness through examining inter-rater reliability. This involved using two independent reviewers producing themes from the researcher's data and making comparisons of the outcomes of these analyses.

The semi structured interviews for the research took place in a natural setting that the participants were used to, i.e., a room within the school setting, as opposed to using an external venue. Therefore, as a result of not using an artificial setting, the current study is considered to have higher ecological validity (Willig, 2013).

5.5.3 Data collection through semi structured interviews

Although one interview was carried out with each participant, it could be argued that more than one interview might have produced further information or even the prospect of participants remembering details that they might have forgotten to share previously. The researcher was aware of taking time from the participants' busy schedules in the lead up to exams, and felt that an extra interview was not necessary.

Although an interview schedule was used and helped to steer the course of the interview, it is possible that it limited or missed opportunities for the participants to say something else of importance, which could not be predicted by the researcher. However, the researcher did check towards the end of the interview with each of the participants as to whether she/he wanted to say or add anything further.

In two cases, participants began speaking of topics unrelated to the questions asked, or repeated themselves on a topic and that reduced the control of the researcher over the topic, to a degree. In this case, the researcher waited for a pause and was then able to ask a relevant question.

A complication of using a semi structured interview schedule was that there was a need to balance making notes and asking follow-up questions, without interrupting the flow of the participant's responses. The researcher did not want to be seen to make too many notes so as not to impact on the rapport established. The researcher realised the need to show appropriate eye contact and to monitor the non-verbal behaviour of both herself and the participant.

Typically, the researcher spent an hour with each participant, with the taped interview taking, on average, forty minutes. At first, the researcher was concerned that this time might not have yielded enough material for phenomenological analysis. However, on reflection this was not the case, and it appeared that an hour was enough time for the participants, who were inexperienced with regards to being interviewed and had busy work schedules themselves. The time taken for introductions and debriefing took on average twenty minutes, which was longer than anticipated. This was considered to be appropriate and essential in order to ensure rapport was established and to check on the participants' physical and psychological welfare. The time allocated also allowed participants to feed back on the process and the clarification of any further questions that they may have had.

5.5.4 Limitations of using IPA

The ability of the participants to articulate their experiences to the researcher through spoken language is an important prerequisite for IPA. The method also relies on obtaining suitable material for phenomenological analysis because it is interested in "experiences where the individual is prompted to contemplate, take stock, worry, and try to make sense of what is happening" (Smith et al., 2009 p. 188). All of the participants were able to express themselves and provide coherent descriptions of their experiences. Initially, some of the participants were nervous and repeated themselves or stumbled over words. Some of the comments made were difficult to understand and were disjointed, making them challenging for the researcher to interpret.

At times, some of the participants found it a challenge to find the words or expressions needed and the fluency of the dialogue was compromised. This was a very minor limitation and, arguably, this may have been because the participants were not used to being interviewed nor being asked to communicate their thoughts and feelings to an unfamiliar adult. However, what was observed is that all the participants relaxed during the course of the interview and were able to talk articulately about their experiences.

Periodically, the researcher had to clarify to participants what was meant by the term 'independent learner'. This had not been an issue during the pilot study but highlighted linguistic variability amongst the participants and something for the researcher to be aware of when conducting future research.

A limitation of IPA is that the researcher has to interpret text, which is not an objective process, but requires the researcher to reflect on her biases and the influences these will have on the interpretation of verbal data. Although not prescribed in the IPA methodology, the researcher adopted a reflexive attitude and used a reflective research diary in order to consider such issues.

Despite some of the limitations regarding the researcher's use of IPA in the current study, it was considered to be a suitable tool in exploring the research question by examining in detail lived experience and giving the participants a voice and allowing them "to tell their own stories" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57) which was appropriate for the research question.

5.5.5 Issues with data analysis

Using a qualitative method for analysis accumulated a considerable amount of data (Willig, 2013). This was an issue for the researcher in deciding what to keep and what to leave out. Although the researcher followed the IPA process and had to keep revisiting the data, which was demanding of time and energy, there was always a concern for the researcher that she might not have accounted for some of the data. The researcher, to ensure rigour, approached two independent reviewers for inter-rater reliability purposes and accessed an IPA data clinic at Cardiff University, for advice and support.

The researcher was aware of the importance of participants not being made identifiable to their peers and teachers, and the probability of being recognised being significant when the sample size is smaller (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, care was taken not to

include information within the descriptions and quotations offered by the participants which could lead to identification.

5.6 Modifications/Improvements

The researcher wondered whether the use of visual prompts such as key words, pictures or diagrams, for example, Fisher's (2012) Transition Curve might have helped to stimulate and focus discussion. It could be argued that a disadvantage of using the Transition Curve as a visual prompt is that it could shape the participants' views and even the vocabulary used in the interview. However in this study, although the participants were able to discuss and share their transition experiences in detail, the use of visual prompts might have inspired memories, feelings, emotions and experiences in richer detail.

On reflection, the study might have benefited from the distribution of a questionnaire to all the incomers who transitioned into the sixth form having completed their GCSEs at other schools. It would have been interesting, depending on the response rate, to have data about the experience of a larger group of participants. Through an anonymous questionnaire, individuals who might have found the prospect of a face to face interview overwhelming, might have felt comfortable to voice their experiences and give honest feedback. This insight could have enabled the researcher to design interview questions derived from the feedback and then invite participants to volunteer to take part in an interview, whereupon further analysis, namely IPA, could have been carried out.

It could be argued that, by interviewing at the beginning of the summer term, the participants might have forgotten details about their transition due to the time elapse. However, in order to yield a wealth of data about the experience and the impact, there needed to be a time lapse, to allow for reflection to take place, otherwise there might have been very little data to analyse or the participants might have been in a position where upon they were not comfortable or confident to talk about their experiences. However, it is also acknowledged that interviewing closer to the transition might have had benefits because participants could have described what was happening in the present time and how that was shaping their experiences. Furthermore, although the interviews had been scheduled for the latter part of the spring term, there were some events and timetabling issues within the sixth form and so the interviews needed to be rescheduled to a later date.

For the purpose of ensuring validity, the researcher checked with the participants as to whether they wanted to read their interview transcripts, once completed, in order to verify their accounts. The participants declined the opportunity. However, the researcher did ensure that the steps outlined in the Methodology (chapter 3) were strictly adhered to, ensuring that the participants were happy with the information they gave in the interview. During the debriefing, it was reiterated that participants could have anything removed from their recordings or indeed have the data erased and not used in the analysis. This was reinforced by the researcher allowing two weeks for the participants to make a final decision before transcription commenced; a final reminder was issued by email. Therefore, the researcher made attempts to ensure that the participants were happy about their interviews being used, before transcription proceeded.

5.7 Future Research

Future research might focus on a number of areas in relation to transition into FE. Firstly, it might be useful to conduct a similar study using more participants but examining the transition experiences and the sense of community and identity amongst incomers and stayers within the sixth form. The research could also be extended to involve participants from other sixth forms within the area and from different local authorities (LAs).

Secondly, the research could include analysing the experiences of transition into the sixth form, comparing the two distinct groups of incomers and stayers. This could be carried out by using a mixed methodology to allow for triangulation with a view to looking at similarities and differences between the groups. This might be achieved by initially using a questionnaire, followed by individual interviews or focus groups using a qualitative approach such as IPA or Thematic Analysis to draw out themes. Building on the idea of differences and similarities, it might be interesting to compare the external transition experiences between groups of students entering a FE college and a sixth form.

Thirdly, a longitudinal study could be arranged to monitor and explore transition for incomers starting from the point of attending an induction day (having finished GCSEs) through to the end of sitting A Levels in Y13 and then being ready to transfer to university or work. This type of analysis would offer a rich and detailed account of what

the individual perceives as challenges and positive outcomes from her/his own experiences.

Lastly, the current study produced interesting observations by some of the participants on the size of the sixth form. A study could be designed to look at whether size of a sixth form does have an impact on transition. Furthermore, although participants discussed teacher and parent expectations during the interviews, future research might, in addition to probing students' experiences, involve investigating the views of parents and teachers on incoming students and transition into sixth form or college.

5.8 Researcher Reflexivity

During the interview process, the researcher ensured that the participants felt comfortable and could speak freely within a safe environment. It was sometimes difficult to gauge when it was appropriate to probe and ask further questions. Whilst the researcher paid close attention to the participants' verbal and non-verbal behaviour, the researcher felt constrained at times to probe further due to the possibility of making the participants uncomfortable or upsetting them. Therefore, the participants may not have been challenged regarding their views or perspectives on particular aspects or anything that could have been deemed controversial or sensitive, such as criticisms of named people or subject departments. This may also have been influenced because the researcher represented the University and belonged to a professional body and therefore was conscious of her responsibilities as a researcher.

The researcher noted that, during a question about high expectations, Alice faltered in answering and appeared overwhelmed. The researcher sensed this immediately through Alice's verbal and non-verbal behaviour and quickly moved onto the next question. During the debriefing stage, the researcher checked with Alice about how she was feeling. Alice explained that she was not upset that the question had been asked, but that she had high expectations and worried about not meeting them and this was something that was on her mind continuously. This situation highlights the fact that it is difficult to know how someone, (especially someone unfamiliar to the researcher), will respond to a question within an interview.

The interviews were challenging to conduct and this was the first time that the researcher had conducted research in this way. An advantage was that the researcher was used to meeting new people and engaging in conversation on a professional basis.

However, although some participants were nervous, they all appeared to relax and talked more freely about their experiences during the interviews. The process became more comfortable for the researcher and the participant as the interview progressed.

Most of the participants mentioned, either at the introductory or debriefing stage of the interview, that they had not been asked or interviewed previously about their transition. Tom, in particular, reflected on this during the debriefing stage. He had originally thought that his experience of transition had been difficult and that he had not coped very well. However, he felt that the interview had given him time and space to reflect. He concluded that, despite the challenges, he had made new friends and been involved in new activities. Therefore, Tom realised that his transition had been a positive new experience. This is consistent with the suggestion by Hernandez- Martinez et al., (2011) that transition can provide positive new opportunities and new experiences for young people.

During the analysis phase, one of the difficulties encountered was reducing the number of themes that emerged from the data. It was difficult to disregard some of the information given by the participants. The decision as to what was kept or discarded was difficult and this might have been affected by the researcher's interest and interpretation, in a double hermeneutic. This was something that the researcher was aware of. There was also the challenge of collapsing, revising and renaming themes to generate super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes during the course of the analysis. This involved numerous re-readings of the participants' transcripts, assessing the relevance of each theme on each reading and making detailed notes and interpretations. Another layer of the analysis was looking at the themes generated across all participants and then looking for the convergences and divergences between individuals whilst not losing the contexts in which the information was given. This required the researcher to adopt a systematic and thorough approach to the analysis.

5.9 Summary: Discussion

This chapter has outlined the results in relation to the literature review and has found consistency with the findings of some other studies of post FE transition (Mallinson, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009; Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2011; Deuker, 2014). Similarly, as discussed in relation to the work of Maslow, 1943; Erikson, 1959; Goodenow, 1993b; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Baumeister & Leary, 1995, concepts of

belonging and identity were significant to those whom were transitioning into the sixth form as incomers from a previous school.

Young people entering a school based sixth form as incomers are likely to experience more than one transition, unlike their contemporaries, who have been through the lower school. Incomers will experience a change of educational placement, change in the level of academic challenge and possibly a change in friendships. In addition, in this study, the participants highlighted challenges involving identity and SoB. Despite some of the difficulties encountered, some of the participants experienced what Beach (1999) described as an identity shift, which involved the opportunity for them to change “one’s sense of self” (p.114) by seeing participation within the sixth form as a means of feeling included and avoiding social isolation.

The current study was critically analysed in terms of its limitations with respect to the study design and methodology. The researcher discussed how some of the limitations and complications were addressed, where appropriate. Future modifications and how potential EP involvement in addressing the issues raised could be extended were discussed. Reflexivity ensured that the researcher considered her own role and impact within the study.

Finally, the implications of the study for practitioners and students (especially incomers) within the sixth form during the transition phase are identified. Additionally, in light of the results obtained, practical implications for the practice of EPs are also considered and summarised.

The conclusion will provide a final overview of the current study, the important issues that transition brings for those incoming into a school based sixth form at 16 and the unique contribution that the EP can bring to the transition process.

Chapter 6

6.0

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The present study utilised a phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of young people entering a school-based sixth form, having previously completed their GCSEs at another school. There is an emerging literature base regarding transition at 16 (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Valjataga & Fielder, 2009; Hernandez-Martinez et al., 2011; Deuker, 2014) and this study has aimed to add to the under-researched area by focusing on the social, psychological and cognitive effects of transition on 'incomers' in particular.

Recent new legislation such as The Children and Families Act (2014) in addition to the governmental focus on RPA to encourage young people to remain in education, training or apprenticeships in order to secure successful future employment, is relevant to EPs, since there is an expectation that they will support life transitions for young people at 16 plus. Therefore, EPs need to understand the issues that are affecting young people at 16 years as they continue their trajectory into FE (Atkinson et al., 2015). The psychological knowledge and skills of EPs can be sourced and utilised to support young people in preparing for FE, by working directly with the young people or collaboratively with schools.

The research has highlighted the impact that transition can have on social, intrapersonal and academic factors, especially for incomers within an unfamiliar setting and knowing few people. The impact on identity, belonging and a sense of community can be challenging, as was the case for some of the participants in this study. Therefore, supporting students to make sense of those experiences is important in promoting and maintaining belonging and adjustment during the transition phase and beyond. Crafter and Maunder (2012) posited the view that the individual should be the focus of making sense of her/his own transition. This is supported by Hernandez-Martinez et al., (2011) who argued the need to listen to the voices of those experiencing the transition. The researcher has, therefore, examined the transition experience of those young people moving into a school-based sixth form from another school with the focus on gaining an in-depth understanding by employing a qualitative methodology underpinned by a

constructionist and relativist position. IPA was used to analyse the research question by listening to the voices of the participants and to explore exactly how they made sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The insight gained by using IPA in exploring young people's views provides valuable information that can generate ideas for future work supporting transition for incomers within EP practice and for teachers involved with education post-16. The key findings of this current study show that the experience of transition at 16 remains complex, in the same way that other educational transitions such as from primary to secondary school and FE into HE also present challenges. In this particular study, social inclusion, intrapersonal factors and academic demands of A Level study have impacted on incomers because they are new to the environment and are involved in more than one transition simultaneously, as defined by Beach (1999).

The findings from the data collection and analysis would indicate that there is a role for EPs to provide practical, targeted support for young people, sustaining their social, psychological and academic needs through direct work such as consultation and therapeutic input. Further action research could take into account Gersch's (2016) standpoint that the EP profession has a unique role in being able to facilitate and consider young people's views, and this could be explored in relation to educational transitions at 16 further informing interventions that could be implemented to secure positive outcomes.

The current study also highlights how EPs can work with teaching staff to develop preventative approaches and to intervene where necessary. These approaches may include training, consultation and collaborative work with key staff, which can then be disseminated across the setting to promote consistent approaches and informed practice. A future consideration would be to consider how EPs might support not only young people but their parents in connection with the transition process regarding the academic and social expectations that parents might have and how their children can be supported effectively.

The results from the research, although conducted from a small scale study and in one setting only, may be difficult to generalise from, however, the individualised accounts obtained using IPA offer an insight into themes that might be relevant to other young people in a similar situation but within other post-16 educational establishments.

Therefore, this could provide a framework for senior staff in sixth forms and colleges to consider the implications for those young people who come into an educational environment with little knowledge about their peers, staff and the placement. The research is important for EPs because it highlights an area which can be developed and extended when working with young people at 16 years during an educational transition; this could also involve future work with moves to HE or employment.

In conclusion, this study has raised some important issues in FE for sixteen year olds coming into sixth forms as incomers from a previous educational establishment. The emphasis on supporting and enhancing transition for individuals and their teachers is an area that can be addressed by EPs, with a clear focus on prevention plus individual or systemic work as appropriate. There is a paucity of research on this subject, in particular, transition into an external sixth form and using IPA as a methodology. It is argued that this current study and its research question has contributed unique psychological knowledge and extended the research base in this area.

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Appendices

- Appendix 1: Educational transitions outlining provision, age, cumulative stages and year groups
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Appendix 1: Educational transitions outlining provision, age, curriculum stages and year groups

Educational Provision	Age	Curriculum Stage	Year Groups
Nursery/Pre-school	2.5-4 years	Foundation Stage	Early Years
Reception Class (found in Infant and Primary Schools)	4-5 years	Foundation Stage	Early Years
Infants (found in Infant Schools and Primary Schools)	5-7 years	Key Stage 1 (KS1)	Year 1 and Year 2 (Y1 and Y2)
Juniors (found in Junior Schools and Primary Schools)	7-11 years	Key Stage 2 (KS2)	Year 3 to Year 6 (Y3 to Y6)
Secondary School (also includes comprehensive and grammar schools)	11-16 years	Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 (KS3 –KS4)	Year 7 to Year 11 (Y7 to Y11)
Further Education (FE) (found in colleges, sixth form colleges and sixth form attached to secondary schools)	16-19 years plus	Key Stage 5 (KS5)	Year 12 to Year13 (Y12 to Y13) Some students might take a third year (Y14)
Higher Education (HE) (university)	18 years plus	Not applicable	Not applicable

1

1

In some UK Local Authorities there are Middle Schools. These are schools which educate pupils from the ages of 9 to 13 years; but this system is in the minority. Most authorities organise educational provision in line with the National Curriculum and the four clear stages, known as Key Stages (Education Reform Act, 1988).

Appendix 2: Gatekeeper letter

Doctoral Programme Educational in Psychology
12th Floor, School of Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff CF10 3AT

Date

Dear

I am a postgraduate doctoral student on the Educational Psychology programme in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my degree I am carrying out a study on young people's experiences of transition into a school attached sixth form. I am writing to enquire whether you would be interested in and willing to give permission for the participation of some of your Y12 students to take part in this research.

The purpose of the study is to look at an individual's experience of transferring into a sixth form. I shall be asking the participants some open ended questions about their learning and social experiences during the transition phase into the sixth form.

The research will involve interviewing six students using a semi-structured questionnaire, and asking them about their sixth form transition experiences. Participants will need to have completed their GCSEs at another school and now be studying for their 'A' Levels in your sixth form. All potential participants will be provided with an information sheet about the study, a consent letter and debriefing information. The data will be audio taped, transcribed and kept securely, with the audio files destroyed after transcription. No names will be mentioned in the write up of the research. Participants are able to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. My academic supervisor is Gillian Rhydderch.

I would be grateful if I could please liaise with your Head of Sixth Form and be able to ask for participants on a voluntary basis. I expect the individual interview to take up to one hour during the school hours at a time convenient for the participant.

The research study has been reviewed and approved by the school of Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research you can contact the School of Psychology Ethics Committee in writing at:

Secretary to the Research Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff CF10 3AT
psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research study. Please let me know if you require further information.

Kind regards,
Helen Powell
Postgraduate Doctoral Student
PowellHL@cardiff.ac.uk

Gillian Rhydderch
Academic Director and Supervisor
RhydderchGA@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Participation invitation letter

Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology
12th Floor, School of Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff CF10 3AT

Date:

Dear

You are invited to participate in a research study, 'An Exploration of Young People's Experiences of Transition into Sixth Form', which I am doing as a part of my postgraduate doctorate in Educational Psychology. You may be interested to take part. I have enclosed an information sheet so that you can find out more about the study.

If you are interested and would like to take part, please let me know by (date). In the event that the student volunteers exceed the number required for the study, then a random selection will be made from those who have expressed an interest. You will be informed by email of the result.

If you are chosen and agree to take part, you will meet with me, Helen Powell, in a room on the school premises to have a chat that will last about an hour. Before the interview, I will make sure that you are happy to continue and we will look through the information sheet and consent form.

If you would like to ask further questions or would like to take part, please email me at the below email address.

Kind regards,

Helen Powell
Postgraduate Doctoral Student
PowellHL@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of study: An Exploration of Young People's Experiences of Transition into Sixth Form

Researcher: Helen Powell
Postgraduate Doctoral Student – Educational Psychology

Supervisor: Gillian Rhydderch
Academic Director

Contact details: Postgraduate Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place

Cardiff CF10 3AT

Email: PowellHL@cardiff.ac.uk

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study to find out how students previously from another school experience transition into a school-based sixth form. The interview will take about an hour. When all the information has been gathered, I will be submitting this study as part of my doctoral thesis.

Please take some time to read through the information below. If you have any questions, please contact me through the details above.

Thank you for reading the information and your interest in the study.

What the study is about?

I want to find out how transition impacts young people moving from year 11 to year 12 in another school with an attached sixth form.

I would like to investigate and understand any challenges and/or positive experiences that you have had. I hope the information you give will help inform educational psychologists how they can help young people and teaching staff with transition from one place of education to another at age 16 years.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have transitioned from your previous school into this sixth form and are currently taking 'A' Levels and you might like to take part in the study.

Do I have to take part?

You only take part in the interview if you want to. Even if you begin the interview you can stop at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen?

If you decide to take part, I will arrange to come to the school at a time which suits you. At our meeting we will go through this information sheet again and consent form, then ascertain that it is appropriate for you to take part. If you are happy to go ahead then

you will sign the consent form. Your information will be kept securely and anonymised. The interview will take about an hour.

The potential benefits and disadvantages of taking part

I hope that you will find it interesting to think about your transition to the sixth form. This will provide useful information for educational psychologists supporting future students and teaching staff. But if talking about these things is very upsetting for you we will stop the interview and talk about whether you need extra support for the issues that have arisen. With your permission, I will then talk to the nominated member of staff about how you could get extra support.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

If you take part in the interview all of the information that you give me will be kept confidential, that is, private from other people who are not listed researchers. The only reason that your information would not be kept confidential is if you said something in the interview that meant you or someone else was in danger. For example, if you said that someone you knew was in danger or that you were going to hurt yourself, I would have to share this information with my supervisor, and the named member of staff in school.

The consent form is the only form that will have your name on it. It will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Your interview will be typed up within two weeks and then the recording will be deleted. All of the information from the interview, including the background information sheet and the typed up interview will be numbered and contain made up names. All computer files will be password protected and only accessible by the researcher. You can ask for your interview to be withdrawn from the research up until the audio file had been deleted, as the typed interview will not contain your name. No original names will be used in the typed up interviews and any quotes used will contain made up names.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The things that you and the other people talk about in the interviews will be put together to try and understand the experiences of young people transitioning into sixth form. They may also be written up and published in an article and presented to people who work and research in similar areas. Small quotes from some interviews might be used to make a certain point, but a made up name will be used to protect your identity. No information that could identify individuals will be used.

Who has said that the study is OK to go ahead?

The research study had been reviewed and approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research you can contact the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee in writing at:

Secretary to the Research Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff CF10 3AT
psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

If you would like more information about the project feel free to contact me.

Helen Powell
Postgraduate Doctoral Student
Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology
12th Floor , School of Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff CF10 3AT
PowellHL@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Consent form

Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology
12th Floor, School of Psychology
Tower Building
70 Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT

School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Consent Form – Anonymous Data

Title of study: An Exploration of Young People’s Experiences of Transition into Sixth Form

Researcher: Helen Powell, Post Graduate Doctoral Student

Supervisor: Gillian Rhydderch, Academic Director and Supervisor

1. I understand that my participation will involve answering some brief questions about my transition into the sixth form that will last about an hour
2. I have read and understood the information sheet and have been able to ask any questions I have.
3. I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary, I do not have to answer all the questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason
4. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I can discuss any concerns with Gillian Rhydderch or the Research Ethics Committee.
5. I understand that the information provided by me will be kept securely and confidentially. I understand that this information will be held no longer than necessary for the purposes of this research.
6. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed (typed up) and that the audio recording will be destroyed upon transcription. I am able to ask for data to be removed up until the recording is transcribed. The transcript will be held anonymously, using made up names, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually.
7. I understand that any quotes used from my interview included in the research will be kept anonymous with personal information changed where necessary to make sure this is achieved.
8. I understand that the researcher will share information with her supervisor, and the named member of staff in school, if she is worried that I am at risk of harming myself or if someone else is in danger.
9. I understand that if I feel distressed during the study that I can discuss avenues for gaining extra support with the researcher.
10. I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study
11. I agree to take part in the study.

I, (name) consent to participate in the study conducted by Helen Powell, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Gillian Rhydderch.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 6: Participant data sheet

Participant #

Gender

Age

'A' Level subjects

Extra notes

Appendix 7: The semi structured interview

The main questions are in bold italics, with supplemental and alternative questions following.

“Hello, thank you for coming along to this interview. Just let me know if you want a break at any time or would like to end the interview. You are not obliged to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. I would like to have a chat about your transition into this sixth form.”

Questions

Please could you tell me something about your transition or move into this sixth form?

- For you, what was the best thing?
- For you, what was the most difficult thing?
- How did you decide to come here?

What were your feelings during the time you moved into sixth form? And now?

- (information on emotions and feelings)

How important is it to you that you participate in the sixth form?

- How do you view a sense of community in the sixth form?
- How do you feel about the sixth form?
- How have your peers and teachers helped you settle in to the sixth form?

What does being an independent learner mean to you?

- What techniques have you used to bridge the gap from GCSEs to ‘A’ Levels?
- How have you experienced the work at ‘A’ Level?
- How did your teachers help you?
- Reflecting back, is there anything else that might have supported you with your work?

What advice would you give a student based on your own experiences?

- (in relation to learning and social opportunities and support)

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your transition into the sixth form?

Verbal prompts

- Why?
- How?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Tell me what you were thinking?
- How did you feel?

“Thank you for taking part in this interview.”

Appendix 8: Debriefing form

Title of study: An Exploration of Young People's Experiences of Transition into Sixth Form

Thank you for taking part in this study. The information that you have provided in your interview will be put together and analysed with the other interviews collected for this research. I hope that the results from this study will help me to understand the social and academic experiences that young people have when they transition into the sixth form from another school. These findings will help educational psychologists generate ideas and interventions in supporting future students academically and socially when they are making a transition into a new educational environment. This information could also be useful for educational psychologists working with students, teachers and parents.

The consent form that you signed will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, only accessible to the researcher. The audio recording will be transcribed and then destroyed. Your general information sheet and typed up interview will be kept anonymously. You can withdraw from participation up until the interview is typed up, because it will then contain made up names.

If you wish to have information about the results of the study please let me know and I will send you a summary of the results as soon as they are available.

If you have any further questions, please contact us:

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If you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you can contact the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee in writing at:

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Appendix 9: Alice's interview

<u>Emergent Themes</u>	<u>Original Transcript</u>	<u>Exploratory Comments</u>
	<p>I: = Interviewer A: = Alice</p> <p>I: Hello, thank you for coming along to this interview. Just let me know if you want a break at any time or would like to end the interview. You are not obliged to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. I would like to have a little chat with you about your transition into this sixth form. Please could you tell me something about your transition or move into the sixth form?</p>	
Reasons for choice of sixth form	<p>A: I remember that when I was in Year 11 I only put another school as a back-up option; I didn't really think that I would actually go to that school. It was just my friend was doing it so I thought, you know, I might as well have like a safe option just in case because at (name of previous school) you had to get Bs in every subject you wanted to study and I knew I would probably get Bs but just in case and then when I actually looked on (name of sixth form) and compared it to my old school I realised that it was a lot better and so I ended up actually going here (laughs) because of that even though I got all the – I got the grades I needed and more for (name of previous school) but I just preferred, from the open evening and the open day at (name of sixth form) I preferred how the teaching was here. So, yeah, (laughs)</p>	<p>Uncertainty - not first choice. Unsure - doing what the friend does - safe option - pressure at last school? Not sure would get the grades?</p>
Safe option		
Academic reasons		<p>Comparison of schools - why better? More flexible?</p> <p>Influenced by the open Evening and open day</p>
Change of placement - socially - fresh start? Wants	<p>I: For you what was the best thing about coming here?</p> <p>A: There were quite a lot of people at (name of previous school) I wasn't particularly fond of but the way that, er, it was kind of laid out; like the</p>	<p>Impressed - positive</p>
		<p>Not keen on the people at the previous school - keen to get away?</p>

<p>Something new and change - reasons for choosing sixth form</p>	<p>lessons and stuff that I've been with them for like GCSE are the same people in the class for two years, the same with the tutor – it's just, we've got quite used to it and I just wanted something new and a change and – I know at (name of sixth form) that I won't have any judgements about me from my last school – not that there were like bad ones per se but it's just nice to have a fresh start, especially when you are starting, like, a new subject.</p> <p>Because I don't know, like, if you go from a transition from Year 9 to 10 it doesn't feel, like, you're, like, really taking GCSEs until it's in Year 11 and then, like, your exams are a couple of months away.</p>	<p>Personality or academic performance - judgement</p> <p>Eager for change - difficulties with peers and teachers?</p> <p>Getting away from difficulties references to new, change and fresh start. New start – new subjects.</p>
<p>Emotional impact</p>	<p>But when you move school completely and start all these new subjects it kind of feels like it is something new if you kind of get that? (both laughing)</p>	<p>The impact of moving and changing courses</p> <p>"If you kind of get that?"</p> <p>Confirmation?</p> <p>Reassurance?</p>
<p>Comparisons - old and new</p>	<p>I: And for you what was the most difficult thing?</p> <p>A: Er – hmm – I think there's, like, in the first couple of weeks when you move there's all these like constant comparisons to your old school. Like, oh this is different; I don't know what's going on here. Everyone who originally went to (name of sixth form) seemed to know – they know what's going on and so it's quite confusing and so this first couple of weeks is, "Oh, should I go back?" It was going to be a big deal if I went back but then because I've moved schools before I know that, like, the first month or so can be quite hard and you just think you want to go back, you want to go back; but if you stick it out, within, like, two or three months you think I'm never going back. But it's, like, once you get to that point it's quite good.</p>	<p>Sense of loss - being lost - uncertainty?</p>
<p>Perceived challenges of movement - emotional impact</p>	<p>Uncertainty</p>	<p>Uncertainty - wanting to go back to previous place. Aware of the difficulties transition can bring. Alice appears to have experienced this before - cycle of uncertainty - do I stay or go? Realises that it is a process.</p>

<p>Comparisons - old and new (physical)</p>	<p>I: Could you please tell me about what you were thinking about during that early stage then?</p> <p>A: I was more like worried about the work than I was, like, about going to a new school. Because (name of sixth form) in itself, um, it's – it's quite, it's got like a logical layout; everything is in blocks – well not blocks, in wings and all the rooms have like normal names. But at my old school they were in random blocks but the rooms they weren't, like, they weren't in order, it was so confusing getting round at my old school, so that was nicer here.</p>	<p>Physical organisation of school important and helpful.</p> <p>Knowing where to go is important.</p>
<p>Social inclusion</p>	<p>Er, at this school it's a bit more cliquy than my old school, so when I first joined I kind of made, like, (laughs) (pause) and when I first joined I um, I actually, because I came to the school with er, it was four people at the time but one of them left after three days and – but we made friends with quite a lot of new people as well. But I think that's something, which happened quite a lot, that all the new people kind of banded together and made, like, friends. Like, um, I was friends with a girl from another school and one who moved here – into (name of town) from somewhere else.</p>	<p>Cliquy=exclusive groups - a problem?</p> <p>Laughs and pauses - embarrassed? Trying to find the right words?</p>
<p>Making friends</p>	<p>And so we would, like, – instead of sitting in, like, the common room with everyone else, like, with all the (name of sixth form) people, we'd just, like, go out at lunchtime and so we didn't actually have to socialise that much with, like, everyone who was used to each other. So we didn't have to worry about that in that way. But then – after like a couple of weeks, I kind of realised that these friends, they weren't, like, my kind of friends, they weren't for me, so I had to try and find my way into a clique</p>	<p>Emphasis on new people coming together - 'banded together' similar status.</p>
<p>Low sense of belonging</p>	<p>Difficulties integrating with the stayers? Easier to be elsewhere. Lack of sense of belonging? Why?</p>	<p>Difficulties integrating with the stayers? Easier to be elsewhere. Lack of sense of belonging? Why?</p>
<p>Social inclusion</p>	<p>'We' in reference to Alice and her friends.</p> <p>Awkwardness? Shyness?</p> <p>Importance of being in a group and avoiding</p>	<p>'We' in reference to Alice and her friends.</p> <p>Awkwardness? Shyness?</p> <p>Importance of being in a group and avoiding</p>

<p>Making friends</p>	<p>somehow, which was quite hard, so I just asked one of my friends from a class, who I knew was in (name of sixth form) before, if I could just tag along with her one day and just made friends with them.</p>	<p>social isolation. 'Clique' - getting into a group - infiltrating to be part of it=safety? 'Tag along' - suggests just being with a group rather than actually being friends? Lacking confidence?</p>
<p>Friendships</p>	<p>I: And how did that work out?</p> <p>A: Oh yeah, I'm still friends with them now. I did it twice and then with one girl I did it I realised that her friends, like I just wasn't a fan of them, which was - it just happens, but with the other friends, yeah, it worked out very well and so I don't really see the new girls any more who I was friends with, not the ones from my old school. But then I never had any lessons with them anyway so - I don't see them like at all. But it doesn't mean, like, I won't smile at them every now and then.</p>	<p>Changes in relationships - fitting in. Finding a niche.</p> <p>Importance of still acknowledging others.</p>
<p>Reasons for coming to the sixth form - Lack of support</p>	<p>I: Okay - can you tell me more about how you decided to come here?</p> <p>A: Um, - I just - oh, I kind of realised how bad my old school was. (laughs) Just essentially that's what it was - ,like, during GCSE I had, like, I was falling behind on like coursework and stuff and so there was just, like, an astonishing like lack of support. Like some of the teachers just didn't care; I know some of the teachers didn't like me for one, which wasn't fun but doesn't really matter now because I got the grades I wanted so that's fine.</p>	<p>Unsupported? Embarrassment (laughing)</p> <p>Workload issues - unhappy - lack of teacher support in previous school - blame on teacher</p>
<p>Reasons for coming to the sixth form - issues with previous staff</p>	<p>But then when I went into the open day at (name of previous school) I was having second thoughts because I was really liking what I was seeing and what I was witnessing too - what I was witnessing. But then I went to (name of previous school sixth form) I realised it was just the content I liked but as in terms of teaching style (name of sixth form) was better. And</p>	<p>Difficulties before transition - dismisses it because Alice got her academic grades.</p> <p>Change of mind?</p>
<p>Academic results and teaching</p>	<p>I realised it was just the content I liked but as in terms of teaching style (name of sixth form) was better. And</p>	<p>Positives of coming to the sixth form outweighed those of</p>

New start	<p>when I looked at results and stuff, (name of sixth form) had an edge in (name of A Level subjects).</p> <p>I knew that (name of previous school) would be better at (name of A Level subject) than (name of sixth form) but (name of sixth form) had different people, and, like, a different style. So (name of A Level subject) as the only issue I had when it came to which school do I want to go to but because at the time I wanted to do something in either (name of A Level subject) or (name of A Level subject) I prioritised (name of sixth form).</p>	<p>the previous school especially academically</p> <p>Comparing the two schools – weighing up which place was better</p>
Subject choice	<p>And then at the time I was going to take (name of A Level subjects), which is only a subject that they did at (name of sixth form), so that was another choice for that side.</p>	<p>New people and teaching. The need to make decisions and prioritise</p> <p>Subject choice influence. Needing to make lots of choices in order to decide where to go</p>
Belonging and identity - Outsider	<p>I: Okay, thank you. And what were your feelings during the time when you moved into the sixth form?</p> <p>A: Er, it kind of felt like I didn't belong. Like, you really do feel like an outsider. (laughs) Um, yeah, I think, like, there's – it's not hostile per se but because it's such a cliquy school and everyone just seems to know each other. Like, with the girls who were from other schools, if they weren't there at the time I finished my lessons, because I didn't have lessons with them, I'd just feel awkward.</p>	<p>Alice - very honest about how she felt</p> <p>Lack of Sob - use of language "I didn't belong", "outsider", "cliquy school" and "feel awkward"</p> <p>Alice externalises her feelings of isolation and Sob on others</p>
Low sense of belonging	<p>So I'd, like, – during free periods and stuff I just spent a lot of time like in the library or something just doing work rather than, um, going up into the, er, common area because I just didn't know anyone. So it wasn't – it was a bit bad in the way that you just feel a bit awkward sometimes and – quite lonely if you don't know people. And then like, like, the (name of sixth form) people just know there's not, like, a 12/13 divide</p>	<p>Emotional response - awkward - isolation?</p> <p>Anxiety? - Does not say anything directly</p>
Social isolation	<p>So I'd, like, – during free periods and stuff I just spent a lot of time like in the library or something just doing work rather than, um, going up into the, er, common area because I just didn't know anyone. So it wasn't – it was a bit bad in the way that you just feel a bit awkward sometimes and – quite lonely if you don't know people. And then like, like, the (name of sixth form) people just know there's not, like, a 12/13 divide</p>	<p>Library - avoidance or escape from others - fear of rejection? Shy? Social anxiety? "bit awkward" and "quite lonely" - helplessness</p> <p>Y12/13 groups - divide</p>
Identity - year groups		

<p>Belonging</p>	<p>between the common room per se but it's just they're used to 13 sticking to one side and 12 sticking to another and then it's just, like, small things like that that – like people, external people just don't pick up on but somehow there's an unspoken rule.</p>	<p>“Unspoken rules” - what one group knows and the other does not = incomers vs stayers? Distinction between Y12/13 - an observation</p>
<p>Peer support</p>	<p>And, like, the same with the hubs and the changing times – it's just a bit confusing and – but most of the people – I haven't really come across someone who was, like, anti new people. They are quite helpful and stuff so they are not going to let you suffer they'll be nice. ((laughs))</p>	<p>Alice - physically and socially lost.</p>
<p>Belonging - comparisons with old school and new school</p>	<p>I: And how are you feeling now about being here after your transition?</p> <p>A: I actually um went back to my old school to like pick up some art books and stuff and I felt just completely out of place, like, I did not belong there, and I was surprised about that. I thought that I'd always be comfortable or something at my old school but when I went in and I saw my headmaster, I was just – oh, I just thought, like, I was going to get, like, kicked off – ,like, because I didn't belong there and also I was there without permission.</p> <p>And then after that I came to (name of sixth form) for, like, a rehearsal or something and then I did feel, like, quite out of place here as well because I just went back to my old school. So it was quite confusing and so there's still, like, some points where I do feel a bit out of place per se but it's not like it feels like a new school any more. I'm used to it but it just – sometimes it doesn't quite sink in that I still go here because, like, with sixth form lessons and stuff I'm not in school for, like, a whole school day; so I'll just come here to do my lessons and then I'll go.</p>	<p>Shift? “completely out of place”, “not belong” - shock for Alice - what has changed? Was she ever comfortable in her last place?</p> <p>“Kicked off” - brutal and forceful - not welcomed - state of limbo? Lost?</p> <p>Example of Alice being in a state of limbo - where do I belong?</p> <p>Lack of attachments?</p>
<p>Lack of attachment</p>	<p></p>	<p>Time has helped</p> <p>Not as connected - not there for full days, only for the lessons</p>

<p>Temporary Status</p> <p>Belonging</p>	<p>So it does feel like I kind of belong here but it doesn't feel like I'm going to have any lasting attachments to the school or anything. It's just for two years and then that's it.</p> <p>I: And – and how do you feel about that?</p> <p>A: I'm not really bothered by it. Like, I'm somebody – I move houses quite often. Like I said I've moved schools before so like I'm – it's kind of like I know that some attachments have, like, a time limit, whether it's places or people. So it's just something I've accepted and it helps me, like, prioritise what is worth putting effort into rather than – ,like, I know I'm just going to be friends with you for two years just because we are in the same class and, like, as soon as we get to Uni that's going to be it. So I'd rather – ,like, not be – ,like, put – put my effort into someone else; like people from my old school, for instance, who I know I've got, like, lasting friendships with. And then the same thing, like at this school, like, when it comes to contributing to, like, house drama or whatever, it's just – well I'm not going to be here for long. If I was, like, doing it – if I was here for, like, the whole Year 7 onwards I'd probably be more engrossed in the school like ethics and the house system and just general sports things.</p>	<p>The process is temporary no “lasting attachments” and “just for 2 years” - lack of commitment?</p> <p>Used to time limits from previous experiences (moving houses and schools) - this helps Alice to decide what is important. Friendships not as important at new sixth form - temporary. Emphasis “two years” a limiting factor.</p> <p>Blunt response.</p>
<p>Lack of participation</p>	<p>But because I've just moved here and feel like an outsider, in a way, because they've already got, like, set sports teams; people have, like, planned what they are going to be doing for house drama since they were, like, in Year 8 and so I just let them do it.</p>	<p>Focus on academic priorities not social</p> <p>Participation with sixth form and friendships are low because of limited time - very direct response</p>
<p>Identity - stayers and incomers</p>	<p>I: So how important is it to you that you participate in the sixth form?</p>	<p>Identity/status = outsider, mentioned again - this is how Alice feels. Not feeling connected - making comparisons with the stayers. Outsider = in the minority</p>

Participation	<p>A: I don't really participate. I don't think it's that important to me personally because I'm just not too fazed with, like, getting to know everyone; like, you have to know everyone in the year group. That feels like – my first school, it was very small. I mean my primary school was very small. You knew everyone in your primary school.</p> <p>In my first secondary school you knew everyone in the year. You get to (name of previous school) and it's a bigger school so there's no way you are going to learn everyone's names in your year and so when I come to (name of sixth form) there's – I know, like, 50 people, I know their names (laugh) so, like, I'm not too bothered about – I was going to do um house play they call it here but when it comes to work and stuff I just prioritise my work rather contribute to the sixth form.</p> <p>Because people who have been at (name of sixth form) are more likely to know what's going on and contribute so it's just easier for me to, like, do my own thing.</p>	<p>Is school size important? Especially knowing everyone</p> <p>Size of place impacts on knowing people</p>
Participation	<p>I: And how do you view a sense of community in the sixth form?</p>	<p>Work more important than the social aspects - shy?</p> <p>Not knowing what goes on - does this stop Alice from participating?</p>
Identity	<p>A: Er, like I said, it's quite cliquy so there is, like, the essence of yeah, we're all together. Like us Year 12s and then also the Year 13s, but then it's cliquy. So if you, like, went up to some random group, I think by now because it's so late in the year they'd kind of, like, give you a shifty look like, 'who are you?' But then as soon as you get into, like, your clique it's fine, like that's it, like there's nothing to worry about really then. That's when you feel that you belong but it's only a temporary situation.</p>	<p>Community "cliquy"- suggested exclusiveness</p> <p>Alice uses this word a lot - does she feel uncomfortable?</p> <p>Identify difference between Y12/Y13</p> <p>Alice would feel awkward approaching people she did not know.</p> <p>Importance of being in a social group to belong</p>
Belonging		

<p>Belonging</p>	<p>I: Why a temporary situation?</p> <p>A: I feel like it's quite temporary, not like a – not settled as in like I've put my roots down here, I'm ready to like get – absorbed – get, like, really, like, into it because to me it's just getting my A Levels. That's really all I'm looking for out of the sixth form is to get good A Levels rather than to make lasting connections or anything. So that was my mind set when I came. After all, I'm only here for a short time - two years and that is it - I move on again.</p> <p>I: How have your peers and teachers helped you to settle in the sixth form?</p> <p>A: Um, when – I know on my first day of my (name of A Level subject) class er they made us sit next to someone they've – we've never met before. But I found that someone in my (name of A Level subject) in my Tutor had (name of A Level subject) with me that I did meet on that day, so technically we'd just met that day and so we sat next to each other and so that worked out for everyone. Everyone sat like that but then the person I sat next to dropped the subject and so – and then the person next to me moved to somewhere else, so it was a bit awkward when people had started making friends in that class.</p>	<p>but it is still temporary for Alice</p> <p>Temporary - no need to get involved because there is no investment except to get A Levels and move on.</p> <p>'Mindset' powerful incentive = goals</p> <p>Two years is mentioned again - clear intentions is to move on. Is Alice happy?</p>
<p>Peer Support in class</p>	<p>But then the tables changed around so you had to sit next to new people anyway so that was fine after that.</p>	<p>Making social connections in the initial stages and feeling ok.</p> <p>Positive contacts – the peer in tutor and class – reciprocal relationship</p> <p>A difficulty when someone moved on- awkward because isolated? Effort to find other people.</p>
<p>Identity – stayers and incomers</p>	<p>But um – in my (name of A Level subject), um, there wasn't a set seating plan - they just let us sit wherever. And so, I think, if my memory is correct, I think a group of new people just sit together at the front and then all the (name of sixth form) like on the outside.</p>	<p>Sense of relief when able to sit next to others.</p> <p>Segregation of the incomers and stayers Within class?</p>

<p>Peer support</p> <p>Identity - Incomers and stayers</p> <p>Social connections - Friendships - peer support</p>	<p>Because I was one of the first people to arrive and someone from my Tutor recognised me and, like, asked me to sit next to them so I was – and then someone else joined from (name of another school) but I think all the new people sit, like, on the same table and I think it’s the same in the other class as well. So – and um, for (name of A Level subject) it was just, like, a group of guys who all new each other and are having banter and stuff and I saw this girl, who looked a little bit lost in my class, and she was new as well and so I was new and so I just kind of stuck to her. (laughs) Yeah, so we were friends because we were both new.</p> <p>I: Okay, right.</p> <p>A: Er – I wouldn’t say I needed support in (name of A Level subject) in terms of, like, making friends because the girl I sat next to was really nice.</p>	<p>Peer support amongst the incomers - making connections and feeling ok.</p> <p>Mutual feeling and understanding - ‘stuck to her’ not wanting to let go. Not wanting to be alone.</p> <p>Friendship of convenience? Could this relationship be replaced with another?</p>
<p>Making social connections</p>	<p>In (name of A Level subject) they did occasionally, like, change our groups and stuff we were working on; they still do it now – to encourage us to work with other people and I quite like that.</p> <p>I: Can you tell me a bit more about why you like that?</p> <p>A: Oh yeah, I think, like, rather than – in a way I kind of like having seating plans that – because one of my (name of subject) at my old school, he changed the seating plan every term and he’d normally put people from different houses together so you actually can talk to people; you are not restricted to the people you know, like, – I remember -.</p>	<p>Alice prefers teachers to group the students rather than making the effort - easier and she may find it socially difficult-shy?</p>
<p>Making friends</p>	<p>Like, if you take for example here, I was a new person so I knew no one and so when you are paired with</p>	<p>Teacher in control - safe - supportive environment to meet people - good excuse. Easier for Alice - comfortable.</p>

<p>Making special connections</p>	<p>someone you have an excuse to talk to someone, to make friends with them, to make friends with their friends and so when it comes to doing group projects and that groups are changing up, you can speak to people that you wouldn't have the excuse to talk to other than like – like, "Do we have homework today?"</p> <p>And, okay, so having that excuse to actually talk to someone and make friends without it being quite awkward is really good; so I quite like that.</p>	<p>Alice benefits from this - lacks confidence? Finds social situations difficult to initiate?</p>
<p>Teacher support - group work</p>	<p>And, like, in my (name of A Level subject) we did a lot of going round in a circle, like, telling a fun fact about yourself. When you are pairing up to do work they choose the pairs rather than you choosing the pairs. I like it when the teachers choose it for you because if you don't know anyone you just have to wait until someone looks at you awkward and says, "Do you want to go together?"</p> <p>But when the teachers do it you just get straight into it; so I like it when the teachers take control of that because I think we are all quite awkward. It's like – like my generation, we are all a bit, like, – a bit shifty of one another. (both laughing)</p>	<p>Social difficulties of not knowing others when in a new situation. Teaching help by selecting work groups. Alice feels more comfortable.</p> <p>Identity - mistrust within the cohort?</p>
<p>Teacher support</p>	<p>I: What does being an independent learner mean to you?</p> <p>A: That's another tough question because independent on its own makes it sound like you don't need the teacher's help, you don't need nothing but I think that would be quite bad in a way because if you lack that support – I think from my experience that teacher support can, like, help you improve vastly. It depends on the teacher and the subject. I find my own ways of coping.</p>	<p>Teacher support valued</p> <p>Independent</p>

<p>Time management - increase</p>	<p>I: How do you cope?</p> <p>A: (pause) Um, a lot more time management's needed, even though I'm taking less subjects.</p> <p>I: Can you tell me a bit more about that?</p>	<p>Individualised responsibilities Acknowledgement that A Levels are demanding despite fewer subjects.</p>
<p>Increased work load</p>	<p>A: I remember through GCSEs one of the things I was just looking forward to was I was done with taking eleven subjects; I can't wait to narrow it down to four, four subjects that I like and I can put all my effort into. But then when you start doing it and you realise how much work it is because the workload has not changed. If anything it's increased; even though I'm taking less subjects it's a lot harder now.</p>	<p>Expectation that fewer subjects at A Level decreases the workload. Workload comparison. Paradox – workload not changed but says it has increased Workload - increase A surprise to Alice - demand is greater – disappointment (?) Positives – likes the subjects.</p>
<p>Workload</p> <p>Lack of teacher support</p>	<p>But I think that the transition between doing eleven subjects and only liking three of them, to doing four subjects you actually like is quite good. But then they don't really prepare you for the change in your workload. But for me there wasn't that much of a change, yeah.</p> <p>I: And how have you experienced the work at A Level?</p>	<p>Teachers are to blame Paradox - Alice said earlier there was a workload increase. Alice - a hard worker - few changes - positive work ethic.</p>
<p>Workload</p>	<p>A: It depends on how much it piles up. Because, like, with some work it's quite simple, quite easy just taking notes. But then when it comes to, I've got essays due for each of my (name of A Level subject) teachers, plus my (name of A Level subject) wants something I didn't hand in last week, plus an extra essay during this week, it can get a bit out of control.</p>	<p>Quantity - trying to manage this - out of control for Alice - sense of frustration as she gives the list of activities</p>
<p>Time Management</p>	<p>Some teachers understand that and they will, like, let you off. Like when I've had issues with workload and stuff that's happened to me outside of school and I've had, like, a (name</p>	<p>Teacher empathy and understanding</p>
<p>Workload</p>	<p>and I've had, like, a (name</p>	

<p>Teacher support – empathy</p> <p>Lack of teacher support</p>	<p>of A Level subject) test, I don't even feel like really needing to give a reason to my teacher, I'll just say I'm having certain issues, could I – and then he'll just say, "Do you want to take the test next week?" or something.</p> <p>So some teachers, when they are, like, you are able to talk to them and discuss the workload and stuff, they can be really understanding. But others I just feel like they are just – they won't take it as an excuse and just like you to be disappointed.</p>	<p>Teacher empathy - helpful.</p> <p>Has this happened before? Teachers supportive to Alice.</p> <p>Empathy - important</p> <p>Disappointment</p>
<p>Teacher support</p> <p>High expectations - teachers</p>	<p>I: How does that make you feel?</p> <p>A: Sometimes it's not my fault that things have happened but then sometimes it just makes me want to be, like, oh what can you do? I've tried. I don't really want to put in any more effort now because I don't feel like I'm going to get anything back. I just don't feel I am going to get understood at all. So it's nice when they, like, make an effort – or just try to be open that they understand that it can be a lot for us but still not having ridiculously high expectations so that you should be doing, like, five essays a week, handing them in on time, plus social life, plus other things.</p>	<p>Lack of teacher support. Feelings of demotivation and frustration.</p> <p>Teacher expectations 'ridiculously high – not the norm and out of reach?</p> <p>Too much for Alice?</p> <p>Trying to balance work and social life</p>
<p>Social connections</p> <p>Peer support</p>	<p>I: Can you tell me more about those other things please?</p> <p>A: Er, well me personally I always like make time to meet up with my friends from my old school. But then because we've got conflicting timetables and they've got after school lessons, which we don't have here and extra-curricular clubs, trying to find that set time per week when we're all free has been really, really hard.</p> <p>So like today I've found out that, um,</p>	<p>Emotional support</p> <p>Importance of meeting up with external friends - difficulties because of timetables and clubs.</p> <p>Difficulties in sustaining these relationships.</p> <p>Lifeline for Alice</p> <p>She values her friends</p>

<p>Workload</p> <p>Work/life balance</p>	<p>because we normally meet up with my friend from 2.30 to 3.30 on a Wednesday because that's the only time he's free throughout the whole week, but now at this school I've got an after school session running from 3.30 onwards so realising that I'll have to cut out, like, – because those are the only two solid social things I do outside of school – so now I've got to get rid of one of them just to attend another thing, which really isn't fun. But then it's – you have to bear in mind it's only for a certain amount of days but I know, like, not having that face-to-face conversation stuff can be quite bad because you need to balance social life and school work and just everything. So as it gets closer towards exams the work is literally just getting higher and higher, which isn't fun but – can't do much about it at this point.</p>	<p>Alice has structure in her week?</p> <p>Frustration from Alice having to accommodate changes.</p>
<p>Workload</p>	<p>(pause) Well I think for me dropping a subject did help a lot in my workload because at the start of it – I dropped it after my mock in er January because I got a D in it and at the time – it wasn't that bad to be fair. I didn't revise anything (laughs) so I wasn't too surprised. I wasn't too fazed in all honesty.</p>	<p>Important for Alice to see her friend – sensing her helplessness especially as the workload gets higher</p> <p>Dropping a subject. Helped with workload. Plays down the 'D' grade - "wasn't that bad", "didn't revise" and "wasn't too fazed" - but did she mind?</p>
<p>Number of A Levels</p>	<p>I wasn't doing too badly in (name of A Level subject) I was doing quite well, I was predicted a B at the end of the year and so that was a brilliant grade on it's own but when I was looking at Unis and stuff, the ones that I was going into, I was looking at like (degree courses) and they were asking for three As and stuff and so I was just weighing up my options, like, should I struggle with four subjects and already, like, (name of A Level subject) was really, really hard; or should I just get rid of one that I'm not guaranteed a B in and just focus on the other three. And getting rid of it at that moment, that was one of</p>	<p>Was Alice disappointed? Confidence? Thinking about the future - high expectations for grades.</p> <p>Quality vs quantity</p> <p>"getting rid of it" - nuisance</p> <p>Positives – choice.</p>

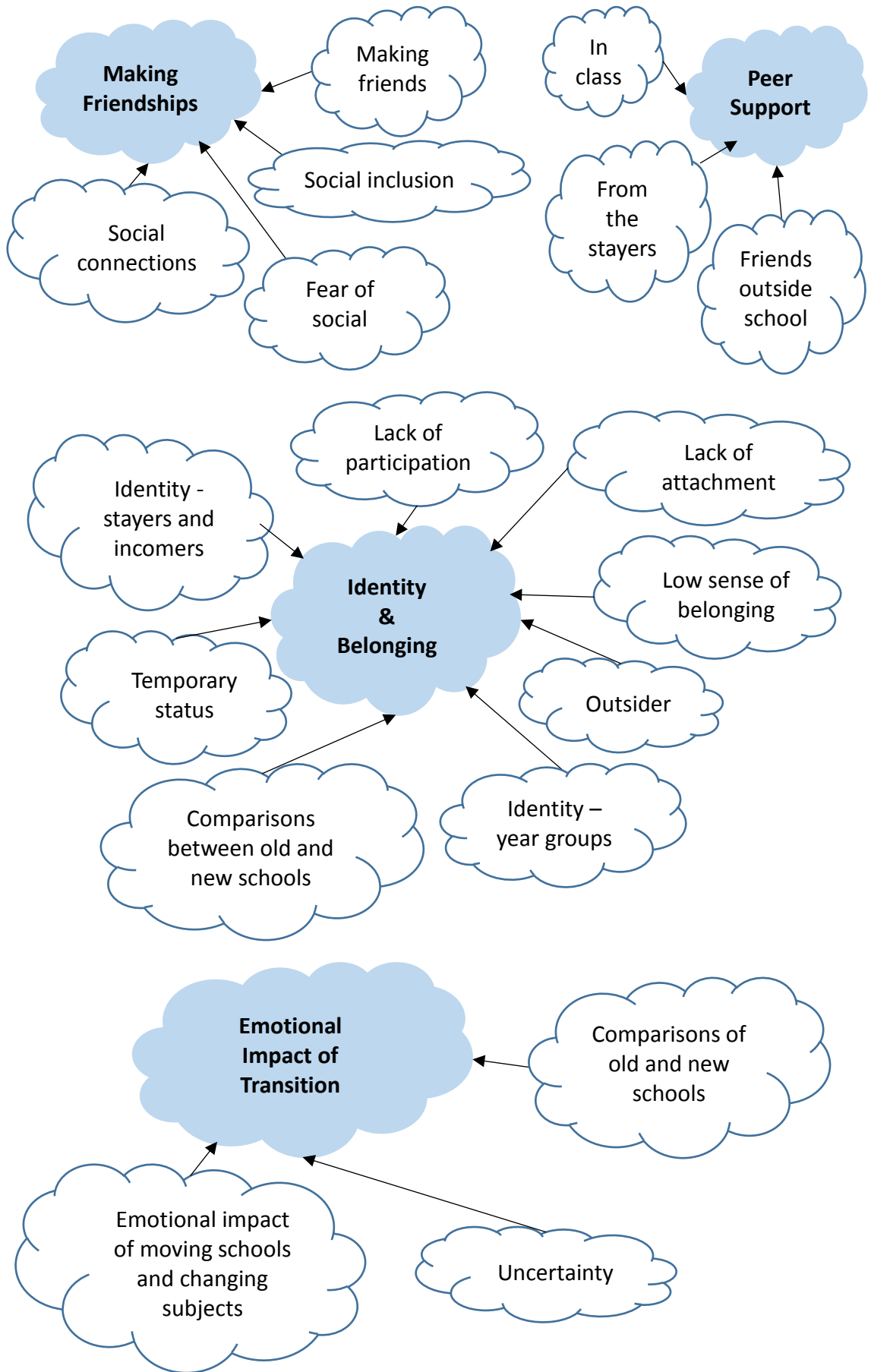
<p>Workload</p>	<p>like the best choices I've made all year I think because just the lack of work and extra periods – I can leave earlier, so it just helps a lot; less stress, less pressure and so I would have been in like a completely different state now if I'd carried on taking it. I would just be beyond stressed – so dropping it has made my transition easier in that way in that I can actually focus, that I am not panicking about this, that and the other thing. That I can actually stop and make some new friends or at, like, lunchtime or whatever have those periods where I am free and I can, like, – so I've dropped – some other people have dropped the same subjects as me and I can, like, hang out with them, which is a lot easier now.</p>	<p>Emotional impact Workload impact</p> <p>Sense of relief</p> <p>Speaking personally about the impact - reflection Social impact Alice is positive about the dropping of a subject – feels happier.</p>
<p>Personal expectations (High Expectations)</p>	<p>I: And how does that make you feel at the moment?</p> <p>A: Glad I don't have to do it (laughs) yeah, I – oh, if I carried on doing it now it just would have been horrible I think. I would have been so stressed and I would be – I think I would be putting on quite a lot of expectations for myself and I think I would be failing in my expectations due to the amount of work. So just not having to worry about that at all and just having three subjects to worry about it a lot nicer. And since (name of A Level subject) is such a content heavy subject as well and revision heavy, dropping it is probably the best thing.</p> <p>I: You talked about expectations ...</p> <p>A: Yes, I've got quite high expectations of myself. (laughs) Yeah, well –</p> <p>I: Can you tell me more about that?</p>	<p>Alice has high expectations – fears failure</p> <p>Reassuring herself that she has done the right thing - justification - stopping herself from feeling guilty? - embarrassed</p> <p>Laughter and 'yeah well' – embarrassed?</p>

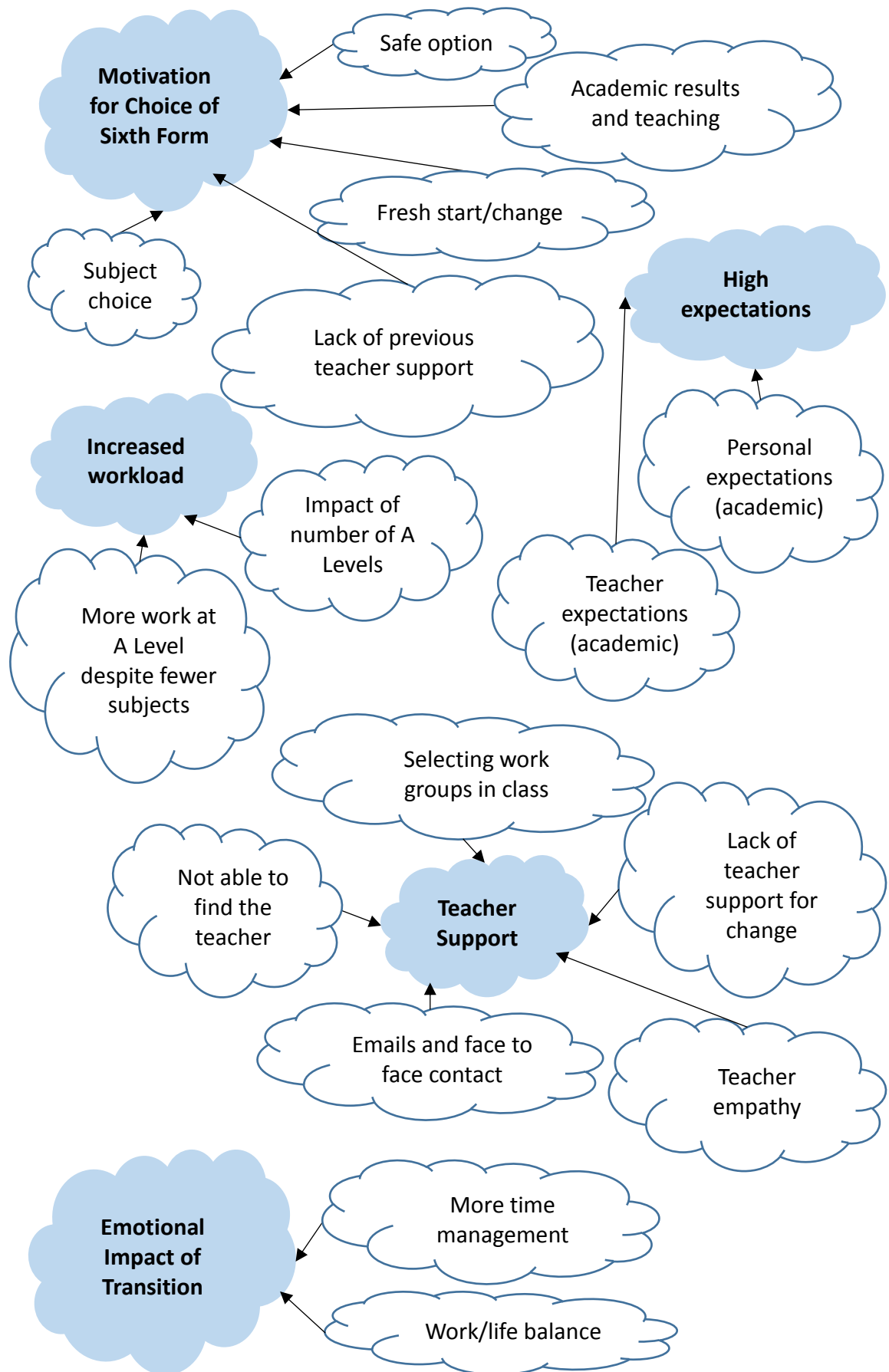
<p>Teacher support</p>	<p>A: Er, well there's not much to say in that kind of aspect. In an ideal world As would be nice but, sorry – (pause)</p> <p>I: And reflecting back is there anything else that might have supported you with your work do you think?</p>	<p>Alice appears overwhelmed – wants to do well. Appears upset</p>
<p>Teacher support (negative)</p>	<p>A: Um – I think having a certain amount of time a week when you are guaranteed to have teacher support, I think that would have really helped. Just like – just like in that, take (name of A Level subject) or whatever, just like every Tuesday lunchtime if you have any issues just come to see me straight away, like having that set time.</p> <p>Because I remember at (name of A Level subject) they said, "Oh just find us at any time," but when I went to find them there was just no one there so it just felt a bit awkward then because I wasn't used to the (name of A Level subject) block, I didn't know who was a teacher and who wasn't so it was just a bit awkward. So I think that when teachers actually make the effort to be here, to answer your e-mails, and say if you need anything just let me know. One of my (name of A Level subject) teachers is like that and he's always in his room so whenever I've got any issues I just stick my head round the door and just have a chat with him.</p>	<p>New - not knowing where to go as new - feeling helpless 'Awkward' a word used by Alice a lot to describe her discomfort - Is Alice shy? Lack of confidence?</p>
<p>Teacher support</p>	<p>(name of A Level subject) teachers is like that and he's always in his room so whenever I've got any issues I just stick my head round the door and just have a chat with him.</p> <p>But, like, with one of my (name of A Level subject) teachers, she is, like, come and find me but she's an absolute nightmare to find. (laughs)</p>	<p>Helpful examples</p>
<p>Teacher as support - problem</p>	<p>I: Can I ask you, is there anything else that you would tell me about your transition into the Sixth Form?</p> <p>A: The only major thing I can think of that is something like I've realised is that I think that because of my</p>	<p>Difficulties in finding a teacher – 'absolute nightmare' – laughter (humour).</p>

<p>Belonging</p>	<p>transitions I can tell that when some things have time limits some things don't and I think that my attitude to coming here affects that. Because I didn't come here to make friends really. I was really happy with my friends at my old school. Like, I was happy and in, like, the last couple of months and I was, like, what am I doing leaving them? So that was not great but, like, I think that lack of drive to make new friends probably did affect my transition. Like, some of my friends just wanted to start afresh, start anew and they've, like, gone straight into like cliques and just made loads of friends. But because I wasn't too fazed about it, I didn't really care about it, I was at a disadvantage slightly but now I've got friends but I still doubt that some of them I'll contact them after Uni but – (laughs) they're nice but not as close as my old friends.</p>	<p>Time limits – an excuse? Personal reflection on attitude. Temporary SoB Friendships – short term – not important?</p>
<p>Friendships</p>	<p>So that was not great but, like, I think that lack of drive to make new friends probably did affect my transition. Like, some of my friends just wanted to start afresh, start anew and they've, like, gone straight into like cliques and just made loads of friends. But because I wasn't too fazed about it, I didn't really care about it, I was at a disadvantage slightly but now I've got friends but I still doubt that some of them I'll contact them after Uni but – (laughs) they're nice but not as close as my old friends.</p>	<p>Self-questioning - doubts? Paradox - talked about wanting a fresh start.</p>
<p>Friendships</p>	<p>I: What advice would you give a student based on your own experiences then?</p>	<p>Why? Not a priority to make friends Could Alice be shy or an introvert? Cliques - Alice uses this word a lot. Defensive language Lacking confidence? Friendships temporary - time limit.</p>
<p>Friendships</p>	<p>A: I think in the first couple of weeks you've just got to try and make as many friends as you possibly can. You might – it might seem like you never speak to any of them again but you'd probably be surprised. Like, even just like someone you wouldn't expect to be friends with later on in life you never know when you are left in, like, an awkward situation and you are queuing up to assembly or something and you are all by yourself but you see someone you spoke to, like, a couple of months ago, to just catch up with them.</p>	<p>Not using first person Aware of the need to make social connections to avoid social isolation - is this what she had learnt? Was this her experience? Paradox with what she said earlier Awkward</p>
<p>Fear of social isolation</p>	<p>So I think – um and then if you don't have anyone to talk to you just feel quite lonely and you'll think, what if I'd stayed at my old school, or I can go back. It's a case of, I think, just for</p>	<p>In the case of Alice?</p>

<p>Social isolation</p>	<p>the first couple of weeks, even if you have to, like, tweak your personality slightly – like, if you’re quite shy, if you just go for it and then it will – it will work out after a couple of months. (laughs) But I think do it for, like, a month or something just to see what happens. Because some people know if they belong at school, some people aren’t too sure and some people hate it straight away. Like one of my friends left after three days because he just couldn’t handle the lack of friends because he wasn’t putting himself out as much as I was and then – you know, some people I know – I know just for me, I’m like quite a – not a shy person but reluctant to socialise sometimes; it takes too much effort. But in the first couple of weeks just anyone at any opportunity. It could be something small just like complementing them on something – just put, just try and do something. (both laughing) Just join a club or anything - just get involved, because they’ll forgive you in the first couple of weeks, like they’re new, it’s fine, we’ve got to be nice to them because they are new.</p>	<p>Interesting insight - could Alice be describing herself? Alice reflecting on her own experience?</p>
<p>Belonging</p>	<p>the first couple of weeks, even if you have to, like, tweak your personality slightly – like, if you’re quite shy, if you just go for it and then it will – it will work out after a couple of months. (laughs) But I think do it for, like, a month or something just to see what happens. Because some people know if they belong at school, some people aren’t too sure and some people hate it straight away. Like one of my friends left after three days because he just couldn’t handle the lack of friends because he wasn’t putting himself out as much as I was and then – you know, some people I know – I know just for me, I’m like quite a – not a shy person but reluctant to socialise sometimes; it takes too much effort. But in the first couple of weeks just anyone at any opportunity. It could be something small just like complementing them on something – just put, just try and do something. (both laughing) Just join a club or anything - just get involved, because they’ll forgive you in the first couple of weeks, like they’re new, it’s fine, we’ve got to be nice to them because they are new.</p>	<p>Alice is describing herself - admits that she finds it difficult to socialise.</p>
<p>Social connections</p>	<p>the first couple of weeks, even if you have to, like, tweak your personality slightly – like, if you’re quite shy, if you just go for it and then it will – it will work out after a couple of months. (laughs) But I think do it for, like, a month or something just to see what happens. Because some people know if they belong at school, some people aren’t too sure and some people hate it straight away. Like one of my friends left after three days because he just couldn’t handle the lack of friends because he wasn’t putting himself out as much as I was and then – you know, some people I know – I know just for me, I’m like quite a – not a shy person but reluctant to socialise sometimes; it takes too much effort. But in the first couple of weeks just anyone at any opportunity. It could be something small just like complementing them on something – just put, just try and do something. (both laughing) Just join a club or anything - just get involved, because they’ll forgive you in the first couple of weeks, like they’re new, it’s fine, we’ve got to be nice to them because they are new.</p>	<p>Importance of participation – does Alice now see that as important? Reference to the stayers?</p>
<p>Participation</p>	<p>I: Can I ask, is there anything else that you would like to tell me before we finish? Anything you would like to add? A: (pause) Not really. I: Okay, thank you for taking part in the interview.</p>	<p></p>

Appendix 10: Initial themes for Alice





Appendix 11: Initial themes across the transcripts for remaining participants

Harry

Fresh start/change - (reason for sixth form choice)
Making friends - social connections and knew some of the stayers previously
Fear of social isolation
Emotional impact – transition - positive start, anxiety and emotional recognition
Peer support - Y13s (presentations) and Y12 (social and emotional)
Belonging - social integration and participation (sport)
Identity - incomers and stayers
Teacher support - positive (email)
Low sense of belonging in tutor group
Teacher, parental and personal academic expectations
Structure and time management
Emotional stress and pressure (with work)
Quantity of workload and pace
Family support
Work/life balance - part time work and extra-curricular activities

Jack

Location - (reason for sixth form choice)
Making friends - importance of social groups and social integration (social pressures)
Identity - social identity (stayers and incomers), personal identity (perception of self)
Emotional impact – transition - ‘new chapter’, lack of confidence and anxiety
Peer support (emotional, academic and social)
Quantity of workload and pace - subject stress and exam pressure
Impact of number of A Levels - dropping a subject
Structure, organisation and time
Teacher and pupil expectations (academic pressures)
Social pressures - friendships
Positive working environment - routine, environment and learning support strategies
Low participation - focus to get A Levels
Belonging - temporary status, fitting in socially and social expectations
Future aspirations
Teacher support - mixed

Lucy

Emotional impact – transition - mixed feelings, feelings of loss and confusion
Comparison of old and new schools - size of school and teachers
Fresh start/a need for change - (reason for sixth form choice)
Making friends - social integration and social connections
Better opportunities and positive reputation of 6th form - (reason for sixth form choice)
Low participation - focus on A Levels, lack of knowledge and belonging
Identity - incomers and stayers (social identity groups)
Staff support - positive
Strategies and techniques for independent study - organisation
Impact of number of A Levels - dropping a subject
Low sense of belonging in tutor group - social isolation
Travel
Teacher expectations - academic pressure, high academic expectations and questioning own ability/achievements
Peer support - social
Segregation from rest of school

Marie

Comparisons between previous and new school
Teacher support - mixed (lack of teacher support, tutor support and emails)
Identity - outsider/ new person (own perception) and stayers and incomers (groups), status
Low sense of belonging - temporary status, in one subject class, stayers and incomers and feelings of exclusion/inclusion
Making friends - social connection and social identity
Subject choice, academic opportunities, school results and locality (reasons for sixth form choice)
High participation and recognition (integration)
Effective learning strategies - independence
Time management, organisation and structure
Quantity of work
Work/life balance (impact on extra-curricular activities)
Teacher expectations - academic pressure
Peer support - social
Emotional impact – transition - making choices ,new chapter and confidence

Tom

Lack of social connection - new to school, new to area and unable to attend the open day

Subject choice and academic opportunities (reasons for sixth form choice)

Making friends - social connection and integration

Identity - stayer and incomers and group identities (interests)

Physical environment - segregated from lower school

High participation - clubs

Peer support - social

Teacher support - email and discussion

Time management, structure and organisation - free periods

Quantity of work

Teacher expectations - academic pressure

Travel

Work/Life balance – part time work and family

Sense of belonging - made a positive shift

Subject choice and possible change

Emotional impact - the first day - anxiety, initial sense of loss and fear of isolation

Appendix 12: Super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes with supporting illustrative data

Super-ordinate Theme 1: Importance of Social Inclusion and supporting illustrative data

Making Friendships

Alice: ...I saw this girl, who looked a little bit lost in my class, and she was new as well and so I was new and so I just kind of stuck to her. (laughs) Yeah, so we were friends because we were both new. (p.5 lines 223-225)

Harry: ...because I knew of lots of people from outside of school and they knew who I was but I think because they'd been together for so long they already had big friendship groups. So I thought it was quite hard to try and join in on these big groups of friends. Yeah. (p.2 lines 42-46)

Jack: ...I've got to make friends with these guys - yeah, in a way safety in numbers. You've got to get into that social group and you're (laughs) you're all right. (p.3 lines 109-112)

Lucy: So me and my best friends just set out and we're like, we're going to make new friends... (p.1 lines 26-27)

Marie: ...the other people that were also new, they friends very easily and they are my close friends now. (p.1 lines 23-24)

Tom: So we all had to go as a tutor in there, so me and him sat together and then we met up with some people who he'd met on the induction day because he came then and um, and now we're like really close friends. So I thought that was really nice. (p.2 lines 78-81)

Peer Support

Alice: But I found that someone in my (name of A Level subject) in my Tutor had (name of A Level subject) with me that I did meet on that day, so technically we'd just met that day and so we sat next to each other and so that worked out for everyone. (p.5 lines 204-207)

Harry: ...they've...introduced me to people and this... a lot of people in my classes who know me, they sort of help me make a good impression on the teachers because they say what I'm like and... what I – what my interests are to sort of help me start talking to people. So they are sort of conversation helpers I suppose, which is good. (p.4 lines 141-145)

Jack: Um, (pause) friends have been - yeah, pretty supportive I would say, my closest friends. If - if I'm stuck on something I'd always ask them and they'd always help me, so - yes, that's fine. (p.5 lines 226-227)

Lucy: ...in my classes people were welcoming and they wanted to talk. (p.3 lines 130-133)

Marie: So there will almost be sort of a smaller group, and that smaller group is always the new people, and they are very supportive and it's very, it's a very nice group to be in. (p.4 lines 145-147)

Tom: I think it's that sense of - from the first week, having to rely on your small close-knit friendship group. There was only like the four of us and we each had to help each other and now that it's grown it's more easier but I think that may have helped because you could talk to them about different things that you were finding difficult. (p.4 lines 170-175)

Identity and Belonging

Alice: ...it's quite cliquey so there is, like, the essence of yeah, we're all together. Like us Year 12s and then also the Year 13s, but then its cliquey. (p. 4 lines 185-187)

Harry: ...there's less of like a family feeling in the tutor like it used to be at my old school. (p.4 lines 160-161)

Jack: ...people who've been here the last five years, they've got into their house and probably become a lot more - I don't know the word - patriotic... (p.7 lines 313-315)

Lucy: I don't know everybody in my year and I find that kind of weird because I knew every single person at (name of previous school). So I think – having that sense of community would just be difficult. I mean there is one but it is definitely more centred around the people that have been here since Year 7... (p.2 lines 89-93)

Marie: I would say between the people that have been here it's very strong but between the people that have been here and the new people it's very weak. So there's almost two separate communities. (p.4 lines 141-143)

Tom: And here it's very noticeable who has been here from Year 7 to Year 12 because they've all already sorted themselves out into groups. And you've got like the sporty jockey people, who are like the popular kind of people and then, yeah, it's hard trying to slot yourself in somewhere. (p.3 lines 103-106)

Alice: Er, it kind of felt like I didn't belong. Like you really do feel like an outsider. (laughs) Um, yeah, I think like there's – it's not hostile per se but because it's such a cliquey school and everyone just seems to know each other. Like with the girls who were from other schools, if they weren't there at the time I finished my lessons, because I didn't have lessons with them, I'd just feel awkward. (p. 3 lines 110-115)

Harry: Um, I've been in classes with people that I like, have met new people, um... the clubs like sports here is a good way of bonding with people who share common interests, which helps. (p.3 lines 94-96)

Jack: I just want to get my A Levels and go. (p.7 line 318)

Lucy: ...I feel like trying to bond with other people in my tutor group is just so difficult. They are so in their family. (p.5 lines 208-210)

Marie: ...within probably the first month it was, it was just really horrible because you just feel like you were not part of anything and that you were always pushed aside and didn't belong here. (Marie p.1 lines 30-32)

Tom: Because where you were at your old school is not necessarily where you are at here in terms of that, so I find that quite hard. And it's not - even though I've been here for six months I still kind of don't feel like I've expanded enough... (p.3 lines 107-110)

Super-ordinate theme 2: Focus on Intrapersonal Factors and supporting illustrative data

Emotional Impact of Transition

Alice: *But when you move school completely and start all these new subjects it kind of feels like it is something new if you kind of get that? (p.1 lines 32-33)*

Harry: *Um, I feel content I guess; not that worried about things anymore... well I know where the school is and I can work my way around the school and I've got a good group of friends now; so I've sort of just... I'm just happy I guess, I feel I belong now and that things are alright. Mm. It was difficult in the beginning... it took a while - the move here but now I feel more settled, yeah, definitely. Wasn't sure about things in the beginning but I've found my feet. (p.8 lines 351-357)*

Jack: *Um before I came here there was like a taster day and I came in and I was really confident and I met some new people who were coming here and stuff that was good. And coming up to the first day I started to have a bit more nerves started building up and that's when a bit of anxiety sort of kicked in. (p. 3. lines 99-103)*

Lucy: *I think I was quite nervous but I think it was more excitement really. It's a massive opportunity to just have a fresh start and I think I was really – really more excited than anything. I mean it was still nerve wracking but I was really excited and looking forward to it more than anything. (p.2 lines 49-52)*

Marie: *...I had to make all these separate choices and, you know, how would I get here and is this the right sixth form? What subjects am I taking? And the people that were here from Year 7, they didn't have to make any of those. It was just coming back to school again in September, so... and they knew all the teachers, they knew all their friends so it wasn't anything different really for them. (p.2 lines 53-57)*

Tom: *And I got like um shifted upstairs and into the sixth form room and there was loads of people in there and there was just me, who didn't know anyone, and I walked in and I just didn't know where to go. (p.2 lines 62-68)*

Motivation for Choice of Sixth Form

Alice: *...I just wanted something new and a change and – I know at (name of sixth form) that I won't have any judgements about me from my last school – not that there were like bad ones per se but it's just nice to have a fresh start, especially when you are starting like a new subject. (p.1 lines 24-28)*

Harry: *...it was just being a fresh start really and being able to sort of prove myself to new people I think. (Harry p.1 lines 32-33)*

Jack: *...we went to a few old colleges in the surrounding towns but they were a bit too far away and in terms of transport it was too far out having to get the bus too early in the morning and walk a mile to get it whereas my Mum could just drop me off here. (p.2 lines 92-96)*

Lucy: *Um, I think the fresh start. Not many people came from my old school with me so I just kind of had my best friend and a couple of other people, so being able to start again having like no – no one before really was definitely a positive, so I could like reinvent myself or change stuff and just start again with completely different people, teachers, everything. (p.1 lines 14-18)*

Marie: *...it just had the best results for the subjects that I was taking.... (p.3 line 109)*

Tom: *...this school's quite – quite known for its academics. It's more of like a humanities school than the other one is so I decided to come here. (p.1 lines 44-46)*

Super-ordinate Theme 3: The Academic Demands of 'A' Level Study and supporting illustrative data

Increased Workload

Alice: *I remember through GCSEs one of the things I was just looking forward to was I was done with taking eleven subjects; I can't wait to narrow it down to four, four subjects that I like and I can put all my effort into. But then when you start doing it and you realise how much work it is because the workload has not changed. If anything it's increased; even though I'm taking less subjects it's a lot harder now. (p.6 lines 267-272)*

Harry: *I thought it would be less stressful cos there are fewer subjects to do - but the workload of each subject's a lot so I feel quite stressed to get a balance for each subject... (p.6 lines 238-240)*

Jack: *...the workloads have been increased a lot since my last school um a hell of a lot more homework, whereas I didn't get much in GCSE stage. (p.8 lines 353-355).*

Lucy: *...the workload wasn't too much and I think having now - just doing three subjects just means I can focus on them a lot more and not have that - that extra subject... (p.4 lines 184-186)*

Marie: *...there is a definite big jump in courses but if you really enjoy them and you are really wanting to do well then it's - it's not a chore. (laughs) (p.5 lines 213-215)*

Tom: *It's a massive step up. It is just so tense. (p.6 line 269)*

High Expectations

Alice: *Yes, I've got quite high expectations of myself. (laughs) Yeah, well. (p.8 line 355)*

Harry: *...my mum has really high expectations so I sort of feel guilty if I don't do any work (laughs) (p.5 lines 207-208)*

Jack: *...there are high expectations and you are expected to know what to do and that's difficult at times, when you don't. You get a bit lost. (p.7 lines 293-204)*

Lucy: *I come here and like, no everybody got like 700 A* and I'm there with my one A thinking, oh, I'm not that smart am I? (p.8 lines 340-342)*

Marie: *So I have high expectations on me from the teachers because I did well at GCSE and that is...it's quite horrible really because you are expected to get all As at least, which lets you go to the top universities and perhaps that isn't what I wanted (laughs) but nobody seems to listen. (p.6 lines 253-257)*

Tom: *And then teachers expect you to be doing two hours of revision for their subject a night - well that's eight hours of just revision on top of the two - hour essay that you gave me. It's just impossible and I don't think they really understand that. (p.6 lines 277-279)*

Teacher Support

Alice: *So I think that when the teachers actually make the effort to be here, to answer all the emails, like if you need anything at notice just let me know. One of my (name of A Level subject) teachers is like that and he's always in his room whenever I've got issues I just stick my head round the door and just have a chat with him. (p.8 lines 371-375)*

Harry: *And they're always available to contact by e-mail, which is helpful. (p.4 lines 155-156)*

Jack: ...there isn't anything they could have done or anything that could have helped even more; I just had to sort of battle through that stage to get to where I was now I think (p.6 lines 256-258)

Lucy: Um - I think –I think some teachers are more open to talking about things and helping than others. I think some of my teachers are very much okay if you didn't do some of the homework and you actually need extra help on it; whereas some teachers are a little bit less - they are more reluctant I suppose and I think the independence thing again. But yeah, some teachers I do find more supportive with like helping you if you haven't been able to do homework, for example, than others possibly. (p.5 lines 190-197)

Marie: ...other teachers are very supportive, they are always in their rooms, they are always happy to answer questions, they'll always reply to your emails very quickly. (p.5 lines 219-221)

Tom: But actually as a whole the teachers are very supportive. On a couple of occasions I've felt a bit overwhelmed with certain subjects so I've e-mailed the teachers and they've been like, yeah, come and meet me for half an hour to an hour and we'll go through it all. (p.4 lines 188-191)

Organisation, Structure and Time Management

Alice: Um, a lot more time management's needed, even though I'm taking less subjects. (p.6 lines 264-265)

Harry: ... you sort of always have to check over your work, which I think is why at sixth form you feel so pressured because it's not like you have a set schedule. (p.5 lines 225-227)

Jack: ...I go into Starbucks and I do a load of work there. (p.4 lines 169-170)

Lucy: ...I've taught myself things so I can be more independent in my own learning...(p.4 lines 166-167)

Marie: I personally do a lot of work so I'll go home and do two or three hours every evening and on half days I'll do sort of four or five. But the weekends well I'll get up early and do work and it's –it's more enjoyable that way because you are never behind, you always understand things...(p.5 lines 192-196)

Tom: So in the sixth form we have like free lessons, free hours, which aren't timetabled. And I found the whole concept of that a bit weird because you sit down and you are like, what do I do now? (p.5 lines 202-205)