

**Professionals' Understanding of EBSA:  
Exploring Barriers and Facilitators to  
Collaborative Multi-agency Practice**

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## **Summary**

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

### **Part One: A Major Literature Review**

The literature review includes a narrative review (Part 1a) and a systematic review (Part 1b). The narrative review aims to explore the context of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This includes the changing landscape of identifying and supporting EBSA as well as the language professionals have used to describe this need. The systematic review, on the other hand, delves into the literature available exploring multi-agency practice to support EBSA.

### **Part Two: An Empirical Research Paper**

Part two is the empirical research paper which aimed to explore professionals understanding of EBSA and their role supporting this need. Furthermore, it hoped to explore their understanding of other professional's roles, and the barriers and facilitators of working in a multi-agency approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five professionals who support children and young people (CYP) who are experiencing EBSA within a single local authority in Wales. The data analysis was conducted using Reflexive Thematic Analysis which is outlined within this section. The themes and relating sub-themes that were developed within the research are also discussed. During the results section quotations from the interviews are included. Finally, the implications for practice, limitations and possible areas of future research were also discussed.

### **Part Three: A Critical Appraisal**

The final part of this thesis provides a reflective and reflexive critical appraisal of the research process and the decision-making carried out by the researcher. This section also includes reflections on the researcher's learning and how this may have impacted the research and their future work, as well contribution to knowledge.

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## **Abbreviations**

ALN - Additional Learning Needs  
APA - American Psychological Association  
ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder  
ASSIA - Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts  
BPS - British Psychological Society  
CAMHS - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services  
CASP - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme  
CYP - Children and Young People  
DfE - Department for Education  
EBSA - Emotionally Based School Avoidance  
EBSNA - Emotionally Based School Non-attendance  
EP - Educational Psychologist  
EPS - Educational Psychology Service  
ERIC - Education Resources Information Center  
EWO - Education Welfare Officer  
FSM – Free School Meals  
HCPC - Health and Care Professions Council  
LA - Local Authority  
PEP – Principal Educational Psychologist  
PRISMA - Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses  
RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis  
SEMH - Social, Emotional, and Mental Health  
TA - Thematic Analysis  
TAPPAS - Team Around the Pupil Parent and Setting  
TEP - Trainee Educational Psychologist  
UK - United Kingdom



*Professionals' understanding of EBSA: Exploring barriers and facilitators to collaborative multi-agency practice*

**Part One: Major Literature Review**

Word Count: 9694

## **Structure of Literature Review**

The current literature review is a combined approach of a narrative and systematic literature review. The decision was made to do a joint approach as it was recognised that the language and context regarding Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is complex and continuously evolving. Therefore, the structured format of a systematic review may have made it challenging to differentiate EBSA from other forms of non-attendance, providing a saturated number of papers. Additionally, the area of EBSA is so complex it may have required multiple systematic reviews to cover all areas that needed to be explored. Therefore, the first section will be a narrative review that attempts to provide an insight into the context of EBSA. This part of the review hopes to consider the changing landscape of EBSA including professionals' and researchers' use of language. Additionally, the narrative review will also explore the impact of EBSA, and how professionals may provide support to children and young people (CYP) who are experiencing EBSA.

The second part of the literature review will be a systematic literature review. This part will identify and critique the available literature exploring the barriers and facilitators to multi-agency working when supporting CYP experiencing EBSA. The reasoning for carrying out the review within this area of support will be outlined in more detail in Part one of the literature review.

## **Part 1a Narrative Literature Review**

### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Outline of Narrative Literature Review**

This narrative review aims to provide a better understanding of the context surrounding EBSA, and the evolving language used within the research to describe this form of non-attendance. Additionally, the review intends to explore the impact EBSA can have on CYP, and how professionals can provide support. A narrative approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to “synthesize multiple points of view” (Sukhera, 2022, p. 414). This is particularly pertinent with the changing terminology and understanding of EBSA that has happened within the literature and professional contexts over the years e.g. a shift from “school refusal” to “emotionally based school avoidance” (Halligan & Cryer, 2022). The narrative literature review aims to explore the following questions:

- What is the historical context of EBSA and how has the language changed?
- What is the impact of EBSA on CYP and their families?
- How can professionals support CYP experiencing EBSA?

#### **1.2 Search Strategy**

An initial scoping search was conducted between August 2024 and September 2024 using Google Scholar and Cardiff Library Search. This search identified the evolving language used to describe CYP who find it difficult to attend due to underlying emotional reasons. The following search terms were identified: ‘emotionally based school avoidance’, ‘school phobia’, ‘school refusal’, ‘school anxiety’, and ‘school non-attendance’. Between September 2024 and December 2024, these terms were used to search for relevant research using Google Scholar. Additional searches were carried out

using three online academic databases: Scopus, Medline and PsychInfo. Further research was identified by reviewing references and applying a snowball approach. It was understood by the researcher that some of the search terms identified may not be specific to CYP absence due to emotional needs, as not all research differentiated between the different forms of non-attendance. However, it was decided all non-attendance search terms would be used to identify relevant papers to ensure pertinent research was not missed. On occasion research focusing on non-attendance as an umbrella term was included, even if it was not specified if the non-attendance was a result of an emotional underlying need. However, this was to discuss the impact non-attendance can have on CYP's learning. Overall, the researcher endeavoured to use research that differentiated EBSA from other forms of non-attendance e.g. truancy.

### **1.3 Clarification of language**

Within this literature review the evolving language used by researchers and professionals to describe EBSA will be discussed. The current researcher reflected on the use of language and the term which would be most appropriate for the current research. Language around non-attendance is varied and could incorporate several different behaviours and needs.

Therefore, a clear definition of the type of absenteeism being explored was identified. The following definition will be adopted during this research:

"EBSA refers to reduced attendance or non- attendance at school where the avoidance is driven by emotional distress" (Lester & Michelson, 2024, p. 1).

The term EBSA highlights the 'emotional' factor to absenteeism, differentiating it from pupils who are absent from school due to truancy or other behaviours (Thambirajah et al., 2008). It must also be noted that the researcher uses the term EBSA within their current work and it is the term they are most familiar with at the time of writing the literature review.

However, this does not mean EBSA is the only term that is used or the most accepted. It is clear different professions, services, and researchers may use alternative terms for EBSA within their roles, and that this has changed over time. However, it was important that a consistent term was used throughout this research to ensure a clear understanding of what is being discussed. Therefore, going forward EBSA will be used for clarity and consistency.

#### **1.4 Impact of language**

Rae (2020) emphasised the importance of language professionals use when describing EBSA as the “words reflect the lens through which we see the behaviour” (p.4). Rae reasoned the language professionals use will be adopted by others and can set an ethos within systems. Terms such as school ‘refusal’ can suggest that the behaviour is something the CYP chooses to do. This can impact how people react to or support the behaviour and disempower the CYP to initiate any changes (Pellegrini, 2007). Other terminology such as EBSA on the other hand, recognises the emotional difficulties that are underlying the persistent absence from school. Therefore, it is valuable for staff to consider their use of language, such as EBSA or Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), to highlight the underlying emotional need of the school absence. Research has shown a consistent understanding of language between professionals can be a key factor in the success or failure of multi-agency collaborations (Costello-Wells et al., 2003; Marino & Kahnoski, 1998; Salmon & Kirby, 2008). A thematic analysis of multi-agency practices within CAMHS (Salmon & Rapport, 2005) found misunderstandings can arise when professionals use the same word but derive different meanings from it. Therefore, it would be valuable for all professionals within a system to use similar language and have a consistent understanding to ensure there are fewer misunderstandings. While this review has discussed the importance of the terminology chosen, and the



impact it can have, it is understood that different systems may use an alternative term to EBSA. However, the consistent approach and understanding of the language within the system is just as important as the terminology used itself. This will allow adults around the CYP to provide positive support that is coherent and collaborative, as well as reducing the risk of misunderstandings between agencies. Additionally, the language professionals use can possibly prevent the CYP feeling stigmatized or at fault. When the CYP feels they are being blamed for their absence, barriers to supporting them can occur. Therefore, professionals taking time to reflect on their language and the implications is important for supporting CYP effectively.

## **2.0 Prevalence**

### **2.1 School absenteeism in Wales**

Since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, there has been an increase in persistent absenteeism (Welsh Government, 2025). The figures show there was a rise in persistent school absence in Wales from 14.7% in 2018/19 to 30.4% in 2023/24 (Welsh Government, 2025). When addressing 'persistent absenteeism' in this study, the term is defined in accordance with the Welsh Government's criterion: missing 10% of school sessions.

Various factors can contribute to pupil absenteeism, which have been explored within the literature. This can include truancy (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020), sickness (Pijl et al., 2023), and underlying emotional needs (Panayiotou et al., 2023).

### **2.2 Prevalence of EBSA**

While government agencies often present clear yearly attendance figures, EBSA is not usually distinguished within these figures. Chian et al. (2024)

argued this would be a challenging task as schools may have different thresholds and definitions for absenteeism and the categories within this e.g. truancy, EBSA etc. The categorisation of absenteeism may be impacted by the school's understanding of Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs or how they accept it within their school. While the complexity of EBSA may impact reporting, current research within the UK estimates that between one and two percent of the pupil population within the UK have difficulties attending school due to underlying emotional difficulties (Elliott & Place, 2019; Gulliford & Miller, 2015; Halligan & Cryer, 2022). However, it is possible the numbers are underreported, especially as persistent absenteeism overall has become more prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic (Welsh Government, 2025, Department of Education, 2025).

The uncertainty in figures may occur due to researchers and practitioners from various professions having different conceptualisations of school absenteeism (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014), and the different categorisations of non-attendance. Therefore, the inconsistent approach to reporting could be affecting the reliability of the data. The inconsistencies in understanding and language may also impact how the CYP is perceived when they do not attend. It is possible they are being marked as truanting or refusing to attend, rather than professionals considering it as EBSA.

### **3.0 Impact of non-attendance**

#### **3.1 Educational Impact**

A study carried out in Scotland found overall academic attainment was impacted by school absences (Klein et al., 2022). It is worth noting, these findings only included older secondary pupils as this used the national exams to measure academic achievement. Therefore, this data may not be generalisable to all age groups. However, the study did argue these findings

supported Faucet Theory, which argues that being absent from school reduces opportunities to learning exposure (Entwisle et al, 2001). In other words, pupils who are exposed to fewer hours of learning are more likely to perform lower in their exams and are less likely to transition to further education once they complete their compulsory learning (Morrissey et al., 2014). Additionally in the cases of EBSA, the anxiety the CYP experiences can impact their ability to learn within the classroom (Butcher et al., 2021) and may influence them to leave the school system early (Melkevik et al., 2016).

### **3.2 Mental Health**

EBSA can be intertwined with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Multiple studies have shown a link between low mental health and non-attendance (Creswell et al., 2020; Finning et al., 2019), with anxiety disorders being present in almost half of CYP experiencing persistent absenteeism (Maynard et al., 2018). EBSA has also been linked to risk factors such as bullying and difficulties with relationships which can also impact mental health (*see section 3.3*). Those CYP exhibiting EBSA behaviours may become more isolated and may withdraw socially, which was especially prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic due to further restrictions (Lester & Michelson, 2024). Social isolation and loneliness can greatly impact a CYP's wellbeing and mental health (Holt-Lunstad, 2021; Lay-Yee et al., 2023). Therefore, it appears to be challenging to unpick causality when it comes to EBSA and mental health. Is it mental health needs that are impacting attendance, non-attendance that impacts mental health, or both occurring simultaneously?

### **3.3 Social Impact**

In addition to affecting the time CYP spend in lessons, being absent from school can also limit opportunities to interact with peers. Research has shown that CYP who do not attend school can have difficulties with social

interactions and can withdraw from friends and peers (Fornander & Kearney, 2020; Havik et al., 2015). Furthermore, challenges with peer relationships and experiences of bullying can lead to further non-attendance (Chian et al., 2024; Egger et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to support CYP to form positive relationships with peers and navigate challenges that occur (Sobba, 2019). Although, this can be challenging to facilitate if the CYP is not within the school environment. In addition, positive relationships have been argued to be a key factor in academic achievement (Greenhalgh, 2002), especially as research has shown that strong relationships between staff and pupils can lead to positive academic experiences (Halligan & Cryer, 2022). As attendance decreases, the opportunities for relationship building and positive interactions between CYP and staff and/or peers will also decrease. This could possibly lead to a reduced sense of school belonging. Research has shown that school belonging is an important factor when considering student wellbeing and attendance (Beatson et al., 2023; Corcoran & Kelly, 2023). Therefore, it can be argued that time within the school environment may be paramount in fostering school belonging and forming positive relationships with peers and staff. CYP experiencing EBSA may miss out on opportunities to engage in these experiences.

### **3.4 Impact on family and home life**

As well as impacting the CYP themselves, prolonged school absence can also impact the families of CYP experiencing EBSA. Firstly, there could be financial and legal implications if the CYP's absences are marked as unauthorised. These absences can lead to fines from the local authority which can be seen as hostile by the parents (Burtonshaw & Dorrell, 2023) and be a potential barrier to the family receiving support. Although, previous research showed that some parents welcomed the support from Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) as it provided a route to communicate with school (Dalziel & Henthorne, 2005). This was supported by a thesis by Sawyer

(2022) who found that parents believed professionals played a key role in home-school communication, often by providing evidence of their child's needs. However, this research also highlighted that at times, parents felt this advocacy by professionals, such as Educational Psychologists (EPs), led to professionals becoming gatekeepers to support as their views were deemed to hold more weight. This may potentially lead to parents feeling that their views are not as important or inconsequential. Lissack and Boyle (2022) found that parents of CYP experiencing EBSA expressed feeling overlooked by schools, resulting in a sense of being unsupported and ignored. This can lead to breakdowns in relationships between home and school which can impact the support CYP receive, as well as prevent a shared understanding of need. Furthermore, parents within this study noted feeling 'blamed' by schools for their children's EBSA behaviours, which they believe affected the support their child received, as the difficulties were often attributed to poor parenting. This aligns with earlier research that highlighted parental/carers blame as a significant negative experience for families (Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Furthermore, parents/carers experienced high levels of stress and frustration when supporting their child experiencing EBSA (McDonald et al., 2023). All the research discussed suggests that not only is the CYP's mental health and wellbeing impacted by EBSA, but also the family. It is also worth noting that there is little information around the impact of EBSA on siblings within the home. This is something that should be considered when supporting CYP with EBSA as it is possible professionals need to support in other parts of the CYP's system.

## **4.0 Risk factors**

### **4.1 A holistic approach to understanding risk factors**

Considering the emotional aspect of EBSA, research by Thambirajah et al. (2008) highlighted the need for professionals to not only consider the behaviours that they observe, but also the emotional factors that could be underlying the non-attendance. Previous research has shown that CYP who experience EBSA are a diverse group, and no two individuals will present in the same way (González et al., 2018). This variance in experience is also mirrored in potential underlying risk factors, and research has shown that factors can occur at different levels of the system e.g. individual, home, and school (Ingul et al., 2019). As well as occurring at different levels of the systems, the underlying difficulties contributing to EBSA also vary from case to case. Thambirajah et al. (2008) argued that school avoidance can occur when the "...pull' factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance" (Thambirajah et al., 2008; p. 33). Therefore, considerations for all potential risk factors that can occur at the different levels of the CYP's system needs to be explored. This will help professionals gain a better understanding of the underlying needs of the school absence before intervention and support takes place.

#### **4.1.1 Individual level risk factors**

An individual risk factor that has been linked to EBSA behaviours is mental health. While EBSA itself is not a diagnostic psychiatric label, CYP may have other anxiety and/or mood disorders diagnoses that could be contributing to the non-attendance that are important to be aware of (Bitsika, Heyne, et al., 2022; Egger et al., 2003). Additionally, a study carried out in Norway using student self-report data, found that girls were more likely to provide EBSA as a reason for not attending school than boys (Havik et al., 2015). This may suggest that gender may be a factor to consider when exploring whether CYP are willing to link why they are absent to emotional wellbeing.

It may be more difficult to identify EBSA in boys if they find it challenging to discuss emotional difficulties that may be impacting their ability to attend school.

Another individual risk factor to consider is neurodiversity. Research has identified significantly higher recordings of EBSA in autistic CYP than their peers without autism (Munkhaugen et al., 2017). This was supported by Totsika et al. (2020) who found EBSA was the most prevalent reason for autistic CYP to be persistently absent from school. One possible contributing factor for the higher prevalence within this cohort is that autistic CYP are more likely to experience social anxiety and social phobia than their peers without autism (Bitsika, Sharpley, et al., 2022). There has also been evidence that shows that autistic pupils can experience high levels of bullying from peers (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015) and blame themselves for unsuccessful social interactions (Fisher & Taylor, 2016; Mesa & Hamilton, 2022). These were identified as possible contributing factors for persistent absenteeism (Chian et al., 2024; Hutzell & Payne, 2012) for this group of CYP. Therefore, due to the high numbers of EBSA within this population, professionals should consider how they can support this group and promote early identification. This may include using guides created by LA EPS that have specifically discussed neurodiversity and EBSA such as the West Sussex EPS guidance (2022).

Finally, challenges with learning may also be a risk factor that needs to be considered when exploring EBSA and school absenteeism. Research carried out in Italy, explored how academic achievement and specific learning difficulties may impact 'school refusal' behaviours (Filippello et al., 2020). They found that students with low academic achievement or specific learning needs showed higher levels of 'school refusal' behaviours than those who exhibited higher levels of academic achievement.

While the research exploring risk factors at an individual level identify key factors that should be considered when supporting CYP presenting with EBSA behaviours, it does not provide a holistic approach. It is important that professionals supporting CYP consider how interaction between individual, school and home may be impacting on the CYP's school attendance (Gubbels et al., 2019), rather than just looking 'within child' as key contributing factors could be missed.

#### ***4.1.2 Home level risk factors***

Familial risk factors that could be linked to CYP not attending school were also highlighted within Ulaş and Seğer (2024) systematic review. This included family expectations to perform well, leading to academic pressures and difficulties with the CYP coping when they made mistakes (Ulaş & Seğer, 2022). These pressures led to school burnout which some research has argued could be a risk factor for not attending school (Liu et al., 2021). Alternatively, research has previously shown that parental involvement in education can be linked to lower levels of non-attendance and school dropouts (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). However, this was when parental involvement was supportive. This may suggest that when parental involvement shifts from encouragement to pressure, the benefits may diminish, potentially increasing the risk of outcomes such as non-attendance. Research has also highlighted parental mental health as a possible predictor for CYP's attendance difficulties (Marin et al., 2019). Therefore, considerations for parental support may be needed to provide a holistic supportive approach.

#### ***4.1.3 School level risk factors***

While research has highlighted both individual and familial risk factors to EBSA, there could be risk factors within the school environment itself, including school transitions (Nuttall & Woods, 2013; Pellegrini, 2007),



classroom management (Havik et al., 2015), and bullying (Chian et al., 2024; Hutzell & Payne, 2012) that could underly EBSA behaviours.

Within a systematic review by, Ulaş and Seğer (2024) it was found that school factors such as performance pressure, peer exclusion, and separation anxiety can also be significant risk factors of CYP not able to attend school (Devenney & O'Toole, 2021). Bullying has also been found to be a risk factor and was reported as the most significant underlying factor of EBSA in autistic teens in Australia (Bitsika, Sharpley, et al., 2022). Similarly, Ochi et al. (2020) found that within their participant group, bullying was the most likely response provided for 'school avoidance' behaviours. They also found that transition to secondary school to be a potential school level risk factor for EBSA within their study. Research has also shown the importance of positive relationships and trust between staff and pupils when promoting pupil wellbeing (Chian et al., 2024). Therefore, if there are challenges in any of the areas identified, the school environment may impact CYPs wellbeing that can lead to EBSA behaviours.

#### ***4.1.4 Wider contextual risk factors***

Furthermore there could be environmental and societal contexts that could impact CYP's wellbeing and impact school attendance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils within the UK did not attend school for extended periods due to mandated lockdowns. This created a "perfect storm of conditions" that increased EBSA risk factors within home, school, and child (Lester & Michelson, 2024, p.1). During this time school closures and social distancing impacted CYP in multiple ways e.g., limited social interactions, limited learning opportunities, and reduced mental health services available (Crawford et al., 2021; Kwong et al., 2021). These factors could impact CYP's mental health and their ability to return to school. Rae (2020) argued that pupils may have faced challenges during this time that could have wellbeing implications that need to be considered e.g. social anxiety, health

anxiety or separation anxiety. Continuous high levels of anxiety can greatly impact a CYP's ability to function within school (Heyne, 2006). Therefore, support is needed to meet the CYP's mental health needs so that they can access learning.

## **5.0 Supporting EBSA**

As previously discussed, EBSA is very complex and may have various underlying factors that require support that can present very differently in each case (González et al., 2018). Professionals need to consider a range of factors to plan and implement effective support that meets each CYP's need (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Each case may require a different approach to support to meet the individual's needs at different levels.

### **5.1 Early identification**

Research has shown that early identification is paramount to prevent and reduce the number of CYP experiencing EBSA (Boaler et al., 2024; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). This includes not only focusing on attendance figures alone to identify pupils at risk of experiencing EBSA (Slifi, 2024).

Additionally, using holistic forms of information gathering to identify the factors underlying school absence was paramount as this could also support professionals to recognise possible difficulties that could arise during school reintegration (Nuttall & Woods, 2013). This information can provide a clearer understanding of the risk factors and potential triggers the CYP is experiencing which can be used to plan support. It also ensures professionals consider the aim of the support. It is possible in EBSA cases professionals may only focus on the attendance and see reintegration as the key goal, without considering the wellbeing element of the EBSA behaviours. If the CYP's wellbeing needs are not met or wellbeing strategies are not implemented, it is possible reintegration goals achieved may be short term

when the CYP starts to feel overwhelmed. Furthermore, early identification is more effective when it coincides with collaborative and multi-tiered approaches to supporting the CYP (Chu et al., 2019) as this will provide support to all areas of the CYP's system. This will be discussed in more detail further within the narrative (*see 6.3 in part one*) and systematic reviews.

## **5.2 Pupil voice**

As previously discussed, EBSA is complex and can present differently in each case. Therefore, it is important to gather the voices of CYP who have experienced EBSA to consider what they found useful. Research by Halligan and Cryer (2022) gathered pupil views from GCSE pupils in a specialist setting who had experienced EBSA in the past while attending a mainstream school. During their time in the specialist setting the participants' attendance improved consistently over three years. The researchers used anonymous quantitative and qualitative questionnaires to explore the participants' views about what they valued within their current specialist setting. The study found that prioritising "interconnectivity and psychological safety" (p.22) while supporting CYP with EBSA could support preventing further negative outcomes for the pupils. The participants highlighted supportive factors such as emotionally available adults they could share concerns with, and being provided a sense of responsibility in school as beneficial. These factors gave them a feeling of "control and autonomy" (p.20), which the researcher noted may have been previously absent due to the school anxiety they previously felt. Furthermore, the findings showed that the participants appreciated 'psychological safety' the school provided through safe spaces, use of timeouts for regulation, no tolerance of bullying, small class sizes, and individualised plans for exams that met the pupil's needs. All of which support previous research that argued that the first step to promoting learning in schools is creating safe relationships within the school environment (Youell, 2018). Overall, Halligan and Cryer (2022) argued that

change needed to occur at a school and systems level rather than focusing on individual factors within the CYP. This suggestion offers potential protective factors that can be used to impact 'push and pull factors' towards school that can be identified when planning support for CYP experiencing EBSA (Thambirajah et al., 2008). However, it must be noted that whilst this study gathered constructions of individuals that had experienced EBSA, the study had a small sample. Therefore, the researchers themselves argued that the results may be "transferable but not generalizable" (p.22). On the other hand, the results can be useful to guide further research in the future to continue gathering pupil voice about their experiences with EBSA and protective factors that can promote their attendance and confidence in school.

### **5.3 Trauma Informed Practice**

Trauma informed practice within schools is an approach used by staff to recognise the impact of trauma and how to respond (Craig, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019). These approaches implement support that aims to reduce CYP's psychological distress and physiological responses following trauma by focusing on areas such as relationships and staff and pupil's regulation skills (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Holmes et al., 2015). The aim is to increase the CYP's feeling of safety within the school environment and build upon their regulation skills (Berger & Martin, 2021). Whole-school approaches are essential for addressing trauma, and this is the foundation of trauma-informed practice (Avery et al., 2021). While schools may implement this differently in each school there are core strategies that are often implemented such as:

- Creating a sense of physical and emotional safety for CYP within the school.
- Supporting and modelling regulation skills.

- Building supportive relationships that are consistent and predictable e.g. emotionally available adults. These relationships provide a safe space for CYP to share their worries.
- Promoting a child centred approach that empowers the CYP to be a part of decisions that impact them and to promote a sense of belonging.
- Move away from punitive measures that do not consider behaviours may be a trauma response. This may include using more restorative measures within the school.

All these strategies can be used to support EBSA pupils, as those experiencing EBSA may view school as an unsafe place. This may be due to experiencing challenging events within the school environment that led to feeling unsafe e.g. bullying or finding the school overwhelming due to sensory needs, or due to the lack of control they may feel due to being unable to attend school (Brighter Future for Children, 2024). Furthermore, the language professionals use can have an impact on the CYP they are supporting. The label used to describe CYP may influence how the CYP is viewed by others, which in turn can potentially impact the services and interventions they are able to access (Corcoran & Kelly, 2023; Elliott & Place, 2019; Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Using trauma-informed language can prevent the CYP feeling they are being blamed for not being able to attend school. An evaluation conducted in an Education service within the UK gathered pupil-voice and CYP shared that they did not like terms such as 'refusal' and 'avoidance' (Callwood and Goodman, 2018). The evaluation explained that CYP described their experience as one of 'not coping'(p1.) instead. They argued this language can support the CYP to feel heard and validated. This may aid professionals to build positive relationships with the CYP and their families.

## **5.4 Relationship building**

As highlighted in Youell (2018) and Halligan and Cryer (2022), safe relationships are important when supporting EBSA. Their research was further supported by Chian et al. (2024) who also found that promoting inclusivity and a sense of belonging is paramount when supporting EBSA. The school staff interviewed within this study highlighted the importance of placing relationship building at the forefront of their EBSA support practices. Additionally, the staff spoke about ensuring they implemented reasonable adjustments to help the CYP feel a sense of inclusivity and belonging within the school. The pupils interviewed within the study shared that this practice helped them feel supported. These findings reinforce results from previous research that argued an inclusive school ethos is vital for positive EBSA approaches (Hallam & Rogers, 2008; Thambirajah et al., 2008). Additionally it supports research previously discussed, which identified interconnectivity and relationships with emotionally available adults as supportive factor for reengagement into school (Halligan & Cryer, 2022).

## **6.0 An ecological approach to support**

Lester and Michelson (2024) argued that EBSA has contributing factors that can occur from family, school and/or peer difficulties such as bullying, academic pressures etc. (Chian et al., 2024), or intrinsic characteristics within the CYP such as separation anxiety, additional learning needs (ALN) and low confidence (Melvin et al., 2019). All of which can predispose and enhance the possibility of EBSA behaviours. Therefore, considering a systemic approach such as Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) is beneficial to identify risk factors and implement support at the necessary levels of the system.

## **6.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**

### **6.1.1 Microsystem**

The microsystem considers the interactions the CYP has with others within their immediate systems e.g. parents, siblings, school staff, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Therefore within this system, professionals supporting EBSA may want to consider if the CYP is having difficulties building and maintaining relationships with peers, is experiencing bullying, or whether they have positive relationships with staff. All of which could impact the CYP's wellbeing and ability to attend school, especially if they are not having any positive experiences with those within their microsystem.

### **6.1.2 Mesosystem**

The mesosystem refers to the interactions and connections between different microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). This can include the communication between home and school, which can be challenging in cases of EBSA as breakdowns in relationships can occur. In some cases this is because the parent feels unheard or they feel they are being 'blamed' for their child's non-attendance (Lissack & Boyle, 2022). It could also be impacted by home and school having different views of what may be going on for the CYP and what support may be beneficial. Multi-agency meetings or consultations led by professionals such as EPs, may be useful in these instances (Corcoran et al., 2024). They can provide spaces to share information, formulate a consistent understanding of need, co-ordinate plans as well as foster positive relationships between those involved (Huxham & Vangen, 2013).

### **6.1.3 Exosystem**

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the exosystem refers to external factors that may not directly involve the CYP but can be influential e.g. parent's workplace, their community, school policies, or services available within their

system. When there are pressures placed on areas of the exosystem e.g. parents' work stress this may move into the home and impact the CYP's wellbeing and relationships with their parents (Koerber et al., 2023). Therefore, when seeking to support CYP with EBSA additional support for parts of the system such as home may need to be considered e.g. support for parents.

#### **6.1.4 Macrosystem**

The macrosystem refers to cultural and societal factors that may have influence on the CYP. In cases of EBSA this may include differences in cultural views of mental health or high levels of academic pressure (Fairclough, 2024). Additionally, school's definition of persistent absenteeism can be influenced by current government guidelines. These dictate attendance expectations which can lead to financial consequences for families. When providing support for CYP with EBSA, professionals may need to consider if there are consequences being put in place e.g. financial or prosecution, without work being carried out to meet the emotional needs of the CYP and their families. Research has highlighted that some school staff believe punitive measures are required and view the absence as within child (Corcoran et al., 2024).

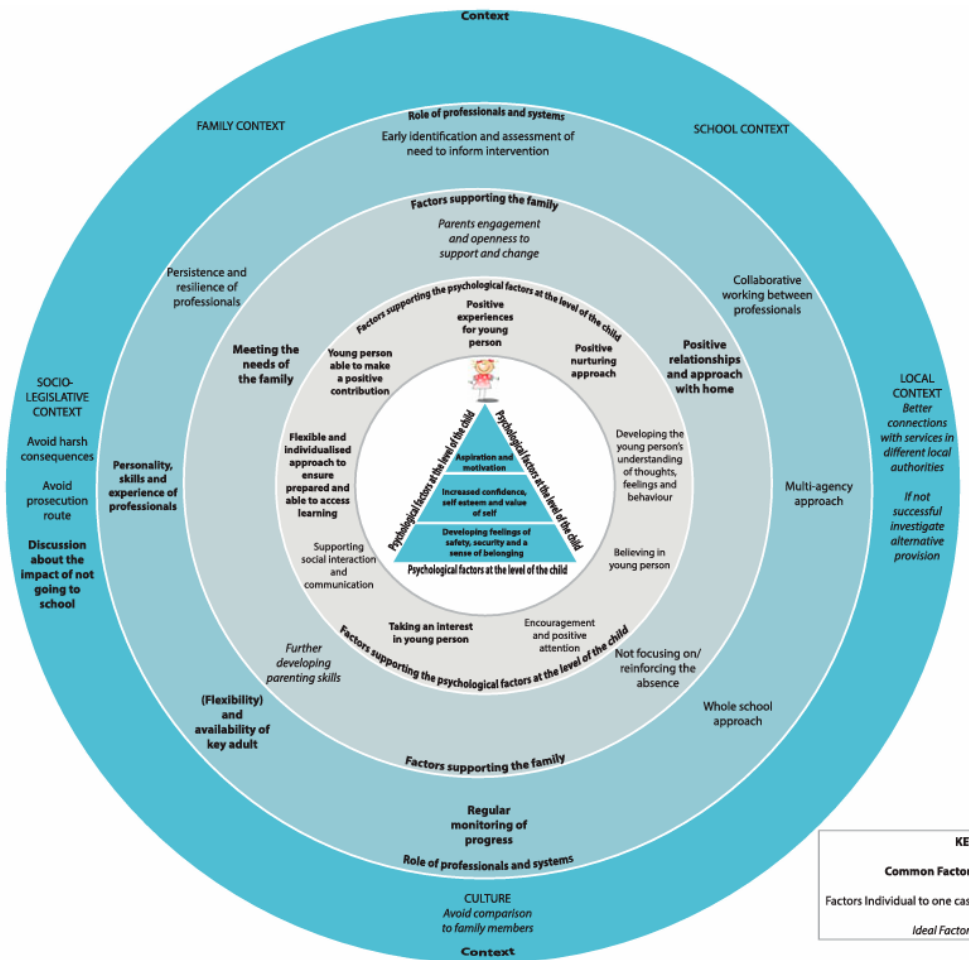
#### **6.1.5 Chronosystem**

The chronosystem considers the impact of time related factors such as personal life transitions and historical events. This is important when considering EBSA as research has shown events such as transition to secondary school can impact wellbeing (Slifi, 2024). Furthermore, recent research highlights the COVID-19 pandemic as a key event that increased EBSA risk factors whilst simultaneously reducing access to support services (Lester & Michelson, 2024).



## **6.2 Systemic Approach to Reintegration**

Nuttall and Woods (2013) suggested an alternative eco-systemic approach which they based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). The ecological model (see figure 1) they proposed incorporates four main systems they identified within their research: psychological factors, support for psychological factors, factors supporting the family, and role of professionals and systems. The researchers identified that when changes were made to the interacting systems within this model, they saw positive outcomes for the participants within their case studies. While it must be noted that this study had a very small sample size, the researchers did argue the ecological model shows the multiple levels where support and intervention need to be considered. Furthermore it identified that interventions may be needed at different areas of the systems, especially when professionals consider the complexity of the different systems and interacting influences of all those involved that may be underlying the non-attendance behaviours. For example, it may be possible mental health support from CAMHS for the CYP may be needed alongside support from the EPS to unpick need and support school, while there is ongoing support for the family from EWOs. Therefore, multiple individuals may be needed to support at once or at different times throughout the supporting process to ensure all the CYP's needs are met at different levels within the system.



**Figure 1**  
*Ecological Model of Reintegration (Nuttall & Woods, 2013)*

Note. Adapted from "Effective Intervention for School Refusal Behaviour," by Clare Nuttall and Kevin Woods, 2013, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 29\*(4), 347–366. Copyright 2013 by the Association of Educational Psychologists.

### 6.3 Collaborative working

Considering the systematic approach that the previous literature argued is needed to implement effective intervention and support, it is likely a collaborative approach would be needed to be able to provide all the required support. Boaler et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of professionals working collaboratively to support CYP experiencing EBSA. They found within their research that working in a joined-up manner was

beneficial as it is “empowering professionally and emotionally” (p.196). The research supported previous studies that identified benefits of collaborative working including sharing expertise and inter-professional learning that they found increased the possibility of positive outcomes (Solomon, 2019). Corcoran (2024) found positive changes in working practices occurred when professionals adopted a multi-agency approach, fostering shared responsibility for the tasks undertaken to provide support to CYP experiencing EBSA.

## **6.4 Summary**

Part one of this literature review has highlighted the complexity of the systems that EBSA behaviours can present in, and the collaborative work that may be needed to provide the CYP and the systems around them with the support they need. Therefore, it was decided a multi-agency approach to supporting EBSA warranted a deeper exploration of the current literature which will be presented in a systematic review in Part 2.

## **Part 1b – Systematic Literature Review**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The literature in part one highlighted the importance of effective multi-agency collaboration when supporting CYP experiencing EBSA (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran, 2024). Therefore, it was decided that exploring the current literature researching multi-agency working to support CYP with EBSA needs would be useful. Part two of the literature review will consist of a systematic review that hopes to identify any potential barriers and facilitators to effective multi-agency collaboration when supporting CYP experiencing EBSA.

### **2.0 Method**

#### **2.1 Step 1: Purpose and Question**

##### *Purpose*

Following the initial findings from the narrative literature review, the purpose of this systematic literature review was to explore multi-agency practice when supporting EBSA in more detail. The hope was to identify any barriers and facilitators to collaboration and multi-agency working that the professionals within the research had detected in their practice.

##### *Literature review question*

1. What are the barriers and facilitators to collaborative multi-agency working to support pupils with EBSA?

#### **2.2 Step 2: Identify and explain search terms**

##### *Method for review*

Following a scoping review to identify key terms and initial search terms, a literature search was completed, through five databases: Scopus, American

Psychological Association (APA) PsycINFO, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA) and Medline. The search terms used are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Search Terms*

<b>Subject mapping terms</b>	<b>Key word search terms</b>
Wellbeing and mental health needs	"emotionally based school avoidance" or "school phobia" or "school refusal" or "school anxiety" or "school non-attendance" or EBSA or EBSNA
Children and young people	child* or teen* or adolescen* or "young person" or "young people" OR pupil* OR student*
Collaborative working	"multi agency" or "joint working" or "partnership working" or "working in partnership" or "inter professional" or interprofessional or "collaborative working" or "working collaboratively"
Barriers and facilitators	barrier* or facilitator* or challenge* or strength* or limitation*

All the subject heading search terms were combined with potential alternative key word search terms using OR. The four search terms were then combined with the use of AND. This method led to 9 papers from PsychINFO, 1 from Medline, 1 from ERIC, 6 from SCOPUS, and 32 from ASSIA. This led to a total of 49 papers.

Additional papers were then identified through the literature discussed in Part one (if they did not emerge within part two's initial search), searching Google Scholar, and citations in reference lists of papers found within the initial search which provided an additional 3 papers.

### **2.3 Step 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The results from three databases were imported into Endnote and compared, this allowed for any duplicates to be exported from the results. Inclusion and

exclusion criteria were identified before the literature was screened to support the removal of results that were not pertinent to the literature review. The criteria were reviewed and revised during the literature sifting process as needed to ensure all relevant literature was included (Siddaway et al., 2019). The final inclusion and exclusion criteria can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria*

<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
1. The research must highlight an emotional element to the non-attendance.	Other terms to describe EBSA will also be included. However, if it does not make it clear there is an emotional wellbeing element it will be excluded.	To ensure research is exploring EBSA and not other forms of non-attendance.
2. Research must mention collaborative practice between professionals who support CYP experiencing EBSA.	Studies that did not focus on exploring multi-agency collaboration to support EBSA.	Relates to research question.
3. Professionals must have been supporting pupils aged 3-18 years who are experiencing EBSA difficulties.	Studies that do not clearly distinguish an emotional underlying need that is impacting attendance.  Professionals are not supporting EBSA.	Relates to research question.
4. Published within 2000 and 2024	Published before 2000	To find the more recent research.

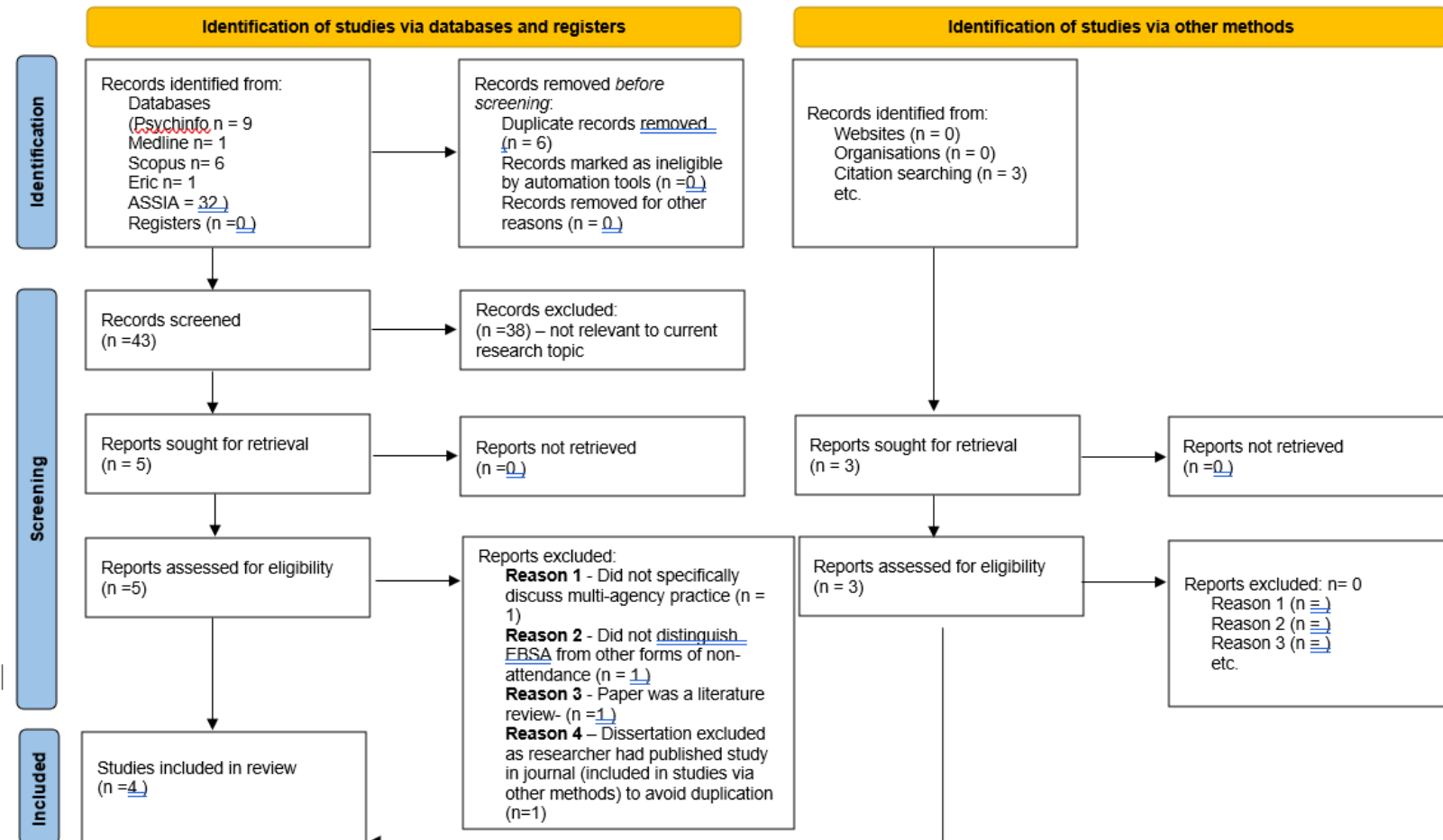
## 2.4 Transparency and reporting

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist (Moher et al., 2009) was used to report the systematic review process (see Figure 2 for further details), as suggested by Siddaway et al. (2019) in their best practice guide for carrying out a systematic review. A total number of 43 papers remained after duplicate papers were excluded. 3 further papers were included that were found through the part one narrative literature review and citations from papers included. It was decided that grey literature such as doctoral theses could be included due to the limited amount of research in this area of study (Siddaway et al., 2019). Research has shown that grey literature can contribute important information to a systematic review (Paez, 2017). However, the one doctoral thesis that appeared in the search had also been written as a journal article and submitted to a peer reviewed journal, which appeared in a further citation search. Therefore, it was decided the journal would be included and the thesis would be removed from the final review to prevent duplication. Overall, 46 papers titles and abstracts were assessed using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 38 of which were excluded as they did not address the research topic. The full text of the remaining 8 studies were read to assess for eligibility and four were excluded. The reasons for removing 4 papers from final review is outlined in *Appendix A*. Four papers were included in the final review. While there are a limited number of papers that fit the inclusion criteria of the current review, multiple databases were searched as suggested by Bramer et al. (2017) using the key terms. This suggests this is currently a gap in research that would benefit from further study. Additionally, the gap may have occurred due to persistent absence being used as an umbrella term in research without differentiating the different forms of absence.

**Figure 2**

*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist*

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources





## **3.0 Findings**

### **3.1 Characteristics and critical appraisal of included studies**

The characteristics of each study included within the systematic review is outlined in Table 3. To critically assess the quality of the four papers included within the review the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklists were used to assess the aims, participant sample, research design and analysis of the included studies (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme [CASP], 2024). Table 3 outlines the critical appraisal of each of these studies .

**Table 3**

*Characteristics of studies included within systematic review*

Title	Country	Research Aims/question(s)	Participants	Design	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Boaler, R., Bond, C., & Knox, L. (2024). The collaborative development of a local authority emotionally based school non-attendance (Ebsna) early identification tool. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 40(2), 185-200.	UK	"How can a collaborative approach be used to develop a multi-agency EBSNA early identification tool?"	The core Research Stakeholder Group which was comprised of nine members from various services across one local authority in England	Participatory action research (PAR) approach	Basic content analysis and directed content analysis	<p>The researchers collaboratively developed an "Early Identification of Needs Tool (EINT)" which aided in identifying potential EBSA difficulties in CYP.</p> <p>EINT was given a positive evaluation by stakeholders</p> <p>The collaborative, participatory action</p>	<p>Analysed multiple data sources.</p> <p>Has multiple phases of collaborative work.</p> <p>Pupil voice is missing.</p> <p>The research develops a relevant tool for early identification of EBSA.</p> <p>May not be generalisable as research consisted of one stakeholder</p>

						research (PAR) process using the RADIO model was found to be beneficial for facilitating collaborative multi-agency working.	group in one LA.
Corcoran, S., Kelly, C., Bond, C., & Knox, L. (2024). Emotionally based school non-attendance: Development of a local authority, multi-agency approach to supporting regular attendance. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 51(1), 98-110.	UK	<p>RQ1: How can a local authority approach to supporting children and young people with school attendance difficulties be developed?</p> <p>RQ2: What are the factors influencing the development of a local authority approach to supporting children and young people</p>	<p>Pre-existing stakeholder group within the LA consisting of representatives from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Virtual School Team</li> <li>- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)</li> <li>- Pupil Attendance Team</li> <li>- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support</li> </ul>	<p>Participatory Action Research – Meeting minutes of steering group, focus groups.</p> <p>Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) model was used as framework.</p>	<p>The analysis was carried out in three stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cumulative analysis</li> <li>2. Participatory analysis</li> <li>3. Content analysis</li> </ol>	<p>Facilitators (e.g. collaboration and positive feedback) and barriers (e.g. misconception s of roles and diminished responsibility) for multi-agency collaboration were identified.</p> <p>The study identified that development of a LA approach to supporting school attendance</p>	<p>May not be generalisable as research consisted of one stakeholder group in one LA. However, the barriers and facilitators to a multi-agency approach could have some transferability to other contexts.</p>

		with school attendance difficulties?	Service: An advice and advocacy group - Special Educational Needs Advisory Service: Specialist teachers - Local third-sector family support groups			difficulties multi-agency collaboration and time to promote positive results.	
Nuttall, C., & Woods, K. (2013). Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour. Educational Psychology in Practice, 29(4), 347–366		What factors are perceived to have been effective in supporting children and young people who have anxiety/fear which is leading to school refusal behaviours, and why?  What might have led to more success or earlier success in	Two successful case studies. Each case included the following participants: - Young person - Parents - School staff - Other professionals e.g. attendance officers, family support workers, and health	Explanatory case study design using semi-structured interviews and case records e.g. attendance records.	Thematic analysis	Research identified push/pull factors that can impact pupils' attendance/  Identified interventions that can be used to support EBSA.  Two case studies identified common themes across the studies as well as themes that	Small sample size (2 case studies) with female participants. Therefore, may have limited generalisability .  Both cases were successful which may introduce some potential biases as there may be different factors to consider when

		the effective support of the school refusal behaviour?	professionals .			were individual to the participant.	cases are not so successful.  Data was gathered retrospectively – potential recall bias?
Chian, J; Holliman, A; Pinto, C; & Waldeck, D; (2024) Emotional based school avoidance: Exploring school staff and pupil perspectives on provision in mainstream schools. Educational and Child Psychology , 41 (1) pp. 55-75.		What are the facilitators and barriers to good mainstream school EBSA practices?	Six school staff  Seven pupils	Qualitative – semi-structured interviews	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for pupil interviews  Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) for school staff interviews	They found finances, misalignment with other services and parental resistance were barriers to supporting pupils experiencing EBSA.	Limited data discussing multi-agency practice. However, included useful barriers to collaborative working.  Included multiple perspectives.  The pupil sample was predominantly pupils with ASD which may have impacted the different experiences of EBSA being represented.

## **3.2 Critical review of the literature**

This section will critically review the literature included within the current systematic review. The impact of multi-agency practice to support EBSA, and the barriers and facilitators to multi-agency working that may have been highlighted within the research will be discussed.

### ***3.2.1 Overview of papers included***

This section will provide an overview of the four papers included within the review. All current literature included multi-agency practice to support EBSA within their studies. However, it must be noted that not all papers focused exclusively on multi-agency practice, and other areas of supporting EBSA were discussed. Nevertheless, all papers highlighted multi-agency practice and provided enough information to identify benefits of multi-agency practice and/or barriers and facilitators to working in a multi-agency manner. Although in some papers the discussion around this area of practice was limited (Chian et al., 2024), it was decided the information provided was valuable enough to be included within this review as it could inform the current research and could have implications on practice. Yet, it is clear this is still an area that requires further research especially as EBSA becomes more prevalent and is increasingly being focused on as a separate area of study from other forms of non-attendance. Furthermore, three of the four studies were published within EP journals, suggesting currently EPs are the profession predominantly looking at this area of research. It is possible it is because EPs are seeing a high need for this form of work within their practice.

Boaler et al. (2024) evaluated the collaborated development of an Early Identification of Needs Tool (EINT) by a steering group comprised of nine core members from services within one local authority (LA) in England. The researcher used a content analysis to analyse multiple data sources such as evaluative survey, parent carer data, focus group and project co-ordinator

interview data. This study emphasized the positive effects of multi-agency collaboration in addressing needs that can affect (and be affected by) multiple levels of the system, such as EBSA. The approach implemented provided a space for professionals to meet to create a consistent approach to supporting EBSA. They argued this joint up approach led to a greater chance of positive outcomes and empowered the professionals to carry out the work. Additionally, time spent together allowed the group to agree on consistent terminology and create a tool that all stakeholders could agree to.

Corcoran et al., (2024), further built upon the work completed by Boaler et al. (2024) within an English LA. The study aimed to collaboratively develop a LA approach to supporting EBSA pupils through the steering group. The researchers highlighted the importance of multi-agency partnerships to develop and disseminate guidance within a LA around EBSA. They suggested this form of collaborative work promotes ownership and decreases the negative feelings towards the implementation of a consistent approach within a system. The multi-agency make-up of the group also allowed them to create guidance that was individualised to their LA and the service users they supported. The steering group offered training to teams within the LA to foster a consistent understanding and perception of school attendance needs. They hoped this would encourage early identification and intervention within the LA. The participants also provided a guidance document that outlined an action plan template and a bank of strategies that could be used to support EBSA pupils. To ensure that appropriate referrals to support services were being made a flow chart was included within the document to identify when further support with need and a signposting section to support professionals to know who to refer to. Furthermore, the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) offered training to schools to ensure there was a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for a slow and graduated response to EBSA. Additionally, they argued the collaborative approach was

able to produce a “cumulative result greater than that of any individual team’s output” (p.108). While both studies showed some positive results of supporting EBSA at a systemic level through multi-agency collaboration, it was carried out in just one LA in England. Therefore, the transferability of the results needs to be considered. If the approach was to be implemented in other LAs, the professionals involved may need to consider their local context e.g. services available, capacity etc. Additionally, the research provides limited information regarding the recruitment process of participants, making it challenging to assess the potential for selection bias which could have impacted generalisability and reliability of the study. On the other hand, the multi-agency aspect of the steering group can be seen as a strength as it provided rich and varied data resources as well as representing a range of services within the group. It also allowed for a triangulation of data as the researchers were able to gather information from multiple professionals.

The third paper included within this review (Nuttall & Woods, 2013) reported on two successful cases of reintegration of female pupils. A multi-agency and collaborative approach were highlighted as a key factor of the interventions implemented within the research. Specifically in one case study, collaborative working between professionals was paramount in meeting the needs of the young person, as it led to professionals working towards a consistent goal. The study argued the multi-agency approach allowed for a holistic approach to assessing needs and implementing interventions at different levels of the system e.g. individual, family, school etc. However, again the generalisability of the findings needs to be considered as the information was gathered from just two case studies. Nevertheless, it did gather multiple perspectives in each case which provided a broad understanding of the work carried out within the CYP’s system. The data was gathered retrospectively which may have impacted the participants



recollections. Their memories of the experience may have also been influenced by the positive outcomes following the interventions and by the length of time since the EBSA occurrences. Collecting the experiences of those who did not achieve the same level of success could have offered a different perspective that could have led to a more balanced exploration.

The final paper within this review was a study focusing on the perspectives and experiences of school staff and pupils regarding supporting EBSA within the school setting (Chian et al., 2024). This paper briefly discusses multi-agency working between school staff and other professionals. However, it must be noted this was only a small part of the research findings.

Nevertheless, the paper was included within this systematic review as it provided useful information about possible barriers to positive collaboration between professionals from the school staff's perspectives.

The current literature provided key information regarding barriers and facilitators to working in a multi-agency manner to support EBSA. While some papers only briefly mentioned this area of working, it was found to be useful to the current literature review question.

### ***3.2.2 Facilitators to multi-agency working***

This section of the literature review will focus on the facilitators to multi-agency working that were identified within the current literature. For example, three of the studies (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024; Nuttall and Woods, 2013) identified that having a localisation of support and a space which allowed professionals to share was a huge benefit to multi-agency working. They found these meetings provided them an opportunity to discuss what their job role entailed, share resources and ask questions. Furthermore, members of the steering group within Corcoran et al.'s (2024) study had worked within the LA long enough to have a good understanding of the local context and potential barriers that may arise within this area of

work. This provided a good foundation of working collaboratively at a systemic level. The group had half-termly meetings to facilitate regular networking which allowed for sharing resources and reducing the possibility of duplication of work. The focus group also identified that regularly meeting allowed opportunities for professionals with a variety of experiences and training to collaboratively problem solve and contribute to a positive ethos. Additionally, they found that consistently meeting had an impact on the attendees using the EBSA guidance material and promoted supporting others around EBSA within their practice. It also presented a 'unified front' to service users regarding the available support for attendance. This enabled them to challenge settings that did not align with the LA, ensuring a coherent and consistent approach for service users overall.

Another facilitator identified by Boaler et al. (2024) was motivation and a shared goal. The study argued this allowed the group to overcome barriers that could have impacted them working together e.g. COVID-19. The group adapted their practice to meet online so they could continue collaborating. However, the researcher did reflect that the momentum of the project may have been influenced by the researcher themselves and the project- co-ordinator, as well as the dedication of key people from services within the LA. They stated in other cases sustainability of long-term collaboration may be a challenge if the stakeholders had limited capacity. Therefore, capacity and buy in from professionals is essential to positive multi-agency working, particularly when supporting a complex area of need such as EBSA. Additionally the research suggests having key leads who can guide the multi-agency work is a facilitator to collaborative working. This was supported by Nuttall and Woods' (2013) study that found the inclusion of a lead professional who was responsible for chairing the meetings and co-ordinating services ensured that actions agreed in the meeting were reviewed. However, within their study the Family Support Model was

implemented to guide the multi-agency approach throughout one of the case studies. While this model was not used in the other case included within this study, the researcher mentioned that the case would have possibly had further positive results if the family support model had been implemented. Therefore, suggesting using a consistent model within multi-agency work could help implement regular meetings where professionals can share information, and the co-ordination of interventions and actions.

Another model discussed in two papers (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024) was the Research and Development in Organisations model (RADIO). This model was used to provide the action research with a clear structure. Corcoran et al. (2024) argued the model allowed the multi-agency group to work in a cohesive manor and co-ordinate their planning to promote “a culture shift” (p.104) in the understanding and perception of EBSA. Therefore, suggesting the use of a model or structure could enhance multi-agency practice by keeping all those involved focused and aligned, particularly when addressing complex and multifaceted needs such as EBSA.

Overall the following facilitators were identified within the studies:

- Localisation of support e.g. steering group.
- Consistent opportunities to meet with other professionals.
- Sharing knowledge and experience e.g. psychoeducation, resources etc.
- Shared goals and motivation.
- Buy in from professionals, especially when there are challenges with capacity.
- A lead professional who can promote and monitor the multi-agency work.
- A model that underpins the work and guides professional’s practice.

### **3.2.3 Barriers to multi-agency working**

A steering group in one paper (Corcoran et al. 2024) identified two barriers to working in a multi-agency manner to support EBSA . The first being 'diminished capacity and resourcing', which suggested limited time, availability, and resources impacted their ability to fully engage despite motivation being high. They argued this also impacted the group's ability to evaluate their project. This in turn prevented them from demonstrating the positive impact the work carried out to request further resources. The limited capacity of the stakeholder group also prevented the evaluation of the guidance document created. The researcher argued that receiving service research feedback about the guidance and the training offered was needed to "ensure the efficacy of the recommended approaches" (p.108). This limitation should be considered if other LAs look to implement a similar model.

The second barrier identified in Corcoran et al.'s (2024) study were misconceptions about EBSA. This theme discussed the idea that when there was a negative narrative around EBSA, the blame shifted onto CYP and their families. The professionals within the steering group identified a need to continue addressing misconceptions about EBSA and to promote support that is evidence-based. This suggests that when professionals have different or negative understandings of EBSA, their views and perspectives can impact the work that is carried out. This was also discussed within Nuttall & Woods (2013) study as they briefly mentioned the differences in feelings towards monetary fines by professionals. While some professionals believed the fine helped to motivate the young person's parents to "keep on track" (p.358), other professionals had hinted at the prosecutions being unhelpful.

The idea of unaligned working models was also shared by participants within Chian et al. (2024) study. They discussed that they often found unaligned working models with external partners as a barrier to supporting EBSA

pupils. The study also discussed the challenges that arose when services worked to different timelines that could be difficult for others working with the CYP to follow. Chian et al. (2024) argued that professionals working together in a multi-agency manner need to discuss expectations before work is carried out. Additionally, school staff within this study highlighted some displeasure at professionals working in a virtual manner when the CYP is at home as they felt technology was not always an appropriate tool to engage the CYP. Again this suggests misaligned working models can become a barrier to professionals working together to support EBSA.

As well as unaligned working models, a lack of clear communication between services can also be a barrier to collaborative working, especially when this leads to misunderstandings. Boaler et al. (2024) identified a lack of clarity of roles between different services as a barrier to positive multi-agency working and consistency. Additionally limited communication between professionals and their limited time capacity to be a part of stakeholder meetings was also a barrier.

Overall the following barriers to multi-agency practice to support EBSA was highlighted within the studies included within the systematic literature review:

- Different understandings of EBSA.
- Difference in opinions about consequences of EBSA such as monetary fines.
- Unaligned working models e.g. working virtually.
- Limited time, resources and professional availability/capacity.
- Different timelines between different services.
- Lack of or limited communication between professionals.
- Lack of clarity of professional roles.

## **4.0 Current research rationale**

The literature in the narrative review found that the language and understanding of EBSA has evolved throughout the years. There is not currently a clear view of how to identify and it is clear each case can present differently. The research shows that the language and understanding of this need can impact how a CYP is viewed and supported regarding their non-attendance (Rae, 2020). Therefore, it is important to gain an understanding of how professionals regard EBSA and what knowledge they have around the need. The research also highlighted that supporting pupils with EBSA may require support from multiple professionals, given that various levels of the pupil's system could both influence and be influenced by the EBSA behaviours (Lester and Michelson, 2024). Therefore, exploring how professionals can work collaboratively together is paramount. The systematic literature review highlighted the limited research that explores the barriers and facilitators to professionals working in a multi-agency approach to support CYP experiencing EBSA. The current research can provide the experiences of multiple professionals from various services within a single LA to add further knowledge in what benefits or hinders collaborative practice. This will broaden our understanding of supporting CYP using a multi-agency approach and provide practical applications for working collaboratively. These findings could also provide useful information for LAs to use when considering their EBSA practices, especially when working with other teams. Furthermore, following exploration of the current research surrounding EBSA it was noted that much of the research focused on the views of school staff (Slifi, 2024) and parent perceptions (Sawyer, 2022; Sawyer & Collingwood, 2024; Slifi, 2024). There has also been research that explores the views of the CYPs themselves (Corcoran, 2024; Halligan & Cryer, 2022; Slifi, 2024). However, there is limited research exploring the views and understanding of other professionals who often support CYP and their families such as

educational psychologists, educational welfare officers, social workers and child and mental health (CAMHS) workers to name a few. The current research will provide the opportunity for voices that are currently missing from the literature to be included.

Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the perspectives of professionals who support CYP experiencing EBSA further, to add to the currently limited breadth of research. It seeks to deepen an understanding of their perceptions of EBSA, their roles in addressing it, as well as the advantages and potential challenges of adopting a multi-agency approach to support EBSA. The current study will do this by considering the following research question:

- What are professionals' understandings of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and what do they perceive as the barriers and facilitators to effective multi-agency collaboration in supporting pupils with EBSA?

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*Professionals' understandings of EBSA: Exploring barriers and facilitators to collaborative multi-agency practice*

## **Part Two: Major Empirical Research**

Word Count: 10,152

## **Abstract**

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is when a child or young person (CYP) finds it difficult to attend school due to underlying emotional needs. EBSA has been found to be a complex and multi-faceted need that can be influenced by many levels of the CYP's system and environment. Therefore, there may often be several professionals supporting the CYP over an extended period.

The current research aimed to explore if there were inconsistencies in how professionals define and label EBSA, and how this may impact identification and support. Additionally, the research explored the potential barriers and facilitators to multi-agency collaboration to support EBSA. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals from one local authority (LA) in Wales. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and four over-arching themes were developed. Professionals discussed areas such as the language used to discuss EBSA, working as a team, ensuring the CYP was at the centre of the work, and the barriers and facilitators to working together. These findings provided information on the complexity of EBSA and how professionals could work together to ensure positive outcomes, as well as what barriers they may face during their work in this area.

## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Language and Labels**

The literature review showed that researchers have found it difficult to differentiate between different forms of non-attendance due to its complex and multi-faceted nature. It would be challenging to discuss all categorisations of absenteeism within this study. However, Heyne et al. (2019) has discussed this in more detail and attempted to provide an overview of the categorisations. While clear categorical definitions have not been identified, what was agreed upon was that language and labels used to describe the non-attendance can have an impact on how others view the CYP (Rae, 2020) and how the CYP views themselves (Pellegrini, 2007). Therefore, careful consideration was given to deciding which terminology would be used within this study, as the current research was exploring non-attendance that had emotional underlying reasons rather than other forms of non-attendance such as truancy or exclusion. The research found within part 1 of the literature review identified that many terms can be used for this form of non-attendance e.g. emotionally based school avoidance (Lester & Michelson, 2024; Thambirajah et al., 2008), emotionally based school non-attendance (Boaler et al., 2024), school refusal (Ulaş & Seğer, 2024) etc. The current research wanted to ensure the emotional need element of the absenteeism was at the forefront of the terminology used. The term emotionally based school non-attendance was considered during this research. However, it was finally decided to use emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) as this was the label that was more widely used within the literature. Additionally, participants within this study also used the term EBSA which was the term agreed upon within their LA at the time of interviews. Therefore, for consistency the term EBSA will be used throughout part 2. However, the current research acknowledges that other terminology may be used within research and other systems, and the 'avoidance' aspect

may need to be reconsidered in future research as the language in this area of study continues to evolve.

In addition to the individual consideration of language that professionals choose to use within their everyday practice, there also needs to be systemic considerations to ensure there are not misunderstandings between services. Salmon and Rapport (2005) identified that misunderstandings can occur when services use similar labels but may intend different meanings. Therefore, the research shows that opportunities for all professionals involved in supporting a CYP to meet would be useful, as this would allow for discussions about language and understanding of what EBSA is to occur. This will promote a consistent understanding between agencies. Additionally, it is important the language being used is trauma-informed so the CYP does not feel stigmatized by labels that are being placed on them. Pellegrini (2007) argued that the terminology used can potentially disempower the CYP to initiate any changes to their behaviour. Using terms that emphasise the emotionally based aspect of this need encourages a trauma informed approach that focuses on creating a sense of safety where CYP do not feel judged. Therefore, professionals need to reflect on language being used, especially as this seems to be a continuously changing area of study.

## **1.2 Prevalence of EBSA**

Welsh Government (2025) defined 'persistent absenteeism' as missing 10% of school sessions. This was amended from the previous guidance which defined it as missing 20% of school sessions. The guidance argued that this adaptation was needed as small increases in absenteeism can have huge effects on learners. Since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, persistent absenteeism has been shown to have increased (Welsh Government, 2025). Using the 10% threshold, the figures show there was a rise in persistent school absence in Wales from 14.7% in 2018/19 to 30.4% in 2023/24 (Welsh Government, 2025). It must be noted that these numbers are



considering absenteeism as an overarching umbrella term and does not seem to differentiate between the different forms of non-attendance e.g. truancy, EBSA etc. Research has explained that distinguishing different forms of persistent absenteeism can be challenging as schools may have different thresholds or definitions of absenteeism (Chian et al., 2024). However, evidence has estimated that between one and two percent of the United Kingdom (UK) pupil population have difficulties attending school due to emotional needs (Elliott & Place, 2019; Gulliford & Miller, 2015). The reported numbers may be underestimated due to difficulties in establishing precise definitions of the different classifications of absenteeism (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). The lack of consensus may therefore be impacting how different forms of attendance are being reported leading to an underreported number of absences identified as EBSA. As discussed previously the language used to identify and understand this area of need can have repercussions, such as the CYP being perceived as truanting or refusing to attend, rather than it being an emotional need that requires support. This may lead to EBSA behaviours not being identified early on which can lead to more entrenched emotional and behavioural needs.

### **1.3 Supporting CYP experiencing EBSA**

There are many components to consider when planning and implementing interventions to support EBSA. As previously discussed, EBSA is multi-faceted and each case may present differently (González et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important for professionals to gather pupil voice to ensure there is a clear understanding of the contributing factors. This may entail exploring the push and pull factors that may be underlying the non-attendance. Additionally, gathering pupil voice can provide a clearer understanding of what they find useful and what will help them engage with school. A study by Halligan and Cryer (2022) gained views from GCSE pupils in a specialist setting who had experienced EBSA in the past during their

time in a mainstream setting. The pupils shared that they benefited from emotionally available adults who they could share concerns with. The importance of positive relationships in schools (Chian et al., 2024) and an inclusive school ethos (Hallam & Rogers, 2008; Thambirajah et al., 2008) have been highlighted as paramount in supporting EBSA. These strategies provide a sense of safety within the school environment that can help to reduce anxiety the CYP may feel regarding school. Furthermore, these relationships and sense of belonging provide opportunities for the adults to build trust with the CYP so they feel more confident to share their concerns and worries. This may also prevent the escalation of EBSA behaviours as the CYP may feel more willing to discuss concerns and challenges at an earlier stage (Heyne et al., 2019; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Therefore, allowing support to be put in place earlier and reducing the chances of prolonged periods of absence.

Emotionally available adults can also support families by being a consistent person they can speak to within the school (Bombèr, 2015). This approach could prevent the family from becoming isolated and avert relationship breakdowns between home and supporting professionals. Additionally, when home and schoolwork together, it allows for comprehensive support to be put in place for the CYP across all areas of their system. A holistic approach is important as EBSA can have contributing factors that may occur at multiple levels of the CYP's system (Lester and Michelson 2024). It can be useful to consider an ecological approach such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) to consider the various systems, environments and contexts that may be affecting the CYPs wellbeing and non-attendance. This model allows professionals to consider the context the CYP is in and how the systems in their environment may be interacting, leading to feelings of anxiety which impact their school attendance.

## **1.4 Multi-agency working**

When considering the systemic approach that may be needed to holistically support the CYP, positive collaboration between professionals may be vital to support (Boaler et al., 2024). Research has shown that multi-agency working can be beneficial as it allows professionals to share expertise and knowledge which can boost the potential for positive outcomes (Solomon, 2019). However, the literature also highlighted there are many barriers to working in a multi-agency manner that can impact positive outcomes and collaborative practice. Firstly, limited time availability and resources was identified as a barrier that prevented professionals from implementing and evaluating systemic work that could support EBSA within the local authority (LA; Corcoran et al., 2024). Furthermore, limited capacity can impact professional's ability to carry out actions. This was especially challenging when services had working models that did not align as the professionals may have different timelines they followed within their service (Chian et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important for professionals working together to ensure time is given to discuss expectations. This discussion may also involve gaining a better understanding of each other's roles as lack of clarity of roles was also found to be a barrier to positive multi-agency practice (Boaler et al., 2024). Furthermore, ensuring consistency regarding the understanding of EBSA is needed as misconceptions or differences in views around EBSA can impact the work that is carried out (Corcoran et al., 2024). This may include the language and/or definitions professionals use or how they feel the CYP and their families should be supported.

While there are barriers to working in a multi-agency manner there are also facilitators that have been identified which can promote positive collaborative working. For example, creating a consistent space where professionals meet to share information has been found to be immensely beneficial (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024; Nuttall & Woods,

2013). These spaces provide the opportunity to clarify roles, share resources and ask questions. Furthermore, joint working prevents duplication of work and ensures a clear action plan that provides a shared goal. Boaler et al. (2024) also identified motivation as a facilitator to multi-agency practice. They argued working together allowed for problem solving to overcome barriers that may occur such as restrictive practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially when there were key stakeholders who followed up on agreed actions and kept momentum.

### **1.5 Rationale for current research**

Despite the growing number of CYP in the UK exhibiting EBSA behaviours, there remains a need to establish a consistent understanding of the need as various terms are still being used (Hammond-Price et al., 2025). This involves exploring the language used and examining how it influences the experiences of CYP, their families, and the support offered to them. Additionally, there is very limited research exploring multi-agency working within this area despite it being a complex need that often benefits from a collaborative, systemic approach (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024).

Therefore, after considering the previous research available the current research aims are:

- To explore professionals' views of what EBSA is and how they identify it.
- To elicit professionals' views of their role and the role of others in supporting EBSA pupils.
- To gain a deeper understanding of barriers and facilitators to working collaboratively in a multi-agency way to support EBSA pupils.

## 1.6 Research Question

The current study considers the following research question:

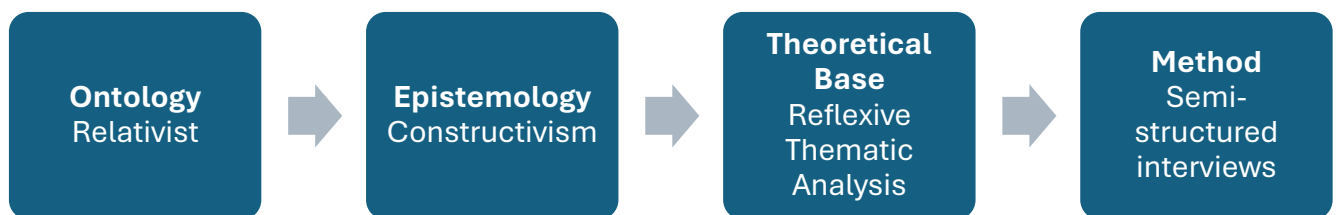
- What are professionals' understandings of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and what do they perceive as the barriers and facilitators to effective multi-agency collaboration in supporting pupils with EBSA?

## 2.0 Methodology

The research design and theoretical framework is outlined in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3**

*Research design and theoretical framework*



### 2.1 Research Paradigm

The aim of the current research is to explore the understanding and experiences of different professionals. Therefore, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen to gather the individual constructions of EBSA and professionals' roles to support CYP who are experiencing EBSA. A relativist ontological and constructivist epistemological stance underpins this research. This perspective allows for the view that multiple realities can be constructed rather than one singular reality (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burr, 2015). A relativist ontological position allows for the participant's individual experiences to be explored and follows the view that each individual

constructs their own reality (Moon & Blackman, 2014). The epistemological stance of constructivism underpins the view that each participant interviewed within this study will share their own understanding of their lived experiences and how they made sense of these experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, this research paradigm emphasises the importance of the context in which the participants' experiences and views are formed in (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## **2.2 Research Design**

Due to the ontological and epistemological stances underpinning this research a qualitative design was chosen. This was implemented through conducting semi-structured interviews on Microsoft Teams with five professionals who support pupils experiencing EBSA within a single LA in Wales. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method over other methods such as focus groups, as they provide the participant an opportunity to share their individual views and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Participants were given the choice of in-person or online interviews, and all five participants chose to participate online.

## **2.3 Participants**

### ***2.3.1 Recruitment and Inclusion Criteria***

The current study recruited participants through a combination of convenience and snowball techniques. Between August and October 2024, participants were recruited by contacting the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) of a Welsh LA. They were asked if they would be willing to disseminate information to professionals within their LA who support CYP experiencing EBSA, and an outline of the inclusion criteria for participating (see Table 4). The LA had an ongoing working group consisting of professionals within the LA who were planning and carrying out multiple funded EBSA projects within the LA. The PEP agreed to contact potential

participants using the participant letter (see Appendix B) and to share the information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D). Potential participants were asked to contact the researcher to express interest. This resulted in five consent forms being returned to the researcher via email and suitable times were agreed to participate in the interviews online. The PEP also shared the information with the lead of Primary Mental Health to share with their team. However, no one from this team chose to participate. The job roles of participants who took part in the study are outlined in Figure 4.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were not offered incentives to participate.

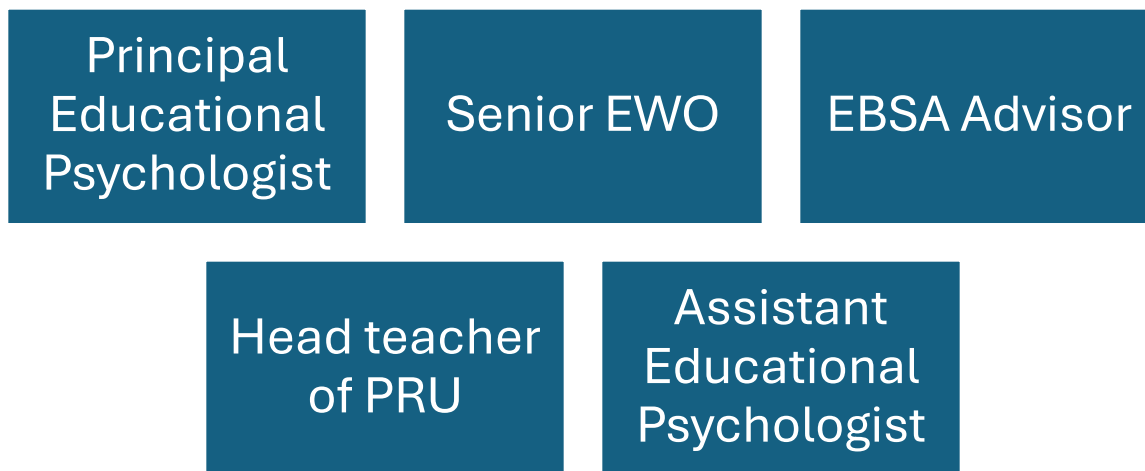
**Table 4**

*Participant inclusion criteria*

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Participants had to be working in a role that involved providing support to CYP who presented with EBSA behaviours.	This ensures that participants have direct, practical experience of supporting CYP with EBSA.
Participants had experience working directly with CYP and/or their families to support EBSA behaviours.	To gain an understanding of professionals' roles and working collaboratively with other professionals.
Had to work within the Welsh LA the research was being carried out in.	It was decided to keep the research within one LA at this time to ensure differences in systems between LA's was not a variable in any differences that may occur in understanding EBSA and professionals' understanding of roles, as well as any potential barriers and facilitators to collaborative work that participants identify.
Must have experience working collaboratively with other professionals to support CYP presenting with EBSA behaviours.	This is essential to ensure that participants can provide informed, practice-based insights into their experiences in working in a multi-agency manner to support CYP experiencing EBSA.

**Figure 4**

*Participant job roles*



## **2.4 Data Collection**

Participants were given the option to complete the interviews in person or online. All participants requested online, and the interviews were conducted using a secure Microsoft Teams account. Some researchers have argued that face-to-face contact between researcher and participant during interviews is more optimal to collect data (Novick, 2008). However, virtual interviews are increasingly becoming used, especially since COVID-19. They can be seen as extensions, rather than substitutes, for traditional face to face methods that have their own strengths as a method of data collection (De Villiers et al., 2022; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Conducting the interviews online allowed the participants within the current study to choose a time that was convenient for them, especially as hybrid working occurs within their LA since the COVID-19 pandemic.



The information was gathered through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen as it allows for targeted information to be gathered with the flexibility for the participant and interviewer to explore certain topics further if the opportunity arose. This form of data gathering provides the participants opportunities to discuss information that is important to them (Braun & Clarke, 2013), aligning with the ontology and epistemology of this research.

Participants were provided with written information sheets before attending the interview and providing written consent. Participants were verbally reminded of the information regarding their data and their right to withdraw. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 70 minutes. Participants were verbally debriefed following completion of the interview and provided with a written copy via email (see Appendix E).

## **2.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was provided by Cardiff University School of Psychology Ethics Committee in April 2024 (see Appendix F). The following ethical considerations outlined in Table 5 were acknowledged:

**Table 5***Ethical Considerations*

<b>Ethical Consideration</b>	<b>Method to Manage</b>
Informed Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants were sent an information sheet (see <i>Appendix C</i>) and consent form (see <i>Appendix D</i>).</li><li>• Participants were required to sign the consent form and send it to the researcher's university email to acknowledge they would like to be part of the research before any interviews took place.</li></ul>
Confidentiality and Anonymity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interview recordings were stored on a secure, password protected University one-drive account.</li><li>• Once recordings were transcribed the video recordings were deleted (example of transcription in <i>Appendix G</i>).</li><li>• All identifying information was removed from the transcripts and participants were given numbers to ensure anonymity.</li></ul>
Right to withdraw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants received an information sheet and consent form. Their right to withdraw was also explained verbally before interviews to begin.</li><li>• It was explained they had the right to withdraw up until the transcription of data and the data was anonymised.</li></ul>
Participant Debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At the end of their interview participants were verbally debriefed and provided with a written copy of the debrief sheet (see <i>Appendix E</i>). The sheet included information about the study aims, how their information would be used, and assurance of anonymity.</li><li>• The debrief sheet also included contact details for the researcher, research supervisor and ethics committee if they wished to contact them about further questions or if they had any concerns about the research.</li></ul>

## **2.6 Data Analysis**

### **2.6.1 Overview of Analysis**

Following data collection, data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (See Figure 5). The familiarisation stage consisted of the researcher creating familiarisation doodles which can be seen in *Appendix H*. This provided the opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the data and begin to make sense of the ideas that were noticed within the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During this stage, time was given to reflecting on the overall data set and the researcher's responses before beginning the coding stage as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2022). They argued this was an important part of familiarisation as it allows for the researcher to enter the coding stage with "an already-engaged, critically questioning mindset" (p.47).

Initial coding of the data was carried out using NVivo to tag segments of the text and label the codes. However, the researcher tracked the code labels by hand to continue the familiarisation stage of the analysis (*see Appendix I*) and evolve the codes as part of the RTA process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Many of the codes were captured at a semantic level as they stayed close to language the participants expressed within their interviews. However, by coding in an inductive manner, latent codes arose as the codes focused on a "deeper more implicit or conceptual level of meaning" of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022; p.57-58). Multiple rounds of coding occurred to refine the code labels before a final list of code labels was compiled (*Appendix I*). The codes were then used to develop initial themes by grouping codes that were potentially connected using thematic maps. The researcher drew maps by hand to develop the themes until the final themes and subthemes were generated (*see Appendix J*).

**Figure 5:**

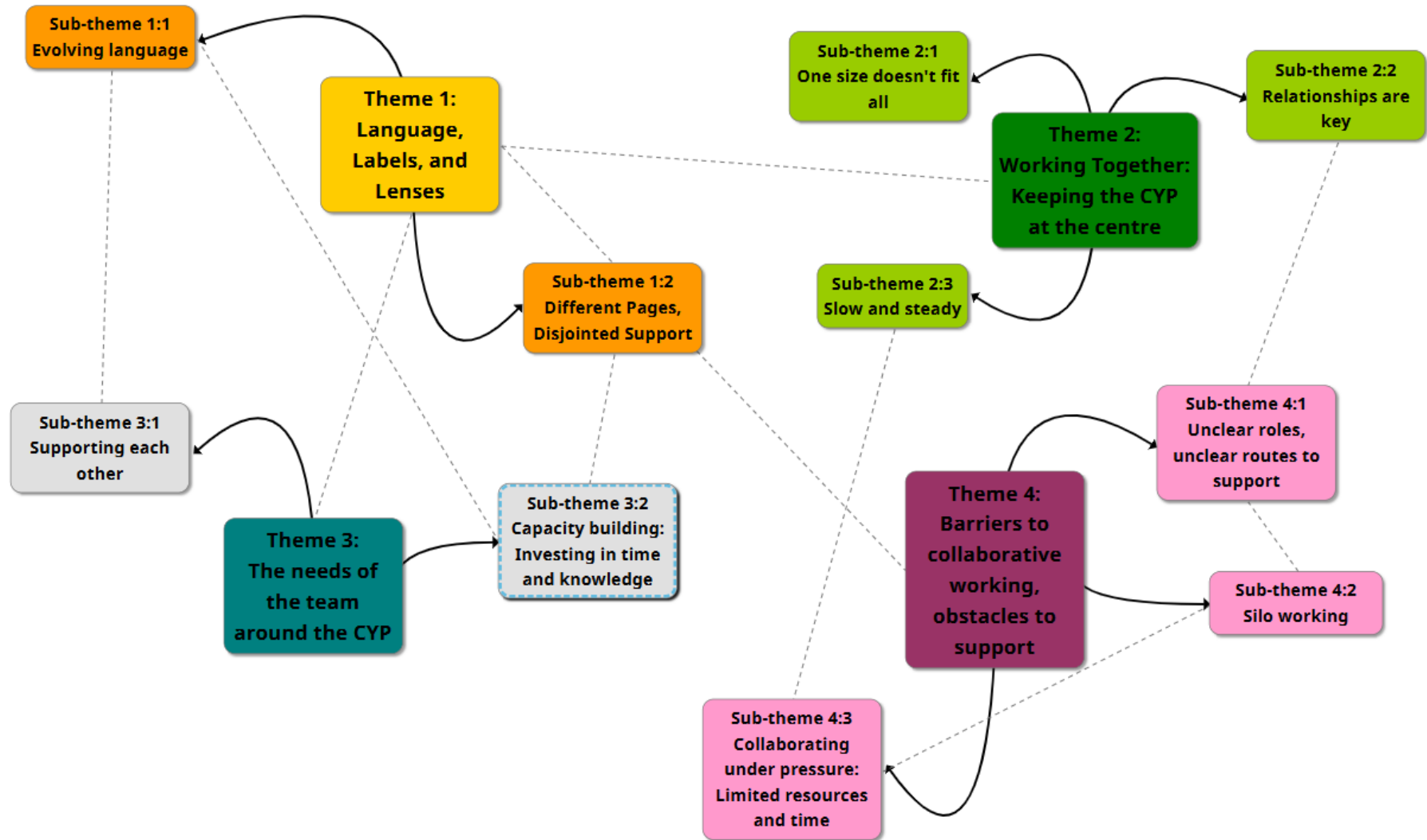
*Braun and Clarke (2022) Six Phases of Reflexive Analysis*



### **3.0 Results**

The themes and sub-themes developed during the thematic analysis are outlined in the thematic map below (Figure 6). Four overarching themes and ten sub-themes were constructed following the initial coding stage. The themes will be discussed in more detail within this section along with supporting quotes from the participants during the interviews. A list of additional quotes for each theme can be found in *Appendix K*.

**Figure 6:**  
*Thematic Map*



### **3.1 Theme 1: Language, Labels, and Lenses**

This theme explores how professionals label, define and identify EBSA. It also explores how participants considered how they differentiate EBSA from other forms of non-attendance e.g. truancy.

#### **3.1.1 Sub-theme 1:1 – Evolving language**

Participants discussed how terminology and definitions of EBSA has changed over the years, both in professional and research contexts.

*"So I think obviously across the literature it's there's lots of different terms that are being used." (Participant 5)*

All participants within this study consistently used the term EBSA at the time of interviews. However, they highlighted that they have heard of different terminology being used by other professionals or at different points within their career. Additionally, a participant discussed that while there is no consistent definition of EBSA within the literature, the presentation of EBSA appears to be more constant. This reflected the responses that was given by other participants within the current study as there were similar views of how EBSA presents and how they identify presentations within the CYP they work with. However, this consistency may be because many participants worked closely with other professionals within the LA on EBSA projects, which required a shared understanding of EBSA.

*"So there is no particular definition, there's nothing that's umm I don't think through literature where there is an overall view, but there is commonality in terms of agreed presentation of behaviour." (Participant 2)*

Participants explained the negative connotations certain terms and definitions can have such as "school-refusal" that suggests EBSA is a within child difficulty. Instead a participant preferred to emphasise the emotional needs that underly EBSA.

*"I like to explain it more as a young person or a child who is struggling to attend school regularly because of an underlying emotional health well-being reason." (Participant 4)*

### **3.1.2 Sub-theme 1:2 – Different Pages, Disjointed Support**

This sub-theme connects to sub-theme 1:1 as participants appeared to associate how to identify EBSA with how they define it. Additionally, while participants within this study appeared to agree on the presentation of EBSA, it was discussed that this may not always be the case. A participant mentioned that identifying and supporting CYP with EBSA can be challenging when professionals are not in agreement with how to define EBSA and how it presents.

*"I think obviously it can get very difficult if people aren't on the same page about what EBSA is" (Participant 5)*

Some participants noted that the term EBSA is being used as a diagnostic term leading to professionals and families to seek diagnoses or who to assert the CYP has a diagnosis when requesting support.

*"...we even have families ringing up saying I need to speak to the EBSA advisor because my child's got EBSA." (Participant 3)*

One participant argued that this could impact individuals taking time to explore the needs of the CYP and identify what is underlying the non-attendance.

*"...every child is EBSA and it becomes a diagnosis in itself. So that's why we have to be very, very cautious about that and not default to, oh, that child is EBSA without the rich pictures we can get to identify the reasons why they don't attend school." (Participant 2)*

The professionals also discussed the tools they use to explore with CYP and the adults around them to identify if there are EBSA behaviours. Multiple participants mentioned using EBSA questionnaires and similar criteria. Additionally, it was noted that information needs to be gathered from multiple sources to gain a holistic understanding of the CYP's needs and the experiences that may be underlying the CYPs worries.

*"...triangulating information really. From the young person, from their parents, from schools and professionals, in order to paint a picture that looks like it's probably an entrenched pattern of behaviour that's been happening for some time." (Participant 2)*

### **3.2 Theme 2: Working together: Keeping the CYP at the centre.**

Theme 2 explores how the team around the CYP offers support.

Furthermore, the importance of ensuring the CYP was at the centre of the work during all stages of support was discussed throughout the interviews of multiple participants.

#### **3.2.1 Sub-theme 2:1 – One Size Doesn't Fit All**

This sub-theme highlights that every EBSA case is different and there is not a "one size fits all" (Participant 4) way to support EBSA. Instead the support needs to be tailored to the CYP's needs.

*"...there's no clear set pathway for each child. Each child might be quite different." (Participant 2).*

Participants shared this can be challenging as the systems they work in do not always allow for this. Sometimes, what the CYP requires does not exist or has limited availability, especially when EBSA is entrenched.

*"Because if there's a lack of capacity in terms of specialist provision, then we are stuck because we can't move those children on." (Participant 2).*



Additionally, this may have impact on services referral criteria and may require them to consider how they can ensure to capture certain EBSA groups. For example, one participant discussed how their referrals occurred after a certain percentage of non-attendance was identified. However, they reflected that this approach might prevent certain CYP experiencing EBSA from accessing support, as it overlooks other risk factors. Some EBSA pupils may not have low attendance but still exhibit anxiety-related behaviours toward school, such as missing certain lessons. Participants highlighted that at times support is provided through positive inter-agency communication to identify EBSA pupils who may get lost within the system or who do not meet current referral criteria for services within the LA.

*"...and where we are reasonably good, I would say, at sharing information... we discuss things and it would be maybe actually we need to get EBSA involved even though this young person wouldn't necessarily be open to the education welfare officer" (Participant 4)*

### **3.2.2 Sub-theme 2:2 – Relationships are key**

A theme that all participants discussed was the importance of relationships when supporting CYPs experiencing EBSA. This included relationships with the parents, professionals and the CYP themselves.

*"Those relationships are the foundation. If we haven't got that, then it's very difficult to make any kind of progress." (Participant 1)*

They discussed the different opportunities available within the LA to meet with other teams including EBSA project groups, and multi-agency meetings. These meetings allowed professionals to learn about each other's roles and the support each team could offer. One participant highlighted the importance of having conversations with other professionals to discuss each other's role and ensure there was no overlap or that professionals did not retract support prematurely just because other professionals were involved.

*"it's not a cut off for fine cut off. OK, we're involved. So now you can step back. It's about how we contribute in our unique ways and understanding people's different roles and functions and how we can actually work together with a common goal."* (Participant 2)

Participants explained that relationships supported CYP and their families to feel safe. This feeling of safety allows families to share their feelings and experiences. Additionally, participants shared that relationships with other professionals could provide resources and knowledge that the professionals may not have previously had access to.

*"I linked in with the local youth centre. They allowed me to use their, use their facilities in the school day."* (Participant 4).

However, professionals had to remain aware of their availability and not become an emotionally available adult for the CYP if they were not able to support them over an extended period. As one participant explained:

*"What we try and not do is we try and not become the emotional available adult for that child. Because we are not in school all the time."* (Participant 3)

### **3.2.3 Sub-theme 2:3 - Slow and steady**

The participants also discussed the importance of slowing the pace of intervention when supporting EBSA. Participants explained that CYP had often been out of school for months or years before gaining support from professionals which meant short term interventions were not always useful or appropriate.

*"...we felt that a 6 to 8 period, 6-to-8-week period wasn't long enough and didn't actually invest enough time in those young people to get them back into a school setting."* (Participant 2)

One participant mentioned that it was not unusual to feel like no progress was being made at times, or that they were moving backwards. However, they also highlighted that it is important to focus on the small steps and progress CYP's achieve that can be overlooked when individuals focus too much on the bigger end goal e.g. accessing school full time.

*"...it's just like those little wins and you know then that they're actually moving forward and they found something that they enjoy." (Participant 3)*

However, they shared that the system does not always allow for CYP to receive support at the most appropriate pace. Possible reasons for this are discussed further in *sub-theme 4:3 - Collaborating under pressure: Limited resources and time*.

### **3.3 Theme 3: Needs of the Team Around the CYP**

'Working as a team' centres on participants' reflections on the importance of their being a team around the CYP and how they can support each other.

*"we can't do it on, on our own. You know, we just can't. (Participant 4)*

#### **3.3.1 Sub-theme - 3:1 – Support Each Other**

Participants expressed their appreciation for opportunities to engage with other professionals within their practice. One participant highlighted the importance of gaining feedback from other professionals to reflect on their practice. They felt this allowed them to consider if there were aspects that may have been overlooked and/or if there were alternative approaches to support that could be considered.

*"...sometimes it's quite nice to be reassured that that you're not missing anything or that there's nothing obvious..." (Participant 1)*

Participants also discussed the importance of supporting the families of CYP. Participants reflected on how families can benefit from psychoeducation and

additional support, especially as CYP with EBSA may spend a lot of time at home. Furthermore, the parents/carers themselves may have anxiety about education that could be having an impact on the CYP's constructions of the school environment or accessing support. As one participant explained,

*"...we need to be able to provide strategies and support for these parents and carers of the young people so that they can help while at home too.  
(Participant 5)*

### **3.3.2 Sub-theme - 3:2 – Capacity Building: Investing in Time and Knowledge**

This sub-theme was formed due to the participants explaining the importance of building capacity within not only their team, but all professionals that work with CYP experiencing EBSA. The Welsh LA where this current study was carried out had a strategic group to facilitate multiple EBSA projects within the LA. A participant spoke about how it allowed them to explore EBSA and ensure they had an understanding that was informed by current research.

*"So you've got to have that strategic group, I think in order to unpick it a little bit more and keep up to date with the research yourself, of course."  
(Participant 2)*

The funding provided to support these projects was highlighted by multiple participants. They viewed it as a facilitator to collaborative working, providing opportunities to be more strategic, identify processes, bring in relevant teams, clarify professional's roles and evaluate ongoing work to identify positive practices. It was felt that these groups enabled key professionals to take on a facilitator role within the multi-agency practice, helping to provide motivation and guidance for the work carried out.

*"And what you need really is is probably quite a strong person to facilitate that. Otherwise it becomes fragmented, fragmented and people work in isolation." (Participant 2)*

Participants also discussed the importance of a consistent and shared understanding of EBSA and support strategies to be across the LA. This links to *Sub-theme 1:1 - Evolving Language* which explored the use of language and understanding of EBSA. Multiple participants stressed the value of training professionals within the LA to promote consistency of what EBSA is and how CYP can be supported.

*"that kind of basic level of psychoeducation, so making sure that obviously the training and workshops just aren't just for, say, parents, but they're also for schools and teams within the local authority too." (Participant 5)*

#### **3.4 Theme 4: Barriers to collaborative working, obstacles to support**

This sub-theme outlines the barriers that the professionals explained can hinder working collaboratively in a multi-agency way to support CYP experiencing EBSA.

##### **3.4.1 Sub-theme 4:1 – Unclear roles, unclear routes to support**

This theme outlines how there can be difficulties that occur between services such as lack of communication or understanding of each other's roles. The participants explained that these can impact the support CYP and their families receive. Participants firstly felt this could occur when services had different processes and referral criteria, which could potentially impact access to support.

*"...there seems to be different ways of viewing how they actually become involved based on their own internal processes and decisions." (Participant 2)*

Secondly, they felt it was important clear systems were put in place to support EBSA that promoted clear communication between services, especially when there are a lot of professionals involved at once. They felt clear lines of communication between professionals contributed to better understanding of everyone's roles and actions.

*"So, you know, it's just if you've got a plan, it's making sure that everybody knows the plan. Everyone knows what their roles are within that plan..."*  
(Participant 2)

It was argued that without professionals having a clear understanding of roles and communicating well, the individuals they support will also feel confused and overwhelmed.

*"But I think it works well when you've got all professionals talking and on the same page. Because if you haven't got that, then if the professionals don't know what's going on, what they're doing, well, the poor child hasn't got a clue either."* (Participant 3)

#### **3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Silo Working**

Linking with the previous sub-theme, 'silo working' considers the impact of professionals working simultaneously but with very little communication between services. Participants shared that this form of working can lead to the CYP being discussed in multiple forums.

*"it doesn't really feel joined up because these are young people brought by school and school are talking to health in one forum, and yet education are perhaps involved in another forum."* (Participant 2)

This can result in disjointed work or the CYP and families becoming overwhelmed with the support being provided. One participant highlighted the confusion that can occur for families when there are a lot of professionals involved who do not clearly communicate.

*"It can be overwhelming for families... I think we have got to be really, really mindful of that and that's why again that clarity on who is doing what and why..." (Participant 4)*

### **3.4.3 Sub-theme 4:3 – Collaborating under pressure: Limited resources and time**

While the LA the research was carried out in had received funding for EBSA projects, this was a recent and potentially short-term increase in resources. A common discussion point throughout the interviews was the impact of funding reductions within teams and how this could prevent the staff and resources needed to support CYP.

*"We've had cut back after cut back and I think that's true with most services." (Participant 1)*

Participants also described the time constrictions some professionals face as a barrier to collaborative working as they have less time availability or professionals feel their support is not needed at that moment as other professionals are already involved. One participant highlighted this is especially difficult in cases where the EBSA is entrenched and long-term support is needed.

*"...it could be that involvement is time limited and that's where we get stuck because quite often, if there's entrenched EBSA, you'll find that services start to back off naturally because of the capacity and resources needed to support that young person over a period of time." (Participant 2)*

Together these sub-themes highlight that there could be multiple barriers that can impact effective multi-agency working that may need to be navigated when collaboratively working to support EBSA.

## **4.0 Discussion**

This study aimed to explore professionals' understanding of EBSA, and to gain a better understanding of the barriers and facilitators to multi-agency working when professionals support EBSA. This section discusses the study's findings with a focus on the importance of language, professional roles and the barriers and facilitators to multi-agency practice. Furthermore, this section will outline the strengths and limitations of the current study, as well as implications to practice.

### **4.1 The importance of language: The impact on identification and support**

The participants within the current study consistently used the term 'EBSA' and appeared to have similar understandings of its meanings. However, they mentioned that the terminology and definitions for this area of need have evolved over the years, and they themselves had used different terminology in the past. They emphasized that certain terms, such as "school refusal", can carry negative connotations that may not emphasise the emotional needs that could be underlying the non-attendance (Pellegrini, 2007; Rae, 2020). Such terminology can attribute these difficulties to the CYP, potentially influencing how individuals perceive and support them (Rae, 2020). Therefore, when professionals use these terms or language there could be a misalignment in understanding, which can impact the effectiveness of the work being carried out (Costello-Wells et al., 2003; Marino & Kahnoski, 1998; Salmon & Kirby, 2008). One participant also argued that the work can become challenging when everyone is not on the same page. For instance, participants noted that people have started using EBSA as a diagnostic term. One participant shared that this practice could hinder individuals from thoroughly examining the underlying reasons why CYP may not be attending school.



Additionally, the lack of clear and consistent criteria for EBSA, combined with its complex and diverse underlying factors, leads to challenges in establishing clear identification guidelines as the language used can impact how professionals view the behaviour (Heyne et al., 2019; Rae, 2020). The term EBSA alone would also not identify a clear plan of support as each case can present differently with a variety of underlying difficulties that need to be addressed (González et al., 2018; Thambirajah et al., 2008). Therefore, while a consistent understanding of EBSA would be beneficial, professionals need to use a holistic approach of supporting to ensure time is given to exploring the underlying reasons for the non-attendance to ensure it meets the individual needs of CYP. This is especially pertinent given that some CYP may not present with conventional anxious behaviours. Instead their distress and non-attendance behaviours may display through externalising actions, which may not always be recognised as EBSA. Externalising behaviours are sometimes more likely to be linked to other forms of non-attendance e.g. truancy, exclusions (Heyne et al., 2019).

Alongside using similar language within this study, the participants also used similar tools and resources to identify EBSA e.g. questionnaires. This may be due to multiple participants being part of a steering group aiming to implement projects to support EBSA within the LA. The participants who were not part of the group had team members who were. They were aware of the work being carried out and were supporting the work within their role. Research indicates that creating a platform for professionals to exchange information and ask questions can foster a shared understanding of EBSA and facilitate the planning of common goals (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). This was supported in the current research as all participants were part of ongoing conversations with other professionals they worked with in the LA within various forums.

Furthermore, the current study highlighted the importance of collecting information from multiple sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that could be impacting the CYP's ability to attend school. Research has shown that professionals need to avoid relying on attendance figures alone to identify CYP who may be at risk of EBSA (Slifi, 2024). While attendance figures may be a good starting point to identify CYP at risk there could be numerous reasons for the non-attendance that may not necessarily be EBSA and instead could be other forms of non-attendance. Alternatively, there may be some behaviours that underly school absence that may not always be linked to EBSA as they may not present in the typical anxious manner that has been linked to EBSA e.g. external behaviours such as anger. Moreover, there could be pupils in school who are experiencing EBSA behaviours but are not yet consistently absent from school. It may be CYP avoid certain aspects of school e.g. specific lessons (Fairclough, 2024). This may not be as noticeable and may require professionals to identify these patterns to recognise the EBSA behaviours.

#### **4.2 Navigating roles in multi-agency working**

While the analysis used within this study may have provided some challenges in identifying clear distinctions between roles, as themes can be quite broad, some sub-themes indicated that professionals within this study benefited from learning about each other's roles, and the barriers that could occur when there were misunderstandings. For example, participants identified relationships between professionals as a key part of supporting EBSA. These relationships provided opportunities for professionals to share knowledge and experiences with each other. This includes problem solving and sharing resources and knowledge, which research has shown to be beneficial (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Participants appreciated being able to receive feedback from other professionals to ensure there was not anything else that could be

implemented or if anything had been missed. This supports previous research that stated joint up working when supporting EBSA can be 'empowering' for professionals (Boaler et al., 2024), as they can share expertise and knowledge.

Furthermore, the funding the LA accessed to facilitate several EBSA projects provided opportunities for professionals to meet and learn about each other's roles. The professional's also discussed other opportunities with the LA, such as multi-agency meetings, meetings with CAMHS etc. that also provided opportunities to discuss each other's roles and how they could work together to provide support to CYP and their families. They felt these spaces allowed professionals to clarify roles and plan joint-up working which could prevent some services prematurely pulling out support due to misunderstanding of others work or not wanting to duplicate work. This supports previous research that discusses the benefits of regular opportunities for professionals to meet to discuss support and have spaces to learn from each other's knowledge and experience (Boaler et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2024; Corcoran, 2024).

#### **4.3 Holding the CYP at the Centre: Professional Support in Practice**

While professionals with different roles participated in the current study, common themes emerged about the work they undertook and strategies they implemented to support EBSA. For example, professionals considered ensuring the CYP was at the centre of their work as key to their role. This idea is aligning with the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) legislation in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018) that states that the CYP should be at the centre of the work and can be part of the process and decision making. This seemed particularly pertinent in EBSA cases due to the variance in presentations and support required. Therefore, information gathering is also

significant and an important part of all professionals' roles. Participants highlighted that they try to gather information from various sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of needs is gained. Comprehensive information gathering supports professionals to tailor the support to the CYP's needs. However, it was found that this can be challenging when CYP and families find it difficult to trust professionals. This may be due to negative experiences in the past where they may have felt unheard or 'blamed' for their CYP's non-attendance (Lissack & Boyle, 2022) or from concerns about potential repercussions by certain professionals, such as the risk of being fined (Dalziel & Henthorne, 2005).

Furthermore, it was found that professionals felt that building relationships was a big part of their role to mitigate barriers in providing support. They felt supporting EBSA can be challenging if relationships are not built between professionals and service users e.g. CYP, families and other professionals. By fostering relationships that created a sense of safety and trust, CYP and their families were able to openly communicate their difficulties, allowing for tailored support plans to be developed that met their individual needs. This supports previous research that highlights the importance of positive, safe relationships between professionals and CYP to support wellbeing and EBSA (Chian et al., 2024; Halligan & Cryer, 2022; Youell, 2018). This ideal also aligns with a trauma informed approach to supporting EBSA by fostering relationships that provide CYP opportunities to share their worries and concerns. However, it needs to be carefully considered who is best placed to form these relationships, especially as professionals often have a limited time to work with CYP and their families. Some professionals had concerns about becoming emotionally available adults that cannot commit to long term support. As discussed by Bombèr (2007), emotionally available adults or key adults need to be someone who can be available to the CYP and who can "keep the child in mind continually" (p.65). It is crucial to determine

which individuals can fulfil this role or if multiple adults within the CYP's support system can share this responsibility to ensure consistent support is available. Additionally, clearly outlining their roles and expectations at the outset of their involvement with CYP and their families would be beneficial, ensuring that everyone understands roles and responsibilities.

While professionals observed that identifying and planning support for EBSA was a key part of their role, they also identified providing psychoeducation as an important part of their work. This included providing resources and training which can provide a consistent approach to support (Corcoran et al., 2024; Corcoran, 2024). Professionals also highlighted the importance of parents/carers having the knowledge to understand and support EBSA within the home due to the large amount of time this cohort may spend there. Psychoeducation may help parents understand the behaviours their child may be presenting with or provide additional support. This can be especially important as research has shown that parents/carers can experience high levels of stress and frustration when they are trying to support EBSA (McDonald et al., 2023). However, it is worth noting that not all professionals felt their role was to provide the psychoeducation but they agreed that everyone should receive it to ensure a consistent understanding of what EBSA is and how to support throughout the LA.

#### **4.4 Working together: Barriers and facilitators to collaborative working**

Previous research has shown that EBSA behaviours can have contributing factors that can occur at different levels of the CYP's system (Lester and Michelson, 2024). Therefore, each case may present differently and need support at different levels of the system. National guidance (DfE, 2022) has stated that LAs need to form individualised, strategic approaches to supporting this area of need. Therefore, it is possible systemic approaches to

support will increase going forward, which may include considering systemic models such as Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) or Nuttal and Wood's (2013) Ecological Model of Reintegration to consider where support needs to be implemented and who is best placed to carry this out. The possibility of multiple professionals being involved may require effective multi-agency working to support EBSA behaviours. The current study offers potential barriers and facilitators that other professionals may want to consider when hoping to develop a multi-agency approach to supporting EBSA. It is noted that the barriers and facilitators identified within this study are that of one LA and may not be transferable to all systems. Each organisation needs to consider their individual characteristics to meet the needs of their cohort. However, the barriers and facilitators identified were factors that have been highlighted in previous research which will be outlined in more detail below.

#### **4.4.1 Barriers**

A barrier identified to working in a multi-agency manner was professionals' lack of communication. The current research highlighted that poor or limited communication between professionals can lead to misunderstandings and the possibility of professional's withdrawing support prematurely. Research has shown that professionals who work in a multi-agency manner need to meet to ensure expectations are discussed before work begins (Chian et al., 2024). This is to ensure services understand the different timelines they may be working to which can arise due to different services working models that may not always align. Further misunderstanding can also arise when professionals do not have a clear understanding of each other's roles (Boaler et al., 2024) which can be a potential barrier to positive multi-agency practice. This lack of clarity of roles was mentioned by the participants in this study, who shared that this could lead to confusion for not only professionals, but also for the CYP and families they support. They argued

that professionals need to communicate their roles to each other. This is especially important due to the complexity of EBSA, which may require a range of professionals to meet all the underlying needs not just one individual (Owoo, 2024).

In addition, participants identified insufficient resources and time as significant barriers to working collaboratively with other agencies to support EBSA. Research has shown that opportunities for professionals to meet can aid learning and build trust within services (Boaler et al., 2024). Without these opportunities, collaborative practices may be more challenging to organise which can lead to isolated pockets of work that may duplicate or impact others' support. Within this study, it was found that coordinating meetings among professionals can be challenging due to their limited time availability, a situation that has been aggravated by funding cutbacks. Moreover, the complexity of EBSA presentations can require a lot of discussion and input from professionals over an extended period, which can be difficult with the capacity each service holds. This capacity also varies from team to team which can cause challenges when services' timelines do not align (Chian et al., 2024). Limited capacity may also impact multi-agency engagement in resources that can provide consistent messages and working (Hammond-Price et al., 2025). Furthermore, the current study identified that professionals had concerns about services closing to service users when support is still needed due to time and staffing capacity. This may be more prevalent in cases of entrenched EBSA where long-term support may be warranted.

In addition, professionals found that EBSA cases often required a 'slow and steady' approach, which could involve as many setbacks as progress. Ensuring to recognise the small achievements was seen as important to keep all involved motivated. EBSA cases also can require reevaluating and altering support to meet the needs of CYP. However as previously mentioned, time

restrictions and service capacity can impact how long professionals can work with CYP and their families. Therefore, while multi-agency practice may be beneficial it is challenging to know if this kind of working is “practicable and achievable” (Hammond-Price et al., 2025; p.14).

#### **4.4.2 Facilitators**

As previously discussed, a shared understanding of EBSA between professionals can be a clear facilitator to collaborative multi-agency practice. The current study found that providing ongoing opportunities for professionals to get together to share information and knowledge promoted a consistent understanding of EBSA within their LA. This is important as the language professionals use can be adopted by others and may impact how professionals view and support CYP (Pellegrini, 2007; Rae, 2020). For example, using terms such as ‘school refusal’ can put the difficulties within child and not recognise the emotional element of the absenteeism. Research has also shown that misunderstanding can occur when professionals derive different meanings from the same word (Salmon & Rapport, 2005). Therefore, spending time to ensure a consistent understanding of what EBSA is and how to support can promote cohesive and consistent multi-agency practice (Costello-Wells et al., 2003; Marino & Kahnoski, 1998; Salmon & Kirby, 2008). Moreover, the participants within this study highlighted the importance of psychoeducation to ensure this consistency and understanding. This was provided to as many professionals as possible within their LA to promote consistent knowledge about EBSA.

The current study also highlighted the importance of relationship building between professional services. These relationships provided open channels of communication to share knowledge and resources. For example, accessing facilities where a CYP would feel safe to engage in support outside of the school environment, providing psychoeducation etc. Opportunities such as project steering groups and TAPPAS provided professionals within



this study spaces to work strategically together. Previous research has found that such steering groups can provide motivation and shared goals that can spear head positive practice (Boaler et al., 2024). Furthermore, it has been found that multi-agency groups that are made up of professionals who have worked within the LA long enough to have a good understanding of the local context can be beneficial and may identify potential barriers to upcoming systemic work (Corcoran et al., 2024).

One of the main reasons these facilitators could occur within this LA was the project groups that allowed the professionals spaces to meet and work collaboratively. Research has shown that spaces such as this can promote networking, a consistent understanding of EBSA and sharing of resources (Corcoran et al., 2024). This is particularly important given the complexity of EBSA and the emergence of new research. The opportunity for discussions provides a space where professionals can draw on each other's knowledge and experiences, as well as identify who is best placed to carry out support and dissemination of knowledge. This can provide wider culture shifts regarding EBSA within the LA as the projects provided spaces professionals could plan a shared vision of how they wanted support to look within the LA. This aligns with earlier findings by Kearney et al. (2022) who emphasised that going forward supporting school attendance challenges will require professionals to have "shared alliances among key agencies and stakeholders" (p.10) to effectively support the complexity of school absenteeism. Although, the current study did find that collaborative working benefitted from someone taking on a lead role who could facilitate and guide the work. Previous research indicates that having such an individual to hold people accountable and check actions are being carried out is paramount to positive multi-agency practice (Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Furthermore, miscommunication between professionals can lead to families feeling confused about support, especially when there are a lot of different services

involved. Therefore, the current study showed having a key professional who acts as a link between home and professionals could also be beneficial to prevent conflicting information or home feeling overwhelmed or ignored. Parents have shared that having professionals as a link between home and school can be valuable as they can provide relevant knowledge that can be shared (Sawyer, 2022).

#### **4.5 Implications for practice**

The current research suggests that professionals need to carefully consider the language for EBSA they are using within their practice, as this can have repercussions on how CYP are viewed and supported. Furthermore, when this language and understanding differs from other professionals, the CYP's needs and support may become misaligned. Therefore, opportunities for professionals to come together to ensure a shared understanding, ask questions and share knowledge has been shown to be beneficial. Steering groups to consolidate and plan LA EBSA projects have been identified as an effective approach to support EBSA, both within the current research study and previous research (Boaler et al., 2024). These groups promote multi-agency collaboration and help professionals understand each other's roles, ensuring that the most suitable individuals are working with CYP. EPs would be beneficial to this form of work as they play a pivotal role in fostering and supporting multi-agency collaboration, as their responsibilities can span across the different levels of the system e.g. individual, school, home, organisational. This research has highlighted the benefits of speaking with various professionals within a LA to explore the work that is being carried out to support EBSA and to consider any barriers to collaborative working that may be occurring. EPs may find it beneficial to dedicate time to nurturing relationships with other professionals to facilitate clear lines of communication or promote collaborative joint-up working. The current

research presented one positive example of project work that was facilitated by an EPS, that provided space for ongoing discussions between professionals within a LA. EPs could consider this within their work, especially when considering future project work.

EPs also provide work which is informed and guided by psychological frameworks, such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (2007), which provides a foundation for their practice and would guide positive systemic work. This would be especially beneficial given the complexity and systemic nature of EBSA behaviours. EPs can use this knowledge to facilitate a collaborative and holistic approach to supporting EBSA within their LAs alongside other professionals. Furthermore, EPs can provide ongoing psychoeducation within their LA that can ensure a consistent understanding of EBSA and how to support. This could be carried out through training, resources, or within consultation.

#### **4.6 Further Research**

The current research showed that EBSA is a complex and multi-faceted difficulty which can require multiple professionals providing support at once. Past research has established that misunderstandings between professionals can negatively impact CYP and their families. Therefore, gathering the views of as many different professionals as possible can potentially highlight barriers to effective communication and multi-agency collaboration. While the current study had a wide range of professionals whose voices were missing from previous research, there is still a gap in professionals from services that may be harder to reach or not considered. It would be useful to consider alternative recruitment methods in future research to access voices of professionals that were not included in this study e.g. CAMHS, youth workers. This may involve directly reaching out to leads in services rather than going through a singular gatekeeper.

It may also be useful to gather views from other LAs to explore if there are inconsistencies in identifying and understanding EBSA within their systems. The LA in the current study had a steering group that provided opportunities for conversations to occur that supported a shared understanding. However, it is possible there would be less consistency in LAs where professionals do not have as many occasions to meet. Therefore, further research to explore different systems, with different contexts may be beneficial. Additionally, gathering the views of parents/carers and CYPs about the roles of different professionals and their experiences of being supported by a team, may also provide further information that could support the implementation of positive multi-agency practice.

## **4.7 Strengths and Limitations**

### **4.7.1 Strengths**

The current study gathered a variety of different professionals which provided an opportunity to gather experiences from various professions within a singular Welsh LA. This helped to provide a broader perspective and increased the opportunities to identify any misalignment in understanding of EBSA and other professionals' roles. Semi-structured interviews were also used within this study which provided rich data that allowed the flexibility for participants to share what they thought was important about their experiences whilst still being relevant to the research question. Lastly, the findings of this study have provided perspectives that are currently underrepresented within the current literature, specifically highlighting the voices of professionals who support CYP experiencing EBSA and how they view EBSA, their role, the roles of others, and multi-agency working.

#### **4.7.2 Limitations**

At the time of beginning this research the term EBSA was widely used within services and research. Additionally, it aligned with the label the participants were using within their interviews. However throughout the study, particularly when exploring the use of language, the researcher identified that the term 'avoidance' may suggest the CYP not attending school was a choice. In the future, it is important to consider adopting more inclusive terminology, such as Emotional-Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA). Moreover, while the participants were asked if they used other terminology, the term EBSA was still used when facilitating the interviews. Therefore, in future research it may be useful to ask what term the participant would prefer to use throughout the interview.

A second limitation is the potential missed views of professionals who support EBSA. While this study was able to recruit a variety of professional roles, there was still a gap regarding health services. Additionally, all participants were part of (or aware of) EBSA project groups within the LA. It is possible if participants outside of this work had been recruited, their views may have varied from the current participant group. Similarly, the participants being from one LA could have influenced the findings e.g. the language they used for EBSA. Professionals from other LAs may have a different understanding of EBSA and how to support. Although, the current research chose to carry out the research in one LA to explore how professionals work together. If the research had expanded to different LAs it may have been more difficult to explore the constructions of professionals who have opportunities to work together and if their views contradicted each other.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Overall, this study has added to the research knowledge about the use of language when discussing EBSA and the inconsistencies that can occur when there are different understandings. The research has highlighted the importance of considering the language that is used and how it could impact how CYP are viewed and potentially how they are supported. This study also provided additional exploration of how professionals support EBSA. It was identified that EBSA often requires individualised support due to its complexity, and the risk factors that can occur at different levels of the CYP's system. They discussed how this can be challenging due to time and financial restraints. Furthermore, the study highlighted the benefits of working with other professionals in a multi-agency manner, adding to the currently limited research in this area. Although, it has highlighted there are barriers that can occur when working in this way e.g. lack of resources, limited communication etc. that need to be considered. The research also identified facilitators to multi-agency practice to support EBSA, such as having consistent meetings where professionals can share information and expertise.

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*Professionals' understanding of EBSA: Exploring barriers and facilitators to collaborative multi-agency practice*

### **Part Three: Critical Appraisal**

Word Count: 7567

***"The greatest gift you can give yourself is time for reflection."***

***– Oprah Winfrey***

## **1.0 Introduction/Overview**

An important part of being a researcher is the ability to reflect on one's own values, beliefs and possible biases that may influence the research process. This will ensure the participant's autonomy is not impacted, or potential interpretation bias does not occur (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Taquette et al. (2022) described this as taking "action with reflexivity" (p.11) by critically analysing the research process. I found this term helpful as it reminded me that I am an active participant in my research. It made me continuously aware of my own experiences and how they might influence my decisions. Furthermore, I had to be conscious of how my choices may affect the participants, the research and my roles as a researcher. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argued that the researcher needs to examine their actions as rigorously as the data they collect. Therefore, this section hopes to explore my decision making in more detail, including the ethical implications that may have occurred.

Part three of my thesis will be separated into two parts, written in the first person to emphasise the personal reflections that are being shared about the experiences and decision-making. I have also included quotes that inspired me during my journey or reflected my feelings. Firstly, I will offer a critical appraisal of myself as a researcher which includes exploring my decision making throughout the development of the research. This will encompass my decision-making during the literature review process, my epistemological and ontological stance, methodology and analysis. I will also take a detailed look at my use of language, particularly around the term emotionally based

school avoidance (EBSA), and how this impacted my thought process throughout the research.

The second section will consist of the contribution to knowledge the research is providing, both in terms of existing knowledge and what may be useful in the future. I will consider the implications the findings may have for Educational Psychologists (EPs) and other professionals who support children and young people (CYP) experiencing EBSA. This felt especially relevant within this research as it aimed to explore the dynamics of professional collaboration, as well as identifying potential barriers and facilitators to this work. Furthermore, I had to consider how I would disseminate these findings to professionals so that the research can make a true contribution to the current work being carried out.

## **2.0 Critical account of the development of the research practitioner**

### **2.1 Selection of the topic**

Since my first year on the Doctorate, I frequently discussed in supervisions the various professional roles I had worked in throughout my career. I reflected on how I often felt the need to adapt and change my language and perspective when starting a new role to fit the language and models used within the new system. I have worked in education, health, and the third sector, each of which used different acronyms and had distinct perspectives. Despite this, the cohort of CYP I worked with were very similar across all roles. Instead it was my role that adapted how I thought and acted rather than the needs of the CYP themselves. This prompted me to reflect on potential misunderstandings that might have arisen between professionals, such as differing interpretations of acronyms or the use of different models. It has also had me consider how much professionals understand each other's roles,

especially when there may be some overlap in their remit. For instance, I worked as a clinical psychology assistant and an educational psychology assistant. Despite being in different sectors, the tasks I performed were quite similar, and I worked with similar cohorts of CYP in both roles. This had me questioning how do we know where one professional's role ends and another begins? I found myself asking this question multiple times during my career, particularly in relation to one specific area of need: EBSA. This was especially noticeable within my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and was supporting pupils presenting with EBSA behaviours. Specifically, when the young people I worked with started to really struggle with their mental health. I often wondered what my role was and when other services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) would need to be considered. I think I found this particularly confusing due to my previous role working within CAMHS. I often found myself ready to jump into work that was familiar to me and would frequently discuss this in supervision to clarify my role within the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Overall, the boundaries of specific roles were not clear and could vary from case to case. I felt exploring EBSA in more detail would be beneficial to my own practice as well as aim to provide more clarity around if different professionals have different constructions of EBSA, their roles and others, as well as consider how they could positively work together. Overall, I wanted to contribute to this area of growing need in a way that would provide professionals with more clarity, confidence and support.

## **2.2 The Complexity of Language**

Throughout the research I reflected upon the language that is used to label and define EBSA. Within this process. I had to carefully consider not only the language I chose to use but also the language that has been used in previous research and how it has evolved over time. This became particularly pertinent when I was conducting the literature reviews as I



needed to be aware of the language and terminology used to ensure I identified the relevant research. This was challenging as the language as evolved throughout the years from terms such as 'school refusal' to 'Emotionally Based School Non-attendance' (EBSNA). Ensuring to conduct a scoping review allowed me the opportunity to make an extensive list of terms that I would refer to during the literature review. I discuss this in more detail during section 2.3 *Conducting the Literature Review*.

The language and terminology I chose to use has been an area of reflection since I first started writing the research proposal. My supervisor and I carefully considered the terms to use during recruitment, as I was concerned that using the term EBSA in my recruitment materials might influence participants before the study even began. We discussed the possibility that professionals may use a different term so could think the study did not relate to them. Additionally, by using the term EBSA within the information documents it may influence them to feel this is the term they need to use. To respond to this I chose to add the explanation of 'non-attendance due to emotional needs' within the initial information sheet (*Appendix C*) and consent form (*Appendix D*) to clarify what was meant by the term EBSA.

During the process of conducting my research I consistently reflected on the language I had chosen to use within my interviews and in Parts One and Two of my thesis. When the research began EBSA was a widely used term within the local authority (LA) I was working within, as well as the current research at the time. This was due to professionals moving away from terms such as 'school refusal' to ensure the emotional factors influencing the non-attendance was being highlighted (Lester & Michelson, 2024; Pellegrini, 2007). However, I relocated to a new LA during the research for my third year of placement who chose to use different terminology (EBSNA). Additionally, new research was published using the term EBSNA (Corcoran et al., 2024; Corcoran, 2024). I felt EBSNA was a more trauma informed term

as research has shown that CYP found the term 'avoidance' or 'refusal' upsetting as it put the difficulties 'within child' (Callwood & Goodman, 2018). I spent time reflecting on what term I should use and decided that I would continue to use EBSA. This was the term the participants used at the time of interviews, and I wanted the terminology to remain consistent across all parts of the thesis. Using the terminology the participants used felt in line with the research paradigm as I was gaining their individual experiences and understanding. I felt if I used a term I was more comfortable with, such as EBSNA, I would detract from the participants contribution and potentially move it to my experience rather than theirs. However, I continued to reflect on the use of language and made it clear in both part one and two that language in this area is evolving and others may be using different terminology. I also highlighted how the language we use can have an impact not only on CYP but also on how others interact and support them (Pellegrini, 2007; Rae, 2020). Therefore, while I used the term EBSA in this instance, I believe within my work and in future research, I would consider EBSNA. Although, it is possible the language may change further in the future. This again highlights the complexity of this area of need and the challenges that may be occurring for professionals to stay updated with these developments and receive a consistent message.

### **2.3 Potential Biases**

Given the evolving and multifaceted nature of EBSA, identifying a clear starting point for exploration was challenging at times. I spent a lot of time reflecting on the topic and how it is understood by myself and others. As previously discussed, the language describing EBSA has changed throughout the years. However, the language has often utilised language such as 'anxiety'. Upon reflection I have considered if this has influenced my perception of the behaviours I believe CYP with EBSA may present with e.g., feeling anxious, separation anxiety. However, it is possible the behaviours

could present more externally e.g. anger, truancy. Furthermore, existing literature highlights a potential gender bias in the self-reporting of EBSA, with girls more frequently identifying emotional reasons for school non-attendance in comparison to boys (Havik et al., 2015). This may be due to girls being more likely to be socialised to express emotions and feelings. Therefore, in the future I may need to consider alternative presentations of EBSA that are outside of my current scope of experience and knowledge. This may be something to continue reflecting on in my practice, as well as considering the implications these potential biases in understanding EBSA may have in schools or the work carried out by professionals e.g. EPs. For example, are cohorts of CYP experiencing EBSA being missed because they are not presented in way professionals consider “typical” and instead are seen as CYP who have behavioural difficulties.

I have considered that these biases around gender and presentation may have influenced the language I used within the research, and the term I selected. However, I do feel that there is not currently a term that can fully encapsulate all presentations of EBSA that could have been used instead. In light of this I will take these reflections into future practice and continue to develop the language I use in my practice and with others.

## **2.4 Conducting the Literature Review**

### ***2.4.1 Rationale for choosing a narrative approach***

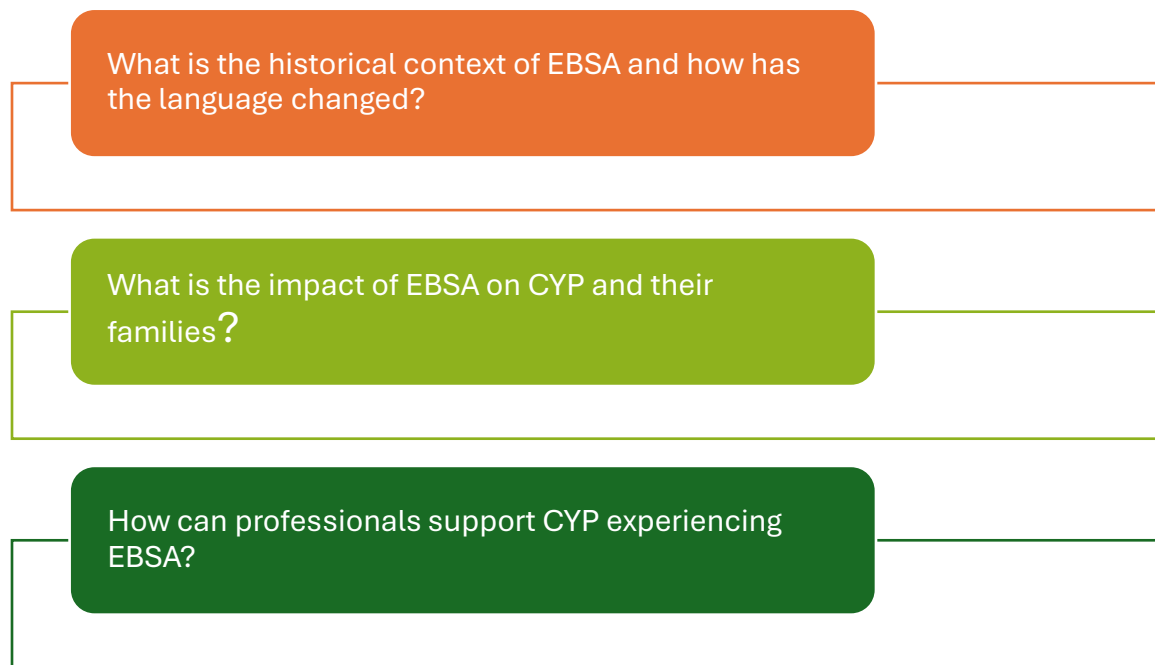
Due to the complexity of the terminology used to describe EBSA, I felt a narrative literature review would allow me the opportunity to explore the research in a way that provided a broad and deep understanding of EBSA. This seemed especially necessary due to the changing landscape of EBSA including how it is identified, and the rising number of CYP who are exhibiting these behaviours. Fink (2019) stated that narrative reviews are “appropriate for describing the history or development of a problem and its solution” (p.16).

The exploration of the historical context and overarching understanding of the need is what I hoped to gain from this part of the literature review. Therefore, a narrative approach seemed the most logical way to ensure a deep understanding of EBSA and any changes that may have occurred. I was concerned using a more systematic approach for this part of the literature review would potentially miss key research and information due to the structured format. Sukhera (2022) argued a narrative review approach allows for flexibility that offers “carefully thought out and rigorous interpretations of a body of knowledge” (p.416). However, the changes in terminology used for EBSA throughout the years did provide a challenge as EBSA was often so deeply intertwined with other forms of non-attendance that it was sometimes indistinguishable. Therefore, I had to ensure I had a clear understanding of how I defined EBSA, which led to my reflections in *Section 2.2 The considerations of language*. I believe that the challenges I encountered while exploring EBSA within the broader category of non-attendance highlighted a gap in the research. It is only recently that professionals and researchers have begun to consciously distinguish EBSA from other forms of non-attendance, which could have an impact on the identification and support elements of EBSA.

Furthermore, I found myself being pulled in several directions due to the complexity of the topic. There are so many aspects of EBSA that require exploring and the narrative review highlighted the different perspectives I could have chosen. This often led to challenges with how I would structure my narrative review and many drafts where I restructured the review or changed what I felt needed to be included. When confusions such as this occurred, I found it useful to revisit my literature review questions (shown in Figure 7) to keep me grounded and remind me what I hoped to achieve from the narrative review.

## Figure 7:

### *Narrative Literature Review Questions*



#### **2.4.2 Rationale for choosing a systematic literature review approach**

After reading the article by Siddaway et al. (2019) on conducting a systematic review, I decided to undertake a systematic literature review to explore the barriers and facilitators to multi-agency working in supporting EBSA. They recommended a systematic review be conducted, when possible, due to the reviews more comprehensive and less biased nature. Systematic reviews also have a clear, systematic approach that provides transparency about the process followed and inclusion/exclusion criteria of research identified (Siddaway et al., 2019).

While the systematic review provided a clearer methodology compared to the narrative review, I hesitated to start this process. I found myself prioritizing other aspects of my thesis over this area due to concerns about facing numerous barriers, such as an overwhelming number of papers or

none. Additionally, I struggled with defining my inclusion and exclusion criteria, fearing that I might miss key papers or make mistakes in the process. This was the one part of my research where I had to actively push myself to begin the process, despite my concerns. I found that once I began, I fell easily into the structured format and appreciated the systematic approach which felt less chaotic than the narrative part of my review.

***"The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity."***

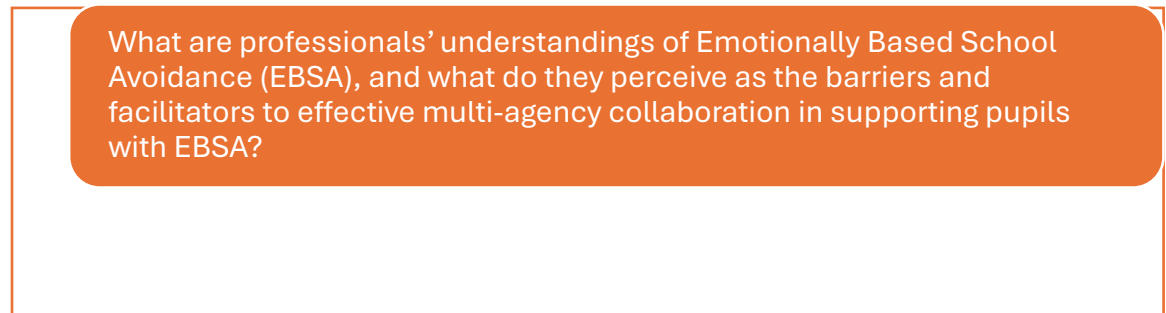
***- Amelia Earhart***

After identifying the various search terms that might be used to describe EBSA within the narrative review, I decided to utilize all of them to ensure the inclusion of all relevant papers. I anticipated that this would result in many papers, but I found the opposite to be true. Even before the sifting process I had a very small number of papers, even after widening my search to additional databases. This led me to identify further papers through citations and papers found within my narrative review. During the initial search grey literature such as theses appeared and I considered including them after reading an article by Paez (2017) who argued grey literature can provide important information. However, during the search of citations I found the theses I had initially found within the databases had been published in peer reviewed journals. I chose to exclude the thesis and include the journal to avoid duplication of studies. This decision was made because peer reviewed journals add another layer of scrutiny and improvement of the quality through the suggestions provided to authors on areas to improve and detect any errors that may have not been previously identified (Kelly et al., 2014).

This systematic review showed very few papers that answered the research question shown *in* Figure 8.

**Figure 8:**

*Systematic Literature Review Question*



What are professionals' understandings of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and what do they perceive as the barriers and facilitators to effective multi-agency collaboration in supporting pupils with EBSA?

I had concerns that the systematic review would not have enough papers to include within the review. However, Siddaway et al.'s (2019) guide to conducting a systematic review appears to highlight quality over quantity as long as at least two databases were searched. This supports Bramer et al. (2017) who argued the importance of searching multiple databases, which is why I searched five databases using the key terms I identified.

However, it is worth noting not all the papers included were exclusively about multi-agency practice to support EBSA. Although, each paper did include useful information regarding the barriers and facilitators. I included these papers because I felt they provided valuable information that I did not want to be missed. However, this review highlighted the limited research currently available in this area, emphasizing the need for the current study to contribute to the existing research base.

### **2.4.3 Future considerations for search terms**

In light of the reflections around potential biases in understanding of language and EBSA presentations (discussed in section 2.3), any future research I undertake in this area would require a more extensive approach to search terms to capture a wider range of EBSA presentations. This may include considering search terms that capture behaviours that may present more externally e.g. “school non-attendance AND behavioural difficulties”, “challenging behaviour AND school avoidance” etc.

### **2.5 Development of the research question**

At the beginning of the study my research had consisted of three research questions focusing on the language used around EBSA, professionals understanding of their roles to support EBSA, and what they believed the barriers and facilitators to multi-agency practice. After reflecting it was decided having three research questions was ambitious and challenging to truly capture all questions using thematic analysis. Therefore, one research question was considered for more clarity (shown in Figure 9). However, the more I delved into existing research, spoke to my participants, and analysed the data, more questions would often arise. Therefore, following the research question and revisiting it as needed was the only way to ensure the study did not evolve into something larger, which was not possible within the limited timeframe of the doctoral thesis.


Supervision also provided me with a space to discuss my research and remind me of my research aims. Discussions with my supervisor allowed me to reflect on where I was at and what I hoped to gain while critically analysing the original aims of the study. These sessions kept me focused and continuously reminded me what the “golden thread” of my research was. I think the need for this demonstrates how the complexity of EBSA can easily pull research into many directions, just as it does for professionals who are supporting EBSA within their work. Therefore, ensuring I kept



checking in with my research question and that they were meaningful for this study was important.

**Figure 9:**

*Research Question*



What do professionals believe are barriers and facilitators to working collaboratively in a multi-agency manner to support pupils with EBSA?

## **2.6 Methodological Considerations**

### ***2.6.1 Research Paradigm (ontology and epistemology)***

I initially approached this research with a constructivist epistemology. I hoped to gain the professionals' individual experiences of supporting CYP with EBSA and their understanding of what EBSA is. This epistemological standpoint influenced my decision making when choosing my methodological design. I hoped that the individual interviews would provide a space for the participants to share their experiences and how they made sense of those experiences. However, during the interviews it started to become evident

that a lot of their understanding of EBSA was socially constructed within the LA. Therefore, I had to consider if I should shift my epistemological stance to social constructivism due to the possibility of the views being shared having a social constructed element. Upon reflection the similarities in understanding of EBSA may have been due to the participant recruitment process. The gatekeeper who supported the recruitment sent the information to professionals who she knew supported EBSA pupils. This local authority had embedded funding to this area of need resulting in several projects being led by a steering group. My participant pool was predominantly recruited from the steering group or those who had team members within the group. This potentially provided them with a space to discuss EBSA with other professionals, opening the possibility that what EBSA was and how they identified it was an ongoing discussion. I did reflect on how this view may have differed if I had been able to recruit from teams who were not embedded within the LA e.g. CAMHS. It is possible the understanding of EBSA and how they identified it may have differed from the participants within this study. Furthermore, they may not have had as many opportunities to meet with other professionals to discuss EBSA to ensure a consistent understanding between themselves and other professionals.

My epistemological stance needed a lot of reflection and questioning, that led to me considering whether my epistemology was about my positioning as a researcher or if it was about the context of my research. Furthermore, it had me questioning whether an epistemological stance needed to be a fixed position or if it could evolve with the research. In the end, I still considered the epistemology to be constructivist as there was not clear evidence that the experiences and views were socially constructed, rather I interpreted it as so through my perceptions of the interview data. However, it was worth keeping in mind that socially constructed views may have been occurring. My ontological perspective, on the other hand, stayed consistent throughout.

A relativist ontological position allows for the individual experiences to be explored and argues the view that each individual constructs their own reality (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Therefore, while there may have been a social element to the participants' constructions, I still provided the participants the opportunity to share their individual experiences using semi-structured interviews.

### ***2.6.2 Participant Recruitment***

From the beginning, my goal was to recruit professionals from different services to ensure a wide range of experiences. When considering the aims of the research, I began to wonder where I should recruit participants from. I was concerned that recruiting from different LAs might affect the research, as each authority could have varying systems, access to information, resources, and other factors, potentially introducing unexpected variables. Therefore, I decided to recruit participants from a single local authority in Wales. This approach aimed to gain a better understanding of the work being carried out to support CYP presenting with EBSA and to capture the experiences of professionals within this specific LA. I believed this approach would provide a clearer view of potential differences in the understanding of EBSA and if there were any misunderstandings about others' roles. Furthermore, it provided a richer understanding of the possible barriers and facilitators to multi-agency working as these were a group of individuals that would possibly work with each other or the teams of other participants within their everyday roles. It allowed systemic barriers and facilitators to be identified as more information was gleaned from one LA. This allowed for a fuller understanding of how a system setup may be impacting multi-agency working when supporting EBSA as I was able to gain multiple points of view from one system.

While I feel I gained a diverse range of professional roles, I reflected that they were all from education. Other voices such as mental health

professionals would have been a useful voice to be shared within this study. Especially as this was a profession that other professionals felt there were sometimes challenges to identifying clear communication pathways with. If I was to complete the study again, I would consider different methods of recruitment to attempt to recruit participants outside of the initial gatekeeper's network. It is possible this could have limited the professionals who had the opportunity to participate and skewed the sample to the gatekeeper's professional network. Furthermore, participants who had a positive relationship with the gatekeeper may have been more inclined to participate. By considering different recruitment methods, I may have had access to a wider participant pool that could have led to a further diverse recruitment of participants in different roles that was not included within the current study. It is possible services worked in a more siloed approach than I had initially considered which is why working through one gatekeeper may have impacted recruitment as they may not have links with all services. Furthermore, the current research allowed me to identify professionals through my participants that I had not previously considered e.g. youth workers. Therefore, in future research I may consider reaching out to other services that are not as widely discussed when supporting EBSA.

### ***2.6.3 Data collection***

I provided participants with the option to choose between in-person and online interviews. All participants chose to conduct the interviews virtually using a secure teams account. While I had some concerns that it would be more challenging to build a rapport rather than in person, all participants seemed comfortable with the online platform. This may be due to the need during the Coronavirus pandemic to carry out work online. The LA the research was conducted in had continued a hybrid approach to working, and the professionals in this authority conducted work on virtual platforms. Research has shown that virtual interviews have their own strengths as a

method of data collection (De Villiers et al., 2022; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). For example, if I had conducted the interviews in person, due to the distance the LA was for me to travel, I would have had to consider grouping the interview times together which may have been a challenge with the different schedules/offices etc the professionals may have had. Conducting the interviews virtually allowed the participants to choose a time that was most convenient for them, which may have been a reason participants felt more inclined to participate. Moreover, Teams provided a secure platform to record the interview to aid in transcribing. Although, I also needed to consider the ethical considerations of confidentiality (British Psychological Society 2018; Health and Care Professions Council, 2016), by ensuring that I transcribed and deleted the recordings within the time frame specified in the information sheet and consent form.

I reflected on the possibility of using a focus group to collect data. However, I felt individual interviews would provide participants with a safe space to share their individual lived experiences and their sense-making of those experiences, in line with my epistemology and ontology. Upon reflection, certain questions appeared to encourage discussions about the challenges of collaborating with colleagues. This may have posed greater difficulties for participants, if they were required to articulate grievances in the presence of other professionals. I may not have gained a true understanding of how other participants perceived each other's roles if they were in the room together, as they would have directly heard from the individuals themselves about their roles. In this sense, I felt information would have been potentially missed. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews aligned well with my constructivist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2013). They also allowed for flexibility to explore the participants' perspectives and their sense-making of their experiences.

Furthermore, if I had prior knowledge to the level of collaborative work the participants had already engaged in, due to funded projects within their LA, I may have considered alternative methodologies. For example, considered a case study or action research that could have further explored the collaborative multi-agency practice that was occurring within the LA. This may have impacted the questions I asked e.g. possibly discussing the positive practice in line with their funded projects. However, I entered the research in a purely exploratory nature and did not have prior knowledge of the professionals who would wish to engage. I did not know if I would have access to a clearly defined group e.g. education professionals that would allow for a case study with clear boundaries. Therefore, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was therefore selected. This approach allowed me to capture a range of experiences from professionals across services within the LA in a flexible manner that may not have been possible with a more structured case study or action research design.

Nevertheless, while this research was not carried out as a case study, it did provide an opportunity to capture a variety of experiences within one LA systemic context. By focusing the research through a singular lens I was able to gain a rich understanding of an organisation's understanding of EBSA and how this may shape practice and collaboration within the system. Furthermore, it provided an insight into positive practice and potential actions that may improve collaborative working and serve as a guide for other LAs to consider when supporting EBSA within their practice.

#### **2.6.4 Data Analysis**

I used Braun & Clarke's (2006, 2013) six stage Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to analyse the data within this research. I selected this method because it offers the necessary flexibility to identify, analyse, and develop themes within my data analysis.

The clear structure of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was beneficial, as it provided an organized framework for interpreting my data set. This approach helped me stay focused and identify significant patterns, which allowed me to clearly construct themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that RTA provides flexibility and has a 'recipe' for people to carry out the analysis "in a way this is theoretically and methodologically sound" (p.78). Additionally, RTA is also data-driven, which meant I was able to use the RTA process of coding and reviewing to identify themes without imposing any of my predefined ideas. However, I did consider if my experience with EBSA could lead to unintentional bias when generating themes. I became aware that the bias was always there and was not something I could avoid. Therefore, to try to counteract this I spent significant time reflecting during this stage to ensure I wasn't imposing my own experiences and sense-making on the themes but rather delving into what the participants were genuinely sharing. I found identifying the themes quite challenging as I found a lot of the codes and themes overlapped. I had to spend time in supervision and using my reflection journal to consider the themes I was constructing and how they were different or if in fact I was discussing the same theme under different labels. Again, I think this reflects the complexity of EBSA and the work that is undertaken to support this need. After developing the themes I did reflect that the information discussed mirrored my own experiences. Therefore, I spent additional time reviewing the data to ensure I had not unintentionally imposed my own biases onto the themes. On the other hand, I did consider that my experiences may have brought a positive aspect to the analysis as within RTA the researcher is seen as an active participant within meaning-making during the analysis, particularly when considering a constructivist paradigm. Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that researcher subjectivity is a resource that can be valuable to the analysing process by possibly bring a deeper understanding of the data. I

wanted to bring my experiences to the analysis without imposing them onto the participants. Finding this balance during the analysis required a lot of reflection and time being immersed in the data.

## **2.7 Ethics**

The current research received ethical approval from Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This ensured the proposal for my research went through a rigorous process addressing the possible ethical issues that may arise before the research began and met ethical guidelines (British Psychological Society 2018; Health and Care Professions Council, 2016).

As my research was advertised within a LA I had previously been on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I had to consider the ethical implications my dual role as a researcher and a TEP may have had. I made it clear to participants what my role as a researcher entailed. Through consent forms, information sheets, and verbal communication during the interviews, I emphasised multiple times that they were under no obligation to participate in the study. I also repeated that they had the right to not participate in and/or withdraw from the research within the time frame outlined in the information sheet. The participants also had time between sending me the consent form and attending the interview to consider if they would still like to opt-in to the research. While all five participants who showed initial interest chose to participate, I did consider if my previous relationship with the LA and the gatekeeper may have influenced the participants who showed interest in the first place. However, from the interviews the participants showed passion and interest in exploring this topic and sharing their knowledge with others. Furthermore, I spent time at the beginning of each interview building rapport to help them feel comfortable before beginning the interview and checked in with them that



they would still like to participate. To further ensure the participants felt comfortable I provided them options on how they would like to carry out the interviews e.g. in person or online. All participants chose to have the interviews conducted online. While this could have had some ethical implications such as confidentiality (British Psychological Society 2018; Health and Care Professions Council, 2016), there were benefits to using this method which I outlined in more detail in section 2.5.3 *Data Collection*.

***"One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done."***

***- Marie Curie***

## **2.8 Emotional Impact of research – Staying the course!**

The biggest challenge for this research was preventing myself from getting lost in the vastness of the topic. At every stage, I sensed there was always more I could accomplish and explore. At times, it felt like my efforts were not enough. These feelings of inadequacy required a lot of reflection within my research journal and discussions with my supervisor and peers. Through these conversations I realised it is possible my feelings were mirroring the hopelessness that can arise when supporting EBSA behaviours. Progress is often slow and there can be times where more steps are taken backwards than forwards. I thought about what I usually advocate for when supporting EBSA, especially when others feel there is no progress or they are stuck. I reflected that I suggest breaking down goals into small, manageable steps. I make a conscious effort to acknowledge and celebrate the small victories, because for the CYP we work with, these achievements represent significant progress, even if they may not appear as such to others. I took my own advice and stepped back to view my goal, breaking it down into small,

manageable steps. I also celebrated the small wins, knowing that when I looked back at the end of this journey, those small victories would show just how far I'd progressed toward my goal. I remember sharing in a reflection group at university that I was waiting for the sense of pride in my thesis that I had witnessed in the Year 3s the previous year. It felt like my thesis and I were always going to be at odds. I shared that I felt like I was in a dark tunnel where I could not even see the light at the end. However, as I started to consider the small wins such as completing my interviews with participants, completing my data analysis, finally grasping my literature reviews, the light at the end of the tunnel became brighter and brighter. These small wins were paramount in keeping me positive as even after supporting CYP with EBSA for years, I think the complexity of the need still took me by surprise as my research progressed, which reflects the frustrations I have witnessed from parents and other professionals in the past. This is something I will take forward with me into my work. I feel it will provide a deeper understanding of the frustration I witness in the adults around the CYP and will give me something to pull from when I considered the systemic value my work can bring as an EP. Overall, this process has taught me to not try to take on too much and to celebrate the small goals I reach within my work. Every achievement led me to a valuable piece of research that I can thankfully say I feel a sense of pride in.

### **3.0 Contribution to knowledge**

#### **3.1 Contribution to existing knowledge - The evolving landscape of EBSA**

While the current research does have limitations, it has highlighted information that would be beneficial to those who work with EBSA. Firstly, the findings from the literature review and the current study emphasized the importance of language when labelling and defining research (see *Section*

2.2. *The Complexity of Language*). The literature reviews demonstrated how intertwined non-attendance behaviours have been in previous research. This may be due to the complexity of non-attendance behaviours and the individuality of each case. However, I believe this study stressed the need to start differentiating EBSA from other forms of non-attendance so that the emotional underlying need is at forefront of those supporting this cohort of CYP. In addition to professionals who work with these CYP, researchers may also benefit from considering how they are labelling and defining this term within their research as this will impact the participants they recruit. During the literature review process, I found it challenging at times to identify if the non-attendance being discussed was EBSA as often non-attendance or school refusal was used as an umbrella term. It is only recently that terms such as EBSA or EBSNA are being used more explicitly during research. This research has stressed the need to consider the language that is being used, especially as CYP have expressed the impact terms such as 'refusal' can have on them and how others view them.

Furthermore, due to the complexity of EBSA and the different ways it can present, one measuring tool may not be able to unpick the needs of all CYP presenting with EBSA. It is possible cohorts of pupils may be missed because they do not present with typical anxiety behaviours and instead may be presenting with more external behaviours. It allowed me to reflect on behaviours such as truancing, and avoidance of certain lessons that may not always be identified as EBSA, which can lead to CYP's needs being misidentified by professionals. Therefore, this research had me considering the importance of meeting with the CYP and taking time to unpick their needs and what may be underlying their disengagement from learning.

Secondly, this research highlighted the complexity of EBSA and the need for professionals to work together to support CYP at all levels of their system. Considering the limited research on multi-agency collaboration, particularly

in the context of EBSA, the barriers and facilitators to working collaboratively highlighted within the study may be beneficial to professionals. Specifically to help them reflect on their collaborative practices in supporting EBSA within their respective roles. It also highlights the need for further research to identify positive multi-agency practices to support EBSA as I am aware this study only focused on one LA. It is possible other systems may have different facilitators and barriers depending on their processes and resources. However, this research provides a positive view of how professionals can work together, especially with access to a space professionals can come together to discuss these issues and share knowledge. This supports previous research by Boaler et al. (2024), Corcoran et al., (2024) and Nuttall and Woods (2013).

***"One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world."***

***- Malala Yousafzai***

### **3.2 Areas for future research**

As previously discussed, the rapidly evolving nature of this area of research highlights the need for further research to explore how professionals can understand, identify and support EBSA. The conflict in language may also suggest further exploration is needed to create a consistent terminology and definition that is trauma informed and does not place blame onto the CYP. On reflection exploring the use of language and understanding could have

been a research project in itself, especially due to the complex nature of EBSA. Additionally, the research has identified a need for a systemic approach to support EBSA due to the complexity of the underlying needs impacting the non-attendance. This research has shown there are several barriers and facilitators to working in a multi-agency way to support EBSA within the CYP's system. However, further research to identify if the barriers and facilitators identified are generalisable to other LAs and services would be beneficial as this research was focused on one LA. It would also be beneficial to consider other professionals that were not included in this study e.g. CAMHS, youth workers etc. as they may have different perspectives and experiences that were not included in this study.

### **3.3 Relevance to EPs and other professionals**

I believe the current research is relevant to all professionals who are supporting EBSA at all levels of the system. The research highlights the importance of professionals being aware of the language they use and how it may be being interpreted by other individuals they are working with. EPs may need to consider this if they are providing training around EBSA and how they choose to label and define this area of need. Furthermore, the research showed that there can be misunderstandings in roles which can lead to barriers when offering support. Professionals could consider spaces where they can come together to discuss plans and ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of actions and outcomes. One of the most important outcomes of this research for me was the emphasis on professionals supporting each other. Often professionals can work in silos with very little information sharing. However, the participants within this study showed the benefits of the sharing of knowledge and the confidence that can occur when professionals support each other. Therefore, professionals could consider platforms to share experiences and knowledge that will in the long run lead

to a consistent approach to support and professionals who feel confident in supporting EBSA.

Additionally, carrying out this research allowed me to fully immerse myself in the topic. This time was invaluable and led me to reflect on my understanding of EBSA and how I support this need within my practice. It became a source of continuous professional development (CPD) to develop my understanding of this topic. Therefore, I will consider opportunities in the future to carry out research in the future to build upon my knowledge in other areas of learning within my role. This is also something other EP's may want to consider, whether it be using this research as a starting point to reflect on their work or carry out research of their own to allow dedicated time to widening their knowledge.

***"The more I see of the world, the more I am convinced that the people who are the most contented are those who are most devoted to others."***

***- Northanger Abbey, Jane Austen***

### **3.4 Dissemination of findings**

I believe this research would be valuable for professionals who support EBSA in their work, particularly those who collaborate with other professionals to support CYP, and the adults around them. I believe this research highlights some barriers and facilitators to working in a multi-agency manner, and why this is important. It also shows the downside of professionals not having a

consistent understanding of EBSA and how this may impact the CYP and the support they receive. This may be of particular interest to those who are hoping to provide a systemic approach to supporting EBSA, or who are looking to implement joint EBSA work within their LA.

I am hoping to feedback my results to the LA the research was carried out in to highlight the positive work that is occurring. Furthermore, I am going to consider how these results can be shared more widely through the possibility of publishing this research in an academic journal or through presenting at conferences. The dissemination plan is outlined *in* Table 6. I think this research could help to highlight the need for further work in this area of need to have a clearer and consistent understanding of this area of non-attendance, and to consider the language that is being used.

#### ***4.0 Conclusion***

Within this critical appraisal I have shown both reflective and reflexive skills that I have demonstrated as a researcher during this research project. I tried to be as transparent as possible regarding my decision-making process and share where I felt I would make changes if I was to do this study again or carry out similar research in the future. Overall, I feel I have made a positive contribution to this area of study, that at the very least I can take with me into my practice as an EP. I hope that within my EP role I will be able to use this research to explore multi-agency practice to support EBSA and consider the language that is being used by professionals in the LA I work. Most importantly, I want to remember the importance of sharing knowledge and building relationships that was identified within my themes. This resonated with me because it aligns with what I have always considered essential to my practice as a TEP.

***"If you have knowledge, let others light their  
candles in it."  
- Margaret Fuller***

**Table 6:**

*Dissemination Plan*

<b>Action</b>	<b>Initial steps</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Share findings with LA where research was carried out.	Create infographic to share findings and contact relevant professionals e.g. participants to share/discuss.	September 2025
Share findings with the EPS I will be employed at in September.	Develop a presentation/infographic to present to the EPS team within a team meeting.	September 2025
Share findings with Cardiff University's DEdPsy tutor team and TEPs.	Contact the course directors of Cardiff DEdPsy.	June-August 2025
Submit my research to be considered to present at Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) annual TEP conference.	Contact the DECP.	January 2026
Submit research to peer-reviewed journal for publication consideration.	Submit to relevant journals	March 2026



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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Excluded studies from Systematic Literature Review with reasons

Name of Paper	Reason for Exclusion
Carroll, H. C. M. T. (2015). Pupil absenteeism and the educational psychologist. <i>Educational Studies</i> , 41(1-2), 47-61. doi:10.1080/03055698.2014.955731	Paper was a literature review.
Kljakovic, M., & Kelly, A. (2019). Working with school-refusing young people in Tower Hamlets, London. <i>Clinical child psychology and psychiatry</i> , 24(4), 921-933. doi:10.1177/1359104519855426	Multi-agency practice was not discussed in enough depth to be included.
Kearney, C. A. (2021). Integrating Systemic and Analytic Approaches to School Attendance Problems: Synergistic Frameworks for Research and Policy Directions. <i>Child &amp; Youth Care Forum</i> , 50(4), 701-742. <a href="https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-020-09591-0">https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-020-09591-0</a>	The paper did not distinguish EBSA from other forms of non-attendance.
Corcoran, S. R. (2024). Extended school non-attendance: Pupil experiences and development of a local authority, multi-agency approach to supporting regular attendance. <i>Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences</i> , 85(11-A), No Pagination Specified. Retrieved from <a href="https://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&amp;CSC=Y&amp;NEWS=N&amp;PAGE=fulltext&amp;D=psyc23&amp;AN=2024-95383-276">https://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&amp;CSC=Y&amp;NEWS=N&amp;PAGE=fulltext&amp;D=psyc23&amp;AN=2024-95383-276</a>	The author published their thesis research in a peer reviewed journal alongside additional authors. The peer reviewed article was included within the current systematic review.

## **Appendix B – Participant Letter**

Dear Sir or Madam,

This is a letter of invitation to enquire if you would like to take part in a research project conducted by an educational psychology doctorate student researcher from Cardiff University. The research will explore professionals' views on what they believe Emotionally Based School Avoidance is and how they identify it. It will also explore professionals' roles in supporting pupils who avoid school due to emotional needs and how this may look in a multi-agency capacity.

If you choose to take part in the study, it is important for you to understand why the project is being conducted and what are the expectations of being a participant. Please carefully read the Participant Information Sheet attached to this email that shares this information.

If you would like to take part, or have any further questions, please contact the lead researcher at [turnera16@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:turnera16@cardiff.ac.uk) and I will then arrange a suitable time to meet with you for an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes.

Kind Regards

Amy Turner  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

## Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet



### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

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 aims to explore:

- Professionals' views of what Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA; children who avoid school due to emotional needs) is and how they identify it.
- To elicit professionals' views of their role, and the role of others, in supporting pupils who avoid school due to emotional needs.
- To gain a deeper understanding of barriers and facilitators to working collaboratively in a multi-agency way to support EBSA pupils.

#### **2. Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been chosen to participate in this study as you are a person who works with children and/or young people who are experiencing school avoidance due to emotional needs.

#### **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, without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw your consent after you have signed the consent form and/or after you have participated, please refer to Section 9 which confirms what will happen to your data. If you wish to withdraw you can contact the lead researcher or research supervisor through the contact information at the end of the information sheet.

#### **4. What will taking part involve?**

If you do decide to take part, you will be expected to participate in a short interview. The interview should last no more than 60 minutes and will be offered in person or via Microsoft Teams (as is necessary). This will be voice

recorded for data analysis purposes. You have the right to not answer a question if you do not wish to do so.

The above interviews will be facilitated by a researcher who is a student researcher on the Doctorate of Educational Psychology course at Cardiff University.

**5. Will I be paid for taking part?**

No. You should understand that any data you give will be as a gift and you will not benefit financially in the future should this research project lead to the development of a new treatment/method/test/assessment.

**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 professionals' roles in EBSA and possibly identify barriers and facilitators to working in a multi-agency manner supporting EBSA pupils.

**7. What are the possible risks of taking part?**

No foreseeable discomforts, risks or disadvantages should be experienced. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable, please let a researcher know. If at any point in the interview you reveal potential risks that have occurred or will occur in your practice, it is within your professional role to follow your usual professional routes to manage the risk.

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

Please note that you will be identified by a pseudonym (and not by name) and any data will be kept in a locked file on a password protected computer. The recording will be stored securely in the researchers' password protected electronic files. Information will be shared only with the researchers and research supervisors. After we have analysed the information, the recordings and interviews will be destroyed. Any information that is then taken back to the Educational Psychology Service will be anonymous.

The consent form is the only form that will have your name on it. It will be kept in a password protected file. Your interview will be typed up within 2 weeks and then the recording will be deleted. All of the information from the interview, including the background information sheet and the typed-up interview will be numbered and contain pseudonyms (made up names). You are advised to not mention any identifiable details about third parties within your interview. However, if this occurs all information will be anonymised during transcription. All computer files will be password protected and only accessible by the one researcher and one supervisor mentioned below. You can ask for your interview to be withdrawn from the research up until the



audio file has been deleted, as the typed-up interview will not contain your name. No original names will be used in the typed-up interviews and any quotes used will contain made up names.

If you take part in the interview any personal information that you give us will be kept confidential, that is, private from other people who are not listed researchers. The only reason that your information would not be kept confidential would be in exceptional cases, where the research team may be legally and/or professionally required to over-ride confidentiality and to disclose information obtained from (or about) you to statutory bodies or relevant agencies. For example, this might arise where the research team has reason to believe that there is a risk to your safety, or the safety of others. Where appropriate, the research team will aim to notify you of the need to break confidentiality (but this may not be appropriate in all cases).

### **9. What will happen to my Personal Data?**

All Personal data will be stored and processed according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your initialed and signed Consent form will be stored securely and, as per the 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 within the recording will be stored confidentially in an online, encrypted and password protected storage (University provided OneDrive) to which only the researchers will have access. After a 2-week period, this will be transcribed and subsequently anonymised using pseudonyms for your name and the names of any other people/the school used within the recording. Once anonymised, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research project. This again will be stored on the online, encrypted and password protected storage. As per the Research Records and Retention Schedule, the transcript 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).

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> however, printed copies of the above-mentioned documentation and privacy notices are readily available should you wish.

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

Once the data collected during the project is transcribed and anonymised (see point 9), it will be analysed by the researchers. At this point, the transcript may be shared with academic/research supervisor Dr Emma Birch for academic supervision. Data will be shared between the researchers on the online, encrypted and password protected storage facility. No data sharing will occur via email prior to anonymisation. If you wish to withdraw your recordings at any time, please contact the lead researcher or research supervisor through the contact details at the bottom of the information sheet.

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

Analysis of the data will inform research question that aim to explore professionals' views of EBSA and their role supporting EBSA pupils, as well as other professionals' roles. As part of their academic requirements, the researcher will write a research report exploring themes and may select, anonymised verbatim quotes that would be used in support of their findings. This report will be presented and shared with academic tutors, peers and possibly the wider public through presentation or future publication in an academic journal. Participants will be anonymised in all forms of distribution. Should you wish to obtain a copy of the report, please let the researcher know.

**12. What if there is a problem?**

If there is a problem during the interview, or at any time you feel uncomfortable, please let a member of the research team know immediately and they will strive to help you.

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 Amy Turner. If your complaint is not managed to your satisfaction, please contact the Secretary of the School Research Ethics Committee as they are independent from the research team.

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 student Amy Turner and academic supervisor Dr Emma Birch.

**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 (SREC), Cardiff University.

**15. Further information and contact details.**

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

Amy Turner  
Trainee Educational Psychologist  
Supervisor  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3EU  
Tel: 029 2087 4007  
[TurnerA16@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:TurnerA16@cardiff.ac.uk)

Dr Emma Birch  
Course Lecturer and Research  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3EU  
029 2087 0366  
[birche3@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:birche3@cardiff.ac.uk)

**Any complaints may be made to:**

Secretary of the Ethics Committee  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3AT  
Tel: 029 2087 0707  
Email: [psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk)

**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 D – Participant Consent Form



### CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: Professionals' understanding of EBSA and how they view their role supporting pupils: Potential barriers and facilitators to collaboration and multi-agency working.

SREC reference and committee: EC.24.02.13.6967R

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Amy Turner

**Please  
initial  
box**

I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 11.01.2024, Version 1, for the above research project.	
I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated 11.01.2024, 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), up until the point of data anonymisation (2 weeks post interview).	
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 (consent form) 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 personal information provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project.	
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 my interview will be transcribed and anonymised, and the original recording then deleted.	
I understand that anonymised excerpts and/or verbatim quotes from my interview may be used as part of the research publication.	
I understand that the anonymised data will be uploaded to a data repository.	
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

Name of person taking consent                      Date                      Signature

(print)  
Amy Turner

\_\_\_\_\_**Researcher (TEP)**\_\_\_\_\_

**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 E – Participant Debrief Form

### Debrief Form



### School of Psychology, Cardiff University Participant Debrief

Many thanks for taking part in the study. Your contribution has been greatly appreciated.

#### **What was the purpose of the study?**

This research aimed to explore professionals' views of EBSA and their role supporting EBSA pupils, as well as other professionals' roles. It also aimed to identify potential barriers and facilitators for collaborative multi-agency working to support EBSA pupils.

#### **What will happen to my information?**

The recording collected via the interview will be stored securely in the researchers' electronic password protected, encrypted files. After a 2-week period, the recording has been transcribed and anonymised using pseudonyms for your own personal details but also any names of people/school that are used. The recordings of the interviews will be destroyed. This transcribed information will be shared only with the researcher and research supervisor. However, anonymous verbatim quotes may be used in a research report.

Should you feel you no longer want your interview to be part of this research, please contact the researcher on the details below within two weeks of the date and time of your interview. If you have any questions relating to the research, please contact Amy Turner.

Should 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 Dr Emma Birch. If, however, you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee who are independent from the research team.

Amy Turner  
Trainee Educational Psychologist  
Supervisor  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building

Dr Emma Birch  
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CF10 3EU  
029 2087 0366  
[birche3@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:birche3@cardiff.ac.uk)

**Any complaints may be made to:**


Secretary of the Ethics Committee  
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Cardiff  
CF10 3AT  
Tel: 029 2087 0707


Email: [psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk)


*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. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be contacted at [inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk). Further information about Data Protection, including your rights and details about how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: <https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/supporting-your-work/manage-use-and-protect-data/data-protection>*


## Appendix F – Ethical Approval

**Ethics** Feedback - EC.24.02.13.6967R

 psychethics

To:  Amy Turner

Cc:  Emma Birch


 **Flagged**

Dear Amy,

The **Ethics** Committee has considered your revised PG project proposal: Professionals understanding of EBSA and how they view their role supporting pupils: Potential barriers and facilitators to collaboration and multi-agency working (EC.24.02.13.6967R).

Your revised project proposal has received a **Favourable Opinion** based on the information described in the proforma and supporting documentation.

**Additional approvals**  
This letter provides an ethical opinion only. You must not start your research project until all appropriate approvals are in place.



Tue 09/04/2024 11:48

## Appendix G – Example of Transcript

**Participant** 7:04

That there has been different terms. My understanding over the years, one of them is school phobic. I tend not to use that term because I think it's a little bit out of date and not perhaps politically correct now when we're talking about phobias, but school phobic. Yeah, there's emotionally based school avoidance, EBSA, but you could probably say social anxiety, is not attending school or just emotionally distressed, but the ones I'm clear about is the EBSA because it's a particular, I suppose, definition that's been more accepted since research has started, which ~~was~~ is fairly new and post COVID I think I don't think I'd heard that term pre COVID. So it's fairly new.

**Researcher** 7:57

So he has becoming more widespread use between professionals that EBSA term.

**Participant** 7:59

Mm hmm.

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**Researcher** 8:05

Yeah. Perfect. So you kind of started mentioning a little bit of this before when you were talking about the checklist. But I was wondering how would you identify EBSA? So within your role?

**Participant** 8:16

Well. Umm Probably identifying EBSA because it I think it's we don't want it to be a term that's used quite loosely because the more a definition or a term goes round, the more likely it's to be used. Perhaps not as accurately or maybe even inappropriately. So for me, if I was identifying a child with emotionally based school avoidance, I would make sure I go through a series of checks or hypotheses to gather information. Sometimes it could be over time from various professionals, so to identify I'm just looking at the question again. To identify it, I would use perhaps in the very start is some non-attendance questionnaires which look broadly at non-attendance and the reason for children not attending and then the Kearney questionnaire is the one that I tend to use which I think is 1990 or 1993.

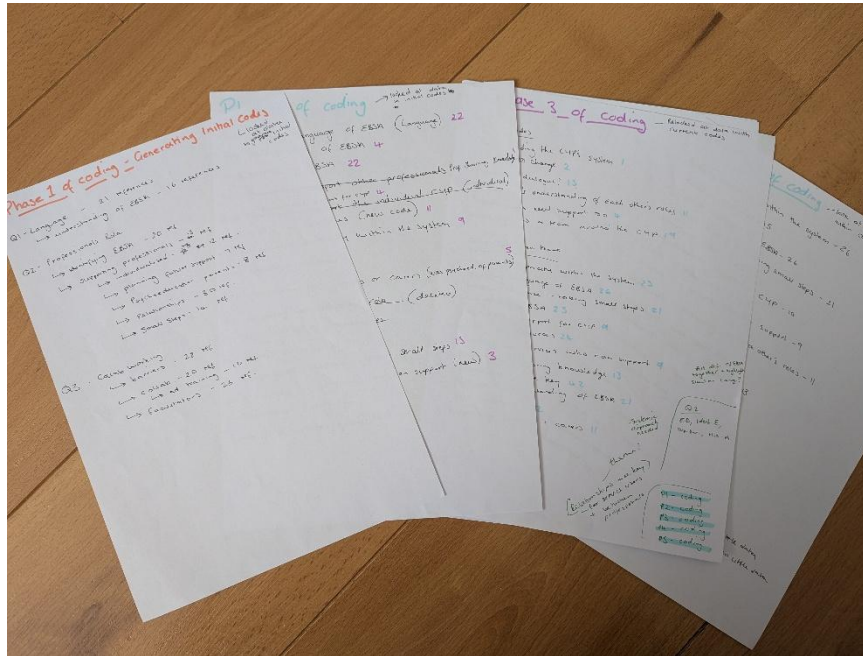


The mind map is a comprehensive tool for addressing EBSA (Emotional and Behavioral Support for All) questions. It is organized into five main branches, each represented by a colored circle and a corresponding question:

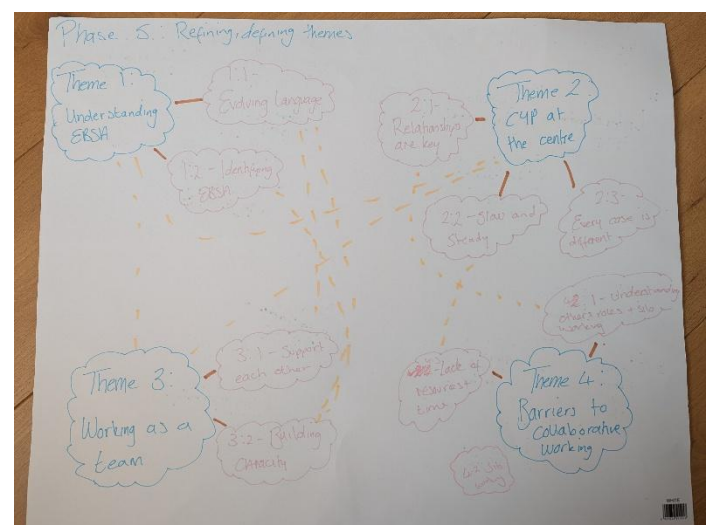
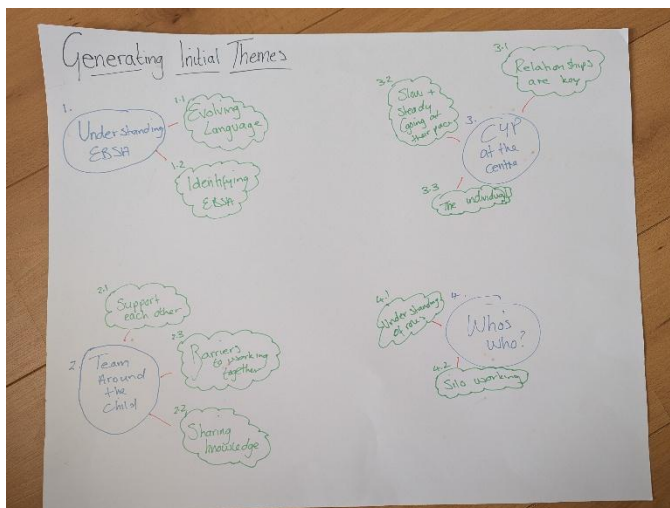
- P1 PASS ON KNOWLEDGE (Purple):** This branch focuses on how knowledge is passed on. It includes sub-topics like 'Info gathering' (with a ladder icon), 'Vocal Research' (with a speech bubble icon), 'Drama' (with a person icon), 'Anxiety' (with a lightning bolt icon), 'EBSA' (with a green star icon), 'EBSA QUESTIONS' (with a box icon), 'RELATIONSHIPS' (with a heart icon), and 'IDENTIFICATION' (with a green underline).
- P2 PARENTS ANXIOUS? (Orange):** This branch addresses parental anxiety. It includes sub-topics like 'Info gathering' (with a ladder icon), 'Vocal Research' (with a speech bubble icon), 'Drama' (with a person icon), 'Anxiety' (with a lightning bolt icon), 'EBSA' (with a green star icon), 'EBSA QUESTIONS' (with a box icon), 'RELATIONSHIPS' (with a heart icon), and 'IDENTIFICATION' (with a green underline).
- P3 RELATIONSHIPS (Red):** This branch explores relationships. It includes sub-topics like 'Info gathering' (with a ladder icon), 'Vocal Research' (with a speech bubble icon), 'Drama' (with a person icon), 'Anxiety' (with a lightning bolt icon), 'EBSA' (with a green star icon), 'EBSA QUESTIONS' (with a box icon), 'RELATIONSHIPS' (with a heart icon), and 'IDENTIFICATION' (with a green underline).
- P4 FACT FINDING (Pink):** This branch is dedicated to fact-finding. It includes sub-topics like 'Info gathering' (with a ladder icon), 'Vocal Research' (with a speech bubble icon), 'Drama' (with a person icon), 'Anxiety' (with a lightning bolt icon), 'EBSA' (with a green star icon), 'EBSA QUESTIONS' (with a box icon), 'RELATIONSHIPS' (with a heart icon), and 'IDENTIFICATION' (with a green underline).
- IDENTIFICATION (Green):** This branch is the central focus of the mind map. It includes sub-topics like 'Info gathering' (with a ladder icon), 'Vocal Research' (with a speech bubble icon), 'Drama' (with a person icon), 'Anxiety' (with a lightning bolt icon), 'EBSA' (with a green star icon), 'EBSA QUESTIONS' (with a box icon), 'RELATIONSHIPS' (with a heart icon), and 'IDENTIFICATION' (with a green underline).

The mind map also includes various other notes and icons, such as 'EBSA QUESTIONS', 'RELATIONSHIPS', 'IDENTIFICATION', 'PARENTS ANXIOUS?', 'P1 PASS ON KNOWLEDGE', 'P2 PARENTS ANXIOUS?', 'P3 RELATIONSHIPS', 'P4 FACT FINDING', and 'IDENTIFICATION'. It is a highly detailed and colorful tool for addressing EBSA questions.

## Appendix I – Tracking codes through multiple phases



## Appendix J – Examples of Development of themes



## Appendix K – Participant Quotes for each code

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotes
Language, labels, and lenses	Evolving Language	"we've seen quite a sharp rise, whereas before we would have perhaps called them school avoiders." (P1)
		"Like I said, we probably would have previously called them non-attenders... not EBSA. And but I think when it comes to anxiety, that would be the term that my staff would use." (P1)
		"So there is no particular definition, there's nothing that's umm I don't think through literature where there is an overall view..." (P2)
		"My understanding over the years, one of them is school phobic. I tend not to use that term because I think it's a little bit out of date ... there's emotionally based school avoidance, EBSA" (P2)
		"you don't so much use the word school refusal anymore or things like that, it's more that you say now they showing signs of EBSA..." (P3)
		"think this is a bit of a changing landscape, isn't it as well, really." (P4)
		"It could be a whole range of of things I know EBSNA, as an ebsna so emotionally based school non-attendance is an is another term that is being used in quite a lot of literature now that I'm, I'm reading" (P4)
		"you know I mean language is important, isn't it, you know it is and the connotations and the context in which we use it, it is important." (P4)

		"we've moved away from school refuse refusal." (P5)
		"know that there are a lot of terms as EBSNA emotionally based school non-attendance just to kind of obviously bring in those people who may not present with specific EBSA avoidance behaviours" (P5)
	Different pages, disjointed support	"we've picked up somebody that has perhaps either poor attendance or whether we're in some cases they are attending, but the anxiety is so high." (P1)
		"the earlier that we can get in and and identify potential problems and maybe it wouldn't even lead to to EBSA." (P1)
		"And it's usually where this behaviour is more entrenched, so it's not just the one odd day where a child might be anxious ... It's over a period of time where you see certain characteristics..." (P2)
		"EBSA presentation because it's not a diagnosis as such. So we have to be very careful in defining what this is." (P2)
		"triangulating information really. From the young person, from their parents, from schools and professionals, in order to paint a picture..." (P2)
		"We've identified through a structured project." (P2)
		"So if we're accessing the attendance record, we will have a look and see if there's patterns that will sometimes help us identify it." (P3)

		"we also use the non-attendance questionnaires that our educational psychologist service put into operation for us." (P3)
		"So it is a bit of fact finding really first of all and have a look at what data and information you have got available to see if there's a bit of a trend" (P3)
		"I found definitely then they thought it was like a diagnosis because we even have families ringing up saying I need to speak to the EBSA advisor because my child's got EBSA" (P3)
		"understand it as a very, very complex issue and different layers ....(P4)
		"There are things like the school on Attendance questionnaire and there's an ebsa questionnaire that we we use to try to kind of tease out what are some of the the key issue..." (P4)
		"So it's just kind of making sure that you do that deeper exploration of, OK, so when they were in school, what behaviours were they presenting with and obviously using those checklists and questionnaires are really handy handy for that." (P5)
Working together: Keeping the CYP at the centre	One size doesn't fit all	"identifying if there's something specific that is, that is the barrier. So sometimes you can unpick it..." (P1)
		"used a lot of the the skills from comoira if that's any help which I do, you know, ability to change, intention to change and what the key change issues were for that young person, what the key change issues are for

		that parent and school. So that I could try and break down some of the barriers to attendance" (P2)
		"...there's no clear set pathway for each child. Each child might be quite different. (P2)
		"So in my mind it means when there's things that are happening for that child or emotions connected to school for that child that prevent them from accessing school ..." (P3)
		"we're not talking of just a 1 size fits all, you know, sort of support" (P4)
		"obviously tailored strategies and support mechanisms so that you can in a way obviously it's not the same for every child..." (P5)
	Relationships are key	Those relationships are the foundation. If we haven't got that, then it's very difficult to make any kind of progress." (P1)
		"And when we've got that relationship, we can have perhaps more of a frank and honest conversation ..." (P1)
		"We've got an outreach tuition team who in many cases for those learners, perhaps, who are too anxious to come into classes or in some cases even to come into school or leave the house and they work really closely. And you know, it does go back to those relationships again, they're a fantastic group of people..." (P1)

		<p>"pre work done beforehand by the specialist teacher for autism who got to know those young people well and probably already started getting their confidence to return to school" (P2)</p>
		<p>"So we try then and link we try and identify the most available adult that within school...it's also about not becoming that safe person for that child." (P3)</p>
		<p>"And it is about making sure it's someone who is there for them, like we don't want to make it someone who pops into school once a month" (P3)</p>
		<p>"I LinkedIn with the local youth centre. They allowed me to to use their, use their facilities in the school day so we could send. It's a great facility and you know there's lots of different things that they can do when they're there." (P4)</p>
		<p>"...the more open that you are and the more that you do build a rapport with a family and they start, you know, to trust you and to talk to you more..." (P4)</p>
		<p>"These things take time to to do and you need and even professionally you need to invest time to build a good working relationship, you know, and especially then across teams and across organisations." (P4)</p>
		<p>"And I think for me that relationship building part of the support is really important and when you've built a trusting relationship with that child or</p>

		young person, they're a lot more open to your help and a lot more open to also taking control of it a little bit themselves" (P5)
		"I felt like it would be most beneficial to have that chance to to build that relationship with the child and young person and the family." (P5)
		"I can imagine that for that young person and their family having that support around them is going to build that relationship between them and education so they don't feel like they're just at home in their own bubble..." (P5)
	Slow and steady	"on the first visit, which might be a home visit. Perhaps the child is a bit reluctant ....it's only over time it builds up. " (P1)
		"And and, you know, we do a very slow phase transition." (P1)
		"Equally, we have to acknowledge that you know, everybody learns or everybody responds at their own rate. So you know we take it quite literally day by day, week by week." (P1)
		"it's very, very slow progress with it" (P2)
		"6 to 8 week period wasn't long enough and didn't actually invest enough time and those young people to get them back into a school setting" (P2)
		"So the likelihood of these young people with entrenched EBSA coming back into school within a six week to 8 week period was low" (P2)



		"Because they are wanting a quick fix and we haven't got a quick fix. And then obviously we're trying all these different things and they get exhausted by it sometimes." (P3)
		"Well, if you give them everything all at once, you can't work out what's worked and what's not worked because you've got too much all going in at once " (P3)
		"But even if you can just get that child accessing in school, maybe for one lesson." (P3)
		"that's taken a long long time you know to to get that. I mean, we're talking 6-7 months now" (P4)
		"they need to have more than six sessions of support, you know? And we're sorry, that's all that we can do." (P4)
Needs of the team around the CYP	Supporting each other	"Sometimes the feedback is you know you're doing everything that you can and sometimes it's quite nice to be reassured ..." (P1)
		"the parents almost being an EBSA profile themselves, if you think of it with parents." (P2)
		"This is a parenting programme that's delivered within a secondary setting that's inviting parents who wish to attend to to spread the knowledge to parents..." (P2)

		"...luckily within the authority that I work in, there's there's a lot of goodwill. It's not closed doors because what we don't want is closed doors situation, which I've known before." (P2)
		"I work then very closely with the Ed Psych on her guidance, then really about what sorts of steps, what I could build in to the work that I was doing." (P4)
		"I think there's got to be a team around the team Of that child or young person, if that makes sense." (P5)
		"It turns into a big team where we can all offer support for each other and we can all do, use the different strengths of the teams because obviously there are going to be there's going to be different work that we can all do.." (P5)
		"...we need to be able to provide strategies and support for these parents and carers of the young people so that they can help while at while at home too..." (P5)
	Capacity building: Investing in time and knowledge	"We invest quite heavily in staff training." (P1)
		"Sometimes somebody will come up with something that actually has never crossed your mind and that's that's really valuable." (P1)
		"how do we get the key messages to them that there's a discreet group of young people with this presentation who might need a different approach." (P2)

		"we're quite fortunate really within this local authority, and it's probably happening in other local authorities, that we've had managed to get some funding streams." (P2)
		"Once we had the funding and we actually identified who it would be, and they had those resources available because we have to find the people then and resources." (P2)
		"So part of it is disseminating information from best practise or ways of working..." (P2)
		"Yeah, the whole team have given access to it. We were doing trauma informed training at the same time." (P3)
		"..little bit further by offering like whole school training now rather than just going and helping like a handful of children." (P3)
		"our manager had managed to secure funding for the whole team to do the trauma informed schools diploma and that was massive." (P4)
		"Lucky enough they they they secured funding for some projects." (P4)
		"try to work closely with, with schools and you know, offer training and support in that way." (P4)
		"And I think without that drive and you know her kind of strategic vision and of what she's really wanting to try to achieve, you know, we might not have achieved what we had." (P4)

		<p>"Again then this drive from the lead, you know the the principal Ed Psych to want to do like a well-being strategy and to really understand what, what what's going on here and that's to come you know so that's really quite exciting for us." (P4)</p>
		<p>"a big thing is kind of that psychoeducation period of them getting to know what EBSA is..." (P5)</p>
		<p>"you're working with other people who have got such a big kind of thing of knowledge and they're ready to share it with you and you're ready to share it with them." (P5)</p>
Barriers to collaborative working, obstacles to support	Unclear roles, unclear routes to support	<p>"So it's making sure that we have that sort of wider understanding about the teams working around that family so that we can be better informed." (P2)</p>
		<p>"we'd have to identify who they are, identify the teams that are best involved and then we would engage with those teams to ensure that we are supporting each other." (P2)</p>
		<p>"So there seems to be different ways of viewing how they actually become involved based on their own internal processes and decisions. The other teams might be health because of course there is an overlap." (P2)</p>

		<p>"And it doesn't mean to say that just because on team is s now becoming involved in terms of the educational elements that the home support should then drop off" (P2)</p>
		<p>"But I think it works well when you've got all professionals talking and on the same page. Because if you haven't got that, then if if the professionals don't know what's going on, what they're doing, well, the poor child hasn't got a clue either." (P3)</p>
		<p>"Everyone knows what their roles are within that plan, including the family and the child." (P3)</p>
		<p>"I don't need to do any one to one work because they are doing something. So let them do what they're doing and I might have a different role." (P4)</p>
		<p>"..And knowing what each person's remit is." (P4)</p>
		<p>"...referring to all sorts of different support services. And it's almost like a tick box exercise, you know." (P4)</p>
		<p>"But obviously I'm still learning a lot more about what other people can do, but I think it's really interesting to to hear about what's being done and what can be done in the future." (P5)</p>
		<p>"as long as you're all in agreement about what it is and what you can do, it does make it easier." (P5)</p>

	Collaborating under pressure: Limited resources and time	"We've cut back after cut back and I think that's true with most services." (P1)
		"So trying to get all of those professionals together at the same time and being able to discuss in some cases, you know, quite lengthy discussions around individuals. So that I would say is is certainly the main barrier..." (P1)
		"...you'll find that services start to back off naturally because of the capacity..." (P2)
		"one of the main barriers is funding for sure..." (P2)
		"Without the funding, and with the lack of capacity, then it's about how do we actually manage and support this very now what's become a very large group of people..." (P2)
		"Because if there's a lack of capacity in terms of specialist provision" (P2)
		"...it can be very frustrating because there isn't enough services out there" (P3)
		"I would say because of the the lack of people around to do what is needed because of the volume has increased." (P4)
		"you might have you know situations where actually there's no staff exist to to even do it you know..." (P4)
		"...there's only so many places that that provision can offer." (P4)

		"We've also got to be mindful of the fact that it is very time consuming and a lot of these schools won't have the capacity or time to be able to access that training." (P5)
	Silo working	"we don't really have that collaborative approach with CAMHS or or health" (P2)
		"it doesn't really feel joined up because these are young people brought by school and school are talking to health in one forum, and yet education of perhaps involved in another forum" (P2)
		"And also change of professionals... And that can cause issues, things you don't know who was dealing with the the family and who was not..." (P3)
		"You know, it's hard enough within a a local authority and from one team to another fully understanding and having the time to to meet and discuss things, yet alone a totally different organisation." (P4)
		"It can be overwhelming for for families, and certainly for children, yet alone parents. To have lots of services involved at any particular time" (P4)
		"The difficulty happens is when we don't have a mechanism to share and to get together." (P4)
		"I've talked about that kind of disjointed working of not being on the same page about EBSA." (P5)