

**An Exploration Of Educational Psychologists Constructs Of Their Role Working
With Young People At Risk Of Becoming Not In Education, Employment Or Training
(NEET) In Wales**

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Summary

This thesis is divided into three sections, which includes a major literature review, an empirical research paper and a critical appraisal.

Part One – Major Literature Review

Part one provides a review of the literature. This is presented as a narrative literature review to explore the historical and political context of young people not in education, employment or training (YP-NEET). This is considered both within a United Kingdom (UK) and Welsh context, due to the influence of the UK political context on devolved powers of Welsh Government (WG). The narrative literature review is followed by a systematic literature review to explore effective support strategies implemented by professionals in Support of YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET. This section concludes with a rationale and research questions for this research study that form the basis of the empirical research paper in part two.

Part Two – Empirical Research Paper

Part two provides a detailed presentation of this research study. Firstly, an overview of key findings from reviewed literature are presented, followed by exploration of the research paradigm, methodology and data analysis employed. A thematic map presents key themes identified from the data analysis and are explored in relation to current literature. It then concludes with implications for Educational Psychologist (EP) practice, strengths and limitations of this study and potential areas for future research.

Part Three – Critical Appraisal

Part three forms a reflective account of the research process to explore researcher choices and the subsequent impact on the presented research. A critical review of the research study will explore its contribution to knowledge and understanding within the NEET context.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Summary.....	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Abbreviations.....	viii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	ix
1 Part 1: Major Literature Review.....	2
1.1 Structure of the Literature Review	2
1.2 Ontological and Epistemological Stance.....	3
1.3 Search Strategy	4
1.3.1 Narrative Literature Review	4
1.3.2 Systematic Literature Review	4
1.3.3 Transparency of Literature Search Strategy	5
1.4 Narrative literature Review	8
1.4.1 A brief history of NEET in the United Kingdom	8
1.4.2 Defining NEET	9
1.4.3 YP at Risk of NEET	10
1.5 Risk and Protective Factors for YP at risk of NEET	11
1.5.1 Risk Factors	11
1.5.2 Risk Factors and the chance of being NEET	12
1.5.3 Cumulative Risk Factors for Risk of NEET.....	13
1.5.4 Systemic Influences Contributing to Risk of NEET	15
1.5.5 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Framework & NEET	15
1.5.6 Protective Factors for YP at Risk of NEET	18
1.6 Long Term Outcomes Associated with NEET	20
1.7 Critique of NEET Terminology	20
1.7.1 Advantages of NEET Terminology	20
1.7.2 Challenges with NEET Terminology	21
1.8 Power, Privilege and Intersectionality	23
1.8.1 Power, Privilege and Experiences of NEET	23
1.8.2 Intersectionality and Risk of NEET	25
1.9 UK NEET Statistics	27
1.10 Welsh NEET Statistics	28
1.11 UK NEET Policy	29
1.12 Critique of UK policy approaches to NEET	32
1.12.1 Focus on NEET as an individual deficit	32
1.12.2 Target driven outcomes vs long-term outcomes.....	32
1.12.3 Social inequality & exclusion	33
1.12.4 Lack of a coordinated approach	34
1.13 Welsh Government NEET Policy & Legislation	35
1.13.1 Strengths and challenges of Welsh Policy in support of NEET	38
1.14 Differences in UK and Welsh Government Policy to Address NEET	41
1.15 Identifying YP at risk of NEET	43

1.15.1	Identification Tools and Early Intervention	43
1.15.2	Preventative Approaches for YP at Risk of Becoming NEET	44
1.15.3	Effective Intervention for YP-NEET.....	46
1.16	The Role of the EP with YP at Risk of NEET	49
1.17	Psychological Theory Relevant to YP at Risk of NEET/YP-NEET	52
2	<i>Section 2: Systematic Literature Review</i>	59
2.1	Rationale for Systematic Literature Review	59
2.1.1	Analysis.....	59
2.2	What can current available literature tell us about how professionals can successfully support YP at risk of becoming NEET?	60
2.3	Identifying Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET	61
2.3.1	Early Identification Tools.....	61
2.3.2	Multidisciplinary Approaches to Identifying YP at Risk of NEET	63
2.4	Promoting Educational Engagement	65
2.4.1	Building Relationships.....	65
2.4.2	Person-centred Practice	68
2.4.3	Transition support	70
2.5	Navigating Systems	73
2.6	Role Construction.....	75
2.6.1	Role of the EP	76
2.7	Summary of Key Findings	79
2.8	Rationale for current study and Research Questions	81
2.9	References	82
	<i>Part Two: Major Empirical Research Study.....</i>	96
3	<i>Abstract</i>	97
3.1	Introduction	98
3.2	Relevance to Educational Psychology.....	101
3.3	Research Paradigm	102
3.3.1	Axiology.....	103
3.3.2	Ontology.....	103
3.3.3	Epistemology.....	104
3.4	Research Methods	105
3.4.1	Welsh Context	105
3.4.2	Participants and Recruitment	106
3.4.3	Data Generation.....	106
3.5	Approach to Data Analysis	108
3.6	Ethical Considerations.....	109
3.7	Analysis Process	111
3.8	The Thematic Map.....	112
3.9	Overview of Exploration of Themes	114
	Superordinate Theme 1: Weaving the Thread.....	114
	Superordinate Theme 2: We Need Change	127
	Superordinate Theme 3: Making a Meaningful Impact/Adding Value	135
3.10	Discussion	141

3.10.1	What are EP perspectives and understanding of YP at risk of NEET?	141
3.11	How do EPs construct their role working with young people at risk of NEET?	145
3.11.1	Promoting Educational Engagement	145
3.11.2	Adopting a Systemic Role.....	149
3.11.3	Multidisciplinary Approach	152
3.11.4	Creating Change	154
3.12	Implications for Practice	157
3.13	Strengths, Limitations and Future Research.....	160
3.14	Conclusion.....	162
3.15	References	163
Part Three: Critical Appraisal		171
4	Introduction	172
4.1	Being a Reflexive Practitioner	172
4.2	Deciding upon a Thesis Topic.....	172
4.3	Researcher Positionality	176
4.4	Exploration of Research Literature	177
4.5	Reflections on the Literature Review Process.....	185
4.6	Theoretical Paradigms	188
4.7	Methodological Considerations.....	190
4.8	Rationale for Focus Groups	192
4.8.1	Preparation for Facilitation of Focus Groups	193
4.8.2	Facilitation of Focus Groups	197
4.9	Recruitment of Participants	200
4.10	Reflections on the use of Focus Groups	201
4.11	Data Analysis	203
4.12	Reflections on data analysis process.....	206
4.13	Contribution to Knowledge.....	208
4.13.1	Contribution of Research to Existing Knowledge	208
4.13.2	Contribution to Future Research.....	209
4.14	Dissemination of Research	210
4.15	Contribution to EP Practice	211
4.16	Concluding Reflections on the Research Journey	212
4.17	References	214
5	Appendices.....	218
	Appendix A - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist.....	218
	Appendix B - Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)	220
	Appendix C – Systematic literature review grid.....	221
	Appendix D – Online recruitment post	240
	Appendix E – Email recruitment communication.....	240

<i>Appendix F – Recruitment Poster</i>	<i>241</i>
<i>Appendix G – Participant information sheet</i>	<i>242</i>
<i>Appendix H - Participant consent form</i>	<i>246</i>
<i>Appendix I – Focus Group Questions</i>	<i>249</i>
<i>Appendix J – Participant debrief information sheet.....</i>	<i>250</i>
<i>Appendix K – Further supporting quotes for themes explored within findings.....</i>	<i>251</i>

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AEP	Alternative Education Provider
ALN	Additional Learning Need
APA	American Psychological Association
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
CYP	Children and Young People
E2E	Entry to Employment
EET	Education, Employment or Training
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
EPC	Engagement Progression Coordinator
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
ESL	Early School Leaver
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
FE	Further Education
IDP	Individual Development Plan
LA	Local Authority
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LRQ	Literature Research Question
MMAT	Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool
NEET	Not in Education, employment or training
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses
PSE	Personal, Social Education
PSPS	Post School Psychological Service
RONI	Risk of NEET Indicators
RPA	Raising the Participation Age
RQ	Research Question
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SC	Social Constructionism
SEMH	Social Emotional and Mental Health
SENCos	Special Educational Needs Coordinators
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socio-economic Status
UK	United Kingdom
WG	Welsh Government
YEPF	Youth Engagement and Progression Framework
YP	Young People
YP-NEET	Young people identified as not in education, employment or training
YPG	Young Persons Guarantee

List of Tables

Table 1. Search Terms	5
Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	6
Table 3 Application of Psychological Theory to Support YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET	53
Table 4 Weighted risk factors as reported in Arnold & Baker (2012)	62
Table 5. Ethical considerations as considered in Braun & Clarke (2013)	110
Table 6. Evaluation of Literature Review Approaches	179
Table 7 Reflection of literature review process 29/09/24	186
Table 8. Advantages and disadvantages of methods for qualitative data generation ..	191
Table 9. Recommendations for a knowing researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2023)	205
Table 10. Dissemination plan for research study	210

List of Figures

Figure 1 PRISMA for Systematic Literature Search	7
Figure 2. Siraj et al., (2014) Risk factors of NEET based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Framework (1979, 1998)	16
Figure 3. The percentage of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the UK, October to December 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2025)	28
Figure 4. Young people not in education, employment or training in Wales, with 95% confidence intervals, year ending September 2010 to September 2024 (Welsh Government, 2025a)	29
Figure 5. UK Government Policy, Guidance and Programs with Relevance to EET	31
Figure 6. Welsh Government Policy and Guidance with Relevance to EET	37
Figure 7. Five mechanisms to tackle the risk of becoming or remaining NEET (Brown et al., 2022)	47
Figure 8. Thematic Map of Systematic Literature Review Themes	60
Figure 9. Braun & Clarke's (2022) Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis	109
Figure 10. Familiarisation doodle	112
Figure 11. Thematic Map Generated from Data Analysis	113
Figure 12. Flow chart for early identification and intervention for YP at risk of NEET ...	144
Figure 13. Combined findings of research and reviewed literature to inform EP practice with YP at risk of NEET	159
Figure 14. Process for identifying a research topic	173
Figure 15. Research diary entry 21/07/24	181
Figure 16. Research diary 11/08/24	182
Figure 17. Research diary 03/11/24	183
Figure 18. Driscoll's (1994) Model of Reflection	185
Figure 19 Plan for preparation to facilitate focus groups	194
Figure 20 Researcher skills for effective facilitation of focus groups	197
Figure 21 Plan for facilitation of focus groups	198
Figure 22. Research diary 24/10/24	203

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*An Exploration of Educational Psychologists Constructs of their Role Working with
Young People at Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
in Wales*

Part One: Major Literature Review

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1 Part 1: Major Literature Review

1.1 Structure of the Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to explore and critique existing literature related to young people (YP) at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), or YP who are termed as NEET (YP-NEET), with the view of developing insight into how professionals offer support to this cohort (Cronin et al., 2008). This literature review has been divided into three sections.

Section 1: includes a narrative literature review, which aims to explore how the NEET construct is positioned within a political, social and educational context and what that might mean for YP that are termed as at risk of becoming NEET/YP-NEET. A narrative literature review provides the opportunity to explore the historical context of NEET and how this has evolved over time, which holds relevance to the topic area being explored (Siddaway et al., 2019). The narrative literature review includes exploration of government policy, grey literature and peer reviewed research studies associated with NEET to allow for exploration of YP-NEET in terms of both individual and systemic factors.

Section 2: includes a systematic literature review, which focuses on research specifically related to professionals working with YP at risk of becoming NEET. This part of the literature review aims to answer the literature review question (LRQ) **‘What can current available literature tell us about how professionals can successfully**

support YP at risk of becoming NEET?’. A critical analysis of the literature will aim to draw together implications for Educational Psychologist (EP) practice and justification for the proposed research (Siddaway et al., 2019).

Section 3: provides a summary of key concepts that are relevant to EP practice and the proposed research, providing a clear rationale for the research questions that will be explored.

1.2 Ontological and Epistemological Stance

The process of the literature search and selection for review are informed by the ontological and epistemological lens held by the researcher. A critical realist ontology is formed from a combination of a realist stance, which posits that there is a concept or entity to discover, and a relativist stance, which theorises that individuals will experience, know or view this in differing ways (Stutchbury, 2022). In this viewpoint, NEET is conceptualised as a construct that can be researched in order to attain further knowledge and understanding; whilst a social constructionist lens takes into account the social and cultural influences that mediate constructions at an individualised level (Burr, 2015). This allows the researcher the tools to review the literature using a critical lens to explore the constructs held of YP-NEET and how this is represented within both socio-political systems and by individuals in qualitative methodologies.

1.3 Search Strategy

1.3.1 Narrative Literature Review

An initial scoping review of Welsh Government (WG) and United Kingdom (UK) Government websites, alongside a grey literature search, was carried out to explore policy and legislation related to NEET. In addition, a broad search of research literature was undertaken using the search term “Not in Education, Employment or Training” via online databases, including American Psychological Association (APA) PsychInfo, Scopus, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre). Searches for grey literature were also completed using ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Overton and Google Scholar. This process offered a broad pool of literature from which to gain understanding of and insight into the historical and social relevance of NEET within a UK political context.

1.3.2 Systematic Literature Review

The systematic literature review aimed to explore research that would answer the LRQ:

‘What can current available literature tell us about how professionals can successfully support YP at risk of becoming NEET?’. Research literature was obtained using the following online databases: American Psychological Association (APA) PsychInfo, Scopus, ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre). Additional literature was acquired through Elicit, citation tracking and sourced via references in bibliographies of relevant research to provide a robust and thorough search method (Hirt et al., 2020; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2022). The searches were carried out between August 2024 and November 2024 with results detailed in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) (Tricco et al., 2018) (see Figure 1).

Key search terms were identified using a hand search of research literature to locate relevant search terms for a comprehensive review of the literature (see Table 1). The Boolean category OR was used between each search term, with AND used to create a string to join search terms together. This method aimed to provide search results of all relevant papers with the included search terms.

Table 1. Search Terms

Key Word Search Terms	Rationale
“Not in education employment or training” “Disengaged” “NEET” “At risk of NEET” “Early School Leaver” “Disaffected student(s)”	The aim of the literature review was to review articles that were focused on individuals that were termed as either at risk of NEET or as NEET. Preliminary searches of the literature were used to inform appropriate search terms for a full literature search.
“Children and young people” “Young people” “Adolescent(s)” “Student(s)” “Pupil(s)” “Teen”	NEET is a term that is used internationally and with differing age ranges dependent upon country specifications. Within a UK context NEET is associated with ages 16-24. The literature search aimed to include both young people at risk of NEET and those already termed as NEET; a range of terms were used to reflect this.
“Educational Psychologist(s)” “School staff” “Teacher(s)” “Professional(s)” “SENDCo(s)” “ALNCo(s)”	To answer the LRQ, a range of professionals were included in the search terms.

1.3.3 Transparency of Literature Search Strategy

Results of the systematic literature search were filtered using inclusion and exclusion criteria detailed in Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria evolved in an iterative process as search results were explored during the literature search. Articles were excluded initially through review of titles and abstracts. This was followed by a full article review to ensure relevance of included studies in answering the LRQ.

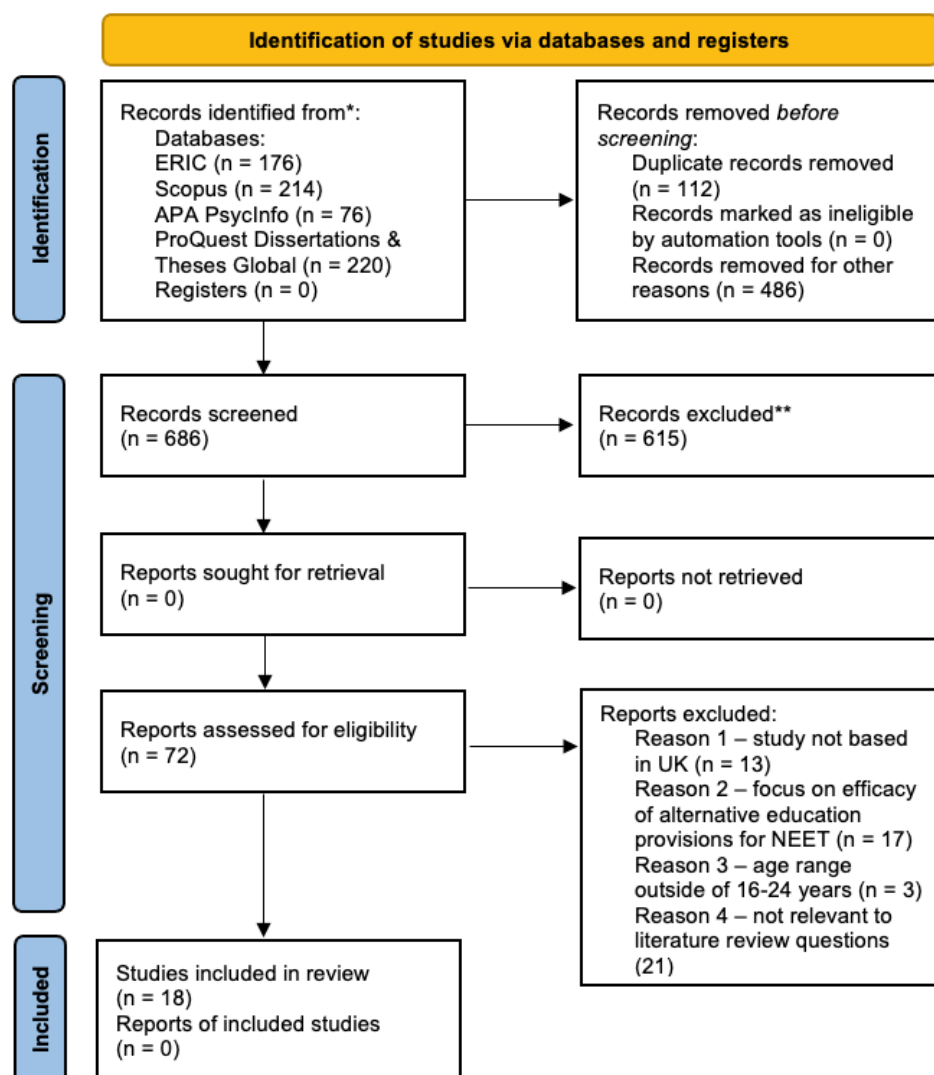
Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
<p>1. Location of Study</p> <p>Studies were included if they were conducted in and related to the UK context.</p>	<p>Studies were excluded if participants were outside of the geographical area of the UK.</p>	<p>Studies were sought that included research within a UK context due to the differing social, cultural and political context that may be present within other countries.</p>
<p>2. Sample Focus</p> <p>Studies were included if research was focused on individuals at risk of becoming NEET (aged 14+) or YP-NEET (aged 16-24).</p>	<p>Studies were excluded if the research participants were termed NEET but were above the age of 24 years old and were not focused on how EPs or other professionals worked with YP at risk of NEET or YP-NEET.</p>	<p>Research studies that included YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET were sought to promote understanding of this cohort in relation to the NEET context.</p>
<p>3. Publication Date</p> <p>Studies were included if they were published from 1999 onwards.</p>	<p>Studies were excluded if they were published before 1999.</p>	<p>NEET became part of political discourse in 1999 as part of the report <i>Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training</i> (HM Government, 1999).</p>
<p>4. Study Design</p> <p>Studies that included use of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research methodologies.</p> <p>Systematic literature reviews relevant to the topic were explored.</p>	<p>No study designs were excluded.</p>	<p>Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies offer insight into the profile and experiences of YP-NEET.</p>
<p>5. Relevance of Topic</p> <p>Studies evaluating how professionals work with YP at risk of NEET or YP-NEET from the perspective of professionals and/or YP</p>	<p>Studies that did not explore work relevant to YP at risk of NEET or YP-NEET.</p>	<p>Research literature included aimed to answer the literature review question, which was focused on how professionals provide successful outcomes for YP at risk of NEET.</p>

<p>6. Publication Status</p> <p>Studies published in academic, peer reviewed journals. Unpublished doctoral or PhD thesis.</p>	<p>Studies that were either not peer reviewed academic journals or unpublished doctoral or PhD theses.</p>	<p>Studies in both peer reviewed journals and doctoral/PhD theses undergo high levels of scrutiny ensuring confidence in the quality of work produced.</p>
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The literature search strategy is reported through the PRISMA (Tricco et al., 2018) to provide clarity and transparency of the literature search process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 PRISMA for Systematic Literature Search



1.4 Narrative literature Review

1.4.1 A brief history of NEET in the United Kingdom

Changes to UK policy in 1988 no longer allowed YP aged 16-18 years old to claim unemployment benefits (Simmons & Thompson, 2011a). These changes led to new terminology for YP, now termed “Status0” in place of “unemployed”, to recognise a lack of participation in the labour market (Istance et al., 1994). However, due to the lack of clarity inherent in “Status0”, the more descriptive term of NEET was coined (Furlong, 2006). The term NEET became part of policy discourse when used in the report *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training* by the Social Exclusion Unit (HM Government, 1999). Although NEET initially related to 16–18-year-olds, this was extended up to age 24 in *Building Engagement, Building Futures* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011).

This new definition of NEET for YP, whilst offering greater clarity than ‘Status0’, also captured a wider group of individuals than the solely unemployed. The term NEET could now include a heterogenous group of YP outside of education, employment and training, in addition to individuals with caring responsibilities or experiencing disability (Furlong, 2006). This potentially places NEET as a catch-all term for any YP not actively engaged in education or employment, returning a sense of ambiguity in relation to who is included under the umbrella term NEET. This risks compromising the capacity to measure and track the NEET population, identify appropriate intervention and enact positive change (Furlong, 2006).

1.4.2 Defining NEET

UK Government policy surrounding education and employment for YP aged 16-24 years remains on the political agenda. Recent UK Government statistics estimate that 13.4% of YP aged 16-24 years are currently NEET (Office for National Statistics, 2025). The defining terms provided by UK Government (Office for National Statistics, 2025) for a YP to be considered in education, training or employment include:

- Enrolment in an educational course (attending or waiting for a term to start)
- Participating in an apprenticeship
- Enrolment on a government-supported employment or training programme
- Working or studying towards a qualification
- Have been involved in job-related training in the previous 4 weeks
- In paid work (including if on holiday or sick)

A YP that does not fulfil the above criteria is considered to be NEET, which includes individuals who are unemployed or termed economically inactive (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Economic inactivity is defined as not in employment, not seeking employment in the previous 4 weeks and unable to begin employment within 2 weeks. In contrast, unemployed status refers to an individual who is not in employment but is seeking work and can start employment within 2 weeks (Office for National Statistics, 2025). For the purpose of this research the definition of NEET, as described within UK Government policy, will be adopted. This reflects the prevalence of the adopted NEET terminology within existing research literature and its function as an overarching term, which encompasses a range of YP at risk of disengagement from education or employment. However, it is acknowledged that there are inherent challenges and

tensions in relation to the term NEET. As highlighted by Thompson (2011), these complexities can result in a lack of clarity to identify YP most in need of intervention and support. These tensions are further explored in section 1.7 *Critique of NEET terminology*. Whilst acknowledging these limitations, the established NEET policy definition provides a consistent framework for the scope of this research study.

1.4.3 YP at Risk of NEET

Individuals experiencing NEET have long been associated with negative life outcomes, such as low academic attainment, mental health issues, insecure employment and social exclusion (Holmes et al., 2021; Lőrinc et al., 2020; Schoon, 2014). Policy responses to NEET can follow two pathways, either to prevent a YP becoming NEET, or to reduce the numbers of YP-NEET (Hutchinson et al., 2016).

Multiple research studies have aimed to identify risk factors that may lead a YP to becoming NEET (Audit Commission, 2010; Department for Children Schools & Families, 2009). Gaining increased clarity and understanding of the risk factors experienced by YP at risk of NEET can inform support and intervention. Such strategies can, in turn, be directed towards specific areas to address individual need and thus act as preventative measures. It is important to note, however, that YP may not experience risk factors in isolation, resulting in a complex profile of need which can be challenging to identify and address (Hutchinson et al., 2016). Access to education, employment or training (EET) for YP at high risk of NEET due to significant and compounding factors such as homelessness, substance misuse, or youth offending is contingent upon resolving identified underlying issues first (Russell, 2013; Yates & Payne, 2006).

Furthermore, risk factors can be perceived as an individual deficit attributed to static characteristics which need intervention to enact change, rather than recognising wider societal and systemic factors that influence YPs' trajectories (Lorinc et al., 2020). Subsequently, this may lead to inappropriate offers of support and intervention for YP at risk of NEET, which fail to address underlying needs that could influence long-term change.

1.5 Risk and Protective Factors for YP at risk of NEET

1.5.1 Risk Factors

1.5.1.1 Disengagement from Education

Attaining a more comprehensive understanding of risk factors contributing to NEET can offer clarity and direction towards addressing root causes of NEET. Previous research has shown that disengagement from education can act as a risk factor for NEET status leading to low school attendance, a lack of school belonging, disconnection from peers and lower academic attainment (Lőrinc et al., 2020). Connell et al (2024) investigated the association between school attendance and at risk of NEET. Their findings indicated that pupils with persistent absenteeism of 10% or higher for all academic lessons across all school years were 3.9 times more likely to become NEET and 6.3 times more likely to become persistently NEET. Furthermore, findings from the Department for Education's (2025) analysis of pupil data from the academic year 2022/23 demonstrated a positive correlation between increased attendance and attainment, whilst controlling for other characteristics, such as prior attainment, sex, free school meals and special educational need (SEN). Pupil attendance above 90% indicated 1.9x increased likelihood of attaining grade 5 in maths and English at GCSE (Department for Education, 2025). Additional research indicates that low academic attainment is a key determinant for NEET status impacting access to further education, training and

employment opportunities (Gladwell et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2021; Rahmani & Groot, 2023). These findings indicate a reciprocal relationship between school attendance and attainment, which can lead to missed opportunities to develop and embed soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving and teamwork, which are valued in further education and employment opportunities, and access to career information, advice and guidance (Connell et al., 2024; Gladwell et al., 2022). Measures to increase school attendance and engagement could, therefore, lead to increased attainment and reduce the risk of NEET (Feng et al., 2015).

Further exploration of factors leading to disengagement from education expand beyond attendance and attainment, signifying a complex combination of potential contributors. A lack of support with mental health needs, SEN, incidents of bullying and school exclusions whilst in full-time education are also cited within the literature associated with NEET (Lorinc et al., 2020; Maguire, 2021; Sadler et al., 2015; Thompson, 2011). Furthermore, existing hierarchies within education perpetuate inequalities, marginalisation and disengagement through a culture of competition measured through success or failure to meet required curriculum targets (Bynner, 2012). This can create an environment which lacks the necessary elements to support growth and progress for all YP (Bynner, 2012). Consequently, this indicates the central role that the school environment, culture and ethos can play in fostering school belonging in support of educational engagement (Parker et al., 2022).

1.5.2 Risk Factors and the chance of being NEET

Multiple research studies have sought to identify the influence of individual characteristics in relation to risk of NEET (Audit Commission, 2010; Department for

Children, Schools and Families & Office for National Statistics, 2009). Risk factors associated with NEET are well documented within the literature, including low educational attainment, socio-economic status (SES), instability at home, free school meals, poverty, disability, SEN, attitudes towards education and geographical location (Thompson, 2011). However, further insight into the degree to which identified characteristics predict the likelihood of NEET could illuminate why one individual is more likely to become NEET than another. Holmes et al's (2021) analysis of Labour Force Survey (LFS) data between 1985-2015 sought to identify the weighting of individual risk factors contributing to NEET. Findings align with prior literature citing low academic attainment as a risk factor for NEET, noting that little progress has been made in increasing academic attainment for YP-NEET in the UK following the year 2000. In addition, mental health needs demonstrated the largest effect size on NEET of all health categories. However, it's important to recognise that these individual factors are interconnected and influenced by broader external elements. Holmes et al. (2021) noted that a lack of diverse EET options for YP, adequate support for mental health needs and local labour markets can also contribute to a risk of NEET. Therefore, it is important to consider the significance of multiple factors that may contribute to risk of NEET, framed within local and national contexts.

1.5.3 Cumulative Risk Factors for Risk of NEET

Research conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (Crowley et al., 2023), explored risk factors for becoming NEET through analysis of longitudinal data between the years 2004-2015. 19 risk factors were explored within education, family, health, living standards and engagement in risky behaviours. Through development of a risk index for NEET, researchers were able to explore cumulative risk for YP becoming NEET,

an approach that might be beneficial in identifying YP most at risk. Findings from data analysis identified six risk factors that were strongly associated with YP-NEET. These include:

- Lack of qualification above level 1
- Experiencing a limiting disability
- Having a child before age 21
- Having a child between age 21 and 25
- Experiencing a mental health condition
- Having an identified additional learning need (ALN)

Findings from the study add weight to previous research that have identified areas of risk for becoming NEET, indicating that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills can contribute to risk of NEET (Feng et al., 2015; Gladwell et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2021; Rahmani et al., 2024). Identification of risk factors highly associated with YP at risk of NEET provide insight that could contribute to policy initiatives to address marginalisation of identified groups, with a view of reducing numbers of YP-NEET (Crowley et al., 2023). However, the researchers acknowledge that certain risk factors, including YP's experience of crime in their local area, SES, and parental attitudes towards education, could not be explored in this study (Crowley et al., 2023). This was due to the limited scope of the data set, limiting generalisability of the findings (Crowley et al., 2023). Despite these limitations, findings add a valuable contribution to existing literature in support of targeted intervention to address identified risk factors for YP at risk of NEET. The complexity and multitude of risk factors contributing to NEET can

create difficulty in finding a straightforward solution, highlighting the importance of acknowledging both individual and systemic factors (Hutchinson et al., 2016).

1.5.4 Systemic Influences Contributing to Risk of NEET

Understanding risk factors associated with NEET populations requires consideration for the social, cultural and systemic influences that co-occur with NEET populations, including increased levels of unemployment, social inequalities, and lack of reliable and quality employment opportunities (Gladwell et al., 2022; Serracant, 2014). For example, risk of NEET was identified as between 1.5 and 1.6 times higher for YP with unemployed parents (Rahmani et al., 2024). In addition, YP who reside in rural areas are at a higher risk of NEET due to reduced opportunities for employment and inadequate transport links, resulting in a cycle of poverty (Sadler et al., 2015). However, additional interacting factors on a macro-systemic to micro-systemic level can influence NEET in relation to parental worklessness (see Figure 2). These include experiences of economic deprivation, insecure housing, low levels of parental education and large family sizes (Feng et al., 2015; Schoon, 2014).

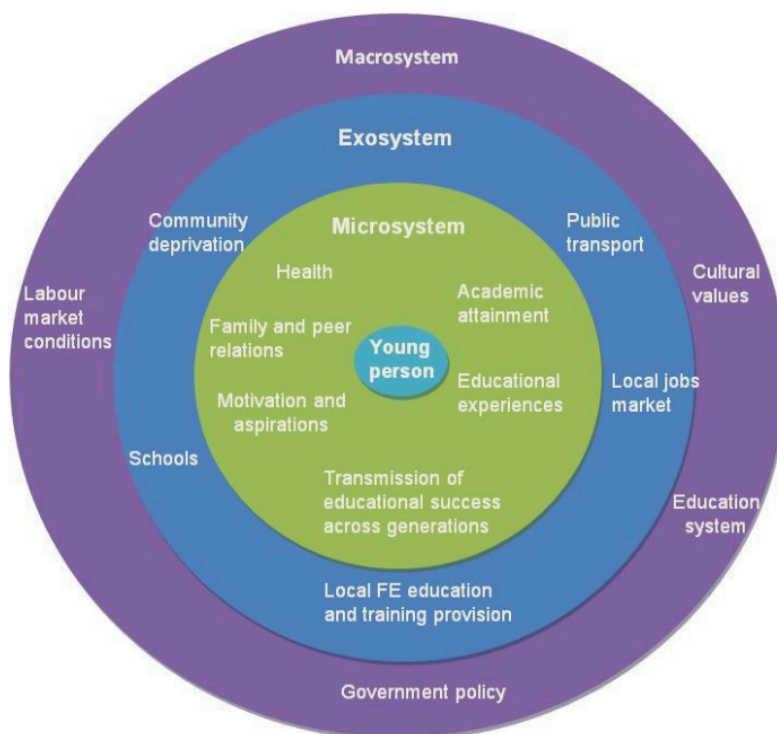
1.5.5 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Framework & NEET

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) development of an ecological systems framework aims to acknowledge and determine the influence of environmental and interpersonal factors upon an individual and their development. Application of this model has been used to understand the complex and interacting systemic influences on YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET (Gabriel, 2015; Lórinç et al., 2020; Simmons & Thompson, 2011b; Siraj et al., 2014). An eco-systemic lens allows for movement away from a within-person view and

expands thinking around how the individual YP operates within a hierarchy of systems.

Siraj et al's (2014) model illustrates the multiple risk factors that can be experienced by YP at risk of NEET (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Siraj et al., (2014) Risk factors of NEET based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Framework (1979, 1998)



Adoption of an ecosystemic lens was incorporated into Lórinč et al's (2020) UK-based case study with 53 YP-NEET, between the years 2015-2016. The study aimed to gather YPs' views to explore the challenges they faced whilst in education and at post-16 transitions to EET. The findings highlighted that unmet SEN needs and mental health issues frequently caused disengagement from school, resulting in low or no qualifications. Further contributing factors included bullying, poverty, the cost of living, the local job market, and a lack of effective career advice and guidance (Lórinč et al., 2020). Macro-systemic factors, including government austerity measures, due to a

global financial crisis, directly impacted YPs educational experience through reduced provision both within schools and external careers services (meso-system) (Lőrinc et al., 2020). An ecosystemic analysis of the findings highlighted the extent to which systemic factors influence the opportunity structures for YP, contributing to social inequality.

Despite the acknowledged systemic factors experienced by YP, narratives shared by participants in Lorinc et al's (2020) study appear to have internalised the cultural and social discourse of individualism. Therefore, suggesting that NEET status is a within-person factor, which YP have the power and agency to effect through personal choice and hard work. Participants did not appear to take into consideration the impact of wider systems, such as government policy and funding for services to support YP at crucial transition points (Lőrinc et al., 2020). Similar outcomes are echoed in Simmons & Smyth's (2016) study, exploring YP-NEET's access to and commitment to engaging in EET. Despite following the neoliberalist path of pursuing education and skills, YP found themselves unable to find employment opportunities equal to their acquired qualifications due to lack of opportunity in local labour markets. Consequently, YP vulnerable to NEET who lack access to suitable EET support may experience further marginalisation. Misattributing their situation to individual inadequacy, as opposed to systemic power imbalances, can reinforce their disengagement and increase their likelihood of long-term NEET status.

1.5.6 Protective Factors for YP at Risk of NEET

School engagement has been identified as a key indicator leading to academic attainment and employment opportunities (Fredricks et al., 2004). YPs' experiences in mainstream education can impact school engagement and feelings of belonging (Lorinc et al., 2020). A sense of school belonging can lead to beneficial academic and psychosocial outcomes (Allen, 2011). Görlich & Katznelson's (2015) research suggest that the relationship between the individual and an educational establishment plays a significant role in YPs' engagement with education. Increasing perceived support from parents and teachers can promote educational engagement, leading to improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET (Ryan et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research studies exploring risk factors as determinants for at risk of NEET conclude that academic attainment acts as a key protective factor for YP at risk of NEET (Feng et al., 2015; Gladwell et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2021; Rahmani & Groot, 2023; Simmons & Thompson, 2011a). However, it is important to note that additional factors influence YPs access to and engagement with education, such as YPs self-efficacy, parental engagement and attitudes to education, access to resources and support within school, and wider policy and funding arrangements in place by local authority (LA) or government bodies (Bond, 2022; Gladwell et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2021; Rahmani & Groot, 2023). Academic attainment as a protective factor for YP offers a strong argument for equitable provision of quality education to ensure all YP have the opportunity to reach their potential. Therefore, understanding the underlying factors contributing to low attainment can open opportunities to offer preventative approaches

through universal and targeted intervention to support the needs of YP, with the aim of reducing or mitigating risk of becoming NEET (Sadler et al., 2015).

Harris et al's (2025) report explores a universal approach that adopts inclusive practices to promote school engagement and increase pupil attendance, with the aim of meeting UK Government initiatives to raise attainment. Implementation of an inclusive ethos offers the potential for YP to feel a greater sense of belonging in the school environment, identified as a protective factor for YP at risk of NEET (Parker et al., 2022).

Recommendations for whole school approaches to inclusion are summarised into 4 steps (Harris et al., 2025):

1. Inclusion is universal: across all school policies, curriculum and staff ethos.
2. Inclusion is a culture led by school leaders: inclusion is central to staff interaction and relationships with all pupils.
3. Inclusion is a community collaboration: building parental and community engagement alongside partnerships with services to support children and families.
4. Inclusion is measurable: promote inclusion through improved pupil educational experience and increased engagement and attendance with school.

The adoption of inclusive approaches to support positive school experiences for all pupils offers a method of early intervention to provide greater access to learning and promote educational engagement with the aim of raising attainment, acting as a protective factor against risk of NEET (Cornish, 2018).

1.6 Long Term Outcomes Associated with NEET

An examination of the long-term outcomes associated with NEET demonstrate the importance of exploring effective mitigating strategies. Negative discourses associated with YP-NEET can lead to social exclusion and marginalisation, leading to long-term impact on mental health, wellbeing, identity, health and relationships (Mawn et al., 2017; Rose et al., 2019). Data related to the long-term outcomes for YP-NEET indicate that 1 in 5 individuals have no qualifications, they are 25x more likely to be parents under 18, 60% more likely to engage in drug use, 25x more likely to commit a crime and 50% more likely to have poor health or 10 years less life expectancy (Arnold & Baker, 2012). In addition, YP-NEET can experience social marginalisation, reduced job opportunities, low earnings and psycho-social factors such as mental health and depression negatively impacting relationships with family and friends (Lőrinc et al., 2020; Serracant, 2014). NEET status also results in a high cost to society through lost wages, taxes and reliance on government welfare payments (Lorinc et al., 2020; Feng et al., 2015). Continued support is needed for YP facing exclusion to encourage re-engagement with EET to enable improved long-term life outcomes (Feng et al., 2015). However, there appears to be greater understanding of the long-term outcomes for NEET status as opposed to how YP might become NEET, highlighting the need for further research in this area 26/08/2025 16:03:00.

1.7 Critique of NEET Terminology

1.7.1 Advantages of NEET Terminology

Although challenges exist with NEET terminology, a recognition of this cohort of YP has led to specific research in this area. Research has enabled further insight into the risk factors that may lead to NEET status, the experiences of YP-NEET and the influence of

wider systems (Gladwell et al., 2022; Rahmani & Groot, 2023; Sadler et al., 2015).

Findings from research can provide insights to inform intervention, government policy and improve outcomes for YP-NEET. In addition, creating and maintaining a NEET category continues to draw political focus towards vulnerable groups of YP who would benefit from intervention and support (Thompson, 2011). This can be seen through previous efforts to address inequalities and support vulnerable groups via education and training schemes, such as Entry to Employment (E2E), the Connexions careers service for YP and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) (Hutchinson et al., 2016). The existence of a datalogical NEET category highlights YP within education systems, job centres and social services, leading to signposting towards local provisions designed to support YP-NEET (Thornham & Cruz, 2018).

1.7.2 Challenges with NEET Terminology

Use of the term NEET can present the idea of a homogenous group of individuals who experience similar challenges and characteristics (Görlich & Katznelson, 2015). However, YP-NEET can include early school leavers (ESL), unemployed YP, those with caring responsibilities, individuals experiencing illness or life-long disabilities or YP taking a gap year between the end of compulsory education and university (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Yates & Payne, 2006). Despite this heterogeneity, NEET is often associated with being socially disadvantaged, low levels of educational achievement and disengagement from education (Robertson, 2018). This can lead to a pejorative view of YP-NEET, such as an unwillingness to learn and a lack of skills and aspiration (Cornish, 2018). Negative discourses around YP-NEET can themselves lead to social exclusion and marginalisation with long-term impact towards mental health, wellbeing, identity,

physical health and relationships (Rose et al., 2012). These negative associations can potentially mask the heterogeneity of YP-NEET and the many complex issues that they face (Spielhofer et al., 2010). The adoption of a more narrow and defined criteria for YP-NEET has been suggested to include only individuals who are not studying or employed and do not wish to do so (Britton et al., 2011; Serracant, 2014). This may offer further clarity to identify individuals who would benefit most from targeted intervention and support. However, this has not yet been taken forward into political or social discourse, reinforcing existing pejorative narratives. Therefore, a clear understanding of the profile of YP-NEET is needed to provide appropriate intervention that addresses individual need (Yates & Payne, 2006).

Existing political and social discourse around NEET can risk placing the focus of the issues associated with NEET upon the individual, without consideration of inequalities inherent in the systems that operate around them that are beyond their control (Cornish, 2018; Furlong, 2006; Thompson, 2011). The narrative of individualism is further embedded by programs and interventions for NEET groups that focus on improving individual characteristics of participants, such as confidence, individual skills and competency (Görlich & Katznelson, 2015). Barriers to engagement in EET can include reduced access to finance, transport and knowledge of potential opportunities (Spielhofer et al., 2010), SES and standard of the educational setting (Shildrick et al., 2009). A lack of recognition of the heterogeneity inherent within the NEET group may lead to little or no support to meet the diverse needs of YP who are in most need (Thompson, 2011). Development of effective government policy to address the diverse needs of YP-NEET requires a more comprehensive understanding of the relative factors leading to a NEET status within a relevant social and political context (Holmes et al.,

2021); whilst addressing existing inequalities to promote social inclusion for long-term change (Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006). This needs to take into consideration the varied experiences of at risk of NEET/YP-NEET relative to age, socio-cultural status and the political and cultural context within which they reside (Hutchinson et al., 2016).

1.8 Power, Privilege and Intersectionality

1.8.1 Power, Privilege and Experiences of NEET

Whilst experiencing multiple, complex interacting factors, YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET may also be subject to the influence of external factors of power, privilege and intersectionality (Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019). Within this context, power can be described as the ability to influence and control outcomes; whilst privilege can be viewed as advantage experienced through social identity leading to gains via social and cultural capital (Furlong, 2006; Lorinc et al., 2020). Adopting a lens that acknowledges the influence of power, privilege and intersectionality allows wider consideration of factors that move beyond the individual. Research conducted by McDonnell (2019), explored pupil voice to identify contributing factors related to YP identified as at risk of NEET within a geographical area experiencing high levels of YP-NEET. Findings counter pejorative narratives of low aspiration associated with YP-NEET, asserting that levels of self-efficacy and agency are key determinants of NEET status. McDonnell (2019) views self-efficacy and agency through Bandura's (1986, p.27) "triadic reciprocal determinism", which considers the interaction between environmental factors, behaviour, and individual qualities. This acknowledges the influence of socio-cultural factors shaped through government policy and the economic landscape upon the behaviours, decisions and attitudes of the individual. YP within this study who

experienced lower levels of self-efficacy expressed less personal agency, potentially increasing the risk of NEET. In response to these findings, McDonnell (2019) advocates for changes within wider systems to increase levels of self-efficacy and agency to support YP to work towards their goals and aspirations related to education and employment. Consequently, this counters narratives of individualism related to YP-NEET, suggesting that external factors can contribute to feelings of powerlessness.

These ideas are further explored by the findings of research conducted by Lorinc et al. (2020). Findings indicate that YPs' choices and agency are shaped by the available opportunity structures, which can be significantly constrained by broader social and political factors. YPs' transitions to education and employment operate within a framework of opportunity structures, determined by the interaction of family background, SES, education and local labour markets (Thompson, 2017). This can be seen in relation to transition opportunities for YP, which rely upon access to financial, social and cultural capital to navigate the complex systems of transition (Thompson, 2011). YP can lack preparation for transition and experience challenges in navigating the complex pathways available at post-16 (Lorinc et al., 2020). In addition, YP with low levels of academic attainment often transition into low-level vocational courses that are less valued than traditional academic routes, leading to low level employment further entrenching inequality and reduced opportunities for YP (Cornish, 2018). In this respect, when the status of NEET is placed upon the individual, it overlooks the impact this can have on personal agency and its potentially limiting factors. To address existing structures of power and privilege, implementation of systemic approaches to challenge existing hierarchies within education and social inequality need to be prioritised to

increase access to social and cultural capital for improved access to EET for YP (Bynner, 2012; Nadesan, 2021; Serracant, 2014; Thompson, 2011).

1.8.2 Intersectionality and Risk of NEET

Intersectionality acknowledges how multiple factors related to individual characteristics, such as race, gender, sexuality and disability can lead to potential experiences of discrimination or advantage (Mooney, 2016). Risk factors associated with NEET can be differentially experienced, leading to further marginalisation, such as disability, young parenthood, SES, gender and ethnicity (Feng et al., 2015; Hutchinson et al., 2016; Russell, 2013; Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019). In relation to this, Zuccotti & O'Reilly's (2019) research investigated the intersectional relationship between individual factors and the risk of becoming NEET. The study explored how the interplay of ethnicity, gender, and parental household employment status influenced a YP's likelihood of becoming NEET. Findings indicated that these intersecting, individual characteristics had differentiated effects on a YP's chances of disengaging from EET. For example, findings suggest that YP who experience workless parents at a young age show an increased risk of NEET compared to YP who had at least one working parent. However, gender differences are apparent within single parent earning households, with males experiencing a similar risk of NEET as with those who reside in households with workless parents. In contrast, female risk of NEET remains stable across both a single parent or two parent household in which one parent is working.

Analysis of data relating to ethnicity presents additional differences (Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019). For example, Indian, Bangladeshi and African males in workless households

experience an average of 20 per cent less chance of becoming NEET than white British males. Similarly, Bangladeshi women are 15 per cent less likely to become NEET in comparison to white British females. In addition, African males are more likely to engage in education and employment within single parent earning households when compared to white British males. Whereas young Caribbean men in two parent earning households are more likely to become NEET than white British males. Despite the recognised association between ethnic minority status, parental unemployment, and an elevated risk of NEET, the study's findings suggest that this relationship is not consistently observed across all contexts. This suggests that additional interacting factors may influence educational aspiration and participation, such as cultural and community values, and access to positive role models. Schoon's (2014) research substantiates these findings, indicating that a YP's educational aspirations significantly influence their likelihood of becoming NEET, even when residing in households with workless parents. Consistent with Zuccotti and O'Reilly's (2019) observations, Schoon (2014) also noted that ethnic minority cohorts reported higher levels of educational aspiration compared to white British individuals. Schoon's (2014) research findings instead identified living in rented accommodation and within highly deprived areas as more significant risk factors for NEET status than parental worklessness or other individual characteristics. Together, these studies suggest that factors commonly perceived as disadvantages or risks may not always result in negative outcomes. Furthermore, the research presented offers insight into how complex interacting factors shape differential experiences of privilege and inequality, viewed through an intersectional lens (Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019). However, further exploration into intersectionality and the risk of becoming NEET is needed to expand upon the limited findings in this under-researched area (Rahmani & Groot, 2023).

1.9 UK NEET Statistics

UK Government policy surrounding education and employment for YP aged 16-24 years old remains on the political agenda. Recent UK Government statistics estimate that 987,000 (13.4%) of YP aged 16-24 years are currently NEET, as reported in November 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Of these 987,000 YP, an estimate of 392,000 were unemployed and an estimated 595,000 were termed economically inactive in October to December 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Whilst statistics report higher numbers of unemployed NEET young men with 251,000 males versus 141,000 females, there were higher numbers of economically inactive NEET young women with 304,000 females versus 291,000 males (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Numbers of YP-NEET have continued to rise since 2021, as illustrated in Figure 3. Although, it should be noted that NEET statistics are informed by the LFS, which could lack accuracy due to smaller sample sizes (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Nevertheless, the statistics associated with NEET remain an area of concern, as YP-NEET can face detrimental long-term life outcomes.

Measurement and reporting of NEET data varies across the four constituent countries of the UK, who retain devolved responsibilities for policy and reporting for NEET (Office for National Statistics, 2023b). Due to estimated numbers through the LFS (Office for National Statistics, 2023a), it remains unclear how many YP currently classify as NEET. Varying approaches and sources of data collection impact the accuracy of the numbers presented (Gabriel, 2015). This could indicate that figures are above or below those presented.

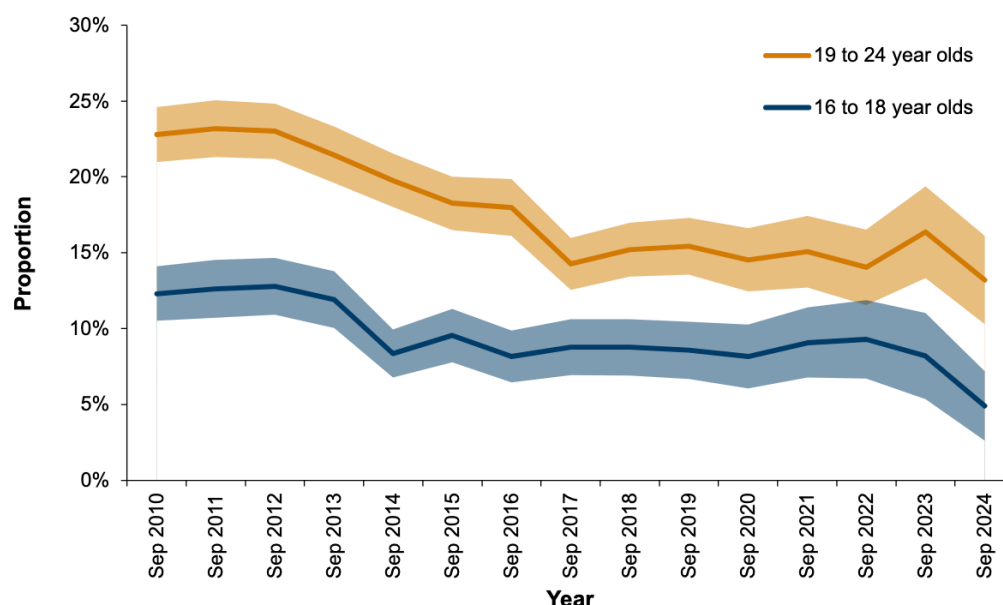
Figure 3. The percentage of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the UK, October to December 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2025)



1.10 Welsh NEET Statistics

Reporting of NEET statistics by WG for YP aged 16-24 are presented differently to overall UK statistics. Statistics are reported in age categories 16-18- and 19-24-year-olds and by characteristic, including age, region, disability and ethnicity. A breakdown in statistics is beneficial in providing clarity for YP facing higher levels of risk for NEET status. As can be seen in Figure 4, numbers of YP in Wales defined as NEET have fallen overall in the past decade, with 4.9% of 16-18-year-olds, 13.2% of 19-24 year olds and 10.7% of 16-24 year olds overall (Welsh Government, 2025a). Higher numbers of YP-NEET are reported at age 24 (18.8%) versus YP aged 16 (3.7%); those registered as having a disability in contrast to YP who are not disabled; and YP of White ethnicity in comparison to YP of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity (Welsh Government, 2025a). However, as noted with UK NEET statistics, due to low survey response rates WG NEET data in recent years is less robust (Welsh Government, 2025a).

Figure 4. Young people not in education, employment or training in Wales, with 95% confidence intervals, year ending September 2010 to September 2024 (Welsh Government, 2025a)



1.11 UK NEET Policy

The progress and transition of YP towards EET remains a focal point within the political agenda of the UK as a whole and within its devolved governments. Policy and intervention have been put in place to address the issue of NEET prevention and reduction (see Figure 5). Raising the participation age (RPA) in education to 18 years of age in England aimed to increase skills and attainment of YP with increased opportunities for EET (Hutchinson et al., 2016; Lórinç et al., 2020; Maguire, 2013). This policy change came into full effect in 2015, however, with increasing numbers of YP-NEET evident in reported Government data, it is not clear if it has fulfilled its purpose. As highlighted by Maguire (2021), without addressing the underlying issues associated with YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET, the impact of RPA is likely to be limited.

The diversity of the NEET population requires an understanding of risk factors associated with becoming NEET, their relative importance and the complex interaction of these over time that may lead to NEET (Holmes et al., 2021). The ever changing political, cultural and economic landscape require both a flexible and individualised approach to addressing NEET to meet the needs of YP within wider systems (Hutchinson et al., 2016). However, continual changes in government policy can lead to instability, resulting in changes to funding and services to support YP-NEET (Hutchinson et al., 2016). This highlights the importance of a coordinated approach with embedded flexibility to meet individual need, with clear efficacy measurement structures.

Figure 5. UK Government Policy, Guidance and Programs with Relevance to EET

Positive for Youth (2011)

- A multi-service, collaborative approach to improving the outcomes for YP aged 13-19 e.g. access to services for support, raising attainment and increasing opportunities for employment & training.

Building Engagement, Building Futures (2011)

- Aimed at raising educational achievement by raising the participation age in education to 18-years old. Increasing engagement in EET for 16-24 year olds through coordinated policies across education, training, skills and employment.

The Youth Contract (2012)

- Promoting apprenticeships, incentives for employers to train & employ YP, opportunities to develop work skills through initiatives & work experience.

Post-16 Skills Plan (2016)

- Focused support for YP facing disadvantage . Skill development for employment in partnership with learning providers and employers.

Youth Offer (2021)

- A post-COVID government initiative to support YP aged 16-24 to find and sustain employment. It consisted of three elements: youth employment programme, youth hubs and employability coaches to support access to employment.

Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth (2021)

- Aims to increase access to learning through education, apprenticeships and training for all YP, linking this to business needs. Strengthen links between colleges and employers. Promote skill development for work.

1.12 Critique of UK policy approaches to NEET

1.12.1 Focus on NEET as an individual deficit

UK policy rhetoric focuses on YP following a linear path transitioning from education to employment, dividing YP into those that follow mainstream routes and those termed at risk (McPherson, 2021). NEET status can be viewed as an individual responsibility and personal failure if the smooth transition between youth and adulthood goals are not achieved. Youth employment, therefore, is positioned as an individual rather than structural issue within NEET policy, where lack of employability is a failure of the YP rather than a lack of opportunity (Crisp & Powell, 2017; McPherson, 2021). A policy lens aligned with neoliberalism aims to transfer risk from the wider systems of government to the individual (Simmons & Smyth, 2016). This can translate as advocating for individualistic, self-sufficient citizens who are responsible for developing their own human capital, rather than a culture of state dependency (Rose, 2000). Within a UK context, this viewpoint can be observed in policies that have been more punitive in nature to individuals outside of the workforce. Simmons & Smyth (2016) argue that although government intervention may be designed to support YP-NEET to re-engage in EET, it may further contribute to marginalisation.

1.12.2 Target driven outcomes vs long-term outcomes

Government led interventions can often be target-driven, with the aim of reducing numbers of NEET in the short-term, rather than aiming for long-term and lasting change (Maguire, 2021; Simmons & Thompson, 2011a; Yates & Payne, 2006). This can also result in the most vulnerable, hard to reach individuals being missed or overlooked due to the time and resource that would be needed to support engagement in EET (Yates &

Payne, 2006). Programmes and interventions aimed at reducing numbers of YP-NEET may push YP towards EET that is not well suited and does not meet their needs (Yates & Payne, 2006). Targets for reducing numbers of YP-NEET are not concerned with the quality of employment or training or if it meets YPs' long term aspiration (Furlong, 2006). Intervention programmes rely on funding and availability of resource, which can lead to short-term approaches that are reliant on justifying their continuity through meeting targets to prove their efficacy in meeting policy goals (Maguire, 2021). This can act as a barrier to addressing the underlying needs expressed through disengagement in EET, to enact long-term change for YP at risk of NEET (Maguire, 2021).

1.12.3 Social inequality & exclusion

UK Government policy cites a discourse of inclusion seen through YPs engagement in education or employment aligned with neoliberalist values associated with productivity (Rose et al., 2019). Whilst UK Government policy aims to promote inclusion through interventions in place to engage YP-NEET in EET, Nadesan (2021) argues that government policy initiatives perpetuate rather than address disadvantage. The author notes that policy lacks the drive to create greater economic equity which could lead to increased social and cultural capital necessary for children and families to successfully navigate education and improve attainment. Social inequality continues to be reflected in social class, with valued academic routes being more accessible for more privileged individuals possessing the social and cultural capital to access, engage with and experience success within these structures (McPherson, 2021; Simmons & Thompson, 2011a). A lack of high quality EET and labour market opportunities perpetuate social

and economic disadvantage, despite YPs positive attitude, individual motivation and future aspiration towards accessing pathways to EET (Cornish, 2018; Thompson, 2017). Therefore, to reduce educational marginality, policy needs to provide inclusive pathways that are as equally valued to traditional routes (Thompson, 2017). There is also a need for policy discourse to evolve to address the complex, interacting factors and social exclusion concurrent with experiencing NEET, whilst also acknowledging YPs' co-existing individual strengths and aspirations (Russell et al., 2011). Policy needs to address vulnerability and social inequality to meet the needs for YP long-term (Furlong, 2006).

1.12.4 Lack of a coordinated approach

Across all 4 nations in the UK there is a commitment to reduce numbers of NEET. However, each devolved government employs differing intervention and support, which can create a geographical divide in the support and funding available to support YP (Maguire, 2021). Whilst the four UK nations have the power to introduce their own policy and legislation to address NEET within their own contexts and profile of needs, the introduction of a UK wide coordinated approach could offer scope for a strategic, fully resourced, long-term funding model based on shared good practice to address the complexities of NEET. Brown et al., (2022) call for a long-term policy approach to address the needs of YP-NEET with adequate resourcing to maintain continuity and quality of provision. Maguire (2020) emphasises the need for government policy to address the needs of YP and effectively evaluate the efficacy of interventions and policies that are put in place to support YP-NEET.

1.13 Welsh Government NEET Policy & Legislation

To address the needs of YP, WG has introduced and implemented policy, legislation and guidance to support YP to access EET (see Figure 6). Introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022a) in mainstream schooling sets forward four purposes to improve the outcomes of YP. These are to promote:

- “a) ambitious capable learners ready to learn through life,
- b) enterprising, creative contributors ready to play a full part in life and work,
- c) ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the World,
- d) healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.” (Welsh Government, 2022a)

Integrating these ideals and offering a flexible, individualised curriculum can create positive educational experiences for YP. Addressing their needs and supporting positive school engagement thus acts as a protective factor against NEET (Ryan et al., 2019).

The WG Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015a) aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. Progress towards these goals is measured via reporting of national indicators, such as the percentage of individuals in EET for different age-groups. The WG Renew and Reform Programme (Welsh Government, 2022b), supports the aims and goals of the aforementioned Act by offering enhanced support to targeted, vulnerable groups of YP to access post-16 provision following the COVID-19 pandemic. In its impact assessment of the Renew and Reform

Programme (Welsh Government, 2023b), WG noted that skills and qualifications, robust careers guidance and transition support were all key factors for YP to access further opportunities in EET and reduce the risk of becoming NEET. Policies supporting equality of opportunity for YP to access EET including Stronger, fairer, greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills (Welsh Government, 2022d); The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) (2021b), demonstrate a commitment by WG to provide appropriate support to improve life outcomes for YP in Wales. WG has committed to a reduction of NEET individuals by setting a national target of 90% of 16–24-year-olds to participate in EET by 2050.

WGs Youth Engagement and Progression framework (YEPF): Early Identification Tool (Welsh Government, 2023a) recommends early identification of YP at risk of NEET using key indicators. These could include low school attendance, mental health needs, homelessness, school exclusions related to challenging behaviour, childhood poverty or an ALN. In addition to key indicators, consideration for intersectionality, personalised approaches and pupil voice are recommended pathways to support individual YP who may be considered at risk of NEET. Therefore, addressing YP's needs through early identification and intervention offer a protective factor for YP at risk of NEET.

Implementing these recommendations aligns with the Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act (2015a), which considers the wellbeing of individuals, as well as wellbeing within wider systems. This acknowledges the need for a holistic approach to supporting individuals and systems, which incorporates skill building alongside consideration of mental health and wellbeing needs. Ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of WG guidance and policy will offer much needed insight into how these are operationalised to positively impact long-term outcomes for YP at risk of NEET.

Figure 6. Welsh Government Policy and Guidance with Relevance to EET

Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (2013, 2022)

- A focus on the early identification of YP at risk of NEET, through identification of risk factors and use of intervention. LA's are responsible for collecting and sharing data with relevant services to support YP.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)

- An approach to support individual well-being through implementation of 7 goals, including: prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, cohesive communities, vibrant culture & Welsh language, globally responsible.

Employability Plan (2018)

- Introduction of The Employment Advice Gateway and Working Wales to support individuals with careers information advice and guidance so that they are able to access employment.

The Young Person's Guarantee (2021)

- A commitment to provide all YP aged below 25 with support to access EET or the option of self-employment. The Young Person's Guarantee overarches existing Government policies related to EET.

Renew and reform: post-16 and transitions plan (2022)

- Set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It offers support with post-16 transition into EET for YP who are identified as vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage.

Stronger, fairer, greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills (2022)

- A plan to support YP to achieve their full potential through reducing inequality, creating a culture of life-long learning, supporting individuals with health needs to access employment and supporting fair working conditions for everyone.

1.13.1 Strengths and challenges of Welsh Policy in support of NEET

1.13.1.1 Strengths of Welsh Government NEET Policy

Implementation of WG policy and legislation in support of improving YPs long-term life outcomes offers the opportunity for early identification and intervention for YP at risk of NEET, as well as addressing the needs of YP-NEET. Gathering, monitoring and sharing data across services, as stated in the YEPF, aims to provide opportunities to identify and respond to YPs needs with targeted support and evaluate the effectiveness of adopted approaches and resources (Welsh Government, 2022c). Embedding recommended WG monitoring systems to identify YPs progression pathways could reduce instances of YP becoming lost at key transition points, such as post-16 transition to EET. This is further strengthened through effective working partnerships between services and organisations, including schools, Careers Wales and NEET leads.

WG policy and guidance offers an inclusive and holistic approach to support YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET. WG policy recommendations and the new Curriculum for Wales aspires to offer a renewed focus on YPs mental health and wellbeing, identified as a contributing factor towards educational engagement and protector against risk of NEET (Rahmani & Groot, 2023). WG aims to offer a universal approach to all YP through the YPG in which Working Wales acts as a gateway to support all YP access EET (Welsh Government, 2022e). Provision of a unitary, accessible pathway to EET can remove potential barriers experienced by YP in a potentially complex landscape that can be challenging to navigate. WG policy has begun to move away from models of compulsory participation, instead supporting a voluntary approach to engagement in employability

programmes to support those who are economically inactive (Maguire, 2021). This is reflected via self-referral processes accessed through the YPG in partnership with Working Wales (Welsh Government, 2021b). This signifies a move away from punitive policy approaches to encourage YPs' engagement in EET.

Ongoing WG monitoring processes of policy and legislation provide evaluation of the impact to support YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET with the aim of supporting all YP into EET. Evaluation of the first iteration of the YEPF identified challenges for all local authorities in reducing the number of YP-NEET aged 16-17 years, contributing to the youth unemployment figures at ages 18-24 (Welsh Government, 2015b). In response to identified challenges through the evaluative process, the updated YEPF addresses access to early intervention and additional support at post-16 transition by extending the age range from 11-18 years and building strong links to the YPG in support of 16-24 year-olds (Welsh Government, 2022c, 2022e). Impact evaluation and subsequent change to WG policy and guidance demonstrates a commitment to providing effective and valued support aimed at improving outcomes for YP via access to EET.

1.13.1.2 Challenges of NEET Policy Implementation

Although WG policy aims to enhance YPs' access to EET, barriers may still exist with its implementation and practice. WG evaluated the effectiveness of Working Wales in supporting individuals aged over 16 to access EET (Welsh Government, 2024a). Findings identified positive working practices to support its clients, available through the flexibility of the Working Wales model, consistency of support offered to YP and partnership with other services. However, challenges were identified in relation to

service staff accessing YP-NEET who were disengaged from EET, experienced social isolation and were therefore hard to reach (Welsh Government, 2024a). This indicates that whilst support services exist, YP may not be aware of these, how to access the support they need or be willing to do so (Holtom et al., 2024; Lőrinc et al., 2020). YP may also face barriers to accessing support services due to lack of trust in public services, individual mental health concerns, ALN needs or the quality of services available (Holtom et al., 2024). Therefore, YPs access to support and services may rely upon professionals reaching out and engaging YP in order to support their needs as a precursor to engagement in EET. This may be challenging when working with the most hard to reach individuals who may be experiencing homelessness, deprivation or substance misuse, or reside in rural areas of Wales (Thompson, 2011). Consequently, a commitment to carrying out policy that focuses on person-centred practice may offer increased efficacy of policy recommendations (Holtom et al., 2024).

Given these challenges, effective policy and intervention implementation depends on the availability of resources. A reduction in funding available to education and associated services will likely impact the ability to fully implement the guidance set out in WG policy and guidance associated with NEET. A report analysing local government spending in Wales comparing the years 2009-10 and 2017-18, shows a reduction of funding available to LAs by £918.5 million since 2009-10, which equates to a decrease of £340 per head of the Welsh population (Ifan & Sion, 2019). Although LAs with more pronounced deprivation received lower WG funding cuts, expenditure within deprived areas fell by up to 18.4% per person (Ifan & Sion, 2019). Arguably, LAs with higher levels of deprivation could experience greater numbers of YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET with SES

identified as a contributing risk factor (Feng et al., 2015; Gladwell et al., 2022; Rahmani et al., 2024). Therefore, reduction in resources available may impact the ability to support this cohort of YP.

In addition to reduction to LA funding, spending in education per pupil saw a reduction of 5.5% in real terms when comparing the years 2009-10 and 2017-18 due to increased living costs and inflation (Ifan & Sion, 2019). In a recent report published by the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) in Wales (2024), school leaders report continued cuts to spending per pupil of 6% due to available funding to schools. A survey of its members suggest that schools face financial pressures due to the demands of meeting pupil and family needs associated with ALN and pupil mental health and deprivation, all identified as risk factors for risk of NEET (NAHT Cymru, 2024). In addition to reduced WG funding, an end to EU funding has led to a reduced LA budget, which previously offered support to YP-NEET through regional projects such as Inspire2Work, inspire2Achieve, Bridges2Work and Active Inclusion (Welsh Government, 2021a, 2023c). Reduction in funding both within schools and external services could, therefore, act as a barrier to accessing sufficient resource to meet the needs of YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET.

1.14 Differences in UK and Welsh Government Policy to Address NEET

UK and WG policy both aim to reduce the number of YP-NEET and improve YPs education and access to EET through use of early identification and intervention to support post-16 pathways. In contrast to UK policy approaches, WG provides clear,

structured guidance outlining LA, school and Further Education (FE) responsibilities in relation to early intervention, support and provision to improve outcomes for YP at risk of NEET through the YEPF (Welsh Government, 2022c). In addition, the YEPF outlines a coordinated approach to addressing NEET through multidisciplinary working and dedicated roles within LAs, such as NEET leads and Engagement and Progression Coordinators (EPC) to coordinate and direct support for YP. It is the responsibility of LAs in UK and WG policy to monitor YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET, however, the YEPF creates increased accountability towards YP through required data sharing and reporting mechanisms to inform intervention (Department for Education, 2024; Welsh Government, 2022c).

Initiatives have been developed and set up both across devolved UK constituencies to support YP at risk of NEET to access EET. In the UK proposed Traineeship and Apprenticeship reforms promise increased funding, access to mental health support and a new Youth Guarantee to increase access to EET for YP and encourage employer engagement (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). However, due to their infancy it is not yet possible to identify the impact of these initiatives. In contrast to the UK, WG policy focus via the YEPF, YPG and Renew and Reform programme aim to direct approaches to engage and support YP at risk of NEET, which can be adapted to meet local need (Welsh Government, 2022c, 2022b, 2022e). Currently, WG policy appears to offer a more structured approach to address and support the needs of YP at risk of NEET. However, both the UK and Wales require continual evaluation of adopted approaches to ensure efficacy of support for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET in addressing the number of YP-NEET and provision of early intervention.

1.15 Identifying YP at risk of NEET

1.15.1 Identification Tools and Early Intervention

LAs are responsible for tracking and supporting YP-NEET (Department for Education, 2024). Early identification tools incorporating risk factors or key characteristics associated with NEET are used to highlight YP at risk of NEET to enable appropriate support and intervention to be put in place (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Britton et al., 2011). Identifying YP at risk of NEET whilst still accessing mainstream education can offer an effective method of early intervention (Lórinč et al., 2020). In England, Risk of NEET Indicators (RONIs) have been developed in line with locally identified risk factors as a screening tool to identify YP who may be at risk of NEET (Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). Comparative early identification tools have been implemented through the WG YEPG, with a focus on measures associated with attendance, behaviour and attainment for 11-18 year olds (Welsh Government, 2022c). This is further supported by the Careers Wales five tier framework, which identifies a YPs level of engagement to inform the support offered (Welsh Government, 2022c).

The use of early identification tools enable intervention to be put in place to support YP considered at most risk of becoming NEET. This can lead to maintained engagement in education and support to develop future career aspirations (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Britton et al., 2011). However, limitations exist in the use of early identification tools as predictors of NEET, due to the complexity of interacting risk factors experienced by individual YP, which limit the efficacy of universal methods of identification (Holtom et al., 2024). This may also present difficulties for YP who are absent from educational

settings, such as electively home-educated individuals or those missing from education for other reasons (Holland, 2021).

1.15.2 Preventative Approaches for YP at Risk of Becoming NEET

YP can experience barriers to education whilst attending mainstream provision in primary and secondary school (Lőrinc et al., 2020). This can impact academic attainment due to experiences of socio-economic deprivation, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, school belonging, ALN and systemic barriers via access to resource and support (Lőrinc et al., 2020; Rahmani et al., 2024; Yates & Payne, 2006). Re-engagement of a YP who has already left mainstream education is more challenging than maintaining engagement (Arnold & Baker, 2012). This highlights the importance of engaging preventative strategies to support YP to remain within education, with its associated improved, long-term life outcomes (Britton et al., 2011).

1.15.2.1 Alternative Education Providers

A range of approaches have been the focus of national and local government strategies to reduce the number of individuals who might become NEET. Alternative Education Providers (AEP) offer opportunities for YP to access and maintain engagement with education outside of mainstream education with access to small group teaching and increased levels of staff support, allowing opportunities for greater flexibility and targeted support to meet the needs of YP. AEPs can offer increased autonomy and choice for YP who may have negative school experiences in mainstream, such as an offer of vocational and practical subjects alongside academic qualifications (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Paterson-Young & Denny, 2022). However, the efficacy of

AEPs to support educational engagement, positive associations with learning and pathways to future EET relies upon the quality of provision. AEPs that lack a focus and drive towards supporting YPs wellbeing and a positive learner identity risk further marginalising YP at risk of NEET (Best, 2024). This highlights the importance of continuing oversight and evaluation of AEPs in support of improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET.

1.15.2.2 Work-based Programmes & Career Guidance

Programmes with integrated career guidance and/or work experience can support YP to identify aspirations for future career goals (Learning and Work Institute, 2020; Robertson, 2018). An increase in measures of YPs' general self-efficacy was identified after completing an Employment Enhancement Programme (Seddon et al., 2013). Access to work experience and career guidance can support maintained engagement in education or training, as YP can relate their school learning to future career goals and aspirations (Learning and Work Institute, 2020; Robertson, 2018). In addition, work experience can offer a connection between education and local labour markets to provide meaning within the context of learning and career aspirations (Britton et al., 2011; Learning and Work Institute, 2020; Rahmani & Groot, 2023). The efficacy of careers advice, information and guidance relies upon integrating YPs values and interests to inform meaningful pathways alongside work experience built via employer partnerships.

1.15.2.3 Post-16 Transition Support

YP can experience a lack of preparation for transition and the skills to navigate the complex pathways available post-16, benefitting from enhanced support to navigate existing services and systems (Lorinc et al., 2020). Offering targeted support at key transition points for YP aged 16 and 18 can reduce the risk of becoming NEET (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Access to successful transitions relies upon access to, and choice of, EET opportunities combined with healthy local labour markets (Gladwell et al., 2022). Timely support is key to ensure that YP develop established pathways to EET via dedicated career support whilst accessing education (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Challenges can be faced in keeping track of YP in the wide range of provisions they may choose to access post-16, which highlights the importance of effective data systems and joint working across services (Maguire, 2013)

1.15.3 Effective Intervention for YP-NEET

The Learning and Work Institute (2020) evaluated support provided for 15–24-year-olds in order to identify effective intervention to promote school engagement and raise attainment for YP who might be at risk of NEET. Employing a flexible and personalised approach, access to work experience and vocational training, support with developing personal skills and aspirations, and focused support at key transition points was seen to improve outcomes for YP at risk of NEET (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). These findings support Britton et al's (2011) findings and recommendations when designing intervention for YP at risk of NEET:

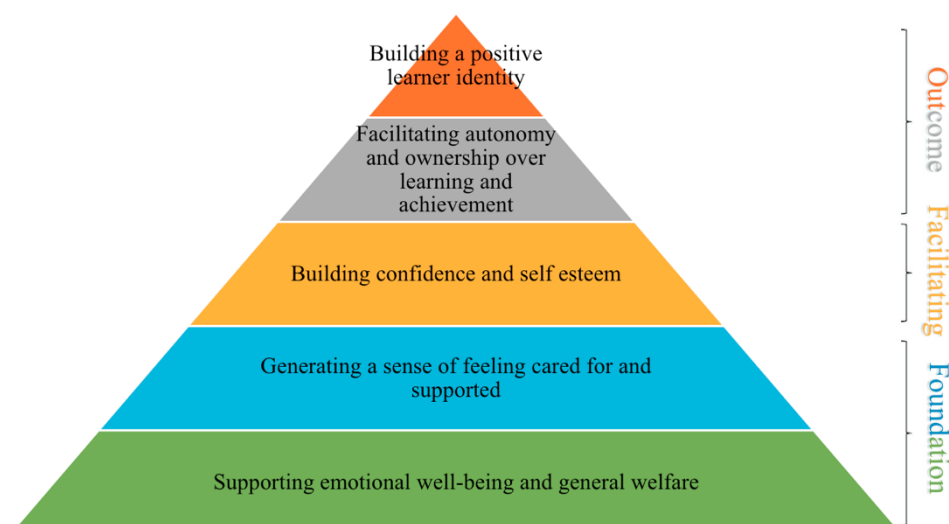
1. Rewarding participation and/or achievement when engaging in an intervention.
2. Attachment to the labour market through work experience or part-time work.

3. Ensuring provision of numeracy and literacy skills that effectively meet learner need.
4. Alternative options to the purely academic route e.g. on the job training/apprenticeships.

Implementation of these approaches addresses risk factors associated with YP at risk of NEET through raising attainment, building aspiration and providing choice for future EET pathways (Britton et al., 2011).

Brown et al. (2022) builds upon these recommendations by addressing psycho-social factors that can act as protective factors in preventing NEET. Five mechanisms of effective intervention for YP at risk of NEET were collated from data collected from educator and YP-NEET voice in relation to their experiences of risk factors related to personal, social, institutional and family circumstances and their view of effective intervention (Brown et al., 2022) (see Figure 7). Aligning with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), this model seeks to address YPs' underlying needs to facilitate engagement with education for improved life outcomes.

Figure 7. Five mechanisms to tackle the risk of becoming or remaining NEET (Brown et al., 2022)



Brown et al (2022) explores practical elements that were highlighted at each stage of the model, which could be replicated by professionals to support YP at risk of NEET:

- 1. Supporting emotional wellbeing and general welfare:** consistent, secure and positive relationships with staff within settings was identified as a key component to support YPs SEMH needs. Applying personalised approaches to support the individual needs of YP, such as supporting social interaction and friendship, the practicalities of navigating the journey to school and signposting to external mental health services, were some strategies identified as foundational towards steps towards educational engagement.
- 2. Generating a sense of feeling cared for and supported:** YP valued building trusted, positive relationships with staff in which they experienced a vested interest from adults outside of solely learning experiences.
- 3. Building confidence and self-esteem:** stages 1 and 2 of this model were seen as integral to building towards increased feelings of confidence and self-esteem. In addition, provision of 1:1 support for YP allowed for a flexible and personalised approach to meeting their needs in building confidence and self-esteem to engage in learning and build peer relationships.
- 4. Facilitating autonomy and ownership over learning and achievement:** sharing the diversity of pathways to EET supported YP to envisage a route that both inspired individuals and aligned with their aspirations. Once YP could envisage a future into EET, they felt motivated to engage with the first steps on the journey towards their goals. Managing realistic expectations was a key component of this stage.

- 5. Building a positive learner identity:** supporting feelings of belonging within an educational setting led to engagement in learning and positive adaptations of the YPs learner identity in which they could let go of past negative associations.

Brown et al's (2022) proposed model offers professionals working with YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET methods underpinned by research to encourage re-engagement in education. However, data collected from participants included settings with small cohort sizes, which facilitated opportunities for high levels of adult support and interaction in order to meet the individual needs of YP accessing these provisions. Whilst it may be possible to integrate approaches outlined in the proposed model, further research may be required to explore how this could operate within a mainstream setting. Understanding and addressing underlying needs of YP in partnership with recommended approaches to intervention, can support YP at risk NEET/YP-NEET to regain or maintain engagement. However, it is important to consider that implementation of recommended approaches relies upon access to resource and funding through a coordinated and robust NEET policy agenda (Brown et al., 2022).

1.16 The Role of the EP with YP at Risk of NEET

Introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (Department of Education & Department of Health, 2014) in the UK and the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021c) increased the scope of the EP role. This resulted in the extension of the EP role to support children and young people (CYP) aged 0-25 years, beyond previously adopted parameters of pupils at

compulsory school age. Fallon et al, (2010, p.4) offers clarity in relation to the multifaceted role of EPs:

“EPs are fundamentally scientist-practitioners who utilise, for the benefit of children and young people (CYP), psychological skills, knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at organisational, group or individual level across educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners.”

The functions described above are maintained through adherence to the Code of Ethics and Conduct (The British Psychological Society (BPS), 2021, p.6) through “[...] continuing development and maintenance of high standards of competence in their professional work [...]”. A central aspect of this is EP understanding of the positioning of the EP role in relation to existing stakeholders, services and settings, as stated within the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2023). A recent publication by WG provides clarity in respect of the varied and unique role of the EP in Wales citing collaboration with CYP, families and relevant stakeholders and embedded psychology to inform guidance and support (Welsh Government, 2025b). Therefore, a key element of EP practice is knowledge, understanding and application of psychological models to identify and address barriers to learning and development to support improved outcomes for CYP (HCPC, 2023; Welsh Government, 2025b).

Welsh Government (2016; 2025b) guidance regarding the role of EPs in Wales, offers further insight into the range of support offered to CYP at an individual, group and systems level. Some key issues stated within the guidance that are addressed by EPs and relate to YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET include:

- Transition e.g. from school to college
- Emotional-based school avoidance
- Assessment, advice or guidance related to specialist placements in post-16
- Career development
- Life planning
- Well-being and resilience
- Offending behaviour
- Relationships
- Learning and attainment

Consequently, EPs are well-placed to offer appropriate support and intervention for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET across a range of educational contexts to include mainstream, Further Education and Higher Education.

Professional roles established within LA and school systems offer support to YP identified as at risk of NEET/YP-NEET, such as NEET leads, careers advisors and school staff (Welsh Government, 2023a). Whilst current legislation and guidance in relation to YP-NEET lacks explicit direction for EPs to work directly with this cohort of YP, EPs have access to relevant skills and experience to improve outcomes for YP. Implementation of psychological theory and evidence-based practice, offered through a model of consultation, can provide a rich picture of complex issues to promote understanding and lead towards potential change (Banks et al., 2007; Cameron, 2006). Consequently, EPs can offer valuable support to identify interacting factors that may be contributing to a risk of NEET to inform appropriate intervention. In addition, EP positioning within, and knowledge of systems allows opportunities for EPs to work strategically through

preventative approaches to reduce the risk of NEET within school and LA systems (Banks et al., 2007).

1.17 Psychological Theory Relevant to YP at Risk of NEET/YP-NEET

A central tenet of EP practice is the knowledge, understanding and application of psychological models to develop formulations and hypotheses that inform appropriate support and intervention (Fallon et al., 2010; HCPC, 2023; Welsh Government, 2025b). As previously identified, this can be applied through individual, group or systemic work, with the aim of supporting positive outcomes for CYP (Fallon et al., 2010; HCPC, 2023; Welsh Government, 2025b). An exploration of psychological theory and its relevance to broadening understanding and supporting improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET is detailed in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Application of Psychological Theory to Support YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET

Psychological Theory	Key Components of Psychological Theory	Relevance to YP-NEET/YP at risk of NEET
Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning occurs within a social context. • Individuals learn through observing modelled behaviours by others. • Social learning relies upon individuals paying attention to models of behaviour exhibited by others, enacting observed behaviours and demonstrating the motivation to engage in this process. • SCT posits that individuals exercise agency through the dynamic process of reciprocal determinism, in which cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors are continually influenced both by and through each other to shape human development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YP can learn from the models provided by individuals within a home/family, community and educational context. A lack of positive role models through disengagement from education, engaging in challenging behaviours or unemployment could lead to similar behaviours exhibited by YP. • YP may use their agency to engage in behaviours that result in negative outcomes within an educational or social context. These experiences could reduce the potential for developing positive relationships with key adults and to access opportunities to experience success through the process of reciprocal determinism.
Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-efficacy is the inner belief that one has the ability to succeed with a task or given situation. • Self-efficacy is closely linked with the motivation to attempt a task and the perseverance to continue despite facing challenge or difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A YP with low self-efficacy may lack the belief that they can succeed within an academic environment. This can lead to low levels of motivation and potential disengagement from education. • A YP with low self-efficacy may struggle to persevere when facing challenge within a learning environment. This may lead to experiences of failure, which could impact wellbeing, mental health and a positive sense of self.

<p>The Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochanska & Diclemente, 1983)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A framework to understand stages of change in which an individual might engage in to move towards change. • The main stages of change explore in this theory include: precontemplation, contemplation, action and maintenance. • Precontemplation stage: change is not yet considered as necessary by the individual, as behaviours are not viewed as negative or limiting. • Contemplation: individuals develop an awareness that identified behaviours may be a problem and may begin to consider change but not yet engage with this. • Action: individuals engage in a process of active change to modify problem behaviours. • Maintenance: engagement in sustained change with individuals demonstrating the confidence to continue with integration of behaviour changes within their future choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention to support YP at risk of NEET can be adapted to reflect the stage individual YP currently reside within in relation to this model of change. • Precontemplation stage: a focus on building positive relationships and exploring the YP's values and interests to provide opportunities to challenge held perceptions. • Contemplation: explore the benefits of EET with a YP and address identified barriers to access these. • Action and Maintenance: provide individual support for the YP to meet and overcome challenges as they move towards and meet their goals. • Consider how individual readiness for change can be influenced by a wider socio-political context, such as SES, access to EET opportunities and structures of support.
<p>Theories of Resilience (Masten, 2014; Rutter, 2014; Werner, 1989; Ungar, 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of resilience have been determined through findings of longitudinal studies conducted with CYP to explore how individuals respond to adversity. • Resilience describes the ability of an individual to navigate challenge and adversity through positive adaptation and growth. Resilience is a dynamic process requiring active engagement in adapting to challenges. This can be developed over time through exposure to manageable stress and access to appropriate coping mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of resilience acknowledge that despite the high number of risk factors experienced by YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET, positive outcomes can be achieved through implementation of increased protective factors. This can be through access to external resources, such as supportive relationships, a sense of belonging within a school or community setting, and quality education and training. In addition, intervention to support development of

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of resilience acknowledge the influence of both individual characteristics and environmental factors upon resilience. An ecological perspective recognises that individual, family and external factors all influence resilient behaviours. This viewpoint moves away from within-person narratives. • Access to resource and support is a key component for developing and maintaining resilience. Interventions to support resilience aim to reduce stressors and increase protective factors. • Increased resilience can be achieved through development of self-efficacy, self-regulation and problem-solving skills. 	<p>individual resources, such as self-efficacy, emotional regulation and problem-solving skills can build towards improved outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of an ecosystemic viewpoint acknowledges the importance of addressing systemic barriers to YPs' access to EET. For example, embedding psychological approaches into program design to support YP to access EET, such as adoption of a strength-based approach building upon existing skills and interests, building positive, trusting relationships and developing feelings of competence through experiencing success.
Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A theory of motivation with three key psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. When these needs are met the individual can access the motivation to engage in goal-centred behaviours. • Autonomy: access to individual choice and agency related to values and interests. • Competence: the confidence in one's own capability to achieve set goals. • Relatedness: connection and relationship with significant others, such as parents, teachers, key adults. • SDT offers a person-centred, needs-led approach which builds towards environments that support intrinsic motivation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPs' experiences within EET can inform feelings of autonomy and choice. When experiencing a lack of autonomy, a YP may feel demotivated, leading to disengagement. Intervention that provides choice and autonomy of individual EET pathways can build motivation and ownership of future goals. • Negative experiences associated with EET may lead to feelings of low confidence and self-esteem, which can impact feelings of competence. Access to experiences of success can support feelings of competence and build towards engagement in EET. • YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET can experience social isolation through disconnection from

		peers and the community. Building relationships of trust with key adults can support wellbeing, belonging and build motivation for engagement with EET.
Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive psychology adopts a lens which identifies and builds upon an individual's strengths to build towards a meaningful life. • The core tenets of positive psychology are encapsulated within the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), seen through promoting positive emotions, providing engagement in meaningful experiences, building positive relationships, identifying meaning and purpose and recognising individual accomplishments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive psychology offers an alternative lens to existing pejorative narratives related to YP-NEET. The focus moves towards a strength-based view of YP, which identifies existing strengths and how to build upon these to foster a life aligned with individual values and interests. Adoption of this approach can support improved mental health and wellbeing, which has been identified as a risk factor for YP-NEET.
Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCP cites that individuals actively develop their own constructs to make sense of the world and their experiences within it. These constructs inform perceptions of events, people and experiences. Personal constructs can change and adapt over time, dependent upon individual experience. • PCP recognises and acknowledges constructs held by individuals. Through exploration of these constructs, alternative perspectives can be explored. Individuals can be provided with opportunities to test and explore alternative perceptions of constructs to evolve their view of the world and themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining an understanding of a YP's personal constructs related to self and EET can inform understanding of exhibited behaviours related to NEET. For example, a YP who attributes low value to educational attainment may display behaviours of disengagement. • Exploration of individual constructs held by a YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET can help to inform intervention that is aligned with a YP's values and goals. An opportunity also exists to explore alternative perceptions of previous experiences to provide a reframe of negative experiences. This can support a strength-based approach to viewing past and future

		experiences of EET to build towards increased motivation and engagement.
Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1968)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial development theory encompasses the entire human lifespan. Erikson states eight stages of human development that are essential to navigate through successfully in order to experience a fulfilling life. Challenges or adversity faced within these stages of development could impact an individual's ability to navigate subsequent stages of development. • Each stage encapsulates two opposing factors associated with a positive or a negative outcome, dependent upon the experiences and environment in which development occurs. Identity formation is regarded as the most important aspect of child development through stages three to five. • Stage three: initiative vs guilt, 4-5 years. Children begin to develop independence in completing some tasks to explore their skills and gain a sense of purpose. • Stage four: industry vs inferiority, 5-12 years. Children are exposed to more complex tasks with opportunities to develop new competencies. Praise and encouragement from key adults can lead to positive self-belief. • Stage five: identity vs role confusion, 13-19 years. YP need access to sustained support and encouragement from key adults to develop a robust sense of self and build independence. This can be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYPs' experiences in education (stage four and five) can impact their sense of self and feelings of competency. If these experiences lead to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, this can reduce educational engagement and result in feelings of low self-efficacy. Consideration for YPs' experiences in education and subsequent identity formation of themselves as a learner could offer insight into constructs held in relation to EET. • A YP navigating identity formation in stage five may experience role confusion when they experience a lack of clarity in relation to their place in EET or within their community. This can lead to feelings of isolation, further impacting relationships and wellbeing. Individuals experiencing role confusion may display behaviours of disengagement from EET, low motivation and low self-esteem. • Application of psychosocial development theory can provide a framework to understand potential influences of disengagement through feelings of inferiority or role confusion. This can allow for identification of underlying psychological needs and provide person-centred intervention to address these before focusing on external factors only.

	supported through experiences of success through gradual exposure to increasingly complex tasks.	
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2 Section 2: Systematic Literature Review

2.1 Rationale for Systematic Literature Review

The systematic literature review aims to synthesise and draw conclusions from existing research in answer of the LRQ: **‘What can current available literature tell us about how professionals can successfully support YP at risk of becoming NEET?’**

Early identification of YP at risk of NEET can offer opportunities for early intervention and support with the aim of improved future outcomes. Exploration of the current research evidence base offers an opportunity to develop robust conclusions in relation to successful support strategies for this cohort of YP (Baumeister, 2013). Research that explores the work EPs carry out with YP at risk of becoming NEET is currently sparse. However, existing research involving a range of professionals can offer insight into informed ways of working that lead to successful outcomes for YP at risk of NEET and inform EP practice. Professionals included within research studies in this systematic literature review included Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), school teachers and support staff in mainstream or AEP settings, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), NEET leads, career officers and learning mentors.

2.1.1 Analysis

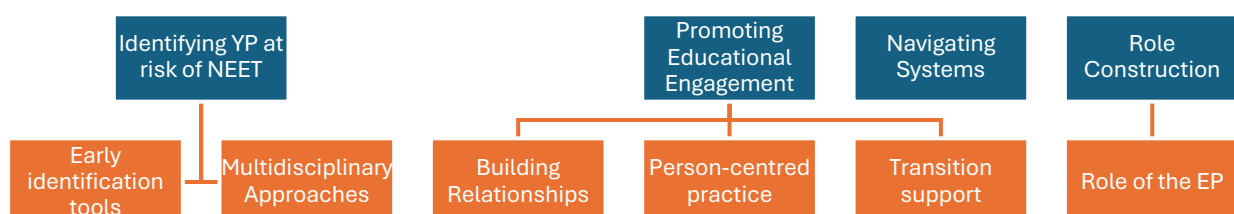
The systematic literature review includes 18 research articles, six of which are doctoral theses. Inclusion criteria allowed for doctoral theses due to limited research literature relating to the LRQ. Although theses do not follow the same peer review process as published research, the viva process offers a robust review of research and, therefore, offers a valuable contribution to the research base (Moyer et al., 2010). Tools used to

evaluate the validity and trustworthiness of research included in the systematic review include the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (see Appendix A) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018) (see Appendix B). Key findings and conclusions from the selected research studies were recorded (see Appendix C) to allow identification of and synthesis of themes within the literature, following the process outlined by Creswell, (2022, p.34).

2.2 What can current available literature tell us about how professionals can successfully support YP at risk of becoming NEET?

The systematic literature review aims to draw together findings and conclusions within the literature to explore answers to the LRQ using a critical stance. This is presented under four themes *Identifying YP at Risk of NEET*, *Promoting Educational Engagement*, *Navigating Systems* and *Role Construction* (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Thematic Map of Systematic Literature Review Themes



2.3 Identifying Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET

2.3.1 Early Identification Tools

Early identification tools can ensure YP within vulnerable categories or experiencing identified risk factors, have access to enhanced and targeted support (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022). School staff can significantly contribute to the early identification of YP at risk of NEET through effective communication and information sharing, allowing for responsive, whole-school support tailored to their diverse needs (Garrett, 2022).

However, robust processes may not always be in place. Holliman et al. (2023) noted that identification of YP at risk of NEET by school staff and careers advisors in a LA in the West Midlands, could rely upon subjective processes often gained through their own experiences and intuition. Although valuable for understanding YPs profiles, this alone is insufficient for reliable identification. LA monitored tools tracking cumulative risk factors should be used in tandem with staff insights (Brown, 2021). Enhanced guidance for effective identification and referral processes could support schools and external agencies to work together to improve opportunities for YP at risk of NEET.

Currently, identification and support may differ across LAs, which can lead to inequity in provision dependent upon the local resources and funding arrangements (Brown, 2021). Furthermore, schools and services can experience difficulties with accessing hard to reach YP and families who experience multiple risk factors, which can act as a barrier to identification and subsequent support (Holliman et al., 2023). In addition, early intervention and preventative support can rely upon YPs attendance at an educational setting to enable targeted intervention (Brown, 2021). Due to staff capacity and

available resource in school, access to multi-agency support is key to addressing the complex needs of YP at risk of NEET.

Robust processes for identification need to be in place in order to offer timely support to YP at risk of NEET. Arnold & Baker (2012) developed one such approach through collaborative research with the Connexions service, resulting in a tool designed to identify YP at risk of becoming NEET. The proposed tool is implemented by assigning a risk score for individual pupils in relation to the number of identified risk factors experienced by the YP. Risk factors that were found to be statistically significant were used as a measure of risk for potential NEET status and weighted according to their prevalence in the participant population (see table 4).

Table 4 Weighted risk factors as reported in Arnold & Baker (2012)

Factor	Weighting
Accommodation issues	3
Low motivation	3
Behaviour issues	2
Unemployment in family	2
Poor Basic Skills	2
Known to Youth Offending Team	1
School Attendance <80%	1
Learning Difficulty/Disability	1

Findings suggest that by using the rating system in table 4, around 50% of YP at risk of NEET could be identified up to 3 years earlier than through existing screening tools; offering the opportunity for early intervention (Arnold & Baker, 2012). Additionally, implementing the use of cumulative risk factors may allow for identification of YP who may have previously been missed (Arnold & Baker, 2012). Early identification tools using

computer screening and information sharing have been seen to be implemented in LAs to support early intervention in South Wales (Brown, 2021), aligning with LA responsibility to monitor YP-NEET and offer appropriate provision for YP (as discussed in section 1 of this literature review). Early identification tools allow the opportunity for professionals to apply preventative approaches for NEET. However, it is acknowledged that these tools would not identify all YP at risk (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Currie & Goodall, 2009).

2.3.2 Multidisciplinary Approaches to Identifying YP at Risk of NEET

Research shows that enhanced identification of YP at risk of NEET necessitates collaboration across professions through a multidisciplinary approach (Brown, 2021; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Garrett, 2022; Holliman et al., 2023; Mallinson, 2009; Vukoja, 2017). This can be seen as information sharing, effective communication and robust referral systems, identifying and meeting need, provision of psychological support and building positive relationships across systems. A multidisciplinary approach offers the opportunity to implement a person-centred, individualised approach considering individual risk factors alongside the local context and influences existing within wider systems (Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

Currie & Goodall's (2009) action research project provides a potential model to build collaborative working between schools, Educational Psychology Services (EPS) and careers services, which was part of the development of post-school psychological services (PSPS) in Scotland. The project facilitated development of relationships across professions, greater understanding of individual roles and promoted an open dialogue

between services in respect of how to support YP at risk of NEET (Currie & Goodall, 2009). Findings suggested that a multidisciplinary approach led to shared goals for improving identification and support for YP at risk of NEET, developing transition processes and enhancing the careers curriculum in secondary school (Currie & Goodall, 2009). Whilst multidisciplinary approaches can benefit collaborative working amongst professionals and lead to improved processes and support for YP at risk of NEET, it takes time and staff capacity to build these systems. As discussed in section 1, WG policy and guidance advocates for multidisciplinary approaches in support of YP at risk of NEET, however, schools and services currently face the challenge of reduced funding and access to resource, which may act as a barrier to enacting these recommendations.

Professionals working within secondary schools including school staff, SENCos, EWOs, NEET leads and careers officers, valued the support offered via external services that extended beyond their own knowledge and expertise, offering a coordinated approach to accessing services to meet YPs' need (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022). Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach can act as a protective factor for YP at risk of NEET through establishment of early links with external services and building effective working relationships leading to increased engagement with early intervention and support (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022). Nevertheless, navigating and understanding the roles and responsibilities of professionals and external services can be complex, resulting in reduced collaborative working (Brown, 2021). However, working across systems offers EPs a position to facilitate collaboration between services and promote joint practices that support YPs' outcomes (Currie & Goodall, 2009).

2.4 Promoting Educational Engagement

Schools sit in a unique position in which they experience high levels of contact with YP. Therefore, school staff have the opportunity to both identify YP at risk of NEET and create a positive learning environment that promotes engagement in education as a protective factor. However, it can be challenging to meet the diverse needs of the school population, which can be influenced by staff capacity, funding and local education options (Garrett, 2022).

Findings in existing literature in relation to YP at risk of NEET suggest integration of holistic approaches that build a positive, nurturing school experience, which can lead to increased educational engagement (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022). These studies highlight the benefit of building relationships, person-centred practice and support with transition, which will be explored in more detail below.

2.4.1 Building Relationships

Developing and maintaining positive relationships between YP and educational staff has been identified as key to supporting engagement in education (Brown, 2021; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Garrett, 2022; Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Owen et al., 2024). Beck's (2015) research into NEET learning providers' views on supporting YP-NEET found that building positive relationships was central to their engagement and progression, achieved through a flexible and responsive approach to their needs. Care, nurture and empathy were seen as key to developing positive relationships by staff in external services and AEPs supporting YP-NEET (Avila & Rose, 2019; Beck, 2015; Duffy & Elwood,

2013; Russell et al., 2010; Thompson, 2010). Furthermore, AEP staff attributed facilitating positive relationships between staff and YP-NEET to provision of a safe learning environment in which YP could thrive (Avila & Rose, 2019; Russell, 2013; Thompson, 2010).

Nicholson & Putwain (2018) also explored the determinants of positive relationships and their subsequent effects within the learning environment. Participants included 60 previously disengaged YP aged 14-16 attending an AEP. YPs views were sought in relation to their educational experiences and the subsequent impact on engagement. Findings suggest that meeting the psychological needs of YP through relatedness, autonomy and competency led to positive student-teacher relationships and increased educational engagement (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018). This was facilitated by offering flexible approaches to learning, access to choice, modelling respect towards YP and using non-confrontational methods to manage classroom rules and boundaries. Promoting both student-teacher and peer relationships developed feelings of belonging, further promoting educational engagement (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018).

This is also evident in Owen et al.'s (2024) research evaluating the TACKLE programme, a multi-component learning initiative for educational re-engagement. Research findings demonstrated that positive relationships between YP and adults facilitated engagement within the programme. Participants included YP aged 14-15 years who were disengaged from education and, therefore, at risk of NEET. YP who participated in the programme valued the relationships that they built with programme staff, reporting that they felt cared for and listened to. These experiences of relatedness led to an increase in YPs'

engagement in the programme, which contrasted with a previous lack of positive, consistent relationships with key adults both within and outside of education (Owen et al., 2024). TACKLE provided each pupil with a 1:1 mentor, which fostered positive relationships with adults (Owen et al., 2024). Similarly, offering 1:1 support in mainstream schools could promote engagement for YP at risk of NEET; however, this is contingent on sufficient staffing and funding within the school system.

Themes of relatedness were also echoed by the voices of YP disengaged from education, who cited positive student-teacher relationships as a facilitator to engagement in education (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Despite previously held negative student-teacher relationships that led to disengagement with education, evidence suggests that YP remain open to building positive student-teacher relationships in future settings (Avila & Rose, 2019; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Owen et al., 2024). Positive student-teacher relationships both encourage educational engagement and enable the identification of risk factors through the mutual sharing of concerns about future pathways or support needs. (Garrett, 2022). Therefore, development of positive student-teacher relationships can act as a protective factor for YP at risk of NEET. Despite government policy promoting early intervention for YP at risk, there is no clear directive for fostering positive student-teacher relationships to enhance educational engagement. (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Therefore, teachers may benefit from additional support and guidance for skill development that supports positive relationships in the classroom.

Whilst the literature offers a strong argument for positive student-teacher relationships to promote educational engagement from the perspective of tutors and YP, the majority of data from this sample of studies was gathered from AEPs with small class sizes (Avila & Rose, 2019; Beck, 2015; Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Russell et al., 2010; Thompson, 2010). Small groups in AEPs offer increased opportunity to implement flexibility, autonomy and relatedness. Professionals supporting YP-NEET have identified similar approaches in support of YP at risk of NEET but note that this can be challenging in a mainstream educational setting in terms of class sizes, staff capacity and the demands of curriculum delivery (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022; Holliman et al., 2023). Therefore, it would be beneficial to further explore how this could be operationalised with YP at risk of NEET in mainstream educational settings through development of a whole school approach and ethos. Additional considerations include the emotional load experienced by professionals in supporting the complex needs presented and challenges with balancing a nurturing role alongside the expectations of the learning provision (Beck, 2015). Access and engagement with families and YP in building and maintaining reciprocal, supportive relationships may also play a role towards promoting educational engagement (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

2.4.2 Person-centred Practice

Whilst some of the needs of YP at risk of NEET can be met through systemic processes, such as a whole school approach to transition or promoting school engagement, addressing the complex needs experienced by YP can also benefit from an individual approach. Implementing a person-centred approach relies upon identifying and

addressing the individual needs of a YP. Offering 1:1 support within educational settings is a key strategy for this through mentoring, individualised targets and goals, and bespoke support, which have been identified as beneficial for educational engagement and improved outcomes (Garrett, 2022; Owen et al., 2024; Thompson, 2010). While UK statutory guidance requires an individual careers meeting before year 11 of secondary school, noted by teachers as an effective method to offer personalised support (Holliman et al., 2023), this single meeting is unlikely to provide sustained support required by YP at risk of NEET, requiring adaptation to current provision. This highlights the need for multidisciplinary and collaborative working to provide targeted support for the diverse needs of these YP.

Research literature suggests that educational institutions that employ processes to identify YP at risk of NEET provide an enhanced offer for post-16 transition and career support (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Garrett, 2022). A person-centred approach might also be enhanced by offering alternative pathways through a bespoke curriculum or AEP directed towards the interests of the YP to promote engagement and wellbeing (Brown, 2021; Owen et al., 2024). Gathering YPs voice is an important step towards identifying and accessing appropriate provision to meet the needs of individual YP (Brown, 2021). This is especially pertinent for YP with ALN who face additional barriers accessing education. YP with ALN may benefit from access to an advocate to champion their voice and ensure educational provision meets their needs, rather than priority being given to a setting with available spaces (Clarkson, 2018).

Gathering the views and experiences of teaching and support staff working with YP at risk of NEET, or with provisions or services aiming to engage YP-NEET, offers insight into how they navigate the complex needs experienced by YP. Findings from research suggest that staff within dedicated NEET settings demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the outcomes for YP (Avila & Rose, 2019; Beck, 2015; Russell et al., 2010; Thompson, 2010). However, staff continued to hold low aspirations for YP-NEETs' access to future EET opportunities indicating the potential influence of pejorative socio-political narratives of NEET (Avila & Rose, 2019; Thompson, 2010). Furthermore, difficulties in addressing externalising behaviours and fostering engagement with YP and their families can reinforce a within-person narrative associated with NEET risk or status. These perspectives on YP-NEET may detract from a person-centred, individualised approach that supports aspiration and progression (Avila & Rose, 2019). In contrast, adoption of a strength-based approach, which centres the strengths and abilities of YP, can counteract negative constructs of YP-NEET drawing focus back to the individual and person-centred practices (Owen et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of employing reflexivity as a practitioner, maintaining an awareness of how held constructs inform practice.

2.4.3 Transition support

Some YP accessing mainstream education can face increased risk of NEET when experiencing a lack of support before and during key transition points, for example post-16 and post-18 (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018; Holliman et al., 2023; Morris, 2017). Challenges can be heightened for individuals with ALN or who are experiencing multiple

risk factors for NEET, highlighting the need for early identification and intervention processes that include a robust transition offer (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018). Post-16 transition presents a complex landscape of provisions and processes for YP to navigate, amplified when seeking provision to meet identified needs. Therefore, professionals with direct contact with YP offer an essential resource in supporting YP to navigate choice and access to appropriate services (Clarkson, 2018). NEET leads are a key role in supporting transition from pre-16 to post-16 settings in Wales, providing continuity of support and a central point of contact (Brown, 2021). In addition, NEET leads monitor YPs transition journey, supporting reengagement for when transition pathways break down (Brown, 2021). Although many Welsh LAs have created the NEET lead role as recommended by WG, this is not yet a statutory requirement (Brown, 2021). Consequently, this can lead to inconsistency of provision for transition support dependent upon geography and LA practices.

Schools currently offer transition support for all pupils; however, an exploration of efficacy of implementation and outcome could offer insight into development of a targeted support for YP at risk of NEET (Holliman et al., 2023). Through gathering pupil voice, Currie & Goodall, (2009) identified that YP did not attribute value to the transition support offered through the school personal, social education (PSE) programme, unless they were selected for enhanced support. Evaluation of research findings led to implementation of psychological and targeted support for schools in provision of PSE and transition support for YP developed by the local EPS (Currie & Goodall, 2009). Collaborative research led to improved relationships between services, lending support for the role of EP as a bridge between professionals in pursuit of improved outcomes for

YP (Currie & Goodall, 2009). Results of this study suggested adopting a needs-led approach to address individual and systemic support before and during transition, which could reduce risk for YP who may be experiencing risk but may not have yet been identified.

Furthermore, developing relationships with key members of staff to support engagement was identified as important for YP during post-16 transition (Clarkson, 2018). This is supported alongside opportunities to access FE provisions, with which YP often lack experience (Currie & Goodall, 2009). Mallinson's (2009) study gathered the views of students and teachers regarding supportive transition practices. The importance of establishing relationships between professionals and services was identified as important for effective information sharing and communication to support YPs' needs and identifying YP at risk of NEET when transitioning to college. In addition, further support was identified in the practices implemented by the FE institution, such as, developing peer relationships during induction, positive student-teacher relationships built upon respect, provision of a curriculum to meet the needs of individual learners and opportunities for work experience (Mallinson, 2009). However, further research regarding facilitating factors for post-16 transition in relation to YP at risk of NEET could offer further insights, due to the small participant numbers in research studies included in this review.

Communication between services, such as schools, careers services and FE provisions, are essential in supporting YP at risk of NEET in provision of individual support to access EET, as well as early intervention (Holliman et al., 2023). However,

availability of support can be exacerbated by the reduction of school-linked career services that offer increased levels of contact and support for YP who may experience complex needs (Holliman et al., 2023). Further barriers can exist due to lack of appropriate provision to meet the needs experienced by YP, or professionals' existing knowledge of the diverse services in the local area and how these might meet need (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018). In response to these challenges, EPs were identified as a key resource in acquiring and disseminating key knowledge of services and provisions, and coordinating transition to meet the individual needs of YP, due to their position within systems (Clarkson, 2018). However, development of the EP role with post-16 services continues to be established and, as yet, may not provide a consistent offer for YP at risk of NEET.

2.5 Navigating Systems

Implementing effective career support for YP in secondary school can provide early intervention and/or identification for those at risk of NEET (Arnold & Baker, 2012). A whole school careers approach, embedding career-based knowledge and skills into the curriculum, alongside work experience, can support YPs' aspirations and transition to further EET (Holliman et al., 2023). Access to meaningful work experience was identified as a facilitator towards building aspiration for future EET and increased self-confidence for YP at risk of NEET as part of a multi-component learning programme (Owen et al., 2024). Building effective careers education is aided by communication between services to support individuals at risk of NEET and enhanced by establishing links with local employers and community services to offer additional support, knowledge and

opportunities for YP at risk of NEET (Holliman et al., 2023). However, a reduction to funding impacting access to career services and lack of engagement of school staff in whole school approaches, present challenges to implement these approaches (Holliman et al., 2023).

Professionals working with YP-NEET identified a range of systemic barriers to supporting YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET. Funding arrangements can lead to instability of resource and support for YP at risk of NEET, which can focus on target-led outcomes, taking away from the potential for more individualised approaches that focus on long-term and sustainable outcomes (Brown, 2021). This can impact the support that professionals can provide when bound by a funding model and expectations built by LA or government systems, restricting flexibility. In Brown's (2021) research study, NEET leads, and school staff noted that current funding models do not allow an offer of support to all YP at risk of NEET. It was noted funding might not extend to the most disadvantaged YP due to the time and resource required to meet complex needs (Brown, 2021). This could indicate that current funding models perpetuate social inequality and isolation for YP most at risk of NEET. Furthermore, Duffy & Elwood's, (2013) research with disengaged YP aged 14-19 years in AEPs indicates that YP would value flexible approaches to curriculum, teaching and learning, leading to wider choice of EET to support educational engagement. However, the success of these changes would rely upon access to qualifications and training perceived by future employers as equivalent in value to traditional academic routes (Duffy & Elwood, 2013).

2.6 Role Construction

Constructions held of individual and collective roles in support of YP at risk of NEET can shape how these are enacted. Professionals represented in the research studies explored in this review demonstrate a desire to improve the future outcomes for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET. However, constructs explored within both mainstream and AEP settings indicate that whilst professionals work to support YP to access EET, tensions exist between their role and the influence of socio-political narratives of individualism, funding requirements of support or target-led intervention programmes, which can embed pejorative narratives of YP-NEET (Avila & Rose, 2019; Beck, 2015; Brown, 2021; Russell et al., 2010; Thompson, 2010). This can negatively shape support and future EET access, potentially resulting in low expectations and the steering of YP towards low-level qualifications (Thompson, 2010). Implementation of a strength-based lens employed by staff could, therefore, offer scope to counter negative constructs of YP-NEET.

Studies exploring the views of professionals working within mainstream education settings, have further identified how staff constructions can inform support for YP at risk of NEET. Holliman et al. (2023) explored the implementation of whole school approaches to career support within mainstream secondary schools. Career leads viewed careers support as a key mechanism to support YP at risk of NEET. However, teaching staff and senior leaders did not always associate careers education with their role (Holliman et al., 2023). As a result, this could limit the implementation and wider impact of support for YP at risk of NEET. This highlights the importance of increased staff awareness concerning the importance of careers education effectively supporting

YP at risk of NEET. Methods to facilitate increased staff capacity may help to enable alignment with whole school approaches which ameliorate risk of NEET.

2.6.1 Role of the EP

Research literature included within this review explored the contribution of the EP role in relation to YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET both directly and indirectly. This was gathered through EP voice or via the perspective of others. EPs can play a key role to support the complex needs of YP at risk of NEET through application of psychology and knowledge of developmental pathways to identify need and implement person-centred approaches (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Professionals working alongside YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET valued the psychological tools implemented by EPs to expand understanding of YPs' needs and how to address these in support of accessing EET (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018; Garrett, 2022). Morris & Atkinson's (2018) systematic review of the literature noted that EPs can offer support at the individual, as well as the systematic level to support post-16 transition. Direct work can centre YPs' voice by setting personalised goals, drawing focus to long-term educational outcomes, supporting development of key skills for transition and employing a strength-based needs analysis (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Moreover, EPs' systemic role enables connections between mainstream and post-16 settings, fosters multi-agency collaboration, and supports the creation of transparent processes and information sharing (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Morris, 2017). As a result, EPs can play an integral role in supporting YP at risk of NEET.

Whilst a need for individual and person-centred approaches have been identified as beneficial for YP at risk of NEET in the literature (Brown, 2021; Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Morris, 2017), the ability to implement these can be impacted by access to EP support, funding and resource to provide individualised support, and continuity of funding to support YP at risk of NEET (Brown, 2021). In addition, EPs may not have the opportunity to work with YP at risk of NEET if they do not already possess an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or Individual Development Plan (IDP), limiting the ability to support individual students that might not have an identified need (Vukoja, 2017). This demonstrates how the EP role is determined by existing systems and processes, which can impact access to EP support to inform intervention for YP identified as at risk of NEET.

Research seeking EP voice in relation to working in post-16 settings, suggest that there may be a lack of confidence, knowledge and experience working in post-16 settings to support YP at risk of NEET (Turner-Forbes, 2017; Vukoja, 2017). This may be due to the lack of robust systems for EPs to work with the 16-25 age range outside of mainstream education (Turner-Forbes, 2017). It is suggested that increasing EP knowledge of the unique needs of the FE sector and raising the profile of their role could support commissioning of work in the post-16 sector, opening up further opportunities for EPs to access and support YP at risk of NEET (Morris, 2017). However, current research cites conflicting viewpoints in relation to post-16 EP practice. Whilst there is strong support for a migration of existing EP working practices into post-16 (Clarkson, 2018; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Garrett, 2022; Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Turner-Forbes, 2017; Vukoja, 2017), there is some suggestion that working practices need to evolve to meet the

needs of differing contexts (Morris, 2017). Despite these challenges, the literature suggests that EPs express confidence in the application of psychological skills to address the needs of YP at risk of NEET across settings (Clarkson, 2018; Morris, 2017; Turner-Forbes, 2017; Vukoja, 2017). In summary, research suggests EP practice continues to develop and evolve in the post-16 sector and may differ between LAs, offering scope for further research in this area.

2.7 Summary of Key Findings

Existing research literature provides insight into the heterogeneity of YP at risk of or experiencing NEET, highlighting the complex interaction of risk factors experienced by YP that can lead to NEET status (Hutchinson et al., 2016; Thompson, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). Government policy offers a framework and associated guidance to enact provision and intervention for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET. However, access to appropriate resource, funding and quality of intervention can present barriers to effective change (Maguire, 2021). Continuous evaluation of policy and related services need to be in place to ensure efficacy of practice and longevity of outcomes for YP-NEET. Moreover, policy development and implementation should consider the multifaceted interactions between YP and relevant systems to facilitate appropriate resource to effectively meet individual need (Holmes et al., 2021; Lőrinc et al., 2020).

Implementation of early intervention tools in collaboration with effective communication processes between staff and settings can provided necessary support for YP at risk of NEET to mitigate risk (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Serracant, 2014; Turner-Forbes, 2017; Yates & Payne, 2006). However, identification processes can be subjective and inconsistent across LAs, leading to inequitable provision (Brown, 2021; Holliman et al., 2023). Challenges of identifying and meeting the needs of YP at risk of NEET can be addressed through engaging in a multidisciplinary approach that encourages information sharing and access to referral channels (Brown, 2021; Yates & Payne, 2006). In addition, effective career advice and guidance to support goals and aspirations towards EET can instil preventative measures for risk of NEET by pre-emptively addressing barriers or concerns with YP (Holliman et al., 2023).

Research findings strongly indicate the protective factor of educational engagement for YP at risk of NEET. Schools are positioned to have a significant influence on YPs engagement in learning through provision of inclusive whole-school practices to promote school belonging (Brown et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2025; Parker et al., 2022). Positive relationships between YP and staff were seen as central to employing care, empathy, nurture and feelings of safety, key contributors to engagement (Beck, 2015; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Owen et al., 2024). In addition, use of person-centred, flexible approaches that address underlying need in support of educational engagement can aid improved outcomes for YP (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Furthermore, YP experiencing multiple and complex needs might benefit from specialist support to identify and address underlying need. EP knowledge and skills offer a psychological lens to identify need and provide bespoke, targeted intervention (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). However, systemic barriers such as limited availability of funding or appropriate educational setting can impede appropriate support for YP at risk of NEET (Brown, 2021).

YP at risk of NEET benefit from support in preparing for and navigating transition accessing professionals' support to access EET that meets their goals and interests (Garrett, 2022; Holliman et al., 2023; Mallinson, 2009). EPs positioning within systems allows the opportunity to support YP and settings to navigate transition to post-16 settings (Currie & Goodall, 2009). This requires established relationships, information sharing and clarity of the EP role in supporting YP at risk of NEET (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). An understanding of professional roles and remit can provide clarity for referral,

intervention and support. However, this can be challenging in a complex post-16 landscape with a range of services, professionals and pathways. The EP role and post-16 continues to develop and evolve in support of YP.

2.8 Rationale for current study and Research Questions

EPs are well-placed to offer support for the complex needs of YP at risk of NEET at both individual and systemic level through implementation of psychology (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018; Vukoja, 2017). This can be achieved through changing perceptions, overcoming perceptual barriers, applying psychology to overcome barriers and raising awareness of need (Garrett, 2022). Research literature indicates that professionals would value the support of EPs for YP at risk of NEET and that EPs demonstrate skills and motivation to fulfil this need (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018; Garrett, 2022). Whilst UK and Welsh policy and legislation has extended the EP role to include individuals aged 0-25 years, clarity around how this might be operationalised and resourced does not appear to be in place (Brown, 2021; Turner-Forbes, 2017). A search of the literature to explore the work of professionals and EPs with YP at risk of NEET are predominantly based in England or Scotland, with only one in Wales. At present, limited research has been carried out to determine the support EPs provide for YP at risk of NEET within the context of Wales. Due to the support that EPs could offer this cohort of YP, the sparsity of research in a Welsh context and in response to identified gaps in current research literature this research study aims to answer the following research questions in relation to EPs in Wales:

1. What are EP perspectives and understanding of YP at risk of NEET?
2. How do EPs construct their role working with young people at risk of NEET?

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*An Exploration of Educational Psychologists Constructs of their Role Working with
Young People at Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
in Wales*

Part Two: Major Empirical Research Study

Word Count: 16,768

3 Abstract

Aims: Engagement in education, employment and training (EET) have been cited as beneficial for improved long-term life outcomes (Maguire, 2021). Young people (YP) continue to face barriers to educational engagement, which can lead to short-term or prolonged periods of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET). United Kingdom (UK) and Welsh Government (WG) policy aim to address and meet the needs of YP-NEET in order to reduce the number of YP experiencing NEET. However, due to continued numbers of YP experiencing NEET this remains an area of concern. Therefore, methods of early intervention to address YPs needs whilst in education could mitigate the risk of becoming NEET. Educational Psychologists (EPs) positioning within education and local authority (LA) systems offer the opportunity to address identified need to promote sustained educational engagement. This research aims to explore EPs construction of their role in supporting YP at risk of NEET and its subsequent impact on EP practice.

Method: Six EPs from six different LAs in Wales were recruited for this research study. Two focus groups were held with three participants in each. Contributions were explored through use of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Analysis: Three superordinate themes with associated subordinate themes were derived from data analysis. The stated themes reflect EP constructions of their role in relation to supporting YP at risk of NEET. Findings suggest that EPs possess the required knowledge and skills to provide meaningful support and intervention to address the needs of this cohort of YP.

Limitations: Due to the small-scale of this research study, findings are not representative of the views of EPs across Wales. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that data analysis is influenced by the lens of the researcher, which can impact how results are interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Conclusions: This research study offers insight into the role of the EP in supporting improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET. EPs are well-positioned to employ psychological skills and knowledge to offer contribution to early intervention in support of sustained educational engagement and future access to EET. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are explored.

3.1 Introduction

Not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a term that has been constructed to identify young people (YP) disengaged from education, employment or training (EET) (Office for National Statistics, 2025). United Kingdom (UK) and Welsh Government (WG) policy and guidance direct local authorities (LAs) to track and monitor YP who are not in education employment or training (YP-NEET) (Department for Education, 2024). YP-NEET can experience a variety of risk factors that lead to a complex set of needs, contributing to NEET status (Crowley et al., 2023; Holmes et al., 2021; Lőrinc et al., 2020; Rahmani et al., 2024). Long-term pejorative life outcomes are associated with NEET status, such as social exclusion and marginalisation, mental health needs, identity, health and relationships (Mawn et al., 2017; Rose et al., 2012), which justify development of robust approaches to reduce numbers of YP-NEET. Despite UK and WG focus on YP-NEET, statistics gathered across the UK and Wales indicate that this remains a current concern that requires continued methods of intervention and support to improve life outcomes for YP (Office for National Statistics, 2025; Welsh Government, 2025a). Implementation of intervention and support varies across the four devolved UK nations, which has led to differing approaches to address NEET, rather than adoption of a cohesive overarching policy approach encapsulating evidence-based practice (Brown et al., 2022; Maguire, 2020).

Welsh policy reflects a drive towards improving the life outcomes of YP through increased support to access EET, raising attainment and improving links between education and employers to provide further opportunities for transition from education to the workplace (for example, Welsh Government, 2022b). WG's Youth Engagement

and Progression Framework (YEPF) offers a coordinated approach to address NEET via established roles including NEET leads and Engagement and Progression Coordinators (EPC) who oversee and direct collaborative work across services (Welsh Government, 2022b). The YEPF presents a consistent framework to address NEET across Wales whilst allowing flexibility to adapt to local need. However, reduction to WG funding, and therefore LA funding, could impact resources available for identification and intervention of YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET (Ifan & Sion, 2019; NAHT Cymru, 2024; Welsh Government, 2020). Furthermore, evaluation of implementation of policy and guidance is key to identify the impact of policy in practice and to inform future steps to support YP to access EET. Consequently, evolving educational, political and economic systems require a reflexive response of support and intervention for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET to address the complex profile of needs experienced by this cohort within a national and local context (Holmes et al., 2021).

A focus on reducing numbers of YP-NEET can take two possible pathways, either through early intervention and prevention or by offering intervention and support once a YP is experiencing NEET (Maguire, 2021; Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). Early intervention relies upon effective identification of YP at risk of NEET in order to offer targeted support to individual pupils who require additional intervention to support engagement in education (Arnold & Baker, 2012). However, approaches can vary across LAs and school systems accompanied by a lack of evaluative processes to identify efficacy of methods employed (Maguire, 2020). This can lead to a disparity of provision dependent upon geographical location (Maguire, 2021).

Engagement in education has been identified as pivotal to improving outcomes for YP resulting in increased academic attainment which has been identified as a protective factor against risk of NEET (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Britton et al., 2011). Provision of inclusive learning environments, supportive relationships and person-centred practice act as facilitators to feelings of school belonging and educational engagement (Brown, 2021; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Garrett, 2022; Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Owen et al., 2024). Promoting and maintaining a connection to education can offer potential for early identification and intervention of YP at risk of NEET, such as sharing of knowledge held regarding YP via existing staff-pupil relationships, which can highlight potential risk factors (Garrett, 2022). In addition, this offers the opportunity for enhanced support at post-16 transition with the aim of facilitating continued engagement in EET (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018). This can be beneficial for both families and YP who may find it challenging to navigate complex systems and therefore, access a provision that meets the needs of a YP who requires additional support to engage in EET (Clarkson, 2018).

Establishing robust systems and processes to both identify and support YP at risk of NEET rely upon a multidisciplinary approach, which incorporate the skills and knowledge of professionals and organisations (Brown, 2021; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Garrett, 2022; Holliman et al., 2023; Mallinson, 2009; Vukoja, 2017). Establishing links and relationships with professionals across services can provide opportunities to access targeted support for YP at risk of NEET (Currie & Goodall, 2009). Research that developed and built upon multi-agency approaches demonstrated improved information sharing, referral systems and targeted support to meet the needs of YP (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022). This allowed the opportunity for

person-centred practice to take place through identification of need and implementation of appropriate intervention with mainstream school settings through career services and embedded psychological approaches (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Application of these approaches were found to be beneficial via both systemic support and individual intervention (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Whilst research elevates some areas of best practice to support YP at risk of NEET, there remains a lack of clarity for identification of YP who may be at risk of NEET and how these YP are prioritised in educational settings for targeted support.

3.2 Relevance to Educational Psychology

YP at risk of NEET can experience multiple and complex risk factors that could lead to NEET status (Hutchinson et al., 2016; Thompson, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). This can impact YPs' ability to access or fully engage in education. The presenting complexity of YPs' needs may act as a barrier to identifying and accessing appropriate support (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). EPs can offer additional insight through a psychological perspective, increasing understanding of the challenges faced by YP and how this impacts educational engagement (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Identifying and addressing psychological need through person-centred, targeted intervention can reduce potential educational disengagement, which could lead to NEET status (Turner-Forbes, 2017; Vukoja, 2017). In addition, systemic support increasing staff knowledge, capacity and access to resource can support whole school approaches to meet the diverse needs of YP and act as a protective factor to support educational engagement (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

Educational Psychologists (EPs) work across the 0-25 age range, placing them in a unique position due to their work in multiple settings and systems, as stated within the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health & Social Care, 2014) and ALN Code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021). This places the EP role and remit to support YPs' access to education across both pre-16 and post-16 educational settings. Whilst EPs can play a key role, there is currently limited research to illuminate how the EP role is utilised and implemented in support of YP at risk of NEET from the perspective of EPs, particularly within a Welsh context. Acquiring a deeper understanding of how EPs in Wales conceptualise the needs and profiles of YP at risk of NEET and enact their role could reveal effective practices that could enhance EP support for this cohort. This research aims to seek further clarity in this area by exploring the research questions (RQs) below:

1. What are EP perspectives and understanding of YP at risk of NEET?
2. How do EPs construct their role working with young people at risk of NEET?

3.3 Research Paradigm

Defining the research paradigm implemented within a research study makes explicit underpinning values and beliefs of the researcher, which influence methodological choices and interpretation of data (Brown & Dueñas, 2019). Adoption and justification of philosophical underpinnings of research provide clarity of methodological approaches, data collection and analysis and are essential for a robust research design (Cohen, 2018). For this purpose, the philosophical approaches adopted for this research study will be further explored.

3.3.1 Axiology

Axiological assumptions acknowledge the influence of researcher values and world views (Creswell & Poth, 2025). Interest in exploring the role of EPs in relation to YP at risk of NEET has been influenced by the researcher's previously held experience working directly with YP-NEET within both Further Education (FE) and Alternative Education Provider (AEP) settings and current Trainee EP status. This research study is also driven by a desire to explore how EPs can contribute to inclusive practices to address the complex needs of this cohort of YP. Researcher values align with a social constructionist position (SC), in which individuals develop their own subjective constructions and make meaning in relation to their engagement with the world and existing social and cultural narratives (Crotty, 2020). This acknowledges that the researcher also interprets meaning derived from the research study and design in relation to their own subjective views and previously held experiences.

3.3.2 Ontology

An ontological position of critical realism acknowledges that there is a reality, which exists independently of our knowledge of it, and that research practices enable greater understanding of this existing knowledge (Danermark, 2019). It identifies the subjectivity of individual experience and the complex interplay of existing factors that contribute to an individual's meaning making processes (Kozhevnikov, 2020). Within social science research, acceptance for the double hermeneutics of meaning making from both participant and researcher is held within a critical realist stance, which

acknowledges that meaning derived from research cannot be inherently neutral due to the subjective interpretations of the world applied by both parties (Danermark, 2019). Reflexive approaches exploring the impact of the researcher on research design, implementation and interpretation will be further explored in Part 3. A critical realist approach allows for acknowledgement that NEET is a real-world phenomenon experienced by YP. However, this may be interpreted differently by individual EPs, impacting how and why they engage with YP- NEET. This research study aims to gather the views, experiences and practices of EPs across LAs in Wales, to gain further insight into how they are working with YP at risk of becoming NEET. A critical realist stance enables acknowledgement of individual, subjective realities of how EPs interpret the construct of NEET and their role associated with this.

3.3.3 Epistemology

An epistemological approach of SC holds the view that individual knowledge and constructed meaning is influenced and formed by existing narratives, systems, cultural and social norms (Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998). SC acknowledges that knowledge is constructed by both individual experience and the interactions between others as they engage with the world around them (Crotty, 1998). SC posits language as central to this meaning making process and expression of individual experience (Burr, 2015). A SC position moves away from a positivist lens which seeks to discover objective truth, instead embracing multiple interpretations that are perceived and constructed through social interaction (Willig, 2022).

The rationale for using SC lens reflects the aims of this research study to explore EP constructs of their role in relation to YP at risk of NEET. Inherent in this is an exploration of the EP role through acquired knowledge, experience and meaning within a Welsh context, which aligns with the selected research paradigm. There is acknowledgement that a SC epistemology may potentially conflict with a critical realist ontology, with an existing tension between an individual interpretation of reality versus socially constructed meaning. However, a critical realist and SC stance holds space for individual EP construction of YP at risk of NEET and their role with this cohort, as well as acknowledging the interacting influences of LA practices, WG priorities and EP service goals and values in forming constructions of the EP role.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Welsh Context

This research was conducted with EPs who currently work within a Welsh context. It was decided that participants would only be recruited from Welsh LAs due to the differences in policy, guidance, funding structures and available services as decided by the devolved WG. In addition, the differing systems and structures within a Welsh context may also influence the EP role and how this might be actioned in relation to WG priorities. Current research exploring YP at risk of NEET tends to focus on a UK context. Therefore, further exploration of EP experiences and practices within Wales could offer further insights to existing research.

3.4.2 Participants and Recruitment

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants for this research study based on their knowledge and experiences related to the research topic. This allowed the opportunity for a deep and rich exploration of the research foci (Palinkas et al., 2015). As the research focused on EPs practicing in a Welsh context, a purposive sampling method was identified as most appropriate. Recruited participants were included if they were practicing EPs working for a LA in Wales and had experience of working with YP at risk of NEET, directly or indirectly.

Participants were recruited via an online post to the forum EPNET providing an outline of the proposed research (Appendix D). In addition, email communication (Appendix E) was sent to The National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists in Wales (NAPEP-Cymru) and each principal EP for every local authority in Wales with an accompanying recruitment poster (Appendix F). Individual EPs who expressed an interest in participating in the research study were sent a participant information sheet (Appendix G) and participant consent form (Appendix H). In total six EPs participated in this research study, each representing a different LA across Wales.

3.4.3 Data Generation

In consideration of the ontological and epistemological approaches discussed, focus groups were deemed an appropriate data generation method as they offer potential for rich and novel data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The aims of the research were to explore the positioning of EPs understanding of YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET and how this framed construction of their role and practices related to YP at risk of NEET. Focus groups

allowed for exploration of individual EP responses, whilst offering a supportive space for deeper exploration using a collaborative approach to extend thinking and reflection (Barbour, 2018). Language as a method of interpreting and understanding the experiences and perceptions is central to this approach, aligning with a SC epistemology (Burr, 2015). Consideration was given to semi-structured interviews as an alternative data gathering tool, as focus groups can lead to consensus of opinion around dominant discourse and limited expression of personal views (Barbour, 2018; Smithson, 2000). However, it was felt that EP participants were well-experienced in sharing viewpoints that may not follow a dominant narrative and would possess confidence expressing these within a focus group setting with individuals who share similar experiences. Whilst both focus groups and individual interviews can offer potential for rich data, it was felt that focus groups would stimulate ideas and discussions from the responses of others that may have been missing from individual interviews (Smithson, 2000). Further reflections will be explored in part three of this study.

Two focus groups were carried out with three participants in each, which allowed time and space for all voices in the group to contribute. Both focus groups were held on Microsoft Teams, due to the geographical spread and availability of participants. This allowed an opportunity to gain the voices of a greater number of EPs across Wales. The focus group was facilitated by the researcher with a short interview schedule of open questions related to the stated RQs (Appendix I). Time was allocated at the beginning of each focus group to build rapport between the researcher and participants, co-construct ground rules, state the importance of confidentiality and the right to

withdraw, and to revisit the aims of the research to allow the opportunity to address questions or concerns.

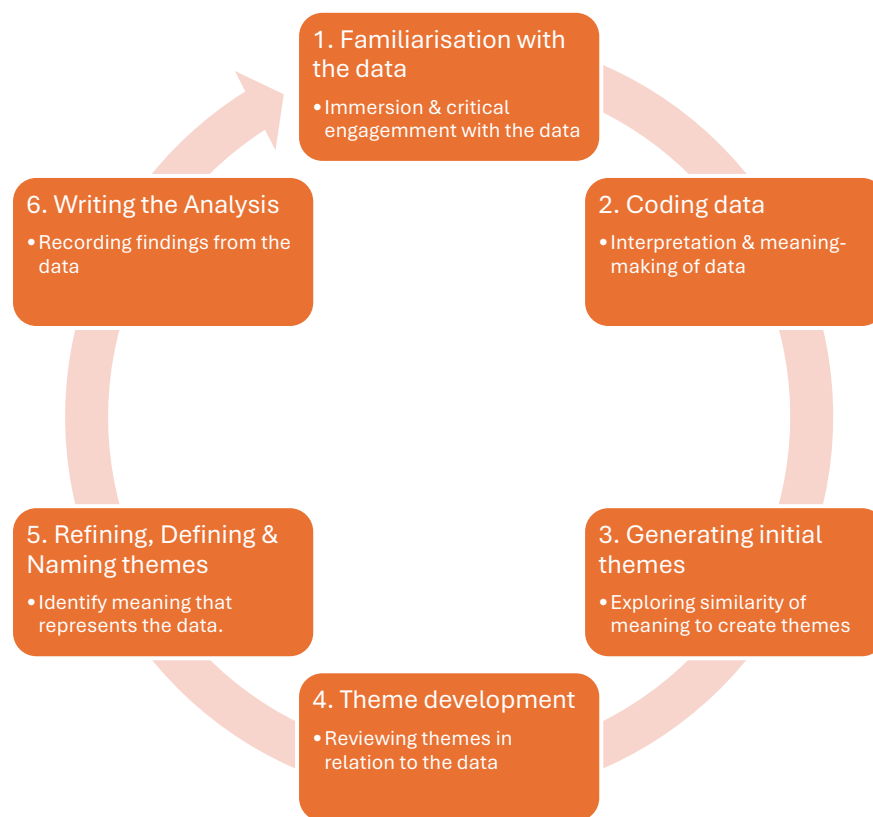
3.5 Approach to Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to analyse and interpret the transcribed data and to explore the constructions held by participants in relation to the RQs being explored (see figure 9). The use of RTA provides recognition of the role of the researcher and reflection upon how this influences the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The influence of the researcher can be described through recognition of their own biases, values and constructs, which may influence the interpretation of collected data.

RTA includes data coding and identification of themes, which are reviewed and refined throughout the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Identification of themes through the RTA method will provide the opportunity and flexibility to explore both individual and shared meaning in relation to the construct of YP at risk of NEET and how these constructs inform EP practice.

Figure 9. Braun & Clarke's (2022) Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis



3.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to any research activities taking place, ethical approval was sought and approved by Cardiff University's Research Ethics Committee (EC.24.04.16.7008). Research was carried out in accordance with the four ethical principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity outlined by the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2021). In respect of these ethical principles, the following actions were taken throughout the research process (table 5).

Table 5. Ethical considerations as considered in Braun & Clarke (2013)

Ethical Consideration	Action Taken
Privacy & confidentiality	At the beginning of the focus group, participants were reminded about the importance of confidentiality in relation to any information shared within the focus group. Participants were made aware that pseudonyms would be used to remove any identifying features, and that data would be anonymised to remove any possibility of tracing data back to individual EPs.
Informed consent	Participants were provided with a participant information sheet (appendix G), which outlined the aims and procedure for the research study. Participants who agreed to take part in the study were emailed a participant consent form (appendix H). At the beginning of each focus group the outline and aims of the research were revisited to allow participants an opportunity to explore questions or concerns and to ensure that they were in agreement with the research processes.
Right to withdraw	Participants were provided with information related to the right to withdraw from the research study, as detailed in the participant information sheet (appendix G) and participant consent form (appendix H). Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at the beginning of the focus group and in the debrief information provided at the end of the focus group.
Debriefing participants	Following completion of the focus group participants received a debrief to allow time to discuss any concerns that may have arisen. This was accompanied by both verbal and written information detailing signposting to support if needed (appendix J). A breakout room was offered to participants if they felt overwhelmed or upset by any topics discussed.

Data protection	Data was recorded via Microsoft Teams inbuilt recording feature and also on a backup recording device. The recordings were kept for 2 weeks to allow for transcription, after which point they were deleted. The transcriptions were anonymised with the use of pseudonyms and this data and associated documentation is stored on a secure network with password protection. It will be stored safely for 5 years in line with Cardiff University's policy for research data retention.
Minimise risk	Proposed topics and questions within the study were not expected to cause any harm to the participants. A focus group script was used to establish ground rules at the beginning of each focus group to ensure that all participants were aware of expectations regarding confidentiality and behaviour within the focus group (Appendix I).

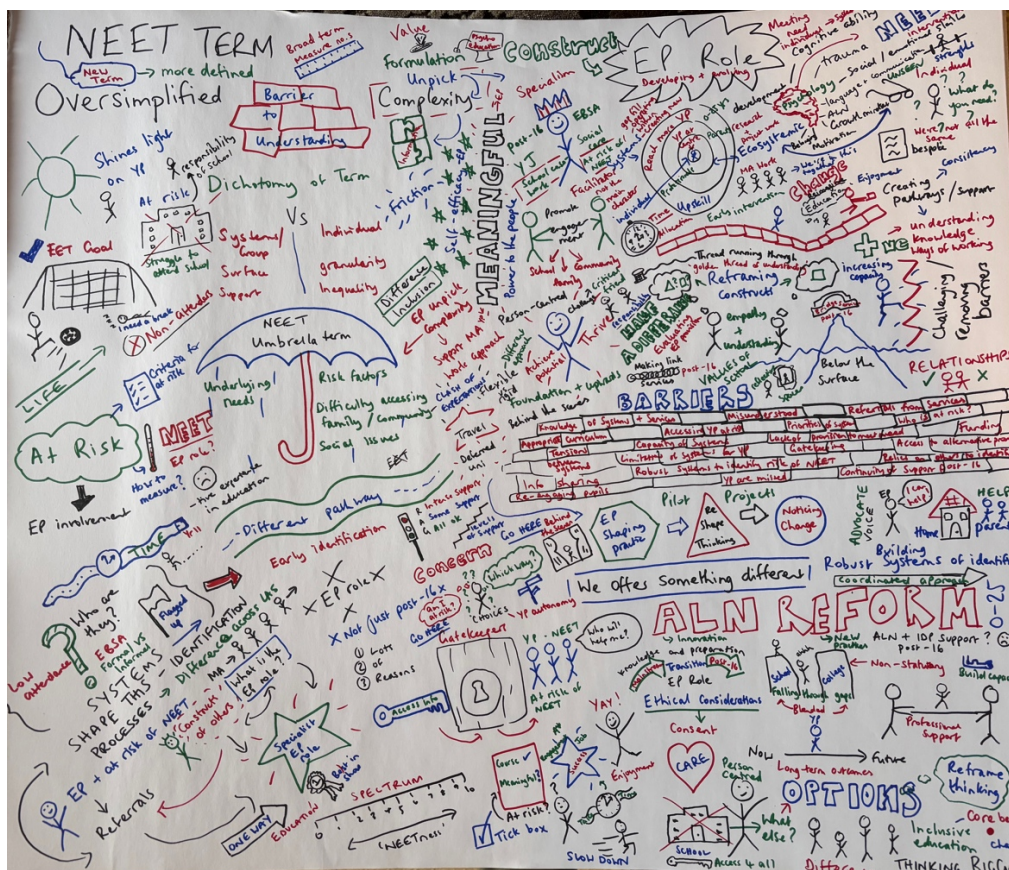
3.7 Analysis Process

RTA was used as the data analysis tool for this research study in accordance with Braun & Clarke's (2022), six phases (Figure 9). Data sets from each focus group were analysed collectively with the aim of generating themes to understand the views of EPs from across Wales. Familiarisation with the data was carried out through techniques of immersion by listening and watching the focus group recordings multiple times, recording thoughts and ideas during transcription and taking breaks to reflect on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This process was further supported through creation of a familiarisation doodle (Figure 10) to critically engage with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The second phase of analysis identified and assigned labels to units of meaning through a coding process. This process was conducted twice to more fully engage with the data

and offer an opportunity to reflect on the robustness of the coding process in relation to the RQs being explored. Semantic and latent codes were assigned to units of data embracing both implicit and explicit meaning communicated (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes generated were taken into phase three of the RTA process to form initial themes, which were developed, reviewed and refined in phases four and five. An iterative process was employed throughout data analysis, moving between phases to fully engage with the data leading to named themes.

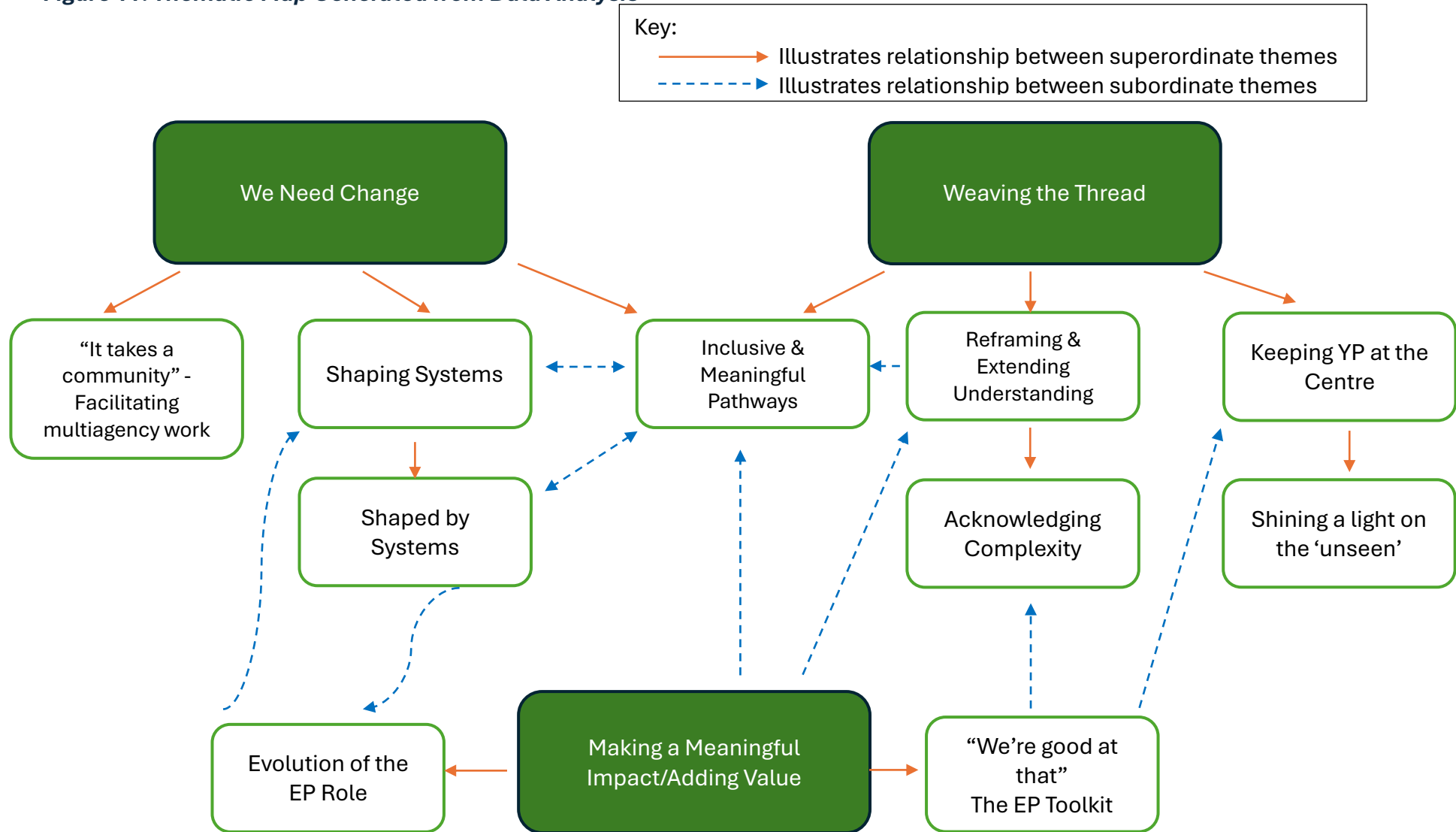
Figure 10. Familiarisation doodle



3.8 The Thematic Map

In this section, the thematic map (Figure 11) will visually present superordinate themes and subordinate themes as generated from the RTA process.

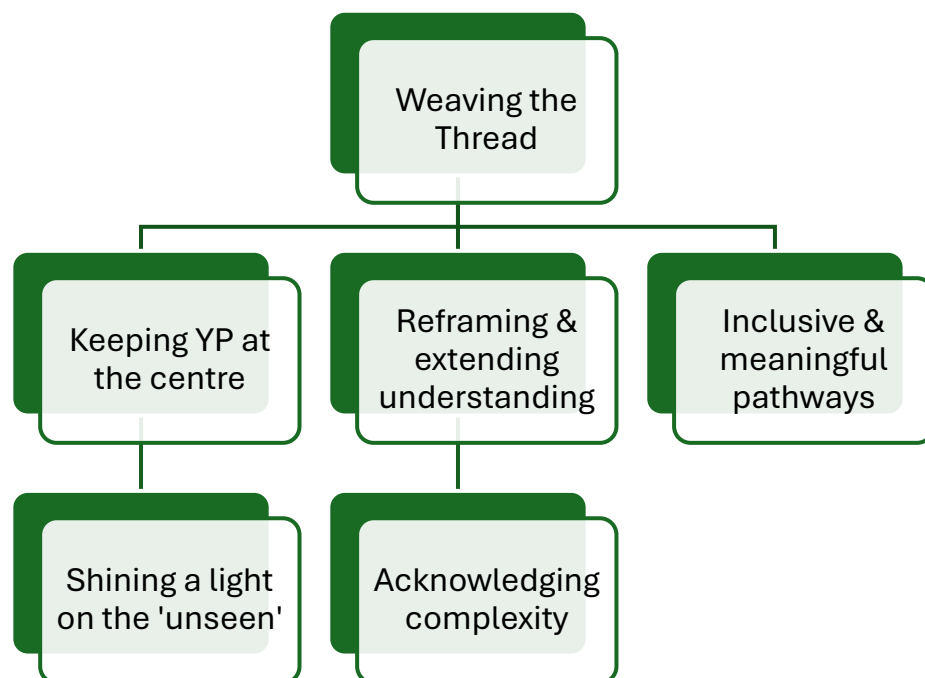
Figure 11. Thematic Map Generated from Data Analysis



3.9 Overview of Exploration of Themes

Participants shared their views, experiences and constructions of YP-NEET and how they perceive their role with this cohort. Analysis of the data using RTA led to three superordinate themes: **Weaving the Thread, We Need Change** and **Making a Meaningful Impact/Adding Value**. These will be discussed alongside related subordinate themes below. Additional supporting quotes for each theme can be found in appendix K.

Superordinate Theme 1: Weaving the Thread



This superordinate theme relates to constructs expressed by participants in relation to how the EP role operates across individual, group and systemic processes. In this way the EP role can offer a link between the different systems, services and individuals involved in work associated with YP at risk of NEET. This theme provides context for how EPs construct their role with YP at risk of NEET and the systems that operate around

them. Participants acknowledged the importance of EP practices to understand and address need, offering continuity of support to YP at risk of NEET and information sharing across professionals and services to access appropriate provision and manage key transition points:

“[...] perhaps supporting the transition, forging links with the right people, maybe, um, sharing information, whether that's through sort of, not just report writing, but but sharing what, what's been learnt about a pupil at school or whatever they've attended, what their needs are and making sure that that there's a a sort of thread running through, so they're not just entering a different system without a sort of background knowledge [...]” (Participant 2)

Participant responses reflected their embedded practice across the 0-25 age range, taking into account a long-term view of YPs' life outcomes from the early years, throughout mainstream education and into adulthood by adopting person-centred approaches to address identified needs of YP at risk of NEET. There was an appreciation of the benefits of working across a broad age range, which allowed for early intervention for prevention of NEET in support of both YP and parents. This demonstrates a unique aspect of the EP role, which is not reflected in other professions. In this way, participants expressed the potential for EPs to offer intervention and support at all stages of a YPs' development with potential for improved outcomes and reduction of risk factors:

“I think the role of the EP in the early years does help the NEET cause because you're getting parents on board early on you're identifying need early and you can really change the way by understanding need early, they're in the correct setting, hopefully you've got parents that, you know, it all makes a difference and I think because we've got that capacity to go down to the littlies that makes a big difference for everything.” (Participant 3)

“I think [...] it starts in primary school, thinking about what young people do want from their education or for the future.” (Participant 6)

Participants noted that the EP role and its impact could reach across systems and time. Inherent in this was a long-term view of improved life outcomes that may operate contrary to dominant narratives of a focus on engagement in school-based education as the ultimate goal. This expression of a more expansive view embraces a wider stance considering a YP's whole life trajectory and what might be meaningful for the individual. In turn, this creates meaning for the EP in their role:

"I think if sometimes we...I, I feel like when I've reflected on, on support I've given before with kind of all the focus is how do we get this young person in school, especially if they're at the older, the latter ages at secondary, it's not actually just about getting them back in school at this point, it's we have to look further into the future because just getting them into school and getting their bum on a seat in school for the next six months, like, what does that mean, really for their long-term outcomes?" (Participant 5)

"I think for me, the two things that drive the work and the motivation to support children that are NEET or reduce the chance of them becoming NEET or things like that, for me, it's like the longer term factors you know, like wanting children and young people to have like an amazing quality of life and like a job that they love and with all the skills that they develop as part of doing, you know, an apprenticeship or college or school or university, whatever it is that they want, um, and to like build an amazing life for themselves, I guess." (Participant 6)

Participant contributions suggested that key to offering appropriate intervention and support for YP at risk of NEET was EP knowledge of external services that could contribute to meeting diverse need.

"[...] it's really important to know what else is out there to support our young people [...]" (Participant 4)

There was an acknowledgement of the importance of attaining this knowledge, whilst recognising that this is an evolving landscape that can be challenging to navigate. This can create challenges for continuity of provision and effective information sharing across services where a multitude of EET pathways could be accessed.

“Yeah, [...] I'm still very aware that there's various kind of organisations that works post 16 you know, and I know the names but do I really know what they do always? And I'm just sort of relying on the fact they say Careers Wales know what those things are, or the school knows what those things are. But also knowing, you know, I might know that oh that one's mainly employment based and that one's mainly training based, but actually knowing what flexibility they have would be useful.” (Participant 1)

EP responses indicated that their positioning within systems added value to current and future provision for YP at risk of NEET, whilst acknowledging areas for growth and development in knowledge of post-16 services and what they could offer.

Subordinate theme 1: Keeping Young People at the centre

Elevating the voice and needs of YP at risk of NEET was expressed as a key component of the EP role. There was a recognition of the multiple risk factors YP might experience, and that EPs held relevant knowledge and understanding of these to manage the complexity of need:

“...as EPs, we know that there's a huge amount of reasons why a young person might not be engaging in education, employment or training.” (Participant 5)

In utilising this knowledge, participants shared that their role can sometimes be to offer a reframe of YPs' individual differences and how these might be expressed and viewed in an educational setting. This acknowledges that mainstream education can be a challenging environment for some YP:

“Yeah, and an appreciation, I guess that, that young person's strengths possibly aren't shown in an educational setting.” (Participant 1)

EPs recognised the importance of relationships as a foundational step towards accessing educational opportunities, centring the needs of the YP over goals directed by a given system. There was an acknowledgement that relationships were a key factor

for educational engagement and skill development within the setting. The EP role can offer alternative perspectives and insights via a psychological lens, which acknowledges relational-based approaches as a path to educational engagement:

“So instead of thinking, oh, this is what you need for college, let's focus on that, it's more like, well, this is where you're at, let's build a relationship, so then we can develop those skills. So often, putting in very, very early building blocks.”
(Participant 1)

Participants shared experiences of how they explored YPs' voice, which might include direct or systemic work with an individual pupil exploring aspirations to direct future support. Contributions by participants suggest that this has led to successful outcomes for the YP and that EPs are well-placed to facilitate and advocate for YPs voice:

“I feel like when I've had success, it's when actually we've had a conversation about what that means, so that young person and we, we've talked about, the, kind of, having that conversation even with the young person, have they even pictured what their future might be like and how we can get towards that and make some steps towards helping them to achieve that future...” (Participant 5)

Awareness of contracting work with YP and the importance of consent, particularly in a post-16 context, was highlighted as something that EPs held in regard and enacted in respect of the wishes of YP despite potential friction that may arise. This demonstrates an ethical approach in EP practice, valuing choice and autonomy of YP, even when this may be an unpopular stance:

“OK, well, what else are you going to do, well actually, there's nothing else we can do because they're say no and that's and they're and that's up to them past this point, and I know that can be quite contentious in, sort of, um, in, in PCRs sort of at year 11.” (Participant 4)

Contributions suggest that EPs value the voice of YP to inform meaningful intervention and support whilst employing an ethical approach.

Subordinate theme 2: Shining a light on the ‘unseen’

Discussion around meeting the needs of YP at risk of NEET recognised the importance of shining a light on a group of YP who might often be absent from educational settings, due to low attendance, or fall below the radar of priorities held within systems:

“...the NEET population and part of that is it's really unseen and these young people don't get seen because they're not anywhere.” (Participant 5)

“I find one of the biggest barriers that, you know, we try to talk about in planning meetings is like, finding out about these children like so much of our work relies on, you know, your ALNCO or whoever it is bringing this child to you. and if they're not high on your radar, like [P4] said, um, they fly under everyone's radar [...].” (Participant 6)

This is where the NEET label was acknowledged as holding the advantage of drawing attention to YP at risk of NEET to enable appropriate support and intervention:

“[...] perhaps the chance for intervention, so by giving that group a label, there's all the pros and cons of labelling, it sort of highlights them that this needs something.” (Participant 2)

Participant contributions demonstrated that they recognised the challenges that settings faced in highlighting YP at risk of NEET for EP support but identified that raising awareness of these YP was important in addressing needs to reduce the risk of NEET.

Participant contributions suggest that some of the challenges identifying YP for EP referral can be due to existing constructs of YP at risk of NEET held by settings and individuals, which can influence if support is sought:

“I think there's a lot, perhaps, who, who never see an EP, who will go on to be at risk of NEET, particularly if they don't attend school very much and they're not causing a huge problem at school other pupils will be prioritised.” (Participant 2)

Participants recognised that this relies upon professionals working directly with YP at risk of NEET to identify and refer YP to EP services to access targeted support. It was

acknowledged that this relies upon how YP at risk of NEET are constructed by professionals, the priorities of the system, existing relationships between services and knowledge of the EP role and remit. Independently or collectively, these factors could influence whether a YP might be considered for referral to an EP. In this sense, EPs are reliant upon settings to recognise and prioritise YP at risk of NEET as a precursor to EP involvement:

“...a common theme actually was that PRUs don't call upon EP support very much at all.” (Participant 1)

“...pupils who were perhaps rated red, they weren't necessarily the pupils who the schools would want to refer to us so the the issue would be well we're saying these pupils are a cause for concern, the school would often say oh yes, they are but we're doing this, that and the other we don't need EP involvement.” (Participant 2)

Whilst participant EPs recognised the risk factors associated with YP at risk of NEET and utilised this terminology, there was a suggestion that this may not be embedded into the communication of YPs' need from settings. There was a sense that professionals working directly with YP might lack appropriate knowledge and awareness of YP at risk of NEET. This could potentially contribute to this cohort of YP remaining unseen:

“Um, it's sometimes knowing who they are because you you don't they when you get sort of asked to work with a pupil they don't say oh could you work with this pupil because they're at risk of being NEET, I mean, that's rare [...]” (Participant 2)

Some discussion was held around how EPs may be positioned as an advocate for YP at risk of NEET to raise their profile through gentle challenge. Participants demonstrated an understanding of the statutory responsibilities of schools to support YPs' access to education and that EPs can enact this within their role:

“I think a really key role for us in consultation, if we get that far, is the one of critical friend like about the responsibility of the school and how we can do this meaningfully.” (Participant 6)

Participant contributions indicate the importance of the EP role in raising awareness of YP at risk of NEET within systems which continue to appear to miss YP whose needs may be misaligned with the priorities of the educational system.

Subordinate theme 3: Reframing and extending understanding

Participants discussed the complex needs experienced by YP at risk of NEET and how these can present challenges to access education. Participant contributions demonstrated a strong attribution to supporting increased understanding of YPs’ needs for professionals working directly with YP to enable positive change:

“Just sort of like shifting understanding and building what on what's already there.” (Participant 1)

“I guess it's helping them to understand what their needs are so that the provision that they're offering, which is fantastic, can just be tweaked accordingly to what might be helpful for them” (Participant 3)

Participants described how reframing understanding and shifting narratives can drive change in practice through implementation of psychology and psychoeducation. Expanding understanding of YP through a psychological lens was seen as a method to change attitudes and develop future practice of professionals. EPs were positioned as having access to key knowledge and skills to increase the capacity of others to understand the needs of YP at risk of NEET. Contributions suggested that this was strongly aligned with the construct of the EP role in support of YP at risk of NEET:

“[...] so it might look like what they're doing is fun, but you can say, well, actually this is the psychological role it's fulfilling for that child and then the next steps part of it, this is what you're doing and if you did this as well, that will take it that bit further.” (Participant 1)

“I think like some of the attachment work we've done, sort of not an individual child level, but at a training level um has really helped perhaps shift perspectives and lead to perhaps a lesser judgemental type approach and more understanding and knowing where some of the behaviours might come from helps people to perhaps be more empathic and kind rather than sort of attaching very negative labels when they're seeing certain behaviours.” (Participant 2)

Discussion was held around how this reframing and extension of understanding was mobilised in EP practice. One method of reframing shared was the adoption of a strength-based approach, recognising and building upon existing skills held by YP:

“Yes, I know there's this great big heap of problems, but what's going well? Where are this young person's strengths? Where are they showing they do have social skills, where they do have emotional literacy to give us a hint of where they're at.” (Participant 1)

This theme explored how EP place themselves in reframing and expanding understanding of YP to offer alternative ways of working to extend the support that is already in place within settings.

Subordinate theme 4: Acknowledging complexity

This theme explores the complexity that is inherent in NEET terminology and how this can impact the framing of YP at risk of NEET in educational settings. There is an acknowledgement that the NEET label can create challenge identifying YP at risk of NEET and, therefore, lead to a lack of intervention. Whilst there was a general acceptance that the NEET label could be a useful term for identifying YP in need of additional support, the lack of clarity and specificity regarding the NEET label created its own challenges in providing targeted support. Participant contributions recognise that the NEET term minimises the complexity of YPs experiences, acting as a potential barrier to intervention:

“...it's a measurement that the government uses, isn't it, to measure these amount of young people, however, it's just that the broad concept of it is almost too broad. Sometimes it keeps track of the numbers, but it doesn't tell us much.” (Participant 5)

“Yeah, it minimises the challenges and barriers that these children young people have, it's so complex that to put them under NEET, um, seems a bit of a barrier in itself, I think” (Participant 3)

Further limitations of the NEET label were identified as a barrier in discerning the nuance associated with YPs choices and experiences at a pivotal juncture of adolescence and adulthood, such as preparation for transition into post-16 or post-18 services, and how this might relate to NEET status. Participants demonstrated an awareness of the spectrum of experiences available to YP and how this can be problematic in providing meaningful and targeted support for YP when NEET terminology lacks specificity:

“[...] would that then encompass the young children that just don't know where they wanna go. They just, they just don't know...because there's no, because young like 16 and or, you know, 14, 15, 16 is a really young age to know what you want to do for the rest of your life.” (Participant 4)

“I don't know whether the NEET figures takes like if you're sort of having having a year out to travel or things like that is, if that's counted in the NEET, maybe if you've got like a deferred place at college or something university. That's not NEET, but I'm just thinking there could be not so negative reasons, it could be they're just delaying things, but they fully intend to engage in more education or whatever.” (Participant 2)

Participants expressed a shared view of the complexity of the NEET term and its limitations in providing an effective tool to identify and direct support effectively in support of YP.

Subordinate theme 5: Inclusive and meaningful pathways

This subordinate theme is relevant to all three of the superordinate themes but will be explored within this section. Participants shared the importance of YP gaining access to an education that was meaningful to them and aligned with their goals and values.

Shared views demonstrated an awareness of the friction that may occur between the demands and expectations of school systems and the individual needs of YP. This exhibited adoption and application of an ecosystemic lens within the EP role:

“I mean in terms of the pupils themselves, I suppose the challenges could be school systems, not necessarily fit for their needs.” (Participant 2)

A notion was shared regarding the limitations of current curriculum offers within mainstream and alternative education, which can be aimed at meeting wider systemic goals related to traditional academic routes, rather than implementing a diverse curriculum offer that could protect against YPs disengagement from education:

“Um, so I I think the curriculum is is a huge barrier to to to many learners and if we had more of a college offer pre 16, we'd hook in a lot more for their strengths. (Participant 3)

“What I find is that if the curriculum offer doesn't meet a lot of individual needs and that that often is, maybe some of those NEET learners, that...as much as the curriculum reforms says it's different, in reality um, there's still quite an academic offer [...]” (Participant 3)

Participants' own values held in relation to EET were embedded within the goals shared to facilitate YPs' access to educational pathways through advocating adoption of inclusive practices within settings. This positioned EPs as possessing expansive views of an education offer that could embrace diverse approaches to meet YPs needs, whilst fulfilling curriculum goals. Integration of flexible approaches to meet YPs' varied

educational needs through curriculum adaptations were seen as positive steps forward to inclusion:

“[...] some of the PRUs that I’ve worked for example like they have a bit more of a vibrant vocational offer to fill up a timetable whilst a child is school age and I just think that, um, blended approach is so much more helpful and accessible for a child that, that was stepping into that space after school.” (Participant 6)

Participants positioned the EP as a facilitator for inclusive practices to support increased engagement in education by offering settings methods to adapt provision to meet YPs needs:

“[...] understanding needs to afford the the correct tweaking of of provision I think is is the angle we can come in.” (Participant 3)

“[...] some alternatives can be small groups within school and then some completely alternative providers...alternative settings outside of the school.” (Participant 5)

Participants posited that adoption of alternative perspectives and constructs of education, which fall outside of traditional views, could offer a pathway to facilitating and embedding alternative practices to support YPs attribution of meaning to their educational experiences. Participants expressed confidence in meaningful change for YP when alternative approaches to education could be accessed, positioning the EP role as an advocate for these changes:

‘[...] so if we're able to adjust that belief, although it's quite a core belief about inclusion I think, and about education, it's obviously very hard to shift, but, um, mindset on how we look at these alternatives is really, really important.’ (Participant 6)

“[...] if we could just put them on a, on a beauty course or a construction course or something that means something to them...um...we could absolutely engage them in their interests and get them back into education.” (Participant 5)

Whilst some YP gain access to bespoke education, challenges associated with accessing alternative education pathways were discussed. This demonstrated an awareness of services available within LAs and employment of critical appraisal of systems to identify gap in provision for some YP. Views expressed in relation to this identify a need for wider inclusion in programs that create meaning for YP in building future aspiration and relevant workplace experience, which was highly valued by participants to encourage engagement in education:

“[...] where, what is available for our young people, what are the other destinations that could best support them, and I think that's really, really important to know because everyone is different, and success looks different to everyone, success is a very broad term as well, because, you know, success is, like you said, looks very different for one pupil who might be getting all A stars and A's, and for another person it could be sort of just actually engaging in something that they love in terms of [...], a work or training program that's not education based.” (Participant 4)

Participants noted that a lack of appropriate provision can reinforce a pejorative narrative of low aspiration for YP at risk of NEET and counter EP approaches to accessing a meaningful pathway for YP, potentially placing them at a higher risk of NEET:

“...is that sort of putting them more at risk of becoming because you know, if we took that extra time to do that work, then...we've got more chance of success if it is, if it's not sort of rushed through.” (Participant 4)

“But it does feel that they're sort of very entry level courses, it's almost feel so much like it's for children who have failed at secondary.” (Participant 1)

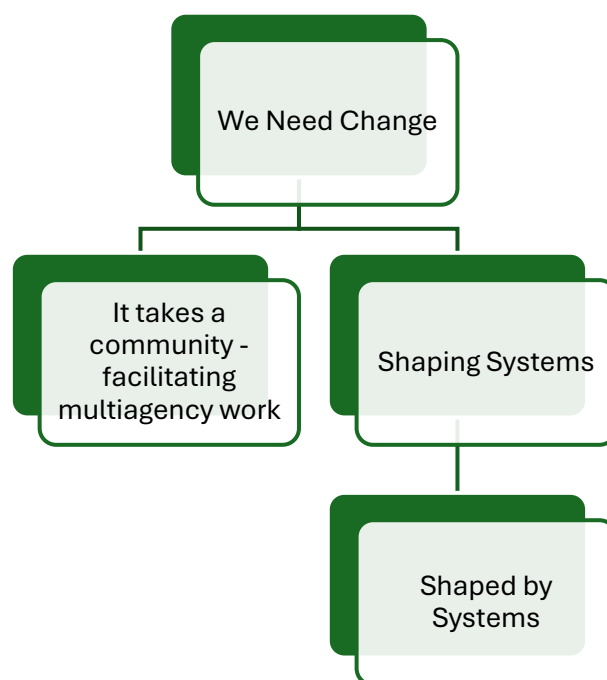
Further to this, participants felt that lack of appropriate provision can act as a barrier to YPs' engagement in EET, impacting on the potential for EPs to enact change that aligns with YPs identified needs:

“...still we hit a brick wall with we can't, if we, we can't get this young person to engage in something that they want to do.” (Participant 5)

Contributions suggest that participants value the role of the EP in facilitating meaningful employment, education and training (EET) pathways for YP working at an individual and systemic level. EPs positioned themselves as a key contributor in the process of identifying and advocating for meaningful educational pathways in which they can find enjoyment:

“I feel like my biggest contribution is that secondary school age where we're thinking about how we can get young people to have an education that means something to them that they can access, that they can leave with something that means something to them.” (Participant 5)

Superordinate Theme 2: We Need Change



This theme explores participant contributions related to systems that influence the potential to support YP at risk of NEET and how the EP role might be facilitated or restricted by processes and services in place. Identified barriers to supporting YP to access education were discussed, such as funding and systemic limitations:

“But the barrier to that is is the funding, because local authority Welsh Government, is two provisions, post 16 FE is Welsh government at the moment and it's even though it's the same money, it's not the same money because it's different systems and processes to allocate that fund.” (Participant 3)

Participant reflections shared that sometimes opportunity for change is driven by WG and LA priorities, which provide opportunities for EP services to work collectively to make changes in support of these, ultimately benefitting the outcomes of YP at risk of NEET:

“...from the local authority's perspective, their driving would be the attendance...kind of, of secondary schools like that's a massive driver in, in the local authority I work with, they want, you know, it, the, the government are asking questions about why attendance is going down, um, that's driving some of the system around to say that actually we need to all be doing something about this.” (Participant 5)

Underlying these reflections is a desire for participant EPs to see and implement change to improve outcomes for YP. Contributions indicate a shared view of a need for future adaptations to available provision to meet YPs need, which can be limited in current offers available within LAs:

“I just think we just don't have enough options sometimes.” (Participant 5)

The limitation and barriers to accessing appropriate provision for YP demonstrated the tensions that can exist between identification of need and effective intervention.

Contributions reflect a discord held between participants' construct of the EP role to identify and meet the needs of YP and the ability to promote change for YP at risk of NEET within existing systems and programs:

“Yeah, that that eternal problem isn't there of we can be as person centred as we like, but ultimately, we're still trying to find the pigeonhole it can feel to slot this, this young person into.” (Participant 1)

Whilst participants demonstrated a recognition of the need for change and a desire to enact this, they also acknowledged that the EP role is bound by the systems that they operate within.

Subordinate theme 6: “It takes a community” – facilitating multi-agency work

Participants demonstrated awareness of their own role and remit as an EP as well as that of others, reflecting the importance of multi-agency links. Relationships with professionals and services were considered as key to supporting improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET. Value was placed upon the role of professionals and services and what they can offer YP at risk of NEET, placing the EP in a facilitating role:

“I think it's just about appreciating it as a team that is required in order to do that, with the skills from all and the relationships that you build with that child and that family and that sometimes it's not us that's the main player.” (Participant 3)

“I feel our college is great you know the staff are just brilliant at coming to planning meetings and being really positive about what they offer and what they can do, or what adaptations and etcetera.” (Participant 1)

There was an appreciation of the contribution of others who offer daily support for YP to engage in EET. Responses suggest that EPs can offer a central role in bringing professionals and services together to provide targeted intervention, whilst allowing space for other professionals to take the lead. Participants identified that the complexity of YPs needs require a ‘community’ to unpick needs to enable a holistic offer of support:

“It's almost sort of that old saying where it takes a community to raise a child, isn't it; is, it's really important and I think a key role of EPs is being that person who can bring everyone together and work systemically around the child, not just systemically in terms of the systems that are going on within the local authorities, but looking at that Bronfenbrenner model in terms of who is around the child and

who, rather than putting it all on school, all on families or you know, what can we do as a sort of community...around that young person to sort of because...‘cause everyone will have that...that bit of valuable input and I think if we work around the child more collectively, then no one feels that immense amount of pressure and the outcomes are going to be better for the child and young person effectively.” (Participant 4)

Participants recognised that they were not always best-placed to work directly with YP due to capacity or opportunity to build relationships with individual YP. In response to these views, participants identified the value EPs can offer at a systemic level to facilitate support for YP:

“There's no way I could do that and build that sort of, that capacity, so I think even though as much as I would love to, it is being that sort of systemic person that can bring all those community circles almost together to support the young person effectively.” (Participant 4)

There was an acknowledgement of the importance of a joint approach with services to support YP at risk of NEET, creating shared ownership and responsibility to support engagement in education. Facilitating and developing relationships with others supported this shared ownership of YP at risk of NEET with the view to instil change.

Participants recognised varied responses to this approach, which can be influenced by the values of the system, which can facilitate or obstruct pathways to change:

“It's, um, stimulating conversation in secondary schools of actually like this is on us, yes, we do have to get these young learners back in school...it's going two ways, some secondary schools are not, it's not being as accepted in the same way, but in some schools it really has changed the conversation of we're doing something about it.” (Participant 5)

“[...] if that's kind of not in the core values or running of the school, then it's really tricky to get people on board with this [...]”. (Participant 6)

There was a shared construct of the EP role as building links and forging relationships between mainstream and post-16 services to support collaborative working to target support for YP at risk of NEET:

*“...just to try and bring them into the opportunities that we offer for schools, so like bringing them into the secondary group consultation so that they start to be aware of, um, needs coming through and what might be helpful at the different levels so they can think about their provision as well as the school provision.”
(Participant 3)*

Additional consideration was given to facilitating positive relationships with parents to build trust and enhance engagement between school and family for collaborative approaches to address YPs needs. Participants noted that parents are a key component that can be missed in addressing the needs of YP at risk of NEET. Mediating development of positive home-school relationships and supporting families was seen as a role EPs could fulfil:

“[...] this year we have actually started some parent workshops as well, so again, recognizing that, you know, if they've got a young person that's not wanting to engage in school and can't, you know, school are doing what they are doing and actually there's still parents at home that are massively struggling.” (Participant 5)

“So they've got parental, um, parental consultations the parents can book on to, [...] I don't want to say this and sounds, sort of really negative towards school, but it's almost out of sight out of mind. Whether you're not getting those day-to-day difficulties that the child is presenting with, it's the parents and the parents are the ones that really need the support.” (Participant 4)

Contributions highlight the importance of EPs facilitating and mediating relationships to support collaborative routes to intervention and support for YP through adoption and implementation of a systemic lens.

Subordinate theme 7: Shaping systems

Discussion was held around development of new approaches and methods of working that have led to changes in practice within schools. Participants shared how identifying gaps in provision to support YP at risk of NEET inspired change and led to improved outcomes:

"[...] as an EPS, we've tried, so, well, we have done the last couple of years, in, we have an allocation model of supporting, um, our schools, we've allocated a pot, this is a designated pot only for young people that are struggling to attend school, so, it's kind of yes, you can't use this time for any other learner unless it's about struggling to attend. It kind of, and I think that separation of this is allocation for everyone, this is that they are thinking so much more and actually now the pot of the mainstream well, the larger part for the rest of the learners, they're using bits of it as well and actually it has, I feel like it's shifted the balance actually of recognizing how we can support schools and actually I feel it's increased our work, I would say, in a good way." (Participant 5)

Participant contributions demonstrate that EPs are active participants in building new systems of working to support the needs of YP, practitioners and services more widely. Participants frame the potential for the EP role to employ both tools of innovation and subsequent processes of evaluation of support to meet individual and local needs. Operating within this role also reflects how EP practice is influenced by LA priorities and processes but can also drive change for YP at risk of NEET:

"[...] it's building those systems that we've never worked in before looking at that extended age range, so it's almost like starting with a blank slate in terms of, like local authority and inclu...and us as an inclusion service as a whole team in terms of like what, what can we do, what do we need to do and what needs to happen to effectively work with this age range." (Participant 4)

"[...] some of the work of the EPS this year's looking at our provisions and whether they're fit for purpose to meet some of the learner's needs as well, especially those at risk of becoming NEET and whether they're quite working, um, in the way that we want to, so a lot of work behind the scenes to upskill and support the provisions that we do have to make sure that they are, you know,

they, they cost a lot of money and we want them to be working well so that that work needs to go on.” (Participant 5)

Confidence was expressed for the EP role to employ a range of skills in support of YP when considering novel ways of working. Embracing a systemic approach in support of YP was seen as key to meeting the growing population and complexity of need that participants were seeing in their current EP practice:

“There's a lot of young people that are struggling to attend school, we have to be systemic in order to be effective, so, we've delivered training to staff to try and help, um, increase their understanding of young people that are struggling to engage in school.” (Participant 5)

“[...] there is a lot more sort of systemic work rather than working with...the individual family or the individual young person, looking at OK, what services can we use to best support?” (Participant 4)

Responses demonstrate that the EP role is driven by a goal to improve outcomes for YP across educational settings, recognising that systemic work provides a greater reach to influence change.

Subordinate theme 8: Shaped by systems

Whilst innovative practices were discussed in support of YP at risk of NEET, participants demonstrated acknowledgement of the systems they operate within that determine the contribution and support that can be put in place. Priorities of school systems can conflict with meeting the needs of YP at risk of NEET:

“...you perhaps identify their needs, you can come up with things that perhaps they need, but then school systems that have limited capacity to provide that.” (Participant 2)

“I think it depends on your secondary school and what their particular difficulties are, so say for example if you've got a secondary school that's really struggling with, sort of behaviour needs, and sort of they are prioritising them, whether these children are actually in school, they're just struggling to be in school and actually they are the ones that often I find, get the focus rather than the ones that

are not attending because they are not causing the day-to-day sort of escalations that a school needs to be prioritising.” (Participant 4)

Additional challenges were highlighted in relation to difficulties for YP to access provision, due to set thresholds or gaps in available support mechanisms. Participants reflected the value of early intervention for improved outcomes for YP whilst recognising that they operate alongside systems with differing purpose and priorities, which may conflict with continuity of provision and their hopes for YP:

“...so you've got to wait until you've failed at this before you can then go on to that rather than them being diverted from the failure...earlier on.” (Participant 1)

“[...] when we recognize some learners with ALN would absolutely thrive on an apprenticeship type course and that that engagement in, in some form of employment as well, if it was, could, if it could be supported, but actually that they wouldn't have an IDP and no one would maintain that either, so that creates problems.” (Participant 5)

Whilst participants noted the importance of continuity of provision for YP, an awareness of reporting requirements set by WG and LA guidance identified a potential for YP to become lost at post-16 transition:

“[...] the college, there's no need to chase that up then, they look all sort of they, they look at the statistics in terms of feeding back to Welsh government, but there's no need to sort of provide extended support to get them back into anything. It's a little bit like you don't want to attend, you don't really have to.” (Participant 4)

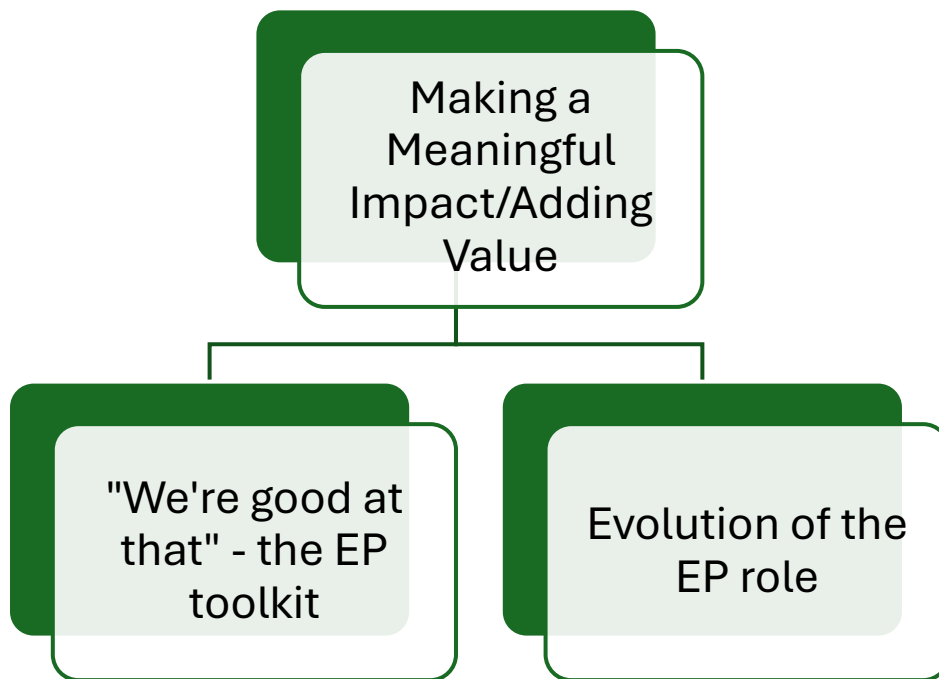
Despite acknowledged barriers and limitations of systems, participants noted that system priorities can also drive change leading to changes in how the work of EPs is constructed in LAs. These changes were viewed positively when aligned with associated values of the EP role in supporting YPs educational engagement:

“It's coming from that government system pressure, um, but the pressure is causing and creating good practice on the ground, so it is meaning that actually, you know, our, the higher up managers are allowing us to prioritize time for young

people, specifically around engagement in education and that's great.”
(Participant 5)

EPs acknowledge the strengths and limitations of the systems that they operate within, valuing their autonomy to advocate for access to education for all YP.

Superordinate Theme 3: Making a Meaningful Impact/Adding Value



Participants expressed views that demonstrated the importance of making a positive difference within their role by adding value and meaning to YPs educational experience and long-term life outcomes. Participants, in turn, found meaning themselves through this aspect of their practice:

“...if you can do something, you know, to intervene at that level, um, it could mean further down the line, 10, 20 years, you can change that trajectory.”
(Participant 2)

“I suppose for me it's them feeling like they can be the version of themselves that they want to be, whatever that could look like you know anything at all, but feeling like they have the chance at doing whatever they want.” (Participant 6)

Contributions which were offered demonstrated what was seen as a valuable contribution in the EP role. There was recognition for the varied and diverse role of the EP and how this can be operationalised to add value for individuals and systems. With many conflicting priorities of the EP role this provides some insight into what key contributions EPs value in support of YP at risk of NEET:

“I think that's a useful contribution to sort of shift that that understanding within schools.” (Participant 2)

“[...] with schools, it's much the same that we really try and recognize the systemic work and the value of that. There's a lot of young people that are struggling to attend school, we have to be systemic in order to be effective, so, we've delivered training to staff to try and help, um, increase their understanding of young people that are struggling to engage in school.” (Participant 5)

The flexibility and breadth of the EP role offers opportunities to engage in a bespoke offer that reaches across a range of systems. In this way EPs have the opportunity to enact change in a variety of spheres that can influence support and outcomes for YP at risk of NEET in diverse ways:

“Offering a bit more of a bespoke...I don't know, support offer to families, I guess, feels really important from, in my role now.” (Participant 6)

“I think because we've got that capacity to go down to the littlies that makes a big difference for everything.” (Participant 3)

Engagement of this perspective offers a hopeful mindset which does not remain limited to one cohort of YP:

“It is an advantage, yeah, because you can for those NEETs that did fall off and they're having babies now it's an opportunity to reframe and change the next generation's opportunities, isn't it, by getting that relationship early on and not having that fear of school.” (Participant 3)

Participants expressed feelings of frustration towards existing barriers to making meaningful change, suggesting dissonance between the hopes EPs hold for adding value within role and the influence of external factors:

“Sometimes it feels systems can be against you, like you know what they need but you know it's not really available, so yeah, it can feel frustrating sometimes.” (Participant 2)

“There's that real sense of it having a timeline a deadline isn't there, particularly when, when it's, a kind of a year 11 you're thinking...urrgh, we've got very little time to make a difference.” (Participant 1)

Subordinate theme 9: “We’re good at that” – The EP toolkit

Identification of the skills that an EP can bring to their role in support of YP at an individual, group or systemic level were highlighted within this subordinate theme. Contributions demonstrated a level of confidence expressed by participants within the EP role to implement their skillset and centre the voices of YP and families, offering a unique contribution of the EP role:

“I think we're really good at that, like, articulating everyone's view in a way that is accessible to everyone, um, with appropriate language and things like that, I think that's something that EPs are really fab at.” (Participant 6)

Participants discussed the complexity of YPs’ needs and how an EP can provide a psychological lens to unpick the complexity of need to further the understanding of individuals for those working with YP and to inform intervention. Engaging psychological knowledge and skills was positioned as a key component of the EP role to direct resource and support, which could be offered through consultation, formulation and understanding developmental pathways. There was recognition that this would be offered from a systemic standpoint:

“We [...] might be just be, as you said before [P1] about kind of assimilating and pulling out and reflecting and I think you said as well. [P2], about, [...] putting that formulation, together about picking all those things together and maybe that's what our role...is, could be rather than more of the direct work. (Participant 3)

“So I suppose the work then is kind of helping, not so much working with the young person it's working with the adults who are working with them to help them understand what sort of developmental strand is missing and what kind of level they're at and what kind of things might work to develop those skills.” (Participant 1)

The role of the EP was discussed in relation to research and training to drive systemic change. In this way participant contributions expressed a unique offer available through the existing skillset of the EP profession. Participants recognised that these skills could be implemented to benefit current and future practice with YP at risk of NEET:

“I guess as EPs leading that sort of research and project and and training I guess that's a unique contribution, isn't it, that we've got the research skills around that to not only deliver, but to is this working or not, could we support you with systemic change in your school, so I think there's lots of things that we can bring to the NEET table, so to speak.” (Participant 3)

“we're really pushing for...it's really group supervision, but we're just calling it reflective spaces for key staff, you know to really often blocked care or compassion fatigue, so we can continue to think about the child's needs and our expectations of them and how we manage and things like that and so everyone feels like they have a space to be heard.” (Participant 6)

Participants demonstrated empathy and understanding for the experiences of those supporting YP at risk of NEET and the difficulties and challenges that they might face due to the complex needs of this cohort. There was a recognition for the value of both offering and building empathy in existing support systems to promote collaborative working, positive relationships and improved outcomes for YP:

“[...] we do need to sort of need to build the capacity with parents to help them feel confident in supporting because it's really difficult because they've got that

personal and that sort of that heart pull in terms of this is my child I want the best for them, but I don't know what to do.” (Participant 4)

“[...] especially if...say for example, it is the child that is causing or is very distressed in school and they are being excluded, for example, if there's a level of burnout there for like how adults feel about that child, if we're not able to get in there and like, build empathy, or understanding or adults motivation to support that child, then they're not going to be able to do it either, so there's so many levels to it.” (Participant 6)

EPs can add value in supporting YP at risk of NEET and the systems that operate around them. The skillset available within the profession provides a unique offer, which can benefit YP at risk of NEET.

Subordinate theme 10: Evolution of the EP Role

This theme explores how the EP role has evolved and continues to evolve its practices within post-16 settings and within specialist EP roles. Whilst, historically, EPs may not have worked extensively with post-16 there was acknowledgement that this was an evolving landscape:

“I think my current my current role and and perhaps amongst EPs more widely is tended to have very little to do with post-16, and I think that's probably changing in a good way.” (Participant 2)

Participants recognised that the EP role was continuing to develop in establishing itself within post-16 settings, working with a range of services:

“it's perhaps making those links with the services that will support them beyond 16, beyond school and being able to work with them, I think that's sort of an emerging area for our role.” (Participant 2)

Participants identified that EP involvement with LA processes to support continuity of provision for YP at key transition points added meaningful input to reduce the risk of NEET. The EP role formed part of a multi-agency approach within established and developing LA practices taking a systemic stance:

“I think a key focus for our local authority has been those transitions ensuring that everyone, every young person, so that's what the [name of multi-agency meeting] [...] it looks at every single young person and what we can do to support and how we can use all the teams within the local authority, not just education, to make that transition to adulthood, to post 16 as effective as it can be for a young person.” (Participant 4)

Participants acknowledged that an assignment leading to a specialist EP role allowed time and space to engage with a range of individuals, systems and projects. This indicated that there is less scope to engage in these activities without a designated allocation of time to do so:

“my role now is slightly different in the specialist role I'm in now, um, cause although it is an EP role, I guess a wee bit more unique that...a lot of what I'm doing now is like getting alongside parents.” (Participant 6)

“I do consultations with college, but I don't work directly with many young people at, at that level.” (Participant 4)

Operating within the specialist EP roles presented opportunities for growth, expansion of knowledge and experience, which led to a change of perspective. This provides insight into the developing and evolving role of the EP, which can be directed towards WG and LA priorities alongside identified needs of YP. The ability to work with individuals and systems highlights the broad influence of the EP role:

“I think since the start of this academic year, my view on how to support NEET has changed just because I've been given this little bit of time for post 16.” (Participant 3)

Participant contributions demonstrated an openness to embracing a range of opportunities within post-16 to support YP, which included personal development of knowledge and skill in navigating new territory.

3.10 Discussion

This research study aimed to explore the following RQs to explore how EPs in Wales construct their role working with YP at risk of NEET.

1. What are EP perspectives and understanding of YP at risk of NEET?
2. How do EPs construct their role working with young people at risk of NEET?

This section will discuss the findings of this research and how this relates to existing research literature explored in Part One. It will also consider implications for EP practice, strengths and limitations of the research and recommendations for further research.

3.10.1 What are EP perspectives and understanding of YP at risk of NEET?

As illustrated in previous research studies, participants in this study recognised that YP at risk of NEET can experience a range of risk factors (Feng et al., 2015; Gladwell et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2021; Rahmani et al., 2024). Participants recognised that YP can experience challenges accessing mainstream educational environments and become lost in the system through physical absence as *‘they fly under everyone’s radar’* because *‘they’re not causing a huge problem at school’*. Pejorative constructs of NEET held within socio-political discourse could act as a contributing factor to an unseen cohort of YP at risk of NEET (Cornish, 2018). Consequently, EP access and ability to contract work with these YP may be limited due to low engagement or attendance, which has previously been highlighted as a barrier experienced by professionals working

with this cohort (Brown, 2021). In alignment with findings from Arnold & Baker (2012), this offers support for implementation of early intervention to address YPs' needs to maintain educational engagement to reduce the risk of NEET. To address identified barriers, introduction of measures to raise the profile of YP disengaged from education via a bounded time allocation model could be beneficial.

Participants' understanding of risk factors, YPs' experience in education and the barriers that can exist in gaining identification, intervention and support contributed to their practice of raising the profile of these individual YP. Participants highly valued implementation of psychology to deepen and expand professionals' understanding of YP to address individual need, identified as a unique contribution of EPs (Garrett, 2022). Participant contributions suggested an underlying expression of hope and potential for change for YPs' improved long-term life outcomes when offered appropriate intervention. Furthermore, contributions suggest that EPs advocate for a strength-based approach, which appears important for supporting YP facing multiple barriers to EET.

Participant contributions demonstrated alignment with existing literature associated with NEET terminology. There was recognition for the importance of a NEET label to raise the profile of YP at risk of NEET, whilst acknowledging its limitation in identifying YP who may be in need of targeted support and intervention (Gladwell et al., 2022). Associated difficulties with the lack of clarity and specificity of the NEET label were identified as contributing factors towards YP being unseen. This suggests that the ambiguity of NEET as a descriptor continues to present a barrier for both YP and

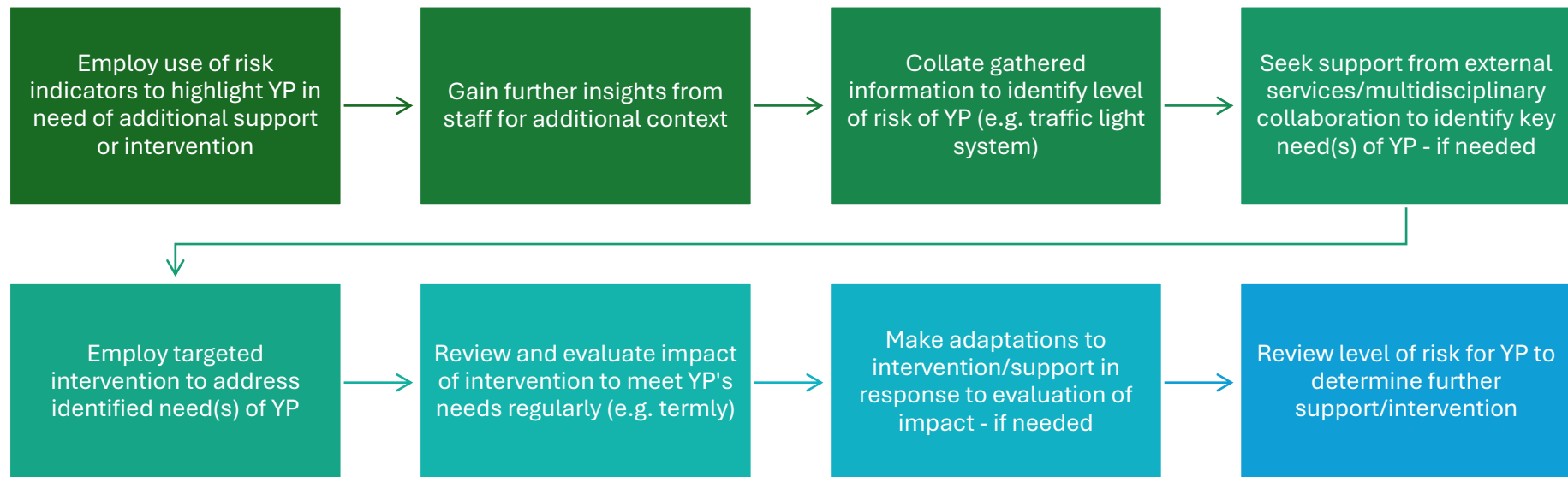
professionals (Feng et al., 2015). Despite demonstrating confidence in identifying and addressing complex needs of YP, EPs still expressed some uncertainty about the specific boundaries for identifying those at risk of NEET:

“[...] would that then encompass the young children that just don't know where they wanna go.” (Participant 4)

Consequently, this can create a barrier to the early identification and intervention for some YP, underscoring the value of contextual insights from staff observations and multidisciplinary collaboration with EPs (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022). Participants also noted the potential misalignment between their own understanding of YP at risk of NEET and that of professionals in direct contact with YP. This can further exacerbate identification and subsequent referral for EP support. This offers justification for adoption of increased clarity of NEET terminology to more accurately identify YP at risk of NEET (Lőrinc et al., 2020; Serracant, 2014). Evaluation of current LA early risk indicators to highlight YP at risk of NEET could provide an enhanced contribution in development of robust identification processes alongside increased clarity. However, this may conflict with current WG identification and reporting procedures in place for YP-NEET. As a result, changes to the existing parameters of NEET terminology may need to be directed from WG.

A flowchart exploring a potential model of identification to employ early intervention for YP at risk of NEET is illustrated below (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Flow chart for early identification and intervention for YP at risk of NEET



3.11 How do EPs construct their role working with young people at risk of NEET?

3.11.1 Promoting Educational Engagement

Existing research cites that promoting educational engagement increases school attendance and attainment, improving YPs long term outcomes and protecting from risk of NEET (Connell et al., 2024; Feng et al., 2015; Lőrinc et al., 2020). Adopting inclusive practices within settings offers a tool for early intervention, promoting a greater sense of school belonging to support engagement in education (Cornish, 2018; Parker et al., 2022) The importance of fostering inclusive education practices and meaningful pathways for YP were strongly communicated by participants, indicating that this was seen as a core aspect of the EP role. This was reflected through a range of methods and practices employed by participants, which will be explored below.

Morris & Atkinson's (2018) findings highlighted a key contribution of the EP role was offered through application of psychology. This was reflected by EPs in this study who positioned themselves as a key contributor in offering psychological input to further understand and address YPs' needs from an individual to systemic level. The approaches adopted by EPs included actively seeking pupil voice to determine YPs' goals and aspirations, implementing a strength-based approach in collaboration with staff, and prioritizing empathy and understanding of YPs' experiences. These practices align with findings in the literature, citing EPs' integration of psychology to embed person-centred, strength-based approaches as key to identifying underlying needs to promote engagement and wellbeing (Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022; Owen et al., 2024). Participant responses reflected application of principles of positive psychology within

their practice (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This centres approaches built upon exhibited strengths of a YP to promote wellbeing, a focus on promoting positive relationships and adding meaning and purpose to a life aligned with one's own values:

“Yes, I know there's this great big heap of problems, but what's going well? Where are this young person's strengths? (Participant 1)

EPs recognised an important aspect of their role was to facilitate meaningful connections between YPs' interests, goals and aspirations and educational experiences. Based on their contributions, participants suggest that EPs are well-positioned to recommend and utilise bespoke approaches in supporting the individual needs of YP at risk of NEET.

Furthermore, the implementation of psychological principles was positioned as a method to reframe and expand the understanding of YPs' complex needs, aiming to shift professionals' attitudes and practices. Integrating psychology was also cited by participants as a method to advocate for new ways of working by 'tweaking' provision and shifting mindset by exploring and expanding held constructs of education. This could be communicated through consultation held in an educational setting or via a training offer. Sharing psychology was seen as a unique contribution of EPs to build the capacity of those working with YP at risk of NEET.

Brown et al.'s (2022) five mechanisms for tackling NEET risk emphasise the importance of positive relationships in their initial stages (1 and 2), positioning a YP's emotional well-being and sense of safety as central to their engagement in learning. Participants embraced integration of psycho-social approaches within EP practice to build a

foundation towards educational engagement, advocating for positive relationships between YP and staff:

“this is where you're at, let's build a relationship, so then we can develop those skills.”
(Participant 1)

Participants acknowledged systemic factors contributing to risk of NEET such as lack of diversity and flexibility in the curriculum that aligns with YPs' values and interests, and absence of attributed meaning to employment pathways through connection to the workplace. In recognition of this there was a strong sense from EPs of the importance of an engaging and '*vibrant*' curriculum offer that motivates YP, provides enjoyment and incorporates opportunities to succeed. The findings of Duffy & Elwood's (2013) study lend further support to this perspective, revealing that YP appreciated curriculum flexibility that included EET to promote greater educational engagement. Arguably, the new Curriculum for Wales offers increased commitment to blended approaches to learning in mainstream and AEP provisions through implementation of its four purposes, which embed values of life-long learning, meaningful employment, and healthy, fulfilling lives (Welsh Government, 2022a). However, due to its infancy it is not yet possible to evaluate its impact and integration into current education settings in meeting these goals.

In addition, EPs identified barriers related to the availability of suitable provision to meet YPs' needs, challenges with learner engagement, and a readiness or willingness to change from a pupil, staff and organisational perspective, which could potentially

increase the risk of NEET. In response to the identified difficulties, EPs could offer individual, group or whole school systemic work to evaluate and promote inclusive practices (Welsh Government, 2016; 2025b). Examples could include strategic support through policy development, such as relational and restorative behavioural approaches, action research to gather pupil voice to inform curriculum choice, or training to address identified areas of need within the school population. These findings relate to the diverse and varied EP skillset that can be utilised to support YP at risk of NEET, as explored in section 1.16 of the literature review.

In promotion of educational engagement, participants recognised that parents can be a key contributor to change for YP experiencing risk of NEET. This is supported by Ryan et al's (2019) findings, which demonstrate a strong correlation between YPs' perceived parental support and educational engagement. According to Bond, (2022), interrelated socio-economic factors can create disparities in parents' social and cultural capital, which in turn can affect how they navigate and participate in their children's education. Both the academic literature and EP participants acknowledged that parents can be '*massively struggling*' and be a missing component in the support and intervention for YP. Parental attitudes towards, and experiences with education have also been identified as a contributing factor to risk of NEET (Crowley et al., 2023). Drawing upon an eco-systemic framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), participants recognise the value of all individuals who operate around the YP in order to identify need and develop appropriate intervention. Upon recognising this gap, EP participants identified new ways of working, such as parent consultation and parent workshops to facilitate increased holistic support and opportunity for change. EPs recognised their contribution in building and

facilitating relationships between home and school by demonstrating empathy and understanding for the struggles that can be experienced both by staff and parents supporting YP at risk of NEET. Use of an empathic approach was cited in the literature as facilitative in building positive relationships between YP and staff (Avila & Rose, 2019; Beck, 2015; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Russell et al., 2010; Thompson, 2010). However, has not yet been attributed to the EP role in light of support for YP at risk of NEET. This may, therefore, offer helpful insight into effective practices in support of individuals and groups for this cohort of YP.

3.11.2 Adopting a Systemic Role

As identified in Morris & Atkinson's (2018) systematic literature review, findings recognise and support adoption of an eco-systemic approach within EP practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In sharing their experiences across individual, group, and systemic work, participants highlighted how the EP role is integrated across individual, family, school and LA systems allowing the opportunity to influence change in all spheres. This is a unique positioning of the EP profession, which was identified as part of EP practice reflected in the research study findings. However, due to a growing number of YP experiencing complex needs, participants recognised the value of developing and contributing to systemic approaches. Application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory offered EPs a framework to reflect upon the complex, interacting factors across systems that can influence risk of becoming NEET. Through recognition of existing gaps in provision, EPs shared development of new processes and practices within systems to address need within their services and LAs. These included introduction of reflective groups, parent workshops, multi-agency meetings,

consultation with FE colleges and transition support into post-16 settings. EP contributions reflected a motivation to create long-lasting change through development of robust processes that work within existing funding models. In this context, the EP role was valued in developing processes that align with the priorities of the local area. One such approach was the development of robust transition for all year 11 pupils via a multi-agency approach to identification of YP who would benefit from additional support to access post-16 pathways. Robust processes for transition into post-16 were identified as a key area of focus in NEET prevention in the reviewed literature, strengthening an argument for adoption of effective approaches to enable early intervention (Brown, 2021; Clarkson, 2018; Holliman et al., 2023; Morris, 2017).

Turner-Forbes (2017) acknowledged that EPs may lack access to appropriate resource within current service delivery models to support YP-NEET. Similarly, in recognition of the limited availability and capacity of EPs, participants emphasised the need for strategic integration of their role within systems to extend their influence in driving positive change. Consequently, EPs suggested that their expertise might be more effectively utilised by enhancing the capacity and skills of professionals who have ongoing contact with YP at risk of NEET, rather than working directly with all YP:

“There's no way I could do that and build that sort of, that capacity, so I think even though as much as I would love to, it is being that sort of systemic person that can bring all those community circles almost together to support the young person effectively.” (Participant 4)

In building the capacity of staff working with YP, EPs could offer support for relational approaches in support of positive student-teacher relationships to promote school belonging and engagement identified as a protective factor for YP at risk of NEET (Beck,

2015; Brown, 2021; Garrett, 2022; Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Owen et al., 2024). This also offers scope to address a lack of clear guidance in this area of knowledge and skills within policy guidance (Duffy & Elwood, 2013).

EPs stand in a unique position to employ a range of skills and knowledge in addressing the needs of YP at risk of NEET due to their positioning within LA systems (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). EPs positioning within LA structures and school systems can impact the power they have to inspire change. Participants showed engagement with a range of systemic approaches, such as, driving change within LA processes, evaluation of existing provisions and building capacity through training professionals who work directly with YP. In addition, there was recognition that EPs were active participants in *'building those systems'* in a new territory of post-16 practice, enabling effective support for YP at risk of NEET. However, as noted by Vukoja (2017), participants recognised that their role is bound by the systems they operate within, influenced by WG funding, LA and school priorities, which can lead to instability of available resource to meet need (Brown, 2021). Arnold & Baker (2012) cited the importance of early intervention to reduce or mitigate the risk of NEET. However, findings of this study suggest that the priorities of existing systems could conflict with addressing the needs of YP. Therefore, this could impede the implementation of early intervention strategies and access to necessary provision. As a result, EPs' experience working across systems within the LA could provide valuable insights into challenges and barriers that may increase the risk of NEET for YP. These could inform evaluative processes to shape future changes in LA and WG policies and practices. Such approaches could include implementation of

strategies to monitor and measure the efficacy of approaches to intervention to improve individual outcomes for YP.

3.11.3 Multidisciplinary Approach

Research indicates that more effective identification of YP at risk of NEET requires collaboration across different professions through a multidisciplinary approach (Brown, 2021; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Garrett, 2022; Holliman et al., 2023; Mallinson, 2009; Vukoja, 2017). Participant responses communicated that multidisciplinary work spanning pre- and post-16 settings was considered central to their role as an EP. EPs described themselves as weaving a *‘thread of understanding’* between services in support of the needs of YP. The EP role was positioned as offering continuity of support by sharing understanding of need and advocating for provision to meet those needs when YP move between systems. In this way, EP input can form part of effective information sharing processes, psychological input and targeted support; identified as an effective method of support at key transition points (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Mallinson, 2009). Furthermore, in support of transition, EPs shared their role of building links, acting as a *bridge* between mainstream and post-16 services through the offer of consultation and presence at multidisciplinary meetings:

“...just to try and bring them into the opportunities that we offer for schools, so like bringing them into the secondary group consultation.” (Participant 3)

Research findings suggest that EPs are building their knowledge and capacity to work with the FE sector to facilitate relationships with secondary school staff and contribute to processes in support of YP at risk of NEET, as recommended by Morris (2017).

However, participant contributions suggest that the EP post-16 offer may vary across LAs, resulting in variability of provision. Consequently, accessing opportunities to share

good practice in developing post-16 practices through specialist interest groups could offer a valued resource to EP practice.

EPs recognised the importance of a team approach in addressing the complex needs of YP at risk of NEET. Holliman et al. (2023) identified that effective multiagency working, facilitated by strong relationships built across settings and services, is an essential component of effective collaboration. Participant responses suggest that this was highly valued by EPs within their role. EPs shared how employing an ecosystemic approach can aid a community approach to supporting YP (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EPs recognised that, as part of their role, they could '*bring everyone together*' to effectively support YP, whilst acknowledging that they are not the '*main player*'. In this sense, EPs can encourage and create collaborative working processes which value the contributions of all and move away from hierarchical systems. Participant contributions demonstrated an understanding of available support offered via existing settings and services for YP. Through including and valuing contributions of everyone working alongside YP, EPs showed an awareness of the roles and remits of professionals and services in meeting their needs; noted by Brown (2021) as a facilitator for effective collaborative working.

In support of a multidisciplinary approach, Clarkson's (2018) research identified that EPs are well-placed to acquire and share knowledge of services to coordinate support for YP. Participants acknowledged that it was '*important to know*' the services that could support YPs' needs and shared their experiences working with services in support of YP at risk of NEET. EPs with dedicated roles in post-16 recognised that their awareness and

knowledge of services was directly linked to their assigned responsibilities and, therefore, continued to evolve. Despite acquired knowledge, participants recognised that this remained an area of growth and development for EP services due to the vast landscape of post-16 provision. Consequently, as highlighted through participant discussion, research and mapping of available provisions and services for YP at risk of NEET could address this knowledge gap.

3.11.4 Creating Change

Embracing a holistic perspective of the 0-25 age group, NEET and its risk factors were seen as relevant by participants across all developmental stages. Early intervention was acknowledged as essential, both for direct support to YP and for influencing surrounding systems and individuals to enable change (Arnold & Baker, 2012). A central theme evident in participants' descriptions of their EP role was the importance of achieving positive and lasting change for YP across their whole life trajectory.

Consideration was given to addressing YPs' current presenting needs whilst engaging a view towards long-term life outcomes. Holding both perspectives in mind can offer the opportunity for meaningful long-term outcomes for EET, health, wellbeing and active participation in communities. This aligns with the purpose and aims of WG policy to improve YPs' access to EET (for example, Welsh Government, 2022b). Consequently, the EP role offers scope to contribute towards the aims and objectives of WG policy.

Engaging in work towards provision of meaningful pathways for YP, EPs themselves acquired meaning for their own role. This was attributed to creating *shifts in understanding* through sharing psychology, systemic roles and facilitating shared

understanding of a YP's needs via consultation, reflective spaces and psychological formulation. EP motivation and drive to promote change for YP and systems was not highlighted within the literature reviewed in this research study. Consequently, this can offer insight into the perspectives and motivations of EPs within their role to drive practice in support of YP at risk of NEET. This highlights EPs as a valuable resource to promote positive change for this cohort of YP.

Clarkson (2018) and Brown (2021) highlight the importance of an advocate for the voice and needs of YP experiencing ALN and risk of NEET. Although EP contributions indicated a primary focus on working with adults supporting YP, EPs also demonstrated how their practices aimed to advocate for YPs' voice to support long-term outcomes, aligned with WG recommendations within the Youth Engagement Progression Framework (YEPF) (Welsh Government, 2022c). This was achieved through prioritising YPs' values and goals while upholding ethical practices that respected YPs' autonomy and choice, despite its potential conflict in accessing EET. In this respect, EPs demonstrated how they placed value upon the voice and experiences of the YP, which may become lost amongst the goals and priorities of settings, to embed support relevant to the individual. Therefore, promoting and embedding processes to value and capture YPs' voice in accessing EET through existing careers education could inform meaningful change for YP at risk of NEET, as modelled by Currie & Goodall (2009).

Participants acknowledged that although they feel that the EP role offers relevant support for YP at risk of NEET, this relies upon professionals recognising and highlighting YP to the EP. Constructs of the EP role, held by others, can influence how and what work

might be contracted. This could impact the scope of influence that EPs can enact with YP at risk of NEET. Turner-Forbes (2017) offers the view that the EP role is not yet established within post-16 and lacks robust systems for collaborative working and support. This may offer some understanding as to why the EP role might be unclear in post-16 settings, where staff may lack sufficient exposure and practical experience of working with EPs. In this respect, participants working to build links between pre and post-16 settings are offering valuable insights into the skills and knowledge that can be offered to staff and settings supporting YP at risk of NEET. To further establish the EP role within the post-16 sector, EP services could consider methods to offer clarity of the EP role and how this could add value to providers' current offer of support for YP (Morris, 2017; Vukoja, 2017). This could be further addressed through consideration of cohesive funding structures across pre and post-16 educational settings. Current funding streams differ between mainstream and post-16 settings. Mainstream funding is currently offered primarily through the LA Education Grant, whereas post-16 providers receive funding directly from WG (Champion, 2018; Welsh Government, 2018). This can create challenges for EP services to contract work in the post-16 sector in which there may not currently be established funding streams allocated to EPs. Consequently, addressing allocation of funding at WG and LA level could elevate the role and practice of EPs within post-16 services.

3.12 Implications for Practice

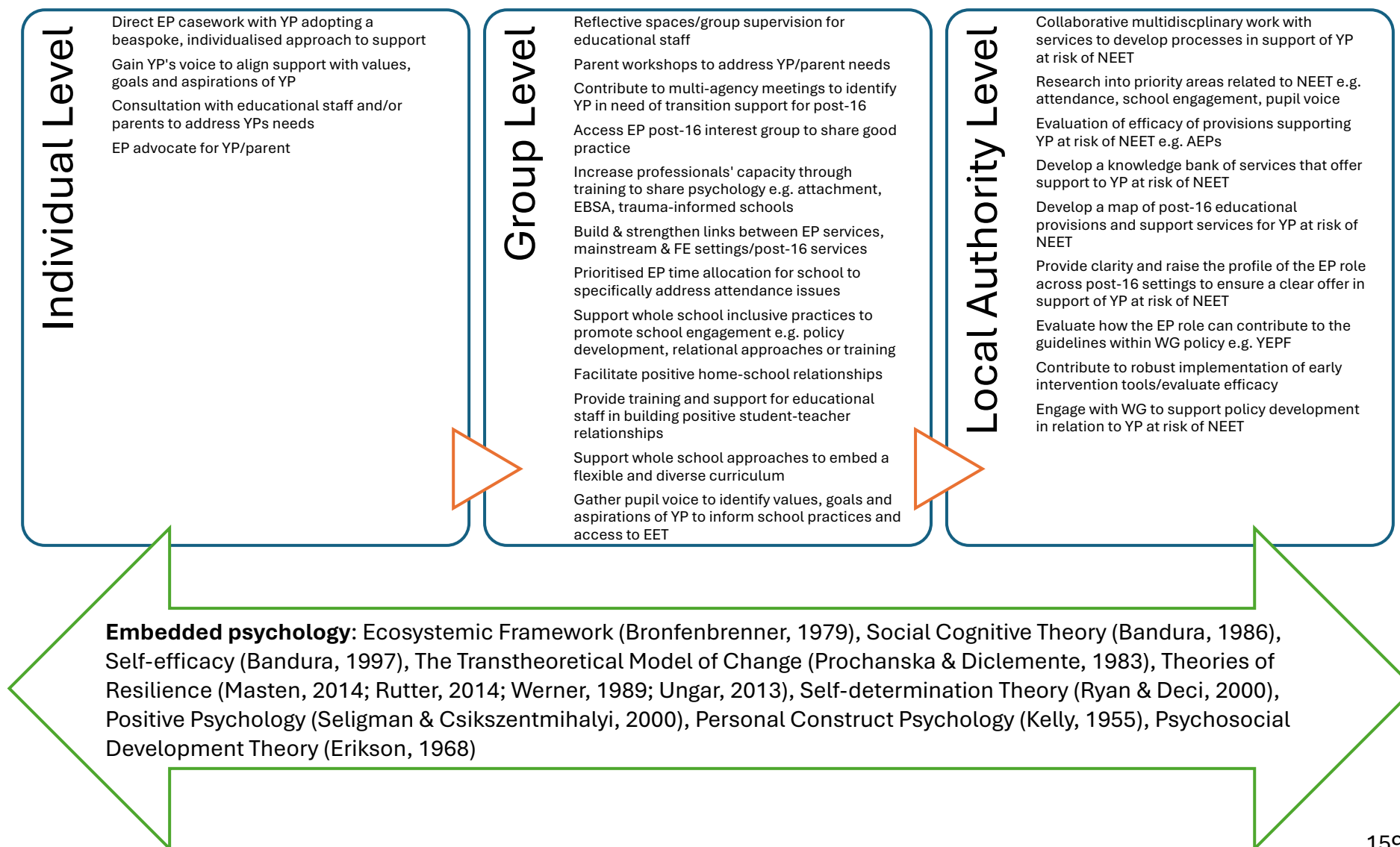
Findings from this research provide additional weighting towards the added value and contribution of the EP role in addressing the needs of YP at risk of NEET. Participants demonstrated key knowledge of child and adolescent development underpinned by psychology, which was a core feature of EP practice (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). This was positioned as a unique contribution to expand understanding of YP, identify need and inform future practices of support and early intervention. Promotion of educational engagement was a key theme expressed through participant contributions. EPs identified that due to the wide scope of their role, they could offer psychological input to increase capacity and promote inclusive practices across individuals and systems. Adoption of a holistic perspective allowed participants to hold in mind the presenting needs of YP alongside long-term life trajectories. This led to consideration for, and adoption of, processes of intervention that counter short-term measures to address NEET. Therefore, integration of EP knowledge and skills across systems can offer opportunities for sustained change.

Application of an ecosystemic lens (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) reflected EPs' positioning within LAs, which allow flexibility to work with individual YP, families, educational settings and wider LA systems and processes. As a result, EPs can act as a bridge between systems to promote engagement through establishing channels of communication for collaborative work (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). EPs engagement with multi-agency processes offer opportunities to add a psychological lens to support transition and continuity of provision to meet YPs needs. Consequently, EPs act as an advocate for the voice of YP, increasing their visibility to promote access to EET.

EPs recognised the multitude of complex risk factors that can be experienced by YP leading to further marginalisation within education. EPs are positioned to challenge existing pejorative narratives to advocate for YP at risk of NEET/YP-NEET through exploration and expansion of held constructs of NEET. In addition, EP positioning within systems and understanding of the challenges and barriers experienced by YP can open opportunities to enact change. Participants engaged in innovative processes to address identified need, demonstrating practical engagement with the dynamic relationship of interacting factors across systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). EP engagement with existing and new processes in support of YP at risk of NEET demonstrate the continual evolution of the EP role to address the underlying needs of individuals and systems. Participants communicated confidence and willingness to develop within their role, embracing and valuing change in their own practice and that of others.

EP contributions, combined with reviewed literature, offer insight into potential practices that can be employed by EPs to support YP at risk of NEET. Participants recognised the growing number of YP presenting with complex needs who would benefit from EP support to mitigate the risk of NEET. With increasing demand for EP support, participants acknowledged the value of a systemic role to afford a broader influence towards change. These findings have been summarised in Figure 13, offering a resource for EPs and EP services to consider how the EP role could be utilised in support of YP at risk of NEET and implemented at an individual or service level.

Figure 13. Combined findings of research and reviewed literature to inform EP practice with YP at risk of NEET



3.13 Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

The aim of this study was to create a transparent and rigorous research process to support validity of the presented findings. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with this study. The intention of this research was to gather the voice of EPs in Wales to explore their views, experience and practice with YP at risk of NEET. Participants in the study represented six different LAs across Wales with differing models of service delivery, leading to potential difference in processes and practice related to YP at risk of NEET. Whilst this can be considered a strength of the study in capturing diversity of practice, due to the small sample size, it does not present a full representation of practices across the entirety of Wales.

Participants who chose to engage in this research study held both an interest and assigned responsibility within their EP role to work with cohorts that included YP at risk of NEET. As a result, findings may not be representative of the general population of LA EPs without this assigned responsibility. Therefore, it would be of value to further explore this research with a wider population of EPs to gain insight into how EP roles are constructed in relation to YP at risk of NEET within general EP practice outside of specialised roles. Despite the cited limitations, the findings of this research provide some insight into how EPs understand and construct their role with YP at risk of NEET within a Welsh context. Consequently, this offers the opportunity for EPs to reflect upon their own practice and consider how findings could inform their approach to working with this cohort of YP.

Data collection methods for this research were conducted online to allow for recruitment of participants across Wales. Adopting this approach removed challenges associated with in-person focus groups, such as travel, cost, time and location (Abrams & Gaiser, 2017). However, it is acknowledged that the online modality utilised may have interfered with promotion of social interaction and group rapport, which is central to facilitating focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Consequently, responses may have been more limited impacting the richness of data (Abrams & Gaiser, 2017). In order to address this, additional time was allocated at the beginning of each focus group to allow for unstructured conversation to support rapport between participants. Analysis of the data aimed to utilise a robust process through RTA, as previously outlined. However, it is acknowledged that interpretation of the data is influenced by the researchers' own constructs, which can influence interpretation and presentation of findings. This will be discussed further in part three of this research.

This study explored how EPs perceived their role and practice with YP at risk of NEET. However, evaluating the effectiveness of cited EP practices was not an aim of this study. Consequently, it may be beneficial to explore the perceived impact of EP practice with individuals representing a range of systems, such as YP, parents, school staff and post-16 services. This could offer a more detailed understanding of effective EP practices in support of improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET, offering potential models of service delivery that could be embedded into EP and LA practice.

3.14 Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to examine the construction of the EP role in supporting YP at risk of NEET within a Welsh context. Application of the selected research paradigm allowed for in-depth exploration of EP voice, exploring views, experiences and practices currently implemented. Findings suggest that participants strongly aligned with implementation of psychological knowledge and skills to support YP, families, educational settings and wider systems. Psychology was seen as a key contribution to identifying and understanding the needs of YP to provide targeted intervention. EPs valued their role in promotion of educational engagement for YP at risk of NEET, recognising its importance in contributing to future access to EET. Meaning was attributed to the EP role in promoting positive change and long-term outcomes for YP. However, there was acknowledgement of existing challenges and barriers to identifying, accessing and supporting YP at risk of NEET. Further clarity and understanding of the EP role in post-16 settings could further support YPs transition within a multidisciplinary approach.

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*An Exploration of Educational Psychologists Constructs of their Role Working with
Young People at Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
in Wales*

Part Three: Critical Appraisal

Word Count: 8,512

4 Introduction

Part three of this thesis will consist of a critical account of the research process to include reflective engagement with how this research contributes to present knowledge in the area explored and a critical reflection on myself as a research practitioner. In this respect, this section will be written in the first person to reflect my own thoughts, experiences, values and decision-making throughout the research process.

4.1 Being a Reflexive Practitioner

Reflexivity in research acknowledges the researcher's influence upon the research process, creating a co-constructed product between researcher and participants (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity aims not to provide a concrete, objective representation of reality, but to acknowledge a qualitative lens of subjectivity in the researcher's contribution to research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Employing reflexivity during the research study provided a tool to explore and justify decisions that were made, such as the philosophical stance and resulting methodological choices. With this in mind, I will aim to explore my own choices related to the research process.

4.2 Deciding upon a Thesis Topic

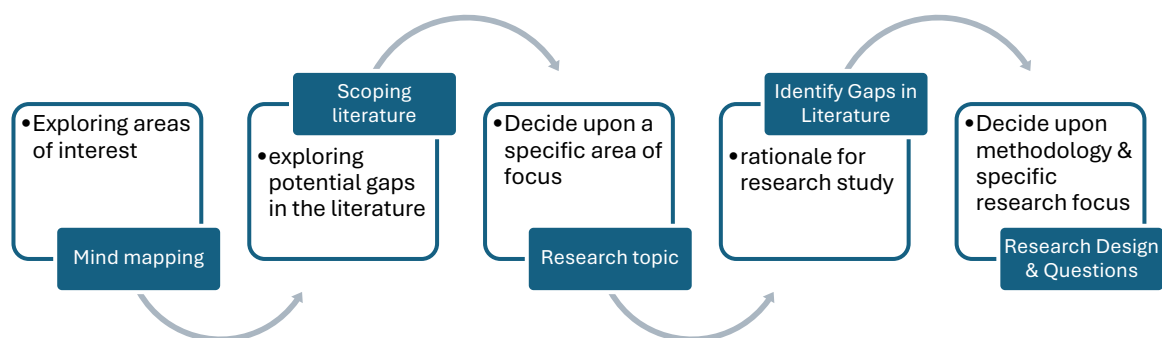
Deciding upon a thesis research topic was a daunting prospect that was always in the back of my mind from the beginning of my doctoral journey. It was something that was percolating in the background through each lecture, research assignment and whilst on placement. I felt myself searching for an area of interest with which I held enough passion to carry me through what I knew would be a challenging process. Experiencing some degree of concern and anxiety during these initial phases, it was helpful to draw

on positive psychology to reframe the challenges ahead. Drawing upon the tenets of Hope Theory, as described by Snyder & Lopez (2002), helped me to draw away from feelings of low self-confidence. Through employing thoughts of hope, this facilitated action by seeing myself as an agent within the process. As a result, I was able to create steps on the pathway through developing achievable goals:

“...hopeful thought reflects the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways.” (Snyder & Lopez, 2002, p.257)

As the ethics proposal approached, I began to explore potential areas of interest using the process outlined in Figure 14. Using this approach, alongside individual and peer supervision, was a valuable process to refine broad ideas into a focused area of study.

Figure 14. Process for identifying a research topic



It felt important to me to explore a topic that helped to open up and develop my understanding of previously held questions, whilst adding value to future Educational Psychologist (EP) roles. In previously held roles as a tutor in the Further Education (FE) sector, I worked directly with young people (YP) who had faced challenges engaging in

education and were often at risk of becoming a YP who was not in education, employment or training (NEET). Whilst the provision within the college setting was designed to support this cohort of YP, I often wondered about their experiences previous to their college enrolment. YP would often share the difficulties they experienced engaging in education due to a range of complex factors, previously held or continuing. I also observed that the systems operating around these YP could potentially lead to entrenched educational and social inequality, due to reduced opportunities and diversity in education, employment or training (EET). As a FE tutor I recognised the value of approaches to early intervention but often felt that the YP I taught had often missed out on these opportunities. Sometimes I experienced challenges and tensions in supporting YP to meet educational objectives, whilst holding an awareness of the influences of home, family and community factors that contributed to a complex profile of need. My passion for improving the outcomes of YP is a considerable contributor to pursuing the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) training to become an EP.

Initially my interest in this research area was focused around the experiences of YP and capturing their voice in relation to the support that they valued in maintaining engagement in EET. In a tutor led, peer group discussion to explore potential thesis topics, questions arose around the challenges and ethics involved in identifying YP as 'at risk of NEET' and how this might impact their perceptions of self. This caused me to reflect upon the Health & Care Professions Council's standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2023, p.6), which require individuals to "promote and protect the service users' interests at all times". With this in mind, it felt appropriate to

explore alternative routes to gain further insight into the how this population of YP were supported, which would still add valuable insights into supporting improved outcomes.

Throughout the training experiences and tuition on the DEdPsy course, I felt that the psychological knowledge and skills utilised by EPs would offer value in identifying need and providing targeted intervention (Cameron, 2006). However, when working within FE roles it was rare to have any contact with an EP. I also noticed, whilst on placement throughout the DEdPsy training, the scarcity of cases directed towards YP who might be considered at risk of NEET. This led me to wonder about the role of EPs within the post-16 sector and how this might relate to YP at risk of NEET in pre- or post-16 settings. I began to wonder ‘what might early intervention offer to YP at risk of NEET?’, ‘who might be involved in the processes of identifying and working with YP at risk of NEET?’ and ‘what was being identified as having a meaningful impact on the long-term outcomes for YP at risk of NEET?’. These thoughts offered a starting point to explore the literature around these questions and any research that related to EP practice in this particular area.

In order to retain researcher reflexivity and provide transparency throughout the research process, I decided to keep a research diary. This enabled me to capture the research journey, including factual observations, thought processes, methodological decisions and personal reflections on how my own perspectives may influence the choices I made at each stage. This aligns with the findings of Nadin & Cassell (2006), who cite a research diary as a core methodological tool for fostering reflexive practice in the pursuit of rigorous and trustworthy research.

4.3 Researcher Positionality

Acknowledgement of researcher positionality offers transparency, with the aim of enhancing the research by identifying how my own experiences and values influence my choices in the research process (Mosselson, 2010). Dwyer & Buckle (2009) explore the notion of insider versus outsider positionality of the researcher. The insider researcher is considered to belong to the participant group in a research study, in contrast to an outsider researcher who is not seen to belong to the participant group (Gair, 2012). This identifies the importance of utilising reflexive practices to acknowledge the influence of the researcher on the researched (Finlay, 2002). I felt that my position was between that of an insider and outsider researcher, as I had previous experience working with YP at risk of NEET but was not yet a practicing EP. This reflects what Dwyer & Buckle (2009, p60) refer to as the 'space between', which rejects the binary narrative of insider versus outsider. Rather, it acknowledges that as a researcher we can be both, embracing the complexity of positionality. This holds space for the dynamic influence of the researcher in both the research design and throughout the research process. This caused me to reflect upon how my positioning as a researcher might influence my decisions, raising questions such as *how might my previous experience working with YP at risk of NEET inform my views relating to the positioning of NEET within existing narratives? What are my held beliefs in relation to the role of the EP with this cohort of YP?* Spending time to reflect on my own biases and assumptions in my research journal helped me to remain open to the potential influence of these. I also recognised the strengths of being in the 'space between', which provided an enhanced understanding of the how the complex needs of YP at risk of NEET may present in an educational setting alongside an understanding of the EP role in relation to this cohort. Accessing supervision was key to

exploring researcher positionality and implementation of reflexive discussions to identify my own influence on data collection and interpretation.

Taking into consideration my positioning within the research led me to explore how my views, experiences and values might inform the research paradigm and methodological approach. This will be discussed further in sections named *Theoretical Paradigms* and *Methodological Considerations*.

4.4 Exploration of Research Literature

Initial searches of the literature were employed to gain a general understanding of research related to YP who were at risk of NEET. I found a vast body of literature spreading across a national and international context exploring many diverse factors and defining features associated with NEET. I recognised that clear criteria would need to be adopted going forward in the literature search in order to maintain a focus directed towards the research aims. Creswell & Creswell (2022) note that the first steps in conducting a literature review is to identify key words related to the research topic. When engaging in initial searches relating to YP who were already NEET (YP-NEET), there was considerably less focus on YP at risk of NEET. This caused me to reflect on potential search terms and how these YP might be framed in the literature. Scanning abstracts and a variety of research articles helped to provide further insight into vocabulary associated with this cohort of YP, such as *disengaged*, *early school leaver* and *disaffected*. I found that initial scoping of the literature aided in informing my search terms and was a valuable method in preparing for further, more comprehensive,

literature searches (Booth, 2022). In addition, seeking support from the Specialist Subject Librarian aided me in developing appropriate search strategies, search terms and necessary skills to navigate various search databases.

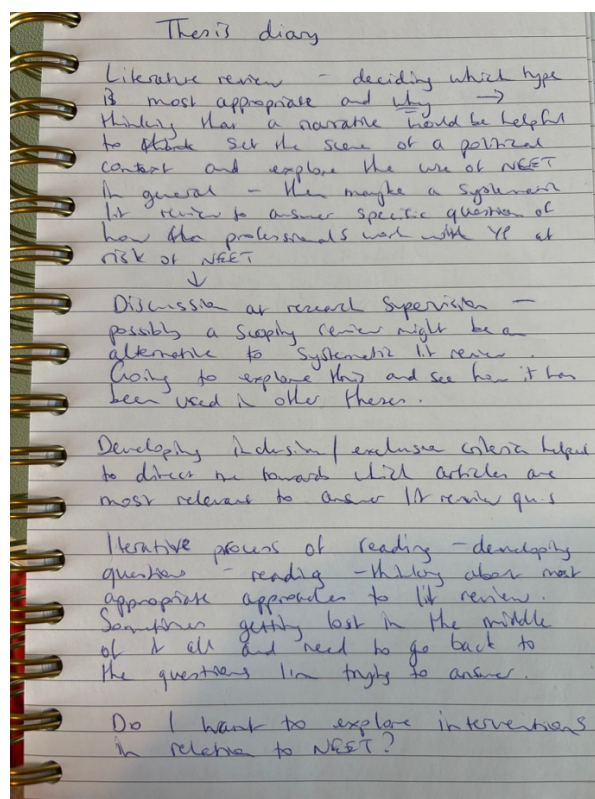
As I became more familiar with the literature exploring YP at risk of NEET, I recognised that in order to take a more directed approach I would need to consider how I wanted to structure my literature review. To build my knowledge and confidence in this area, I spent time exploring different approaches to a literature review and how these might relate to my research focus and research paradigm (see table 6 & figure 15).

Table 6. Evaluation of Literature Review Approaches

Literature Review Type	Advantages for use in this research study	Disadvantages for use in this research study
Narrative (Siddaway et al., 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a broad overview of the topic, which would allow exploration of breadth of the NEET literature that exists. • Allows inclusion of a historical perspective of the research topic, which feels an important factor to explore in identifying what is successful or unsuccessful for YP at risk of or termed NEET. • Offers the opportunity to place the research topic within a context. This feels relevant when considering the socio-political context influencing NEET policy and guidance and the narratives that might emerge. • Allows for exploration of grey literature to inform and add to the research literature on NEET. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can lack specificity directed towards the research focus e.g. a specific focus on the literature based on EP practices. • May not offer a robust search method and narrowing of literature to justify the research study, as there is no requirement to report search methods for a narrative literature review.
Scoping (Munn et al., 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A method to explore a wide breadth of research with an exploratory approach to emerging evidence on a topic • Can be used to identify key concepts related to NEET. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less rigorous approach than a systematic literature review, providing an overview rather than answering a specific LRQ. • Existing literature has already explored the NEET concept in detail and it does not appear to be necessary to explore this further or offer further clarity.
Systematic (Siddaway et al., 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers a robust method to identify relevant literature on the topic of NEET, with a transparent search process using inclusion and exclusion criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting inclusion and exclusion criteria for selection of research articles can still result in challenges due to lack of research studies conducted in the area of YP at risk of NEET.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical appraisal tools can be used to assess the quality of literature included in the literature review to support validity of research studies and their contribution to the literature base. • Offers the opportunity to explore themes that arise in the literature that is selected for the systematic review to identify similarities and differences in findings related to professional practice with YP at risk of NEET. • It aims to identify a gap in the literature. This helps to justify the research study that will be carried out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take time to filter through research articles and make decisions on what to or not to include. • Use of inclusion and exclusion criteria can limit opportunities for broad exploration of the literature and narrow the discussion.
Integrative (Torraco, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for inclusion and synthesis of research designs to include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, as well as a range of sources, such as reports, theoretical papers. This can offer a more holistic presentation of the concepts explored, which would be relevant to NEET within an historical and socio-political context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher's unfamiliarity with this type of literature review and the approaches that need to be employed would make this time consuming and challenging to complete. • The advantages offered through using this approach are also found within other literature review approaches. Therefore, it is not necessary to deem this approach more advantageous.

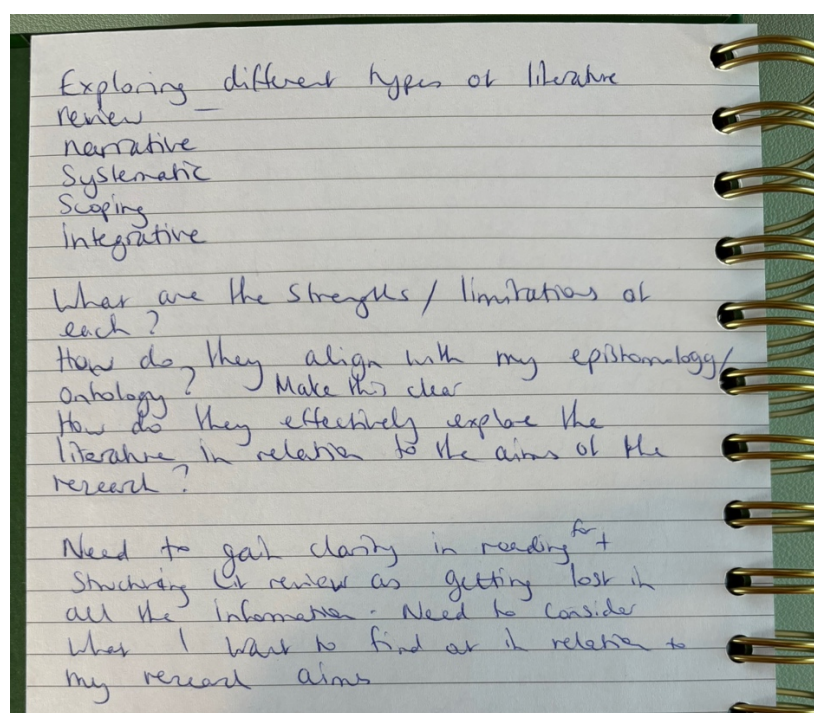
Figure 15. Research diary entry 21/07/24



Through examination of the literature I became aware that NEET was deeply entwined within the political landscape. In order to explore how NEET is constructed and situated within a historical and socio-political context, a narrative review was selected. This also enabled synthesis of a wide range of studies, including grey literature, to offer a comprehensive overview of influencing factors across a range of contexts applicable to NEET (Cronin et al., 2008). When exploring the literature in relation to NEET, a key theme that emerged was the influence of language in shaping perceptions of YP-NEET within the systems and structures they resided within. A narrative literature review framed within a critical realist-social constructionist research paradigm allowed the flexibility to explore the influence of language, social constructs and systems relating to NEET.

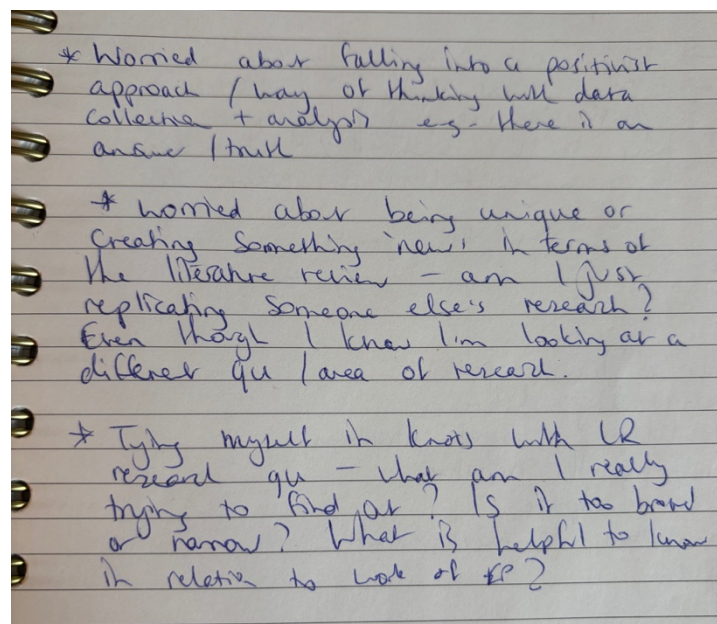
Reflections in my research diary allowed me to consider thoughts and questions regarding how to progress with my literature review aligned with the aims of my research. I spent time to consider whether to continue with a narrative review only or combine this with a systematic literature review (see figure 16). A narrower focus on research into effective support for YP at risk of NEET felt relevant in exploring literature related to my proposed RQs. A combination of both a narrative and systematic literature review approach provided access to both breadth and depth of understanding concepts explored in existing literature (Turnbull et al., 2023).

Figure 16. Research diary 11/08/24



Developing a clear literature research question (LRQ) with defined search terms and inclusion/exclusion criteria supports a transparent and replicable systematic review process (Stern et al., 2014). I was also aware that developing a LRQ would support a coherent search of existing literature in preliminary and ongoing stages of the literature review (Fink, 2020). However, although I felt that developing a LRQ should be a simple task, I found that I became really stuck in this stage. I became caught in feelings of uncertainty regarding which area would be most pertinent to focus on and add value to the research study as a whole. To address these issues, I made use of my reflective journal to frame my concerns in order to begin to work towards possible ways forward (see figure 17).

Figure 17. Research diary 03/11/24



In addressing the identified challenges in forming a LRQ, I found it helpful to employ an iterative process of re-visiting the literature to identify key themes and develop broad questions that could then be refined (Booth, 2022; Fink, 2020). As I engaged in this process and sought supervision, I found that I was able to develop a specific and

focused LRQ. The selected search terms for the systematic literature review were initially very limited when directly focused towards EPs. Only four identified studies included EP participants, with a further three studies mentioning how the EP role could be implemented. Therefore, search terms were expanded to include professionals who worked directly with YP at risk of NEET, such as school teacher, mentors and AEP providers. This process of reflection and scoping of literature led to the LRQ:

‘What can current available literature tell us about how professionals can successfully support YP at risk of becoming NEET?’.

To ensure transparency and trustworthiness of the literature review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidance was used (Tricco et al., 2018). Use of a PRISMA to guide my literature search, although time consuming, offered a degree of confidence in the methods employed to select appropriate research for review.

4.5 Reflections on the Literature Review Process

Conducting the literature review as part of this research study was extremely challenging. I felt that I spent a considerable amount of time caught in a circular process between literature searches, assessing the validity of articles and adjusting the inclusion and exclusion criteria. I reflected on my own self-efficacy as I worked my way through this process. Bandura (1993) cited that an individual's own beliefs of their ability to negotiate their own learning plays a key role in motivation and academic accomplishments. Although I was determined to work towards the end goal of producing a completed literature review, at times it felt like a heavy load. Seeking academic and peer supervision were both useful tools to address these concerns. Self-reflection using Driscoll's (1994) Model of Reflection (see figure 18 and table 7) also provided a framework to utilise and action the knowledge and skills I was gaining throughout the literature review process.

Figure 18. Driscoll's (1994) Model of Reflection

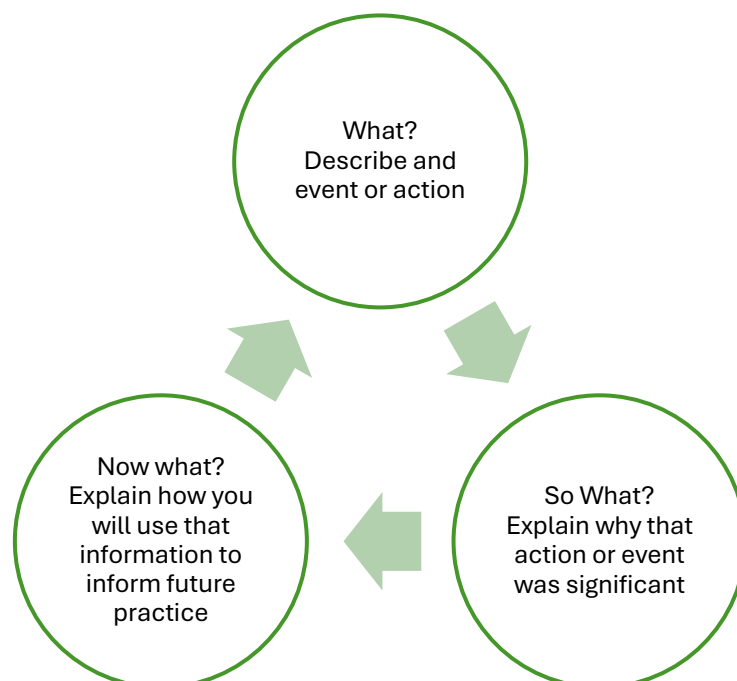


Table 7 Reflection of literature review process 29/09/24

<p>What?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used the title and abstract of each article from database search to decide which to include for further screening. • Systematically went through 72 articles in the reference manager using my inclusion and exclusion criteria to decide which would be suitable for the systematic review. • Reflected on my inclusion and exclusion criteria and thought about relevance/adjustments that needed to be made so that they were aligned with the aims of the research study. • I noticed a lot of articles were focused on mental health associated with a medical model e.g. needs being addressed within a medical unit. These did not feel pertinent to the experiences of YP-NEET within an educational context.
<p>So what?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial searches produced a high number of studies with a focus on NEET. Employing inclusion and exclusion criteria reduced this to 72 articles. It helped me to see the importance of using these criteria to remain focus on my research aims and questions. • Refining the literature articles was a long and arduous process, but it gave me a good indication of the diverse literature available on NEET. This process also helped me to further refine my inclusion and exclusion criteria. • I had to spend time reflecting on what was most relevant to my research study and try not to get drawn into tangents just because they looked interesting!
<p>Now what?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need to seek further advice and support from the subject librarian to ensure that I have used a robust search process. This will help me to feel more confident and secure in my approach so far. • To ensure that I have followed a comprehensive review of the articles, I am going to spend time checking the articles I have excluded to make sure I have stuck to my inclusion and exclusion criteria. • I am going to seek supervision from my research supervisor to review what I have done so far and discuss and concerns that I have regarding the literature review process e.g. number of articles that would be appropriate for a systematic review, confirm my literature research question aligns with what I want to find out and with my research aims.

The literature review process has helped me to improve my research skills and knowledge in several key areas. Through comparing various literature review methodologies, I gained a broader understanding of different approaches, alongside the advantages and disadvantages of each. I also developed the ability to apply a

transparent and replicable literature search strategy, using a range of databases to explore existing research relevant to my topic. The application of critical appraisal tools, such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (see Appendix A) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018) (see Appendix B), have developed my skills to critically evaluate the quality of included studies. The process has also given me a deeper understanding of the need for an alignment between methodological choices and the research paradigm of the broader research study to offer a coherent and robust approach.

In following a systematic approach to the literature search and applying a refining process using inclusion and exclusion criteria, I think this helped me to feel more secure through employing what felt like a robust process. I also felt at the time of carrying out the literature review that a systematic approach offered transparency and reduced bias. However, as explored by Petticrew & Roberts (2006) I can now see how my own views and experiences influenced the choices that I made regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria and how I assessed the validity of each study, which can introduce bias. I identified with Kamler & Thomson's (2008, p.508) description of carrying "the weight of expectation most of the time" in order to produce a high quality literature review. This feeling of responsibility coupled with a lack of confidence in my own skills may have led me to choose a systematic approach in order to feel secure in the process adopted. If I were to repeat the process, I would opt for a narrative literature review in place of a narrative and systematic approach. I feel that this would enable me to explore some areas of focus more fully, which were restricted by the approach that I had chosen. When writing the findings and discussion I felt that the opportunity to engage

more fully in exploration of the role of the EP was missing from the literature. I feel that a narrative review would have allowed the flexibility to include this as part of the literature and added value to the research study as a whole.

4.6 Theoretical Paradigms

Much of the grey literature surrounding the NEET construct held in government policy and guidance cited NEET as something that could be measured. Quarterly reporting of NEET statistics (for example Office for National Statistics, 2024) present NEET as a concrete entity that can be quantified. An exploration into EP practice with YP at risk of NEET could have easily utilised a positivist lens, capturing data through survey-based data collection methods. Potentially, these methods could have offered a more accessible method for participants to engage in the research study and, therefore, yielded higher responses. However, whilst I accepted that NEET was a construct that existed within political and social narratives, the research literature pointed towards the complexity and heterogeneity of the NEET population (Yates & Payne, 2006). Therefore, a positivist lens lacked the opportunity to engage in deeper exploration of social and subjective aspects related to constructs of NEET and the EP role, which was a key focus of my research aims.

Adoption of a critical realist ontology allowed for acknowledgement of the existence of NEET as a construct, whilst embracing flexibility in relation to how this may be perceived or interpreted by individuals (Danermark, 2019). Furthermore, critical realism acknowledges that factors that can be observed are influenced by deeper structures that are not always evident and require further investigation to uncover (Stutchbury,

2022). As a result, this lens held space for exploring the influence of systemic factors upon individual interpretations of NEET, such as government policy, LA priorities or educational initiatives. This felt relevant to the aims of my research study in exploring the role of the EP, which both influences and is influenced by observed structures and systems in place that drive their work with YP at risk of NEET. A social constructionist epistemology further leans into exploration of individual constructs and perceptions of the world influenced by individual experiences, the social world, language, culture and historical context (Burr, 2015). I wanted to explore the potentially diverse perspectives of EPs, how they attached meaning to a construct of NEET and made sense of their role in supporting YP at risk of NEET. These philosophical assumptions recognise that there can be multiple truths framed by perceptions of experiences and understood in relation to the social context through interactions with others (Willig, 2022). In this respect, I remained aware that participants' various constructs were rooted in the distinct interpretations of participants and myself regarding situations and their attributed meanings. A combined ontology and epistemology of critical realism and social constructionism provided the opportunity to acknowledge the existence of constructs, explore the diversity of interpretation of these by individuals and explore how underlying structures influence the social structures these exist within (Crotty, 2020).

Consequently, adoption of the research paradigm allowed for an openness to the individual EP experiences in practice, which offered space to explore individual interpretations of the NEET construct and how this was framed in their own work.

Within the selected research paradigm, I recognised how my own views and experiences would play a role in my own interpretations of the research.

Acknowledgement of researcher positioning is a key element of social constructionism, recognising the researcher as an active participant in co-construction of meaning throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). Rather than viewing this as a potential barrier within the research process, maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process made it possible for me to remain aware of my own subjective influence. During the focus groups I was aware that my own interpretation of participant responses and subsequent reflections back had an influence on the direction of the discussion that was held. This was likely to be directed by my own interests, views and values held outside of and within the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This could be viewed as a hindrance or seen as a tool towards building rapport, contributing to richer discussion through deeper exploration of topics raised within the focus group and at the later stages of data analysis (Gough & Madill, 2012; Willig, 2022).

4.7 Methodological Considerations

The aim of this research study was to capture the views and experiences of practising EPs in Wales. The selected research paradigm led to qualitative data generation methods. Therefore, semi-structured, individual interviews or focus groups were explored, with consideration for the advantages and disadvantages of each method (see table 8).

Table 8. Advantages and disadvantages of methods for qualitative data generation

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks individual views of participants on the research topic. • Allows for in depth exploration of an individual's views. • Provides a structured method to gather in-depth, qualitative data with scope for flexibility. • Easier to schedule a time to hold an interview with an individual rather than a group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be time consuming to conduct individual interviews, transcribe and analyse. • Individuals may feel less comfortable to engage in a 1:1 interview as this may feel more overwhelming. • Data may be more highly influenced by the researcher if the interview schedule is more directive.
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a space for naturalistic conversation. • Some participants can feel more comfortable in a group setting rather than 1:1 interview. • Opportunity to build upon comments of others, stimulated by their discourse. • Allows for generation of rich data to contribute to the aims of the study. • Can offer an efficient method for gaining multiple voices in a timely manner. • Reduces the dominance of the facilitator/researcher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be difficult to manage if a participant dominates the group. • Can be challenging to recruit and organise to meet everyone's schedule. • Contributions of participants can divert from the area of focus being explored, with challenges to re-engage towards the research topic.

(Braun & Clarke, 2013; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Smithson, 2000; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015)

4.8 Rationale for Focus Groups

I took time to reflect upon the aims of my research and how the chosen methodology could be informed by the research paradigm. To explore the construct of the EP role in practice with YP at risk of NEET, it felt important to explore the multiple perspectives held by EPs in LAs across Wales. This aligned with a social constructionist epistemology and aims of the research in facilitating a process in which participants' shared and diverse views could be communicated, as opposed to seeking a singular truth or reality (Burr, 2015). Utilising a focus group structure offered the opportunity to gather rich data through naturalistic conversation supported by the group dynamic, and stimulating responses through the comments of others (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). This was an important consideration in this study as I aimed to create a space that allowed open discussion, guided by the open questions in the focus group interview schedule (see Appendix I). The focus group also offered the opportunity to encourage further reflections through engagement with participants in the group. This is something that would have been absent from a semi-structured interview. Although there can be challenges with conducting focus groups (see table 8), I felt that EP participants were likely to be experienced in either conducting or participating in research. Therefore, they were likely to possess the requisite skills to allow space for others to contribute, employ listening skills and be willing to share their own experiences. However, I recognise that these assumptions reflect my own biases as a researcher and may not represent the experiences of all participants. Consequently, this may have impacted how I navigated the facilitation of the focus

groups with reduced awareness and consideration for the experiences of each participant.

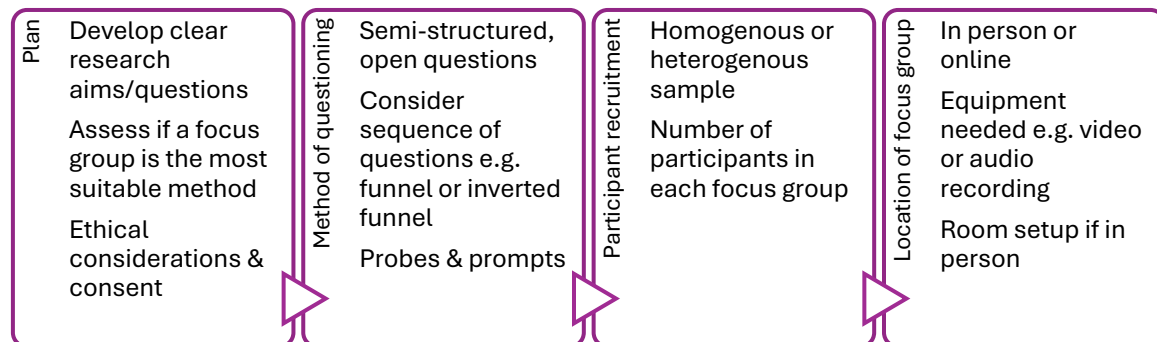
Due to the geographical spread and limited availability of recruited participants, it felt appropriate to hold focus groups virtually. This is something that has gained greater prominence following the Covid-19 pandemic, enhancing recruitment and participation (Keen et al., 2022). Although I felt that a virtual option would facilitate participant recruitment, I recognise that an in-person focus group could have created opportunity for greater connection within the group, supported the flow of conversation through observed body language and cues, and promoted natural conversation (Krueger & Casey, 2014). As a result, it is possible that some richness could have been lost through this approach to data collection. However, it is likely that participants had experience accessing and using a virtual format in their EP role, which offered familiarity and confidence in navigating the discussions held in the group. Whilst virtual focus groups present their own challenges, this method felt appropriate and accessible to enable participants to contribute to this research study.

4.8.1 Preparation for Facilitation of Focus Groups

The adoption of focus groups as a data collection method was followed by a consultation of existing literature to explore rigorous approaches to obtaining rich data aligned with the RQs. Distilling key ideas through engagement with research methodology literature allowed me to discern essential considerations in developing a clear plan in preparation for facilitating focus groups. Practical steps included

formulating an interview schedule, participant recruitment and consideration of location for the focus groups (see figure 19).

Figure 19 Plan for preparation to facilitate focus groups



(Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan & Hoffman, 2018; Morgan 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015)

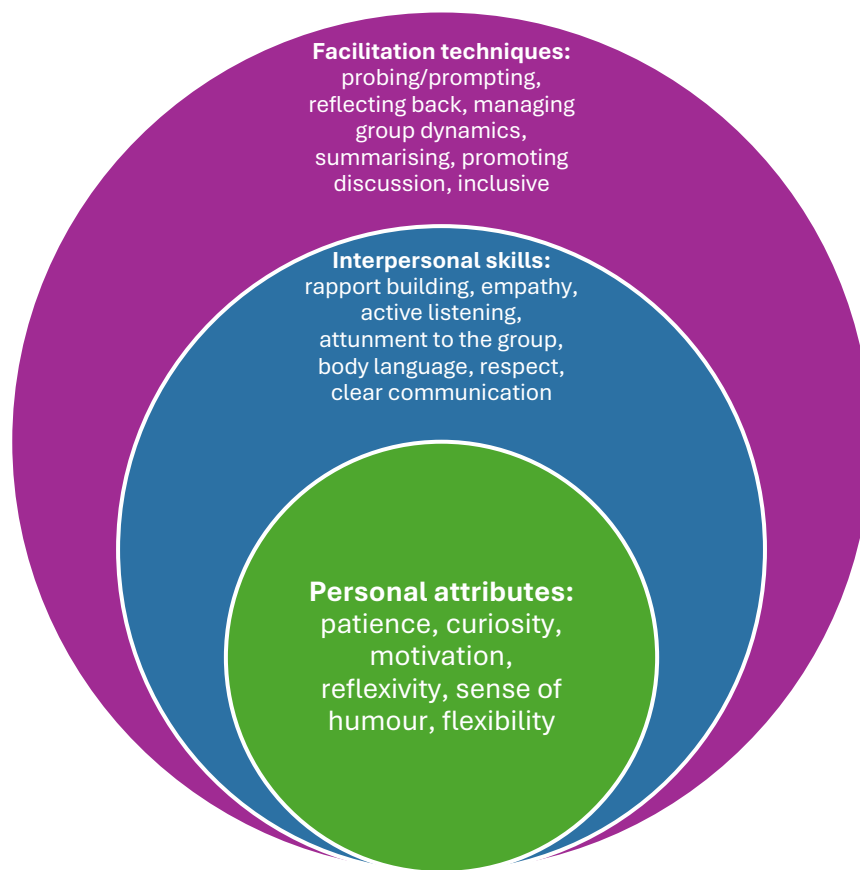
In alignment with my ontological and epistemological stance, social interaction was a key tenet to facilitation of focus groups. This offered the opportunity to explore constructs of the EP role with YP at risk of NEET by exploring meaning in relation to the views of others through potentially more in depth and naturalistic conversations (Braun & Clarke, 2013). An initial step in working towards this goal was consideration of questions and their potential influence upon participant contributions. Questions were developed with research aims in mind and reflection upon how they might stimulate conversation. Consideration was given to prevalent question sequencing methodologies, notably the funnel methodology (broad-to-narrow progression) and the inverted funnel methodology (narrow-to-broad progression) (Stewart & Shamdasani,

2015). However, I felt that an interview schedule of broad, open questions related to the research aims offered a flexible framework to explore constructs and allow for discussion to be guided by participant-led contributions (Morgan, 1997). In addition, consideration was given to question order to promote comfort and ease into the topic explored with use of introductory questions to open up initial discussion (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Therefore, the interview schedule (Appendix I) was used as a guide and prompt as needed throughout the facilitation of the focus groups. I also wanted to be led by the discussion generated within the group and, therefore, incorporated some flexibility in when and how questions were asked through a less-structured approach (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018; Franz, 2011). I found that this offered the opportunity to explore contributions in greater depth and generated further comments through integrating probing questions, summarising, and reflecting back what had been shared without being directive (Morgan, 1997). I feel that this offered the opportunity for participants to explore areas of the topic that were not directed by me as the facilitator, leading to areas of discussion that I may not have considered at the outset of the research.

As outlined by Stewart & Shamdasani (2015, p.79), the facilitator of a focus group can take the default role of “nominal leader”. This indicates a position of power and influence, with the potential to shape the experience of participants in the group and impact their willingness and openness to share held views. Therefore, consideration of my stance and leadership style as a group facilitator was an important consideration in preparation for holding the focus groups. As an inexperienced focus group facilitator, I recognised the importance of seeking out approaches within existing literature to inform

effective moderation of participant groups (see figure 20). Reflecting upon the personal, interpersonal and facilitation skills identified for moderating focus groups, I recognised that I could draw upon previously held experiences in professional roles and placement opportunities when working with groups. Whilst this helped to instil a degree of confidence in the facilitation of the focus groups, I recognise that my own assumptions and biases are likely to have influenced the group dynamic through expressions of body language, such as nodding my head when participants offered contributions and my interpretation of responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is possible that this may have impacted my position of perceived neutrality and influenced the direction of discussion, reflecting my limited experience with focus group facilitation. However, drawing upon previously developed skills enabled integration of active listening, confidence to allow silences and embedding a flexible approach to provide space for varied views and constructs to be explored.

Figure 20 Researcher skills for effective facilitation of focus groups



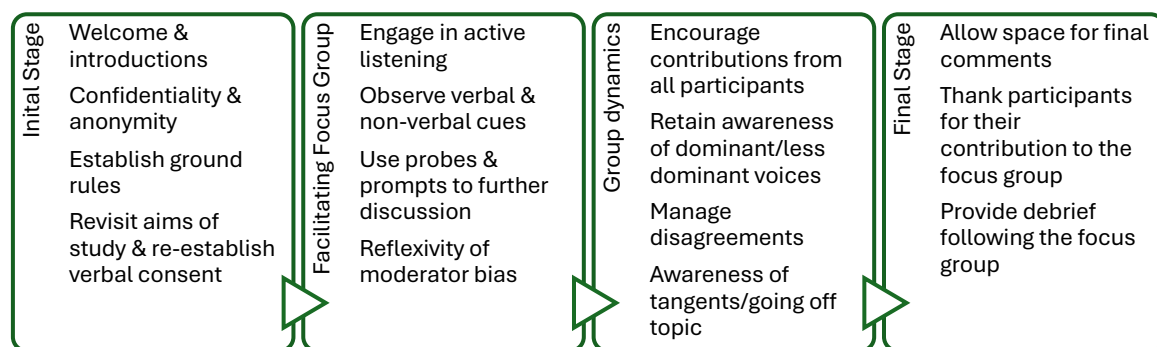
(Barbour, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2014; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016)

4.8.2 Facilitation of Focus Groups

Braun & Clarke (2013) note that facilitating a focus group is a skill that is developed over time, incorporating interview skills, managing group dynamics and interpreting unspoken processes to facilitate rich data collection. Recommendations to build the skills required include observing an experienced group moderator or recruiting a second moderator to work alongside and support the novice researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Morgan & Hoffman, 2018). Due to the scope and time boundary of this research study, it was not possible to access these opportunities. However, this is something that could

offer valuable support in future research endeavours. Holding this in mind, I reflected on new and acquired skills I could draw upon (see figure 20) alongside key considerations from literature that I could incorporate into facilitation of the focus groups (see figure 21).

Figure 21 Plan for facilitation of focus groups



(Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan & Hoffman, 2018; Morgan 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015)

Whilst preparing for and conducting the focus groups, I was mindful of the perception of power held by participants in relation to myself as the facilitator and towards other participants in the group. I recognised that a power imbalance could lead to the presence of dominant voices, restricting the contributions of quieter participants. I also felt it was important to consider how my role as facilitator could impact group rapport, the flow of discussion and the direction taken with topics explored in the session. Promoting an inclusive environment by establishing ground rules, offering a space to ask questions, validating contributions and demonstrating warmth, interest and

empathy were some methods I employed to address these potential issues (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Facilitating the focus groups was a part of the research process that I found really enjoyable. I was passionate about exploring the RQs and seeing the participant contributions unfold before my eyes. Upon reflection of my experiences of facilitating focus groups, I can acknowledge how I can take this learning forward into a future EP role when working with groups. Some aspects that I feel would be beneficial to consider include:

- Recognising and observing dominant voices within group consultations and consideration for ensuring all voices are heard.
- Use of probing questions or body language to encourage participation of all members in a group and consideration for why individuals may be reticent to contribute.
- Tools to manage potential conflict, such as, reframing contrasting opinions and redirecting the focus of the discussion to central themes to be explored.
- Consideration for the structure of questions being asked and how these might influence the contributions of individuals within a group setting.
- Employ active listening skills, which consider both verbal and non-verbal communication. Use of active listening to reflect back and summarise the key messages being communicated.
- Provide a space without judgement to promote feelings of trust and experiences of empathy.
- Take time to think about the time, location and environment in which the group-based work takes place and how this might influence the contributions and experiences of the individuals present.

4.9 Recruitment of Participants

The recruitment of participants was much more challenging than I anticipated. Whilst I aimed to recruit participants and carry out focus groups earlier in the research process, I struggled to gain enough interest. My initial aim was to recruit 3-4 focus group with between 4-6 participants in each, as recommended for small research studies by (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In an effort to draw further interest towards participation in my research I took note of Braun & Clarke's (2013) recommendations for recruitment methods. These included an eye-catching recruitment poster (appendix F), creating online posts (Appendix D) and contacting appropriate organisations, such as LA EP teams via the Principal EP (Appendix E). When reflecting upon the challenges experienced and taking note of responses received from EPs, it was likely that the busy schedules of participants were a significant barrier. It is also possible that some EPs did not feel that this was an area of interest that related to their role or that they held relevant experience that could add value to the research topic being explored. Potentially this could mean that some voices are not represented within this study, which may have further contributed to the findings. With hindsight, I think it would have been beneficial to begin recruitment earlier to address these issues, whilst recognising that the demands on EP time are generally high, and this may not fully address the challenge of recruitment. It may have also helped to draw a clearer link between the benefits of participation in the study with relation to the EP role during the recruitment process to incentivise individuals to express interest. However, it is also acknowledged that despite a range of strategies employed, participant recruitment can be a significant challenge in the research process (Patel et al., 2003).

The recruitment process resulted in two focus groups of three participants in each. I had hoped for one further focus group to add to further data and felt disappointed that this was not the case. I continued the recruitment processes until it would have been untenable to transcribe and analyse data within the required time available, however, this did not result in further focus groups. Braun & Clarke (2022, p.28) acknowledge the complexity associated with ascertaining the 'right' sample size, shifting focus instead to the 'richness' of data. Although I would have liked the sample size to have been larger, I felt reassured that through the considered and comprehensive contributions of participants there was an orientation towards a richness of data, which would add value to the research area (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this sense, the data generated through both focus groups felt sufficient for the size and scope of this study.

4.10 Reflections on the use of Focus Groups

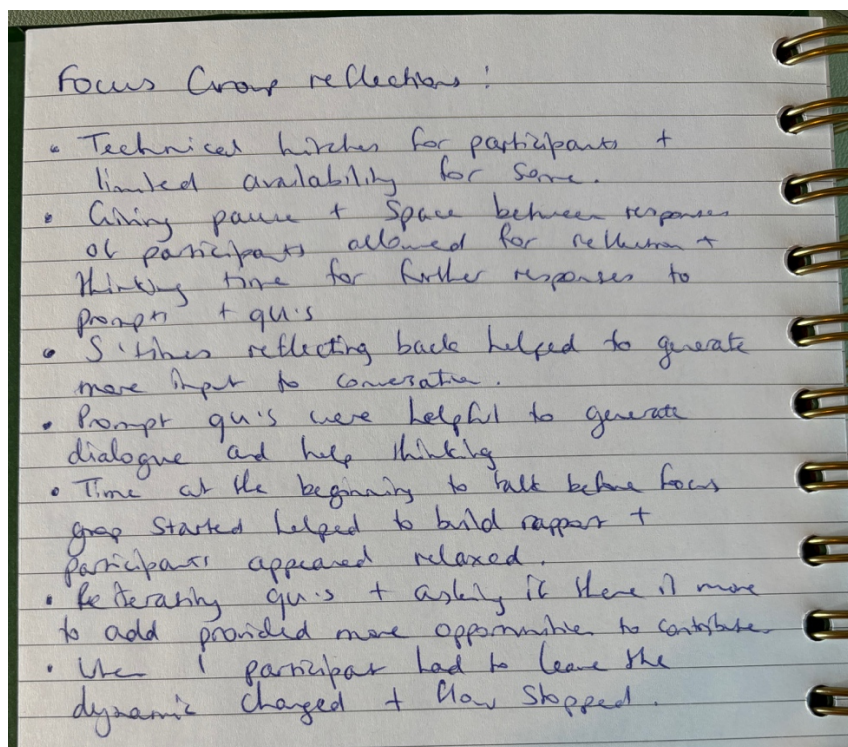
One of the greatest challenges with utilising focus groups with participants who have a busy caseload was finding a suitable day and time on which to carry these out. This became a very time-consuming task, despite the use of online tools to assist aligning calendars to identify availability. At times, I felt that this may have almost created some discouragement for participants to continue forward to engage in the focus group when the communication chains became lengthy. This may have potentially added to an already busy email inbox and workload. This adds further support to engaging in recruitment at an earlier stage when EPs may have had a lighter workload.

Carrying out the focus groups was a part of the research process that I really enjoyed and found a *rewarding experience* (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.128). I felt that experiences with the practice of consultation whilst on placement throughout the doctoral programme had provided a valuable skillset that could be utilised in this setting. This included active listening to guide the discussion forward, reflecting and summarising key ideas, and using prompts and pauses to support further contributions. Reflecting back contributions participants had shared opened up space for additional thoughts, as well as acting as a method for checking with participants that I had provided an accurate interpretation of their contributions. Positive group dynamics facilitated by ethical and respectful practices of participants agreed within the ground rules (Appendix I) allowed space for all individuals to contribute. Subsequently, this provided a supportive and cohesive experience in which to develop my group moderation skills. With more experience and confidence, I feel that I would have been able to offer more opportunities to explore contributions in further depth. This may have created scope for participants to uncover and share aspects of the explored topics that may not have been previously considered (Franz, 2011).

Due to technical issues experienced by participants at the beginning of each focus group, the allotted time of 90 minutes was reduced. However, this provided additional time to build rapport with participants that were present whilst we waited to begin. When reflecting upon this, I felt that both myself as the facilitator and the participants benefitted from this time, which contributed to the flow of conversation in the focus group. However, for those participants who arrived later to the focus group, this may have had an impact on their readiness to engage in discussion. In preparation for the

focus group, I had a prepared introduction to review the research aims and allow time for questions. I feel that, in a small way, this allowed all participants the opportunity to reset and prepare for the focus group discussion. Participant contributions reflect a high level of participation from all participants, which offer an indication that there all individuals felt able and ready to communicate. However, considerations for technical issues and time for group cohesion and rapport are important considerations that I can take forward into future research which involves virtual focus groups (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Research diary 24/10/24



4.11 Data Analysis

Willig (2022) notes the importance of a coherent research design, with its component parts logically operating together. Consideration of a data analysis method was framed within the selected qualitative research paradigm to ensure that the RQs could be

addressed and answered (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Upon reviewing a range of data analysis methods explored by Braun & Clarke (2021a), reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was considered an appropriate approach to data analysis as it aligned with data collection methods, applied philosophical approaches and exploration of participants' experiential factors (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2022). Due to its flexibility, RTA was appropriate for an inductive analysis of the subjective experiences and perspectives of participants relating to issues explored in the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I was also drawn towards RTA, as this approach recognises the relationship between the researcher, participants and research process. In this way I hoped to be a 'knowing' researcher in acknowledging my own influence in the research through the decisions that I made (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.1). This was guided through following the ten steps outlined by Braun & Clarke (2023) in table 9.

When immersed in the data, I reflected upon the importance of acknowledging my own assumptions, choices and beliefs as I moved through the analysis process (Finlay & Gough, 2003). It was helpful to reflect upon these questions as I moved through the research 'what are my values and assumptions of the world?', 'who are you and what do you bring to the research?' (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The significance of these factors became apparent to me throughout the process of data collection and analysis. During the focus groups I noticed how my mind was drawn towards particular comments shared by participants that I felt aligned with my RQs. Although this felt exciting at the time, I reflected upon the importance of remaining open to and aware of the nuance and unseen structures that operate beneath what might be heard or seen in the data, remaining true to the chosen research paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Burr, 2015;

Stutchbury, 2022). I also observed how my own views and experiences impacted what I noticed in the data and methods of coding. In recognising this I noted the importance and efficacy of engaging in an iterative cycle of revisiting the data to question my own assumptions and actively engage in searching and drawing together themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Finlay, 2021).

Table 9. Recommendations for a knowing researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2023)

Recommendation	How this was approached
Provide clarity of where chosen TA approach sits on the small q/Big Q spectrum.	Methodological decisions clarified in part 2 of thesis detailing ontology and epistemology. Critical realist/SC sits towards a big Q approach.
Clarify research values/philosophical assumptions and relate use of TA theoretically.	Critical realist/social constructionist philosophical stance acknowledges that individuals construct their own meaning through their experience in the world. RTA offers an approach to explore how individuals view constructs of NEET and its application to their practice.
Alignment of analytical practice with research values and TA approach.	RTA approach was utilised to generate themes to explore individual participant constructions of NEET and their work with YP at risk of NEET.
Justify any divergences from established practices.	N/A
When using RTA link personal reflexivity to the analysis.	Explored in part 2 & 3 of thesis – findings section
Discuss how you engaged with chosen approach leading to analysis.	Discussed in part 3 of thesis: ‘reflections on data analysis process’
Be aware of differences between topic summary and meaning-based interpretation of themes and ensure coherence with TA approach used.	This was considered throughout the data analysis 6-stage process for RTA.
Check that language use related to theme development aligns with TA approach used.	Used vocabulary such as theme generation, creation or construction as opposed to identified, found, discovered.
Clear presentation of themes and thematic structure.	Thematic map used to illustrate themes and relationships between themes in Part 2 of thesis.

Employ robust quality standards and practices that align with the chosen TA approach and theoretical assumptions.	Use of an iterative approach to 6-stage RTA analytic process to support data familiarisation and immersion in the data to enable deeper engagement.
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4.12 Reflections on data analysis process

I had gained some previous experience of using RTA during the doctorate course and was therefore familiar with the iterative, staged process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2022). Although, I had used this approach before I still found it challenging in relation to the time that it took to become familiarised with and fully immersed in the data. I found it useful to take time to create a familiarisation doodle (figure 10) to support immersion and engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p46-47). Using a creative approach such as this, alongside coding, aided my thinking and initial interpretations of the data. I felt that this was an important step towards a more analytic, rather than descriptive approach.

I felt keenly aware throughout the coding and subsequent theme generation stages of RTA of the importance of moving to a level of deeper engagement and understanding. With this in mind, it was challenging to avoid the trap of only providing a surface level description of what was shared by participants. This emphasised the importance of engaging in an iterative process, which involved continuous re-immersion in the data and time to reflect on the central idea that drew together diverse contributions (Braun & Clarke, 2023). To aid this process, I found it beneficial to take periods of time away from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). This offered me an opportunity for reflection and to gain alternative perspectives, rather than becoming caught in cycles of previously

attributed meaning. In this way it really did feel that I was on a journey of finding, losing and finding my way again (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

I observed that as I became deeper within the data analysis process that it was difficult to ascertain when I had reached a point of analysis that was 'good enough' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.71). My aim with the coding process was to adopt a granular approach through semantic and latent labelling to represent diverse meaning expressed in the data. However, I noticed that this quickly became unwieldy as the number of codes built up. This required a process of revisiting and letting go of codes that did not capture or represent meaning in the data. I also felt a responsibility throughout the research process to reflect the voices and experiences of participants. I was passionate to offer valuable insights that could inform the practice of others in support of YP at risk of NEET. In this sense, I feel that my attachment and desire to carry out a robust and thorough data analysis was connected to these personal aims. However, at times it was difficult to identify when it was ready to move forwards to the next phase. Seeking a reflective space within supervision helped me to discuss and explore how I could take my data analysis forward.

4.13 Contribution to Knowledge

4.13.1 Contribution of Research to Existing Knowledge

This research study offered some insight into the constructs held by EPs in Wales in relation to YP at risk of NEET and how these influence working practices. This is an area of research that has not yet been explored in depth within a Welsh context and is sparse in the wider UK context. It therefore offers a unique contribution to literature exploring EP practice.

Findings from the research provide insight into the role of the EP with YP at risk of NEET and how this can translate into LA practice in support of a cohort of YP facing multiple risk factors impacting engagement in education. EPs who participated in this study aligned their role as advocates for YP in support of improved outcomes associated with educational engagement. The EP role spans across both pre and post-16 settings, with an emerging role in post-16. Findings from this research offer insight into potential working practices or areas of influence for EPs to support YP at risk of NEET. With increasing numbers of YP experiencing NEET, this research supports the value of the EP contribution at an individual, group and systemic level to promote change in support of the needs of YP. A further strength of this research is the use of qualitative methods to capture the subjective experiences of EPs and their diverse practices across LAs in Wales. These unique perspectives offer insight into the range and variety of work that can be implemented to support YP, whilst capturing the underlying values and motivations of participants to improve outcomes for YP.

Participants in this research shared:

- How they have driven and supported innovative programmes to identify the needs of YP and provide appropriate support in an effort to reduce the risk of experiencing NEET.
- How they have implemented Welsh Government policy and guidance in practice and in collaboration with pre and post-16 services to support the outcomes of YP.
- How they seek to integrate psychology into everyday practice to expand understanding of YPs' underlying needs in order to access appropriate intervention and support.

In response to these findings, EPs and LAs can build on current research by considering the following:

- How can we think creatively and innovatively to develop processes to support YP in line with Welsh Government policy and guidance in relation to NEET?
- How can we work with others to promote change in support of improved outcomes for YP at risk of NEET?
- How can we further evolve and develop the EP role within the post-16 sector in support of YP at risk of NEET?

4.13.2 Contribution to Future Research

This research study only sought the views and experiences of practicing EPs in Wales.

Therefore, it may be beneficial to further explore the experiences and perspectives of

YP, their families and professionals who support YP at risk of NEET. However, it is

acknowledged that there would need to be ethical considerations for the identification

of YP at risk of NEET and how research could be carried out that would not further

stigmatise this cohort of YP.

It is important to note that participants in this research study were given responsibility in specialist EP roles that relate specifically to YP who may experience risk of NEET. This may impact the values and experiences shared by EPs participating in the current research in comparison to EPs who are not working under these responsibilities and, therefore, warrants further exploration. Furthermore, this study focused on EP perspectives regarding their work with YP at risk of NEET, without assessing the effectiveness of their approaches. Further investigation into the perceived impact on different systems could offer valuable insights into effective practices and inform EP and LA service delivery.

4.14 Dissemination of Research

In the initial stages, dissemination of this research, once examined, will be via online open access through Cardiff University. I also aim to share research findings in a range of contexts in the hope that this may offer a useful contribution to EPs' work with YP at risk of NEET, outlined below (table10):

Table 10. Dissemination plan for research study

Intended Action	Plan	Timescale
Poster presentation at Cardiff University Educational Psychology conference	Create and share poster presentation during the summer programme conference	July 2025
Share research findings with participants	Email participants a link to the final thesis published on Orca	September 2025
Share findings with the post-16 special interest group	Share academic poster and summary of key findings in person or via email with the post-16 interest group	September-December 2025
Share findings with EP services across Wales	Share academic poster and summary of key findings in person or via email to the Principal EPs in each LA	September-December 2025

Consider opportunities to share findings at appropriate conferences and events	Share academic poster and summary of key findings in person or online via PowerPoint presentation as opportunities arise.	Ongoing
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4.15 Contribution to EP Practice

This study adopts Braun and Clarke's (2022) perspective that statistical generalisability is not the primary goal of qualitative research. Instead, the focus is on a rich description of the research context and participants. One aim of the research is to provide the opportunity for reflection on the EP role with YP at risk of NEET in relation to current service delivery through engagement with the presented findings of this study. This provides additional insight into implications for EP practice explored below.

The literature review identified a notable gap in empirical research concerning the specific role of EPs in supporting YP at risk of becoming NEET. Consequently, this research offers valuable insight into the construction and practice of the EP role with this cohort, advocating for its contribution to both pre- and post-16 settings and future development of this evolving function. Furthermore, it underscores the value added by applying a psychological lens to identify and address the unique needs of YP at risk of NEET and aims to raise awareness of this often-unseen population among wider EET providers. EP positioning within systems, coupled with an understanding of the influence of individual, groups and systemic factors upon the experiences, opportunities and outcomes of YP offers unique opportunities to support this cohort (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Through implementation of EP practitioner knowledge

and skills, there is the opportunity to reframe constructions that promote pejorative narratives in relation to YP at risk of NEET. This change in perspective through a strength-based, person-centred approach centres the EP role as key to moving towards improved outcomes for these YP. Findings suggest that adopting a systemic role offers EPs opportunities to engage in wider spheres of influence through multi-disciplinary roles and building the capacity of those working directly with YP at risk of NEET.

To facilitate evaluation of EP practice, the research proposes a model for assessing the EP role at individual, group, and systems levels (as depicted in Figure 13) and demonstrates the practical application of Welsh Government policy and guidance within existing LA multi-agency systems to meet the needs of YP at risk of NEET. Ultimately, this work seeks to inspire EPs to develop innovative and collaborative practices to better support this vulnerable group.

4.16 Concluding Reflections on the Research Journey

Carrying out this research has led to an opportunity for extensive personal growth. Throughout the journey I have found it challenging to identify myself as a researcher, experiencing various crises of confidence. However, despite these hurdles I am immensely proud of how far I have travelled in developing and implementing a toolkit of research skills. It has provided me with the experience of immersing deep within the literature and expanding my knowledge, not just of the concept of NEET, but the surrounding political context. As a result, I have developed a more extensive knowledge of UK and WG policy, which will be invaluable in my future role as a qualified EP. In turn, this has brought to my attention the bidirectional influence of the political context in

association with the EP role. Whilst policy and guidance can shape the structures that influence EP practice, EPs have the opportunity to drive change through implementation of innovative and creative processes. This is an inspiring insight to take forward into future endeavours.

The research experience has also caused me to reflect on the importance of centring the voice of others with the aim of understanding the views, perspectives and experiences of others. The opportunity to become immersed in data analysis to explore and draw together meaning has been a rewarding and significant experience in paying attention to constructs expressed by others through language. This holds significant value for my EP practice and the future outcomes of my work.

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5 Appendices

Appendix A - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist

	Section A: was there a clear statement of the research	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Section B: Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Section C: How variable is the research? Will the results help locally?
Beck (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brown (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clarkson (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Duffy & Elwood (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Garrett (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Holliman et al. (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mallinson (2009)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Morris (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Morris & Atkinson (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes

Nicholson & Putwain (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Partially	Yes	Yes
Owen et al (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Thompson (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turner-Forbes (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vukoja (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix B - Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)

	Arnold & Baker (2012)	Avila & Rose (2019)	Currie & Goodall (2009)	Russell (2010)
Screening Questions: Are there clear RQs?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do the collected data address the RQs?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Qualitative: Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the RQ?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the RQ?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes
Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes
Quantitative non-randomised: Are the participants representative of the target population? Are measurements appropriate regarding both outcome and intervention (exposure)? Are there complete outcome data? Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis? During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Quantitative descriptive: Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the RQ?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is the sample representative of the target population?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Are the measurements appropriate?	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes

Appendix C – Systematic literature review grid

Reference	Summary of Research	Research Design & Methodology	Sample Focus/Participant Info	Findings of Research/key themes	Critique/Limitations	Conclusion and critique (using CASP 2018 Qualitative Checklist)
<p>Arnold & Baker (2012)</p> <p>Transitions from school to work: Applying psychology to 'NEET'</p>	Development of a screening tool to identify YP at risk of becoming NEET to support methods of early intervention.	<p>Mixed methodology via collection of quantitative data from existing databases and individual interviews of each student participant.</p> <p>Intervention carried out with high risk of NEET YP.</p>	<p>79 x young people aged 17 to develop risk factors included in screening tool.</p> <p>Group 1 = 40 YP in EET</p> <p>Group 2 = 13 x YP in education, 13 x YP in training, 13 x YP in employment</p> <p>Pilot study in a secondary school. Data collected from 181 year 9 pupils.</p>	<p>Around 50% of YP at risk of NEET can be identified up to 3 years earlier than through existing screening tools.</p> <p>The early identification tool offers the opportunity for identification and early intervention of YP at risk of NEET, offering a scoring system via identification of risk factors.</p> <p>Increased clarity of the NEET term and the characteristics, risk factors and activities of these YP could offer greater focus for identification and intervention.</p>	<p>Consideration of the ethics of using YPs' personal data as part of an early identification tool. This may be seen as compromising an individual's right to privacy. However, the gains outweigh possible disadvantages.</p> <p>Extension of the identification tool to other mainstream settings would be beneficial to determine its efficacy, alongside evaluation of early intervention strategies.</p> <p>This was a pilot study and, therefore, does not claim rigour for the identification tool.</p>	<p>The screening tool allows for identification of cumulative risk factors that can lead to identification of at risk of NEET YP, who may have otherwise been missed.</p> <p>Establishing early links with external services, e.g. with Connexions personal advisor, can act as a protective factor for YP at risk of NEET. Developing trusting relationships with professionals at an early stage can offer the potential for increased engagement through the support it offers.</p>
<p>Avila & Rose (2019)</p> <p>When nurturing is conditional: how NEET practitioners position the</p>	Research explored the views of professionals who worked with NEET YP to gain insights into the perception of their	Mixed methods including 6 x semi-structured interviews and a survey completed by	31 professionals working with NEET individuals	<p>NEET practitioners held low expectations in relation to the outcomes for YP e.g. access to employment or further education. This is held within a dichotomous view of NEET as both a</p>	<p>A small sample of participants resulting in descriptive statistics.</p> <p>A larger sample could have afforded further insights related to quantitative and qualitative data.</p>	NEET professionals' aspirations for NEET YP appear highly correlated with their own experiences e.g. low education and low-skilled employment. This may indicate a lack of objectivity when working with NEET YP, viewing them through a lens

support they give to young people who are not in education, employment or training	role in supporting these YP.	25 professionals who work with NEET YP.		<p>systemic and an individual issue.</p> <p>NEET training provisions are perceived by practitioners as a safe place for YP, in contrast to perceptions of negative experiences experienced both by themselves and YP in mainstream education.</p>		informed by their own life trajectories. This may take away from a person-centred, individualised approach to support aspiration and progression.
Beck (2015) Learning Providers' work with NEET young people	An exploration into the dynamics and relationships between learner provider staff and YP who were termed NEET and how this impacts YPs' agency.	Qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews.	13 participants across 11 learning providers	<p>Developing positive relationships with YP was key to support their engagement and progression, providing a flexible approach that was responsive to the YP. Care and nurture were key to developing these relationships. However, this can lead to burnout and also challenges balancing the nurturing role with expectations of the learning provision.</p> <p>Learning providers themselves experienced unstable and low-skilled work. These low expectations can be transferred to NEET YP and perpetuate cycles of low aspiration and low quality employment. This can impact the level of agency to make change or meet aspirations by YP.</p>	It is not clear what age range of learners are included in this study. Research focused on YP termed as NEET and offered insight into the relationships developed with these YP. This was not directly linked to YP at risk of NEET but may offer some relevance to that cohort.	<p>Learning providers for NEET can often be associated with a low-quality provision. However, this varied across providers with some offering appropriate learning and challenge that led to employment opportunities. This is dependent upon local labour market opportunities.</p> <p>NEET YP can exist on the edges of the labour market, however learning providers can offer opportunities to exercise autonomy and agency. Professionals offer this through emotional and social support as well as opportunities for further progression.</p>

				Learning providers can provide small group learning that offers the opportunity for YP to develop and practice social, emotional skills and soft skills alongside their identity as a learner and participant of the group. This can offer the opportunity for engagement in learning and enactment of agency in their life decisions within a safe space.		
Brown, (2021) Doctoral Thesis An Exploration of Multi-Professional Practice Working with Young People Who Are at Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Wales: Implications for the EP Profession	The research explored the current work that is being carried out by differing professionals within 4 different LA's in Wales with YP at risk of becoming NEET to identify how EPs might work with this cohort of YP. Major literature review: provided context for NEET terminology and how this was located within UK and Welsh Government policy.	Qualitative methodology using individual interviews. Thematic analysis of data separated into 3 groups relating to participant role.	5 x NEET Leads 2x Education Welfare Officers 3x School staff Total of 10 participants from 4 different LA's	Multi-agency collaboration is important to identify YP at risk of becoming NEET to implement early intervention. Computer and collaborative screening methods are in place to identify YP at risk of NEET. However, keeping track of everyone's differing roles and responsibilities can be complex. Developing positive relationships seen as key to supporting engagement in education. Also supports understanding of disengagement and offering opportunities for personalised support.	Small sample of participants from 4 local authorities in South Wales. However, research provides an insight into the differing roles held within a LA and how these support YP at risk of NEET. YPs voice missing from the research, which would add an additional perspective in relation to the support they receive from professionals and its utility.	There are many good practices in place to identify and support YP at risk of NEET. However, there appears to be differing practices across the LAs represented in the research. This suggests that YP may have different access to resources and support dependent upon where they live. This suggests potentially inequitable support for YP at risk of NEET or via post-16 transition support. Funding arrangements can lead to instability of resource and support for at risk of NEET YP, which can focus on target-led outcomes, taking away from the potential for more individualised approaches that focus on long-term and sustainable outcomes. This can impact the support that professionals can provide.

				<p>Gathering pupil voice was an important element of this.</p> <p>An understanding of own role and remit was important in supporting YP, as well as a knowledge of alternative pathways provided within or outside of mainstream education that might meet the YP's needs.</p> <p>There are challenges supporting NEET YP, who may face complex challenges e.g. funding availability to support individualised support for all YP at risk of NEET, some YP/families choose not to engage, limited grant funding available tied to LA targets.</p> <p>Lack of diversity of post-16 options, including for ALN pupils. Some robust transition support in place but variable across LAs.</p> <p>No current and consistent referral processes in place to gain EP support and professionals in study could not refer directly to EPS. However, EPs are well placed to</p>		<p>Continuing difficulties to access hard to reach YP/families suggest continuing systemic inequalities resulting in complex needs and multiple risk factors experienced by YP which take higher priority than accessing EET.</p>
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				<p>work with individuals, other services and at a systemic level to support the complex needs of at risk of NEET YP.</p> <p>Implications for Welsh policy discussed.</p>		
<p>Clarkson (2018)</p> <p>Doctoral Thesis</p> <p>Exploring Support for Post 16 Young People Outside Mainstream Education</p>	<p>The research explored transition to post-16 settings for YP who have been identified as having an additional learning need. The study aimed to identify factors that support or impede transition for these YP through gathering YP, EP and staff views.</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews, observations and personal construct psychology (The ideal self).</p> <p>Thematic analysis was conducted.</p>	<p>Phase 1: 10 YP 5 EPs 6 professionals supporting YP in provisions</p> <p>Phase 2: 10 YP 5 staff supporting YP in provisions</p>	<p>Professionals identified a lack of knowledge of the diverse number of provisions available for YP and how these might meet the individual need of a YP. EPs were identified as being key to acquiring and disseminating this knowledge in a multi-disciplinary role and coordinating transition to meet the individual needs of a YP.</p> <p>Developing a positive relationship with a key member of staff was identified as important for transition and engaging in a new provision by YP in the study.</p> <p>YP benefit from the support of professionals when making post-16 transition decisions. This can be a complex process and YP with additional needs benefit from an advocate to navigate this</p>	<p>Analysis of data is subjective and relevant to the time and context within which the research is carried out.</p> <p>The study focused on transition for YP who experience additional needs. The study was not solely focused on YP at risk of NEET, although they may experience a variety of needs that could include additional learning needs. However, there were some insights that may be relevant to NEET YP accessing appropriate provision and the role of the EP associated with this.</p>	<p>Navigating the post-16 transition to find appropriate provision for YP who would benefit from alternative education options to mainstream and meet individual need can be complex. EPs are well placed to support YP to navigate post-16 transitions by identifying need and working as part of a multi-disciplinary team to identify appropriate provision.</p> <p>Developing positive relationships with staff helped to support engagement and also supported development of self-identity and future aspirations.</p> <p>EPs may need to further develop their skills to work with the post-16 cohort e.g. knowledge of development up to the age of 25. However, they could draw upon existing skills to support YP with transition e.g. application of psychology to identify need and psychoeducation to support the understanding of those who support the YP.</p> <p>EPs in the study identified that they do not think beyond the point</p>

				complexity to identify the most appropriate provision for the YP.		of post-16 transition. The researcher suggests looking further forward into the future to support the needs of YP.
Currie & Goodall (2009) Using collaborative action research to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET	Exploring a method of identifying YP at risk of NEET and how to support them. A collaborative research model involving Careers Scotland, schools and the EPS in 4 local authorities in Scotland	Quantitative through use of a questionnaire developed in collaboration school so that it was relevant to the specific school context. Qualitative: General themes were identified from data analysis to feedback to schools.	34 young people 4x schools: a separate questionnaire completed to identify the support provided for each YP who participated in the project.	YP did not attribute value to the personal social education (PSE) provision that supported with transition from school to next destinations. There was a wide variety of in-school support, however, in general, YP did not recall using these services to address any worries or concerns related to goals related to transition. YP that did access in-school support had found it a positive experience, but they were generally those identified as moving towards a negative pathway and may therefore have been more likely to have been referred to these services. YP tend to be in negative destinations to access additional support services through Careers Scotland, EPS, CAMHS and community-based organisations. YP generally had little, if any, exposure to college which highlighted the	The information provided for some YP by school staff was incomplete, which was a potential barrier to assessing risk factors associated with a YP. This indicated a need for building staff capacity to identify YP at potential risk of NEET. The questionnaires used for data collection were long and overwhelming. Careers Scotland advisors carried out the questionnaire with YP but were not involved in its design. There were a small number of participants, no formal analysis of data and schools carried out the project differently.	The research project helped EPS' to identify psychological and targeted support for schools in provision of PSE and transition support for YP. The research project led to strengthened relationships between Careers Scotland, schools and EPS'. Promoting a multidisciplinary approach was found to be beneficial in support of YP at risk of NEET. EPs are well placed to act as a bridge between different services in support of the outcomes of YP. Action research projects also offer an opportunity for EPs to bring together services for a common goal. Although it was noted that this required a large time and resource commitment.

				<p>importance of school-college relationship for transition.</p> <p>Work experience appeared to have a positive impact on positive future outcomes, however, this needs more research.</p>		
<p>Duffy & Elwood (2013)</p> <p>The Perspectives of 'Disengaged' Students in the 14-19 Phase on Motivations and Barriers to Learning within the Contexts of Institutions and Classrooms</p>	<p>This research study aims to investigate factors that influence engagement in education from the perspective of YP aged 14-19 year olds within</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology including interviews and focus groups.</p> <p>Data analysis used thematic analysis.</p>	<p>18 x educational institutions across England were included.</p> <p>3x case studies carried out in each institution, including interviews with senior leaders, governors, teachers, year 11 & 13 students and students identifies as disengaged from years 10-13.</p> <p>Focus groups with students groups of 6-8 students in years 11, 13 and with disengaged students.</p>	<p>Relatedness via student-teacher relationships and peer relationships are an important factor leading to school engagement. Students can experience a hierarchical structure within the classroom which leads to differential treatment. Students that felt placed at the bottom of the hierarchy experienced higher levels of disengagement. Disengagement related behaviours may be an expression of the frustrations held with the unequal hierarchical structures in place. Students may experience disengagement but continue to hold future aspirations. Experiences of disengagement can evolve over time and are not static in nature.</p>	<p>The views of students were gathered in relation to their perceptions of school engagement. Within this study, teacher voice was not represented, which may offer additional insight into views around educational disengagement.</p>	<p>The term disengagement can be problematic due to complex interacting factors that lead to disengagement. This can present difficulties with identifying and therefore targeting YP experiencing disengagement with their education.</p>

				<p>Although policy aims to address disengagement through recommendation of early intervention, it is not yet clear how this leads to improved student-teacher relationships to promote engagement.</p> <p>Government programmes and policy to create flexible, creative and vocational education and pathways has benefits for educational engagement for some YP, however there remains an imbalance in the quality of provision and how it is valued by employers and educational provisions in comparison to traditional academic routes.</p>		
<p>Garrett (2022)</p> <p>Doctoral Thesis</p> <p>How Do Secondary School SENDCos and Career Leads Perceive the Successes and Barriers to Identifying and Supporting Those at Risk of Becoming</p>	<p>The research aimed to gain the views of SENDCos and Career Leads in relation to how they viewed their role in supporting YP at risk of becoming NEET. This was then applied to a potential role for EPs in this area.</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology through paired interviews (with a SENDCo and career lead in each school).</p> <p>Reflexive thematic analysis of the data.</p>	<p>9 x career leaders 8 x SENDCos Total = 17 participants</p>	<p>SENDCo and Career leads identified strategies that successfully supported YP at risk of NEET, including raising aspirations, supporting relationships, partnering with external agencies, supporting families, working with vulnerable students and a whole school approach. Barriers to these were limited access to resource both within and outside of the school mechanism.</p>	<p>Research was focused in one local authority and potentially recruited participants who were already engaged in NEET prevention. However, considerations and findings from the research may resonate with other settings and EP services.</p> <p>Implications for EPs were drawn from the responses of individuals who participated in the research. Participant understanding and perceptions of the EP role may have impacted their views on the support EPs could offer.</p>	<p>Due to resource and capacity of the EP service at the time of the research, it was suggested that EPs supported YP at risk of NEET using the existing LA EP offer. This contrasts with the suggestions and findings from other research.</p> <p>Schools have the potential to identify and support YP at risk of NEET through developing a nurturing learning environment and early intervention via preventative support. Although this can be limited by capacity, funding and local</p>

NEET, and How Might Educational Psychologists Support in This Area?				<p>Participant narratives reflected a within-child viewpoint, whilst considering complex interaction of external factors.</p> <p>One of the research questions aimed to identify the role that EPs could offer in supporting YP at risk of NEET. Within the EPS included in the research there was limited capacity and resource to support at risk of NEET YP.</p> <p>4 suggested areas of support: changing perceptions, overcoming perceptual barriers, applying psychology to overcome barriers and raising awareness of need.</p>		education/training offer to meet individual need.
<p>Holliman et al. (2023)</p> <p>Understanding and Reducing NEET: Perspectives of Schoolteachers and Career Advice Service Providers</p>	Research to explore the efficacy of careers provision within schools alongside the NEET referral process.	<p>Qualitative methodology using individual, semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>Data were analysed vis Thematic analysis.</p>	<p>2 x schoolteachers with a career's advice responsibility</p> <p>3 x careers advisors</p>	<p>Teachers noted that 1:1, personalised support was an effective method of identifying pupil need and those at risk of NEET. However, statutory guidance only requires 1 x 1:1 meeting before year 11, which would not be sufficient to support at risk of NEET learners.</p>	<p>Only a small number of participants. Use of focus groups could have offered richer data and further insights into the topic explored.</p> <p>Further research could include a greater number of schools to identify variability of approach and support across provisions.</p>	Development of robust systems for career support over time that meets the individual needs of YP at risk of NEET could act as an early intervention tool. This would be supported through increasing staff understanding and knowledge of a whole school careers approach that is embedded into the curriculum and is continued over time.

				<p>The pandemic led to some careers support moving onto online, which was seen to benefit some YP at risk of NEET. Offering flexibility could benefit some individuals.</p> <p>Understanding of the careers provision within the school was not always fully understood by senior leadership teams or teaching staff and this could impact embedding within the curriculum. However, this was specific to the school environment and could be variable.</p> <p>Work experience offers the opportunity to raise pupil aspirations and offer insight into the world of work. However, this can be influenced by parental aspirations and opportunities within the local area.</p> <p>Processes for identifying YP at risk of NEET vary and can rely upon experience and intuition rather than robust processes. Further support and guidance would be beneficial. Pupil referral processes and</p>		<p>Identification of YP at risk of NEET could be supported by robust referral systems within school and in collaboration with the careers service. Communication between services to support individuals at risk of NEET could help to offer support into appropriate EET at transition, as well as early intervention.</p> <p>Links with local employers and community services could offer additional support, knowledge and opportunities for YP at risk of NEET. This would require staff within schools and careers services to build the required relationships to carry this forward.</p>
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				<p>communication have limited efficacy and can lead to pupils being missed and removing opportunities for early intervention. Partnerships between careers services and schools need to be strengthened.</p> <p>A reduction in careers services available to schools has limited the opportunity to identify YP at risk of NEET. Careers advisors also cited less opportunities for EET were available to YP at risk of NEET.</p> <p>YP at risk of NEET face an increased number of complex factors, such as mental health, which require more specialist support.</p> <p>Accessing YP at risk of NEET can be challenging due to instability of living arrangements, educational provision or mental health needs. Parents can sometimes be a barrier to supporting at risk of NEET.</p>		
Mallinson (2009)	A study to explore student and teacher views on what supports a	Qualitative methodology with focus groups and	3 x focus groups with students aged 15-18 years old, n=17	Themes from data analysis for effective transition to post-16 included good	Small number of participants and only based at 1 FE college reduces generalisability to other institutions.	Supportive strategies for transition identified in the study include effective communication between schools and FE institutions to

From school to further education: Student and teacher views of transition, support and drop-out	successful transition into further education. Students were involved in a college preparation course at the time of the study.	use of an abbreviated method of grounded theory for data analysis.	1x focus group of teaching staff in an FE college, n=5.	information, positive attitude, learning and teaching and opportunities.	Students and teachers may have wanted to present a positive representation of their experiences and the college as the findings of the study would be shared with others. Students were not identified as at risk of NEET, however, they experienced some risk factors including low attainment and living in a low-SES area. Consequently, this study may offer some insights into potential factors leading to or preventing drop-out.	support YPs' needs when transitioning to college, developing peer relationships during induction, identifying YP at risk of NEET, development of partnership working between schools, colleges and other services for information sharing to support YP, positive student-teacher relationships built upon respect, provision of a curriculum to meet the needs of individual learners, opportunities for work experience.
Morris (2017) Doctoral Thesis Exploring the Potential Contribution of Educational Psychologists to Post-School Practice	This research study aimed to explore how EPs could support the mental health of YP identified as SEND at transition into post-16 settings.	Qualitative methodology using an Appreciative Inquiry approach carried out in 4 focus groups. Thematic analysis of data.	6 x Educational Psychologists operating in 1 Local Authority EPS.	EPs play a key role in managing transition by building and maintaining key relationships with professionals involved in the transition process. EPs are skilled at implementing person-centred practices, which support with transition. EP knowledge and confidence in relation to the post-16 sector require further development, including clarity of the EP role in the FE sector and commissioning work.	Small scale research with 6 participants, which therefore lacks generalisability. One EP had a post-16 responsibility within the EP team and focus group, which may impact their responses to the research carried out. Attendance varied throughout the 4 stages of the AI process and may have impacted the data and discourse from each session. The research focus was on supporting YP with mental health needs. However, this is a relevant risk factor for YP at risk of NEET.	EP practices in post-16 need to develop a clear understanding of the roles held by stakeholders in FE settings, alongside FE systems and support structures. This can be used to develop the post-16 EP role to meet the needs of individuals appropriate to the context and existing systems, rather than perpetuating existing support mechanisms already in place.
Morris & Atkinson (2018) The role of educational	A systematic review of literature that provides an insight into how EPs can support	Systematic literature review	7 studies included	EPs can offer support with post-16 transition for SEND YP through systemic and strategic practices e.g. managing	The majority of papers included in the systematic review were doctoral theses, however, it was felt that the viva process offered a	The identification of the role of the EP to support YP with SEND at post-16 transition highlights the areas of support that could be offered by an EP at a systemic,

psychologists in supporting post-16 transition: findings from the literature	individuals with SEND to access transition into post-16 services.			<p>processes, roles and supporting understanding of YPs' individual needs.</p> <p>EPs can offer support at the individual level through personalised goals, a focus on long-term educational outcomes, development of key skills for transition to post-16 and a strength-based needs analysis.</p> <p>EPs offer a psychological perspective on transition and can support provisions to take a person-centred approach to develop appropriate provision to meet need.</p> <p>EPs can build relationships with post-16 services to promote multidisciplinary working and development of provision to meet the needs of SEND learners.</p> <p>EPs can offer support with early intervention and facilitate parent-school relationships, assessment, gathering pupil voice and offering therapeutic work.</p>	<p>robust review process for their inclusion.</p> <p>Inclusion and exclusion criteria used for this review may have led to some relevant papers being missed that may have offered a contribution to the EP role in post-16 transition.</p> <p>Research papers selected and discussed were not directly associated with NEET or at risk of NEET YP.</p>	group and individual level. The identified areas of the EP role for post-16 transition reflect the skills held and utilised by EPs within mainstream education roles. This provides a strong argument for EPs to play a key role in post-16 transition, both in the early stages, during and post-transition.
Nicholson & Putwain (2018)	Use of the self-system model to determine YPs'	Qualitative 1: 1 semi-structured	35 x students (aged 14-16)	Meeting the psychological needs of pupils in the AP led to positive student-	The research study was only carried out in 1 alternative provision school with a small	This study lends support for development of positive student-teacher relationships to promote

<p>The importance of psychological need satisfaction in educational re-engagement</p>	<p>experience of psychological support in terms of autonomy, relatedness and competence to support educational engagement in an alternative education provision.</p>	<p>interviews and lesson observations.</p> <p>Data analysis using IPA.</p>	<p>37 x staff members</p>	<p>teacher relationships, leading to increased educational engagement.</p> <p>Teaching practices in the classroom environment through flexibility, choice, respect and non-confrontational approaches led to YPs' feelings of autonomy. This led to student engagement and value of education.</p> <p>Relationships with teachers and peers promoted school belonging and feelings of being understood, promoting school engagement.</p> <p>Student competency was built through clear classroom expectations, support and confidence in learners.</p> <p>Relatedness appeared to be of most importance in building positive student-teacher relationships, leading to increased educational engagement, which can lead to positive life outcomes for YP.</p>	<p>sample. Some pupils declined to participate, which may have impacted results derived from collected data.</p> <p>Quantitative data collection related to measure of psychological factors, school attendance, attainment and reported behaviour might offer additional insight into the impact of the measures put in place in the AP that do not rely only upon self-reported experiences.</p>	<p>school engagement in an alternative education provision, despite previous held negative experiences in mainstream education with developing and maintaining relationships. This offers some insight into how approaches taken by teachers, such as flexibility, care, respect, choice and experiences of success through appropriate academic challenge. Further research into a wider range of alternative provisions and mainstream education could offer further insight into facilitating factors.</p>
<p>Owen et al., (2024)</p>	<p>A study to explore how a programme that incorporated</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology including</p>	<p>38x pupils aged 14-15 years who</p>	<p>Pupils valued relationships with programme staff, who</p>	<p>The TACKLE programme was carried out over a period of 6 months, but was interrupted by</p>	<p>A multi-component approach, which includes work placements and vocational learning</p>

<p>A realist evaluation of a multi-component program with disengaged students</p>	<p>a range of learning components (TACKLE) could support educational engagement for YP at risk of NEET in Wales.</p>	<p>interviews, observation of pupils in learning sessions</p>	<p>were disengaged from education</p> <p>4x teachers</p>	<p>acted as a 1:1 mentor. They felt listened to, respected and valued. Over time they felt mutual trust and respect. Countering negative relationships outside of education.</p> <p>Through care and being listened to by mentors, pupils demonstrated higher engagement in the TACKLE programme.</p> <p>Use of a strengths-based approach support pupils to feel more confident about their own skills and abilities and feel hopeful for the future and building aspirations.</p> <p>Engaging in active learning supported pupils to feel that they had more autonomy over their learning and could share their voice.</p> <p>Pupils developed positive peer relationships through shared experiences.</p> <p>Pupils engaged in work-based placements which demonstrated a positive impact on engagement in learning, future</p>	<p>school holidays, which may have affected the resulting impact of the programme. If the programme was continued for a longer time period there may be more likelihood of disengagement from participants.</p> <p>It is not possible to identify what the long-term impact of the TACKLE programme may have over time for pupil outcomes. Further longitudinal research would need to be carried out to investigate this further.</p>	<p>demonstrated higher levels of engagement for disengaged pupils than mainstream education. Therefore, adapting the curriculum to meet the interests and needs of pupils could offer a route to higher engagement. However, this may be challenging to navigate in mainstream classes with 30 or more pupils. Changes in approach to the curriculum via the new Welsh curriculum to follow pupil interests could offer an alternative route to the current mainstream approach.</p> <p>A constructivist approach to learning may benefit disengaged learners in which they become active collaborators in their learning experience.</p> <p>An environment which encouraged the development of positive peer relationships supported pupils with psychosocial needs due to shared experiences.</p> <p>TACKLE provided a 1:1 mentor for each pupil, which facilitated positive relationships with adults. This was valued by the pupils, building feelings of trust and respect. Provision of 1:1 support in mainstream school could be supportive for disengaged pupils. However, this relies upon the resource of staff and funding in the school system.</p>
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				<p>aspirations and self-esteem. It also helped pupils learn what they do not want to do as a join in the future.</p> <p>Opportunities for leadership built feelings of self-confidence.</p> <p>The TACKLE programme had a main focus of rugby. For the pupil that had no interest in rugby, professional role models did not have a positive impact on engagement during rugby sessions.</p>		<p>Pupils felt that a focus on academic attainment within school contributed to pressure on teachers, which did not allow them time to listen to pupils and offer pastoral support. School systems could benefit from evaluating how they could fulfil this need for disengaged learners.</p> <p>A strengths-based approach adopted in the TACKLE programme shifted the focus to YPs strengths and abilities, leading o increased self-esteem. This is something that could be adopted as a whole school ethos.</p>
<p>Russell et al. (2010)</p> <p>Playing the numbers game: Connexions personal advisers working with learners on entry to employment programmes</p>	<p>This research study explored the experiences of Connexions advisers' work with staff and learners involved in an Entry to Employment (E2E) Government training scheme.</p>	<p>Mixed methods including analysis of official documents, local provider texts, photographs, interviews and observations.</p>	<p>Interviews held with 3x Connexions advisers, E2E learners, provision managers, tutors, E2E partnership managers and the local NEET Strategy co-ordinator</p>	<p>Connexions advisers identified developing positive relationships with empathy and understanding as a key part of their role. Suitability and appropriateness of provision was noted as a challenge to supporting NEET YP, with allocation of funding, level of qualification.</p> <p>Connexions advisers had established relationships with a range of professionals, which supported collaboration</p>	<p>The Connexions service existed between 2000-2012 for YP aged 13-19 (or up to age 25 if there is identified SEN). This has now been replaced by the National Careers Service, which is for all individuals ages 13+. The E2E program is also no longer in operation. Although this research study offers some insights into the professionals that work with NEET YP, further research would be beneficial to explore current views and perceptions of professionals working with this group.</p>	<p>Connexions advisers demonstrate motivation to support the needs of individual YP, however, they experience constraints through funding, availability of providers and target-driven measures.</p>

				and referral of NEET YP to services.		
Thompson (2010) Teaching in the margins: tutors, discourse and pedagogy in work-based learning for young people	A research study exploring practitioners' work with learners on an E2E programme and the culture of the learning that takes place and the efficacy of this.	Qualitative: observation, interviews, recorded and transcribed. *Note same data set as in the study by Russell et al (2010)	48 x learners on E2E programme 15 x E2E practitioners	Tutors on E2E course shared the fulfilment that they feel from supporting YP attending the programmes. They felt that they were able to offer quality support through empathy and availability. Staff were able to react flexibly to address the learning needs of learners e.g. provision of life skills, pastoral support. Tutors identified that systemic constraints of their role in affecting change for YP on the E2E programme, such as sourcing appropriate training or employment.	As with Russell et al (2010), the E2E programmes are no longer in existence. This has been replaced by Foundation Learning in FE settings. Further research may offer insight into how these settings support YP at risk of NEET and the perceptions of staff and learners in these settings.	The construction of programmes, funding and staffing have an impact on the proceeding learning culture that is created through these structures, for example, associating lower value to the learners, staff and courses/qualifications offered. This then perpetuates pejorative discourse around YP at risk of NEET and contribute to social exclusion.
Turner-Forbes (2017) Doctoral Thesis An Action Research Investigation into a Possible Model of Working Between an EPS and an Organisation that Supports	The research suggests a potential model for EPs to work with an external organisation supporting NEET YP aged 16-25, suggesting there is a role for EPs to work collaboratively with organisations outside of mainstream	Qualitative action research Action research using the RADIO method Thematic analysis using a group collaborative method to	Professionals working with NEET: 8 EPs & 4 staff in an external organisation = 12 participants in total	There is no current set model to work with 16–25-year-olds termed NEET or hard to reach, external organisations are willing but unsure how this would work practically. EP work with NEET YP tends to support those at risk whilst still in mainstream education.	Limitations: practicalities of funding and capacity were cited. The RADIO method was unable to be fully implemented due to the external agency closing, which may add insight into potential barriers to working with the temporary nature of some external services. Confidence of EPs to work with NEET YP and external organisations also cited as a challenge to implementation.	It does not appear that there are robust systems for EPs to work with the 16-25 age group who reside outside of mainstream education. In addition, EPs shared they felt they lacked the experience working with this group, which impacted their levels of confidence. A model of working with post-16 for EPs was developed by the researcher, using the themes that emerged from the action research. This mirrors established

NEET (Those Not in Education, Employment or Training) 16-25 Year Olds	education settings using the same models as already in place in mainstream.	build upon initial themes identified by the researcher.		<p>EPs could work at the individual and systemic level to support YP and staff.</p> <p>EPs could use the same model of delivery currently used in LA's to work with organisations that support NEET YP.</p> <p>EPs may lack experience and confidence working in post-16 settings to support YP at risk of or termed as NEET.</p>	<p>Unable to identify if this would transfer across to other LA's and organisations who may have different models of working.</p> <p>YPs' voice was missing from the research as the focus was on the professionals that work with them. Further research in this area would be beneficial.</p>	<p>methods of EP work with mainstream CYP in current LA practices. It would be beneficial to conduct further research as to whether this would be an effective model to use in post-16 with YP at risk of or termed as NEET. NEET YP can often be hard to reach due to being absent from EET. If the YP is not known to EET settings it may be challenging to follow the process outlined. This may point towards a more systemic approach to support parents/carers and staff to support the YP.</p>
<p>Vukoja (2017)</p> <p>Doctoral Thesis</p> <p>The Development of the Educational Psychologist's Role in Post-16 Education</p>	The research explores how Educational Psychologists view their role within the post-16 sector and how they can support YP post-16.	<p>Qualitative methodology using individual interviews.</p> <p>Thematic analysis of the data.</p>	6 x EPs 3 x members of staff working in a post-16 setting	<p>EPs constructed their identity as psychologists and applying psychology to support YP and wider systems. Participants demonstrated a strong sense of identity within their role.</p> <p>EPs identified that their role in post-16 may require an extension of knowledge around key legislation, appropriate assessment for post-16 and understanding of FE systems. EPs constructed their role as mediator between key professionals and involvement with more</p>	<p>EPs who participated in the research had a range of experience in post-16 practice some with no or very limited experience in this area. This may have impacted the constructions held of their role with post-16 as they develop their understanding of how to work with individuals and systems in FE.</p> <p>Small sample of EPs and post-16 staff. Research was completed when post-16 work with EPs was in its beginning stages and therefore EPs potentially lacked experience and knowledge in this area.</p> <p>The study does not address at risk of NEET YP, however post-16</p>	<p>EP constructions within the participant group indicate that they view the EP role as involving more direct work with YP alongside multi-disciplinary work with professionals, and systemic work. EPs did not view their role as needing to change with the remit to work with the 16-25 year old age group.</p> <p>Findings from the research indicate that EPs could use the skillset that they have already developed in mainstream education to post-16 settings. This is in contrast to the findings of other research studies. In addition, EPs felt they would need to extend their knowledge of legislation related to post-16 e.g. The Mental Capacity Act, 2005</p>

				<p>direct work with YP rather than systems.</p> <p>EPs demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy in acquiring and developing their skills in relation to working with YP in post-16 settings.</p> <p>EP understanding of the roles and strengths of other professionals can direct potential work or intervention with YP and/or systems.</p> <p>Systems become more complex and varied when transitioning again at 17-18 years old. This can be challenging to navigate as an EP due to the changing nature of services and provisions.</p> <p>Due to funding arrangements, EPs may not have the opportunity to work with YP at risk of NEET if they do not already have an EHCP or IDP limiting the ability to support individual students that might not have an identified need.</p>	<p>support can offer a protective factor for these YP.</p>	
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Appendix D – Online recruitment post

EP Participants needed for Doctoral Research exploring the EP role with YP at risk of NEET

I am a 2nd year Trainee Educational Psychologist studying on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology program at the University of Cardiff. I am looking for educational psychologists working in a local authority in Wales, who have worked with children and young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Participation will involve taking part in a focus group with up to 6 participants, which may last up to 90 minutes.

The focus group will be held on Microsoft Teams to facilitate the participation of EPs from across Wales. The aim of the focus group is to collect the views and experiences of educational psychologists in Wales working with children and young people at risk of becoming NEET. This will include exploring current EP practice in this area and the facilitators and barriers of working with NEET young people.

If you would be interested and willing to take part in this research study, please could you contact Anneliese Goodare via email: XXXXXX and I can provide further information.

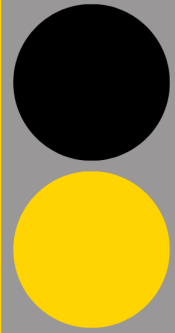
Appendix E – Email recruitment communication

I am a 2nd year Trainee Educational Psychologist studying on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology program at the University of Cardiff. I am looking for educational psychologists working in a local authority in Wales, who have worked with children and young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Participation will involve taking part in a focus group with up to 6 participants, which may last up to 90 minutes.

The focus group will be held on Microsoft Teams to facilitate the participation of EPs from across Wales. The aim of the focus group is to collect the views and experiences of educational psychologists in Wales working with children and young people at risk of becoming NEET. This will include exploring current EP practice in this area and the facilitators and barriers of working with NEET young people.

If you would be interested and willing to take part in this research study, please could you contact Anneliese Goodare via email: XXXXXX and I can provide further information.

AN EXPLORATION OF CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' PRACTICE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF NEET IN WALES



I am a 3rd year Trainee Educational Psychologist studying on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology program at the University of Cardiff. I am looking for educational psychologists working in a local authority in Wales, who have worked with children and young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

What does it involve?

Participation will involve taking part in a focus group with up to 6 participants, which may last up to 90 minutes. The focus group will be held on Microsoft Teams to facilitate the participation of EPs from across Wales.



Aims of Study

1. To gain a greater understanding and awareness of Educational Psychologists' (EPs) in Wales work with young people who are at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).
2. To explore how Educational Psychologists view their role and contribution working with young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Contact Information

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact:

Anneliese Goodare

email: XXXXXX

Appendix G – Participant information sheet



School of Psychology Participant Information Sheet Version: 1 Date: 29/02/24



An Exploration of Current Educational Psychologists' Practice with Young People at Risk of NEET in Wales

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of this research project?

This research project will aim to gain a greater understanding and awareness of how Educational Psychologists (EPs) in Wales are working with young people who are risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the associated facilitators and limitations of this work.

This is a year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist research thesis project.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you are an educational psychologist who has experience of working with young people who are at risk of becoming NEET.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, we will discuss the research project with you and ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide not to take part, you do not have to explain your reasons and it will not affect your legal rights.

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project at any time before the transcription of data collected from the focus groups without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form.

4. What will taking part involve?

This study will be using a focus groups, containing a minimum of 4 participants and a maximum of 6 participants. The focus groups will last up to 90 minutes and all questions and answers will be recorded on via the Microsoft Teams audio recording facility and stored on a password protected, encrypted computer. Following the focus group, a thematic analysis of the transcript data will be conducted. The focus groups will take place on Microsoft Teams to enable participation of EPs from across Wales.

5. Will I be paid for taking part?

No

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct advantages or benefits to you from taking part, but your contribution will help us understand current EP practice with young people at risk of becoming NEET.

7. What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks for taking part in this study.

8. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

All information collected from (or about) you during the research project will be kept confidential and any personal information you provide will be managed in accordance with data protection legislation. Please see 'What will happen to my Personal Data?' (below) for further information.

9. What will happen to my Personal Data?

All personal data will be stored on a password protected and encrypted computer. This includes: participant name, name of local authority, signature for consent forms and audio recordings of the focus group. The personal data collected will not be shared by the researcher and all participants' personal information will be anonymised following the transcription process and within the research report.

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. Further information about Data Protection, including:

- your rights
- the legal basis under which Cardiff University processes your personal data for research
- Cardiff University's Data Protection Policy
- how to contact the Cardiff University Data Protection Officer
- how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office

may be found at <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>

As per Cardiff University's Research Records and Retention Schedule, data will be retained for a minimum period of 5 years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data (whichever is later). Personal data collected during the audio recording will be stored on an encrypted and password protected computer system to which only the researchers will have access. After a 2-week period, this will be transcribed and anonymised using alternative initials for participants names and for any other person identified in the recording.

After collection of data in the focus group, the research team will anonymise all the personal data it has collected from, or about, you in connection with this research project, with the exception of your consent form. Your consent form will be retained for a minimum period of 5 years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data and may be accessed by members of the research team and, where necessary, by members of the University's governance and audit teams or by regulatory authorities. Anonymised information will be kept for a minimum period of 5 years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data, but may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes. Once data is anonymised it will not be possible for participants to withdraw their data from the research project.

10. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

Upon completion of the project, the anonymised data will be included in a written research report. This data will be shared with the Cardiff University Doctorate of Educational Psychology staff team. Participants will not be identifiable by their anonymised data.

11. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the project will be presented in a written report and presentation, which will be shared with staff from the University of Cardiff Doctorate in Educational Psychology department. The results will be available from July 2025.

Your anonymised data may be stored in a data repository as part of Cardiff University's commitment to Open Science.

12. What if there is a problem?

If you wish to complain or have grounds for concerns about any aspect of the manner in which you have been approached or treated during the course of this research, please contact Hayley Jeans, email: XXXXXX or the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University at the address below. If your complaint is not managed to your satisfaction, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>.

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for it.

13. Who is organising and funding this research project?

The research is organised by Anneliese Goodare (Trainee Educational Psychologist) on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University. This research is supervised by Hayley Jeans, email: XXXXXX. There is no funding being received for this research project.

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

This research project has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University. Secretary of the Ethics

Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT.
Tel: 029 2087 0707 Email: XXXXXX

15. Further information and contact details

Should you have any questions relating to this research project, you may contact us during normal working hours:

Anneliese Goodare, email: XXXXXX or Hayley Jeans, email: XXXXXX

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed consent form to keep for your records.

Appendix H - Participant consent form



**School of Psychology
Consent Form
Version: 1 Date: 29/02/24**

**An Exploration of Current Educational
Psychologists' Practice with Young People at
Risk of NEET in Wales**



Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Anneliese Goodare

Type of Consent:

- i) **If research study is in the format of a questionnaire:** please tick box if consent is considered implied in taking part in the Questionnaire ☐
- ii) If consent is not implied or research study is NOT a questionnaire, please complete table below

**Please
initial
box**

I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 29/02/24 version 1 for the above research project.	
I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated 29/02/24 version 1 for the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences (e.g. to medical care or legal rights, if relevant). I understand that if I withdraw, information about me that has already been obtained may be kept by Cardiff University.	
I understand that data collected during the research project may be looked at by individuals from Cardiff University or from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in the research project. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information, which includes the consent form and audio recording of the focus group, for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be held in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation and in strict confidence, unless disclosure is required by law or professional obligation.	

I understand who will have access to my personal information, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project.	
I understand that after the research project, anonymised data may be made publicly available via a data repository and may be used for purposes not related to this research project. I understand that it will not be possible to identify me from this data that is seen and used by other researchers, for ethically approved research projects, on the understanding that confidentiality will be maintained.	
I consent to being audio recorded for the purposes of the research project and I understand how it will be used in the research.	
I understand that anonymised excerpts and/or verbatim quotes from my contributions within the focus group may be used as part of the research publication.	
I understand how the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published.	
I agree to take part in this research project.	

Name of participant (print):

Date:

Signature:

Role within school setting:

Name of School:

Name of person taking consent (print)

Date

Signature

Role of person taking consent:

(print)

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN OUR RESEARCH
YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP**

Appendix I – Focus Group Questions

- Welcome everyone & introductions (name)
- Share screen – recruitment poster & go through it
- Ground rules: respect opinions of others, allow time & space for everyone to speak, ask for clarity from others if needed, maintaining confidentiality of what is shared within the group.
- Reminder that you are free to leave at any time if you feel uncomfortable at any point with what is being discussed.
- I will be available for a debrief at the end of the focus group if there is anything you would like to reflect on or discuss further.
- You can also contact myself or my research supervisor if you feel that you would like additional support or have any concerns.

Question schedule:

1. What does the term NEET mean to you?
2. What are your thoughts and ideas around the term NEET?
3. What do you feel you can contribute in your role as an EP with young people at risk of NEET?
4. Facilitators and barriers to working with YP at risk of NEET.
5. Share an experience you have had working with a young person at risk of becoming NEET.

Prompt questions:

- Tell me more about that.
- Could you explain what you mean by that?
- Do you have any further thoughts on that?

Appendix J – Participant debrief information sheet

Participant Debrief Information Sheet

An Exploration of Current Educational Psychologists' Practice with Young People at Risk of NEET in Wales

Thank you for taking part in this research study, your time and participation is valuable and appreciated. The aim of this study was to gain the views and experiences educational psychologist working with young people at risk of becoming NEET to identify current EP practice and apparent facilitators and barriers within this area of work. The data and results gained through your participation in this research study will help to inform the researcher's thesis research study completed as part of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology.

Anonymised data and results may be published and used in presentation upon completion of the research study. It is hoped that the findings from this research may provide further insight into how EPs are working with young people at risk of NEET and the associated facilitators and barriers for this work. This would help to build a picture of current practice across Wales and offer insights into the approaches that have resulted in successes for young people at risk of NEET.

The focus group audio recordings and subsequent transcripts will be stored on a password protected and encrypted device only accessible to the researcher. Focus group data will be kept confidential throughout the transcription process. Following completion of the transcription, the recorded data will be deleted. All transcribed information will be anonymised through use of a pseudonym for each participant.

You have the right to withdraw your data up to two weeks after the focus group. After this period, there will be no identifiable link between yourself and your responses. If you are concerned about the data collection process, your participation in the focus group or have any further questions, please contact:

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Appendix K – Further supporting quotes for themes explored within findings

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Weaving the Thread	<p><i>“I think the really important link is to make sure there's some sort of pathway so that when they when they no longer legally have to go to school at 16, there's still support and it's appropriate support that understands them.” (Participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>“I know in, um, our local authority there's, we've had a secondment, um, from one of our managers to explore all the options that are available for young people post-16, because if the professionals working with them don't know what the options are, then how are the young people meant to.” (Participant 4)</i></p>
Shining a light on the unseen	<p><i>“I think I mentioned that earlier in the colleges seem quite pigeon holed to the ones that are there, there are conversations that those at risk of becoming NEET because they're not actually engaging as they, as the college want on the course, so there are question marks there about whether this young person might drop out of college, but we're not, it's not about the ones that are struggling to attend.” (Participant 5)</i></p> <p><i>“I've found that I've picked up cases through that, which perhaps weren't prioritised by the ALNCo at the beginning because they were prioritising, perhaps more IDP ALN type work rather than the, um, the NEET type, other vulnerability not attending.” (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>“So you don't necessarily go into the piece of work thinking this is a pupil at risk of NEET, and I need to, you know, the work needs to happen accordingly. So perhaps you're you're doing it without consciously thinking of them as at risk of NEET.” (Participant 2)</i></p>

<p>Acknowledging complexity</p>	<p><i>"I thought that was really interesting that she was mentioning like about it being a really broad definition, which it is, but even though it's like so broad, it still doesn't catch those children that we were talking about before, so...in a kind of like spectrum way of NEET [...]" (Participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>"There's a lot of reasons why a young person might be NEET, and sometimes not always, I suppose, not always for...most of the time it might be for, um, reasons that an EP would want to support with, but sometimes I suppose, yeah, it could even be a young person that's gone travelling, and obviously they technically still count as NEET. (Participant 2)</i></p>
<p>Inclusive and meaningful pathways</p>	<p><i>"School isn't for everyone, you know, school doesn't work for every pupil [...] it's something that we have to do...but, it, it just doesn't suit every learner. (Participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>"I find particularly our PRU is very limited in what they've got available, and it just doesn't, doesn't suit the strengths and they just switch off..." (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>"[...] when a curriculum and an education can be altered in some way, whether that's we use the AV1 robots and allow young people to try and observe and watch lessons virtually, [...] and start to kind of see a lesson again and kind of problem solve and think about their anxieties around going into that classroom." (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>"I know [...] some need to be 16 to offer that those, those alternative curriculums, but some of them will take them from year 10, 11 and if that's and, that's if that's what they succeeded in, and if that's what builds up that young person's motivation, then why do they need to be a bum on a seat in a classroom?" (Participant 4)</i></p>

	<p><i>"I think there's some really good projects out there, it suggests should it just be for CLA pupils when we know that there's a lot of NEET who aren't CLA, and can we offer those things that are working well to our other learners with our local providers who benefit from it as well because they get the workforce then who, who are prepared to go into these environments."</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p><i>"there is an alternative curriculum for some rather than your just...the limited options that our local authority has, as, as you've alluded to, [P1] with to which, which place can they fit into best and sometimes it's not any of them."</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p><i>"Actually, we do need to think about there are better ways, perhaps, of, of engaging young people and getting them into something that they enjoy."</i> (Participant 5)</p>
We need change	<p><i>"I do feel like it's almost like a catch 22 for some pupils as well, or like, almost like a behaviour lottery where OK, you, you behave well and enough so that you can go out and do this alternative provision, but because you don't behave well enough you can't really access a program that could really suit you and that you really need."</i> (Participant 5)</p>
"It takes a community" – facilitating multi-agency work	<p><i>"I think if somebody is able to hold that case as a key worker, whether it be through children services or youth service, or whoever is the main player there, bringing those people together so you can put all the bits together of the jigsaw to help understand strengths and needs is the key with with NEET really."</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p><i>"So there's a whole, the NEET is the top and there's lots of things going on underneath for them that we need to</i></p>

	<p><i>unpick and try and support on a multi-agency level.” (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>“[...] even though you might want to do the direct work, there are other teams who have more capacity to take them out three times a week and um...do things out that we haven't got the the ability necessarily to do so.” (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>“[...] so having that member of staff on the college come to speak to our secondary ALNCos, so there's consistency going through, so I'm guessing in time this is going to help the NEET community because there will be better relationships, better information sharing, it becomes part of of the offer and as an EPS it's just a follow through, even though we might not be doing lots of individual casework because hopefully needs are understood earlier on, looking at the the actual offer and the provision and the communication, it's like a bridge at the moment which they haven't had and that's been quite interesting to have been given that little bit of time to forge some, some, some better links.” (Participant 3)</i></p>
Shaping Systems	<p><i>“[...] we're doing a project around trauma informed schools and bringing the college into that so that there's, as you said before, like that thread, that golden thread of understanding.” (Participant 3)</i></p>
Making a meaningful impact/adding value	<p><i>“It's been really valuable so far this year that we've got, we've had eighteen sets of parents came to the first one and we got ten sets of parents come to another one and it is, it was a bit of like Psycho Education, this is anxiety, this is how it could look and just a bit of that sharing psychology.” (Participant 5)</i></p> <p><i>“[...] it's hugely time intensive, but actually getting the fuller picture just seems to be so valuable.” (Participant 1)</i></p>

<p>We're good at that – the EP toolkit</p>	<p><i>"I do a lot of direct work now, um, with parents and families and really sharing their views and like what as we as EPs do like a really good, like illustrating a child's voice, a parental voice where is really central to my role now" (Participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>"[...] partly promoting understanding of the complexity of the issues that things that might get overlooked, like the the trauma aspect or sometimes it's things like expressive language difficulties which haven't been identified and then there's often, you know...I think, yeah, perhaps promoting understanding of the pupils as individuals because they'll all have different needs, they may be, maybe they don't all have trauma, there could be all sorts of reasons, um, why they're at risk of NEET." (Participant 2)</i></p>
<p>Evolution of the EP role</p>	<p><i>"I think it's prime time for that, isn't it, as more like there's now a post-16 EP group, isn't there that I've found out about, um, so it seems that people are starting on that journey." (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>"we're gonna have a bit of a system where there's more multi agencies including the EPS on that panel of thinking how do we smo...make this transition as smooth as possible." (Participant 5)</i></p> <p><i>"So I've found that that is a good use of my time because...I've got an overview of of the school, I'm now covering the college as well since September, which is a brave new post 16 world, which I'm starting to learn about." (Participant 3)</i></p>