

**Meeting the Duty?  
An Explorative Study of Four  
Welsh Local Authority Looked-  
After Children's Education (LACE)  
Teams and Views of their  
Interventions from Looked-After  
Young People.**

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## **Abstract**

There is a specific statutory duty upon local authorities to 'promote' the educational achievement of looked-after children. The objective of this thesis has been to understand how specific Wales policy guidance entitled 'Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been understood, interpreted and enacted by LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners and how their interventions have been perceived by young people in foster and kinship care placements. The thesis has addressed the following research question: From the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, how do they understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children and how in turn is the impact of their interventions perceived by those same young people? This research is informed by constructionist ontology and is positioned within an interpretivist framework. Central to this study are the day-to-day constructed worlds of the LACE Coordinators, their team practitioners and looked-after young people and their inter-subjective engagements. To meet the research objective, the research design comprised a qualitative cross-sectional study utilising semi-structured interviews to explore meanings and experiences. Data were subjected to a coding framework and thematic analysis. Findings include: The LACE team relationships with young people were described by workers typically in administrative and procedural terms. LACE team members described their work practice as a specialist knowledge area, but also disclosed how their knowledge and expertise was often undervalued or rejected by other external practitioners. Young people's identities appeared to be fashioned through occupational assumptions derived from a broader public welfare child discourse. In addressing the research question, LACE practitioners understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children through LACE support, which typically lasts for an hour, once a week, and which was described by some young people as of welcome but limited value. Therefore, the perennial discourse of 'low attainment' that surrounds looked-after children might more aptly be re-cast as 'low investment' by the state, national and local. The thesis has argued that there needs to be a new framework that unites the way workers understand looked-after children and the relationships that will optimise meaningful achievement. It is then more likely that looked-after young people can be better supported to achieve at school as ably as their contemporaries do.

# Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature review: Understanding Looked-After Children in Wales - Key Characteristics	8
Chapter Three: Literature review: Understanding Looked-After Children and their Educational Achievement through Legislation, Policy and the 'Public Welfare Child' Discourse	44
Chapter Four: Methods and Methodology	75
Chapter Five: Promotion of Education in Practice	113
Chapter Six: Looked-After Young People's Self-Defined Identities, Formal Care Relationships and Experiences of Schooling	148
Chapter Seven: Looked-After Young People's Perceptions and Experiences - The LACE Service, Educational Outcomes, Post-School Directions and Career Aspirations	173
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	208
Bibliography	227
Appendices	260
Appendix A Information Sheets -Young People -Key Professionals	261
Appendix B Research Consent Forms -Young People -Key Professionals -Social Worker/Carer/Guardian	265
Appendix C Interview Guides -Young People -Key Professionals	269

## List of Tables

Table 4.1:	Overview of the LACE Coordinators and their front-line LACE team practitioners from the scoping phase	83
Table 4.2:	The local authority LACE Coordinators and their LACE Team Practitioners	91
Table 4.3:	Practice background of the Research Sample – LACE Coordinators and their LACE Team Practitioners	93
Table 4.4:	Overview of the Research Sample - Young People	94
Table 5.1:	LA1 Team	119
Table 5.2:	LA2 Team	120
Table 5.3:	LA3 Team	122
Table 5.4:	LA4 Team	123
Table 6.1:	Overview of the Young People	150
Table 7.1:	LA1 LACE team practitioners and young people interviewed	174
Table 7.2:	LA2 LACE Team Practitioners and Young People Interviewed	183
Table 7.3:	LA3 LACE Team Practitioners and Young People Interviewed	189
Table 7.4:	LA4 LACE Team Practitioner and Young People Interviewed	194
Table 7.5:	Post-School Destinations and Career Aspirations	204

# Chapter One

## Introduction

For children residing in public care, the term 'looked after' was introduced by the Children Act 1989 'to describe all children who are the subject of a care order, or who are provided with accommodation on a voluntary basis for more than 24 hours' (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 10). Previous research has shown that when compared to the majority of their peers, looked-after children and young people typically 'underachieve' within the education system (Jackson, 1987; Berridge, 2012; Welsh Government, 2015a). UK Governments, local authorities, social workers and school teachers have collectively sought to improve looked-after pupils' participation and attainment (The Children Act, 1989; Jackson, 2000; The Children Act, 2004; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007; The Children and Young Persons Act, 2008; Berridge, 2012; The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, 2014; Welsh Government, 2015a). Moreover, they have collectively aimed to minimise differences in educational outcomes between differing economic and social groups, particularly those poorly placed to engage in schooling as a result of disadvantage (Gorard and Huat See, 2013). Why then do looked-after children and young people fare so poorly in this most important of life events for our children and young people? This thesis seeks to address this question in the context of Wales and the services provided by local authorities that seek to moderate the challenges faced by looked-after children and young people in achieving parity of outcomes with their peers in the wider community.

At present, there are twenty two local authorities in Wales which were established in 1996. Each is 'seen as playing a crucial role in interpreting, delivering and evaluating government policy' in regard to education (Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall, 2003, p. 3). There are various challenges encountered by each local authority within Wales. These include a varying geography with a mix of coastal, valley, mountainous, urban and rural regions and differences in terms of their population density, size and scale (Ilbery, 1998). This in turn brings differing financial challenges within a climate of continuously squeezed resources which, taken together, 'constrain their ability to develop robust and innovative evidence-based policy and practice' (Power *et al.*, 2003, p. 4). Furthermore, since the 1970s the Welsh economy has experienced major

restructuring and has transformed itself from a largely industrial to a post-industrial economy (OECD, 2014). Many of the traditional extractive heavy industries have either disappeared or are in decline and have been replaced by service industries and tourism (OECD, 2014, p. 14). Consequently, for many communities this has resulted in these areas and peoples being classified as some of the most disadvantaged in the UK (Egan, 2012). Wales has a child poverty rate of 22 per cent compared to 18 per cent in the UK as a whole (OECD, 2014). Crucially, as educational opportunities and outcomes are profoundly stratified by student background, poverty is a major factor in low achievement and educational attainment (Berridge, 2012; Gorard and Huat See, 2013). This introductory chapter now positions the scope of the study. The chapter begins by outlining the overall aims and objectives and the research question and associated lines of enquiry. Following this, a brief précis of each chapter will provide an outline of the structure of the thesis.

## **Background**

There is a specific statutory duty upon local authorities to ‘promote’ the educational achievement of looked-after children and young people in England and Wales. Most recently this was reaffirmed in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (s.78, 2.a). Originally, this duty had been in place since the introduction of the Children Act 2004 (s.52). The Children Act 2004 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 set out responsibilities for local authorities that are far-reaching in terms of the development, implementation and enactment of appropriate policies that can assist in meeting their statutory duties to promote the educational attainment of looked-after children. In 2007 the Welsh Assembly Government issued guidance for improving the educational attainment of looked-after children entitled: ‘Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). This specifically required all local authorities in Wales to introduce the post of a lead (specialist) professional, designated as a ‘Looked-After Children’s Education (LACE) Coordinator’. Those occupying this role were assigned the responsibility to ensure that looked-after children and young people fully optimise educational opportunities (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42). Since 2007 many local authorities have established a range of Looked-After Children’s Education (LACE) front-line team practitioners to assist the Coordinator by providing one-to-one ‘catch-up’ educational support (within the school setting) for looked-after pupils, undertaking their Key Stage Four GCSE/vocational examinations.

## **Approach and Scope**

Although this qualitative research is largely 'descriptive', theoretical and analytical approaches are drawn upon in order to generate a social constructionist perspective to understand the way that key actors, in this instance LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, interact and construct understandings via meanings, relationships, performances, discursive practices, and settings. Moreover, the objective is to reveal how policies concerning children in public care are understood and mediated by LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners. These policies and the nature of their enactment within the discursive and practical activities of institutions and relevant LACE Coordinators and team practitioners are discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Thus the focus of this thesis is upon how formal policy guidance regarding the promotion of the educational achievement of looked-after children, in this case (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), has been interpreted, translated, implemented and enacted by local authority LACE Coordinators and their teams in south Wales. While the policy and politics nexus established by Government (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) may seem to be settled in regard to guidance over the schooling of looked-after children, their continuing poor educational outcomes begs a question about the adequacy of policy in regard to its capacity to deliver.

There is a dearth of research concerning how local authority LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners are meeting their legislative duty (The Children Act, 2004 (s.52)) in 'promoting' the educational achievement of looked-after children and young people in Wales. Despite some understanding of formal structures that shape this area of child welfare (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a), there is little research exploring how government policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been interpreted, translated or enacted by local authorities, in their formation of the LACE team practitioners, beyond the stipulated LACE Coordinator role (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43). Furthermore, little is known about the ways in which LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners interpret and enact relevant policy in their day to day work. To explore this rarely researched occupational world, the thesis adopts a largely 'upward' (from the 'front-line', street level), as opposed to a 'top-down' (Hupe, 2014, p. 171) perspective, in order to grasp policy as mediated by activities, meanings, relationships and settings.



In terms of the research scope, there are a wide variety of social agents than can be identified as relevant to the aim of providing a broad and diverse range of views on a research topic. However, due to the focused in-depth nature of the qualitative approach, this study did not seek the views of teachers, social workers, or carers involved with looked-after children and young people and their education. Instead, the focus of this thesis is upon how a sample of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners in four Welsh local authorities, have undertaken the enactment of relevant legislation and guidance. In addition, the thesis explores the perspectives of a sample of looked-after young people receiving a service from the four LACE teams. All of the young people were either in foster or kinship care placements and were undertaking their end of school compulsory examinations (vocational/General Certificate of Secondary Examinations) at Key Stage Four (school years 10 and 11). Their perspectives on the educational support received from LACE team practitioners and the extent to which they saw this as having facilitated their educational achievement are considered. Throughout this thesis the term 'young people' (in preference to 'children') is used as this acknowledges the active agency, diversity, experience, and personhood (James and James, 2004), of this group of participants. The categories of 'children' and 'young people' are used interchangeably only to illuminate how they have been constructed within legislation, policy and empirical research. Moreover, throughout this thesis the term 'looked-after', in preference to other terms including: children in public care; or children 'in care' of the state; children in the care of a local authority; or children looked after, is used as a descriptive category for the young people.

### **Summary of the Research Focus**

To reiterate, the study seeks to address the following primary objective: from the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, how do they understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children and in turn how their interventions are perceived by those same young people. In order to explore these various viewpoints four broad lines of enquiry were identified to inform data collection:

- (i) LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perspectives on their role and duties in regard to policy guidance and how this has been translated in terms of implementation.
- (ii) LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perceptions of barriers to the enactment of good practice.
- (iii) LACE Coordinator and team practitioner social constructions of looked-after children's identities.
- (iv) The views of young people about their 'looked-after' status and experiences of schooling, as well as their perceptions about the educational support received from LACE teams.

In order to generate a more rounded analysis of the meanings and understandings that participants (LACE Coordinators, team practitioners and young people) construct in relation to the implementation and enactment of policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), an inter-disciplinary perspective is central to this research, and the thesis draws upon social policy, sociology, education and social work. Of particular interest throughout are the subjectivities of all participants and the ways these are symbolically constructed and bear upon the interpretation of policy and practice. At the same time, the institutional realms of policy, law and organisation are also of much significance in their own right and a matter of scrutiny and critique in the early chapters of the thesis. This thesis is not about evaluation and attribution of the LACE team members with regard to educational outcomes, albeit outcomes are considered in later chapters. Instead it is about understanding in depth the nuanced and subtle nature of policy implementation through a snap-shot in time of the views of key participants. A more detailed outline of the thesis content is described below.

### **Outline of the Thesis Chapters**

This introductory chapter has positioned the focus and scope of the research study. The following chapter is the first literature review chapter relating to the topic. This chapter is presented over three sections. The first section presents the 'public welfare child' discourse in order to position a background and a theoretical framework for the research topic. The second section presents legal and social conceptualisations of looked-after children in Wales, whilst the final section presents an overview of the educational attainment of Welsh looked-after children. This is accomplished by providing statistical outcomes of each phase from the Foundation Phase through to Key Stage Four. The discussion centres upon how 'underachievement' has been conceptualised. Explanations

concerning looked-after children's 'low attainment' are presented through three lenses: pre-care experiences; low expectations; and the importance of having aspirations. How these vocabularies create particular challenges through their constructions are also considered.

Chapter Three presents the second literature review chapter. This discussion draws upon the macro level, legislative and policy developments, within a Welsh context of looked-after children's educational attainment. A reprise of the 'public welfare child' discourse, together with narratives of children as 'victims' and 'threats' (Hendrick, 1994), are presented to reveal the possible constructions that the LACE Coordinators and LACE teams may draw upon to make sense of looked-after young people.

The research design and methods are presented in Chapter Four and outline the advantages and disadvantages of a qualitative cross sectional research design. Matters of an ontological and epistemological nature are then addressed. This chapter provides an outline of the research sample and discusses issues of access, ethics, informed consent and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews. Finally, this chapter addresses methods of transcription and data analysis, as well as issues of reliability, validity and reflexivity.

Chapter Five is the first of three findings chapters, exploring how LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners interpret, translate and enact policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). From the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and LACE team practitioners, the chapter explores how looked-after children's educational achievements are being promoted, as well as the perceived barriers to implementing good practice. Furthermore, analysis is undertaken of the ways in which the LACE Coordinators and the LACE team practitioners construct looked-after identities and the extent to which these correspond to those within the 'public welfare child' discourse narratives of children as 'victims' and 'threats'.

Chapter Six takes an alternative approach by focussing upon the young people. The intention here is to explore how young people construct and 'claim' their own identities, and the extent to which these constructions correspond to those identified in the previous chapter in terms of the 'public welfare child' discourse. Chapter Seven then explores looked-after young people's experiences of the LACE services and considers how these correspond with the LACE

Coordinators' and their LACE team practitioners' perspectives concerning the impact of the LACE services (as outlined in Chapter Five). The objective of this chapter is to consider whether the LACE team practitioners' perspectives on issues that were perceived to affect practice negatively (boundary-spanning activities; professional rivalry; and a deficiency of resource) correspond with the young people's perceptions and experiences of the LACE service. This chapter also explores young people's educational outcomes (GCSE/vocational qualifications), their career aspirations and hoped for directions after compulsory education (Key Stage Four).

The final chapter presents key conclusions. This chapter first provides an answer to the research question: From the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, how do they understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children and how in turn is the impact of their interventions perceived by those same young people? In addition, the chapter will seek to generate a more rounded summation of the meanings and understandings that participants construct in relation to the implementation and consumption of LACE policy and practice (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) through a focus is upon the key findings and analytic themes that have permeated the thesis and structured the analysis of data. Furthermore, the limitations of this study are presented together with suggestions for further research. Finally, the thesis concludes with a short section entitled: 'Final Comments'.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Understanding Looked-After Children in Wales - Key Characteristics**

##### **Introduction**

In this chapter selective sources and debates which can help illuminate the key characteristics of looked-after children and young people in Wales are focused upon. Rather than a homogenous static group, it will be shown that these young people, as welfare subjects, are a dynamic population that need to be grasped analytically within a set of complex and shifting occupational constructs (Pinkney, 2000). The chapter is presented over three sections. In the first section the 'public welfare child' discourse is presented in order to position a theoretical background to the research topic. The second section explores how 'looked-after children' are conceptualised legally and socially and provides information about looked-after children in Wales in terms of key characteristics. The various pathways into the care system are then discussed along with an outline of the different types of placements in use. In section three the educational attainment of looked-after children in Wales from the Foundation Phase through to Key Stage Four, including statistical outcomes for each phase, are presented. The discussion will focus upon how 'underachievement' has been conceptualised and the particular challenges this presents. Finally, explanations of looked-after children's 'low attainment' when compared to their non-looked-after peers are explored through three lenses: pre-care educational experiences (including an absence of meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging); low expectations; and the importance of having aspirations.

##### **Section One: Introducing the 'Public Welfare Child' Discourse**

A measure of how civilised a society is can be gleaned from how it treats children who have no one to look after them (Sissay, 2016). From the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day anxieties about what happens to children have been reflected in culture and played out in politics (Sissay, 2016). From the Greeks through to Dickens, children have often been perceived as 'vulnerable' and in need of protection (Hendrick, 1994; Sissay, 2016). Within culture, many fictional

characters were either orphaned, abandoned, fostered, adopted or placed in children's homes (e.g. Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Pinocchio, Peter Pan, Oliver Twist, Batman, Superman, Harry Potter, James Bond, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Jane Eyre) (Sissay, 2013; Sissay, 2016). So what is it about the lives of these children that make them fascinating? As a care experienced person, Sissay (2016) writing in the Guardian (online), observes it is in part 'because young people in care use extraordinary skills to deal with extraordinary situations on a daily basis'.

Looked-after children are categorised as a group that are more likely to have experienced maltreatment compared to all children in the general population (Bazalgette, Rahilly and Trevelyan, 2015). Reflected in culture and also played out in politics, these children have long been perceived as threats, as 'impulsive', 'unsocialised' and in need of guidance and control (Foley, Parton, Roche and Tucker, 2003; Parton, 2006; Sissay, 2013; Sissay, 2016). Within the Western perception of childhood, 'vulnerability' is positioned 'as a master identity for children' (Christensen, 2000, p. 40). In this context, all issues of delinquency, abuse and neglect are inextricably linked to the relationship between the state and the family (Wyness, 2012). Historically, the state has long been concerned with regulating the threats posed by the poor (Frost, Mills and Stein, 1999). At the core of child welfare practice are conceptions of the archetypal child in need as 'victim' (Christensen, 2000). As such, to 'see' children and young people as threats, ultimately undermines their interpretation as 'victims' (Hendrick, 1994).

The child as 'victim' has dominated priorities and policies at many points, to different degrees, over time in the UK (Parton, 2006). Similarly, the child as 'threat' also has a long history with problems perceived around delinquency or potential danger to society (Hendrick, 1997). Consequently, specialist provision such as workhouses, hospitals and boarding-out establishments have been operated since at least 1597 by the state and private individuals with the chief aim of improving the lives of poor and vagrant children (Frost *et al.*, 1999). The birth of the new human sciences: psychology, criminology, psychiatry, medicine and social work, created a system of social regulation, which was identified as the 'psy' complex (Foucault, 1977). The 'bodies' that 'psy' practitioners sought to regulate included:

homeless and ragged; infants who were starved, neglected and sometimes murdered by their paid carers; children who were hungry; children who were ill; children who suffered from mental and physical disabilities; children who were cruelly treated by parents; and delinquent children who were put into close proximity to adult criminals (Hendrick, 2003, p. 3).

It has been argued that the relations between 'power' and 'knowledge' provide a regime of normalising judgement through the human sciences (Foucault, 1977). Children have thus long been pursued and submitted to scrutiny to ensure they aspire to a particular norm of behaviour (Frost *et al.*, 1999). It has been suggested that this occurred in industrializing Britain through four primary forms: food and feeding by the School Meals Service; the medical inspection and treatment through the School Medical Service; the ordering of body in movement and tongue in speech in schools, orphanages, reformatories, child guidance clinics, and hospitals (Hendrick, 1997, p. 37). Finally, there was also the use of physical punishment in welfare institutions such as schools. It was through the advent of compulsory education, following the Elementary Education Act of 1870, that children became 'known' through the classroom environment (Hendrick, 1994). Mass schooling became increasingly focused on control, creating 'docile bodies' that 'may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). As such, schools were:

...infused by a psychology fixated with the individual and individual difference, both normalization and pathologization, and realised within a set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic and normative practices (Ball, 2013, p. 52).

The inter-relationships between 'psy' practitioners', institutions, science, law, language, and education policies 'were realized in a set of shifting categories, divisions, crises and exclusions which were enacted upon vulnerable bodies' (Ball, 2013, p. 65). Embedded in cultural understandings and ubiquitous in psychological thought is the construction of 'vulnerable' bodies, which has placed children in a perpetual state of need (Christensen, 2000). Within the focus of treating and normalising 'poor' working class children through medico-social judgements, the 'psy' practitioners required the knowledge of the 'whole individual' from both the private and public domains (Parton, 1998).

The psy-sciences established dominant ways of thinking about children, their childhood and the family and how the state and external agencies should

intervene when problems arose (Rose, 1999; Wyness, 2012). As a way for the state to continue to regulate its citizens and maintain its own legitimacy, while protecting individual children, the emergence of the 'social', described as a 'hybrid domain' consisting of governmental and non-governmental agencies (Wyness, 2012), was identified as the most appropriate way of achieving this state of affairs (Parton, 1998, 1999). In this shift to reconfigure the relationships between the state and its citizens, new regulations and social practices were deployed (Fairbanks II, 2012). It was through the 'social' that the 'public welfare child' discourses emerged which positioned how children were to be regulated within the new practices of the human sciences (Parton, 1999).

What can be gleaned from the discussion so far is that there have been various movements and different motivations concerning children's welfare which has resulted in them becoming 'objects of welfare interventions' (Hendrick, 1997, p. 39). Moreover, that within the normal and abnormal binary, it is possible to think of a number of identities who are receiving welfare (Hendrick, 2003). Rather than being described foremost as 'victims' however, conceptions of children as a 'threat' to social order emerged through the public welfare child' discourse from the mid-nineteenth century and these constructions remain pertinent today for many vulnerable children (Hendrick, 1997; Parton, 2006). Situating the public welfare child within this polemical discourse of regulation, threat and victimhood can assist in the analysis of contemporary policies for looked-after children, which is the focus of much of this chapter. We now turn to examine the construction of 'childhood' and the notion of becoming 'looked-after' by the state.

## **Section Two: Defining 'Children' and the 'Looked-After' Category**

It was the Children Act 1989 (s.22(1)), which defined some children as being 'looked-after'. This category relates to children who are 'accommodated' and those subject to a 'care order'. However:

...the new terms 'accommodation' and 'looked after' were created to emphasize the proposed partnership approach. Efforts were made to reframe accommodation in terms of working alongside parents, but it became clear that in effect, this was hard to achieve... it was commonly acknowledged that repeated episodes of accommodation led to a drift into long term care (Howard, 2005, p. 23).

As some have described, the idea of 'accommodation' and the concept of being 'looked-after' represent a central shift from previous ideas about voluntary and



compulsory care (Frost *et al.*, 1999). In addition, as described in Chapter One (p.1), 'looked-after' children and young people are also known as children 'in care' of the state, children in 'public care', and children in the care of a local authority. These different categories are sometimes used interchangeably and thereby, inaccurately (Johns, 2011). However, for the purpose of economy the term 'looked-after' will be applied here generically to include multiple categories as above but distinctions will be made where relevant to the analysis or discussion.

In everyday speech, the term 'children' exists within a fragmented vocabulary of: babies, infants, juniors, teenagers, adolescents and young people (Hendrick, 2008). It is widely accepted that childhood is a period that varies in length (Rogers and Rogers, 1992; Qvortrup, 2009). Although the beginning and ending of childhood is problematic to define both legally and socially (Bainham and Gilmore, 2013), it is broadly accepted that the term 'child' typically refers to people under the age of eighteen years (the Children Act 1989 (s.105(1)); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989). Age, therefore, is a distinguishing criterion for identifying childhood (Hendrick, 2008). In this regard, I shall be referring to the sample of seventeen teenage 'children' participating in this study as '*young people*' as this term encompasses better their active agency, experience, and personhood (James and James, 2004, p. 201). As explained in Chapter One (p.1), I will, however, refer to either category to illuminate how they have been constructed within legislation, policy and research. The focus now turns to explore looked-after children in Wales in terms of their key characteristics.

### **Locating Information about Looked-After Children in Wales**

Following Welsh devolution (1999), data about looked-after children and young people have been published by the Welsh Government as follows. First there is the online 'Stats Wales' database which presents information by individual Welsh local authority. There are two other sources which are the 'National Statistics First Release' annual figures entitled: the 'Adoptions, Outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities', and the 'Wales Children in Need Census'. The first source presents statistics on looked-after children who are subject to care orders and those who are provided with accommodation by their local authority. The second source presents the educational outcomes of the children 'in-need' categories, which includes

looked-after children, at the four assessment Key Stages and also provides the 'Pupils in Wales' data.

### **Numbers of Looked-After Children in Wales**

In relation to published figures for the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, 5,617 children were classed as being 'looked-after' in Wales (Welsh Government, 2015c). Over the preceding five years (up until 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015) the number of looked-after children had increased overall, year on year, by 9 per cent (Welsh Government, 2015c). It has been stated that the number of children becoming looked-after in Wales is increasing at a greater rate than England (Drakeford, 2012). One factor relating to a rise in England and Wales was the Baby Peter Connolly scandal of 2008 which produced a dramatic acceleration in children being admitted into care (Drakeford, 2012). But it is not clear why the looked-after population has risen, and continues to rise, more sharply in Wales than in England, albeit there is some variation across Wales with the figures for some authorities closer to English averages but several much higher.

The 'Wales Children in Need Census' states that on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, out of 19,385 children in need, there were 5,500 children (28.4 per cent) identified as looked-after (Welsh Government, 2016a). To reiterate, these numbers of looked-after children are never stable, they fluctuate throughout any given year (Jackson and Simon, 2006). Across Wales, the twenty-two local authorities have markedly varying numbers of looked-after children and care leavers at any one time. The All Wales Heads of Children's Services' (2013), commissioned a report with the objective of providing insight into why this occurs. They identified that demographic and socio-economic factors alone cannot explain the variation in the numbers and rates of looked-after children across local authorities. Rather, they suggest that what affects the rates of looked-after children relates to the way that local areas lead, organise and deploy services for vulnerable children (All Wales Heads of Children's Services, 2013).

### **Ages of Looked-After Children in Wales**

In relation to the figures above, in Wales on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015 there were: 265 looked-after children aged under one year old; 955 were aged one to four years old; 1,325 were aged five to nine years old; 2,025 were aged ten to fifteen years old; and 930 were aged sixteen years and over (Welsh Government,

2016a). Additionally, there were 437 young people categorised as ‘care leavers’, ‘who had their 19th birthday between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 and were in care on 1 April 2012’ (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 9). It is notable that data on looked-after children are collected via different government sources and for different purposes (Stats Wales, 2015a, 2015b; Welsh Government, 2015c, 2016a) and this needs to be recognised and selectively integrated to obtain a more rounded profile.

### **The Gender and Ethnic Composition of Looked-After Children in Wales**

Regarding the gender composition of looked-after children in Wales, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2014, there were 3,110 males compared to 2,645 females (Stats Wales, 2015a). The largest age group for both females and males was aged ten to fifteen years old (1,055 males and 975 females) (Stats Wales, 2015a). In relation to the ethnic composition, the majority of looked-after children in Wales were identified as ‘White’ (5,250); 175 were identified as ‘Mixed’; 65 as ‘Asian or Asian British’; 45 as ‘Black or Black British’; 50 as being from ‘Other Ethnic Groups’; and 170 children were identified ‘Unknown’ ethnically (Stats Wales, 2015b). Wherever looked-after children and young people are placed (to be discussed further below) it is of paramount importance that practitioners support the young people to develop a positive ethnic and cultural identity (Thomas, 2005). A discussion of the different pathways and periods of being looked-after is now presented.

### **Pathways into the Care System**

Depending upon their category of ‘need’, children and young people can enter the care system for a variety of different reasons (Forrester, Goodman, Cocker, Binnie and Jensch, 2009). The idea that children should be kept with their family, whenever possible is a core principle within the Children Act 1989. There are three main pathways into the care system (Cocker and Allain, 2013). The first pathway is via ‘accommodation’ (s.20) of the Children Act 1989. This pathway is positioned as a service to support parents via a voluntary arrangement between the child’s parents and the local authority. Under this pathway the parental responsibility is with the parents and not with the local authority, although the agreement is that parents and the local authority must work together in safeguarding and promoting a child’s welfare. If requested, under this voluntary arrangement the child can be removed from care by the parents (s.20(8) of the

Children Act 1989). This can occur when there has been a period of respite for both parents and children who have experienced stressful circumstances. Furthermore, this arrangement also relates to children who have no person acting with parental responsibility such as: children who find themselves lost, abandoned, unaccompanied entering the country, having parents who are seriously ill or hospitalised, or having parents who have died leaving them with no surviving relatives who can provide care (Cocker and Allain, 2013).

The second pathway, as outlined by Cocker and Allain (2013), is via a court intervention. This pathway requires that a threshold criterion must first be met (s.31(2) of the Children Act 1989) which relates to a child suffering or likely to be suffering significant harm or being beyond parental control. Under Part 4 of the Children Act 1989 the child can be subject to a Care Order (s.31), an interim Care Order (s.38), or an Emergency Protection Order (s.44). In each of these cases, and as long as the order is in force, the responsibility for the child is undertaken through an agreement between the child's parents and the local authority. Again as outlined by Cocker and Allain (2013), the third pathway (s.25(1) of the Children Act 1989) is the provision of Secure Accommodation in which the child's liberty is restricted for their own welfare. This pathway, however, can only be applied for when all other avenues and accommodation types have been exhausted and the child continues to be at risk of harm to themselves or others; this includes children who repeatedly abscond.

The length of time a child or young person can spend being looked-after varies greatly. Up to forty per cent of children who enter the care system only do so for a number of weeks or months and in any year they may return home within six months (Cocker and Allain, 2013). However, it is not unreasonable to estimate that 'any one child in care is likely to spend at least four years of his or her life being looked after' (Jackson and Simon, 2006, p. 57). To repeat, some children spend their entire childhood in the care system as looked-after children, while for others it is only a temporary arrangement (Forrester *et al.*, 2009). Prior to becoming looked-after many children and young people may have been vulnerable for many years, with many experiencing serious family problems (Thomas, 2005; Forrester *et al.*, 2009; Cocker and Allain, 2013). For many looked-after children and young people, family problems are exacerbated by hardship, poverty, abuse (sexual, physical and psychological) and neglect in its various forms (Thomas, 2005). In addition, young people's own behaviour is often cited as a major factor for them entering care (Bebbington and Miles, 1989;

Berridge, 2012; Welsh Government, 2015c). Each of these categories of need will now be discussed further, starting with deprivation, hardship and poverty.

### **Deprivation, Hardship and Poverty**

Deprivation, hardship and poverty have many guises. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, there were 498 children who became looked-after in Wales because their family was deemed as 'in acute stress or dysfunction' (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 4). This number was in fact a decrease from the 547 children looked-after between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2012 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2013 (Welsh Government, 2015c). It is well known that children from lower socio-economic groups are over represented in the care population (SEU, 2003). Bebbington and Miles (1989), in their classic study, explored the family backgrounds of 2500 children in England who were admitted into the care system. Building upon the idea put forward by Wedge and Prosser (1978) that some children appeared 'born to fail' as a result of poverty (cited in Bebbington and Miles, 1989, p. 350), Bebbington and Miles (1989) were interested in exploring the association between indicators of social and material deprivation. They identified that most young people within the care system came from working class families who were experiencing poverty. Beyond living in poor neighbourhoods in rented housing, they found that nearly three quarters of their sample were in receipt of income support. Thus, it was widely acknowledged from this study that children who were experiencing adverse circumstances within families with limited resources were more likely to enter the care system and to 'bring with them a history of relative disadvantage and associated problems' (Thomas, 2005, pp. 21-22). These factors have also been described elsewhere (Davey, 2006; Berridge, 2007).

In relation to experiences of deprivation, it is recognised that most young people entering the care system have experienced family breakdown, maltreatment or a lack of parental support (Thomas, 2005; Berridge, 2007). Drakeford (2012) observes that poverty and deprivation are strongly correlated with becoming looked-after in local authority care in Wales. Moreover, 'the majority of children who enter care are from families who experience hardship' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 3). The families that are most likely to experience hardship are typically defined as poor, working class families (Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Thomas, 2005; Davey, 2006; Berridge, 2007; Jackson, 2013a). It is known that many people experiencing material deprivation have limited access to a range of social, cultural and material capital, all of which leads to greater inequality in

society (Ball, 1993; Thomas, 2005; Estyn, 2012). In addition, it has been described that many deprived people are centrally positioned within the stigma of an 'undeserving poor' discourse that occurs across ordinary conversation as well as political rhetoric (Katz, 1989, cited in Williams, 1998). It is the people considered materially disadvantaged or poorly educated, poorly dressed and unfed that:

...usually remain othered, outsiders, strangers to be pitied or despised, helped or punished, ignored or studied, but rarely full citizens, members of a larger community on the same terms as the rest of us (Katz, 1989, cited in Williams, 1998, p. 13).

All of the factors associated with poverty have collectively assisted in the creation of a metaphorical mountain that (poor) children have to negotiate, ascend and/or descend before they are able to move beyond the entrapment of social hostility and political prejudice (Thomas, 2005). Moreover, it has been argued that social class is so entrenched within British society, 'that we hardly recognise it. And we use lots of weasel words like 'disadvantage' instead of 'poor' and we never say 'lower class', [like] they do in other countries' (Jackson, 2013a). Similarly, it has been suggested that the social background context is:

....variously described as social class, socio-economic status or more simply poverty [yet] recent UK governments have attempted to portray poverty as an outcome of dysfunctional families and their disorganised lives rather than a cause (Berridge, 2012, p. 1173).

In the UK the reframing of poverty as an aspect of 'social exclusion' emerged through European Commission social policy discourse as well as the arrival of New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit. This new focus on social exclusion included the overlapping inequalities that accompanied issues of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and disability and their connection to questions of fair distribution and social justice (Williams, 1998, p. 15).

In summary, a focus on the differences between the social classes has been an enduring and heated political concern in Britain for a century or more (Foster, Gomm and Hammersley, 1996). Although the social class attainment gap has narrowed slightly in recent years (Berridge, 2012), it is still a significant concern for children in lower socio-economic groups, including those looked-after, in relation to their future outcomes in regard to education and mobility.

## **Abuse and Neglect**

Child abuse is defined as: 'any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of love, care and attention' (NSPCC, 2015a). Regarding child neglect, this form of abuse not only causes serious long term damage but can be so harmful as to cause death (NSPCC, 2015b). In the UK, a high percentage of children and young people (60 per cent), enter the care system as a result of abuse or neglect (Thomas, 2005; SSIA, 2007, 2011; Bazalgette *et al.*, 2015). Between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, there were 2,033 children who became 'looked-after' in Wales of which 61 per cent experienced 'abuse or neglect' (an increase from 48 per cent since 2003) (Welsh Government, 2015c).

According to the NSPCC's website, neglect is defined as: 'the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs (NSPCC, 2015b). A child may be left hungry or dirty, without adequate clothing, shelter, supervision, medical or health care'. For the looked-after children and young people who have experienced abuse or neglect they 'may have both physical and psychological consequences to deal with [and] unless these difficulties are successfully managed, the child's passage through care is likely to be rough' (Thomas, 2005, p. 22). In addition, being taken into care is not necessarily a panacea for children who have previously experienced abuse or neglect, as allegations concerning the abuse or neglect of children in care still 'occur in all placement settings and at any point in the life of a placement' (Biehal, Cusworth, Wade and Clarke, 2014, p. xi).

The Children Acts 1948 and 1989 were both largely concerned with the protecting and safeguarding of looked-after children from forms of abuse and neglect. However, as Biehal *et al.* (2014, p. 37) suggest, 'very little is currently known in the UK about the extent and nature of abuse or neglect of looked after children by those adults charged with their care'. Cocker and Allain (2013) argue that it is paramount for social workers to be better equipped to identify the typical symptoms and consequences of long term abuse or neglect. Biehal *et al.* (2014, p. 138) have argued that:

it is essential that both foster and residential care are underpinned by a child-centred, rights-based approach, which ensures that children and young people are listened to if they experience poor quality care, abuse or neglect.

The focus now turns to the notion of looked-after children's own problem behaviour, which is widely believed to be a major factor as to why children enter the care system.

## **Problem Behaviour**

In an attempt to change public misperception about the causes of becoming looked-after, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2003, p. 79) reported that:

...there is a widely held view that children are in care because they have "done something wrong". Yet fewer than one in 10 is in care because of their own behaviour. The vast majority (80 per cent) enter care because of abuse, neglect, family hardships or other factors relating to their families.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, only 123 (6 per cent) young people entered the care system in Wales due to 'socially unacceptable behaviour' (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 4). What precisely constitutes behaviour regarded as 'socially unacceptable' is not easily defined. It is, however, a notion well established in therapeutic and research literature on the behaviour management of 'problem' (usually poor) children. This, incidentally, includes looked-after children and young people who are routinely reported as presenting with 'challenging behaviour' and 'emotional difficulties' (St Claire and Osborne, 1987; Pithouse, Hill-Tout and Lowe, 2002; SEU, 2003; Feinstein, Duckworth and Sabates, 2004; Gilligan, 2006; Brown Rosier, 2009; Duckworth, Akerman, Gutman and Vorhaus, 2009; Sims and Holtom, 2009; Hopkins, 2010; Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012b).

Problem behaviour features prominently as a dominant discourse within the context of schooling (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012). Managing student behaviour in the classroom has always been a concern for schools, teachers and policy makers (Powell and Tod, 2004). Defining poor behaviour, however, is problematic as there are many competing definitions ranging from low-level misbehaviour to more serious assaults on staff and pupils (Department for Education, 2012). Furthermore, we should also be aware of the power of cultural hegemony when defining certain behaviours as abnormal since some young people express themselves through behaviour which may also prove to be a form of adaptive resilience given the difficult circumstances they experience (Ungar, 2004). Indeed, Ungar (2004) observes that oppositional behaviour rather than passive victimhood as regards abuse is associated with better mental health outcomes. Such a challenging stance may be one which key practitioners



are unable to understand as a result of limited training on such issues (Govier, 2015). Instead of focusing upon understanding adversity and seeing young people as presenting behavioural issues relating to their need, key practitioners and wider society, may often see behavioural issues as the problem rather than understand these as a possible reaction to post-traumatic stress (Govier, 2015).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that any behavioural challenges, such as in school or in placements, may arise from poor planning rather than difficult children (Dewey, [1938] 1998). Schools are now required to provide pupils with counselling and support with health and emotional needs (School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013). In the case of children who have experienced abuse and neglect what is required from those in a position of care is understanding and patience (Thomas, 2005). As directed by the Welsh Government: 'teachers need to be able to manage as sensitively as possible', looked-after children's educational experiences (Welsh Government, 2015a). This 'can often result in behaviour that might be categorised as erratic and irrational' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 23). Nonetheless, it has been argued that there is a dearth of research at the juncture between the post-traumatic stress literature and the bereavement literature in relation to looked-after children (Jackson, 2013b). In addition, it has been pointed out that many abused and neglected children may experience undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorders which often are unintentionally vented in school classrooms (Cairns, 1999). In this situation reactive or disruptive behaviour is often seen as the problem rather than the young person's distress (Cairns, 1999). It has been suggested that many children in care have been bereaved and questions have been raised concerning how many children and young people have had bereavement counselling or whether practitioners have a sufficient understanding of the effect that loss has upon the child's performance at school (Jackson, 2013b). Jackson (2013b) notes that bereavement may be unknown and therefore unlikely to be considered by teachers and associated practitioners. Consequently, it is essential that a detailed educational and psychological assessment takes place for all children when they become looked-after, instead of waiting until problems occur (Jackson and McParlin, 2006).

Other pathways into care include: 'parental illness, disability or absence' (138 children / 7 per cent), and 35 children entered care for 'other' reasons (2 per cent), undefined (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 4). Having considered the

various pathways into care, we now focus on the different types of care placements that are available for looked-after young people in Wales.

### **Types of Care Placements: Foster, Residential, Kinship and Adoption**

Where, as well as with whom, a looked-after child or young person resides is crucial to their overall wellbeing. Some looked-after children and young people reside in 'out of authority placements'. There are several reasons why this occurs: some relate to the child's own protection and some young people choose this option, however, it is likely that this will be due primarily to lack of suitable or available local placements (SEU, 2003). For looked-after children and young people, their permanence, stability and continuity of care and school placements are essential for their overall welfare development (Jackson, 2002). Although it is paramount that looked-after children and young people are found a placement that can meet their needs (Thomas, 2005), this may only occur for some and not all looked-after children and young people. In terms of the selection of placements, very often young people are not necessarily given a choice (Thomas, 2005). The identification of a placement depends on how practitioners construct the young person's needs within a context of what resources are available to meet these (Thomas, 2005; Cocker and Allain, 2013). Thus, with the purpose of creating permanence and stability, care services should be designed and tailored to address the needs of the individual (SSIA, 2007). Types of care placement will now be outlined, starting with foster care.

#### **Foster Care**

In 2015 the majority of looked-after children (4,255) in Wales (76 per cent) were accommodated in foster care placements (Welsh Government, 2015c). There are currently a variety of foster care placements in existence including: emergency placements; short term placements; respite care, long term placements; in-house foster care provision; independent fostering agency provision; remand foster care and treatment foster care (Cocker and Allain, 2013). Despite this range of fostering interventions, it has been pointed out that there is an enduring issue in Wales in terms of recruiting and retaining an adequate supply of foster carers (Pithouse and Crowley, 2001). This issue was identified as a consequence of a variety of complex factors including:

the ageing profile of many carers; people perceived as less willing to foster and thereby sacrifice lifestyle and domestic comforts; reluctance to adapt to the implementation of National Standards by 'old-style' foster carers; apprehension about the caring role particularly in the wake of abuse scandals in Wales (Pithouse and Crowley, 2001, p. 54).

As a marketised resource, both public and private foster care provisions are premised on providing a 'safety net' and improving young people's outcomes (Little, 2010). This, however, may not necessarily be the case as the evidence suggests much instability and movement for many in care. This has been a long running thread within the looked-after research literature (Stein, 2009), and will be returned to later in this chapter. In regard to foster care provision, some have described evident variation in the scale and availability across Wales, particularly in rural parts (Pithouse and Crowley, 2001). Within the UK there is yet to be a major discussion about the backgrounds of foster carers in terms of their capacities to help promote successful school attainment levels and positive outcomes for looked-after children (Jackson, 2007). Jackson and McParlin (2006) advocate that foster carers should have a minimum educational level and that potential foster carers should be selected on the basis of capabilities and skills which are required to optimize educational outcomes and wellbeing more generally. Similarly, it has been advocated recently that in order to properly care for the diversity of looked-after children, better informed and trained foster carers will need to show that they are: 'warm, child-centred, responsive and thoughtfully 'attuned' to the individual child's needs' (Pithouse and Rees, 2015, p. 41).

## **Residential Care**

An alternative to foster care is residential care (Berridge, 2002). In Wales in 2015 there were 242 children recorded as living in a mix of children's homes, hostels and secure units (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 3). Furthermore, a further 52 children were in attendance at residential schools and 114 were in 'other placements' which include: residential care homes, NHS/Health Trust or other establishments providing medical or nursing care, Youth Offender Institutions or prison family centres or mother and baby units and 'whereabouts unknown.' (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 3).

Again, the collective category of 'other placements' is a further example of the limitations of how looked-after children's data are collected and analysed in that we are unable to identify any individual factors in relation to the 'other placement'

types. Despite this limitation, as an alternative to foster placements a residential care placement can be a valuable option for some children and young people, especially those who are considered as having highly specialised needs or who may have previous experiences of dysfunctional family life, and are unable to live within a family placement (Berridge, 2002).

Residential care encompasses private and local authority homes, small and large institutions including specialist boarding schools, secure accommodation and short-term therapeutic community placements (Forrester *et al.*, 2009). Notwithstanding this diversity, residential care placements have reduced over recent decades with the most rapid decline in England and Wales occurring during the 1980s (Frost *et al.*, 1999). A variety of reasons have been provided as to why residential care homes have declined. These include high-profile inquiries and investigations into abuse and neglect within children's homes (Cocker and Allain, 2013, p. 48), and anti-institutional thinking from the 1960s and 1970s, together with growing awareness of abuse and damage arising in some residential care settings has led to a growing transition from group care to foster care (Frost *et al.*, 1999).

Residential care is still an important part of the care system (Thomas, 2005; Cocker and Allain, 2013). Berridge, Biehal and Henry (2012) provided insight into the nature of a selection of the remaining children's residential homes in England and the circumstances and characteristics of the young people who live in them. Within their sample of 16 homes, 11 were described as local authority homes, the rest were a mix of voluntary and private organisations (Berridge, Biehal and Henry, 2012). Moreover, most homes were long-standing, with six having been in operation for over 20 years. In terms of location, 13 homes were in urban locations and the remaining three homes were in rural locations. Most of the homes were small in size and on average they each contained six rooms. Within the 16 homes there were 94 places available of which 83 of were occupied at the time of the study. In terms of specialist provision, half of the homes had, or offered links with, specialist therapeutic and mental health support. Regarding the qualifications held by the residential staff: 'only two staff, a manager and a deputy, had degree-level social work qualifications. For 62 percent of the care staff, the highest relevant qualification was NVQ Level 3' (Berridge *et al.*, 2012, p. 21). Furthermore, within this study it was identified that of the proportion of looked-after children ( $n=59$ ) that did reside in the 16

residential homes, most were over the age of 12 (Berridge *et al.*, 2012). Many had 'moved there either from home or from foster care as a result of their challenging behaviour' (Berridge *et al.*, 2012, p. 4). Over one-third had been assessed as having special educational needs, most commonly emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Furthermore, seventy-four per cent were reported to have been aggressive or violent and over half had gone missing (Berridge *et al.*, 2012).

It has been described elsewhere that 'most young runaways from care began running away before being taken into care' (Rees, 1993, p. 77). Thus the notion of absconders and care runaways is a particularly complex issue that does not necessarily commence in teenage years, as is widely believed, but stretches back to childhood years (Rees, 1993). Regarding the educational outcomes of the sample of young people living within the 16 residential homes, they 'had relatively low levels of educational attainment [and] staff were unaware of test results for a significant minority' (Berridge *et al.*, 2012, p. 37). In light of this, the most effective homes were identified as those that were small in size and 'child-centred' in their approach (Berridge, 2002).

## **Kinship Care**

'Kinship care' is 'the term used for situations where children live with relatives other than birth parents. These relatives may be grandparents, aunts and uncles or older siblings' (NAfW, 2012, p. 1). In addition to the term 'kinship carer', there is also 'kinship fostering' and the 'informal kinship carer' role. The latter can be a close relative or friend; this person does not have parental responsibility and the child is not 'looked-after' by the local authority (Children in Wales, 2014, p. 9). In addition, arrangements for looked-after children's care can be made through a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order (Nandy, Selwyn, Farmer and Vaisey, 2011).

Within the UK, both law and policy favour children's care being provided by wider family members and friends when birth parents are unable to provide this function (Brown and Sen, 2014). In 2014, there were 534 looked-after children in Wales placed with their own parents or other persons with parental responsibility (Welsh Government, 2015c). Each kinship care situation is unique (Children in Wales, 2014) and it is estimated that there are between 200,000 and 300,000 children in the UK living with kinship carers (Children in Wales, 2014). In the

2001 census there were 7,400 kinship carers in Wales, two-thirds (66 per cent) of which were grandparents, and this was a considerably larger proportion than in England with 46 per cent or Scotland with 44 per cent (NAfW, 2012).

In Wales, girls are less likely to be living in kinship care compared to boys and 'the chances of children being in kinship care in Wales were inversely related to poverty' (Nandy *et al.*, 2011, p. 65). Echoing this point, it is predominately in the areas of Wales that have the highest concentration of deprivation that the highest proportions of children live with their relatives (NAfW, 2012). In a UK wide study it was identified that, in Wales, children who were 'experiencing multiple deprivations were three times more likely to be in a kinship household compared to children not multiply deprived' (Nandy *et al.*, 2011, p. 66).

Kinship carers are most likely to be grandparents, often over 65 years old with many having no educational or professional qualifications. In addition, these carers are more likely to be associated with poverty, long-term illnesses, disability, unemployment, considerable economic constraints, poorly paid jobs and few economic resources (Nandy *et al.*, 2011; NAfW, 2012). Despite these poverty and disadvantage indicators, evidence suggests that kinship placements offer a high degree of security, 'children cared for by relatives or friends often do better than those who are looked after by strangers' (Thomas, 2005, p. 99). In their review of the evidence, Brown and Sen (2014, p. 161) identified that in some kinship placements, stability was more likely to be achieved for some looked-after children while for others they were: 'more likely to experience problematic parental contact and problems within a child's immediate family may exist in the child's wider network.' As 90 per cent of kinship care 'arrangements do not involve 'looked after' children, it is clear that much remains to be learned about the needs and conditions of children and carers involved in kinship care in the UK' (Nandy *et al.*, 2011, p. 112). The focus now turns to another form of placement: adoption.

## **Adoption**

By the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, there were 274 looked-after children in Wales who were placed for adoption (Welsh Government, 2015c). Moreover, between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015 there were 383 children adopted from care, of which 11 per cent were adopted by their foster carer (Welsh Government, 2015c).

It is currently the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which provides the regulations and guidance about adoption. Established by the Act was the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) which:

...gives the special guardian parental responsibility for the child. Unlike adoption, under a SGO the parents remain the child's parents and retain parental responsibility, though their ability to exercise their parental responsibility is extremely limited (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 10).

In Wales, adoption is high on the political agenda and the National Adoption Service has been developed in order to increase the number of adoptive families, tackle delay and ensure equity across Wales in terms of service provision (Ottaway, Holland and Maxwell, 2014). In relation to the adoption support services in Wales, through adoption agencies' and adoptive parents' perspectives, it has been identified that within the climate of limited financial and service resources, adoption agencies reported that they were 'struggling to meet the needs of birth families and adopted adults in a consistent and timely manner' (Ottaway *et al.*, 2014, p. 94). (Ottaway *et al.*, 2014, p. 94) concluded that highly committed adoptive parents with limited support were managing highly complex needs and that the variety of support service provision was not consistent across Wales. Moreover, service provision was 'resource' led and not 'needs' led and more was required in terms of family finding and adopter recruitment.

Although adoption can be a positive intervention, some placements unfortunately break down or experience disruption (Wijedasa and Selwyn, 2014). It has been argued that the term 'disruption' should be given preference to the term, 'breakdown', as this suggests that relationships have ended (Wijedasa and Selwyn, 2014). Wijedasa and Selwyn (2014) note that in Wales between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2002 and 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2012 there were 2,352 children adopted of which 35 were identified as having 'disrupted' post adoption orders. Of these, 66 per cent experienced a 'disrupted' adoption while aged 11 years or older. The children who experienced a 'disrupted' post adoption order were:

...significantly more likely to have come into care on an Emergency Protection Order or under police protection. These were more likely to have been in care for two or more years before being placed for adoption compared with those in intact placements (Wijedasa and Selwyn, 2014, p. 34).

Despite this however, Wijedasa and Selwyn (2014) concluded that disruption rates post adoption are low overall.

In summary, this section has revealed how looked-after children are conceptualised both legally and socially; the key characteristics of what constitutes a looked-after child were also outlined. The discussion has shown that looked-after children and young people are not a homogenous group. Rather, they are a dynamic population constructed within complex, shifting occupational categories (Pinkney, 2000). It has been shown that through being constructed discursively as vulnerable, dependent and 'in need' of protection, their own voice and unique identity has been obscured for many looked-after children (Pinkney, 2000). In addition, it has been emphasised that the depiction of young people in relation to their legal status and official records: 'cannot describe the lived experience and embodied social world and affiliated identities of the looked after child' (Davey and Pithouse, 2008, p. 70). This point will be given further consideration in later chapters. For now, the focus moves on to exploration of the educational outcomes of looked-after children and young people.

### **Section Three: The Educational Attainment of Looked-After Children in Wales**

Until the mid to late 1980s, the educational outcomes of looked-after children were largely ignored in policy terms (Jackson, 1987). However, with the advance of new managerialist approaches within welfare, educational performance in the form of statistics has become something of a government policy obsession (Fergusson, 2000; Pinkney, 2000; Boyne, Farrell, Law, Powell and Walker, 2003). In particular, it was the advent of the UK evidence-based policy research agenda and the focus on a 'what works' agenda that fashioned a drive for 'hard' quantitative statistics (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006).

Examination outcomes of looked-after children have been available through the UK Department of Health returns since 1999 (Jackson, 2001). It has been well debated and documented that when compared to the school population as a whole, looked-after children and young people have consistently underperformed across all Key Stages within the education system (Ferguson, 1966; Jackson, 1987; Goddard, 2000; SEU, 2003; Driscoll, 2011; WAO, 2012; Welsh Government, 2015c). Furthermore, this gap continues to extend



throughout higher education (Stein, 2013). Despite this, as described by the Welsh Government, (2015a, p. 27):

...there has been a slight improvement in attainment for all pupils, but the attainment gap between children in need and all pupils has remained similar at each key stage. Children looked after have maintained a slightly higher level compared to other children in need.

In light of this, the focus now turns to explore selective aspects of the educational attainment of looked-after children in Wales, from the Foundation Phase through to Key Stage Four. For each phase, Welsh Government statistical sources will be provided.

### **The Foundation Phase**

Since devolution, Wales has developed its own framework for children's learning for those aged between three and seven years old. This approach is known as the Foundation Phase. Within the Foundation Phase, the Early Years (from three to five years old) and Key Stage One (from five to seven years old) of the National Curriculum were merged in order to create one phase of education (Welsh Government, 2015b). The premise of this phase is that children learn best through play (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a). The mandatory areas of learning in the Foundation Phase are: mathematical development; personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity; and language, literacy and communication skills, which can be studied in either Welsh or English (Welsh Government, 2015b). As of the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, out of a total of 245 looked-after children (135 boys / 110 girls), 64 per cent of looked-after children achieved the Foundation Phase compared with 87 per cent of all pupils in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016a). In terms of the gender composition, 59 per cent of looked-after boys and 72 per cent of looked-after girls achieved the Foundation Phase; this compared to 83 per cent of all non-looked-after boys and 91 per cent of all non-looked-after girls in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016a). These outcomes confirm that there is a clear attainment gap at this level of education.

### **Key Stage Two**

Moving on to Key Stage Two, this phase consists of pupils aged from seven to eleven years old (in School Year Groups Three - Six). At Key Stage Two, concerning 265 looked-after children, 64 per cent (170) achieved this level compared with 88 per cent of all pupils in Wales. In relation to meeting the Core

Subject Indicator at Key Stage Two, 60 per cent of looked-after boys and 68 per cent of looked-after girls met this level threshold - compared to 85 per cent of all non-looked-after boys and 91 per cent of all non-looked-after girls in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016a). In the year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, 60 per cent of care leavers achieved the Core Subject Indicator at Key Stage Two (a slight improvement compared to the previous year) (Welsh Government, 2015c). As with the attainment gap of the Foundation Phase, there is also a clear attainment gap between looked-after and non-looked-after pupils at Key Stage Two.

### **Key Stage Three**

Key Stage Three consists of pupils aged from 11 to 14 years old that are in school Year Groups Seven - Nine. The previous attainment gap trend is shown again in Key Stage Three. Of 295 looked-after children, 48 per cent achieved Key Stage Three compared to 84 per cent of all children. In terms of the gender composition of attainment at Key Stage Three, 44 per cent of looked-after boys and 53 per cent of looked-after girls achieved this level compared to 80 per cent of non-looked-after boys and 88 per cent of non-looked-after girls (Welsh Government, 2016a). In the year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, 43 per cent achieved the Core Subject Indicator for Key Stage Three (Welsh Government, 2015c). This outcome conversely, showed a slight improvement compared to 2013 (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 7).

Collectively, these outcomes reveal that the attainment gap between looked-after children and all pupils in Wales extends across the Foundation Phase, Key Stage Two and Key Stage Three. In addition, these outcomes confirmed that girls out-performed boys across the three phases (both looked-after and non-looked-after pupils). Furthermore, 'children in need who were looked after achieved slightly higher levels than children in need who were not looked after' (Welsh Government, 2016a, p. 22).

It is noted that education achievement results on the basis of gender are fraught with difficulties, which is a particular issue when analysing underachievement in schools (Smith, 2007). It is long recognised that 'poor working class boys' are not expected to achieve in education (Delamont, 1999) and this expectation extends to 'poor' working class girls and boys that reside in the care system (Jackson, 2013a). The Welsh Government (2015, p. 10) insists that: 'a child or young person's background must never limit their achievements'. It is, however,

only the most resilient of looked-after children that have the best chance of educational success (Jackson, 2000).

### **Key Stage Four**

Key Stage Four relates to pupils aged 14 to 16 years old (in school Year Groups Ten - Eleven). Students at this stage of their education journey in Wales are now provided with options of vocational and academic curriculum subjects through the Learning Pathways 14-19 framework. This framework was informed by the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (2009) and has resulted in young people attaining a mix of both academic and vocational qualifications (Welsh Government, 2010). In an era of educational competition within a skills-based economy, GCSE results are highly scrutinised (Berridge, Dance, Beecham and Field, 2008). For students that are deemed 'weaker' compared to their 'brighter' peers, these young people are often entered for General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) instead of GCSEs, as GNVQs 'can count as the equivalent of four GCSEs' (Claxton, 2008, p. 39). In 2005 nine out of ten improved schools in England achieved their success by entering more than usual numbers of students for GNVQs over GCSEs (Claxton, 2008). This outcome prompted the government to revise its key indicators to include maths and English at GCSE level (Claxton, 2008). Therefore, within the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and within a global era of educational competition, these higher results showed another encouraging rise in attainment levels at Key Stage Four (Claxton, 2008).

Achieving the normative Key Stage Four level of attainment equates to reaching the Level 2 threshold of five GCSEs at grade A\* - C (Welsh Government, 2015b). This level of attainment is also referred to as the 'Level 2 inclusive' (Welsh Government, 2015a). Moreover, the Level 2 threshold: 'is considered the baseline of proficiency at which students begin to demonstrate competencies to actively participate in life' (OECD, 2014, p. 5). Regarding the educational outcomes at Key Stage Four, within a total of 320 looked-after children, only 60 (18 per cent) achieved the Level 2 threshold (including a GCSE grade A\* - C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics), compared to 58 per cent of all pupils in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016a). The Level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A\* - C in mathematics and English or Welsh (first language) was achieved by 16 per cent of looked-after boys and 19 per cent of looked-after

girls. This compares with 54 per cent of boys and 62 per cent of girls who were non-looked-after pupils in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016a).

The difference between looked-after children and all pupils at Key Stage Four (Level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A\* - C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics), 'was 40 percentage points for both 2011 and 2015' (Welsh Government, 2016a, p. 24). These results clearly reveal the marked differences in the attainment levels between looked-after children and their non-looked-after peers. In the year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, the Welsh Government estimated that of the 713 care leavers (children aged 16 or over who ceased being looked after), 562 (79 per cent) achieved at least one qualification including: GCSEs, GNVQs, NVQs, advanced level GNVQs, A levels, and any other qualifications approved under the Education Act 1996 (s400) (Welsh Government, 2015c). Drilling down further: 453 (64 per cent) of care leavers achieved at least one GCSE A\*- G or GNVQ; 277 (39 per cent) achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\*- G; while only 80 (11 per cent) gained 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\*- C (the pathway to higher and further education and employment or training), compared to 10 per cent in 2012-13 (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 8).

Overall, looked-after children across the Foundation Phase and Key Stages Two, Three and Four 'have maintained a slightly higher level compared to other children in need' (Welsh Government, 2016a, p. 22). Moreover, at Key Stage Four, there has been a slight improvement in attainment for all pupils (Welsh Government, 2016a). Having outlined the attainment levels at each Phase, this chapter now considers the complexity of measuring low attainment through official statistics and discusses the limitations of the term 'underachievement'.

### **The Problem of Measuring Low Attainment and the Limitations of the Term 'Underachievement'**

In relation to the value of educational attainment and performance outcomes, as some have described: 'all official statistics have their limitations' (Berridge, Henry, Jackson and Turney, 2009, p. 89). A further criticism of official statistics is the way they present looked-after children as a homogenous group, ignoring their diversity (Chase, Simon and Jackson, 2006; Berridge *et al.*, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2009). Official statistics do not give the context of a young person's educational experience, the quality of their education or the particular circumstances within their care placement and are therefore problematic to

interpret (Smith, 2007). By way of further criticism, Smith (2007) notes that many 'underachievers' go on to achieve within further and higher education thereby challenging the stereotypical and often negative characteristics associated with the looked-after population. Consequently, these statistics cannot be considered as adequate indicators of the quality of education or the quality of care (Berridge, 2007). In terms of the value of statistical data, some have highlighted that the issue should be: '...whether examination results reflect school performance or socio-economic factors' (Boyne *et al.*, 2003, p. 128). Berridge (2007) maintains that published statistics are by no means clear cut. Within a context of pressures on schools and pupils to achieve performance indicators, Berridge (2007) notes that errors can be made; interpretations can be problematic and gaps can occur within data collection. Further, Berridge (2007, p. 4) argues that: 'the underlying rationale behind certain indicators may be misleading or flawed.'

The three Welsh Government sources of statistical outcomes concerning looked-after children offer an overall snap-shot of educational attainment. The WAO (2012, p. 4) argues that: 'the attainment of looked after children and young people is improving slowly but many are not achieving their potential, there is too much variation in attainment, and weaknesses in data hamper its evaluation.' It has been well recognized that despite educational standards rising constantly year after year, the gap in attainment between looked-after children and their non-looked-after peers is actually widening (Jackson and Cameron, 2012). As argued by the Welsh Government (2015, p. 10), low performance levels within education are 'unacceptable' as:

Too many children who are looked after will leave compulsory education with few or no qualifications and are being failed by a system which can all too often lead to children who are looked after becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) or within the youth justice system. This is not always the case, but we need to improve the life chances of children who are looked after within a system that all too often accepts poor performance with some inevitability.

Moreover, research over time has identified that from care leavers' perspectives, it was school itself that they recalled as having a negative effect on their attainment and their employment chances (Biehal, Clayden, Stein and Wade, 1994; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Allen, 2003; SEU, 2003; Stein, 2008; Bilson, Price and Stanley, 2011). Despite a variety of Welsh Government initiatives

which are to be addressed in the next chapter, Berridge (2012, p. 1175) observes that improving the low attainment of looked-after children and care leavers: 'may be more fundamental and difficult to remedy.' Having identified numerous problems and limitations of measuring attainment levels of looked-after children through statistical sources, the focus now moves on to explore the problem and limitations of the term 'underachievement'.

One problem and limitation of measuring achievement is that the term 'underachievement' can 'disguise the true nature of patterns of learning in schools' (Smith, 2007, p. 171). Underachievement can be described as school performance: 'measured by grades, that is substantially below what would be predicted on the basis of the student's mental ability, typically measured by intelligence or standard academic tests' (McCall, Evahn and Kratzer, 1992, p. 54). In this context, the most tangible outcome of schooling is premised upon the increasing scrutiny of examination performance which has led to some sections of the school population being labelled as underachieving or failing (Smith, 2007). At age sixteen, low educational achievements are often associated with socio-economic deprivation and 'disadvantaged students are more likely to attend poorly performing schools' (Cassen, Feinstein and Graham, 2012, p. 38). However, the majority of looked-after children are of 'normal intelligence' (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001, p. 1). Yet at the same time there is a perception that is emphasised through local and national media that looked-after children, through their often low educational achievement, are characteristically labelled as abnormal 'underachievers' (Walker, 1994; Welbourne and Leeson, 2012).

Underachievement is frequently associated with low attainment and adopted by the media in the UK as a ready explanation for what is wrong with education (Smith, 2007). Despite the ubiquity of the term 'underachievement' in education debates, it is inherently inadequate in regard to grasping 'what is happening with regard to the relative achievement of students in school' (Smith, 2007, p. 155). Thus, Smith (2007, p. 171) argues that 'underachievement':

...has probably outlived its usefulness. The lack of clarity in its use has led to multiple meanings that sometimes disguise the true nature of patterns of learning in schools.

Thus some now argue that the term should be replaced with 'low achievement' (Berridge, 2012, p. 5). Smith (2007) has suggested that low achievement can be shown to apply to pupils from the poorest homes, whereas underachievement is

understood more as an individual phenomenon. In order to produce positive outcomes, Berridge (2012:1175) suggests: 'the care system should not operate in such a way that repeats those factors that lead to the attainment gap.'

An overarching theme within this debate is whether looked-after children's underachievement is due to the care system or the education system, or both of these at the same time. Berridge (2012, p. 1172) has reported a longstanding misperception caused by confusing correlation with causation where 'commentators have often falsely linked the low attainments of children in care to the care experience itself'. Berridge *et al.* (2008) have suggested that the care system is not inherently damaging to children's attainment, indeed they suggest that it is generally beneficial. As most young people enter the care system aged 13 to 15 years old, Stein (2013) asks if the care system itself is the immediate variable which influences outcomes and identifies pre-care adversities as a potential factor in low achievement. Berridge (2012) suggests that low attainment in England has unfairly been linked to unsatisfactory social work services. Others such as Thomas (2005, p. 180) propose that: 'the evidence does not suggest that in general admission to care actually depresses children's educational achievement.' St Claire and Osborne (1987) argued that education was given a low priority by families before young people entered the care system. It has also been suggested that children bring their educational problems into the care system (Department of Health, 1991a). Conversely, Jackson and McParlin (2006, p. 91) have observed: 'if early adversity were the main reason for low attainment, one would expect children who come into care at an early age to do better than those who enter later, but there is no evidence that this is the case'. Jackson (2013b) believes that the care system does indeed fail looked-after children and offers three explanations: that it fails to provide stability for children; that it fails to support their transition to adulthood; and that it fails to educate them in terms of Key Stage outcomes as evidenced in annual government statistical data (Jackson, 2013b). Thomas (2005) notes that even though some children and young people experience long-term placement stability, the care system is still failing to raise their overall level of educational success in step with their non-looked-after peers. For Forrester *et al.* (2009), care is not universally effective yet it is often positive for many and this has been lost in the general perception that it typically fails young people. By contrast, it has been argued that the care and education systems combined are essentially responsible for looked-after children's underachievement and low attainment

(Fletcher-Cambell and Hall, 1990). Forrester *et al.* (2009, p. 452) argue that instead of adopting a deficit focus upon care, there needs to be 'a more nuanced appreciation of the contribution it can make.'

Beyond these central arguments, there are other factors that need to be taken into account when exploring looked-after children's low levels of attainment. Building on Jackson's (1987) original work, five explanations for looked-after children's low attainment have been presented as follows: pre-care educational experiences (including a lack of secure meaningful relationships and attachments and a sense of belonging); broken schooling; low expectations; low self-esteem; and a lack of continuity of the caregiver (Sinclair, 1998). In 2003, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2003, p. 4) presented its own five reasons why looked-after children and young people underachieve within the education system. These were:

1. Too many young people's lives are characterised by instability.
2. Young people spend too much time out of school.
3. Young people do not have sufficient help with their education if they fall behind.
4. Carers are not equipped or expected to provide sufficient support and encouragement at home for learning and development.
5. Young people need more help with their emotional, mental or physical health and wellbeing.

Similar and additional reasons have been offered that include: inadequate corporate parenting; the care environment; a failure to prioritise education; inappropriate expectations; placement instability; disrupted schooling; and poor pre-care experiences (Hayden, 2005). It has also been argued that a lack of educational resources in care placements can relate to low attainment (Hatton and Marsh, 2007). Furthermore, Berridge (2012) outlines six reasons: prior attainment; special educational needs; parental background; the role of the school; deprivation and access to material and educational resources; young people's attitudes and behaviour; and the in-care status.

There is often an overlap between these explanations and some issues are far more longstanding in their status than others. Sinclair (1998) and Hayden (2005) both cite 'pre-care experiences' while Berridge (2012) referred to this as 'prior attainment'. Hatton and Marsh (2007) and Berridge (2012) have suggested that



looked-after children experience a lack of material and educational resources whilst residing in care. Another factor mentioned is 'broken schooling' due to young people spending time out of school in between placements (Sinclair, 1998; SEU, 2003; Hayden, 2005). Hayden (2005) suggests that a failure to prioritise education and inappropriate expectations hamper efforts, while Sinclair (1998) referred to a lack of continuity of caregiver. These factors were also reported by the SEU (2003) with carers not being equipped or expected to provide sufficient support and encouragement at home for learning and development.

Having outlined a range of explanations, the following overlapping and recurring themes that are used to explain looked-after children's 'low attainment', will now be discussed in further detail through the following topics: pre-care educational experiences (including a lack of secure meaningful relationships and attachments or a sense of belonging); and low expectations from significant others. Finally, a discussion relating to the importance of aspirations will be provided.

### **Explaining Looked-After Children's 'Low Attainment' – 'Pre-Care Experiences'**

Having a secure family background has been suggested as a major contributor to success in education (Jencks, 1972; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998; SEU, 2003; Thomas, 2005; O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007; Smith, 2007; Berridge, 2012). As described by the SEU (2003, p. 21): 'if children are unable to develop secure bonds with carers, particularly when very young, it can have a significant impact on their development and learning'. In particular, having a sense of belonging (achieved through meaningful attachments and relationships with others, (see Shemmings, 2016) is considered to be a basic human need (Maslow, 1962). A lack of meaningful, continued and secure attachments and a related sense of belonging 'can seriously affect their school life and ability to learn' (Phillips, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, developing a sense of belonging is central when considering the needs of any vulnerable child or young person (Gilligan, 2006; Noble-Carr, Barker, McArthur and Woodman, 2014). Noble-Carr Barker, McArthur and Woodman (2014) outline four domains that are essential for building positive identity and meaning which comprise: caring relationships; participation and contribution within communities; competence; and hope for the future. They suggest that taken collectively, these four domains can assist in

fostering a sense of belonging (Noble-Carr *et al.*, 2014). The absence of a sense of belonging has 'been linked to problems in social and psychological functioning' (Hagerty, Williams and Oe, 2002, p. 793). Jackson and Martin (1998) argue that one of the protective factors associated with later educational success is learning to read early and fluently. It has been suggested that looked-after children: 'do poorly at school, largely because of early experiences' (Berridge, 2002, p. 100). Sinclair (1998, p. 8) echoes this point in reminding us that: 'the great majority who are looked after come from disadvantaged homes, a circumstance associated with reduced social and cognitive development'.

Pringle (1965) explored the effects of pre-care deprivation upon language development, intellectual growth and education process. Pringle (1965, p.172) referred to the children in residential public care as having been deprived of a 'normal' family life and stated that: 'deprived children have greater educational difficulties than those living in their own homes.' Within this study Pringle sought the viewpoints of residential care staff, rather than the 'deprived' children themselves. It was revealed that receiving a disproportionate number of 'unfavourable school reports' relating to children in residential care was a 'natural occurrence' (Pringle, 1965, p. 172). Pringle (1965) suggested the idea of residential staff being more active in their approach to children's educational development as a means to remedy the children's pre-care schooling difficulties and their future attainment. It was argued that staff should be:

...talking to the children, reading and telling them stories, getting them to make up and act simple plays about everyday occurrences, encouraging them to relate small happenings that take place during the day to express their feelings, ideas and thoughts (Pringle, 1965, p. 180).

A decade later it was revealed that more consideration was being given to the social and emotional development of children in care, but their cognitive development was being overlooked (Essen, Lambert and Head, 1976). More recently, it was identified that genetic factors account for about a fifth of the difference in the attainment gap (Goodman and Gregg, 2010). However, some observers dispute this significance as innate intelligence may well play some part (Berridge, 2012). Berridge (2012), notes that more emphasis should be placed upon the future as the past is not subject to change. Moreover, Sinclair (1998, p. 9) argues that to remedy the effects of pre-care deprivation, looked-after children need even more support than they currently receive: 'they need

additional help and support to compensate for earlier deprivation and distress.’ The focus now turns to explore the ‘low expectation’ discourse of looked-after children’s educational abilities from key welfare practitioners.

### **Explaining Looked-After Children’s ‘Low Attainment’ - ‘Low Expectations’**

Looked-after children have consistently highlighted how welfare practitioners (teachers, social workers and carers) hold ‘low expectations’ about their educational potential (Elliott, 2002; SEU, 2003; Jackson, 2010a; Berridge, 2012; Mannay, Staples, Hallett, Roberts, Rees, Evans and Andrews, 2015). Jackson (2010) argues that there needs to be a far more positive culture towards the expectations others have of looked-after children. In terms of their time in school, Elliott (2002) discovered that teachers expected looked-after children not to be able to meet homework deadlines and that they were victims of bullying, more often than their non-looked-after peers.

Research by the Institute of Education (2015) revealed how teachers perceived students from poorer disadvantaged backgrounds or those with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) as less able when compared to their peers (Adams, 2015). For a child or young person issued with a SEN, this indicates, crudely, that they have learning challenges which require special educational provision (Welsh Government, 2015b). Thomas (2005, p. 183) suggests this factor alone: ‘would lead one to expect that the average level of achievement of looked after children would be lower than that of the general population’. Fletcher-Campbell and Archer (2003) observed that one-third of the looked-after young people in their study were statemented and that this in some way became self-fulfilling in anticipating failure during their Key Stage Four assessments. In 2015, of the 3,400 children in need who were looked-after, 1,265 children had no special educational needs while 640 children (19 per cent) had a SEN (Welsh Government, 2016a). Compared to 3 per cent for pupils in Wales (for all ages), the average proportion of children in need with a SEN was 27 per cent (for all ages) (Welsh Government, 2016a, p. 2).

Being looked-after, however, does not automatically imply the need for special education (Berridge, 2012). The Wales Audit Office (2012, p. 19) notes that: ‘the low achievement of looked after children is not accounted for by the relatively high proportion who have additional learning needs.’ Jackson and McParlin

(2006) argue that having a SEN is likely to be understood by teachers and social workers as implying low intelligence. Prior to the 1980s, children termed as having 'special learning needs' were labelled as 'educationally sub-normal' (ESN) pupils and educated outside mainstream schools (James and James, 2004). Specifically, it was the Warnock Report (1978) that argued that categorising and excluding these children was more likely to result in stigma and failure than achievement and success. Thus there was a change from classifying children as ESN to the less pejorative SEN label (James and James, 2004).

Jackson and Sachdev (2001) discovered that many looked-after children felt their potential was undermined by school staff. In a longitudinal study, Davey (2006, p. 266) described that in one authority in south Wales, there was some evidence that key practitioners 'tended to take a rather pessimistic view of the education potential of the young people and did not vigorously promote their inclusion or achievement.' As some have described, teachers can be mentioned as the most common source of academic support however, a minority of young people explain that teachers have a lack of understanding of their looked-after status and feel that they had been stereotyped as low achievers (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Akhurst, Berridge and Sinclair, 2004).

In a different study (Dixon, Wade, Byford, Weatherly and Lee, 2006) the views of 106 young people across seven local authorities in England were explored prior to them leaving care. Dixon and colleagues (2006, p.80) discovered that 54 per cent had left school with: 'no qualifications at all.' Regarding the leaving care practitioner input: 'the motivation for encouraging participation was not always aimed at attainment per se' (Dixon *et al.*, 2006, p. 87). Numerous young people: 'were often undertaking fairly low-level courses that may not necessarily push them up the career ladder' (Dixon *et al.*, 2006, p. 87). For many looked-after children in compulsory education, being in care is associated with lower GCSE grades, for example, 'G' and 'F' grades (Berridge, 2012). It is unknown whether this:

is linked to the specific reasons for being in care which are not accounted for in the family background and parenting factors, such as neglect or abuse; or they might be attributable to particular ways in which care services operate (Berridge, 2012, p. 1174).

By stark contrast, Monbiot (2015) writhing in the Guardian (online), has suggested that elites, in their cause of self-advancement, engender aspirational

parents who condemn 'their children to a desperate, joyless life' of status seeking and ladder-climbing. He cites one example where parents: 'had already decided that their six-month-old son would go to Cambridge then Deutsche Bank.'

In another account of aspirational parents, their two-year-old daughter already:

...had a tutor for two afternoons a week (to keep on top of maths and literacy) as well as weekly phonics and reading classes, drama, piano, beginner French and swimming. They were considering adding Mandarin and Spanish (Monbiot, 2015).

Regarding middle-class parents, it is argued that they are more likely to relate to the school system as it is a key source of mobility and cultural capital (Laureau, 1987). Moreover, it is recognised that middle-class parents take an active role in their child's education (Smith, 2007; Jackson, 2010a; Berridge, 2012; Ball, 2013). Berridge (2012, p.1175) has argued that: 'the State should have positive expectations for the children it looks after in the same way that middle class families do'. He describes how middle class families (through house purchases and moves) usually plan their lives around their children's education and argues: 'the State should give the same priority to the education of children in care' (Berridge, 2012, p. 1174). In contrast, instead of accepting elite, upper and middle class norms which problematise the working classes, Reay (2001) suggests it would be more productive to problematise conceptions of restless social mobility and an associated meritocracy; which are after all middle-class practices. This may be more difficult to problematise however, as the British education system, despite more than 100 years of universal state education, continues to serve middle-class interests: 'which valorizes middle - rather than working-class cultural capital' (Reay, 2001, p. 334). Unlike their upper and middle class counterparts, many working class looked-after children and young people experience a lack of continuity and many receive very little support from their families (Sinclair, 1998). Moreover, and to reiterate an earlier point: 'their social workers are pressed for time; there is a rapid turnover in care staff - all this means there is no-one to take a broad interest in their schooling' (Sinclair, 1998, p. 10). Harker, Dobel-Ober, Lawrence, Berridge and Sinclair (2003) revealed an absence of significant pro-education relationships amongst looked-after children and adults in their study. As stated by Jackson and Martin (1998), the protective factors essential for later educational success are: stability and continuity; having a parent or carer who values education; having friends outside

of care who did well at school; developing hobbies; consistent encouragement and support and from adults and attending school regularly. In addition, looked-after children and young people:

...should have the same opportunities as other children to education, including further education. They should also be offered other opportunities for development, such as leisure and extracurricular activities (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001, p. 1).

### **The Importance of Aspirations**

While the body of research on looked-after children and education in the UK is relatively modest in scale it is evident that looked-after children and young people are not somehow 'different' from their non-looked-after peers. They are likely to share comparable aspirations (Davey, 2006; DCSF, 2010; Estyn, 2016). In Davey's (2006, p. 264) small sample of looked-after young people in Wales, it was discovered that 'most of the sample had much the same ambitions and aspirations as other young people and against the odds some did very well.' Similarly, the aspirations mentioned by looked-after young people in a different study included: becoming a firefighter, a barber, attending college and university, and having a loving family and friends (Driscoll, 2011). In a more recent study, it was emphasised that the majority of children and young people consulted were not lacking aspiration (Mannay *et al.*, 2015). The chosen vocations comprised: 'hairdressing, teaching, farming, acting, policing and being a vet, a chef or owning a hotel' (Mannay *et al.*, 2015, p. 69).

Mannay *et al.* (2015) identified that many future aspirations were often connected to personal interests and activities the children enjoyed and that they were also influenced by family and friends. Berridge (2012) observed that some young people from challenging social backgrounds were often held back regarding their aspirations as a result of their own attitudes and behaviours. In a small study of 14 looked-after young people in England by the DCSF (2010), it was described that most expressed a high level of fatalism over their circumstances. Although their aspirations ranged from having financial security, a good job and career, and a comfortable home and loving family, many did not appear to have confidence in achieving their desired futures (DCSF, 2010). Jackson and Martin (1998, p. 580) identified from their study of 'high achievers' that whilst they were residing in public care:

...career advice was either absent or pitched at a very low level. Women who now hold higher degrees were advised to go in for nursery nursing or secretarial training. Catering was the career most often recommended to boys.

Honey, Rees, and Griffey (2011) compared the aspirations of 51 looked-after children (22 males and 29 females) and 99 non-looked-after children (56 males and 43 females) in school years 7 to 10, in two neighbouring local authorities in Wales. They identified that amongst the non-looked-after young people nearly 50 per cent desired to be in a professional role compared to 10 per cent of the looked-after sample. In terms of gender composition, looked-after males chose skilled manual roles and looked-after females chose teaching, caring and health and beauty professions (Honey, Rees and Griffey, 2011). Investigating the positive educational experiences of looked-after children and young people, Cann (2012) explored the ambitions of nine looked-after young people in England, of which six were in foster care and three in residential care. Notable differences between the aspirations of the young people were apparent with those in residential care more concerned with the goal of obtaining GCSEs, whilst young people in foster care spoke more about their long-term plans with several mentioning a desire to attend university (Cann, 2012).

Another study suggested that the home learning environment and support from carers must be encouraging in order for looked-after children to have high aspirations (Brodie, 2010). Banbury, Schlösser and Taylor's (2014), small study of three males and four females aged 12-16 years old in foster care revealed interesting differences. They discovered that past family involvements with their biological parents, holiday excursions, and relationships with foster carers, teachers and mentors were all key influences that informed aspirations. Regarding their career ambitions, two young males desired to join the army and three females cited working with children. Most planned to marry and have their own family. The influence of the media was referred to in stimulating identity formation and role aspiration. Moreover, being part of wider community activities was identified as important for encouraging young people's aspirations towards an adult future (Banbury, Schlösser and Taylor, 2014). This was similar to findings by (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Lawrence, Berridge and Sinclair, 2003) who argued that out-of-school interests were necessary for educational attainment. As described by Banbury *et al.* (2014, p. 122):

findings emphasise the significant role that the wider systems around the individual can play in facilitating the necessary development and opportunities for these aspirations to become a reality in the future lives of these young people.

## **Concluding Comments**

This selective review of largely UK research will provide a foundation in which the findings and analysis in later chapters can be contextualised. This chapter has outlined the 'public welfare child' discourse together with a range of definitions and understandings that shape our knowledge of what constitutes being a looked-after child. It has been shown how looked-after young people are positioned within complex and shifting occupational constructs within an ever evolving (and devolving) UK welfare state. It has been described that looked-after young people are typically constructed through their subordinated categorisation as 'abnormal' subjects in terms of their vulnerability, victimhood and/or threat to order (Hendrick, 1994; Pinkney, 2000; Hendrick, 2003). It is, however, their own voices that, when authentically heard, set a serious challenge to these dominant constructions and reveal them as no different to other children and young people in regard to their needs and capacities. This literature review concludes that the central areas of concern for looked-after young people's education assemble around three themes: pre-care educational experiences (including a lack of secure meaningful relationships and attachments and a sense of belonging); low expectations; and the importance of aspirations. These themes will help inform the analysis to come and will be drawn upon extensively. The next chapter continues the exploration of the looked-after child and their education but from a different standpoint, that of key legislation and policy, together with some reprise of the 'public welfare child' discourse and how this impacts upon those charged with promoting the education of looked-after children and young people.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Understanding Looked-After Children and their Educational Achievement through Legislation, Policy and the ‘Public Welfare Child’ Discourse**

##### **Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the macro level, legislative and policy developments with regard to looked-after children’s education, specifically within a Welsh context. The objective of this chapter is twofold. First, to reprise the ‘public welfare child’ discourse as it will be seen in later chapters that Hendrick’s (1994; 2003) narrative analysis of children as ‘victims’ and ‘threats’ finds strong resonance with the ways in which LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners make sense of looked-after young people’s identities and their educational attainment. Second, to understand how the ‘public welfare child’ discourse impacts upon and shapes the LACE Coordinators’ and their team practitioners’ interpretations and enactments of policy and practice. It will be argued that key legislation and policies tell us relatively little about the complex and often underlying structures that shape this area of child welfare, nor anything about the way that statute, policy and regulations are mediated by LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners. Before considering elements of the ‘public welfare child’ discourse within key post-war UK legislation and policy in order to glean something of the ways the looked-after child is formally constructed, the policy-making process is first considered.

##### **The Policy-Making Process**

It was through the development of ‘policy networks’ that governments themselves ‘...became but one actor in the policy-making process and dependent upon the expertise and goodwill of others to achieve its goals’ (Lowe, 2005, p. 57). This expertise or knowledge, however, is never static; it is endless, in a context where there is no ‘true’ source of knowledge beyond how it is constructed, it changes over time, and becomes more complex through different historical, social, cultural, political and ideological epochs (Adams, 2014). Thus

as 'knowledge is located in perspectives on, and assumptions about, the world, with particular practical, ethical and political implications' (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004, p. 13), consequently there are always going to be competing ways of knowing or expertise. Policy has been cast as an enlightenment concept linked to the notion of progress; it is hence about transforming something that has inadequacies to something that works well (Ball, 2008). In the case of looked-after children's educational attainment, policy therefore has a creation cycle, it needs to be created before it can be enacted (Adams, 2014). According to Rein (1983) at a national level the policy-making process involves three basic steps: defining a problem; the mobilisation of action by government agencies; the achievement of a settlement in the face of the identified problem (Rein, 1983 cited in Trowler, 2003, p. 96). After a problem is defined the policy-making process begins, often in tandem with the present-day political process (Trowler, 2003). From the late 1970s in a drive to roll back the state and its hierarchy of power (Lowe, 2005), policy-making became what Adams (2014, p. 28) terms 'a problem-solving event', made possible through new policy networks in an attempt to share power in a 'shared process of exchange' (Lowe, 2005, p. 57). Further, as a vehicle for making informed decisions where discovering what does not work is as crucial as discovering what does work (Gorard and Huat See, 2013). Hence, the effectiveness of possible government interventions is emphasised increasingly in terms of 'evidence' (Quinn, 2002), and it is now this 'evidence' that validates knowledge concerning child welfare (King and Piper, 1995). At the root of this thesis is the LACE front-line team staff's interpretation of the legislation and subsequent policies that are directed to them and how they have implemented the policy and established the education support provisions that they have a duty to provide. It is this 'evidence' therefore, drawn from their distinctive perspectives that will provide insights to this topic.

Within the evidential status of policy research it perhaps could be argued that looked-after children's education policies are part of the 'political/tactical model' of policy research, which can be described as a model where 'studies [are] commissioned and/or used to support the position adopted by the government of the day, the relevant minister, or perhaps the civil servants most closely concerned' (Young, Ashby, Boaz and Grayson, 2002, p. 217). Thus the looked-after education underachievement topic is politically driven alongside a focus on the normative achievement (5 GCSEs grade A\* - C) pathway, which each year,

is compared to the attainment of looked-after young people's non-looked-after peers.

Notwithstanding the best interests of actors within the policy-making process, contradictions within the process can occur (Adams, 2014). Rather than being static, policy is typically a process with different outcomes (Ball, 2008) as policy can be seen as words, deeds, text, and action which are enacted as well as intended (Ball, 1994). However, the unintended consequences identified between intentions and consequences (James, Bathmaker and Waller, 2010), show how 'policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map a 'wild profusion' of local practice' (Ball, 1994, p. 10). Policy developments are subjectively defined by the observer (Hill and Hupe, 2009) and, as stated by Ball (2008), policies, legislation and guidelines are often messy, confused, unclear, contradictory and interpreted and contested in a variety of ways. Consequently, policy is not a precise reflection of intent or a true representation of reality and therefore it is not value free, simply understood or applied; instead it is actively consumed and performed in practice (Adams, 2014). In order to glean something of the ways that looked-after children and young people are formally constructed, we now move on to consider elements of the 'public welfare child' discourse within key post-war UK legislation and policy.

### **The Children Act 1948**

As outlined in Chapter Two, it was argued that from the mid-twentieth century a new practitioner welfarism (Hendrick, 1994) was built upon the founding of the UK's modern child care law (Eekelaar and Dingwall, 1990). The introduction of the Education Act 1944 and the Children Act 1948 promoted an ever closer approach to children and their relationship with public services (Cameron, 2003). In this new dawn of family support and child protection, vulnerable children once identified as 'threats' to order became more visible as 'public welfare children' in need of welfare services.

In 1946 the landmark Curtis Report was the first UK enquiry 'directed specifically to the care of children deprived of a normal home life' (Hendrick, 2003, p. 133). Not satisfied with provisions for children entering into the care of local authorities, the Curtis Report (1946) provided the foundation for the Children Act 1948. This Act established 'Children's Departments' in a period where society was becoming more sympathetic in its attempt to normalise vulnerable children

who hitherto had been identified as threats to wider society (Hendrick, 2003; Mubi Brighenti, 2010). In essence Children's Departments were established to manage vulnerable children constructed as both 'victims' and 'threats': 'in order to control them, sort them, train them and get them accustomed to the norm' (Foucault, 1999 cited in Mubi Brighenti, 2010, p. 173). In so doing, the 'psy' practitioners, via the Children Act 1948, endeavoured to provide a type of care that gave all children a sense of their individual worth (Thomas, 2002). Invoking the notion of 'normalisation', this approach aimed not only to maintain the state's legitimacy, but also protect vulnerable children (Parton, 1998).

Specifically, the Children Act 1948 was the first piece of legislation which positioned public welfare children through the discourse of 'investments' in children themselves through their own 'responsibilisation' and in wider society (Hendrick, 1994). The Act placed a duty on local authorities to further the child's best interests and invest in the young person by providing proper development of their character and abilities (Cameron, 2003; Stein, 2012). Remaining a cornerstone of the structure of children's services for over forty years, the Children Act 1948 marked a substantial step away from reliance on voluntary organisations, the clergy, family doctors and neighbours concerning welfare problems towards reliance on trained, paid practitioners (social workers and children's officers) employed by local authorities (Hendrick, 2003; Bainham and Gilmore, 2013). Thus the Act 'established a centralised and coherent child care structure, with trained personnel and local-authority children's officers' (Hendrick, 1994, p. 6). These new practitioners, identified as child 'experts', shared responsibility to contribute to children's social well-being and 'the best interests of the child' (Parton, 1998, p. 16). During this period much of social work knowledge was based on psychoanalytic theory (Jackson, 2010b). As outlined within the Children Act 1948, if a child or young person was unable to be cared for by their relatives, their care and general welfare was to be provided through 'experts' within the local authority (Cameron, 2003). For looked-after children identified as 'victims' as a result of their looked-after status, the main and enduring principles of the Act included eventual restoration to their birth parents and an emphasis on 'boarding-out' (fostering) over residential care placements (Hendrick, 2003). In addition to offering care and general welfare, local authorities were required to provide accommodation and for the upbringing and maintenance of children and young people until their eighteenth birthday (Cameron, 2003).

At this point in post war Britain state education (for looked-after children and young people) was the central responsibility of the Home Office and later the Department for Health, rather than of the Department of Education (Jackson, 2010b; Bainham and Gilmore, 2013). This resulted in an era where education in policy terms and in practice became less important, becoming almost neglected, as education was not amalgamated into care planning (Jackson, 2010b). In their critique of the Children Act 1948, Eekelaar and Dingwall (1990) argued that the Act represented a humanitarian rhetoric, marking a fresh and progressive political perception of society's duties towards children and their rights. Additionally, Cameron (2003) described the Children Act 1948 as having shifted the perspective of the term 'care' away from basic needs towards the quality of public care provided by local authorities. Notably, this signified a high point for the care of vulnerable children in mid-twentieth century Britain as the term 'care' had widened and had come to equate with 'welfare' (Cameron, 2003; Petrie, 2003).

### **The Children and Young Persons Act 1969**

Central to the legislative authority of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 was the location of vulnerable children through the continuing discourses of 'threats' and 'victims' (Hendrick, 1994). These enduring constructions of the public welfare child featured in the Ingleby Report (established in 1956) which 'united deprivation and depravation through delinquency and neglect, both of which were seen as products of the disturbed family' (Frost and Stein, 1989 cited in Hendrick, 1994, p. 11). Hendrick (1997) notes that this Act heavily relied on the family approach to treatment of 'offending' children in their own homes rather than in the juvenile court. However, this substitution of care proceedings over criminal prosecution concentrated on 'delinquency' over neglect and cruelty (Hendrick, 1997). Emerging from this Act was state paternalism which placed 'a greater emphasis on substitute care and on protecting children' (Hendrick, 1997, p. 60). Moreover, the Act signalled the beginning of a managerial role in terms of target setting and assessment (Cameron, 2003). For looked-after children: 'successful achievement of these targets is assumed to indicate an improved quality in care' (Cameron, 2003, p. 91).

From the late 1960s reliance by social workers upon psychoanalytical theory become gradually displaced by theories of attachment (Jackson, 2010b). Situated as a psychological developmental theory, attachment theory was

developed by John Bowlby and advanced by Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). As stated by Bowlby (1969), the foundation for later development is dependent upon the maternal bond a child forms with their mother during early infancy. In this gendered account of care, Bowlby considered that attachment is measurable through: 'observation of how a very young child behaves towards his mother, both in her presence and especially in her absence, can contribute greatly to our understanding of personality development' (Bowlby, 1969, p. 3). Thus this means that within attachment theory our sense of self is produced through our early interactions with our care providers when we are in our infancy (Winnicott, 1984 [1958]). Attachment theory therefore offers 'a powerful lens through which to understand carer-child (or carer-adult) interactions' (Shemmings, 2016). The introduction of attachment theory led to an emphasis upon placement relationships concerning looked-after children and as a result a lack of external attention towards children's lives and their education per se (Jackson, 2010b). Education had also become lost within the employment environment of the 1960s when the working classes generally left school at fifteen and went into often unskilled or semi-skilled labour (Jackson, 2010b). In this era, working-class pupils attending secondary modern schools were unlikely to be entered for examinations due to a low skilled manufacturing environment which did not require educational qualifications (Jackson, 2010b). Thus, educationally and occupationally, looked-after children and young people from working class backgrounds were not considerably more disadvantaged than their non-looked-after working class peers (Jackson, 2000).

### **The Children Act 1989**

Striking a new balance between the protection of children and family autonomy, it was the Children Act 1989 which specifically reorganised existing child public law into a single instrument (Bainham, 1992; Cameron, 2003). It has been described that the Act's ambit remains significant and encompassing and continues to delineate much contemporary public law and practice for children in care (Pithouse, 2011). Described as the most comprehensive piece of legislation that Parliament had ever enacted about children, the Children Act 1989 envisaged an effective support system of welfare which would enable, first and foremost, most families to stay together (Jackson, 1998). For instance, 'the legislation encouraged an approach to childcare based on negotiation with families and involving parents and children in agreed plans' (Parton, 1998, p. 16). Building upon the concept of the 'responsible local authority' as set out

within the Children Act 1948, the Children Act 1989 introduced the idea of 'responsible parents'. This move supported a range of new powers and duties in order to improve and advance the welfare needs of looked-after children (Bainham, 1992). Within the Children Act 1989 (s.17(1.a)) a particular duty for local authorities was established concerning the safeguarding and promotion of children's welfare. This duty offered:

the chance to move away from the negative and narrow definition of child care as simply those activities that are concerned with children who are looked after by local authorities (Parker, Ward, Jackson, Aldgate and Wedge, 1991, p. 73).

Research however, has described that the 'looked-after' category is often identified as a stigma and a subjective punishment or symbol of failure (Holland, Floris, Crowley and Renold, 2010; Mannay *et al.*, 2015), creating what can be defined as a spoilt identity (Goffman, 1968). Despite this, Cameron (2003) argued that the language of 'care' was refocused by the Children Act 1989 in terms of its recognition of children's needs and what could be offered to support these requirements.

Specifically, it was the Children Act 1989 which expected all practitioners in the child welfare field to collaborate in undertaking their joint parenting tasks as 'good' corporate parents (Jackson, 2000). This expectation stimulated a wave of activity within the childcare arena and a growing cadre of 'psy' practitioners were appointed within the field of public care and family services (Parker *et al.*, 1991). Additionally, the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) introduced a theoretical and policy shift in attitudes concerning children's involvement in the services they accessed (Goodyer, 2013). This development was to be achieved through the notion of including children and young people's participation and listening to their 'voice' (Allen, 2005; Bainham and Gilmore, 2013). Traditionally, it was only through the realm of classical philosophy and common sense thinking, as well as through literature, health, factory labour, infanticide, emigration, penal reform and the evolution of the welfare state, that some children have made routine appearances in histories (Hendrick, 1992). Indeed, it is typically family history that has attempted to treat children as serious historical figures, although always in a passive context (Hendrick, 1992; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Beyond this, the majority of children's own perspectives have been 'kept from history' in a similar way that

the majority of women's lives have been 'hidden from history' (Hendrick, 1992, p. 1). Thus, the idea of 'participation' and 'voice' for children become a new rhetorical orthodoxy enshrined in law through Article 12 of the UN convention of the Rights of the Child (Prout, 2003). In particular, welfare agencies were: 'required to take into account not only, as was the previous formulation, children's 'best interests', but also the wishes and desires of individual children' (James *et al.*, 1998, p. 7). In Wales, Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 is the legal basis for 'local authorities to promote and facilitate participation by children and young people in decisions that might affect them' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 26).

Although the Children Act 1989 was identified as, 'a first step towards ending the neglect of education within the care system... it still does not give the matter much prominence' (Jackson, 2010b, pp. 49-50). Within the Act education is rarely referred to *per se*. It is mentioned initially in the duty (1.3(b)) to meet 'educational needs' of looked-after children and in Schedule 2 and regulation 5 which refer to six-monthly reviews of care plans and stipulate that 'Responsible Authorities' are to have 'Regard' to the educational needs, progress and development of the child (Jackson, 2010b). Furthermore, in the 'Matters for Consideration' section of regulations provision for education is low down the list at number ten (Jackson, 2010b). Despite the school teacher being the practitioner that should see the child every day, they are listed in regulations at the bottom of those who may be requested to attend a looked-after children review (Jackson, 2010b). As a consequence of this it is unlikely that teachers would be positioned as first in line to understand and promote the educational needs of looked-after children. This may be a reason why young people consistently report that they feel that they are not expected to achieve whilst in school (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Goddard, 2000; Elliott, 2002; Dent and Cameron, 2003; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek and Fogarty, 2012).

In 1992 further guidance and regulations via the 1989 Act were issued by the then Conservative government with a two-fold objective: to explain relevant provisions including the regulations and rules of the 1989 Act to relevant parties; and to inform local authorities of their new duties, and explain how the law should be implemented (Allen, 2000, 2005). Beyond what has previously been stated about education, the accompanying guidance provided further clarity concerning what 'having regard' to education actually meant (Jackson, 2010b).



Within the new guidance and regulation only three sources provided reference specifically to education (Jackson, 2010b). These were: volume three (Family Placements) which provided seven short sections in one chapter (Department of Health, 1991b); volume four (Residential Care) which provided seventeen short sections over two chapters (Department of Health, 1991c); and volume six (Children with Disabilities) which provided an entire chapter concerning 'working with education services' which largely denoted the need for a multi-agency approach within this area (Department of Health, 1991d). Collectively, the messages from these materials set about putting looked-after children's education on the agenda. By providing a set of particular standards for local authorities the intention was for looked-after children to receive the same opportunities within education as their non-looked-after peers (Jackson, 2010b). In terms of their impact on practice, the new guidance and regulation did take into account key messages from a Department of Health Working Party, chaired by Roy Parker, that any future outcome measurement should move beyond minimum standards and take into account how a local authority has promoted children's well-being including education (Parker *et al.*, 1991). According to a joint report by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and Ofsted (1995), despite all the above guidance for, and training by, local authorities they were identified as generally failing to promote and improve the education achievement of looked-after children and young people as:

...the standards which children achieve are too low and often the modest progress they make in primary school is lost as they proceed through the system. Despite the clear identification of the problem in several research studies and by committees of enquiry little has been done in practice to boost achievement (SSI. and Ofsted, 1995, p. 3).

Although the Children Act 1989 provided a far-reaching reform of child law through a new statutory code which governed private and public law affecting children's welfare, it was still generally assumed that the majority of looked-after children were uninterested in education (Bainham, 2005). This was because many young people were then leaving school when they reached the statutory leaving age and not going on to further or higher education (Jackson, 2000). After the Children Act 1989 was implemented, education outcomes had improved in general for most children yet the gap in the educational attainment of looked-after children and young people grew ever wider when compared to

their non-looked-after peers (Blyth and Milner, 1998; Broad, 1998). Whilst the Children Act 1989 did not improve the educational attainment of looked-after children it nevertheless recognised its importance and 'ended a period of four decades during which the education of children and young people in care was almost entirely neglected' (Jackson, 2010b, p. 48).

Jackson (2000) argued that the shift of power to head teachers and schools, via the 1988 and 1993 Education Acts, over that of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) left looked-after children in a vulnerable position. At the same time as the 1989 Children Act was being implemented to 'promote' the educational welfare of looked-after children, education reform (the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1993) had a negative impact on looked-after children (Jackson, 2000). Schools were now required to meet performance criteria in regard to attainment tests and were concerned that that 'looked-after children will depress their SATS scores and GCSE results' (Jackson, 2000, p. 73). In light of these concerns, it is almost impossible for local authorities to fulfil their duty under the Children Act 1989 to 'promote' educational welfare, especially if a looked-after child is excluded from school as well (Jackson, 2000).

In summary, both the Children Acts 1948 and 1989 were concerned with protecting children from forms of abuse and neglect. However, they each added to an enduring rhetoric of: 'the child as helpless, as being acted upon, usually in some kind of damaging manner [in which] the victims were rarely allowed to reap the benefits of sympathy for their condition' (Hendrick, 2003, p. 7). Moreover, presenting young people in care as vulnerable 'victims' ignores the systems that have essentially failed to support them and also ignores their own agency in determining their own future (Chase *et al.*, 2006). Prout (2003) points out that through the cultural and policy shift towards individualisation many public service institutions have struggled to adapt and ensure procedures for children's participation and voice in decision-making. Furthermore, Goodyer (2011) suggests that since ratification of the UNCRC in 1991 in the UK, children's participation in decision-making is, at best, patchy. This suggests that children's rights to protection, provision and participation are yet to be fully implemented in practice. In this sense some children are still identified as a minority group who lack significant power (Goodyer, 2011). Despite children's rights and entitlements being enshrined in legislation and guidance, numerous looked-after children, young people and care leavers report that they do not always know about these rights and entitlements (The Who Cares? Trust, 2013). Having

outlined a number of themes from legislative development since the mid-twentieth century, the focus now turns to explore policy developments in Wales.

### **The Learning Country 2001**

In 2001 the newly devolved Welsh Assembly launched the 'Learning Country' programme (NAfW, 2001). Positioned as a paving document, this programme was a ten-year strategy that embodied a post-devolution vision and action that set out to transform education and lifelong learning in Wales (NAfW, 2001). This policy development was outlined as a 'Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme' which reflected Wales' claim to a distinctive identity and to aspirations and traditions that set it apart from England (Raffe, 2006). For the National Assembly (NAfW, 2001), education and training were presented as of prime importance for Wales in an age of competitive pressures from Europe and beyond. Education and training were identified in the Learning Country programme (NAfW, 2001) as a means of empowering communities for the global market as both consumers and workers and of creating wealth for Wales as a whole, liberating talent, empowering communities and extending opportunity for all.

The Learning Country (NAfW, 2001) referred briefly to looked-after children. Within one paragraph (NAfW, 2001, p. 28), collaborative working as a way of improving standards was encouraged. Moreover, the ambition to raise looked-after children's educational attainment was expressed alongside providing schools with assistance to deal with: 'poor pupil behaviour'; 'reduce absenteeism'; 'tackle disaffection'; and 'increase qualification entries'. Although not directly affiliating these themes with looked-after children, such terms still contribute to how looked-after young people are constructed within child welfare policies in terms of victims and threats (Hendrick, 2003).

Regarding looked-after children's educational attainment, the Learning Country programme stipulated that out of the 3,200 children looked-after in Wales in 1999, 75 per cent left formal education with no qualifications (NAfW, 2001). Furthermore, only 3 per cent achieved five or more GCSE A\*- C grades and less than 0.3 per cent went on to further education (NAfW, 2001). In light of these outcomes, and in order to raise the attainment of looked-after children, the Learning Country recognised that: 'the education service cannot achieve better standards for the least advantaged pupils on its own' (NAfW, 2001, p. 29). So in

an attempt to improve looked-after children's attainment the National Assembly specified that:

Local authorities should work with schools to ensure that 75 per cent of *'looked after children'* should leave school with at least two GCSEs or equivalent by 2003; with at least a range of qualifications at level 2 by 2007; and a range of qualifications at levels 2 and 3, (and a minimum of 5 GCSEs or equivalent) by 2010 (NAfW, 2001, p. 62).

The Learning Country (NAfW, 2001, p. 29) suggested that testing these targets was vital to ensure continuing improvements. However, the target set by the Welsh Assembly government (NAfW, 2001, p. 62) for 75 per cent of looked-after children gaining 5 GCSEs at grade A\*-C was not achieved. The Children in Need Census (2010) revealed that in 2010-11, only 21 per cent of looked-after children achieved the Level 2 threshold of five GCSEs at grades A\*- C compared to 64 per cent of all children not looked-after (Welsh Government, 2011). However, the target of looked-after pupils achieving a wider range of qualifications was achieved from putting into practice the Learning Pathways 14-19 in Wales, which had been implemented from the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (2009) (Welsh Government, 2010). This meant that young people could study a wide range of courses which could lead to both academic and vocational qualifications (Welsh Government, 2010).

### **National Assembly for Wales Circular 2/2001**

Within the same year as the Learning Country (NAfW, 2001), the National Assembly published Circular 2/2001 and Guidance for Local Authorities (NAfW, 2001a). Although this policy is now superseded, it was the first devolved policy direction concerning looked-after children's education in Wales and merits some brief comment. Circular 2/2001 identified various themes for local authorities to consider in relation to looked-after children's education including: an emphasis on the importance of corporate parenting; a guide to understanding the responsibilities for key practitioners within education and social services; and the promotion of more effective co-operation across service provision in terms of joined-up working practices and partnerships (NAfW, 2001a). The National Assembly also set the target of young people leaving care achieving one GCSE or GNVQ equivalent qualification (NAfW, 2001a). However, this target was set even lower than the previous target of two GCSEs or equivalent by 2003 and a minimum of 5 GCSEs or equivalent by 2010 as set out in the Learning Country

(NAfW, 2001). Arguably this lowering of target qualifications emphasised a low expectation of what could be attained. In terms of looked-after children the National Assembly (NAfW, 2001a), set out three key 'actions' for local authorities to improve their educational attainment:

1. To establish designated looked-after teachers and retain a protocol for sharing relevant information about the education of children in the authority.
2. To ensure that arrangements for a suitable placement include appropriate education to be secured within twenty school days.
3. To ensure that all children in care have a Personal Education Plan (PEP).

A discussion of the designated looked-after teacher and the PEP policy for looked-after children is provided below. For now the focus turns to explore the Children Act 2004 that set out specific state powers and introduced a specific statutory duty in a renewed effort to control, normalise, and raise the educational achievement of looked-after children.

### **The Children Act 2004**

The Children Act 2004 (section 52) amended section 22 of the Children Act 1989 Act to place a 'duty' on responsible authorities to 'promote' the educational achievement of looked-after children. By placing a specific duty, rather than a requirement as under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 expected local authorities and their partners to combine forces. In particular, this renewed agenda was another attempt to yield a commitment to a 'whole child' approach in terms of a 'joined-up' environment of service provision. This redirection of 'combined forces' meant that rather than an overlap or a shortfall within child welfare provision, all services 'should be provided in a systematically coordinated fashion' (Archard, 2003, p. 40). In Wales this development only strengthened the already established Welsh Assembly Government's Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships (2000), which sought to facilitate co-operation within local authorities and their associates by placing these partnerships on a statutory footing through the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (Children in Wales, 2006). Hitherto, there had been a long standing promotion of joined-up working practices and partnerships as essential 'in creating conditions under which children can thrive' (Gilligan, 2006, p. 36). Despite this rallying call for fresh action, research undertaken by the Care and Social Services

Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW, 2015) continues to highlight a lack of effective coordinated support available for children and young people whilst in care and as care leavers (CSSIW, 2015). Moreover, the Welsh Government (2015) argues that as a result of the complexity of practitioners involved in looked-after children's lives: 'effective joint working is critical... to enable young people to remain in education and fulfil their potential' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 21). Failing to achieve this means that: 'the impact on children and their education can be extremely damaging' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 22).

In terms of improving looked-after children's attainment, the Children Act 2004 placed a duty on each local authority to identify a leader, such as a Children's Director, to have sole responsibility for overseeing local authority educational services (Children in Wales, 2006). Stipulated within the Children Act 2004, before any decision about a child or young person's welfare is made, local authorities have to consider the implications for their education (Children in Wales, 2006). Building on the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), local authorities' duties were now required to ascertain the child or young person's wishes and these were to be taken into consideration when deciding both their care and education needs (Children in Wales, 2006). However, any such decisions were now based on efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money, as well as the usefulness of a productive future worker (Adams, 2014). In the neo-liberal shift in UK welfare to the 'market-state' looked-after young people are identified as 'active' citizens and expected to compete in society at the same level as their non-looked-after counterparts (Adams, 2014). In this context, to compete at the same level all individuals are expected to take a lead role in meeting their own welfare needs (Adams, 2014).

Thus in this competitive and individualised environment educational failure is likely to be understood as the fault of the 'victim', rather than the failure of the state (Adams, 2014). It has been suggested that:

...there is still a strong tendency to attribute low attainment to the characteristics of the children themselves instead of locating the problem where it belongs, with the care and education systems and their failure to work effectively together (Jackson, 2000, p. 66).

In contrast to this, research has recently challenged the widely held assumption of the care system being detrimental to looked-after children's attainment (Sebba, Berridge, Luke, Fletcher, Bell, Strand, Thomas, Sinclair and O'Higgins, 2015). It has been suggested that: 'there was an overwhelming view from the [young people's] interviews that entry to care had been beneficial educationally' (Sebba *et al.*, 2015, p. 30). Moreover, research by Berridge noted that 'once they felt safe and secure' young people's attainment improved (see Pigott, 2015). Having provided an account of the Children Act 2004, which created a statutory duty to promote educational achievement for looked-after children, the focus now turns to discuss the designated looked-after children's teacher and PEP policies.

### **The Looked-After Children's Designated Teacher Policy Development**

To reiterate an earlier point, in an effort to ensure that local authorities are meeting their duty to promote educational achievement each looked-after young person in a maintained school is required to have access to a designated looked-after teacher (NAfW, 2001a). The designated looked-after teacher policy was part of the three actions for local authorities as set out by the National Assembly (NAfW, 2001a). A maintained school in this context refers to: foundation schools (including foundation special schools); community schools (including community special schools); voluntary schools (including voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools); and maintained nursery schools (NAfW, 2001a). All maintained schools are expected to have a designated teacher, even though some schools do not have any looked-after children on roll (NAfW, 2001a). As stated by the National Assembly (NAfW, 2001a, p. 15) designated teachers: 'should act as the school's advocate for children and young people who are looked after, accessing services and support, and ensuring that the school shares and supports high expectations for them.' Although it is the responsibility of the school to select a teacher for this role, research has identified that designated teachers in some circumstances are typically a senior member of staff (head teacher) and not form tutor/subject teachers (Cardiff County Council, 2007). Despite training being offered to designated teachers, research commissioned by Cardiff County Council (2007, p. 13), states that what 'is provided and who attends is inconsistent and attendance is not monitored'.

It has been suggested that beyond the advent of the designated teacher role, some schools already had in place: 'highly developed structures to identify and meet individual needs in a range of ways and had little additional to do to meet the needs of children in public care' (Fletcher-Campbell, Archer and Tomlinson, 2003, p. 1). Moreover, it has been identified that looked-after children and young people, carers and schools had developed a better understanding and awareness of the role of designated teachers (Berridge *et al.*, 2009). Some years after implementation in England, designated teachers were 'having a positive effect on the experiences of looked-after children and young people' (Brodie, 2010, p. 2). In contrast, however, a survey of 66 care leavers aged between 16 and 21 demonstrated that 55 did not know about the designated teacher policy for children in care (Barnardo's, 2006).

More recently, the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (s.20) specified that governing bodies in maintained schools in England and Wales were to appoint not a 'designated teacher' but instead a 'designated person' that was in the school setting. In the same way as the 'designated teacher' (NAfW, 2001a), this 'designated person' was to implement the duty to promote educational achievement for all looked-after children who are 'registered pupils' (Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (s.20)). Despite the establishment of the 'designated person' in the school setting, looked-after children and young people's educational attainment has not risen notably (see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, this development has helped to place looked-after children and young people on the agenda within all maintained schools.

### **The Personal Education Plan (PEP) Policy Development**

In a further effort to ensure that local authorities are meeting their duty to promote educational achievement, each looked-after young person is required to have a 'high quality' Personal Education Plan (PEP) and this policy direction: 'has been strengthened using powers under the Children Act 2004' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 10). In terms of the planning aspect of the PEP, this is a significant part of a social worker's task (Hayden, 2005). It is stipulated within Welsh Government guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), that it is the young person's social worker who is responsible for initiating the PEP in partnership with the young person, parents or family members, carer, link worker and designated teacher. In terms of how this actually works in practice, Hayden



(2005, p. 346) notes there is: 'something of a reality gap in care planning in social work, between theory, guidance and practice.'

The objective of the PEP is to 'reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning, which secures good basic skills, stretches aspirations and builds life chances' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 44). The PEP policy is positioned as a lead education record alongside the young person's Care Plan and Pathway Plan (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). According to guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), looked-after children are to have a PEP within twenty school days when either joining a new school or entering the care system. Through this policy direction the PEP should:

...ensure access to services and support; contribute to stability; minimise disruption and broken schooling; signal particular educational needs; establish clear goals; and act as a record of progress and achievement (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 43).

If, however, there is a placement change or disruption then a copy of their PEP should be transferred with the young person when they move placement and attend a new school in order to assist in the continuity of their education (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). In terms of updating the PEP a review can take place: 'at any time in response to arising needs' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 44). Beyond this it is advised that a PEP is normally reviewed in parallel with the Care Plan within either twenty-eight days, three or six months, or at every six months in relation to their Pathway Plan (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007).

In practice, it has been identified through the exploration of twelve local education authorities in England, that from the looked-after young person's perspective, the PEP was not necessarily of use to them (Fletcher-Campbell *et al.*, 2003). One young person described the PEP as 'extra work' and identified it as the business of the school or college. Another young person was without a PEP as they had experienced a change in social worker while they moved to a different school placement (Fletcher-Campbell *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, others have suggested that in one study, just 42 per cent of young people knew about PEPs and only a small proportion of these actually had a PEP implemented (Harker *et al.*, 2004). In one large local authority in England, it was identified by Hayden (2005) that there were problems in relation to prioritising PEPs. This was due to numerous overlapping and competing planning mechanisms within

social services and education departments. Moreover, the practitioners that were interviewed in this research perceived PEPs as just another 'paperwork' exercise and argued that not all looked-after children necessarily had difficulties in school (Hayden, 2005). Thus in questioning the use of PEPs 'both social workers and teachers quoted instances where they felt that a PEP was either not needed or inappropriate' (Hayden, 2005, p. 347).

Similarly, although the PEP is designed to collect and focus on the views of looked-after children and ensure they have access to services and support, in line with findings from Hayden (2005), the PEP uptake may be limited and seen as just another bureaucratic task (Cardiff County Council, 2007). Likewise, some have maintained that there can be difficulties in the collection of information about the young person in order to complete the PEP (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007). It has also been identified that 'targets were often not set or did not provide adequate information on how they were to be met' (Cardiff County Council, 2007, p. 34).

In summary, there are various concerns relating to the value of the PEP and although they are supposed to collect the voices of looked-after children 'there is no formal means of reporting the views of LAC and using these views to develop [PEPs] policy and strategy' (Cardiff County Council, 2007, p. 10). It has been suggested that although the use of PEPs has been variable across local authorities, there has been some improvement in children's participation and implementation of the PEP as a resource for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children (Brodie, 2010). Thus, as with the establishment of the designated person (teacher), having the PEP for looked-after children has not of itself profoundly improved educational attainment (see Chapter Two). Again, as with the designated person/teacher legislative and policy direction, it would appear that this has assisted in placing looked-after children's educational needs on the school agenda, rather than actually raising the young people's level of attainment. Having outlined key features of the designated person (teacher) and the Personal Education Plan policies, the focus now moves to the looked-after children's education policy context and developments in Wales.

## **Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future 2007**

The Welsh Assembly Government's guidance document, *Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) directs how local authorities should meet their duty and promote the education achievement of their looked-after children in compulsory education and also for young people leaving care and to ensure: 'their educational needs are met appropriately' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 37).

Within this guidance looked-after children are recognised as a vulnerable group. In the first chapter of the document the arrangements for the placement (home and school) of looked-after children and young people are outlined with an emphasis on how collaboration between practitioners and agencies is essential to improve outcomes for these vulnerable children (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Chapter Two sets out the review of looked-after children and young people's cases while, Chapter Three refers to looked-after children and young people's homes. Finally Chapter Four outlines the responsible commissioner arrangements concerning the welfare of looked-after children and young people (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007).

In a new attempt to ensure that an improvement of educational provisions for looked-after children and young people was made available, a key feature of *Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) was the introduction of the 'Looked-After Children Education Coordinator'. It is to this initiative that we now turn.

### **The Appointment of the 'Looked-After Children Education Coordinator'**

A key feature of the guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) was the concept of 'responsible partnerships' between parents, children, the responsible authority and other partner agencies connected with the guidance issued under the Children Act 1989 and 2004. Thus each responsible local authority in Wales, in discharging their duties under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, was obliged to designate a lead 'specialist practitioner' in the role entitled as the 'Looked-After Children Education (LACE) Coordinator' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42). The guidance and regulations set out within (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) built upon progress made through Circular 2/2001 (NAfW, 2001a), the core aim of which was to ensure that decisions are made in the best

interests of the looked-after child or young person whilst also stressing the need for close collaboration between practitioners and agencies as an essential tool for improving outcomes (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Specifically, this guidance recommended that joint protocols on the responsibilities and roles of the LACE Coordinator were to be developed between education departments within local authorities and their social services counterparts (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). The LACE Coordinator was directed to work in co-operation with a number of significant adults including the child's carer, children's homes link workers, social workers, designated teachers, and clinical nurse specialists.

The main objective of this 'specialist practitioner' is to ensure each looked-after child has a high quality and effective Personal Education Plan (PEP) and '...to co-ordinate the child's education plan and address the education needs of looked after children and care leavers in the local authority area' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42). According to the guidance, local authorities are obliged to take account of the availability and continuity of suitable educational placements and ensure a full-time place in a local mainstream school is commenced without delay. Those occupying the LACE Coordinator role were assigned the responsibility to ensure all looked-after children and young people optimise education opportunities and to maximise life chances and benefits. In doing so, LACE Coordinators are 'expected to perform' the following fourteen roles as specified by the guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43):

1. Work towards Welsh Assembly Government objectives on the education of looked-after children;
2. Promote the education of looked-after children placed within and out of the local authority area;
3. Work with LAC Education Co-ordinators in other authorities in relation to out of area placements and to establish working arrangements;
4. Develop and promote a means of engaging looked-after children and obtaining their views on educational provision;
5. Bridge the gap between Social Services, Schools and the Education authority regarding SEN, admission arrangements policy and so on;
6. Liaise with Careers Wales and Youth Services to ensure appropriate and timely support and access to universal entitlements;
7. Provide challenge in cases of exclusion;

8. Arrange provision of 'catch up' support;
9. Disseminate good practice including training for elected members, foster carers; social workers, school governors and designated teachers;
10. Ensure PEPs are in place and provide guidance on their implementation;
11. Monitor attainment of looked-after children, collating and analysing performance information on an individual and collective basis;
12. Purchase and allocate personal computers and other educational resources for looked-after children as appropriate;
13. Establish and maintain a list of designated teachers for each school in their authority and for schools attended by children placed out of area;
14. Attend LAC reviews as appropriate.

Such formal prescriptions tell us little about the sorts of occupational relationships and assumptions that might emanate from these role expectations. There is a dearth of research exploring the LACE Coordinator role in terms of everyday practice and performance. However, a recent study (Sims and Holtom, 2009) which comprised telephone interviews with twenty LACE Coordinators in Wales, attempted to identify factors that contributed to looked-after children's poor educational attainment. Findings suggested that children were positioned through either the narrative of 'threats' (e.g., experiencing social and behavioural difficulties; emotional, physical and mental health needs; lack of coordinated planning surrounding admission into care) or depicted through the narrative of 'victims' (e.g., system failure via low expectations of some teachers and carers; placement instability and numerous placement moves; suffering from pre-care trauma; having emotional and educational needs; disruption; gaps in education; poor early experiences of education; low aspirations) (Sims and Holtom, 2009, pp. 24-28). Collectively, it is through this mix of narratives that children with looked-after status are constructed as threats and/or vulnerable victims (Parton, 2006) and these in turn can be cast as causes of poor education progress (Hendrick, 2003; Jackson, 2010b).

Within research undertaken by Holtom and Lloyd-Jones (2012) two local authority Coordinators in Wales were interviewed and a range of factors were reported that they believed hindered looked-after children's attainment including out of county children being inadequately supported; the geographical distances some key workers had to cover and the costs in terms of time and transport; a

lack of support from schools and the limited capacity of some specialist services (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a). Moreover, similar to Hendrick's (1994) perspective, some children were cast as 'threats' through their perceived reluctance or unwillingness to engage with support the local authority offered and their behavioural problems, including anti-social behaviour (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a). By contrast there were also constructions of children as 'victims' which included family problems, problems with placements, placement moves, problems with physical and mental health, emotional needs and trauma of pre-care experiences, being placed out of county, gaps in education, additional learning needs, special educational needs, and exclusion from school (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a, pp. 113-114). The focus now turns to explore how looked-after children's educational achievement support packages are funded in Wales.

### **Funding the Educational Support for Looked-After Children**

To implement the above policy direction, between 2006 until 2010 each local authority received specific funding from the Welsh Government through the Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education (RAISE) programme. To date, funding support for looked-after children's educational achievement emanates from the School Effectiveness Grant (SEG) and the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) (Welsh Government, 2013).

In terms of the RAISE programme, in order to improve attainment levels local authorities were required to maintain a detailed database of each looked-after child supported by RAISE (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a). Moreover, they were also to undertake their own self-evaluations as part of the RAISE evaluation (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a). At first the RAISE grant element for looked-after pupils initially focused on 14-16 year olds pupils at Key Stage Four, yet in 2008 this age restriction was dropped and local authorities were then able to provide intervention for pupils across the Key Stages and in primary as well as secondary education (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a; WAO, 2012).

As stated by Holtom and Lloyd-Jones (2012) RAISE directly funded intervention and support for looked-after children in all but one of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales. This included:

...additional academic support for children looked after by Local Authorities outside of school (in 12 Local Authorities); enhancing the access of children looked after by Local Authorities to computers, by either providing laptops or access to computers (in 12 Local Authorities); additional pastoral support or personal development work with children looked after by Local Authorities (in 10 Local Authorities); additional resources, such as revision packs (in nine Local Authorities) (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a, pp. 124-125).

From interviews with two local authority Coordinators it was discovered that levels of attainment had improved 'partly due to the support provided by RAISE, and often in part due to the efforts and determination of the young person themselves' (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a, p. 112). It was reported that twenty-one local authorities utilised RAISE to directly fund intervention and support for looked-after children such as: by either providing laptops, pastoral care support, access to extra curricula activities, and additional academic support, as in a LACE service (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012). Thus, in order to fulfil their statutory duty to promote looked-after children's educational achievement many local authorities provide different types of support for looked-after children. However, despite these developments the RAISE funded interventions were: 'unable to address these factors which impact upon attainment' (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a, p. 115). The focus now turns to the development of the local authority LACE team practitioners.

### **The Emergence of the LACE Team Practitioners**

The emergence of the local authority LACE team practitioners can be argued to be a response to the pressures of policy in the performance climate. The activities, interventions and initiatives that are provided by the LACE team practitioners could be summarised as:

mostly aimed at those students on whom it was judged they would have a short-term positive impact with the resulting effect of boosting the overall performance of the school in terms of national indicators (Ball *et al.*, 2012, p. 82).

Therefore learning and teaching is adapted to the processes of output in the A\* to C grade range at the GCSE level (Ball *et al.*, 2012). Prior to the 2006 RAISE programme, some English local authorities delivering education and social services in the 1990s had already established education support services for

looked-after children and young people (Jackson, 2000, 2010a, 2010b). Walker (1994) identified that Manchester City Council, in 1989, was one of the first local authorities in England to develop a substantial practitioner service for improving looked-after children's attainment. Walker (1994, p. 342) argued that the Manchester Teaching Service was 'a landmark in the development of educational services for children for whom local authorities exercise parental responsibility.' It had its own administrative centre and comprised thirty full-time teachers, fifteen sessional paid staff and four administrative staff (Walker, 1994). These were all positioned to ensure that education was always placed at the centre of a looked-after child's general welfare. Walker (1994) observed that despite directly working with around 1100 looked-after children 'the role of teachers within the service is difficult to define as there is little precedent for the work they do' (Walker, 1994, p. 334).

Research by Fletcher-Campbell *et al.* (2003) in eight local authorities in England revealed that the official titles of the looked-after children's education (LACE) practitioners varied, as did the size of their service, from one person to over five. 'Looked After Children's Education Service (LACES), Education of Children in Public Care team (ECPC) and similar titles were common' (Fletcher-Campbell *et al.*, 2003, p. 21). While these services were typically multi-disciplinary, in practice there were two broad types of approach:

...the discrete model (or segregated approach), by which a dedicated team is responsible for a range of functions such as monitoring and direct services and the distributed model (or inclusive approach), by which a small number of people coordinate responses and maintain an overview of interventions but direct services and other functions such as monitoring are provided by other services and embedded within 'normal' provision (Fletcher-Campbell *et al.*, 2003, p. iv).

That said, Fletcher-Campbell *et al.* (2003, p. 23) observed that provision 'rarely fitted completely into one of these models.' In one large authority in England an Education Support Service (ESS) was established which consisted of seven teachers whose central role was to ensure social workers were trained and supported, in particular in the development of the young people's PEPs. It was discovered that some ESS teachers knew the child much better than the social worker because they often produced the PEP, despite this being the responsibility of the social worker. Moreover, the ESS teachers reported having:



'too many children' with one ESS teacher having over 100 young people making their role at times 'an absolute headache' (Hayden, 2005, p. 348).

Davey (2006) explored a LACE service in a Welsh local authority that aimed to address looked-after children's educational underachievement. The LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners comprised a project leader (Coordinator), education welfare officer, educational psychologist, teacher, administrator and two sessional workers. The LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners focused upon looked-after young people aged 11-18 offering, for instance, GCSE coursework groups, homework and support sessions, and were very much valued by social workers. Likewise, research by Berridge *et al.*, (2009, p. 79), noted that social workers were keen to utilise LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners as they 'could relieve the pressure on them by undertaking some tasks which otherwise would be their responsibility, such as coordinating PEPs'. Despite the value of the LACE practitioners and the support service they provide, some practitioners are nonetheless, still plagued by 'barriers that hampered cohesive working, particularly the workloads of social workers and teachers in mainstream settings that impeded attendance at meetings, joint training and planning' (Davey and Pithouse, 2008, p. 62); see also (Hibbert, 2003; Harker *et al.*, 2004).

In Wales there is evidence of outward-bound residential activities, 'achievement' events, and educational visits such as college open days (Davey, 2006). In a study exploring three English authorities, relating to looked-after adolescents who presented emotional and behavioural difficulties (Berridge *et al.*, 2008), it was discovered that each authority had developed a specialist practitioner-based educational support service. Each service had a strong corporate function and prioritised a range of activities including: organising individual tutoring; playing a role of providing management information; gathering predicted grades relating to outcomes of SATs and GCSEs; working with teachers, social workers and carers to highlight the importance of schooling; outlining the responsibilities of designated teachers and PEPs; and establishing links with other practitioners/professionals in the field (Berridge *et al.*, 2008).

Berridge *et al.* (2008) described how the practitioners were multi-disciplinary (one service comprised twenty-five members; another had nine staff members including teachers, Connexions advisers, education welfare officers, educational psychologists, an unaccompanied refugee worker, and a youth worker). Despite

these formations the direct work with looked-after young people 'tended to be limited' and not always targeted at those likely to need it most (Berridge *et al.*, 2008, p. 49). The practitioners concentrated largely and disproportionately on the Key Stage Four school population with the purpose of improving the low attainment levels of looked-after pupils. Berridge *et al.* (2008) note the absence of research into the national picture of these practitioners including their structure, priorities and organisation. In a further study of English local authorities, Berridge, Henry, Jackson and Turney (2009) suggest that the LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners evince a range of nomenclature and roles such as: educational 'support workers' (Holtom and Lloyd-Jones, 2012a); 'learning support assistants' (LSAs), 'learning coaches' and 'learning mentors' (Sims and Holtom, 2009). In particular, the 'learning coaches' education support provision developed from the Learning Pathways 14-19 policy (Welsh Government, 2010). Nonetheless, all forms of learning support outside the formal teaching professional are fundamentally the same in that they 'give learner support in ways that are relevant to a wide range of providers' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b, p. 296). However provided, one-to-one/group work educational support is associated with mentoring which stands as supplementary support and advice (Miller, 1998; Colley, 2003; Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b). Within recent years there has been a prevalence of mentoring programmes based in schools (DuBois and Karcher, 2015). In youth mentoring there is a focus on having an emotional connection and relationship with the young person and the mentor is typically a non-parental adult acting in a formal practitioner capacity (DuBois and Karcher, 2015).

Sims and Holtom (2009) discovered a range of eight approaches of support offered to looked-after children in Wales which were: academic support; emotional support; behavioural support; social support; joint working; support for schools; support directed at the home and carers; and individual packages of support for looked-after children. With reference to the academic support interventions, provided by LSAs, mentors and learning coaches or youth workers, all targeted disengaged looked-after children (Sims and Holtom, 2009). Collectively, these LACE team practitioners provided: learning resources (study guides, laptops); alternative learning opportunities and qualifications through the Open College Network (OCN); literacy support; revision classes; and additional tuition (after school clubs - academic focus, and 'catch up' support). Not unrelated to Hendrick's (1994) narrative of children as 'threats', the 'catch up'

support provision at Key Stage Four implicitly positions children as a potential challenge or 'threat' to the education performance targets of the local authority. Sims and Holtom (2009) also revealed that it was acknowledged by the LACE Coordinators that resources were provided on a needs basis but they could not describe how this need was calculated. Provision was split across emotional and social needs, the former was provided through school mentors and social support was provided through extracurricular activities in order to promote self-esteem. Referring to local authority 'joint working' to support the attainment of looked-after children, a multi-agency group of practitioners was mentioned by respondents which incorporated educational and child psychologists, children's services representatives, education staff, mental health nurses and a drugs worker (Sims and Holtom, 2009). In their conclusion, Sims and Holtom (2009, p. 42) came to the view that there were 'no systematic differences in the types or range of support offered by local authorities..., there are a number of commonly adopted approaches to supporting the attainment of looked after children'. Nevertheless, there were some differences in terms of how local authorities 'joint working' practices intervened to support looked-after children with some being more formal in nature (Sims and Holtom, 2009). It was identified by the Wales Audit Office (WAO, 2012) that since 1999 there were examples in Wales of a range of specialist support projects and LACE team practitioners. However, the Wales Audit Office (WAO, 2012) described that such arrangements have changed in response to fluctuations in funding.

Brodie (2010) observed that in England, evidence suggests that looked-after children's education support services appeared to work well and were having a positive impact. In particular these practitioners:

...played an increasingly important role in providing direct services such as tutoring, collecting data and providing advice and training to other front line professionals such as designated teachers (Brodie, 2010, p. 3).

More recently, in research undertaken by Estyn (2016) the term 'learning coach' was given to education support staff that had a specific focus on supporting looked-after children. It was identified that the schools that were most effective in supporting looked-after children's education included having 'a named individual who provides support such as a learning coach' (Estyn, 2016, p. 5). In summary, various types of looked-after education support exist in Wales and England and provide both formal and informal interventions. Despite practice being a

bricolage of interventions, 'evidence suggests these vary in their service location and in the range of practitioners involved and services offered' (Brodie, 2010, p. 20). We can glean from the discussion so far that there are complicated and contested issues around the delivery of looked-after children and young people's legislation and policies. However, for LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, despite being valued by some social workers (Berridge *et al.*, 2009) there is no firm evidence base regarding their overall effectiveness (Brodie, 2010). Moreover, we have no insight into the day-to-day occupational worlds of the LACE practitioners and how they operate within the setting of the school. The focus now turns to explore recent developments in Wales with reference to looked-after children.

### **The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**

Improving the well-being of all children in Wales is a Welsh government priority. The new legislative framework of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 underpins the delivery of improved outcomes for all children and their families in Wales (Welsh Government, 2015a). For looked-after children, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (s.78, 2.a), updates the local authority duty to promote the child's educational achievement, as originally established in the Children Act 2004 (s.52). The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 underpins a new era of support, building upon developments made within Welsh Assembly Government (2007) guidance, *Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future*. Section 25 of the Children Act 2004 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, along with the 'Programme for Government', both 'establish the importance which the Welsh Government attaches to improving the lives and well-being of children who are looked after' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 2). Furthermore, the 2014 Act includes provisions which are intended to strengthen requirements and ensure looked-after children 'receive a more fulfilling experience of education and an improved level of educational attainment consistent with their mainstream counterparts' (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 19). According to Mark Drakeford, the (then) Minister for Health and Social Services, the 2014 Act (implemented from April 2016), means that for looked-after children there is a renewed emphasis on preventative and early intervention services including parenting programmes and family support (Part 2 of the Act); and under the 'When I am Ready' scheme (implemented across Wales during 2015-16), local authorities have a new duty, for young

people in foster care, to provide information and to facilitate and support post-eighteenth birthday living arrangements (Part 6) (Drakeford, 2015).

### **The 2016 Strategy for Future Action (Looked-After Children)**

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 seeks to address ways in which services are delivered and improve the life chances of looked-after children (Drakeford, 2015; Welsh Government, 2016c). In order to improve outcomes for looked-after children, a joint strategy between the Welsh Government's Health and Social Services Group and Department for Education and Public Services was published in 2016. This strategy was informed by a consultation with key stakeholders (Welsh Government, 2015a), research conducted by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE - Cardiff University, (Mannay *et al.*, 2015) and also research undertaken by the Fostering Network and Voices From Care (Welsh Government, 2016c). The Welsh Government's national strategic approach to improving outcomes for looked-after children focuses on academic attainment and vocational achievement and the 'actions required of all key partners to drive better educational outcomes and offer a range of options that best suit the ambitions, abilities and circumstances of each child who is looked after' (Welsh Government, 2016c, p. 5). A framework for future action, as described by the Welsh Government, should address the following objectives:

- Raise educational aspirations and attainment and the ability of those who care for them to support their educational development;
  - Reinforce collective accountability and effective leadership across the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authorities, schools, further and higher education institutions for their educational outcomes;
  - Make education a priority and point of focus and stability, especially during the periods of upheaval and uncertainty;
  - Ensure the necessary support to enable positive life and career choices and reduce the chances of entering the youth justice system;
  - Identify data that will aid practice, policy making and monitoring of educational outcomes;
  - Ensure excellent practice is identified, promoted and shared wherever it exists
- (Welsh Government, 2016c, p. 5).

In addition to the 2016 Strategy For Future Action, since devolution there has been a wider education revolution in Wales in order to improve *all* children's

educational 'underperformance' (Hill, 2013, p. 1). Some of the many changes that have been put in place are:

The School Effectiveness Framework, the Improving schools programme and the Minister for Education and Skills' '20 priorities to tackle underperformance'... The National Literacy and Numeracy Programmes, the Welsh in Education plans, mandatory training for governors, the implementation of a digital learning platform, the introduction of a Masters' programme for newly qualified teachers, the reform of the qualification for headship and the creation of a School Standards and Delivery Unit (Hill, 2013, p. 1).

More recently, other developments in the education system in Wales include: a curriculum reform and the development of a new curriculum for Wales by September 2018 (Welsh Government, 2016b); and a new long-term vision for education for 3-19 year old learners in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016d).

## **Concluding Comments**

This selective review has revealed that looked-after children's special status within laws and policies in the UK and Wales has evolved over time. This has resulted in competing perspectives on looked-after children's welfare (Fox Harding, 1997). Within modern Western societies, unlike adults who are positioned as being responsible for themselves, we have seen that children have been constructed as vulnerable, dependent and in need of protection (Hendrick, 1994; Fox Harding, 1997; Parton, 2006). With regard to looked-after children and young people's educational attainment, and despite the policy and legislative developments outlined herein, looked-after children's educational attainment has not been raised in proportion to their non-looked-after peers (Welsh Government, 2015c, 2016a). Although looked-after children's education has been placed on a statutory footing, we have little research on how policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been interpreted, translated and implemented by the LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners through their day-to-day process of policy enactment. On the macro level, the legislation and policy objectives to improve the attainment of looked-after young people reveals little of the typical day-to-day activities of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners or their relationships with children and young people or other professional/practitioner partnerships and boundaries which emanate from policy ambition. Hence, the thesis now turns to the micro level of practice and

discourse that stem from the engagements between LACE practitioners and young people and which they jointly negotiate in a much more nuanced and complicated manner than can be gleaned from policy formulations. In order to illuminate this under-researched landscape of settings and relationships that are explored in later chapters, we first turn to the research design that has sought to generate critical and reflective analysis of the LACES' endeavor and the views of young people.

## Chapter Four

### Methods and Methodology

#### Introduction

Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children. Since 2007 local authorities have been required to recruit a lead 'specialist practitioner' in the role of the 'Looked-After Children Education (LACE) Coordinator' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42). Beyond the appointment of the LACE Coordinator, it has been left up to each local authority to design their provisions for meeting the duty as there has been no government guidance regarding front-line LACE team practitioners' roles. For the purposes of this study a sample of: looked-after children's LACE Coordinators ( $n=4$ ); front-line LACE practitioners ( $n=7$ ); and looked-after young people ( $n=17$ ) aged fourteen to sixteen, undertaking their GCSE/vocational qualifications, drawn from across four different local authorities (LAs) within south Wales have been selected for examination. The objective is to identify, through their own narratives and experiences, how the policy development (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been interpreted and translated in terms of enactment by LACE Coordinators and their front-line team practitioners. In addition the 'public welfare child' discourse that the LACE Coordinators and their teams may draw upon when they construct looked-after young people and whether the perspectives of looked-after young people correspond with this discourse is a distinctly under-researched area that is also considered.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an account of the overall research process and present details of the methods and methodology deployed to capture the narratives and experiences of the research sample. What now follows is a reflective account of the design and the undertaking of this study. First, a description of my interest in the research topic and a discussion of the importance of reflexivity when considering and undertaking research is presented. After this, the ontological and epistemological positioning of this study is provided. This chapter then provides a discussion of the research design which comprises a qualitative cross-sectional study utilising semi-structured interviews to explore meanings and experiences from a social constructionist epistemological approach. The scoping phase of the study is then discussed,



followed by the process of accessing the research participants, along with a description of the research participants. Ethical considerations are then explored followed by an account of a particular qualitative technique termed as 'research on the move'. How the data were transcribed and the thematic analytic approach utilised is then set out. Here it will be shown how thematic analysis and interpretation of the data enabled an exploration of the individual and policy levels which appeared to impact upon LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners in meeting their statutory duty to promote looked-after children's educational achievements. Finally, a discussion of the issues concerning writing up, representing the findings, and the decisions that were made in undertaking qualitative research is provided.

### **Locating the Researcher**

Before outlining the implications of my status (who am I), I will first provide an outline of what constitutes the 'insider-outsider' perspectives in qualitative research. Being considered as an 'insider' relates to the notion of familiarity or the idea of being a member of the population that is being studied (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). In contrast an 'outsider' position emphasises the notion of 'strangeness' and that of being distant from the research topic (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). However, in contrast to these two polarised positions, it has been suggested that the insider-outsider perspectives are 'not always mutually exclusive categories' (Northway, 2002, p. 6). For all intents and purposes, what the 'insider-outsider' notions amount to is how and how much the interviewer presents themselves and the ability and willingness of the interviewee to be able to share their stories (Miller and Glassner, 1998). Whilst I do not have experience of an 'insider' status of what it means to be a looked-after child, young person or a LACE practitioner, I have undertaken a Masters research dissertation (regarding care leavers' previous education)<sup>1</sup> and other related paid research (*Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales* – a research report commissioned by Welsh Government and conducted by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre 'CASCADE' (Cardiff

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<sup>1</sup> Dissertation (available in: Cardiff University, Arts & Social Studies Library, Cardiff; The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth).

University<sup>2</sup>); and voluntary experience (Social Science Research Methods training for care leavers - CASCADE/Voices<sup>3</sup>) whilst being a student at Cardiff University. I also have a partner who has experience of being in care. Thus this research topic has on many occasions, fuelled many debates with which I have engaged emotionally and intellectually. Therefore, the implication of my personal and academic status requires me to achieve an 'intersubjective depth and mutual understanding' between myself as the interviewer and interviewees (Miller and Glassner, 1998, p. 106).

## **Ontological and Epistemological Positioning**

There is no self-evident objectivity to a social research enquiry; as our personal experience not only shapes how we undertake a research project, it also shapes our ontological, epistemological and theoretical standpoints (Jones, 2004; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Before providing an account of the ontological and epistemological positioning within this research, each concept will first be outlined.

Ontology is 'concerned with the nature of what exists' (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard and Snape, 2014, p. 24). In terms of the significance of my ontological position, and to reiterate a theoretical assumption outlined in Chapter Two, ontologically I view the teenage participants as young people who are positioned as competent social actors with agency and rights occupying time, place and culture (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002; Goodyer, 2013). The term epistemology refers to, 'the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired' (Ormston *et al.*, 2014, p. 24). Similarly, an epistemological consideration can be defined as 'a matter which has to do with the question of what is to pass as warrantable, and hence acceptable, knowledge' (Bryman, 1998, p. 104).

As the research is concerned with exploring the meanings and experiences of LACE Coordinators, their LACE team practitioners and looked-after young people, these 'knowledges' will most likely be multifaceted. Therefore, with the aim of capturing the phenomena under study the theoretical framework will be

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/understanding-educational-experiences-opinions-attainment-achievement-aspirations-looked-after-children-wales/?skip=1&lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> CASCADE Voices <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/people/young-peoples-advisory-group/>

grounded ontologically in terms of constructionism and epistemologically on the basis of interpretivism. Each framework will now be outlined.

### **A Brief Account of a Social Constructionist Framework**

As we are born into a world where people identify each other through various categories and conceptual frameworks that already exist within culture, social constructionists, in common with interpretivists, view knowledge as constructed, as opposed to being 'a direct perception of reality' (Burr, 2003, p. 6). In other words, within social constructionism: 'language predates concepts and provides a means of structuring the way the world is experienced' (Andrews, 2012, p. 41).

A social constructionist framework takes a critical stance towards our understanding of ourselves, and the world (Burr, 2003). Moreover social constructionism questions our taken-for-granted categories of ourselves as 'simply a reflection of naturally occurring distinct types of human beings' (Burr, 2003, p. 3). In essence, the position taken here is that 'meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting' (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). From a constructionist perspective all social phenomena are socially constructed by human beings (Crotty, 1998), and it is through language that individuals give meaning to their world (Burr, 2003). Constructivist perspectives propose that individuals 'mentally construct the world of experience' (Andrews, 2012, p. 39). As some have described, thematic analysis, as a constructionist method, 'examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 9). Central to this study are the day-to-day constructed worlds of the LACE Coordinators, their team practitioners and looked-after young people and their inter-subjective engagements. In summary, a social constructionist account of knowledge construction relocates 'problems' from pathological and essentialist frameworks of knowledge accounts towards a more fruitful vision of human beings constructed between people through daily interactions (Burr, 2003).

### **A Brief Account of the Interpretive Paradigm**

Within social research both positivist and interpretive paradigms offer a platform for exploring the social world through competing philosophical and methodological foundations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In contrast to positivism, which positions social researchers as value neutral,

interpretive social researchers seek to understand other people's beliefs in order to understand their worlds and understand how they create meanings to understand their own lives (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The purpose here is not to provide a discussion of the positivist and interpretive 'paradigm wars' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Hammersley, 2008). Instead it is to position this study within the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm searches people's circumstances, conditions and perceptions of their lives (Ormston *et al.*, 2014), and people's meanings and their construction of reality, 'from the inside out, to understand and portray people as they understand themselves' (Harrington, 1997, p. xxv). Within any social context it is important for the interpretive social researcher to emphasise the 'verstehen' or 'understanding' of the 'lived experiences' of the people being studied (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 7). By emphasising the complexity of social life, interpretive social researchers examine socially constructed meanings and as there is no one reality it is the different views and values that are focused upon and accepted in an empathetic understanding of the worlds of others (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In summary my ontological and interpretivist position situates people's knowledge and experience as meaningful social reality. Hence, my central research objective was to explore the constructions of participants and my epistemological position thereby rests in gaining research interactions 'with people, to talk to them, to listen to them, and to gain access to their accounts and articulations' (Mason, 1996, p. 40). Having outlined these ontological and epistemological frameworks, the chapter now turns to an account of reflexivity, validity and reliability.

### **Reflexivity, Validity and Reliability**

It has been suggested that in order, 'to make sense of what we observe or what people tell us, we may draw on the richness of our own experience' (Hertz, 1997, p. xiii). Reflexivity refers to, 'the recognition that the product of research inevitably reflects some of the background, milieu and predilections of the researcher' (Gibbs, 2007, p. 91). Thus in terms of my 'self' accordingly, researchers ought to be positioned as 'research instruments' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 18), rather than trying to remove their own 'researcher effects' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p. 225). Researchers have an obligation to be reflective (Taylor and White, 2000), and to disclose their own selves in the research and acknowledge and understand their influence on this (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In line with the 'outsider' status described above, it has been argued that for the researcher to understand a vision of the world, a critical distance from it is

necessary (McCracken, 1988). Nonetheless despite aiming for 'empathic neutrality' and avoiding obvious biases while conducting research activities, objectivity 'can never be fully attained' (Ormston *et al.*, 2014, p. 22). As the researcher is positioned steadfastly within the construction of knowledge, it is their duty to critically assess their own thinking in relation to the matrices of economic, cultural, social and political relations (Desmond, 2007). One challenge to the notion of reliability is that the research process is shaped by the researcher's subjectivity. Therefore, throughout the research process (research design, scoping phase, data collection and analysis) I have aimed to be reflexive and consider what was behind the construction of accounts that I heard and read, with the intention of providing an understanding of this under-researched topic (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Within qualitative research, beyond technical or conceptual concerns, issues of reliability and validity raise questions about the objectivity of knowledge and the nature of research (Mason, 1996; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg, 2011). Thus in order to be confident about any research instrument, the researcher must determine its reliability and validity (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2007). It has been suggested that reliability, 'pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 245). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) there is a need for validity in qualitative research to be well-crafted throughout the whole research process. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p.191) argue that 'data in themselves cannot be valid or invalid; what is at issue are the inferences drawn from them'. It has been proposed that in qualitative research validity refers to the factual accuracy of the researcher's account in terms of what they saw and heard whilst 'in the field' and then how they went about interpreting and presenting the data (Maxwell, 2002). Regardless of having the same methodology, one researcher cannot replicate the study of another (Jones, 2004; King and Horrocks, 2010). This is, 'because all observers view an object of inquiry from their own vantage points in the web of reality, no portrait of a social phenomenon is ever exactly the same as another' (Kincheloe *et al.*, 2011, p. 70). Due to the nature of qualitative research then, 'inter-researcher reliability becomes far more difficult to achieve' (Kincheloe *et al.*, 2011, p. 170). Within the subtext of engagement and openness utilised throughout the whole research process within this study was what Altheide and Johnson (2011, p. 585) refer to as 'validity-as-reflexive-accounting.' This approach to validity specifically 'places the researcher, the

topic, and the sense-making process in interaction' (Altheide and Johnson, 2011, p. 585). Moreover, the upshot of the 'validity-as-reflexive-accounting' approach ensures that researchers are 'explicit about their preconceptions, power relations in the field, the nature of researcher/respondent interaction, how their interpretations and understanding may have changed' (Gibbs, 2007, p. 92). The focus now turns to an account of the scoping phase of the study design.

### **The Scoping Phase of the Study Design**

As a starting point for this study and to enhance my own understanding of this topic, I directly emailed the elected leader of each of the twenty-two local authorities in Wales with a request for information about their LACES provision. This request resulted in a response from LACE Coordinators from fifteen of the twenty-two local authorities. Their responses provided data of the policies and guidance they enact; their role and those of their LACE team practitioners and an account of the role of the 'designated person' (teacher) in maintained schools. An overview of staff posts within the fifteen local authorities can be seen in Table (4.1, p.83). For example, in their email response the LACE Coordinator (LA15) described that they focused upon improving standards of literacy and numeracy and delivering programmes relating to the development of children's social, emotional and behavioural skills. The LACE Coordinator (LA14) described working on a 'needs' basis when raising education achievement. Likewise, the LACE Coordinator (LA7) described that LACES staff offered pastoral, academic and/or transitional support to looked-after children who they identified as "*in need*" of the provision. While the LACE Coordinator (LA5) stated that they worked on a "*hands on approach*" and provided support "*when and where needed*". However, none of these responses revealed how 'need' was defined or who defined it. In LA11 the LACE Coordinator stated that there was no specific practitioner for looked-after pupils and rather "*inclusion staff*" were involved in working with their looked-after children. In contrast, the LACE Coordinator (LA10) reported that their authority provided one to three hours a week of one-to-one tuition at home for any looked-after child in school years 9, 10 and 11. We can see from this selection of responses that a variety of specialist support was highlighted and which in turn suggested potential inconsistency between the authorities in terms of their provision.

With help from one LACE Coordinator I was provided with the contact names of all LACE Coordinators in Wales and I was able to resend the enquiry request for

information directly to the seven local authorities that had not responded. This resulted in a further four responses which revealed further variation in service configuration (such as: LAC Virtual Head; Vulnerable Learners Service; Children First Team) but with LACE provision being the most prevalent across the local authorities. From the responses it was identified that each local authority had a looked-after children's education Coordinator, although some of these are known by different titles such as: Education Liaison Officer; Education Officer; Learning Advisor for LAC; and an Education Coordinator for Vulnerable Students. Regarding the LACE team practitioners, these ranged from one practitioner to eight in a team, with the following occupational titles: LAC (education) Mentor, Learning Coach, Teaching Assistant, Learning Support Officer, Support Worker, Non-Teaching Staff, LACE Education Officer, Inclusion Officer, Education Psychologist, Child Psychologist, CAMHS Worker, Administrators and one looked-after child nurse. Despite having varying membership and titles, as Table (4.1, p.83) indicates, this is unrelated to the number of looked-after children in each authority. LA14 had four practitioners and over 500 looked-after children and LA15 had the same number of looked-after children with eight practitioners. Likewise, LA5 had fewer than 200 looked-after children and had a LACE Coordinator and no other practitioner in that service. However, LA4 had the same population of looked-after children with four practitioners. Thus these initial responses alerted me early on to variation in service scale and objectives and their likely effect on practice and relationships with service users and other professionals.

One LACE Coordinator (LA7) invited me to their office in January 2013 for an informal discussion of their role and those of their team practitioners. This was an opportunity to build upon the information I had already sourced and with the consent of the participant, to treat this meeting as informal pilot activity. Pilot activity is where the researcher, in the first instance, can try out and test the usefulness of their research lines of enquiry and the applicability of the chosen research methods before undertaking the actual study (Bryman, 2001; Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010).

It should be noted here that, consistent with suggestions by Bryman (2001), this LACE Coordinator was to be one of the members of the sample that was employed in the full study. This informal pilot activity was invaluable in terms of gaining an insight into how they were going about meeting their statutory duties. I was informed that not all looked-after young people were accessing LACE

provision. Thus what I discovered from this pilot activity was that each local authority's approach was different in terms of how they went about meeting the duty and how the related policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) was interpreted and implemented. This early intelligence helped to shape the topics of enquiry and in turn the research design, which I discuss next.

**Table 4.1: Overview of the LACE Coordinators and their front-line LACE team practitioners from the scoping phase**

Local Authorities (n=15)	Team Numbers	Role and Titles	Number of Looked After Children aged 1-18 on the 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2012*
1.	3	1 'Education Liaison Officer' 2 Learning Mentors	Under 100
2.	3	1 'LACE coordinator' 2 Learning Mentors	Between 100 - 200
3.	3	1 'LACE coordinator' 2 Learning Coaches	Between 100 - 200
4.	4	1 'LACE coordinator', 2 Teaching Assistants and 1 Repatriation & Prevention project teacher	Between 100 - 200
5.	1	1 'LACE coordinator'	Between 100 - 200
6.	2	1 'LACE coordinator' 1 Education Psychologist	Between 100 - 200
7.	5	1 'LACE coordinator', 3 Learning Support Officers & 1 PEP Administrator	Between 100 - 200
8.	1	1 'Education Coordinator' for Vulnerable Learners	Between 100 - 200
9.	4	1 'Education Coordinator', other 3 roles not supplied	Between 200 - 300
10.	2	1 'LACE coordinator' 1 Administrator	Between 200 - 300
11.	2	1 'LACE coordinator' 1 Inclusion Officer	Between 300 - 400
12.	5	2 'LACE coordinators', 2 Learning Support Officers & 1 Administrator	Between 300 - 400
13.	2	1 'LACE coordinator' 1 LAC Education Officer	Between 300 - 400
14.	4	1 'LACE coordinator' 3 Support Workers	Over 500
15.	8	1 'LACE coordinator', 1 Education Psychologist, 1 Child Psychologist, 1 Nurse, 1CAMHS worker, 1 Counsellor & 2 non-teaching staff	Over 500

#### **References**

\*Welsh Government. 2012. *Adoptions, Outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities, Wales, 2011-12* [Online]. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/120927sdr1622012en.pdf> [Accessed: 19/01/2015].



## Research Design and the Overall Research Question

It has been suggested that a research design is the 'logical structure of the inquiry' rather than the method operated to collect research data (de Vaus, 2001, p. 9). Ontologically speaking, the way that reality is constructed cannot be separated from the methods or research designs one applies to analyse the social fabric (Kincheloe *et al.*, 2011). Denzin, and Lincoln (2011) point out that with no paradigm or theory that is distinctly its own, qualitative research is difficult to clearly define. Nevertheless, it is 'a field of inquiry in its own right' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Qualitative researchers are more positioned and inclined to draw closer to the perspectives of social agents (Warren, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Ormston *et al.*, 2014). Thus, as a means to make lived experience visible, a qualitative approach at both the micro and macro levels can assist in describing the experiences of social agents (Denzin, 2001). Accordingly, as a set of interpretive activities which honours no solitary methodology over another (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), a well thought out qualitative research design can assist in addressing the research aims and research questions in this study by closely searching the participants' perspectives and meanings within their social world and capturing, 'the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings' (Mason, 2002, p. 1).

In terms of the research design, four LACE services in south Wales were selected insofar as they represented distinctly varied models of service. Also, I specifically focused on a sample of looked-after young people undertaking their GCSE/vocational qualifications (Key Stage Four) who were accessing these four LACE services. The four local authorities were selected as cases in their own right (see Hammersley, 1992) for a cross-sectional study (see p. 86) of four local authority's different models of attainment and assigned professionals within the organisation structure. In addition, they had different social/cultural contexts, they were located in different parts of Wales, and had different numbers of young people with looked-after status in their care. I discuss this further later (see pp. 90-91).

The qualitative design aims to discover how LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners were meeting their statutory duty to promote looked-after children's educational achievement through their policy enactment and support practices. It

also sets out to examine the views of relevant young people undertaking their GCSE/vocational examinations about the type of educational support they receive from the LACE service and to identify whether the support has facilitated or impeded their achievements from the young people's perspectives.

Therefore, to reiterate, the study seeks to address the following research question: From the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners, how do they understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children and how in turn is the impact of their interventions perceived by those same young people? In order to explore these various viewpoints four broad lines of enquiry were identified to inform data collection:

- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perspectives on their role and duties in regard to policy guidance and how this has been translated in terms of implementation.
- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perceptions of barriers to the enactment of good practice.
- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner social constructions of looked-after children's identities.
- The views of young people about their 'looked-after' status and experiences of schooling, as well as their perceptions about the educational support received from LACE teams.

As the objective of this study is to generate insights concerning the social world through the participants' own meanings and experiences, a research study was planned with a commitment to understand a given social world (Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008). Taking a constructionist approach, I aimed to recognise the various contexts out of which the participants construct what is important for them, informed through their own meanings of the social world (Jones, 2004). It has been suggested that good research is defined as, 'the product of clear analysis of problems, clear specification of goals, careful design of fieldwork and thoughtful analysis and exposition afterwards' (Abbot & Sapsford (1988, p. 180) cited in Becker and Bryman, 2012a, p. 15). Thus an advantage of developing a sensitively informed research design as a way to achieve data is that it is more likely that the interviewee will feel comfortable enough to open up and share their experiences to an unknown interviewer (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The application of a particular qualitative technique known as 'research on the move', or what can be referred to as 'the

waiting field' (Mannay and Morgan, 2015, p. 172) is presented later in the chapter. The focus now turns to explain why a cross-sectional study was chosen.

### **A Cross-Sectional Study**

A cross-sectional study involves a cross-section of a phenomenon either at one time or multiple times in a short time period (Bryman, 2001; Babbie, 2010; Polit and Beck, 2014). In this study the cross-section refers to a representative four LACE service provisions (see Table 4.1, p.83). Both descriptive and exploratory studies are often cross-sectional as together they aim to understand causal processes that occur over time (Bryman, 2001; Babbie, 2010). The interest of this inquiry lies in the variation and nuances between the four LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners, sourced and captured through a 'snap-shot' in time (Blaikie 2010). A typifying characteristic of this approach is that the sample within each authority was typically interviewed on the same day (see Table 4.2, p.91) with the intention of 'capturing a frozen moment in time' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p. 267). Many cross-sectional studies have been used in nursing research (Polit and Beck, 2014), and sports studies (Jones, 2015). According to de Vaus (2001), cross-sectional studies are one of the most widely used designs within social research and he suggests that researchers utilising a cross-sectional design are not interested in *change* but, rather, are interested in *differences* and similarities between and within groups which can then be compared. As the focus of this study is to explore the meanings and experiences that participants construct and, with the purpose of addressing the research question, to examine the differences and similarities between the four LACE provisions, a cross-sectional study design was identified as the most appropriate for this study.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

This section will outline why semi-structured interviews were identified as the most appropriate method for this study. It has been suggested that we live in an 'interview society' in which interviews, in all guises (television and radio), are central to making sense of our lives (Silverman, 1993; Rapley, 2004). In line with this, the interview was chosen as the sole research tool for this study as it was deemed to be the most appropriate due to the sensitivities around the population and also as data are most commonly collected through interviews in a cross-sectional study (Jones, 2015). Mason (1996) suggests that semi-structured

interviews can offer participants more control over the direction of the research topic during the interview process. In undertaking the semi-structured interviews, the interviewer draws upon topics that act as a prompt or catalyst to a line of enquiry (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Bryman, 2001; Fielding and Thomas, 2008). For examples of the interview guides used in this study, see Appendix C. Wanting to identify the meanings and experiences of the research participants, the semi-structured interview strategy was realised as an ethically suitable method to gather an in-depth understanding of this research topic. In terms of designing a distinctive approach, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) set out nine types of interview questions each designed specifically to capture the complexity of meanings and experience. These are: introductory questions; follow-up questions; probing questions; direct questions; indirect questions; structuring questions; silence questions; and interpreting questions.

Within the research method tool, the introductory questions such as: 'can you tell me about?' are questions which can yield 'rich' descriptions of the topic being investigated (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The majority of other questions in the interviews were either direct questions arising from the participants' initial spontaneous descriptions in response to the introductory questions or follow-up questions which allowed me to ask about specific key terms or issues, concerns, perceptions and so on which had been divulged regarding the topic. In addition, probing questions were used to pursue and explore content (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Probing questions are vital for keeping people talking; especially those who need more encouragement to provide detailed accounts (Wilson and Powell, 2001). Nonetheless, despite having a number of questions prepared, the responses from the participants cannot necessarily be predicted in advance (Wengraf, 2001). Additional questions, as suggested by Wengraf (2001), can be asked depending on what is expressed by the interviewees. As long as the researcher covers the same themes across interviews, it does not necessarily matter how the questions are sequenced as the central rationale of qualitative interviewing is 'that it enables you to gather contrasting and complementary talk on the same theme or issue' (Rapley, 2004, p. 18). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews were designed for the fieldwork phase with 'enough freedom for respondents also to steer the conversation, to bring in all sorts of tangential matters that, for them, having a bearing on the main subject' (Hakim, 2000, p. 35).

In terms of the value of interviewing as a solitary data collection tool, there have been growing criticisms (Dingwall, 1997; Silverman, 1997; Atkinson and Coffey, 2002). In particular critics have suggested that there has been an over-reliance on interviews and they challenge the view:

that interviews can tap stable attitudes or perspectives that govern people's behaviour beyond the interview situation; and/or that they can be a sound source of witness information about what happened, or what happens, in particular settings or in the world more generally (Hammersley, 2007, p. 297).

In an attempt to validate interviewing as a viable tool of data collection, Hammersley (2008) maintains that interviews can offer insights into the perspectives that govern behaviour and many qualitative studies rely totally, or mainly, on interview data (Hammersley, 2008). It has been suggested that during qualitative interviews the perspectives of the interviewee and interviewer, 'dance together for a moment but also extend outward in social space and backward and forward in time' (Warren, 2001, p. 89). By their very nature, interviews are social encounters which do not necessarily involve possessing any extraordinary skills (Rapley, 2004). However, it has been described that 'asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first' (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 47). Thus 'qualitative interviewing is more than a set of skills, it is also a philosophy, and approach to learning' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 2). This philosophy equates to the idea that *understanding* is achieved through the encouragement of people to describe, in their own terms, their social worlds (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 2). In a further account, Warren (2001) advocates that skills are essential within interviewing as this method requires researchers to deal with human subjects' regulations and professional ethical codes (see below). Furthermore, it has been argued that what is required within interviewing is having the skill of 'active listening' which Kvale and Brinkmann describe as requiring:

...an ear for the interview theme and a knowledge of the interview topic, a sensitivity toward the social relationship of an interview, and knowledge of what he or she wants to ask about (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 139).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe 'active listening' as listening that goes beyond that of an ordinary conversation; instead, they argue, it is a skill that takes considerable practice. Within much qualitative face-to-face interviewing the

research objective is to acquire 'thick', detailed responses from the interviewees (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Bryman, 2001). In order to achieve 'thick' responses, a semi-structured interview method was selected for its capacity to generate data to gain insight into the research participants' social worlds (Silverman, 2010). Specifically chosen for its flexibility, the semi-structured interview offers a great deal of leeway (Bryman, 2001; Rapley, 2004).

Notwithstanding the advantages of undertaking semi-structured interviews, there are some potential problems with this method that need to be acknowledged. Concerning interviewing the LACE Coordinators in their role as leaders and experts, it is possible they may well invoke 'prepared 'talk tracks' to promote the viewpoints they want to communicate' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 147). The task of the interviewer may then be to get beyond the occupational 'line' often provided by practitioners in order to reveal more authentic insights into how they construct their social world (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

In terms of undertaking research with children and young people, despite children and young people thinking similarly to adults, children are more likely to give answers that they believe will please the researcher rather than always being entirely truthful (Greene and Hill, 2005, p. 9). One difference between the children-adult research relationship and the adult-adult research relationship is that children may believe their views will not be taken seriously by adults (Greene and Hill, 2005). Thus, the way in which the researcher views children is pivotal in terms of the relationship that ensues between the participant and researcher (Robinson and Kellett, 2004). Based on sound ontological and epistemological principles, undertaking interviews can be fulfilling but at the same time they are, 'difficult intellectually, practically, socially and ethically' (Mason, 1996, p. 59). A way to overcome what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to as a feeling of emptiness at the end of an interview when the interviewee has divulged information about their social world for what may seem nothing in return, the research was designed to include a £10 retail voucher which was to be presented to each young person after their interview, as a way to thank them for their participation in the research.

Having outlined in some detail the primary research method along with my role as the researcher, other researchers have the opportunity to replicate aspects of the study if this is something they desire. I next provide an account of how I sampled and gained access to the participants.

## **Sample and Access**

When undertaking social research there are numerous social agents than can be located with the aim of providing diverse views on a research topic. Due to reasons of time, in this study only one strata of looked-after children in school Year Group Ten and Eleven (Key Stage Four) were included in this study. For the same reason, within this study it did not prove possible to gain views from teachers, social workers, or carers (foster/kinship). Thus the focus of this thesis comprises an explorative qualitative research design utilised to discover how four Welsh local authorities' LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners ( $n=11$ ) have undertaken the implementation of the policies framing their work as directed by the Welsh Assembly Government (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). In addition, the focus is to identify the views of relevant looked-after young people ( $n=17$ ), in foster care and kinship care placements and undertaking their GCSE/vocational examinations, about the type of educational support they received from the LACE team practitioners and to discover whether this support, in their view, facilitated or impeded their achievements. Before discussing how I gained access to the research participants, an account of a purposive sampling strategy is first presented. It has been suggested that purposive sampling strategies apply when, 'the researcher exercises his or her judgement about who will provide the best perspective on the phenomenon of interest, and then intentionally invites those specific perspectives into the study' (Abrams, 2010, p. 538).

### **Research Participants: LACE Coordinators and their LACE team Practitioners**

In light of insights from the scoping phase four LACE services were selected in south Wales based upon two variables: the demographic aspect of the local authority and the range of different service models which are described fully above and outlined in Table (4.1, p.84) as LA 7, 3, 2, and 13. These four sites will be referred to as LA 1,2,3,4 from hereon. Demographically, all four locations rank high on the Welsh Government's 'Indicators of deprivation' measures<sup>4</sup>. LA1, LA3 and LA4 can be described as former industrial urban Valleys communities of which LA1 and LA3 are inland, while LA4 expands inland from a coastline. LA2 can be described as a coastal communality which is largely rural. LA2 and

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation/?lang=en>

LA4 are larger geographically than LA1 and LA3. As this research involved populations sometimes difficult to access (LACE practitioners and looked after children), these research participants were identified by gatekeepers (the LACE Coordinators). This calls into question exactly how free the front-line LACE practitioners felt in terms of being critical of their experience as a provider of the LACE services. However, as we shall see in Chapter Five, it will become apparent that team practitioners seemed able to speak openly about their work and its likely impacts. Abrams (2010) has argued that this is a common occurrence within research of this type. Table 4.2 (below) presents the sample of LACE Coordinators and their front-line LACE team practitioners. Here we can see that each of these four LACE services has one LACE Coordinator, but variance can be seen in the title of their service and the roles of the front-line LACE team practitioners. LA3 has the title of 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Support and contains two front-line Mentors. LA2 also has the title of 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Support however, this service contains two front-line Learning Coaches. In contrast, LA1 is the 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Service, which has three front-line Learning Support Assistants/Officers and one PEP Administrator. While LA4, also known as a 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Service, has one front-line Looked-After Children's Education Officer.

**Table 4.2: The local authority LACE Coordinators and their LACE Team Practitioners**

<b><u>LA1, team title: 'Looked-After Children (LAC) Education Service'.</u></b>		
Team size:	5	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Ann)
Learning Support Officers/Assistants	3	2 (Brenda, Rachel)
PEP Administrator	1	
<b><u>LA2, team title: 'Looked-After Children (LAC) Education support'.</u></b>		
Team size:	3	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Sara)
LAC Learning Coaches	2	2 (Donna, Rhiannon)
<b><u>LA3, team title: 'Looked-After Children (LAC) Education Service'.</u></b>		
Team size:	3	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Laura)
LAC Mentors	2	2 (Anna, Morgan)
<b><u>LA4, team title: 'Looked-After Children (LAC) Education Service'.</u></b>		
Team size:	2	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Erin)
LAC Education Officer	1	1 (Bryn)



Table (4.2, above) demonstrates that the LACE service roles occupied are largely gendered, with all of the Coordinators and the majority of the front-line LACE practitioners being female. The sample across the study sites comprised all four LACE Coordinators and seven of the nine front-line team practitioners. In terms of their ethnicity, all of the LACE Coordinators and their front-line LACE team practitioners were 'white' Welsh/British. Regarding previous educational experience, there is some variance between the Coordinators and their front-line teams (see Table, 4.3 below). The Coordinators have more formalized qualifications and experiences. Three Coordinators were educated to graduate level. Two Coordinators had a background in teaching. The four Coordinators had been in role from six to thirteen years, Erin (LA4) had been in role the longest at thirteen years, followed by Sara (LA2) with eleven years of experience then Laura (LA3) with seven years and lastly Ann (LA1) had six years of experience in the LACE Coordinator role. In contrast, the front-line LACE team practitioners had less formalized and less accredited previous experience. Despite all front-line LACE practitioners having a background within 'youth work', Bryn (LA4) was the only front-line LACE team practitioner that reported having a youth work qualification. Their time in role as front-line LACE practitioners ranged from less than three months to ten years. Anna (LA3) was the only front-line LACE team practitioner to have obtained a university degree.

**Table 4.3: Practice background of the Research Sample - LACE Coordinators and their LACE Team Practitioners**

Local authority	LACE Coordinators: time in post, practiced backgrounds	Front-line LACE practitioners: time in post, practiced backgrounds
1	<b>Ann:</b> LAC education Coordinator six years. Psychology background. Previous manager within a residential school for children with social, emotional behavioural difficulties.	<b>Brenda:</b> Looked After Children Learning Support Assistants/Officer, ten years. Previous Youth Development officer; Adult Education Officer. <b>Rachel:</b> Looked After Children Learning Support Assistants/Officer, two years. Previous Youth Inclusion Support Worker; Life Long Learning and Education Learning Support Officer.
2	<b>Sara:</b> LAC education Coordinator eleven years. BA (Hons) English; MSc Education Management. Previous secondary school teacher	<b>Donna:</b> Looked After Children Learning Coach, six years. Previous youth worker. <b>Rhiannon:</b> Looked After Children Learning Coach, six years. Previous youth worker.
3	<b>Laura:</b> LAC education Coordinator seven years. Previous local authority administration role.	<b>Anna:</b> Looked After Children Mentor, (less than three months). BA (Hons) Education and Childhood Studies. Previous youth worker. <b>Morgan:</b> Looked After Children Mentor four years. Previous youth worker.
4	<b>Erin:</b> LAC education Coordinator thirteen years. BA (Hons) Primary Education. Previous primary and secondary school teacher; PE Coordinator; head of year; senior teacher (children protection and welfare).	<b>Bryn:</b> Looked After Children Education Officer, (less than one year). Previous youth worker.

### Research Participants: Young People

Information is presented in Table 4.4 below which identifies the purposive sample of seventeen young people in school Year Groups Ten and Eleven (Key Stage Four) selected by the LACE Coordinators as the research gatekeepers. The sample of looked-after young people ( $n=17$ ) were in foster and kinship care placements. The largest group of young people was recruited by the LACE Coordinator Sara (LA2) ( $n=7$ ); followed by ( $n=4$ ) in LA1; and ( $n=3$ ) in both LA3 and LA4. I use the term 'young people' as a wide-ranging descriptive category whilst being aware that they are not a homogenous group of participants. In terms of the ages and school Year Groups of the sample, two young people were aged fourteen years old and in school Year Group Ten, and an additional

young person was aged fifteen years old but also in Year Group Ten. All the rest of the sample ( $n=14$ ) were aged sixteen years old and in school Year Group Eleven. Fifteen young people were attending a mainstream school (both rural and urban), while Connah (LA4) was attending a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Garth (LA1) was attending an 'Education Other than at School' (EOTAS) set of provisions over four days a week. The majority ( $n=14$ ) of the sample resided in foster care placements. A further three lived in kinship care placements with grandparents identified as their main carers. Regarding the gender composition of the sample, there were eight females and nine males. In terms of their ethnicity, all of the participants were 'white' Welsh/British.

**Table 4.4: Overview of the Research Sample - Young People**

Name	Local Authority (LA)	Placement Type	School Year Group	Type of School
Garth	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Educated Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)
Elen	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Jac	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Bethan	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Lynn	LA2	Kinship care (Grandparent)	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Rural Mainstream comprehensive
Dylan	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Rural Mainstream comprehensive
Beca	LA2	Kinship care (Grandparent)	Year Group 10 (age 15)	Rural Mainstream comprehensive
Glyn	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Martyn	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Alan	LA2	Kinship care (Grandparent)	Year Group 10 (age 14)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Ceri	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 10 (age 14)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Griff	LA3	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Tegan	LA3	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Carwyn	LA3	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Connah	LA4	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
Jenni	LA4	Kinship care (Grandparents)	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Sian	LA4	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive

## **Ethical Considerations**

The purposive sampling strategy outlined above has raised a number of ethical questions which will now be explored. As noted above, the LACE Coordinators (gatekeepers) across the four study sites recruited the entire sample and hence there is the potential issue of sample bias which relates to who was chosen to participate and why they were chosen (Punch, 2005). Moreover, it has been described that 'there is a danger that gatekeepers can have their own expectations and sometimes try to manipulate the research - intentionally or unintentionally' (Holloway, 1997, p. 77). Furthermore, gaining access to looked-after children, young people and care leavers as one of the most vulnerable and excluded group in society is always bound up with questions of ethics (Miller and Bell, 2002). It has been well documented that gaining access to looked-after children can be a lengthy process as a result of their vulnerability and protection needs (Butler and Williamson, 1994; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; Heptinstall, 2000; Wigfall and Cameron, 2006).

As the LACE Coordinators solely recruited the sample of young people, the young people's actual agency to choose to take part, or perhaps being expected to take part is unknown. Therefore the risk of selection bias is a price to pay for accessing these young people and this also relates to the sample of front-line LACE team practitioners who had also been selected by the LACE Coordinators across the four study sites. Later in the chapter I will discuss the implications of seven young people (four in LA1 and three in LA4) requesting that their LACE worker be present during their interviews. As the sample was selected and 'volunteered' by the gatekeeper it was vital that all the participants were aware they were able to reject taking part in any aspect of the research (Miller and Bell, 2002).

Regarding undertaking the research across the four study sites, it was decided in negotiation between me and the LACE Coordinators (gatekeepers) that they would provide the locations and dates that the research could be conducted. In addition, the LACE Coordinators and the LACE team practitioners all acted as access chaperones (Lee, 1993) for me in that they would organise transport and access to various sites including: a civic centre, social services departments, various schools (urban and rural), a college, and a foster placement in order for the research interviews to be conducted. It did not prove possible to gain access to official records or the full care histories of the sample of young people,

although this was initially sought. While there was some modest access to some of the sample of young people's Personal Education Plans (PEPs) (Elen and Garth LA1 and Lynn, Dylan and Beca LA2), given to me in the field, this was not forthcoming in the other two local authorities, although this was sought. It was decided therefore that not being able to access the entire sample of young people's PEPs or access their care records, these sources should not comprise part of the study. Through informed consent, the young people's educational outcomes (Key Stage Four qualifications), along with their post-school destinations were verbally sought. This information was provided to me either by the LACE practitioners (Coordinators and their LACE team) in LA1 and LA2, or the young person themselves in their interviews (LA3 and LA4).

It was within the early stages of the research design that the formal process of seeking ethical approval commenced. Key ethical codes and regulation were reflected upon in the design of this research (The British Sociological Association, 2002; ESRC, 2010; The British Educational Research Association, 2011). As the study involved a vulnerable group of young people the research was designed to ensure that during their engagement within the study there were no risks or harm to their well-being (Lee, 1993; Miller and Bell, 2002). Although the term 'harm' is often elusive and invisible social researchers must ensure their work is harmless and benign and that it will not embarrass or cause distress to the participants during and after the research project takes place (Alderson and Morrow, 2011).

Upon the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee granting permission to conduct the research, I sent copies of the research information sheets (see Appendix A) and consent forms (see Appendix B) to the four LACE Coordinators. In their role as gatekeepers the LACE Coordinators circulated the LACE team practitioners these information sheets and consent forms and the relevant information sheets for the looked-after young people (see Appendix A). In addition, the LACE Coordinators circulated consent forms to relevant young people and their social workers, carers and birth parents asking for their consent for the young person to take part in the research. Following agreement from the significant adults, the young people in the interviews were able to consent to the research project themselves.

Regarding anonymity, the research information sheet explained that each participant and local authority would be provided with a pseudonym and that any information that might identify them would be omitted, thus assuring confidentiality. As the research was undertaken with support from the LACE Coordinators and LACE team practitioners, these were always available for support for the sample of young people and researcher whilst 'in the field' as appropriate staff members (Mannay and Morgan, 2015). When beginning the semi-structured interviews, it was explained to the young people that if any information they provided during the interviews indicated a risk of harm to the participants or other people, this would be disclosed to the LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners acting as *loco parentis*.

This responsibility was enacted upon two occasions. Each will now be presented. The first occasion was in LA2 when Ceri (age 14) reported in her interview that she had recently self-harmed. After this interview I promptly informed the LACE team practitioners who were on hand, acting as access chaperones, of the context of the disclosed information (Lee, 1993). After passing on the disclosed information to the LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners in LA2 I was promptly informed by both Donna and Rhiannon (LA2 practitioners) that this concern with Ceri had already been discussed with Sara the LACE Coordinator in their team meeting in the social services office on the previous day, at which I was present. In the meeting I observed staff share concerns about the young person in terms of how unhappy she seemed at school and in their foster placement and that this young person had informed Donna (LACE Learning Coach) that they had self-harmed. In their meeting I observed staff speaking about the reported rise in young people self-harming and in this instance Sara (LACE Coordinator) said to her team that they "*would monitor the situation*" (Fieldnotes: LA2). In considering the implications of this, it could be argued that to 'monitor' instead of a more interventionist response could delay the necessary support needed for Ceri to overcome her self-harming. For Ceri, the support she wanted meant having a fresh start in a new school and new foster family and escaping her unhappiness in terms of her current placement.

The other occasion was in LA3 when I asked Griff (age sixteen) what he least liked about school? To which he replied: "*Erm, Mr [name] he's a paedophile, and waking up early and walking to school, and Miss [name] she's a bitch*".

Again, after this interview I promptly informed the LACE team practitioners who were on hand, acting as access chaperones. In this case it was Anna the front-line LACE team practitioner (LA3 LAC mentor) who was onsite at the social services department having bought another young person for their interview (Tegan). During the interview with Tegan, a note was placed under the door of the interview room. This asked me to contact one of the leaving care practitioners, at the reception, before leaving the research site. I did so and was asked to confirm the information that I had disclosed to Anna and the context in which Griff had made the two allegations and whether they appeared to be serious or malicious in nature. I explained that the comments were made in the context of describing what he liked least about school in which his response was negative rather than positive. The leaving care team practitioner emphasised how clarity of language in this context was vital and from what I had said they felt that it may have been malicious in nature rather than a serious accusation. As a consequence the leaving care practitioner said that they would speak to Griff about the seriousness of these accusations and the appropriateness of using language such as this. In considering the implications of this, what if this accusation was factual? Critical to accusations of this nature is belief in the young person's disclosure (Smith, 1992, p. 132). The leaving care team practitioner thanked me for informing them of the accusation (of a possible paedophile) and stated: *"just in case something comes up again about the teacher in the future"* (Fieldnotes: LA3).

In a further ethical consideration the quality of the interview can be negatively impacted for a variety of reasons (Lee, 1993; King and Horrocks, 2010). 'Interviewer effects' include the researcher's moods, biases, interests and experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Additionally, 'interviewer effects' include the status of the researcher and also their social characteristics such as: age, gender, social class, accent, dress and body language (Lee, 1993; Warren, 2001; Kirby, 2004; Rapley, 2004; King and Horrocks, 2010). In an attempt to redress age and status imbalances between the young people and researcher during my time 'in the field' casual clothing was worn. Also, after each participant had arrived but before commencing the interview I took the opportunity to build a rapport with them. In short, I sought to create a relaxed environment for the young people (Wilson and Powell, 2001). By asking the participants in the first instance about their hobbies and interests this allowed the participants to become acquainted with me on an informal level which created an atmosphere

of reciprocal friendliness, necessary for building trust. It has been pointed out that researcher empathy, sincerity and sensitivity are important tools and in seeking openness the researcher is unlikely to achieve this if they are impersonal and closed in their approach (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

In terms of informed consent, the research sample must have access to adequate information about the study in order to make an informed decision to take part in it (Aldred and Gillies, 2002). On the face of it, gaining informed consent may seem fairly straightforward; however this is not necessarily the case. Mason (1996) points out that gaining informed consent can be a difficult and quite complex task. Warren (2001) suggests that the informed consent and information logic presumes that the participants will understand the research through the information and consent letters. To be sure that informed consent was given and to ensure the participants understood the overall research, the information sheet contained an explanation of the study including what would happen with the information that the participants provided. Also, the participants were advised that the interviews would last approximately forty-five minutes. In addition, it was explained on the consent form that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without giving a reason, that they could decline to answer any of the questions they were asked, that the interview content would be digitally recorded, transcribed for the stated purpose and kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years after which the data would be destroyed (The Data Protection Act, 1988). The discussion now turns to explore these points further through an account of conducting the semi-structured interviews.

### **Conducting the Semi-Structured Interviews**

Data were collected from a sequence of interviews which took place over eight months in 2013. Interviews occurred during 'office' hours and in various sites organised by the LACE Coordinators. According to Rapley (2004) there is no such thing as the 'ideal' interview. Thus, in acknowledging that the interview process can sometimes be stressful for the interviewee concerning sensitive topics, it is important to build trust at the outset (Lee, 1993; Wilson and Powell, 2001). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that the key to undertaking successful interviews is secured in the first few minutes of meeting the interviewee and establishing eye contact and showing an interest in what the interviewee talks about. After reading the research information sheets all



participants were asked to read and sign the research consent form before the interview commenced. Subsequently, the sample was asked for their permission for the semi-structured interviews to be digitally recorded for transcribing purposes and all the participants gave their permission. Relating to conducting the semi-structured interviews, some consideration of the differences in interviewing different populations, such as the young people and LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners will now be discussed. The art of interviewing young people will be considered first.

### **The Art of Interviewing Children and Young People**

Although I view young people as competent social actors with rights and agency occupying place, culture and time (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002; Goodyer, 2013), it has been well documented that adults and children exist in distinctive and differing culture and social worlds (Fine and Sanstrom, 1988; Arksey and Knight, 1999). In emphasising this perspective, some have argued that children are complex beings situated within a complex world (Greig *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, in society there are marked differences that can influence children and young people in how they react in a situation (Wilson and Powell, 2001; Greig *et al.*, 2007). In the context of this study, it has been suggested that rather than viewing children as different to adults, what is required is for researchers to be 'reflexive throughout the research process and critically aware of the range of reasons why research with children may be potentially different from research with adults' (Punch, 2002, p. 25).

Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 116) provide six differences between children and adults that are often cited as affecting interviews: cognitive development; attention span; language development; life experiences; status and power; what is remembered and what is meaningful. In terms of conducting interviews with children, these differences have ethical and methodological implications that must be considered when undertaking research (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Interviews were selected in this study as an appropriate research tool as young people 'can be treated in the same way as adults and display their competencies' (Punch, 2002, p. 12).

Over recent years there has been an accelerating movement that has promoted children's participation and 'voice' as centre stage within research relating to children (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Pinkney, 2000; Prout, 2003; Wigfall and

Cameron, 2006). In critiquing this, however, the point has been made that some 'voices' are heard over and over yet nothing much changes for them (Lundy, 2007). In order to elicit young people's experiences and views directly, interviewing children and young people requires not only courage from the child or young person, but also knowledge and skill from the researcher (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This researcher knowledge and skill includes gaining:

knowledge of the language barriers that must be overcome; knowledge of what information needs to be obtained and the skills needed to access that information (Wilson and Powell, 2001, p. xiii).

The art of interviewing young people rests in not imposing one's own perceptions but, as previously discussed, in gaining trust and ensuring that participants are listened to, accepted and, crucially, are believed (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Wilson and Powell, 2001; Punch, 2002). Although ontologically I view young people as basically the same as adults (Punch, 2002), due to their status as 'children', young people under eighteen years of age are often 'marginalised in adult-centred society... [where] Adults' fears, assumptions and attitudes affect their behaviour towards children' (Punch, 2002, p. 5). By viewing children and childhood as a social construction this can assist in improving notions of children's personhood (James and James, 2004). Nevertheless, as many children's lives (especially those with a looked-after status) are regulated and examined by society, schools, families and carers, notions of childhood hold a pivotal but contested place in child research, everyday discourses, and in practitioners' practice and policies (Woodhead, 2009). This is why researchers have been called upon to ensure that, in an adult dominated society, a platform is given to the voices of looked-after young people (Winter, 2006). In terms of understanding young people's own capability, Wilson and Powell, (2001) point out that age per se is not necessarily a good predictor to young people's abilities. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the researcher to 'draw attention to any adult-child distinctions' (Punch, 2002, p. 2).

Regarding this study, each interview with the sample of young people lasted an average of forty-five minutes. Garth from LA1 was interviewed in his foster placement while all three young people in LA3 were interviewed in local authority offices. Three young people in LA2 were interviewed after school in the school setting when they were attending an extra-curricular revision class (provided by Donna the LACE team practitioner). Ten other interviews with young people were undertaken in four schools (urban and rural) during the school day. LACE

team practitioners were on site during all interviews in order to support the young person if this was required. On the day of conducting the semi-structured interviews with some of the young people I was told by their LACE workers (Brenda and Rachel LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistants and Bryn LA4 LAC Education Officer) that a total of seven young people (four in LA1: Garth, Elen, Jac and Bethan; and three in LA4: Connah, Jenni and Sian), wanted their LACE worker present during their interview. Reasons for this were given to me as the young person was either shy or lacking in confidence when meeting new people. Naturally I was aware that having their LACE worker present in the room could impact upon what the young people would say about the LACE service. It has been suggested that these situations can influence young people to say what they think the professional wants to hear instead of speaking for themselves and this limits the potential range of authentic perspectives (Lefstein and Snell, 2011). Wilson and Powell (2001) suggest seating the support person behind the child in order to limit their influence. In LA4 Bryn, in the role of LACE team practitioner, occupied a position of sitting behind the young person (Wilson and Powell, 2001). Bryn later commented to me that having the opportunity to sit in and listen had been interesting *“as we don’t get feedback on our role”*. The position of sitting behind the young person was not practised by the LACE team practitioners in LA1. Instead, Brenda and Rachel sat next to the young people thus potentially influencing what they said, and often speaking on the behalf of the young person. In the following example from Garth’s interview, we can see how Brenda, sitting next to Garth, rephrases the question and also encourages Garth’s responses:

DA: *What is it like on a day to day basis at school?*

Garth: *I ‘dunno’ like work and that.*

Brenda: *You know ‘EOTAS’ (Education Other than at School - all forms of education that takes place outside of the formal school environment), what’s it like day to day? You know you go to different provisions so what would you say it’s like day to day?*

Garth: *It’s not good. Tuesday’s I have more like work and that. I go to EOTAS I have work, that’s it.*

Brenda: *Its education on Tuesdays at the EOTAS provision isn’t it?*

Garth: *Yeah.*

Brenda: *And you were having two hours on a Monday because you dropped out of [name of another provision]*

*Yeah?*

Garth: *Yeah.*

Brenda: *Why was it? Why didn't you like your Monday provision because, what did you dislike about that?*

Garth: *Everything! The people there and that, the workers at the provision they used to not let you outside and that. They, they'd say stuff and they don't keep their word to it like so. If they said like you could go out early but you have to do your work, we'd do our work and they'd tell us to do more work before we'd get to go outside, stuff like that.*

What this example shows is how Brenda asked some of my questions in a way that she felt Garth would understand, and by giving prompts over specific information such as people and events (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Nevertheless, this practice does have its own drawbacks (Wilson and Powell, 2001). The young person could feel uncomfortable about being asked about the LACE service with the LACE worker present during the interview. Furthermore, the third party person within the interview situation may filter the information so that the researcher, in effect, is hearing their interpretation rather than the young person's perspectives (Arksey and Knight, 1999). It is worth noting that having such a person present will most likely 'serve to inhibit responses' (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 122). Moreover, it has been described that in interviews where the participant had a third party alongside them, sometimes this person would try and take over the conversation (Booth and Booth, 1994). In Jac's (LA1) interview his LACE worker Rachel (LA1) was sitting next to him and waited until the final question in the interview before interjecting about a concern that she had about Jac. Within the dialogue Rachel also referred to her colleague Brenda (LA1) and another looked-after young person named Bethan (LA1):

DA: *As a final question, do you think that I have asked you everything to understand your education or do you think I've left anything out?*

Jac: *No, I don't think so.*

Rachel: *I think in this new foster placement, you've been there for quite a while haven't you?*

Jac: *Yeah.*

Rachel: *He's the oldest out of the four children that are there [in the foster placement] and I think it's a nice role for him, it's what he likes and he gets on with the other children. You get on really well with the other children?*

Jac: *Yeah.*

Rachel: *And they're a nice couple as well and Brenda [LACE colleague] works with some of the other children. Jac wants to go on to independent living.*

Jac: *I don't now!*

Rachel: *You don't!*

Jac: *No.*

Rachel: *Well that's music to my ears! I was really worried about him because he had this focus that he was going into independent living, like it was the best thing and I kept saying, 'well it's really lonely, I'm sure you're not going to realise what'... Poor Bethan, she counselled him, like I don't know what, 'you can't do it, and you can't do it!' They're best buddies and she was really as stressed out about it as I was, I think! But since he's been with this family, they do a lot of family activities together and go off on the weekends.*

Jac: *Well they've booked two holidays, well one now in August. I've never been abroad before and they're taking us to France!*

Rachel: *I think it's the best thing that has happened to him at this time because it's keeping him in a nice environment, he's doing lovely, I'm so happy because he's, ahh it's just lovely!*

These extracts suggest that when the LACE team practitioners spoke on behalf of the young person, 'the performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer' (Goffman, 1959, p. 83). As we will see in Chapter Seven the interaction between the LACE team practitioners in the young people's interviews did nonetheless provide a 'favourable definition of their service' (Goffman, 1959, p. 83). However, it is possible that the presence of LACE workers during the interviews with young people did not have some effect. The focus now turns to explore conducting the interviews with the LACE Coordinators and their front-line LACE team practitioners.

## **The Art of Interviewing LACE Coordinators and their LACE Team Practitioners**

One main difference with interviewing the LACE Coordinators rests in their role as the local authority LACE leader and the research gatekeepers. This combination set these participants in a different position to me as a result of their status as powerful mediator of research access. In LA1 and LA2 where I was chaperoned around various research sites by the LACE team practitioners, the longer the time was spent in the field, it seemed the less I was treated as a stranger (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). An account of these encounters with an emphasis on undertaking research 'on the move' while being chaperoned around research sites in LA2 is provided below. The focus here, however, is to further understand the deepening of the relationship between me and LACE team practitioners while in the field and the implications of these same workers being present in the interviews with the young people yet also being participants is given due consideration.

The interviews with the LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners lasted one hour on average. Across the sample of four local authorities all four LACE Coordinators' and seven LACE team practitioners' interviews took place in their local authority's offices, apart from Bryn (LA4). In LA4, Bryn was interviewed on the same day as the sample of three young people within a local college premises. Apart from LA4 all the other LACE Coordinators were interviewed before their LACE team practitioners and the young people. In the interviews with the LACE team practitioners I was therefore able to follow up on some of the accounts provided first by the LACE Coordinators. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), follow-ups are more about completing a missing narrative or learning the meaning of a core idea or concept. Follow-ups may also be a way to explore further emerging themes or to clarify some aspect of the themes that other interviewees have already provided that the researcher does not fully understand as yet in the research process (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). An example of how the follow-ups helped to understand what had already been talked about in greater depth can be seen in the interviews with the LACE team practitioners following the LACE Coordinators' interviews. The LACE Coordinators outlined the team practitioners' roles, however it was the team practitioners that undertook the direct work with the young people and could therefore provide a more detailed account of their working role and practices. In addition, they were better placed to talk about specific young people; the ones

they supported were often used as examples during their interviews. Having provided an account of conducting the interviews, the focus will now turn to a description of the encounters and conversations 'on the move' and outline how this has supplemented the data analysis.

### **Research on the Move**

Beyond the interview encounters and as previously stated, the LACE team practitioners in LA1, LA2 and LA3 provided me with transport to the various research sites. Thus there were numerous encounters and opportunities for conversations that took place on the move during car journeys. These encounters and conversations were loosely based on ethnographic practices of 'waiting in the field' (Mannay and Morgan, 2015). The notion of 'research on the move' is described by Mannay and Morgan (2015, p. 166) as the time spent while 'waiting in the field' wherein the researcher has 'an opportunity to explore the times where real lives carry on before they make room for the intrusion of the data production of 'the technique'.

After each period 'in the field', field notes were drafted in order to represent the research process by recording what happened and about conducting the research. Notes were also made regarding my own reflections on what was happening throughout (Gibbs, 2007). It is the experience of being in the field, in these research situations of 'the waiting' or being 'on the move' where the skills of the researcher are tested. As already mentioned, these encounters were useful in terms of deepening the relationships between me and the LACE team practitioners. Moreover, the way that the practitioners view, construct and position the children and young people they support, complements and enriches the interview data. What is said in the context of being 'on the move' can be considered 'off the record' as journeys are an environment much less formal than an interview situation (Bryman, 2001). The process of data collected in research 'on the move' has its own advantages. These conversations ensure the researcher is 'in the know' about certain aspects of what they are about to encounter. It must be remembered, however, that these are LACE team practitioners' views and thus the researcher must be responsive to this when considering the relevant background information whilst 'on the move' in the field (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 125).

It has been argued that ‘thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings’ (Allport, 1954, p. 5). Due to reasons of space, only a brief outline of aspects of the research ‘on the move’ within LA2 is presented here. There was only one example where I was traveling alongside the LACE Coordinator, Sara (LA2), to a research site (urban school) in order to conduct interviews with young people. This journey occurred on the third day in the field in this local authority. In the following example from that journey, we can see that, as Mannay and Morgan (2015) point out, there is always some form of presentation of self (Goffman, 1959). In this extract Sara informed me in advance of the ‘different’ young people who were about to be encountered:

I arrived at the local authority office to meet Sara at 8.45 am and we promptly entered Sara’s car and I was driven for half an hour to meet the two front-line LACE team practitioners (Rhiannon and Donna) who were on hand in the school acting as a chaperone for me. On the journey I was asked how the research “*had gone yesterday with the young people*” (rural ‘high achieving’ school). Sara was referring to three ‘high achievers’ (Lynn, Beca and Dylan) that I had interviewed the day before. Sara then stated upon driving into the school premises, “*you will see some different kids today*” referring to the socioeconomic status of the area (Fieldnotes: LA2).

Upon entering the school site with Sara, which was located in a marginalised area in urban south Wales, both Rhiannon and Donna (LACE team practitioners, LA2) were waiting at reception. After a quick discussion about their session plans for the day Sara, the LACE Coordinator, promptly left and I was led by Rhiannon and Donna to the room booked for the interviews with the young people. On the way to the room Donna commented on how she had been a pupil at the school, and knew it really well. Compared to the rural school of the previous day, this urban school was much larger in size and had double the pupil population (over 1,000). The environment of the school appeared more chaotic than the previous school. Teachers here could be heard, though what seemed rather thin walls in the assigned interview room, shouting and distributing detentions.

While waiting for the young people to arrive, both Rhiannon and Donna (LA2 LACE team practitioners) provided me with further information relating to the participants (young people). For example, in a conversation directly about young



people, Donna described how she preferred to work with *“the more colourful ones”* while describing Rhiannon’s young people as *“the quieter ones”* (Fieldnotes: LA2). It was explained that to get one participant, Alan (LA2), involved in the LACE provision he has to be paired up with a non-looked-after friend as a means to get him to attend the session provided by Rhiannon. When meeting the research participants, I was introduced to them and following being introduced to Alan, Donna commented on Alan’s response to seeing him shake my hand, stating that she: *“was so pleased to see this”*. After each young person’s interview the LACE team practitioners enquired if they had gone okay. Following the interview with Dylan (LA2) Donna remarked:

*So what did you think of the charmer? He’ll [name] be a snake charmer! I will be supporting him in his science lesson [later today]. The teacher saw me and asked me to support him – we call this ‘hot-seating’*  
(Fieldnotes: LA2).

That afternoon, I was driven to a different school urban school (500 pupils) by Rhiannon (LA2). It was explained that, in their LACE practitioner role, both Rhiannon and Donna travelled more than fifty miles a day and how the local authority mileage payment had been reduced *“from sixty to forty pence a mile”* (Rhiannon, LA2). On the journey Rhiannon commented on the uncertainty of her afternoon session:

*You can just turn up to a school and not know what you’ll be doing. Is the kid doing a test in class, there is no communication with some teachers; they don’t always let me know! Schools don’t know what we do, so it’s up to us to tell them what we’re doing*  
(Fieldnotes: LA2).

Rhiannon (LA2) also explained that officially Donna’s work contract was thirty hours a week, while Rhiannon’s was for twenty-four hours a week over four days. Both Rhiannon and Donna had complained earlier in the day that there was always extra work to be completed and this extra work undertaken beyond their contracted hours was unpaid. Rhiannon stated, *“the amount of work we do and our pay!”* To which Donna responded *“yeah, but we are better off than others though!”* (Fieldnotes: LA2).

These conversations and encounters, whilst on the move, did provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of the everyday world of the LACE practitioner *in situ* and these encounters, ‘centralise the salience of the ‘waiting field’ (Mannay and Morgan, 2015, p. 178). Further accounts of the research sites will

be presented, when required, in later chapters. Having outlined what constituted interviewing the participants and the encounters of the research on the move across a range of specialized contexts, it is to the data analysis that we now turn.

## **Data Analysis**

Some twenty-nine hours of interviews were digitally recorded from all the participants ( $n=28$ ) and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis of interview transcripts and field notes is neither linear nor discrete (Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson, 1996), and qualitative data have famously been described as an attractive nuisance when it comes to analysis (Miles, 1979). This is 'because of the attractiveness of its richness but the difficulty of finding analytic paths through that richness' (Bryman, 2001, p. 388). In analysing primary research data there are various routes to assist the researcher to overcome the complexity of qualitative data handling. For instance, there are computer-assisted software packages such as NVivo and ATLAS.ti that have been invaluable for analysing data sets with, the 'code-and-retrieve' theme (Coffey *et al.*, 1996; Bryman, 2001). An alternative to this approach is to mark the text in different colours and code words or diverse font styles or there remains the traditional manual exercise of photocopying the transcripts, cutting out and pasting small pieces of paper together to create codes and themes (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Bryman, 2001). Regardless of these choices the most important work relates to how the analytic procedures give rise to the codes and concepts that are used, not whether they are manually or computer software recorded (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that it is possible for researchers to be led indirectly towards the uncritical implementation of a particular set of strategies as a result of embracing computer-aided analysis (Coffey *et al.*, 1996). However, whichever approach is chosen, the researcher still has to interpret and retrieve the data themselves. My intention was to keep close to the data and pay detailed attention to what the participants were saying. For this reason a manual approach was utilised.

Rapley (2004) states that the objective of analysing interviews is to examine how your interaction fashioned that trajectory of talk and thus it is this interview-talk which '*speaks to and emerges from* the contemporary ways of understanding, experiencing and talking about that specific interview topic' (Rapley, 2004, p. 16). Thematic analysis was utilised as this approach identifies recurrent themes

within the data and ‘works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81). I utilised a ‘lite’ version of thematic discourse analysis which entails a pattern-type analysis of data and which discusses where patterns are identified as socially produced, instead of conducting actual discursive analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 8). However, in terms of the analysis of discourse here, and consistent with Kitzinger and Willmott (2002), I take what the participants in this study say as evidence for what they experience. For example, rather than as locally specific ‘action’ I treat their talk as ‘interpretative autobiography’ (Kitzinger and Willmott, 2002, p. 351).

In order to produce new understandings, following the transcribing phase and before the onset of coding the data, it was vital that I re-listened to the audio recordings and also re-read the transcripts and field notes ‘to get a sense of the interactional, collaborative, work of the speakers’ (Rapley, 2004, p. 27). This familiarisation process is the first step in data management and should continue until the researcher has understood the diversity of characteristics and circumstances within the data set (Spencer, Ritchie, O’Connor, Morell and Ormston, 2014). In the first instance, the familiarisation within this study was achieved by analysing each transcription separately across the three data sets (LACE Coordinators, LACE team practitioners, and young people). With the purpose of thinking about and being with the data, in the first instance I segmented and coded the material (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Thus creating the coding framework began by first providing a column placed on each transcript alongside the data to document the emergent codes. In this sense, the codes that were produced from this analysis relate to:

“chunks” of varying size – words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. metaphor) (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

As advocated by Rubin and Rubin (1995) the codes that were produced were also labelled using a numerical system where each code was given a number as shorthand for each coding category. To assist the analytical thinking the transcripts were coded loosely, based upon the line-by-line coding approach, as this ensures that I could remain close to the data as the codes produced reflect the participants’ perceptions and experiences (Gibbs, 2007). Consistent with (Schmidt, 2004), an analytical strategy specifically designed to manage and sort

the data after each transcript had been coded was commenced. In terms of conceptualising the data, the analysis of the semi-structured interview data was catalogued in three Microsoft Word documents and was characterised by four phases of coding as advocated by Bryman (2001). For example, document one contained a list of emergent codes (across the three data sets) in relation to the interview questions and in this first stage, were largely descriptive codes. Once initial coding is accomplished the codes need to be explored so as to create meaning (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Arksey and Knight, 1999; Delamont, 1999). The second stage of coding, in document two, contained the research lines of enquiry in terms of the interview questions and the associated codes. This was particularly useful due to the nature of qualitative data is not to be found neatly bound-up together or at the same place in each interview. A skill here relates to the researcher's 'ability to locate stretches of data that, at least ostensibly, are "about" the same thing is a valuable aspect of data management' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 35). This stage is about identifying commonalities running through the data and grouped under the thematic headings were direct quotes from the data:

providing both a clear illustration of each theme - in participants' own words... it offers a sense of the extent to which a particular construct/experience was common across responses (Toerien and Wilkinson, 2004, p. 73).

The third phase of coding was document three which contained a list of themes derived through a more analytical approach that had either combined categories with others or rejected them. In the final phase, in document four a list of themes was produced that interconnected the three data sets.

## **Concluding Comments**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an account of the overall research process of this study. A presentation of the methods and methodology deployed to capture the meanings and experiences of the research sample was provided. This included a detailed description of the research design along with a consideration of how my standpoint and the ontological and epistemological positioning of this study were considered through an account of the importance of reflexivity within the research process.

A description of the research design provided an account of the cross-sectional study and the semi-structured interview method and the qualitative technique of

'research on the move' utilised to enjoy in full the richness of the fieldwork encounters were presented. The ethical considerations within the study were outlined. A description of the research process included the preliminary phase of the study and subsequent data collection and analysis have been set out along with a consideration of challenges in regards to reliability and validity within qualitative research.

The findings of this research are presented in the subsequent three chapters. Chapter Five will present a collective account of the key characteristics of the four LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners and explores how these interpret, translate and enact policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) through their day-to-day work practices. The objective is to define what the LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners 'do' in their roles in order to understand how looked-after children's educational achievements are being promoted and how LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners understood barriers to good practice. Where Chapter Five examines knowledge from LACE Coordinators' and their LACE team practitioner's standpoint, Chapter Six takes an alternative approach and centres upon the young people. The interest here is young people's constructions about themselves (identities), from their own perspectives to see if they correspond, for example, with the 'public welfare child' discourse outlined in the previous chapter. Moreover, Chapter Six presents important insights into looked-after young people's own meanings and experiences of their 'looked-after' and schooling identities. Chapter Seven explores looked-after young people's experiences of the LACE services. Chapter Eight is a concluding chapter which summarises the overall findings and how these have addressed, or not, the core research questions.

## Chapter Five

### Promotion of Education in Practice

Erin: *“...it’s very difficult to have any concept of it”.*

Sara: *“...there isn’t a normal, ordinary run-of-the-mill day”.*

#### Introduction

This is the first of three chapters which present the findings from a qualitative cross-sectional research design study, using a thematic analysis approach. This approach is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 6). The approach is further informed by a social constructionist perspective, whereby ‘who we are’ is often constructed out of ‘what we do’ (Halford and Leonard, 2002, p. 103) and in this study through one’s occupational talk. In other words, this chapter is interested in grasping the subjectivities of the respondents to identify the ways in which they symbolically construct the interpretation of policy and practice. Relating to the implementation and enactment of Welsh Government policy and guidance on promoting better educational outcomes for looked after children (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), this chapter explores the following lines of enquiry:

- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perspectives on their role and duties in regard to policy guidance and how this has been translated in terms of implementation;
- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perceptions of barriers to the enactment of good practice;
- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner social constructions of looked-after children’s identities.

The chapter is presented over three sections. In the first section the symbolically constructed subjectivities of the Coordinators are explored through a critique of the design and aims of the LACE Coordinator role as set out in policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). After which, the symbolically constructed subjectivities of the front-line LACE team practitioners are explored, again with reference to the design and aims of their roles vis a vis the same policy guidance. The second section considers how the Personal Education Plan

(PEP) policy and the provision of 'catch up' support as directed through policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been interpreted, translated, implemented and enacted by the LACE Coordinators and their front-line practitioners. Section three presents the LACE Coordinators' and their LACE team practitioners' expression of perceived barriers to good practice through a variety of lenses that include: the impact of boundary-spanning roles and professional rivalry; education potential and the 'low ability' view of looked-after children; meeting the GCSE 'threshold'; looked-after young people and contested identities as 'threats' and 'victims'; the problem of visibility (stigma); and issues of young people's own 'responsibilisation' in a neo-liberal discourse (Liebenberg, 2015).

### **Section One: The Design and Aims of the LACE Coordinator and the LACE Team Practitioner Roles**

This section commences with the design and aims of the LACE Coordinator role. In performing the LACE Coordinator role, each post holder is: 'responsible for ensuring looked after children gain maximum life benefits from education opportunities' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42). These public service specialist professionals are directed by the Welsh Government:

to co-ordinate the child's education plan and address the education needs of looked after children and care leavers in the local authority area' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42).

In order for local authority LACE Coordinators to meet their statutory duty, each is: 'expected to perform' fourteen specific roles' as set out by Welsh Assembly Government (2007, pp. 42-43). All four LACE Coordinators described their work practices in ways that drew upon the fourteen elements (see pp. 63-64). Examples included:

Sara (LA2): *I can be in schools, helping schools to write Personal Education Plans, I can be in looked-after children reviews, planning meetings, child protection strategy meetings. I can be at my desk doing data performance indicators for the authority. The role is varied so there isn't a normal, ordinary run-of-the-mill day.*

Ann (LA1): *It [the role] may involve attending LAC reviews. It may involve attending Personal Education Plan meetings with schools... I organise those meetings... Other things in the role are panel meetings, statement reviews, erm, meetings with*

*foster carers to discuss concerns they may have with regards to education... Because we have to report back to the Welsh Government Performance Indicators, so we need to feedback on Key Stage results: Key Stage Two, Three and Four as well as attendance, exclusions. And that again is part of the role, collating all that information and feeding that back to the Welsh Government and looking at ways that we can reduce exclusions and improve attainment really.*

These examples included: attending LAC reviews; ensuring personal education plans are in place; monitoring attainment of looked-after children, collating and analysing performance information on an individual and collective basis; and providing challenges in cases of exclusion. The roles of LACE Coordinators can be contextualised within the landscape of new public managerialism whereby they are oriented and 'interested in achieving results consistent with agency objectives' (Lipsky, 1980, p. 18). In this instance, the expected objectives as set out within the above Government guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43), which denote the multiple duties that LACE Coordinators are expected to perform - a hybridised role in which work practices are set within a complex, diverse and multifaceted organisational landscape. Accordingly, it was not surprising that Sara (LA2) emphasised the diversity of the day-to-day LACE Coordinator role. The administrative aspect of the role, as described above by Sara (LA2) and Ann (LA1), seems to 'fit' with various parts of the specified roles within the above framework (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43). A reference that resonates with a performance and accountability managerialist discourse was made by Sara (LA2) when referring to: *"doing data performance indicators for the authority"*. This activity was corroborated by other LACE Coordinators, for example the extract above from Ann (LA1) emphasises similar points.

The accounts of LACE Coordinators may suggest the alignment of their activities with the policy framework (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), but also they implicitly indicate: 'that adherence to performance targets has become imbued with strong normative significance and has become part of organisational talk' (Wastell, White, Broadhurst, Peckover and Pithouse, 2010, p. 313). Despite this, there was some frustration voiced over official statistics, with regard to the way performance indicators are interpreted and published annually by the Welsh Government:



Ann (LA1): *I think that sometimes, that figure on that particular year was very skewed by the fact that there was fifty per cent that attended a special school or residential school but that information doesn't always get relayed to the Welsh Government. So when they publish those figures they look at one figure and that is your point score and I think that sometimes that can be frustrating and sometimes that can be frustrating for the young people because they look at that figure and they think, 'oh you know? We're being viewed within the press as a failure', when ultimately for those young people that were perhaps accessing the special school placement, they've actually reached their targets- they've reached their optimum level.*

Sara (LA2): *With looked-after children we collect point scores but this doesn't make any difference, you know? It's still the same and the education performance indicator is how many children leave without any qualifications at all... reporting on their GCSE results is not a reflection on the work that my team has done!*

From these extracts, an overarching aspect of the Coordinator role seems to be positioned in terms of performance. Performance in the form of statistics is itself a form of impression management (Goffman, 1959). For example, the above extract (Sara, LA2), which stated that GCSE results are not in themselves a reflection of the work of LACE practitioners, suggests how such welfare agencies/governmental bodies (i.e. LACEs services/the Welsh government) can work to 'save one's face' (Goffman, 1972, p. 9), by sustaining an impression that they have not lost reputation in the advent of published statistics showing that some looked-after young people leave education with no qualifications.

Each of the four Coordinators can be seen as occupying a complex public service environment in which they deploy 'the prerogatives of 'discretion', 'judgement' and expert knowledge to justify their decisions' (Flynn, 2002, p. 35). We can see these features in the following selection of data which emphasise an 'expert' advisory capacity claimed by Coordinators when describing their role:

Ann (LA1): *Part of my role is meeting with tuition providers, making sure that regular reports are submitted, looking at progress and those meetings happen on a monthly basis to sort of update our database and look at what's working with tuition and what isn't working and whether or not any changes are needed... I get a lot of calls from social workers and foster carers asking for advice on school admissions. I submit all the school applications*

*forms. If the child moves out of county or moves within [name of local authority], I submit the application forms for those and attend admission meetings.*

Similarly, Laura (LA3) described key features of activities which, again, include an 'expert' advisory function and oversight of service impact:

*My role centres on ensuring that young people are in appropriate school placements... I oversee that they're happy in school and that they are making the progress they should be and that they're well supported... Part of my role is training foster carers around what's expected of them in terms of their role with linking with schools and how to promote the education of young people placed in their care.*

Such formal training of other professionals/practitioners in the field (e.g., social workers, teachers, carers), was also specified by the other Coordinators. However, the dynamics of their training activities differed. Ann (LA1) described how annual training was offered to "*LAC Designated Teachers, foster carers, social workers, SENCOs and school heads*". Further, that in terms of ad hoc day-to-day training needs: "*LAC Designated Teachers will just phone...and just say, 'could you just clarify this point'*". From Ann's extract, it appears that training is undertaken in a flexible and sometimes bespoke manner. In contrast, Sara (LA2) stated: "*I wouldn't say it [training] is universal.*" Erin (LA4) echoed this point, stating that: "*[training] has been more formal previously*". Thus despite a call for teachers to improve their promotion of looked-after children's educational experiences (see Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 23), it appears that there is little consistency across the four study sites with training being delivered in a varying, and sometimes ad-hoc manner, instead of a more integrated and uniform approach to knowledge and skill development. Moreover, such a disjointed approach to training may not be the most effective way to refine and update teachers' knowledge and expertise in the long-term (Fish and Coles, 2000, p. 295).

As described in Chapter Two there is a requirement for teachers to improve their understanding of looked-after children's needs in order to improve their attainment (Elliott, 2002; SEU, 2003; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Jackson, 2010a; Berridge, 2012; Department for Education, 2012). Indeed, there has been a call for a far more positive culture concerning teachers' expectations of looked-after children (e.g., through comprehensive training, (see Jackson, 2010a)). Thus, despite saying that training had previously been "*more formal*", Erin (LA4) was

the only Coordinator who reported provision of routine termly training for LAC Designated Teachers, whilst also meeting the training needs of other key professionals/practitioners:

*We now do a termly Designated Teacher network meeting which is an after school meeting and there is often some form of training within that, but it's usually to meet their needs, they come up with what they need and I try and meet it. Training for social workers, it's about Personal Education Plans, but I go broader than that, I talk about the education department and the services and admissions... with foster carers it's about how they can best support their young people with their education and understanding the education system.*

In this extract, Erin's claim to 'expert' status can perhaps be understood as implicit in her statement: *"but I go broader than that, I talk about the education department and the services and admissions."* This claim would seem to support the 'expert' status of the Coordinator role in that it reflects: 'their expert knowledge and skills and therefore distinguishes them from experts within other fields as well as from non-experts and learners' (Gunnarsson, 2009, pp. 5-6).

As described earlier in the thesis (see Chapter Three), in order to support LACE Coordinators in delivering on their specified roles (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43), LACE teams were established by local authorities in Wales. Within the discursive realms of organisational and management literature, terms like 'teams', 'team-working', 'team players' are contemporary and familiar concepts (Jelphs and Dickinson, 2008). However, without government guidance beyond the LACE Coordinator role (see Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43), it has been left to each local authority in Wales to develop their own approach to the formation and function of LACE teams (see Chapter Three).

In the following extract, Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) describes one of the consequences of this lack of formal guidance and the way this affects how other professionals in the field (e.g. teachers) see the LACE team role. She also indicates something of the ways in which LACE team have interpreted, translated, implemented and enacted their role beyond what is formally stipulated for the LACE Coordinator (see Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43):

*...Donna, Rhiannon [LA2 LAC Learning Coaches] and I went to a meeting in Wales [name of town] a few years ago, when the RAISE ['Raising Attainment and Individual Standards of Education', Welsh programme - launched in 2006] was underway and we were asked [by the Welsh Government] what we did and somebody said, 'well how do you get into the schools?' And we said, 'well we just turn up and we just go in!' Yeah, our schools know me, they know [Donna] and [Rhiannon], and we just go in and do our bit.*

This extract suggests how the front-line practitioners in LA2 (Donna and Rhiannon) access the looked-after children in their local authority in order to support them with LACE provision. In particular, the extract highlights how this is achieved without any formal guidance in terms of how the LACE provision should be received by the local authority schools. This aspect is explored in more depth later in the chapter through consideration of particular enactment problems regards Welsh government guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007).

From these initial accounts provided by the Coordinators it appears that policy translation and enactment cannot be considered as some static or fixed phenomenon (Ball *et al.*, 2012). The focus now turns to explore the symbolically constructed subjectivities of the LACE team practitioners in relation to the design and enactment of their team and individual functions. First, the role of the LACE team practitioners is explored, to see how their subjectivities are symbolically constructed and to consider how these bear upon the interpretation of policy and practice.

## The Design and Aim of the LACE Team Practitioner Role

**Table 5.1: LA1 Team**

<b><u>LA1. Team Title: 'Looked-After Children (LAC) Education Support'.</u></b>		
Team size:	5	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Ann)
Learning Support Officers/Assistants	3	2 (Brenda, Rachel)
PEP Administrator	1	

In terms of the number and ages of young people that receive a LACE service, Brenda (LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistant) stated that she supports fourteen young people of various ages:

*I work with children from nursery age right up to comp, supporting up to post sixteen before they go off to college, in numerous and different levels - so where and when needed.*

This extract is an example of how this team appears to provide a flexible approach to service provision which is not restricted to support at Key Stage Four. The broad aim of the LACE practitioner role and duties was described by Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) as being:

*...ultimately to improve outcomes for looked-after children and also to provide a sort of, a pastoral, academic and transitional support for the young people. It's a point of contact and support for not only young people, but schools, and social workers and foster carers as well.*

Similarly, Brenda described the aims as: “...raising their educational attainment and reducing exclusions.” Whereas Rachel (LA1 LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant) defined the broad aim as being: “to encourage the children with learning...it's making a friend of them really and letting them not be afraid of achieving.” This approach to building meaningful relationships with the young people they supported was seen by the team as one of the protective factors associated with resilience and eventual educational success (Jackson and Martin, 1998, p. 578).

What we have seen within this formation of this LACE team is that these front-line practitioners focus on raising, improving and encouraging learning and reducing exclusions through pastoral, academic and transitional support. Such comments suggest something of the ways in which policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), has been interpreted, translated, implemented and enacted through building relationships of trust and friendliness with young people in order to improve attainment. The focus now turns to the formation of the LACE team in LA2.

**Table 5.2: LA2 Team**

<b>LA2. Team Title: 'Looked-After Children Education'.</b>		
Team size:	3	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Sara)
LAC Learning Coaches	2	2 (Donna, Rhiannon)

In contrast to LA1, team members in LA2 were defined as 'LAC Learning Coaches'. In terms of their work practices, this team appeared to focus more

specifically on the GCSE years and in their accounts invoked a greater emphasis upon managerialist imperatives (i.e., outcomes) and resource constraints:

Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator): *We tend to concentrate on GCSE years... we do work with some younger children. We just haven't got the capacity, and, you know, years ten and eleven are the important years when they are actually sitting the exams.*

This extract highlights a difference with LACE team (LA1). Interviews with Rhiannon and Donna (Learning Coaches) revealed their focus on young people at Key Stage Four (GCSE years). In brief, their team efforts were premised on channelling support for looked-after pupils within the GCSE years (school Year Groups Ten and Eleven) as a means of assisting in improving attainment. An example of the number of looked-after young people that team members supported came from Donna who stated she saw nine young people: “...*they are ones that I actually see on a weekly basis.*”

Sara described the team aim as being to get the young people to achieve their potential: “*the aim well, what we want is the children in our care to achieve their educational potential. Get as good as they can do really*”. For Rhiannon, the aim of her role was presented through an account of how the team go about inspiring the young people:

*we do actually take all our pupils to open evenings at the college so they get an idea of why are they doing their GCSEs... we go to two of the universities nearest to us just to make them see that school is like a closed door there and there is another door that's going to open to go to college.*

Nonetheless, Rhiannon specifically described the aim as: “*basically to get each pupil through their exams, sit their exams, pass their exams and go on then to further education.*” Echoing this focus on enabling young people to pass exams, Donna stated: “*I'd say our main pressure is to make sure they leave school with something and appropriate grades really.*” In terms of how this LACE team has interpreted, translated, implemented and enacted the policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), their focus would appear to be upon Key Stage Four pupils and ensuring these young people achieve their educational potential and leave school with GCSE qualifications. These claims will be further assessed in Chapter Seven when we consider if LA2 does anything more than

focus on enabling young people to pass GCSEs exams (i.e. academic areas over vocational areas). Here, the focus now turns to the formation of the LACE team in LA3.

**Table 5.3: LA3 Team**

<u><b>LA3. Team Title: 'Looked-After Children Education Service'.</b></u>		
Team size:	3	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Laura)
LAC Mentors	2	2 (Anna, Morgan)

In LA3 Laura, the LACE Coordinator, described the LAC mentors (Morgan and Anna) as having a sole “academic focus” as opposed to a mix of pastoral and academic support as seen in the other two LACE teams. Laura stated:

*We've got a number of our young people who receive support from school counsellors or youth workers. We have workers in [a Youth Service project] in this local authority that do...the more emotional and personal education kind of side of things. But our mentors, there is an academic focus with that to ensure that we're...helping to raise standards.*

In the above extract, Laura actively operates managerial disapproval of the Learning Mentors providing pastoral care support. By contrast, when defining his role, Morgan (LA3 LAC Learning Mentor) described how the pastoral care aspect of support was a key feature of the role:

*...he [young person] divulged things to me previously and I had to think: is this a part of the job? It is a part of the job even though sometimes I've been told - not off, but basically to try and focus on the academic side of it because that's what my role is! I think it is very difficult then to sort of say black and white. I think the two do merge and I do think...my role does have a part to play in the sort of pastoral sort of sense and I think it's what it should be, to be honest with you.*

Relating to the numbers of young people supported, Anna (LA3 LAC Mentor) stated: [Morgan and I] “both have about thirty to oversee [monitor] and like ten to fifteen students to do direct work with.” With a focused academic emphasis within the role, the LAC mentors’ support centred on preparing young people for their GCSE exams and revision at Key Stage 4. However, in this local authority, as with those outlined previously, other ‘catch-up’ support for younger ages in different Key Stages was also provided if a need was identified by school

teachers. Within LA3 there was an emphasis on ‘bridging the gap’ (in agreement with policy guidance: (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), and the ‘network’ focus in LA1), to ensure that there is collaboration across the LACE team, teachers, social workers, and foster carers, in order that the young person’s educational *“outcomes are reflective of their true abilities”* (Laura). Laura defined these, *“true abilities”* as ranging across both academic and vocational subjects and described the aim of the team thus:

*I think it’s to raise standards, yeah, so to raise their academic attainment, but to make sure that they’re making the progress in that they should be, so that their outcomes are reflective of their true abilities. What we endeavour to do is kind of bridge the gap. So we’re talking to social workers so they know what issues the children are up against with regard to their school. We talk to foster carers, to teachers.*

Morgan defined the aim as to help young people: *“...with their academic studies and improve their attainment results.”* Anna stated simply it was: *“to improve LAC’s attainment.”* Laura however, described how this attainment related to a vocational rather than academic emphasis: *“for a lot of our young people they’re talented in a more vocational area.”* Again, these claims will be addressed in further detail in Chapter Seven, in terms of how this team has translated, implemented and enacted the policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). In essence, the team focused upon realising educational potential, acknowledging that this was mostly through vocational subjects. However, in contrast to the other LACE teams, in this team there was no pastoral care within the LAC mentor role (although aspects of this did seem to obtain given Morgan’s comments above). Instead, as described by Laura, other professionals/practitioners were assumed to be on-hand in school to provide this type of support. The focus now turns to the formation of the LACE team in LA4.

**Table 5.4: LA4 Team**

<b><u>LA4. Team Title: ‘Looked-After Children Education Service’.</u></b>		
Team size:	2	Interviewed
LACE Coordinator	1	1 (Erin)
LAC Education Officer	1	1 (Bryn)

In contrast to the other three teams, the vast bulk of the educational support (LACE) provision in LA4 was commissioned through a private tuition service. Erin (LA4 LACE Coordinator) emphasised this point: *“in the main we use [name of tuition service] which is a private franchise, and we’ve bought their services*



*bulk.*” Compared to staff in the other three LACE teams, Bryn (LA4 LAC Education Officer) had the least direct LACE support contact with looked-after pupils. Instead, a private tuition service, operating within the local authority area, provided most of this support. This then, ensured that Bryn was able to undertake a relationship-building exercise, meeting as many looked-after young people as possible and assessing what, if any, type of educational support they needed. Bryn stated, for example:

*For this academic year [2013-14] it will be in the region of say one hundred [looked-after] young people that I will try and get contact with. In the academic year just gone erm, I'd say in the region of perhaps forty five undertook their GCSEs.*

Erin identified the team aim as to: *“improve the educational achievement of looked-after pupils”*, whilst Bryn (consistent with LA2 and LA3) provided a broader definition: *“to bridge the gap and just offering as much support particularly with key subjects English, maths and science and bring them up to the level of attainment.”* The aim of the LA4 LACE team was similar to that of LA2 and LA3 in terms of ‘bridging the gap’; primarily the aim focused on achieving educational potential in the core subjects (English, maths and science). In contrast to the other three LACE teams, as the private tuition service provided the bulk of educational support, this meant that Bryn’s main focus was on providing pastoral care support – while any ‘catch-up’ education support was provided as and when necessary, on an ad hoc basis.

Erin (LA4 LACE Coordinator) defined pastoral support thus: *“as long as we can say, ‘well any other good parent would support them this way’, we would do that.”* Other teams defined it as follows: for Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator), pastoral support was described as the *“emotional and personal education kind of side of things. But our mentors, there is an academic focus.”* While Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) described pastoral support as support for young people in addition to *“academic and transitional support.”* Finally, Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) described pastoral support as all *“things that they [looked-after children] need as well as the actual academic learning.”* This included equipment for exams, how the young people *“switch off”* from school, and what leisure activities the young people undertake in order to relax. Also, as part of their pastoral ambit the practitioners mentioned that they annually celebrated looked-after children’s education achievements through various events where all those charged with looking after these children were invited to attend. Such varied and

all-inclusive notions of what pastoral support is 'might be an obstacle to taking forward the complex multi-agency work' (Calvert, 2009, p. 268), needed to promote better education outcomes for looked after children. These claims of what actually constitutes pastoral care will be further assessed in Chapter Seven. The focus now turns to the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and the nature of 'catch up' support (see Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43) and how this has been interpreted and enacted.

## **Section Two: The Interpretation, Translation, Implementation and Enactment of Policy Guidance - in Practice**

Policy enactment cannot be considered as a static or fixed phenomenon (Ball *et al.*, 2012), but is typically a process with variable and unanticipated outcomes (Ball, 2008). This is partly because policy is subjectively defined by the observer (Hill and Hupe, 2009) and furthermore, policies, legislation and guidelines can be messy and confused (see Ball, 2008, p. 7).

### **Initiating the Personal Education Plan (PEP)**

The regulations (see Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 44) state that the social worker is responsible for initiating a Personal Education Plan (PEP). Yet, Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) questioned whether social workers had any training on this policy, stating:

*I don't know how much training social workers have had on 'Brighter Futures' because some social workers think it's my job to fill in the PEP and it isn't, it's my job to facilitate it.*

This extract might suggest that when Sara talked about how policy should be enacted, she was implicitly invoking a sense of demarcation in relation to her role and status. Moreover, the 'doing' of policy (from Sara's account) may infer a linear top-down conception of how policy guidance should be implemented with her position as 'above' that of social workers. It is through such claims to expert knowledge and skills that professionals/practitioners justify their autonomy and status (see Flynn, 2002, pp. 25-26). Sara's account of 'doing' policy enactment via a top-down approach was not the same across the other LACE teams. LA1 was unique in that they employed a part-time PEP administrator. Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) stated:

*The PEPs are set up when the child becomes accommodated or moves schools and it's reviewed prior to every LAC review and our PEP administrator identifies if there is a need to update targets.*

As will be shown later in this chapter, despite the PEP being updated by the part-time PEP administrator within LA1, the plans were completed by the LACE team practitioners and not by social workers as directed by the policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Similarly, Laura (LA3 Coordinator) reported that PEP completion was a function of the LACE team practitioners and not of social workers. According to Laura, a central part of the LA3 LAC mentors' role was to ensure that the PEPs are *"updated within statutory time scales."* Erin (LA4 Coordinator) summed up how the PEP policy had been translated into variable practice stating:

*There's always been this sort of discrepancy as to who's responsible for completing it. The social worker completes it here in this authority in consultation with the school and the young person.*

Additionally, Erin highlighted how across Wales the PEP policy was interpreted differently and argued that:

*...some local authorities have gone down the all singing and all dancing fifteen page [PEP] document that's completed by schools, and is, in my mind, a learning plan not an education plan. Others went for the minimalist approach and it's completed by social workers.*

Furthermore, the PEPs were also occasionally seen as a point of tension. Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor) stated:

*[Personal Education Plans] are the bane of my existence [laughs]... since I've been based over in social services, which has been about two years now, we've become much more hands on with it, and in fact it's generally us that takes the lead on them.*

This was the same for the LACE team practitioners in LA1 but this example of policy interpretation, translation and enactment is in contrast to LA2, as described above, where PEPs are led by social workers as stipulated within the policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). It is through a range of creative responses to policy enactment that interpretation varies from policy to policy (Ball *et al.*, 2012). This variation consists of both the possibilities and the constraints of context and the apparatus of power within which these are set

(Ball *et al.*, 2012). Thus professionals/practitioners ‘make inferences; they treat individual clients, make specific decisions, analyze specific cases, or give specific advice on the basis of learned, abstract insights’ (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 766). In the following extract we can see how Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) explained precisely where her role begins and where it ends:

*My role is to coordinate not the provision because the schools do that, but to make sure that educationally looked-after children are being catered for.*

In order to understand policy enactment further, how the provision of ‘catch up’ support (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42), has been interpreted and translated into day-to-day work practices is now examined.

### **The provision of ‘Catch Up’ Education Support**

The provision of ‘catch up’ support is defined by the Welsh government as ‘support for those who have fallen behind with schoolwork’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 47). How this has been translated and enacted through a form of service provision that is specifically provided by the LACE team practitioners was described by Brenda (LA1 LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant) as “*mostly help with homework*” and this account was corroborated by the other LACE team practitioners across the four teams. In addition to help with homework, the respondents described focusing on supporting pupils before their examinations. Brenda emphasised this point:

*[we] support year eleven towards their GCSEs - whether it be just a boost, just before their exams for Maths or literacy or science, something’s put in just to re-inforce - so they get their grades up.*

From this extract it appears that the catch-up work practices in LA1 are largely bound up with the consolidation of core indicator subject knowledge (English maths and science) before examinations. In further recounting the nature of academic support, Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator) confirmed that Morgan and Anna (LA3 LAC Mentors) provide ‘catch-up’ academic support in schools and foster placements and described how this works in practice with different aged pupils:

*...with the older ones, its making sure that their coursework is completed. Or that they are preparing for their exams and supporting them with revision. For the younger ones, they offer catch-up support where there has been gaps in their learning or bits that they've missed out.*

In terms of the academic 'catch-up' support sessions, as corroborated by all LACE team members across the four teams, this was described as being based on a one hour session, once a week. However, there is also the potential for having more than one session a week during examination periods. Anna (LA3 LACE Coordinator) spoke frankly about the one hour session stating: "*after about forty-five minutes, I'd say they start losing interest.*" Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator) confirmed that the sessions were based on one hour, once a week: "*The mentors would very often see the young person on a weekly basis, so it's one session.*" In contrast, Donna (LA2 Learning Coach) described how some young people (Grade A students) only ever require exam revision support before examinations and that during these times the LACE support can occur more than once a week:

*I average about four sessions a week... Some of the sessions might be after school clubs. In one that I do, they're A grade students, they don't need me, I'm just there to get resources, show them good revision methods to help them... two weeks ago I went out there every night after school because they had exams, so it does change like on a daily basis.*

The 'catch-up' support can be directed by social workers and foster carers but on the whole it is directed by teachers and this was corroborated across the four study sites. Rachel (LA1 LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant) emphasises this aspect of work practice:

*You need the relationship with the class teacher to know what level they're [young people] at and the books, according to the levels they're at. I don't particularly carry books into school but sometimes I'll take the laptop in. If they've done really well, as a reward they can have a little go on the games on the laptop. But they're also learning games; it's fitting the words and letters into all different categories. So that's a little treat. But mainly using the class teacher, I will always talk to the class teacher first, before I take the child out and say: 'what particular thing would you like done today?'*

What is apparent from LACE team respondents' discussion of the 'catch-up' aspect of the policy guidance (see Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-

43) is that provision seems to have a focus, largely, on the core indicator subjects (English maths and science) at Key Stage Four. The 'catch-up' provision is largely concerned with examinations and outcomes, rather than the value of learning for its own sake (Claxton, 2008). Despite all the 'catch-up' support that is provided by the front-line LACE team practitioners, Rhiannon (LA2 LAC Learning Coach) described how looked-after children are, in general, yet to reach the A\*- C GCSE grades: *"I suppose with the grades they're doing better than ever before; were still looking at D's and C's, the odd B.* In later chapters this topic is returned to and addressed from the perspectives of the young people. Here, the focus now turns to barriers to good practice from the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and practitioners.

### **Section Three: Barriers to Good Practice**

Within this section, barriers to 'good practice' are being used to refer to the list of fourteen roles as specified by the guidance (WAG, 2007). The fourteen roles are cited on pages 63-64. Barriers to good practice is explored here through six lenses: crossing occupational boundaries and professional rivalry; working with limited resources; educational potential - 'low ability' perceptions of looked-after children; meeting the GCSE 'threshold'; looked-after young people constructed as 'threats' and 'victims'; looked-after young people's visibility (stigma); and young people's own 'responsibilisation' for improving their attainment. First, inter-agency working partnerships, the impact of crossing occupational boundaries and experiences of professional rivalry, in the implementation and enactment of policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) are considered.

#### **The Impact of Boundary-Spanning and Professional Rivalry**

As both the problems facing society and the policy responses to these are complex, a proportion of jobs within new public management (NPM) 'demand cross boundary engagement' (Williams, 2010, p. 7). There has been a long standing promotion of 'joined-up' services which 'means that interprofessional activity is required to meet multiple objectives and professionals are expected to work together and share their expertise and skills' (Oliver and Keeping, 2010, p. 90).

One of the defining characteristics of contemporary public management is that of partnership working (Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016, p. 239). Concerning

boundary-spanning within multi-site and inter-agency working, there were positive accounts such as in the extract from Rachel (LA1, LAC Learning Support Assistant) above which references close working relationships with class teachers. However, this was not necessarily the same for other LACE practitioners. Anna (LA3 LAC (education) Mentor) observed:

*Some [teachers] are more helpful than others...some will provide work for you to do with the child in all Key Stage areas... I find with teachers, they concentrate more on the older ones... The majority [teachers] are happy for you to be in their classroom. But some of them just ignore you really- it's like you're there, but just not really helping much. If you're taking them [young people] out of the class to do extra work, they're [teachers] just like: 'bye then' and you go back to tell them how it went - but they're just not very interested in what you've been doing with the young person.*

Within practitioner discourse(s) it has been argued that boundaries can mark 'the identity of a group of individuals within the organisation' (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991, p. 36). This could suggest that there can be a notable identity difference for formally qualified teachers compared to unqualified classroom support workers. The idea of blurring the boundaries between differing practitioner roles within the joined-up working policy discourse may thus be less straightforward in practice. As such, new partnerships, 'may threaten the identity of distinct practitioner groups' (Oliver and Keeping, 2010, p. 90). Others have observed that practitioner groups typically differ in status, training and education and hold differences in expectations, values, beliefs and accountability (Mickan and Rodger, 2000). When working within multidisciplinary teams, this can be a dilemma for professional practice in that the boundaries between particular practitioner bodies of knowledge may be blurred and as a result a sense of distinctive practitioner identity may become challenged (Frost, Robinson and Anning, 2005). Moreover, as roles, responsibilities and identities are blurred or challenged for team members, so this may 'generate discomfort, anxiety, and anger' (Frost *et al.*, 2005, p. 188). To facilitate a further understanding of functioning within multi-sectoral arenas - and reveal some additional challenges that typify this landscape, the concept of the 'boundary spanner' will now be presented. There are two types of boundary spanner (Williams, 2010). The first are individuals that have a dedicated responsibility or job role to work in multi-sectoral or multi-organizational settings. Within the public sector, such instances may include:

crime and community safety co-ordinators, community strategy officers and partnership co-ordinators; and in the private sector, the alliance management staff and relationship managers involved in helping to make strategic alliances and joint ventures work effectively (Williams, 2010, p. 7).

The second type of boundary spanner may include: 'individuals (practitioners, managers and leaders) who undertake boundary spanning activities as part of a mainstream job role' (Williams, 2010, p. 7). Guarneros-Meza and Martin (2016, p. 239) define individuals in either cross-sectoral relationships (public organisations) or between different public services (education) as 'horizontal boundary spanning'. As these individuals undertake boundary spanning activities, they play a central role in that they facilitate exchange between groups. Yet, one of the most frequently associated problems with boundary spanning is that of role conflict (Friedman and Podolny, 1992). Thus the attributes and skills needed by boundary spanners include the ability to listen empathetically 'not only to build up trust, but also to understand the social constructions of partners and to be able to define issues in relation to the partner's own values and interests' (Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016, p. 240).

Regarding the uptake of LACE team practitioner support, it was reported by Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) that the majority of schools are: "*welcoming of this extra offer of support.*" Yet there are some schools that are not as receptive to the offer of LACE practitioners. Ann defined how one young person (Garth), had requested support from his long-term LACE worker (Brenda, LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistant) while he attended a 'special' school (referring to non-mainstream school for pupils with special needs). However, it seemed that the school was unreceptive to Garth's request as they had their own staff (on site) to undertake this service:

Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator): *We've had an example recently where [Garth] has been saying: 'but I want my LACES worker to come in a do that piece of work with me' - and what school are saying is that they've got school staff employed to do that package of work, that our LACES LSA [Learning Support Assistant] could be doing in terms of catch-up etcetera... We've offered that support after school, but the young person in that instance is saying: 'no I don't want to do it after school, I want to do it in school'... With the majority of schools, if you're offering support, they're fully welcoming. But it's more from that perspective really, a young person's request... we try our best with regards to*



*putting in extra support, but ultimately, it's still you know? It's a big issue!*

As Garth's request for LACE worker support was unsuccessful this might suggest some aspect of boundary spanning conflict and practitioner rivalry. In terms of managing role conflicts, it appeared in this instance that no negotiation was possible despite the position of the LACE Coordinator as expert. We will return to consider boundary spanning activities and professional rivalry within LA1 in Chapter Seven when we explore the views of young people about their educational support received from LACE practitioners and how their perceptions and experiences of LACE support correspond with those of practitioners, as outlined here. The focus now turns to consider the boundary spanning activities and professional rivalry within the LA4 LACE service.

To reiterate an earlier point, LA4 was the only team to provide most of the 'catch up' support directly through a private tuition franchise. However, this was not without its own conflict and issues of practitioner rivalry. Here is an example from Erin (LA4 LACE Coordinator):

*We've experienced the tuition centre saying: 'this young person is capable of doing the higher paper in English' - and the school saying: 'they're not!' My first thinking was well, if they say they are, then surely they must be! But then being put straight - from the school - who were saying: 'but this is in a completely different context, they can try that if they want, but our advice is no - go for the lower paper and we will see, if they gain confidence next year, then maybe they can aim higher - but don't interrupt everything by aiming too high now!*

The extracts from Ann and Erin (LACE Coordinators) perhaps confirm that the boundary spanning role can contain components of conflict within LACE teams' organisational life. What both these extracts suggest is that day-to-day work practices positioned across sometimes competing organisations can generate a climate of distrust (Adams, 1976). Although some school partnership working practices may seem to be improving:

*...much of the partnership culture is relatively shallow. In many schools there is a reluctance to share or exchange leaders and outstanding practitioners with another school (or schools) for even one day a week – despite all the evidence pointing to both schools gaining hugely from the experience (Hill, 2013, p. 9).*

The boundary spanning capability regarding a joined-up approach to local authorities meeting their statutory duty and promoting looked-after children's educational achievement relies on the development of good communication and trust between different boundary spanning persons. Despite this being 'central to the maintenance of effective inter-personal relationships' (Williams, 2010, p. 10), concerns were raised about a lack of knowledge about the LACE practitioners' organisational roles and practices and poor communication amongst other key professionals. This was consistent across all the respondents; examples include:

Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator): *Communication is sometimes something that needs work on... we have had some issues, where perhaps issues aren't fed from the head of year to the LAC Designated Teacher - that's been a bit of a challenge.*

Brenda (LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistant): *...because you're a LACES worker, schools think you're a social worker - they think we can make decisions.*

Donna (LA2 LAC Learning Coach): *There used to be quite a lot of people that didn't really understand what me and Rhiannon did. Sara does child protection training now. So like when Sara does something she is promoting us now. She's saying: 'you know? I've got these two girls, blah, blah blah - they can come out, and they can help with this'. I'd say that has been good, because sometimes, with schools they are just, not aware of what we do.*

Rhiannon (LA2 LAC Learning Coach): *There are so many people with different nuggets of information. And I might find something after the event, and think - oh! I wish I'd known that. So communication is a big, big issue.*

Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor): *The communication between everybody wasn't as good. I think it was to the detriment of the child. But I think that is improving.*

Bryn (LA4 LAC Education Officer): *I've organised a LAC celebration event for young people at college. I've emailed the LAC teachers in the schools, to see if they want to nominate anybody. But for the most part, nobody even replied!*

Collectively, these extracts may suggest that for successful working partnerships, relationships between members of the wider organisational environment must be forged with those in similar positions at the front-line of

services (Jelphs and Dickinson, 2008). Furthermore, these practitioners must be equipped with the necessary authority to ensure they can confidently participate with others with a legitimacy of presence (Jelphs and Dickinson, 2008). In the following extract, Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor) describes the particular lengths that a front-line LACE team member may have to undertake in order to achieve successful knowledge exchange between different boundary spanning members:

*[In schools] I have to liaise with their LSAs... the LSA then gives me a seal of approval to be there with [name of pupil] and things like that...over the last couple of years, I think communication has improved - perhaps schools are taking us a bit more seriously? Perhaps, that's not the right wording - but what we've got to say is that perhaps, we are also practitioners! As in we have the opportunity to work with these people, on a one-to-one, where they don't!*

In the above extract Morgan implies that the LACE mentors' contribution, is perhaps more significant than that of the school's own LSA (Learning Support Assistant). However, despite Morgan suggesting that LACE team members can have a closer relationship with and deeper understanding of looked-after young people, Morgan nevertheless still requires the LSA's "seal of approval" before completing any work with looked-after pupils. This may suggest that the boundary spanning activity, in this context, is perhaps fixed upon the 'ability to convey a sense of commitment to the relationship, communication strategies and joint problem solving – all of which are agential in character and focus on the relationship between partners' (Williams, 2010, p. 27). In contrast, this was not necessarily the same for other LACE team practitioners. Both Brenda (LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistant) and Donna (LA2 LAC Learning Coach) reported less positive relationships with school LSAs when it came to boundary spanning activities:

*Brenda: ...sometimes you can go to schools and what I feel is, because it's got LSA as your title - when you go to them for information and stuff and organising meetings and all that - I tend to feel as if they look down at us and they say: 'well your only an LSA!'*

*Donna: I was told by a classroom LSA: 'help your children and leave mine!' I couldn't believe that I was told off for being so helpful! [Laughs]. I said to*

*Sara [LA2 LACE Coordinator] that I can't believe it - and she was like: 'okay let's not tread on their toes!'*

These extracts from Brenda and Donna may suggest that within boundary spanning activity a professional rivalry conflict may exist simply around issues of role definition. However, this type of conflict both reinforces practitioner boundaries and at the same time also restricts joined-up collaboration (Mickan and Rodger, 2000). Within this section I have drawn upon a small body of research surrounding analysis of the effectiveness of boundary spanning roles in delivering collaborative public policy (Williams 2010). In the same way as mentioned earlier, we shall return to consider this aspect of perceived barriers to good practice in Chapter Seven when we compare how these accounts coalesced (or not) with the perceptions of looked-after young people. The focus now turns to explore the second theme of barriers to implementing good practice through the LACE Coordinators' and team practitioners' experiences of working with a deficiency of resource.

### **Working with Limited Resources**

In terms of the new managerialism climate in the public sector with regard to controlling professional autonomy, there has been a major focus on efficiency in resource allocation (Flynn, 2002). New public managerialism has argued for a greater responsiveness to consumers, and a more efficient use of resources through priority-setting and rationing, yet it 'says very little about resource allocation and rationing, and their distributional effects – the fundamental parameters for all decision making' (Flynn, 2002, p. 28). In order to conform to broader government goals (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) of supporting all looked-after children, of all ages, across the four education key stages (Foundation Phase to Key Stage Four) resources were identified as a persistent issue by all the respondents. Below is a selection of responses:

*Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator): We've got an increased number of young people wanting support which is fantastic. But obviously there are budget constraints as well.*

*Brenda (LA1 LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant): The time now that we can offer, because there are so many children, and like my timetable's full to capacity... We definitely need more money, that's a big drawback to what we are able to do.*

Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator): *We could do with a bigger team to work with children at a younger age and early intervention... Sometimes we're playing catch-up where we could do with more provision early on.*

Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator): *We're under extreme financial constraints... the direct support has reduced because we can't physically support as many children as we could with three members of staff as we can with two.*

Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor): *Generally what happens, it's purely down to funding and the number of workers we have... there were five mentors to start off a few years ago, but now only two.*

Bryn (LA4 LAC Education Officer): *We could do with a lot more staff to go to, say, junior school age. It could be staff for year eight, year nine. It could be staff based in schools. You could be offering more activities and provisions throughout the summer... It can be difficult [for me] to attend LAC reviews. Sometimes the information sharing can be difficult like getting the information you need... That's erm one of the drawbacks unfortunately [of one front-line staff member in this team].*

The LACE Coordinators were also asked if there were, in their view, any differences in resources compared to other LACE teams in England. Overwhelmingly, the answer was yes - and that LACE teams in England appeared to be better resourced than those in Wales. Both Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) and Erin (LA4 LACE Coordinator) emphasize these points:

Sara: *Certainly yes! When children come in from England, because our education systems are different, because we've got devolved powers within the Assembly, very often English authorities are amazed at the lack of services that we have in Wales. I think that you see that in the media generally with the Health service you know? It's patchy isn't it? It's post-code!*

Erin: Yes [laughs]. *Erm, England, from my experience, often the local authority will have a Virtual Head Teacher and a team that any other head teacher would perhaps have access to i.e. a specific education welfare officer for their school; A specific education psychologist that their school would access and maybe a number of Learning Support Assistants that they can deploy wherever they feel the need is. So it feels as though they are*

*better resourced in terms of their teams... people have phoned me and asked to speak to the Virtual Head and it's like well [laughs] sorry I'm it! Well, myself and Bryn we're it!*

These extracts suggest how insufficient staff and skill mix in LACE provision is acting to constrain the educational attainment of some looked-after young people. Moreover, it has been recognised that where children *do* access such support practices, this advances the child's future 'intrinsic academic motivation' (Gorard and Huat See, 2013, p. 141). Even so, it has been suggested that a key feature of front-line welfare workers (like other public workers) is that they are asked to perform within a contemporary context of chronically inadequate resources (Lipsky, 1980; Newman, 2000; Knights, 2009; Spellman, 2011; Daft and Lane, 2016). Next explored is how LACE Coordinators and front-line LACE team practitioners perceived looked-after young people's education potential through a 'low ability' perspective.

### **Education Potential and the 'Low Ability' View**

It has long been observed that key practitioners (such as teachers and social workers) tend to have a pessimistic view when it comes to looked-after children and young people's education potential (Jackson, 1987; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Davey, 2006; Berridge, 2013). Such a view may be evident in the following extract from Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) who stated: *"this is probably politically wrong to say - but often looked-after children are lower ability because the parents are lower ability."* Similarly, Erin (LA4 LACE Coordinator) recalled a longstanding pessimistic assumption stating:

*there used to be, not so much now, but there used to be in schools a sort of 'poor dab' approach, as I termed it as in you know, 'oh, [tuts] fair play they've had a rough time, we can't expect that much'.*

Similar views were expressed by Anna (LA3 LAC (education) Mentor) who stated: *"they [looked-after young people] don't aim high."* In a further example, Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) described how looked-after children should not be *"pushed"* to achieve in the same way as some of their non-looked-after counterparts because looked-after children and young people are perceived to be vulnerable welfare 'victims' as a result of their situation:

*I don't feel that they're pushed. I feel to be honest that, in certain cases, we actually have to remind some, not all, foster carers that actually - we can't push this young person as we would perhaps our own child. Although we can promote education, it's not fair to place too much pressure on a young person that has just had a massive upheaval of moving.*

Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor) also appeared to suggest a corresponding view of low ability. However, Morgan did advocate the need for a wider challenge to the negative stereotypes of educational potential associated with looked-after children, arguing that looked-after children and young people should be given: “a fair crack” at opportunities aimed at improving attainment:

*Some of them [young people] are unfortunately, quite narrow minded about the fact that they feel they're not A\*'s. That's them then, and they've got to go and get a job - and no disrespect to people, you know? Working in supermarkets or things like that perhaps. I don't know, maybe a few years ago, they wouldn't be made aware that there are these other avenues for you... just because a child is LAC, doesn't automatically mean that they are going to underachieve. I know the statistics do support that, but I do think a lot of that is, in my personal opinion, is because - back again, I've always felt that a stereotype only becomes a stereotype for a reason. But I think, slowly, I think, where they're given more of an opportunity. I do think that we are seeing results slowly improve definitely. So, I think just give them a fair crack at it!*

Perhaps in a different but direct example of stereotyping, Donna (LA2 LAC Learning Coach) described one looked-after young person she supported as:

*...a gypsy. That's the sort of the way that they're brought up. They tend to leave school at fourteen... I do think if we had been in there at a really young age, we could have changed that mind-set. We could have sort of changed the way he's been instilled to think... They are gypsies; they are brought up a different way and taught different values. Like, don't get me wrong, he is a worker, you put him on a farm and he'll work his socks off. That's what he wants to do - he doesn't see the value of an education behind him.*

We shall see another example of this type of direct stereotyping again in Chapter Seven. In terms of looked-after children being seen to make progress, Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator) described how, beyond academic achievements:

*We've got children that are really talented at sport, we've got children that are really talented at a whole range of activities outside of school and it's about promoting that as well.*

Consistent with this view, it has been suggested that instead of relying purely on academic ability, other leisure pursuits and hobbies, outside schooling, should be considered (Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Wade and Dixon, 2006). In the following extract Brenda (LA1 LAC Learning Support Assistant/Officer) describes how pre-care experiences impact upon looked-after children's attainment and can hold steadfast the associated 'low ability' view of professionals charged with supporting these young people:

*[Despite] going to college in September, he's [Garth] still got a reading age of eight and I've worked with him for years. But that delay in the beginning has stopped him, it's like as if his brain has stopped growing. And there are a lot [of children] that I work with and you're going through the same stuff with them, but they're not retaining the information. It's like as if, I know they see psychologists and this and all that and they wait to see if they've got a diagnosis for any particular things, but it's confidence I think that has a lot to do with it.*

Having presented how a 'low ability' perception appears to influence practitioner assumptions and, by extension, service provision outcomes, the discussion will now turn to a particular unintended consequence of policy. This exists within the culture of performance driven services, in this instance to meet the GCSE 'threshold' of achieving five A\*-C pass grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), or an equivalent qualification level.

### **Meeting the GCSE 'Threshold'**

The notion of a key 'threshold' for education outcomes in England and Wales relates to achieving five A\*-C pass grades at GCSE or equivalent qualifications (James, 2009, p. 2). It has been described that at the end of compulsory school age these five 'good passes' can be otherwise understood as indicative 'of grammar school ability' (Power *et al.*, 2003, p. 44). In this sense the 'threshold' idea is, 'a remarkable and anachronistic survival from the tripartite system' (Power *et al.*, 2003, p. 44). With independent and grammar school instruction, this 'threshold' is the 'prime indicator of 'effective' secondary school performance' (Power *et al.*, 2003, p. 44). Thus this "threshold' attainment is now



so widely expected to function as the fundamental indicator of schooling quality' (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 17).

In the management culture of performance to meet threshold-related targets, despite students being supported to improve their attainment, no child can have a personalised education (Ball *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, some schools appear to perhaps overlook some students and focus on those on the C/D grade boundary with the intention of getting as many as possible into the A\*-C grade achievement (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Ball *et al.*, 2012). As policy pressures within 'the 'delivery chain' are translated into practice, pupils that cannot be boosted across the C/D boundary are positioned as the 'hopeless cases' (Ball *et al.*, 2012, p. 81). It is this focus that drives the 'machinery of delivery, as enactments of policy' (Ball *et al.*, 2012, p. 81). In terms of how the threshold thinking may be related to the LACE provision and practice, Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor) described the following experience:

*If a child's, say achieving on their own, you know? Maybe not amazingly - you know, we're not talking A\*s or anything. But, you know, who's getting C's and D's and things like that. Then perhaps we wouldn't go in there - where they seem, to be achieving on their own. When there's perhaps, a child that's lower down, we could then pull them up a little bit. Now, I totally agree with that and that's always going to be the main focus. But I did feel that it was disappointing that we couldn't help those that are doing quite well, on their own, but with a little bit of help, you know? You can go from D's up to C's, which again, is a huge difference, when you're going on to college courses and things like that. We've had discussions and meetings about this as a team and I think that it's changing. I've just got back from a particular young person and she's a C, B grade candidate. But it was flagged up that actually she's an A grade in the GCSE predicted grades, at the moment - but it was a, C and a, D in her maths - which again, it would be a shame basically as in that was the only subject she was struggling in. So after discussions with my line manager [Laura LA3 LACE Coordinator], it was agreed that I could sort of go in and offer support-with the help of the class teacher - specifically in maths, to hopefully pull her up to that C grade.*

In their evaluation of the Learning and Skills Council (West of England) Work Related Learning Project, James, Bathmaker, and Waller (2010) identified unintended consequences as a result of 'threshold' thinking. For example, they

identified that the purpose of a work-related learning project was 'to contribute to raising the levels of 14-16 year olds' participation, achievement and progression through high quality work-related learning' (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 3). The subjects that were supported however, related to the core indicator subjects (English, maths and science) and not the vocationally-orientated programmes (James *et al.*, 2010). They discovered that where learners were predicted to achieve grades A\* to C in GCSE examinations this was seen as good enough and these pupils were therefore not supported through the WRL workshop provision to improve from a predicted grade C to a grade B attainment. This performance related culture:

(i.e. collective assumptions and managed perceptions of the task in hand) dissuaded teachers' from 'taking risks' with learners in higher sets: these were, as one respondent put it, 'not to be interfered with (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 16).

Moreover, 'this held true even in those cases where new, differentiated WRL materials had been deliberately developed across the ability range' (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 16). Having outlined how threshold thinking may insinuate itself into LACE practitioner practices and assumptions, the focus now turns to how they perceive and construct looked-after identities and how these may also act as unintended barriers to the enactment of good practice.

### **Looked-After Young People and Contested Identities**

In terms of theorising social identities, as explored in Chapters Two and Three, looked-after young people often have contested identities which can sometimes produce unintended barriers to the enactment of good practice (to promoting education achievement). As discussed in Chapter Two, some children with a looked-after status are constructed as vulnerable. This vulnerability can then become the master identity for children (Christensen, 2000, p. 40). In contrast to this master identity, as we shall see in later chapters, when authentically heard looked-after young people's own voices can challenge dominant constructions by revealing themselves as no different to other young people. The discussion, in Chapter Two concerning looked-after young people's identities focused upon 'underachievement' and 'low attainment', when compared to their non-looked-after peers, through three lenses: pre-care experiences; low expectations; and the importance of having aspirations. It was also shown how looked-after young

people are positioned within complex and shifting occupational constructs within an ever-evolving (and devolving) UK welfare state.

Following on from the advancement of children's rights, children's participation and the importance of including children's 'voice', children have become subject to greater surveillance and protection (Prout, 2003). Thomas and Holland (2010) argued that understanding children's identity as a specific category is important as it touches their subjective sense of 'self' and therefore professionals must be sensitive and balanced in how they portray children and young people. There are numerous theories of what constitutes 'identity' and to establish a clear definition is 'something of a challenge' (Williams, 2000, p. 3). Thus, relating to the nature and meaning of identity, a selective rather than comprehensive account is provided here. Retaining elements of Lockean and Cartesian understandings of identity, modern understandings of self and identity rely on the tensions from within modern societies such as social regulation, social experience and social organisation as a means of shaping identities (Williams, 2000). A postmodern formation of identity argues that it is an existence of multiple networks of possibilities (Baudrillard, 1998). From an interactionist perspective, individuals often hold multiple identities (both individual and collective) (Jenkins, 1996). Moreover, it is through historical and external social forces that the idea of a multiplicity of self suggests that, 'although childhoods are variable they are also intentional, predicated upon social, political, historical, geographical and moral contexts' (Aitken, 2001, p. 57). The concept of identity within this study is thus informed by a postmodern formation of identity.

Chapter Three explored how during different policy eras looked-after young people's identities were sometimes constructed at macro policy level as threats to social order and in need of state regulation, but also as 'victims' of neglect and other harms and in need of family intervention (Parton 1998). As previously stated, policy is interpreted, translated, mediated and implemented in often complex circumstances by public service professionals. Thus, with the focus on the micro or practice level, this section will explore how the identities of looked-after young people were constructed by LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners. It will be seen that the identity construction of looked-after children within practitioner accounts can be broadly positioned within the 'state paternalism and child protection' perspective (Fox Harding, 1997; Pinkney, 2000), where looked-after children as a result of their 'looked-after' status are

understood through narratives that mix, thicken or thin the status of young people as 'victims' and/or 'threats' (Hendrick, 1994). Furthermore, this is where the child is viewed not as a subject with agency but instead as a deficit category: a vulnerable, passive subject dependent on state protection (Pinkney, 2000). Examples of this tendency towards problematizing the identity of looked-after young people can be noted in the following extracts:

Donna (LA2 LAC Learning Coach): *People will say to me now: 'you work with naughty children'. I don't work with naughty children! I work with colourful children! [Laughs], those with a personality!*

Brenda (LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistant): *We've got challenging children... I would say the majority, have got some kind of chip on their shoulder ...We usually find that their needs hadn't been met prior, before coming into care. So you're always playing a catch-up game!*

Anna (LA3 LAC (education) Mentor): [young people] *they found it a bit hard to take to me... they just don't turn up [to my sessions]... I think a few of the GCSE students, would say that they found it [the LACE provision] annoying [laughs]. Because, they'd rather be elsewhere. When you're sixteen, some things are more important aren't they? Like their boyfriends, and they're off like!*

Rachel (LA1 LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant): *In this authority, attitude is quite poor... it's difficult changing [young people's] attitudes, but I do try.*

From these extracts, we can deduce that LACE team practitioners construct looked-after children's identities in step with the notion of 'threats' linked to their own conduct and/or as vulnerable 'victims' of often multiple harms, and who are 'in need' therefore of welfare intervention. It appears that the matter of looked-after young people's identities (discursively, victims and/or threats) operates to impede rather than perhaps to mediate policy enactment. Such identities intermingle beyond a simplistic binary. Linked to this point and described by all respondents as a major barrier to providing good practice, was the notion of visibility and stigma and how these can impact upon taking up LACE support within the school setting. For Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator), it was acknowledged that other school staff may be competing with LACE practitioners, by providing a less stigmatising support provision within the school setting:

*Some of the barriers are young people wanting to access the support themselves... tuition is something that's offered to all looked-after children and young people... it's based a lot on whether or not the young person wants support. And I must admit in the Key Stage Four, the ones that aren't accessing support from LACES, it's really a fact that they don't want it or don't need it themselves. Or it's a case that they are receiving other intensive support from the school, they perhaps have got a full-time LSA support via the LEA anyway.*

The term visibility denotes an element of social sorting - an activity that relegates some people into invisibility (Mubi Brighenti, 2010). Visibility establishes a threshold where stigmatisation operates (Mubi Brighenti, 2010). Research has long reported that looked-after young people, in terms of visibility, frequently feel marked, labelled and stigmatised as a result of their 'looked-after' status (Martin and Jackson, 2002; SEU, 2003; Holland *et al.*, 2010; Mannay *et al.*, 2015). In this study several respondents reported that being identified as a looked-after child had significant consequences for their schooling outcomes. Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) recalled a year eleven pupil who did not want LACE support stating: *"I don't actually want to be seen as different in a mainstream school, I don't want to be highlighted as looked-after."* Goffman (1968) attempted to describe the relationship between 'normal' and 'stigmatised' individuals through their interactions within social groups and social institutions. For Goffman (1968) people can experience spoiled identities, which refers to those who are discreditable, discredited, have abomination of the body, and blemishes of individual character. However, it has been suggested that such spoiled identities can be and are resisted by some individuals (Goffman, 1968; Juhila, 2004; Severinsson and Markström, 2015). Rhiannon (LA2 LAC Learning Coach), described how there was evidence of looked-after children feeling marked out as being not the same as their peers and how this identity deficit is resisted by some young people:

*I think a lot of looked-after children probably still see themselves as different... there is like that feeling of being different. Some of the looked-after children we work with they'd rather us not work with them in school.*

Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) described how visibility was managed. Her account was corroborated across the other LACE teams:

*LACES support is available to every pupil and it's just that battle as well of, you know? A year eleven pupil thinking, 'I don't actually want to be seen as different in a mainstream school. I don't want to be highlighted as looked-after. The team try to be very discreet. And they try to sort of work their timetable, so it's not that they are withdrawn from classes.*

Similarly, Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator) described how some young people were cautious about the LAC mentor support (in school): *"on the whole young people are very positive about having the support, but there's been occasions where they've been hesitant about it."* The consequence of being labelled as 'different' results in a stigmatised identity and as such Donna (LA2 LAC Learning Coach) observed that: *"It can be quite hard I find as well, for children to admit that they're in care."* The notion of visibility as part of stigma (Mubi Brighenti, 2010) is returned to in later chapters when this topic is considered from the perspectives of the young people in the study. Here, notions of young people's own 'responsibilisation' and identity and how these link together as a means to engage in educational improvement are next considered.

In terms of the link between identity and responsibilisation, across all the LACE respondents the willingness of young people to take up the support offered by the team members was raised as a persistent issue and discussed in terms of young people's own 'responsibilisation' to engage in their own educational improvement. It has been argued that the 'repercussions of neo-liberal policy are that youth who cannot be 'responsibilised' by the systems become further marginalised when they adopt alternate ways of coping' (Liebenberg, 2015, p. 1019).

The role of the local and national state has evolved from being a direct service provider to a commissioner of services that are often targeted at those most in need. At the same time, social life has moved from being viewed as fixed, inevitable and subject to 'fate' to being mediated through human agency and control in a world where we are deemed to make life choices and to take responsibility for these choices (Parton, 1998). By extension, held within this, it is the responsibility of young people themselves (including looked-after young people), to develop into 'empowered' responsible citizens (Newman, 2010). The following extract hints strongly at this notion:

Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator): [The team] *will offer support to all of the looked-after children. Some of them won't want it; some of them will have to be persuaded that it's a good thing ... The difficult ones are the ones that don't want support and won't engage... they could get used to working with [the team] and get that academic ethos - that education is a key to a successful life, if they want it to be.*

The notion of identity is returned to in later chapters when this topic is considered from the perspectives of the young people in the study.

## **Concluding Comments**

There is a dearth of research concerning how local authority LACE Coordinators and team practitioners are meeting their legislative duty and promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children and young people in Wales. In addition there is little research exploring how government policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been interpreted, translated or enacted by LACE Coordinators and front-line LACE practitioners in their day-to-day work practices (see Chapter One).

This thesis set out to explore this rarely researched occupational world through a largely 'upward' (from the 'front-line') instead of from a 'top-down' perspective (Hupe, 2014, p. 171). This chapter has highlighted that LACE Coordinators' and their team practitioners' work practices are set within a complex, diverse and multifaceted organisational landscape. The respondents described some unintended consequences of the policy direction, as a result of 'threshold' thinking. In their day-to-day engagement in inter-agency working partnerships and in crossing occupational boundaries they experienced aspects of professional rivalry that stemmed from and impacted upon their boundary-spanning activities. Furthermore, LACE Coordinators and practitioners held resources that they deemed chronically inadequate relative to the tasks they were asked to perform. It was shown that LACE Coordinators and their team members invoke narratives in which children are often cast as 'victims' and/or 'threats' (Hendrick, 1994). This is because a public child welfare discourse (legislation and policy) constructs the identity of looked-after children as often vulnerable 'victims' of often multiple harms as well as 'threats' to order by their own conduct and who are 'in need' therefore of welfare intervention. We have seen how the link between young people's identity and responsabilisation can move us beyond the simplistic binary of victim/threat to demonstrate that these

notions intermingle and can be used for particular occupational purposes to account for the work of LACE Coordinators and their team members. Their displays of expertise and legitimacy stem in part from appeals to the notion that they work with young people who are challenging. Issues of service failure or stress can also be positioned in a narrative of exoneration related to resource inadequacy and insufficient training to succeed with some children with complex needs.

Before exploring the young people's engagement with and views about the LACE services (Chapter Seven) it is important to first explore their perspectives on being 'looked-after', their 'in-care' identities and their schooling experiences. It is towards these background contexts of the young people that the analysis now turns.



## Chapter Six

### **Looked-After Young People's Self-Defined Identities, Formal Care Relationships and Experiences of Schooling**

Ceri: *"One cover teacher told me I'm 'gonna' fail in life. And she didn't even know me!"*

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter Five, the LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners identified a number of difficulties within their day-to-day occupational work practices. These included issues such as professional boundaries and rivalries and resource constraints. Yet, another obstacle centred on their reports that the complex identities of looked-after young people can sometimes produce unintended obstacles to the enactment of good practice. Indeed, it was seen how practitioners relied upon hegemonic, 'expert', child welfare knowledge through discursive expressions of children as passive, in need, vulnerable - 'victims' and/or 'threats' (Hendrick, 1994). Such conceptions deriving largely from state paternalism and child protection perspectives (Fox Harding, 1997; Pinkney, 2000). Consequently, many looked-after young people are often 'trapped within welfare identities as "victims"' (Stein, 2008, p. 43). Furthermore, whilst Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children the right to have their views given due weight in terms of matters affecting them (Lundy, 2007), young people regularly feel that their voices are not heard: 'their perspectives, and consequently their needs, often remain invisible' (Osler, 2010, p. 1; see also Lundy, 2007). Thus, the primary aim of this chapter seeks to explore the perspectives of the young people, with particular emphasis upon the ways in which they claim their own 'self' identities (Jenkins, 1996; Williams, 2000).

Making sense of one's identity is a central aspect within children and young people's lives (Noble-Carr *et al.*, 2014). Yet the depiction of looked-after young people in relation to their legal status and official records do not reveal much of their subjective identities, nor 'describe the lived experience and embodied social world' of being in care (Davey and Pithouse, 2008, p. 70). Despite there being a wide variety of potential theoretical influences 'on how we might

understand identities' (Thomas and Holland, 2010, p. 2619), professionals must consider how identity formation is achieved from the standpoint of the young person, beyond discourses of child welfare. Therefore, this chapter will draw on a 'strengths-based' approach (Saleebey, 2002), otherwise described as a 'positive perspective' (Chase *et al.*, 2006), whereby looked-after young people are positioned as the 'experts' about their own identities and their embodied social worlds. The chapter thus focuses on positive attributes expressed through the voices of the young people, in terms of their: 'looked-after' status, formal relationships ('corporate' parents: social workers, carers and teachers) and experiences of schooling (moving through Key Stage Four). A broader aim is to ascertain whether young people's identity claims correspond with practitioner constructions, and the extent to which these coalesce. Moreover, the data generated in this chapter is intended to 'improve our understanding of [looked-after] young people's perspectives on schooling and on the issues important to [these] students' (Osler, 2010, p. 35).

To reiterate, this chapter focuses on the views of young people about their 'looked-after' status and experiences of schooling. For this to be achieved, the chapter is set out in two sections. The first begins with an exploration of young people's self-defined 'looked-after' and 'care' identities, whilst drawing on positive, strengths-based perspectives (Saleebey, 2002; Chase *et al.*, 2006). Attention then moves to young people's perceptions and experiences of educational support received through their formal (caring) relationships with 'corporate parents' (social workers and carers - foster and kinship). The section then concludes with an examination of young people's perceptions of the educational facilities and equipment within the care placements (such as, a quiet space, access to computers and revision books) and the extent to which these were deemed suitable for successful attainment. Section two explores young people's perceptions and experiences of their 'looked-after' identities upon their 'schooling'. This will be presented through a variety of lenses such as: the school placement on a day-to-day basis; peer friendships; peer bullying; school rules and discipline; individual (problem) behaviour; and finally, perceptions and experiences of teachers (school and college professionals). As a conceptual framework to inform this analysis, the chapter will draw upon a range of interrelated ideas about identity, relationships and belonging discussed in Chapters Two and Three and Five. Before moving on to section one, the young people in this study are identified in Table 6.1 (below) in regard to the local

authority research site, placement type; school Year Group; and type of school attended.

**Table 6.1: Overview of the Young People**

Name	Local Authority (LA)	Placement Type	School Year Group	Type of School
Garth	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Educated Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)
Elen	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Jac	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Bethan	LA1	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Lynn	LA2	Kinship care (Grandparent)	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Rural Mainstream comprehensive
Dylan	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Rural Mainstream comprehensive
Beca	LA2	Kinship care (Grandparent)	Year Group 10 (age 15)	Rural Mainstream comprehensive
Glyn	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Martyn	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Alan	LA2	Kinship care (Grandparent)	Year Group 10 (age 14)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Ceri	LA2	Foster care	Year Group 10 (age 14)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Griff	LA3	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Tegan	LA3	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Carwyn	LA3	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Connah	LA4	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
Jenni	LA4	Kinship care (Grandparents)	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive
Sian	LA4	Foster care	Year Group 11 (age 16)	Urban Mainstream comprehensive

In summary, the sample of seventeen young people were drawn from four local authorities, with most residing in LA2 ( $n=7$ ). The vast majority (82.3 per cent) were aged sixteen and in school Year Group Eleven ( $n=14$ ). Over three quarters of the young people (76.4 per cent) were in foster care placements ( $n=13$ ) and within ‘mainstream’ comprehensive school placements ( $n=15$ ). To reiterate, as described in Chapter Four, it did not prove possible to gain access to official records or to full care histories of the young people, although this was initially sought. However, there was some modest access to some of the young people’s

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) whilst 'in the field' (Elen and Garth LA1 and Lynn, Dylan and Beca LA2). However, this was not forthcoming in the other two local authorities (LA3 and 4), despite this information being sought.

### **Section One: Perceptions and Experiences of 'Looked-After' and 'Care' Identities and Formal Care Relationships**

In Chapter Two it was outlined that around three quarters of young people enter care as a result of abuse and/or neglect and/or family breakdown and/or families not wishing or feeling able to manage young people's behaviour; thus, around ten per cent enter care as a result of their behaviour (Welsh Government, 2015c). As a result, the young people in question are often constructed through knowledge pertaining to individual pathology and perceived personal deficits (Jackson and Martin, 1998). Many looked-after children and young people are often believed to lack a caring capacity, especially if they have had little opportunity to create meaningful caring relationships with their birth parents (Holland, 2010). A positive, strengths-based perspective (Saleebey, 2002; Chase *et al.*, 2006) however, is not premised on assumptions of deficit, but rather positions young people as the 'experts' upon their own lived existence and embodied social worlds. This approach is adopted from hereon as 'a rebellion against the dominant medico-scientific paradigms, which reduces people's symptomatology to problems' (Cohen, 1999 cited in Engelbrecht, 2010, p. 49). A strengths-based perspective not only positions looked-after young people as 'experts', but also 'provides a distinctive lens for examining the world of practice' (Saleebey, 2002, p. 20). Moreover, as Odell (2008, p. 20) suggests, the strengths-based approach recognises problems, 'but keeps them in context', whilst allowing for people (clients, carers or practitioners) to focus on growth. Through a strengths-based approach, this section will now present looked-after young people's perceptions of their 'looked-after' and 'care' identities. This is essential as they are the experts of what this consists of - and what these category identities mean in terms of their embodied social world. With illustrations from attachment theory and the notion of belonging, the chapter will now address how different identities and constructions of 'self' are shaped by experiences of formal care relationships. The discussion then moves to the young people's perceptions and experiences of educational support received from their social workers and carers. Finally, young people provide their subjective evaluation of the resources (and suitability) of study facilities provided within their care placements.

## Exploring Young Peoples' Self-Defined 'Looked-After' and 'Care' Identities

As observed in Chapter Two, Three and Five, looked-after young people's identities can be constructed through discourses of 'threats' and 'victims'. It was identified here that these constructions can impact upon the ways welfare professionals (including LACE Coordinators and their team) enact good practice. In terms of exploring young people's conceptualisations of being 'looked-after' and 'care' identities, it was necessary to ask directly what the 'looked-after' category meant to the young people. Firstly, consider the following responses:

Jac (LA1): *I like it [being 'looked-after']. It's like I'm in a better environment now than what I was when I wasn't in care.*

Elen (LA1): *It's like [being 'looked-after'], even though I don't live with my parents. There are people looking-after me, who are actually like parents to me. So it's like being cared for.*

Dylan (LA2): *That's great! [Being 'looked-after']. I've got great support at [foster] home.*

Tegan (LA3): *It's like someone wants to take you on so that you are safe... the people you live with actually want you to have a better advantage in life and want you to get somewhere and do something.*

Carwyn (LA3): *I called them my mum and dad because I've been with them since I was three... They're amazing [foster parents]. I owe them a lot really, because obviously being in care. I realise that if it wasn't for them my life would have turned out differently.*

Connah (LA4): *Personally, it ['looked-after'] means living in care; having someone other than my birth parents looking- after me and taking care of my well-being.*

Jenni (LA4): *It's ['looked-after'] being taken care of, just normal like, taken care of by people, other than your birth parents.*

In step with a positive strengths-based perspective, these extracts challenge professional discourses of how these young people are often 'seen' predominately as: passive, vulnerable, victims or threats. Indeed, such discourses seem notably absent above. In contrast, the young people's accounts

highlight what being 'looked-after' means and the types of care that these young people value (being cared for or about).

Consistent with theories on attachment, these extracts suggest that 'looked-after' and 'care' identities are shaped by the existence of supportive relationships with 'caring' carers (McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot and Wigley, 2011). This is matched with findings from McMurray *et al.*, (2011, p. 214) who identified that, 'when asked to describe themselves, young people's responses were often shaped by their relationships with others, the underlying currents of which were rooted in their family and current looked-after experiences'. Moreover, the extracts from the young people above suggested that their conceptualisations of being 'looked-after' and 'cared for' are typified by 'fairness, reliability, partiality and everyday acts' (Featherstone and Morris, 2012, p. 349). Notwithstanding this, upon leaving the care system some young people recall that 'care' itself was an absent factor (Sissay, 2013). As Sissay (2013) observed, 'in many cases it seems care is a one-word oxymoron'. In the same way, some young people in this study rejected the looked-after classification when articulating their 'in-care' identities. In the following extract Bethan (LA1) questions the usefulness of the 'looked-after' status as a descriptive category:

[Being 'looked-after' means] *Not a lot! Looked-after by someone else. I might have had a better upbringing than anyone else and they could live with their mother!*

Bethan's account suggests that neatly 'fitting in' and straightforwardly experiencing a 'care' relationship within a placement may be more challenging for some young people as 'public care is more likely to be seen as a stigmatized form of state responsibility than a positive option for enhancing the life chances of disadvantaged young people' (Cameron, 2003, p. 92). The experience of being 'in care' or categorized as a 'looked-after' young person has often 'engendered in the participants perceptions of being second-class citizens, important to nobody; rejected by their parents, their carers and often their peers, and effectively stigmatised by society' (Mallon, 2005, p. 100). Since the establishment of the looked-after category through the Children Act 1989, research has shown that young people experience the 'looked-after' category as a form of stigma (Martin and Jackson, 2002; SEU, 2003; Holland *et al.*, 2010; Mannay *et al.*, 2015). Thus, these 'identities become real and are learned at a certain moment in history' (Juhila, 2004, p. 263). As observed in Chapter Three, Holland *et al.*, (2010) identified stigma as a feeling of subjective punishment or

failure. However, as seen above in the data extracts, any categorisation can be 'resisted' (Severinsson and Markström, 2015). One 'may adopt a reflexive or even critical position in relation to them, in other words, talk back to the stigmatized identities' (Juhila, 2004, p. 271). Severinsson and Markström (2015) suggest that some people however, 'can protest against the described identities and refuse to make a categorization to their own' (Severinsson and Markström, 2015, p. 3); resistance to such categorisation and client identities can be intended, unintended, explicit or concealed (Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; McFadden, 1995; Högberg, 2011; Russell, 2011).

Consistent with (Holland *et al.*, 2010, p. 1675), the young people in this study were also 'relatively uninterested in the formal care system, and rarely mentioned aspects such as care plans, reviews and court orders'. Only one respondent (Sian, LA4) described how attending court resulted in missing many school days during the Key Stage Four - GCSE period, resulting in a period of:

*...stressing out; because I was missing lessons... I didn't realise at the time, but it was a lot to have on your shoulders, especially like when it's around the GCSEs time. And I literally had to come home and panic, when I realised I'd missed a load of stuff at school. I missed loads and then I'd have to catch-up, and it was really stressful at the time. But I managed it; at least, I think.*

Mannay *et al.* (2015) suggest that when social workers come into school and call young people out of class, this not only exposes their personal lives to their school peers, it also makes 'their difference to other children obvious and visible' (Mannay *et al.*, 2015, p. 80). Consistent with Mannay *et al.*, it was also reported that young people were often taken out of class, particularly if there was a scheduled LAC review:

*...if we have a LAC review coming up and they want us to fill out a form...or if our social worker or our advocates come in to talk to us, then we get taken out of lessons for that as well (Lynn, LA2).*

*Sian (LA4): I'm quite a private person and I didn't like to be called out of the classes. So I just told them [social worker] in the end don't even bother asking me.*

*DA: Do you remember being called out of the classroom a lot?*

*Sian: It did happen a lot for the first years in school and it did happen just before I left school. But each time was for a different reason. So I just had to tell them [social worker] basically, no every single time, so it was awkward.*

In summary, we can see that the young people in this study overwhelmingly embraced their looked-after status, without it being perceived as an open, visual, stigmatized and negative identity. Thus, challenging established professional discourses of looked-after young people 'seen' often as passive victims. However, as with other research, it should be noted that this was not the case for all respondents in this study, with some resisting giving visibility to their 'looked-after' status. I will return to the 'looked-after' identity later in the chapter when discussing young people's experiences of attending school. For now, the focus turns to the young people's experiences of receiving educational support from their 'corporate' parents (social workers and carers).

### **Educational Support: Social Workers**

Social workers (as corporate parents) should build meaningful relationships with looked-after young people as this can play a pivotal role in a young person's education (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007); the young person's personal education plan (PEP) should provide the means for this (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Yet, as described in Chapter Five, social workers are only central in leading on the PEP within some local authorities, whilst in others this is undertaken by either LACE Coordinators and/or their team practitioners. This is despite the Welsh Government recommending that PEPs should be initiated by the social worker:

...in partnership with the child or young person, designated teacher, parents and/or family member, carer, link worker where the child is placed in a children's home and any other relevant person (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 44).

In addition, Welsh Government recommend that the PEP should be an up-to-date, high quality plan, which contains 'the child's educational history and any special educational needs' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 41). Furthermore, the PEP should be updated every six months (alongside the young person's care plan) and ought to:



- Ensure access to services and support;
  - Contribute to stability;
  - Minimise disruption and broken schooling;
  - Signal particular educational needs;
  - Establish clear goals; and
  - Act as a record of progress and achievement
- (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 43).

Regarding the awareness of specific policies that were aimed at improving their educational achievements, the young people in this study were asked if they had or recalled having a PEP. Consistent with research undertaken by 'Voices from Care' (2015) about looked-after young people's experiences of being involved with their PEP - when the young people in this study were asked if they had a PEP, initially many of the responses ( $n=10$ ) were 'no' (Jac, Bethan and Elen – LA1; Ceri, Glyn and Martyn - LA2; Carwyn and Tegan – LA3; Jenni and Sian – LA4). Research undertaken by 'Voices from Care' (2015, p. 6), described how it was only through reminding the young people about what the PEP was that they recalled their involvement. In a similar way, within this study, it was only by prompting the young people about a specific young persons 'contribution sheet' (within the PEP), that some young people then remembered having a PEP having forgotten about any discussion or experience of it. Consider the following extracts:

Dylan (LA2): *No I don't [recall having a PEP]. I should do! I just think that I've probably been told and I've just forgotten.*

Griff (LA3): *...I can't even remember looking at it [a PEP], but I know I had one.*

Connah (LA4): *It [a PEP] was bought up in the LAC Review - but I can't remember any more details about it.*

Beca (LA2): *No [I do not recall having a PEP]... [The my contribution sheet prompt] Yeah a little bit... what lessons I enjoy. Who my friends are. How I feel in school. If I needed help who could I go to. What subjects do I enjoy. Which ones don't I like - I think that's it.*

Elen (LA1): *No [I do not recall having a PEP]... [The my contribution sheet prompt] All I remember is the different boxes. Like what do you like about school.*

Carwyn (LA3): *No [I do not recall having a PEP]... [The my contribution sheet prompt] Ahh yeah, every year. Well the first one was just like stupid. So for the last ones [KS4] I'd just tick yes, yes, yes for every single one of them [question], that's what everyone does! It's like, do you attend school a lot? Do you do homework on time? Do your teachers sit down and talk to you? Do they take time to focus on you? Do they supply extra time if needed after school? - Stuff like that. It's a weird way of working but we all tick yes to it working but it doesn't really happen. They just go yes because that what the school wants. Everyone does that. No one really reads it. Because it's meant to take half an hour and we do it in two minutes!*

Furthermore, two young people (Tegan and Lynn), in a similar vein to Carwyn above, perceived the PEP as a distant, vague procedure and of little or no impact as a method of education support:

Tegan (LA3): *No [I do not recall having a PEP]... [The my contribution sheet prompt] Ahh, it's something to do with targets, I think? Yeah, every couple of months you have long-term targets and short-term targets. That's all I can tell you really... I think I only did it once? I can't remember - it was quite a while ago!*

Lynn (LA2): *It [the PEP] doesn't give you the opportunity to write down things that you find difficult in school... I guess it would be nice to know that they want to know what your concerns and worries are. Because they're asking you about the positives and I mean there are going to be negatives. I'd rather they'd address them, rather than just assume that everything's okay.*

Lynn describes (above) how the PEP was unable to address her educational concerns and continued to explain why this factor was important for practitioners (and policy makers) in terms of achieving a more rounded understanding of the young person's needs within education. This finding is consistent with other research (Harker *et al.*, 2004; Voices from Care, 2015), which found that PEPs were not a 'reality' to many of the young people. For Lynn, the PEP would seem to be seen as a skewed bureaucratic procedure that is unable to address fully her particular educational concerns. This is not dissimilar to other research that revealed how welfare assessment procedures can produce a 'distorted account of children's identities' (Thomas and Holland, 2010, p. 2630).

The focus now moves onto explore the young people's perceptions and experiences of developing formal caring relationships with their social workers. Positioned within the formal care system, Holland (2010) has suggested that social workers should form meaningful (caring) relationships with looked-after young people, even where carers and social workers are no longer formally part of their lives (for any reasons): 'their continued interest and concern could be encouraged' (Holland, 2010, p. 1679). However, 'high turnover' within social work is a consistently cited problem and an element which contributes to a lack of stability for looked-after children and young people (Odell, 2008, p. 19). Consequently, social workers are often observed as 'surprisingly minor players' in young peoples 'narratives about their everyday lives and care relationships' (Holland, 2010, p. 1675). This was the same for three young people in LA2 (Lynn, Alan and Glyn). Despite social workers being directed by government to take the lead on PEPs, some young people described hardly ever seeing their social worker, and even less, talking to them about school or their educational needs.

Lynn (LA2): *I only met my social worker once [in twelve months]. He didn't talk about my education it was just an introduction about who he was and what he was doing.*  
[10 years care experience].

Glyn (LA2): *I don't see them [social workers] a lot. If I see him [social worker], he just talks to me about my father!*  
[11 years care experience].

Alan (LA2): *I haven't got one [social worker] at the moment!*  
[12 years care experience].

Ceri (LA2): *My social worker keeps changing... like from when I come into care, I've had fifteen to twenty! I've had four in the last year! ...It's like as soon as I get used to one, they have to go and I get a new one. And all these new people, I can't really get used to lots of different people.*  
[8 years care experience].

Carwyn (LA3): *I don't have clue how many [social workers] I've had, its loads! Say, over five... I hated them!*

Griff (LA3): *I've been in care for two to three years and I've had six or seven of them [social workers]. So it pisses me off a bit really. Because they don't give you a social worker to stick with!*

Tegan (LA3): *I've had about ten or twelve social workers.*

Sian (LA4): *It's too many to count!*

The young people often described a strong feeling of antipathy towards particular social workers, perceiving them to be either a hindrance to their educational progress and stability, or irrelevant to their lives. This finding is consistent with other research (Harker *et al.*, 2003; Mallon, 2005; Davey, 2006; Jackson and Cameron, 2012; Kippen, 2016). In contrast however, six young people (Jac, Beca, Dylan, Garth, Martyn LA2; and Jenni LA4) recalled opportunities to build meaningful formal relationships with their social workers in which they had time to talk about education. For example, these accounts were mainly focused on recollections of: Key Stage Four - exam revision; continuity of education (attending Higher Education); and support for training (preparing to join the Army). Several examples include:

Dylan (LA2): *She's [social worker] always telling me how education is important and that I really should, because she believes that I can go onto higher education and get a degree and be where I want to be.*  
[1 year of care experience].

Jenni (LA4): *I've had two [social workers] and they've talked to me about education. They said different things about the GCSEs, like about how with the GCSEs, you need to get certain grades to get into the courses at college and get things ready with the revision as well.*

Martyn (LA2): *[My social worker said] 'what do you want to do after school?' And they've said how they're going to help me achieve what I want to do. Because if I want to join the Army, I'd have to go to [name of another local authority] and they said they could help me with transport - and I could stay there for my interviews and everything. I've had the same social worker for twelve months now.*  
[12 years care experience].

These extracts are consistent with previous research that identified that social workers who provided meaningful educational encouragement were central in improving the educational attainment of looked-after young people (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Voices from Care, 2015). In contrast, some young people expressed a dislike towards their social worker, perceiving them as uninterested in their education, as in the following reflections:

Connah (LA4): *A social worker should be more, well seem more interested. I understand that it may be difficult for them to be interested, all the time, especially if they're working on a lot of cases. But even if they act as if they have an interest, perhaps that will be better than nothing?*

Bethan (LA1): *She [Social Worker] don't even know me! She tries to think she knows me, but she don't... They don't talk to you about anything [education]. They're a waste of time social workers 'coz' when you want them you can't find them, no one's there! You phone in and ask to speak to your social worker and they're like, 'oh she's not here' and if you look down there, you see her walking out there - she's not there mind! They don't find days for kids, none of them! Ohh, she's a waste of time, she is!*

Garth (LA1): *[involvement with Social Services] Well I wouldn't want them, I want them off like. She [social worker] annoys me!*

The extract from Connah is consistent with other research, where looked-after 'children believed that social workers would benefit from greater awareness of educational issues and training to improve their ability to support young people's education' (Harker *et al.*, 2003, p. 97). Moreover, from the extracts above, the key messages from the young people's perspectives are consistent with previous research that has described that looked-after young people have repeatedly articulated dissatisfaction with their social workers, saying that many social workers are overly preoccupied with negative issues in the lives of the young people, or are unresponsive or unavailable (Harker *et al.*, 2003; Goodyer, 2013). Garth felt frustrated about having to have involvement with social services; while Bethan and Connah both stated a feeling of being outside of their social worker's priorities which impacted negatively on forming any caring relationship. It has been suggested by Featherstone, Morris and White (2013) that such perspectives are largely bolstered within the contemporary neoliberal project in public services which has emphasised the promotion of individual responsibilities and intensified distances between groups such as social workers and their service users:

....Within a couple of decades under both conservative and labour governments, greater distances emerged between individuals, groups and communities. These distances were physical and psychological and affected everyone (Featherstone, Morris and White, 2013, p. 6).

Bethan's and Connah's extracts suggest that social workers can sometimes appear too busy to form a long-term caring relationship. Indeed, as Connah suggested, social workers need to at least 'appear' to be "*motivated in every case*". In many regards, the looked-after young people in this study can also 'be seen as assessors of their social workers' qualities' (Holland, 2010, p. 1676). Holland (2010) argues for the re-balancing of priorities which ensure care and interdependency are valued (both within and beyond care). In Holland's view, 'it seems fundamental to an individual's well-being that they may be able to envisage a future in which they will have continued caring relationships' (Holland, 2010, p. 1679). The chapter now turns to explore the looked-after young people's perceptions and experiences of educational support received from their carers.

### **Educational Support: Carers**

Prominent in the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) was the idea that children (and their carers) value stable relationships. Moreover, in order to talk freely and openly 'about personal and often painful problems requires a degree of trust' (Munro, 2011, p. 32). In this study, over three quarters of the young people were in foster care placements ( $n=13$ ). The remaining four young people (Lynn, Beca, Alan and Jenni) were in kinship care with grandparents as their main carer. Consistent with other research (Sebba *et al.*, 2015), this study found that the young people residing in foster care reported having the most educational support. Examples included:

Griff (LA3): *I get on with my foster mother very well... She's always offering me [educational] help.*

Bethan (LA1): *They [foster carers] try and help as much as they can, and give me [education] advice.*

Jac (LA1): *If I'm stuck on anything, I know that I can ask them [foster carers] and they'll help me as much as they can. They'll find websites and they'll just do it [help me]. They brought loads of revision guides, stuff like that.*

Elen (LA1): *My foster mother says, 'if you don't revise you won't get the grades and you won't be able to get into college'.*

Tegan (LA3): *My foster mum was pretty strict with revision. She'd just come in and say, 'revision'!*

These extracts suggest that some foster carers may well be positioned to meet the educational needs of the looked-after children they support (Odell, 2008, p. 19). Moreover, children are more likely to succeed in foster care if they want to be there and are 'attached to a trusted adult and have a good experience at school' (Sinclair, 2005, p. 123). Thus, there is a sense that foster carer input and support for education is welcomed and viewed positively. For the young people in foster care, their meaningful relationships with their carers, appeared to help build a positive sense of belonging (fitting in) with the care placement (foster and kinship. In other words, feeling 'comfortable and connected' (Roberts, 2013, p. 45).

Of the four young people in kinship care placements, only two reported a positive sense of belonging and recalled receiving education support:

Jenni (LA4): *My [kinship carers, grandparents] have talked to me about the exams saying that they're important. And [they are] hoping that I can do what I can, and [they] helped me through it. The foster carers before didn't talk about it that much.*

Alan (LA1): *[My kinship carer talks to me] sometimes about my exams, [they] tell me, to do good in them.*

In contrast however, sisters Beca and Lynn (LA2) reported that their kinship carer provided no education support. Lynn stated: *'I'm one of those people, who prefers to spend their time, locked up in their room, rather than talking to my family; because I don't get much support there!'* In the following example, Lynn describes this feeling of being at odds with her kinship carer in terms of post-compulsory education:

*I'd rather do something that makes me happy. But my Nan [kinship carer] would rather I did something that makes me a lot of money. So there's a conflict there ...I don't wanna go against Nan and do something she doesn't want me to do... I know my Nan is always saying: 'oh yeah Lynn you have plenty of support'. But I feel that I don't get as much as I deserve. Like because I try really hard, but I always feel that I'm not trying hard enough in my Nan's eyes.*

In addition, Beca stated: *"I'm not allowed to go to college...because my Nan doesn't want me turning out dodgy!"* These extracts seem to suggest potential conflict in terms of (intergenerational) values placed upon education (Nandy *et al.*, 2011, p. 132). In summary, it is well known that the attainment of looked-after

children can be promoted through supportive formal relationships (with social workers) and through the help and encouragement of carers (Martin and Jackson, 2002). Thus, there appears to be the potential for social work to intervene and to mitigate such anti-education attitudes by carers. In addition, however, this also includes access to educational facilities and equipment within care placements. Thus, the focus now turns to examine young people's perspective of the facilities and equipment made available within their care placements.

### **Educational Facilities and Equipment: Care Placements**

Regardless of placement type, having access to suitable education facilities is key to successful attainment (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). However, almost a third ( $n=6$ ) of the young people (in this study) reported not having suitable space to study. Of the majority of young people that had a suitable space to study, these were able to utilize their bedrooms for study purposes. By contrast, two young people were allocated the 'kitchen table' (Dylan, LA2; Carwyn, LA3), or a mixture of places within the home as JAC (LA1) described: "*I either go in my room or on the table in the kitchen or sitting room*". In the context of working at the kitchen table, this perhaps promotes relevant and supportive interaction with others as regards the learning process compared to doing homework on one's own, in one's bedroom. However, for some carers, doing homework at the kitchen table does not necessarily mean that homework gets completed without tension (Vatterott, 2009, p. 29).

All young people reported having access to GCSE revision guides. However eight young people, despite having a computer within the care placement, were unable to use it for completing school work (online revision packages). Several reasons included:

Bethan (LA1): *I broke my laptop!*

Elen (LA1): *I have a computer but I'm not allowed to use it now until my exams are over!*

Lynn (LA2): *It's [my computer] been taken off me at the moment, because I misbehaved!*

Beca (LA2): *I'm not allowed on the internet.*

Dylan (LA2): *It's [my computer] got a virus, so I can't use that at the moment!*



From these extracts, we can perhaps deduce that some looked-after young people may well be disadvantaged in having no access to a computer in order to complete school work or revise for their exams at Key Stage Four. This would support findings from previous research which identified that a lack of resources (such as computers) acted as a barrier to educational progress (Harker *et al.*, 2003, p. 95). However, in contrast, recent research has suggested that a lack of access to computers did ‘...not emerge as a key issue in the lower progress of looked after pupils’ (Sebba *et al.*, 2015, p. 31). The focus now turns to explore the young people’s ‘looked-after’ and ‘care’ identities while attending school and their perceptions of ‘fitting in’ the school community.

## **Section Two: The ‘Looked-After’ and ‘Care’ Identities in School - ‘Fitting-In’ the School Community**

In order to understand looked-after young people’s experiences of their ‘looked-after’ and ‘care’ identities while attending school, the discussion will first consider what constitutes ‘being in’ school on a day-to-day basis for participants.

### **School: On a Day-To-Day Basis**

When asked to describe experiences of school on a day-to-day basis, young people expressed both positive and negative views. When the young people were asked about any ‘negative’ aspects, Bethan (LA1) stated: *“rubbish...nothing; only home time!”* Other negative expressions included: *“not good”* (Jac, LA1); *“horrible”* (Carwyn, LA3); *“crap”* (Ceri, LA2); *“average”* (Tegan, LA3); *“hectic”* (Elen, LA1); *“stressful”* (Lynn, LA2); *“sometimes hard”* (Martyn, LA2); and *“boring”* (Alan, LA2). This finding is consistent with other recent research (Voices from Care, 2015). In contrast, positive views included: *“easy and calm”* (Beca, LA2); *“quite easy”* (Griff, LA3); *“quite relaxed”* (Connah, LA4); *“fine”* (Jenni, LA4); and that [teachers were] *“on the same level with us”* (Sian, LA4). These findings suggest that looked-after young people’s experiences of school on a day-to-day basis, are not inconsistent with their non-looked-after peers experiences of school (Smith, 2007; Claxton, 2008).

Likewise, in the context of the young people being in the period of final year examination at the point of interview (Key Stage Four), their usage of terms such as *“exams”* (Tegan, LA3); *“stressful”* (Lynn, LA2) and *“revising”* (Glyn, LA2) are perhaps not unusual. In contrast, however, for some young people the examination period was described as being a stress-free time (Beca, LA2, Griff,

LA3 and Connah, LA4). Nevertheless, stress itself is widespread for many students undertaking examinations. As Claxton (2008, p. 9) notes, this is often compounded with:

all the uncertainties, responsibilities, complexities and choices of their out-of-school lives throbbing away in the background, academic pressure turns up time and again as one prime cause of young people's feelings of stress and apprehension.

Claxton's (2008) exploration of stress during schooling suggests it can result in dramatic symptoms of teenage insecurity. From the extracts above we might surmise that most of the looked-after young people experienced school as negative, a stressful place, especially while undertaking examinations. However, this appears to have little to do with their 'looked-after' and 'care' identities per se. Building on the discussion of everyday school experiences which showed that being a fifteen and sixteen year old at school and facing exams, is a 'unexciting' experience for many, if not most, young people (Claxton, 2008). The focus now turns to explore young people's perceptions and experiences of their school peers. This includes both friends and adversaries (e.g., peer bullying).

### **School: Peer Friendships and Peer Bullying**

Beyond the existence of supportive relationships with carers, the young people in this study were also in reciprocal caring relationships with their school peers; most young people felt accepted by their peers. Several examples included:

Dylan (LA2): *Just seeing my friends, that's the best bit [of attending school].*

Jenni (LA4): *Being able to speak to people and being around others [peer friendships in school].*

This finding was consistent with other research which identified that 'friends played an important role in supporting the young people' (Voices from Care, 2015, p. 4). It has been suggested that beyond peer group acceptance, friendships can also help sustain students' sense of school belonging (Hamm and Faircloth, 2005). Moreover, for some children possessing a willingness to help others or not in the classroom, is a vital aspect of their friendship development and also their teacher's praise (Gorard and Huat See, 2013). Hamm and Faircloth (2005) suggest that adolescents are frequently depicted as claiming friendships as the primary purpose for attending school, more so than teachers or other aspects of school life.

Indeed, respondents were not reluctant to disclose their care status to friends at school as the following examples suggest:

Jac (LA1): *The only thing I like about school really is, some of the lessons, and I get to see my friends.*

Jenni (LA4): *I told them [non-looked-after peers] and they took it alright.*

Bethan (LA1): *They [non-looked-after peers] said nothing about it.*

Connah (LA4): *It's not something I tell everyone, only close friends.*

Carwyn (LA3): *It was okay [telling non-looked-after peers]; I was very open like that. It was like I'm a looked-after child straightaway. It hasn't really bothered me.*

Griff (LA3): *I don't mind explaining it [to non-looked-after peers], it's quite easy.*

These extracts imply that trust was seen as an important factor for developing friendships while in school. According to Holland (2010), how trusting friendships relate to reciprocal caring relationships has not been a strong feature in policy documents or practice. As Hamm and Faircloth (2005) suggest, a key feature of a safe community for adolescents in school is friendships; these underlie feelings of acceptance, security and value, as well as a sense of belonging. At the same time, however, peer bullying can be a corrosive feature of some young people's lives. It is to this subject that the focus now turns.

Bullying is a key factor that can impact negatively upon a child's chances of 'fitting into' the school community. For some young people, a visible 'looked-after' status resulted in different treatment compared to their non-looked-after peers. Consider the following examples:

Elen (LA1): *Like most people, I've made friends and then they turned against me for no particular reason.*

Ceri (LA2): *In school you get like singled out a lot [by other young people] ...It's like I have to tell people, so they don't make jokes and talk about parents... They say jokes like, the no 'momma' jokes... I get bullied a lot 'coz' of who my family and sisters were...I can't like deal with it because like [name of area] school and everything; everybody knows my background.*

Griff (LA3): *Loads of people get bullied who are in the care system. Like: 'you're an orphan' and all stuff like that. 'You're not wanted by your family' and stuff like that. I didn't have that thrown at me, but I hear about people who have.*

Tegan (LA3): *I didn't like asking for help in school because of the other students. If it's wrong, they laugh at you.*

These extracts suggest that peer bullying makes the day-to-day experience of 'fitting into' the school community a stressful process for young people and in a host of ways. Here, we dwell very briefly and selectively on the notion of 'community' and its relevance for schooling. Within the community literature the concepts of belongingness and connection permeate debate (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps and Delucchi, 1996). A community can be defined as 'a social organization whose members know, care about and support another, have common goals and a sense of shared purpose, and to which they actively contribute and feel personally committed' (Solomon *et al.*, 1996, p. 720). Hamm and Faircloth (2005) further emphasise the importance of community in developing a sense of belonging while attending school. They argue that in order to understand the process of school community membership (as opposed say to focusing on role adjustment), there needs to be a greater emphasis on understanding the experiences that contribute to a developing sense of belonging. They argue that this:

...involves feeling more than just that one fits in; there is an emotional attachment to and security in the setting that comes from feeling valued by and valuing of the community (Hamm and Faircloth, 2005, p. 62).

Within this study, the majority of the sample (eleven young people) had experienced only one senior school placement, and thus had relative stability. Such stability is shown to be a factor that contributes to developing meaningful relationships and attachments (Jackson, 2002). In contrast, five young people (Elen, LA1; Beca, Ceri, Lynn and Alan, LA2) had experienced one senior school move and one young person (Dylan, LA2) reported having three senior school moves in addition to four primary school moves. In light of such school moves, despite the Welsh government promoting stability, as described by the (then) Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis AM, in the Ministerial foreword to the Welsh Government's recent strategy (Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales), as a stable and committed

school placement (Welsh Government, 2016c). Between the 1st April 2014 and the 31st of March 2015 - 'there were 512 children looked after at 31st March 2015 who had three or more placements in 2014-15, a rate of 9 per cent' (Welsh Government, 2015c, p. 1). Previous research has shown that multiple school placements can act to limit opportunities to form meaningful relationships and attachments with significant others, and this particularly differentiates the experience of looked-after children from their non-looked-after peers (Jackson, 2002; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Voices from Care, 2015). The focus now turns to the young peoples' experiences and perceptions of school teachers.

### **School: Teachers**

In terms of belonging to the school community, trust (as with their peers) was a key theme that was mentioned by the young people when it came to their formal relationships with school teachers:

Elen (LA1): *They [teachers] keep it confidential and don't tell any others... It's like a weight off my shoulders to know that someone knows.*

Jenni (LA4): *I prefer them to know, so they know what situations I'm in and everything and if anything goes wrong.*

Young people's perceptions of school teachers were largely mixed. Positive elements related to: being encouraged to study (Lynn, LA2) and having understanding: "*she knows how to calm me down and I know that she's always there if I need to talk to her*" (Bethan, LA1). Other attributes related to oversight and monitoring: "*my head teacher, he checks-up on me, a lot, to see if I'm doing well and what help I need, which is helpful*" (Beca, LA2). This finding is consistent with other research which reported that many looked-after pupils '*...felt like they had someone they could talk to. This was usually a particular teacher, head of year or support staff*' (Voices from Care, 2015, p. 8). In contrast, negative perceptions of school teachers often centred on what were experienced by some as stigmatising practice through differential treatment:

Sian (LA4): *When I was in school, I just told teachers that I didn't want anyone to know. Because I didn't want to be treated differently!*

Beca (LA2): *[Teachers] do give you different treatment being looked-after... their behaviour and their attitude towards you changes.*

Bethan (LA1): *They do my head in! [Teachers]. Because they try and like keep on the right side of you, just in case you got mad like, they try and treat you differently!... they're like: 'ohh Bethan we know you've had a difficult time' ... just 'coz' I'm in foster care don't mean that I need to go somewhere and talk to somebody!*

Jac (LA1): *I don't like the teachers! They're not liked. They're rude and they won't consider like your point of view... They just haven't got the time of day for you! They'd just be like: 'it's your work!' They'd say that quite often!*

Ceri (LA2): *Teachers don't really interact with pupils. It's just like they expect us to get on with our work and I'm like: 'I don't get it!' [the class work]... one cover teacher told me I'm 'gonna' fail in life and she didn't even know me!*

Elen (LA1): *...as soon as you ask [for help], the teacher goes to another people, before she comes to me.*

Griff (LA3): *I hate teachers anyway! Because teachers hate me! Because the teachers are bitches! They'd say the same things every day and we all experienced it.*

These views were not dissimilar to other research that has revealed that some looked-after young people 'had the perception that teachers at school did not understand what it was like to be looked after and how being looked after has a direct effect on their education' (Voices from Care, 2015, p. 2). In addition, other research has discussed 'the importance of being treated as an individual with agency instead of a label, and therefore not being seen as ontologically different to other children' (Adrian-Vallance, 2014, p. ii). Adrian-Vallance (2014) argues for a philosophical shift suggesting - if we cease to use the essentialist 'looked-after' label and treat these children as an individual instead, this could 'provide them with supportive relationships within school, and thus potentially help them to feel more included indirectly' (Adrian-Vallance, 2014, p. 61).

Conversely, a different set of views were held by the young people on vocational courses (in colleges/non-mainstream placements) undertaking their Key Stage Four studies. Here, perceptions about teachers included their being more likely to respect the young person's age and maturity:

Garth (LA1): *They teach you more grown up.*

Bethan (LA1): *They've got more respect for you. Teachers in college they don't teach you like a child. We're not children anyway!*

Jac (LA1): *It's like more independent and it's not like Miss and all of that. It's like mutual respect and stuff like that, you don't get treated as a child!*

In their negotiation of their own and others' identity 'children are also prone to erect sturdy boundaries between self and other, casting out what is felt as undesirable' (Rabello de Castro, 2004, p. 489). Furthermore, this stance highlights 'the important role that the construction of difference/otherness plays in the establishment and maintenance of social relationships' (Rabello de Castro, 2004, p. 489).

### **'Problem' Behaviour: School Rules and Discipline**

When pupils feel that they are unfairly treated in school, this can impact negatively on their learning (Smith, 2012). It has been suggested that schools are typically authoritarian in their orientation towards time, place and rule-based activities which require high levels of compliance from young people (Osler, 2010). For the young people in this study, it was not always their looked-after status which acted to hinder effective learning per se (beyond the 'low expectations' of some teachers). Rather, learning was hindered by a simple disinterest in a curriculum subject and also being distracted by the behaviour of classroom friends:

Alan (LA2): *My friends [distract me]. They talk to you, we start mucking around. [Teachers] move us, but that don't stop us, then one of us gets sent out.*

Martyn (LA2): *All the kids that are naughty that are in the same class as you. They just start mucking around and it takes your attention off working and takes the teacher's attention of working too.*

Beca (LA2): *Other people [laughs]. Yeah, I'm quite a talkative person.*

Elen (LA1): *My friends distract me too much! All the time, we end up taking about something else.*

Another factor which prevented learning centred on school exclusion. Six young people in mainstream school (Bethan, Carwyn, Garth, Dylan, Glyn and Griff) had experiences of exclusion. The reasons for their exclusion ranged from: swearing at a teacher (Bethan and Carwyn); fighting and arguing with teachers (Garth);

shoplifting (Dylan); arson: *"In year ten I set the school on fire"* (Glyn); and *"burgling the school"* during a summer break (Griff). Cairns (1999) observed that reactionary or disruptive behaviour may be an experience of undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorders relating to entering care.

Such behaviours are unintentionally vented in school and seen as the 'problem', rather than the young person's distress (Cairns, 1999). Nonetheless, exclusion from school 'fits' within the 'threat' narrative; young people are seen as a threat to their own economic future but also to the annual educational outcome of the local authority (see Chapter Two).

It has been suggested that, 'unfairness may harm the personal development of pupils' (Smith, 2012, p. 89). Consistent with other research (Voices from Care, 2015), two of the young people (Ceri, LA2 and Jac, LA1) felt that their school's rules were too harsh in terms of the regulation of their schooling identity. This resulted in the young people feeling 'singled out':

*Ceri: You get like singled out a lot! Like, with me, I want like a certain piercing. And like there are people that are starting to get loads and loads of piercings and all this. And like well, the school have told me that I'm not allowed it and they haven't told anyone else to take theirs out! You're only allowed two piercings, like one on each ear. But like I have one here [pointing to another piercing on the ear] 'coz' it's like a stretcher and they still have a go at me about that. And like yeah other people get away with it and like they single me out, and don't let me do stuff. It's strict and I'm fed up with it!*

*Jac: I got accused of bunking a lesson, when we had a supply teacher and the whole class didn't get a mark because the teacher didn't do a register. Yet, I was the only one that got accused of bunking, rather than the whole class! So I had an after school detention and it got put on a report card. My head of year still hasn't apologised for that. But he's told my foster carer that he was in the wrong, but he hasn't apologised to me about it! ...There was another thing when somebody shouted at a teacher, but I was blamed! But the teacher that was shouted at didn't know who it was! So, they just jumped to a conclusion really!*



## **Concluding Comments**

What we can glean from this chapter is that young people's own voices challenge the dominant constructions of the LACE Coordinators and their LACE practitioners (as discussed in Chapter Five). As described by Thomas and Holland (2010, p. 2619) 'there are a multitude of potential theoretical influences on how we might understand identities'. As observed in the opening section of this chapter, there is a dearth of research concerning the voices of looked-after young people beyond the perceived passive recipients of care. Thus, the objective within this chapter was to make visible the perspectives of looked-after young people as well as exploring the ways in which young people lay claim to their own identities. The chapter has highlighted how the importance of supportive relationships (having positive meaningful attachments and a sense of belonging, inclusion in school and in care placements) having their looked-after status understood, shapes looked-after young people's identities, which collectively 'need to be taken seriously' (Osler, 2010, p. 74) by key professionals and policy makers. The focus now turns to explore the young people's perceptions and experiences of education support received from the LACE team practitioners, their educational outcomes, post-school directions and career aspirations.

## Chapter Seven

### **Young People's Perceptions and Experiences - The LACE Service, Educational Outcomes, Post-School Directions and Career Aspirations.**

Lynn (LA2): [re the LACE service] *"Once a week is a bit brief. And we only do an hour!"*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is the final findings chapter and explores the following line of enquiry: the views of young people about their educational support received from the LACE team practitioners. The objective here is to consider how the looked-after young people's perceptions and experiences of LACE support correspond with those of practitioners, as outlined in Chapter Five. The chapter is presented in two sections. In section one (the larger of the two) the four LACE teams are presented sequentially as this approach reveals, analytically, their distinctive impacts as perceived by the young people. In re-introducing the teams this way there will be a brief re-capitulation of the LACE practitioners' perceptions of the services they provide (see Chapter Five), before turning to those of the young people. Section two addresses more briefly the matter of the young people's education outcomes, post school directions and career aspirations.

From the outset it is important to re-state that the thesis does not claim or seek to prove that young people's educational outcomes can be directly linked to the support received from the LACE team practitioners. It is recognised throughout preceding chapters that education outcomes relate to a wide range of multifaceted factors such as: geography and location (WAO, 2012); socio-economic backgrounds (SEU, 2003); school placement types (Jackson, 2002; Berridge, 2012); care placement types (Jackson, 2002; Hayden, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Berridge, 2012; Cocker and Allain, 2013); meaningful relationships (Holland, 2010); stability (Jackson, 2002; Jackson and McParlin, 2006); resilience (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Stein, 2008); attachments (Sinclair, 1998; Walker, 2015); the dominant discourse of 'performance' in education (Calvert, 2009); a lack of extra educational support (SEU, 2003; Harker *et al.*, 2004); a sense of identity and belonging (Sinclair, 1998; Osterman, 2000; Hagerty *et al.*, 2002; Hamm and Faircloth, 2005; Walker, 2015; Shemmings, 2016; Sissay,

2016); and pre-care backgrounds (St Claire and Osborne, 1987; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998; Sinclair, 1998; SEU, 2003; Hayden, 2005; O’Sullivan and Westerman, 2007; Berridge, 2012).

## Section one: Young People’s Perceptions and Experience of the four LACE Services

Before exploring the young people’s perceptions and experience of the LACE support, I want to first acknowledge the potential impact of specific LACE practitioners (Rachel and Brenda, Learning Support Assistants/Officers, LA1; and Bryn, Education Officer, LA4) being present during the interviews with some of the young people in this study (Garth, Elen, Jac, and Bethan, LA2; Connah, Jenni and Sian, LA4). The methodological implications of such arrangements during interviews were discussed in Chapter Four, where it was suggested that in some instances this may have inhibited or altered the young people’s commentary (Wilson and Powell, 2001; Lefstein and Snell, 2011). That said, the young people in this study expressed positive appreciation of their LACE practitioners, regardless of whether these were present at interview or not. Moreover, none of them expressed negative views regarding the LACE practitioners; although some deemed the service they had received to be inadequate or unnecessary.

### Perceptions and Experience of the LA1 LACE Service

**Table 7.1: LA1 LACE team practitioners and young people interviewed**

<p>LA1 LACE team practitioner – Brenda (LAC Learning Support Assistant/Officer): Young people interviewed: 2 (Garth and Elen)</p> <p>LA1 LACE team practitioner – Rachel (LAC Learning Support Assistant/Officer): Young people interviewed: 2 (Jac and Bethan)</p>
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In Chapter Five, Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) described this LACE team as having a flexible approach to service provision. This approach was not restricted to support at Key Stage Four instead the broad aim of the LACE practitioner role and duties was *“to provide a sort of, a pastoral, academic and transitional support for the young people”*. Note that there was no mention of support for the *vocational* aspects of learning, despite this being a main feature of attainment since the introduction of the Learning Pathways 14-19 policy where children can now achieve qualifications in either or both academic and vocational areas (Welsh Government, 2010). Thus, the focus on academic support within this

team (and as we will see in the other teams too) appears to be upon pupil performance - a dominant discourse in education (Calvert, 2009).

Within this team, barriers were identified related to good practice. Key themes arising from the data included: boundary-spanning activities; professional rivalry; relationships with young people and significant others. I now explore whether the LACE team practitioners' perspectives with regard to these themes correspond with the views and experiences of young people.

### **Boundary spanning activities and professional rivalry – in a EOTAS ('Education other than at school') provision setting**

In Chapter Five, it was noted that LACE practitioners can be defined as 'boundary spanners' engaging across organisational and sectoral boundaries as a mainstream part of their job (see Williams, 2010, p. 7). In her interview, Elen described how Brenda had been supportive (pastoral care role aspect) by speaking to teachers on her behalf: *"If I've got anything on my mind from the lessons I can come up here [to Brenda's school office] and talk to her about it and then she'll like have a word with my teachers"*. In Chapter Five, Brenda described the effectiveness of this in terms of her occupational status as a (LACE) LAC Learning Support Assistant:

*Sometimes you can go to schools and what I feel is, because it's got LSA as your title - when you go to them for information and stuff and organising meetings and all that - I tend to feel as if they look down at us and they say: well you're only an LSA!*

Consistent with Mickan and Rodger (2000), issues of role definition are one of many factors that reinforce practitioner boundaries. This extract suggests how effective boundary spanning roles require individuals to be more flexible as boundary spanners 'in practice' (Williams, 2010, p. 32). In Chapter Five, Brenda described how school teachers confused her occupational status as a LACES worker with a social worker, and how this resulted in boundary spanning ambiguity if not conflict:

*...a difficult situation would be when you get schools who, because you're a LACES worker - they think you're a social worker - although they know we're not social workers, they think we can make decisions etcetera. But err some can; it can be very challenging sometimes.*

According to Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator), the majority of schools were: “welcoming of this extra offer of support”. Yet, as described in the above extracts, some schools would seem to be not as receptive as others. This in turn would seem to undercut the promotion of ‘Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes’ as set out under sections 25 and 27 of the Children Act 2004 (see Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 8).

Having presented Elen’s experiences of the LACE service (via Brenda), we now further consider matters of boundary-spanning activities and professional rivalry, and also introduce the theme of relationships in regard to the experiences of Garth. Garth gave an account of why he had been excluded from school while in Year Group Ten for: “fighting and arguing with teachers and ‘playing up’ in class”. This exclusion meant that Garth completed school Year Group Eleven through an EOTAS (‘Education other than at school’) provision. As an EOTAS pupil, Garth described his schooling as attending different educational settings and provisions. Mathematics and English GCSEs were undertaken on one day in a ‘special’ school (that is, a non-mainstream school for pupils with special needs), such as a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU); the next day was Vehicle Mechanics (college placement); then one morning of playing football (youth service); and two hours, once a week, of a local authority home tutor for ‘catch-up’ education support (not LACE service input). In addition to this, Garth also received the LACE ‘catch-up’ educational support (stipulated as one of the fourteen specific LACE Team roles (see Chapter Five, and Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 42-43), and provided by Brenda, once a week, for one hour. As a result of being an EOTAS pupil, the number of GCSEs that Garth could undertake was limited to two (mathematics and English). In the following extract Garth discusses how Brenda supported his English GCSE and also provides a comparison to the Maths GCSE support he received from staff in the ‘special’ school:

*She [Brenda] sits down with me. We do reading work and she explains stuff on what it means, and I ‘get it’ then - see when she explains it. [In the ‘special’ school] we only just do maths.... Teachers, they just read it and then walk off! And you’re on your own then!*

The extract above appears to suggest that Brenda is perceived as more helpful than school teachers in helping Garth ‘get it’. In Chapter Five, it was noted that Garth had requested that Brenda should provide his GCSE mathematics support

while he attended the EOTAS provision 'special' school. This request for support from Brenda was, however, rejected by the 'special' school staff (see Chapter Five). To reiterate, as described by the LACE Coordinator (Ann), the rejection of LACE support by the EOTAS staff was said to be because they had their own in-house workers to provide this type of support (i.e., GCSE mathematics):

*We've had an example recently where a young person [Garth] has been saying, 'but I want my LACES worker to come in and do that piece of work with me'. And what school are saying is that they've obviously got school staff employed to do that package of work. But it's more from that perspective really, a young person's request. Now we've offered that support after school but the young person in that instance is saying, no I don't want to do it after school; I want to do it in school.*

The extract above appears to suggest a lack of choice for Garth and in this context, as stated by Garth: *"I can ask her [Brenda] for help to do it [mathematics]. But when I'm up there [in the EOTAS provision] doing maths, she [Brenda], don't come in the classroom and I just leave it [the work]"*. From this extract, it would seem that without Brenda's support, Garth did not complete his GCSE mathematics – *"I just leave it"*. Without the requested support from Brenda, it could be argued that the broad aim of the LACE practitioner role and duties, described by Ann (LA1 LACE Coordinator) as being: *"ultimately to improve outcomes for looked-after children"*, may not always be realised in the context of some EOTAS provision. This is considered later in the chapter when Garth's educational outcomes (GCSE mathematics) are discussed. We will return to boundary spanning activities and professional rivalry but from within the mainstream comprehensive school setting in LA2, discussed later in the chapter. The focus now turns to Elen's perceptions and experience of the LA1 LACE service.

## **Relationships**

In contrast to Garth, Elen attended a large urban mainstream comprehensive school. Despite not receiving any direct 'catch-up' educational support from Brenda, Elen described how Brenda was nonetheless a constant positive theme within the school setting. In the following example Elen describes the kind of pastoral support that she received from Brenda:

*Brenda's asked me like every time she sees me and asks if I have finished doing the coursework and every time I see her, I'm like almost finished and Brenda always says, keep up the hard work.*

The above extract appears to suggest that having Brenda on hand (even if only part-time) within the school setting encouraged Elen's education attainment and achievement to "keep up the hard work". Moreover, Elen's account would seem to place the significance of Brenda's (on hand in school) pastoral care in step with attachment theory which emphasises how such relationship activity can provide a secure base (and promote resilience), providing sensitive support and understanding 'at times of emotional need' (Ahmed, Windsor and Scott, 2015, p. 21). While contemporary attachment theory focuses upon 'relationships between two individuals; it now stretches well beyond mother and child' (Shemmings, 2016). Moreover, attachment theory offers several insights into belonging as 'when we are accepted and loved by others, we experience feelings of warmth and belonging' (Walker, 2015, p. 85). Notwithstanding all the work by LACE workers that goes into creating durable relationships with the young people they support, their interventions do end abruptly when the pupil leaves compulsory education (at age 16). In the following extract, Brenda provides an example of when the LACE support finishes upon completion of Key Stage Four examinations, and the consequences of this for young people's self-esteem and life chances:

*I work with them right through - from comp and usually from primary if they haven't moved on. What I find from that year eleven group - is that they're fearful of the next step before college. Because, they're gonna, be left on their own, basically, without me... They [young people] find it hard to trust and relate to people. It takes time to build that up! I just feel as if, you know? If for the sake of somebody going along and following them through, that they could end their future career, basically, because they'd give up at the first level in college.*

Despite some further and higher education colleges having a designated support role for looked-after young people, as discussed by all the LACE team respondents, this is very much without government guidance and left up to each institute to decide upon and to implement any policy themselves. Erin (LA4, LACE Coordinator) describes this in context:

*...some young people will be going to different places [colleges] so there isn't one specific person - but there are different roles, I guess, in different provisions... it feels as though it sort of will disperse somewhat sadly.*

Thus, some looked-after young people in further education may find themselves without any education support such as that received while in compulsory education. Garth emphasises this point:

*I'll be all by myself in college probably. I won't have Brenda or my mates to help me in college. You'll have to do it all by yourself probably. Brenda can't help me. I'll have to ask someone else, and I don't like meeting new people, see all the time. It does my head in because you have to get used to them then and all that and if they ain't that nice to you, you ain't gonna be nice to them are you?*

From this extract it appears that Garth was concerned about having to develop new (formal) relationships when he considered attending college. It is well-known that having successful relationships (long-term meaningful support) not only produces resilience but also promotes higher attainment outcomes (Martin and Jackson, 2002). Holland (2010, p. 1678) argues that: 'we need to ensure that children who are looked after are enabled to form and sustain lasting care relationships' (e.g. beyond compulsory education, beyond leaving care, and so on). However, as described by Holland (2010, p.1677), for looked-after young people, it is the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 that 'anticipates a much earlier 'independence' than that experienced by the majority of the population'. Thus, bringing an end to formal care relationships through individual pathways towards becoming autonomous, self-reliant adults, can greatly affect interpersonal care relationships (Holland, 2010). Later in the interview, Brenda described how she may be able to go to visit Garth in the college:

*With one particular young person [Garth], I did say, 'if I can I'll pop over some lunch times just to make sure that you're okay'. But obviously erm, I know Ann [LA1, LACE Coordinator] is working hard at the moment with the college to put up a new support network within the college which hadn't happened previously.*

The extract reaffirms the lack of an established (or government policy guided) support network within colleges, as mentioned earlier.

The discussion now considers young people's accounts of Rachel's LACE support interventions. Rachel provided LACE support in a different school and in



a different part of the local authority (to where Brenda was based); neither Jac nor Bethan (both in a different mainstream comprehensive school to Elen) received direct LACE 'catch-up' support. Instead, both Jac and Bethan were being 'monitored' by Rachel who was at regular times in the school site and could be contacted when LACE support was desired. Describing the LACE practitioner support role, Rachel stated:

*I monitor quite a few on my case load. That's just checking with the class teachers or the LSAs who work with them, finding out how their weeks have been and looking at the emotional side of things really. And passing that on to the social workers and my boss Ann [LA1, LACE Coordinator] and talking about it in team meeting every week, any anxieties or anything I worry about.*

In the following extract, Rachel describes how if young people are identified as struggling in school, they can receive both pastoral care and academic support from the LACE team practitioners in school. However, this is very much reliant on the teachers' assessment and referral:

*I don't know all of my case-load because there is a lot of them in the comprehensive that I don't get to see. If they're not identified as struggling and they're coping really well with the class work then I don't need to see them.*

Within this school there was an established pastoral system support facility (available in a designated 'chilling out' room) for looked-after children to utilise when necessary. According to Rachel the school staff role:

*...is to give support when problems arise, they're on the spot where I'm not. If they wanted 'chilling out' time they could walk to that classroom and see that teacher and she could give them a bit of advice on what to do and what's wrong.*

In the following extract Jac provides an account of the pastoral system. He first describes the support teacher and then how long he had utilised this designated space:

*[I use it] quite often like when I get into trouble and stuff like that. She advises me not to go off, storming off or whatever.... Like when they say, 'don't go getting angry' and stuff like that when you're being blamed for something you didn't do it's like you're obviously gonna get angry.*

As described above, Rachel disclosed not knowing all her potential case-load of looked-after children attending the school, especially if they did not come to her

notice as needing support. Similarly, Rachel describes her LACE practitioner relationship with Jac as being informal and opportunistic:

*I've only seen him [Jac] for social reasons and just as we're passing. I haven't actually had time allocated for Jac and he hasn't needed it and he's been very busy with his GCSE revision.*

This extract affirms what Rachel stated earlier in that Jac “hasn't needed it [LACES]” as he was not identified as struggling or had not requested the LACE support. In the following extracts both Jac and Bethan describe their informal and occasional encounters with Rachel:

*Jac: It's nice to know that somebody's asking how you are and actually interested like in wanting you to do well.*

*Bethan: [Rachel] talks to me sometimes... I haven't gone to her, to talk to her – because, I don't need it. ...if I need to talk to somebody, I'll go to one of the girls!*

In the above extract, Bethan notes how she, like other young people, selectively seeks trusted peers to speak to first about matters of personal concern rather than professionals (Cotterell, 2007). Moreover, the above extract is perhaps significant because:

*... it touches the core of one's being, the subjective sense of 'self' and therefore it could be argued that it is vitally important to be sensitive and balanced in how a child's identity is portrayed (Thomas and Holland, 2010, p. 2618).*

In summary, it appears that the looked-after young people's perceptions and experiences of support, correspond to varying degrees with those of the LACE Coordinators and the LACE team practitioners, around improving and encouraging learning through a range of support activities, both pastoral and academic (see Chapter Five). On the theme of relationships there appeared to be a valuing of the LACE team members being on-hand in the school setting, and knowing that they were there to talk to - if this was deemed necessary. To reiterate, this was the only LACE team that had the use of a school-based office. This arrangement appeared to facilitate a closer affective engagement with the LACE provision. As Thomas (2005) has suggested, attachment is about permanence (in this context, being a relationship both valued and readily accessible in the school). However, some looked-after children experience difficulties when constructing a sense of belonging, especially if they suffer from

unresolved upsets and trauma, such as not having grieved for the loss of their birth family (Walker, 2015). In LA1, some young people selectively seek trusted LACE practitioners to speak to about matters of personal concern, while Bethan selectively sought trusted peers rather than practitioners within the LACE service. Even so, the well regarded relational aspects as described by both Brenda and Garth can be double edged as this valued relationship ends abruptly once compulsory education finishes. Holland (2010) has described how such arbitrary termination of affective and stable relationships can negatively affect a young person's future interpersonal care relationships.

In relation to boundary-spanning and inter-agency working, as a specific role stipulated in government guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, pp. 42-43), Garth (unlike Elen) received direct 'catch-up' education support from Brenda (his LACE practitioner) but only for GCSE English and not for his GCSE maths whilst in the EOTAS provision. Consistent with previous research (Friedman and Podolny, 1992), this was to some degree due to a boundary-spanning related matter of professional rivalry between the EOTAS provision staff and LACE staff. In recent years the workforce of schools in England and Wales have implemented a range of policy initiatives (e.g. tackling teacher workloads, pupil inclusion, and the reformation of children and young people's services), and this has resulted in a proliferation and diversification of new roles in schools with the creation of 'associate professionals' such as: counsellors, mental health workers, social workers, learning mentors, higher level teaching assistants, cover supervisors, and parent support advisors (Edmond and Price, 2009, p. 301). It is perhaps not surprising therefore that some tensions may exist between groups of workers engaged with the same children. Thus the instance of professional rivalry for LACE practitioners in LA1 suggests that such issues may require new guidance from government on how to better integrate the functions of different workers within the education system. To reiterate a point made in Chapter Five, for successful inter-agency working, 'individuals need to be much more flexible and not adhere to their practitioner boundaries in a strict manner' (Jelphs and Dickinson, 2008, p. 38). This however, did not appear to be the case for the LACE Coordinator and practitioners in LA1.

We now turn to the young people's experiences of the educational support received from LA2 where we shall discover that some of the interviewees deemed the LACE service they received to be inadequate.

## Perceptions and Experience of the LA2 LACE Service

Table 7.2: LA2 LACE Team Practitioners and Young People Interviewed

<u>LA2 LACE team practitioner – LAC Learning Coach (Donna):</u> Young people interviewed: 6 (Lynn, Beca, Dylan, Ceri, Glyn and Martyn)
<u>LA2 LACE team practitioner – LAC Learning Coach (Rhiannon):</u> Young people interviewed: 1 (Alan)

In Chapter Five, Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator), described the aim of this LACE team as being to get the young people to achieve their potential: *“the aim well, what we want is the children in our care to achieve their educational potential. Get as good as they can do really”*. However, within this team, a greater emphasis upon managerialist imperatives (i.e., outcomes) and resource constraints appeared to focus more specifically on the GCSE:

Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator): *We tend to concentrate on GCSE years... we do work with some younger children. We just haven't got the capacity, and, you know, years ten and eleven are the important years when they are actually sitting the exams.*

Given this team orientation towards pupil performance, the discussion now turns to how the LACE team perspectives about looked-after children correspond with the views and experiences of young people in terms of the following key themes that arose from the analysis of data on LA2: the nature of LACE support; boundary-spanning activities; and professional rivalry within the school setting.

### The Nature of LACE Support

In LA2, Lynn, Beca and Dylan were enrolled in a small rural mainstream comprehensive school, while Ceri, Glyn, Martyn and Alan attended a larger urban mainstream comprehensive school. Beginning with the *“A grade students”* (described by Donna, LA2 LAC Learning Coach), in the rural comprehensive, Donna refers to supporting this group of students (Lynn, Beca and Dylan) each week, for one hour, in an after school ‘LACE revision club’. In Chapter Five, Donna described Lynn, Beca and Dylan as gifted high achieving *“A grade students”*.

*...they don't need me, I'm just there to get resources, show them good revision methods to help them.*

This comment exemplifies how Donna distinguishes those young people (positioned here as “A grade students”) as in need, or not, of any LACE support that the LA2 LACE team can provide.

In the following extract, Dylan describes how the LACE revision sessions provided by Donna worked in practice: *“I’ve worked through past papers, gone through revision guides. We made a revision timetable for my exams”*. Similarly, Lynn described Donna’s support as providing *“us with loads of stuff like any stationary, paper, mind maps and booklets to help us revise”*. These accounts resonate with the comments from Donna outlined above regarding resources and to *“show them good revision methods”*. In describing the use of the revision sessions, Lynn stated:

*I think it’s [revision sessions] helped me discover what revision techniques work best for me. And having someone there to help me go through it helps a lot because having Donna asking me questions constantly, and stuff like that, it keeps me on the ball, and I always know what I’m doing that way.*

In terms of the revision club support, Dylan described how this resource had a more relaxed and fun approach to learning:

*It’s a fun environment to work in. Like we have a joke while we are working and stuff and then we’ll do some work, then have a game of cards or something. Then we will do some more work... You get to learn in your way with fun; sometimes the music is on, maybe there’s a packet of sweets or something.*

There has long been a debate that children need to learn through diligent application and discipline (Postman, 1985; Bruckman, 1999). Nonetheless, learning through fun can still be identified as having strong learning potential (Prensky, 2001). Since devolution in Wales, (see Chapter Two), Welsh Government has developed its own framework for children’s learning through play and fun (the Foundation Phase) based on the premise that children learn best through creative play (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a). Furthermore, following the introduction of the Learning Pathways 14-19 policy (Welsh Government, 2010), where children are able to achieve either or both academic and vocational area qualifications, the Learning Coaches in LA2 would be expected to have knowledge of learning styles and different approaches to learning (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b). This would include an informal,

creative, fun approach to learning. In Chapter Five, the approach advocated by Sara (LACE Coordinator) was that Donna and Rhiannon's role was *"based on a mentoring role as opposed to an academic role"*. Likewise Rhiannon described her learning coach role as *"a mentor and coach for a pupil through education. So its support, it can also be counselling"*. In the following extract Donna reveals how her Learning Coach training sought to promote learning through games:

The Learning Coach training was all about different methods and the idea was like they gave us sort of resources that we could develop and bring into the lesson - a lot of the materials were like games to do it - because I think games are a brilliant way for people to learn without them actually realising that their learning.

In contrast to those young people in care described as *"A grade students"* in the rural school, Sara (LACE Coordinator) invoked Ceri, Glyn, Martyn and Alan's socioeconomic status as *"different kids"* (see Chapter Four). Moreover, these same young people were described in Chapter Five as the *"difficult ones"* (Sara) and euphemistically as the *"colourful ones"* (Donna). In Chapter Six, such constructions were explored through the perspectives of the young people, with particular emphasis upon the ways in which they, like other young people in school, claimed their own 'self' styled identities (Jenkins, 1996; Williams, 2000).

In terms of the nature of the LACE support, in the extracts below Beca and Glyn describe the differences between the school's own staff (Learning Support Assistants/teachers) and how this compared to Donna's Learning Coach approach to providing educational support:

Beca: *LSAs are more to help you to learn, like teaching stuff like that and Donna's there kind of to guide you... it's different support that you get from teachers because some teachers spend more time with certain students than others. She [Donna] has all the information, like, revision books and tells you which stuff you need to revise for, which is helpful.*

Glyn: *The LSAs are alright but sometimes they can be a bit moody... Donna usually just helps me. Donna just sits with me and helps and the LSAs just help you for a couple of seconds then just go and help someone else.*

The following extracts draw from all the LA2 young people interviews, in describing the type and value of the support received from Donna:

Ceri: *She's [Donna] given me books and stuff to help me and she's taught me different ways to do stuff.*

Dylan: *Ahh! She's [Donna] great! I haven't actually been coming to revision sessions that long, only for about five weeks. But I've known Donna for a longer time, four or five months. She'd come into the house to see my foster brother, she'd sit down and say, 'are you getting on alright in school?' And, 'is there anything you need revision wise?' And I was like, 'no I'm alright' - because she [Donna] wasn't in charge of my revision and I don't particularly like doing revision. But I need to and I need help with time management. So she [Donna] helps me with that.*

Glyn: *Donna helps me with my classwork, things I don't understand.*

Martyn: *In my coursework, I was way behind and the deputy head teacher said that she [Donna] should come into my lessons and give me help. So like in science, I was like six pieces of coursework behind and within two lessons I finished them all!*

DA: *How did you manage to finish the coursework so quickly?*

Martyn: *By Donna, pushing you constantly! If you walk away from her, she just shouts you to come back!*

In the above extracts the young people describe how Donna and Rhiannon do indeed support them academically (although some had more fun learning than others) and this was described in Chapter Five by Donna and Rhiannon as the focus of their work (GCSEs/exams). In addition, in the above extract from Martyn we can note that the attempt to increase looked-after children's measurable performance in learning is (like teachers) a central premise of the LACE practitioner's role, which is 'to analyse the ways in which children 'misbehave' in ways that challenge them, react to that behaviour and implement systems and processes that are designed to improve it and them' (Wright, 2009, p. 248). Donna's role is perceived by Martyn as being about "*pushing you constantly! [And] If you walk away from her, she just shouts you to come back!*" In this sense, Donna functions as a case instance of the expected orientation of LACE practitioners, suggesting a focus on 'assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies for a myriad of factors that influence school performance' (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2004, p. 247).

In the following extract we turn to Rhiannon's 'catch-up' educational support and Alan provides an account of how this was perceived as being superior (in this instance 'more fun') to the support provided by school staff:

*Rhiannon has helped me about fifteen times, something like that, [since Year Ten]... It's like she reads the questions out for me, and makes it more interesting [than teachers], like she makes it more fun, as I don't like reading - it's boring!*

Further on in the interview, Alan described why he liked Rhiannon's 'catch-up' support, asserting it was: "*because she comes into your lessons and she can actually help you with it [school work]*". In particular, Rhiannon provided 'catch-up' support for mathematics and science - because, as Alan described: "*they're the ones I'm mainly struggling with and she does revision cards with me*". The focus now turns to boundary spanning activities and professional rivalry within the mainstream comprehensive school setting.

### **Boundary spanning activities and professional rivalry – in a mainstream comprehensive school setting**

In the following extract Rhiannon describes how in some cases, she provides (unofficial) classroom support to other young people that are not 'looked-after':

*Sometimes I find that if I'm sat with a pupil in the classroom and there may be two or three other lads that are engaging, so sometimes it works out well to engage three lads on the same table, even though they're not looked-after because it makes the child I work with not feel so, 'oh she's here for me'.*

How this support works on the ground is described in the following extract where Martyn accounts for having Donna in the classroom setting. It is an example of a moment within the classroom where along with Donna, the teacher and Learning Support Assistant were also on-hand. However, in the same way as Rhiannon, Donna also provided (unofficial) classroom support to other non-looked-after pupils sitting on the same table as Martyn, if this was requested by the young person. As described by Martyn:

*She [Donna] has helped me in the classroom. Donna helps other people as well as me when she's in the class. She just helped me then this girl who was sitting next to me who said, 'do you know what to do on this?' And Donna went, 'yeah', so she helped her as well.*



To reiterate an example provided in Chapter Five, in the following extract, Donna describes being ‘told off’ by the LSA for supporting other non-looked-after pupils:

*I was told by a classroom LSA: ‘help your children and leave mine!’ I couldn’t believe that I was told off for being so helpful! [Laughs]. I said to Sara [LA2 LACE Coordinator] that I can’t believe it - and she was like: ‘okay let’s not tread on their toes!’ However, if a child comes up to and asks me for help I not going to, I can’t say no, I can’t say, ‘oh go and ask your support worker!’*

This extract suggests that boundary spanning activities (e.g., going into classrooms) and professional rivalry may obtain in relation to role definition and locus of work within the multi-agency landscape that is the contemporary school setting. As a result, this not only restricts joined-up collaboration but further reinforces practitioner boundaries (Mickan and Rodger, 2000). This point was emphasised by Sara [LA2 LACE Coordinator] who pronounced to Donna (after her being ‘told off’ by the LSA) “*let’s not tread on their toes!*”

In summary, all seven young people spoke of positive experiences of direct ‘catch-up’ and/or revision LACE sessions. From their extracts, the looked-after young people appeared to value the direct ‘catch-up’ and/or revision sessions provided by Rhiannon and Donna. In particular, the young people equated the support from LACE practitioners as being primarily about *fun*; itself a skilful medium for learning used by LACE staff (LACE learning coaches) to help ensure looked-after children achieved their educational potential and left school with some qualifications. In the above extracts we can note for the “*A grade*” pupils within the LACE revision club, their engagement was very much constructed as being a fun activity. In contrast, Ceri, Glyn, Martyn and Alan were described variously by LACE workers in Chapters Four and Five, as “*different kids*”, the “*difficult ones*”, and the “*colourful ones*”. For these young people their identities appeared to be fashioned through occupational assumptions derived from a broader public welfare child discourse that positions vulnerable children as ‘victims’ and/or ‘threats’ in need of welfare regulation and intervention (see Hendrick 1994; 2003). However, such essentialist discourses that ‘construct children as bad, mad or sad have resulted in a polarised response of ‘care and sympathy’, on the one hand, and ‘blame and discipline’, on the other’ (Wright, 2009, p. 288). Additionally, it has been identified in earlier chapters how children in care or leaving care have ‘often developed self-reliance skills in highly

disadvantaged circumstances, can be misperceived by professionals as being 'difficult' (Cameron, 2007, p. 39).

As noted in Chapter Five, within practitioner discourse(s) it has been suggested that boundaries can mark 'the identity of a group of individuals within the organisation' (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991, p. 36). Building upon the extracts from the LACE Coordinators and LACE practitioners provided in Chapter Five, this chapter has contrasted their accounts with those of the young people. The young people's perspectives and experiences confirm that the boundary spanning role can contain components of conflict within LACE teams' organisational life and this has implications for looked-after children, in terms of how young people are managed within any particular LACE model. Thus, for successful inter-agency working, 'individuals need to be much more flexible and not adhere to their practitioner boundaries in a strict manner' (Jelphs and Dickinson, 2008, p. 38).

To summarise, this section has presented insights into the role and behaviour of different boundary spanning practices and its implications for looked-after children. This conceptual framework can therefore assist in revealing some additional challenges that typify this landscape, in terms of a variety of consequences for LACE practitioner effectiveness, and related implications for looked-after children, when involved in inter-agency activities. Its application suggests that the public sector is a far more complex arena to manage with its diverse purposes and actors (Williams, 2010). In this study and as for Williams (2010, p. 30) 'there is little evidence to connect their interventions to collaborative performance, indeed, what constitutes 'success' in many public sector collaborations is often hazy and contested'.

The focus now turns to LA3, where we explore the young people's experiences of their educational support through the themes of relationships and the nature of LACE support.

### **Perceptions and Experience of the LA3 LACE Service**

**Table 7.3: LA3 LACE Team Practitioners and Young People Interviewed**

LA3 LACE team practitioner – LAC Learning Mentor (Morgan and Anna):
Young people interviewed: 3 (Tegan, Griff and Carwyn)

In contrast to LA1 and LA2 team formations, in LA3 the LACE Coordinator, Laura, described the team function as having a sole “*academic focus*” as opposed to a mix of pastoral care and academic LACE support. In Chapter Five, Laura (LACE Coordinator) actively eschewed the idea that the Learning Mentors (Morgan and Anna) would provide pastoral care support. Hence, the focus here will be upon the managerially imposed specificity of the academic function of this LACE team through the analytic themes of relationships and the nature of LACE support. It will be seen that despite the Coordinator’s (Laura) claims to clarity of function around academic focus (core subjects), the team members actively deploy pastoral and care skills in order to achieve their objective of academic support. In order to glean some further insight into the ways the Mentors appear to operate with discretion, Lipsky’s (1980) notion of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ will be utilised to illuminate how they manage their workload pressures within complex organisational environments where work performance is rarely straightforward.

### **Relationships (the nature of)**

Within the United Kingdom, pastoral care is the term used in education ‘to describe the structures, practices and approaches to support the welfare, well-being and development of children and young people’ (Calvert, 2009, p. 267). Chapter Five, presented the LACE Coordinators’ descriptions of ‘pastoral’ and how aligned this was with ‘care’. Consistent with Calvert’s research (2009) there were limited notions and understandings of what pastoral meant. Laura (LA3, LACE Coordinator) actively operated a managerial position of disapproval in regard to Learning Mentors providing pastoral support. To reiterate, pastoral was defined by Laura as “*emotional and personal education kind of side of things. But our mentors, there is an academic focus*”. Laura assumed that this type of pastoral support was on-hand in the schools. However, it will be seen below that care and pastoral support is very much part of this LACE team’s orientation. In the following extract, Carwyn describes the difficulties he had while attending school and provides an account of his relationship with his Learning Mentor, Morgan. In particular, Carwyn emphasises the importance of pastoral care and support and the significance of this in his relationship with Morgan:

DA: *What school work did you do with Morgan?*

Carwyn: *I'd do my maths, English, science. He [Morgan] would usually ask the teachers or ask me but I would forget so he asked the teachers for the work and he would do that or we'd go online because he had this homework online thing for revision and all that.... I struggled with my maths and English because I had ADHD [Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] so I did miss out on things in junior school. I'm on one slow release tablet now but in school I had to take three pills and take one in school, which was fine, I was pretty open about it. But if I forgot to take it in the morning I was unteachable and I would be disrupting all the classes. That was me! I tried, but just gave up! There was no hope! In science, I was hyper but I would focus really hard.*

DA: *What was it like doing science work with Morgan?*

Carwyn: *It was difficult at the beginning 'coz' I didn't want to do it. But then I had to do it and Morgan helped me. So it was easier. I still struggle now. But it's got a lot better. Like my writing is rubbish but it was like a baby's scribble! Sometimes I can't read my own writing and my spelling has really deeply improved and so has my reading, I can read now, I couldn't before.*

DA: *How often did Morgan work with you?*

Carwyn: *I saw him once a week and that made a hell of a difference. There was one year I saw him in school. Then I think it was for two years I've seen him at my house for one hour and fifteen minutes. 'Coz' he [Morgan] found out that I messed around a lot at school. So he [Morgan] did it at my house in front of my [foster] mum.*

In the above extract we can deduce how strongly aligned care was with the *pastoral* from Carwyn's perspective, in that working with Morgan "*made a hell of a difference*" in terms of his attainment. In essence, this type of support can be characterised as social pedagogy. This approach is 'characterised as taking an integrated view of the needs of the whole child in terms of five key dimensions: care and welfare; inclusion; socialisation; academic support; and social education' (Kyriacou, 2009). Thus, in the above extracts we can identify that Morgan was focused upon four of the five key dimensions developed by Kyriacou (2009): care and welfare, inclusion, socialisation and academic

support. Situated as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), the Learning Mentors (Morgan and Anna), 'develop working practices which maximise their use of discretion' (Becker and Bryman, 2012a, p. 34). When a street-level bureaucrat exercises discretion in regard to the decisions they make about the individuals they interact with, this act is essentially policy-making at the street level (Lipsky, 1980). Discretion can be defined, 'in the basic sense of freedom within a work role' (Evans, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, it has been argued that in order '...to understand actions, practice and institutions, we need to grasp the relevant meanings, the beliefs and preferences of the people involved' (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1251). In the following extract Morgan (LAC Learning Mentor) describes the discretion needed for adopting a social pedagogical stance in order to engage closely with young people as this may help them to disclose issues or needs that may require attention. Such an approach to the personal and the emotional was not, from the Coordinator's perspective, a primary objective of the LACE team role:

*I did work particularly close with one young person and he generally responds better to males than females. The majority of his teachers are female and his social worker was female, and he sort of divulged some information to me about the way he was feeling in the foster placement and in school and it sort of linked into the deterioration of his behaviour in both the foster placement and school and no one really knew why. He then happened to divulge this to me again and I said to him, because of what he said to me, 'I have to take this forward'... I did say to him 'now that you've let me know I can help you take these issues forward and hopefully get these issues sorted out', which we did and he was very appreciative of at the time and it was just left to other professionals to put things in place and to improve things.*

Consistent with Kyriacou (2009) this extract suggests that the personal development, social education, care and overall welfare of the child should be a shared enterprise for all professionals working with children. Moreover, this extract suggests that despite the formal policy aims of the team around academic focus, these Learning Mentors can and do exercise discretion (as street-level bureaucrats) in order to deal with this kind of practical and moral dilemma. Thus, from Morgan's' extract (above) we can see how discretion is used at street level as a 'form of agency, an ability to make choices or influence what's done...between policy rhetoric and resource realities' (Evans, 2009, p. 10). In contrast to the opinion that the expansion of managerialism has

eradicated discretion and therefore made redundant Lipsky's (1980) theory, the findings in this study, along with others (see Evans, 2009, p. 9) suggests that discretion is still an aspect of public service bureaucracies. Križ and Skivenes (2014) note that according to Brodtkin (2012), 'what drives front-line policy is not necessarily bureaucrats' attitudes and preferences, but policy aims and organizational conditions, including the availability of financial resources and the extent of managerial control of workers' discretion' (Križ and Skivenes, 2014, p. 71).

## **The Nature of LACE Support**

As defined by Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator), the Learning Mentors in LA3 have an “*academic focus*”. Having experiences of both Morgan and Anna's 'catch-up' education support for GCSE mathematics, English and science (core subjects), Tegan emphasised how the LACE mentors' academic support was activated:

*If you were struggling in your English, maths and science then the mentors [Morgan and Anna] from social services would come into school and help you, like one-to-one. Like they would give you extra stuff and work sheets. [The support] was held in school and you'd have one-to-one work out of the main classroom... If I had some work in English and didn't understand it, they would explain it and they can go into depth about how to do it. They'd give you different scenarios on how to do it. Once I finished my GCSEs - I finished my English back in May - then you'd actually do your coursework with them so if you're stuck on anything or like you needed to type it up, you'd just do the typing up in the mentoring sessions.*

In the extract below Tegan describes how the LACE mentors' support sometimes meant compromise over selecting and achieving in other subjects:

*I loved the mentoring stuff. But I wish I could have had it like differently because I loved Welsh and I loved RE as well, but I had to drop them because of the mentoring stuff... But to be taken out of something and then not do it and everyone else gets like a GCSE grade C in it and you can't! It's a bit disappointing really!*

In describing the LACE support received from Morgan, Griff reaffirmed that the support related to the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) and that his support was undertaken in school but in a separate room to the classroom.

Nonetheless, this support provided by Morgan was described by Griff as more informal than formal in practice:

*Anything I needed help with like he'd [Morgan] kindly do it. He wouldn't mind having a chat while we do it. He'd come in like once a week for one hour and we'd sit in a separate room to the classroom.*

In the above extract we can deduce that the LAC Mentors are undertaking pastoral care support along with academic support.

In summary, these extracts suggest that looked-after young people's perceptions and experiences of support correspond broadly with LACE team practitioners' (LAC Learning Mentors) perceptions of improving attainment with a focus on realising educational potential across academic subjects (see Chapter Five), through both academic and pastoral support. This is despite such support not being part of their formal occupational role as defined by the Coordinator. Nonetheless, the nature of relationships as thematically analysed suggests otherwise, that the Learning Mentors *do* provide both academic and pastoral support. Thus, for the young people and the Mentors, their relationship reflects more a social pedagogy approach in which the mentors operate with a 'conception of the needs of the whole child' (Kyriacou, 2009, p. 106). We now turn to the young people's experiences of the LACE support received from LA4.

## **Perceptions and Experience of the LA4 LACE Service**

**Table 7.4: LA4 LACE Team Practitioner and Young People Interviewed**

LA1 LACE team practitioner – LAC Education Officer (Bryn):

Young people interviewed: 3 (Connah, Jenni and Sian)

In Chapter Five, it was noted that in contrast to the other three LACE teams, the vast bulk of the educational support (LACE) provision in LA4 was commissioned through a private tuition service. Compared to the other LACE practitioners, Bryn (LA4, LAC Education Officer) for operational reasons, offered the least direct education support to looked-after pupils. Instead, a private tuition service provided most of this support ensuring that Bryn was able to undertake a relationship-building engagement, meeting as many looked-after young people as possible and assessing what, if any, type of educational support they needed. To reiterate, Bryn describes his sphere of practice thus:

*For this academic year [2013-14] it will be in the region of say one hundred [looked-after] young people that I will try and get contact with. In the academic year just gone erm, I'd say in the region of perhaps forty five undertook their GCSEs.*

The discussion now turns to the distinctive nature of LA4 and the model of pastoral care that is provided by Bryn in regard to the mandate for the service and the nature of relationships with young people.

## **Relationships**

In LA4, care and pastoral support is very much part of this LACE team's orientation. As with the Mentors in LA3, Bryn was focused upon four of the five dimensions developed by Kyriacou (2009), that is, care and welfare, inclusion, socialisation and academic support. However, Bryn's main focus was upon providing pastoral care and support, not academic support as with the previous three LACE teams. Erin (LA4 LACE Coordinator) defined pastoral as all encompassing "*as long as we can say, 'well any other good parent would support them this way', we would do that*". Nonetheless, within this context of diffuse care, Erin describes Bryn's role in regard to a traditional welfare orientation in which a sensitive empowering and professional relationship obtains:

*...he [Bryn] came from the youth service background. And I have to say it's been a learning curve for me to watch him very sensitively take all the good things that were going on before and mould them to fit his strengths. And he's come at it from a different approach, from a youth service style, and he's been very much more hands on, meeting up with young people. It's been important for him to form a relationship with the young person first before working with them.*

As described in Chapter Five, Bryn had the least direct academic support contact with looked-after young people. Instead, a private tuition service commissioned by the local authority provided the educational support. This meant that Bryn spent most of his time meeting as many looked-after young people as was possible, assessing what, if any, type of educational support they needed and then referring them to the private tuition service. Below are some examples of how Bryn directly supported and coordinated education support via the private tuition centre:



Connah: *Bryn helped me with the coursework in the BTEC in IT. He worked with me at the unit [PRU] using one of the [LACES] laptops, and he helped me go to [tuition centre] to work with the IT teacher there. That's where I finished the BTEC.*

Jenni: *Bryn helped me with tutoring [the tuition centre]. It was like a study type class. The tutoring I had was for English and maths for most of the GCSE period. It was in the [tuition centre] after school on Thursdays every week for an hour to an hour and a half. I worked quite a few times on past paper questions and answered them and I had sheets and I had work from school as well.*

These extracts suggest how Bryn was able to provide support and also organise a tutor from the private service to help Connah complete his IT BTEC qualification, whilst he attended the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Connah, like Garth (in LA1), was a pupil in EOTAS (Education other than at school) provision (i.e. attending a PRU). The reason for attending this type of provision was to improve his confidence, despite noting that this move may impact upon his overall attainment. According to Connah:

*While the academic focus in a normal mainstream school would have been best for exam results, at the time I think it was best for me to go to the PRU because I really lacked confidence.*

As described above, in LA1 Garth, who also attended another EOTAS provision, was limited to undertaking only two GCSEs (mathematics and English). In contrast, in LA4, Connah was able to take six GCSEs (English Language; English Literature; Maths; Double Science; Art and Design and History – in addition to the BTEC). The difference between what Connah and Garth could study in their respective PRUs may point to the way local authority EOTAS provision varies and perhaps suggests that some young people may ‘... not have the opportunity to attain qualifications at an appropriate level in relation to their ability’ (Estyn, 2015, p. 21). Connah’s experience of the subjects he could study, was what Estyn (2015, p. 21) described as an example of a ‘best case’ where ‘PRUs and schools work closely together to ensure that pupils can continue to study subjects in the PRU that they have started in their mainstream school’. Like Garth (in LA1), Connah (LA4) described having access to a local authority home tutor for ‘catch-up’ educational support (beyond LACES):

[The home tutor] ...was for one hour a day, five days a week that's all. There wasn't really enough time to go over anything really apart from some small bits of English, some of history. It was a stop gap measure. It didn't really help much, but it was better than nothing.

In addition to receiving support from the private tuition service, Jenni also described how Bryn organised a place at a skills study club in the local college. In addition, Bryn organised a one-time activity in the local sports centre for a group of looked-after young people. Examples of this are discussed in the following extracts:

Jenni: *He took a few of us, about nine or ten of us, to the sports centre and we were doing rock climbing. That was just one time.*

Connah: *He's orchestrated many activities like rock climbing and it been good to meet with other looked-after kids and the children that are looked-after in 'aftercare' or have been looked-after by LACEs and things just like that.*

In contrast, despite “*stressing out because I was missing lessons*” due to attending court during the GCSE period (see Chapter Six), Sian did not ask for any support from Bryn (e.g. to attend the private tuition centre). In the following extract, Sian describes why Bryn's support was not necessary:

*I didn't actually ask for anything [from Bryn], I just did it myself because I tend to do that. But I had support with maths because I sat it early [in year ten] I had a tutor [Non-LACE] who came into school and helped me and another student on a one-to-one basis, every week and he was a great help because I actually passed it in the end.*

In summary, as with the other teams, these extracts appear to suggest that looked-after young people's perceptions and experiences of support correspond broadly with the claims by the team practitioners about their practices and impacts in improving the educational achievement of looked-after pupils. Despite the focus of “*offering as much support particularly with Key Subjects - English, maths and science and bringing them up to the level of attainment*” (Bryn) - the focus of the LAC Education Officer was concerned with meeting as many looked-after young people as was possible. And this relationship seemed focused upon referring them to the private tuition service, if an educational support need was identified by the young person or by Bryn himself. As Bryn

had the least direct educational support contact with looked-after young people, so this LACE team was notably different from the other three in how it chose to implement its duty to improve attainment (The Children Act, 2004 (s.52); Welsh Assembly Government, 2007).

So far this chapter has presented how the LACE teams promote the education of looked-after children and how young people's perceptions and experiences of LACE support correspond with those of practitioners, as outlined in Chapter Five. Before exploring the young people's education outcomes (Key Stage Four), their post-school directions and their career aspirations, the young people were asked what, if any, changes to the LACE service they would like to see and their responses are now summarised.

### **Perceptions and Experience: "What I'd Change about the LACE Service..."**

In a challenge to how looked-after children are often constructed as passive recipients of welfare services, some looked-after young people in this study evidently exerted a sense of agency (James and James, 2004), in that they could and did choose whether or not to partake in the LACE support that was offered. Both Ann (LA1, LACE Coordinator) and Sara (LA2, LACE Coordinator), confirmed this when describing the active engagement of young people as defining what works well within their LACE support approach:

*Ann: We have some young people that if you'd asked me kind of two years ago would they be requesting tuition, I would have never thought that we would be getting to that stage, but they are engaging brilliantly.*

*Sara: We had one [young person] who hasn't really wanted a lot of support but now exams are coming and he's behind in his coursework and he contacted Donna and said, 'look can you come and give me a hand?' So she spent two days working with him intensively, this week, to get these deadlines met and up-to-date. So it [LACES] is flexible.*

The idea of being flexible and able to support "*intensively, this week*" is an example of providing 'catch up' support. This is defined by the Welsh government as 'support for those who have fallen behind with schoolwork' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 47). How this policy aim has been translated and enacted, by the LACE team practitioners, can be seen in the way

Brenda (LA1 LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant) described her interventions as *“mostly help with homework”*. This approach found corroboration by other LACE team practitioners across the four teams. In addition to help with homework, the respondents described focusing on supporting pupils before their examinations. Brenda emphasised this point:

*[We] support year eleven towards their GCSE's - whether it be just a boost, just before their exams for Maths or literacy or science, something's put in just to re-inforce, so they get them grades up.*

In Chapter Five, Morgan (LA3) described how the LAC Learning Mentors' purely academic (and not pastoral care) support focused on the C/D grade mark boundary, with the intention of getting as many as possible young people into the A\*-C grade level in core subjects (maths, science and English). Despite having a *flexible* approach to providing support at times of academic deadlines, largely, the LACE intervention across the four LACE teams was typically delivered in units of one hour, once a week. And this was defined by the LACE teams and *not* by the young people (i.e. young people are positioned as passive recipients of an hour long involvement usually once a week). Despite Carwyn's experience of how Morgan's 'catch-up' support (one hour, once a week) *“made a hell of a difference”* to his perceived attainment (set out later in this chapter) - for most other respondents the scale and frequency of LACE support was deemed insufficient:

*Dylan (LA2): I think there could be more revision sessions. I know Donna [LAC Learning Coach] can only do so much but maybe they could get more people doing it, so like there is like a rotation. I'd have two sessions a week instead of one! And then I just think that there should be a wider range of extra curricula things that we can go and take advantage of.*

*Lynn (LA2): Longer hours with Donna [LAC Learning Coach]. I mean more days with her because we only meet once a week. And I think perhaps having it twice a week or something like that would be better for me because once a week is a bit brief, and we only do an hour!*

*Griff (LA3): The fact that Morgan [LAC Mentor] should have come in more, instead of once a week for one hour. There's like five lessons a day for an hour each, that's twenty five hours of lessons a week and he's only in for one of them. And like it's a bit easy to forget the information especially because*

*it was so early in the week like and then you had the weekend.*

*Tegan (LA3): I think that when I was in Year Ten. I think they [LAC Mentors] should have been involved.*

*Connah (LA4): I think perhaps more support with maths to be honest. I think within the last year there may not have been enough focus on my maths ability. That was bought to my attention by the [private tuition centre] tutors.*

Notably, these young people recognised that the dominant discourse in education is performance and in this culture of learning, the emphasis is upon 'demonstrating achievement rather than focusing on improving learning as such' (Calvert, 2009, p. 274). Despite some examples of strong pastoral support systems evident in schools 'very few schools allocate learning coaches (such as LACE team practitioners) to pupils for the duration of their time at the school' (Estyn, 2016, p. 6). Nonetheless, when allocated they act as advocates for looked-after 'pupils and provide invaluable support, advice and guidance on a comprehensive range of issues that affect the pupil' (Estyn, 2016, p. 20). Having presented key analytic insights concerning the educational support received through the LACE services, the focus now turns briefly to the young people's educational outcomes, post-school directions and career aspirations.

## **Section Two: Education Outcomes, Post-School Directions, and Career Aspirations**

This section first outlines the young people's education outcomes (GCSE/vocational qualifications achievements) after which the young people's post-school directions and career aspirations are discussed.

### **Education Outcomes**

To reiterate the point made at the outset of this chapter, the education outcomes that are discussed here cannot be attributed to any single factor such as the interventions of the LACE teams. The reasons that the young people achieved education outcomes are multifaceted as noted throughout the thesis.

All young people in year eleven achieved a wide range of GCSE and vocational qualifications. This is a result of the Learning Pathways 14-19 framework informed by the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (2009) which has resulted

in young people attaining a mix of both academic and vocational qualifications (Welsh Government, 2010). The wider choice of qualifications seeks to promote the idea that looked-after children may be talented regarding both academic and vocational education. This point was emphasised by Laura (LA3 LACE Coordinator) who stated:

[Promoting education] *I don't think that necessarily has to be just about the academic achievement, although that is extremely important in its own right. We've got children that are really talented at sport, we've got children that are really talented at a whole range of activities outside of school and it's about promoting that as well.*

Nevertheless, the four LACE teams focused largely upon providing revision/'catch-up' academic, rather than vocational subject support. The reasons for this can be located within the dominant discourse in education which purports a focus upon (academic) performance (Calvert, 2009).

Rather than focusing upon looked-after children and young people's 'underachievement', given what they may have experienced before entering care (SEU, 2003; Mannay *et al.*, 2015), the fact they attend school, sit examinations, complete coursework, and achieve a wide range of GCSE (academic) and vocational qualifications - is in itself an important achievement worthy of celebration (Harker *et al.*, 2004). This may not always be recognised, however:

Bryn (LA4, LAC Education Officer): *I've organised a LAC celebration event for young people at college. I've emailed the LAC teachers in the schools, to see if they want to nominate anybody. But for the most part, nobody even replied!*

Overall the young people achieved a range of GCSE and vocational qualifications. Vocational qualifications included: City and Guilds and BTEC's. Specifically, six young people (Jac, Lynn, and Dylan (LA1); Tegan (LA2); Connah and Sian (LA4)) achieved GCSE passes within the A-C grades range for the core subjects (mathematics, science, English). There are two important points to consider here. Firstly, this is what the Welsh government seeks; more looked-after children achieving the baseline Key Stage Four level of attainment (see Chapter Two). In Chapter Two, this level of attainment is also referred to as the 'Level 2 inclusive' (Welsh Government, 2015a), and equates to reaching the Level 2 threshold of five GCSEs at grade A\*- C (Welsh Government, 2015b). The reason why this is important is that it is believed that reaching this level of

attainment will help secure future life opportunities and prosperity. This is because it is recognised as a 'baseline of proficiency at which students begin to demonstrate competencies to actively participate in life' (OECD, 2014, p. 5). In Chapter Five, the 'catch-up' practices in the LACE teams are largely bound up with the consolidation of core indicator subject knowledge (English maths and science) before sitting examinations. As noted above, the Welsh Government (2016c) state that achieving the Key Stage Four level of attainment equates to reaching the Level 2 threshold of five GCSEs at grade A\*- C (Welsh Government, 2015b). In this study, this level was achieved by only four young people: Lynn and Dylan, LA2 (*"A grade students"*); and Connah and Sian, LA4, (Connah attended a PRU and Sian did not seek Bryn's support). To reiterate a point made in Chapter Two, within a total of 320 age-relevant looked-after children in Wales, only 60 (18 per cent) achieved the Level 2 threshold (including a GCSE grade A\* - C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics), compared to 58 per cent of all pupils (Welsh Government, 2016a). As presented in Chapter Two, looked-after children are often associated with performance at the lower levels of the GCSE examinations, for example, 'G' and 'F' grades (Berridge, 2012). This is also evident in this study. Notwithstanding the LACE support being typically one hour, once a week, some young people described how this helped to improve their grades, examples include:

Martyn (LA2): *It really helped me in science because I needed all of my coursework to get two Cs in science and I wouldn't have got them if I didn't do my coursework [with the LACE worker].*

Glyn (LA2): *Yeah, [the LACE support did help] because I got better grades than I did before. Well I'm getting better in maths, [but] English ain't so much and geography's just got worse, because I'm not really interested in geographical stuff.*

Griff (LA3): *I can't really describe it. But I know it helped.*

Tegan (LA3): *Yeah, I think so, because it [LACE mentoring support] stopped in [school] year ten because someone left. And they couldn't find anyone to come on to that, and my grades went down quite far, they went down to a G. And then in [school] year eleven, when I had the mentoring again my grades went right back up to a D. So, I think the [LACE] mentoring really helped.*

In summary, there appears a varied and variable impact of LACE interventions. The LACE practice was identified as: an accomplishment (e.g. getting the “*difficult ones*” to engage); as justifiable (e.g. as corporate parents the LACES role is: “*to make sure they leave school with something and appropriate grades really*” (Donna, LA2); as valued (e.g. from Carwyn’s perspective, working with Morgan (LA3 Mentor) “*made a hell of a difference*”; Or, as not valued (e.g. as described by Lynn (LA2): [re the LACE service] “*Once a week is a bit brief. And we only do an hour!*” As described earlier, the young people’s education outcomes cannot be attributed to any single factor such as the interventions of the LACE teams. The reasons that the young people achieved education outcomes are multifaceted as noted earlier in the thesis (see p. 176). The focus now turns to consider the young people’s post-school directions and their career aspirations.

### **Post-School Directions; and Career Aspirations**

In table 7.5 (below), a revealing range of future orientations and aspirations are presented. Consistent with previous research, what can be noted here is that looked-after young people’s aspirations are much the same as their non-looked after peers (Davey, 2006; DCSF, 2010; Mannay *et al.*, 2015).



**Table 7.5: Post-School Destinations and Career Aspirations**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Post-School Destination</b>	<b>Career Aspiration</b>
<b>Garth</b>	FE College: Motor Vehicle Mechanics	Motor Vehicle Mechanic
<b>Elen</b>	FE College: Health and Social Care	Nurse
<b>Jac</b>	FE College: Health and Social Care	Social worker (University degree)
<b>Bethan</b>	FE College: Child Development	Nursery Nurse/ Teaching Assistant
<b>Lynn</b>	FE College: A-levels - Physics, Chemistry and Law	Forensic Scientist
<b>Dylan</b>	FE College/Sixth Form: A-levels - Geography, Chemistry, Biology/ Welsh Baccalaureate	Marine Biologist (University degree)
<b>Beca</b>	FE College: (Course was not yet chosen)	Owning a restaurant/Tattoo Artist
<b>Glyn</b>	FE College: Army prep	The Marines
<b>Martyn</b>	Work-based Learning	Army - Mechanical Engineer
<b>Alan</b>	FE College: Carpentry	Carpenter
<b>Ceri</b>	FE College: Army prep	The Army "front-line"/ Catering/Animal Care
<b>Griff</b>	FE College: Hairdressing/ICT	Not provided
<b>Tegan</b>	FE College: Health and Social Care (Level 3)	Social Worker (University degree)
<b>Carwyn</b>	FE College: Motor Vehicle (Level 1)	Motor Mechanic
<b>Connah</b>	FE College: A-levels - History, Politics and Computing	University degree
<b>Jenni</b>	FE College: Art and Design (Level 2)	Art based career
<b>Sian</b>	FE College: Dance	Dance Psychotherapist (University degree)

On the whole the young people were interviewed before leaving school; hence these aspirations reflect the young people's stated aims and not actual positions occupied. However, Griff, Tegan and Carwyn were interviewed post school and were actually in their intended destinations. Within the sample, nine young people wished to attend higher education courses in the future. These sorts of destinations are typical of peers more widely - particularly so in light of the global economic, structural and policy changes which have affected 'young people more generally in society' (Stein, 2012, p. 156). However, despite the comprehensive universal policies on post-16 further and higher education many looked-after children, young people and care leavers 'are at high risk of social exclusion' (Stein, 2012, p. 156).

As described in Chapter Two, it has been well debated and documented that when compared to the school population as a whole, looked-after children and young people have consistently underperformed within all the key stages within the education system, including further and higher education (Ferguson, 1966; Jackson, 1987; Goddard, 2000; SEU, 2003; Driscoll, 2011; WAO, 2012; Stein, 2013; Welsh Government, 2015c). Nevertheless, Smith (2007) notes, many 'underachievers' go on to achieve within further and higher education. As described in Chapter Two, although gaining 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C is the normative pathway to further and higher education and employment or training (Welsh Government, 2015c), as the above destinations reflect, these young people's stated aims were to attend FE college even without having the relevant GCSEs at grade A\* to C. This would seem to challenge the often pessimistic assumptions about the looked-after population in regard to ambition and achievement (see Chapter Two). To reiterate a point made in Chapter Two, the term 'underachievement' is inherently inadequate in grasping the relative learning achievements of pupils from diverse backgrounds who suffer multiple adversities (see Smith 2007, p. 171). Considering the post school destinations and career aspirations provided above (Table 7.5), it would seem that the term 'underachievement' often associated with the looked-after population has limited resonance for our understanding of the achievements of the young people in this study.

## **Concluding Comments**

There is a dearth of research concerning looked-after young people's perceptions and experiences of the LACE service. However, this chapter has identified a number of complex issues. Despite all teams focusing (on the whole), on Key Stage Four pupils, various internal distinctions between the four LACE teams were presented. Each has a different organisational model, for example, while all have one LACE Coordinator variance can be seen in service nomenclature and the role focus and job titles of the front-line LACE team members. LA3 has the title of 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Support and contains two front-line Mentors. LA2 also has the title of 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Support but contains two front-line Learning Coaches. In contrast, LA1 is entitled the 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Service and has three front-line Learning Support Assistants/Officers and one PEP Administrator. LA4 also known as a 'LACES' Looked After Children's Educational Service, has one front-line Looked-After

Children's Education Officer. The type of educational support from LACE team practitioners ranged from one-to-one or group work; catch-up support for vocational and GCSE core subjects (mathematics, English and science); education support (coursework/homework); GCSE core subjects revision techniques; pastoral care and support as and when needed (although this was not supposed to be part of the LAC mentors' role in LA3). Most notably, the LACE members enjoyed considerable discretion to use different pedagogical approaches. The practitioner accounts of support they provided appeared to mesh with the accounts provided by the young people about the help they sought or received.

The chapter has attempted to demonstrate how the LACE service structures itself as a boundary spanning multi-site and inter-agency organisation. The prime objective of the teams collects around the notion of pupil achievement; meeting the GCSE threshold is a core totem within the dominant discourse in education. This emphasis on pupil and school performance (Calvert, 2009) is the unifying feature of what is otherwise a diverse set of LACE activities, some of which engendered professional rivalry in school settings (Friedman and Podolny, 1992). That said, LACE support was seemingly quite modest in scale and intensity, occurring usually once a week, for just an hour, and described by some young people as a somewhat tokenistic exercise. For instance, Dylan described how one hour a week equates to doing "*a little bit of something*". Lynn (LA2) described the LACE support as being "*a bit brief*". Nonetheless, the relational aspects and their quality between teams and young people were often the key to effective engagement, particularly when this was sustained, empathic and responsive to the learning needs of the young person (see also Holland 2010; 2015).

Largely, the young people's perceptions and experiences of the LACE services appeared positive. There were some young people who exercised agency in their decision to seek support elsewhere and not to engage with the LACE service. Such self-reliance meant that they were the principal agents 'of their educational direction and success' (Cameron, 2007, p. 45). This and previous chapters have attempted to focus on the interpretive processes that participants (Coordinators, team members and young people) deployed in making sense of LACE team practice.

The next and final chapter reviews the research findings and will seek to generate a more rounded summation of the meanings and understandings that participants construct in relation to the implementation and consumption of LACE policy and practice (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). The focus will be upon the key themes that have permeated the thesis and structured the analysis of data. The chapter also explores the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research and concludes with a short section entitled: 'Final Comments'.

# Chapter Eight

## Conclusion

### Introduction

This final chapter reviews the main findings and their implications for policy and practice. The chapter will first provide an answer to the research question which has sought to make an original contribution to understanding how looked-after children's education is promoted in Wales by LACE Coordinators, their LACE team practitioners and how this impacts upon the young people they support. This study has addressed the following research question:

- From the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, how do they understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children and how in turn is the impact of their interventions perceived by those same young people?

In order to address the research question, a qualitative cross-sectional research design and a thematic analysis was chosen to identify and report patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Moreover, sociological research should challenge the meanings embedded in dominant theory, 'to question taken-for-granted social assumptions and beliefs and to analyse critically formal discourse about social phenomena' (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002, p. 61). The objective of this study (presented in Chapter One), has been to understand how specific Wales policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) has been understood, interpreted and enacted by LACE Coordinators and their teams and how their interventions have been perceived by young people in the care system. In order to achieve this objective, four broad lines of enquiry were undertaken in regard to:

- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perspectives on their role and duties in regard to policy guidance and how this has been translated in terms of implementation.
- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner perceptions of barriers to the enactment of good practice.
- LACE Coordinator and team practitioner social constructions of looked-after children's identities.

- The views of young people about their 'looked-after' status and experiences of schooling, as well as their perceptions about the educational support received from LACE teams.

The chapter will seek to generate a more rounded summation of the meanings and understandings that participants construct in relation to the implementation of LACE policy and practice (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). After addressing the research question, the focus turns to a brief recapitulation of the key findings and analytic themes that have permeated the thesis and structured the analysis of data. Subsequently, the limitations of this study are presented together with suggestions for further research. The thesis concludes with a short section entitled: 'Final Comments'.

### **Findings - Addressing the Research Question**

The answer to the research question: From the perspectives of LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners, how do they understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children and how in turn is the impact of their interventions perceived by those same young people?, is reflected in the multifaceted meanings and experiences of LACE Coordinators, their LACE team practitioners and looked-after young people. The prime objective of the LACE teams collects around the notion of pupil achievement and meeting the GCSE threshold (attaining the core GCSE subjects) which occupies a dominant position within the prevailing discourse in UK education. Nonetheless, the LACE team members enjoyed considerable discretion to use different approaches of support as advised by their occupational status (learning coaches, LSAs mentors, and education officers - with varying pastoral/academic/vocational dimensions of their work activities). Building relationships was deemed as both a professional value and a practical stratagem in the way they went about promoting their occupational objective of educational achievement. Therefore, in addressing the research question, LACE practitioners understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children though LACE support, which typically lasts for an hour, once a week, and which was described by some young people as of welcome but limited value. Given the scale and frequency of LACE provision in the four authorities it is difficult to imagine that the service is meeting its statutory duties with any sense of

significant impact and reach. If one were to extrapolate this provision across Wales then it would seem unlikely that the service as a whole is delivering the policy ambitions of Welsh Government with any sizeable effect. In such a context the continuing discourse of 'low attainment' that surrounds looked-after children might be more aptly be re-cast as 'low investment' by the state, at the national and local level.

## **Analytic Themes and Key Findings - A Brief Discussion**

The analytic themes that have permeated the data and structured the analysis comprise: the nature of LACE support; relationships - relational aspects and their quality; identity management; achievement and underachievement; and belonging as a pupil. Collectively, these themes have emerged from a social constructionist methodology which seeks to capture 'the varying ways in which the social realities of the world are shaped and perceived' (Gergen, 1999, cited in Fisher, 2003, p. 53). Within each theme I provide an overview of the main insights in relation to the research objective (above) and thereafter consider the implications of the key findings for policy and practice. Moreover, in addressing these implications for policy and practice, the chapter will invoke C.W Mills' (2000) notion of a 'Sociological Imagination' to grasp why personal troubles might better be understood as public issues when considering promoting looked-after children's education achievement.

### **The Nature of LACE Support**

This theme presents the research findings from Chapter Five and Seven, which explored the views of young people about the educational support received from LACE teams. In Chapter Seven we learnt that LACE support was seemingly quite modest in scale and intensity, typically occurring once a week, for just an hour, and described by some young people as a tokenistic exercise. There were some young people who exercised agency and choice in their decision not to engage with the LACE service, or to seek support elsewhere. However, on the whole, the young people's perceptions and experiences of the LACE services appeared positive. Building on these key findings, Chapter Five also identified that the LACE input is oversubscribed and under resourced. This finding is in line with other welfare provisions (Newman, 2000; Knights, 2009; Spellman, 2011; Daft and Lane, 2016). Nonetheless, as demand for LACE provision outstrips supply, the LACE input that is offered can be termed as 'slender'

(typically, one hour, once a week). Despite the heady rhetoric we still have a poorly resourced service given the needs of this group of learners (See Chapter Seven). In line with Lipsky (1980) a concern by LACE workers related to resources that they deemed chronically inadequate, relative to the tasks they were asked to perform. Identified as a shared concern, it was this limited resource that participants considered a constraint upon the educational attainment of some looked-after young people..

### ***Academic over Vocational Qualifications***

Although the Learning Pathways 14-19 policy framework promotes children in Wales achieving qualifications across both academic and vocational areas (Welsh Government, 2010), the type of educational support that the LACE team practitioners delivered focused most on academic over vocational areas. Moreover, not all young people could have LACE support. For the young people that did receive LASE support, the educational support ranged from one-to-one or group work; 'catch-up' support for GCSE core subjects (mathematics, English and science); education support (GCSE/BTEC coursework/homework); GCSE core subjects revision techniques; and pastoral care (although this was not officially recognised as part of the LAC mentoring role in LA3). In terms of this finding, the LACE team practitioner accounts of education support (practice) they provided appeared to mesh with the accounts provided by the young people about the help they sought or received. However, the academic–vocational divide in education following the Learning Pathways 14-19 framework is hitherto yet to be fully evaluated and challenged. As Tomlinson (2005) states, the academic–vocational divide continues to be synonymous with a class divide, thereby resulting in some children being separated into high status education (academic subjects), while other children are placed in lower status (vocational subject) courses (Tomlinson, 2005).

### ***Occasional Occupational Rivalry***

While the participants, workers and young people, considered the LACE offer as relatively ungenerous, it would be inaccurate to view this as the sole limitation. It was evident from previous chapters that occasional occupational rivalry and 'territorial' disputes sometimes would impede LACE interventions. Such tensions between professionals have evidently not been extinguished by policy and law that seeks to ensure effective collaboration and integrated working in Wales



(Edmunds and KilBride, 2015). As discussed in Chapter Three, 'new public management' (NPM) shifted policy towards 'a problem-solving event' (Adams, 2014, p. 28), where discovering what doesn't work was as crucial as discovering what does work (Gorard and Huat See, 2013). In this sense, NPM played a part in changing the discourse of responsibility for social problems from structural determinants to private sorrows, a reverse of the classic C.W Mills dictum. In addition to the shift towards 'responsibilisation' (Hendrick, 1994; Muncie, 2006; Liebenberg, 2015), NPM also played a part in re-positioning accountability across a more lean and 'joined-up' service system in which managers would enjoy greater control over decision making over practice (Newman, 2000). Yet, contrariwise, previous chapters have shown how LACE team members enjoyed a fair amount of discretion in their use of time, location and activities when undertaking their various duties, and there seemed few if any examples of their work coming to the notice of senior managers, auditors or regulators. This finding finds some similarity with NPM notions of 'attention to outputs and performance rather than inputs' (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin, 2000, p. 6). NPM has been criticised for its concern with short-term fast impact approaches to policy delivery and it is not unreasonable to view LACE services as exhibiting aspects of this tradition. LACE services seek to help meet national policy targets around GCSE attainment and thereby deliver on measurable outcomes as opposed to a more rounded provision to meet the multiple educational needs of looked-after young people. The inputs that the LACE services offer are geared more towards, in Mills (2000) terms, the private sorrows of being looked-after as opposed to the public problem of damaged childhoods and the parental duties of state and society. In this sense LACE provision (as innovation) could be described as an 'empty signifier' (Newman, 2000, p. 50), as it has become detached from its object to improve (promote) looked-after children's achievement due to its inadequate resource and limited influence of the LACE workforce. Yet, as the next section will reiterate, the relationships that LACE staff had with young people was often viewed positively by those looked-after and here we may find benefits to LACE interventions that are not readily ascertained via the negative lens of NPM and its critics.

## **Relationships - Relational Aspects and Quality**

Chapter Five explored the subjectivities of the LACE Coordinators and their team practitioners, regarding the ways in which they interpret policy and practice. One key finding suggested that each LACE team explicitly focused

upon building relationships with other school staff (teachers/learning support assistants), and the looked-after young people, in order to facilitate their engagement with the LACE support. The study explored the ways in which these LACE teams differed in terms of relational aspects and the quality of these relationships. For instance, despite all the four LACE teams providing academic support at Key Stage Four, the LA1 team was the only team to occupy a dedicated base in a comprehensive school. By contrast, LA4 commissioned a private tuition service operating across the local authority area, which provided most of the education support. This ensured that Bryn (LA4, LAC Education Officer) was in a position to undertake relationship-building as a full-time day-to-day exercise, meeting as many looked-after young people as possible and assessing what, if any, type of education support they required. Alongside the academic support ('catch-up'/revision), each team provided pastoral care. However, in LA3, support for young people was officially based on academic support only and not pastoral care (nevertheless, this team did provide pastoral care despite this not being part of their designated mentor role - as defined by the LACE Coordinator). While different, these approaches to relationship-building can be understood as acting, in varying degrees, as a protective factor associated with resilience and contributing to eventual educational success (Jackson and Martin, 1998, p. 578). Even so, the relational can be double edged.

### ***Communication***

The LACE team relationships with young people were described by workers typically in administrative and procedural terms (see Chapter Five). The LACE practitioners described how their day-to-day activities were often undermined through poor communication with other boundary spanning actors (teachers and learning support assistants). The findings within Chapter Five suggested that the development of good communication and trust between different staff who have boundary spanning roles relies on a joined-up approach within local authorities when promoting looked-after children's educational achievement. While it is well documented that good communication and trust between different boundary spanning persons is 'central to the maintenance of effective inter-personal relationships' (Williams, 2010, p. 10).

### ***Occasional Occupational Rivalry***

Across the sample of LACE practitioners, their day-to-day work activities located across, on occasion, competing organisations (e.g., school settings) suggested they worked in a climate of some distrust (Adams, 1976) with teachers and learning support assistants. Role conflict between different practitioner groups is one of the most frequently associated problems with boundary spanning activities (Friedman and Podolny, 1992; Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016). As such, this had a negative impact on partnership working. Despite this, 'partnership working is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary public management' (Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016, p. 239). Yet, within contemporary public welfare multidisciplinary teams, practitioner occupational identity and authority is often challenged and in consequence professional practice can be both contested and uncertain in terms of accountability (Frost *et al.*, 2005). Mickan and Rodger (2000) argue that professional rivalry and conflict both restricts joined-up collaboration and reinforces practitioner boundaries. Thus, it is paramount that the Welsh government and policy makers understand this issue. It is of some concern if LACE practitioners in implementing their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children do not feel valued by other key professionals. It is imperative for policy makers to acknowledge the challenge and complexity of this problem in that 'partnership working is fraught with difficulty' (Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016, p. 239). As one of the defining characteristics of contemporary public services is partnership working (Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016), perhaps the multiple occupational statuses in this field of looked-after children's education (e.g., teachers; tutors; educational: 'support workers'; 'learning support assistants'; 'learning coaches'; and 'learning mentors') should be acknowledged and recategorised as valued 'informational facilitators' (Guarneros-Meza and Martin, 2016, p. 239).

### ***Formal Care and Reciprocal Caring Relationships***

Chapter Six explored looked-after young people's formal care relationships and experiences of schooling. The young people in this study (in the main), described having meaningful relationships with their carers. Despite being key players in looked-after young people's lives, social workers are often 'surprisingly minor players' in young people's 'narratives about their everyday lives and care relationships' (Holland, 2010, p. 1675). In Chapter Six, the young people often described a strong feeling of antipathy towards social workers,

perceiving them to be either a hindrance to their educational progress and stability, or irrelevant to their lives. This finding is consistent with other research (Harker *et al.*, 2003; Mallon, 2005; Davey, 2006; Jackson and Cameron, 2012). Moreover, publically provided welfare (such as social work interventions) have become increasingly stigmatised within the UK (Clarke *et al.*, 2000). Although social workers are directed by government (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007) to take the lead on Personal Education Plans (PEPs), some young people described hardly ever seeing their social worker in this context. By contrast, six young people (Jac, Beca, Dylan, Garth, Martyn LA2; and Jenni LA4) recalled opportunities to talk about education and build meaningful formal relationships with their social workers. Beyond the existence of supportive relationships with their carers, the young people in this study were also in reciprocal caring relationships with their school peers; most young people felt accepted by their school peers. Employing 'the Sociological Imagination' (Mills, 2000), relating to the relational aspects and quality of the relationships between the LACE teams and the young people, the personal trouble for these children is not having access to long-term meaningful quality time-rich relationships. Ideally, looked-after children should be able to choose who supports them, for how long, and when and where this support should take place - and they should decide when these support relationships end. However, the structural issues relating to LACE relationships are temporal and have spatial limitations. In working from nine to five, Monday to Friday, LACE workers may not be accessible at those points in evening and weekends when children may have crises or upsets, hence a personal trouble is likely to become a public issue if this leads to subsequent relationship difficulties with carers, professionals and school during the working week. The result of this is that the child or young person is likely to be identified as the 'problem' that needs 'fixing', rather than the structural context of service delivery and the narrowly prescribed nature of the LACE relationship.

### ***Stability***

The findings within Chapter Seven identified that the majority of the sample of young people ( $n=11$ ) had experienced only one senior school placement, and thus enjoyed relative stability. Previous research identified that multiple school placements can limit opportunities to form meaningful relationships and attachments with significant others (Jackson, 2002; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Voices from Care, 2015). Chapter Seven presented young people's perceptions and

experiences of education support received from the LACE team practitioners. In LA1, both Brenda (LAC Learning Support Officer/Assistant) and Garth (EOTAS pupil) described their valued relationships ending abruptly once compulsory education was completed. According to Huntley (2002) there is inadequate understanding of the impact of the ending of social care relationships on service users. For example, 'this may result in the reinforcement of previous negative separation experiences for the client and may undo much of the positive work that has been achieved' (Huntley, 2002, p. 59). To reiterate, more recently, Holland (2010) has argued that such arbitrary termination of affective and stable relationships can negatively affect a young person's future interpersonal relationships. Here, a message for policy makers to acknowledge is that the valued relationships developed by LACE professionals should ideally continue longer across the life course in order to support the ongoing development of those young people when they leave care (Holland, 2010). Moreover, positive relationships between welfare staff and clients are critical as these relationships may 'facilitate engagement in difficult situations' (McNicoll, 2012). Thus, it is important for policy makers to acknowledge the complexity of this relationship and to consider the nature of young people's agency and discretion in regard to service take-up. A more imaginative, active and inclusive approach to participation may prove more effective in engaging young people in co-producing better education outcomes. The chapter now turns to consider further the nature of LACE support and the relationships through the theme of identity.

## **Identity Management**

This theme presents the research findings from Chapter Five and Six, which explored LACE Coordinator and team practitioner social constructions of looked-after children's identities and the views of young people about their own 'looked-after' status. Chapter Two and Three both demonstrated how looked-after young people's identities have been characterised over time through specific policy agendas and professional narratives. Although malleable, such narratives and agendas form a backdrop to understanding how these children and young people's identities have been shaped and operationalised ever since the twentieth century through 'public child welfare' legislation and policies. Accordingly, the study addressed the ways in which participants' identities were understood and managed within the LACE service relationships. Insights from the practitioners' perspectives are summarised first (Chapter Five). When describing looked-after children's identities, the key findings suggested that the

LACE practitioners appeared to utilise the ‘public child welfare’ narrative, that is, they defined looked-after children as “*colourful children*” (Donna, LA2 LAC Learning Coach); as “*difficult ones*” (Sara, LA2 LACE Coordinator); as “*challenging children*” (Brenda, LA1 Learning Support Officer/Assistant); and explained other people beyond the LACE service as referring to them as “*naughty children*” (Donna, LA2 LAC Learning Coach); and a long view of children that “*we can’t expect that much [of]*” (Erin, LA4 LACE Coordinator). These typical understandings of the looked-after status, as a problem category, were then connected to the ways that these same young people were managed by the LACE service staff.

### ***Young People’s Own ‘Looked-After’ Identities***

There are numerous theories of what constitutes ‘identity’ and to establish a clear definition is ‘something of a challenge’ (Williams, 2000, p. 3). Chapter Six presented how the looked-after young people defined their own ‘looked-after’ identities, and how these accounts coalesced (or not) with the perceptions of LACE Coordinators and LACE team practitioners. Consistent with theories on attachment, this study suggests that ‘looked-after’ identities are shaped by the existence of supportive relationships with ‘caring’ carers (McMurray *et al.*, 2011). The findings suggested that from looked-after young people’s perspectives, their identities are based upon a more meaningful set of ideas, which not only reflect the individuality of the child; they also constitute a ‘real’ lived identity. The depiction of looked-after young people in relation to their legal status (official records) do not reveal subjective identities, nor ‘describe the lived experience and embodied social world’ of being in care (Davey and Pithouse, 2008, p. 70). Although there is a variety of theoretical influences ‘on how we might understand identities’ (Thomas and Holland, 2010, p. 2619), beyond negative discourses of ‘public child welfare’, welfare professionals must consider how identity formation is achieved from the standpoint of the young person. In this study, looked-after young people’s extracts about their own ‘looked-after’ identities challenged professional discourses of how these young people are often ‘seen’ predominately as passive, vulnerable, victims or threats - these constructions were notably absent. Instead, their comments indicated a more ‘normalised’, non-stigmatised, and pragmatic but also care (as affect) related sense of self. As the young people (to some extent) can guard or disclose their looked-after

status, this is important to understand in the context of the presentation of self and agency.

In summary, there is no such thing as a unitary 'looked-after' child with predictable needs and hence no singular looked-after young people's 'identity'. Instead identities are both multiple and in flux and the human impulse to categorize 'has resulted in labelling people in ways that restrict the expression of complex identities' (Raible and Nieto, 2008, p. 208). As looked-after young people's own voices can challenge dominant constructions around their public welfare identity (Chapter Six), we need a reconstruction of looked-after children within the professional imagination - from their own knowledge (epistemological standpoint). Considering the theme of identity management, employing 'the Sociological Imagination' (Mills, 2000), beyond a personal trouble to a public issue (structural one), if society does not prepare social care practitioners, including LACE workers, and resource them effectively then conflicts and mismatch of expectations between workers and service users is to be anticipated. The chapter now builds on the discussion of relationships and identities that underlie the nature of LACE support, though a consideration of the theme of achievement and underachievement.

## **Achievement and Underachievement**

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, looked-after children typically 'underachieve' within the education system. Chapter Two described how educational success is rewarded through exam performance and 'where children do appear to underachieve, they do so for a range of reasons, some transient, others more profound' (Smith 2007 p. 147). As Neihart notes (in Glicken, 2009, p. 93), such factors can range from just tuning out of education (e.g., through peer influence and other socialisation effects) to battling anxiety, dyslexia, hyperactivity, learning disorders, aggressive behavioural problems and 'cultures of class, gender, race and ethnicity'. The early chapters in this thesis established different explanations regarding the looked-after children's achievement gap. For Berridge (2012) the 'care system is not inherently damaging to children's education but is generally beneficial' (Berridge, 2012, p. 1172). In contrast, for Jackson (2013b) it is the care system that fails looked-after children as it does not educate or provide stability and support transitions. While such arguments informed the study it was not the purpose of this thesis to evaluate the impact of care on education outcomes but rather to understand better the ambitions and

impact of policy and practice in optimising the school experience through the LACE interventions. In doing so it was important to grasp the notions of achievement and underachievement as occupational and professional constructions of LACE Coordinators and their team members. In Chapter Five the findings suggested that LACE practitioners (like other professionals engaged with children in public care) can often hold a pessimistic view when it comes to looked-after children and young people's education potential (Jackson, 1987; Mannay *et al.*, 2015; Sebba *et al.*, 2015). This much was recognised by LACE staff, in an attempt to reframe negative views about looked-after children and young people's education potential, Laura (LA3 Coordinator) described how (beyond a narrow academic focus), looked-after children perform well in vocational subjects. Consistent with this view, it has been suggested that other leisure pursuits and hobbies, outside schooling, should be considered as achievement - instead of relying purely on academic ability (Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Wade and Dixon, 2006). However, to reiterate, academic (GCSE) results have become highly valued and scrutinised in an era of educational competition (Berridge *et al.*, 2008).

### ***The Culture of Performativity***

In Chapter Five, the findings suggested that in the public management culture of performativity, the focus for local authorities is typically upon meeting threshold-related targets (Ball *et al.*, 2012), notably that of achieving five A\*-C pass grades at GCSE or equivalent qualifications (James, 2009, p. 2). From the young people's experiences in this study, this meant that schooling during Key Stage Four was all about 'cramming it all in' before they left. Indeed, the focus of the front-line LACE practitioners was very much on supporting preparation for Key Stage Four GCSE core subjects (mathematics, English and science). More generally, education support has been defined as a narrow teaching activity producing exam test scores and local authority performance indicators. For some, this has resulted in the UK partaking in a 'tutoring arms race' (Boyle, 2015), instead of providing any meaningful education (reflective knowledge creation - see (Claxton, 2008). Such views were expressed by LACE teams who typically cast their endeavours as focused upon "*exams, exams, and exams*" (see Chapter Five).



### ***Looked-After Young People's Aspirations***

In Chapter Seven the findings suggested that consistent with previous research, looked-after young people's aspirations are much the same as their non-looked-after peers (Davey, 2006; Broad, 2008; DCSF, 2010; Mannay *et al.*, 2015). In consequence we might agree that the term 'underachievement' has limited resonance for our understanding of the achievements of the young people in this study. Morgan (LA3 LAC Mentor) indicated that: *"just because a child is 'looked-after' doesn't automatically mean that they are going to underachieve"*. Moreover, Rhiannon (LA2, Learning Coach) argued that: *"when you compare a looked-after child to a mainstream child - that's not in care, you can't really see the difference"*. Indeed, six young people (Jac, Lynn, and Dylan (LA1); Tegan (LA2); Connah and Sian (LA4)) obtained GCSE passes within the A-C grades range for mathematics, science and English (core subjects). By contrast, looked-after children are often linked with performance at the lower levels of the GCSE examinations, including grades 'G' and 'F' (Berridge, 2012). Nonetheless, as argued by Sara (LA2 LACE Coordinator) these lower grades are still GCSE passes. Yet, within the education discourse of performance targeted at A-C grades, the lower grades are constantly devalued (Tomlinson, 2005; Smith, 2007; Berridge *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, statistics (qualification performance indicators) cannot be considered as significant indicators of the quality of care or education (Berridge, 2007). As outlined in Chapter Two, however, 'all official statistics have their limitations' (Berridge *et al.*, 2009, p. 89). As noted by Smith (2007) in Chapter Two, many 'underachievers' go on to achieve within Further and Higher education and as a result this challenges both stereotypical and often negative associations accompanying the looked-after population.

In summary, all young people (in year eleven) achieved a wide range of academic (GCSE) and vocational qualifications (City and Guilds and BTEC's) - a result of the Learning Pathways 14-19 framework informed by the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (2009). This achievement should be celebrated by those charged with looking after children in public care. However as we have learnt from LACE practitioners, this is often not the case. Historically, we understand looked-after children through normative assumptions about their 'impaired status' which has been central to a UK public welfare child discourse. In contrast to such pathologising and individualising traditions we might invoke C.W Mills (2000) notion of a sociological imagination to grasp why personal troubles might

better be understood as public issues. How a child performs in school can determine their overall education career and here public service professionals appear to legitimise the way looked-after children are likely to be aligned with more vocational opportunities. In such a context, their 'underachievement' may remain less visible and perhaps appear little different to their non-looked-after (working class/poor/socially excluded) peers. For these children, low attainment is constructed as personal troubles - however, the ability to connect with school is a structural issue in that the education system claims to be an engine of social inclusion. Thus the problem of 'underachievement' moves from being a personal trouble to a public issue whereby some pupils from a restricted milieu (working class/poor/socially excluded) are powerless to change or solve the institutional demands imposed on them by a middle-class academic-focused system of education (see Chapter Two). It is this which continues to serve middle-class interests 'which valorizes middle - rather than working-class cultural capital' (Reay, 2001, p. 334). On this matter of class and structure, the challenge for the state is to find ways to support and promote the education of looked-after children in ways that generate the same successful outcomes as those enjoyed by middle class children (see Berridge, 2012, p. 1175). Such a challenge, likely to be complex and resource intensive, will have limited chances of being met without understanding the ways in which school is understood by children in public care. It is towards this point that the discussion moves next.

### **Belonging as a Pupil**

This theme presents the research findings from Chapter Six, which explored looked-after young people's perceptions of school and belonging as a pupil. There have been numerous studies that asked looked-after children about their school experiences (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Martin and Jackson, 2002; McLaughlin, McConvey, Rodgers, Santin, Foster and Hannan, 2006; Broad, 2008; Berridge *et al.*, 2009; Osler, 2010; Sugden, 2013; Adrian-Vallance, 2014; Mannay *et al.*, 2015; Estyn, 2016). Such studies have collectively identified that looked-after children feel the need to be understood and to feel part of a school community (Broad, 2008; Sugden, 2013). This child-school relationship is achieved through a sense of belonging. That is, being acknowledged by school staff, receiving praise and having their work displayed, this all contributes to feeling part of the school (Broad, 2008; Sugden, 2013).

In this study, when asked to describe experiences of school on a day-to-day basis, the young people expressed both negative and positive views. The findings suggested that in doing so, their perceptions found similarity with other looked-after children (Broad, 2008; Voices from Care, 2015), and also non-looked-after young people's experiences of school (Smith, 2007; Claxton, 2008). An obvious example would be the way in which education policies and related testing has 'led to an increase in stress and pressure in schools' (Weale, 2016). What was particularly notable from the data was the ways in which the young people were in reciprocal caring relationships with their school peers. This finding was consistent with other research which identified that friends played an important supporting role in the school setting (Sugden, 2013; Voices from Care, 2015).

The findings within Chapter Six and Seven suggested that most young people displayed strengths associated with routinely attending school, revising and sitting an exam, completing coursework, and aiming for Higher and Further Education. Furthermore, some young people were not reluctant to disclose their care status to friends at school. In contrast, for some young people, making visible their 'looked-after' status resulted in different treatment (in school) compared to their non-looked-after peers. This included being singled out, being bullied, destructive gossip (failure of family), social snubs, and putdowns which when all present in an educational system 'it is surprising that anyone does well' (Glicken, 2009, p. 102). Thus, peer bullying makes the day-to-day experience of 'fitting into' the school community a stressful process for *all* young people. Moreover, the growth in use of mobile phones and social networking websites is opening up new contexts in which bullying ('cyberbullying') can take place (Gill, 2007). Thus, bullying is still a serious problem for some children in terms of how they interact within the dynamics of a school environment (Sugden, 2013) - a place often identified as a source of jeopardy. As such, incidents of workplace/school bullying is a social issue for individual lives and society in general (Mitsunori and Michael, 2015).

In summary, 'a certain way of labelling the situation or the individual is established through categorization' (Severinsson and Markström, 2015, p. 3). The 'looked-after' categories essentially make these young people visible and different to their 'normal' peers within the public domain. Intrinsically, 'visibility defines territories of action' (Mubi Brighenti, 2010, p. 186). Yet, visibility is not only inherently ambiguous it is also 'highly dependent upon contextual social,

technical and political complexes and regimes' (Mubi Brighenti, 2010, p. 186). As visibility is relational and strategic (Mubi Brighenti, 2010), some young people, through exercising their own agency, reject the 'looked-after' negative status, preferring to be in-visible instead in social life. This equates to their 'resistance to visibility and resistance through visibility' (Mubi Brighenti, 2010, p. 188). Even so, the visibility and in-visibility phenomena is dynamic and variable in that such strategies may 'possess a back-and-forth rhythm' (Mubi Brighenti, 2010, p. 187). From a sociological viewpoint, giving children (including those looked-after) a voice within research is epistemologically essential (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002). Within educational settings the reality experienced (belonging as a pupil) by young people may not correspond with their teachers or carers as 'the subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults' (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2002, p. 61).

Any resistance to welfare identities is not only a consequence of institutional practice but also a reaction to the unequal power relations between children and adults (Severinsson and Markström, 2015). In this context, children and young people do not choose the negative status of 'looked-after' categories. Such categories are imposed upon them, in this sense their personal troubles (as in Mills, 2000) have a clear public or structural connection as powerful institutions and related professionals ensure that looked-after pupils 'have to accept and 'become' [visible] before they can be helped' (Severinsson and Markström, 2015, p. 3). For the young people in this study, school in their lifeworld was identified as a negative stressful place, especially while undertaking examinations. However, this was time limited and appeared to have little to do with their 'looked-after' identities per se. The chapter now turns to consider significant limitations of this study.

### **Limitations of this Study**

As described in the Chapter Four (methods chapter), in order to cast a wide net over the geography of Wales in the scoping phase of the study each elected leader of each of the twenty-two local authorities was directly emailed seeking specific information about the LACE service. This yielded insights concerning the different models/approaches that local authorities had embarked on through their interpretations of policy. However, the scale and detail of responses was limited concerning service systems and relationships. Thus, it was necessary to engage in a more explorative approach during the interview stage of the study design.

The semi-structured interview method utilised generated sufficient data which was then thematically analysed. The reason for choosing the interview as a central tool for this study was informed by McLeod (2007) who states: 'a one-to-one conversation was the central technique I used to get a window on the young person's world view, so the interview became a microcosm of the research' (McLeod, 2007, p. 280).

As this study explored four Welsh local authorities it cannot speak for the practices and systems to be found amongst LACE Coordinators and their LACE team practitioners in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Equally, younger looked-after children in the other Key Stages (The Foundation Phase to Key Stage Three) were not considered in this study or children residing in residential care placements, or those who were adopted. The possibilities of bias due to the role of the Coordinator in selecting the young people to be interviewed cannot be discounted. Nor is it possible to be confident that the presence of LACE workers during the interviews with young people did not have an effect. Finally, a notable limitation exists in the notion that despite qualitative enquiries being an important part of policy research, this type of study can be difficult to 'sell' to policy makers (Hakim, 2000) as it does not enjoy the same cachet as large-scale quantitative research which is likely to be seen as more powerful in evidencing policy options and justifying policy decisions.

### **Future Areas for Research**

Categories of looked-after children as vulnerable, victims, and threats, are unhelpful in dispelling misconceptions about looked-after children's educational abilities and future life chances. Re-constructing looked-after children's identities through a strengths-based approach can help to challenge the categorisation of looked-after children's educational underachievement as a 'problem', and instead draw upon a more positive set of ideas around their capabilities (sameness rather than othering). Moreover, there was some disparity in the ways that LACE support was provided and experienced. And some young people felt abandoned when they left school particularly when the valued LACE support/relationships with practitioners was swiftly terminated. This study therefore recommends a number of areas for further research:

- What are other practitioner groups' (i.e. school teachers, college tutors, other school support staff (LSAs), social workers) experiences of promoting looked-after children's education?
- How do other practitioner groups perceive and experience their formal relationships with looked-after children?
- Does the educational improvement of looked-after children require a more specialist professional role and skill-set?
- How do the views of young people in residential care or those adopted compare with the views of young people in foster and kinship care about their 'looked-after' status and experiences of schooling?
- How will the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the 2016 Strategy for Future Action (Looked-After Children) be interpreted, translated, implemented and enacted by welfare practitioner groups'? Will these new approaches remedy the low attainment of looked-after children?

## Final Comments

The Wales Audit Office (2012, p. 19) argued that 'the low achievement of looked after children is not accounted for by the relatively high proportion who have additional learning needs'. Moreover,

...although there has been an increase in research and debate about educational achievements of young people looked after this has not yet been translated into improved results or a decisive shift in practice from key professionals (Davey, 2006, p. 271).

Almost a decade ago, Berridge *et al.* (2008, p.49) noted a worrying absence of research into the UK picture of education support teams in terms of their organisational structure and priorities. This research has sought to address that lacunae and add to a slowly growing knowledge base. It offers a 'snapshot in time' of the local picture of LACE teams in selected Welsh local authorities in regard to their organisational settings, relationships, meanings, values and priorities. It has also explored the views of those young people who utilise the LACE service. To reiterate, LACE practitioners understand and seek to implement their statutory duty to 'promote' the educational achievements of looked-after children through LACE support, which typically lasts for an hour, once a week, and which was described by some young people as of welcome but limited value. The findings further suggest that the LACE team relationships with young people were typically on administrative and procedural terms.

Despite the LACE provision being a specialist knowledge area, findings suggested that LACE team members' expertise and knowledge was often rejected or undervalued by other external practitioners. Although young people's identities appeared to be fashioned through occupational assumptions derived from a broader public welfare child discourse, for the young people in this study their identities were based upon a more meaningful set of ideas, which constitute a 'real' lived identity. The thesis has argued that there needs to be a re-constructing of looked-after children's identities away from their public welfare status. Moreover, the thesis has argued that there needs to be a new framework that unites the way workers understand looked-after children and the relationships that will optimise meaningful achievement. This requires that significant others in the world of public service and progressive policy (e.g., researchers, government and policy advisors, think-tanks, charities, teachers, school support staff, social workers, education support workers - all corporate parents, media, and political parties), should understand looked-after children as '*our*' children. This point has been emphasised by the present Children's Commissioner for Wales, who has argued that we should give looked-after children 'as much of a chance in life as we'd want to give our own' (Holland, 2015). If as a society, we really want to improve the outcomes for looked-after children, young people and care leavers - we must act upon this advice, work together and put these values into practice. With this more nuanced but imperative understanding, it is then more likely that looked-after children and young people can be better supported to achieve at school as ably as their contemporaries do.

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## **Appendices**

# Appendix A

## Information Sheets

### Research Information Sheet (Young People)

#### Front page

**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

# **RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET**

**Who is the researcher and what is the research about?**

Hello! My name is Darren Andrews and I am undertaking research for a PhD (University Degree) at Cardiff University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research project about your education. Before deciding, please read this information sheet.

**Who can take part in this research project?**

Anyone who is looked after, in school Year Group 11, undertaking their GCSEs and receiving additional educational support.

**What will I be asked to do?**


I would like to interview you for approximately 45 minutes about your views about your education. The interview will be digitally recorded and afterwards it will be transcribed (written down) for the research project.

Your participation in this research project is totally voluntary and you can withdraw from the research project at any time without having to give a reason.

**How will my identity be protected?**

The information that you provide will be kept in a safe and secure locked place. I will not use your real name in the research project instead a different name will be used so that your identity is protected.

In terms of confidentiality, you should know that if the researcher receives any information during the interview concerning possible harm to yourself or others then the researcher is obliged to report this information to the relevant authorities.

**PLEASE TURN OVER** 

## **Research Information Sheet (Young People)**

### **Back page**

#### **What will happen with the information I provide?**

The information you provide will form a written project called a thesis for a PhD qualification. In the future, parts of this research project may be published but your identity will always be protected.

#### **Why should I take part?**

Your views could be of help to other young people undertaking their GCSEs in the future. Also by way of thanking you for the information that you provide in the research project, at the end of the interview you will be given a £10 High Street shopping voucher.

#### **How do I take part?**

If you would like take part, tell the person who has given you this information sheet and they will let you know when and where the interview will take place.

#### **How can I contact the researcher?**

If you would like some more information about this research project then please send me an email: [andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk), or you can write to me at the following address: Darren Andrews, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences PhD Office, 3rd floor, 1-3 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD.

**THANKS FOR READING!**

## Research Information Sheet (Key Professionals)

### Front Page

<b>RESEARCH INFORMATION</b>
<b>For Key Professionals</b>
<b>What is the Research About?</b> My name is Darren Andrews and I am undertaking a PhD at Cardiff University funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). I would like to invite you to participate in a research project about supporting and promoting the educational attainment for young people with looked after status.
<b>Title of the Research Project:</b> Meeting the duty: An explorative study of local authorities in Wales and their different models of supporting and promoting the educational experiences and attainment of young people with looked after status.
<b>Participation:</b> Your participant in this research project is totally voluntary and you can withdraw from the research project at any time without having to give a reason.
<b>Data Collection:</b> I would like to interview you for approximately one hour about how the educational attainment of young people with looked after status is supported and promoted in your local authority. The interview will be conducted in a relaxed and informal manner and will give you the opportunity to raise any issues that you think are particularly relevant. The interview will be digitally recorded, transcribed and kept in a locked secure place and used only for the stated purpose in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.
<b>Anonymity:</b> A pseudonym will be used instead of your real name and the local authority will not be identified. I can guarantee that I will omit any information that is identifying and confidentiality will be assured in the final thesis and subsequent publications.
<b>Please Turn Over</b> 



## **Research Information Sheet (Key Professionals)**

Back page

### **How will you protect my rights?**

This research is underpinned and guided by the following ethical codes: Cardiff

University's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy 2010; the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA 2011); and the ESRC Research Ethics Framework (2012).

On the 7th of March 2013 this research received ethical approval from Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

### **How do I take part?**

If you would like to take part in this research, tell the person who has given you this information sheet and they will let you know when and where the interview will take place.

### **Primary Research Topics:**

- How is the duty of supporting and promoting the educational experiences and attainment for young people with looked after status approached.
- What type of educational support is utilised to promote the educational experiences and attainment of young people with looked after status.
- In terms of supporting and promoting the educational experiences and attainment of young people with looked after status; what works well?

Research findings will be made available to all participants upon completion in 2015.

### **How can I contact the researcher?**

If you have any questions or would like some further information about the research please contact:

Darren Andrews,  
Cardiff University,  
School of Social Sciences PhD Office,  
3rd floor, 1-3 Museum Place,  
Cardiff, CF10 3BD.

Email: [andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk)

## Appendix B

### Research Consent Forms

#### Research Consent Form (Young People)

**Research Consent Form**  
**Young People**

As a participant in this research project I understand that:

- ♦ My participation is totally voluntary and I can withdraw from the research project at any time without giving a reason.
- ♦ The interview will last for approximately 45 minutes.
- ♦ The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed.
- ♦ I can refuse to answer any of the research questions.
- ♦ The researcher has the responsibility to disclose any information discussed that is concerning in terms of safeguarding or well-being issues.
- ♦ The information I give will form a PhD thesis (university degree).
- ♦ Parts of the information may be published in academic journals.
- ♦ My identity will always be protected.

If I have any additional questions regarding the research project, I can write to: Darren Andrews, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences PhD Office, 3rd floor, 1-3 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD. Or Email: andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understood the research information sheet and would like to take part in this research project:

Name of participant:

Date:

Participant's signature:

Researcher's signature:

Following the interview: I confirm that I have received the high street voucher for taking part in this research:

## Research Consent Form (Key Professionals)

# Research Consent Form Key Professionals

As a participant in this research project I understand that:

- ✦ My participation is totally voluntary and I can withdraw from the research project at any time without giving a reason.
- ✦ The interview will last for approximately one hour.
- ✦ I can refuse to answer any of the research questions.
- ✦ The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed.
- ✦ My identity will be protected.
- ✦ The information provided will be kept confidential.
- ✦ The information I provide will form a PhD thesis.
- ✦ Parts of the information provided may be published in academic Journals and disseminated through academic conferences and public engagement events.

If I have any additional questions regarding the research project, I can write to: Darren Andrews, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences PhD Office, 3rd floor, 1-3 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD. Or Email: [andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk)

I confirm that I have read and understood the research information sheet and would like to take part in this research project:

Name of participant:

Date:

Participant's signature:

## **Research Consent Form (Social Worker/Carer/Guardian)**

### **Name of Researcher**

My name is Darren Andrews and I am undertaking a PhD at Cardiff University funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

### **Purpose of the research**

I would like to invite the young person you support to participate in a research project about their education. This research has been given approval from Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and will be conducted in accordance with Cardiff University's Child Protection Guidance and the ESRC Research Ethics Framework.

### **Procedures**

If I agree for the young person that I support to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- The young person will be asked to consent to the research by the researcher.
- The young person will be asked to discuss their education in a 45 minute interview with the researcher. The date, time and venue of the interview will be arranged by the local authority looked after children's education coordinator.

- **Confidentiality**

- The information the young person provides will form a PhD thesis and parts of the information may be published in academic journals.
- The young person's interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed and their real name will not be used in the thesis.
- The information gathered from this study will be kept confidential and the transcripts and data will be stored in a locked cabinet and no one except the researcher will have access to it.

### **Costs**

There will be no costs to yourself or the young person as a result of taking part in this research. At the end of the interview I will give the young person a £10 shopping voucher to say thank you in recognition of their time in participating in the research project.

### **Contacting the researcher**

If I have any additional questions regarding the research project, you can write to: Darren Andrews, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences PhD Office, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 1-3 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD. Or Email: [andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:andrewsdm2@cardiff.ac.uk)



**Consent**

I understand that the young person's participation in this research is totally voluntary and they can decline to participate in this research or I can withdraw the young person's participation from the research project at any time without giving a reason.

**The young person (name) \_\_\_\_\_ has my consent to participate in the research study about their education.**

**Signature of Social Worker \_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature of Carer/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Guides**

#### **Looked After Young People**

What do you like to do in your free time?

Probe: Do you have any hobbies? Did you attend after school activities?

What is school like on a day to day basis?

What do you like most about school?

Probe: The school / school friends / school teachers - Can you give me an example?

What do you like least about school?

Probe: Is this recent or long standing?

How long have you been in care?

Probe: Type of placement - foster/kinship?

What does being 'looked after' or being 'in care' mean to you?

Probe: How do you explain being looked after (school friends)? Can you give me an example?

Do you think that you are treated differently to other young people at school?

Probe: Can you give me an example?

What has it been like doing your GCSEs?

Probe: Which subjects did you chose to study? Are you enjoying studying these subjects?

What GCSE grades are you predicted?

Probe: What grades do you think you'll get? How do you think you're doing? What was it like doing the exams/coursework? Can you give me an example?

Would you say that you are encouraged to ask for help with any of your school work?

Probe: If [yes] by whom? In school / outside? Can you give me an example?

Has anyone helped you with your GCSE coursework or revision?

Probe: If [yes]: What type of help and who gave you this help? Can you give me an example?

Would you say that you were encouraged to ask for help with any of your school work?

Probe: If [yes] by whom? Was that in school or outside of school?

Can you tell me who supports you the most with your school work (coursework and exam revision)?

Probe: A particular teacher / teaching assistant / social worker / carer / LACE team worker / school friend...?

Can you tell me about the education support that you receive from the LACE team worker?

Probe: What's it like - Can you give me an example? How has it helped you? How often do you receive support? Is there anything that you did not like about it? If you had a magic wand would you change anything about it? Can you give me an example?

Have you had any school or care placement moves whilst doing your GCSEs?

Probe: Have you missed any school time? If [yes]: Has someone helped you catch up with school work?

Do you know if you have a Personal Education Plan?

Probe: Do you remember filling in a 'my contribution sheet'? If [yes]: Can you tell me about it? How does it help you? Is there anything better that could help you?

Have you ever been excluded from school?

Probe: If [yes]: Reasons. For how long? What did you do with your time? Did you have any school work set for you to complete?

Is there anything extra that might have helped you at school?

Probe: Extra tuition / equipment?

Have you had any career advice?

Probe: Can you give me an example?

What are you plans for when you leave school?

Probe: Employment or education (college or university)? Has anyone ever talked to you about going to college or university? What type of job would you like to do?

Is there anything that I haven't asked that you think I should have asked about your education?

## **LACE Coordinator**

How would you describe your professional background?

How long have you been the LACE coordinator in this authority?

Roughly how many looked after children are in this authority?

Can you briefly tell me about your role and the sort of things you do on a day to day basis?

Probe: In your position do you provide any training?

Probe: How do you engage with looked after children?

What is the broad aim of your LACE team?

Probe: Can you tell me a little more about your team and what they do in their day-to-day roles?

Probe: Is there a threshold to accessing the education support from your team?

Probe: Can you tell me about any examples where you and your team have wanted to support looked after children but weren't able to?

How are you and your team overseen?

What do you think looked after children would say about the educational service that you provide?

What do you think is a good example of education success?

What does promoting education mean to you?

How do you and your team promote the continuity of education?

Which looked after children's education policies do you think are most important?

Probe: Can you tell me a little about the Personal Education Plan? How do they work, what's included? Who initiates it? How is a looked after young person involved?

Probe: 'Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007).

Roughly how many looked after young people are undertaking their GCSEs this summer?

Probe: Roughly how many looked after young people undertaking their GCSEs were registered with Special Educational Needs?

Can you briefly tell me about the Performance Indicator 'Key Stage' figures that you send to the Welsh government?

How would you describe your relationship with schools?

Probe: Other authorities across the UK/ looked after children

How would you describe your relationship with other local authority looked after children's education coordinators?

Probe: The All Wales Network Group

Probe: Which other services do you work with in this local authority to support looked after children's education?

What do you think are the factors that impact upon the educational experiences and attainment for young people with looked after status?

What do you perceive the pressures to be in terms of supporting and promoting the educational attainment of young people with looked after status?

In terms of your model in supporting and promoting the educational experiences and attainment of looked after children - what works well?

Probe: Beyond the service that you and your team provide is there any other service in your view, that could optimise looked after children's educational attainment?

In terms of understanding how you and your team support the educational attainment of looked after young people, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think I should have asked?

## **LACE Team Member**

What is the title of your position?

Probe: How long have you been in this position?

How would you describe your professional background?

Can you briefly tell me a little about your role, and the sort of things you do on a day to day basis?

Probe: How are you overseen in your role? What would you say is the broad aim of your role?

In your position what type of training do you receive?

Probe: What, how often?

Roughly how many looked after children do you support?

Probe: How many are doing GCSEs /registered as SEN/ not in mainstream schools?

Can you tell me how you engage with looked after children?

Probe: is it frequent, intensive, long-term or open-ended?

Are all young people with looked after status supported?

Probe: Is there a threshold of accessing educational support?

Can you tell me about any examples where you have wanted to support a young person but were not able to?

What is the relationship like between you in your role and schools?

What does promoting education mean to you?

Probe: How do you promote the continuity of education?

Which looked after children's education policies do you think are most important?

Probe: Can you tell me a little about the Personal Education Plan? How do they work, what's included? Who initiates it? How is a looked after young person involved?

In terms of supporting the educational attainment of looked after children: What things do you perceive to be working? What things do you perceive not to be working?

Beyond the services you provide are there any other services in your view, that could enhance looked after children's educational experiences and attainment?

What do you think might create better educational experiences and outcomes for young people with looked after status?

What do you think young people with looked after status would say about the education support that you provide?

Can you tell me what you think is a good example of educational success?

In terms of understanding how you support and promote the educational attainment of looked after children within this local authority, is there anything that I haven't asked that you think I should have asked?