

**FULL PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING TO AGE 18 IN ENGLAND:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM POLICY AND LIFE-  
WORLDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Education

by

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# CONTENTS

		Page
	Abstract	6
Chapter 1	Context and structure of thesis	7
Chapter 2	Literature review	17
Chapter 3	Institution focused study	39
Chapter 4	Research methodology	65
Chapter 5	Results, findings and discussion	92
Chapter 6	Conclusion	129
	Bibliography	144
	Appendices	166
1.	Leaflet for young people to provide information on research	167
2.	Ethics approval	169
3.	Extract from transcript from Focus Group 2	192
4.	Word cloud	195

## **Tables**

Table	Title	Page
1	Policy goals for which the labour market is expected to act as the motor	33
2	Numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 in education or training by sector in selected local authority (LAX)	43
3	Numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 who are classified as NEET, JWT or not known in LAX	44
4	Wards in LAX with highest levels of young people classified as NEET	61
5	Key themes identified by young people	62
6	Composition of focus groups	81

## **Charts**

Charts	Title	
1	Percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are classified as NEET from 2004-5 to 2009-10	44
2	Job Seekers' Allowance claimants by age range in LAX	53

## **Diagrams**

Diagram	Title	Page
1	Triple tripod model	127

## Glossary of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
A Level	Advanced Level of the General Certificate of Education
AS Level	Advanced Supplementary Level of the General Certificate of Education
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CXS	Connexions
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
EBac	English Baccalaureate
EdD	Doctorate in Education
EFA	Education Funding Agency
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification

JWT	Jobs without training
LAC	Looked after children
LAX	Local Authority X (local authority focus in study)
LLDD	Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NAS	National Apprenticeship Service
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
YDS	Youth development service
YO	Young offenders
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency
YSO	Youth Support Officer
YSS	Youth Support Service

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis draws on the voices of the young people who will be affected by the government's proposal to increase the age of participation in education and training to 18 by 2015, voices which are otherwise overlooked in policy formulation and much research. The young people most affected are those who currently do not participate in education or training after the age of 16. The thesis takes a phenomenological approach, building understanding from the young people's perspectives of their life-worlds and their reasons for not participating and exploring their response to their particular circumstances as perceived by them. The thesis explores their understanding through focus groups held in one local authority in South East England, comprising urban and rural settings.

The thesis highlights factors that impede young people's participation from their own perspectives, which fall into three categories: physical factors; social factors; and emotional factors. Nationally, the government has confirmed its commitment to raising the participation age by 2015, yet many of the government's policies are exacerbating the challenges that young people face. This study concludes that the barriers highlighted by young people in relation to physical factors; social factors; and emotional factors are neglected in the current policy drive to full participation to age 18 and this needs urgent attention if the policy is to succeed. The thesis proposes a model which is offered for future policy and practice development to give greater weight to the perspectives of young people in relation to participation as expressed in this research. There is a risk if their concerns are not addressed that young people who have experienced a failure by the system and associated damaged self esteem, are now further pathologised, and potentially criminalised, for failing to fulfil their duty to participate. Yet, a more holistic approach that addresses the broader issues highlighted by this research, could realise pathways into further education and training that redress some of the previous negative experience and restore their confidence for the future.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF THESIS**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis presents perspectives of young people on why they are not participating in education and training, and argues a case for urgent change to recognise their views and understanding in policy development if further increases in participation are to be achieved. It argues for a greater emphasis to be given to the voices of the young people who are most affected by these changes, voices that are too often overlooked or ignored in policy development. This chapter sets out a succinct background to the thesis and an overview of relevant government policy, which is expanded on in greater depth later in the thesis. The chapter also sets out the rationale for the thesis, the research questions and the structure of the thesis.

### **1.2 Policy context**

The Labour Government set a policy agenda for all young people to be participating in education or training to age 18 by 2015 in the 2008 Education and Skills Act (DCSF, 2008c), extending the current school-leaving age from the end of the academic year in which a young person becomes 16. The Labour Government drove this policy with an argument and evidence base which was largely economically driven, drawing on neoliberalist approaches from the previous Conservative Government, but with a clear commitment to social justice (DCSF, 2007). The then Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, introduced the policy by outlining the challenge that: ‘The demands of the economy, and our ambition for social justice, mean that we must do more . . . we will ensure that those who are most at risk of not participating, and therefore with the most to gain, do not fall behind’ (DCSF, 2007, p.1). The Coalition

Government, when it came to power in 2010, retained the policy for full participation, with a continuing emphasis on the economic benefits, and a stronger drive on employment based routes, such as apprenticeships (Rhodes, 2010). However, the Coalition's Secretary of State for Education placed greater emphasis on the importance of knowledge and less on social justice, to the extent that 'he expressed concerns about schools having wider social aims, which could divert them from the core task of passing on this stock of knowledge' (Hodgson and Spours, 2011a, p.209).

Whilst the economic argument for full participation has been retained, it has been contested in relation to its evidence base (Wolf, 2007; 2011). Professor Alison Wolf (2007) challenged the prevailing assumption that increasing levels of education would necessarily lead to more employment at a higher skill level with a greater monetary value to the economy and the individual. This was in stark contrast to assumptions in 2007 and it is interesting to note that Professor Alison Wolf was subsequently selected by the Coalition Government for its review of vocational education when it came to power in 2010 (Wolf, 2011). The literature review draws out the contrasting arguments in relation to compulsory participation in more detail, but also highlights that for those young people who do not participate, 'very little is actually known about their lives, their work and their priorities – particularly from the perspectives of the young people themselves' (Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008, p.185).

The need for greater understanding of young people's perspectives was acknowledged by the Labour Government, which recognised that more needed to be done to understand the characteristics and experiences of young people who were not participating in education, training or employment after the age of 16. The Labour Government therefore commissioned research firstly to explore the benefits and challenges of achieving full participation (Spielhofer et al., 2007) and secondly to develop understanding of the lives of young people who were NEET (not in education, employment or training) (Spielhofer et al, 2009). However, this

thesis raises serious questions concerning the scope and findings of this research and the degree to which it informed national policy at the time, or provided a clear basis to challenge aspects of subsequent policies. Spielhofer et al.'s (2007; 2009) reports were key bodies of research commissioned to inform national government policy and are therefore given thorough consideration in this thesis. The thesis seeks to develop greater understanding of the life-worlds of young people in particular in relation to their participation in education and training between the ages of 16 and 19: how they perceive the barriers to participation in education and training; what would help them overcome these barriers; and to what extent national policy is addressing changes that would support increased participation. The wider policy context, including reports commissioned by government to inform policy, is explored in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

### **1.3 Local authority context**

The research is focused in one local authority, a county council which is a large shire local authority, with a population of about one million, comprising a range of settings from urban to rural. The local authority has given permission for the research, on a confidential basis for the authority and the young people involved, so it is referred to throughout the thesis as Local Authority X, which is abbreviated to LAX for ease of reference. There were 28,200 young people aged 16-19 in 2010 (LAX, 2010b). The community is diverse with 120 languages being spoken and 15 per cent of young people declaring their ethnicity to be one of a range of ethnic minorities (LAX, 2009a). For this local authority, participation levels in education, training and employment of young people aged 16 to 19 are high at 96 per cent (LAX, 2010b), but despite a previously increasing trend, have remained at this level since 2006 (LAX, 2010b). The local authority is described in more detail in Section 3.4 of the thesis.

## **1.4 Personal context**

I have developed a strong interest in young people's education and training, particularly in the years following compulsory schooling, throughout my career which has spanned teaching in further education, through management of curriculum and staff development to leading the commissioning of education and training opportunities in a county council. This has led me on a journey with greater insight to young people's motivation and the challenges they face, alongside a more questioning approach to the assumptions which drive national policy for education and training for young people. I have also developed as a researching professional through the Doctorate in Education, exploring the different paradigms, methodologies and methods as I sought the approach best suited to the research.

In 2008, I was working in a large shire local authority in England, developing 14 to 19 provision and local authority support with schools, colleges and young people to increase young people's participation in education, training and employment and their levels of achievement and progression to Higher Education (HE) or employment. This position enabled me to have access to a wide range of local policy documents and associated material for the research, but it was also a requirement that I maintain anonymity for the local authority. In this research, I was conscious of being both an 'insider' and an 'outsider', reflecting the concept of a fluidity of role described as a being a 'liquid researcher' by Thompson and Gunter (2011, p.26). I was an insider through my role in the local authority, which enabled privileged access to databases and an understanding of the context, which would have taken an external researcher significant time to establish. However, this also presented risks of insufficient distance and critical appraisal of findings, as highlighted by McGinty.

A researcher who is also a member of the organisation in which their work is carried out may have the advantages of knowing intimately the systems and structures which guide the institution, and as such have a more thorough insight into the more subtle nuances of relationships and

agency that may inform and affect the data collection processes, however they may lack the much needed distance and perspective with which to critically appraise the events which they study (McGinty, 2012, p.763).

I was conscious in developing methodology and methods to be aware of these risks and build in a reflexive approach to actively consider the risks and seek to balance them wherever possible. I was also aware that I was an outsider for the young people who were the participants in the research. This was an important balance to strive to achieve, where the insider role gave access to information, but there was a need to be seen as an outsider by the participants in order to secure their confidence and open contributions to the research process (McGinty, 2012). Whilst I would be seen as an outsider, I sought to ensure that my approach respected and endeavoured to understand and communicate the young people's perspectives through careful design of methods and sensitive selection of research settings and arrangements (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Throughout I was therefore conscious of my positionality and the associated conflicts and complexities, but with the recognition that 'if engaged creatively', such conflicts and complexities, 'have the capacity to challenge beliefs, values and thought patterns' (Gold, 2002, p.223).

As a professional working with young people, grappling with insider and outsider perspectives, I was inclined to question whether compelling young people to participate in education and training, was the appropriate approach and to question whether sufficient consideration was being given to the barriers young people face and what support they would need to overcome these barriers. Through the research, I discovered conflicting arguments for and against compulsory participation. These arguments are considered in more depth in the literature review drawing on literature arguing in support of the government drive for full participation, such as Coles et al. (2010) and Hunt and McIntosh (2008), as well as literature opposing the government's drive, such as Wolf (2007; 2011). My questioning of government policy, and a passionate belief that the position of many young people and their perspectives were not being adequately considered,

led to a stirring desire to understand more fully the research behind the government proposals and the perspectives of the young people who would be most affected, those not in participation.

## **1.5 Theoretical context**

The structured approach of the Doctorate in Education, as a professional doctorate, provided the framework for me to develop a greater understanding of educational research and to pursue this research whilst remaining in my professional position. Whilst this required me to be cognisant of the potential for my professional role and any real or perceived power imbalance to influence the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, pp.151-152), I was able to draw on a wide body of professional practice and networks to support the research. The Doctorate in Education's structured approach also enabled the exploration of the proposed research in greater depth through the Research Training Portfolio, alongside developing strengths in researching skills and techniques. For example, through the data collection and data analysis sections of the Research Training Portfolio, I conducted research to improve my understanding of the perspectives of other professionals, which required designing the methodology and methods that best suited the research questions (Robson, 2002, pp.81-83). This led to an increasing focus on the perspectives of the young people who were not participating and the need for a greater understanding of their perspectives. The literature review confirmed there was a gap in current understanding of young people's perspectives (Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008), which was problematised to become the focus of the research questions.

The emerging focus on young people's perspectives required me to consider my theoretical perspective. My prior academic learning through a degree in Physics and Masters in Business Administration drew heavily on positivist and postpositivist approaches. Further, part of my research in the Research Training Portfolio had drawn together extensive analysis of quantitative data on

participation from different local authorities across England, which was significantly postpositivist in approach. The focus of this research on young people's perspectives, and the research questions in particular, required a different paradigm and my exploration led me to a phenomenological methodology within a constructivist paradigm, with focus groups as the method of data collection (Mertens, 2010, pp.16-20). The phenomenological perspective provided a clear focus on understanding the phenomenon of young people's participation in education and training from their perspectives, seeking understanding of their life-worlds and what changes from their perspectives would increase participation. This position was reached after extensive consideration of the alternatives available in relation to which was most suitable to address the research questions. The exploration of alternative approaches is described in more depth in Chapter Four. My journey reflected Crotty's (1998, pp.2-14) perspective that research rarely starts with a rigid framework, but the framework needs to be developed in response to the particular requirements of the research. From an ontological perspective, my research journey increasingly focused on developing greater understanding of the multiple realities for the participants of the factors currently holding young people back from participation and what could change these. Epistemologically, I recognised the interactive link between the researcher and the participants within the design of the methodology and methods, which are expanded on in the chapter on methodology. I was also keen to ensure the research had clear purpose and that I could articulate the purpose clearly and appropriately for all participants, mindful of the two key questions for research with young people posed by Alderson and Morrow (2011) as set out below.

Is it worth doing?

Can the investigators explain the research clearly enough so that anyone they ask to take part can give informed consent or refusal?

Alderson and Morrow (2011, p.11).

## 1.6 Research questions

I have outlined above the personal and professional interest in researching young people's perspectives on participation in education and training after compulsory schooling and this section sets out the wider rationale for this research. To date, research on participation has tended to focus more on professionals' perspectives and the exploration of their understanding of what would need to change to increase participation. Even this research leaves open to contest whether increasing participation is beneficial from the perspectives of young people or, indeed, from a wider economic context. Few studies have focused on the perspectives of young people themselves, yet their choices and actions are critical to increasing their participation in education and training. Further, government policy now proposes that participation to age 18 will become compulsory in 2015, risking pathologising, and potentially criminalising, those young people who do not take part. This creates both an urgency and a timeliness to the current research, as there is both a limited period to influence government policy and a window of opportunity for that influence to be exerted.

Having problematised the understanding of young people's perspectives on participation, the research questions have been framed to build greater understanding. The research addresses these questions through considering one local authority in England, drawing on young people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The research questions were defined as follows:

- For young people who are not participating in education and training in England in the two years after compulsory schooling, what is their understanding of why they are not participating?
- What changes, viewed through the lens of the young person's perspective, would secure their participation?
- To what extent is national policy, the evidence it is based on and its influence on practice, addressing the changes from a young person's perspective that would secure full participation?

The rationale for these questions is set out in Chapter Two, the literature review, which sets out the case for the research in response to the questions regarding purpose and clarity posed in the introduction to theoretical context (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). These questions then informed the selection of the research paradigm, which is explored below and in Chapter Four.

## **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter Two of the thesis reviews the current literature on young people's participation, drawing out areas of consensus and areas still in contention. The literature review provides a historical analysis of the developments in increasing participation in England since the end of the First World War and considers new and emerging terminology deployed in describing the groups of young people who are not participating. It is based around three key themes which emerged from the literature: influence of school experience before age 16; influence of families, peers and socio-economic factors; and influence of learning pathways and information, advice and guidance. This is followed by a critical consideration of research on young people's perspectives, resulting in the identification of gaps, with an argument for where this research can contribute. Chapter Three comprises an institution focused study, which critically describes the issues for one institution, in relation to the focus of the research study, which is the phenomenon of young people who do not participate in education and training in England in the two years immediately following compulsory education. The selected institution is the local authority in which I hold a management position and from which young people are drawn for the research. The chapter builds greater awareness of the context of the local authority in which the young people live, to assist developing understanding of their perspectives.

Chapter Four describes the approach to research methodology and methods. It sets out the argument for the research methodology in the context of alternative approaches that were considered, but rejected. It establishes the rationale for a

phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm. It describes the rationale for data collection through focus groups and an interpretative approach, drawing on grounded theory, to the data analysis. It sets out the data collection methods, including consideration of ethics, confidentiality, validity, participants and the associated administrative arrangements. This chapter also sets out some of the challenges experienced in accessing groups of young people, who in many cases were disengaged from the education system and had no clear incentive to contribute to research on participation. Chapter Four also sets out ethical considerations and the approach to analysis and presentation of data.

Chapter Five sets out the results of the data analysis, with reference to direct relevant quotations from the focus groups as supporting evidence for the emerging themes. It then outlines the results in the context of current research, both in relation to young people's perspectives where available and in relation to the perspectives of professionals working in the field. Chapter Five also considers the implications of the findings in relation to the current Coalition Government policy on increasing the age of compulsory participation. Chapter Six presents the conclusions in relation to the contribution of this research, and implications for policy and practice. The conclusion also considers limitations of the research, my personal learning through the research and areas for potential further research.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two reviews research concerning young people's participation in education and training between the ages of 16 and 18, and considers contrasting arguments and key themes. The chapter comprises a historical analysis of participation in education and training, followed by three inter-related sections that explore the findings in relation to young people's participation in education and training between the ages of 16 and 18 and the factors which influence participation. These are considered firstly through textual definitions and usage of key terms from a range of sources and an exploration of the increasing interest in the phenomenon of young people's participation in education and training. Secondly, the arguments in relation to increasing participation are explored, both in support of increased participation (Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Hunt and McIntosh, 2008) and opposing increased participation (Wolf, 2002; 2007). This includes in-depth critical consideration of Spielhofer et al.'s (2007; 2009) work, which was the key research funded by the Labour Government at the time of policy development for raising the participation age. Thirdly, findings are highlighted in relation to emerging key themes: the impact of school before the age of 16; the impact of family, peers and socio-economic factors; and the impact of learning pathways after the age of 16 and associated information, advice and guidance. Finally, the perspectives of young people themselves which emerged from the literature, including Spielhofer et al. (2009), are considered in relation to participation.

## **2.2 Scope of literature review**

The literature review focuses primarily on material relevant to the education system in England, as the proposed policy on raising the participation age applies only to England. It draws primarily on literature published since 2000, as this has greatest relevance to the current policy agenda and, as explained below, the start of the new millennium marked a shift in national thinking on the curriculum offer and associated support for young people aged 16 to 19 (Spielhofer et al., 2007).

The reviewed literature focuses on young people in the age range 14 to 19, as this range has been a national focus for much of this period (Hodgson and Spours, 2011c) and the period between the ages of 14 and 16 has been shown to be particularly pertinent to decisions on participation after the age of 16 (Pring et al., 2009). The review draws on a wide range of sources including published literature reviews, journal articles, books, reports, committee papers and published statistical data. It also draws on searches from a range of bibliographical databases. Additional manual searches were conducted of bibliographies to draw on sources not directly highlighted through automated searches. The published material was reviewed, firstly at abstract level, then the full article and key points from relevant articles were drawn into a summary table to enable themes to be identified, drawing on an established template for this purpose (Hart, 1998). These themes informed the structure of this review as outlined above, which commences with a historical perspective of the changing policy context.

## **2.3 Changing policy context**

The changing policy context is considered from a historical perspective, taking as a start point the end of the First World War and the 1918 Fisher Act, which required local authorities to establish free and obligatory Day Continuation Schools, with attendance initially to 17 and then to 18 by 1925, with attendance for a minimum of 320 hours per year (Simmons, 2008, p.64). However, few institutions were established and only one local authority, Rugby, took forward

full implementation (Simmons, 2008, p.64). The principle of free and universal secondary education for all was subsequently established in the landmark 1944 Education Act (Board of Education, 1944). Prior to this, under 90 per cent of children attended school to age 14 and fewer than 1 per cent went on to university (Ball, 2008). The aspirations of this Act were expressed in the White Paper, *Educational Reconstruction* (Board of Education, 1943), which proposed all young people would either participate in education full-time or engage in day-release to college from employment (Richardson, 2007, p.386). In practice, the aspirations were not easily achieved, and Ellen Wilkinson, the Minister for Education in Clement Attlee's government had to fight to ensure the school leaving age was raised from 14 to 15 in 1947 (Norris, 2007).

The next shift in the policy context came in 1973, when the school leaving age was raised to 16, although this was deferred as a result of public funding constraints which the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was later to reflect as a decision which was, 'difficult, not to say repugnant' (Wilson, 1971, p.484). However, the extension of education was not universally welcomed and many saw the extension as delaying young people's independence, with mixed views from teachers and opposition from disaffected youth (Standish, 2007).

More recently, revised proposals for compulsory participation in education or training to age 18 were proposed in the Green Paper, *Raising Expectations: Staying on in Education and Training Post-16* (DCSF, 2007) which stated:

The future of our society depends on the education we provide to our young people . . . never before has it been as important as it is today for every young person to achieve a good level of skill . . . the time has come to consider whether society is letting these young people down by allowing them to leave education and training for good at 16 (DCSF, 2007, p.5).

Whilst this has much in common with previous changes, it was presented with a greater urgency and a higher priority by the government (Simmons, 2008). A second distinction is the emphasis on economic competition and that competitor countries were no longer seen as developed countries such as Germany, but the developing economies of countries such as China and India (Avis, 2007). The changing policy context nationally has influenced local provision after the age of 16. For example, sixth-form colleges were developed from the previous grammar schools (Wright and Oancea, 2006), following reorganisations in response to the government requests for local authority's to plan for comprehensive reorganisation in 1965, followed by legislation through the Education Act 1976 (DES, 1976), which was subsequently repealed in 1977 (Ball, 2009, p.70). This is particularly evident in the local authority which is considered in the Institution Focused Study, where six of the seven sixth-form colleges were developed from previous grammar schools.

The development of policy in the 14 to 19 sector has become more centralised over the last 30 years, with a decline in the influence of professionals and local government and an increase in the influence of Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations (quangos) (Pring et al., 2009). This trend has been sustained under both Conservative and Labour governments and, more recently, under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition. The recent development of policy has placed a greater emphasis on choice and opportunity (Roberts, 2009), which is particularly evident in the Green Paper, *14-19 Education: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* (DfES, 2002), which first described the 14 to 19 age range as a distinct sector. This paper also marked a further shift in the policy language from terms such as education and lifelong learning to the language of skills, competitiveness and performance, with a greater emphasis on economic benefits alongside the wider social benefits of education (Pring et al., 2009). There was an emphasis on neoliberal policies, with 'skills seen as essential to improving economic competitiveness and helping to promote social inclusion' (Hodgson and Spours, 2011c, p.6). This emphasis on skills continued through the 14 to 19 White Paper, *Education and Skills* (DfES, 2005), the FE White Paper,

*Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES, 2006) and the Green Paper, *Raising Expectations: Staying On in Education and Training Post-16* (DfES, 2007a), with the assumption that the development of skills would lead to employment and greater social inclusion (Hodgson, Spours and Steer, 2008). However, Wolf questioned this linkage and the wider argument for a compulsory increase in the participation age (Wolf, 2002; 2007). These arguments are explored more fully in Section 2.4. The Coalition Government, following the election in 2010, confirmed its commitment to the policy of raising the participation age. The Coalition Government's policies however demonstrated a further shift towards an emphasis on the importance of skills and far less weight was placed on the broader social inclusion agenda (Hodgson and Spours, 2011a).

## **2.4 Conceptions of key terms**

The research in this field draws on key terms in developing arguments but many of these have themselves emerged only recently and there are differences in conception. A recently developed key term is that of 'NEET', an acronym for young people who are classified as not in employment, education or training. This term first emerged as a phrase in the *Bridging the Gap Report* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Subsequently, it has been formally recorded as a recognised term in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University, 2010). However, this term is not consistently understood or applied within the research or wider publications. For example, the government definition specifically references young people in the age group 16 to 18 who are classified as NEET at any time (DfES, 2007b), but many researchers take a different interpretation, such as only including young people who are classified as NEET for at least six months (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). Interestingly, the term NEET or similar terms have been developed in other countries, such as Japan demonstrating the international interest in this group (Yuki, Asao and Kazutomo, 2006). However, more recently the term in Japan has been extended to include people up to the age of 34 (Toivonen, 2011).

The term 'participation' is key to this research and it is important that there is clarity of understanding of this term and consistency in its deployment. At its simplest, to participate is defined in the *OED* as 'to have a share or to take part in something' (Oxford University, 2010). However, it is important to clarify what qualifies for participation in relation to the nature and the period of provision. This is important as a starting point in addressing the research questions on understanding the levels of participation, what holds young people back from participating and what would support their participation. For the purpose of raising the participation age, government defines participation as: being in full-time education in school, college or home education; being in work based learning, such as an apprenticeship; or part-time education or training if employed, self-employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours per week with accredited training (DCSF, 2007). The government proposals are that participation would be required to the end of the academic year in which a young person is 17 by 2013, and then to age 18 by 2015 (DCSF, 2007). However, questions have been raised as to whether this definition is too narrow and whether it should include other positive activities, such as a recognition of employment-based training which is either not accredited or accredited below the levels currently recognised (Wolf, 2007). Alternative approaches are also proposed, such as whether young people should be given an entitlement to two years' full time education or training or equivalent, which could then be taken at any point in their lives (Wolf, 2007). For the purpose of this research, the government definition of participation is taken as the focus, although the study remained open to wider interpretations, particularly when the views of young people themselves are sought. The rationale for taking the government definition of participation in this thesis is that it is a widely accepted definition and this approach supports the potential future influence of the thesis on national and local policy and practice.

Other terms, which are widely deployed in research in this field, are yet to be recognised by the *OED* and also remain open to different interpretation and application. There are several terms which have been developed to recognise the group who are in employment, but who were not engaged in education or training

that would lead to a recognised qualification. Under the legislation for raising of the participation age (DfES, 2007a), this group would be required to undertake a recognised qualification part-time alongside employment. Terms for this group which are used variously are Employment Without Training (EWT) (Centre for Social Justice, 2009) and Jobs Without Training (JWT) (Spielhofer et al., 2009). The range of terms employed reflect the developing nature of research and wider publications in this field. Ultimately, as was the case for NEET, a single term would be expected to be the accepted term which in due course may be included in the *OED* as part of the developing language in this field. Even the definitions of accepted terms, however, remain subject to change as exemplified by the government announcement in April 2011 that the technical NEET definition would be extended beyond young people's nineteenth birthday to include young people to the end of the academic year in which they become 19, which effectively expanded the group by some 20 per cent. For this literature review, each term is carefully considered in its context and the meaning assigned by the author at the time.

## **2.5 The developing arguments in relation to increasing participation**

The section on the changing policy context outlined developing national policy which has steadily increased the age of participation, with proposals to increase the age of participation further to 17 in 2013 and to 18 in 2015 (DfES, 2007a). The brief policy context in the introduction highlighted arguments in relation to economic competitiveness and the associated need for higher levels of skills in the future workforce (DfES, 2007a). Here, I review these arguments in more detail.

Whilst Hunt and McIntosh (2008) argue that increasing participation is the key to future economic competitiveness, Wolf (2007) argues that increasing participation has the reverse effect. The argument of Hunt and McIntosh (2008) is based on research demonstrating the link between skill levels and future earnings, with the

assumption that further increases in skill levels would result in an associated increase in earnings for the individual and for the economy as a whole. Hunt and McIntosh demonstrate that the 'central estimate of the additional benefits of the raising participation policy is £2.4 billion, with a range between the very worst and best case scenarios being £0.3 billion to £5.4 billion' (Hunt and McIntosh, 2008, p.21). A further argument is made that as the nature of work changes and more flexible skills are needed, that a higher level of skill achieved at an earlier stage yields greater flexibility in future employment (Hunt and McIntosh, 2008). Additionally, there are potential savings identified as the costs of a young person being in the category of NEET are avoided. These costs are estimated as £12 billion to £32 billion, comprising benefit payments and tax losses, with a further £21 billion to £32 billion reflecting lost productivity and additional welfare and associated costs (Coles et al., 2010). These arguments are drawn on significantly to support the government's policy drive for increased participation (DfES, 2007a).

In contrast, Wolf (2007) argues that increased participation has no significant impact on economic competitiveness and resources would be better deployed elsewhere. The argument is based on a challenge to the assumption that more highly skilled people would lead to more highly rewarded employment. If, however, this link does not hold, then the economic argument for increased participation would fall. The government has identified wider arguments in support of increasing participation, such as increased economic mobility, improved health, reduced teenage pregnancy and reduced crime (Audit Commission, 2010). However, Simmons (2008) argues that the government is primarily interested in the economy and, 'social justice is subordinated to the needs of the economy. . . Rather than increasing social justice, extending the age of compulsory participation may simply serve to increase social class inequalities' (Simmons, 2008, p.434). There is also a shift in emphasis from the responsibility for participation resting with the state, to responsibility for participation resting with the individual (Corney, 2009). This shift reflects an increasing emphasis on

neoliberalism, where, 'young people have to chase credentials to gain security in future education or workplaces' (Lakes and Carter, 2011, p.107).

Fevre, Rees and Gorard (1999) argue, however, that research on participation in post-compulsory participation in education and training is focused to too great an extent on the development of economic capital. This argument builds upon Bourdieu's (1986) concept of three 'fundamental guises' of capital (p.243): social capital; economic capital; and cultural capital. Fevre, Rees and Gorard's (1999) argument postulates that there are significant limitations in the prevailing view that 'people invest the time and effort (and sometimes money) in the education and training that their individual utility functions suggest they should' (p.118). The key criticism is that this 'ignored the historical, geographical, cultural and social factors which influence the disposition of various groups towards education and training' (p.118), with an argument for a more holistic approach, reflecting Bourdieu's model.

Bourdieu's concept of human capital is important to this thesis and is drawn on in the findings to support consideration of young people's views and their development into a model, which is offered for wider application. The application of Bourdieu's model of human capital to this field is extended by Lauder et al. (1992) who draw on Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', finding that 'The career decisions of the young people we interviewed can only be understood in terms of their own life histories, wherein habitus had evolved through interaction with significant others within the social structure and culture in which the subject has lived and is living' (p.148). Hodkinson (1998) extends this argument to a criticism of the over-reliance on individualism and the potential of natural choice in national policy. He develops his argument based on a study of ten young people's career choices and pathways, viewed through the lens of Bourdieu's consideration of capital and concludes that there are more significant challenges young people face and that there is 'futility about using notions of choice' without 'sophisticated strategies, developed with an understanding of the complex realities. . . ' (p.103).

## **2.6 Impact of school experience before the age of 16 on participation after age 16**

Much of the research on participation in education and training of young people aged 16 to 19 refers to schools as having an influence on participation (Coles et al., 2002; Spielhofer et al., 2009). Whilst Gorard and Smith (2007) argue that the impact of school on participation is marginal compared to other factors, the majority of researchers, such as Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2007) argue that school is key to participation after the age of 16 and should therefore be the main focus of future policy change. Gorard and Smith's (2007) argument is based on a review of evidence from other studies, organised around the life-course of a young person from birth to decisions on whether to participate in education or training after the age of 16. They find that young people from particular families are significantly less likely to continue in education and training after the age of 16. The groups of families they identified were those from lower socio-economic groups, with lower incomes, unemployment, disabilities, ex-offenders and those with lower literacy skills or negative attitudes to institutional learning. They extend this consideration of barriers to include cost, both of education and associated costs such as transport, and the greater impact of costs on lower income groups. Recent changes, such as the withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which increased participation, have only exacerbated the disproportional impact of cost on lower income groups, despite the introduction of the new Bursary, which offers only a fraction of the support previously available (Rennison et al., 2005). Gorard and Smith (2007) also highlight the availability of time as disadvantaging particular groups, such as those with caring responsibilities, again it is argued with a disproportionate impact on those in lower socio-economic groups.

Gorard and Smith (2007) build on the significance of the family and socio-economic background to develop the argument that the role of schools and other educational institutions in increasing participation at age 16 is marginal and 'policy levers to widen participation must be applied elsewhere' (Gorard and

Smith, 2007, p.141). Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2007), however, argue that the ethos of schools is a very powerful influence on participation after the age of 16. This argument is based on a series of qualitative interviews in 24 schools, drawing together focus groups of young people in years ten, eleven and twelve (ages 14-15, 15-16 and 16-17 respectively), as well as interviews with school staff and a postal survey of parents. In particular, four school based factors are found to be significant in influencing future decisions whether to participate. These four factors are: whether the school has a sixth form; the characteristics of school leadership; school ethos and values; and the socio-economic status of the school's catchment area. The argument for the significant influence of school is also supported by Foskett and Hesketh (1997), who consider the impact on young people's choices. These studies lead to the influence of school being highlighted as a significant factor in participation.

More specific aspects of the school experience, which influence participation after the age of 16 are highlighted in the published research, such as prior school attainment (Birdwell, Grist and Margo, 2011; Steer, 2000); relationships with teachers and negative views of school (Coles et al., 2002; Golden et al., 2002; Sims et al., 2001; Spielhofer et al., 2009); poor school attendance and incidences of bullying (Spielhofer et al., 2009; Stone, Cotton and Thomas, 2000); aspirations before the age of 16 (Stehlik, 2010); and pathways, particularly vocational options after school (Zepke, Isaacs and Leach, 2009). The arguments from these more specific aspects are presented below.

Birdwell, Grist and Margo (2011) develop the more specific case that prior attainment at school influences decisions to participate after the age of 16. This is supported by Gibbons and Chevalier (2008), Higham and Yeomans (2007) and Atkins (2008), who highlight the relationship between prior lower attainment and lower rates of progression after the age of 16. This link does not hold for all groups of young people, however, and Payne (2001) demonstrates that for certain ethnic groups, their progression after compulsory schooling is higher than those

from the ethnic group of white young people, even though the performance at GCSE is lower. However, whilst it is important to recognise these differences and to seek to understand them, the link between prior attainment and progression to further education holds in the majority of cases and is further strengthened by Fergusson (2004), who discovered through a survey of 800 young people that those with lower levels of educational achievement are much less likely to participate on an ongoing basis in education and training after compulsory schooling. Further, Fergusson (2004) found that not only are these young people less likely to progress to further education and training, but for those who did progress, they are much more susceptible to non-completion of the course. Additionally, many of these young people experience multiple movements between providers, non-completion of courses and not achieving recognised qualifications.

A further aspect of school experience influencing participation is relationships with teachers (Barnardo's, 2007; Golden et al., 2002). Barnardo's (2007) highlights the difficulties experienced by young people in progression after compulsory schooling where those young people consider that they are seen as a failure by their teachers. Young people themselves highlight in this study that key aspects of the relationship for them are not being treated with respect, being treated like a child and not being recognised as an individual (Barnardo's, 2007). A related factor is wider negative views of the school or curriculum which is highlighted by Spielhofer et al. (2009), who identifies for some young people that this is rooted in issues for them which first emerged at primary school or in the transition from primary to secondary school. Additionally, some young people find the curriculum to be irrelevant to their current needs and lifestyle (Archer et al., 2005).

Young people's disengagement could in turn result in poor school attendance and incidences of bullying, although these could also be a cause of disengagement (Spielhofer et al., 2009; Stone, Cotton and Thomas, 2000). Young people with

low attendance are seven times more likely to be categorised as NEET at 16 than other young people (DCSF, 2008d). Young people who have been bullied are also more likely to become categorised as NEET (Stone, Cotton and Thomas, 2000). However, it should be noted that not all young people who are categorised as NEET have low attendance or report being bullied. Analysis shows that, while these factors are more prevalent in young people who have been categorised as NEET for long periods, it is less significant for those who were categorised as NEET for shorter periods so it is important to exercise caution in any generalisations (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

The aspirations of young people before the age of 16 in school are significant in influencing young people's decisions on progression after the age of 16 (Stehlik, 2010). However, there are contrasting views as to whether school is the primary influence on their aspirations (Foskett, Dyke and Maringe, 2008; Spielhofer et al., 2007; Thomas and Webber, 2009) or whether the aspirations are more influenced by factors outside school (Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Gorard and Smith, 2007; Morrison, 2008). Pathways at school before the age of 16 are shown to influence choices on participation after the age of 16 (Zepke, Isaacs and Leach, 2009). In particular, Coles et al. (2002) and Steer (2000) highlight the detrimental impact on progression of a curriculum offer at school which young people find insufficiently vocational or simply not perceived to be relevant to their needs. Wolf (2007; 2011) takes this argument further as part of the case for not extending compulsory participation.

In summary, there are differing arguments, but the weight of the argument, supported by direct research drawing on young people's views, highlights the importance of school experience before the age of 16, both from the detrimental impact of a negative experience, but also importantly the potential impact of a positive school experience (Furlong, 2005). There is a need for caution in relation to any generalisations on the impact of school based factors, particularly for the

group who are categorised as NEET temporarily for whom fewer studies have been conducted (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

## **2.7 Impact of family, peers and socio-economic factors**

A key theme is the influence of family, peers and socio-economic background (Atherton et al., 2009; Morrison, 2008; Tieben and Wolbers, 2010; Wayne and Webber, 2001). Atherton et al. (2009) find that young people identified parents and carers as the most influential group from a range of potential factors in an influence ladder – other highly ranked factors are their plans for future career, school, teachers and friends. Further discussions with the young people on the highest ranked factor of parents and carers reveal that it is not a case of parents telling the young people what to do or that young people are pursuing the same options as their parents/carers, but it is the support and backing of their parents that is seen as significant. In some cases, for young people in year 7, an older sibling is more influential than the parents/carers (Atherton et al., 2009). The factors offered to young people in Atherton et al.'s (2009) research did not, however, include access to funding and transport, which other studies show to be significant in increasing participation (Maguire, 2008). In particular, Maguire (2008) demonstrates a reduction of 2.4 per cent in the group categorised as NEET and increased retention as a result of the introduction of EMA. However, Maguire acknowledges that, 'giving young people financial support is only one piece of the jigsaw' (2008, p.214) and that there is a need to engage with the wider socio-economic factors and influences that impact on participation.

Spielhofer et al. (2007) identify a range of characteristics, which are more likely to be found in the population of young people categorised as NEET. These factors are: lower socio-economic background; parents/carers with low qualification levels, aspirations and awareness of options after compulsory schooling; low levels of career exploration skills and self-awareness; not enjoying school, with a history of truancy and or exclusion; achieving no or very low qualifications at

school; being male; being of white ethnic origin; teenage pregnancy and parenthood; being homeless; having a disability; having mental health problems; having misused drugs or alcohol; and being a young offender (Spielhofer et al., 2007, p.18).

These factors support the importance of family, peers and socio-economic factors, which is the focus of this section, together with schooling which is addressed in the previous section. Studies highlight financial factors as significant in young people not completing programmes of learning. Young people themselves highlight difficulties coping with housing rents, utility bills and food, with some reporting homelessness as a particularly acute challenge (Sims et al., 2001). The impact of family is particularly evident for those young people for whom family relationships break down and they are then taken into care by the local authority (Barnardo's, 2007).

Peer influences have been shown to be influential (Furlong, 2005), particularly those of friends (Wayne and Webber, 2001). There is a more significant effect of peer influence among males compared to females (Webber and Walton, 2006). Archer et al. (2005) discovered a particular aspect of peer pressure experienced by some boys in some environments where the boys reported pressure to demonstrate an antipathy to school and learning in general in order to secure the respect of their peers. The influence of family, peers and socio-economic background is the second theme emerging from the literature review. The analysis now considers the third theme.

## **2.8 Impact of provision after age 16, employment opportunities and information, advice and guidance**

Breadth of opportunities and progression pathways from compulsory schooling are important to young people's participation after school (Bivand, 2004; Kewin et al., 2009; Pring et al., 2009; Spielhofer et al., 2009). There is a need for a range of curriculum pathways, which take account of different needs and abilities and reflect different economic and social contexts (Mangan, Adnett and Davies, 2001; Pring et al., 2009). Flexibility in programmes is highlighted, including start times, programme activities and locations, to meet the needs of different groups in different localities (Kewin et al., 2009). Apprenticeships are highlighted as a work-based route, with vocational training that offers a valuable alternative route (Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch, 2010; Fuller and Unwin, 2009). Quality of provision is highlighted as important, particularly for retention (Bivand, 2004; Spielhofer et al., 2009). However, the complexity of retention is also highlighted. Bivand (2004) identifies that some providers who took on more challenging learners, with multiple disadvantages, then experienced lower retention, which may reflect the greater challenges faced by the learners rather than being a reflection of the quality of the young person's experience on the programme (Bivand, 2004).

Employment opportunities provide important pathways for young people from age 16, both with informal training and formal training such as apprenticeships. Pring et al. (2009, p.137) provided a helpful summary of the policy goals 'for which the labour market is expected to act as the motor', from which extracts are presented in the table on the next page:

<b>Policy goals for which the labour market is expected to be the motor</b>
Far higher levels of achievement of Level 2 (General Certificate of Education (GCSEs) and/or diplomas at age 16
Far higher levels of post-compulsory participation, with the aim of reaching 90 per cent in the near future
Far higher levels of achievement at Levels 2 and 3 (A-Levels, diplomas and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at age 18/19
Diplomas (at Levels 2 and 3) to have achieved parity of esteem with GCSEs and A-Levels, in terms both of entry into higher education (HE) and of the esteem with which they are held with employers, reflected in the size of the wage premiums they are willing to offer to those who hold them
Diplomas (at Levels 2 and 3) to have achieved parity of esteem with GCSEs and A-Levels, in terms both of entry into higher education (HE) and of the esteem with which they are held with employers, reflected in the size of the wage premiums they are willing to offer to those who hold them
Provision of high quality work experience to all youngsters, and the embedding of such provision within the diplomas
Expanded, vibrant and high quality apprenticeship system, as the sole means of acquiring vocational qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds;
End to jobs without formalised, certified training for young people under the age of 18 as part of the move to raising the compulsory learning age to 18

**Table 1: Policy goals for which the labour market is expected to be the motor**

(Table comprised from points highlighted by Pring et al., 2009, p.134)

These are high expectations for any sector to act as the motor, but for employers, this is compounded by the pace of change in the sector for which Hodgson and

Spours (2008) argue 'there is no settled view about the way forward in either the short or the longer term' (Hodgson and Spours, 2008, p.115). This is demonstrated by the shifts in policy and expectations on employers even since Pring et al.'s work (2009). For example, diplomas were subsequently made optional rather than a key part of the 14 to 19 Entitlement (Hodgson and Spours, 2011d). The complexity of policy development and lack of clear direction is referred to as 'turbulence masquerading as change' by Lumby and Foskett (2007, p.86). Lumby and Foskett argue the source of this was a tension in the then Labour Government policy between a dominant neoliberal approach and subordinate social democratic approach. The neoliberal approach is reflected in the restructuring of the public sector through privatisation and competition, with an emphasis on performance management and auditing. The social democratic approach, however, is demonstrated through promoting increased expenditure on education and the drive to reduce the number of young people who are classified as being NEET. Further shifts in policy are occurring, as the Coalition Government implements its policies and seeks to reduce public expenditure in response to the economic downturn. This is resulting in further changes for employers as the emphasis on diplomas has been reduced further (Hodgson and Spours, 2011d) and requirements for work experience at Key Stage 4 withdrawn (Wolf, 2011). However, the expectations on the sector remain high as government still expects all employers to provide accredited training when employing young people aged 16 to 18 (DfES, 2007a) and anticipates that much of the remaining increase in participation would comprise growth in apprenticeships.

There is therefore a significant tension as government policy rests on contributions by employers in providing increased employment opportunities with training for young people, but employers find the policy shifts confusing and are providing fewer opportunities as experienced by young people through the focus groups in this research. The reduction in opportunities for young people in the recession is proportionately larger than for the population as a whole and in North America, the reduction in employment for young people is reported as higher than the total reduction in employment in the Great Depression (Gandel, 2010).

Young people's pathways from school to further education or employment are inter-related with their access to information, advice and guidance, with young people who are classified as NEET less likely to receive advice or guidance at school than those in further education or training (Maguire and Rennison, 2005). For young people who achieve less well than they expected at age 16, many become classified as NEET because of a lack of awareness of alternative options (EdComms, 2007). Information, advice and guidance are also important for a successful transition for those young people moving into employment with training at 16 (Cartmel, 2000; Furlong, 2006). Information, advice and guidance while young people are at school are therefore important and good decision making on options after compulsory schooling is linked to the wider strengths in school of good curriculum management, good student support and strong leadership (Blenkinsop et al., 2006).

The quality and timing of information, advice and guidance is critical, with evidence that a generalised approach without a focus on individual needs is part of the cause of unsuccessful transitions to further education and training (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). There are case studies of programmes where early leavers describe the course not meeting their expectations as a key factor in their withdrawal from the course (Simm, Page and Miller, 2007). In summary, it is important to have flexible and relevant learning pathways, with high quality provision supported by timely information, advice and guidance (Lumby and Foskett, 2005). These factors are shown to be important not just to initial participation but, critically, to retention and progression. The literature review now considers emerging findings in relation to the perspectives of young people themselves.

## **2.9 Young people's perspectives on participation**

Whilst there is considerable literature on young people's perspectives on education and training after compulsory schooling, recent writings highlight the lack of research into the perspectives of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not participating in education and training, with particular emphasis on the group who are in JWT (Spielhofer et al., 2007). This argument is further extended by Quinn, Lawy and Diment (2008) who concluded there was a 'dearth of current qualitative analysis about young people in Jobs Without Training' (2008, p.193). The research to date on young people who are classified as NEET highlights that this is not a homogeneous group of young people, but comprises a collection of groups: some with low prior attainment but some with high attainment; some lacking future aspirations but some with clear aspirations; and some having been categorised as NEET for a long periods whilst others are only briefly in this group before moving onto another course or job (Anderson et al., 2006; Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008). There is more literature available to date on young people categorised as NEET than young people categorised as JWT, with an acknowledgement that there is a particular shortfall in published evidence of information on those categorised as JWT, even in relation to their 'qualifications, ethnicity or socio-economic backgrounds' (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.7).

Some young people with particular characteristics demonstrate a greater propensity to be classified as NEET and these factors are: low prior attainment; history of poor attendance; prior school exclusion; lower socio-economic background; male; white; low self-awareness; and with parents/carers with low qualification levels, aspirations and low awareness education and training options after compulsory schooling (Spielhofer et al., 2007). Whilst Spielhofer et al. (2007) highlight the link to disadvantage and external circumstances, for some young people there is an active choice to be in the NEET category, although often their motives are not well understood (Bivand, 2004).

There are different groups of young people within the population of young people categorised as NEET. Different approaches have been taken to the segmentation of this group with categorisation such as: young people who are open to learning; young people who are sustained in the NEET category; and young people who are undecided. Spielhofer et al. (2009) finds these groupings to hold in practice through interviews with young people, but finds very different motivations and experiences within these groups. These differences are seen to influence both the likelihood of them re-engaging in education or training and the types of education or training they are willing to engage in (Spielhofer et al., 2009). Themes highlighted by young people are: negative experiences of school; incomplete or biased information, advice and guidance; qualifications seen as lacking value; and desire to secure employment rather than continue education or training, but often finding employment difficult to secure without experience (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

Recent research on the JWT group tends to focus more specifically on young people's attitudes to education and training rather than consider holistically the underlying reasons why young people are not participating. Maguire (2008) identifies three sub-groups of young people in JWT: those who choose to take a year out with the intention to return to education or training; those who make a deliberate career choice, having started work with a company they perceive to offer progression opportunities (although not formal training); and those who take occasional temporary work, typically low skilled and low paid. Anderson et al. (2006) further identify that young people in JWT generally have a positive view of training, which is supported by Maguire's (2008) findings that the majority of young people are in the first two of the three categories above. This is contrasted by Quinn, Lawy and Diment (2008), however, who find that there is some resistance to wider learning with over a quarter of young people in JWT disinclined to take further education and training unless offered by their employer and only four per cent inclined to take a recognised formal education or training course. In conclusion, themes which emerge from views of young people identified in the research to date are: negative prior experiences of education;

weaknesses in information, advice and guidance; need for experience of work; access to financial support for transport and other essential items, such as rent and food and; need for more flexible provision. A further key finding, however, is that much of the research highlights the need for further understanding of this group, what their perspectives are on their situation and what would support their future participation (Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008). Such understanding will be key to achieving the government's requirement for full participation.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the literature review identifies a growing body of research and wider publications, with a developing consistency in the understanding and application of key terms and an emerging consensus on the key factors relevant to young people's participation. This review highlights the emerging themes at this point as: the impact of school; the impact of family, peers and socio-economic factors; and the impact of education and training provision after compulsory schooling and associated information, advice and guidance. The review also identifies emerging themes from the young people themselves as: negative prior experiences of education; weaknesses in information, advice and guidance; need for experience of work; access to financial support for transport and other essential items; and need for more flexible provision. The perspectives of young people have much in common with the wider analysis, particularly for impact of school; financial support; and information, advice and guidance. However, it is interesting that the themes of the family; peer influence; and education and training provision after compulsory schooling are not identified through the studies considered of young people's views. These studies though acknowledge their limitations and the need for further research on the these young people's perspectives and how they could be encouraged to participate in the future.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **INSTITUTION FOCUSED STUDY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically describes issues for the institution, which is the focus for this research, a local authority in England, in relation to the phenomenon of young people who do not participate in education and training in the two years immediately following compulsory education. The study draws on research highlighted in the literature review and both national and institution based policies, plans and practice to identify the issues for the authority. The study draws out what is known about the young people who have not participated and highlights where there are gaps in this knowledge and understanding. It was completed in 2010-11, with in-depth analysis of the data at that time, within the then national context of the recently formed Coalition Government. This was a critical time for the identification of these issues for LAX, as local policies and practice were developed in readiness for the national requirement for all young people to participate in education or training to age 17 in 2013 and to age 18 by 2015 (DCSF, 2007). The authority has the statutory duty to secure education and training for young people aged 16 to 18 and a responsibility to secure full participation, so these issues would need to be identified and addressed in readiness for young people then in Year 9 to participate to age 17 in 2013 and for young people then in year 8 to participate to age 18 in 2015 (DCSF, 2008d).

### **3.2 Purpose of the Institution Focused Study**

This chapter critically explores the issues for LAX in relation to changing government legislation for young people's education and training after compulsory schooling. The study seeks to develop understanding of those issues and highlight where there are gaps in understanding to inform further enquiry in

order to develop enhanced understanding and ultimately effect improvements in practice (Robson, 2002). In relation to the focus, the study draws out what is already known and identifies gaps in relation to what is yet to be known, for LAX and nationally, about key factors such as the numbers of young people not participating in the age range 16 to 18, issues for LAX in relation to the cohort and its characteristics, and issues relating to national and local inter-relationships in planning and policy. The study is set in the context of an increasing local and national profile for young people's participation in education, training and employment, to the extent that nationally legislation had been passed to require young people to participate in education or training (DCSF, 2008c), and locally in LAX the Leader of the Council has identified an aspiration for all young people to be in education, training or employment (LAX, 2010g). In particular, it considers issues for LAX arising from the local and national policy contexts and the inter-relationship in Section 3.5, building on the longer term historical perspective in Section 2.1.

The local policy, planning and practice of LAX are critically considered in relation to the key themes of centralism versus localism (Section 3.5.1), collaboration versus competition (Section 3.5.2), compulsion versus choice (Section 3.5.3) and universality versus personalisation (Section 3.5.4). The influence on LAX of employers and the labour market is critically considered in Section 3.6. The characteristics of those young people who are not participating in LAX are identified and the policy, planning and practice of LAX is critically considered with specific reference to these groups (Section 3.7). An analysis is undertaken of the characteristics of young people not participating in LAX and nationally, by considering recognised groups: young people who are classified as NEET; young people who are classified as JWT; and those whose current status is not known (Spielhofer et al., 2007). The underlying reasons behind their non-participation are then explored within a framework with three recognised themes: education/learning disadvantage (Section 3.7.1); gender, ethnicity and personal circumstances (Section 3.7.2); and structural factors (Section 3.7.3) (Spielhofer et al., 2009). Within this framework, three specific groups in LAX are considered in

more detail – learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD), looked after children and children leaving care (LAC) and young offenders (YO). These groups are selected as they are a priority highlighted in the local authority's needs analysis (LAX, 2010b) and are identified nationally as among those more likely to be categorised as NEET (Coles et al., 2002). Finally, the perspectives of young people themselves, in LAX and nationally, are considered (Section 3.8), although this highlights a relative lack of understanding in research to date both nationally (Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008) and locally in LAX (LAX, 2010b).

The reasons for conducting this study at this time are therefore to develop greater understanding of the issues for LAX in developing local plans, policies and practice to support the national changes in the raising of the participation age. Further, the research is intended to support LAX in its influence on the developing national direction in relation to this significant policy change.

### **3.3 Scope of the Institution Focused Study**

In relation to scope of the Institution Focused Study, it is important to set boundaries on the age range to be considered. For the purpose of this study, the age range 14 to 19 is taken as scope, which is set in national government policy as the key age range to consider in the promotion of increased participation in the two years following compulsory schooling (DfES, 2003). The two years, from 14 to 16, are significant in influencing choices at 16 and destinations from 16 to 19 and beyond (Pring et al., 2009). In LAX, this age range is a focus for local policy development and LAX has developed specific plans for this age range from 2005 onwards (LAX, 2005; 2008; 2010a). There is, therefore, a range of sources of associated information to inform the study across this age range. Within this age range, there is a particular focus on young people aged 16 to 19 who have not chosen to stay in education or training after compulsory education.

The analysis draws on a range of data sources nationally and locally, such as key policy and planning documents, progress reviews, external inspection reports, self-assessments and recent engagement work with young people. The study was conducted in 2010-11 and reflects national and local policy and practice at that time. This was a time of significant change in education as the new Coalition Government took office in 2010 and had already set out changes in education through key planning and policy documents (DfE, 2010b). However, the proposed raising of the participation age had been confirmed as standing policy for implementation in 2013 and 2015, as originally set in place by the previous Labour Government (DCSF, 2008c). The nature of implementation was likely however to be different and key changes in the educational opportunities for young people aged 14 to 19 had already been highlighted in the recent Wolf report and the government response (DfE, 2011a; Wolf, 2011). These changes are included and addressed within the thesis.

### **3.4 Selected Local Authority**

LAX is a large authority with urban, sub-urban and rural environments, areas of ethnic diversity and a range of education and training providers for young people aged 16 to 19, comprising schools, general further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and private training providers. This section sets out the knowledge on levels of participation in education and training of young people aged 16 to 19 at the time of the study. The section draws together data on those who are not participating, and identifies the distribution of this cohort between young people who are categorised as NEET, JWT and not known. Comparisons are made with other local authorities and the national position and both seasonal variations and longer term trends are considered. The local partnership structures between providers are also considered in relation to their influence on participation, providers and young people.

### 3.4.1 Context of Selected Local Authority

The local authority has a population of just over one million and there are 68,100 14 to 19 year olds (LAX, 2010b). The focus of this study is particularly on the two years following compulsory education, comprising 28,200 young people aged 16 to 19 in 2010, although this is forecast to decline to 26,300 by 2018, before increasing to 31,300 in 2025 (LAX, 2010b). LAX is a two-tier authority area, comprising a county council and 11 districts and boroughs.

Fifteen per cent of the school population are from ethnic minorities, with over 120 different languages being spoken (LAX, 2009a). Provision of education and training for young people aged 16 to 18 is through 32 schools with sixth forms with 6,909 learners; nine colleges (five sixth-form colleges and four general further education colleges) with 15,114 learners; and a further 2,498 young people starting apprenticeships and 731 on entry to employment programmes. The local authority also places young people with complex levels of learning difficulty or disability in independent specialist colleges. In 2009-10, 128 learners were in independent specialist colleges, of which 96 were in residential provision. The trends for the last three years are shown in the table below (YPLA, 2011b).

<b>Provider</b>	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>
General further education colleges	7,636	8,555	8,472
Sixth-form colleges	6,190	6,630	6,642
School sixth forms	6,422	6,609	6,909
Private training providers	369	383	731
Apprenticeships	2,519	2,291	2,498
Independent specialist colleges	84	96	128
Total	23,220	24,564	25,252

**Table 2: Numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 in education or training by sector in selected local authority (YPLA, 2011b)**

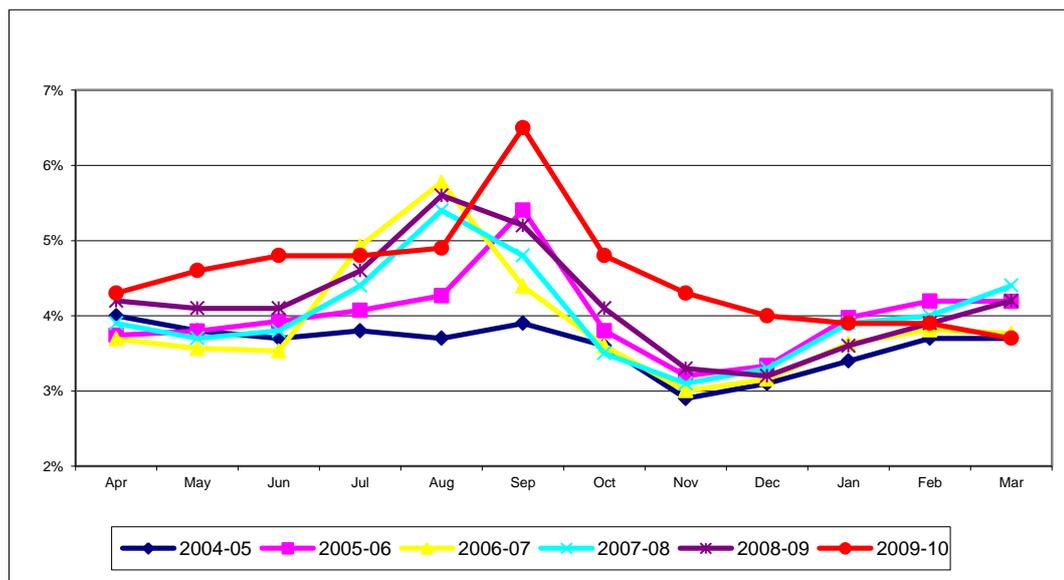
Apprenticeships are seen as a key potential growth area to support the raising of the participation age (DCSF, 2007), but despite recent growth, the proportion of young people taking apprenticeships in LAX is the lowest in the south east of England (NAS, 2010), which is possibly linked to the high level of service-based

industries and relatively low level of manufacturing. LAX has high levels of participation and relatively low levels of young people whose status is NEET, JWT and not known (YPLA, 2011a; 2011b). An issue for LAX is, however, that as participation is high, the proportion of young people whose status is JWT or not known is higher compared to young people who are categorised as NEET (YPLA, 2011b). The numbers of young people in each of the categories of NEET, JWT and not known are shown in the table below (LAX, 2010c).

	Number of young people	Percentage of young
NEET	993	3.5
JWT	2,171	7.7
Not known	1,135	4.0
Total	4,299	15.2

**Table 3: Numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 who are NEET, JWT or Not known in LAX (LAX 2010c)**

A further issue for LAX is the seasonal variation in the numbers of young people classified as NEET, as shown in Chart 1 below for the period from 2004 to 2010. This showed a seasonal peak in September each year, when new school leavers are registered as NEET if they have not secured a place in education, training or employment (LAX 2009c). An issue for LAX is that the number of young people classified as NEET has not decreased over that period (LAX, 2009c) and the seasonal peak in September 2010 is the highest across to date.



**Chart 1: Percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are classified as NEET from 2004-5 to 2009-10 (LAX, 2009c)**

### **3.4.2 Partnership structures in the Selected Local Authority**

LAX established a 14 to 19 Partnership in 2004 to plan for education and training across the age range 14 to 19 and to promote smooth transition for young people between providers, particularly for vulnerable groups where such support could be instrumental in their successful progression (Canduela et al., 2010). This reflects national policy direction (DfES, 2003), although LAX was not selected as one of the lead local authorities, termed Pathfinders by DfES, to drive forward the changes in *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* (DfES, 2003), including formation of such partnerships, but nonetheless took the initiative locally. The partnership comprises key partners, ranging from education and training providers such as schools and colleges, funding bodies such as the local authority, Skills Funding Agency and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) (since transferred to the Education Funding Agency (EFA)), as well as other stakeholders and providers of related services such as the voluntary sector. The range of partnership members fully meets the range of membership expected in national guidance (DCSF, 2008b) and, indeed, wider membership such as voluntary sector representation was introduced locally prior to this being recommended nationally (LAX, 2009a). The countywide partnership is supported by twelve local 14 to 19 learning networks, bringing together schools, colleges, training providers and other partners, to develop local collaborative provision, with flexibility across the sectors.

### **3.5 Issues for LAX arising from the inter-relationship between national and local policy**

Key issues have arisen for LAX from recent national policy developments, which have affected LAX's policy, planning and practice in relation to young people's participation from the age of 14 to the age of 19. This section critically reviews these by considering some of the tensions within the themes of: centralism versus localism; collaboration versus competition; compulsion versus choice; and universality versus personalisation. The policy context is considered throughout

for LAX and from a national perspective, which also enables a critical approach to the intended impact and actual effect of national policies.

### **3.5.1 Centralism versus Localism**

One issue arising for LAX in relation to recent policy developments in 14 to 19 education and training under the previous Labour governments in England is that an increasingly centralist approach has been adopted, with the use of policy levers through national initiatives, planning, funding, targets, performance measures and inspection (Steer et al., 2007). This is highlighted in the Wolf Review (Wolf, 2011), which reports a need to move away from the highly centralised approach:

The priority must be to move 14-19 vocational education away from the sclerotic, expensive, centralised and over-detailed approach that has been the hallmark of the last two decades. Such a system inevitably generates high costs, long delays and irrational decisions. The best international systems, in contrast, delegate a large amount of decision-making and design to the local level. (Wolf, 2011, p.21).

Further, the policy intentions set out in the centralist approach do not always achieve the intended local impact. Lumby and Foskett identify that, ‘The locus of control has become contested and unclear’ (Lumby and Foskett, 2005, p.43). Central government, having become frustrated with insufficient local progress in increasing participation and raising achievement, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, then sought to give greater weight to the local dimension through further changes, dissolving the national Learning and Skills Council (LSC), with its regional and local offices, and transferring key functions in relation to commissioning and funding to local authorities (DCSF and DIUS, 2008). However, the shift to localism was short lived and, although the Learning and Skills Council was disbanded and staff transferred to local authorities, the new Coalition Government relocated funding within national government, albeit with an arm’s length quango, the YPLA (DfE, 2010b). These changes reflect a pattern of short-term national policy in the arena following compulsory schooling, which has been likened to an ever shifting landscape over recent decades

(Ramsden, Bennett and Fuller, 2004). This is in contrast to a greater degree of consistency in the priorities specified in LAX's published plans for 14 to 19 education and training (LAX, 2005; 2008; 2010a). The most recent plan highlights the focus on raising participation, as set out in the Green Paper *Raising Expectations* (DCSF, 2007), and sets out local proposals to address the introduction of local commissioning, which it highlights will help drive preparations for raising the participation age (LAX, 2010a). It is notable that each of the five local strategic priorities in the plan reflect national priorities set out in *Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver* (DCSF and DIUS, 2008), which demonstrates the influence of the centralism. However, the combination of increasing centralism and more short term national policy-making has led to unpredictability and complexity, resulting in calls for a new balance of national, regional, local and institutional governance to provide a more effective and inclusive policy process (Pring et al., 2009).

### **3.5.2 Collaboration versus Competition**

Local issues have also arisen for LAX as national government has simultaneously promoted policies of collaboration and competition. LAX has developed local collaborative arrangements between providers in the form of twelve networks, in line with national thinking on local partnership working as a means to providing solutions to often complex inter-related needs (LAX, 2010a). Collaboration and partnerships between providers, are stated as one of the eleven planning principles for LAX (LAX, 2010a). However, whilst partnership working has been sought in national policy (DCSF, 2008b), it is recognised that this is often dependent on a complex interplay between local contextual factors, institutional values and interests as well as personal relationships and opportunism (Higham and Yeomans, 2010). Further, there has been a national tension in contradicting policy aims which have sought both to stimulate institutional competition as a means to raise standards, yet whilst also promoting collaboration, such as through joint appointments or sharing curriculum development (Higham and Yeomans, 2010). Both are evident in LAX and, indeed, many institutions manage both to

collaborate and compete, although often with defined parameters. For example, in one part of LAX, a school with a sixth form and a neighbouring sixth-form college compete for students, but had broadly defined curriculum areas giving each a distinct offer. However, in the last year the school started offering provision which was previously offered only by the sixth-form college and this severely tested the collaborative aspects of the relationship. The current increasing pressures on institutions to grow, whilst the demography declines, will test these relationships still further and threaten the desired collaborative learning partnerships (Pring et al., 2009).

### **3.5.3 Compulsion versus Choice**

LAX, in common with local authorities nationally, is presented with challenges as the new duty to participate comes into effect, but with no powers being developed for local authorities to compel participation, such as exist for compulsory schooling. It is interesting to note that, contrary to compulsory schooling where the duty was on the local authority to provide education and parents and carers to educate their children, the new duty is on young people themselves. This reflects a broader neoliberalist approach as highlighted by Lakes and Carter (2011):

In the neoliberal risk society, young people have to ‘chase credentials’ (Jackson and Bisset, 2005, p.196) to gain security in future education or workplaces. Failure to achieve is deemed one’s own fault and ‘human beings are made accountable for their predicaments’ (Wilson, 2007, p.97). (Lakes and Carter, 2011, p.108).

LAX and providers of education and training are being expected to develop the breadth of offer and choices available so that the offer secures young people’s interest and participation becomes universal. However, this has led to concerns being expressed nationally by local authorities on the achievability of the proposed raising the participation age (McCrone, Featherstone and Chamberlain, 2009). LAX has achieved high levels of participation through developing the curriculum offer for young people and providing targeted guidance and support, bringing the numbers of young people who are classified as NEET down to the

lowest in the south east of England (DCSF, 2010). The current 14 to 19 Plan of LAX identifies further progress in this area through one of its key five-year actions as set out below:

Increase the range and availability of learning opportunities and pathways 14 to 19 in all Learning Networks to improve levels of participation and reduce the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (LAX, 2010a, p.13).

There is also a recognition in LAX of the need for more targeted support through action, ‘To provide and monitor additional targeted support for young people at risk of becoming disengaged and those in vulnerable groups . . .’ (LAX, 2010a, p.13). However, LAX’s 14 to 19 Plan recognises that a degree of compulsion may ultimately be required in some cases and also proposes, ‘To develop a support and intervention policy and process for those who become disengaged or who are defined as vulnerable’ (LAX, 2010a, p.13).

This duality of promoting choice and encouraging participation, but with the backstop of intervention and ultimately potential compulsion, reflects the national position and the dilemma as to how the extension of the participation age should be enforced (Simmons, 2008). However, the extension to age 18 is proposed to be taken forward on a more flexible basis, as the definition of participation would also include employment or voluntary work with training of a minimum of 280 hours per year (DfES, 2007a). Further, it is the intention that employers providing recognised training would then be exempt from paying the national minimum wage for young employees (DfES, 2007a). Therefore, for many of the young people currently in JWT, employers would be incentivised to offer recognised training which, in turn, could be paid for through a reduced wage. This raises questions as to whether the reduced wage would then diminish the incentive for some young people to enter employment, which could prove to be counter-productive. This is particularly important for LAX as the group in JWT is relatively larger in LAX than in other parts of the country, and is comparable to

the number of young people classified as NEET, representing as much as 19 per cent of the population aged 16 to 18 in one borough in LAX (LAX, 2009c).

A further issue is that in its original form *'The Education and Skills Bill'* individualises and potentially criminalises the non-participation of the NEET' (Simmons, 2008, p.434). However, the Coalition Government has set out in the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010a) proposals to retain the increased participation age but to defer to a later unspecified date the introduction of measures to enforce participation. Whilst this proposal recognises the dilemma created by the extension of the participation age, it risks undermining the universal acceptance and success of the new proposal by leaving a distinct lack of clarity over what would happen for those young people who choose not to participate. Indeed, the apparent lack of a 'carrot and stick' approach led one journalist for the *Times Educational Supplement* to question whether the 'ambitions are doomed to failure?' (Lee, 2011).

#### **3.5.4 Universality versus Personalisation**

While there are synergies between the drive to universal participation and the thrust for greater personalisation, there are also tensions which create issues for LAX. On the one hand, universalisation, particularly at a time of financial constraint could lead to pressures for more uniform provision to achieve economies of scale, but in reality the motivation of all young people to take part in learning would require personalised learning with tailored support (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). In LAX, both these drives are reflected in the 14 to 19 Plan (LAX, 2010a), which sets out the need for universal participation alongside the development of increased personalisation. LAX has taken a proactive role in the development of a broad range of learning opportunities, such as the introduction of the new diplomas under the Labour Government, for which LAX has been highlighted for its good practice nationally (DCSF, 2009). This increasing diversification of the offer is drawn together into the 14 to 19 entitlement,

confirmed in the 2005 Education Act (DCSF, 2005), and significant investment in the new programmes, alongside a centralist approach to the management of qualifications has been evident for over 20 years in England (Wolf, 2011).

Public finance pressures have, however, led to a policy move away from the entitlement, which the Coalition Government has significantly reduced, alongside ceasing several significant funding streams such as funding for diplomas. This has been compounded by real terms decreases in funding of education and training for young people aged 16 to 19. This has resulted in areas of provision being withdrawn in LAX and specifically the level of entitlement funding has been reduced from 114 hours to 30 hours per full-time student. Alongside this, funding provided directly to learners has been reduced and, in some cases, ceased such as the EMA. In LAX, providers were already planning to withdraw some of the more costly aspects of provision from September 2011, which would impact both on the breadth of choice and the support available for learners. Additionally, funding has been significantly reduced for Connexions Services, which provided information, advice and guidance for young people, which is recognised as key to securing personalised progression from compulsory schooling and ongoing participation in education and training (Spielhofer et al., 2009). Yet this is happening at a time when, nationally, government has confirmed its commitment to increasing participation to achieve universal participation by 2015 (DfE, 2010b). These changes follow on a wealth of changes in the sector, which have not always been delivered successfully or allowed sufficient time to become embedded and be evaluated, as highlighted in the review of evidence collected over five years as part of the Nuffield Review by Pring et al. (2009), which stated:

It is necessary to ask why the present reforms should succeed when so many of the ones in the recent past have failed, as reflected in the need to review those changes so soon after they have been made – the national curriculum in England by Dearing in 1994, the NVQs by Beaumont in 1995, the GNVQ by Capey in 1995, 16 to 19 Qualifications by Dearing in 1996, Modern Apprenticeships by Cassells

in 2001 and Curriculum 2000 in England by Tomlinson in 2004 (Pring et al., 2009, p.7).

LAX has responded to the changed national priorities and tightening public finances in its local commissioning statement 2011-12 which draws on national priorities but asserts clear local priorities, with local evidence of need (LAX, 2010f). Moreover, LAX has developed new local more personalised provision targeted to those groups not currently participating, with support from related services such as the Youth Development Service (YDS), Connexions (CXS) and Children's Services (LAX, 2010g), with a drive to form an integrated Youth Support Service (YSS). This local distinctiveness draws on national government's expectation that there would be a greater local diversity and less national prescription. However, the question remains as to whether the local flexibility would give greater permanence to current changes as distinct to the temporary nature highlighted by Pring et al. (2009) above, particularly given the increasingly challenging financial position of LAX and the organisations providing education, such as schools, colleges, employers and training providers.

### **3.6 Employers and the Labour Market**

Another issue for LAX is that the proposed raising of the participation age in England makes considerable assumptions on the willingness and capacity of employers both to increase their employment of young people and to increase their training, either through formal apprenticeships or other work-based training routes (DfES, 2007a). LAX has a strong local economy, although it has suffered as part of the recent national downturn, which has restricted some opportunities for young people (Roberts, 2009). Employment levels were high across all age ranges, including 16 to 19 compared to other parts of the region (LAX, 2010e), but have suffered more recently. Chart 3 below is drawn from LAX's local economic assessment, which was conducted to research the state of the economy and to inform future planning. The chart shows relatively low levels of unemployment, but also highlights the impact of the recent economic downturn, particularly on young people (LAX, 2010c), with a particularly high peak in

unemployment for young people aged 20 to 24 between February 2009 and August 2010.

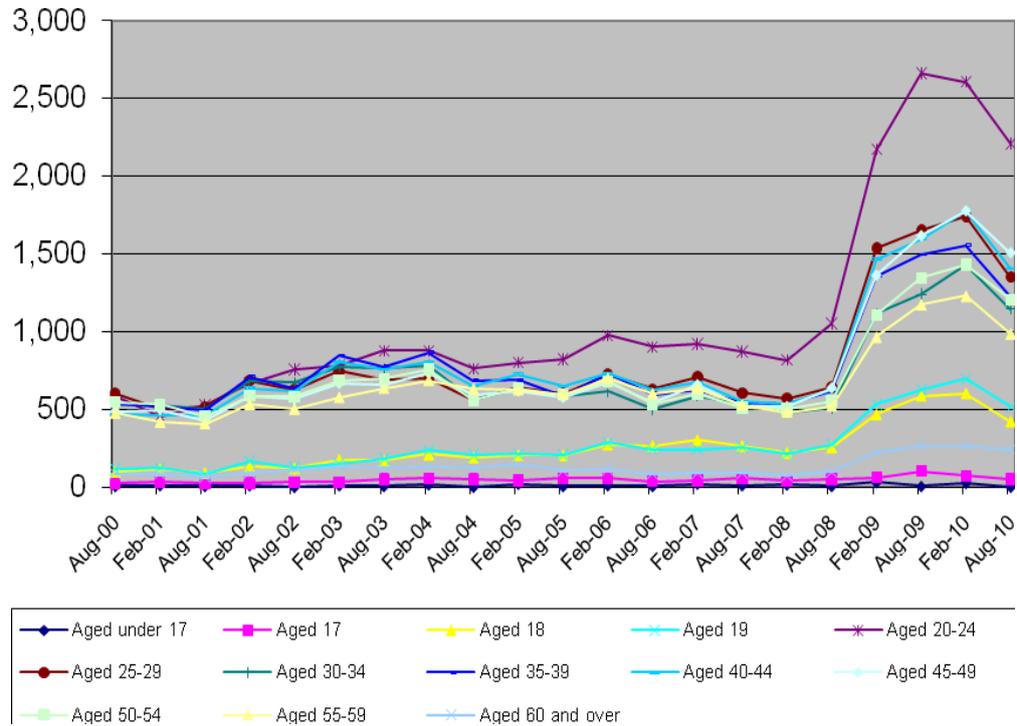


Chart 2: Job Seekers' Allowance claimants by age range in LAX (LAX, 2010e)

The local labour market is influenced by the high proportion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and a greater concentration of service industries and high technology businesses. The workforce is also relatively highly skilled, with 39.3 per cent of the residents of working age recorded as being qualified to Level 4, which is equivalent to degree-level qualifications (LAX, 2010e). However, LAX has highlighted a growing need for graduate level entrants to the labour market as distinct from school leavers (LAX, 2010e). Moreover, questions have been raised as to the extent to which employers generally are ready to take the role that government policy makers envisage for them (Pring et al., 2009). Indeed, the concept of a diverse range of employers acting as a coherent and meaningful body in relation to national policy is open to question, particularly if their engagement is without business incentive or supporting directive (Gleeson and Keep, 2004).

Apprenticeships are seen by national government as a key part of the strategy of increasing participation through employer engagement (DfES, 2007a), but questions remain concerning the quality of provision (Brockmann, Clarke and Winch, 2010), which limit their potential and in LAX participation in apprenticeships ranks amongst the lowest in the region (YPLA, 2010). Government has also been criticised for interfering in the development of apprenticeships and taking away ownership from employers, with consequent damage to their profile and young people's willingness to take this particular learning pathway, which compounds the unrealistic level of national expectations for this pathway as highlighted by Wolf (2011) below:

It is extremely unlikely that, under the current model of provision, apprenticeship for 16 to 18 year olds will expand much, let alone meet the demand generated by the virtual disappearance of the traditional youth labour market and the raising of the participation age (Wolf, 2011, p.79).

Therefore, a key issue for LAX is the extent to which employers can readily provide new opportunities for young people as part of the strategy to increase the participation age to 18. However, England does not have a strong history of social partnership between employers, government, education and professional bodies, which exists in other countries such as Germany and Switzerland (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). The government in England has taken a more voluntarist approach, with no statutory regulation to regulate the youth labour market or promote work-based learning. This more neoliberal position risks a lower engagement of employers than may be necessary to raise the participation age in England.

### **3.7 Issues for LAX arising from the characteristics of non-participants**

A particular issue for LAX is the need to understand the composition of the group who are not participating and to identify predictors to target support to those most at risk of not participating in the future, as has been highlighted for all local authorities in evaluation of pilot areas (DfE, 2010a). For LAX, although levels of

young people classified as NEET are low, there are relatively high proportions of young people who are in JWT (7.7 per cent) and not known (4.0 per cent), compared to those who were classified as NEET (3.5 per cent) (LAX, 2010b). Further, following the impact of financial reductions brought in by the Coalition Government, the proportion whose status is not known has increased dramatically, reaching 11 per cent in early 2011 (LAX, 2011). This had resulted in a local priority being set in 2011 to reduce the numbers whose status is not known, but this is at the cost of reduced emphasis on securing education, training and employment places for those who are classified as NEET or JWT (LAX, 2011).

A particular issue for LAX is that those not participating comprise a diverse range of young people in a variety of settings, some of whom have learning difficulties and disabilities, some were from economically more deprived areas, but spread geographically across the local authority area. The group in LAX is not homogenous, which reflects national studies of those not participating (Hayward et al., 2006). In LAX, some work has been conducted to build greater understanding of those not participating as described in Section 3.8, but this has focused on those who are classified as NEET, rather than the full group including JWT and those whose status is not known. This reflects the national position where the research has focused on those who are classified as NEET and neglects consideration of the other groups (Spielhofer et al., 2009), resulting in a gap in understanding of this cohort for LAX and nationally.

A key issue for LAX is the over-representation of particular groups amongst young people classified as NEET, such as LAC (11.4 per cent), YO (19.4 per cent) and LLDD (44.2 per cent) (LAX, 2010h). The composition of the population of young people who are classified as NEET and associated issues for LAX are further considered below in relation to characteristics highlighted in national research. These are 'Education/learning disadvantage; gender, ethnicity and personal circumstances; and structural factors' (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.41). In identifying these characteristics, it is recognised that in some cases these factors can be cyclical in that the factors could increase the likelihood of being classified as NEET and being classified as NEET could, in turn, contribute to particular

characteristics. For example, a young person's education/learning disadvantage could make being classified as NEET more likely and being classified as NEET could lead to a young person experiencing further education/learning disadvantage.

### **3.7.1 Education/learning disadvantage**

A key issue for LAX in relation to participation for the young people classified as NEET is that lower levels of educational achievement in compulsory schooling and irregular attendance at school are linked to being classified as NEET after compulsory schooling (LAX, 2010b). This matches the national position where links are demonstrated between weak educational performance in compulsory schooling and being classified as NEET after compulsory schooling (Steer, 2000). Taking GCSE passes as an indicator of educational performance by age 16, the proportion of young people not having achieved any passes who subsequently became classified as NEET could be determined. This relationship was reflected in the national proportion of young people (39 per cent) who became classified as NEET having secured no passes in GCSEs, which compared to just two per cent of young people being classified as NEET among those who achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C (DCSF, 2008a). Retention in education, training and employment is also weaker for young people who had the lowest levels of educational achievement (Fergusson, 2004). However, there are some exceptions nationally as some young people from certain ethnic groups with lower achievement in compulsory schooling than white young people, go on to further education with higher staying-on rates (Payne, 2001).

In LAX, 41 per cent of young people with no GCSE passes subsequently are classified as NEET, which compares with the national figure of 39 per cent (LAX, 2010b). Young people with particular characteristics, that are over-represented in the lower performing groups in relation to GCSE passes, are therefore, not surprisingly, over-represented in the population of young people categorised as NEET in LAX. For example, the most common specific characteristic of young people classified as NEET in LAX is having a learning difficulty or disability. In

February 2010, young people with a learning difficulty or disability were more than twice as likely to be categorised as NEET than their peers (LAX, 2010b).

### **3.7.2 Gender, Ethnicity and Personal Issues**

Spielhofer et al. (2007) identify a range of characteristics, which are more likely to be found in the population of young people categorised as NEET, some of which fit within the theme of gender, ethnicity and personal issues. These comprise: being male; being of white ethnic origin; teenage pregnancy and parenthood; being homeless; having a disability; having mental health problems; having misused drugs or alcohol; and being a young offender (Spielhofer et al., 2007, p.18). These are recognised in LAX (2010b), but additionally LAC have been identified as being one of the three groups at highest risk of becoming categorised as NEET, with the other two groups being LLDD and YO. A particular issue for LAX is the significant variation in the composition of the population of young people who are NEET by geographical location within the local authority area. For example, in the county, there is a broadly balanced distribution by gender (53 per cent were male in September 2009 (LAX, 2009c)), but it should be noted that this contrasts significantly with the distribution at District/Borough level, which varies from 46 per cent male to 61 per cent male (LAX, 2009c). The latter position is closer to the national picture, where males are more than twice as likely to be classified as NEET (EdComms, 2007). This national distribution is confirmed by Payne's (2001) analysis of the Youth Cohort Study, which demonstrates higher rates of staying on in education and training after compulsory schooling for girls compared to boys.

A further issue for LAX is the significant variation in ethnicity of the population of young people categorised as NEET as young people who categorise their ethnicity as Black are three times more likely to be classified as NEET (LAX, 2010c). In LAX, particular groups of young people with recognised personal issues are more likely to be classified as NEET. These groups are more evident given the relatively low numbers of young people classified as NEET, although the groups are similar to those identified nationally, particularly LLDD, YO and

LAC (Rennison, et al., 2005; Sachdev, Harries and Roberts, 2006; Sims et al., 2001; Spielhofer, et al., 2007; Stone, Cotton and Thomas, 2000).

LAX has a high level of LLDD who are classified as NEET, with 428 (44.3 per cent) recorded as NEET in February 2010 (LAX, 2010b). This group is also highlighted as over-represented in young people classified as NEET nationally (Coles et al., 2002). LAX also had the highest level of residential placements for LLDD in the South East, with some 123 young people aged 16 to 25 placed in 2009-10 (LAX, 2010b). Whilst this prevents these young people from becoming classified as NEET, it represents a comparatively expensive solution, with LAX spending twice the level of comparable local authorities on this provision (LAX 2010d). A further issue for LAX is the high number of YO who are classified as NEET, with 72 recorded as NEET in February 2010 (LAX, 2010b). Although the number may appear small compared to the overall population in LAX, it is a higher proportion of the population of young people categorised as NEET than in other local authorities and YO are recognised nationally as a challenging group to engage in education, training and employment (Spielhofer et al., 2007).

A particularly key issue is the over-representation of LAC in the population of young people categorised as NEET in LAX, especially as LAX is the corporate parent with associated responsibilities for these young people. LAX mirrors the national position in that LAC are less likely to achieve good educational outcomes by age 16 and more likely to be classified as NEET. By the end of compulsory schooling at age 16, 13 per cent of LAC achieve 5A\* to C grades in GCSE by age 16, compared with 69 per cent for all local authority young people (LAX, 2010b). Additionally, LAC are three times more likely to be classified as NEET in LAX (LAX, 2010b), with 32 LAC reported as being classified as NEET (LAX, 2010b). These statistics compare with the national position where between half and three quarters of LAC do not achieve any academic qualifications by the end of compulsory schooling (Biehal et al., 1995). Nationally, LAC are also much less likely to progress to further education. Only between 12 per cent and 19 per cent of 16 year olds who were LAC progress to further education compared to 68 per cent for the whole population (Coles et al., 2002). This trend continues through

their lives with over 75 per cent of care leavers having no academic qualifications (Utting, 1997). Further, children and young people who are taken into care are more likely to have been living in deprived or disadvantaged circumstances immediately beforehand (Bebbington and Miles, 1989). LAC are therefore the focus of much national policy, with key programmes designed nationally to transform outcomes for this key group of young people (Coles et al., 2002). In LAX, the importance of planning with LAC and Care Leavers is highlighted as it is a key action in the local authority's *Children and Young People's Plan, 2009-10* (LAX, 2009a). Whilst there is clearly a high profile given to LAC in the local authority's *Children and Young People's Plan*, it remains a concern that a recent Ofsted inspection highlighted that the required pathway plans were not in place for three quarters of the LAC in the authority (Ofsted, 2010). Such a disconnection between national policy direction and local implementation calls into question the effectiveness of the national programmes and the stated priority of LAX.

### **3.7.3 Structural factors**

In LAX, external or structural factors also present issues which impact on a young person's likelihood of being classified as NEET. In LAX, youth unemployment has risen following the recent economic downturn, although this remains low in comparison to the national level. Nationally, the proportion of young people categorised as NEET is higher in areas which have suffered a significant decline in local industries such as manufacturing (Bivand, 2004). For example, the highest level of young people categorised as NEET nationally is in the North East of England, followed by Yorkshire and Humber and the North West of England (DCSF, 2010). As there is a higher level of service based industries, with higher qualification requirements, in LAX, this could have offered an incentive for young people to stay on in education and training (Furlong, 2006).

Whilst there are generally good standards of living in LAX, as evidenced by a ranking of fifth in the *Child Well-Being Index* (DCLG, 2009), there are neighbourhoods with significant disadvantage. This is highlighted in a local report which stated that:

LAX is a county of contradictions. LAX's appearance as a wealthy county is deceptive. Throughout there are tight pockets of deprivation, enclosed within housing estates or even within a few streets with high levels of child poverty, low income, poor mental health and other significant problems. Often they are adjacent to affluent areas that camouflage the extent of need, driving down the statistics and diverting public funds to areas of more widespread poverty in other parts of the country (LAX, 2004).

There is a need therefore to consider local statistics, in relation to socio-economic conditions, at a much more localised level, typically at ward level (total population generally under 10,000) rather than district/borough (total population around 100,000) or whole county (population around one million). An indicator of income deprivation experienced by 16 to 19 year olds is the take up of EMA and this was recorded as being at comparatively low levels for LAX (YPLA, 2010) – although it should be noted that EMA was withdrawn in 2010 by the Coalition Government, with subsequent recommendations from OECD for its reinstatement (OECD, 2011).

Local analysis within LAX at ward level highlights that there are links between socio-economic deprivation and participation levels, which range from 7.36 per cent to 24.58 per cent, with the highest level in the area with the greatest socio-economic deprivation in LAX (LAX, 2010c). Further more detailed analysis at ward level in LAX highlights that young people living in some wards are more than ten times more likely to be categorised as NEET than in other wards in the same local authority (LAX, 2010c). The wards with higher levels of young people categorised as NEET are those with the higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The wards with the highest levels of young people classified as NEET in LAX are shown in the table below.

Ward	Number of young people in the NEET category			
	Sep 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09
Ward 1	33	36	32	30
Ward 2	39	27	24	22
Ward 3	27	26	27	23
Ward 4	25	24	20	19
Ward 5	22	22	22	18
Ward 6	20	20	18	16
Ward 7	15	20	18	16
Ward 8	15	15	17	17

**Table 4: Wards in LAX with the highest levels of young people in the NEET category (LAX, 2010c)**

More extreme structural issues experienced by some young people are homelessness, which was experienced by 374 young people in LAX in 2009 (LAX, 2010b). For such young people, they, not surprisingly, experience a strong need to resolve the issues of accommodation prior to seeking educational progression as reported in research of young people's experiences in a previous government funded initiative in increase participation (Sims et al., 2001).

### **3.8 Perspectives of young people**

A critical issue for LAX is the need to engage young people effectively to understand their views and enable their influence on policies, plans and practice, which is essential to the success of a major policy change such as raising the participation age (Spielhofer et al., 2009). Yet LAX acknowledges in a recent report that 'There is little evidence of young people's input/feedback being used by the council to inform service development or improvement' (LAX, 2010b, p.18). Further, whilst there is a recognition that raising the participation age will require new services, informed by young people's needs (DCSF and DIUS, 2008), LAX recognises that 'The council does not routinely seek the views of young people when commissioning or re-commissioning services' (LAX, 2010b, p.18).

However, this is not directly linked to a lack of discussion with young people as 25 extensive consultations had been conducted with young people, in relation to

progression to further education, training and employment by the council in the last five years (LAX, 2010b). The critical issue is that the findings of these consultations did not impact on policy, planning or practice and there was a lack of any feedback to the young people engaged. Indeed, LAX itself reports that, ‘Young people are not informed of the findings of consultations’ (LAX, 2010b). This is in stark contrast to the engagement, feedback and follow up advocated as good practice in national planning guidance (DCSF and DIUS, 2008) and recommended through national studies (Spielhofer et al., 2009). A further issue for LAX associated with the studies to date is that these focus on the population of young people who are categorised as NEET and neglect those in JWT and not known. Yet if all young people are to be engaged in raising participation, then it is essential to engage these two groups who have often been omitted from the studies locally (LAX, 2010b) and nationally (Corney, 2009).

LAX has conducted 25 previous consultations with young people, although these have not had the depth and rigour of this thesis. The key issues highlighted by young people from the 25 consultations, involving 954 young people, over the last five years, have been drawn out through analysis and reported to LAX, alongside the concerns about limitations of the studies to date (LAX, 2010b). These issues are highlighted in the table below.

<b>Key themes identified by young people</b>
Low expectation of success at school linked to poor educational choices
Poor experience of school resulting in low motivation for education or training after compulsory schooling
Transport concerns – high cost and inadequate provision
Lack of appropriate provision, particularly work with training and more flexible, part-time provision
Lack of awareness of support and guidance on choices after compulsory schooling
Impact of the recession with reduction in available jobs and sense of hopelessness

**Table 5: Key themes identified by young people (LAX, 2010b)**

These themes have much in common with those identified nationally, particularly in relation to informed choice, providing second chance opportunities after compulsory schooling and flexibility of provision geared to the needs and learning styles of young people (Spielhofer et al., 2009). However, it is a concern that there is a lack of evidence of the views of young people having an impact on subsequent policy and practice and that these studies to date have not included young people classified as JWT or not known (LAX, 2010b).

### **3.9 Summary**

This study highlights that, whilst LAX has low levels of young people who are classified as NEET at 4.0 per cent (LAX, 2010h), this level has not reduced over the last five years (LAX, 2010i) and particular groups remain consistently over-represented amongst young people classified as NEET (LAX, 2010h). There are key issues for LAX in increasing participation in relation to the national emphasis on centralism rather than localism; the local authority role to promote collaboration whilst national policy is tending to increase competition; the national policy of compulsion whilst holding to the expectation that full participation will be delivered locally through increased choice; and an expectation of a universal offer alongside local flexibility in the curriculum and increased personalisation. Further, the composition of the cohort who are not participating (comprising young people classified as NEET, JWT and not known) in LAX presents issues as particular groups are considerably over-represented, such as LAC, YO and LLDD (LAX, 2010b). The relative small size of the cohort of young people not participating accentuates the proportion of these groups, which require more differentiated approaches to secure their participation. This, in turn, requires a good understanding of the reasons why young people choose not to participate and what would change their position.

However, there is a recognised shortfall in the engagement of young people to understand the position of those who were classified as NEET and then to link this to future policy, planning and practice (LAX, 2010b). Further, there is additionally a recognised lack of engagement with young people in JWT and the not known category. For the young people in this group, there are clearly reasons

why they choose not to participate or are meeting obstructions that deterred them. The understanding of these reasons and barriers and building on this understanding to inform policy, planning and practice in relation to increasing participation is critical to the successful implementation of the drive to full participation and improving educational outcomes for those who are classified as NEET, JWT or not known. Nationally, the understanding of the views of these young people is recognised as an area requiring further research in order to secure their future participation (Quinn, Lawy and Diment, 2008) and this has also been highlighted in LAX, but with added emphasis on the importance of the link through to inform future policy, planning and practice (LAX, 2010b). This research therefore addresses developing greater understanding of those young people who are not participating, in particular in relation to why they were not participating in education, training or employment with training and what would change their position. The research also explores the degree to which the other issues identified for LAX, as summarised above, are identified, directly or indirectly, by the young people themselves.

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue that clear methodology and methods are a ‘principal concern’ (p.47) to achieve credibility in research and for education research in particular, to develop ‘a maturity and sense of progression it presently lacks’ (p.48). In this chapter, I set out how the research questions have informed the selection of paradigm, approach and methods for the research in this thesis. The selection is significantly informed by the focus of the questions on understanding young people’s perspectives on participation, why they are not participating and what could change this from their perspective. This chapter explains the rationale for the selection of the research paradigm, approach and methods for this research and includes exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative strategies and methods in relation to the research questions. The chapter concludes with a more detailed explanation of the approach to data collection and data analysis, including questions of ethics, with the emphasis placed on understanding young people’s perspectives.

### **4.2 Paradigmatic perspective**

Firstly, it is important to establish the research paradigm, with its accompanying philosophical assumptions, in order to bring clarity of thinking. Some researchers challenge the necessity for a fixed paradigm, such as Patton (2002) who argues for flexibility through a ‘paradigm of choice’ which ‘rejects methodological orthodoxy in favour of methodological appropriateness’ (Patton, 2002, p.39). Most research, however, establishes the clarity of a fixed paradigm, either explicitly or implicitly, but in a way that can be determined by the reader. The importance of declaring the paradigmatic perspective and its relevance to subsequent decisions in the research is clearly set out by Mertens (2010):

A researcher's philosophical orientation has implications for every decision made in the research process, including the choice of method . . . working without an awareness of our underlying philosophical assumptions does not mean that we do not have such assumptions, only that we are conducting research that rests on unexamined and unrecognised assumptions (Mertens, 2010, p.7).

Mertens (2010, p.8) identifies four broad paradigms in educational research: positivist/postpositivist; constructivist; transformative; and pragmatic. Each of these paradigms is now considered. The positivist/postpositivist paradigm emphasises objectivity, with a focus on one reality, that can be determined within a specified level of probability. This fails to recognise the complexity and individual nature of young people's lives as highlighted by Alldred and Burman.

Hearing children's voices' is an active, subjective process in contrast with the positivist depiction of data collection as a neutral process of gathering pre-existing facts that are unmediated by our perceptions and unchanged by our practices of description and representation (Alldred and Burman, 2005, p.175).

The research questions in this thesis seek to understand the young people's perspectives and recognise that there are multiple perspectives, as each young person has their own understanding of why he or she is not participating. Hence, a positivist/postpositivist perspective would be problematic as it considers that there is 'one reality, knowable within a specified level of probability' (Mertens, 2010, p.11) and where there is a clear separation between the participant, the subjective knower and the objective world (Scott and Usher, 1999).

In contrast, a constructivist perspective recognises 'multiple, socially constructed realities' (Mertens, 2010, p.11), supporting the determination of different understandings for different people. This fits the framing of the research questions, which seek to determine an understanding of the multiple realities for young people in relation to participation in education and training. The constructivist paradigm is, however, criticised both by postpositivist researchers

and by researchers following a transformative paradigm. They argue that the constructivist paradigm places insufficient weight on principles of equality and social justice and that research should seek ‘to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.26). As the focus of the research questions is to understand a phenomenon, rather than to focus on issues of social justice, a transformative paradigm is not selected. However, as the thesis reveals, this research into the understanding of the phenomenon of young people’s participation raises issues of equality and social justice, which provide a platform for further research which would be well placed in the transformative paradigm.

Finally, a pragmatic paradigm, with mixed methods, was considered. This places the researcher as central, with the researcher deciding to ‘study what interests you and is of value to you, study in the different ways that you deem appropriate, and utilise the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system’ (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p.30). Given the research questions focus on the individual, this paradigm gives too much weight to the researcher’s role. There are also concerns that as the researcher takes the research forward in ‘different ways as deemed appropriate’ (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p.30), the pragmatic paradigm could give rise to difficulties in drawing the strands of analysis together (Mertens, 2010).

Therefore, the constructivist paradigm was selected for this research. Within the constructivist paradigm, there is a family of more specific and inter-related approaches. Mertens (2010, p.8) highlights several: naturalistic; phenomenological; hermeneutic; symbolic interaction; ethnographic; qualitative; and participatory action research. These are not mutually exclusive though and neither are they universally regarded as a subset of the constructivist paradigm. For example, although Mertens (2010) herself highlights the phenomenological approach as a subset of the constructivist paradigm, she also describes how the constructivist paradigm itself developed from the philosophy of Edmund

Husserl's (1931) phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's (1976) study of hermeneutics, which is the study of interpretive understanding (Mertens, 2010, p.16). Within the constructivist paradigm therefore, no one single approach is exclusively selected but consideration is given to a principal approach, with recognition of the inter-relationship between the approaches.

The research approach would necessarily be naturalistic and qualitative to understand the young people's perspectives and to align with the constructivist paradigm. The research approach, however, is not participatory action research as its focus was on understanding young people's perspectives, rather than 'a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 1994, p.186). An ethnographic approach was considered, but this would have necessitated 'immersion of the researcher in that setting' (Robson, 2002, p.89), which is unrealistic within the scope of the part-time Doctorate in Education. Social interactionism was considered and elements are drawn upon as the research approach recognises that 'Meanings are established in and through social interaction' (Robson, 2002, p.197). Hermeneutics was considered, and whilst it provided a valuable frame that 'All understanding takes place in time and a particular culture' (Robson, 2002, p. 196), its requirements for the researcher to be 'closely embedded in the context' are regarded as challenging to achieve in the context of the Doctorate in Education. Neither social interactionism nor hermeneutics, therefore, are selected as the principal approach. The key focus of the research questions is to understand the perspectives of the young people involved, in relation to the phenomenon of their non-participation in education, training or employment. Phenomenology enables the researcher to develop understanding of others' perspectives through building the subjective experience of everyday lives, drawing as close as possible to the lens of reality for the participants themselves (Schwandt, 2001). Danather and Briod (2005) argue the potential of phenomenological approaches with children and young people in particular to 'capture in everyday language distinctive qualities in a child's

emerging world, qualities that may not be remembered, or even seem quite foreign to adults' (p.218).

Phenomenology was therefore selected as the principal approach within the constructivist paradigm, whilst recognising inter-relationships particularly with naturalistic enquiry, qualitative approaches, social interactionism and hermeneutics. The rationale is strongly based on the focus of building understanding of young people's perspectives and Mertens (2010, p.235) indeed clearly states, 'The feature that distinguishes phenomenological research from other qualitative research approaches is that the subjective experience is at the centre of the enquiry'.

A general research question from a phenomenological perspective is framed by Patton (2002) as, 'What is the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon from the perspective of this person or group of people?' (p.104). A phenomenological approach is considered appropriate for this research as it is seeking to determine the reasons for young people not participating in education and training from their perspective and phenomenology gave the required weight to the perspective of the participants (Madriz, 2000). The development of phenomenology itself is now considered.

Husserl (1931) first argues the phenomenological case for understanding the different lived experiences of a given phenomenon, with a depth and rigour that enable the identification of the essential qualities of that experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Husserl seeks to develop a depth of understanding of the lived experience that provides illumination on that experience for others. Phenomenology seeks a focus not on observing the everyday experiences, but rather to reflect on perceptions of those experiences. These experiences are brought into focus through bracketing, whereby the researcher seeks to set aside the world as it exists in order to focus on the conscious experience of the world in relation to perceptions and thoughts and then how that experience shapes the

beliefs, values and actions of the individual (Ueda and Sakugawa, 2009). As the researcher endeavours, as far as possible, to set aside, in brackets, the distractions and misconceptions of their own assumptions and preconceptions, the researcher draws closer to the essence of the experience of the phenomenon, through the process of eidetic reduction (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Thus, this thesis endeavours to understand the life-world of young people facing barriers to participation in education and training, through bracketing their perceptions and experiences as expressed in their own terms.

Phenomenology is further developed by Husserl towards more abstract levels as he seeks to understand the nature of consciousness itself, by progressively bracketing out real experience and achieving transcendental reduction (McPhail, 1995, p.159-166). Heidegger (1962), however, develops phenomenology in a different direction from the abstract exploration of consciousness, towards more hermeneutic and existential emphases (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This is further developed by Merleau-Ponty who emphasises the embodied nature of our relationship to the world with 'the body no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.106). This emphasis on practical activities is essential for the research into young people's experiences where although 'the lived experience of being a body-in-the-world can never be entirely captured or absorbed, but equally, must not be ignored or overlooked' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.19). This research therefore takes a phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm, to understand the life-worlds of young people facing barriers to their participation in education, training or employment. The theoretical perspective is based on phenomenology as originated by Husserl, and developed by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

### **4.3 Research methods**

Having taken a phenomenological perspective, the methods for the research need to be selected to gather information on the life-worlds of the young people themselves. This requires a method which gives space to participants to offer an in-depth account of their experiences. Consideration was given to the following methods: surveys; structured interviews; semi-structured interviews; unstructured interviews; and focus groups. Surveys and structured interviews were considered unlikely to yield rich free flowing descriptions from the participants and are recognised as being ‘not well suited to exploratory work’ (Robson, 2002, pp.232-234). Case study was considered but not taken forward as the principal method as it is seen as a focus on a single case or small number of specific, unique, bounded cases (Mertens, 2010, p.223). Semi-structured and unstructured interviews have greater potential to develop understanding and to develop ‘rich and highly illuminating material (Robson, 2002, p.273). Wellington (2000) argues that ‘A focus group is rather more than a group interview’ (pp.124-125). He outlines advantages that a focus group ‘sets up a situation where the synergy of the group, the interaction of its members, can add to the depth or insight of either an interview or survey’ (Wellington, 2000, pp.124-125). The more open methods of unstructured interviews or focus groups also draw closer to the individual’s understanding of the essence of their experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Parker and Tritter (2006, p.25) highlight the distinct roles of the researcher contrasting an ‘investigator’ as ‘central stage’ where the participant(s) ‘relay answers back to the researcher’ in semi-structured interviews compared with a ‘facilitator’ stimulating and moderating discussion’ between participants’ in focus groups. Further, focus groups shift the power balance in favour of the participants, which is particularly important in relation to disadvantaged groups and it is recognised that ‘this ability to give the group control over the direction of the interview is especially useful in exploratory research’ (Morgan, 1997, p.11). Fine and Sandstrom (1988, p.14) highlight factors that influence the power imbalance specifically in work with children and young people as ‘age, cognitive development, physical maturity and acquisition of social responsibility’. It is important therefore to give up some control to help to address issues of power imbalance, as there is both an age difference between the participants and me and

I could be perceived as an authority figure (Lumby, 2012). Eder and Fingerson (2001, p.182) consider the particular power dynamics with young people and argue ‘the adult researcher’s power can be reduced while making the interviewing context more natural if children are interviewed as a group rather than as individuals’. The steps taken to help reduce power imbalance are set out further in the section below on data collection. Focus groups are therefore explored here in more depth as a potential method for data collection.

Focus groups are particularly appropriate for enabling participants to set out their priorities, from their perspective, in their vocabulary (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). Focus groups are a recognised source of data for phenomenological studies, particularly where the research question has an immediate and applied perspective (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Such a need to address the immediate issue and assess it from an applied perspective is clearly required in this research. Focus groups are also recognised as having strengths in producing significant amounts of data on the topic of interest, from the perspective of the participants (Morgan, 1997). The focus group is seen as a means to give greater control to the participants rather than the researcher and allow greater spontaneity, stimulation of topics, snowballing of ideas and greater security for participants (Crabtree et al., 1993). Focus groups are also recognised as particularly suitable for research with young people, giving ‘space to raise issues that they want to discuss’ (Kellett and Ding, 2004, p.167). Further, Hennessy and Heary (2005) argue benefits of focus groups for research with young people as they ‘create a safe peer environment and replicate the type of small group settings that children are familiar with . . . ’ (p.207). Additionally, ‘the peer support provided in the small group setting may also help to redress the power imbalance between adult and child that exists in one-to-one interviews’ (Hennessy and Heary, 2005, p.207).

The potential disadvantages of focus groups were considered prior to a final selection of research method. Robson (2002, p.285) highlights the potential disadvantages as: limitation in the number of questions; potential issues

concerning confidentiality; and lack of generalisability. These three are considered in turn. Firstly, in relation to the limited number of questions, this is also an advantage as there is considerably more open time for participants to identify their concerns, from their perspectives, as well as the potential for thinking to be stimulated by other members of the group. This would not be achieved through a more structured interview, where the direction would be set by the researcher's questions and the power imbalance would be much more evident. Secondly, in relation to confidentiality, all members of the group are asked to agree to ground rules including confidentiality, prior to the start of the focus group. The strategy for the focus groups is also set out and agreed within the ethical clearance process at Brunel University, to ensure participants are given appropriate guidance and support through the data collection process (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). Ethical issues are considered in more detail at the end of this section. Thirdly, the lack of generalisability is recognised and therefore the research is not empirically or statistically extrapolated. Krueger (1998b) suggests the concept of transferability for focus group research rather than generalisability. Through transferability, 'A person who wants to use the results should give thought about whether or not the findings can transfer into another environment . . . by examining the research methods, the audience, and the context . . . considering if these situations and conditions are sufficiently similar' (Krueger, 1998b, p.70). A fourth potential disadvantage of focus groups which is not highlighted by Robson (2002), but is advanced by Morgan (1997) is the risk that participants with strong views might dominate the group and exert influence on other participants, thereby restricting the data or skewing the data towards particular themes. Hennessy and Heary (2005, p.239) highlight specifically for children and young people that 'intimidation within the group may inhibit some individuals from making a contribution'. In order to mitigate this risk, the possibility is given consideration in the design, planning and running of the focus groups as described later in this chapter. Having considered the advantages and disadvantage of focus groups and the main potential alternatives for the phenomenological approach within the constructivist paradigm, focus groups were selected and the thesis now examines the ethical issues before more detailed consideration of how focus groups would be applied in this research.

#### **4.4 Ethical considerations**

All person-based research requires careful consideration of ethical issues (Potter, 2006). In particular, Hennessy and Heary (2005) highlight two particular ethical issues in considering focus groups with children and young people. These are: ‘the fact that disclosures by participants are shared with all group members and not just the researcher; and intense group discussion may give rise to stress or distress in individual participants’ (p.239), which are considered below. The research in this thesis complies fully with the British Educational Research Association’s *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011) and thorough consideration was given to the fundamental ethical principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. The autonomy of every individual was considered and all participation was by voluntary informed consent, with the right to withdraw at any time explained to all participants. Particular attention was given to ensuring time was set aside at the start of each focus group to ‘fully explain what the research was about, whom it was for and what it would involve’ (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009, p.34).

No young person was compelled or cajoled into taking part and no one was exposed to any undue risk. Wherever any risk was foreseen through risk assessments, mitigating measures were established, such as setting confidentiality for the whole group to which each member made a formal commitment, with supporting explanation, prior to the group. The four key ethical rules (Robson, 2002) of confidentiality, fidelity, privacy and veracity were strongly upheld throughout the research and are described in more detail in the approach to data collection, analysis and reporting. However, absolute confidentiality was not possible as there was a need to work within the safeguarding policy of the local authority. France, Bendelow and Williams (2002, p.160) highlight the question of ‘what the response would be if there was a disclosure of sexual abuse’. As part of the opening discussion with young people, the limitations on confidentiality in relation to such issues was made clear and presented as an exception for their protection. It was explained that any such allegation would need to be followed up and shared with an appropriate professional, most likely their Youth Support

Officer, but that this would be discussed with them first, immediately after the session. No such allegations were made in the course of the focus groups, but it was important to be open with the young people in relation to the necessary boundaries to confidentiality.

Participants were then asked to maintain confidentiality for all focus group members and ground rules for discussions were agreed at the start of each session. All participants were given a comprehensive leaflet, with supporting explanation, summarising the research and ground rules, followed by an opportunity for questions and discussion. The leaflet is attached as Appendix One. These ground rules were prepared in advance, but discussed in depth with participants. Consideration was given to drawing up ground rules afresh with each group of participants, but this was rejected as the rules were required to ensure confidentiality for participants and to confirm in writing their option to withdraw at any stage. This was particularly important to address the first of the two above concerns highlighted by Hennessy and Heary (2005) in that confidentiality needed to be agreed by all group members given the open discussion in the group. In relation to the second concern, I was prepared to intervene if discussions were becoming stressful for participants. I also remained available on the site after discussions and made clear that the young people could follow up discussions with me if they wished. Additionally, all young people had an ongoing relationship with their Youth Support Officer and could draw on that relationship to discuss any concerns further. Through these measures, I sought to address the second specific concern identified above in relation to focus groups with young people of the potential stress or distress for the participants (Hennessy and Heary, 2005).

The Brunel University Ethics Application Form was completed ahead of all data collection and approval secured before data collection commenced. This form is attached as Appendix Two. Agreement was also secured from the local authority in which the research was conducted. All participants were ensured anonymity, but asked their permission for unnamed quotes to be referenced in the final report. As previously outlined, the name of the local authority and all associated place

names were not revealed in the interests of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were considered for the place names and participant names, but were rejected based on preconceptions such terms might evoke in the reader. This approach draws on the work of Delamont and Atkinson (1995) who highlight the risks associated with pseudonyms that unintentionally could give rise to preconceptions, including some clearly applied with a degree of intended humour, such as ‘Annie Body’, which they conclude is ‘singularly inappropriate’ (p.79). Overall, Delamont and Atkinson (1995, p.84) conclude that ‘What can be written, read and remembered about a given setting, such as an individual school, is largely dependent on how the account is written, how that setting is evoked, and, hence, how it and its social actors may be called to mind’. The decision was made therefore to avoid the risk of preconceptions arising through the use of pseudonyms and simply report quotations as the statements from the young people. This decision was reached after considerable thought, with the need to balance the young people’s confidentiality and the risks associated with pseudonyms with the potentially greater value of the research if specific locations or indications of their identities were known (Guenther, 2009).

#### **4.5 Data collection**

Having selected focus groups as the method for data collection, it was important to design the focus groups in relation to size, location, composition and dynamics drawing on appropriate literature and reflecting the phenomenological approach within the constructivist paradigm. It was important the design was developed recognising the groups of young people to be engaged, many of whom are disadvantaged and will have had negative experiences of the education system. This section sets out how the design and running of the focus groups was approached, with particular attention to the fact that participants would be young people.

#### **4.5.1 Listening to young people**

Alderson (2004, p.100) outlines three levels of engaging children and young people in research: as ‘unknowing objects’; ‘aware subjects’ or ‘active participants’, which progressively seek to give greater power to the participants, shifting the positions of researcher and the researched, building on the concept of positionality discussed earlier. The first level, as unknowing subjects, is where young people are not informed or aware of the research, such as covert research employing observation through two-way mirrors. This reinforces power differentials, leaving the researcher in control throughout the process. The second level, as aware subjects, would involve the securing of informed consent, but within ‘fairly rigid adult-designed projects such as questionnaire surveys’ (Alderson, 2004, p.100). The third level, as active participants, covers a range of approaches where children and young people give informed consent and where flexible methods are employed such as focus groups. However, Alderson (2004) highlights risks of involving children and young people as active participants as they may ‘reveal far more about themselves than they intended’, with the consequence that ‘they might later feel greater regret, shame or anger if researchers produce disrespectful reports’ (Alderson, 2004, p.100). The third level is deliberately selected for this research to give young people greater control and to support open discussion through the focus groups. However, given the diverse nature of the group and the involvement of more vulnerable groups, the structure of the focus groups with ground rules concerning confidentiality is retained, rather than opening up the structure and ground rules themselves for discussion.

The thesis so far has highlighted the need to engage with vulnerable groups of young people, such as LAC, LLDD and YO, who are over-represented in the population of young people who are not participating in education or training. Yet there are challenges in engaging participants in research where ‘the subject of practice is those who are in some sense ‘other’ to the dominant or powerful’ (Lumby, 2012, p.266). Lumby highlights the ‘relative powerlessness’ of young people and that ‘listening to young people and communicating what is heard is,

therefore, as problematic as listening to any other group in a position of subjection' (Lumby, 2012, p.266). Further, Lumby (2012) questions the researcher's position in claiming to represent the views of young people and highlights 'serious challenges as the researcher may unintentionally or otherwise use the knowledge and understanding which results in ways which have a negative impact on the group which is studied' (Lumby, 2012, p.267).

The approach to the data collection therefore is developed cognisant of the potential for the discussion to be limited if the power imbalance is overt. This was addressed by actively considering the potential risks at all stages and seeking to address this positively wherever possible, but recognising I would not be able to anticipate fully the responses of the participants to the environment. For example, locations were arranged as those which were familiar to young people such as youth centres and I ensured discussion flowed freely without my direction. I introduced myself in the same way as I asked young people to introduce themselves. I sought to arrange the room in a way which did not reinforce or further the power imbalance, 'like a meeting between friends, with chairs in a close circle' (Alderson and Morrow, 2004, p.53).

#### **4.5.2 Number and composition of focus groups**

Six focus groups were held in total, comprising young people aged 16 to 19, who were either classified as either NEET, JWT or NK at the time or had been in the previous three months. Whilst holding six focus groups exceeds the range of three to five recommended by Morgan (1997), it is within the range of four to six supported by Krueger and Casey (2000). Six groups were selected also as this enabled groups to be held in locations recognised as having a higher proportion of young people categorised as NEET (LAX, 2010b). Morgan (1997) also recommends determining a number of target groups, but to have flexibility to hold additional groups if required and this flexibility is maintained within the design, and findings were developed as the focus groups were held. These findings were

analysed to determine the emerging issues and to check that a point was reached where those findings were being confirmed and no new themes were emerging, where saturation had been reached. If saturation had not been achieved, then additional focus groups would have been held.

Focus groups were held in locations that were easily accessible and non-threatening for the participants, for example youth centres or community centres. The locations were selected to be centred in areas with known higher levels of young people who were classified as NEET or JWT known based on the findings reported in the Institution Focused Study. Groups were systematically established, drawing on the findings of the Institution Focused Study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Morgan, 1997), in order to ensure the characteristics found to be more prevalent in young people who were classified as NEET or JWT were represented, in particular LAC, YO and LLDD. These three categories were selected for particular focus as they are highlighted as the highest risk factors by the local authority (LAX, 2010b), as described earlier in the Institution Focused Study. The criteria for selection are that: the young people were classified as NEET or JWT, or had been so within the last three months; the young people were aged 16 to 19; and the young people lived within five miles of the geographical high concentration of young people classified as NEET or JWT identified through the Institution Focused Study. For young people in the not known category, where their category had been established as NEET or JWT prior to the selection, these young people were included. The sample was designed to give gender balance, representation of ethnic groups reflecting the wider population in the selected Local Authority and representation of LAC, YO and LLDD as particular risk factors highlighted in the Institution Focused Study.

The sample was drawn from the local authority's database of young people who were classified as NEET or JWT, which included information on the characteristics identified in the Institution Focused Study. I had access to this database through my position working in the local authority, where I had secured permission to access the data for the research. This enabled a purposive approach

to sampling prior to contact being made with the young people. Invitations were then issued to the sample for ten young people in each of six focus groups. Where the potential participants exceeded ten, random sampling was employed but in a way which met the criteria highlighted above (Morgan, 1997). The selection of young people, therefore, was a combination of purposive and stratified sampling, but with an element of voluntary sampling as participation was by invitation to those in the selected areas or with the selected characteristics, but also only by voluntary informed consent and participation was open to other volunteers meeting the defined criteria (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996).

In practice, the organisation of focus groups of young people who were either currently or recently categorised as NEET proved to be more challenging than anticipated. Despite there being over 1,000 young people who were categorised as NEET at the time, there was a reluctance to join focus groups to discuss their experience. Jarrett (1993) highlights the challenges presented in engaging hard to reach groups in focus groups and the need for much more personalised approaches to secure their trust and engagement. A more personalised approach was taken for this research, working with Youth Support Officers (YSOs) to explain the purpose of the research and the nature of the discussion. The YSOs already had established a level of communication and trust with the young people, which supported the initial approach and securing their informed consent to take part in the focus groups. Support for travel was offered through a payment for travel expenses and pizza was provided on the day, as such support had been found to be effective in securing attendance, particularly for those in JWT (Spielhofer et al., 2009). Focus groups were held at times which were convenient for the participants, generally early evening, typically 6.30pm to 8.30pm. Six focus groups were held, comprising 45 young people, with individual groups ranging in size from four to thirteen. The composition of each group is shown in the table below.

Focus Group	Number of young people	Gender		Participation category			Identified group		
		Male	Female	NEET	JWT	NK	LAC	LLDD	YO
1	7	4	3	4	2	1	2	2	2
2	7	2	5	4	3	0	0	0	0
3	10	4	6	6	4	0	0	2	2
4	13	5	8	10	3	0	0	3	0
5	4	2	2	2	2	0	1	3	0
6	4	4	0	3	1	0	1	2	0
Total	45	21	24	29	15	1	4	12	4

**Table 6: Composition of focus groups**

It should be noted that young people were either in the category NEET, JWT or NK so the total across the categories was the total number of young people taking part. For the second set of categories, only some young people were either LAC, LLDD or YO and in some cases young people were in more than one of these categories so the total in this section did not match the total number of participants.

### 4.5.3 Questions posed in focus groups

The groups had limited structure, with only nine questions planned for the two hour period. This was to ensure discussions were free flowing, with plenty of time for young people to take the discussion into areas that concerned them, in keeping with the phenomenological approach (Morgan, 1997). Questions were designed to be as simple as possible, but it was recognised that young people may need to seek more guidance than adults (Scott, 2008). In this case further explanation would be given to address the clarification sought as it was recognised that 'it is preferable for interviewers to paraphrase the question, than give the standard response' (Scott, 2008, p.92). Questions were drafted as below, building on the research questions, with careful consideration given to their design as 'Quality answers are directly related to quality questions' (Krueger, 1998a, p.59). Morgan

(1997) highlighted the importance in interpreting focus group findings of determining what the participants saw as important and distinguishing this from what they found interesting. Morgan (1997) highlighted that the length of discussion did not necessarily indicate relative importance. The suggested approach was to ask the participants in a final question, what they thought the most important areas of discussion had been. These questions were posed after a brief outline of the purpose of the research and ground rules concerning confidentiality:

1. What do you think of the the Government proposal for all young people to be in education, training or jobs with training to age 18 by 2015?
2. Why do you think some young people are not in jobs or college?
3. What are the challenges you and others in your situation face when you try to find a job, particularly with training, in this area?
4. What are the challenges in getting a place at college or other education or training provider in this area?
5. If you could change one thing to make it easier to get a place at college or another education or training provider, or a job with training, what would you change?
6. Thinking about your life before you were 16, how did it prepare you for education, training or a job with training at 16?
7. If you could change one thing about your experience before the age of 16, which would have made it more likely that you'd be in education, training or a job with training now, what would you change?
8. What do you think is the most important issue we have talked about today? (each young person to be encouraged to highlight one issue)
9. Is there anything else anyone wants to raise which you haven't had the opportunity to say so far?

## 4.6 Data recording

Focus group discussions were fully recorded, both by camera and voice recorder, in order to capture the detail of who said what and to be able to view expressions and gestures after the focus group has finished. Such in-depth recording has been shown to be valuable in capturing focus group discussions in particular (Krueger and Casey, 2000). A complete transcript of all discussion was recorded, including noting other aspects of the discussion, such as pauses and any interruptions. Hammersley (2010, p.556) identifies a series of nine areas to be considered when transcribing, from 'whether to transcribe any particular audio- or video-recording, and if so how much of it' to whether 'to include relevant gestures and fine or gross physical movement'. For this research, all discussions in focus groups were fully transcribed so all data from the participants was taken into the data analysis stage. However, gestures were not recorded on the transcripts, but the videos were retained for subsequent reference during the analysis. This approach was taken as whilst it was considered important to ensure every conversation in every focus group was fully transcribed, it was not realistic to include every gesture in the written transcript. Additionally, to maintain confidentiality, where place names or particular colleges were referred to, the generic titles of 'place name' and 'college name' were used respectively. An extract from the transcript of one of the focus groups is included as Appendix Three. All quotations are also anonymous, as anonymity was guaranteed to all participants as part of the agreement for taking part in the research. Consideration was given to the use of pseudonyms or short descriptions, but this was rejected on the basis that it could be seen as emphasising the power of the researcher over the participants and could lead to some comments being given greater weight, as explained in the section on ethical considerations. Hammersley (2010, p.8) explores the issue of naming and identifies the issue that 'any labels we give to speakers, beyond numbers or letters, may convey information about them, and this raises questions about what should and should not be included'. Hammersley (2010) expresses concern that names, or even pseudonyms, could be given to convey gender, but this may then imply gender is the most significant factor when considering that person's contribution in the interaction. Guenther (2009, p.412) outlines the power of

naming, which he develops as the 'politics of naming' as he explores the complexities of whether to name places and participants in research. He highlights that 'because names are powerful, choosing to use - or to alter - them is also an act of power' (p.413). This was considered in relation to the potential benefits of a greater understanding of the particular circumstances of the participant who made the comment (for example in relation to gender, disability or being a young offender). I decided, however, to let each quotation stand on its own to be considered equally with all others, rather than the researcher take the position of determining what characteristics of that young person's background, character or circumstances should be singled out (Guenther, 2009). This approach reflects other research in the same field, such as Spielhofer's (2009) report for the government on young people's participation. All quotations are also presented verbatim from the transcription, even where this may require greater effort on the part of the reader to understand the comment, as this presents the young people's perspectives in their words, as they chose to express their views at the time. Finally, all participants were thanked for their involvement and an outline of the findings was sent to each participant and the responses, although limited, are considered in Section 4.8 below.

#### **4.7 Learning from the first focus group**

A pilot focus group was not run, but the first focus group was reviewed with the participants, based on the approach advocated by Krueger (1998a), as this gave equal weight to the views expressed by young people in this first group rather than dismissing their views as an initial pilot with no direct impact on the eventual findings. If the participants had expressed concerns in relation to the focus group itself, including the questions posed, then the findings would have been set aside and the design reviewed. However, if concerns were not expressed, then this would have been taken as the first focus group for data collection purposes (Krueger, 1998a).

The first focus group was held at a youth centre in an area with a high level of young people who were categorised as NEET, and comprised seven young people out of a final expected attendance of eight. This was a lower level of dropout on this occasion than might have been expected based on wider research (Morgan, 1997) but possibly reflected the benefits of the more personalised approach to selection through the YSOs (Jarrett, 1993). After informal discussion as the young people arrived, all the young people were welcomed and talked through an overview of the research and key principles relating to confidentiality, openness, respect, informed consent and the right to withdraw. At this stage, young people were also informed of the use of both tape recording and video-recording, in order to capture full transcripts and to clarify who said what, as well as to record expressions and gestures. The young people were also assured all film material would be destroyed after the full transcripts had been produced and analysed and tapes would be destroyed after five years. This was accepted though not without a few jokes that the young people had hoped this might have been their opportunity for fame. After a further time for questions and discussion, the young people were asked to sign the consent form, which was completed by everyone. This section now considers the reflections on the first focus group and how these informed subsequent focus groups.

Feedback from the first focus group was drawn from young people in discussion immediately afterwards. I was conscious of the need to give the young people confidence to express their views and stressed the importance of open feedback and that this would help to inform future groups, with no consequences for them, however critical the feedback. In order to assist this process, the young people were asked to discuss potential feedback in pairs first, before being invited to give feedback in the focus group. Though this approach I sought to address again the potential for perceptions of power imbalance and the risk that 'the power of adult views always takes precedence over children's views and confines children to subordinate roles' (Kellett, 2010, p.17). Following this process, young people fed back that the purpose had been clear and they considered they had the opportunity to say anything that they wanted to. No young person conveyed a view that they

had not had the opportunity to speak or to ask questions at any stage. They particularly valued the opportunity to highlight one key issue from their perspective at the end, although some questioned the need for the final question. The final question asked, 'Is there anything else anyone wants to raise which you haven't had the opportunity to say so far?'. Looking back, the highlighting of this question as appearing superfluous was potentially a positive reflection on the discussions to that point. The young people also commented positively on the venue which was a familiar place for five of the seven and welcomed the pizza and financial support for transport which had supported their participation. The young people questioned the proposed timing in the evening and stated lunchtime would be fine and for some even preferable.

There were also learning points from the intra-group discussion, particularly in relation to issues which proved to be controversial. The topic of bullying led to a heated discussion, particularly between the two most vocal participants, with a need for me to intervene ultimately to take the discussion on to a different topic. Clearly this is a topic on which there are passionate views, but I was also conscious of my responsibilities for the involvement, and ultimately the safety, of the wider group.

In summary, from the first focus group, there were key learning points in relation to the need to anticipate more challenging group dynamics and to be well equipped to manage the range of personalities to draw out the full range of views that the group had to offer. The proposed timing of future groups was also revised to hold them at a range of times, rather than solely in the evening. As the feedback from the first focus group overall was broadly positive, this was taken as the first focus group for the research, rather than being put aside as a pilot as it would have been if there had needed to be significant revisions to questions (Krueger, 1998a).

## **4.8 Data credibility**

The quality of the data was assured based on internal validity (credibility), external validity (transferability), reliability (dependability) and objectivity (confirmability) as criteria outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1989). Internal validity, or credibility, was established through ensuring significant time was spent in focus groups and the participants were relaxed and open (Lincoln, 2009). This was achieved through allowing discussions to roam freely in locations that were familiar to the young people, such as youth centres. An overview of findings was also developed using a word cloud, based directly on the transcripts from the focus groups, simply by giving greater weight to the terms most commonly expressed. The word cloud is included as Appendix Four. This was provided for feedback to all participants, to provide ‘member checks’ (Mertens, 2010, p.257) and discussed with other stakeholders in the local authority, as ‘peer de-briefers’ (Mertens, 2010, p.257). Whilst this approach had significant limitations in that it did not give greater weight to those areas young people spoke more passionately about or those issues which they highlighted as significant for them at the end, it did generate an early opportunity for wider feedback on the views expressed. In the event, no feedback was directly received from the young people and limited comments from peers. Some views from young people were received indirectly from other workers who were working closely with the young people and aware of the research. These views were positive but also questioning. They were positive in that they appreciated that their views had been drawn together and reflected back. There were no further issues identified for inclusion at that stage. However, several also questioned whether anything would change as a result with expectations of change taking place swiftly following the discussions. An example of feedback from the wider peer group was the relatively low profile given by young people to apprenticeships in their discussions. Whilst this was not added to the research, apprenticeships are addressed later in the thesis.

External validity, or transferability, was established by including sufficient description on research methods, local authority context and focus group

composition to support the reader in determining the degree of transferability to other settings (Krueger, 1998b). This reflects the approach known as thick description, whereby a full description supports consideration of transferability (Geertz, 1973). Dependability, or reliability, was established through a consistent approach to the format of the focus groups and the questions posed, whilst recognising that in open qualitative discussions, each discussion took its own course, as shaped by the participants. Any significant changes were documented to further support dependability, such as the recording of the need to intervene in one discussion, which was becoming progressively more heated. Finally, objectivity, or confirmability, was sought through both ensuring the effect of my presence was minimised at the time of discussions and maintaining a clear audit trail of the development of findings from the data, so that findings were clearly based on the foundation of the focus group discussions.

#### **4.9 Personal reflections on the first focus group**

My reflections were that although I had expected the group to be challenging, aspects of the group dynamics had proved to be more challenging than anticipated. The range of participants and their personal histories presented challenges in facilitating the group in a way which encouraged all to participate but yet did not over emphasise my role as I was keen that the young people were free to express their views and that my influence was minimised as far as possible. Hence the selection of research methods that enabled active participation on the part of the young people as discussed earlier (Alderson, 2004, p.100). The active participation inevitably involved a degree of risk and at the outset, one of the group sought to make fun of the session and me at a point where the group dynamics were only just developing, with a comment, 'You look just like Rodney off Del boy'. I took the point in good humour and managed to re-focus it back on the purpose of the discussions. This got us all off to a good start. In hindsight, and knowing more now about that particular young man's background, I think this was posed as a test to see whether my reaction would be the same as they had experienced at school and found so limiting in their development. As will be clear

in the next chapter, many of these young people had experienced early ‘labelling’ as challenging or ‘problem’ children with an early and sustained oppositional relationship with teachers. I was conscious subsequently that a different reaction to that first comment would have simply reduced the focus group from their perspective to yet another challenging engagement with an authority figure.

#### **4.10 Further focus groups**

A further five focus groups were then held as planned, building on the learning from the pilot. The numbers attending these groups ranged more widely than had been anticipated at the design stage, from four to thirteen. The smallest groups arose as there were higher numbers of young people expected but not attending, whereas the highest group arose from full attendance and a young person bringing along a friend who met the criteria. The variation in group size and attendance reflected some of the challenges in working with hard to reach groups (Jarrett, 1993). The numbers attending each group and breakdown by gender and other relevant factors are shown in Table Six in Section 4.5.2 of the thesis. The comments of the young people are presented and explored in more detail in the next chapter.

#### **4.11 Analytical framework**

The analytical framework is selected in line with the phenomenological paradigm and is based on grounded theory, drawing on interpretive analysis (Krueger, 1998b). Hennessy and Heary (2005) identify four stages in the analysis of focus group data drawn from groups with children and young people. The first stage is an initial reading of the focus group transcript followed by identifying and summarising any emerging themes. The second stage is the identification of codes, which will subsequently be drawn together to form categories. The third stage is to group codes and then the fourth stage is to check the categories back with the emerging themes (Hennessy and Heary, 2005, pp.247-248). The approach in this research draws significantly on the work of Hennessy and Heary

(2005), but included additional steps in the analysis and reflection, as the themes were developed as outlined below.

All focus groups were fully transcribed drawing on the audio and video recordings. Although requiring considerable time, this ensured a close familiarity with the data and, surprisingly, different comments became more apparent at transcription stage, even though I had been listening intently in the original discussions. This is a more comprehensive approach than that proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), who suggest simply transcribing only 'as much as is needed' (p.30), but my experience was that this would have omitted much rich material and risked comments being overlooked where their importance only became apparent at the stage of transcription.

Interpretive analysis within grounded theory was employed to determine findings from the focus group data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), building up the findings from the data, through identification codes and progressive clustering of codes (Bell, 2005). Consideration was given to use of a computer based package, such as NVIVO, but the data was considered manageable through paper-based approaches. Once codes were identified, the transcripts were physically cut up and stuck to large flip-chart sheets of paper and moved between sheets or copied to additional sheets as the analysis progressed. Codes were developed from the data itself, with the first set being developed after careful reading of the first transcript (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The second transcript was then read and similarities and differences identified. New codes were generated where differences were identified. This process was repeated for each of the transcripts. Clusters of codes were developed by grouping codes with similar themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). However, this process was not taken to the theoretical end point of grounded theory to one core category (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), but rather to a more pragmatic conclusion, in line with the interpretive approach, of key themes which highlighted a range of barriers to participation for young people (Knodel, 1993). The themes are presented in the next chapter with extensive quotations

from the young people. These quotations are presented with a reference to the focus group where the comment was made, but no names or pseudonyms are employed for the young people, as explained in the section on ethical considerations (Guenther, 2009). The analysis identified three key themes, each with three sub-themes. These themes, the associated quotations from the young people and the inter-relationship of the themes with wider research are considered in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESULTS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The analysis of focus group data identified three themes, which are considered under three broad headings in this chapter, each relating to the barriers young people experience in their life worlds in relation to their participation in education, training or employment: physical barriers; emotional barriers; and social barriers. Whilst these three themes are addressed separately in this chapter, they are closely inter-related and many of the issues relate to more than one of the themes. It is important to recognise that these sections do not stand in isolation, but are necessarily inter-connected as the lives of young people cannot be considered separately from physical, emotional and social perspectives. These themes provide a structure in which the perspectives of young people are considered, but their perception of barriers and their perspectives on what would overcome these barriers straddle all three themes and require a holistic approach to understanding them. Each of the themes is considered in relation to the perspectives of young people themselves, with supporting direct quotations from the young people's comments in the focus group discussions. Extensive quotations are drawn on to reflect the phenomenological approach, in order to root the findings in the direct comments of young people, in their own quotations words, and to draw as close to understanding their perspectives as possible. This chapter considers the results in relation to the three research questions, drawing out the young people's understanding of the barriers they face to their participation in education, training and employment; how these barriers could be overcome; and links these findings to national policy. The themes are also considered in the context of wider research and critically examined for the contribution the findings make to wider research in this field.

## 5.2 Physical barriers

### 5.2.1 Curriculum offer

The young people in the focus groups highlighted barriers in relation to the curriculum offer as lack of accessible breadth of offer, lack of vocational and practical focus including work experience, inflexibility and insufficient range of learning styles. These barriers were holding young people back, with concerns that the curriculum subjects sought were not accessible as demonstrated by one young person's concern below:

The problem with like me round here is there's only sort of one course I want to do round in 'college name', whereas everything else there isn't like anything I would find interesting.

(Focus group 3)

The balance of the curriculum offer was also seen as a barrier with a clear lack of vocational and practical focus, including insufficient work experience, with a strong yearning for more that was relevant to their 'real world and real life', as one young person stated:

They teach you pointless things, like they don't teach you nothing about the real world or like real life. They're like – who actually needs to learn about poetry and any different words that poetry means? Why couldn't they teach us something that would have been needed that we're going to use?

(Focus Group 3)

There were many references by the young people to the need for more practical and vocational provision, although these were usually generally voiced rather than directed at any specific curriculum area. Many of these views appeared to be rooted in school experience, as for many young people in this group there was limited experience of provision after school, although their school experience had clearly shaped their perceptions of education more widely.

Young people also voiced concerns in relation to a lack of flexibility in the curriculum offer. This was demonstrated in a particularly acute way by one young person who considered she had no option but to withdraw entirely, when she just wanted to focus her study on fewer subjects. Her perspective is clearly stated:

I went to college for about five months and I found it really difficult but they did not like the idea of me dropping out and they said that I should drop a subject because I was doing three. But none of the teachers wanted me to drop theirs. They said, "You can't drop my subject". So I had to leave.

(Focus group 1)

This demonstrated how a lack of flexibility impacted directly on young people, as if this young person had been offered the flexibility to continue with a different combination of courses, she may well have continued in education. However, at the time of the discussion she was not participating in education and training. Flexibility was also needed in relation to timing and content of provision.

I think they need to change not just the curricular system, but like the way teachers teach us, because they sort of just dull you down into this person, like, I wake up at nine, go in, finish at three and it all goes in a cycle just being dull, like nothing happens.

(Focus group 2)

A variety of learning styles was also sought by the young people, as demonstrated through the following quotation from the discussions:

And like myself, I'm a visual learner, I like to see things and, if I have the book in front of me, I'm not learning nothing . . . If they did more things like visually, I would have learned better but with this book and sheets, it just didn't do anything for me.

(Focus group 2)

Overall, in relation to curriculum offer, young people highlighted accessible breadth of curriculum offer, lack of vocational and practical focus including work experience, inflexibility and insufficient range of learning styles supported as

barriers to their participation in education, training and employment. These were directly related to the changes that young people put forward that would help to overcome these barriers. The changes sought were a greater breadth of curriculum offer, more vocational and practical focus, with a greater flexibility and support for a wider range of learning styles. The breadth of issues contrasted with the review of literature by Spielhofer et al. (2007) which did not specifically refer to the curriculum offer, but highlighted a related theme of quality of provision, but this focused primarily on retention. This would appear to omit a broader consideration of quality, as retention was only one indirect indicator as it was influenced by other factors such as the young person's personal circumstances at the time (Bivand, 2004). The issues highlighted by young people in the focus groups were not identified either in the themes emerging from the interviews conducted by Spielhofer et al. (2009). The importance of curriculum offer was however made clear by the young people in this research and was identified as a key factor in influencing young people's participation by Blenkinsop et al. (2006). Again, it was surprising that this was not drawn into Spielhofer's review of the literature, particularly as there was also earlier research highlighting the curriculum offer as one of the most significant factors influencing young people's choice (Mangan, Adnett and Davies, 2001, p.43).

The young people in the focus groups sought both a breadth of opportunities and flexibility in the offer (Finlay et al., 2010). Yet, the extent of flexibility that was desirable has been questioned in the literature. Pring et al. (2009, p.101) argue for flexibility within a framework as below:

The answer must be a curriculum framework that is precise enough to ensure that the agreed educational aims are pursued, that quality assurance can be enforced, and that learners can progress to the whole spectrum of higher level studies, training and employment, and have the knowledge and skills for the 'intelligent management of life' (Pring et al., 2009, p.102).

This highlights the importance of maintaining rigour in the design so increased flexibility does not compromise quality of provision or opportunities for progression. Young people also highlighted the need for a practical approach, which Pring et al. (2009, p.69) distinguished as ‘learning how to do something’ as distinct from ‘learning that something is the case’. However, Pring et al. (2009) reported the Nuffield Review’s findings that such opportunities have declined in school in contrast to the aspirations of the young people in the focus groups:

The Review believed that a tradition of learning based on practical engagement has been lost in schools, reflected in the near demise of Woodwork, Metalwork and Home Economics, in the decline of fieldwork in Geography (Power, 2008), in less experimental approaches to Science (caused partly by assessment almost exclusively through written examinations), and in the decline of work based learning and employer related apprenticeships (Stanton, 2008) (Pring et al., 2009, p.69).

Arguably, this trend has only increased since that report, as evidenced by the loss of work experience as a statutory requirement and the reduction in vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4 following the Wolf Review (Wolf, 2011). Following the Wolf Review (Wolf, 2011), the Department for Education cut the value of more than 3,175 vocational qualifications in January 2012 by ending their recognition in England’s school league tables for all but 70. This was widely seen as likely to reduce the number of schools offering these qualifications, although schools were not prevented from doing so. At the time, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers was quoted as saying, ‘It is sad but true that league tables determine what schools do. In saying that some qualifications will not be included in the tables, the government is effectively signing their death warrant’ (Cassidy, 2012, online). This shift away from vocational and applied teaching and learning is concerning at a time when the government is seeking to achieve full participation, yet removing pathways that young people themselves are seeing as inspiring retention and progression in education and training. The narrowing of the curriculum offer has also been driven by the political emphasis by the Coalition Government on the ‘English Baccalaureate’, which comprises a core set of GCSEs to be achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 (Hodgson and Spours,

2011a). The English Baccalaureate comprises five GCSEs grades A\*-C in maths, English, two sciences, geography or history and either a modern foreign language or a classical language. Concerns over the impact of this on groups less likely to achieve this level have been expressed, such as those of the House of Commons Education Select Committee which reported that:

However, other evidence suggests that the EBac might lead to a greater focus on those students on the borderline of achieving it, and therefore have a negative impact on the most vulnerable or disadvantaged young people, who could receive less attention as a result. At the same time, we believe that the EBac's level of prescription does not adequately reflect the differences of interest or ability between individual young people, and risks the very shoe-horning of pupils into inappropriate courses about which one education minister has expressed concerns. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, paragraph 4 in conclusions and recommendations).

These concerns from a political perspective correlate with those expressed by the young people themselves, with a risk that current national policy changes open up the likelihood of increasing barriers to participation rather than reducing them.

### **5.2.2 Access to employment**

In the focus groups, young people were concerned that lack of access to employment opportunities was a key barrier holding them back from participating in employment with training after compulsory schooling. The young people's perspectives on lack of employment opportunities can be grouped into themes which are prior experience, qualifications, age and availability of opportunities, both for employment and apprenticeships. Many young people highlighted employers' requirements for prior experience as a barrier to participation.

Like, they say that they want six months experience but nowhere is going to give you a chance to get that experience – that's one of the big problems of finding a job.

(Focus group 3)

Many of these young people found the lack of employment opportunities compounded by their lack of qualifications, or having qualifications that were not seen as relevant by the employers, as a barrier to entry to employment.

Most jobs that you apply for they always say you need five C grades or equivalent, usually. If you don't have those grades, then that stops you from getting the job that you want to get and it makes it harder for you.

(Focus group 5)

Young people's frustrations with entry to employment extended to their age being presented to them by employers as a barrier to entering employment, with some highlighting specific age requirements (for example for working on a construction site) and others highlighting more general feedback from employers.

The age you need to be to get a job should be lowered, like jobs that you need to be 18, they should be 17 or 16 or something because they are too high.

(Focus group 5)

Finally, availability of opportunities, both for employment and apprenticeships, with views that the economic downturn had increased competition for jobs, was identified by the young people as a barrier to entering employment:

There's not a lot out there and 'place name' is not really a big place, so all the people who do need something are really fighting – not really fighting each other but they're trying their hardest. I think that increases the amount of people on Job Seekers' Allowance and stuff like that, because there is not generally a lot of jobs.

(Focus group 2)

And there isn't any jobs out there at all so it's quite hard.

(Focus Group 6)

Overall, young people identified barriers in relation to access to employment as lack of prior experience, lack of the required qualifications, age and insufficient

availability of opportunities, both for employment and apprenticeships. They sought more opportunities for entry to employment with limited or no qualifications and opportunities to build experience through shorter work placements or temporary work. The lack of suitable employment opportunities, however, has been highlighted as a barrier for young people's participation in wider recent research and confirmed findings, for example, from Spielhofer et al.'s (2007) review of literature related to participation. However, Spielhofer et al. (2007) focused more particularly on high levels of young people classified as NEET in areas with traditions of manufacturing industry (Bivand, 2004). The argument was presented that with the decline of traditional industries, there was no longer sufficient appropriate employment opportunities for the previous levels of participation in employment after compulsory schooling. This was combined with greater emphasis on short term contracts, temporary and seasonal work, as part of a move to less security of employment for young people, which in turn increased the churn out of being classified as NEET status but then returning to that classification. The concerns expressed by the young people in focus groups highlight the shortage of employment opportunities as a key issue in LAX, even though this was an area with a high level of service-based industry and no strong tradition of manufacturing industry (LAX, 2010e). This may have indicated that following the recent downturn in the economy which affected all parts of England, the employment opportunities for young people were decreasing across all sectors, which was supported by the national participation data.

The young people's perspectives on lack of employment opportunities were grouped into themes which were prior experience, qualifications, age and availability of opportunities, both for employment and apprenticeships. Yet, before these are considered, it is useful to consider the expectations that are being placed on the labour market as a whole and on individual employers, which Pring et al. (2009) describe as 'high and, in our view, unrealisable expectations' (p. 137). In particular, young people highlighted in the focus groups barriers to participation associated with lack of prior experience, insufficient or no qualifications, age and availability of opportunities, both for employment and

apprenticeships. These barriers confirmed findings by Spielhofer et al, who identify similar factors from qualitative interviews with 120 young people, who voiced concerns over barriers, having applied for ‘loads of jobs’ (2007, p.66).

### **5.2.3 Transport**

In the focus groups, young people highlighted transport as a key issue for them as a barrier holding them back from participating in education and training after compulsory schooling. Factors in relation to transport that were highlighted are cost, time and distance, often simultaneously identified by the same participants.

It’s a bit of everything really, the cost, the time and the distance, like having to get two trains and stuff. It will cost too much. . .

(Focus group 5)

There were also more specific aspects of transport that emerged as a barrier, such as the need for transport to apprenticeship placements. Some participants found it difficult to access apprenticeship placements, and one described the experience of starting an apprenticeship at a considerable distance from home.

I did an apprenticeship in childcare and I, um, phoned up to do the one over there, ‘Place name’, and they told me I had to phone up a number in London and all I had to do was go up there for an interview and they’d place me somewhere nearer to where I lived. I ended up having to go to London every Wednesday, and the thing that annoyed like quite a few people was they wouldn’t pay for the expenses to go up there and it was £25 a week.

(Focus group 4)

Further, for some young people the cost of transport was prohibitively expensive compared to the wages on offer, such as for one young person who was struggling to work in central London:

When I got a job that was quite good on good money, I had to quit because I wasn’t earning enough to, like, basically all my wages, the £50 a week, was going on just getting to work and it was £52 for a

monthly Travel Card and that was one week I would work for basically nothing.

(Focus group 3)

The participants also identified a need for some forms of employment to either have a driving licence or a car, such as the comment, ‘Most of the jobs now, you need a driving licence from 18 years and up’ (Focus group 4).

In summary in relation to transport, young people identified cost of transport, time involved in journeys and distance to be travelled as barriers as well as highlighting the more specific barrier of not owning a car. The young people sought greater access to more subsidised or free transport, or a level of earnings which reflected the costs involved in transport. The young people also sought more local opportunities for work and more open access with the removal of requirements for a driving licence unless that was absolutely essential for the job. It was evident though that the concerns were not universally identified, nor did each issue represent the same level of concern for all young people, as this depended on their particular situation, which contributed to their perception of the issue. Indeed, one young person’s comments on transport that ‘it’s the cost, the time and the distance’ (Focus group 5) almost directly paraphrased the summary phrase in Spielhofer’s report in relation to the barriers for young people being ‘the cost, the availability of public transport and journey times’ (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.69). Spielhofer et al. (2009) highlighted a second key finding that young people were reluctant to travel, with reasons cited as insular communities and a lack of confidence (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.69). These findings were not seen in the focus group discussions and there were clear cases to the contrary where young people were prepared to travel to neighbouring towns and indeed to London. This may have been a reflection on the different communities considered as the majority of Spielhofer’s sample was drawn from urban communities where there may be less requirement to travel and a greater rivalry between different communities, particularly from a young person’s perspective (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.69).

It was interesting to note that Spielhofer et al.'s (2007) review of research literature related to participation did not specifically highlight transport as an issue. It drew out indirectly related factors such as financial and poverty issues (Simm, Page and Miller, 2007; Middleton et al, 2005), but without specifically linking these to transport. This was surprising as Spielhofer et al.'s (2009) report goes on to identify transport as an issue highlighted by the young people themselves. Indeed, there was literature indicating that transport was an issue in relation to young people's participation, which pre-dated Spielhofer et al.'s (2007) report, such as Mangan, Adnett and Davies's report (2001), drawing on survey data from 643 young people. This highlighted transport as an important factor influencing choice, as it emerged as third in median ranking by the young people. Interestingly, Mangan, Adnett and Davies (2001) also considered parents' perspectives and transport again emerges as third in median ranking (Mangan, Adnett and Davies, 2001, p.42). The importance of transport as a barrier was also highlighted by Gorard and Smith (2007) who cited earlier work (Hramiak, 2001) for the case that, 'a major reason for not continuing with study was distance to the nearest FE College' (Gorard and Smith, 2007, p.146). Evaluation work related to the provision of the EMA, however, found transport not to be significant factor in relation to participation (Perren, Middleton and Emmerson, 2003), which contrasted with the young people's perspectives and the wider research highlighted above (Gorard and Smith, 2007; Hramiak, 2001; Mangan, Adnett and Davies, 2001; Spielhofer et al., 2007). This difference in findings was surprising and a disappointing consequence was that the support through EMA was subsequently withdrawn with the loss of support for transport and other living costs. This is considered more fully alongside other socio-economic factors in the section on social barriers to participation below.

The focus group discussions on transport in this research also highlighted examples of how young people have different perceptions of the same issue. In one discussion, one young person commented that 'Most of the jobs now, you need a driving licence from 18 years and up', but this was contested by another young person's view that, 'Not most of them' required a driving licence (Focus

group 4). This was interesting as from one young person's perspective, 'most of the jobs' require a driving licence and this was clearly perceived as a barrier in securing employment. However, for another young person, the perspective was different and 'not most of them' were seen as requiring a driving licence. This perception would be likely to affect the approach to the job market and whether a young person would consider applying for a particular position if the requirement was not stipulated, but left open to perception. This built on and extended current thinking in relation to the population of young people who were classified as NEET. There was a well established consensus that this population was not homogeneous (Archer et al., 2005; Speilhofer et al., 2007), yet limited consideration as to how the heterogeneity of the group affected their perceptions of similar circumstances. This focus group discussion indicated the differences in perception could be significant in their influence on a young person's decisions in relation to participation.

### **5.3 Emotional barriers**

#### **5.3.1 Lack of confidence**

Many young people directly articulated a lack of confidence, often exacerbated by their school experience, or complete breakdown of schooling. For a small number of young people, the loss of confidence had been compounded and they expressed what could be termed a 'lost hope' for their future. Negative school experience was often a significant factor, with some young people having attended several schools or having long periods out of school, such as the young person who commented:

I dropped out of school when I was young, so I did not have much confidence from when I did leave school. I applied for college but I wasn't confident so I couldn't do much. Then I went to Connexions and they told me there was no point in writing up a CV – they said I should either do voluntary work or come here, so I came here.

(Focus group 4)

Conversely, for some young people, one positive experience, such as securing a part-time job, then boosted confidence to pursue other opportunities.

I think people have to have much more confidence like to get jobs, to go into courses, because I've had a lot of trouble with sort of the Tech and not getting into courses which I wanted to, and now I've got my part-time job I feel like more confident and that I can grow in my experience of what I've learned and what I have to gain through a job, basically.

(Focus group 3)

However, an interesting finding from these focus groups was the range of perspectives and the mutual support seen in the groups. This was evident both for those where there are pre-existing relationships outside, but interestingly this mutual support was also observed between participants who only came into contact through the group. This was seen both at the level of one participant changing the tone of the discussion through a more optimistic comment, through to specific advice offered from one participant to another. An example of the comment that shifted the tone of the conversation was when following a number of more pessimistic views from participants, one participant commented as below, which then led to a change in the discussion:

I think to be honest that no matter where people are or what their background is, whether they are in school, college, work or wanting to do something as a career, they should just be given a chance, like to boost their confidence up, to like know that they're going to be good at something.

(Focus group 4)

For some young people, however, the emotional impact of difficult relationships with teachers and a feeling of rejection by the school, was further embedded through a feeling of rejection by employers, colleges and wider society as they sought opportunities after school, leading to a sense of lost hope for their future. The discussion below highlighted some of the sense of rejection felt by some of the young people:

But it puts you off after you've been rejected so many times.

Too many times because of my criminal record.

If you ring them (employers) up they're like, "Oh yes, we'll ring you back", and I was like, you're gashed, you're not ringing me back.

(Focus group 1)

In many cases, young people spoke of their dreams at earlier stages in life and how these had been dashed, building on their sense of rejection, or in hindsight were now seen as unrealistic. The thoughts and feelings are expressed in the discussion here.

You've got dreams and you always think when you're older you're going to have this and you're going to be able to do that, and it's not easy.

I thought I'd just walk into the Job Centre and ask for my dream job and I'd get it. Yeah, alright. Start work the next day. That's easy. Buy my mortgage next week.

(Focus group 1)

In some cases the young people expressed feelings of resignation to their situation, with a sense of regret for the past and lost hope for the future. These were strongly expressed and clearly represented deeply held emotions for the young people concerned. The sense of lost hope was simply expressed in discussion by one young person emotionally expressing at age 17 that it 'felt too late' for her as in the discussion below:

I would love to go back and change everything that I've done!

It kind of does feel too late - I was proper stubborn in school so if someone told me to do something, I'd do the complete opposite.

(Focus group 3)

However, it was interesting to see that within the focus group these views were questioned and other members of the focus group offered support and more positive views of the future:

I think it's important that everyone knows that it's not too late even though it feels like it, and like, how hard it is to actually get a job, so you don't think that as soon as you get out of school you're just going to get one and everything.

It's about giving people a chance, to be honest, no matter what's gone on in their life. Everyone deserves a chance, really.

(Focus group 3)

Overall, lack of confidence was seen as a key barrier for young people from the discussions in the focus groups. with a clear theme of the importance of second, third and further chances to support young people to succeed. The young people themselves recognised the importance of further opportunities, which enabled them to start to build greater confidence for their lives ahead. The identification of low confidence or self-esteem concurred with earlier research, such as the review of literature by Spielhofer et al. (2009, p.44). Spielhofer et al. (2009, p.59) also highlighted the impact of difficulties in school, including bullying and low self-esteem, which was found to be particularly evident for young people who had been classified as NEET for a prolonged period. Low self-esteem has been identified more widely across education at all ages as a factor leading to disaffection and disengagement (Holroyd and Armour, 2003). Low self-esteem has been linked to a lack of social and personal capital, with fewer supportive peers or mentor figures (Phillips, 2009), but Phillips also highlights the potential of cultural capital, drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1986) to highlight how some young people draw on cultural pursuits which increase their self-esteem. This was evident in the comments made by some young people, who articulated strong interests, for example, in music.

Several young people in the focus groups expressed regret for the past and lost hope for the future, which held them back from exploring and pursuing future opportunities for participation in education and training. These themes were not specifically highlighted as significant issues in government sponsored research, either through analysis of existing research or through direct discussions with

young people (Spielhofer et al., 2009). This omission is possibly because lost hope is a difficult area to quantify. Spielhofer did, however, identify the emerging theme of low confidence or self-esteem and identified that for some ‘there may have been an element of active choice - a wish not to comply or conform’ (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.44). This was an interesting distinction, which drew on the theme of neoliberalism highlighted in the literature review where the government had increasingly pursued policies on the basis of supporting choice rather than supporting the individual, yet here was an example of that choice then running counter to national policy on raising participation. At this juncture, surely alternative policy approaches are required?

### **5.3.2 Bullying**

Some young people attributed their difficulties with school to bullying at school, which in turn had reduced both their ability and motivation to continue in education or training after the age of 16. This was illustrated in the quotation below:

At school for the whole five years I got bullied because of my back deformity. I think they should punish people that are bullying you. Because of the bullies I came out with absolutely nothing. I was naughty at school because of the way I got bullied, so because of that I’m now suffering because I can’t get a job.

(Focus group 1)

There were also strong views from these young people that insufficient action was being taken in schools to address bullying, with examples cited of bullying being overlooked despite a stated policy to the contrary, as illustrated by one person’s comment below:

You always see signs up as well in schools, anti-bullying, teachers are always going to be there, yet bullying is happening right under their nose and nothing’s happening about it.

(Focus group 1)

Interestingly, there was also clear evidence of peer pressure against bullying, which was highlighted in the discussion below where the final comment secured clear support from the majority of the group:

The people that bully are the ones that have got insecurities themselves, they've got to try to take it out on somebody else.

Exactly. And there's just no point. And they think it's a good look as well and it's really not.

It's unattractive being a bully as well because no one wants to go out with a bully, who wants a boyfriend that's a bully?

(Focus group 1)

In summary, the experience of having been bullied, often accompanied by a real or perceived lack of action by others, and often expressed with strong emotion, was a barrier identified in the focus group discussions, which was included as a key emotional issue for young people. The young people held strong views, often passionately expressed, concerning their view that bullying needed to be challenged more directly in schools. Bullying was specifically identified by Spielhofer et al. (2009) and Coffield et al. (2008) as one of several factors affecting participation. Coffield et al. (2008) described a range of negative experiences of learning in school including 'being picked on in class by teachers, experiences of bullying, receiving insufficient attention within large classes or feeling that teachers were only interested in 'brainy ones'' (pp.53-54). Spielhofer et al. (2009) set out a positive view in government funded research on the national response to these concerns. He gave a clear endorsement of recent policy documents addressing 'better classroom management and anti-bullying strategies (that) minimise the impact of disruptive pupils on their peers' learning opportunities' alongside 'opportunities for more applied teaching and learning' (p.59).

In relation to the Coalition Government's policy stance on anti-bullying the position is mixed. Whilst the publication of clear recent guidance for schools is

welcome (DfE, 2012), it is surprising that the government has disowned previous research into reducing bullying. A comprehensive analysis of previous research, with recommendations for future policy in this critical area, remains on the DfE website. However, there is an accompanying statement to the effect that it has been archived and should not be considered to reflect current policy or guidance - despite being described as guidance on the web-site (DfE, 2011b). The lack of recognition of this research is disappointing, particularly as there is evidence that schools' anti-bullying policies are limited in their breadth (Smith et al., 2012), yet the 'anti-bullying policy provides a framework for a consistent whole-school approach' (Thompson and Smith, 2011, p.8). Smith et al. (2012) found that schools had only 49 per cent of the expected items in their policies, which is disappointingly only a small increase over the level identified in a similar study six years earlier. In particular, Smith et al. (2012) highlight that there is little reference to cyberbullying, homophobic bullying, bullying based on disabilities or faith, teacher-pupil bullying, following up of incidents or specific preventative measures (Smith et al., 2012). The specific issues of bullying linked to disabilities and lack of follow up of bullying incidents directly match concerns highlighted by the young people in the focus groups and further raised concerns that guidance, policies and action are not sufficiently robust to tackle the challenge of bullying and the barrier this represents to young people's participation after compulsory schooling.

### **5.3.3 Labelling**

For some young people, they reported that the school experience and relationships with teachers had undermined their self-esteem, leaving them either to accept a label of being 'small and stupid' or to rebel and be seen as 'a problem'.

Yes. Sometimes they see you like you're a naughty kid, you're going to be treated like a naughty kid for the rest of the six years. They shouldn't do that, they should give you a chance after chance. They can't just put you in a box and think that you're that s\*\*t, you're going to be put in a corner of the room and they're not going to help you. They say you're

going to go in these special lessons but that doesn't help you, that makes you feel small and stupid. That's why I never went to school. It's like f\*\*k this, isn't it? If you want to talk to me like I'm a d\*\*k, I'm out.

It's like, as soon as you're labelled the problem child, they don't want you at all. They don't even bother trying with you either, they just give up on you.

(Focus group 1)

This also reflected a wider issue of stereotyping, which was also experienced by young people in relation to perceptions of them by staff offering information, advice and guidance.

They don't help you very much. They like talk to you about what you want to do and that and then that just seems to be it, rather than with those wanting college, they got the application form, but for us that was it. It was just like, "Yeah, you're dim". It was just like if you didn't like know what you wanted to do and you didn't have many options, they would call you a troubled child or something.

(Focus group 4)

The issue of labelling or, more broadly, stereo-typing was also raised by the young people in relation to the topical issue of the disturbances, or riots, that took place in several English towns and cities in 2011, where views were expressed that young people were unfairly blamed.

I wasn't involved in none of that. I'm a good girl. It wasn't scary, but it was like, I want to shop in that shop tomorrow but I can't now because it's empty. They may have found it fun or whatever, but in a way the police provoked it because they were basically offering us a fight. I've got pictures on my phone of police hitting people, people hitting the police, but in a way the police were just offering us up.

(Focus group 1)

Overall, young people stressed strong concerns regarding the detrimental impact of stereotyping or labelling as they perceived that teachers formed early

perceptions of their ability, motivation and behaviour which then shaped their future relationships. In some cases the young people reported that these perceptions were formed early in the first year of secondary schooling and remained fixed until they left school. For the young people, there were limited views on how to overcome the effects of labelling, other than to seek to re-build confidence as outlined in the previous section. The young people, however, felt strongly that this needed to be addressed for the future through changes in the way schools work with young people, running throughout secondary school and including the transfer between primary school and secondary school. The issue of labelling, however, is not given prominence in government-funded research (Spielhofer et al., 2009), but is a very important issue, yet inevitably complex. Kelly and Norwich acknowledge the tension as they highlight that labels could have ‘negative connotations and be used to stigmatise someone’, yet labels also ‘can provide the means to identify certain groups of people who require additional help with their education’ (Kelly and Norwich, 2004, p.413).

Stigmatisation is a serious concern, which Bourdieu (1990) criticises as part of a wider approach of classification in academic and political thought, and he likens such classification, or labelling, to racism:

The logic of the classificatory label is very exactly that of racism, which stigmatises its victims by imprisoning them in a negative essence (Bourdieu, 1990, p.28)

Labelling also brings the risk of locating the problem with the young people, rather than with wider school and society interaction with the young people thereby limiting the extent of the response (Riele, 2006). Further, labelling can lead to changes in the young people themselves through ‘lowered expectations, decreased self-esteem, and de-motivation, all with possible detrimental effects on students’ educational achievement’ (Riele, 2006, p.138). Labelling has been shown to make the labelled young people consider themselves as ‘not good enough’ for the education system, thereby creating further loss of confidence and reinforcing the original label (Archer and Yamashita, 2003, p.58). The young

people's concerns expressed in the focus groups in this research that they were swiftly labelled and then struggled to be seen in a different way was clearly a significant concern at the heart of teacher-pupil relations, and reflected in wider research..

## **5.4 Social issues**

### **5.4.1 Access to information, advice and guidance**

In the focus groups, some young people highlighted limitations on the information, advice and guidance available, with direct reference by them to their social networks, both family and friends. This is highlighted in the following quotation:

Lifestyle, like what your parents do can affect - say your mum does hairdressing and your dad's a labourer, like it will affect what you want to do, because say your dad owns his own business, an easier option for you to make money would be for you to go into business with your dad, and then you've always got a secure job, because people are always going to need labourers. Then, say, your parents work in a bank, accountants, lawyers or whatever, like it's all to do with your family, what different jobs they do, because that influences your decision in what you want to do.

(Focus group 2)

A particular aspect that emerged from focus group discussions is the importance of the timing of information, advice and guidance, with many looking back to selection of options in Year 9 at school as a critical period. Many looked back and considered more in-depth information, advice and guidance would have supported them to make better decisions, as exemplified by the discussion from one of the focus groups below:

. . . the options evening that we had and we had to pick that night what we actually wanted. They just said what subjects there were and what subjects would you like to do and they only had the amount of subjects

they had there. They didn't have anything like – if you wanted a taster day at work or something like that, they didn't have anything like that. You had to pick it there and then, after they finished talking to you and I think it is just wrong.

(Focus group 4)

Breadth of opportunities in information, advice and guidance was also highlighted, both in relation to alerting young people to the range of opportunities available and also specifically in relation to apprenticeships and work related training. This was exemplified by one young person who commented, 'Give us more details on apprenticeships and maybe help us to get an apprenticeship on the career path that we actually want to do' (Focus group 4).

However, the focus groups' findings also identified a key issue for young people of realistic information, advice and guidance that was based on a recognition of their current position and the pathways that would be available to them. One young person expressed concern that:

I feel that they were not realistic with people. I know that it sounds harsh but they were not honest with people.

(Focus group 4)

This raised issues of the quality of information, advice and guidance and some young people experienced shortcomings in quality ranging from lack of approachability to non-responsiveness as demonstrated in the quotations below:

Yes, they don't talk to you too much. They send you on. They will send you on easy enough but if you want to talk to them then you have to wait and wait, and if you go in and get an appointment and that, they just say, "Oh yeah, what do you want to do? Do you want to go to college?" All they do is talk to you for about ten minutes and then send you away. They say, "Oh yeah, go home and think and then come back. But you go back and they just don't talk to you again.

(Focus group 4)

Overall, in relation to young people's identification of information, advice and guidance as a barrier, young people highlighted lack of wider social networks to raise awareness of opportunities, realism, timing, breadth of opportunity and quality as key issues of importance. Young people sought open and honest information, advice and guidance, drawing on a breadth of opportunities which went beyond their knowledge and experience from family and social circles. The young people were conscious in hindsight of the importance of timeliness of this advice, particularly in relation to year nine options and choices for routes after school. The young people's wish for an honest discussion of options based on their skills and experience, but also the avoidance of labelling, represented a fascinating combination as they demonstrated a need for targeted and specific information, advice and guidance but without this falling into the trap of stereotyping these young people as only interested in or capable of certain options. Archer et al. (2005) highlight that social factors are often linked in a complex interplay of factors involving social, cultural and educational dimensions. Young people also highlighted, through this research, limitations on their choices based on perceived pressure to follow occupations already known to the family and in some cases simply being unaware of the breadth of opportunities available without anyone in their family or social circle to highlight those possibilities. This reflects Archer and Yamashita's (2003) conclusions that some young people's aspirations were 'bounded by dense, impermeable limits, which were constructed through a complex interplay of social identities of race, class and gender' (p.67). For these reasons, the barriers presented by issues associated with information, advice and guidance are presented under the theme of social issues.

The identification of information, advice and guidance as a key issue for young people, linked to social networks, concurred with recent research, such as the government supported research by Spielhofer et al in 2007 and 2009. Whilst the report highlighted the importance of information, advice and guidance and specifically highlighted quality as a key theme (Spielhofer et al., 2009, pp.46-47), addressed timing issues (in relation to insufficient early information (p.47)), breadth of opportunities (in relation to insufficient information (p.47) and

declining employment opportunities (p.45)), it did not directly identify the other particular themes highlighted by the young people in this research. The need for information, advice and guidance to be available at an early stage was also highlighted in NFER research specifically focused on understanding how young people made choices at ages 14 and 16 (Blenkinsop et al., 2006, pp.100-102). Whilst Spielhofer et al. (2007) did not specifically highlight impartiality as a key issue for young people, this was drawn out in other studies. Blenkinsop et al. (2007, p.101) highlighted concerns that teachers in 11 to 16 schools may lack the level of knowledge to give informed advice on options after compulsory schooling. Further, and of greater concern, they stated that, 'teachers in 11 to 18 schools often had the knowledge and understanding of post-16 routes, yet there is evidence to suggest they are less impartial in giving this' (Blenkinsop et al., 2007, p.101). This was a significant concern when considered alongside the results of this research that, for some young people, the lack of informed advice was a factor in them not participating in education, training or employment.

The importance of breadth of opportunities was closely linked to the quality of information provision on the opportunities. From the results of this research, young people have found both that they were unaware of particular opportunities in education and training and that they experienced a lack of opportunities in employment. Yates et al. (2011) found that young people who had received less information, advice and guidance and were more uncertain about their future were more likely to be classified as NEET. Further, Maguire and Rennison (2005) found that young people who were classified as NEET were less likely to have received formal advice or support, which concurred with the lack of information emerging as a key theme for this group. The declining employment opportunities have accelerated in the recent economic downturn (LAX, 2010e), which partly explains this being highlighted by the young people. However, it could be argued that this decline is part of a longer term trend, with earlier research identifying a more fundamental structural shift in the labour market (Bivand, 2004; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). This raises concerns as to how such a barrier can be

meaningfully addressed when it is a result of longer term macro-economic changes.

Whilst Spielhofer et al. (2009) do not specifically highlight the need for realistic information, advice and guidance as an issue, they draw out the broader theme of 'inappropriate guidance' (Spielhofer et al., 2009, p.47). The failure to focus information, advice and guidance through developing a thorough understanding of young people's needs highlighted in this research is recognised more widely (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005).

Finally, in relation to information, advice and guidance, much of the findings of the focus groups concurred with current research. However, the need for realistic advice and guidance was highlighted specifically in the focus groups, but not given a prominence in the overview of research to date covered in Spielhofer et al.'s report (2007). From research to date and the focus group discussion, there is clearly a need to make improvements in information, advice and guidance, which need to respond to issues highlighted in this report, as confirmed by the government's research (Spielhofer et al., 2007) and the research of the Sutton Trust (2008), which reports that 'at least half of careers advice young people receive was inadequate or inappropriate' (Sutton Trust, 2008, online).

However, government policy on information, advice and guidance is not recognising these needs and has provoked strong concerns, even from the government's own advisory group on careers:

Although the national careers service will include face to face services for adults, young people will only have access to telephone and web-based services. Responsibility for providing the face to face services to young people is being transferred to schools, without any transfer of funding. The group argues that this funding-free transfer equates to a £200 million annual cut. Members of the group added that they believe

current quality assurance and accountability measures for the new careers service are inadequate.

In a joint statement the group said: "At a time when young people are facing massive changes in further and higher education, and new apprenticeships - as well as high youth unemployment - stripping out the professional help available to them is not only foolhardy, it is potentially damaging to young people's lives and ultimately to the economy.

(Higgs, 2011, online).

This highlights the importance of the findings from the focus groups and associated research as current government risks reducing the availability and quality of information, advice and guidance, which young people themselves have highlighted as a significant factor, in influencing their participation. This is particularly important for young people without access to social networks which could provide some information, advice and guidance more informally, which was confirmed by the government's own advisory group (Higgs, 2011).

#### **5.4.2 Discrimination**

Some young people described experience of discrimination based on the social perceptions of their physical appearance such as their dress or demeanour.

Yes. Most people don't listen to people our age as well, or they look at us and think we hang around in streets making trouble.

Yes, that is why they don't give us jobs and everything, isn't it?

(Focus group 5)

This again highlights the concern of young people in relation to other people's preconceptions or labelling of them, based solely on impressions of their dress or manner. It was also evident that for some young people, they interpreted their lack of success in securing jobs or college courses with their views of others' preconceptions, without necessarily considering other factors. For example, where the young person above states, "Yes, that is why they don't give us jobs. . . ."

(Focus group 5), she was quick to associate her difficulty in securing a job with her impression of others' preconceptions, without considering other factors that might have played a part. Issues of gender bias in information, advice and guidance were raised by female participants in the focus groups as exemplified by the quotation below:

It was like hardly anything that people want, because they label girls – oh, yeah, they want to do hair and beauty, but do you know what, some girls really don't.

(Focus group 2)

The issues of gender bias and lack of open choice have been highlighted in feminist research, with a challenge to the 'male/mainstream research evidence' (David, 2006, p.86), with a particular highlighting of gender stereotyping of vocational options as expressed by the young people in this research.

Many of the young people had caring responsibilities, which often only became apparent in discussion and considered these caring responsibilities, often with limited support, had held them back from opportunities for education, employment or training. In some cases this was for parents or siblings, and for one for her child. Wider research has raised concerns in relation to the stigmatisation of teenage parents, especially mothers, and challenged the attempts to shift the focus to being seen as a problem with the person rather than the wider community and society (Alldred, Kelly and Reiss, 2004). Such approaches have been heavily criticised, especially so in feminist literature (Luttrell, 2003) and these criticisms reflect concerns in this research for the increasing focus on neoliberal choice focused policies, which seek to focus all responsibility with the individual, without a recognition of the need for wider support.

There was also concerning evidence of discrimination on the basis of disability and race as well as gender. Firstly, in relation to disability, this was often linked to

bullying, with consequences for the young person with a disability that included non-attendance at school and disaffection with education.

I did find it quite hard actually, because there's some reasons why people don't attend because like if someone has a disability they go to school and they get picked on for it, and if you was to say something to someone then, like a teacher or something, then they say something to the student but then it doesn't really go any further. Then they do it even more and more and then that person gets bullied, so they just give up and don't come to school. Then they wonder why their teachers get annoyed with the students because they don't turn up.

(Focus group 3)

Secondly, in relation to race, there are strong views expressed, particularly in relation to race-related bullying.

It's like being racist, isn't it? Some people are racist, some people are not. I know people get bullied for being white. I know people who have been bullied for being Asian and all that.

(Focus group 1)

There were further concerns expressed with perceptions that immigration was leading to reduced opportunities for employment through greater competition for jobs and a concern that jobs are being transferred to other countries from England. One young person commented, "There are English people that can't find jobs but then there are people coming in that are taking all our jobs" (Focus group 1).

In summary, the young people highlighted discrimination as a barrier to participation, with specific references to discrimination on the basis of gender, race and disability. The young people generally wanted a stronger approach taken to challenge discrimination, although some young people themselves demonstrated discriminatory attitudes in discussion in the focus groups. Gender discrimination and issues of stereotyping, or labelling, were identified as themes emerging from the focus groups in relation to information, advice and guidance as

a barrier to participation, yet these were not specifically highlighted in the review of research by Spielhofer et al. (2007). Spielhofer et al. (2007) did, however, highlight that gender was a factor in likelihood of becoming classified as NEET, with boys twice as likely to be classified as NEET (EdComms, 2007) but did not set out any consideration of gender as a factor in relation to effective information, advice and guidance. In contrast, Blenkinsop et al (2007, p.56) stated, ‘teachers. . . had a strong feeling that the media and role models are an influence, particularly in terms of gender-stereotypical careers’. The influence of gender in relation to peer groups was investigated in empirical research by Thomas and Webber (2009), which reported that whilst peer group effects were significant for boys, this was not the case for girls (Thomas and Webber, 2009, p.134). This confirmed earlier research by Thomas and Webber (2001), which also postulated, ‘in seeking to increase participation in education and training post-16, gender is one of the key factors that needs to be taken into consideration’ (Thomas and Webber, 2001, p.351). This clearly supported the importance of considering gender in increasing participation and, alongside focus group findings, would support a higher profile for the consideration of gender appropriate approaches to increasing participation.

The experience of discrimination on the basis of disability was not highlighted by Spielhofer et al. (2007; 2009), but was clearly articulated by young people by young people in the focus groups, both by those with disabilities and those with no disability. It was surprising that discrimination on the basis of disability was not highlighted by Spielhofer (2007; 2009), as here was clear evidence of discrimination presenting barriers to young people with disabilities (Lindsay, 2011; Russell, 2003).

The experience of racial discrimination as a barrier is not highlighted by Spielhofer et al. (2007; 2009), but was highlighted by the young people in the focus groups. The fact that racial discrimination is not highlighted by Spielhofer et al. (2007; 2009) is surprising as there was evidence of racial discrimination acting as a barrier to participation and more widely in educational achievement and progression at the time of Spielhofer et al’s research (Stevens, 2007;

Tannock, 2008). Finally, government policy in relation to raising participation has yet to recognise the importance of the challenges faced by young people in relation to discrimination on the basis of gender, race or disability, and the government emphasis on neoliberal policies risked exacerbating these effects rather than directly addressing them.

### **5.4.3 Financial challenges**

Some young people also experienced financial challenges as a barrier to participation, with a dependency on others, typically parents. Some young people expressed concern in relation to this ongoing dependency on parents and for others that would not be an option anyway, as illustrated by the quotations below:

I reckon it is the cost, because it is not your money, it is your mum and dad forking out for you all the time, making sure you are getting out, it is not your money, it's a bit out of order to be honest.

Yes, because they are having to go without just to fund you to go to college and that.

(Focus group 5)

And the financial pressures are felt more acutely for those young people no longer living with parents:

Especially if you live by yourself, when you don't get a lot of money a week it is hard. You have to buy stuff you need for your house, you need to get to college.

(Focus Group 5)

There was one time when I went for an office job, only because it was there, and they said no because I live on my own they weren't sure that I could live off the amount of money they were going to pay me.

(Focus Group 6)

Financial challenges were identified as the third key barrier in the theme of social issues, with young people seeking support to overcome this barrier, in particular

where they felt they were increasing pressure on the family. Financial barriers are included in the range of factors considered to date in government sponsored research (Spielhofer et al., 2009), but are not clearly being addressed in current national policy. Sims et al. (2001) highlight significant financial needs among the cohort moving from being classified as NEET to participating in the government's Learning Gateway programme. Many of these young people express views that they do not have enough money for essential items such as housing rents, utility bills and food. For some, this is accompanied by homelessness, making entry to further education, training or employment challenging as there is a need to address these more fundamental issues first (Sims et al., 2001). For others, they feel a pressure to contribute to family finances after compulsory schooling or to achieve early financial independence (Sims et al., 2001). Financial challenges are also associated with early leavers from education after compulsory schooling, with early leavers more likely to highlight financial challenges compared to those who completed courses (Simm, Page and Miller, 2007).

The EMA has been shown to have contributed to increased participation (Middleton et al., 2005) and higher staying on rates, particularly for financially disadvantaged young people (Legard, Woodfield and White, 2001). These findings are supported by the views expressed in the focus groups, where young people highlighted financial challenges as a barrier to their participation in further education. Further, for those groups most at risk of not participating, the financial incentive provided by the EMA has been shown to have made a significant impact on their participation, particularly so for vulnerable groups, such as homeless young people and teenage parents (Allen et al., 2003). The loss of financial support is being compounded by the increasing level of fees for HE (Hodgson and Spours, 2011b), with the risk that 'under these circumstances, the raising of the participation age in England could become a symbolic measure, as increasing numbers of young people find themselves excluded from the high status A level and apprenticeship routes, unwilling to enter lower status provision or without appropriate courses' (p.267).

However the Coalition Government decided in 2010 to stop the EMA, replacing it with a lower cost bursary scheme. Yet the Coalition Government's appointed child poverty adviser has recommended that the EMA should be reinstated as reported in the Guardian newspaper:

He has argued that 'teachers have expressed concern that EMA acted as a clear incentive for young people to stay in education. . . independent evaluations also found that it significantly increased staying-on rates and attainment.

He also points out that when the Institute for Fiscal Studies looked into EMA, it found that it had significantly increased participation rates in post-16 education among young adults. It increased the proportion of eligible 16 year olds staying-on in education from 65 per cent to 69 per cent and eligible 17 year olds from 54 per cent to 61 per cent

Research into those in receipt of the new bursary fund has found that, whilst it is too soon to quantify the long term impact on student numbers, many young people are not receiving the financial backup they need to support their everyday living expenses.

In summary, there is legitimate cause for concern that these changes may have a negative impact on widening participation. (Wintour, 2012, p.1 and online).

These concerns expressed by the Coalition Government's own child poverty adviser correlated with concerns expressed with young people in the focus groups here and highlighted a risk that government policy risked increasing barriers to participation in education and training which run counter to raising the participation age.

McInerney (2007) set out the case for a wider approach, beyond just the school, to address social disadvantage and inequalities. This argument is based on a study of school ethnography and the voices of graduate students, in which he concluded:

I have argued that the persistence of educational disadvantage and social inequalities in neoliberal times demands a concerted effort on the part of

education systems, schools and teacher education institutions, to speak out against oppressive policies and to reinsert social justice principles, values and practices into all aspects of curriculum policy and planning... Because the fates of schools and their communities are inextricably linked, school reform needs to proceed in tandem with community rejuvenation. (McInerney, 2007, pp.269-270).

McInerney (2007) clearly argues for an agenda beyond a neoliberal promotion of choice, with a clear advocacy for those for whom a more proactive approach, rooted in the principles of social justice, is required. Such an approach would both set a model that would address some of their concerns at the level of compulsory schooling, but also set in place strategies for their support, re-integration and progression into further education in line with the policies of increasing participation. Yet, a risk is that the momentum would be lost in a lack of clear action as social justice is all too often regarded as a 'malleable and essentially contested phrase that can mean all things to all people' (Thrupp and Tomlinson, 2005, p.549). Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005) argue that this concern required greater recognition and that the response demands complex hope, which recognises the potential for obfuscation and the pressures against social justice.

Complex hope is described as 'an optimism of the will that recognises the historical and structural difficulties which need to be overcome' (Grace, 1994, p.59), which reflects the depth of policy consideration needed to achieve full participation and social justice. This recognition of the need for wider understanding is reflected in current developments in social justice pedagogy, which seek to build an empowering understanding for the young person, enabling engagement in learning (Cammarota, 2011). Yet the Coalition Government is moving towards a greater focus on schools delivering the core task of passing a stock of knowledge, rather than addressing wider social aims (Hodgson and Spours, 2011a, p.207), which were reflected in the previous Labour agenda (Blair, 1994).

## 5.5 Key themes overview

From the young people's perspectives, three key types of barrier have emerged: physical; social; and emotional. These themes have been considered in relation to wider research on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. In relation to Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital, as introduced in the literature review, this has led to the development of a three part model to set out the themes for the young people, each theme comprising three strands as a triple tripod, which forms the basis of the remainder of this chapter. Whilst the phenomenological approach has set out to develop understanding of young people's perspectives and this has led to the three themes, the model is proposed as a means to raise awareness of the young people's concerns and to stimulate a greater impact on future policy and practice. This is seen as a key dimension, in particular, of the Doctorate in Education, where a thesis is expected to have a greater impact on policy and practice than might be the case with a Doctorate in Philosophy.

Bourdieu's concept of capital is linked to work to improve outcomes for young people in relation to participation in education, training and employment (Kamp, 2009). Capital is significant as it provides the ability to overcome disadvantage (Cederberg, 2012). Indeed, the acquisition of intellectual capital as knowledge and skills and the confidence for their transferability, as personal capital, are central to entering and sustaining employment in global capitalism (Giddens and Hutton, 2001). However, this emphasis on the individual's knowledge and skills and underlying neoliberalism has been questioned as it is seen as receiving too great an emphasis at the cost of wider forms of capital. Apple (1996) argues for the need to consider the social context and that people's 'biographies are intimately linked to the economic, political and ideological trajectories of their families and communities, to the political economies of their neighbourhoods' (Apple, 1996, p.5). The social capital enables different groups to appear to benefit to differing extents from otherwise similar economic and cultural capital. Social capital is seen as largely dependent on links or connections to groups, which are mobilised through deliberate effort or 'specific labour' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.253).

The key themes are presented in more detail as part of the proposed triple tripod model, which is explained below.

## **5.6 Triple tripod model**

Based on the findings of this thesis, I am proposing a triple tripod model, built on the young people's perspectives, which draws on Bourdieu's concepts of capital and comprises three parts, each with three components, drawn directly from the findings of young people's perspectives from the research. Firstly, there is a need to build greater social capital for the young people, in response to their concerns in relation to social barriers to participation. In this model, drawing on the analysis of young people's views of barriers, I have highlighted three particular aspects of social issues, or contributors to social capital, to be considered: young people's networks and information, advice and guidance; fairness and equality to prevent and overcome discrimination; and access to finance. Secondly, there is a need to build emotional capital to improve emotional well-being in response to the emotional issues outlined above. Although Bourdieu did not set out the concept of emotional capital, this has been subsequently advanced in the development of his work (Zembylas, 2010). In this model, drawing on the analysis of young people's views of barriers, I have highlighted three particular contributors to emotional capital: building confidence and overcoming lost hope; preventing and overcoming labelling; and anti-bullying strategies to overcome bullying. Thirdly, there is a need to build economic capital to address the physical barriers highlighted above. In this model, drawing on the analysis of young people's views of barriers, I have highlighted three particular aspects of physical barriers, which impact on economic capital: learning pathways; employment opportunities; and transport. In so doing, I am conscious these links are inevitably overlapping and that the impact for example of successful learning pathways would build emotional, social and economic capital. Further, they are mutually supportive or defeating so a positive impact on one would generally influence the others beneficially, but a negative impact would generally be to the detriment of the others. I am not arguing therefore that the triple tripod model is directly drawn

from Bourdieu’s work, but that it is interesting to review the views of young people, grouped in the three themes, against an established framework, that of Bourdieu’s consideration of capital. The triple tripod model is shown in diagrammatic form below, which necessarily has required some simplification of the themes. The diagram is offered, whilst recognising the need for it be considered alongside the fuller narrative, as it is intended as a support to convey understanding of the young people's perspectives.

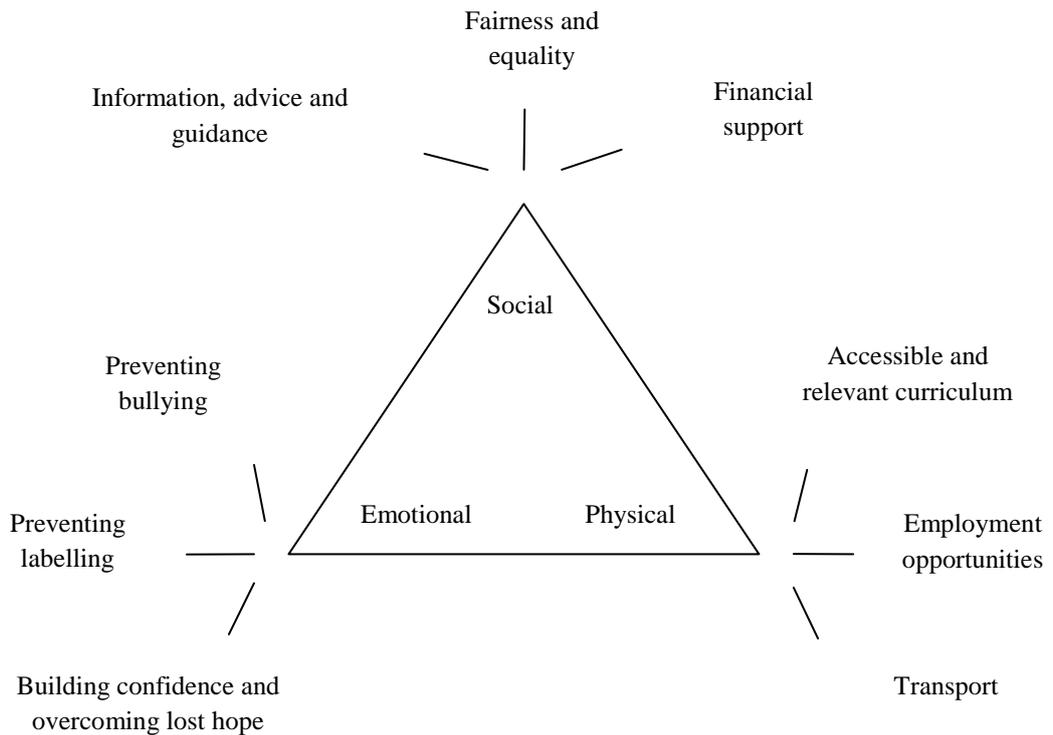


Diagram 1: The triple tripod model

However, there are limitations to Bourdieu's model, such as highlighted by Kamp (2009) who argues Bourdieu's model of different types of capital was insufficient to recognise the potential of what could be achieved by different bodies joining together locally with a common aim (Kamp, 2009, p.471). Hodgson and Spours (2012) identified three approaches to localism: centrally managed localism; laissez-faire localism; and democratic localism, with the argument that democratic localism provided a route forward 'if there is a genuine interest across the UK in meeting the needs of all learners in a locality' (Hodgson and Spours, 2012a, p.207). Democratic localism was seen as providing an option where national government offers educational leadership, but provides the space and the resources for collaboration at the regional and local levels to develop the creative and dynamic local learning system' (Hodgson and Spours, 2012a, p.207). It offers local flexibility and a stimulated dynamic partnership which would enable a local response to the triple tripod model, with effective integration of education providers, employers, local authority support services and young people to reduce the barriers identified by young people.

The key application for the triple tripod model, whilst recognising its limitations, for any current or proposed change in policy or practice, is does the change add to young people's social, emotional and economic capital, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups? The model provides a framework to review the impact of policy or practice change for young people in relation to each of the nine areas, with the potential to increase positive impact and mitigate any negative impact prior to implementation. This framework has the potential therefore to inform policy and practice development in a way which directly supports full participation, by ensuring a positive impact through reducing barriers for young people accessing education, training and employment. Some potential means to achieve this are expanded on in the conclusion.

# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

This thesis takes a phenomenological approach to developing an understanding of young people's perspectives on the barriers to continuing to participate in education and training after the age of 16, the age to which schooling was compulsory at the time of the research.

The research addresses the research questions, which are:

- For young people who are not participating in education and training in England in the two years after compulsory schooling, what is their understanding of why they are not participating?
- What changes, viewed through the lens of the young person's perspective, would secure their participation?
- To what extent is national policy, the evidence it is based on and its influence on practice, addressing the changes from a young person's perspective that would secure full participation?

The literature review highlights gaps in understanding young people's perspectives, particularly those of young people not participating in education or training. The literature review considers current government policy on raising the participation age for education and training to age 18 by 2015, in relation to the developed understanding of young people's perspectives on barriers to participation, and in the context of wider research. The research considers young people's perspectives on barriers to participation in relation to government policy which aims to increase participation and concludes that there is a significant and widening gap between government policy and the issues that young people

declare to be significant for them in continuing to participate in education and training after the age of 16. This is demonstrated through drawing out three key themes and nine key issues from young people's views: these are considered in turn in relation to current government policy. Indeed, this research highlights a tension whereby government policy is often exacerbating the very issues which young people highlight as presenting obstacles to their participation.

The Institution Focused Study critically describes issues in relation to young people's participation for the institution at the focus of this research, a local authority in England. The study identifies key issues as: the national focus on centralism rather than localism; the national policy emphasis on competition in tension with the local authority duty to promote collaboration; the national policy emphasis on compulsion in tension with the local authority duty on promoting choice; the national drive to greater standardisation and reduced flexibility in contrast to local emphasis on breadth and personalisation. These findings were drawn out prior to the focus groups with young people, but the tensions between national policy and the local changes needed to deliver increased participation heralded the challenges to national policy that arose directly from the themes which emerged from the focus groups with young people. These themes comprise physical barriers, emotional barriers and social barriers, which are considered in turn, and then as a whole, in this conclusion.

There is a need for urgent action to align the drivers on policy change with the areas which young people highlight as critical to securing their participation in education and training. The alternative is to continue with the current tension, which presents greater hurdles to young people's participation, risking a failed national policy and a lost opportunity. Further, it risks pathologising, and potentially criminalising, a group of young people who already consider themselves failed by the education system. The conclusion draws out the argument outlined above from the findings of this research and presents recommendations for policy and further research. The conclusion also presents a

section on personal reflection on the learning from the Doctorate in Education and implications for the future.

## **6.2 Physical barriers to participation in education and training**

This research concludes that young people identified physical barriers to their participation in education and training, which are under-represented or not recognised in research to date, particularly government funded research, and that many of these barriers are often overlooked or, worse still, exacerbated by current government policy. A key issue identified by the young people but not directly recognised in government-funded research is the need for a broad and varied mix and balance in the curriculum offer, particularly including vocational options before and after the age of 16. This is largely omitted from research by Spielhofer et al. (2007), despite earlier work highlighting its importance (Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Mangan, Adnett and Davies, 2001). Further, current government policy has reduced the breadth of the curriculum offer with the emphasis on the limited offer of the EBac with its associated disadvantages, particularly for the ‘most vulnerable or disadvantaged young people’ (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, p. 20).

A second issue highlighted by young people as a physical barrier to participation is lack of employment opportunities. Whilst this is being exacerbated by the economic downturn at the time of research, this is, by contrast to the above barrier, a theme which is identified in government research (Spielhofer et al., 2007) and arguably one where the government is driving policy to support young people’s employment opportunities, such as through support for increased apprenticeship opportunities.

A third key issue in relation to physical barriers highlighted by young people in this research is lack of transport. Spielhofer et al. (2007) do not specifically identify transport in their review of literature, but subsequently identify transport as an issue for young people. This is surprising as previous research had highlighted transport as a significant issue for young people, such as Mangan,

Adnett and Davies's report (2001), drawing on survey data from 643 young people. However, government-funded research on the evaluation of the EMA found transport not to be a significant factor in relation to participation (Perren, Middleton and Emmerson, 2003). This is a surprising conclusion given previous research to the contrary view that transport was significant in influencing participation (Hramiak, 2001; Managan, Adnett and Davies, 2001). Current government policy again is exacerbating this barrier for young people as the EMA was subsequently withdrawn and replaced with the less generous bursary, reducing support for transport for young people.

### **6.3 Emotional barriers to participation in education and training**

This research concludes that young people identified emotional barriers to their participation in education and training, which are under-represented or not recognised in research to date, particularly government-funded research. As is the case above, some themes are recognised to an extent, such as bullying, but many of these barriers are often overlooked or, worse still, exacerbated by current government policy. Themes identified by the young people but not recognised in government funded-research are the debilitating effects of labelling and the impact of low self-confidence, and in a minority of cases, lost hope, which is compounded by national policy largely driven by a neoliberal imperative, with its assumptions that all young people are equipped to resolve the challenges they face. The young people highlighted labelling or stereotyping as a challenge to their future participation, yet this has not been given prominence (Spielhofer et al., 2007), nor is it yet recognised as an issue in the policy drive to full participation. Labelling is shown in some circumstances to lead to benefits, such as for special educational needs, but often the effects of labelling and special treatment, such as internal exclusion lead only to short term positive effects on behaviour (Barker et al., 2010). The issue of lost hope is also not yet recognised in recent research (Spiehofer et al., 2007; 2009), but associated issues of low confidence or low self-esteem are recognised. Government policy is following a neoliberalist agenda with an increasing emphasis on choice for the individual, rather than support for the individual to find future pathways through education

and training. This emphasis on the neoliberal in preference to support for those experiencing educational disadvantage or social inequalities risks marginalising those young people already at greatest disadvantage (McInerney, 2007), but the thrust to full participation risks further pathologising, and potentially criminalising, those young people who do not participate.

#### **6.4 Social barriers to participation in education and training**

As the third and final theme, this research concludes that young people identified social barriers to their participation in education and training. Again, some of these are under-represented or not recognised in research to date, particularly government-funded research, and are strongly felt by the young people. However, also of concern is where there has been some recognition in national research, but national policy has nonetheless run counter to the research findings to date. The key barriers identified by young people are: lack of information, advice and guidance, particularly when their social networks are limited in this respect; discrimination on the basis of gender, race and disability; and pressures to earn money rather than continue education. Some of these issues are highlighted in government-funded research (Spielhofer et al., 2009) and associated research (Archer et al., 2005; Sims et al., 2001), but have received surprisingly little attention in policy developments associated with raising participation. Indeed, government has exacerbated the position for many young people through the withdrawal of the EMA, which the government's own child poverty adviser has associated with a negative impact on widening participation (Wintour, 2012). These areas would warrant further research, potentially through a transformative paradigm, particularly given the disadvantages being experienced by groups who in many cases are already more vulnerable than their peers.

Whilst there has been recognition of the importance of timely, realistic and impartial information, advice and guidance, government-funded research has not emphasised issues of gender bias and stereotyping, which several young people highlighted as significant for them. Arguably, government policy again is exacerbating this issue with the withdrawal of Connexions, which had been

established as an independent service to offer well-informed and impartial information, advice and guidance.

## **6.5 Overall conclusion**

This phenomenological research highlights barriers to participation from young people's perspectives, which are grouped as physical, emotional and social barriers. These barriers and the steps needed to overcome them are presented as the triple tripod model, which is offered as a model to inform policy and practice development. This puts forward the three key factors and the measures to overcome them as parts of a tripod. From the young people's perspectives, three key strands are set out for each of these factors. Firstly, three key themes for social factors are: young people's social networks and information, advice and guidance; discrimination; and financial challenges. Secondly, three key themes for emotional factors are lack of confidence and lost hope; bullying; and labelling. Thirdly, three key themes for physical factors are: curriculum offer; employment opportunities; and transport. A key test for policy and practice change therefore is: what is the effect of the proposed change in relation to these factors?

It is important to stress that some of the barriers identified by young people in this thesis are unrecognised or under-recognised in research to date, particularly government-funded research, and also in associated policy development. Firstly, themes which are under-recognised in government-funded research to date are: the need for a breadth in curriculum offer, particularly vocational options before and after the age of 16; transport; and issues of discrimination in relation to gender, race and disability (Spielhofer et al., 2007; Spielhofer et al., 2009).

Government policy is exacerbating this situation through its emphasis on a neoliberal approach and a steady withdrawal of the social support that these young people require to overcome the barriers to their future participation. In particular, the withdrawal of financial support such as the EMA, was a loss of support that had been shown to increase participation, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Allen et al., 2003), although government research found no link (Perren, Middleton and Emmerson, 2003). Further, government policy

changes leading to a reduced breadth in the curriculum and fewer vocational opportunities with reductions in information, advice and guidance are running directly counter to the requirements young people highlighted that would have supported their participation.

Secondly, young people identified barriers that are largely unrecognised in research on increasing participation in education and training, such as the issue of compounded loss of self confidence leading to a sense of lost hope. Yet this is a critical area to address if there is to be a successful re-engagement of the young people most at risk of not continuing to participate in education and training. This requires action to address their need for greater personal, social and economic capital and wider changes across the system in line with the proposed triple tripod model. A policy drive on this basis, focused on overcoming the barriers as perceived by young people is essential to achieving full participation and realising the potential of all young people, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

If this key group who were not participating in education and training are to be engaged, then a broader vision and wider change is required, such as that set out as a ‘national rescue plan’ in a recent paper addressing the ‘crisis of opportunity’ for young people aged 14 and above (Hodgson and Spours, 2012b). This sets out the need for swift and radical change across the system to deliver *Education for the good society*, with key principles as outlined below (Hodgson and Spours, 2012b, pp.35-36; Lawson and Spours, 2011).

- Fairness and equality
- Well-being
- Democracy and collective capacity
- Sustainability
- Creativity and innovation

This research confirms the importance and the urgency of achieving this vision, if full participation is to be achieved and the benefits realised for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. The vision must address the issues of social and economic disadvantage highlighted by young people through this

research and strive for fairness and equality. It must address the emotional well-being of these young people, overcoming the sense of lost hope expressed by young people in this research and equipping future cohorts with the resilience to overcome setbacks. The future vision must draw on the wider resource of the community and develop collective capacity across the stakeholders, including young people, to develop the pathways and support sought by these young people for their successful learning and progression. The future model must be sustainable and support development of skills in creativity and innovation to secure future employment in response to concerns highlighted by young people in this research and for the benefit of all learners.

## **6.6 Implications for national and local policy and practice**

The conclusions of this research highlight an urgent need to review the research base on which the policy drive to full participation is based. This research highlights gaps in the research base and identifies new areas to be integrated into future understanding of the areas to be addressed to achieve full participation. Nationally, current and recent policy developments require review such as the drive to the Ebac and consequent reduced curriculum breadth in school, as well as the consequences of devaluing a wide range of vocational qualifications following the Wolf report (Wolf, 2011). The value of vocational pathways needs to be emphasised and vocational alternatives recognised as equally valid alongside the EBac. A broad range of equally valued pathways is required to support the required emphasis on choice rather than compulsion, as highlighted in the Institution Focused Study. This is necessary to deliver a truly personalised curriculum from a range of pathways, with targeted support, which would secure the motivation of young people (Hodgson and Spours, 2008), as argued in the Institution Focused Study. Financial support for transport and other living costs, such as was available through the EMA, needs to be re-instated, with an emphasis on supporting young people's pathways to future participation. In short, no young person should be in the position where they feel deterred from participating in education and training on financial grounds.

A wider policy drive is needed to address the concerns in relation to discrimination, including stereotyping and gender bias. This requires a thorough programme to address approaches that the young people expressed as being an accepted part of their experience of the way the education system works. This clearly requires urgent action, particularly for those vulnerable and disadvantaged young people who may be least likely to challenge such approaches and, as shown in the research, inclined to lose hope for their futures. This is an area that requires urgent action for this group to ensure they receive early, impartial information, advice and guidance on a range of pathways for their future participation, which is free from stereotype, bias or any form of prior labelling. There is a need to question whether this can be achieved through current policy which has resulted in the dismantling of Connexions, the independent information, advice and guidance service, with its replacement through school based services, which may reinforce pre-existing stereotypes, rather than support fresh approaches, unencumbered by any pre-existing views in the school. This is an area worthy of further research, but which also requires short term policy review given the expectations of full participation by 2015.

National policy also needs to be more clearly research based and to maintain a longer term stability in policy direction to overcome the shifts that have undermined progress in the 14 to 19 field in the past (Pring et al., 2009). National policy making needs to recognise the limitations of a neoliberal approach particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts and ensure targeted and integrated support is available at key times of transition for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Thompson, 2011). There also needs to be a greater shift to local decision making as highlighted in the Institution Focused Study to provide a more effective and inclusive policy process (Pring et al., 2009).

Alongside the national policy changes sought above, there is a need for local authorities, schools, colleges and other providers to give greater weight to the views of young people, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, if full participation is to be achieved. This demands greater weight being given to voices and perspectives that have been overlooked. Archer (2004, p.470) argues from a

feminist perspective for ‘policy makers and funders to engage with the complexity of real life differences and inequalities . . . moving away from the immature discourses that research delivers quick and immediate gratification, requiring little or no effort on the part of the reader to engage with the complexity of the social world’. This is all the more essential if government is persuaded to deliver a genuine shift in governance, policy making and decision making to the local level (Hodgson and Spours, 2012b) and the triple tripod model is offered from this research as a tool to support a greater consideration of young people's perspectives in future.

For other local authorities, this research should be considered for those aspects which are transferable. As highlighted in the chapter on methodology, the degree of transferability needs to be assessed by the reader, as ‘A person who wants to use the results should give thought about whether or not the findings can transfer into another environment . . . by examining the research methods, the audience, and the context . . . considering if these situations and conditions are sufficiently similar’ (Krueger, 1998b, p.70). In considering transferability, it is important for the reader to be cognisant of the socio-economic characteristics of the geographical area at the focus of this study, as set out in the chapter on the institution focused study. Where the reader is satisfied such transferability can be applied, then the triple tripod model is offered as a means to give greater weight to the the perspectives highlighted by young people through this research.

## **6.7 Contribution of this research**

This research makes a unique contribution for five reasons. Firstly, this is the only research identified to date which takes a phenomenological approach to understand young people’s views on the barriers to their participation from their perspectives. It therefore draws out a unique set of views on the barriers, which presents features that have not previously been identified. Secondly, it highlights gaps from the young people’s perspectives in the national research studies which underpin national policy on raising participation. In particular, it highlights an under-recognition to date, particularly in government-funded research, of barriers in relation to curriculum opportunities, transport and discrimination, including

gender bias and labelling. Thirdly, tensions are highlighted where young people's perspectives on barriers run counter to national policy. This is particularly evident in relation to young people's expressed requirements for greater curriculum flexibility, transport and wider financial support and early, impartial information, advice and guidance. These findings from the young people run directly counter to recent national policy changes reducing curriculum breadth and flexibility, cutting back transport and wider financial support and closing of the Connexions Service, which offered impartial information, advice and guidance.

Fourthly, the research highlights the issue of compounded loss of confidence leading to lost hope for a group of young people, who in many cases have already experienced prior educational disadvantage. For these young people, the government's reliance on a neoliberal stance of increased choice is unlikely to secure their participation without more direct focused and targeted support. Indeed, in many cases this is exacerbated by the government actually reducing the breadth of pathways available, thereby reducing choice whilst simultaneously articulating its importance. Fifthly, the research offers a model which can be applied to bring the perspectives of young people to future policy and practice development. Through this model, which is offered for wider application, I hope the young people's views will have an impact on policy and practice, which achieves some of the changes they seek.

## **6.8 Limitations of this research**

Whilst this research highlights new perspectives on understanding young people's understanding of the barriers they face in relation to participation in education and training, it is necessarily based on a small sample. The sample was selected purposively and included groups known to be at higher risk of not participating, such as looked after children, care leavers, young offenders and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The sample is not representative of the whole population, but arguably is more representative of those groups which need to be successfully engaged if full participation is to be achieved.

Whilst my position as a manager in the local authority where the research took place presented advantages of local knowledge and easier access to young people and premises, it also presented the risk that young people's responses were influenced by my presence. This risk was mitigated by emphasising to the young people the importance of openness on their part and the confidentiality of the research. Focus groups were also selected as the means of data collection as this approach was seen as reducing the influence of the presence of the researcher as distinct from interviews where the power relationship would have been much more evident (Alderson, 2004). Whilst the emerging findings were checked with young people to yield greater reliability to the research, the proposed model has not been explored with young people. A future beneficial exercise would be to test the model with young people for their views on it and to engage them in jointly further developing the model.

## **6.9 Areas for further research**

The raising of the participation age offers a rich field for research and this thesis has highlighted the following potential areas for further research. Firstly, the thesis highlights areas that are under-researched in relation to discrimination, including stereotyping, gender bias, and labelling particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, which would benefit from further research to understand these issues more deeply. Such research could be taken forward with a transformative approach given the social justice issues which have been highlighted in the course of this research. Secondly, the research could be applied specifically to one or more groups of young people with a higher risk of becoming NEET, such as one of the three groups identified by the local authority, LAC, YO or LLDD (LAX, 2010b). Alternatively, this could focus on other groups identified nationally such as teenage parents or young people with needs related to mental health (Spielhofer et al, 2007). Thirdly, there is scope to undertake a longitudinal study of the first cohorts to be subject to the requirements of increased participation and to understand more fully the impact on their decisions and their experiences. This would be valuable in informing future policy and practice in England and internationally.

## **6.10 Reflections on the research journey**

At the start of the EdD, I would not have claimed to have had a research identity: what identity there was would have leant towards a post positivist paradigm, with a heavy reliance on quantitative methods, and a narrow understanding of wider paradigms and the rich body of educational research waiting to be explored. The programme has developed my identity as an ‘emerging practitioner-researcher’ (Robson, 2002, p.534), with a greater understanding of educational research, but also a far deeper recognition of the wealth of educational research I haven’t yet explored. It feels as though I have climbed from a valley to the top of the nearby hill, which in turn has revealed further ranges of hills – and mountains beyond!

I have moved from a significantly post-positivist paradigm to a phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm, recognising ontologically the range of realities to be explored (Mertens, 2010). I have moved epistemologically from a bias towards highly objective approaches, which require distance between the researcher and the participants, to a recognition that the methodology is determined by the research questions (Mertens, 2010). This is reflected in the phenomenological paradigm and selection of focus groups for data collection. As a developing researcher, I have become more questioning and more ready to challenge the existing literature and national policy. As I have read more widely, my understanding and even my language has developed as I employ terms which were previously unfamiliar – but also my appreciation of the often contested definitions of those terms has deepened (Pring, 2000). My experience of the focus groups has exposed me to a range and depth of issues directly expressed by young people that I had not previously encountered. The depth of emotion expressed by some young people concerning their perceptions of having failed and lost hope, despite their young age, was both moving and disturbing, adding greater urgency to my belief in the importance of ensuring young people’s perspectives inform the drive to full participation. Having drawn to the end of this thesis, on reflection the constructivist paradigm and phenomenological approach have provided a valuable framework for the research. However, as the depths of some of the concerns of young people have been revealed, and as issues of

discrimination and lost hope have been highlighted, there is a case for further research to be conducted through the transformative paradigm, which would set out to address some of the social injustices experienced by this group.

My experience of the analysis of the data was both challenging and revealing. I surprised myself on several occasions when a new perspective would emerge from data I had considered several times. The data analysis was both daunting and all absorbing, with a constant feeling of duty to the young people to ensure their voices were clearly articulated by the research and the findings reflected the depth of the focus group discussions. I have developed personally both in my knowledge of their perspectives and through my wrestling with the data transcripts to draw out findings that reflected their life-worlds.

I have developed the triple tripod model to offer for transferability to policy and practice development more widely, to bring the perspectives of young people to influence future policy and practice. This model is developed drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital, which provides a robust foundation, but leads to questions as to whether Bourdieu had sufficiently recognised the potential benefits of bodies joining together and acting for mutual benefit (Kamp, 2009, p.471). Such benefits would be recognised by the triple tripod model and reflect more community oriented approaches (Lawson and Spours, 2011).

I have discovered a richness in the perspectives of the young people, whose voices are often crowded out by professionals and policy makers. The phenomenological approach has placed the life-worlds of the young people at the centre of this research throughout. The young people have given their views at the focus groups, often with an apparent openness and frankness that was refreshing. The phenomenological approach supported the environment for these young people to express their views in their terms in their surroundings, enabling a richer picture of their life-worlds to be formed. Thus, this thesis brings about a change where

young people, who are often spoken about but not spoken with, have been given the space to express their views and the young people have taken this opportunity and spoken with clear messages for the professionals and policy makers to hear.

I am promoting the findings of the research to seek changes for the young people so their perspectives inform the future policy and practice on increasing participation. I aim to achieve this through national articles in key media, national lobbying, regional networks and shaping local policy and practice. As highlighted earlier, unless action is taken, we all risk marginalising, pathologising and potentially criminalising, young people, many of whom are already vulnerable and disadvantaged. This we must avoid, however challenging the alternatives seem, as we must overcome the risk of embedding lost hope for the next generation, and the response is best summed up by Levitas (2004), writing on the importance of hope and education, 'If we do not demand the impossible, all we will get is more of the same' (Levitas, 2004, p.273). It is critically important that we rise to this challenge and take radical action to shift the barriers experienced by young people, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This requires urgent action to address the barriers highlighted by young people through this research and presented as the triple tripod model. This requires action as set out in the implications section and a wide application of the triple tripod model as a test of new policies in the 14 to 19 phase to check that young people's barriers to participation are being reduced through new policies and not increased. Only then are we offering young people a genuine opportunity to participate, which recognises the challenges in their lives as highlighted in this research. Only then are we offering full participation in a way which genuinely is available to all young people and addressing the concerns of young people expressed in this research, to whom the last words of this thesis belong:

It's about giving people a chance, to be honest, no matter what's gone on in their life. Everyone deserves a chance, really.

(Focus group 3)

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# APPENDICES

1. Leaflet for young people to provide information on research
2. Ethics approval
3. Extract from transcript from Focus Group 2
4. Word cloud

## Appendix 1: Leaflet for young people to provide information on research

<b>Brunel</b> UNIVERSITY WEST LONDON	<i>Research Project</i> <i>Participation of young people in employment</i> <i>with training, education or training</i>
<b>Facts and what next?</b>	

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research.

### **What's it all about?**

We are holding this focus group as part of a research project to understand why some young people aged 16-19 aren't in employment with training, education or training. We want to know your thinking on this and to hear your ideas on what could change this. This project is being conducted by Frank Offer as part of the Brunel University Doctorate of Education Programme.

### **Who's involved?**

48 young people will be involved through six focus groups, each supported by the Local Authority.

### **How are the focus groups run?**

The focus groups are your opportunity to tell us your views and your ideas for the future. All discussions are confidential - the key findings will be reported, but individual views will not be linked to any one participant. Please respect the confidentiality of others in the group. You will be asked for your consent for quotes to be used in the final report, but again these would not be linked to any one participant. You will have an opportunity for any questions at the start of the focus group. You may withdraw at anytime if you wish.

### **What next?**

Your focus group will be followed by a pizza supper as a small thank you for your time for this research. A full research report will be written and a brief summary leaflet developed for distribution to the participants. You will be sent a copy of this leaflet, along with all other participants.

If you have any further queries about the research project please contact:

Frank Offer

Email: [frankoffer@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:frankoffer@brunel.ac.uk)

Phone 0208 541 9507

Thank you

## **Appendix 2: Ethics approval**



**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**APPLICATION FORM**

**FOR**

**RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL**

## SECTION A: GENERAL

1. Title of the Study:	Participation of young people in education and training		
Project Start Date:	March 2011	Project End Date:	December 2012
2. Full name of applicant: Frank Stanley Offer			
Position Held:	Doctorate in Education student		
School:	Sport and Education	Course Title (if student):	Doctorate in Education
Email:	frankoffer@brunel.ac.uk	Telephone:	0208 541 9507
Please provide details of any and all other researcher(s) who will work on the research project: n/a			
3. Is this a student proposal?	Yes		
<b>If yes, please complete the remainder of this section.</b>			
Supervisor Name:	Dr Alexis Taylor Dr Emma Wainwright	Position held:	First supervisor Second supervisor
Location:	Brunel University		

Contact details (email/telephone/fax):	Alexis.taylor@brunel.ac.uk      01895 267176  Emma.wainwright@brunel.ac.uk    01895 266088
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4. Declaration to be signed by the Applicant or the supervisor in the case of a student:

- I confirm that the research will be undertaken in accordance with the Brunel University Ethical Framework, Good Research Practice Policy, and Code of Research Ethics.
- I will undertake to report formally to the relevant University Research Ethics Committee for continuing review approval.
- I shall ensure that any changes in approved research protocols are reported promptly for approval by the relevant University Ethics committee.
- I shall ensure that the research study complies with the law and Brunel University policies on the use of human material (if applicable) and health and safety.
- I am satisfied that the research study is compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998, and that necessary arrangements have been, or will be, made with regard to the storage and processing of participants' personal information and generally, to ensure confidentiality of such data supplied and generated in the course of the research.

*(Note: Where relevant, further advice is available from the Information Access Officer, e-mail [data-protection@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@brunel.ac.uk)).*

- I will ensure that all adverse or unforeseen problems arising from the research project are reported in a timely fashion to the Chair of the relevant University Research Ethics Committee.
- I will undertake to provide notification when the study is complete and if it fails to start or is abandoned.
- I have met and advised the student on the ethical aspects of the study design and am satisfied that it complies with the current professional (*where relevant*), School and University guidelines.

**Signature of Applicant:** ..... **Date:**.....

**Signature of Supervisor:**..... **Date:**.....

## SECTION B: FUNDING

5. If the research is externally funded, what is the source of the funding?

n/a

5.1. Are there any conditions attached to the funding? n/a

## SECTION C: THE RESEARCH

6. In **lay terms**, please provide an outline of the proposed research, including:

- background
- objectives
- research methodology
- contribution of research
- justification of benefit

*(max 1000 words).*

### **Background**

Young people's participation in education, training and employment with training (ETE) in the two years following compulsory school education (i.e. ages 16-18) increased significantly from 45 per cent in 1988 to 70 per cent in 1993, but since then increases have been much slower (Ball, 2008). Increases in participation in education and training have been shown to bring economic benefits (Hunt and McIntosh, 2008) and wider social benefits (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). The previous Government in England therefore proposed the extension of the participation age in ETE to 18 in 2015 on a compulsory basis (DCSF, 2007). However, there are questions as to whether compulsion would bring the anticipated benefits (Wolf, 2002). Research into the characteristics of those who are not participating in ETE has identified two groups – those who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and those who are in Jobs Without Training (JWT) and identified characteristics of these groups (Coles, Hutton, Bradshaw, Craig, Godfrey and Johnson, 2002). However, there is a lack of research on the perspectives of these young people themselves (Spielhofer, Walker, Gagg, Schagen and O'Donnell, 2007). This has led to the focus for the research as set out in the next section.

### **Objectives**

The research questions to be investigated are:

1. Why some young people aged 16 to 18 do not participate in ETE?
2. What would change their choices?

### **Methodology**

The methodology sets out a phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005), recognising multiple realities and drawing on qualitative methods to address the research questions from the perspectives of the young people. Ontologically, the research seeks to determine reality for the participants, of the factors currently holding young people back from participation and what could change these. Epistemologically, the interactive link between the researcher and the participants is recognised within the determination of the methodology and design of methods. Focus groups are employed as a key method of data collection, given their ability to draw out perspectives from the participants and reduce the impact of the power imbalance between researcher and participants (Morgan and Krueger, 1993). Participants will be drawn from young people who are NEET or in JWT in one selected Local Authority through a combination of purposive sampling and voluntary participation (Morgan, 1998).

Interpretive analysis will be employed to develop findings from the focus groups, through coding the data and identifying links and groups within the codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The final thesis will set out the findings and how they have been developed through analysis of the data, with illuminating quotes where these are pertinent to the findings (Robson, 2002).

### **Contribution of Research**

The section on background above highlighted that there is a lack of research on the perspectives of these young people themselves (Spielhofer, Walker, Gagg, Schagen and O'Donnell, 2007). This is further stressed by Quinn, Lawry and Diment (2008) who conclude that there is a, "dearth of current qualitative analysis about young people in Jobs Without Training" (2008, p193) and that, "very little is actually known about their lives, their work and their priorities – particularly from the perspectives of the young people themselves" (2008, p185). This research contributes to addressing the identified need for further research in this area.

## **Justification of Benefit**

The research will support the identification of good practice to share with schools, colleges, training providers and employers and the identification of issues to be addressed within the selected Local Authority, which will influence future policy and practice. The research will be published to be available for other local authorities and an international audience to draw on where the reader sees a rationale for application.

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Wolf, A. (2002) <i>Does Education Matter?</i> Penguin Group, London				
Attach any questionnaires, psychological tests, etc.				
<b>7. Who originated the study?</b>				
Frank Offer, post-graduate student on Doctorate in Education at Brunel University				
<b>8. Location of study</b>				
<b>8.1</b> Where will the study take place?				
One selected Local Authority area - LAX				
<b>8.2</b> If the study is to be carried out overseas, what steps have been taken to secure research and ethical permission in the country of study? (Please attach evidence of approval if available.) n/a				
n/a				
<b>9. Multi-centre and off-campus studies</b>				
<b>If this is a multi-centre or off-campus study, please answer the appropriate questions below; otherwise, go to Question 10.</b>				
<b>9.1</b> Does this project involve a consortium (other research partner organisations)?				
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No	
If yes, please complete the details below in Question 9.2.				
<b>9.2</b> Who has overall responsibility for the study?				
n/a				
Please provide details of the contractual agreement between Brunel University and the other organisation(s).				
<b>9.3</b> Is this an off-campus study?				
<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
If yes, please provide signed, written permission from an appropriate level of management within the relevant organisation(s). - approval from Local Authority				

attached as Appendix 1.			
<b>10.</b> Has approval been sought from other Ethics Committees and LRECs?			
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No
Please enclose copies of approval letters, where applicable.			
<b>11.</b> If appropriate, has the protocol been reviewed by a statistician? n/a			
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	
If yes, give the name of the statistician:		n/a	
Position held:			
<b>11.1</b> Define ( <i>where necessary</i> ) the statistical power of the study.			
n/a			
<b>12.</b> Who will have overall control of the data generated?			
Student researcher			
<b>13.</b> How do you propose to disseminate the results of your research?			
Thesis for EdD accessible through Brunel University Library, publication of articles in relevant journals e.g. Research in Post-Compulsory Education, conference presentations e.g. Brunel University Education Research Conference, national (BERA and 14-19 Conference) and international (ERA) conferences.  Summary findings will be fed back to participants.			
<b>14. PROCEDURES</b>			
Please state whether the project includes procedures which: ( <i>please tick the appropriate box</i> )			
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>
<b>a.</b> are physically invasive;			No
<b>b.</b> involve the use of human tissue or taking of bodily samples;			No

<b>c.</b> involve the use of biological, radiological, chemical or hazardous substances;			No
<b>d.</b> are psychologically/socially intrusive.			No

If you have answered YES to any of the questions in 14 above, please complete questions 15; otherwise proceed to question 16. You must also consult the Head of Risk and Radiation to ensure compliance with Health and Safety regulations.

***If you are using human tissue in your project, you must complete section H.***

<b>15. Specific procedures involved:</b>			
Include details, as applicable, of:			
-the dosage and route of administration of the drug(s) used in and under research, other substances and/or appliances to be administered/used, and the method of administration or use,			
-measurements and samples to be taken;			
-tests to be performed;			
-the use of visual aids or the administration of psychological tests.			
n/a			
<b>15.1</b> Might the procedure(s) cause pain, distress, disruption or intrusion to a participant? n/a			
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	
If yes, please explain.			
<b>15.2.</b> Are there any particular requirements or abstentions which will be imposed upon the participant (e.g., multiple visits, abstention from alcohol, tobacco, etc.)? n/a			
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	
If yes, please explain.			
<b>16. Products and devices</b>			
<b>16.1</b> Does the research involve the testing of a product or device?			
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No

If yes, please describe it.		
<b>16.2 If this research involves a drug, is it being used in accordance with its licensed uses? n/a</b>		
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>
If no, please explain why:		

<b>SECTION D: THE PARTICIPANTS</b>
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*For the purposes of this section, "participants" include human subjects, their data, their organs and/or tissues. For participants to be recruited to the research, please state:*

**17.** the number of participants: 48

**18.** if data are to be collected on different sites, please state the number of participants at each site:

Site 1:	Number of participants:	8
Site 2:	Number of participants:	8
Site 3:	Number of participants:	8
Site 4:	Number of participants:	8
Site 5:	Number of participants:	8
Site 6:	Number of participants:	8

*(insert additional sites if necessary)*

**19.** How have you arrived at this number? Please state proposed inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Data is being gathered through focus groups and for focus group research, three to five groups are recommended as a typical number (Morgan, 1998) - in this case six will be conducted to increase likelihood of reaching saturation. Each group is planned to comprise eight young people, which is the mid-point of the six to ten generally recommended (Morgan, 1998). Ten invitations will be issued with confirmation sought for each focus group, based on a 20 per cent dropout rate typically being experienced on the day of the

focus group (Morgan, 1997). Invitations will be sent to a purposive sample in order to secure representation from groups with each of the characteristics identified as prevalent for NEETs and young people in JWT (Coles, Hutton, Bradshaw, Craig, Godfrey and Johnson, 2002). Confirmation of participation will be sought and further invitations will be issued to achieve a balanced representation across the characteristics described above.

**References**

Coles, C, Hutton, S, Bradshaw, J, Craig, G, Godfrey, C, and Johnson, J. (2002) *Literature Review of the Costs of Being "Not in Employment, Education or Training" at Age 16-18* Social Policy Research Unit, University of Hull for UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (Research Report no. 347)

Morgan, D. (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* Sage, London

Morgan, D. (1998) *Planning Focus Groups* Sage, London

<b>20.</b> Age group or range (e.g., under 60s):	16-19
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<b>21.</b> Sex:	Male	24	Female	24
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**22.** Do participants belong to any of the following vulnerable groups?

Children:	<b>YES</b>	Over 16 yrs	<b>NO</b>
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Participants unable to give informed consent in their own right (e.g., people with learning difficulty):

	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No	
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Other vulnerable groups (e.g., mental illness, dementia, students, refugees, unemployed, prisoners):

	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
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*The above list is indicative, not definitive. Care will need to be taken to formulate inclusion/exclusion criteria that clearly justify why certain individuals are to be excluded, to avoid giving the impression of unnecessary discrimination. On the other hand, the need to conduct research in "special" or "vulnerable" groups should be justified and it needs generally to be shown that the data required could not be obtained from any other class of participant.*

If the answer to any of the above is yes, please complete Questions 22 to 27; otherwise proceed to Question 28.

<p><b>23.</b> Please explain why it is necessary to conduct the research in such vulnerable participants and whether required data could be obtained by any other means.</p>
<p>The focus of the research is on young people aged 16-19 who are not participating in education and training. Previous research (Spielhofer, Benton, Evans, Featherstone, Golden, Nelson and Smith, 2009) has demonstrated that vulnerable groups, such as young people with caring responsibilities are over-represented in this group and members of the group are unemployed or in jobs without training. In order that the findings are balanced, it is essential that vulnerable groups are represented within the sample. The research also seeks the first hand views of the young people and these views could not be accurately secured other than through direct dialogue.</p> <p>Spielhofer, T, Benton, T, Evans, K, Featherstone, G, Golden, S, Nelson, J, and Smith, P. (2009) <i>Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People who do not Participate in Education or Training at 16 and 17</i> National Foundation for Education Research for UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (Research Report no. 72)</p>
<p><b>24.</b> Please state what special or additional arrangements have been made to deal with issues of consent and the procedures to safeguard the interests of such participants.</p>
<p>All young people will be given the choice whether to participate. All young people will have a full written and oral explanation of the purpose of the research. Confidentiality will be maintained for participants in the recordings of findings and reporting of research and the ground rule of confidentiality will be explained to all participants and their agreement secured prior to commencement. All participants will be given the right to withdraw at any stage of the research.</p>
<p><b>25.</b> Please describe the procedures used to ensure children (i.e., persons under 18 years) are able to provide consent/assent to participation.</p>
<p>Participants will be over 16, but some will be under 18. Consent forms will be explained to the participants, with an opportunity for questions. Consent forms will be signed by the participants prior to commencement of focus groups.</p>

**26.** If appropriate, please state whether and how parental consent, or the consent of the legal guardian and/or order/declaration of the court, will be sought in relation to the participation of children in the research.

Where required, this will be secured from the parents prior to commencement of research, using established processes within the Local Authority.

**27.** If the participant is unable to consent in their own right, will you seek the prior approval of an informed independent adult and any other person or body to the inclusion of the participant in the research?

	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
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State precisely what arrangements will be put in place.

Written consent will be sought in this situation from the parent or legal guardian of the young person.

**Recruitment and Selection**

*The Research Ethics Committee will need to be satisfied with the effectiveness and propriety of recruitment and selection procedures given the participant involved, e.g., that the participant will not feel in any way obliged to take part, that advertisements do not appear to offer inducements. The Committee will be particularly interested in cases where a participant’s relationship with the investigator could raise issues about the voluntary status or motive of the participant’s involvement in the research (e.g., students).*

**28.** How will the participants in the study be selected, approached and recruited (please indicate the inclusion and exclusion criteria)?

Participants will be selected through a combination of purposive stratified sampling and voluntary sampling (Morgan,1998) as invitations will be extended to young people who are not in ETE in the selected Local Authority. Response to the invitations will be on a voluntary basis.

Morgan, D. (1998) *Planning Focus Groups* Sage, London

*If you are proposing to advertise, please attach a copy of the advert to be used.*

<b>29.</b> Where are you recruiting the participants? n/a					
<b>30.</b> Relationship of participant to investigator:		<p>The investigator holds a management position within the Local Authority, which will be declared to participants as part of the explanation of the purpose of the research. The investigator is mindful of the potential threats to validity from reactivity, respondent biases or researcher biases ( Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This threat will be reduced through reflexivity (Crotty, 1998), specifically member checking (Robson, 2002), whereby transcripts of each participant’s contributions and interpretations will be fed back to each participant.</p> <p>Crotty, M. (1998) <i>The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process</i> Sage, London</p> <p>Lincoln, Y, and Guba, E. (1985) <i>Naturalistic Enquiry</i> Sage, California</p> <p>Robson, C. (2002) <i>Real World Research</i> Blackwell, Oxford</p>			
<b>31.</b> Will the participants take part on a fully voluntary basis?					
	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
<b>32.</b> Will Brunel University students be involved as participants in the research project?					
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No	
If yes, please provide full details.					
<b>33.</b> Will payments or other inducements be made to participants?					
	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
If yes, give amounts, type and purpose.					
Focus groups will be followed by a pizza supper and participants will be given a small book token (circa £10) towards travel costs and previous research has shown this to be beneficial (Morgan, 1998).					

Morgan, D. (1998) <i>Planning Focus Groups</i> Sage, London					
<b>Information to Participants and Consent</b>					
<b>34.</b> Will participants be informed of the purpose of the research?					
	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
If no, please explain why.					
<b>35.</b> Will the participants be given a written information sheet?					
	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
If yes, attach a copy. Attached as Appendix 2.					
If no, please explain why.					
<b>36.</b> Will written consent be obtained?					
	<b>YES</b>	Yes	<b>NO</b>		
If yes, attach a copy of consent form. Attached as Appendix 3.					
If no, please explain why.					
<b>37.</b> Where potential participants will/may suffer from any difficulties of communication, state the methods to be employed both to present information to the participants and achieve consent. If written, please attach a copy.					
Information will be presented in a manner appropriate to the participants, with full explanation, based on the attached information sheet and consent form, with an opportunity for questions and discussion.					
<b>38.</b> Please state how you will bring to the attention of the participants their right to withdraw from the study without penalty.					
All participants will be informed prior to taking part, and at the start of the focus group, that they have the right to withdraw at any time. This is also stated on the information and consent form.					
Where relevant:					
<b>38.1</b> Will information be given to the participants' GP (if deemed necessary)? n/a					
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>		
<b>38.2</b> Have the participants consented to having their GP informed? n/a					

	YES		NO		
<b>39.</b> Please state what measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the participant's data (i.e., arising out of the research and contained in personal data).					
Published information will contain no names or personal data, although anonymised quotes (with permission) may be drawn into the thesis, summary reports or presentations.					
<b>40.</b> How long will the data be retained following completion of the study?					
Personal data will be retained confidentially for five years following completion of the study. This data is held to enable the researcher to have access to the primary data in the event of questions arising in relation to the research. Confidentiality would still be maintained, but the source data could be referred to by the researcher. After five years the source data would be destroyed.					
<b>41.</b> How will participants be informed of the results of the study if they so wish?					
Following analysis of the data from all focus groups, a summary of findings will be sent to all participants. The thesis would be available to any parties requesting access to it, including participants or their parents or carers.					

**SECTION E: RISKS AND HAZARDS**

<b>42. Risk to research participants</b>					
<b>42.1</b> Do you think there are any ethical problems or special considerations with the proposed study?					
<b>43. Risk to researchers</b>					
<b>43.1</b> Are there any potential hazards or risks for the researchers and others associated with participation in the research (as distinct from the <i>research participants</i> )?					
<b>44.</b> Has a Health & Safety risk assessment been carried out?					
	YES	Yes		NO	

<b>SECTION F: COMPENSATION FOR DEATH OR PERSONAL INJURY</b>					
45. Is Brunel University providing indemnity for compensation in the event of personal injury or death arising out of participation in the research?					
	<b>YES</b>	yes	<b>NO</b>		
46. If the insurance cover is <b>not</b> being provided by Brunel University, please provide written confirmation that you have insurance cover for negligent <b>and</b> non-negligent harm. n/a					
47. Has a manufacturer provided commercial equipment and/or mechanical devices?					
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No	
If yes, please state what arrangements have been made to compensate or provide indemnity in the event of personal injury or death arising from the use of the equipment or mechanical devices.					

<b>SECTION G: CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY</b>					
48. Are there any potential conflicts of interest arising from the project, deriving from relationships with collaborators/sponsors/participants/interest groups?					
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No	
Please disclose all relevant personal and commercial interests.					
49. Does the project require access to intellectual property rights (IPR) belonging to third parties?					
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	No	
49.1 If yes, has use of such IPR been cleared with the relevant owners? n/a					
	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>		
50 Are arrangements in place to ensure the proper attribution and acknowledgement of inventive contributions to the project by all participants/collaborators? n/a					

	<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>	n/a	
If yes, please provide evidence of this.					

<b>SECTION H: USE OF HUMAN TISSUE</b>					
51. What types of human tissue or other biological material will be used? None					
52. Will the material be obtained from participants in this study? n/a					
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>			
<b>If yes, please go to question 59.</b>					
53. Will you know the identity of the donor? n/a					
<b>YES</b>		<b>NO</b>			
If yes, please explain.					
54. Has consent been obtained previously to use the samples for research? n/a					
55. Do you plan to seek further consent to use the samples in this project? n/a					
<b>56.</b> Will any of the samples be imported from outside the UK? n/a					
If yes, please justify the use of imported samples.					
<b>56.1</b> Please indicate if there is evidence that consent was obtained from the donors.					
<b>56.2</b> If you are obtaining the samples from a tissue bank <b>within</b> the UK, please provide evidence of consent from the donor(s) and the HTA licence number for the tissue bank.					
57. What types of tests or analysis will be carried out on the samples? n/a					
58. Will the research involve the analysis or use of human DNA in the samples? n/a					

<p><i>Please go to question 68.</i></p> <p><i>The following questions apply to human tissue or other biological material which is to be obtained from participants in <b>this</b> project.</i></p>
<p><b>59.</b> Please state the nature, amount and frequency of the samples to be taken. n/a</p>
<p><b>60.</b> Who will collect the samples? n/a</p>
<p><b>61.</b> From whom will the samples be removed? n/a</p>
<p><b>62.</b> Will you obtain consent from living donors for the use of the samples in <b>this</b> project? n/a</p>
<p><b>63.</b> Will you obtain consent from living donors for the use of the samples in future projects? n/a</p>
<p><b>64.</b> Please state the arrangements for obtaining consent to remove and use samples from the <b>deceased</b> for this project. n/a</p>
<p><b>65.</b> Will you or others on the research team be able to identify the donors after the samples have been obtained? n/a</p>
<p><b>66.</b> What types of tests or analysis will be carried out on the samples? n/a</p>
<p><b>67.</b> Will the research involve the analysis or use of human DNA? n/a</p>
<p><b>68.</b> Please give details of where the samples will be stored, who will have access, and the custodial arrangements. n/a</p>
<p><b>69.</b> What will happen to the samples at the end of the research? n/a</p>
<p><b>70.</b> Have you received training on obtaining consent for the use of human tissue? n/a</p>
<p><b>71.</b> What experience do you have in handling human tissue? n/a</p>
<p><b>72.</b> Please provide evidence from the Biological and Genetic Modification Safety Committee that they are satisfied with the safety protocols for this project. n/a</p>

## Appendix 2b: Draft leaflet for young people

<b>Brunel</b> UNIVERSITY WEST LONDON	<i>Participation of young people in employment with training, education or training</i>
<b>Facts and what next?</b>	

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research.

### **What's it all about?**

We are holding this focus group as part of a research project to understand why some young people aged 16-19 aren't in employment with training, education or training. We want to know your thinking on this and to hear your ideas on what could change this. This project is being conducted by Frank Offer as part of the Brunel University Doctorate of Education Programme.

### **Who's involved?**

48 young people, male and female, will be involved through six focus groups.

### **How are the focus groups run?**

The focus groups are your opportunity to tell us your views and your ideas for the future. All discussions are confidential - the key findings will be reported, but individual views will not be linked to any one participant. Please respect the confidentiality of others in the group. You will be asked for your consent for quotes to be used in the final report, but again these would not be linked to any one participant. You will have an opportunity for any questions at the start of the focus group. You may withdraw at anytime if you wish.

### **What next?**

Your focus group will be followed by a pizza supper as a small thank you for your time for this research. A full research report will be written and a brief summary leaflet

developed for distribution to the participants. You will be sent a copy of this leaflet, along with all other participants.

If you have any further queries about the research project please contact:

Frank Offer

Email: [frankoffer@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:frankoffer@brunel.ac.uk)

Phone 0208 541 9507

Thank you

### **Appendix 3: Extract from transcript from Focus Group 2**

**Facilitator:** What are the challenges you and others in your situation face when you try to find a job, particularly with training, in this area?

**Young Person 4:** Lifestyle like what your parents do can affect – say your mum does hairdressing and your dad's a labourer, like it will affect what you want to do, because say your dad owns his own business, an easier option for you to make money would be for you to go into business with your dad, and then you've always got a secure job, because people are always going to need labourers. Then, say, your parents work in a bank, accountants or lawyers or whatever, like it's all to do with your family, what different jobs they do, because that influences your decision in what you want to do.

**Young Person 2:** And school, like what your past schools have been like. If it's been bad, you're not really going to want to go to college to learn because you ain't been learning in your secondary school.

**Facilitator:** Yes.

**Young Person 4:** Like (all names withheld for publication) said as well, it's not just about illness but if you've got, like, some sort of learning disability, are you getting the right help that you need to do well, because if you don't do well and you don't get good grades, like you can't get a job.

**Young Person 6:** To find a job, it's really hard to find a job.

**Facilitator:** Why, what makes you say that?

**Young Person 6:** There's not a lot out there and 'place name's not a really big place, so all the people that do need something are all fighting – not really fighting each other but they're trying their hardest. I think that increases

the amount of people on Jobseeker's Allowance and stuff like that, because there isn't generally a lot of jobs.

**Young Person 5:** Even people with degrees and that can't get jobs.

**Young Person 4:** A lot of places want experience but, if it's your first time going out looking for a job, you're not going to have any experience.

**Young Person 6:** That's my problem, I don't have any experience.

**Young Person 4:** Like, they say that they want six months experience but nowhere is going to give you the chance to get that experience, that's one of the big problems of finding a job.

**Young Person 5:** You have to be willing to work for free to get that experience.

**Young Person 4:** But even then when you do volunteering and stuff, it still doesn't increase your chances of getting a job, because they think, at the end of the day, there's a job that they need doing, you're doing the job and they don't have to pay you for it because you are volunteering. But then I suppose that is experience but it's not paid and then it's difficult because, like, there's only so much volunteering you can do before you just think, I need money of some sort, so what am I going to do to get a job. I've got all this experience but no-where's going to take me.

**Young Person 6:** I think, like, the Government have put a lot of pressure on young kids, like, to get jobs, because they're upping the prices of things and our wages aren't a lot. We get like £3.68 an hour if you are under 18 and that's not actually a lot to be working. We've got to work like nine hours to get not even £30, so I think they put too much pressure on us.

**Young Person 2:** Even if you do have the right grades – like everyone learns differently when you go to school. If you learn differently to, like, the

brainier ones, they'll put you in a select group, you know what I mean, so you're not going to learn, you're just going to be with that select group learning the same stuff, you know what I mean. Like they dull you down with the curricular system, you know what I mean, sort of thing, so, like, when you do come out, you haven't got any sort of, like, anything anyway, because they just put you in that group. So you're just put in that group to do the same work or labour or something like that, you know what I mean.

**Young Person 4:** You don't have the chance to do anything the higher sets are doing, because they think you're not capable, where you might be capable. You just might need a little bit of extra help to get there.

**Young Person 2:** Or learning in a different way, you know what I mean. If you learn in a different way, they don't suit you for that work, they just only suit one way.

**Young Person 6:** When you're in school, you've just got to sit there. They write it on the board and you've got to copy it down or whatever, and like for some kids it's easier for them to do it themselves than it is to have to copy stuff and everything like that.

**Young Person 4:** It's like a dumb group and a clever group and you get chosen what one you're gonna go in.

**Young Person 2:** Straight from the beginning, as soon as you've got the SATs, they put you in them groups and, if you're in a dumb group, unless like you sit there and you do the work, keep doing the work over and over again it's sort of like a couple of years maybe until you go up a group, you know what I mean.

**Young Person 4:** And everybody learns differently but in school they've got their one way of teaching you, that's as much as the teachers can do. They can teach you the way that they're told to teach you but, like 'name withheld' said, some people learn by doing, some people learn by seeing other people doing it. Like, everybody learns at different speeds and stuff.

## Appendix 4: Word cloud

