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## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

### **A longitudinal study exploring post-school transitions of young people with learning disabilities perspectives of young people, parents and professionals**

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# DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

## A longitudinal study exploring post-school transitions of young people with learning disabilities

*perspectives of young people, parents and professionals*

Azahar Aziz

2014

University of Dundee

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**A LONGITUDINAL STUDY EXPLORING POST-SCHOOL  
TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LEARNING  
DISABILITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE,  
PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS**

**Azahar Aziz**

A longitudinal study exploring post-school transitions of young people with learning disabilities: Perspectives of young people, parents and professionals.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Education

School of Education, Social Work and Community Education

University of Dundee

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**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the candidate, Azahar Aziz is the author of the thesis presented herein; that, unless otherwise stated, all references cited have been consulted by the candidate; that the work of which the thesis is a record has been done by the candidate, and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

**Signature:**

All conditions stated within the Ordinance and Regulations of the University of Dundee have been strictly adhered to and fulfilled by the candidate, Azahar Aziz.

**Supervisor's Signature:**

**ABSTRACT**

This is a longitudinal study that aimed to explore the planning and preparation, and experiences of post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities in both, mainstream and special schools within one local authority in Scotland. Data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with the young people, parents and professionals, and also from questionnaire with parents, at three different stages, covering a period from the final year at school, up to the first year at college. In addition, observation was undertaken of two review meetings in one special school.

The results found that despite all young people's post-school destination being college, they went through a variety of experiences, suggesting that a different approach needs to be taken to planning and preparation to ensure a smooth and seamless transition. The study revealed that despite many improvements, there was still a lack of information about the post-school provisions for the young people among the school staff and other professionals. The study proposes that the role of parents is as important as the role of the school staff.

The study also makes some recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

**Key words:** longitudinal study, planning and preparation, post-school transition, young people, learning disabilities

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Ethan was diagnosed as having a global delay and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and attended a special school. He experienced a few episodes of bullying, not only while attending the link course<sup>1</sup>, but also when starting a full time course at college. As a result, he was transferred to a lower level course than the course he was supposed to take. Alban was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and attended a mainstream school with special provision for pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN). His mother wanted him to stay on at school until the sixth year, but felt she had no choice because the special provision at his school only lasted until the fourth year. If she still wanted him to continue to the sixth year, she would have to find another school for him. Finally, he ended up doing a life skills course at college. Kian also had a global delay and felt reluctant about taking the link course, but ultimately realised that college was a better place for him than the school. Chloe suffered from a number of mental health problems and was initially unwilling to leave school and move on to college as she felt safer there. However, with the continuous help and support she received, she was able to cope well at the college in the end. Details of each case above are discussed further in Chapter 7.

The four brief scenarios shown above, including one composite, illustrate part of the actual transition journey experienced by young people with learning disabilities from school to post-school which is the main focus of this study. This suggests that each and every young person's experience of the post-school transition is exclusively unique

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<sup>1</sup> A course conducted jointly by the school and college that the young people attend twice a week for seven weeks which is at college whilst they are still at school.

(Riddell, Ward, & Thomson, 1993). Due to its exclusivity and uniqueness, each and every young person's transition process needs careful attention and a different approach so that the outcomes will be worthwhile and meaningful to them.

### **1.1 Overview of the study**

Preparation for life after school can have a great impact on young people and their parents. It is especially difficult in the case of young people with ASN. There are many things that need to be considered in order for them to have a seamless transition from school to post-school. This includes whether or not to continue their education through further education or training, going to a day care centre or directly going to work, or staying at home which is unlikely for the majority of the young people. Riddell, Ward and Thomson's (1993) statement two decades ago, that the pattern or norm of young people starting work immediately after leaving school has become history still seems to be true and relevant today. Their view is supported by Mitchell (1999) who agrees that the direct school to work transition is seen as rather outdated. According to Riddell et al. (1993) the unemployed young people are left without social security benefits unless they participate in some form of post-school education or training. In other words, working directly after leaving school is less of a tradition today, as many more young people, regardless of their ability are encouraged to equip themselves with more skills and knowledge through further education or training in order to secure a better job and a better future. Indeed, in preparing for adult life, the young people should be given the chance to attain the highest level of achievement they possibly can, irrespective of the degree of their disability (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1978). As *Valuing People* (Department of Health, 2001) points out, it has been the intention of the government to see that more young people participate in education and training, which will help them with getting better jobs and consequently having more productive lives.

The importance of constant learning for the young people was also stressed by Donald Dewar, the then Scottish First Minister in the Scottish Green Paper when he said:

*Learning has never been more important for our society than it is today. We live in a highly competitive world characterised by fast changing technologies... Lifelong learning will make a major contribution to building a modern Scotland and a strong society where people understand the importance and benefits of developing their abilities and talents (Farmakopoulou & Watson, 2003, p. 226).*

This statement shows how continuing education is key for the young people regardless of their abilities in order to face the challenging and competitive world. One of the ways of preparing continuing education is through further education. The decision to continue to further education is certainly not an easy task for the young people as many aspects need to be considered in order to achieve a meaningful outcome. The lack of information and choices about post-school transition, inconsistency between the relevant agencies including the move from children's services to adult services, and lack of involvement of the young people and parents, are among the main issues raised in the literature each time the transition issues were discussed. Indeed, the stage of transition is often found to be a stressful and difficult time for the young people and their families (Department of Health, 2001). In fact, it will be more stressful and worrying especially when information and support are lacking (Dee & Byers, 2003).

Although young people with learning disabilities have more choices now after leaving school than they had in the past, research shows that difficulties in making the transition from school to further education, training or employment still persists among them (MacIntyre, 2009). As Kaehne (2012) has noted, although transition has been the subject of research for a significant number of years, it continues to be a difficult time for a large number of young people with learning disabilities and also their families.

Yet, not many studies, especially in the Scottish context, have explored the transition of young people with disabilities to adulthood (Stalker, 2002). Therefore, the current study examines the planning and preparation, and experiences of post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities within one local authority in Scotland by exploring the views of the young people, their parents, the school staff and other professionals.

## **1.2 Rationale behind this study**

- The issues of post-school destinations of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been discussed by many researchers over the last 25 years in the UK (Riddell et al., 1993). Despite many changes and improvements, some problems still remain as to how decisions about post-school provisions were made, what they would do and where they would go next (Dee, 2006).
- Pioneers have shown that young people with severe disabilities can attain a high level of competence (McGinty & Fish, 1992). Some of them can work and contribute to society and live independently. However, lack of knowledge and uncertainties about the possibilities after school still remain (McGinty & Fish, 1992).
- From database research, it seems that only one study conducted in the United States (see Cooney, 2002) on post-school transition has looked at the perspectives of the young people, parents and professionals at the same time. Thus, it is these gaps in the literature that this study attempts to address by focusing on the perspectives of four different groups of stakeholders, namely the young people, their parents, the school staff and other professionals involved in post-school transition planning and preparation.

- Most studies have collected data retrospectively after post-school transition or at two time points, namely once at the secondary school and once at the post-school setting. As the transition is an on-going process, and research and Scottish Legislation highlight that planning and preparation should start early, this study took the form of a longitudinal study, with data collected at three time points from stakeholders involved at those time points.

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives**

The main aim of this study is to explore the experiences of post-school transition planning and preparation of young people with learning disabilities in special and mainstream schools. The objectives are:

- To explore the views of young people, parents and professionals about planning and preparation for post-school transition.
- To explore the transition experiences of young people with learning disabilities and their parents.
- To explore the role of parents and professionals in the post-school transition of the young people with learning disabilities.
- To explore the optimum time and duration required for the young people with learning disabilities to make plans for the transition.

### **1.4 Some terms used in this study**

Throughout this thesis, some terms are repeatedly used. To make it clear, the terms used are referred to the following, unless otherwise stated:

### **1.4.1 Post-school transition**

Is a period between leaving school and entering a new phase in life after school. This term is discussed further in the next chapter.

### **1.4.2 Young people**

Are pupils aged between 15 and 17 who were involved in this study and were at the end of their school year. The term ‘young people’ in this study means the young people with learning disabilities. It should be noted that various terms are used to represent young people in research such as student, young adult, youth and adolescence. However, for the purpose of this study, the term ‘young people’ is used throughout, because it is the term most widely used in the United Kingdom (Crawford, 2012). This term is also discussed further in the next chapter.

### **1.4.3 Learning disability**

There is still tension among the participants as well as the authors cited in this study regarding the use of the terms ‘learning disability’ and ‘learning difficulty’. The Scottish Executive (2000) also conceded that, there is confusion between the terms ‘learning difficulty’ and ‘learning disability’. At present, there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a ‘learning disability’ nationwide (MacIntyre, 2009). It is apparent that the two terms are used interchangeably. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs for instance, uses the term ‘learning difficulties’ instead of ‘learning disabilities’ which is also used by the 1981 Education Act. The Code defines ‘learning difficulties’ as: are deemed to exist if children have *significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of their age, or if they have a disability that either prevents or hinders them from making*

*use of the educational facilities generally available to their age peers* (Hornby, Davis, & Taylor, 1995, p. 2).

In addition, another term that is more frequently used to describe young people with learning disabilities in Scotland is ‘Global Learning Delay’ or just ‘Global Delay’ or ‘Global Learning Difficulty’. As Jenkinson (1997) points out, the terms ‘learning difficulty’, ‘learning disability’ or ‘student with special needs’ have different meanings in different countries; even within states in Australia there is variation in the interpretations of these terms. Some authors even use both terms simultaneously by adding the word “and/or” in between, such as learning difficulties and/or disabilities (for example, see Pavey, 2005; Elson, 2011). While the term ‘learning disabilities’ is currently used all over the UK, mainly in health and social care settings, the term ‘intellectual disability’ appears to be replacing the term ‘learning disability’ in academic journals and international organisations (Scottish Executive, 2000). However, for the purpose of this study, the term ‘learning disability’ is used throughout, rather than ‘learning difficulty’. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, when referring to certain authors or participants in this study, the term ‘learning difficulty’ is used, because this was the term used by them. A detailed definition of this term including the evolution of the term is discussed in the next chapter.

#### **1.4.4 Special Educational Needs and Additional Support Needs**

The term ‘special educational needs’ was introduced by the Warnock Committee Report in 1978 and was incorporated into the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 as amended (HMIe, 2007, p. 1). However, since 14 November 2005, the term ‘additional support needs’ has been used to replace the term ‘special educational needs’, following the

passage of the Education (Additional Support for Learning – ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004 to encapsulate all children who require additional support to make progress in education for whatever reasons (Riddell, 2006). The Education (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004 defines ‘additional support needs’ more broadly than ‘special educational needs’ and aims to ensure that all children and young people are given the necessary support to help them work towards achieving their full potential (HMIE, 2007). The Act defines a child or young person as having additional support needs *where, for whatever reason, the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person* (2004, p. 3). The reference to school education includes, in particular, such education directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential (Scottish Parliament, 2004, p. 3). According to McLarty and Hawthorn (2003), the change from ‘special educational needs’ to ‘additional support needs’ is made to incorporate children for whom English is an additional language, refugees and asylum seekers, children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and gypsy/traveller children; and may also include gifted and more able children. For the purpose of this thesis, however, both terms are used throughout, depending on the situation and context.

#### **1.4.5 Parent**

The term parent in this study includes biological parents, adoptive parents, primary carer or foster parents.

#### **1.4.6 School staff**

The term school staff refers to teachers and classroom assistants. Details about the post of the teachers can be found in Chapter 3.

### **1.4.7 Other professionals**

Other professionals in this study refer to those who work outside of the school including the Education Department, the Social Work Department and the college, and who are involved in post-school transitions. Further details of these professionals can also be found in Chapter 3.

### **1.4.8 Names**

All the names used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms.

## **1.5 The structure of this thesis**

This thesis comprises eight chapters in total. In this introductory chapter, I begin by introducing four short case studies about actual post-school transition experiences. An overview of the study, including the rationale, aims and objectives is then given, followed by some terminologies used throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the current study. It begins by describing the three key concepts in this study, namely the young person, learning disability and post-school transition. The context of the legislative, policy and practice frameworks of transition are discussed in general before moving on to the discussion of the policy context in Scotland in particular. This chapter also looks at the conceptualisation of educational transition and its impact on planning and preparation, and some theoretical perspectives underpinning the transition. Consequently, the key elements of transition planning, and issues and challenges related to the transition are explored. This chapter concludes by looking at some of the good practices of transition.

Chapter 3 provides details about the methodology employed, and how the current study was designed and conducted. The demographics and profiles of the participants are given and the procedures of each stage in this study are explained. The instruments used and the time frame allocated to each stage are also described, as well as how the data were analysed and when ethics approval was granted.

Chapter 4 reports and discusses the findings from Stage 1 which includes the interviews with the young people, the school staff and other professionals. The findings are reported under several themes which emerged from the interviews with the participants, such as the transition planning and preparation, feelings about leaving school, college experience and future aspirations. This chapter also reports and discusses the observations from two review meetings.

Chapter 5 reports and discusses the findings from Stage 2 which includes the interview with the young people and the questionnaire completed by the parents. Reports and discussions are clustered under several themes which emerged from the data, including the involvement in review meetings and social activities, courses of interest and issues of post-school transition.

Chapter 6 complements the overall findings from the three stages. It reports and discusses the findings from Stage 3; the last stage of this longitudinal study. This includes the interviews with the young people as well as the interviews with their parents. Similar to Chapters 4 and 5, the findings from this stage are reported and discussed under several themes as they emerged from the data, including the college life, courses attended, future aspirations and some difficulties and challenges in post-school transition.

In Chapter 7, we return to the four case studies introduced in Chapter 1. Considering these in greater detail, they help to illustrate some of the key themes relating to young people's transition journeys. It also provides the rationale for demonstrating these case studies, followed by a general discussion of the findings of the three stages which were blended together to provide a strong and robust argument.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by providing recommendations for future research and listing the limitations of the current study. A reflection on my research journey is also described at the end of this chapter.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Young people today are the leaders of tomorrow and thus become an invaluable asset for each and every country. However, many issues in the world today, such as unemployment, leaving school early and having access to further education are affecting these young people. Whilst these issues may be a big challenge for young people on the whole, it is an extra challenge for young people with learning disabilities, as they require more attention. One of these issues is the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities which has yet to be resolved.

Research related to the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities has become increasingly popular over the last decade. Several studies have been conducted, such as a study on the transition experiences of young people with disabilities after leaving special schools (for example, see Mitchell, 1999), a case study exploring young people's involvement in the transition review meeting (Carnaby, Lewis, Martin, Naylor, & Stewart, 2003), the experience and outcomes of the transition from child to adult services and from childhood to adulthood for young people with disabilities and their families (Beresford, 2004) and parents' views on the transition planning process and how the adult placement met their children's needs (Smart, 2004). More recent research studies have focused on identifying the recurring factors that affect the continuity and discontinuity of care and services in the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Hudson, 2006), the choices for young people in the post-education transition (Kaehne, 2009), and a longitudinal qualitative study of choice or

the decision-making of parents of young people with disabilities during the transition (Maddison & Beresford, 2012; W. Mitchell, 2012).

Despite the many issues that have been explored and the improvements that have been made to the existing services and systems for these young people, such as the increase in the number of college places in further education (FE) (Elson, 2011; Mitchell, 1999), some key issues related to the post-school transition remain unsolved, including the persisting issue of unemployment among the young people concerned.

Whilst a considerable number of studies on the post-school transition of young people have been carried out in the UK, most of them, unfortunately, were conducted in England (for example, see Hornby & Kidd, 2001; Ward, Heslop, Mallett & Simons, 2003; Caton & Kagan, 2006), and fewer studies were undertaken in Scotland, which has its own distinctive legal and policy framework (Stalker, 2002). In addition, previous studies only tend to look at the perspectives of certain stakeholders at one moment in time, and rarely combine all the perspectives in one single study (for example, see Smyth & McConkey, 2003; Burchardt, 2004; Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Kaehne & Beyer, 2009). In contrast, the current study looks at the viewpoints of various stakeholders at the same time through a longitudinal qualitative study. Thus, it is this gap in the literature, especially within the Scottish context, that this study attempted to address.

This chapter begins with a description of the literature search strategy. This is followed by in depth definitions of three main concepts that are central to this thesis, namely the young person, learning disability and post-school transition. A general policy and legislative framework are reviewed, followed by the policy context in Scotland which is where this study was carried out. Some conceptual and theoretical aspects of the

transition are also explored. The key elements of the transition plan are then discussed in detail. Also included are the issues and challenges of transition which are presented in a table. Finally, some of the good transition practices are addressed towards the end of this chapter.

## 2.2 Literature search strategy

Four main databases have been identified as the main reference in my literature search strategy. These are the British Education Index, the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), the Wiley Inter Science Journals and the Scopus database. In addition, literature found in the list of references from each paper referred to, was also used. In order to alleviate the search strategy, certain keywords were used in combination to search for these databases (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1** The combination of keywords used to search databases

<b>Keyword 1</b>	<b>Keyword 2</b>	<b>Keyword 3</b>
Transition Post-school  Post-16	Young people	Learning disabilities Learning difficulties  Intellectual disabilities  Special Educational Needs
Professional Multi-agency	Involvement Learning disabilities	Person-centred planning Partnerships
Young people	Leaving school Aspirations	Further education Work Choices

It should be noted that all the journals and papers reviewed were divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of journals published between the years 1990 and 1999 and Part 2 consists of journals published between the years 2000 and 2013. This was purposely done to see any differences or similarities that might have changed or remained unchanged throughout the two decades, particularly in terms of policies and practices.

Since the population of this study is from the UK, the majority of papers used are from the UK. However, papers from the USA, Australia, Europe as well as some Asian countries were also reviewed in order to see the holistic views on various policies and practices. The selection of the papers was based on the ability of a paper to illustrate the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study, the conceptualisation of learning disability and transition, policy and practice as well as issues related to the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities.

### **2.3 Key concepts**

Although there are many other key concepts concerning the post-school transition that might directly or indirectly affect the transition process of young people, it is the following three concepts that I am concerned about in the current study, namely, the young person, learning disabilities and post-school transition. This section discusses these three concepts in more detail.

#### **2.3.1 Young person**

In general, the concept of a child or young person varies across every country. In other words, it has a different definition in different legal contexts (The Scottish Government, 2010b). However, most countries in the world tend to follow the definition stated by The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child which states clearly in Article 1 that everyone under the age of 18 is defined as a child (UNICEF, 1989).

In the United Kingdom, there is no single law to define the age of a child across the nations. Despite each nation having their own guidance setting out the duties and responsibilities of organisations to keep children safe, the UK government in 1991, consented to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that a child

means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 2012).

Nevertheless, in the Scottish context in particular, Section 93(2)(a) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 defines a child as follows:

*A person under the age of 18 years and parental responsibilities order remains in effect until the person reaches that age. It is, however, to be noted that on the child attaining the age of 16 years, all the parental responsibilities except that to provide guidance come to an end, as do all the parental rights (Norrie, 2005, pp. 192-193).*

This means that, other than in certain circumstances, the young person aged between 16 and 18 would not be regarded as a child. For instance, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 provides that parental rights and responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting a child's health, development and welfare, for providing direction and guidance about personal relations and acting as legal representative only apply to children under 16. Similarly, the children's hearings system applies ordinarily to children who are not yet 16 (although it does extend to those under 18 who are already in the system when they turn 16) (The Scottish Government, 2006). In addition, under Scots law, the term 'child' only applies to those under minimum school-leaving age; whilst those over 16 years but not yet 18 are referred to as 'young persons' (L.-A. Barnes, 2009). This has been clearly mentioned in the Code of Practice (Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 9) which states that a young person "*is a person over school age (generally over 16 years) who is not yet 18 years of age and receiving school education*".

In the context of this study, the young person refers to those aged between 15 and 17 years old and in their final year of secondary school. They had been diagnosed or identified by the school system as having additional support needs. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 defines a child with Additional Support Needs as:

*A child or young person has additional support needs for the purposes of this Act where, for whatever reason, the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person. (Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 15)*

Each of them required some kind of special attention in different ways to enable them to follow the curriculum (Dee, 2006). The Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) identifies the following areas of need:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Behaviour, emotional and social development
- Sensory and/or physical development.

### **2.3.2 Learning Disability**

As mentioned in the first chapter, the term learning disability is used throughout this thesis instead of the term learning difficulty. However, both these terms, as well as others such as intellectual disabilities, special educational needs, etc. that are all used by researchers have also been mentioned.

The definition of the term learning disability has become a major debate among the practitioners and researchers, as found in the literature, due to several factors. For instance, Lerner (1971) states that the confusion and conflicting ideas of the term is

because so many diverse professions are concerned with the field of learning disabilities. Lerner suggests five different disciplines that cause various definitions of learning disabilities, namely the medicine, education, psychology, language and discipline involving other areas such as social work, paediatrics and so on. For instance, the medical specialties tend to view a learning disability as a pathological condition and concerned with the cause of a learning disorder such as neurological dysfunction or brain impairment; whereas the educationist may focus more on the learning behaviour of the child. Torgesen (2004) argues that the definitions of learning disabilities are frequently critiqued because they universally state that the presumed cause of the problem is the neurological impairment. What is clear from these views is that most of the changes reflect additions to our knowledge about learning disabilities which stems from developments in research and practice (Torgesen, 2004).

Historically, the term learning disability has gone through several phases of meaning, starting from the first half of the twentieth century until now (Porter & Lacey, 2005). According to Porter and Lacey (2005), in those days terms such as ‘idiots’ (low-grade amentia), ‘imbeciles’ (medium-grade amentia) and ‘feeble-minded’ (high-grade amentia) or sometimes ‘moron’ in the USA were mostly used to refer to people with learning difficulties. However, these terms were replaced in the UK by ‘mental deficiency’ around about 1920. The second half of the century saw other terms being used which were perceived to be more acceptable at the time, like ‘severely and moderately subnormal’, ‘mentally handicapped’ or ‘mentally retarded’ as in the case of the USA. It was not until the latter part of the century, which again saw a vast change in the terms, that people started to use the terms ‘learning difficulties’ or ‘learning disabilities’ (Porter & Lacey, 2005).

In relation to the changes in the terminologies, the perception of people towards people with learning disabilities has also changed. Prior to 1971, many children with more ‘severe’ or ‘profound’ learning difficulties were deemed ‘ineducable’ following assessment, and had no right to an education (Boxall, 2002). However, this notion has changed nowadays when children with learning disabilities are no longer viewed as ‘ineducable’. Rather, they are perceived as educable and many are being placed in mainstream schools alongside their non-disabled peers. According to Closs (1997), no child had been deemed as ‘ineducable’ or ‘untrainable’ in Scotland since 1974, however profoundly disabled they are. In fact, the belief that ‘all children are educable’ has been the central theme of Melville’s Committee report, set up by the Secretary of State in 1969 (G. O. B. Thomson, 1983). The White Paper in 1971 used the terms mild, moderate and severe mental handicap and in 2001 changed it to people with learning disabilities (Porter & Lacey, 2005).

It is quite obvious that most people tend to use the term ‘learning disability’ and ‘learning difficulty’ interchangeably. For instance, the British 1981 Education Act uses the term ‘learning difficulty’ and defines a child as having a ‘learning difficulty’ if:

- a. *He has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his age; or*
- b. *He has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools, within the area of the local authority concerned, for children of his age; or*
- c. *He is under the age of five years old and is, or would be if special educational provision were not made for him, likely to fall within paragraph (a) or (b) when over that age (Education Act 1981, 1981, p. 3).*

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the term ‘learning disability’ is used in this study rather than the term ‘learning difficulty’ as it brings a broader definition to the education legislation. In other words, the term ‘learning disability’ does not incorporate all of those with a ‘learning difficulty’.

According to *The Same As You?* (Scottish Executive, 2000, p. 103), ‘a learning disability is a significant, lifelong condition which has three facets:

- Reduced ability to understand new or complex information or to learn new skills.
- Reduced ability to cope independently.
- A condition which started before adulthood (before the age of 18) with a lasting effect on the individual’s development.’

The same definition is also used by *Valuing People* (see Department of Health, 2001, p. 14). This definition includes young people with autism who also have learning disabilities, but does not cover those with a higher level autism spectrum disorder with average or above average intelligence including those with Asperger’s Syndrome.

In addition, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010a, p. 7), described a disabled person as a person with:

*“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and longterm adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”*

*This means that, in general:*

- *the person must have an impairment that is either physical or mental;*
- *the impairment must have adverse effects which are substantial;*
- *the substantial adverse effects must be long-term; and*

- *the long-term substantial adverse effects must be effects on normal day-to-day activities”.*

Although there are objections to the term ‘learning disabilities’ (and other similar terms) by many people due to the stigma and discrimination that is often associated with such terms, a clear definition still needs to be created so it is clear who the organised services and support are for (Emerson, Hatton, Felce, & Murphy, 2001). As a result, most people think that the term learning disabilities should be retained despite the term ‘intellectual disabilities’ being increasingly used as the preferred term internationally (Emerson et al., 2001). In sum, there is still no absolute agreement about terminology in the field of learning disability which can be adopted universally, despite improved scientific knowledge (Cramer & Ellis, 1996). However, I believe that improved scientific knowledge does not necessarily suggest that it could lead to an agreed definition or terminology of learning disabilities. This may be helpful in streamlining and consequently increasing understanding of the terminology or definition of learning disability in both clinical and research work. Therefore, further research in this area is extremely crucial.

### **2.3.2.1 Theoretical and conceptual aspects of learning disabilities**

This sub-section examines the theoretical and conceptual aspects of learning disabilities and some issues associated with these conceptualisations. As mentioned earlier, there is still substantial variability and disagreement among stakeholders and practitioners about the definition of learning disabilities due to different ways of interpreting it. These include the fact that definitions have varied historically, according to prevailing ideas, policies and economics, as well as being subject to personal, societal and cultural variations in the ways that people view and regard disability. For instance, in the

medieval era, being unable to read was not a problem at all because the social processes did not demand literacy; learning difficulties only became central and visible once a complex social order required literate workers and citizens (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). The changes in its concepts and definitions are not surprising, as theories are always challenged, modified and evolved as researchers and practitioners test the theory's relevance and usefulness, which then leads to changes in assessment and instructional practices (Lerner, 2003). As Finkelstein (2001, p. 3) suggests:

*A good model can enable us to see something which we do not understand because in the model it can be seen from different viewpoints (not available to us in reality) and it is this multi-dimensioned replica of reality that can trigger insights which we might not otherwise develop .*

Without denying that good definitions are ones that are useful, I argue that we should also bear in mind the fact that they are linked to norms, values, beliefs or preference in society about what is desirable and undesirable, and not simply agree with whatever comes from the science. At one time, UK society thought it was a desirable thing to segregate education. However, from the 1970s, opinion began to shift towards a view that integration is better, although, more recently it is the integrationists who once again have to defend themselves. In other words, things may swing as well, and they do not always progress or move forward. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is vital that all notions of progress will not be abandoned.

In addition to the various perspectives on the conceptualisation of disabilities, Haddow (2004) has used different authors to discuss the concepts of disabilities. For example, Haddow has cited Oliver and Sapey (1999) as saying that disability as the dominant model in society, while others view disabilities as a sign of being chosen (Shearer, 1981), or of being possessed by God or an evil spirit (Jilek-Aall, 1965), as well as an issue to be resolved by the community (Groce, 1985). In other words, different people

have different views on the conceptualisation of learning disabilities. Perhaps, the following imagination by Vic Finkelstein (1981; cited in Boxall, 2002) of a fantasy wheelchair village that was organised for the benefit and convenience of the wheelchair users who lived there might explain this concept better.

*Finkelstein's wheelchair user villagers designed village buildings to suit their physical needs with ramps and lower doors and ceilings that would normally be found in the non-disabled world. They also organised employment within the village in such a way that it met the needs of wheelchair users. As a result, the wheelchair user villagers did not experience disablement within their village. However, a small number of 'able-bodied' people settled in the village and, as a result of the lowered doors and ceilings, experienced difficulties in using the buildings. They became known as the 'able-bodied disabled' and were treated in a similar way to disabled people in our disability society. They received 'treatment' for their bruised heads and were fitted with helmets and special braces which bent them double in order to prevent them from injuring themselves. They also experienced discrimination in the labour market and charitable organisations were set up by the wheelchair user villagers in order to provide for the needs of the 'able-bodied disabled' (Boxall, 2002, p. 213).*

Finkelstein's imaginary wheelchair village, as illustrated above, seems to suggest that the environment and social structures are two main components that could create barriers to the full and active participation of disabled people in society. As Boxall (2002) has noted, if it were possible to remove all physical and attitudinal barriers, wheelchair users would no longer be deemed as disabled in our society. However, it should be noted that, although Finkelstein illustrates the point in a simple way, he assumes that none of his wheelchair users have severe and multiple disabilities. I argue that if his wheelchair users have severe and multiple disabilities, he also needs to consider designing the village in such a way that it will suit all the physical needs of all the people in the village, including those with severe and multiple disabilities. As Shakespeare and Watson (2002) point out, it is impossible to remove all the obstacles to people with impairment, since some of them are extremely complex aspects of

impairment that are not generated by the environment. They further argue that creating a ‘barrier free environment’ is an unsustainable myth, such as Finkelstein’s wheelchair village. In other words, people have such variable needs that there such a perfect society is not possible. Thus, it is the role of society to identify and remove all the barriers, be they physical or attitudinal, which could prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in society.

In addition, people with a disability may also experience similar attitudinal barriers and loss of independence and control over their own lives in terms of the education system as well as the labour market. Similarly, people with learning difficulties would also be less disabled in our society if these barriers could be removed by changing attitudes and making information more accessible. This is the perspective of the social model of disability which views disability as a situation of collective institutional discrimination and social oppression (Boxall, 2002).

The social model was originally brought about by a group of disability activists in the 1970s called the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). They campaigned for the rights of people with impairments to participate fully in society, to live independently, to undertake productive work and to have full control over their lives. They stated:

*“In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society.”(Shakespeare, 2006, p. 198)*

It was Mike Oliver who coined the term ‘the social model of disability’ (Oliver, 2004) and became the most successful in promoting a clearly expressed version of the UPIAS’s interpretation in the public arena (Finkelstein, 2001). Oliver’s social model of

disability has gained a wide readership and general acceptance over a long period of time, especially among the British disability movement (Finkelstein, 2001). To put it simply, the social model removes the focus and “blame” from the disabled person to society at large. Unlike the individual model approach, the social model of disability believes that disability is not caused by people’s impairment, but rather that it is the failure of society to accommodate people with an impairment that causes disability (Boxall, 2002). In other words, from the social model point of view, disability is not determined by the biological difference but instead it is viewed as a social state (Boxall, 2002). For instance, adding a ramp to the entrance of a building as an alternative to a step or stairs for a wheelchair user would be deemed as one solution under the social model approach. Similarly, providing support for a young person with a learning disability who is unsure of how to pay the rent to live independently in his own home would be considered as a social model approach rather than expecting him to live in a communal home. In short, the social model looks at ways to eliminate barriers that could confine life choices for people with disabilities so that they can have equal opportunities and live independently with choice and control over their own lives. As Oliver (2004) points out, by modifying the environment setting, not only can it benefit those with a mobility issue, but also other groups as well, such as mothers with prams and pushchairs, and porters with trolleys.

As such, when considering the social model perspective in relation to people with a learning disability, Boxall (2002) argues that the ‘problem’ should be seen to be in the education system rather than the child. Issues such as choices between college or work after leaving school, sustaining friendships, independent living, making own decisions, as well as some personal challenges including lack of self-confidence and communication skills, are among the problems experienced by young people with

learning disabilities, particularly at the time of transition. From the social model point of view, all these problems require social interventions, particularly at the school, to support young people with overcoming their problems. According to Boxall (2002), a social model approach should consider ways of modifying the mainstream school environment so that the child's educational needs are met within that setting rather than considering a child with a learning disability to have 'failed' in the mainstream setting. For instance, the school can provide more support in terms of the resources, including manpower and the facilities in the classroom that could provide more opportunities for young people with learning disabilities to have choices of their own. Another approach that seems to be suitable for the social model is the person-centred planning, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Despite acknowledging the countless contributions of the social model of disability to achieving equal rights for people with disabilities on a large scale, there are also some criticisms of this model. Shakespeare and Watson (2002) argue that the social model is outdated and creates more problems than solutions. According to them, the model is no longer as useful as it once was, especially at the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, it is time for a new paradigm shift that can create a model which will account for disabled people's experience more effectively. Another main criticism came from the feminists such as Jenny Morris, Sally French and Liz Crow who argue that the social model of disability disregarded the individual experience of impairment (Shakespeare, 2006). As Crow (1992, pp. 3-4) points out:

*As individuals, most of us simply cannot pretend with any conviction that our impairments are irrelevant because they influence every aspect of our lives. We must find a way to integrate them into our whole experience and identity for the sake of our physical and emotional well-being, and, subsequently, for our capacity to work against Disability.*

Crow's argument seems to suggest that the individual or medical model cannot be abandoned completely. Crow (1996) further argues that the social model fails to work well at the personal level, that is to include and fully represent the range of disabled individuals. According to her, a renewed approach to the social model of disability is crucial, both individually and collectively in developing truly effective strategies to manage impairments and to confront disability.

Despite the criticism received from various parties regarding the social model, Oliver insists that the social model should not be regarded as a social theory, but rather as a practical tool for challenging the conceptualisation of disability and as a trigger for research, practice, theory and daily living with and by people with disabilities (Barnes & Mercer, 2004; Chappell, Goodley, & Lawthom, 2001).

With regards to the social model of disability and its significance and relevance for people with learning disabilities in particular, evidence shows that the majority of research has not attempted to explicitly and effectively utilise the social model for analysing the views and experiences of people with learning disabilities (Chappell, 1998; Chappell et al., 2001; Hollomotz, 2011). This view arises from the assumption that the social model of disability was primarily developed for people with physical disabilities. As Chappell (1998) points out, previous emancipatory disability analysis of our society tended to focus mainly on barriers to the inclusion of people with physical

and sensory impairments and neglected the analysis of barriers that might affect people with learning disabilities. Chappell (1998) further asserts that, in order to fully utilise the social model of disability to benefit all disabled people, an explicit commitment has to be made to include the particular barriers experienced by people with learning disabilities. Among the barriers that are likely to affect people with learning disabilities are barriers to information, individual and collective advocacy, as well as adequate assistance, which are often discussed with reference to people with disabilities in general (Hollomotz, 2011). Hollomotz (2011) argues that although the social model is not explicitly applied to people with learning disabilities in general discussions, it does not mean that such debates are not relevant to them. Instead, as mentioned earlier, it can be a central tool in explaining the disadvantages encountered by people with learning disabilities. One example of how the social model can be a useful tool for engaging people with learning disabilities is through the service of self-advocacy, which can provide people with learning disabilities with a collective voice and a framework for resistance (see Chappell *et al.*, 2001). In other words, this indicates that the social model of disability can still be adapted to people with learning disabilities although it may not necessarily be applied in a straightforward manner. Therefore, the current study focuses on the voice of young people with learning disabilities, as well as their parents, the school staff and other professionals to enable the exploration of the full range of their experiences. It recognises that the problems experienced by young people with learning disabilities are not only affecting them, but others too. However, as Chappell *et al.* (2001) point out, the greatest challenge is to ensure that supporters, professionals, researchers and most importantly, people with disabilities (including those with learning disabilities) recognise the relevance of the social model for people with disabilities, and the ways in which it is being articulated. Failure to do so would mean that they fail to listen to the voices and actions of dissent from people with learning disabilities.

To conclude, the discussion on the conceptualisation of disability, or more specifically learning disability, is indeed very complex and ranges from labels and definitions, then moves on to the concepts and consequently to the institutional and social practices. In other words, it requires different levels of analysis and intervention, ranging from the medical to the socio-political (Shakespeare, 2006). Thus, more sophisticated and complex approaches are needed to address all the issues surrounding the conceptualisation of disability.

### **2.3.3 Post-school transition**

Just like the term learning disability, the term transition can also be interpreted in a variety of practical and theoretical contexts, thus it is not a surprise that there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a transition (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2010). However, for the purpose of this study, it is the educational transition that has been the main focus of discussion. In brief, the educational transition is defined as a continuous process which involves moving from one educational context and set of interpersonal relationships to another (Jindal-Snape, 2013). This includes progressing from one stage of an educational context to another, such as from nursery or pre-school to primary, primary to secondary and secondary to post-school. The concept and theoretical perspectives of transition will be discussed further in section 2.5.

As we move on throughout our lives from birth to death, we experience many transition, some which have been seen as stages of transition, namely childhood, adolescence and adulthood (McGinty & Fish, 1992). During childhood, people probably always face a very common question about their future ambitions. As we grow older and move on to adolescence our thinking and concentration sharpens and becomes more

focused, as we realise that adult life is approaching (Carnaby & Lewis, 2005) and it is inevitable, especially at the stage towards the end of the school year when a decision needs to be made about what the next step should be. It is at this stage that young people may face some hard choices about plans for his or her future life.

The Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 states that post-school transition takes place when a young person is moving on from secondary education and entering the adult world. Transition can happen *“in their final years at school, when children and young people with additional support needs should engage in personal planning helping them prepare for leaving school. This process must start no later than 12 months before the young person leaves school”* (The Scottish Government, 2005, p. 30).

According to McGinty and Fish (1992, p. 6), the post-school transition is:

*... a phase or period of time between the teens and twenties which is broken up educationally and administratively. During the phase, there are changes of responsibility from child to adult services, from school to further and higher education, and from childhood dependence to adult responsibility. It is a process by which the individual grows through adolescence to adulthood and achieves the balanced state of dependence and independence which a particular community expects of its adult members.*

McGinty and Fish (1992) note that the transition process was messy and disorganised in the past, leaving many of the young people unattended and unemployed. This scenario happened in most developed countries which led to the introduction of a wide range of

youth training and employment preparations to decrease the unemployment rates and that have progressively been extended to young people with disabilities (McGinty & Fish, 1992).

The term transition is mainly used by professionals to describe the process of change particularly in services from childhood to adulthood (Mencap, 2008). There are agencies that deal with the whole process of transition of every young person. For instance, in England, Connexions<sup>2</sup> services which are based on the local authority's plan support all young people aged 13-19 with their adult life. They provide information, advice and guidance on education, training and work. For those who have a learning disability, the services can be extended up to the age of 25. In Wales and Scotland, the same services are carried out by Careers Wales and Careers Scotland<sup>3</sup> respectively, while in Northern Ireland the services are run by JobCentres, Jobs and Benefits offices under the careers advisers who provide advice and guidance to the young people about their future pathways (Mencap, 2008). Table 2.2 summarises the agencies and officers in charge of the transition process across the UK.

**Table 2.2** Agencies and officers dealing with the transition process across the UK

<b>Country</b>	<b>Local Authority Agency</b>	<b>Officer in-charge</b>	<b>Young person starting age</b>
England	Connexions	Personal adviser	13-14 and up to 25 (in the case of learning disability)
Wales	Careers Wales	Careers adviser	13-14
Scotland	Careers Scotland	Careers adviser	14
Northern Ireland	Job Centres, Jobs and Benefits	Careers adviser	14

*[Source: Mencap (2008)]*

<sup>2</sup> Connexions is a national public service in England providing wide-ranging support and advice such as education, employment, housing and health matters for young people including those with a learning disability up to the age of 25 (Bhaumik et al., 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Careers Scotland was replaced by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008.

For most young people, the transition process from childhood to adulthood means further education, work training and gaining employment (G. Thomson, Ward, Dyer, & Riddell, 1992). This is the most difficult stage on their journey to adulthood as it involves a very significant and comprehensive change in their entire life. The process is far more complicated for the young people with learning difficulties who have been relying on children's and adult services (Heslop et al., 2002; McGinty & Fish, 1992). In short, post-school transition is obviously a process that begins at school, thus, careful preparation and planning are very much required. Failure to do so can lead to wasting the time and effort initiated by professionals and disappointment to the young people (McGinty & Fish, 1992).

#### **2.4 Legislative, policy and practice frameworks**

A post-school transition takes place in various ways worldwide, depending on the policies and practices of each and every country. This section sets out the legislative, policy and practice frameworks of post-school transition across some countries around the world.

Basically, most young people with learning disabilities have two main options when it comes to post-school provision. These are either to continue their studies in some kind of training or further education held in different settings, or to directly go to work without any prior training or further education. Most developed countries have their own policies and legislative framework designed specifically to help and support the young people going through this stage. The United States for instance, has provided federal grants under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 for individual states to operate an extensive vocational rehabilitation programme for individuals with disabilities in order to prepare them for productive employment (Crawford, 2012). In

addition, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers who have 15 or more workers are required to make the accommodations available to workers who are otherwise qualified to do their jobs (Crawford, 2012).

Apart from that, various measures were also put in place in the United States to help and support the young people. One of the successful measures used to recruit, train and retain young people with disabilities for college and careers was through a programme called Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT), which was introduced in 1992 at the University of Washington, (Burgstahler, 2003). The feedback and input from the young people and their parents suggests that this programme had a positive impact on post-secondary academic and career outcomes for people with disabilities (Burgstahler, 2003). Table 2.3 summarises the successful strategies used in the DO-IT programme.

**Table 2.3** Successful strategies in DO-IT programme

<b>Successful strategies in DO-IT programme</b>
<p><b>Computer and Internet Access</b></p> <p>Young people are provided with computers, assistive technology, electronic communication and Internet resources at an early age.</p>
<p><b>Peer Support</b></p> <p>More capable young people help others who have disabilities. This situation encourages relationships between young people with a diverse range of disabilities and could help them to understand their own challenges and solutions and subsequently gain insights into the potential and accommodation needs of others.</p>
<p><b>Mentor Support</b></p> <p>Experienced young people mentor their juniors. This creates situations where young people can gain access to role models who have disabilities and yet become successful in challenging careers. The relationships are sustained through the Internet.</p>

**College Preparation**

Make a college visit over the summer to learn about resources and get familiarised with their needs including working with peers from a wide range of disabilities before the end of their school year. This is done to bridge the gap between the school and college.

**Work-based Learning**

Provide opportunities for the young people to actively participate in paid and unpaid work experience and prepare them for future employment. Gaining experience in their potential careers could motivate them to be more successful at school.

(Adapted and modified from Burgstahler (2003))

From this programme, it seems that the combination of technology, mentoring and peer support, career preparation activities and work-based learning have yielded a positive result towards better career development for the young people with disabilities post-school.

In the UK, the Education Act 1996 as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) requires local education authorities to conduct formal needs assessments for children and young people who need special education services, which include a transition plan (Crawford, 2012). Following this legislation, the UK government has focused more on employment policy and programme initiatives related to transition into the working world for young people with disabilities (see Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4** SENDA related employment policy and programme initiatives for young people with disabilities in the UK

<b>Access to Work</b>	Provides advice and practical support related to accommodation issues for disabled workers and employers.
<b>Jobcentre Plus</b>	The main centre for those seeking to leave welfare for work.
<b>New Deal for Disabled People</b>	Assists people with disabilities to move from benefits to paid employment.
<b>Workstep</b>	Has a special function within Jobcentre Plus for people with an intellectual disability.
<b>Connexions</b>	Provides general information and guidance to young people including career advice.
<b>Pathways to Work</b>	Pilot programmes to coordinate a range of support for people with disabilities seeking a job.

*[Source: Crawford (2012); Dempsey and Ford (2009)]*

Prior to that, the UK government also introduced a supported employment programme in the late 1980s. This programme, which was derived from the United States model, is based on the principle of ‘place and train’, whereby disabled employees are placed in real job settings with mainstream employers alongside non-disabled workers, following a process of job matching and work-based training (Wellard, 2008). The main principle behind this programme is that no one is unemployable and that, with the right support, anyone can access work (Owen, Hewitt, Avis, Betts, & Munir, 2005). Evidence from the research indicates that the supported employment programme has been successful in increasing the independence and confidence level and self-esteem of people with learning disabilities, broadening their social contact with non-disabled people and

gaining a sense of playing a valued role and having a more structured life (Wellard, 2008).

It should be noted that in the UK, the people with disabilities are also covered under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Part 2 which prohibits discrimination in employment. This Act was amended in 2004 as a result of the European Union Employment Directive on Equal Treatment to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities in employment and vocational training, including work placements (Disability Rights Commission, 2007).

In addition, the white paper *Valuing People* (Department of Health, 2001) and *Valuing People Now* (Department of Health, 2009) also plays a major part in shaping the future life of young people with a disability in England, especially in terms of employment, health care as well as education (Dempsey & Ford, 2009). However, Dempsey and Ford (2009) argue that the various departments in the government sector (including Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health) make the coordination of support across different agencies a daunting task despite their best intentions.

Moreover, the UK government also released a report entitled *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* in 2005, a comprehensive strategy in an attempt to address a range of barriers to the young people including barriers to post-school education which emphasises the need for clear outcomes from employment programmes (Crawford, 2012; Dempsey & Ford, 2009).

Likewise, Australia also has its own legislation and policy regarding the transition of young people with disabilities from school. The Australian federal government has focused on its social policy efforts in an attempt to improve the employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities (Dempsey & Ford, 2009). Table 2.5 shows some of the main policies and national plans concerning people with disabilities in Australia.

**Table 2.5** Main policies and national plans for people with disabilities in Australia

<b>The Disability Services Act (DSA) 1986</b>	Provides the same rights for people with disabilities as others in society and to realise their capabilities to contribute fully to the society including independence, inclusion and employment opportunities.
<b>The Disability Reform Package 1992</b>	Aims to improve the involvement of people with disabilities in employment and community life, and ensure that those who have limited job prospects receive adequate and secure income support.
<b>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</b>	Designed to address all areas of employment including recruitment, access, training, promotion and dismissal.
<b>Australians Working Together 2002</b>	A national plan to support individuals of working age in training, securing employment and accessing appropriate government pensions, benefits and allowances. It aims to reduce welfare recipients and increase labour force participation.
<b>Bridging Pathways 2000</b>	A national strategy to promote the participation of people with disabilities in vocational education and training, including partnerships between public and private agencies.

*[Source: Dempsey and Ford (2009)]*

In addition, some of the European countries also have their own policies and legislation with regard to people with disabilities transitioning from school. For instance, in Sweden, disabled young people are assigned a special 'liaison officer' who is in charge of assisting them and their families in coping with the transition from school to work. One of their tasks is to coordinate the various services offered by a range of local and regional agencies (Brodsky, 1990). This seems to be similar to the key worker or a named person in the English and Scottish context, who is also doing a similar task in some way. However, the difference is that the role of the key worker or named person ends once the young person enters a new setting post-school such as the college. In other words, there is no post as key worker or named person for post-college transition as there is for post-school transition. This is due to no statutory process being put in place for post-college transition (see DfES, 2001b; Beyer, 2005; and Hudson, 2006). Perhaps, if this post exists, the chances of young people entering the job market might be easier. In Cyprus there were regular workplace supervisions and a close liaison established with local employers in the last two years of compulsory special schooling. This was then supplemented when the young people moved on from school or training programmes and a 'job coach' service was provided to support them in the workplace until they were able to cope independently (Corbett, Kitteringham, & McAnespie, 1999).

In Denmark the Danish disability policy practices its three principles, namely normalisation, integration and decentralisation in ensuring the full involvement of people with disabilities in the employment market (Brodsky, 1990). Interestingly, the system known as the 'Kurator Approach' is seen as a very successful approach in supporting young people with disabilities going through transition from school and gaining employment. It was reported that through this system, 75% of high school

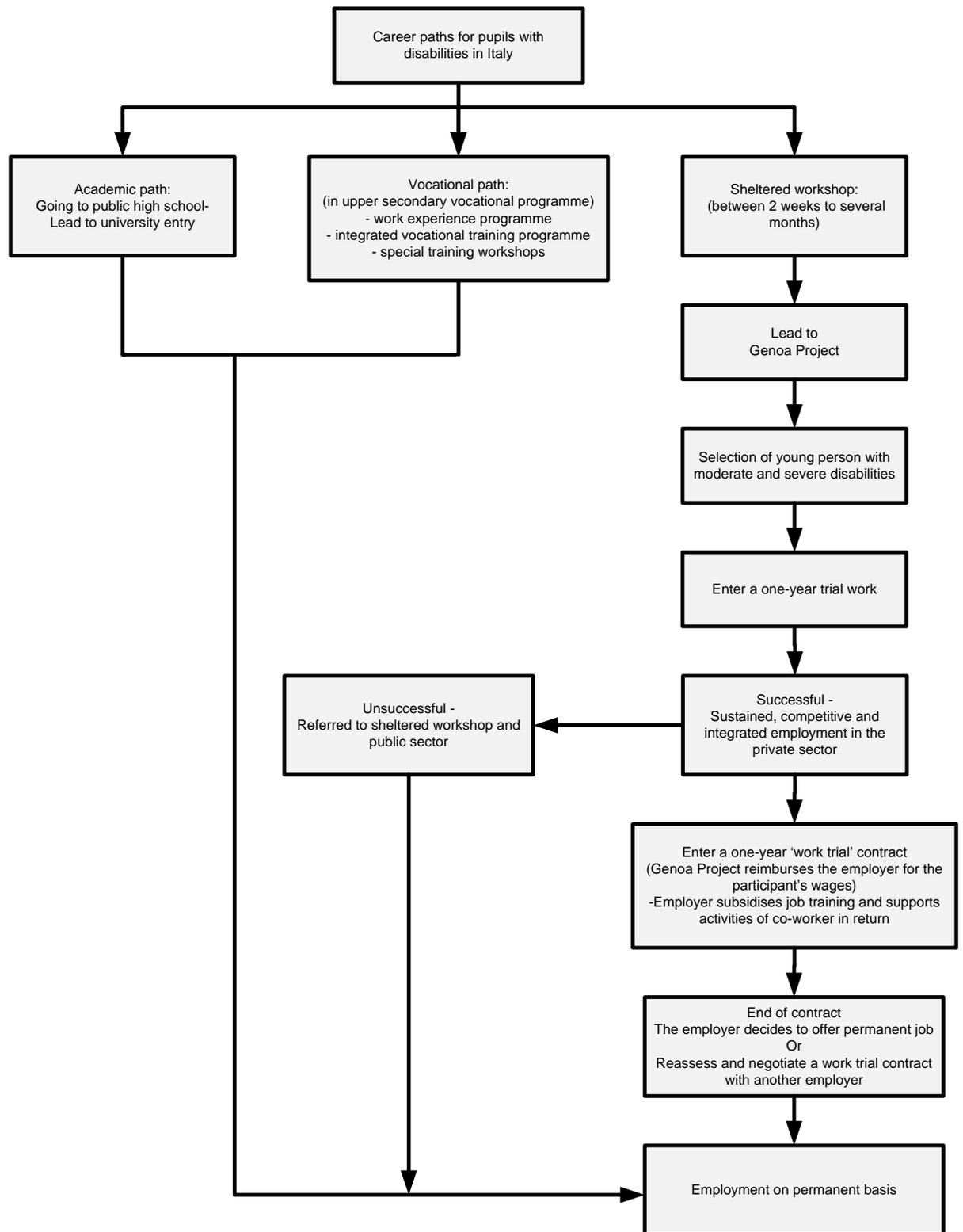
graduates (“Folkeskole”) who have disabilities managed to find paid and competitive employment (Brodsky, 1990).

In Italy, the ‘Genoa Approach’ or ‘Genoa Project’ which was initiated by Dr. Enrico Montobbio, a psychiatrist who has dedicated his life and career to the development of people with disabilities, has been very successful in gaining meaningful and purposeful careers for people with moderate and severe disabilities. The fundamental philosophy inspiring this project is that young people with ‘mental disabilities’ should be positioned in ‘regular’ (integrated) rather than ‘sheltered’ (isolated) employment surroundings, wherever possible.

The idea behind this philosophy is based upon four essential principles, namely:

- a) work inspires strong stimulus towards adult status;
- b) working environment does not have infantile features like those at the school or at a sheltered workshop;
- c) open employment is concerned with the exercise of an actual status, which is carried out according to operative requirements and
- d) it is a basic step towards acquiring a social ‘positional’ role rather than maintaining an infantile ‘personal’ one (OECD, 1992).

The illustration of the career path for students with disabilities in Italy is shown in Figure 2.1.



[Based on: OECD (1992)]

**Figure 2.1** Career path for students with disabilities in Italy

In Asia, one of the developed countries, Japan, has successfully employed people with disabilities through its supported employment technique (Yaeda, 2010). Through this technique, a transition coordinator was made responsible for assessing the vocational interests and needs of a young person before referring him/her to a job coach or vocational counsellor. The transition coordinator then monitors the progress of the young person as long as required so as to maintain the acquired job. It is interesting to note that although having specific job skills is key in maintaining the job and reflects the successful transition from school to work, that is not the sole factor in retaining the job. According to Yaeda (2010), factors such as basic daily living skills, social skills, conceptual skills, as well as self-direction skills are also vital to contributing to job retention.

Apart from that, some of the developing countries have also shown a good practice or model in relation to the transition of young people with disabilities. For instance, Barbados has had a successful small curriculum for young girls with disabilities by teaching them job skills. Through this programme, the young girls are able to learn how to present themselves well in public. In Cambodia, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has initiated an effort to assist young people with disabilities by providing training and support to enter mainstream vocational training programmes and finally to help them find a job or start a business. This effort is initiated in conjunction with the support of Cambodia's Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Youth Rehabilitation and the Japanese Ministry of Labour who are responsible for the funding of the programme which ultimately has helped 180 people of which 67% are now employed (Groce, 2004).

In addition, the presence of the Internet throughout the world today has had a tremendous impact on people around the world including those with disabilities. The various creations of web pages, chat groups and bulletin boards have made it easier to link to people with disabilities. Through these sites people with disabilities have the opportunity to share their experiences and resources including those related to the transition to adulthood which has received growing attention since 1995 (Groce, 2004). In fact, as Winn and Hay (2009) have noted, young people with disabilities also need to be taught how to use the Internet to look for a job or job enhancement services including issues related to job safety as part of their life skills curriculum at school. Through such exposure, I believe more opportunities will be made available to the young people to find information on searching for jobs as everything is at their fingertips.

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that some similar trends are seen in the legislative, policy and practice frameworks for people with disabilities in some countries. For example, the supported employment scheme as practiced in the United States, the UK, Australia and Japan demonstrates the governments' determination to help the young people with getting a stable job. Similarly, the emphasis on vocational education and training as in the United States, Italy, Australia and Cambodia seems very timely in guiding the young people towards productive employment. Above all, the existence of the disability discrimination act, as enshrined in a number of countries, including the United States, Australia as well as the UK, clearly shows the government's central commitment to ensure that people with disabilities are protected from any discriminations and have the same rights as all other people in all areas including the rights to employment opportunities and to make a contribution to society.

As for the Scottish context in particular, there are some lessons that can be learned here. One good example is the ‘Genoa Project’ in Italy (refer to Figure 2.1) which shows the pathway of how the young people are supported to gain a permanent job. Nevertheless, there are also some similarities that can be highlighted here. For instance, the role of ‘liaison officer’ as found in Sweden can be likened to the role of a named person or a lead professional in the Scottish context who has an almost similar role in helping the young people going through the transition process. In addition, taking part in the college programme as part of the college preparation and work experience through work-based learning, as found in the DO-IT programme in the United States, is also carried out in Scotland as part of the planning and preparation for the transition process of the young people (a detailed discussion of the policy context in Scotland can be found in the following section). In short, although some countries may have similarities as well as differences in their practice frameworks, they should be implemented in full and aim to gain the maximum output or benefit for all the young people concerned.

In brief, it is relatively clear that many developed countries in particular, have provided a clear framework for the young people with disabilities after leaving compulsory education. This is to ensure that the people with disabilities are not left out and marginalised as they also have the same rights, and contributions to make as other people in society. In addition, all the initiatives undertaken by the government are seen as an effort to help and support the young people with disabilities to have an independent, better and meaningful future. I believe that all these positive steps should be emulated by other countries in the world that do not yet have a proper framework to support the young people with disabilities to have a better future with greater opportunities.

### 2.4.1 The Salamanca Statement 1994

Although the following statement may not necessarily be applicable to all countries, I argue that it should be a guideline or fundamental framework for the majority, if not all countries across the globe, in implementing or imposing policies related to post-school transition. The statement, which was taken from the Guidelines for Action at the National Level under the sub-topic of Priority Areas – Preparation for adult life says:

*Young people with special educational needs should be helped to make an effective transition from school to an adult working life. Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide them with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life. This calls for appropriate training technologies, including direct experience in real life situations outside school. Curricula for students with special educational needs in senior classes should include specific transitional programmes, support to enter higher education whenever possible and subsequent vocational training preparing them to function as independent, contributing members of their communities after leaving school. These activities should be carried out with the active involvement of vocational guidance counsellors, placement offices, trade unions, local authorities, and the different services and agencies concerned. (UNESCO, 1994, p. 34)*

This statement reflects that young people with special educational needs should be treated the same as their non-disabled counterparts in all aspects of their life including the one pertaining to post-school transition. The young people should be provided with opportunities to gain necessary skills and training including, where appropriate, a specific curriculum in order to prepare them for bigger challenges in their adult life. It also indicates the key role of all service providers and professionals in working together as best they can to ensure that young people achieve their dreams and aspirations and are placed in the right setting once they have left school.

### **2.4.2 The Warnock Report 1978**

Despite a number of policies concerning the transition of young people after leaving school, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) is seen as a major catalyst for the changes to the young people with learning disabilities in the UK. As Elson (2011) and Wright (2006) state, the Warnock Report was the first official publication to argue for continued education for young people with learning difficulties after compulsory schooling. In fact, the publication of the report in 1978 was often referred to as the watershed year which brought about a change in the attitudes and approaches to providing learning support for young people with learning disabilities (McLarty & Hawthorn, 2003).

In Chapter 10 of the report, Warnock (DES, 1978) outlines several key points regarding the transition from school to adult life. Whilst the report does not reflect the policy context in Scotland in particular, in my view, the points highlighted are still relevant today even though the report was published more than three decades ago. The points can be summarised as follows:

- The young people's disabilities should be recognised and they should be supported to the utmost, not only whilst at school, but also beyond the school boundary.
- The resources spent on FE and training facilities and on support before and after leaving school could reduce the cost and young people's dependency on various services.
- Employers' and community's attitudes in general towards young people's disabilities need to be changed, increasing acceptance and recognising the skills

and talents they bring, whilst accommodating any particular needs an individual may have.

- The careers guidance for the young people needs to be provided as early as possible (at least two years) prior to leaving school and a career officer plays a key role as well as other professionals in providing all the information. In addition, the young people's own and their parents' aspirations for and apprehensions about the future should also be fully taken into account.
- The careers teacher or guidance staff at school need to update their expertise in order to provide suitable advice and guidance for the young people as well as working closely with the careers officers in their area. Both parties should also find time to see or visit the parents of the young people to discuss their opportunities post-school.
- There are relatively few young people who have achieved full educational potential or reached an adequate degree of maturity by the age of 16 in order to have a smooth transition to adult life. As such, the young people and their parents are strongly encouraged to let their children undertake continuing education by either staying on at school or going on to further education. In other words, more young people over 16 should continue in full-time education.
- Where it is in their interests, the young people should be allowed to stay on at school beyond the statutory leaving age. In order to do this the scope of provision needs to be extended and suitable courses for young people over 16 needs to be developed. In addition, the young people should also have access to sixth forms or sixth form colleges where it is in their interests and possible to arrange.
- A variety of more vocationally-oriented courses are needed for the young people in further education as they tend to undertake such courses rather than higher

education courses. In addition, special vocational courses should also be provided at operative level with special courses and training in competence and independence.

- Wherever possible, the young people should be given the opportunity to attend ordinary courses in further education, provided that necessary support and additional resources are given such as adaptations to premises, special equipment and specialist staff.
- A named person should be appointed as a single point of contact for the young people and their families should they need any advice or support during the transition. This support should be provided for a sufficient period of time until the young people are settled in employment.

From the points summarised above, it is clear that all the key points which were triggered by Warnock are still as relevant today as they were, more than 30 years ago to the needs of young people with learning disabilities.

As has been mentioned, although this report does not specifically reflect the policy and practice in Scotland, it was nevertheless the most influential in Scotland in promoting:

- *“the de-categorization of children in favour of recognizing and planning to meet their ‘special educational needs’,*
- *More provision for under-fives and over-sixteens,*
- *Revision and expansion of specialist teacher training, and*
- *Partnership between professionals and parents” (Closs, 1997, p. 82).*

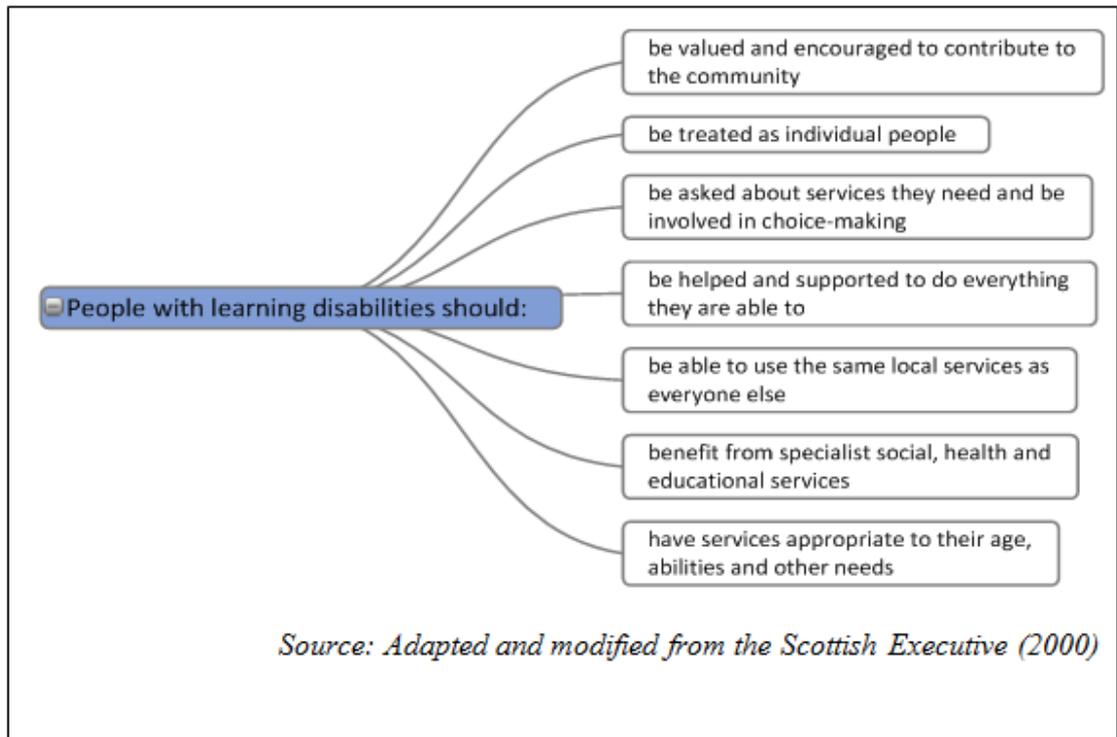
## 2.5 Policy context in Scotland

The UK is made up of four constituent countries, namely, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 1997, the UK government devolved some powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which means that there are four legislatures and governments in the UK with some comparatively minor variations in legislation, policy and practice across the four countries (Dempsey & Ford, 2009). For instance, while the future life of young people with disabilities in England is mainly shaped by the white paper *Valuing People*, as mentioned earlier, the Scottish Executive's review *The Same As You?*<sup>4</sup>, on the other hand, portrays a similar agenda for the young people in Scotland.

In general, *The Same As You?* outlines seven key principles to helping people with learning disabilities lead full and active lives (Scottish Executive, 2000). The seven principles are summarised in Figure 2.2.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Same As You?* is a review of services for people with learning disabilities launched by the Scottish Executive in May 2000.



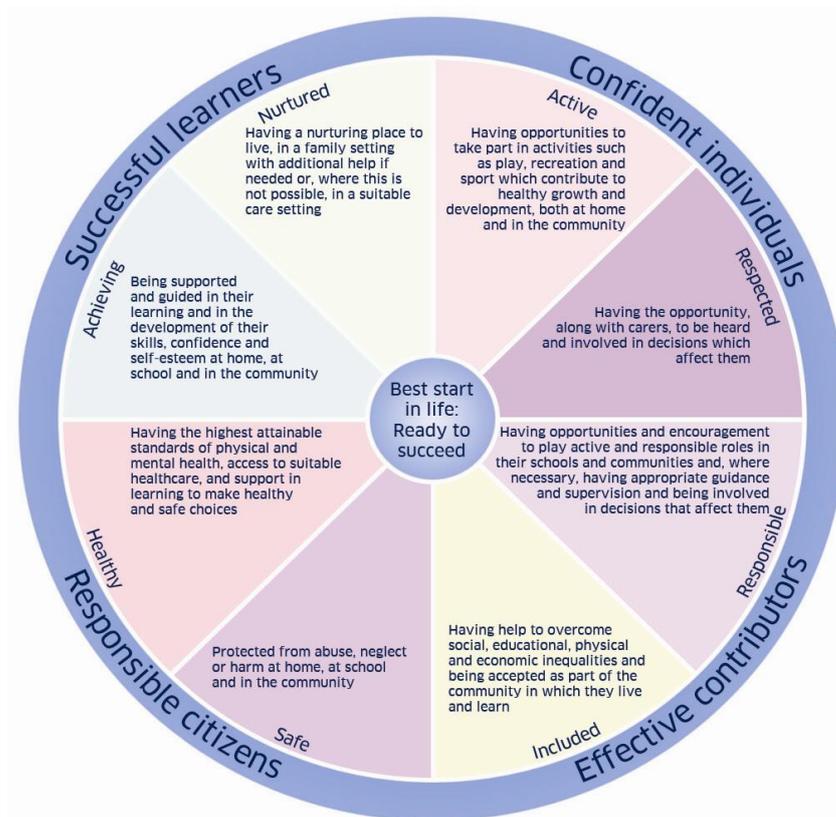
**Figure 2.2** Seven principles outlined for people with learning disabilities in *The Same As You?*

As noted earlier, whilst *The Same As You?* underpins the primary policy of the current services of the transition of young people in Scotland, a range of other legislations is also associated with the transition services for young people, to which I turn next.

### 2.5.1 Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) was created based on, and resulting from, various policies and strategies for all children and young people including those with Additional Support Needs (The Scottish Government, 2012d). The various policies and strategies that underpin GIRFEC's approach include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Children's Charter as well as the Curriculum for Excellence. As its name suggests, GIRFEC places the child and the young person and their family at the centre and provides full support and assistance to each and every one of them as

they grow up to meet their needs. The full support is based on the goal of enabling all children and young people to be the following: a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor (The Scottish Government, 2012b). From these four capacities, eight areas of well-being are set out, where children and young people need to achieve in order to progress well in the present and in the future. The eight areas of well-being are acronymed as SHANARRI, namely, **S**afe, **H**ealthy, **A**chieving, **N**urtured, **A**ctive, **R**espected, **R**esponsible and **I**ncluded (see Figure 2.3 below).

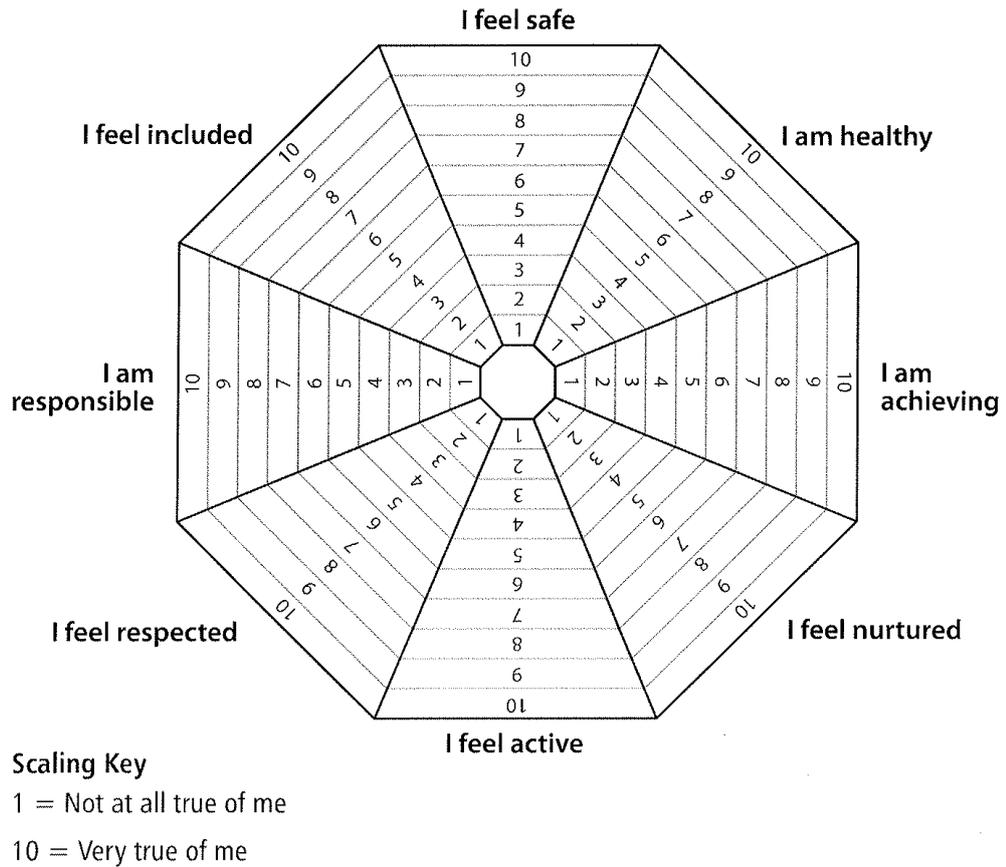


**Figure 2.3** The 8 Well-being Indicators; adapted from The Scottish Government (2013c, p. 6)

As mentioned earlier, this approach applies to all children and young people, including those with Additional Support Needs. This clearly shows the seriousness of the Scottish Government in its agenda of supporting and fulfilling the needs of the future generation.

With respect to the young people with learning disabilities in the current study, the presence of GIRFEC is seen as an additional source to the support and assistance to them over the years. It has extended the range of support for the young people to achieve the best possible opportunities in their lives. In fact, the transition process will be managed more effectively by incorporating the 8 well-being indicators of GIRFEC (The Scottish Government, 2012c). The 8 well-being indicators, as shown in Figure 2.3, demonstrate a perfect match for identifying how the young people can be supported and helped. For instance, the Angus Council has developed a Wellbeing Web (see Figure 2.4), derived from the 8 well-being indicators as a tool to identify any issues or problems that the children or young people might face so that appropriate measures can be taken in advance to support their journey throughout.

The positive results shown by this tool, which was piloted in late 2011 and subsequently launched in mid-2012, have attracted most of the other Scottish local authorities to replicate similar measures in their respective local authorities (Ready for Business). It should be noted that none of these can be achieved without the involvement of all the stakeholders in the lives of the children and young people. I argue that if similar measures were taken by all the councils and local authorities in Scotland, many more children and young people, particularly those with Additional Support Needs could be helped to achieve a better future.

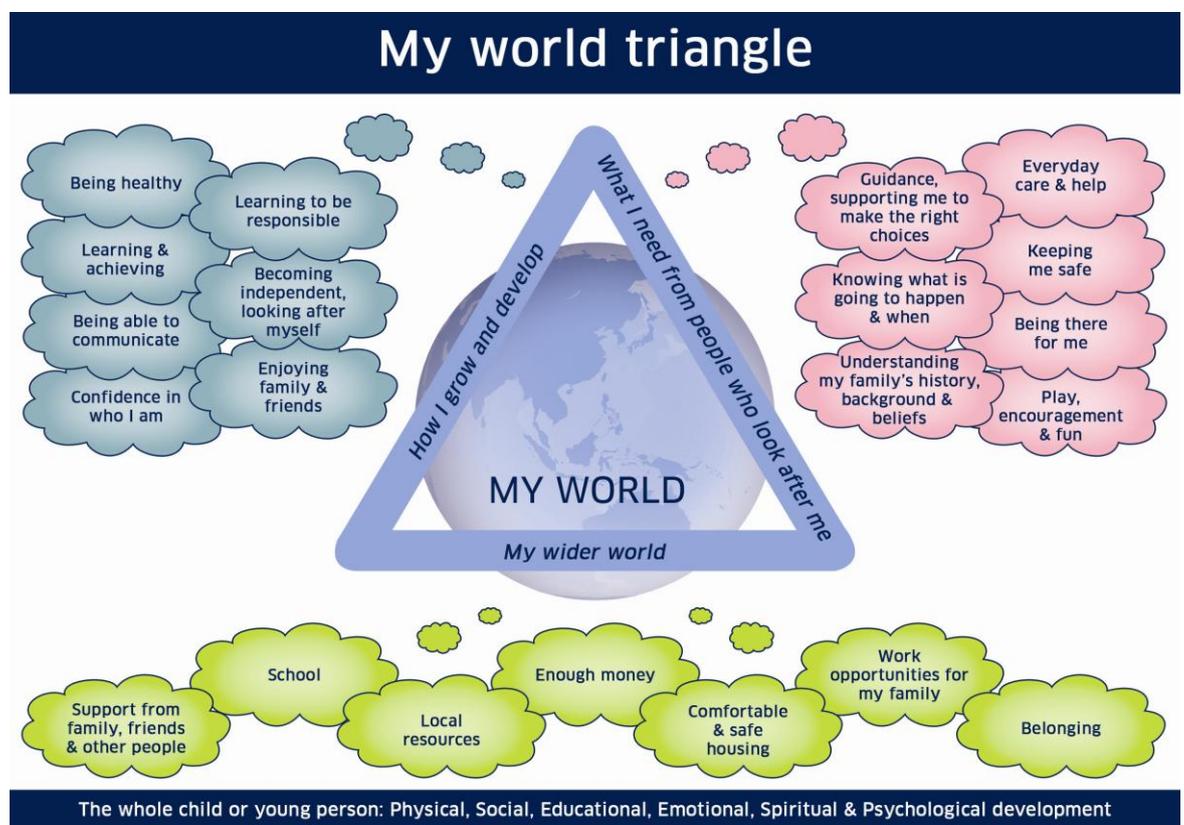


**Figure 2.4** Well-being Web, adapted from the Angus Council (p. 1)

Another model which was derived from GIRFEC's approach is known as 'My World Triangle' model<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 2.5). This model is particularly helpful to collate more information about the strengths and pressures in the child or young person's world (The Scottish Government, 2012b). The information gathered may come from other agencies including the health services, as GIRFEC is not only restricted to the school or education setting, rather, it includes all children and young people's services across Scotland. I believe that the information gathered is extremely useful and helpful for identifying the positive features of the young people (rather than their negative features), in supporting them towards what they want to achieve or become in their

<sup>5</sup> The My World Triangle is one of the models of GIRFEC's National Practice Model, a dynamic and evolving process of assessment, analysis, action and review, and a way to identify outcomes and solutions for children and young people. See The Scottish Government (2012b) for more information.

future lives. For instance, one of the aspects under ‘How I grow and develop’ is ‘Learning and Achieving’. Under this aspect, the practitioner (or more specifically, the teacher) who is involved in the transition of the young people can identify their strengths by focusing on their cognitive development, achievements, skills and interests and consequently develop their self-confidence based on these elements. This would potentially help them to achieve their future aspirations, including finding job opportunities that could lead to more meaningful and independent living in their future.



**Figure 2.5** The My World Triangle, adapted from The Scottish Government (2012b, p. 16)

In addition, GIRFEC also includes the role of a *Named Person*<sup>6</sup> or a *Lead Professional*<sup>7</sup> through this model by facilitating the help and support for the child and young person

<sup>6</sup> A person who acts as the first point of contact for the child and his/her family in helping the child's development and well-being.

concerned. It should be noted that the role of a Named Person is also emphasised in the Warnock Report, which implies how important the role is in the young people's lives, particularly those with learning disabilities. In short, the My World Triangle model provides a systematic way for the practitioners to help the young people by considering their growth and development, identifying their needs and consequently thinking about the impact on the young people's wider world of family, friends and community (The Scottish Government, 2012b).

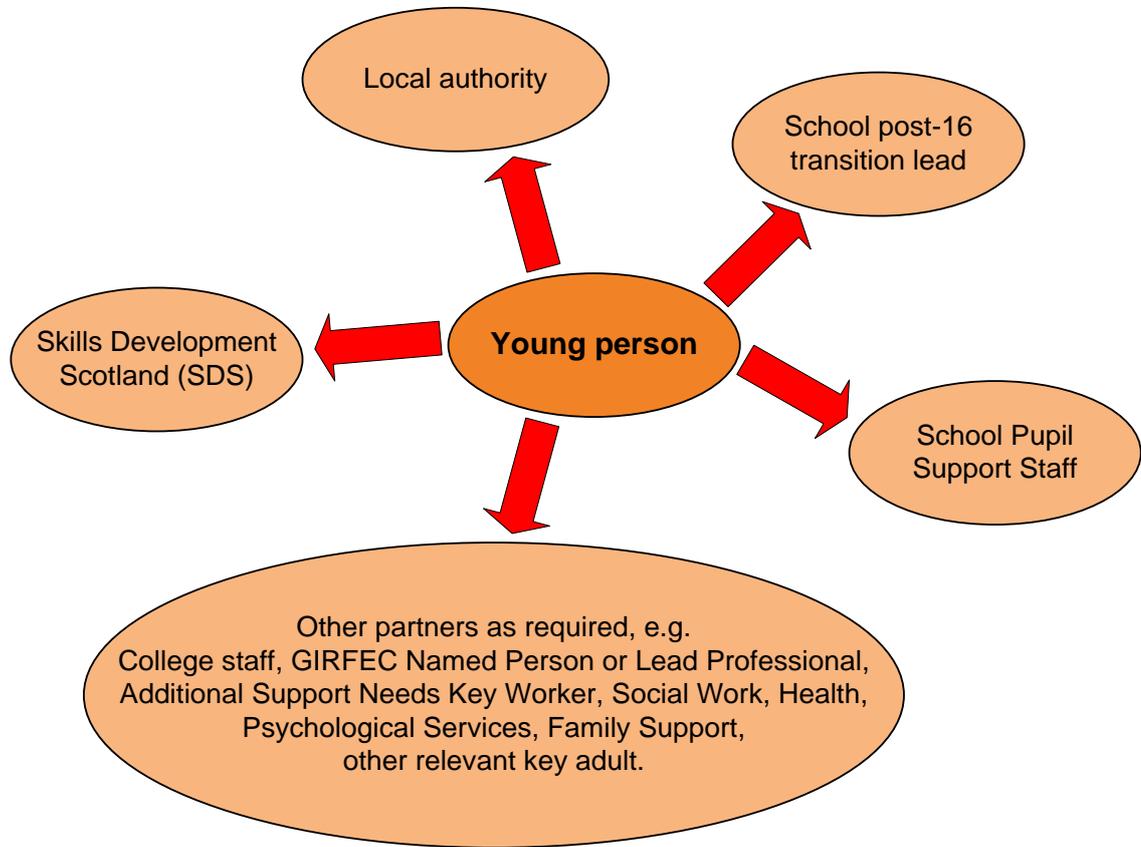
### **2.5.2 The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004**

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 is the Scottish legal framework which underpins the system for identifying and addressing the additional support needs of children and young people who face barrier/barriers to learning (The Scottish Government, 2010c). The Act, as amended by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 aims to ensure all children and young people are helped and provided with necessary support towards achieving their full potential (The Scottish Government, 2010c). It is this Act that the education authorities and schools in Scotland use to address and implement the transition planning process of young people with additional support needs post-school. Indeed, each and every young person, whether or not they have any kind of disabilities, would and should experience proper planning prior to leaving school. The Act requires all young people with additional support needs to be engaged personally in the transition planning process to help them be prepared for the next stage of their life, be it further education, training or employment. This process is helped and led by professionals such as a teacher, careers adviser or social worker who act as a coordinator to ensure a smooth transition takes place. In the case of more than two agencies being involved, a lead

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<sup>7</sup> A person who co-ordinates the help for the child and his/her family when two or more agencies are involved in helping the child or young person.

professional is appointed to coordinate the planning process. Figure 2.6 shows a range of partners who are likely to be involved in the transition process of the young people.

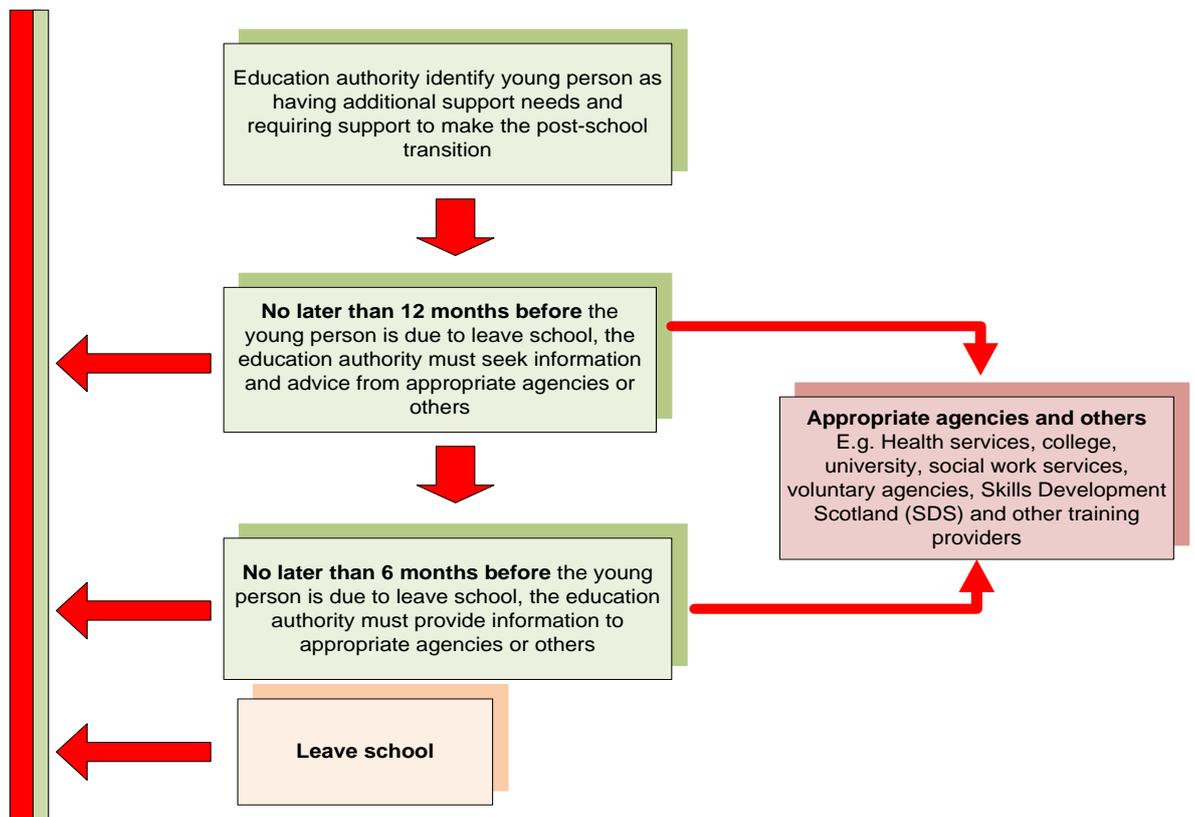


*Source: Adapted and modified from The Scottish Government (2012c)*

**Figure 2.6** The range of partners involved in the transition process of young people

In terms of the timeline (see Figure 2.7), the Act requires the planning process to be done no later than 12 months prior to the young person leaving school and to take account of information and advice from appropriate agencies likely to make provision for the young person when s/he leaves school (The Scottish Government, 2010c). Nonetheless, it is always encouraged to start the process well in advance of the 12 month period to make sure the process is more effective, though in some circumstances the local authority has less than 12 months to carry out the process. The education

authority, as part of the local authority, is also required to send information to appropriate agencies (if any), no later than 6 months before the expected date of leaving school takes place (The Scottish Government, 2010d). In addition, the Act also requires the education authorities to provide information to whichever appropriate agency/agencies will support the young person once s/he leaves school, if the child's parent or young person agrees (The Scottish Government, 2010c). Hence, thorough and comprehensive planning and management are needed in order to make sure that a smooth and seamless transition takes place.

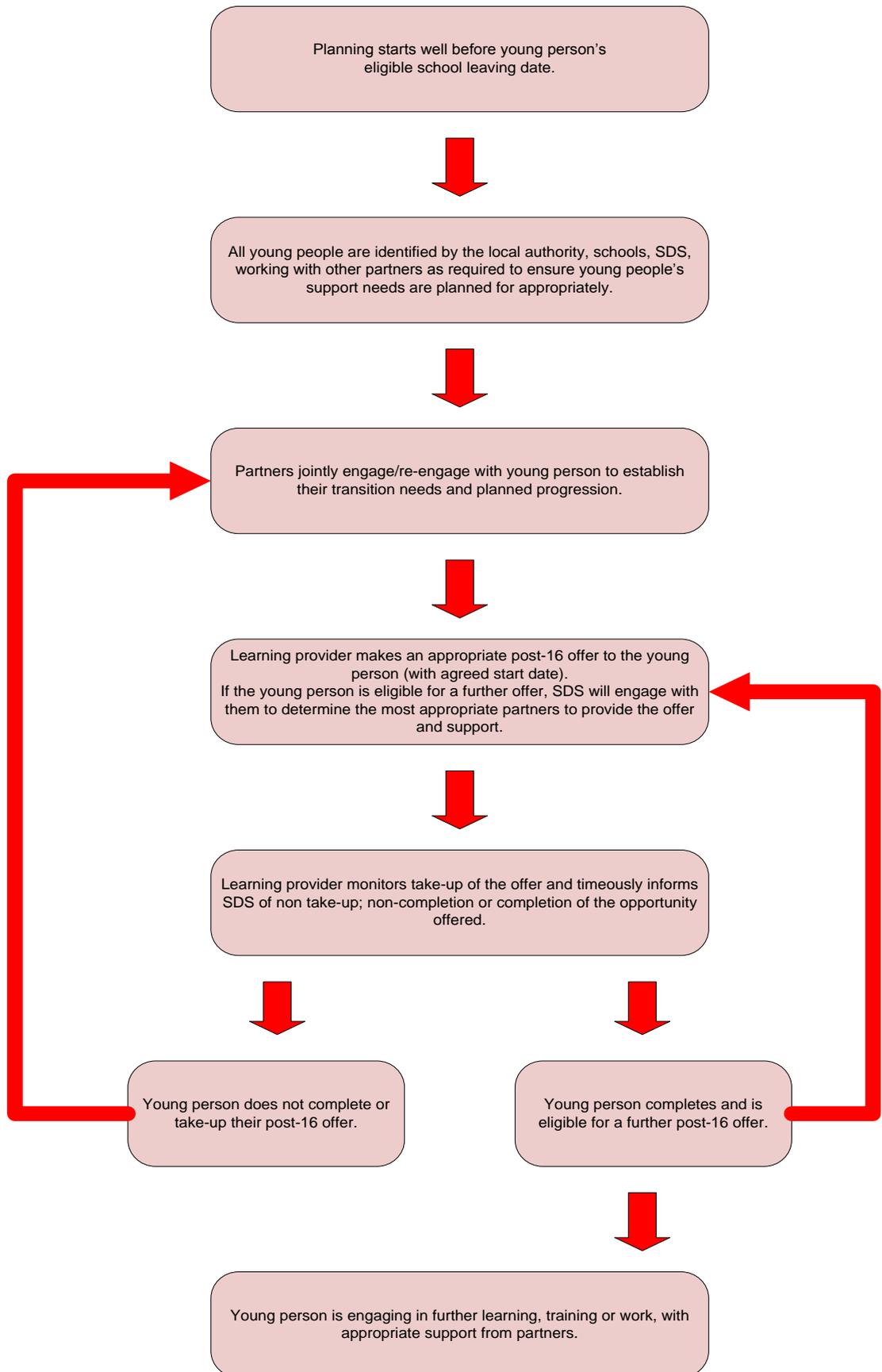


*Source: Adapted and modified from The Scottish Government (2010c)*

**Figure 2.7** Timeline for the post-school transition planning process

As indicated in Figure 2.6, a range of partners including the local authorities and schools are involved in the transition process of the young people. The school in

particular, has a lead role in supporting the young people's transition as all of them (except those who are home-based educated) are based at school. The school also serves as a facilitator in contacting all the relevant and appropriate agencies or partners for post-school provision. Together, these partners are responsible for offering and ensuring that suitable provisions are sufficient and available to the young people after leaving school. More importantly, the offer made to the young people should be based on their informed choices, and access to accurate and up-to-date information about the range of opportunities available should be provided to them (The Scottish Government, 2012c). Figure 2.8 shows how the offer process of post-16 transitions are implemented.



Source: Adapted and modified from *The Scottish Government (2012c)*

**Figure 2.8** The offer process of post-16 transitions

In addition, the offer made must also be agreed on by both the young person and the service provider including the agreed start date (The Scottish Government, 2012c). In doing so, all the providers involved need to work together closely to ensure that the outcomes meet the young people's needs. I believe that profound consideration should also be given to the young people's aspirations and what they want to achieve in their future lives which may not necessarily be a permanent job.

### **2.5.3 Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)**

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the national curriculum for all publicly funded schools across Scotland. Although the first document of *A Curriculum for Excellence* was published in November 2004 (Education Scotland, 2010), it was not until the year 2011 that the CfE started to be launched in all Scottish state schools (The Guardian, 2012). The CfE enables all schools and their partners to build a more responsive and flexible learning system from the ages of 3 to 18, offering personalisation and choice to meet the needs of all children and young people wherever the learning takes place (The Scottish Government, 2012c). The ultimate aim of the CfE is to make the Scottish education system fit for the modern world and to improve the young people's achievements, attainment and life chances; thus enabling them to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (The Scottish Government, 2013a). These goals are in line with the goal of GIRFEC in bringing about changes in the young people's education system in terms of achieving their full potential. One of the objectives in the CfE particularly in relation to school leavers, (senior phase – broadly aged between 15 and 18) is to support them moving into positive and sustained destinations beyond school (The Scottish Government, 2012c). This goal shows the commitment of the government to ensuring that no young

people drop out or are left behind as soon as they leave school. However, it should be noted that at this stage, the young people might be involved with a number of service providers to help them progress to the appropriate settings. As such, all the agencies involved, including the school should ensure that the needs and aspirations of the young people are fulfilled.

Apart from that, the Scottish Government has also introduced several other frameworks and strategies to help and support the young people throughout their lives post-school. These strategies are summarised in Table 2.6 below.

**Table 2.6** Scottish Government's frameworks and strategies to support young people post-school

<b>More Choices, More Chances (MCMC) (2006)</b>	The government's strategy to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment and training. Three key elements are emphasised, namely; the right learning provision must be in place, the right financial support, and the right information, advice and guidance must be available for the young people (The Scottish Government, 2010c).
<b>16+ Learning Choices (2008)</b>	A transition planning model to ensure an appropriate place post-16 for every 16-18 year old is offered. Aims at improving the transition for young people either choosing to stay on at school or moving from one post-16 option to another.
<b>Opportunities for All (2011)</b>	An explicit commitment by the government to offer an appropriate place of learning or training for every 16-19 year old currently not in education, employment or training (including those who have

	disengaged and are seeking to re-engage).
<b>Action for Jobs – Supporting Young Scots into Work</b>	The government’s approach to delivering a national response to the challenging economic circumstances and high numbers of unemployed young people. Highlights the importance of successful transitions in enabling the young people to progress towards and into employment.

[Source: *The Scottish Government (2012c)*]

Another service provider that is also important for delivering the service to the young people is Skills Development Scotland (SDS). The aim of SDS is to work hand in hand with the school and other multi-agency partners to ensure that the young people are getting the right career information in order to progress either to further education and training or to work. An on-line service known as *My World of Work* is provided for the young people to prepare for and access work, and those who are most at risk of unemployment are also offered a *Work Coach* or *Career Coach* to fully develop their career management skills (The Scottish Government, 2012c).

In conclusion, a variety of strategies and approaches have been taken by the Scottish Government including the introduction of new policies and frameworks to help the young people go through a better and smoother transition. The diversity in these approaches has become an important ingredient in the government’s efforts to achieve greater success in the transition process of the young people. In short, Figure 2.9 draws out the overall discussion in this section.

Goal setting (Based on the 7 key principles of <i>The Same As You?</i> )	+	Combination of various strategies and approaches	+	Full support (from all the stakeholders involved)	=	<b>SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION</b>
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**Figure 2.9** Ingredients that may contribute to the success of transition

As can be seen in Figure 2.9, it is clear that the government has already set a clear goal for the young people as contained in the seven key principles of *The Same As You?* These principles are then translated into the implementation of various strategies and approaches by the government. It should be noted that the combination of these approaches does not mean everything should be used because it may depend on the needs of each individual young person. What is more important is that the combination of these ingredients may be helpful in contributing to the success of the transition process. With the full support of everyone involved in the transition process, it is not impossible that these strategies will lead to the success of the transition process for the young people as a whole. The only argument is if a good practice (as shown and discussed above) is not followed by a serious commitment to its implementation, then there is no point in having the policy just for the sake of a new policy or strategy.

## **2.6 Educational transition**

As has been mentioned earlier, this study is concerned with the educational transition of young people with learning disabilities. This section will lead a discussion on the concept of transition and its impact on planning and preparation followed by the discussion on transition from the theoretical perspectives.

### **2.6.1 Conceptualisation of educational transition and its impact on planning and preparation**

As stated earlier in this chapter, one may experience several stages of transition throughout his or her life from birth to death. The several stages of transition here mean a change or move from one setting or phase of life to another that may commonly happen to anyone, if not everyone. It normally signifies progress and development in one's life. For instance, a child may start his or her educational transition experience when s/he starts at nursery or kindergarten. This is followed by his or her progression through the transition from nursery to primary, primary to secondary, and secondary to post-school, either to work, training or further education and so on. It should be noted that the transition process does not stop only at that point in time. It continues throughout one's lifespan, and educational transitions are just one aspect of it. In other words, transition should and could rather be seen as a life event than a single event. This includes the change from single status to married, having a family, moving house or even migrating to another country, getting a work promotion (or being demoted), etc., until one probably reaches retirement age. All of these changes indicate the developmental changes that can or may happen in one's life time, which can be seen as transitions when people feel that their sense of who they are changes (Ecclestone et al., 2010). While on the one hand these transitions can result in a major change and be the momentum for a new learning; they can also be unsettling, difficult and unproductive (Ecclestone et al., 2010).

Others have suggested that transition is an ongoing process rather than a one-off event (see Jindal-Snape, 2013), which requires specific planning and preparation in order to face changes at different stages of transition but also throughout the lifespan. When viewed from this perspective, day-to-day life transitions are taken into account as well

as emphasis being put on transitions that are inherent within the same setting, for example, moving from one class to another within the same school or changes in relationships with teachers and peers despite no change in setting. In short, transition may occur in various settings and contexts, which means a change or move from one regular or comfort zone situation to another might bring more changes and probably more challenges as well to one's life, either in a positive or in a negative way. As Jindal-Snape (2010b) has noted, transition can be both, satisfying and fulfilling for some, and challenging and stressful for others. The extent to which challenge and stress has an impact on the young people during the transition has become another concern to some researchers. As Ecclestone et al. (2010) have noted, transitions in the UK have increasingly become a political concern especially when various policy initiatives have been implemented to encourage multi-agencies and individuals to manage and support transition more effectively. Ecclestone et al. (2010) further state that research shows that transitions are problematic and require 'support', especially for children, young people and adults who are more vulnerable, disaffected or 'at risk'.

Transition is likely to be seen as problematic when it involves adaptation to a very different new environment which requires a lot of planning and preparation, both physically and psychologically. For example, in the case of moving from school to college, on the one hand, it might be exciting as college seems to be bigger than the school with more attractive facilities, new friends and new staff, etc. On the other hand, it might also be scary, especially if one is not fully prepared for the move. It might also be threatening when thinking about leaving the old school, with may be a lot of memories with the friends and teachers. Therefore, it is not impossible that both feelings of excitement and feeling threatened can be experienced during the transition. Very

often, the new change in one's life may lead to a situation that is uncomfortable for many, or a state which Adeyemo (2010) terms as psychological disequilibrium.

Although transition can be interpreted differently based on a different context or facet, this study is concerned with the context of educational transition, which can also be seen in multiple dimensions. As Jindal-Snape (2010b) has noted, transition in the educational context has been conceptualised in various ways. This is because the educational context itself has various aspects which can all contribute to the transition process of the young people, such as the education and learning process, parental involvement, relationship with professionals, peer support, friendships, leisure activities and so on. All of these aspects have an impact on each other in the transition process of young people, depending on how the planning and preparation are done for the transition. In addition, transition can also be conceptualised based on the skills of the individuals (in this context, the young people) and how they deal with the changes in a new setting; or the role of key stakeholders for the young people, including the family and community; or a single event of one end of educational journey to another (see also Mayer, Amendum, & Vernon-Feagans, 2010); and its concept as an ongoing effort or process (see also Mayer et al., 2010) which focuses on the interactions between all the stakeholders involved. F. Mitchell (2012) argues that post-school transition should not only be seen as negotiating the barriers between child and adult services from school to further education or employment; but also as a journey from childhood to adulthood which involves changes to a young person's social and legal status. Essentially, all of these various perspectives need to be made clear, as it is only then that the stakeholders can act and work accordingly to enhance the transition experience, towards a seamless and more effective transition process.

### **2.6.2 Theoretical perspectives of transition**

According to Bryman (2008), a theory provides a backcloth and rationale for the study that is carried out as well as providing a framework within which social phenomena can be understood and research findings can be interpreted. This sub-section looks at some of the theoretical perspectives adopted by researchers in order to understand what is happening to the young people during the transition and to find ways to improve the experience of transition.

The theoretical perspectives of transition have been discussed and argued by many researchers, including self-esteem, resilience, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, ecological systems theory, the interactionist model and the maturational model (to name a few) (Jindal-Snape, 2010a). Interestingly, some of these theories are being utilised by different countries across the world. For instance, Adeyemo (2010) stresses the importance of psychological skills and resources in order to help students adjust effectively during the transition period. Such skills are essential in the sense that students need to relate to their peers, teachers and everyone else within their circle of new environment. He developed an emotional intelligence intervention and carried out an experimental study to see the impact on the transition of the first year student at the university. His findings suggest that this intervention was effective at enhancing the transition of the first year student into the university, and self-efficacy was part of the fundamental aspect of emotional intelligence intervention.

Jindal-Snape and Miller (2010) use the theories of self-esteem and resilience to understand the transition process in which they point out transition as times/contexts where individuals can face challenging events and struggle to cope with a new environment (see also Jindal-Snape, Roberts & Venditozzi, 2012). In brief, self-esteem

is defined as “*appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others*” (The California Task Force, 1990, p. 18) While resilience is defined as “*a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*” (Jindal-Snape, 2013, p. 192). At the time of transition, the individual’s sense of worth and competence, particularly young people with learning disabilities can be at risk, resulting in a decline in self-esteem, academic achievement and motivation (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010). For instance, in the case of the young people moving to college, there are many things that contribute to their concerns, such as their ability to cope with the bigger environment and bigger community, the new course, new friends, new staff, and concerns about the loss or how to maintain relationships with old friends, etc. This is where the importance of the internal attributes such as self-esteem come into play, as they act as the internal protective factor to reduce the multiple risks or concerns during transition. Research shows that low self-esteem interferes with learning and suggests that high self-esteem may well promote it (The California Task Force, 1990). Thus, any risks that the young people might face during transition could be lessened by promoting conditions that could enhance self-esteem, which should come from the external protective factors such as the positive support networks from parents, college staff or peers. Evidence suggests that when the stress related to the transition of an individual can be overcome, future progress is more likely to be successful (Margetts, 2002).

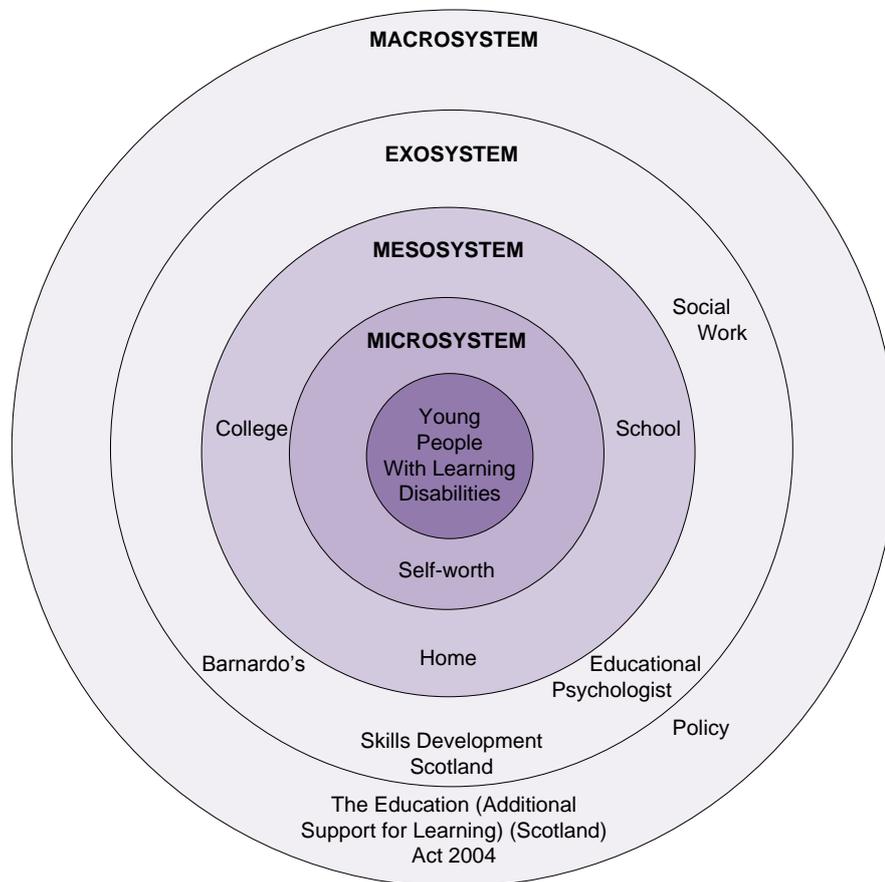
As mentioned earlier, the sense of self-worth of individuals, particularly young people with learning disabilities might be at risk at the time of transition. At this stage, young people really need a strong support system that helps them to retain their self-esteem and competence. Evidence suggests that young people who have better family relationships and strong support, especially from the mother, tend to have more self-

esteem (Klarin, Šašić, & Proroković, 2012). In other words, there seems to be a significant relationship between the social interaction (of the parents and the young people) and the development of the self-esteem of the young people.

In my view, there is an interrelated connection between self esteem, resilience and self efficacy, as each of them has its own and unique role within the individual's attributes that might determine a successful transition. The degree to which these feelings are strong in order to encounter new challenges during a transition period again depends upon each and every individual. Inevitably, several factors such as the internal characteristics of an individual, family background, education level and informal peer support are vital in contributing to this feeling of self worth. For instance, if a young person is surrounded by strong support from his or her family and peers, the possibility of adapting quickly to the new environment for him or her is probably high. However, if the support is very low, then s/he may take a longer time to adjust to the new environment.

Another interesting theory is the ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This theory emphasises the multi-layered dimensions which play a significant role during transitions (Jindal-Snape, 2010a). This theory conceptualises the system ranging from the closest to the individual to the furthestmost, namely microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem with the addition of chronosystem in the later model (Jindal-Snape, 2010a), (see Figure 2.10). This suggests that all the stakeholders around the child, including the family members, teachers, peers as well as the community have, and play, a key role and part in determining the success of the individual's transition. A clear example of how Bronfenbrenner's model has

been used as a framework can be seen in a study by Hannah, Gorton, and Jindal-Snape (2010).



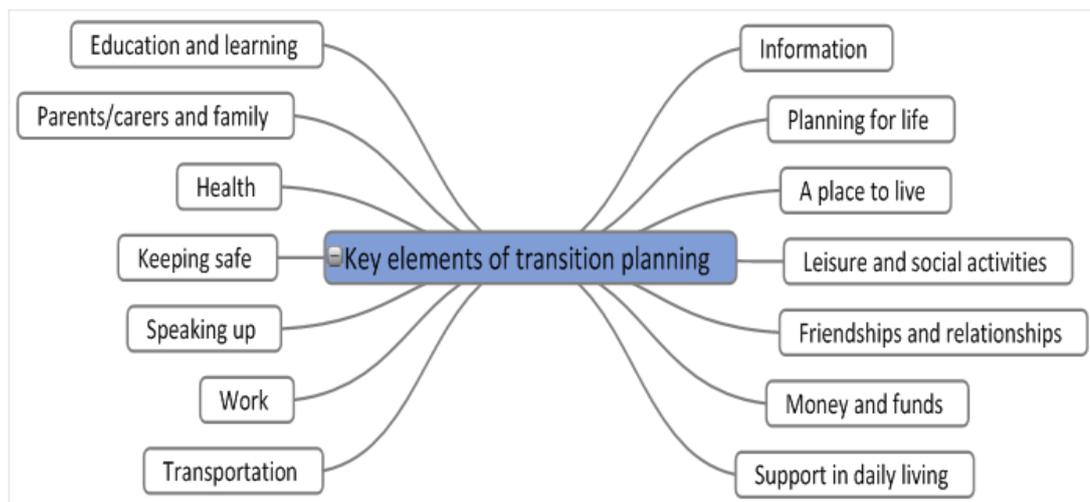
**Figure 2.10** Ecological System Theory based on Bronfenbrenner (1992)

Again, one cannot deny that the environmental factor is crucial in determining the effectiveness of an individual's transition from one stage to the other. Generally, a person will feel more comfortable with those who are familiar and close to him/her rather than those whom s/he meets for the first time. However, it should be noted that those working with young people also need to bear in mind that they should really

understand all aspects of their needs in order to help them go through the transition process smoothly.

## 2.7 Key elements of transition planning

There is no doubt that transition planning is essential for all young people. The Department of Health (2002) has listed various important elements that should be a key pillar in the transition planning of the young people in fulfilling their aspirations (see Figure 2.11). It should be noted that none of these elements can be achieved without the involvement and cooperation of all relevant agencies and service providers in the young people's lives. Each of them should know their respective roles and be responsible for this full range of aspects to work towards effective transition planning.



*Source: Adapted and modified from the Department of Health (2002)*

**Figure 2.11** Key elements of transition planning

In addition, these key elements also reinforce the policy adopted in *The Same As You?* set by the Scottish Executive to ensure that young people with learning disabilities have as full and independent a life as possible (Curtis, 2006). However, for the purpose of

this thesis, only some elements are discussed in detail, while others are not specifically encompassed in this study.

### **2.7.1 Education**

Education is one of the most important parts of one's life, as without this one would be left behind in all aspects of his or her life. This is also true for the young people with learning disabilities. No matter how severe their conditions are, education still plays an important part in their life. This was stated in the Education Act 1972 which asserts that all children have a right to education, however severe their disabilities, and it abolished the concept of 'ineducable child' (Warnock, 2005). A question arises when it comes to the end of the schooling life regarding what the future might hold for them.

In general, there are a few options for people with disabilities when it comes to education and learning. Looking at the UK context of the education system as a whole and the Scottish context in particular, the young people might either go to a local college for further education or higher education (FE/HE) or do some training in different settings that might equip them with certain skills before starting work. However, these options depend on the smoothness of the transition planning they had had before leaving school, as not all of them had the same experience of post-school transition. According to The Scottish Government (2012c), progress for young people with additional support needs often takes longer, and in such cases, the offer of learning or training may be extended appropriately.

Further education seems to be the most popular pathway for young people with learning disabilities. Whilst college places are often considered for young people with mild

learning disabilities, day centres, on the other hand, are automatically considered for those with severe or profound disabilities (Carnaby & Lewis, 2005). In fact, the school professionals and parents felt that day centres were seen as the 'usual' destination after school, particularly for those with the most pronounced learning disabilities (Mitchell, 1999). Mitchell (1999) found that 94% of the special school leavers remained in some form of education, either full or part-time, after leaving school. Similarly, Heslop, et al. (2002) discovered that 78% of young people with learning disabilities remain in further education as their first placement after school. It seems that young people and their families would have expected that college or further education would be their 'next destination' after school. Interestingly, Ward, Mallett, Heslop, and Simons (2003) raise the question as to whether when the youngsters move on to college there should be an exit plan in order to avoid college from being labeled as just a kind of 'holding operation'. In addition, they suggest that youngsters and their families can be inspired by informing them about the supported employment opportunities.

Indeed, further education is one of the ways in which one can learn more skills before looking for a job, particularly for those with learning disabilities. Even if one has already gained a job, he or she still needs to upgrade their relevant skills and make sure they are up to date. As Mitchell (1999) has noted, the traditional thought that a 'job is for life' is no longer relevant in the late twentieth century. Even now (in the twenty first century) this thinking still remains relevant and appropriate to the current situation. Thus, a new model of transition and how employment is being perceived and judged is truly important. In short, a more flexible and extensive approach is needed. Not only does the nature of the job need to be reassessed, but also the appropriateness of the job for the young people with a variety of disabilities also needs to be taken into account. There has been apprehension that the young people leaving special schools are likely to

be excluded in the future if vocational criteria and appropriate schemes are not highlighted and attended as a concern (Mitchell, 1999).

I believe that in the young people's minds, there are a lot of aspects that they will think about in their life when it comes to future aspirations, such as having a job, family, housing, marriage, etc. However, policy and practice are more inclined to fragment people's lives and focus only on education, training or employment, disregarding other issues like housing needs, making new friends and developing new interests (Dee, 2006).

### **2.7.2 Employment Services**

One of the main issues faced by people with disabilities is the issue of unemployment. Past studies have shown that young people with learning disabilities are capable of working just like their non-disabled counterparts; even those with severe disabilities can work (part-time) and earn a wage rate at or above the minimum wage and make social contacts (Jenkins, 2002). However, opportunities for them to be in the job market remain very low (Giddens, 2009; Owen et al., 2005; Wellard, 2008), thus many are left unemployed. This has been worsened by the worldwide economic recession as well as the economic crisis within the UK, which has adversely affected the youth labour market (Riddell, 1999). Inevitably, the same effect was also felt by the young people with a learning disability. For instance, in the mid-1970s, around 70 per cent of these young people gained employment on leaving school; however, the number decreased to less than 10 per cent by the mid-1990s (Riddell, 1999). Lamb and McKenzie (2001; cited in Winn & Hay, 2009) stated that the disparity between young people with and without a disability, with individuals with a disability being three times less likely to

find a full-time job. This statement reinforces both the findings from Enable Scotland and official statistics from the Scottish Executive which agree that very few people with learning disabilities engage in full-time work (Curtis, 2006). Although the employment rates among people with disabilities vary from a variety of sources (Wellard, 2008), the latest figure conducted by the Labour Force Survey in 2012 shows that only 46.3 per cent of working-age disabled people are at work compared to 76.4 per cent of working-age non-disabled people (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013). This survey reinforces the fact that the employment rate among them still remains significantly low in comparison to the non-disabled people, despite more disabled young people being at work now than there was a decade ago.

Previous studies have shown that many young people and their parents do recognise the importance and desirability of 'having a job' (Riddell et al., 1993). In fact, many of them aspire to having an ordinary job (McConkey & McGinley, 1992). However, very few of them end up having 'real' employment. As stated in *The Same As You?* (Scottish Executive, 2000), those leaving school may want to consider further education at the beginning, however, the job would be the next preference eventually. Research shows that the main impetus towards employment among people with learning disabilities include the desire for choice, control and independence, avoiding boredom, meeting people, getting paid and having the chance to achieve and succeed (Scottish Executive, 2003). Moreover, employment provides them with a sense of purpose and competence in life; makes them feel needed; provides a change of environment from home to the work place; fosters social activities through contact with a range of different people as well as helps them to develop self-discipline through the scheduled framework (DES, 1978). In addition, having paid employment could also provide a sense of identity and access to an independent home away from the family home, as well as the possibility of

having adult relationships (Riddell, 1999). Giddens (2001) and Jenkins (2002) have highlighted several characteristics of work that serve a different purpose and meaning to people (see Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7** Purpose and meaning of working

<b>Characteristics of work</b>	<b>Meanings</b>
<b>Money</b>	The main source of income
<b>Activity level</b>	Development of skills and capacities
<b>Variety</b>	Different tasks and contexts from home chores
<b>Temporal structure</b>	Provides a sense of direction in daily activities
<b>Social contacts</b>	Provides friendships and participation in shared activities
<b>Personal identity</b>	A sense of stable social identity and self-esteem

*Source: Giddens (2001) and Jenkins (2002)*

All of these possibilities can be accessed with a paid job. Although earning money is regarded as a key aspect of work, both in terms of material benefit and self-esteem (Wellard, 2008), Willis (1984; cited in Riddell, 1999) argues that having a paid job is not only about a wage or money, but rather it provides a crucial link to other social possibilities, processes and desirable things including social and cultural transmissions. However, from the social model point of view, the concept and purpose of work is as much about identity, participation and social and psychological well-being as it is about income and productivity (Roulstone and Barnes, 2005 cited in Winn & Hay, 2009). Roulstone and Barnes (2005) argue that social policy has failed to acknowledge the barriers in employment that people with a disability are confronted with.

Those who manage to get a job can be considered as lucky as their chances of getting a job are very slim. Research shows that a supportive family and social relationships are

also one of the main factors of a successful transition from school or vocational programme to employment for people with disabilities (Winn & Hay, 2009). With support for the young person and employers, they can make full use of their experience during a work placement whilst at college to gain permanent employment. Evidence shows that young people were able to gain paid employment after finishing at college with the same company they went to during the work placement whilst at college (Heslop et al., 2002).

This evidence signifies that the cooperation between the families of the young people and the employers is also important in terms of helping them to get a job. On the family side, they should play their role in getting as much information as they can about the job, and on the employers' side they should also give the young people a chance to prove that they can be employed just like anybody else. I believe that people are born with some potentialities and this is also true for people with disabilities, however these potentials are not fully utilised and exercised. As such, more opportunities should be given to people with disabilities to prove that they can work by focusing more on their ability rather than their disability. In fact, recognising the abilities of people with disabilities and the business case for employing them is the most effective way to promote employment for people with disabilities by the employers (Employment Department, 1994; cited in Thornton and Lunt, 1995). This view is supported by Wellard (2008) who notes that focusing on what the person can do rather than their incapacity, and a willingness to allow them to try out new things is a useful way to support them. Perhaps the government should give some incentives to the companies or employers who employ disabled people such as by reducing their tax bill by a certain percentage or by implementing a policy in which every company should employ at least certain quotas of disabled people at their work place. It should be noted that in the UK,

under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, private sector employers who have 20 or more workers were required to employ a quota system (3% of their total work force at that time) of registered people with disabilities (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1978; Thornton & Lunt, 1995). However, according to Thornton and Lunt (1995), the quota scheme failed to promote the employment of people with disabilities. A low level of registration of people with disabilities, no incentives to public bodies to increase their performance as well as the lack of awareness, either among the employers or employees, about the existence of the scheme, are among the reasons which led to this failure (Thornton & Lunt, 1995). In addition, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) argues that the quota system might give rise to unpleasant feelings among people with disabilities as they will be labeled as 'disabled' in order for their employers to fulfil the quota requirement. Nevertheless, many of the European Union (EU) member states have been operating a quota system which requires employers to employ a certain proportion of disabled employees in an attempt to improve active inclusion policies among people with disabilities (Wynne & McAnaney, 2010). However, they did not require registration in order to qualify for the quota, as in the UK system. Rather, those in employment and receiving benefits automatically qualify for the quota, as in France and the Netherlands, whilst Denmark on the other hand, has long objected to the policy of a quota system on the basis of registration (Thornton & Lunt, 1995).

From the above discussion, it is clear that the issue of unemployment among young people with learning disabilities has continued over the years. For instance, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) highlighted this issue more than three decades ago. According to the report, people with disabilities are often unemployed or under-employed just because they are not provided with the right help at the right time.

However, I argue that even today, with so much support and help available and provided for the young people, the issue of unemployment still persists. This has been shown in a more recent research by Riddell, Edward, Weedon, and Ahlgren (2010) which indicates that people with disabilities are still disadvantaged in the labour market, with a higher probability of not being at work at all, or with less stable and lower paid jobs compared to the non-disabled people. Does this mean that the young people are too selective or is it true that there really are no suitable jobs for them in the labour market? A past study suggests that young people with disabilities find it extremely difficult to secure an open job, not because they do not want to work, or because they are not capable of doing so (Coles, 1997; cited in Caton and Kagan, 2007). Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the issues that constrain many young people into FE as the only option after leaving school.

### **2.7.3 Parents/Carers and Families**

According to Jindal-Snape (2010a), the transition does not only have an impact on the child/young person, but also the family who will experience joy and anxieties throughout the process. Similarly, Mitchell (1999) found that families experienced conflicting emotions during the transition. In addition, research also suggests that fear and anxiety about the future are the two key issues that surround the families when talking about the perceptions of the transition to adulthood for their son or daughter (Goupil, Tasse, Garcin, & Dore, 2002; Mitchell, 1999; Ward, Mallett, et al., 2003). However, most research tends to focus on the transition of the young people and fails to notice the transition of parents (Jindal-Snape, Roberts, & Venditozzi, 2012). On many occasions, the transition can be a very taxing time for families, particularly the parents and carers. It also means a transition for them into a new task as parents of young adults (Russell, 2003). This suggests that transition can also have a direct or indirect impact on

the family as a whole, which is either positive or negative. This shows that support is really essential for both the young people and their families during the transition.

Apart from the support, family involvement is also another key aspect in determining the success of transition for the young people. Indeed, families play a very significant role in determining their children's future. It is even more vital for young people with learning disabilities leaving school. According to Jindal-Snape et al. (2012), transition to another educational context is one of the key stages where parental involvement is crucial. Evidence also suggests that there was a positive connection between support from parents and how easy the transition could be (Johansson, 2002). Likewise, Blacher (2001) noted that active family participation in accessing services is the key element towards the successful transition of young people with learning difficulties. As mentioned earlier, this is also important as the family is an important support network.

However, research shows that family involvement and their perspectives and contributions are sometimes ignored by professionals in the transition planning process (Morris, 2002). McNair and Rusch (1991) in their study in North America discovered that only 30% of parents were involved in the transition programmes in comparison to 70% who wanted to be. Given that families play a significant role in the transition process of the young people, more acknowledgment should be given to them and they should be considered as central to the transition planning process.

#### **2.7.4 Financial Arrangements and Funding Issues**

Being able to have one's own money and learn how to do financial planning correctly is one of the key aspects of the transition to adulthood. In some way it indicates the 'adult' status of the young people and boosts their self-confidence and self-identity. Financial

arrangements and all issues related to funding such as the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), travel cost to and from college, etc. are crucial in the transition process and need to be clearly explained to the young people and their parents so that they are aware and know how to access them. It is also important to determine the continuous involvement of young people in a wide range of social activities that they can join in. Regrettably, not all young people with disabilities have the opportunity to manage their own money. In fact, most of them need support either from their own parents or advocates with handling their own account. Research shows that the issue of claiming or changing benefits was not, or only 'partly' covered in the transition planning (Heslop et al., 2002).

One of the essential elements with regards to financial arrangement is the issue of direct payments. It is worth noting that all people with disabilities in Scotland in particular are entitled to direct payments as one of the ways to increase the flexibility, choice and control over their care, so that they can live more independently (The Scottish Government, 2012a). Direct payments have been available in Scotland for people with disabilities aged 18-64 since 1997, and to all age groups since 2001, including 16 and 17 year olds, and to parents of disabled children (F. Mitchell, 2012; The Scottish Government, 2008). In essence, direct payments are funds paid by local authorities to people with disabilities and other community-care service users to buy their own support and thus allowing them to determine what support is needed, where it is needed and who is involved in its provision (Riddell, 2008). Research shows that the young people would like more control over their personal care, to access different places, social activities as well as to have more control over using the equipment that they have access to (Lenahan, 2008). As such, direct payments are seen as a perfect means of promoting the personalisation agenda and future shape of welfare provision in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century (Riddell, 2008). However, several issues arise regarding the use of direct payments although they have been available for more than a decade. For instance, Jones and Hack (2008) found that of 43 parents in their survey, the majority had not heard about direct payments and only two had used them. Another main concern raised was that inability or failure to manage finances properly can lead to exploitation and abuse issues by, or among family members or personal assistants (Riddell, 2008).

Further to the introduction of direct payments, the Scottish Government has established another major policy known as Self-directed Support (SDS). SDS was built based on the platform of Direct Payments legislation and the rights enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act (Scotland) 2003, and aimed to promote personalised services and to encourage a more equal partnership between professionals and those in need of support (F. Mitchell, 2012). The Bill on SDS was passed by Parliament in November 2012 and provided professionals with four choices of options, namely; 1. Direct payment, 2. The person directs the available support, 3. The local authority arranges the support, and 4. A mix of all the three options (The Scottish Government, 2013b). Although the Act is expected to come into force in March 2014 (The Scottish Government, 2013b), SDS has both the potential to protect budgets and power, and the capacity to improve integration if a person-centred approach is promoted (F. Mitchell, 2012).

### **2.7.5 Transportation**

In general, having access to public transport is another main concern for young people with disabilities and their parents. The importance of having accessible transport for people with disabilities is emphasised as transport is covered by both Parts 3 and 5 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which requires service providers to make

‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure the service is accessible (McQuigg, 2008). Transport is seen as vital for disabled people in the sense that it may provide accessibility to many important things in their life, including access to education, workplace and/or social activities. Failure to access these facilities may become a big barrier for them to have better life chances. Although the transport law has already been enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities to transport facilities as mentioned earlier, the issue of transportation is still an ongoing debate for people with disabilities. A survey carried out by Leonard Cheshire Disability of 213 people with disabilities on public transport usage in Scotland shows that they still do not fully utilise public transport (McQuigg, 2008). Table 2.8 shows a brief report on the key findings from the survey.

**Table 2.8** Key findings of people with disabilities using public transport in Scotland

<b>Percentage of overall respondents</b>	<b>Key findings</b>
70%	Stated that they cannot rely on public transport
47%	Believed that inaccessible transport restricted them from finding a job
41%	Stated that they had to turn down a job offer due to inaccessible transport
20%	Reported that they had to leave their job due to inaccessible transport
62%	Missed out on visiting family or friends due to the lack of accessible transport
31%	Had missed a medical appointment due to inaccessible transport
32%	Stated that they had faced problems entering further education or a training programme due to inaccessible transport
40%	Said that they do not feel safe on Scotland’s public transport

*[Source: McQuigg (2008)]*

From Table 2.8 it is clear that people with disabilities are still experiencing difficulties in accessing public transport, which is vital to give them greater freedom and choice in their daily life activities. As such, using public transport needs to be dealt with more carefully in the transition planning as it involves their physical safety. Thus, it is no surprise that many parents are hesitant or concerned about letting their children use public transport or travel independently (Topping & Foggie, 2010). The incorporation of independent travel as part of the transition planning and preparation by the school is a good step to convince the young people to use public transport. Those who regularly practice using public transport may become more confident than those who rarely or never use it. Previous research indicates that independent travel can be achieved through gradual and consistent practice at using public transport (Heslop et al., 2002; Topping & Foggie, 2010). In fact, the ability to use public transport on one's own can increase the young person's independence without relying on their parents all the time (Topping & Foggie, 2010). Indirectly, it will help the parents to ease their burden of sending and collecting their son or daughter every time they want to go to college or do any other leisure activities. It is clear that the involvement of the third party during the transition planning in handling this issue will lead to the smoothness of independent travel for the young person.

#### **2.7.6 Leisure activities and friendships**

As young people move towards adulthood, they will become more mature and start to think of many aspects in their life including social activities, friendships and relationships. Their involvement in these activities is predominantly vital, not only as part of growing up, but also as part of mental and emotional well-being developments. In general, leisure is defined as a free-time activity chosen so as to provide enjoyment,

which constitutes four elements, namely, a notion of non-obligated time, activity or interest, choice, and relaxation or pleasure (Cavet, 1999). According to Cavet (1999), leisure involvement can reduce the sense of isolation, encourage a positive self-image and develop community contacts. Indeed, a leisure pursuit could potentially provide a more fulfilling learning medium rather than employment, which has not always been a realistic option for people with learning disabilities (Jenkins, 2002). However, research suggests that many young people with disabilities have less involvement or chances for leisure activities in comparison to their non-disabled peers (Cavet, 1999; Flynn & Hirst, 1992; Hirst & Baldwin, 1994; Morris, 1999).

The lack of involvement of young people with disabilities in leisure activities could be due to various factors. This could well be the lack of 'disabled-friendly' facilities on public premises where most of the leisure activities take place such as parks, cinemas, shopping or sports centres, transportation issues as well as being restricted by parents, particularly due to safety reasons. Cavet (1999) argues that one of the major barriers to active leisure participation is due to unemployment. The argument is that unemployed people tend to have less active leisure participation than those in employment. This is seen as reasonable as participation in employment could also encourage the young people to make more contacts and thus they will be more likely to make more friends and actively participate in leisure activities outside the home. In addition, the lack of transport and inadequate access to support were also found to be key barriers to the leisure involvement of the young people (Morris, 1999). Heslop, et al. (2002) found that 53% of parents of young people with disabilities said that the topics of leisure and social activities were not covered during transition planning when they were still at school even though many families really wanted more information about this topic for their children, but less than half were able to get it. What is important in relation to this

particular subject is that not only is comprehensive knowledge needed by the parents as well as the young people themselves, the agencies that provide the information also need to make sure that it is consistent and up-to-date. Among the activities that are most popular are listening to music, following their favourite groups, going to special youth clubs, swimming, etc. However, some of these activities have an age restriction (see Heslop, et al., 2002), which is why the terms and conditions of such activities need to be updated from time to time so that they will not feel disappointed later on if they are no longer able to join in due to age restrictions.

Another aspect that is deemed significant and worth covering in the transition planning is the issue of friendships and relationships. According to Brackenridge and McKenzie (2005), friendships not only provide non-judgemental warmth and understanding, but also allow the development and confirmation of self-identity as well as raising and sustaining self-esteem. In fact, achieving meaningful relationships has been part of the main agenda explicitly stated in *The Same As You?* (Scottish Executive, 2000) and *Valuing People* (Department of Health, 2001). Brackenridge and McKenzie (2005) investigate the popular and unpopular factors that are important in the friendships of people with a learning disability. The findings reveal that being confident, having a good sense of humour, being mentioned frequently, good verbal and non-verbal skills, ability to pick up on emotions and good social skills are the most popular factors, whilst the reverse of them emerged as the unpopular factors. Nevertheless, people with learning disabilities generally have fewer friends, more limited social networks and fewer friendship-related activities than their non-disabled peers (Garvey & Kroese, 1991; Knox & Hickson, 2001; McKenzie, 2010; Zetlin & Murtaugh, 1988). Evidence strongly suggests that a large number of people with learning disabilities do not get involved in a range of satisfying social relationships; instead they experience loneliness,

isolation and many lead impoverished lives (Chappell, 1994). In addition, Morris (2002) noted that someone with no friends is unlikely to have much self-esteem either. This aspect is particularly essential as it might have a big impact on the young person's personal and social development. Evidence suggests that a lack of meaningful friendships would lead to deterioration in the person's overall quality of life (Brackenridge & McKenzie, 2005). Richardson and Ritchie (1990) identify several factors that could be barriers to the formation of friendships. These include the lack of opportunities to meet new people, large group-based environments for social activities, a lack of self-confidence as well as lack of freedom to choose their own friends. In addition, they also state that parents sometimes seem to let their son or daughter become quite isolated from any activities outside of the family, which could also be a barrier to the formation of friendships. In my view, this could be due to safety or the protection factor, rather than stopping their son or daughter from socialising with other people. However, as the young people grow older and become more mature, this issue is inevitable. My view would be that parents need to be more open and flexible to the issue of the friendships and relationships of their son or daughter. In fact, this relationship is far more important, as it may lead to a further connection, including issues such as sexuality and marriage. It should be noted that disabled young people will have the same sexual feelings and rights as other people of their age (Douglas, Wood, & Sim, 2010; Morris, 2002). However, some of the parents were concerned and did not know how to handle the sexuality issue (O'Connell, Bailey, & Pearce, 2003) and needed someone else to talk about this especially to their children. In addition, evidence also suggests that increased vulnerability to sexual abuse of the young people was also a reason why parents restricted their access to sexual information and services, as they fear it may exacerbate this vulnerability (Douglas et al., 2010). It seems that the role of other professionals, particularly the support worker in handling this issue is vital.

## **2.8 Issues and challenges**

The issues and challenges faced by the young people during the post-school transition have long been raised and discussed in the literature. This section seeks to compare and contrast some of the prominent issues and challenges faced by the young people in the post-school transition since the late twentieth century until more recently. In doing so, I have created a table showing the issues raised from the early 1990s to the present time (see Table 2.9). The rationale for looking at the past two decades is to consider the impact of the introduction of *The Same As You?* and *Valuing People* in the years 2000 and 2001 respectively, which marks the major changes in the life of, and services for people with learning disabilities.

**Table 2.9** Issues and challenges in the post-school transition

<b>Issues and challenges highlighted (between 1992 and 2002)</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Issues and challenges highlighted (between 2003 and 2012)</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>
<b>Further Education (FE), training and employment:</b> Young people still remain in a ‘special group’ in FE, mixing within a limited and isolated population labelled as ‘special educational needs’ (SEN) with few interactions with non-disabled peers.	Mitchell (1999)	<b>Further Education (FE), training and employment:</b> The skill level of young people decreased as they moved on from special school to FE.	Jacobsen (2003)
Many young people experienced long periods of training with poor prospects of ever gaining employment.	G. Thomson et al. (1992); Morrow and Richards (1996); Routledge (2000); Riddell, Baron, and Wilson (2001)	Many young people experienced long periods of training with poor prospects of ever gaining employment.	Armstrong (2003)
No statutory process put in place post-college. As a result, many young people were referred back to day centres or other further education courses.	DfES (2001)	No specific law or guidance enforced to support the young people post-college. As a result, many young people were referred back to day centres or other further education courses.	Beyer (2005); Hudson (2006)
Many FE, training and work experience placements are considered to be ‘care’ placements for the young people, rather than a place to gain qualifications or a paid job.	Morris (2002)	Some young people remain at college simply because there is nowhere for them to go to.	Mittler (2007)
		Chances of getting or receiving employment support are small; and they are less likely to achieve employment compared to their non-disabled peers.	Beresford (2004); Kaehne and Beyer (2009)
<b>Transition planning:</b> Poor coordination between multi-agencies and professionals in the transition planning, including between	Morris (2002)	<b>Transition planning:</b> The proportion of young people leaving school without a plan increased between 1998 and 2000.	Ward, Mallett, et al. (2003)

children and adult services.				
			Lack of involvement of young people in the transition planning process.	(F. Mitchell, 2012)
<b>Lack of information and options:</b> Young people, their families and other professionals frequently lack comprehensive and up-to-date information about options, choices and possibilities.	Routledge (2000); Morris (2002)		<b>Lack of information and options:</b> School staff lack awareness about possible post-school options.	The Scottish Government (2011)
Post-school options are always limited, particularly for those with pronounced learning disabilities.	Mitchell (1999); Stalker (2002)		Parents and young people lack information about future options and opportunities.	Beresford (2004); Tarleton and Ward (2005)
<b>Friends and relationships:</b> Choices about friends, relationships and the social life of young people are rarely recognised by the services.	Morris (2002)		<b>Friends and relationships:</b> People with learning disabilities have fewer friends and limited social networks.	Beresford (2004); McKenzie (2010)
People with learning disabilities have fewer friends and limited social networks.	Morris (1999); Knox and Hickson (2001)			
<b>Multi-agency cooperation:</b> Lack of collaboration between agencies involved. Often there is a lack of means for the agencies responsible for children's and adults' services.	Routledge (2000)		<b>Multi-agency cooperation:</b> The process of transition from children's services to adult services is more complex, problematic and highly unsatisfactory.	Beresford (2004)
			The implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 for the post-school transition arrangements was less effective due to difficulties in coordinating agencies and accessing adult services.	HMIe (2007) F. Mitchell (2012)

As seen from Table 2.9, the issues raised have been clustered into five main themes namely, further education; training and employment; transition plan; lack of information and options; friends and relationships; and multi-agencies cooperation. Although there are many other issues discussed in the literature, these are among the key issues raised in the past two decades. What can be concluded from the issues highlighted in the table is that the same issues seem to have been continually raised and discussed in the last two decades. This raises the question of why lessons had not been learned from what happened in the past. As Morris (2002) has noted, despite increasing developments to improve transition planning and having a clear legislative and regulatory framework to help the young people, the issues of the transition of young people with learning disabilities, in the words of Abbott and Heslop (2010), unfortunately, are as relevant today as they were in the previous decade.

## **2.9 Good transition practices**

Despite the many issues and challenges faced by the young people during post-school transition, some good practices have been implemented to gain a better outcome. This section looks at some of the good practices that are deemed successful and effective in easing the transition process of young people with learning disabilities.

### **2.9.1 Person-centred planning**

As its name implies, person-centred planning is an approach that places the young person at the centre of the plan and focuses on looking at what the person wants. Person-centred planning was originally developed in the United States, nearly 30 years ago and became of particular importance in England when it came to form a fundamental element of the 2001 White Paper *Valuing People* (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2004). Three main ideas are identified in person-centred planning, namely listening and learning about what the young person wants in his or her life; helping the

young person to think about what s/he wants now and in the future; and family, friends, professionals and services working together with the young person to make sure these dreams come true (O'Brien, 2004; Rasheed, 2006). Coyle and Lunt (2010) highlight four core tools that underpin the person centred planning (see Table 2.10). It should be noted that these tools are not always employed separately; within individual planning sessions, elements from various approaches might be used as required (Stalker & Campbell, 1998). Thus, the key role of the facilitator in this approach is to judge which tool will be the most appropriate and effective, based on the individual's circumstances (Stalker & Campbell, 1998).

**Table 2.10** Core tools in person-centred planning

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Features</b>
Essential Lifestyle Plans (ELPs)	Used to get details of what a person needs in their life.
Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH)	An impetus to plan for the person for the next two to five years and to ensure they have people around them to be part of that journey.
Making Action Plans (MAPs)	A planning process that gets to know the person's history and aspirations.
Personal Futures Planning (PFP)	Employed to create a picture of the person, where they want to be and what might hinder this.

*Source: Coyle and Lunt (2010)*

As Coyle and Lunt (2010) point out, people with learning disabilities not only need better services, but also better opportunities, fairer access and enjoy all kinds of life that other people experience. Person-centred planning is seen as one of the approaches that can help young people achieve their dreams. One of the advantages of person-centred planning is that it focuses on the strengths and capacities of the young person and their support systems, rather than their deficits (Rasheed, 2006). According to Rasheed (2006), this makes the plan different from the traditional planning which tends to establish goals that have already been designed, and too often did not meet the needs of the young person. This approach was used by the Personal Advisers (PA) in

Connexions to progress the life chances of young people who face emotional problems (William, 2004). Rowland-Crosby, Giraud-Saunders, and Donlon (2003) state that the young people felt much better after talking to the PA, although they were worried about leaving school initially. This implies that this approach is more comprehensive in its nature, including helping the young people to cope with their stress during the transition.

Although person centred planning is just one of the approaches to facilitating the transition process of the young people and is not even made mandatory, research has shown it to be effective when implemented. As such, this good practice should be emulated across the UK, including Scotland. For instance, the code of practice of Supporting Children's Learning has made it clear that the young people should have the opportunity to make their views known, to express their opinions and to take them seriously, especially with regards to decisions that affect them (The Scottish Executive, 2006). Unfortunately, not all young people are able to express their views explicitly and thus need somebody else like family members or an advocate to speak on their behalf, particularly during meetings with the professionals. The recommendation from the code of practice seems good when person centred planning is used. In other words, this is where person centred planning should come into effect and play its comprehensive role using the four core tools, as mentioned in Table 2.10. This is because person centred planning will ensure that the young people really have control over the planning process (The Scottish Executive, 2006). Although this is just an option in the transition, what is important is that parents and the young people are aware of its existence and have an informed choice whether to use it or not.

However, as Coyle and Lunt (2010) have noted, the implementation of this approach requires a deep understanding and commitment to change; something that could challenge both the young person and the service providers equally.

### **2.9.2 College and work experience**

Evidence suggests that more and well-planned transition activities would lead to a better adjustment and increase the likelihood of success in the new setting of transition (Akos, 2010; Hannah et al., 2010). For instance, research shows that children with a high number of transition activities adapt better than those with a limited number of transition activities (Hannah et al., 2010). Although this evidence was based on a study of pre-school children moving to primary school, I believe that the same concept is applicable at other stages of the transition, including the post-school transition context. What I understand and mean by transition activities here is any plans or programmes specifically designed or arranged in order to facilitate the transition process, and in the context of this study, it is the move from school to the post-school setting. One of the good practices of the transition planning process is the arrangement of visits to some possible post school destinations which included local colleges, work experience placements as well as day centres (Heslop et al., 2002). Through these visits, the young people can at least have some kind of idea or a sense of something being suitable for them in the future. However, the outcome of these visits should be discussed with the young people to share their views.

Apart from the visits, the opportunity to do the college link course and work experience are among other positive aspects that the young people may have experienced. Although this opportunity may not be experienced by all young people, exposure to college life during college link courses or work experience for some is indeed a valuable moment

for young people with disabilities. It will not only give them a new experience of meeting new people, including their peers and staff, but will also boost their confidence level gradually before making the real transition. Past research shows that a first-hand experience of the new setting prior to commencement can provide time for the young people to assimilate and accommodate the old with the new, in preparing them for any challenges they may face later on (Margetts, 2002). In other words, the more familiar and sensitive the new setting is for the young people, the easier the transition could be for them (Margetts, 2002). In some way, these activities could also relieve the stress and anxiety levels or 'culture shock' when moving to a new setting.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the post-school transition process faced by young people with learning disabilities and their families throughout the UK. It begins with the definitions of the three main concepts namely, the young person, learning disability and the post-school transition. The three concepts defined suggest that there is not a single concept that can be mutually agreed upon, as they seem to slightly vary across different sources. However, one clear message, especially in terms of the concept of learning disabilities, is that it is becoming more and more popular to study for the researchers and practitioners. Similarly, in terms of the services for young people with a learning disability, it seems that more effort and policies have been made and improved to ensure that their needs are met.

The literature shows that the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities is indeed universal in nature. It seems that each and every country discussed in the literature including the UK itself, has a policy and practice of their own in supporting the young people going through the post-school transition process. In

addition, the policies and acts implemented would ensure that their needs and rights are guaranteed and protected, including the needs and rights to further education, work, etc. However, there was also a dispute that the involvement of inter-agencies might also lead to more challenging tasks.

As for the Scottish context in particular, the current transition services for young people are primarily depicted through the Scottish Executive's review *The Same As You?.* Although there were some new policies and legislations introduced thereafter, including the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 as amended in 2009, the old policy as found in the Warnock Report (1978) seems still relevant and consistent with the current needs and trends (although the report does not specifically address the Scottish context). Since the old policy still appears to be relevant in the current context, it could be argued that perhaps some, if not all the policies and legislations that came later could have been inspired and driven from the old ones. Perhaps, it is also not an exaggeration to note that the emergence of the later policies such as GIRFEC, is more towards improvements of the existing or old policies, rather than a new policy of its own. In other words, it is rather a new template of the old version.

The concept of educational transition is multi-dimensional in nature, which can be interpreted in various ways as viewed by researchers. However, my view is that it is an ongoing process rather than a one-off event as it has various factors which all contribute to the success of the transition process over time. The theoretical perspectives from many researchers suggest how important theories such as self esteem, resilience and emotional intelligence could be, in understanding what is happening and to find ways to resolve any issue. However, it is worth noting that other support, particularly from the

families, peers or community, either formally or informally, also has a big impact on the transition process of the young people (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). As Jindal-Snape and Miller (2010) have noted, a supportive family and other external support networks including school, peers and community can all contribute to a successful transition.

A number of opportunities are awaiting the young people after transitioning from compulsory education, such as further education, training and employment. However, other aspects are equally important in the lives of the young people towards adulthood. These key elements include relationships with families, and friends, and social and leisure activities which are crucial for a meaningful and fulfilling life. However, evidence from the literature suggests that these opportunities are always limited despite its emphasis on the policy and legislation.

The issues of post-school transition have been discussed and argued by many researchers for many years since the late twentieth century. Issues such as limited places and provisions post-school, high unemployment rates, lack of information and involvement of young people in the transition plan, are among the recurring issues highlighted in the literature. Unfortunately, the same issues are still raised in the more recent literature, thus raising the question of why such issues are still being repeatedly discussed. There is no doubt that there are some good practices for post-school transition already in place in Scotland, including the implementation of person-centred planning and exposure to college through a college link course or college visit, and work experience to help the young people going through the transition process. However, unfortunately these good practices are not standardised, either across the local authorities or other relevant agencies throughout Scotland in particular, thus leading to differences in practices between local authorities. This raises the question of why good

practice is not made mandatory for all the local authorities throughout Scotland. It may be due to the needs that might be different based on the context of each and every local authority. If that was the answer, then it may be acceptable that the good practice is not standardised. However, if the needs are the same, then the same question arises.

As such, this study tries to identify some realistic answers to the issues related to the post-school transition by exploring the views of the young people, their parents, the school staff and other professionals through a longitudinal study. As noted earlier in this chapter, the lack of studies in this area, particularly in Scotland, sparked the idea for the current study. In fact, this has also made the study different from the previous studies, as it looks at the various viewpoints at three different stages in one single study (see Figure 2.12), whereas previous studies tend to be done separately or at different time points.

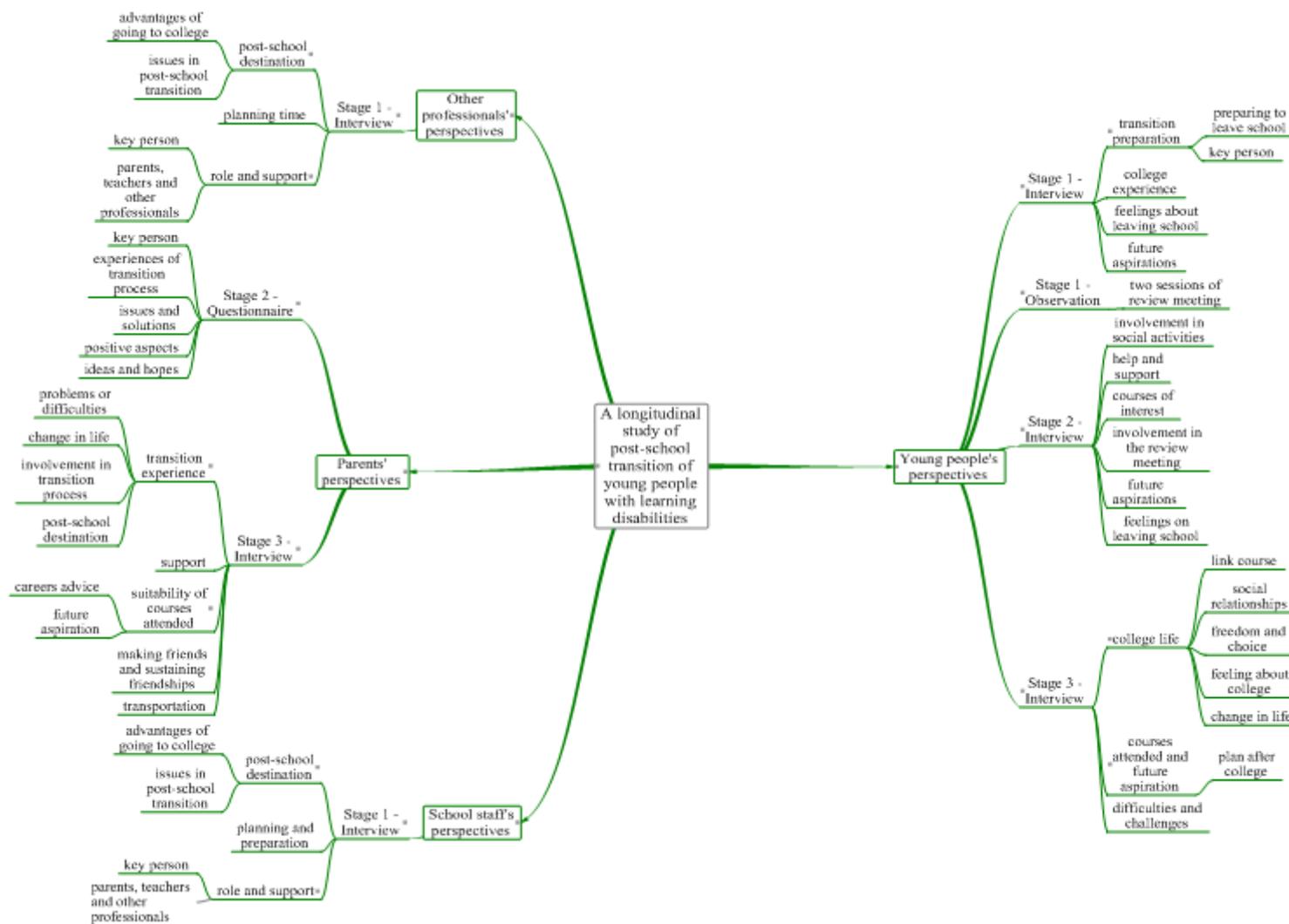


Figure 2.12 Research framework of the current study

Figure 2.12 suggests the research framework of the current study and how it was structured. This longitudinal study aims to explore the experiences of the transition planning and preparation of young people with learning disabilities in special and mainstream schools in one local authority in Scotland. The current study is influenced by the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) and the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004). According to the Ecological Systems Theory, interaction between and within layers plays a significant role during transitions (refer to sub-section 2.6.2 for further detail). In this study, the interconnection of each ecological layer is further explored in several aspects (refer to Figure 2.10). For example, the individual's self-worth and interaction with family members becomes the main focus at the microsystem layer. At the mesosystem layer, the interaction between home, school and college is explored. In addition, the interaction among multi-agencies such as the Social Work, Educational Psychology Services, Barnardo's and Skills Development Scotland in supporting young people in transition is discussed at the exosystem layer. Finally, at the macrosystem layer, the legislation perspectives, such as the policy of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 are also taken into consideration.

In line with the Social Model of Disability, the current study explores the contemporary social organisation relating to the transition of young people with learning disabilities. As the social environment is the central idea in this model, the elements of the environment, which include the people, social, physical and emotional factors are explored. However, it should be noted that both theories used in this study only provide a framework for generating the whole picture of the transition of young people with learning disabilities. Analogically, a complete set of the pieces of a puzzle needs to be put together before the whole idea or picture can be understood.

Chapter 3 will discuss in detail how the study was conducted.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains details of the methods and analyses used in this study, which mainly employed a qualitative approach. There are two main reasons why a qualitative approach was chosen. First, I wanted to tell the story from the participants' point of view rather than acting as an 'expert' who passes judgment on the participants; and second, my inclination was towards writing in a literary style (Creswell, 1994) rather than in a factual or historical manner. As such, the key way of collecting data was to conduct an in-depth semi-structured interview with the participants. Four different groups of participants, namely the young people, the parents, the school staff and other professionals participated in three different stages of the longitudinal study.

These four different groups were purposely chosen in my study because I wanted to look at the different perspectives of different people and to hear their voices. In fact, an effective way to support young people with learning disabilities is to ensure that both their families' and their voices are heard and supported by the policy makers and practitioners (The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2005).

The epistemological stance of this study was based on the constructionism approach in which the perspectives from various stakeholders were explored. The focus of research from the constructionist perspective is on exploring the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences in the world they live in, and how the contexts of events and situations and the placement of these within wider social environments have impacted

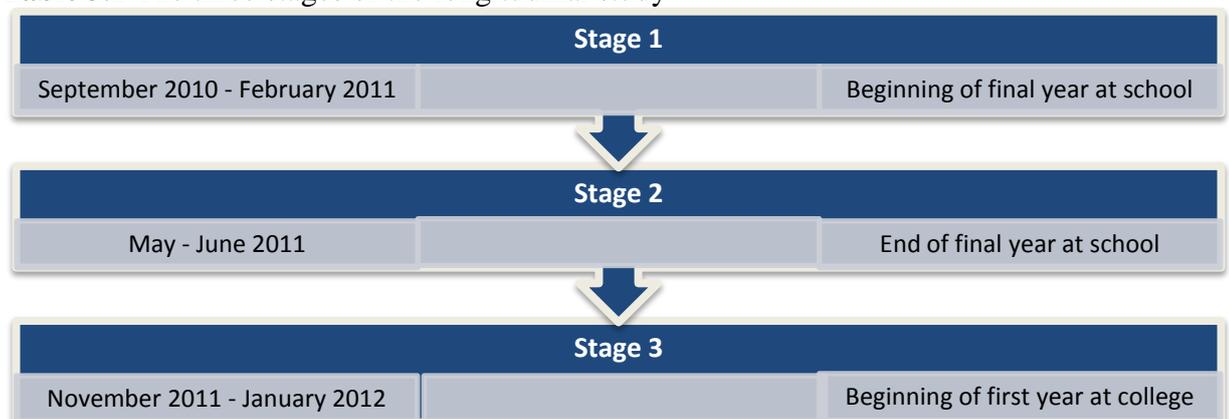
on constructed understandings (Grbich, 2013). According to Grbich (2013), constructionism is based on the view that various realities are presumed by means of different people experiencing these in a different way. In line with this paradigm, data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and observation of transition meetings. Indeed, the reality for the young people might be different from that of the professionals and their parents. By keeping to this paradigm, different voices could be captured around the same topic.

More importantly, being able to interview the young people and their parents, for instance, would also enable the triangulation of data (Gilbert, 2004). I believe that by considering a variety of perspectives, not only would those who give their views feel more involved in transition planning and preparation, but also any decisions made later on would be more justifiable and valued. For instance, apart from obtaining the parents' and other professionals' views in my study, the views of the young people themselves were much more important, as the decisions that they will make later on would have a big impact on their future life, especially in determining the course that they would like to take after leaving school. In fact, they were the ones (apart from their parents) who would bear the consequences the most, if a wrong decision was made, such as the wrong choice of course while at college. In addition, past research has also shown that people with mild or moderate learning disabilities are well able to reflect on their experiences and to give rational accounts of their emotions and in many cases, their sources of information are more likely to be reliable compared to their parents' perspectives which might differ (The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2005). Due to this necessity, multiple perspectives from different people were gathered.

In addition, questionnaires and observation were also chosen as other methods for collecting the data in this study (refer to Figure 2.12 in the previous chapter). In brief, Figure 2.12 describes my overall paradigm of this qualitative research. According to Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima, and Haider (2011, p. 2083), a paradigm is essentially a worldview, a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place. It is through this worldview that this longitudinal study was constructed and carried out.

A longitudinal study was chosen as I wanted to see the progress made by the same participants over a period of time. Thus, data were collected at different time points in order to follow the young people's 'journey' throughout the transition process from school to post-school destinations. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) remark, the longitudinal study gathers data over an extended period of time. It may take from several weeks or months, as in a short-term study, or up to many years, as in the case of a long-term investigation. This study was done in three different stages, covering a period from the final year at school up to the first year at college. Stage 1 covered the period from September 2010 to February 2011, Stage 2 from May to June 2011 and Stage 3 from November 2011 to January 2012 (See Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1** The three stages of the longitudinal study



In the following sections, each stage will be discussed separately, in order to see the differences among the three stages easily.

### 3.2 Stage 1

As stated above, this stage covered a period from September 2010 to February 2011, which is when the young people were at the start of their final year of school. The time was purposely chosen to find out when planning and preparation to leave school started.

#### 3.2.1 Demographics of participants

At this stage the participants were divided into three main groups: the young people, the school staff and other professionals who worked closely with the young people. Overall, 57 individuals participated in this stage (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2** Total number of participants in Stage 1

Participants	Number	Gender	
		Male	Female
Young people	16	13	03
School staff	31	05	26
Other professionals	10	01	09
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>38</b>

This section looks at the details of the demographics of the individuals who participated in this stage.

### **3.2.2 Young People's Profiles**

Altogether, 16 young people aged between 15 and 17 from five different schools in one local authority including one special school were involved in this stage. Of the 16, the majority of the young people interviewed were male (n=13). Eight were in S4, seven in S5 and only one was in S6. (Note that S4 is the last year of compulsory education in Scotland). On the whole, eleven of them were categorised as having a learning disability and the other five were on the Autism Spectrum (see Table 3.3).

They were chosen by the teacher-in-charge based upon the criteria given by me, which included those with mild to moderate learning disabilities and those potentially leaving school by the end of the academic school year of 2010/2011. In one school, the young people on the autism spectrum were also involved. Although initially the number of potential young people to interview seemed to be more than was mentioned by the teacher-in-charge, only 16 returned the consent form and agreed to participate.

**Table 3.3** Demographic of Young People

Code	Gender	Age	School Year	School Code	Type of Disability	Mainstream or Special School
YP 1	Male	15	S4	SC	LD	Mainstream (Faith school)
YP 2	Male	15	S4	SC	LD	Mainstream (Faith school)
YP 3	Male	15	S4	SD	LD	Mainstream (Faith school)
YP 4	Male	15	S4	SD	LD	Mainstream (Faith school)
YP 5	Male	16	S5	SE	LD	Special
YP 6	Male	16	S5	SA	AS	Mainstream (Enhanced Provision)
YP 7	Male	16	S5	SE	LD	Special
YP 8	Male	16	S5	SC	LD	Mainstream (Faith school)
YP 9	Female	15	S4	SB	LD	Mainstream
YP 10	Female	15	S4	SB	LD	Mainstream
YP 11	Male	16	S4	SA	LD	Mainstream
YP 12	Male	16	S5	SA	AS	Mainstream (Enhanced Provision)
YP 13	Male	16	S5	SA	AS	Mainstream (Enhanced Provision)
YP 14	Male	16	S4	SC	LD	Mainstream (Faith school)
YP 15	Male	17	S5	SA	AS	Mainstream (Enhanced Provision)
YP 16	Female	17	S6	SA	AS	Mainstream (Enhanced Provision)

LD – Learning Disability

AS – Autism Spectrum

Considering the involvement of the young people in my study, it should be noted that although the criteria for selecting the young people were given to the teacher-in-charge, one could still argue as to what extent the criteria were followed rather than staff bias or judgement playing a part. As Groundwater-Smith puts it:

*In considering who is consulted in inquiries involving young people, it is important to take account of issues related to equity and social justice. Are only those students who are likely to put a good face on things the ones who meet the researcher? Have some been excluded because they may have difficulties in formulating their ideas? Perhaps they have speech or learning difficulties, or are just being seen as 'difficult'.*

*(Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 124)*

According to Groundwater-Smith (2007), the young people are generally willing participants in school-based inquiry projects, nonetheless they might be easily persuaded and naive on occasion. This notion was true when asked whether or not they would like to take part in the second interview, as all of them agreed easily after the rationale for the second interview was explained. However, it is vital that they understand their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw (Groundwater-Smith, 2007).

### **3.2.3 Professionals' Profiles**

The professionals who participated can be split into two groups, namely 31 school staff from six different schools, and 10 other professionals from different agencies who were engaged or working closely with the young people. Of the 31 school staff involved in this study, 27 were teachers and the other 4 were classroom assistants (see Table 3.4).

Among the teachers involved were the Head Teacher/Deputy Head Teacher, Principal Teacher Support for Learning, Principal Teacher Guidance, Class Teacher, and Support for Learning Teacher. As can be seen from Table 3.4, the majority were female (n=26). The criteria for their participation were their close involvement in the transition process and also their close relationship with the young people.

**Table 3.4** Demographic of School Staff

ROLE		DH T	PT SFL	PT G	GT	SFL T	BL T	CA	TOTAL
Gender	Male	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	5
	Female	2	8	2	1	8	1	4	26
Age	31 – 40	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	5
	41 – 50	0	1	0	1	3	0	2	7
	51 – 60	3	7	1	0	5	1	1	18
	>61	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
School	SA	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	5
	SB	0	2	0	0	5	1	3	11
	SC	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	6
	SD	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
	SE	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3
	SF	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	4
Highest Academic Qualification	Master's	3	3	0	0	5	0	0	11
	Bachelor's	0	3	2	1	5	0	0	11
	Diploma	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	6
	Certificate	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Years of experience	0 – 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	6 – 10	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	6
	11 - 15	0	2	1	0	2	0	1	6
	16 – 20	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
	>21	4	6	1	0	2	1	0	14
Years of experience in that role	0 – 5	0	3	0	0	4	0	3	10
	6 – 10	0	2	2	0	5	0	0	9
	11 – 15	4	3	0	0	0	1	1	9
	16 – 20	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3

Note: DHT – Deputy Head Teacher, PT SFL – Principal Teacher Support for Learning, PT G – Principal Teacher Guidance, GT – Guidance Teacher, SFL T – Support for Learning Teacher, BL T – Bilingual Teacher, CA – Classroom Assistant

In addition, 10 other professionals from different agencies and organisations were also involved in this study. Table 3.5 shows the demographic of the other professionals in detail.

**Table 3.5** Demographic of other professionals

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Highest Academic Qualification</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Years of Experience in that role</b>
Employment Unit	41-45	Male	Assistant Manager	Diploma	21	16
Barnardo's	46-50	Female	Project Worker	Master's	19	9
Careers Scotland	56-60	Female	Careers Adviser	Master's	16	12
Social Work Department	46-50	Female	Transition Worker	Diploma	16	16
Discover Opportunities (16+ LC)	25-30	Female	Project Manager	NA	14	1
MCMC	46-50	Female	Manager	Bachelor's	3	3
Education Department	51-55	Female	Coordinator ASN	Bachelor's	34	4
College	51-55	Female	Curriculum Manager	Bachelor's	16	3
College	51-55	Female	Transition Worker	HNC	21	9
City Council	46-50	Female	Educational Psychologist	Master's	7	3

As can be seen from Table 3.5, most of the other professionals who participated were female (n=9), with ages ranging from 25 to 60 years old and who represented different agencies. Most of them had more than 14 years of working experience (n=8) and from at least one year up to 16 years of experience in their current roles. In terms of academic qualifications, the lowest academic qualification was an HNC (n=1) and the highest was a Master's degree (n=3). The criteria of their participation in this study was their job scope and involvement with the young people.

### 3.2.4 Procedures

As this research involved young people with aged under 18 years old with ASN, the Enhanced Disclosure was first of all required and this was obtained in May 2010. Prior to that, the Malaysian High Commission issued a Certificate of Good Conduct in March 2010. Approval from the Local Authority's Education Department was also sought to carry out the study in the schools within one local authority and this was successfully gained in August 2010 (see Appendix 1). Finally, ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) was gained in August 2010 before the interviews were conducted (see Appendix 2). The UREC approval was gained three times as the study had three stages of study and each stage had a different set of instruments. Table 3.6 shows the chronological order of the steps taken at this stage.

**Table 0.6** Chronological order of steps taken at Stage 1



Once approval from the Education Department had been granted, attempts to get access to all the schools within the local authority were made. Official letters were sent to all the Head Teachers of every secondary school in the local authority. This was followed by phone calls to confirm that they had received the letters. However, out of all the schools contacted, only six agreed to take part in the study. After getting consent from the six schools, a preliminary visit to all the schools was arranged in order to get more information and to identify the potential participants. Details of the research were made clear during the meetings, either with the Head Teacher or the Deputy Head Teacher, of all the schools involved. The teacher in charge of the young people involved was introduced to me and follow up steps were discussed in detail with them about the criteria for the potential participants. This included the young people and also the teachers who have been working with the young people.

After several discussions through phone calls and e-mails, all of the participants were identified by the teachers in charge and dates for the interviews were arranged with all the participants. Prior to that, a hard copy of the information sheet about the study and the consent form for the participants and the parents were passed on to the teacher in charge and also via email. It should be noted that all of the participant information sheets and consent forms were provided separately at each stage (see examples of stage 1 in Appendices 3 - 8). The semi-structured interviews with the young people were only conducted after getting the signed consent form from their parents. Of all the six schools, one school failed to return any of the consent forms, thus resulting in zero participation from the young people although the interviews were successfully carried out with the teachers.

All of the relevant school staff and the young people were informed about the interview process prior to the interview being conducted. This included information about voluntary participation, their right to withdraw at any time during the interview session and study, the confidentiality of their identification (their names and schools would be anonymised), the purpose of the audio recording as well as the rationale for the data collected for the present study. As for the young people, they were accompanied by one staff member, either a teacher or a classroom assistant during the interview. However, they remained silent throughout the interview sessions, except for one or two occasions when they spoke if I had a communication problem with the young people (e.g., what they said was not clear). At the end of the session they were also asked to state whether or not they would agree to be interviewed for the next stage of the data collection. All the interview sessions with the young people and the school staff were tape-recorded after their consent was gained.

Prior to contacting the schools, contact had been made with the other professionals as they were the first group to be interviewed. This contact was made via phone calls and e-mails with these professionals and arrangements were then made to conduct the semi-structured interviews. All of the 10 professionals contacted agreed to be interviewed face to face at their respective workplaces, except one professional who preferred the interview schedule to be sent to her via email after an initial visit. Like the school staff and the young people, the process of the interview was clearly explained and consent was sought before the interview was conducted. All the interview sessions were also audio-recorded with their permission, except for the sessions with two participants who refused their interviews to be audio-recorded. As a result, note taking was used as an alternative to audio-recording for analysis purposes. In order to validate the data, respondent validity (Miller, 2012) was ensured by rewriting the notes in a narrative

form and sending it back via email to the two participants to confirm what they said was right or wrong. Out of the two, one participant made a few corrections to the notes that had been sent to her, while the other participant was satisfied with the notes sent and no further corrections were made.

Altogether, the whole process of the first stage interview sessions covered a period from September 2010 to February 2011, with the professionals being the first group to be interviewed, followed by the school staff and finally the young people. Although initially it was planned for the interview sessions to be finished by December 2010, they had to be delayed for another two months due to both the severe weather conditions at the end of 2010 and the school holidays.

### **3.2.5 Interview schedule design**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the semi-structured interview was the main method used to collect data in this study. According to Drever (1995, p. 1), the semi-structured interview *“means that the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked. This leaves the detailed structure to be worked out during the interview. The person interviewed can answer at some length in his or her own words, and the interviewer responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answers”*. The rationale for using the semi-structured interview in this study was not only to gain rich data from the interviewees in a more flexible manner, but also, more importantly, to clarify any misunderstandings about the questions asked, or answers given, by using probes.

An interview schedule is a written list of questions, either open-ended or closed-ended that is used by an interviewer in a person-to-person interaction (Kumar, 2005). The interview schedules in this stage were designed in two parts; one for the young people and one for the school staff and the other professionals. These schedules were designed by considering the questions posed in the previous studies by Beresford (2004), Kaehne and Beyer (2009) and Smart (2004). The interview schedule for the young people comprised 14 questions and was divided into three parts. Questions 1 – 6 were the closed-ended questions and required the participants to choose the answer from the list provided. Question 7 consisted of eight statements regarding getting ready to leave school and required the participants to answer ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Don’t Know’ as a response to the statements. Finally, Questions 8 – 14 were the open-ended questions in which further information was sought from the participants (see Appendix 9). According to Drever (1995), the closed questions offer little scope for the answer and assert the interviewer’s control, while open questions offer a wide range of options. As such, a mixture of closed and open questions was used in the interview schedule as it reflected one of the main characteristics of semi-structured interviews (Drever, 1995).

As for the interview schedule for the school staff and the other professionals, a semi-structured interview was also used and was comprised of nine main questions and was followed by probing questions (see Appendix 10).

### **3.2.6 Observation of review meeting**

Observation is one of the ways to get first-hand data or information. According to Newby (2010), observation is an organised process with structures and protocols which guarantees that the data are valid and reliable. In this study, observation was undertaken of two review meetings which were both held at the special school. The main reason for

using this method was to observe the proceedings, including its agenda, the participation of those involved, as well as the interaction between the members during the meeting. For this purpose, observation was seen as the most appropriate method of data collection. It should be noted that this was non-participant observation (Kumar, 2005), meaning that I did not get involved in the meeting, but rather remained a silent and passive observer, watching and listening to the meeting and drawing conclusions from the observation. Prior to the observation, permission was sought from the Deputy Head Teacher of the special school as well as those present at the meeting. Detailed information about these observations is reported in the next chapter.

### **3.3 Stage 2**

At this stage, the young people were at the end of their final year of secondary school which covered a period from May to June 2011.

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

Altogether nine young people agreed to be interviewed again at this stage, even though during the first stage all of them wrote 'Yes' as a sign of agreement for the interview to be carried out again at the second stage (see Table 3.7). It should be noted that at this point in time, of all the 16 young people interviewed during the first stage, only five were still at school. Of the five, three were from School A and two were from School E which was the special school. Of the three from School A, two had decided to stay on at school and only one decided to go to college. Thus, only one was interviewed from this school, as my criterion was to interview those who were going to college. Of the remaining eight who were interviewed during this stage, two were interviewed at their respective homes, with consent given from both the young people and their parents, while the rest, including the one from School A were interviewed at their respective schools with the arrangements made by the teacher-in-charge. Five others could not be

traced even though attempts had been made to contact all of them with the help of the teachers-in-charge.

**Table 3.7** Total number of participants at Stage 2

Participants	Number	Gender	
		Male	Female
Young people	09	07	02
Parents	07	02	05
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>07</b>

As for the parents, out of 16 parents who were approached, only seven returned the questionnaire (refer to Table 3.7). Even though a polite reminder was made by telephone two weeks before the deadline, the number remained unchanged until the deadline.

### 3.3.2 Procedures

This stage involved the semi-structured interview sessions with the young people and questionnaires being sent to their parents. As this was the first time the views of the parents were sought, it was deemed convenient that the data was collected via questionnaire rather than through a face-to-face interview (note that the interview with the parents was undertaken during the third stage of this study). Not only did it save time, but this also avoided additional costs. As Kumar (2005) has noted, the advantages of questionnaires include that they are less expensive in terms of time, and human and financial resources. Besides, the data obtained from the questionnaire can be used to follow up with a further study via the interviews with the parents during the following

stage. As Drever (1995) states, a questionnaire survey provides the opportunity to select interesting issues or cases to be followed up in depth through interviews.

Procedures similar to those in Stage 1 were repeated by gaining the consent of the young people and their parents as well as ethical approval from the UREC (see Appendix 11). Table 3.8 shows the chronological order of data collection in Stage 2. The only difference in this stage was that the Enhanced Disclosure was not required as I had already obtained it in the first stage.

**Table 3.8** Chronological order of data collection at Stage 2



As for the questionnaire for the parents, all the questionnaires were sent with a stamp and a self addressed envelope via the teachers-in-charge of all the five schools (note that one school was not included because there were no young people participating in the interview). Telephone calls were then made to follow up whether or not they had received and responded to the questionnaire. In order to reduce bias in the questionnaire as participants may under-report (e.g. avoid socially undesirable responses) or over-report (give socially desirable answers) (Cohen et al., 2011), face-to-face interviews

were subsequently undertaken with the parents during the third stage so as to explore their views in more detail.

### **3.3.3 Interview schedules and questionnaire design**

The interview schedules were again designed based on the criteria that I was looking for in my study. This time, the schedules were designed in the form of a mind map and a poster so that the young people could easily understand what was required of them. Two versions of the mind map were created (one for male and one for female participants) with slightly different pictures that were associated with the different genders (see Appendices 12 and 13). They were created using the Mind Genius software and consisted of six main themes, namely the possible places after school, the support, the activities, the review meeting, the future aspirations and the preferred college course. Each theme represented one particular topic that was then explored further with the young people during the interview session. As for the poster format (see Appendix 14), it consisted of 20 feeling icons that represented human face caricature emotions and the young people were asked to choose any of the icons that represented their feelings at the beginning of their final year at school and towards the end of their final year at school. The icons were retrieved from the following website:

<https://eee.uci.edu/wiki/images/b/b0/Emotions.JPG>

The decision to use a mind map and a poster format was made due to the lack of responses from the young people during the first stage when text-form and verbal interview questions were used. It was hoped that by looking at something visual, more insights could be provided by the young people. According to Lewis and Porter (2004), the use of visual or enactive methods (e.g. photograph, video) has the potential for shifting control to the participant, as the potential range of response can be wider,

indeed limitless. Likewise, the use of photographs or sketches can also help elicit the young people's voice, which probably cannot be portrayed by words alone (Jindal-Snape, 2012).

The questionnaire for the parents consisted of nine main questions. Questions 1 – 2 required them to choose an answer from the list provided, Question 3 was designed based on a five-point Likert scale where they were asked to choose five options, namely 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree' and 'don't know' to respond to each of the 16 statements, while Questions 4 – 9 provided them with space to express their views in detail (see Appendix 15). In addition, the instructions also stated that they had the option of leaving Questions 3 – 9 blank.

### **3.4 Stage 3**

This stage covered a period from November 2011 to January 2012 which is when the young people had already started their first year at college.

#### **3.4.1 Participants**

Of the 16 young people interviewed during the first stage, nine were interviewed again in the second stage and 11 were interviewed again in the final stage. (Details of the summary of data collection for all three stages can be found in Chapter 6). As mentioned earlier, two young people had decided to carry on to S6 and thus were excluded from this study as it did not meet my criteria. One interview was not carried out as despite attempts to track him down via letter, there was no response. Two other young people could not be interviewed despite agreed appointments and permissions. However, upon reaching their houses to conduct the interview as agreed, it was found that the first young person had been told to leave the house by her parent and the other young person could not be interviewed because the parent was unwell. Although repeat

attempts were made to interview one of them at the college after discussing this and asking for permission from the parent, according to the college staff, the young person decided not to take part. The participant's right to withdraw from my study at any time was respected (BERA, 2011). As a result, the young person did not participate in Stage 3. However, his parent agreed to be interviewed over the telephone. All the interview sessions took place at their respective homes with permission given by their parents. Table 3.9 shows the total number of participants at Stage 3.

**Table 3.9** Total number of participants at Stage 3

Participants	Number	Gender	
		Male	Female
Young people	11	09	02
Parents	12	01	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>

As for the parents, of the remaining 14, only two parents were unable to take part. For one parent, this was due to work commitments, although the interview session was successfully done with his daughter. The other parent did not respond at all, although attempts were made to contact them via letter as no telephone number was given (details about the data collection of parents during Stages 2 and 3 can be seen in Chapter 6).

### **3.4.2 Procedures**

This stage involved the interview sessions with the young people and their parents. Interview arrangements were made through phone calls to the parents. In addition, two letters were sent to the parents as no contact number was given to me. One parent replied, giving consent for the interview to take place at her house. Prior to the

interview taking place, approval from the UREC was sought for the third time and this was successfully obtained in November 2011 (see Appendix 16). Table 3.10 shows the chronological order of data collection for Stage 3.

**Table 3.10** Chronological order of data collection for Stage 3



Permission for the interview was sought beforehand and confirmation was also provided via telephone prior to the interview taking place. All of the interview sessions were conducted face-to-face in the parents' respective homes with one exception where one parent preferred to be interviewed over the telephone. The interview sessions for both the young people and their parents were done on the same day, with the young person being interviewed first, followed by their parents. For all the interview sessions, neither the parents nor the young person were present during each other's interviews.

### **3.4.3 Interview schedule design**

As for the previous stage, I also designed the interview schedules for this stage after discussing them with my supervisors. This time the interview schedule for the young people was simplified and designed in a graphic format and six illustrative pictures were chosen to represent six main themes. They were: college life, people who support you,

friendships and socialisation, difficulties and challenges, transportation, and courses learned and future aspiration (see Appendix 17). This was purposely thought out and designed to serve as a complementary means so as to aid the young people when responding to the questions asked during the interview session. As Lewis and Porter (2004) highlight, complementary methods like drawings, diaries, cameras, etc. are often best used alongside additional methods through which their views can be explored.

As for the parents, I also designed the semi-structured interview schedule which covered five themes, namely transition process, support, courses learned and future aspiration, friendships and socialisation, and transportation (see Appendix 18). Each theme was then followed by probing questions so as to explore further information about their views. The questions were almost the same as the questions asked to the young people so that I could see the similarities or differences between both the view of the parents and their children with regards to the themes discussed.

As with the previous stage, the interview procedures were made clear before the interview took place and they were also told that they have the option of not answering any of the questions. All the interview sessions were audio-recorded with their permission.

### **3.5 Analysis of data**

All the interview audio-recordings were first transcribed verbatim and then analysed using NVivo software. Since it was a semi-structured interview, the duration of the interview varied from one interview to another. The shortest interview session took around fifteen minutes, while the longest interview was around an hour and fifteen minutes. However, the majority of the interview sessions lasted between thirty to forty

five minutes, as noted on the information sheet. Once all the transcripts were complete, the data were analysed manually using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify any recurring themes or patterns that have similar meanings in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79), “*thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail*”. However, as the data was quite extensive, it was then transferred to the NVivo software which aided me considerably in terms of organising them thematically. In order to measure the reliability of the interpretation of the data, six transcripts were selected randomly from all four groups of participants, namely of two young people, two teachers and one each from the parent group and the other professionals. The transcripts were then coded by two coders, me and one other coder (who was a Malay male lecturer) in order to measure the degree of agreements and disagreements in the six selected transcripts. The scores were then calculated using the formula of inter-rater reliability by adding the number of agreements, dividing them by the number of agreements and disagreements and then multiplying them by one hundred (Jindal-Snape & Topping, 2010). Details of the scores can be seen in Table 3.11.

**Table 3.11** The agreements and disagreements between the two coders

<b>Transcripts</b>	<b>No. of agreements</b>	<b>No. of disagreements</b>	<b>No. of agreements + disagreements</b>	<b>Inter-rater reliability scores</b>
Young person 1	49	0	49	100%
Young person 2	42	0	42	100%
Teacher 1	68	8	76	89.5%
Teacher 2	60	2	62	96.8%
Parent	25	5	30	83.3%
Professional	88	16	104	84.6%

The average score was 91.5 per cent. The agreements between the two coders were significantly higher, suggesting that the reliability of the interpretation of the data was

also highly significant. As Kadzin (1977) suggests, per cent agreement that achieves 70 per cent or 80 per cent is accepted as satisfactory for a good analysis.

As for the questionnaire, the analysis of the qualitative data was done using NVivo software in order to find the themes. However, for question 3 in the questionnaire, where the five-point Likert scale was employed, simple statistics were used to manually analyse the data, as the number of participants was relatively small.

### **3.6 Ethics approval**

Ethics approval from the University Research Ethical Committee of the University of Dundee was gained three times as there were three stages of this study. The first approval for Stage 1 was gained on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2010, the second approval for Stage 2 was gained on April 21<sup>st</sup> 2011 and the final approval for Stage 3 was approved on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

#### **3.6.1 Informed consent**

Obtaining informed consent is the most basic condition that is required prior to collecting data. In my case the study involved young people under 18 years old, which means that they are all legally considered to be children in the UK context (Doyle, 2007). Therefore, informed consent needed to be sought first, not only from the young people but also from their parents. However, according to Doyle it is not necessary to seek parental permission in some cases, which is in accordance with the ethical guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) which state that:

*Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity. Children should therefore be facilitated to give fully informed consent (BERA, 2011, p. 6).*

In order to make sure that all of the participants in my study really understood their role as participants and to assure that ethical conduct was properly exercised, an information sheet was attached at all three stages, which included information about the objectives of the study. The information sheet also indicated how the study would be conducted, how the data would be collected and what would happen to the data. It included details of where it would be stored and who would get access to it. Emphasis was also made in relation to the confidentiality of the study, ensuring the anonymity of the participants, their rights of withdrawal at any stage, taking into consideration the repercussions of their participation and finally it was proposed how the data would be dealt with once the study was finished. With regards to withdrawal, participants were also reminded at appropriate intervals of their right to withdraw (Lewis & Porter, 2004).

Prior to starting each interview with the participants, the information sheet was explained verbally to ensure that the participants really understood the contents, in order to confirm that they were informed when asked for their permission to conduct the interview. More importantly, as Groundwater-Smith (2007) suggests, the basic ethical principle is to prevent harm and wrongdoing to others, to promote what is beneficial to them, and to be respectful and fair to the participants. However, Lewis and Porter (2004) in their study of young people with learning disabilities, raise an issue about the extent a participant is able to give fully informed consent. Similarly, considering autonomy as one of the common ethical principles and the notion of respect for persons,

Gorman (2007) raises the question as to whether people fully understand what they are consenting to.

There is some concern that the young people may not fully understand the usefulness of the study even though this was clearly explained to them. This was seen while interviewing the young people, as some of them were struggling to understand my questions and therefore the questions had to be repeated and rephrased. However, that difficulty was not experienced while interviewing the school staff and the other professionals.

### **3.6.2 Some ethical and methodological issues involved in research with young people with learning disabilities**

Despite the careful attention given to all the steps and procedures prior to engaging with the young people, there are always particular complexities and complications when researching young people with learning disabilities. Literature shows that many studies have been carried out with regards to issues involving research with young people with disabilities (for example, see Lewis & Porter, 2004; Stalker, 1998; Walmsley, 2001). Lewis and Porter (2004), for instance, suggested guidelines to support the critical self-evaluation of those involved in systematically gathering the views of young people with learning disabilities. The guidelines were divided into 10 broad sections: research aims, ethics (including access/gatekeepers; consent/assent; confidentiality/anonymity/secretcy, recognition, feedback and ownership and social responsibility) sampling, design and communication. This suggests that at every step thorough consideration should be given to the effects and consequences that will, or may, happen to young people with learning disabilities before, during and after the study is completed. For instance, in terms of gaining consent/assent, Lewis and Porter (2004) stressed the importance of

reminding participants of their right to withdraw at appropriate intervals. Also, they argued that the right to silence/privacy (informed dissent) of a participant should be recognised. A study by Burke *et al.* (2003) and Gilbert (2004) argued that enabling people with disabilities to fully understand what research entails is one of the key challenges to gaining informed consent.

Another issue which is also discussed by researchers when doing research with people with disabilities is related to the participatory and emancipatory research paradigms which create key questions about the nature of relationships in the research process (Gilbert, 2004). According to Chappell (2000), a participatory research enables partnerships between researchers and participants, while emancipatory research allows participants to control the whole research process, thus encouraging a change in the social position of those with a disability. However, the literature shows that these two terms are used interchangeably (Gilbert, 2004; Northway, 2000; Stalker, 1998). The distinction between participatory and emancipatory approaches described by Gilbert (2004) and Walmsley (2001) is shown in Table 3.12.

**Table 3.12** The distinction between participatory and emancipatory approaches

<b>Participatory approach</b>	<b>Emancipatory approach</b>
Concerned with the experiences of people with learning disabilities.	Based on the social model of disability.
Can be influenced by normalisation theory, phenomenological approaches or by the social model of disability.	Can employ both qualitative and quantitative methods.
The researcher works in partnership with participants.	The researcher's expertise is placed at the disposal of people with disabilities.
Employs qualitative methods.	Committed to changing the conditions of the relationships between the researcher and the researched.
Aims to interpret and explain the experiences of people with learning disabilities.	
The researcher remains accountable to the funding body.	

[Source: Gilbert (2004) and Walmsley (2001)]

Although the differences between both approaches can be clearly seen in Table 3, Gilbert (2004) pointed out that participatory research can also be viewed as a transitional stage towards emancipatory research. Gilbert's view is supported by Burke *et al.* (2003) who suggest that participatory research can be a step along the way to carrying out emancipatory research, particularly for those who may not have the experience, confidence or control over resources.

Based on the issues discussed in this section regarding research with people with disabilities, it can be said that involving people with disabilities in research has its own constraints and challenges including the various issues surrounding them. However, research also shows that many ideas and suggestions have been put forward to address these challenges (for instance, see Gilbert, 2004), right from the very beginning before the research is carried out, up until it is completed. Therefore, due to the multiple disabilities and complexities that people with disabilities have, it is ethical to develop methods of data collection, that are meaningful for each participant, and to provide them with opportunities to share their 'voice'.

In conclusion, although in the past the young people's views and voices have been widely ignored by researchers and practitioners, there has been a growing recognition of the significance of listening to all people with disabilities, to gain insight into their lives and to discover the issues concerning them, including listening to their views and perceptions about the service provision available to them (The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2005).

### **3.7. Keeping and handling of data**

All the electronic data, including the audio-recorded data, were stored and saved in a secure password protected computer at the University of Dundee as well as on my personal password protected laptop. In addition, the data was also saved and backed up securely on an external hard drive as a safeguard step. Paper copies were kept and saved in a secured cabinet at the University of Dundee. All the raw data will be destroyed upon the completion of my PhD and any publications emerging thereafter.

The next three chapters will discuss the results of the study, at three different stages, namely Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 respectively.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION – STAGE I**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this research was a longitudinal study in which data were collected at three different stages. This chapter looks at the findings from the first stage of the data collection which took place from September 2010 to February 2011. In addition, an observation of two review meeting sessions which took place in January 2011 at the special school will also be reported at this stage. The findings from the other two stages will be discussed in the following two chapters. This is done in order to facilitate the reader to see any differences or similarities from each stage, particularly in the young people's views with regards to transition issues after being interviewed three times at three different stages.

#### **4.2 Results and Discussion**

As there were three main groups interviewed at this stage, this section will look at the findings from each group separately, followed by the discussion thereafter.

##### **4.2.1 Young people's perspectives**

Four main themes emerged from the interviews with the young people about their views and experiences regarding leaving school. These were transition preparation, college experience, feelings about leaving school and future aspirations.

###### **4.2.1.1 Transition preparation**

The young people were asked about preparations that they had made in order to leave school. The results showed that the two most frequent responses were the discussion

and meeting about leaving school as well as going to the link course at college, as mentioned by 10 out of 16 young people. For example, one participant commented:

*They put me to college for a while, to see if I can get into that.*  
(YP2 SB)

Other responses mentioned included getting the best information from the school, having more chances and options as well as getting help to look for a job or courses at college. When asked further if the school could make things easier for them, the majority of them said 'No' or 'Don't Know'.

The young people were also asked about what they could do better to get ready. 11 said that they had no idea. Of the remaining five, one mentioned that he could have learned more about college and another said that he could be more confident and more positive. One said that she hoped to improve her behaviour and another said that he would concentrate on the course that would be best for him to gain a career. Another stated that he would try to get a part-time job with the help of his mother to be more prepared for leaving school.

In addition, the young people were also asked about the first time they had a talk about leaving school. Eight said that they had first talked about leaving school one year ago (2009) and six said that it was the current year (2010). One was not sure and another one had forgotten about the first time that he had talked about leaving school.

### **Preparing to leave school**

In one of the interview questions (Q7), eight statements concerning their preparations for leaving school were given to the participants and they were asked to respond either

‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Don’t Know’. Three different cards marked with the word ‘Yes’, ‘No’ and ‘Don’t Know’ were also provided in case they needed to use them to facilitate their response to the statements. Table 4.1 shows the statements asked and the responses from the participants.

**Table 4.1** Preparing to leave school

Statements	Responses		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. I think I know what it will be like to leave school.	14	1	1
2. I felt happy about how people talked to one another about leaving school.	14	0	2
3. I am happy with how the school has helped me get ready.	16	0	0
4. The school has given me lots of time to get ready for leaving school.	16	0	0
5. I am happy with the way the school spoke to me about what leaving school would be like.	16	0	0
6. The school knew all the people who could help me do what I want after finishing school.	14	0	2
7. I feel ready to leave school and be an adult.	10	1	5
8. I have had the chance to talk about lots of different things I can do when I leave school.	15	0	1

In response to Statement 7, 10 people responded ‘Yes’, five responded ‘Don’t Know’ and only one responded ‘No’ to the statement about whether they feel ready to leave school and be an adult. The fact that the statement required two answers, one being ‘felt ready to leave school’ and the other being ‘ready to be an adult’, might have confused them as the answer to each could be different. Perhaps some of them felt ready to leave school but possibly not ready to be an adult. This might suggest why they chose ‘Don’t Know’. Overall, the findings show that the majority of the young people responded positively (by saying ‘Yes’) to almost all the questions asked regarding preparations for leaving school. This seems to suggest that most of them felt prepared or at least felt that they had been prepared to leave school.

## **Key Person**

The finding revealed that both the Principal Teacher Support for Learning and the class teacher were the most frequent names mentioned by the young people (n=8) when asked who had been discussing leaving school with them. This was not surprising as they were the closest and had a direct link with the young people. In fact, evidence suggests that teachers are often the trusted adults to whom children tell their secrets, hopes, fears and wishes, in various ways including conversation, play, writing or drawing (Lindsey, 1994). This was followed by parents as the second most mentioned names (n=7), followed by the Support for Learning teacher and the Guidance teacher (n=6) and the college staff (n=5). Other names mentioned included the Careers Scotland staff (n=3), Social Worker (n=2), the Deputy Head Teacher, the Head House teacher, school staff assistant, sibling and friend (n=1) respectively. Topping and Foggie (2010) suggest that the main role of the key person is to make sure that one consistent person is in-charge all the way through to support the young person going through the transition process. In addition, their position is unique in such a way that they perform as the one and only contact person for the young person to access the various agencies; advocating and negotiating on behalf of the young person and work as the major source for all agencies should they have any difficulties. Evidence also shows that the existence of a key worker or lead professional who assumes responsibility for a co-ordination role is one of the key attributes of effective multi-agency working (F. Mitchell, 2012). F. Mitchell (2012) further states that where the key worker had a clearly defined role, and were adequately managed, supported and trained, services resulted in a better outcome.

### **4.2.1.2 College Experience**

Having a visit to the college and undergoing a college link course were among the activities experienced by the young people whilst they were still at school. These

activities indicate a good practice which suggests that the young people should be given a chance to try out options and/or make visits to adult services (Heslop et al., 2002). Of the 16 young people interviewed, nine had had the experience of going to the college link course programme organised by the school with cooperation from the college. All of them stated that they enjoyed the experience at the college. Two others had experienced a visit to college, whereas the remaining five had never had any experience of college or been on a college visit. One said he was looking forward to the college link course after Christmas. Even though the last five had no experience of the college, they reported a few visits by the Careers staff to their school and had discussed possible careers for their future, as can be seen in the following comment:

*Um, yeah they have um, helped me um, like find my likes and dislikes, jobs and what was your um best job you could do and what is the job like you could choose, good to make it opportunity, it might not be the best, but if you have no choice, you could just go for it. (YP3 SA)*

Those who had been on the college link course said that there were various things that they learned throughout the course including art, cooking, building, construction, gardening, language, personal profiling, health, computing, hospitality and also a bus trip. While the two who went for a visit said that they just toured around the college as one of them commented:

*Um, it was just like a walk around the place you know, you know like um seeing classroom where everything like a staff tour around the college, you know, just to see what it's like and everything when I do go there and stuff. (YP4 SA)*

Although the two young people did not have the opportunity to go on the link course, it is vital to note that having a visit to college is also one of the factors that could ease the transition from school to college. According to Heslop et al. (2002), having regular visits, over a period of time, to the possible options and involving the young person in

reaching decisions about where they wanted to move on to seemed to be among the crucial aspects of making successful transitions from school for the young people and their families.

#### **4.2.1.3 Feelings about leaving school**

Of all the 16 participants interviewed, only two said that they felt scared about leaving school. However, both of them did not explain in detail why they felt this way. Another participant said that he felt scared when he thought about getting a job.

A few also expressed their concern about finding a job and maintaining a normal life or going to college after leaving school, as college is much bigger than the school, and they wondered what the work at college would be like. One participant stated:

*Um, I am going to have hard to get a job or going to college.  
(YP1 SB)*

In addition, several participants also stated that they were not really sure about one particular thing or course that they wanted to do after leaving school. One said it was quite hard to respond as he had not experienced it yet.

*...it's hard to describe about how I feel 'cos it's not happened yet... I'm not sure sorry. I just tend to not think about it that much. (YP5 SA)*

Nevertheless, the majority of the participants said that they felt happy about leaving school even though a few of them said that they felt a bit sad as well. It seems that having the opportunity to go to college, making new friends, having new staff, a new environment and new experiences were among the things that really made them feel excited about leaving school. One participant commented:

*I feel quite happy moving on, about leaving school and making new friends. I'm doing different things at college just now. (YP1 SE)*

Some of them also mentioned getting a job, moving on and being more independent when they expressed their happiness about leaving school. One participant stated:

*Going to college, get a job, get a car, get a house. (YP2 SC)*

The other participant said:

*Exciting part is when you're leaving school, you don't need to come back... you don't need to come back to school for life... 'cos I get going ask some jobs somewhere. (YP1 SA)*

Despite feeling happy about leaving school, a variety of other feelings were also expressed by the young people as a result of leaving school. These can be seen from the following responses:

*That I'm gonna miss my old friends and my old teachers. (YP1 SE)*

*Sad that I'll be leaving here because I know everyone, but I get to meet new people at college so, yeah. (YP6 SA)*

*Um, I'm just worried if I am not going to do well, you know 'cos college is much more bigger and more harder than secondary school...but I most worry about how the work's gonna be at the college. (YP5 SA)*

One also said that he felt worried when thinking about living on his own after leaving school. Perhaps he was not ready to live on his own just yet. On the other hand, two young people spoke of how school had made them feel more confident about preparing to leave school. As one commented:

*Um , I feel fairly confident um with the school cause the school has given me a lot of confidence, a lot of independence and hopefully I can, make me a better person. (YP2 SA)*

This shows how important the school's role is in terms of increasing the confidence and independence levels of the young people as part of the preparation to leave school. In short, while some young people seemed to be happy about leaving school, others were quite uncertain about how to face and cope with the new situation. As Smart (2004) points out, the transition at this stage demands a great change and readjustment both in negative and positive ways. Heslop et al. (2002) in their study also discovered that the young people found it difficult to leave school, especially their friends and a familiar environment. However, they also welcomed the idea of moving on as they were bored at school and sometimes they felt that they were ready to start a new life.

#### **4.2.1.4 Future Aspirations**

Some of the young people seemed to be able to articulate their wishes when asked about future aspirations upon leaving school. Among the aspirations mentioned, two participants stated careers in art, shops and hospitality, and others mentioned other careers and jobs such as teacher, gardening, music, computing and electronics. One mentioned his dream of working abroad in the future but said that he needed to study the language first.

*Um, I wish going to work for a company but first I need to go to college and get my grades or so first, and then move to a certain place where this company is, but in order to do that I have to speak a certain language which I'm not fond of, but I probably get used to it within a couple of years, but here you go France, well let's speak French and move out to Paris may be (YP1 SE)*

Another four said that they were not sure and didn't know what they were going to do in the future, whilst three others did not specifically mention their aspirations in the future. Although these seven did not mention their future aspirations in particular, all of them were looking forward to entering college as their next destination post school.

#### **4.2.2 School Staff Perspectives**

As has been mentioned earlier, 31 school staff consisting of 27 teachers and four classroom assistants were interviewed at Stage 1. Through the semi-structured interviews, their views and experiences of the planning and preparation of the post-school transition of the young people with ASN in both special and mainstream schools were explored. Three main themes emerged from the interviews with the school staff, namely post-school destination, planning and preparation, and the role and support. Under these main themes, several sub-themes emerged and these will be discussed alongside the main themes.

##### **4.2.2.1 Post-school Destination**

For the majority of the young people with Additional Support Needs, college seems to be the destination after leaving school. This was clearly stated by three of the Principal Teachers Support for Learning. One of them commented:

*We have very good links with [College] and for the majority of my pupils that is their destination. (PTSFL1 SF)*

In fact, many parents of the young people expected that their sons or daughters would move from school to college together with their peers, and in many cases the schools seemed to have made the choices about the colleges that the young people would attend, rather than they themselves and their families choosing what might be the most suitable for them (Heslop et al., 2002). Likewise, Kaehne and Beyer (2008) found that college

and further education remain the major pathway for the young people, where skills and qualifications are the main focus regardless of whether these will help them with obtaining a meaningful job at a later stage.

Despite all the young people interviewed in this study who were potentially going to college after leaving school, there was still tension among teachers, as places at college were limited, as reported by a number of teachers.

*But there aren't enough places at college and it's like everything else, um there's a greater demand for them than there are places and I know just now there's a waiting list of places 'cos it's been all schools in [city]. (SFLT4 SB)*

In addition, eleven expressed their concern about the pathways of the post-school destinations for the young people. For example, one teacher commented:

*I'm not entirely sure what's there for them after school...because I'm not entirely aware of what there is available for these people after school and post-16. (PTG SF)*

While there were a few alternatives that the young people could opt for apart from the college, as mentioned by a number of teachers, these places are not appropriate for all the young people. As a result, many would go back to school, as mentioned by some of the teachers.

*...um, a lot of our pupils end up coming back for fifth year um, just because there's nothing else for them, really. (PTSFL1 SB)*

Although going back to fifth and sixth year might be one solution, this does not solve the whole problem. For example, one teacher raised the question of whether they can cope with that or not. In addition, another teacher said:

*...we had in my last school, we had pupils but that was where there was no um, the learning difficulty was not cognitive I would say, so they were able to access the mainstream curriculum um, because their needs were not of a cognitive nature... (PTSFL2 SB)*

To sum up, the limitation in terms of places and choices of post-school destination for the young people seems to be a continuous dilemma for everyone, including the teachers who have been trying their best to find appropriate provisions for the young people. While other alternatives seem to be available, places at these provisions are not always appropriate for everybody, including going back to fifth year.

### **The advantages of going to college**

As the main focus of this study was to look at those young people who will be going to college after school, the question was also directed towards the benefits or advantages of going to college. Participants spoke about how the life skills course could help the young people to be more independent and more prepared to face the outside world. The majority of participants also believed that going on the link course could provide the young people with experience of being at college as preparation before going there full time. It could also give them chance to assess the college before deciding whether college is really for them or not, as mentioned by another teacher. For example, one Support for Learning teacher commented:

*I think visiting the different places and linking with the college or the place by going out a day every week gets them used to seeing the different person, gets them used to being with the new group of adults they're gonna be with, who the key workers are gonna be. I think that's very important they used to these people so that they don't feel you know apprehensive and things like that, I think it's a great benefit that they go out on a link and visit the places and try as much of the week as possible to go. (SFLT1 SE)*

In addition, two teachers described how the young people felt after attending the link course:

*...um, I think that they realise by going on the link course is different to school. It's not just more of the same and I think that does motivate them and I think we do start after they've been to the college link course anyway to just feel a little bit more grown up, a little bit more mature and yeah I think it does them a lot of good actually, yeah. (DHT SE)*

Despite the many advantages that the young people could gain from going to college, Morris (2002), on the other hand, perceives further education for many young people with disabilities as an important opportunity for them to 'catch up' and compensate as a result of the poor experience of secondary schooling, therefore, they need extra time to gain qualifications and make the most of their potential.

Nevertheless, it appears that there are many things that the young people could benefit from by going to the link course at college. In short, the opportunity that they had might help them with deciding whether or not college is the right destination for them.

### **Issues related to post-school transition**

The school staff members were asked about the issues related to the post-school transition that they experienced throughout the transition process of the young people and how they overcame them. Overall, these issues are clustered into four main headings and the results are summarised in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2** Issues related to the post-school transition of the young people and recommendations reported by the school staff

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Recommendations and solutions</b>
<b><u>Resources (e.g. places, funding, courses, staff and information):</u></b>	
Shortage of places at college. (11)	Expanding college places and more choice of provisions. (3)
Dispute about the funding issues that affected the services and facilities (for example, who would provide funding if the destination was located outwith the local authority). (5)	
Courses offered were not appropriate for all young people. (4)	Offering another type of vocational course at college to a slightly more able pupil. (2)
The staff lack information about college. (4)	Organising a visit to the college for the staff. (4) Asking the previous students who had been to college to come and speak to their juniors. (2)
Lack of staff to support (for example, to accompany the young people during the link course). (3)	Adding more staff including the transition workers. (1)
Transportation issues (for example, getting the bus to the link course). (3)	By compromising with the other staff.(1)
Not all young people were able to study full time due to lack of places. (2)	Create more places at college or more work places. (1)
<b><u>Parents and young people's engagement and commitment:</u></b>	
Young people and parents were not ready and were anxious about facing a new environment. (8)	Offering more variety of subject choices at school to get them prepared (e.g. by introducing more vocational subjects). (1) Building up good relationships with the parents and the young person. (1)
Parents and young people's disengagement. (8)	Matching up the young people's skills with a course at college to attract their interest. (2) Trying to get parental support. (1)
Young people lack confidence, motivation and have low self-esteem. (3)	
Different expectations of young people and parents. (3)	
Parents refused to allow their children to travel independently. (2)	Parents should recognise that their children need to develop independent skills as much as they possibly can. (1)
Communication problem due to English not being first language. (2)	Organising an interpreter. (1)
Parents have learning disabilities. (2)	Giving a lot of support to ensure that they can really understand what was suggested to the child. (1)
Young people having difficulty in expressing themselves verbally. (1)	Keeping a diary so that it could always be referred back to later on. (1)
<b><u>Time constraints:</u></b>	
Finding the right time to assemble all the professionals including parents for a meeting. (3)	Having an informal discussion via telephone or email with the other professionals. (1)

<p><b>Weaknesses in the system:</b> Information about the transition process among the staff was inconsistent and not standardised. (4)</p>	<p>Building up links between the school and the college staff to share information. (2) Providing a step-by-step guide on transition through the booklet. (1)</p>
<p>No clear information about the move between children's services and adult services. (2)</p>	<p>Making sure the adult services were accessible before they move into it. (2)</p>

*NB: Number in bracket indicates the number of responses*

As seen in Table 4.2, the issues related to the engagement and commitment of the parents and young people were the most frequently discussed topic among the school staff. It shows that the school staff members felt that many issues involving the parents and the young people in the transition process were still unsolved. Despite some ideas being suggested, some of the problems were still seen as difficult to address, as one teacher stated:

*...getting the pupil to engage, we can't force them to engage, so if they are not willing to do it and not willing to attend, then it will be very difficult to tell how any sort of smooth transition or any transition that is going to be effective, that will get them into further education or employment or wherever they want to go.  
(PTG SF)*

This was followed by the issues related to the resources, including the shortage of places, lack of information about college and inappropriate courses. In this regard, one teacher highlighted the need to have, not only more places at college to cater for the demand for more students, but also the support for work places for the young people concerned. This could indirectly give another chance to the young people who did not get a place at college, the opportunity to work, rather than staying on at school without any assurance of their future. She described how the young people could make a better attempt at working if proper support was given to them:

*Well, I mean some of our youngsters are very good with elderly people, you know it could be working with elderly people. Some of them are very good with elderly people. We run an ASDAN group and part of the challenge that they did was to run a Bingo event for one of the oldies pension of clubs and they did these children of our Additional Support Needs. They ran the Bingo, they ran a raffle for the old people and they helped provide teas and coffees for them. And it really went very well because they have a good relationship with elderly people. Some of the girls in particular get on with young children. You know some of them have younger brothers and sisters and have helped to look after them. So you know things like, things like that may be beauty and hairdressing, you know. (PTSFL1 SB)*

The same teacher further proposed the need for the school to have more subject choices at school which are more vocationally oriented so that the young people would be more prepared for the full time work of college. This could also expose them more to the working world. She commented:

*There is a school in [city] who actually, when youngsters come into the fourth year, they actually provide in the subject choices and they've got room in the school to do it, hair dressing, nails, you know doing nail painting and training them how to do that. They also have a garage where they do motor mechanic work. Now there is only one school in [city] that has that. I think there could be more of that. And that we could be offering youngsters in the school and then that will prepare them for either go on to college for a full time placement or to work. But we don't have the facilities, we don't have room in the school to provide that or we don't have the funding either. So you know that's not gonna happen tomorrow, unfortunately. (PTSFL1 SB)*

In addition, the issue of the shortage of places unavoidably has a relation to the budget and money as reported by five teachers. One of them commented:

*I think a lot of this has got to do with funding. I think funding is a really big issue. Um, they just don't have the places and the money to fund all the children for the transition period, making sure that they've got places to go. (SFLT1 SE)*

In terms of the staff lacking information about college, apart from visiting the college, as suggested by four school staff members, two other school staff members also recommended inviting previous students to come and speak to the existing students. This idea was similar to the suggestion made by Carnaby and Lewis (2005) who proposed establishing a 'buddy' system where the young people visiting either employment or further education settings can get in contact with the ex-students already working in these settings and can spend time with and talk to them about their experiences. By speaking to those who have gone through the same experience, the young people can get very useful advice to support and prepare them for the post-school transition. Jindal-Snape et al. (2012) in their study, found that parent-parent interaction has been one of the most important support mechanisms in supporting each other during transition periods. This was discovered through interacting with those who have been, or are going through the same experience. Similarly, Morris (2002) found that parents and young people often find information by chance, that is through informal networks of other parents and young people, as the most useful source of information. Although these studies were done in a different setting and with a different sample, the idea suggests that getting advice from someone who has gone through the same experience before is very useful for creating a smoother transition.

The other two issues highlighted by the school staff were issues related to the weaknesses in the system and the time constraints. It indicates that there are still some flaws in the transition process of the young people that need thorough attention and improvement. Although the solutions to these difficulties were only personal thoughts from the participants, some of these ideas might be worth trying. However, the extent to which these ideas can be implemented might depend on various factors especially the funding and the agreement of all the parties involved.

#### 4.2.2.2 Planning and Preparation

The school staff members were also asked when transition preparation and planning from school to post-school started. The responses given were varied, according to their roles and responsibilities at the school. The majority of the participants said that the transition planning generally started in the third year. This corresponds with the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 which states that the period prior to a child or young person leaving school should be done at least 12 months before the expected leaving date, that is when a young person is 15 years old or earlier than that (HMIe, 2007). For example, one teacher stated:

*...it's based on, it certainly [city's name] Council policy that they will start from third year. The transition starts from third year, yeah. (PTSFL1 SA)*

However, some had different views, including staff from the same school, as to when transition planning should start. Perhaps this is not surprising as they hold different roles in the school. The gap of the period varied from as short as a few months before leaving school to as long as several years. The following two examples illustrate their different views:

*I'd certainly say a few months before they left, before they were going. (CA1 SC)*

*... as I say we start, we had an open evening last night with Primary 7 and so we already started the process with some parents last night. We've already identified pupils in Primary 6 and Primary 7 who have Additional Support Needs and they will be coming up to us for more than the two day visit and at that point we're getting to know the parents, and again, just, you know, just feeding them information and making them aware of these things and aware that they can understand. (PTSFL1 SD)*

Six others mentioned that the planning time could vary depending on the young people's individual needs and ability level. As one teacher commented:

*I think for most of them I don't know if there's any point thinking about it much earlier than that because of the nature of our children and their learning difficulties. Looking ahead, that's difficult, that is hard, you know, so um I don't even know at present S4 whether they have fully taken on board that they're going to be leaving school and then um, going to college. It's um that something nature of difficulty and they do tend to be quite immature as well. (PTSFL1 SC)*

Two teachers said that it could also vary depending on the performance of the young people and how well they can get on at school. One teacher stated:

*It's probably best during the third year for staff to start identifying those that need it and because by that point in time it would be identifying whether they are likely to achieve Standard Grade, Access 3 or Intermediate 1 Grade and then that would identify whether they are going to be staying on until the fifth year or whether they are likely to be needing to find alternative arrangements at the end of fourth year because school wouldn't be, you know, the correct place for them. So, round about the third year point. (PTG SF)*

In one case, one teacher stressed the importance of planning early, especially for the young people who are in care. She commented:

*...the planning time for youngsters who are in care is hugely more important in some ways because youngsters who aren't in care have the continuity of their parents. They're with them supporting through them, but youngsters who are in care potentially turn sixteen and then, you know, they then have to Social Work Department will help them find their own flat, that's a massive extra um thing you know ...they also have to look, find a source of living on their own with no support. So I think, potentially, I think it's more important and that it begins early. (GT SA)*

In short, although many of the school staff seem to follow the policy given by the government with regards to planning time, they also seem to consider the ability of the young people regarding whether they have to start the planning either earlier or later.

In terms of the preparation, the school staff members were asked about what they did to prepare the young people for the transition process. The majority reported that having a transition meeting was the main preparation in the transition process. As Carnaby and Lewis (2005) have noted, a transition review meeting is an essential forum for both, interagency and the young people and their families to cooperate and discuss planning for their future. One school staff member stated:

*It's about I mean the most basic mechanism is having the review meeting, having that regularly, that's where you bring everyone together. That's the baseline. Without that it wouldn't happen successfully. ...but the meeting is probably the most important mechanism for bringing everyone together and discussing things. (GT SA)*

Other preparations noted by the school staff included suggesting the names of the potential young people that are deemed suitable for college and taking them for a visit to college to familiarise themselves with the college environment. Two other school staff members emphasised the importance of the social and personal skills of the young people as preparation for leaving school so that they will be more confident about facing society.

Also mentioned was having a chat with the young people, gathering as much information as possible and keeping them constantly informed about the planning. In addition, dealing with parents and other professionals who are involved with the young people, planning early and making sure that everything was in place as soon as possible

were other ways stated by the school staff to make sure that the planning and preparation goes smoothly.

In short, there seem to be a lot of planning and preparation done by the school to ensure that the process of transition for the young people could run as seamlessly as possible.

#### **4.2.2.3 Role and Support**

Another main theme that emerged from the school staff perspectives is the role and support. It seems that the role and support given by the school staff is very essential for the young people. This section discusses who the key person was in the young people's life, followed by the role and support of the school staff, parents and the other professionals.

##### **Key person**

Although the role of the Principal Teacher Support for Learning seems to be very significant in dealing with the planning and preparation for the transition process, the findings showed that the Guidance teacher appeared to be the most frequently mentioned name (n=14) when asked about the most significant person.

*In our school, it would tend to be the Guidance teacher that would be most likely to have in depth knowledge of the student.  
(PTG SC)*

The Principal Teacher Support for Learning and parents emerged as the second most mentioned names (n=9), followed by the Support for Learning teachers as the third (n=5). The other names mentioned included the careers staff, college staff, other professionals, Health Service, Head House, Pupil Support Worker, an advocate and also one teacher mentioned a neutral person as the key person for the young people.

However, many of them also commented that sometimes it depends on the young people's needs and circumstances as to who they were most comfortable with or had close relationships with and it varies from one young person to another, as described by the following teacher:

*It depends um, for most youngsters, it would be the Guidance teacher, but you know for some of the pupils that we work with up in Support for Learning, we know them probably better than the Guidance teacher. Then it would be somebody from the Support for Learning whoever had worked with that pupil the most, um probably throughout the third and fourth year, would be the best person to do the, to be the key worker. (PTSFL1 SB)*

In one case, one Deputy Head teacher from the special school said that she was the one that would deal with the young people mostly, although the Principal Teacher would also help her with the job, as she stated:

*Well, it would be me overall but my Principal Teacher also takes the share in the transition process as well and she helps me to do some of the meetings and arrange the links, that kind of thing. Overall I would be the person involved. (DHT SE)*

In contrast, the Guidance teacher and the Principal Teacher Support for Learning seemed to be more dominant in dealing with the young people's transition rather than the Deputy Head teacher in the mainstream schools. This was clearly stated by one of the following Principal Teachers Support for Learning:

*Well, I organise on, I organise the meeting and I organise the transition process, so I suppose it would be me. (PTSFL1 SF)*

Overall, while the key persons are considered to be from the Guidance team and the Support for Learning department at school, parents were also seen as the central figures

at home. In other words, the key person can vary according to the environment, depending on where the young person is, whether at school or at home. It all depends on the person they feel most comfortable with.

### **The role and support of parents, teachers and other professionals**

From the school staff members' point of view, the role and support of parents, teachers and other professionals are equally important in helping and easing the transition process of the young people. There seems to be a good relationship between parents and teachers as noted by some school staff members.

*Well, the parents I've worked with have been really superb over the years, they've been very supportive because they've known it, are really care about their children ... so it is a pretty intense relationship with the parents we're having as well. (PTSFL2 SA)*

Similarly, the majority of the school staff seemed to acknowledge the role and support of the other professionals from multi-agency as very essential in the transition process. Table 4.3 illustrates the types of support that the young people received from parents, teachers and other professionals.

**Table 4.3** Types of support from the parents, teachers and other professionals reported by the school staff

<b>Parents</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Other professionals</b>
Participating in the school events (for example, attending parents' night and meetings).	Providing as much information as possible about the transition process.	Being involved in meetings and making a joint decision with all the parties involved.
Helping teachers to pick up their child from the college during the link course.	Identifying and suggesting potential young people who will be going to college.	Supporting families by making a home visit.
Visiting college with the teachers and their child.	Taking the young people to college for a visit.	Providing the skills to the young people in a small group.
Having a good relationship with teachers (even as early as when the child was in the transition period from primary to secondary school).	Inviting speakers from college to give a talk at school.	Keeping in touch with the school leavers to ensure that they are not left behind or feeling abandoned.
	Giving advice and consulting the young people about the	

transition issues.
Backing up the young people whenever there is a conflict between the child and the parents.
Teaching the young people independent travel.
Training and developing the young people's social and personal skills.
Helping the young people who have already left school and need help through an open door system.
Contacting and tracking the school leavers to ensure that they do not disappear off the radar.
Going out and visiting other places that are appropriate for the young people.
Establishing a good relationship with parents and providing information as early as possible.

On the whole, the school staff seemed to suggest that the parents' role is really essential in supporting their children throughout the transition process. This could further help the school to make the transition more seamless for the young people. The relationship between the parents and the school (teachers) is also important and some teachers were found to be very good at establishing a relationship as early as when the child was in the transition period from primary to secondary school. On the other hand, the key role of the teachers seems to be focussing on the young people's well being in order to ensure a smooth and seamless transition process. This was clearly seen in their continued support towards the young people to make sure that their needs are really fulfilled and met. In addition, their support of parents was also as important as that provided to the young people, particularly when it came to resolving conflict between parents and young people. Likewise, the role and support of the multi-agencies seem to be going well at all the schools involved. Perhaps this is due to the strong commitment and relationships between both parties (the school and the multi-agencies) over the past few years.

### 4.2.3 Other professionals' perspectives

Ten other professionals from different agencies gave their views with regard to the transition process of the young people. Three main themes emerged from the other professionals' perspectives: the post-school destination, planning time, and the role and support. This is followed by several sub-themes from each of these themes.

#### 4.2.3.1 Post-school Destination

There seem to be quite a number of other options available given by the participants with regards to post-school destinations, including the respite, day and social work resource centres. Also, one participant spoke about other options such as work training and job opportunities that the young people could choose to gain some skills and work experience. However, these provisions also have limited places which might mean the young people and their parents will be disappointed, as commented on by one participant. As a consequence, some individuals can only go there part time, as the following participant said:

*Um, places in those are quite limited because there's a higher demand than availability, so for some people they are considered as an option but usually that will be a part time place because there just isn't enough to go around for everybody that might, um look, um, would be wanting that. (SH BAR)*

Yet, even where the places were available, those from the special school are seen to be less fortunate in comparison to the other young people, as commented on by the following participant:

*...for the kids at [special school] there is very little for them to go beyond school. They could go to like Social Work Day Centre or the college but that's it, whereas young people would be given the options generally of Get Ready for Work, the Life Skills programme um, ... there's a whole load, there's a whole range, but these young people don't get the optional about which is a shame. (SH DO)*

Nevertheless, some young people were found to choose to stay at school rather than going to other places, as one participant noted:

*For those who are not being selected for the college, they will go back to the school and the school will then think of alternative provision like training centre, the [name] or [name] group which is more related to work experience. Some of the young people choose to stay on at school instead. (SH CL2)*

However, it is not known whether their choice is based on their own option or because there are no other suitable options for them.

### **The advantages of going to college whilst at school**

It seems that the young people could benefit quite a lot from attending the link programme or the bridge week at college. One participant said that the link programme was a good way for the young people to familiarise themselves with the college environment. According to another participant, by having this experience, they could enhance their level of confidence as well as be more mature when it comes to real life when they are at college. As she described:

*... for the young people, especially the autistic, it's good for them because it helps them get used to a totally different routine and structure to their day as well. And I think a lot of them, it increases their confidence and self esteem.... I think a lot of youngsters grow out of school because this is the nature they get a bit older. The college is a different environment than the school, the school's structure. And that they seem to enjoy that they are not wearing the uniform they can wear what they want, you know what I mean. They see the decoration of the rooms, they see the card, the student card that gives them that bit of feelings of grown up. (SH SW)*

Consequently, one participant said that going to college could also be seen as a chance to build a relationship with new people and a new environment which is very important with helping them to surmount the level of anxiety felt when going to a new place and meeting new people. She further added:

*Um, but also to give them a taste of all the different kinds of um opportunities that they have, the subjects that they have, um, so you know it's really an important part of the process and for many young people then, it's that kind of stepping stone, if you like, otherwise they might not attend the full time course without that kind of bridging opportunity, if you like. (SH EP)*

In short, having the opportunity to go to college through the links course could help the young people develop their skills and confidence level when facing new challenges and environments in the future once they have left school.

### **Issues related to post-school transition**

A number of issues related to the post-school transition of young people were raised by participants. These issues are grouped into four main headings and are summarised in Table 4.4. In addition, a number of recommendations and solutions are also shown in response to some of the issues highlighted.

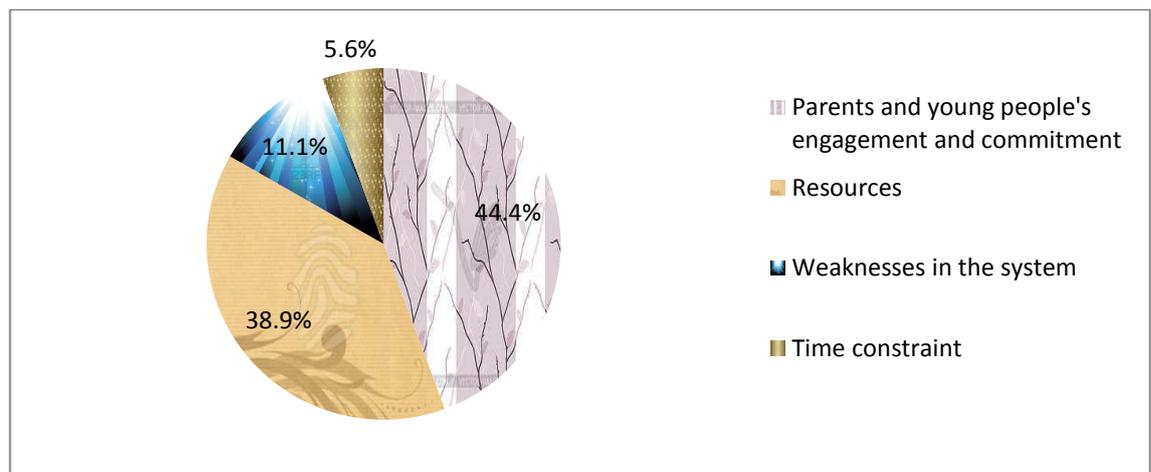
**Table 4.4** Issues related to the post-school transition of the young people and some recommendations reported by the other professionals

Issues	Recommendations and solutions
<b>Resources (e.g. places, funding, staff, courses and information):</b>	
Lack of appropriate post-school destinations. (6)	Having earlier intervention so that a wider range of places could be identified and proper planning could be done for the young people. (2)
Funding and cuts that would affect the resources (e.g. manpower and courses ending). (2)	Make some additional funding available. (1)
Limited places mean some can only opt for a part time place rather than a full time one. (2)	Including or integrating some of the young people in the mainstream courses at college could support their needs. (1)
<b>Parents and young people's engagement and commitment:</b>	
Lack of engagement from parents and young people (e.g. due to being home educated; not registered and hard to reach groups) and not motivated. (4)	
Young people are not independent travellers. (1)	Start looking at independent travel earlier. (1)
<b>Weaknesses in the system:</b>	
Lack of work experience and opportunities which might lead to difficulty in getting jobs in the future for the young people. (3)	Giving each and every young person a work experience in order to broaden their horizons and get a taster for other things. (1) Collaborating with the mainstream providers or employers that could help and provide training provisions for the young people. (2)
Difficulty in implementing the government programmes such as the 16+ Learning Choices and the More Choices More Chances. (3)	Developing promotional materials with the Job Centre. (1)
Lack of consistency in approach (e.g. school staff members are not clear about referring the young person to the appropriate agency). (2)	Setting up a transition email account to facilitate the professionals to make the referral rather than making a telephone call which is more complicated and time consuming. (1)
Inconsistency between the support for the school leavers and the college leavers – more support tends to be provided for the school leavers than the college leavers. (1)	Appointing a local coordinator who would be responsible for supporting the young people all the way through the next step of their life once they leave college. (1)
The move from the children's services to the adult services was not clearly explained to the school staff and the families of the young people. (1)	More clarification is needed. (1)
<b>Time constraints:</b>	
Getting all the professionals together for a meeting. (2)	Keeping everybody in touch via telephone. (1)

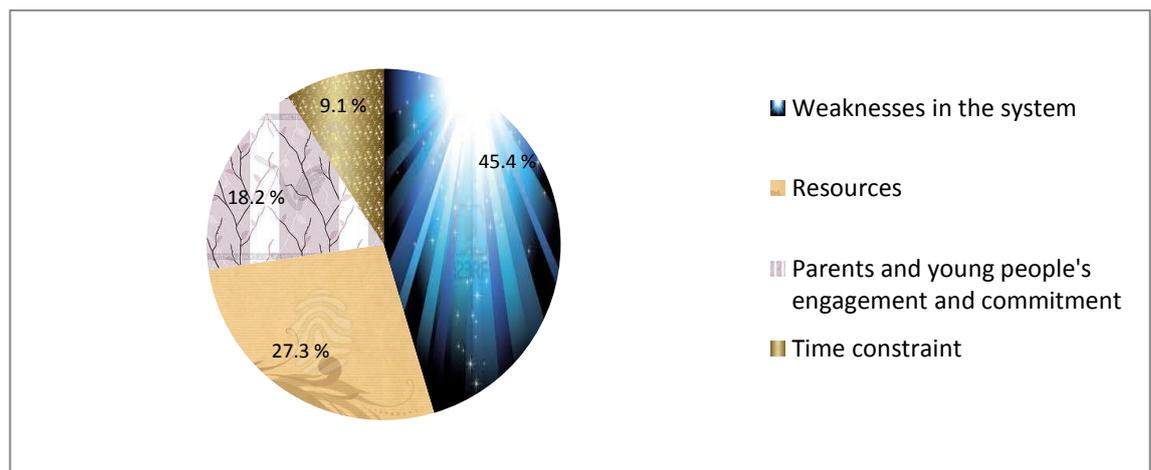
*NB: Number in brackets indicates the number of responses.*

It seems that both the school staff and the other professionals from multi-agencies have the same issues in relation to the difficulties and challenges of the transition process. This can be seen from both, Tables 4.2 and 4.4, where all the main headings were similar. The only difference is the degree of the issues mentioned. The school staff

seemed to highlight more issues concerning the engagement and commitment of the parents and young people, whereas the other professionals perceived the weaknesses in the system as the main issue in the post-school transition of the young people (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Perhaps this is not surprising, as the school staff members are based at the school with the young people and thus have more encounters with the young people and their parents in comparison to the other professionals.



**Figure 4.1** Issues related to post-school transition of young people reported by the school staff



**Figure 4.2** Issues related to post-school transition of young people reported by the other professionals

Some ideas were also suggested by the professionals to address the issues faced by the young people during the transition process. Although some of them were similar to the ones suggested by the school staff, there were some ideas that were different. It highlights the differing views of the school staff and the other professionals about what the best outcomes are for the young people in their post-school transition. While some of these recommendations might be worth considering, it highlights the hopes and expectations of all the professionals that many more issues need to be handled more critically and effectively in order to ensure a better transition process for the young people.

#### **4.2.3.2 Planning time**

In commenting on the planning time of the transition process, the majority of the participants reported and agreed that the legal planning time should start no later than 12 months prior to the young person leaving school, as stated in the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 and amended by the 2009 Act. They believed that this would give ample time for all the parties involved to make and plan the transition process as seamlessly as possible with regards to the young people's future destination. One participant, for example, explained:

*...it allows them to explore in a secondary school setting um, what they may or may not wish to do, so clear what they may or may wish to do, may or may not wish to do after school. So I think it, there are many agencies involved but in a way I think that helps to widen the scope of what's available to them because they have that within a protective environment of a secondary school they can investigate different opportunities and options. (SH ED)*

However, some also seemed to suggest that the process should start much earlier than S3 particularly for those with profound needs at the special school. This view was seconded by three participants. One of them commented:

*Although legally they should start when they are in S3, but sometimes the young people need longer time to have a better understanding of the process especially for those who have profound disabilities. Also, they will experience a lot of anxieties throughout the process. Thus, the earlier the planning starts the better. (SH CL)*

Nevertheless, one participant commented that the transition process should not only mainly focus on the leaving date, but rather it should also consider the quality time that the young people spend while they are in S3 and S4.

*...you know, you shouldn't always be working with them about when you're leaving school, we should be working, if we go too far in advance it's almost like we're putting in their minds that they're thinking about leaving than about making the best time in their S3 and S4 or S5 or S6, so we should be aware of transition but be aware of with planning how the senior time at school's working. (SH MC)*

Although the planning time seems to be varied according to the professionals' views, all factors should be taken into consideration to ensure that the planning time is adequate for the young people to start making a move to their next destination.

#### **4.2.3.3 Role and Support**

The third theme that emerged from the interviews with the other professionals was the role and support. Similar to the school staff, their views were sought on whose role it is to support the young people during the transition process.

### **Key person**

The majority of the participants seemed to believe that the key person could vary depending on the young person's circumstances and how close their relationships were with the key person.

*I think it depends who the child or young person and the family have the strongest link with um, it may be with the Social Work or it may be with the voluntary agency who have been commissioned to deliver services or social work, it may be Health or it may be Education ... (SH ED)*

Interestingly, two of the participants stated that the young person was the key person, since they seemed to be the central point of the process.

*The young person... Well, they should be at the heart of it. (SH BAR)*

### **Parents' role and support**

Participants were then asked about the role and support of parents. One participant commented:

*It depends on the parents, some people are very influential in a very positive way and some are very influential in a negative way. (SH ED)*

Two participants mentioned having a good relationship with parents, although sometimes they did have some difficulties in the relationship.

*We have a good relationship with parents and try our best to work with them for the benefit of their children. However, like the school, sometimes we do have difficulty forming relationships with the parents/guardians but it is very important to work together to support the transition from school to college. (SH CL1)*

Another participant seems to suggest that parents should also have a clear picture about their roles and responsibilities when going through the process and not just be a passive partner.

### **Teachers' and professionals' role and support**

Next, when asked about the teachers' and other professionals' role and support, four participants reported that there seems to be good collaboration and support between all the multi-agencies involved in the transition process of the young people. For example, one participant noted:

*Mostly positive, with teachers and agencies offering assistance in the best interests of the pupil. (SH SDS)*

It appears that one of the main forums for getting all these agencies together was the Joint Action Team (JAT) as stated by two participants. This forum was seen as very efficient in supporting the young people, as one participant commented:

*Um, the young adult JAT is a group of partners you know partners around the post school context who come together to try problem solve, identify the needs and seek um, maybe kind of more support for the young person or if they moved into college for example and don't sustain the place, they dropped out of college and they picked up, they can be referred to the young adult JAT as a contact for you know, try to find something that is more appropriate for the young person or whatever. (SH EP)*

### **The type of support that the young people received**

In general, there were many ways in which the young people were supported as reported by the professionals. This support can be in the form of one-to-one support, family support, group support as well as providing information through various means to the

young people and their family. Table 4.5 illustrates the types of support provided by the other professionals to the young people.

**Table 4.5** Types of support provided by the other professionals

<b>Types of support</b>	<b>Quotation</b>
A home visit	<i>... if anyone doesn't attend the course or falls out the college placement, then they'll put under the referral to the young adult JAT and it will be followed from there. There's a team of people that will go out and knock on the doors of the young people to try and find out what the issues are, what they're doing, try to reengage them back in the process of looking for something more suitable. (SH EP)</i>
Referring the young person to the right person/agency	<i>I have um, for instance a young girl who left school last year. I went down to the careers um, Skills Development Scotland with her to help her through her interview with the careers adviser, um but I don't have the expertise to do that job but I can support people who want to access that. (SH BAR)</i>
Induction programme	<i>In fact, when they come to the college, we also have a programme to help them adapt to the new environment. I put together the programme that the young people will follow when they come to college and support them to undertake this. (SH CL1)</i>
Developing a transition programme	<i>... Um, we developed a transition programme over the summer where the young people um, that have been offered places on the life skills course, 27 places that we offered last year and of those 27 young people, 22 of them, I think it was 22 or 23 of them participated in the summer programme in some way and many of them came for the whole six week block. We replicated some of the opportunities that they would have in college, we brought in Drama teachers, Art teachers, um, Music teachers, we did sports activities, took children for an outing, full day outing for the day... (SH EP)</i>
Providing information via websites	<i>Yeah, they know what's available for them and what they can do themselves and where they can get support if they want support. So I think we, you know, we're looking at websites so they would just go and these are all the trainers pro provisions that you could go to or these are all [name] College courses when they start and how you apply, you know it's that sort of thing, it's very practical support. (SH MC)</i>

In short, there seem to be various ways provided by the other professionals and multi-agencies to support the young people to ensure that they get the best outcome from the transition process.

#### **4.2.4 Observation of the review meeting**

The two observation sessions of the review meeting took place in a meeting room at the special school. Each meeting took approximately thirty minutes. Present at the meeting were the parent (in both meetings, this was the mother), a representative from the college, a Career's Adviser from Careers Scotland, the class teacher, and the Principal Teacher who served as the chair of the meeting as well as recorded the minutes of the meeting. In one of the meetings, a representative from Barnardo's was also present. When asked about the absences of both young people in the meeting, the class teacher said that they themselves chose not to attend the meeting even though both had been invited. The young people's school report was given to those in attendance at the start of the meeting. However, it was not known how many times this meeting had been held prior to that.

The purpose of the meeting was clearly stated. This was to ensure both young people's education programmes are meeting their current needs and to look at possible post-school provision. However, my observation seemed to suggest that in both meetings, the decision had already been made that both young people would be going to the college and the meetings were just to ensure that everything was put in place and went smoothly, and also to discuss any arising matters regarding the transition to the college such as transportation and support of the college. This seemed to suggest that the purpose of the meeting was to look at the possibility of post-school provision was not met as only the provision of college was discussed.

The meeting started with a report from the class teacher about the young people's progress, including their behaviour in class and how they coped with the subjects. Table 4.6 provides the detailed discussion at both meetings.

**Table 4.6** Detailed discussion in the review meeting

YP1	YP2
Reports from the class teacher about his progress, including his behaviour in class and how he coped with the subjects.	Reports from the class teacher about his progress, including his behaviour in class and how he coped with the subjects.
The mother expressed her concern about her son being unaware of Stranger Danger and also worried about him when crossing a road because he could 'switch off' which was quite frightening for her.	The mother stated that her son did not travel independently and was unaware of the dangers and might rush into a road while crossing. The class teacher said that they were doing road safety while out to help her son focus on this.
The mother also asked about the term 'Global Delay' used for her son, and this was explained to her by the Principal Teacher.	The mother was worried about her son going to college. However, she was reassured by the college staff and was told about the strategies they would use when her son started.
The class teacher explained about the independent travel module including the college journey with the young person. The 'Stranger Danger' work would also be done in the class.	The college staff also explained to the mother about the bursary for the transportation and they would provide a taxi if required. The mother agreed for her son to take a taxi providing that he was permitted to use his mobile to tell her of his safe arrival and this was agreed by the college staff.
The Barnardo's staff would be doing a Needs Assessment to ask about supporting the young person with independent travel and also for short breaks as he had been part of the Barnardo's holiday club.	The college would also ask for a support worker to work with her son on his independent travel.
The college staff told the mother about how her son got on really well at his college placement and became a popular member of the group. He was keen and showed an interest in all subjects and could perhaps advance to a more subject related course in two years time. The college staff also told the mother about the available bursary for the transportation and that there would be an adviser to help with the bursary paperwork. In the meantime, her son could have a taxi for travel until he was capable of independent travel and the college would organise a Support Worker at college to aid with independent travel.	

A number of issues arose from the discussion at the meeting above, from my observation:

- What was the function of the Career Adviser's presence since the decision had already been made that the young person was going to college?
- The parents did not contribute much to the meeting. In most cases, they were just told what to do, rather than being asked what they or their sons would like to do.
- Since the decision had been made that their sons were going to the college, no other issues were discussed or raised such as friendships or future aspirations. This, in a way, restricted the parents' rights to have more choices or options for their sons.
- The parents were not even asked whether they or their sons were really happy with the decision made for them. Rather, they seemed to just follow what was decided for their sons.
- The absence of both young people meant that they had no chance to say whether or not they really wanted to go to college. There was a possibility that they might have changed their minds by that time, even though they said they liked it at first. In other words, their voices were unable to be recognised at the time of the meeting.
- The young people's absence also did not seem to affect the meeting or the teachers since the meeting and discussion could still be held. This raises the question of whether the outcome of the meeting would be different if the young people were present.
- The absence of any other key individuals such as an Educational Psychologist, key worker or personal advocate also meant that other forms of support required in the transition process were not fully addressed or explained to the parents.

It was not known how the decision from these two meetings would be delivered to the two young people. It could possibly be that their parents would let them know personally at home, or their teachers could possibly inform them when they were at school. Again, in this regard, the young peoples' rights of whether to accept or reject the decision made about them were not known and needed further exploration.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Despite all the young people interviewed anticipating college as their next destination after school, many of the school staff expressed their concerns about limited places and choices post-school for the young people. Where some other options of places were available, these places were not always appropriate for all the young people. Similarly, some other options of post-school destinations were also discussed by the other professionals. In addition, they also spoke about the work training and job opportunities as the other alternatives of post-school destinations for the young people. However, the same issue of limited places still arises, similar to what was stated by Kaehne and Beyer (2009), even if the employment support was available, there were still concerns expressed by the social services staff that the opportunities offered did not match the young people's aspirations

Where limited places were seen as inevitable, the school staff and other professionals cited going back to school or going to college part time as one way to avoid young people from going nowhere. However, two teachers questioned the idea of going back to school in particular, which seems to be impractical, especially when considering the young people's lack of ability to cope with the mainstream curriculum.

Despite all this, college still remains the most popular destination for the young people post-school. This is similar to Townsley (2004), who found that further education seems to be a very popular progression pathway for young people with learning difficulties. In fact, both the school staff and the other professionals believed and shared similar views that young people can benefit a lot from going to the link course. This included gaining new experiences, building new relationships with other people, increasing their level of confidence as well as becoming more mature in terms of facing a new phase of their life. This demonstrates the anticipation of the young people, the school staff and the other professionals that more places are needed at college to cater for the demands so that the skills they possess will not deteriorate and their time will be fully utilised in a meaningful way. In contrast, Kaehne and Beyer (2009) found that the stakeholders would prefer to see more young people explore work opportunities after school although very few do as many would still end up at further education colleges. Their argument was that employment is seen as a more prominent goal of transition planning for the young people.

Despite the other professionals stating that the young people could benefit a lot from college, Kaehne and Beyer (2009) further argue that staying at educational facilities does not necessarily make the young people more mature. In fact, according to them, the young people should be challenged with new social situations which are deemed to be more beneficial as this might sharpen their sense of confidence and polish their adaptive skills. This raises the question of to what extent their views (the other professionals) are true (regarding gaining skills whilst at college).

The majority of young people stated two things that they did when preparing to leave school - have a discussion and meeting about leaving school and go on the link course.

This coincides with the school staff members' perspectives which also focussed on the meeting as the main agenda of preparing the young people for the transition. Likewise, the school staff and the young people also mentioned providing and receiving information with regards to leaving school. These similarities indicate good cooperation between the school staff and the young people in the preparation for leaving school.

Most of the young people also reported feeling ready to leave school, with college being the most popular destination post-school. Perhaps this is due to the exposure to the college through the link course that many of them had whilst still at school which made them feel more prepared to leave school. Many also seem to feel more happy than sad about leaving school even though the feelings were sometimes a mix of both, thus suggesting that their feelings about leaving school were almost the same as those of all the young people, regardless of their additional support needs. In addition, many of them were also found to have aspirations like becoming a teacher and a chef in the future and this suggests that their aspirations are similar to those of other young people in general. Evidence suggests that young people with disabilities have the same aspirations as their non-disabled peers (Morris, 2002; Stalker, 2012), but they need specific support to overcome the barriers of their disability.

The data also show that half of the young people had started participating in preparatory activities one year prior to leaving school, while most of the other half started in the current year, which is when they were expected to leave school. Meanwhile, the school staff and the other professionals have different views in terms of when the planning period started. According to them the planning period could vary depending on the circumstances of the young people, although many would follow the period stipulated in the statutory transition planning legislation. This indicates that they believe the planning

period could be flexible and take into consideration the young people's ability and circumstances. In other words, the more severe the disability a young person has, the more time is needed to plan the transition and vice versa.

In relation to the role and support, the Principal Teachers Support for Learning and their staff, the class teacher and parents appear to be the most important people according to the young people with supporting them through the transition process. On the other hand, the school staff perceived the Guidance teacher as the key person in the transition process of the young people followed by the Principal Teacher Support for Learning and parents as the second most key person. It highlights the differing views of the young people and the school staff about the key person. Nevertheless, many of the school staff also believed that the key person could be varied depending on how close the young person was to that particular person. The same view was expressed by the other professionals who also believed that the key person could be flexible depending on the young person's circumstances. This means that each and every young person has a different key person supporting them, although the main person would be either the Support for Learning team or the Guidance team. However, it should be noted that the data showed that this situation only occurs at the mainstream school and not at the special school in which the Deputy Head Teacher would be the main or a key person in supporting the young person all the way through. This was due to no Support for Learning team at the special school. Thus, the task and responsibility of the transition process is handled entirely by the Deputy Head Teacher with the help of some other school staff members.

In terms of supporting the young people, there seems to be good cooperation between the school staff and the other professionals as well as the parents. Some of the school

staff reported having a good relationship with the parents in terms of supporting the young people, although a few reported having some difficulties, especially when parents or young people did not want to engage with the school. Likewise, the majority of them also acknowledged the role and support of the other professionals as very crucial in the transition process. The same view was also expressed by the other professionals, in which they reported having a good relationship and collaboration between each other, although they sometimes had difficulty in forming relationships, particularly with the parents.

In conclusion, this chapter gives an overview of the post-school transition process of young people with ASN by looking at the perspectives of three different groups at the first of the three stages of the longitudinal study. While many of the issues with the transition process have been identified in the previous research about the transition of disabled young people (P. Heslop & Abbott, 2007), the solutions and recommendations highlighted by the participants in this study should be seriously taken into consideration and are worth implementing, at least at the local authority level where the study was conducted. The findings could also contribute to a new insight for all the parties involved in order to improve the transition process for the young people in the future.

**Chapter 5****RESULTS AND DISCUSSION – STAGE 2****5.1 Introduction**

This chapter reports the findings from the second stage of the longitudinal study that was carried out between May and July 2011, just before the summer holiday started which marks the end of the school year in Scotland. Although attempts were made to interview all 16 individuals from Stage 1, only nine agreed to participate and thus returned the consent form with the help of the teacher in charge. Five had left school and did not respond to the letter that was sent earlier and thus could not be interviewed. The other two decided to carry on to S5 and thus did not meet my criteria, which was to look at those who were going to college. Therefore, both were taken off the list. Table 5.1 shows the number of participants interviewed at both stages. Of the nine interviews, seven were carried out at their respective schools while the other two were conducted at their respective homes after getting consent from their parents.

In addition, this chapter also reports the findings from the questionnaire that was sent to the parents of the young people. Of all sixteen sets of questionnaires distributed, seven were returned. The questionnaire mainly included qualitative data. The analysis of the data from the interview and the questionnaire was done using NVivo software (refer to Chapter 3 for details).

**Table 5.1** Summary of data collection stages (Young People)

School	YP	Stage 1	Stage 2
SA	1 YP1 SA	✓	Left school
	2 YP2 SA	✓	Carried on to S5
	3 YP3 SA	✓	Carried on to S5
	4 YP4 SA	✓	✓
	5 YP5 SA	✓	Left school
	6 YP6 SA	✓	Left school
SB	1 YP1 SB	✓	✓
	2 YP2 SB	✓	✓
SC	1 YP1 SC	✓	✓
	2 YP2 SC	✓	✓
	3 YP3 SC	✓	✓
	4 YP4 SC	✓	✓
SD	1 YP1 SD	✓	Left school
	2 YP2 SD	✓	Left school
SE	1 YP1 SE	✓	✓
	2 YP2 SE	✓	✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>09</b>

✓ = Interview carried out

## 5.2 Results and Discussion

This section discusses the themes that emerged from the interviews with the young people and from the questionnaires completed by the parents.

### 5.2.1 Young people's perspectives

Five main themes emerged from what the young people said with regards to post-school transition: Involvement in social activities, help and support, courses of interest, involvement in the review meeting and future aspirations.

### 5.2.1.1 Involvement in social activities

The young people were asked about their involvement in social activities such as clubs or groups and what they did in their leisure time. The results indicate that out of nine young people, three did not join any clubs or groups while the other three said that they did join some clubs but had already left some time ago. One participant said:

*Well, before, I joined the club, but I left to move up here. It's like games club, the games club where you can play that ping-pong something like that. (YPI SE)*

One participant stated that he joined a youth club and another one joined an Art and Music group at college. One participant said that he was waiting to join a swimming club and his name was on the waiting list at the moment. In short, more than half of the young people joined clubs or groups and they seemed happy with the activities.

When asked about their leisure activities, their replies were mixed, as summarised in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2** Young people's leisure activities (more than one response given)

Leisure activities	Number of young people
Going out with family members or friends to watch movies or shopping	4
Playing football with friends and siblings	3
Playing American football	1
Playing golf or skateboarding	1
Playing video games or watching TV	1

In addition, one young person said that he was working as a volunteer at Cancer Research UK at that time to gain some experience. He commented:

*I'm working for voluntary just now... Um, just like talking with people so like if I do, going to get a job, I would be able to communicate a bit more and there's also like working with money and stuff by couples of Maths some, so it would be, so it's just like giving a feel of if I do get a proper job I know what I've got to be doing. (YP3 SC)*

In short, although three of them did not join any clubs or groups, all of them still took part in some activities, either with their friends or family members, including becoming a volunteer to fill their leisure time.

#### **5.2.1.2 Help and Support**

The young people were asked about the people who have been helping and supporting them throughout the transition process. All of them said that they had a lot of support from their parents. Two young people commented:

*My mum (gives support) the most, my mum the most... she gives me a lot of support and helps me a lot. (YP2 SC)*

*They (parents) support me quite well actually you know gave me a lot of support in school and stuff like that. (YP4 SA)*

This seems to suggest that the carers of young people with learning disabilities (most often either a parent or foster parent) play a key role in the transition process beyond the school (Kaehne & Beyer, 2008). Besides parents, teachers were also mentioned as the most supportive people. The teachers they mentioned included the Support for Learning teachers, class teacher, guidance teacher and PE teacher. One young person stated:

*I got a lot of support, I got teachers like \*name (Principal Teacher SFL)\* and all other teachers, \*name\* they try to support me, they try their best to support me. (YP2 SC)*

Another one added:

*My guidance, class teacher, support teacher. (YP1 SB)*

The other young person said that his teacher helped him by exposing him to the world of work. He said:

*Take me to [name of a supermarket] for work experience. (YP2 SE)*

Another young person from the same school further commented:

*Um, like help me with my work, um, helps me like progress my work and they've been there all the way through when I've been here as well and they've just been helping me, so, and um, I went to college for like seven weeks and I've been there for the first week to help me, help as well and work experience as well. (YP1 SE)*

One young person said that her teacher had helped her by taking her to the college every day. On the other hand, one young person mentioned receiving help from a member of staff from Careers Scotland who had helped him get into college. He commented:

*They (Careers Scotland) helped to understand just about college you know, and stuff like growing up and stuff like that. (YP4 SA)*

In short, the young people seemed to be happy and satisfied with the support that they received either from their parents or teachers. However, none of them, except one, mentioned support from other people apart from their parents and teachers. This suggests that the young people heavily depended on the people who were really close and those they have close contact with on a day-to-day basis, rather than someone else.

### 5.2.1.3 Courses of interest

It was found that all of the young people interviewed had been offered a full time place and were going to college after school. Eight had been on the link course during their fourth year at school and only one young person had never been to the college before. When asked about the courses that they were interested in doing at college, three said that they were going to take the life skills course. One said that he was also interested in hospitality, as he commented:

*I'm doing life skills and I might also be doing hospitality, I don't know. (YP3 SC)*

One said that he was not sure about what course he was going to take yet, as he said:

*Yeah, but I don't know which one just yet... I don't know any skills just yet, so just um, but if I got my skills up I'll choose the course (YP2 SC)*

Five of them showed interest in taking art at the college, as one commented:

*Yeah, it's um, Introduction to Art and to kind of you know to do with drawing and making stuff and that so it'll be kind of like designing stuff and that. (YP4 SA)*

Interestingly, one young person also said that he was interested in taking a foreign language besides art, as he described:

*Um, the main course that possibly that I'm going to take is like taking a French language in order to go to France, speak French, then I can understand what they say (YP1 SE).*

Another young person said that she was doing a childcare course at the moment and was also interested in the welding course, while another young person said that he was interested in electronics:

*Um, electronics.... Well, cos I like making stuff bits and pieces.  
(YP4 SC)*

It seems that there were a variety of courses mentioned by the young people with regards to their courses of interest at college (see Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3** Courses of interest at college as shown by the young people (more than one response possible)

<b>Course of interest</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Life skills course	3
Hospitality	1
Don't know	1
Art	5
French language	1
Childcare	1
Welding	1
Electronics	1

It seems that the majority of them were interested in Art more than any of the other courses. Perhaps this was due to the nature of the course which puts emphasis on the talent more than anything else. On the one hand, this means that the young people probably had a hidden talent that had not been developed throughout their life at college. On the other hand, the various courses taken at the college also seem to suggest that their courses of interest are no different with some other young people at large.

#### 5.2.1.4 Involvement in the review meeting

Of the nine young people, seven said that they had attended the review meeting at school. In addition, six also said that their parents came to the meeting as well, while the other three said that their parents did not come. One of them stated:

*Parents were not there... they're always at work. (YP2 SC)*

When asked about their input at the meeting, five said that they offered some suggestions and two said that they did not give any ideas at the meeting. One young person commented:

*Well, not really. I was just sitting in the corner, just don't know anything, while my mum and my teacher discussed, sitting there with friends and so I can actually listen to them. (YP1 SE)*

These findings seem similar to those of Rasheed (2006), who suggests that often when young people attend the meeting, they and their parents tend to sit passively, overwhelmed by the experience, and simply agree to the school's proposed goals and objectives. When asked further about the discussion at the meeting, three said that they had forgotten what the meeting was all about, while the other four said they discussed matters about the college and leaving school, as one commented:

*Um, talking about leaving school, going to college and ... work. (YP1 SB)*

They were also asked about the people involved in the meeting besides their parents and teachers. Surprisingly, only one mentioned the involvement of the college staff, as he stated:

*Yeah, people from college came. (YP1 SC)*

While one said that he met a lady, but was not sure where she came from. Table 5.4 shows the summary of the findings from the review meeting.

**Table 5.4** Summary data from the review meeting

<b>YP/School</b>	<b>Attended meetings</b>	<b>Parents attended</b>	<b>YP gave ideas</b>	<b>People involved</b>
YP4 SA	Y	Y	Y	P/T
YP1 SB	Y	Y	N	P/T
YP2 SB	N	N	NA	NA
YP1 SC	Y	Y	Y	P/T/C
YP2 SC	Y	N	Y	T/?
YP3 SC	N	Y	NA	NA
YP4 SC	Y	N	Y	T
YP1 SE	Y	Y	N	P/T
YP2 SE	Y	Y	Y	P/T

Y = Yes, N = No, NA = Not applicable, P = Parents, T = Teachers, C = College staff, ? = Unknown

Table 5.4 clearly shows that of the seven who attended the meeting, only one young person attended along with a teacher, parents and college staff. Four attended with only their parents and teachers, while the other two meetings only involved the teachers, one of which also involved one more person who was unidentified, as reported by the young person. Despite the fact that all of them were potentially going to the college post-school, the school apparently failed to engage college representatives, besides the parents and the young people themselves simultaneously, in all the meetings. This could possibly lead to a lack of information, especially among the young people themselves and their parents about what was going to happen when they move on to college. This

seems to suggest that all the information regarding the transition was only provided by the teachers to the young people and their parents at the meeting. It could also possibly be that the meeting was held separately, with either the college representative or parents, and the young people themselves were not involved at that time, and thus, they had no idea of who was involved in the meeting.

When analysing in more detail, it was found that at School B, only one of the two young people moving on to college attended the meeting. Likewise, at School C, only three out of four attended the meeting. This raises the question of how did the school select the young people to attend the transition meeting? It could possibly be that the young people had been invited to attend the meeting, but had chosen not to attend, or they had never been invited to the meeting. Even if they chose not to attend, it might suggest that they were not clear about the importance of being at the meeting or perhaps the setting was not appropriate.

Looking at the contribution or input from the young people at the meeting, even though they said that they did offer some suggestions, the view of YP1 SE, as quoted above, seems common when illustrating the young people's reaction when attending the meeting with the adults. They were more likely to remain silent and just listen rather than speaking up or giving any ideas. This raises another question as to whether or not they really understood the purpose of the meeting, as well as the importance of their input at the meeting to determine their future life course. Further, as was seen in this study at Stage 1, unless the ways of capturing their voice are adapted to meet their needs, as was done for Stages 2 and 3, the young people might not be able to give their views.

### 5.2.1.5 Future aspirations

Out of nine young people interviewed, only two said that they did not know what they wanted to do in the future. The other seven were able to articulate their dreams and aspirations quite clearly.

*Yeah, I want to become a teacher and my dream is just to travel the world, well half the world, yeah. (YP3 SC)*

*Um, I'm hoping to do a job that is to do with designing thing, I'm thinking electronics or something like that you know, cos I'm good at designing things and creating ideas and stuff. (YP4 SA)*

Other aspirations mentioned by the young people included becoming a fashion designer, a footballer, a child care worker and a chef. This suggests that their aspirations are just the same as those of their non-disabled peers. Previous research has shown that the young people's personal goals and aspirations do match and are similar to those of their non-disabled counterparts (Burchardt, 2004; Morris, 2002; Routledge, 2000; Shah, 2008; Stewart et al., 2010; The Scottish Executive, 2006). In fact, three individuals mentioned two dreams or aspirations that they were hoping to achieve, as one young person stated:

*That's my dream to get the course ... move to France and get that dream what I want to... Yeah, if I don't get into my proper dream job but if that means I have to wait for that, then I can hold on like one can go for the second choice (to become a graphic designer). (YP1 SE)*

Further, the same young person described how he was attracted to the art course because his sister was doing the same course at college.

*Um, second course that I possibly take is Art because of the graphic and stuff like that. But I can also get hints off my sister because she's in Art college at the moment and I can just get some ideas off her and just go at college and get some Art ideas as well. And if I can get that, I'll be really, really happy to go. (YPI SE)*

This shows that family members, particularly parents or siblings do play a significant role in constructing the positive growth of the young people's aspirations. They can not only influence but also act as a role model for the young people in choosing what they want to do in the future. Indeed, research suggests that family is one of the most influential social structures in society that moulds and impresses children with certain expectations, values and beliefs that could shape their aspirations and choices in their entire life course (Shah, 2008).

In addition, he also expressed his dream to continue his studies at university after college. He commented:

*...Yes, I like to go there (university) after, once I finished college, but in the meantime I'm gonna stick on to the college so like, at least a couple of years and for my course to work out. If it doesn't, I don't know, I can just switch the course if I wanted to. (YPI SE)*

When asked further about how they were going to achieve their dreams, some of them said that they were not sure but would try their best to achieve it. One commented:

*I need to work hard...(YPI SB)*

Although the dream of achieving their aspirations is still uncertain, their ability to articulate their dreams and aspirations seems to suggest that they do have their own vision in life and are aspiring towards that.

### **5.2.2 Feelings about leaving school**

At the end of the interview, the young people were given a poster that had feeling icons. They were asked to state their feelings when they first started their final year at school and towards the end of the final year of school by choosing any of the icons in the poster and either write it down or just write the numbers on the sheet provided. They could write more than one feeling at a time.

The results showed that the majority of them stated happy, proud and excited to express their feelings at the beginning of the final year of school. This was due to various reasons, as mentioned by them (refer to Table 5.5). In addition, two of them also stated surprised and lost when they started their final year at school. One young person stated that she felt angry, worried and tired at the beginning of the final year of school as she did not like being at school. Yet, only one young person said that he felt sad as he was going to miss his friends and teachers.

On the other hand, towards the end of the final year of school, most of them stated that they were happy, excited and proud to leave school and go to college. However, one young person expressed her unhappiness at having to leave school, as she wanted to stay on until the sixth year. Another young person stated that he felt worried and surprised about leaving school, while two stated feeling sad as they were going to miss their friends and teachers.

**Table 5.5** Summary of the feelings felt by the young people at the beginning and at the end of the school year

YP/School	Feelings			
	At the beginning of the final year of school	Why?	At the end of the final year of school	Why?
YP4 SA	Surprised	<i>Because it was like I wouldn't think it was I'd actually come to that last year last point you know.</i>	Proud	<i>Yeah, what I have achieved you know, how far I've come and stuff like that.</i>
	Lost	<i>Yeah, it was like I wasn't sure what it's gonna be happening and stuff like that.</i>	Happy	<i>Because you know I've actually managed it, actually get through the year and managed it everything, completing stuff until now I also can never thought get anything complete or anything like that you know happy that I'm probably got a good mark and see my works are done at school.</i>
YP1 SB	Happy	<i>I feel happy because [name of college] is exciting ... Because I can meet new people.</i>	Unhappy	<i>Because I was planning to stay up to sixth year.</i>
	Lost	<i>I felt lost because I don't know more people don't know more, many people.</i>		
YP2 SB	Angry	<i>Cos I hate at school...</i>	Happy Excited Proud	<i>To leave school.</i>
	Worried Tired	<i>I don't know. Cos it's boring</i>		
YP1 SC	Happy	<i>Going to leave school.</i>	Excited	<i>Won't be in school anymore, can start at college soon.</i>

<b>YP2 SC</b>	Proud	<i>I felt a little bit proud of myself.</i>	Worried Surprised	<i>Leaving school.</i> <i>Because it goes so quick.</i>
<b>YP3 SC</b>	Surprised  Proud	<i>I felt surprise, I know I'm going to be leaving soon</i>  <i>...I also felt proud that I would be there like the school wouldn't be comfort me anymore you know ...</i>	Sad  Worried	<i>I'm gonna miss all teachers and stuff.</i>  <i>I'm not gonna like find college and stuff you know what happen before ...</i>
<b>YP4 SC</b>	Happy Proud	<i>Going to leave school.</i>	Excited	<i>Go to the college.</i>
<b>YP1 SE</b>	Happy    Sad	<i>I was very happy because I was glad that got picked for a college on a bridging week for next week and in summer, that's me going to college, getting ready, getting stuff, organise for what I'm doing. So I'm very happy about that.</i>  <i>Because I'm gonna also miss my friends and my favourite teachers as well. So I'm gonna miss them.</i>	Happy  Sad	<i>I'm also happy with guidance there and make me meet new people.</i>  <i>...also sad I'm leaving my friends and my favourite teachers.</i>
<b>YP2 SE</b>	Happy Excited Very happy	<i>Going to college, moving to college.</i>	Happy	<i>Same thing.</i>

The findings seem to suggest that there was a mixture of feelings experienced by the young people with regards to leaving school. Nevertheless, the feelings of joy and pride appear to be more prominent than the feeling of sadness as felt by the majority of them. On balance, most young people are happy to be moving on from school and entering the next stage of their life.

### 5.2.3 Parents' perspectives

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, of the sixteen parents, only seven returned the completed questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions (refer to Chapter 3 for details). The following sub-sections discuss the findings from the questionnaire.

#### 5.2.3.1 Key person

Parents were asked to select all of the professionals who have communicated with them and been the most involved. Out of seven, four responded to the question (see Table 5.6)

**Table 5.6** Professionals who have been the most involved and communicated with the parents (more than one response possible)

Professionals	Number of parents responded
Social Worker	4
Class Teacher	3
Guidance Teacher	3
Head Teacher	3
Support for Learning Staff	3
Careers Staff (School)	2
Careers Staff (Outside School)	2
Educational Psychologist	2
College Staff	1

It seems that according to the parents' views, the Social Worker appeared to be the most significant person to support them during the transition process. These responses highlighted the significance of the relationship that parents have with the Social Worker as compared to the other professionals. Even though all the young people interviewed were going to college, only one parent mentioned the involvement with the college staff. However, it should be noted that these views may not be generalisable due to the small sample of participants that responded to this study.

#### **5.2.3.2 Parents' and young people's experiences of the transition process**

Parents were then given statements regarding their experiences of the transition process. They were asked to respond to sixteen statements by responding to a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and don't know. All of the parents responded to these statements, except two who did not respond to statement 'd' and one who did not respond to statement 'f'. The results are summarised in Table 5.7.

**Table 5.7** Parents' responses to statements regarding parents' and young people's experiences of the transition process

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
<b>a.</b> I have been informed clearly about the transition process of my child by the school.	5	2			
<b>b.</b> The information given was very helpful for me as a parent.	4	2	1		
<b>c.</b> The information given was very helpful for my child.	3	3			1
<b>d.</b> The information given was up to date.	3	2			
<b>e.</b> I am aware of and understand the transition process clearly.	3	4			
<b>f.</b> The transition process was carried out smoothly by the school.	3	3			
<b>g.</b> The preparation by the school for the post-school transition was helpful to me as a parent.	3	4			
<b>h.</b> The preparation by the school for the post-school transition was helpful for my child.	3	4			
<b>i.</b> I am happy that the school has done its best to make the transition process of my child as smooth as possible.	6	1			
<b>j.</b> The school has given my child ample time to prepare for the transition process.	5	2			
<b>k.</b> The school has played its role effectively in the transition process of my child.	6	1			
<b>l.</b> The school has interacted well with me as a parent in the transition process.	5	2			
<b>m.</b> The school has good links with the people involved in the transition process (college, social workers, etc.)	5	2			
<b>n.</b> The transition planning has prepared my child for his/her adult life.	4	2	1		
<b>o.</b> The transition preparation has provided my child with many post-school opportunities.	4	1	2		
<b>p.</b> The current school system adequately prepares the school leavers for transition.	5	1	1		

In general, most of the parents seemed to agree with almost all the statements asked except four, by responding either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. For instance, while one parent disagreed with the statement saying that the information given was very helpful for her child, another parent responded 'don't know' to the same statement. One parent disagreed with the statement saying that the transition planning has prepared her child for her adult life. Two also disagreed with the statement saying that the transition preparation has provided their children with many post-school opportunities. One parent also disagreed with the statement saying that the current system adequately prepares the school leavers for transition. However, the disagreement to the four statements, as shown in the table, seems to suggest that the current practice of the transition process still has some deficiencies which need to be improved to meet the needs of parents and the young people, especially in terms of information provided and post-school opportunities.

### **5.2.3.3 Issues and solutions**

Parents were asked about any difficulties that they or their child might experience as a result of the post-school transition (refer to question number 4 in the questionnaire). Out of seven parents, four responded to this question. Two said that they had no problems with the transition process and one said that her son was keen and ready for the transition process. One parent was anxious about transportation for her son, as she commented:

*Just worried whether transport will be available to and from college, as [child] has never travelled alone, and also if transport will be provided for the summer programme starting 6<sup>th</sup> July during the summer holidays. (PYP4 SC)*

On the other hand, another parent expressed her concern about post-school information, as she commented:

*Trying to access information about what is available post-school. I would like parents to be better informed at least a year prior to their child leaving school in order to put things in place for when their child leaves. (PYP4 SA)*

Parents were then asked about any plans that they had put in place to overcome any difficulties. Six replied to this question and their replies were mixed. Two parents mentioned that their sons had been referred to a care worker who would be looking after them at college. The other two said that they had been supported by the Social Worker. One stated that she had been waiting to find out about transport, while another parent said that she had been speaking to the teacher and often asked for feedback in order to overcome any difficulties she might have.

#### **5.2.3.4 Positive aspects**

In question number 6, parents were asked about the most beneficial aspects of the work that they think the school has done to assist them or their child in the transition process. Even though one parent responded 'none', six other parents had different responses to this question. Their responses are summarised in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8** The most beneficial aspects of the work done by the school reported by parents

The most beneficial aspects	Parents
The school was helpful and informative including inviting someone from college to explain the range of courses available to the child.	PYP4 SA
Reassure the child by organising a visit to the college prior to the child leaving school.	PYP5 SA
Helped the child to get into college.	PYP2 SB
Had a meeting to discuss options and arranged other sources of help such as the Social Worker, etc.	PYP2 SC
Most impressed by the dedication of all the staff at the school.	PYP3 SC
The school was fantastic with all aspects of the transition process.	PYP4 SC

In short, apart from one parent who replied ‘none’ to this question, as stated earlier, the other parents seem to feel positive and appreciated the help and work done by the school for their children in the transition process. These results show that a good effort was made by the school, which made the parents feel really supported.

### 5.2.3.5 Ideas and hopes

The parents’ views were sought on any things that they thought the school or they themselves could have done to make the transition process better for them and their child. One parent, for instance, seemed to appreciate the effort made by the school to keep in contact with her constantly regarding her daughter. Two other parents praised the excellent job done by the school, which was really helpful for them. On the other hand, one parent emphasised the meeting and being kept informed on a regular basis when she commented:

*It would have been helpful to meet more frequently, which would also have been more reassuring especially to [child]. It would have been helpful to receive regular updates from the school... I would have found written updates very reassuring instead of having to ring up myself. (PYP4 SA)*

Commenting on what they, as parents, could have done to make the transition process better, two of them responded. One said that she would make sure her son was ready for the transition. While the other parent said that she could have looked into other choices apart from college to give her son more choices, although she thought that further education was the right choice for her son.

In the last question, parents were asked to comment on any aspects of the transition planning and preparation for the young people. Of all the seven parents, four responded to the question. Their comments are summarised in Table 5.9.

**Table 5.9** What parents hoped for or wanted from in the transition process

<b>Parents hoped for or wanted from:</b>
To meet up with providers of post-school transition to discuss options for the child.
More information to be provided by the school.
To know where to access information about what is available post-school.
More regular updates about the transition process.

This would appear to indicate that parents felt that these are the most important things in the transition process. It highlights that the sources, especially in terms of information, are the main aspect that they would want to help their child with going through the transition process post-school.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings of the second stage, which involves the perspectives of the young people and their parents. The findings from the young people's perspectives indicate that most of them depended on the people who were closer to them, especially their parents for support, rather than anyone else. Although teachers were also referred to as people that can be relied on, parents seem to be more dominant in terms of support for the young people in this study. This highlights the need for parents to receive sufficient information and understanding about the transition process to enable them to give their full support to their children in all aspects of transition that they need. In terms of the courses of interest, art seems to be the most popular course among the young people. Perhaps, this is due to the art being intellectually easier or more enjoyable subject. This raises another question of why art has become the most popular course among the young people with disabilities. Perhaps, it is due to the nature of the subject which is really fun and enjoyable. However, it should also be noted that art also requires special skills and talent. In other words, having fun and enjoyment does not guarantee that someone will be excellent at art because they must also be equipped with talent and skills. This perhaps suggests that young people with disabilities are more skilful and talented in art than any other subjects. However, this requires further research.

The lack of stakeholders' involvement in the review meeting as seen in the findings seems to suggest that the meeting was either held separately or did not fully involve all the stakeholders at the same time. This poses the question of the commitment of all the stakeholders involved in the review meeting or it could be that they were not invited to attend the meeting. It should be noted that the Children in Scotland Act 1995 has clearly

stated that it is obligatory that the views of children and young people be included in reviews, further needs assessments and decisions that might affect them (Cameron & Murphy, 2002). Hence, the involvement of young people in particular, in review meetings is essential to ensure that their voices and views are heard and listened to. The similar ambitions and aspirations of the young people demonstrated in these findings with their non-disabled counterparts indicate that they also have the same tastes in terms of their ideals for the future. In fact, these findings show that having ideal future aspirations is not uncommon among young people, including young people with disabilities. Research shows that young people with learning disabilities also want some very common things at transition, namely work, independent living and friendships (William, 2003; cited in Townsley, 2004). I believe that with the full support and commitment of all parties involved, it is not impossible for all their dreams to be realised. Likewise, when it comes to leaving school, they also share the same feelings as their non-disabled peers. It is normal for anyone to feel sad when leaving someone or something that they have been attached to for a long time, especially a school that they might have many fond memories of. However, the young people need to keep moving and to look forward to their future. A study by Heslop *et al.* (2002) found that young people with learning disabilities do feel sad and/or upset about leaving school, whilst others expressed their wish to move on and do other things.

Meanwhile, from the parents' perspectives, as noted, the findings could not be generalised due to the very small number of respondents involved in this stage. However, it does not mean that their perspectives could simply be ignored. The lack of help from a significant person to support them, the lack of information and post-school opportunities for their children as well as the lack of preparation for transition are among the points brought up by the parents which require immediate action and change

to ensure a smooth transition. This suggests that the cooperation and engagement between parents and professionals is essential and needs to be strengthened so that parents are also well equipped with all the latest information required for the transition of their child. In other words, parents should not only be fully involved in the transition, but also be treated as partners (Tarleton & Ward, 2005) in order to deliver appropriate support and opportunities to young people.

## Chapter 6

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION – STAGE 3

## 6.1 Introduction

This was the last stage of the data collection of the longitudinal study undertaken between November 2011 and January 2012. For the third time, interview sessions were carried out with the same young people to track their journey post-school. At this stage, all of them had already started their course at college. Of all the 16 young people interviewed in the first stage (nine in the second stage), eleven agreed to be interviewed in this final stage (see Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1** Summary of data collection stages (Young People)

School	Young People (YP)	Stage 1 (Interview)	Stage 2 (Interview)	Stage 3 (Interview)
SA	1 YP1 SA	✓	Left school	✓
	2 YP2 SA	✓	Carried on to S5	Carried on to S5
	3 YP3 SA	✓	Carried on to S5	Carried on to S5
	4 YP4 SA	✓	✓	✓
	5 YP5 SA	✓	Left school	✓
	6 YP6 SA	✓	Left school	✓
SB	1 YP1 SB	✓	✓	✓
	2 YP2 SB	✓	✓	-
SC	1 YP1 SC	✓	✓	✓
	2 YP2 SC	✓	✓	✓
	3 YP3 SC	✓	✓	✓
	4 YP4 SC	✓	✓	✓
SD	1 YP1 SD	✓	Left school	-
	2 YP2 SD	✓	Left school	✓
SE	1 YP1 SE	✓	✓	-
	2 YP2 SE	✓	✓	✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>11</b>

✓ = Interview carried out

Additionally, this chapter also reports the findings from the interview sessions with their parents. Of all the 14 young people who participated, 12 of their parents agreed to be interviewed (see Table 6.2). Analysis of both sets of data from the interviews was done using the NVivo software.

**Table 6.2** Summary of data collection stages (Parent)

School	Parent	Stage 2 (Questionnaire)	Stage 3 (Interview)
SA	1 PYP1 SA	*	✓
	2 PYP2 SA	Carried on to S5	Carried on to S5
	3 PYP3 SA	Carried on to S5	Carried on to S5
	4 PYP4 SA	✓	✓
	5 PYP5 SA	✓	✓
	6 PYP6 SA	*	✓
SB	1 PYP1 SB	✓	-
	2 PYP2 SB	✓	✓
SC	1 PYP1 SC	*	✓
	2 PYP2 SC	✓	✓
	3 PYP3 SC	✓	✓
	4 PYP4 SC	✓	✓
SD	1 PYP1 SD	*	-
	2 PYP2 SD	*	✓
SE	1 PYP1 SE	*	✓
	2 PYP2 SE	*	✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>12</b>

Stage 2 – (✓ = questionnaire returned, \* = questionnaire not returned)

Stage 3 – (✓ = interview carried out, - = interview not carried out)

## 6.2 Results and Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the final stage by seeking the perspectives of the young people and their parents through the interviews. Following on from that, several themes emerged, which will be discussed accordingly.

## **6.2.1 Young people's perspectives**

The discussion in this section involves three main headings, namely college life, courses attended and future aspiration, and difficulties and challenges. These are then followed by a number of sub-headings which will be discussed along with the main headings.

### **6.2.1.1 College life**

The young people were asked to give their views on their experience of college life and the findings revealed that nine had had the experience through link courses at college prior to attending full time. Table 6.3 summarises the experience they had of college life. Five themes emerged and they were: the link course, social relationships, freedom and choice, feeling about college, and changes in life.

**Table 6.3** Summary of the young people's experience of college life

Code	Attended link course?	Found it easier?	Why?	Like about college	Dislike about college	Feeling about college	Any changes in life?
<b>YP1 SA</b>	Yes	Yes	Used to the environment	New building	Dancing	Good	The same
<b>YP4 SA</b>	No	-	-	Socialising with people	Time too long	Alright	A bit more open with people
<b>YP5 SA</b>	No	-	-	Art work	Long – tired	Alright	A bit independent
<b>YP6 SA</b>	Yes	Yes	Used to it	Meeting new people	Quite boring	Good, fun	More social
<b>YP1 SB</b>	Yes	Yes	Find it easier	More opportunity to learn	Nothing	Very good	Independent
<b>YP1 SC</b>	Yes	Yes	Know some people	Class	Nothing	Good	Being older
<b>YP2 SC</b>	Yes	Yes	Sometimes easy	Make new friends	Nothing	Very good	More confident
<b>YP3 SC</b>	Yes	Yes	Help to think	Freedom to wear own clothes	Nothing	Good	No
<b>YP4 SC</b>	Yes	Yes	Fine	Drama, computing, art	Nothing	Good	Writing getting better
<b>YP2 SD</b>	Yes	Yes	Work is easier	Art	Not much	Better	No, the same
<b>YP2 SE</b>	Yes	Yes	Up with friends	Being with friends	Bullying	Happy	Being older

### **The link course**

Having the experience of college through the link course while still at school seemed to have helped the young people in some way. All the nine young people who went on the link course reported that they found it easier once they had gone there full time. It helped them adapt to the new environment and to people who were previously considered as strangers. One young person commented:

*It [link course] made me like think of what it was going, what college was going to be like so when I did go to college, I didn't feel quite scared or worried, I wouldn't know how it feels to make the big move honestly. (YP3 SC)*

This was reiterated by another young person who stated:

*I mean we get used to it and realised what college would be like. (YP6 SA)*

However, since this is only a small sample of the population, it could not be generalised to a larger group of young people, i.e. that by going on the link course could have helped to make college life easier.

Although two had no experience of college life before this, they had been visited by the people from the college whilst at school and had been told about what college would be like and what they might want to do. One stated that his mother used to take him to the college and introduced him to the people who would support him at the college, and this made him feel happier in some way. This seems to suggest how important the parents' role and support is, in easing the transition process from school to college. In sum, the key points that made the transition from school to college easier from the young

people's perspectives were: having a prior visit to college to adapt to the new staff and environment, being introduced to the people who will work with them and support from parents by visiting the college in advance.

### **Social relationships**

The young people seemed to believe that going to college might improve their social life and established friendship networks. They seemed to be able to move from the comfort zone that they had in school to a more sociable environment. Four of them mentioned how much they enjoyed making new friends and meeting new people at college. One young person stated:

*Just being socialising with people and just how relaxed it is, how casual it is ... (YP4 SA)*

Another young person said the following when asked about the best thing at college:

*Being with my friends. (YP2 SE)*

For some young people, the only way to maintain some of the friendships that they developed during the school years was through the college link courses (Kaehne, 2009). It seemed that going to college could make them more sociable and open with the new people around them. While nine enjoyed having and making new friends, two said that they did not make any new friends at college and only mixed with their old friends from the old school (see Table 6.4). Eight said that they still kept in touch with their old friends by seeing or visiting them and the other three said that they did not see their old friends any longer. In addition, seven mentioned that they mixed with their friends either after class or over the weekend.

**Table 6.4** Young people's social relationships

Code	Made new friends	Still see old friends	Enjoy being with new friends	Joined external club	Mix after class/weekend
YP1 SA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
YP4 SA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
YP5 SA	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
YP6 SA	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
YP1 SB	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
YP1 SC	No	Yes	-	No	Yes
YP2 SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
YP3 SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
YP4 SC	No	Yes	-	No	Yes
YP2 SD	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
YP2 SE	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

The data seems to suggest that only 2 young people didn't make new friends easily. This may be due to relationship failure during the long gap between leaving school and starting at college. Research shows that social networks sustain and develop by spending a great deal of time with people either in further and higher education or work settings (Riddell et al., 2001). It could also be argued that the lack of opportunity to meet old friends due to specific barriers might be the reasons why they did not see their old friends any longer. It is not surprising, therefore, that the young people find it difficult to sustain relationships developed in the educational settings, as they are more prone to have complications in terms of making social arrangements and having access to transport (Riddell et al., 2001).

Although all of them had joined several activities at college as part of their course, only one mentioned that he joined an external club that was not connected to the college. He said:

*Um, go to the cadets. Well that's not from the college, the college won't do that. I have my own time go to cadets on Thursdays. (YP3 SC)*

This may be due to less exposure to external activities other than the ones at the college. It could also be other factors such as lack of transport or parental restriction that prevents them from taking part in external activities.

### **Freedom and Choice**

Apart from making new friends and meeting new people, the young people also mentioned the opportunity to learn new things that they did not get when they were at school. One young person commented:

*... and you got to do more stuff like go on the computer and go on the Internet and all that. (YP2 SC)*

Another young person stated:

*As you gain more opportunity to like to learn stuff, you get another chance to do the subjects that you can't do in the school. (YP1 SB)*

One young person mentioned about the choice that he had at college as compared to at school. He commented:

*Just the freedom and to wear your own clothes and stuff. (YP3 SC)*

He further described the freedom that he experienced at college compared to at the school in terms of late attendance:

*... so if you're late like school they'll ask you why you're late, like whereas at college if you're late, you just go, just don't make it happen again. So they're not asking you why at college. They do ask you later but they don't ask you when you walk into class when everybody is there, like they listen to what you've said, you know. (YP3 SC)*

This is similar to Hyland and Merrill (2003) who found that the young people shared the consensus, regardless of whether they have learning difficulties or not, that college was a place that treated them as adults, by imposing fewer rules and regulations and giving them more freedom.

Another four seemed to enjoy the classes and courses that they attended including drama and art, while one young person seemed to enjoy the new building at the college. The findings also revealed that five preferred to be at college rather than school and one said that both were great, although he still missed school. Despite feeling happy and enjoying the freedom of college life, it is vital that the young people really know the main purpose of going to college. More importantly, the decision to go to college should come from themselves rather than someone else.

### **Feelings about college**

All of the young people seemed to feel happy and good about being at college, although a few of them mentioned their dislikes when asked about the things that they did not like about college. Two of the young people who had no experience of attending the link course at college reported that they felt the hours spent at college were too long, as one of them put it:

*Um, well it can be kind of long sometimes but I think on Monday and Tuesday, it's about eight hours you know... at the end of the day it gets later, it's kind of tired...(YP5 SA)*

However, both of them said that they felt alright when asked about being at college. One young person said that she felt quite bored as she did not do anything in the class although she did feel good and had fun at college. On further probing, it was found that this young person felt bored with the course that she was doing and was looking

forward to changing courses in the next semester. While one young person said that he did not like dancing at college, another young person reported that he was being bullied at college despite feeling happy about being at college, as he described:

*When I sit in that room, they tell me to go away home and don't let me in the college. (YP2 SE)*

Although this case was seen to be resolved after his mother reported it to the college, it can be argued that this was only diffusion of the tension and was to the detriment of the young person being bullied. Firstly, it is not clear what the rationale was for the young person being transferred to a lower course (see Table 6.5) than his original course, and secondly, it is not known what action was taken to ensure that there was no bullying in the future against this or any other young person.

Overall, although there are a few things that the young people did not like about college, but in general all of them reported feeling happy and good about being at college.

### **Changes in life**

Three of the young people said that going to college had transformed their life and made them feel more grown up than when they were at school. One of them stated:

*It's like more adult, more adult, like school is kiddish. College is more adult, so much adult and the college, I'm trying to be as adult. (YP2 SC)*

This seems to suggest that some young people are aware of the changes in their life as they grow older. They also mentioned that they became more independent and more socially active compared to when they were at school. One young person stated:

*I have, like when I go to college, I have to do stuff by myself and I don't rely on other people like my mum and dad. (YP6 SA)*

Another young person said:

*Just, you know, a little more open with people, being a bit more social than I was when I was at school, you know talking to a lot more people and staff interacting more, being sociable. (YP4 SA)*

However, three of them said that their life remained the same and had not changed since they started at college. This highlights that some young people might need extra time to adjust to the new situation or environment. In general, the changes as noticed by the young people in their life, can be grouped into the following themes:

1. Independence
2. Interpersonal skill
3. Confidence
4. Development

These changes may reflect the young people's improvement as a result of the transition process from school to the post-school destination. It highlights the positive aspects that emerged in line with the process of growing up.

#### **6.2.1.2 Courses attended and future aspirations**

Of all eleven young people, seven were doing life skills at college while the other three were doing Introduction to Art, Introduction to Care and MQ Animation respectively. Another young person was also doing the life skills course initially, but had changed to

another course due to the bullying case as mentioned earlier. Table 6.5 summarises the courses that they attended and their future aspirations.

**Table 6.5** Courses attended and future aspirations

<b>Code</b>	<b>Courses attended</b>	<b>Well suited?</b>	<b>Plan after college</b>	<b>Advise about job prospects?</b>	<b>People who talked about future plan</b>
<b>YP1 SA</b>	Life skills	Yes	Gardener	Yes	Tutor
<b>YP4 SA</b>	Introduction to Art	Yes	Designer	Yes	Care worker
<b>YP5 SA</b>	MQ Animation	Yes	Cartoonist and illustrator	Yes	Family
<b>YP6 SA</b>	Introduction to Care	Not anymore	Sports physiotherapist	Yes	Tutor
<b>YP1 SB</b>	Life skills	Yes	Not sure but interested in designing	Yes	Tutor
<b>YP1 SC</b>	Life skills	Yes	Don't know yet	Yes	Tutor
<b>YP2 SC</b>	Life skills	Yes	Not decided yet	Yes	Tutor
<b>YP3 SC</b>	Life skills	Yes	Teacher	Yes	Social worker
<b>YP4 SC</b>	Life skills	Yes	Chef	No	Nobody
<b>YP2 SD</b>	Life skills	Yes	Make cartoons, work in stores	No	Nobody
<b>YP2 SE</b>	Initially was placed on life skills course but due to bullying case was moved to another course called a Step Up course which was slightly lower than the Life Skills course.	Yes	Footballer	Yes	Tutor

All of them reported that they were happy with the course that they were doing and found that the courses suited them well, except one young person who said that the course did not suit her well. This seems to suggest that the young people had been advised either by their parents or teachers to choose the right course in line with their interests and aptitude. This shows how choosing the right course based on one's interest is essential in achieving one's dream goal.

Only one said that she was no longer interested in the course that she was doing, although she did like the course at the beginning. She said:

*I did want to, like I joined the course cos I want to, like work with children and nursing environment but I don't want it anymore... I don't like it. (YP6 SA)*

When asked further about a course that she might want to do, she replied that she was interested in, and planning to do, sport science after that. It could well be that the young person had not been clearly informed about the course or was a bit late in realising what her main interest was. It could also be that nobody had asked her, and she only later found out that she did not like the course, as noted in the quote.

### **Plan after college**

Based on the course that they were doing, the young people were then asked about their plans once they have left college. A variety of answers and careers were given, and only one said that he did not know what to do. Another said that he was looking for something simple and not hard to do but still could not make a clear decision, while another said that she was interested in designing stuff, although she was still not particularly clear.

In addition, they were also asked whether or not they had had a discussion with regards to job prospects at college. All of them except one said that they had had a discussion on job prospects at college. When asked further about the people that had discussed their future plans with them, two said that nobody had discussed their future plans with them. One mentioned the involvement of the Social Worker and another mentioned a care worker. Another one said family members, while the rest said only their tutors had discussed future plans with them.

### 6.2.1.3 Difficulties and challenges

All of them reported that they had never encountered any big issues during their studies at college apart from two who said that they had a problem with their writing skills. However, with help from their tutors, their writing seemed to have improved. They also reported that they were happy with the support that they received from the college, especially from the tutors and none of them mentioned any difficulties or problems with the support from the college. One of them commented:

*Yeah, when I kind of stuck or something, they'll help... Um, they are there to help me so it's good. (YP1 SA)*

Another young person stated:

*Um, some lecturers help if you need it and if you have any worries they would listen to what you want to tell (YP3 SC)*

Similarly, in terms of transportation, no issues were reported, apart from having to take two buses to get to college. Of all 11 young people, six said that they took a taxi which had been arranged for them to go to college and four took a bus, whilst the other person went with her father. In other words, they were able to travel independently, even though before that some of them had never been independent travellers.

### 6.2.2 Parents' perspectives

12 parents were interviewed in this final stage. Out of the 12, only two sets of parents were interviewed without their children being interviewed (see Chapter 3 for details). Five main areas were discussed from the parents' perspectives and they were: 1. The

transition experience; 2. The support; 3. Suitability of courses attended; 4. Making friends and sustaining friendships and 5. Transportation. Some emerging themes were also discussed after the main areas.

### **6.2.2.1 The transition experience**

Of all 12 parents involved, nine seemed to be satisfied with their experience of the transition process, and three reported being dissatisfied. The parents reported being more likely to be satisfied if everything was put in place very well and arranged early on, with the help and support from all the people involved (see Table 6.6). One parent, for example commented:

*...the staff were extremely supportive and they made the transition for [name] from school to college totally seamless.... So it's very positive. (PYP3 SC)*

On the other hand, the other three seemed to have had bad experiences, with one reporting that she felt really stressed due to the transition process of her child. She described:

*Stressful... yeah, really stressful and it's a lot harder for him (son) go to college. Um, I don't know what else to say... just because it's different you know, um, I think because [name] thinks it's not school that he can have days off when he wants and he doesn't have to go all the time. Um, it costs me more money 'cos he needs a packed lunch on Wednesday and transport from the Education Department finishes at Christmas, that's another worry for me cos [name] doesn't, he doesn't go to a lot of places on his own and even though the college is only down the road, it's still quite far away and I don't drive, so I can't take him. And I worry about him being out on his bike, but because they were trying and sort something out for him and obviously as you know [name] has a lot of different problems as well you know, and that I feel like these things are exhausting you know, they are more prominent now that he's gone to college than what it was finding his own to school. I just feel like they're more, he's getting older, he's harder to get along with. (PYP1 SC)*

Even though the parent said that she did receive support from a transition worker with regards to her son's transition, the extent that the support was really helpful, especially to herself as a parent could be argued. This seems to suggest that more moral support is needed for parents to help them go through the transition process of their child, which could reduce the stress and burden that they have in the process.

**Table 6.6** Summary of the parents' experiences of their child's transition

<b>Code</b>	<b>Transition experience</b>	<b>Problems or difficulties</b>	<b>Change in life</b>	<b>Involvement in the transition process</b>	<b>Post-school placement and guidance</b>
<b>PYP1 SA</b>	The child was referred to a transition worker who helped and gave info about the process. Knew quite early on before the child left school but did not know whether the child had a place until the last few months. Everything was arranged.	The child was bullied during the seven week links course but then this stopped after staff were informed about the case. As a result, the child did not go to the bonding session over the summer, as he thought the boy who had bullied him might be going there as well.	The child felt more confident and more mature. Got different friends. Deals with things better now on his own way than he did before. Seems to think more about the consequences before he does anything.	Parent went to all the meetings and was well informed. The child went to the college whilst still at school so felt that was good for him.	Parent was very happy with the placement at college which was created by the school and the college.
<b>PYP4 SA</b>	It went quite smoothly and ready for the transition.	Did not know where to go to access information about other choices but presumed the school would be able to help. Found there was a lack of information about choices available. Would consider other options if given a choice.	Not stated.	Quite closely involved with the transition process. However, felt a bit unhappy as the school had not been able to contact college about a taster session for the child and failed to inform her sooner.	Someone from the college came to talk about what college life was going to be like, so that was really helpful. Both were happy with the decision to go to college.
<b>PYP5 SA</b>	Initially was concerned about the child's transportation but the child seemed to cope very well and settled quickly at college.	No particular concern, just prior to that, but once it was in place everything seemed to be working fine.	Not a great deal, he's always been quite isolated and very happy with his own company. Not good at time keeping and planning but managed to travel independently.	Lots of meetings prior to moving over. Met with support worker. All arranged in advance, was great, very clear and helpful.	Thought to have been guided properly and was happy with the placement at college.
<b>PYP6 SA</b>	The transition was quite smooth because everything was in place at school with help from the care worker.	A lot of worries and anxiety because of the child's mental illness which obviously affected	Still pretty much the same. No independent travel. Has made a number of	Was involved from the months before the child finished school to when they started college.	Happy on the placement at college and will discuss what the child wants to do

		her mood and turned into a sort of depression. The child felt that she could not cope or manage. However, she was able to deal with it with the help that she got which was really good and it gave her a bit of independence as well.	friends at college which was good. Getting independent at college which is good.	Planned what was best for the child and with the help of support workers, everything was put in place to make it easy so that everything was good.	next year before the course finishes with help from the people around her.
<b>PYP1 SB</b>	At the beginning the child could not wait to go to college after leaving school, but after a few weeks, she was late and never went there again but the college kept in touch with the carer. The child said she did not like it and finally ended up with the [city] Council Alcoholic. The child left home after that.	The child stopped going to college as she was no longer interested. Had behavioural problems that led to her leaving college. Tried other placements but seemed not to work either.	No change.	The school did keep in touch with her. The teachers were very good and kept in touch with one another.	Happy with the decision made by the school about the college, as the child was hard at school as well.
<b>PYP1 SC</b>	Felt really stressful and a lot harder due to various factors. Costs more money and worried about the transport issue. The child is getting older and harder to get along with. Other problems – the child also has ASD and ADHD and can be quite withdrawn.	Did not get a choice to stay on to sixth year because the base in the previous school only runs until fourth year and thus needs to find a new school. Would rather keep him at school.	Not really, not drastically. Still got the same groups of friends from the old school. It's much the same as it was when he was at school.	Always had a good relationship with the school. Always went to meetings.	The child was helped by a transition worker and things were put in place for him and that was helpful.
<b>PYP2 SC</b>	Felt very much supported by the school especially the support team.	No problem, it went smoothly.	Grown up a lot. Independent. Drastic change.	Had a couple of meetings at school and they arranged meetings with a	Placement was suggested by the school and believed

	Always got constant feedback.			few people from different departments like Social Work and Youth Link. Was briefed very clearly on the transition and the life skills course.	this pathway was really very good for the child.
<b>PYP3 SC</b>	It was a very positive experience. The process was seamless and the child had no problems at all. Staff were extremely supportive. The child went on to a bonding session throughout the summer which was very positive. Both had been kept informed and had a very good liaison with the tutors.	No problem whatsoever.	Became more independent and took more responsibility. Also made more friends and the friendships seemed to have blossomed.	Had enough involvement in the transition process.	The school had a day release at college and was told what college was going to be like.
<b>PYP4 SC</b>	More worried than the child but he seemed to manage it fine.	No problem, the child seemed to be confident enough going through the transition so that was good enough for her.	Became more confident, as was relatively quiet before. Time keeping was excellent. Managed to make own decisions and can travel independently.	Had all the meetings and visits, always been kept informed by both the college and the school, so it was fine.	The decision to go to college was suggested by the teachers at the school. Happy with the decision.
<b>PYP2 SD</b>	Everything went quite smoothly, as the child was attending a one day a week programme while still at school. So everything went quite well.	No problem.	Felt a bit happier and better at college compared to at school. Tried to be more independent.	Everything went fine and quite smoothly. The child went to college one day a week and that really helped him to decide that college was for him.	The child had the right guidance. Originally he refused to go to college one day a week but he was encouraged and eventually felt happy with the placement.

<b>PYP1 SE</b>	Happy with the child's move to college. Haven't had any problems since the child started, doing very well.	No problem at all.	Just a little bit, wanted to be treated a bit more grown up which is fair enough.	Went to all the meetings held at the school. The staff and other people from various other bodies were really good and helpful. The child went on a bridge course for a week and really enjoyed it and that helped him a lot.	The child made the decision to go to the college and was happy with it.
<b>PYP2 SE</b>	Thought the child was not ready for the transition to college. Do not think the child was mature enough or could cope with the college surroundings. A bit upset because she was not listened to in the transition meeting, thus did not get a lot of info about what was going to happen.	The child was bullied during the bridging week and after starting college. Case was sorted out finally after changing course.	Nothing much changed except going to college three days a week instead of five days as he used to be when he was at school.	Thought could have more involvement in it. The child did not seem to settle at college. Thought there would have been more support than what there was.	Could not really say much as did not have much involvement. They only talked to the child about the transition to college without her presence.

One parent reported her daughter had some behavioural problems which eventually led her to leaving home. Her experience of her daughter's problems was reflected in the following words:

*...it's been a hard in two years I'm telling you, honestly. (PYPI SB)*

Again, in this situation, moral support is really crucial especially from individuals such as a support worker, not only for the young person, but also for the parent to alleviate the difficulty. It could help this particular parent so that she would not feel at a loss as to where to go for advice or support in handling the issue.

Another parent said that her son was not ready for the transition as he did not seem to be 'mature' enough to face this new phase of his life. She described her dissatisfaction with the transition meeting:

*The transition meeting I wasn't very happy about because I only went to one transition meeting, so I didn't really get a lot of info about what was going to happen from college going up to school and going back from school to college and vice versa... It was just a main one transition meeting, I've little meetings before but only had a couple of people come to be asked about it [name] going to college but it was just that one big transition meeting. (PYP2 SE)*

Although only three parents reported to have felt dissatisfied or to be having a hard time with the transition experience, this could raise the question of whether they were supported after the young people had moved to college.

### **Problems or difficulties**

Seven parents reported that they had no big issues regarding the transition process of their children. One parent mentioned her worries and anxiety about her daughter's mental illness. However, the daughter seemed to cope well and was able to deal with it with the help and support that she got, which finally relieved her worries. Another parent, on the other hand, reported that her daughter had stopped going to college as she was no longer interested. She also had some other behavioural problems which led to her leaving home, as mentioned earlier. Although several attempts had been made to put her daughter on the other placements, it seemed that the attempts did not work. This raises the question of which agency the parent should refer her daughter to for support or consultation if this case prolonged. Although the parent said that the college did contact her, the lengths the college had gone to, to take action once they knew that the young person had stopped going to the college, was not known. While one parent reported that there was a lack of information about the choices available, another parent expressed her hope that she would rather see her son staying on at school as she stated:

*We didn't get a choice because the base at \*school\* only runs until fourth year. So if I wanted him to stay on at school until sixth year I would have had to find him a new school and we wanted him to stay on at school. So we didn't get a choice, he had to go or there wasn't really anything they could do. So, I'm not saying I'm not happy he's going to college, I just, with the brother, he was given a choice because he was in three mainstream classes. I know that doesn't constitute a whole week of school, but I would have liked to have had the opportunity to make sure he would stay on at school. (PYPI SC)*

Even though their children finally ended up at college, it could still be argued that if the power of choice was really being given to parents would they still have chosen the college or would they have found a better choice that they thought their children might

be happy with, rather than just accepting the decision that seemed to have been made for their children. In addition, the case of a parent's wish to see her son staying on at school until sixth year seems to suggest that more options in terms of staying on at school beyond 16 should be taken into consideration, especially at the mainstream school that has a special provision for young people with ASN. This could give parents, as well as the young people themselves, more choices, especially if they are not ready to leave school at 16.

At least two bullying cases were reported to have had occurred at college, as mentioned by the parents. Both cases happened during the bridging week and one stopped after being reported. However, the other one continued after the young person started college, despite a report being made by the parent after the first incident. She commented:

*...when he was at \*school\* and they had the bridging week from \*school\* to college, he was getting bullied then and I told them about that when it happened, and I told them my concern at the transition meeting about the bullying because the same people who were bullying were in the same class with \*name\* when he started. And I told them and they reassured me that nothing like that would happen but it did so. (PYP2 SE)*

It was interesting to note that the bullying behaviour occurred within the young person's group which means this was the group of young people with disabilities. This shows that the risk of being bullied could also occur between and within young people with disabilities themselves, and not necessarily by another group of young people without disabilities. A study by West (1991) shows that while most cases of bullying behaviour occurred within the group of young people with Special Needs on or off the college campus, most mainstream students on the other hand, were found to be more helpful and considerate towards students with Special Needs. Another question raised was how the issue was handled, as a report had been made but the incident still took place. It

could be that the case was not seriously handled, which led to a repeated case, or as Cowie and Jennifer (2008) argue, it could be due to the capabilities of the teachers who were always seen as too busy to discuss the bullying in detail or could not be fully trusted to handle personal information with tact and sensitivity.

The parent further described how her son was getting bullied before she finally involved to sort the issue out:

*It was virtually every day those doing it to him 'cos it first when he was doing what they called the life skills course for first year. It was in every single day at college and it was every day it was coming on the day they ripped his quota, they pushed him away or they pushed him over or they called him names or he sat on his own in the morning when they get to college they won't let him in the college. Now the tutors, it was the children, it was in his class who were saying no, you cannot come in. So I rang it up and we sorted it. (PYP2 SE)*

Even though the issue was now being resolved, it could be said that the level of precaution put in place in order to ensure the young person's safety in the first place whilst he or she is at college was debatable. This consequently raises the issue of the whereabouts of the staff and tutors when the incident happened. Previous research shows that parents of children with disabilities might be concerned that their child might be bullied or injured by other students, as their disabilities make them a more likely target and more vulnerable (Taub, 2006). Moreover, research suggests that college students with Special Needs can be the main targets of bullying, not only amongst themselves, but also from other public members, and they are at risk of being targeted such as at the bus station, in the underpass or when walking to and from college (West, 1991). Thus, it is vital to note that parents need to be convinced that their sons or daughters are really in the safest place when they are at college, especially when it involves young people with ASN.

### Changes in life

At least eight parents seemed to have noticed changes in their children's lives since they started at college, while the other four reported that their children remained unchanged. The changes reported included becoming more mature and confident, as well as having new friends and being more independent. It could be concluded that these changes entail emotional as well as social skills and it is undeniable that these changes could probably happen as a result of growing older. What is more important is how parents could play their role to support the changes in their children's life because not all parents are able to deal with a teenager's growth and changes without proper support. One parent reported how she dealt with her son growing up:

*He's grown up a lot. When he was in \*school\* we used to have to ask him to wake up, and we make breakfast for him, it's like a child. So the moment he stepped into college, I prepare him, I said you are sixteen going to college and we set the time for him to get up and he makes his own breakfast, he takes the bus to school. So he irons his own clothes, everything is ready, his wallet, his money, his bus card, his keys and his mobile phone because I told him that's important because it's something I need to contact him. So he is independent at the moment. (PYP2 SC)*

She further described the drastic change in her son's life:

*... last time he doesn't talk to girls. Now is that college is different and he's interacting with girls and he has got Facebook, I can see him chatting with girls and everything. I get involved in his social life because I don't want to stop him. If you stopped him then he won't tell you. (PYP2 SC)*

Based on my own observation throughout the series of interviews with the young people, I also noticed the changes in them, especially when they became more talkative in comparison to being shy and hesitant when I met them for the first time. However, a

few of them had not changed much, as mentioned by their parents. Perhaps this was due to slow development, which as some young people can experience, or due to the comfort level of each and every individual.

### **Involvement in transition process**

Overall, 10 parents seemed to be happy with their involvement in the transition process of their child. However, two parents expressed their dissatisfaction about their involvement in the process. One parent said that she thought the school would be able to contact the college with regards to a taster session for her son, but they did not contact her as expected and also failed to inform her earlier about that. It seemed that there was a communication problem in this regard as the parent commented:

*The only thing that I was um, a bit unhappy about was um, the school informed me in one of the meetings that they had tried to contact the college about taster sessions for \*name\* but hadn't been able to get in contact and I suggested perhaps I should phone in myself and they said oh yes that would be a good idea but I wished I've been told sooner than that you know. I really, it would have been expected them to have told me before then you know give me more notice um, but they didn't you know they didn't relay that information to me. (PYP4 SA)*

It is important to note that good communication between school and parents is essential at this key stage, as indeed it is at all times. It is also equally important for parents to have good communication and co-ordination with the college or any new establishment that the child is going to. Failure to do so could lead to inhibiting the progress made (Closs, 1993).

The other parent thought that she could have been involved more, as her son did not settle at college. However, the support that she received was not as good as expected.

She commented:

*... I expected \*name\*, when he went on to the life skills course I was happy for him because that's what he wanted to do, he wanted to go to college and learn and get with the child whether have disabilities or not, but when he went on to the life skills, things changed, he didn't seem to settle. I thought that there would have been a bit more support than what it was, that's why I was taking him out to that course, important to one another cos there wasn't enough support, so was the one's in there. (PYP2 SE)*

According to Closs (1993), the transition programme should address the needs of parents and carers regarding information, decision-making as well as counselling. However, in this case, it is still uncertain how much of all these elements have been addressed properly.

### **Post-school destination**

Although the samples in this study might be the college goers, parents were also asked whether or not they were given any other options apart from the college. The data revealed that eight said that they had not been given any other options apart from the college. Only one parent said that she could not comment much about the guidance for the post-school placement since the school only talked about that with her son at school without her presence. One parent commented:

*No, no really it was the college that was the main issue that he would go to the college and would see what would happen after that. They never said well if you could if he doesn't go to the college, we could do this. I never got told that or know that I remember anyway. Um, I just got the letters and that once I've been at the meeting soon he'd been accepted in the college and that was it. So I've not been told of it any other options or that he would, he's got at the moment. (PYP1 SA)*

The other three said that it was the child's decision to go to college after going to a day release program whilst they were still at school, as one parent commented:

*\*Name\* on a previous joined a day release kind of course from the school. He was doing three days a week at college... it could actually be \*name\* decision as well that he wants to take up the skills for life course and that's the way it is. (PYP3 SC)*

Although they said that it was their child's decision to go to college because of the day release programme, it can still be argued that if parents and young people were given more options, they could possibly have chosen other placements that they thought their children might be better at rather than just going to college.

Another parent said that her child was not ready for the transition to college, even though he finally ended up at college after being reassured by the college and the school. She commented:

*I have a problem because I don't think \*name\* was ready to transition from school to college, I don't think he was at that stage but yet the school did. That's why at the transition meeting I didn't really think he was ready up to that stage to go from school to college I don't think he was mature enough and could cope with the college surroundings. I was a bit upset because I wasn't listening to by some of the people who were in the transition meeting cos I knew what would happen, I could tell. (PYP2 SE)*

It seems as if the college really wanted the young person to be there and tried to convince the parent with their reassurance. This raises the question of whether this is the only alternative that parents have, as this parent seems to be in a dilemma about whether to agree or possibly facing the consequences of her child ending up with nowhere to go. Only one parent mentioned the work experience that her son might have been exposed to, as she stated:

*Um, they were, may be going to try um, work experience but they didn't know if that it works for \*name\* that's why they suggested the college to bring his confidence in whatever into it as well, so yeah. (PYP4 SC)*

Even though the majority seemed to be happy with the placement, it could be argued whether the placement was really in the best interests of the young people. A study conducted by Kaehne and Beyer (2008) showed that 56% of carers hoped that their child would enter into paid employment, compared to 27% who believed that further education would be the choice after leaving school. This is supported by ample evidence which shows that people with disabilities also would like to have paid work (Thornton & Lunt, 1995). However, their follow up study six months after the young people left school revealed that only 21% entered the workforce, with a further 9% having an unpaid job, while the majority (63%) went on to college. Similar findings were also found in Anderson & Clarke's study (1982; cited in Burchardt, 2004) as far back as three decades ago, who conducted a study on teenagers with cerebral palsy or spina bifida. Their findings show that 40% of the young people attending mainstream school at age 16 wanted to get a job; however, three years later, it was found that only 17% of them had done so (Burchardt, 2004). This raises the question of why carers, as in Kaehne and Beyer's study, would prefer a paid job than further education for their child. It could possibly be that they are aware of the difficulty, or uncertainty, of getting a paid job for their child, especially after leaving college, or maybe they know better what the strengths and weaknesses are of their child. As Heslop and Abbot (2008) point out, families usually know far better about their son or daughter than any other professionals and generally have aspirations and expectations of and for their child which can favourably shape their choices.

By taking this scenario into account, it could be argued whether parents would still put college as their preference if they really knew the consequences of their children going to college. It is important therefore, that parents are given information about the pros and cons of going to college before a decision is made.

It may possibly be that some parents did not really understand the consequences of their children going to college and only agreed for the sake of furthering their education without having a thorough understanding of the consequences. It could also possibly be that they would really want to know more about it, but perhaps due to the lack of information or resources to refer to, they seem to just follow what has already been planned for their children.

#### **6.2.2.2 The support**

In general, all the parents reported that they were happy with the overall support that they and their children received particularly from the college. Three parents said that their children received support from the care workers and they seemed to be happy and satisfied with the support. One of them commented:

*Yes, it was very good uh huh! They're very supportive and they're very good with [name]. (PYP4 SA)*

However, when asked further about the level of support in terms of learning that their children received from college, five parents said that they did not know how much support that their children received, as they had not had any letter or feedback from the college thus far regarding the learning support. One parent commented:

*Really, we haven't had any negative feedback and there were a couple of behavioural issues that is most highlighted and have been addressed but certainly not that anything negative feedback regarding \*name\* fault or good one now, but I don't have the courses particularly academic at the moment, so I really don't know what level of support he actually got. (PYP3 SC)*

Although they did not know the level of support that their children received, the feedback from their children seemed to suggest that they were pleased with the support, as one parent put it:

*Um, but he seems to say that you know everybody is really friendly and everything, so...yeah, he seems very happy with it. (PYP1 SE)*

Conversely, one parent seemed to be unhappy with the support from the college from the beginning, as she expected. She expressed:

*...but I don't think there's much, they said there's a lot of support out there for children with special needs and disabilities but there isn't, there's not as much as what people say there is. Because I've had the support, I'm, I've been told if I need support, ring such a thing and such a thing but it's not always there you know if you get what I mean. You can ring and they said well, we do what we can, so what? It's not really the support that is needed at times, not every time but at times it's not the support that is needed. (PYP2 SE)*

Even though she was finally happy with the support after things had been sorted out, this incident seems to suggest that more attention needs to be paid to handling parents' concerns. Although this is only one case, it seems to imply that the level of parents' satisfaction should be given priority when dealing with students' issues at college otherwise it could possibly affect the reputation and service provided by the college.

### 6.2.2.3 Suitability of courses attended

All the parents seemed to know about the courses that their children were doing at college. One parent described:

*He gets everything from cooking, computing, he gets a bit of everything, he gets computing, cooking, dancing, how to look after himself, things like that a bit of everything yeah gardening, construction work, um, so it's not like a boring day for him, he's always got variety in his day. Um, I think he likes most of it. (PYP1 SA)*

In addition, their children also seemed to enjoy their current level of study, as one parent put it:

*Yes, well he hasn't made any complaints anyway, but yeah, he seems to be enjoying that all, so yeah. (PYP4 SC)*

Only one parent reported that her daughter did not enjoy her current level of study, as she commented:

*Um, no... no, she thinks that's too easy... I don't think that she finds it boring, I think she finds it too easy. (PYP6 SA)*

This shows that choosing the right course and matching it with the young people's interests is essential to the success of the study. Otherwise, it could possibly lead to the young person feeling bored or not being interested in their studies. Also, the level of suitability of the course should be matched to the level of thinking so that they do not feel bored or find it hard to follow. As Levinson (2004) has noted, the choices of programme should always be based on the young people's skills, interests and aptitudes.

## Careers guidance

Of all the parents interviewed, only one said that her son had been advised about careers guidance.

*Yes, he has. They had, they have a few sessions with the Careers Scotland, people come over to talk about what are the choices and all but like I say... in college, yeah when they started, they have Careers Scotland coming to them to talk about it, you know ... (PYP2 SC)*

In contrast, six young people said that they discussed future plans with their tutors at college (refer to Table 6.5). This shows that there was a contrast between the information given by the young people and their parents regarding careers prospects. It can be argued that perhaps the young people did not inform their parents about any careers related guidance, including the talk from Careers Scotland and therefore parents had no idea about that, as one parent commented:

*... he doesn't tell me what he does at college, I do ask, ask when he comes to the door, I don't get an answer. (PYPI SC)*

Another parent said:

*Um, well, we don't have any, we've not had any letters or anything you know from the college, so we don't really know what he does at college, they didn't inform completely on it. (PYPI SE)*

This suggests that perhaps, parents would expect the college to inform them about what was planned for their children in advance, rather than them finding out about it themselves.

## Future aspiration

Even though some of the parents could foresee what their children would want to do in the future based on their interests, some were not very sure of their children's future once they finished college. They were also unsure of how many courses their children would take and how long they would stay there. One parent commented:

*This is a year's course and then there's another year's course after that if he wishes and I think there's yet another course he can take after that I'm not sure how long that one is, that's towards more advanced. Um, I presume sometime next year they'll discuss with him whether he wants to stay on to another course ... (PYP4 SA)*

Another parent added:

*Completion is in three years time, so it's a long time for a child like him with gone in just a few months to decide what he wants to do because I've asked him and he really doesn't know, he doesn't know yet... (PYP2 SC)*

The data show that parental expectations in terms of aspirations did not vary significantly from those of the children. As can be seen in Table 6.7, there were only two statements that were found to be mismatched between the child and the parents with regard to the future aspirations of the child. For example, one young person seemed to be looking forward to becoming a teacher, however, his parent did not seem to be in line with his dream, as they foresee him not being able to hold a higher level job. He commented:

*\*name\* could sustain a basic level job and that's all as much as we could actually expect from \*name\* because he's working at a very low level and... so he should and could be able to hold down a job but it won't be based on academic level... Somebody with \*name\* IQ is categorised as a person who can do simple tasks slowly and that requires supervision so that's gonna be \*name\* always days. I would imagine it'll be low level employment, but things have to be spelled out to \*name\* and he's got to be supervised of what he actually does.(PYP3 SC)*

**Table 6.7** Comparison between child's and parents' thoughts about the future aspirations of the child

Code	Future Aspirations		Code	Future Aspirations
YP1 SA	Gardener		PYP1 SA	Doing gardening
YP4 SA	Designer		PYP4 SA	Doing designing
YP5 SA	Cartoonist and illustrator		PYP5 SA	Continue to Art College
YP6 SA	Physiotherapist		PYP6 SA	Line of sport
YP1 SB	Not sure, but interested in designing		PYP1 SB	Not interviewed
YP2 SB	Not interviewed		PYP2 SB	Don't know
YP1 SC	Don't know yet		PYP1 SC	No plan
YP2 SC	Not decided yet		PYP2 SC	Don't know
YP3 SC	Teacher		PYP3 SC	Basic level job
YP4 SC	Chef		PYP4 SC	Chef
YP2 SD	Make cartoons		PYP2 SD	Doing an animation course
YP1 SE	Not interviewed		PYP1 SE	No idea, but interested in computers
YP2 SE	Footballer		PYP2 SE	Hasn't really planned, perhaps just a part time job in a cafe

The parent, whose child's dream was to be a footballer, might not see this as a job and might also be doubtful about whether it is a full time job. In fact, she said that her son had not even planned for his future yet, as she commented:

*We have talked about it but \*name\* hasn't really planned ... To be honest I don't think \*name\* could have what they call a full time job because of his learning difficulties. If anything it'll be a little part time job where he could help out in a cafe like he did do on work experience like clearing cups and moving things and that. He can't cope in an everyday situation as a full time job because he's not got the main tools or they understand him to do it. (PYP2 SE)*

In my view, the mismatch between parents and young person in terms of aspiration is not something uncommon in family. As Lindsey (1994) has noted, the interests of the child may not always be the same as those of the parents, as such, it could also create a dilemma. In this case, a mediator or a key worker might be seen as a better person to deal with the issue more appropriately, in the interests of the young person.

The rest of the statements seemed to be either similar or slightly similar to each other or at least in line with the child's interests, if not really close to them. This seems to suggest that there is a good match between the young person's wishes and their parents' wishes. Perhaps this is not surprising as previous research has shown that the wishes of young people with learning disabilities greatly influenced the decisions made by their carers (Kaehne & Beyer, 2008).

One parent said that she had not planned that far ahead while another said that she thought it was too early to decide about it. On the other hand, although the other three parents said that they did not know their child's future aspirations as yet, at least one of them was thinking of equipping or at least preparing her child for a vocational-type course in which he could gain more skills before embarking on the employment market. She commented:

*... So he'll be there until about nineteen, and then after nineteen they'll move on to their vocational first year which is sort of hands on, work based...Yes, yes, I would like to because academically wise he's not really that great, alright! So that's the only thing for him to learn is work based, hand skills or whatever skills he can learn. (PYP2 SC)*

It seems that the parent really knew her son's strengths and capabilities. However, she said that it would all depend on his progress in the next couple of years. As Riddell, Baron and Wilson (2001) highlighted, the majority of all post-school programmes only seemed to enhance social skills and maturity level, and were not directly vocational. Hence, her plan of moving her son to do a vocational course might still be unclear.

#### 6.2.2.4 Making friends and sustaining friendships

It is necessary not only to make and develop friendships, but also to maintain and preserve them (Richardson & Ritchie, 1990). Although nine out of eleven young people reported that they had made new friends at college, that was not really what their parents thought. The data revealed that six parents said that their children did not have any new friends at college and only mixed with their old friends from their old schools.

One parent commented:

*I think he tends to mix more with his friends that already, he's already been to school with, um, I think he feels more comfortable with them because he knows them, so and that makes him feel at ease as well, so... he tends to mix more with his old school friends so. (PYP4 SC)*

Another parent said that his son tried to make new friends, but it seemed that his effort did not work, as she commented:

*He did try when he first started he tried to make new friends, but it just didn't seem to work for him so the people he is with now he knows 'cos he was from his school so he's got friends from his previous school within in his college so you know. (PYP2 SE)*

Surprisingly, one parent said that his son had no friends at all, despite the son himself saying that he enjoyed having new friends. He commented:

*He didn't have a friend in the world. \*name\* is not a boy, as I said, that makes friends easily, so there was absolutely no friends. (PYP3 SC)*

It was found that the young person had difficulty in making or sustaining friendships and tended to rely on them contacting him, rather than the other way round. Indeed,

friendship is a reciprocal relationship which means that friends give and take various resources from each other including time, presence, material objects, practical assistance, comfort and other forms of emotional support (Lutfiyya, 1991; Richardson & Ritchie, 1990). According to Lutfiyya (1991), a relationship without an obvious reciprocity is generally not considered a friendship. Perhaps this was the reason why the parent said that his son did not have any friends, as he (the son) seemed unable to maintain the relationship with his friends for a long period, or maybe he did not even think seriously about the relationship with his friends. For a friendship to last for a long time, both parties need to have a mutual understanding of what friendship is all about. Richardson and Ritchie (1990) outline two crucial elements, namely the *opportunities* to meet people, and the *ability* to develop and sustain the relationships, as prerequisites to enable friendships to foster and flourish. However, the findings from existing literature failed to recognise and explore the real meaning of friendship from the perspectives of the individuals themselves in their lives (Knox & Hickson, 2001). Knox and Hickson (2001) argue that the results were generally measured based on the researcher's perspectives of what characteristics were important in establishing a relationship, rather than what the people with learning disabilities thought were important for them. In addition, the parent also mentioned that the young person had a biological brother but never spoke to him either, as he commented:

*He's been in the kids' cadets for three and a half years and doesn't socialise with any of them. One of the people there was his brother and he doesn't socialise with his brother...yes, yeah, he doesn't socialise with him. The only time he sees his brother is at the, once a week at the army cadets. And his brother doesn't keep in touch and \*name\* doesn't bother like keeping in touch...(PYP3 SC)*

It should be noted that the two brothers did not live together and rarely communicated with each other. Perhaps this was the main reason why he did not socialise with his own

biological brother. It seems that some of the young people found it difficult to make new friends, particularly in a new setting like a college. Nevertheless, it was not surprising to discover that some of them were happy with the way they were, being in their own space rather than mixing or mingling with other people, as one parent stated:

*...he doesn't have a great circle of friends but he's happy with the environment um, hopefully in time he'll socialise more but he's always been quite isolated and he's happy. I'd like him to be more sociable. (PYP5 SA)*

Even those who seemed to say that they had new friends would rather stay at home at the weekend than going out or socialising with their friends, as mentioned by six other parents. In other words, they only mixed with their friends at college and there was no further socialisation beyond college. This could raise a further question of how young people make and sustain friends and to what extent they really value the meaning of friendships in their life. As Garvey and Kroese (1991) have noted, although it is easy to measure the frequency of contact, the quality of any one relationship, on the other hand, is hardly measured, which is necessary in order to define friendship.

#### **6.2.2.5 Transportation**

According to the parents, out of twelve young people, five of them were able to travel independently by bus while the rest seemed to be more comfortable travelling by taxi which was provided and arranged by the college for them. Only one young person chose to travel with her parent everyday as she was not used to travelling independently even by taxi even though it was initially offered to her by the college as her parent commented:

*We take her you know she does just not, she'll no go on a bus, we've been offered a taxi sort of to come and take her but no, it's got to be me being there with her sort of thing and drop her off to a support worker, the support worker meets her, we've always to pick her up so we've always done that and she feels safe us doing that for her. (PYP6 SA)*

It seems that almost all young people involved were able to travel on their own to college without any problems apart from the bus timetable factor sometimes, as stated by one parent. This may be due to the effect of the independent travel that the young people learned during the link course. However, the role of parents could not be denied in this regard. In other words, if more parents could come on board and help their children get on the bus themselves, it could possibly give more reassurance to the child so as to be more confident in the future to travel on his or her own, as one parent said:

*... he looked into the buses himself. I went with him at the bus place in the town... and found out what buses went along to \*name\* College and stuff. So we'd done it ourselves and he just goes back and forwards himself. (PYP1 SA)*

Perhaps this could be one good example of how to train more young people to become independent travellers.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

On the whole, going to college seemed to be an enjoyable experience as viewed by all young people. Getting early exposure to college life prior to going full time seems to ease them in adapting to the new environment. Their social skills also seem to be enhanced by getting new friends and being more sociable, although this does not include all of them. This is similar to Hyland and Merrill (2003) who note that the college environment also enabled the young people to develop themselves and their

identities by treating them in a respectful and adult manner, something that they had never experienced at school which might have given them a sense of self worth. In fact the enjoyment of college life seems to eliminate the bad experience of being bullied, as happened to two of the young people. It is quite interesting however, that bad experiences were only reported by the parents and not the young people themselves, even though they were the ones who had experienced it.

The young people also seemed to be happy with the course that they were doing, as it was found to be suited to their interests which implies that matching their interests with the right course is essential in sustaining the young people's commitment to their studies. They also did not seem to encounter any major problems and were able to cope with all situations fairly well with the help and support of all the people around them.

Despite the fact that the young people seemed to be reporting their experiences in very positive terms, a few of the parents on the other hand, expressed their difficult experiences in the transition process, including dealing with bullying cases and options for the post-school placement. It is quite obvious that only parents reported all the problems that their children had and not the young people themselves, apart from one case of bullying. Perhaps this is the nature of parents who are always more concerned about what is going to happen to their son or daughter than the children themselves. Moving to college also meant changes in their children's life, including becoming more mature and independent, although a few mentioned that there were no clear changes.

Some of their children were also reported to be able to make new friends and all except one were able to travel independently to and from college every day. All parents except two seemed to be happy with their involvement in the transition process. Similarly, all

except one seemed to be happy with the support that their children received from the college. It is also quite obvious that college seems to be the only option that they were offered and that raised the issue of whether college is the best destination for the young people post-school.

While all parents except one reported that their children were happy with the courses that they were doing at the moment, the other two parents' views did not seem to correspond with their children's future aspirations. Despite the finding that most parents seemed to have similar aspirations as their children, their future is still yet to be determined regarding how long they are going to stay at college and what will come after that.

## Chapter 7

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will pull together the findings from all participants across the three stages. Essentially, this longitudinal study aims to explore the experiences of the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities in special and mainstream schools by focussing on their planning and preparation before they leave school. The study further aimed to explore the views of young people, parents and professionals about the planning and preparation for the post-school transition. Additionally, the study also aimed to explore the role of parents and professionals by seeking their experiences in the post-school transition of the young people with learning disabilities. Despite the fact that the study only involved one local authority in Scotland, the data gathered from all three stages, including the rich data from the parents and professionals, managed to achieve the main aim of this study which was to explore the experiences of the post-school transition process of young people with learning disabilities. In a way, this study provides a balanced insight by taking into account the viewpoints of all the stakeholders involved in one single study, as little research has previously been done in this way. In fact, this implies the exclusivity and strength of this study and shows the major differences between the previous studies which tend to look at the viewpoints of stakeholders either separately or at a different time and rarely combine the whole groups in a single study over a period of time (see, for example, Kaehne and Beyer 2008; Kaehne and Beyer 2009). As such, this study contributes to the body of knowledge in respect to the post-school transition of the young people with learning disabilities, particularly by looking at planning and preparation before leaving school at two time points from the viewpoints of all the stakeholders, through to once they are at college.

Four scenarios of young people's transition experiences have been presented in this chapter, to illustrate their transition journeys from school to post-school destinations. It should be noted that three of the case studies below represent the journey of three different young people in this study, whilst the other case study (Kian's story) is a composite of four other young people's journeys in this study. In other words, the four case studies demonstrated in this chapter represent seven young people's journeys altogether. The case studies illustrate that each and every young person's transition is different, although the process generally looks the same. The rationale for choosing three individual case studies is first, that, taken together the cases illustrate the different themes in the transition although their destination is the same (college); second, two of them (Ethan's and Alban's cases) were fully followed throughout the three stages and thus more experiences were explored from each of them, so it was felt important to include them; third, the four case studies also represent the different schools from which they came, i.e. Ethan was from the special school, Alban was from the mainstream faith school, and Chloe was from the mainstream school with the Enhanced Provision Unit, whilst Kian represents the combination of the other mainstream schools with special provision for Additional Support Needs; and fourth, Chloe's case represents the female participant as the remainder of the cases are all representing male participants. Although these seven young people's journeys represent seven case studies, for the sake of clarity, it is imperative to say that the three case studies (Ethan, Alban and Chloe) are different from each other. As for Kian's case study (which represents four other young people's journeys, as mentioned earlier), the fact of the matter is that these four young people were in a similar school structure and system (i.e. from the mainstream school), although their transition experiences were very unique in their terms. Another reason for creating a composite case study is not to make the whole case study voluminous, but to make it precise. Besides, my intention is to unfold the many challenging or hidden

stories within a composite case study. The different experiences that they went through seem to suggest that a different approach needs to be used to ensure a smooth and seamless transition process takes place. In addition, I believe that by looking at the actual transition experiences of young people, it could help the stakeholders, particularly the services providers make a difference by paying more attention to what the young people's needs are, rather than just placing them on the existing placement which may not necessarily be suitable for each and every one of them. In fact, having services available to meet people's needs, rather than having people to suit the services on offer has been one of the areas the government focused on in order to personalise the services (Department of Health, 2008, 2010b).

### **Ethan**

Ethan aged 16 attended a special school in his local authority. He had a medical history of Global Delay and ADHD and his speech was not very clear. According to his teacher, Ethan was an enthusiastic young person but could be stubborn at times. His teacher described him as someone who liked to organise his classmates in groups, but to them, this might come across as Ethan being 'bossy'. Ethan was first told about the post-school transition process by his teachers and parents when he was 15.

At the time of the study (when the first interview took place), Ethan was attending a two day a week link course or bridging week at a college. While attending the link course, he learned about art, cooking, getting on the bus and personal profiling. Ethan said he enjoyed going to the college, especially sitting with his friends. When he was at school, he enjoyed playing football and going off riding as part of the school activities. However, he feared that he might miss these two activities when he went to the college.

He really loved football and aspired to become a professional footballer and play for Celtic in the future. Every weekend he would go to a park near his house to play football with his brother and sister. He also enjoyed swimming and his name was on the waiting list to join the swimming club.

Ethan was once involved in a meeting regarding his future needs with his teachers and his mother at school when he was 15. However, he did not remember what was discussed at the meeting. When he was 16 another meeting known as the 'Post 16 Planning Meeting' was held to ensure his educational programme met his current needs and to look at a possible post-school provision. Those present at this meeting were his Principal Teacher, class teacher, his mother, a college staff member and a careers advisor. Ethan himself chose not to attend this meeting even though he was invited.

When he was 16 Ethan also underwent work experience for six weeks at a cafe in a supermarket. His task was to take the tray from the table to the kitchen and he seemed to enjoy working there as it gave him a new experience of working life. By the time the final interview with him took place, Ethan was already at college. Every morning, a taxi picked him up and dropped him off from his house to the college and vice versa. At the college, he was supported by his tutors and also a good friend from his school, Owen. Ethan did not have a big circle of friends. He only stuck to the friend he knew from his old school and made no new friends at the college even though he did try, but it just did not seem to work for him.

At the beginning, Ethan was doing a full time life skills course at the college from Monday to Friday. However, he suffered a bad experience when he was bullied almost every day by his classmates during the course. According to Ethan's mother, Mrs.

Ferguson, Ethan would cry in his bedroom because he was so upset about it and said that he did not want to go to college. Mrs. Ferguson then rang up the college to report the incident and said that she would pull Ethan out of the college if the bullying case continued. Finally, the college manager of the Special Programme where Ethan was placed sorted it out and the bullying case ceased.

According to Mrs. Ferguson, the bullying had been going on since Ethan did the bridging week. She was upset and had tried to raise this issue during the transition meeting before the move. However, she felt that her voice was not heard by some of the professionals during the meeting. She had been reassured by the college that this would not happen again. However, it did happen when Ethan started college full time.

As a result of the bullying, Ethan was transferred to another course called a Step Up course, which was a slightly lower level than the life skills course, and he was fine doing that course before moving on to the life skills course the following year. However, instead of five days a week, Ethan only went to college three days a week, namely Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday because the new course only lasted three days a week. For the following days, Ethan just stayed at home with his parents and did nothing. This worried his parents as Ethan used to be active five days a week at school, but now it was cut down to only three days where he would be active and join in with other people.

Mrs. Ferguson also said that she was not happy about the transition meeting as she only attended one big transition meeting with fewer small meetings before, where only a couple of people came to ask about Ethan's move to college. Thus, she did not get much information about what was going to happen to Ethan during his transition from school

to college. She further said that the school only discussed the transition with Ethan without her being there. Although she was involved in the transition meeting, she felt that her involvement was not significant even though she said that she was a very supportive person and would do everything she could for Ethan. She had hoped that she could have been more involved in Ethan's transition meeting at school so that she could get more information to plan for this. Mrs. Ferguson felt that Ethan was not fully ready to go to college because he did not seem to settle in well at the college. She said Ethan still needed more support than what the college could offer him to cope with college life. Mrs. Ferguson went on to say that although she had had experiences of the transition process with her other children moving on from school to college, it had not been as smooth for Ethan as it had been for her other children because they did not have any learning disabilities. She said that she tried to treat the same way to Ethan but it seemed that Ethan found it hard to cope because of his condition.

In terms of Ethan's aspirations and future planning, Mrs. Ferguson personally felt that Ethan could not have a full time job because of his learning disability. The only thing that Ethan could do, according to Mrs. Ferguson, was a part time job like helping out at a café, similar to what he did when he was on work experience. However, Ethan himself said enthusiastically that he would like to be a football player or a teacher so that he could teach people how to play football.

### **Alban**

Alban was 15 at the start of the research and lived with his mother and his step-father in a double storey house on the outskirts of a city. His biological father lived far away in the south of England and Alban had visited him during his recent summer holiday.

Alban attended a mainstream Catholic secondary school where they had a special provision for young people with Additional Support Needs. According to his mother, Mrs. Dickson, Alban had been diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and ADHD. This made her life harder, especially when thinking about his post-school transition.

Observation of Alban during the interview suggested that he was a very quiet and shy young adult. However, according to Mrs. Dickson, that did not really reflect his actual behaviour at home. Alban could be quite withdrawn at times and did not always want to talk to her for whatever reason that it might be. As he grew older, Alban became very uncooperative, violent, caused a lot of trouble and constantly argued about everything, said Mrs. Dickson. Even though she had experienced these problems for years, Alban's problems had got worse in the past few months and thus made her life more stressful. Fortunately, Mrs. Dickson had been supported by a transition worker from the Social Work Department who was very helpful and in some ways made her life easier with regards to Alban's transition.

Mrs. Dickson was initially hesitant to let Alban go to college after leaving school. She wished Alban could have stayed on at his school until the sixth year. However, she did not have a choice as the place where Alban was placed only operated until fourth year. If she still wanted Alban to stay on, Mrs. Dickson would have to find him a new school otherwise there was nothing much else she could do for Alban. Although she did not say that she was not happy about Alban going to the college, Mrs. Dickson would have liked to have had the opportunity to make sure that Alban can stay on at school.

According to Alban, he felt happy about leaving school and moving on to college even though he said that he felt scared when thinking about getting a job. Prior to moving to

college, Alban attended a link course at college for six weeks. Alban enjoyed his time at the college and learned about art, cooking and also building. He could still remember that the first time he was told about leaving school by his teacher was before Christmas. Alban also said that he attended one meeting where his teacher, mother and a college staff member were present but he could not remember what it was all about. He said that he had a lot of support from both his teachers and his mother.

Alban started attending the college full time at the end of August 2011 and was taking the life skills course. Alban took a taxi and it was arranged between Mrs. Dickson, the school and the college for him to commute from his house to the college every day. He had never travelled independently before, although he had learnt about it at college. Since he had attended the link course earlier, he felt happier about adapting to the college environment and also because he knew the people, as he had already met them before. At college Alban took part in activities like playing football and basketball. He also liked to play golf and skateboarding and always played with his friends during his leisure time. However, Alban did not make any new friends at college. He was more inclined to spend time with the people he knew and thus only stayed with his old friends from his old school. Alban would spend much of his time playing computer games, including x box with his friends at the weekend, said Mrs. Dickson.

Alban was interested in art and building but did not know what he wanted to be in the future. Although he said that the tutors at college had spoken to him about his future, he still did not know what to do. According to Mrs. Dickson, Alban's life skills course was meant for three years and they would assess Alban's progress to decide whether or not he could proceed to the second or third year. However, neither she nor Alban had any plan for what he would be doing after that.

Alban's main interest was art and music, said Mrs. Dickson. "Give him Maths, English, Science or Physics, that's not him, but give him music, give him drama, that's him all over", stressed Mrs. Dickson. She further said that Alban would always take her pencils, pens and paper and she had never said no to him because she was happy for him if he wanted to use them. According to Mrs. Dickson, her father was once a musician, and used to write books and poetry which were published, until he suffered from schizophrenia. Therefore, she hoped that Alban could possibly follow in his grandfather's footsteps one day. Deep in her heart, Mrs. Dickson said that she would actually like to see Alban becoming an architect, or something to do with art or design. However, she knew that Alban was not that good academically. She would just be very happy if Alban could go to an Art college because she knew that he would do well there. One thing was sure, said Mrs. Dickson, despite all the hardship that she had had with Alban, she wanted to see Alban doing well and to become somebody successful in the future.

## **Kian**

Kian, aged 15, lived with his father, a carpet fitter, his mother and his 19-year old brother, who worked as a plumber in a two bedroom flat in a town not far from his school. Kian's previous school had been closed down and merged with another large mainstream school. Kian's mother, Mrs. McKenzie, said that the merger had been a bit overwhelming for Kian and he had never quite settled in, as the new school was larger and had too many people. His attitude towards school changed from then onwards.

Kian had a global delay and dyspraxia. He always needed a lot of support. At school Kian was supported by the Additional Support for Learning team led by Mrs. Brown,

the Principal Teacher Support for Learning and the Guidance team led by Mrs. Wilson, the Principal Teacher Guidance. Mrs. McKenzie was very pleased with the support that Kian received from his school especially from Mrs. Brown and her team. She felt very supported and involved, especially in Kian's transition process for college. Mrs. McKenzie had had a couple of meetings with Mrs. Brown and in fact, Mrs. Brown had also arranged for her to meet a few people from different agencies, including the youth link, Social Work and Enable Scotland. However, the Social Work staff did not help much, said Mrs. McKenzie. She also had a bad experience with the Enable Scotland staff when she sent Kian to a session with them and was asked to go home because there was not enough staff available at that time, whereas the appointment had already been made earlier. Mrs. McKenzie felt very irritated and called the manager to complain about the poor service she had experienced. The manager eventually apologised to her on behalf of her staff.

When Kian was at school he was offered to go on a one day a week link course at college for seven weeks. Originally, Kian was reluctant to go, but he was encouraged by his teachers to give it a try. Once he went there, he found that college was somehow different from school and finally decided that college was indeed a better place for him. Kian accepted the offer to go on a full time basis at the end of August 2011 to do a life skills course. However, Kian's tutors felt that the full time course was physically too much for him. Therefore, instead of five days a week, Kian only went for three days a week to the college. Mrs. McKenzie said that Kian seemed happier at college compared to at school.

Kian had difficulty with his handwriting. However, since he started college, his handwriting seemed to have improved with help and support from his tutors. Overall,

Kian seemed to be happy with the courses that he took at college except for two: the dance and costume design courses. Kian also enjoyed learning about cooking and the bus trip as part of his course at the college. It taught him to be a little bit independent. According to Mrs. McKenzie, Kian had never been out and about, on his own. However, since starting at college, he became more independent and started to go out to the shop around the corner by himself, something which he had never done before. Thus, in a way, Kian had started to change gradually. In fact, Kian also took a taxi in order to attend college from day one which had increased his level of independence, added Mrs. McKenzie.

Although Kian seemed relatively shy and introverted, he tried to make some new friends while at college, including those who came from a special school who were on the same course as him. However, he only mixed with them at college and never socialised with them after class or at the weekend as Kian preferred to stay at home.

Kian was interested in art and computing. His dream was to become a cartoonist. He was also very talented at drawing. During the final interview with him, Kian showed his art book which was full of his own drawings of his favourite movie characters, from the Lord of the Rings. Mrs. McKenzie said that she hoped there would be a course in computer animation for someone at Kian's level so that he would be able to take up that course in the future. Alternatively, Mrs. McKenzie said she hoped that Kian could finish his three year life skills course and proceed with the vocational course in hospitality and catering at the same college as he was also interested in this field. She knew that if Kian worked really hard, he would be able to equip himself with all the skills he learnt from the life skills course before embarking on the vocational course. Mrs. McKenzie also realised that a person with limited ability like Kian could hardly excel academically.

Instead, he would be more able in areas that did not emphasise literacy and numeracy skills and a vocational course seemed to be the best option for him.

## **Chloe**

Chloe was 17 when she was first interviewed, and attended an urban mainstream school which had a special provision for pupils with special needs. She lived with her parents and older sister in a residential area which was approximately fifteen minutes away from her school. Chloe was diagnosed as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder and faced a number of mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, which would constantly affect her mood and feelings. She had been on anti-depression medication for the past four years and had been seen by an anxiety nurse in between that period.

At first, Chloe did not want to leave school as she felt safe and comfortable because she had been there for many years. However, as her mother Mrs. O'Neill said, Chloe had to accept the fact that she was getting older and could not stay on at school forever. Sooner or later she would have to leave school and move on to the next phase of her life. Chloe's school was great at helping her go through the transition period. According to Mrs. O'Neill, everything was set up and put in place very well and that made it a lot easier for Chloe and she seemed to be fine when she started college. Mrs. O'Neill and Chloe were both involved in the transition process months before Chloe finished her sixth year. She also attended a meeting every three months in order to plan what would be the best for Chloe. A number of support workers were also involved in the meeting to make it easy for Chloe as well as for her parents.

When she was at school, Chloe was the only girl at the base. Chloe's world was just confined to the small base and she had never been out before, even at lunch time. This was because Chloe did not like crowds which would be too much for her said Mrs. O'Neill. However, when she attended college, Chloe started to make a number of friends which was good for her because she had not had many friends at school. She managed to stay and go out for lunch with some other girls at the college. Chloe really enjoyed making new friends and meeting new people at college and became more sociable, although the relationships only took place in college and never went beyond that. She would rather stay at home all the time at the weekend or during holidays. There were times when Chloe would only lie down on her bed or sleep all day long if her mood was not good, added Mrs. O'Neill. Incidentally, this happened when I wanted to interview her for the last time, as she was not willing to meet anyone and was lying on her bed. Eventually, the interview with her had to be postponed to another date.

At college Chloe was supported by her tutors as well as two other care workers who looked after her (from a distance) even though she did not need them all the time. As stated by Mrs. O'Neill, although Chloe seemed to be quite independent at college, that did not mean she was fully independent. She still needed support from others, particularly her parents. In fact, she was driven to and from college every day by her father as she felt safer that way and had never tried independent travel.

At the time of the final interview with Chloe, she was already at the college and was taking an Introduction to Child Care course, the only course that was available for her. Initially, there was nothing for Chloe at the college when the placements were put in. However, with help from the Head Teacher who spoke to the Education Department who then got in touch with the college, Chloe's application was finally accepted and she

agreed to take the Child Care course. According to Mrs. O'Neill, Chloe was a 'routine person', she did not like change, everything had to be the same, like getting up for school every morning, i.e., the things that she had been doing for many years. If Chloe did not go on to college, Mrs. O'Neill worried that her routine might change and her anxiety and depression could become worse. Mrs. O'Neill did not want to see Chloe doing nothing after leaving school. This was why Mrs. O'Neill finally agreed with Chloe taking the course so that she could continue with her routine at the college.

According to Mrs. O'Neill, although Chloe had never thought a great deal about what she would like to do in the future, she had expressed interest in working with children with mental health issues because she had suffered and gone through that experience and would possibly like to go down that path as well. When asked, Chloe said that she took the course because she wanted to work with children and in a nursing environment. It was later that she found out the course was boring and not as interesting as she had thought it would be. Despite no longer being interested in the course, Chloe still needed to spend a couple more months completing the course before moving on to the next level. She hoped that she could switch to sport sciences at the next level. She said that she enjoyed sports and hoped to work in the field of physiotherapy in the future.

In short, Mrs. O'Neill was very pleased with Chloe's progress at college considering her condition and the way she managed to cope with college life. She hoped that the support Chloe received at college would continue for her sake and for her future.

## 7.2 Discussion

This chapter began with the four case studies of the young people involved in this study, which represented both the special and mainstream school. The case studies presented here illustrate the young people's transition journeys to post-school, in particular to college by exploring their experiences in planning and preparation for the post-school transition. It gives an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the current system of the post-school transition process of young people with Additional Support Needs as practiced at one local authority in Scotland.

The main point that needs to be highlighted here is what is needed by the young people at this crucial stage of their lives and how the support networks around them play their roles to help and prepare them to achieve their dreams. Therefore, whatever decision or outcome that they are going to take will be very important, as it will eventually affect their future undertakings over a long-term period. Given that the current study looks at the young people moving on to college does not mean that it is their only aim or ultimate goal in their lives. They should indeed be prepared and trained to become independent contributing citizens who are members of a skilled and flexible workforce (McGinty & Fish, 1992). More importantly, their future should be driven in the direction of what they want their lives to be, rather than what other people think they should be doing.

In the following subsections, the key points extracted from the findings of all the three stages will be discussed further.

### **7.2.1 Limited Post-16 options**

Despite the fact that this study focuses on those who are going to college post-school, the issue of post-16 options is still frequently discussed, particularly among the professionals. The findings reveal that one third of the school staff and more than half of the other professionals raised the issue of limited or inappropriate places post-school. An example of this issue can be seen in Alban's case, which eventually caused his mother to choose college as the only option post-school. A question is asked about whether or not, the choice for parents should be restricted. It is quite disappointing to see parents' wishes are not being fully met, as in Alban's case. The question is who should be responsible for helping or providing opportunities for them in this case? What is needed here is not only help, but also, more importantly, the right for both of them to have options and opportunities, so that they can make the best choice. In fact, the need to have provisions, including access to sixth forms if this is possible to arrange, has long been outlined in the Warnock Report (DES, 1978). Although the report does not reflect the Scottish context directly, the recommendation included in the report is very useful for addressing issues such as the ones in Alban's case.

If viewed at a glance, maybe some will say that his mother should go and find a solution to the problem on her own. However, if many other parents face the same issues, do they also have to find a solution to the problem on their own? In the view of the social model of disability (Boxall, 2002), this issue should be targeted to the education system, or in particular the school that Alban went to, rather than targeting it to Alban himself and his mother. The school could probably play a more proactive role by suggesting to the local authority, or perhaps even an higher level, to modify the existing system to a system that is more supportive in finding ways to address this particular issue and ultimately ensuring that the needs of both the child and the parents are met. This, in

turn, could prevent the child (in this case Alban) and his mother from being labelled or seen as a 'failure' in making the best option post-16. Perhaps sixth year might not be the best option for Alban, and not even the best solution for him and his mother. In other words, Alban's problem should not be seen as an individual problem, rather, it is society's problem that needs collective strategies from all parties in order to tackle the problem.

The issue of lack of places post-school has been discussed for many years, but there is still no absolute solution to this matter. Stalker (2002) for instance, has highlighted the issue of a wide range of post-school options that should be considered seriously in the transition planning since 2002, including employment and inclusive further and higher education with learning support. However, after ten years, a similar issue is still being discussed and raised, as the findings reveal. This raises the important question of why, after a very long time, the same issue is still happening and being discussed (Aziz, 2012a). In a similar vein, the report from The Scottish Government (2011) also highlighted the same issue, in which parents were concerned about the school staff members' lack of awareness about the range of possible options for their child after leaving school.

According to McGinty and Fish (1992), teachers could be a source of information and guidance, and should be well aware of the opportunities available to the young people in further education and what is on offer at the end of the school period. This is where the Guidance teacher should play their role more effectively. However, the findings reveal that there are still concerns among teachers about what is on offer post-school for the young people. If they really knew about the available opportunities, perhaps Alban could be placed at a better provision, as his mother wanted him to be.

### **7.2.2 The career path of young people with LD after school - choice between college and work**

The findings suggest that the link course benefited all of the young people involved in terms of easing their transition to college, apart from the two bullying cases as discussed earlier. This provides a good opportunity for them to get a taster of what college life would be like, and whether or not it is well-suited to them, as was the case with Kian who finally accepted the offer for college even though he was reluctant at first. Nevertheless, his decision to accept the offer should also take into account other pull factors, including the facilities or resources and more importantly, the support network available at the college that acts as a protective factor in increasing his resilience to stay on at college. For example, in the case of Chloe, the support that she received from her tutors and care workers made her feel safe and supported, even though she did not need them all the time. More importantly, the college should ensure that all the services are available and that they can be provided at any time when needed.

Kaehne and Beyer (2008) found that there is a strong correlation between the link course that the young people attended in their final year at school, and their preferences for the next step after leaving school. The argument was that the young people's wishes are strongly informed by their actual experiences (Kaehne, 2009), which means that the young people are likely to choose based on what they have gone through (in this case, the link course). Kaehne (2009) further argues that most young people also experienced job tasters or work experience in their last year at school and some gained a strong inclination towards employment through these schemes. This is supported by Smyth and McConkey (2003), who state that many young people were influenced by the work experience placements that they had embarked on, either at school, college or day centres. It not only gives them an understanding and a sense of feeling for the world of

work, which can be positive (Shah, 2008; Townsley, 2004), but is also a test whether employment is the right choice for them or not (Ward, Mallett, et al., 2003). However, those who aspire to get a paid job or to go on to employment schemes after leaving school might be frustrated, as the probability of them getting a place at college is 2.7 times higher than them getting a paid job (Beyer, 2008). This is due to the fact that work experiences are not seen as crucial preparation for the next step, as the college link courses are, thus they are seen as irrelevant by families (Beyer, 2008). Yet, I argue that work experience is still relevant and becomes one of the crucial elements in the preparation for leaving school, especially for those who plan to work right after finishing school. This can be seen in Ethan's work experience which has given him a new experience that could not have been gained in a classroom setting. In fact, through his work experience, his mother realised that her son does actually have the ability to do some kind of job, even if it is not full time. In addition, it also shows that work experience can somewhat influence one's career choice in the future.

The issue of work experience for the young people has long been highlighted in the Warnock Report 1978. According to the report, work experience has positive benefits and should be developed more progressively (DES, 1978). Warnock believes that if it was well organised and prepared, it could not only help to bridge the gap between the protected school environment and the more challenging working environment, but also lead to a more practical career choice (DES, 1978).

Despite the fact that work experience is good for gaining a new experience of the world of work, and offering invaluable benefits for the young people, not all work experience placements match their career aspirations. A study by Shah (2008) shows that a work placement had been arranged by the school who initially had already established a

professional partnership with the workplace for a period of time. Shah argues that, while the young people were given a chance to go on work experience, it did not promote their self-determination to exercise their own choices. Rather, they become passive recipients of adult choices. This is particularly the case in the special school. Shah's findings seem to be consistent with the current findings in which two young people from the special school underwent work experience that had already been arranged for them by the school. However, it was not known whether or not they were given a chance to choose which work placement they wanted, as no direct questions were asked about this. Nonetheless, both of the young people from the special school, including Ethan, seemed happy and enjoyed their work experience. In any case, I do agree with Shah's argument that young people should be given a chance to exercise their own choices when going on work experience.

In contrast, according to Shah, a different situation was experienced by the young people at the mainstream school, where they were given a choice to choose which work placement they wanted to go on. In a way, this could give the young people autonomy about what they wanted according to their own preferences, rather than what was determined for them, as in the case of the special school. As Duffy (2003; cited in Shah, 2008, 63) has noted, *'if you have self-determination, then, this means you are in charge of your own life, however, if you do not have self-determination, then, this means other people are in charge of you'*. The current study shows that one young person from a mainstream school (faith school) was thought to have been considered for work experience whilst still at school, according to his parent. However, the school did not know whether the work experience would work for him or not and finally suggested for him to go to college without giving him the chance to go on the work experience placement. This means that this young person was not given a choice about work

experience and it contrasts with Shah's findings that the young people from the mainstream school were given a choice about a work experience placement. This finding also shows that there is a difference in practice between the mainstream (faith school) and the special school, where the young people were given the opportunity for work experience.

While the link course and work experience seem to have a strong influence on the young people's future choice, as stated earlier, the experience that they gain at school itself could also be a strong factor. Shah's (2008) study, for instance, indicates that the young people's choices are also influenced by the subjects that they learn at school as well as the school teachers themselves, who are deemed to be one of the significant influences on shaping the choices for their future life. On the other hand, Burchardt (2004) identifies individual characteristics (like self-belief), contextual factors (school experience) and parental social class background (like parental level of education) as a significant influence on the formation of the young people's aspirations and educational outcomes. Burchardt's view seems to be almost consistent with the current findings, where parents' views are seen as crucial and influential in determining the future aspirations of their children. This can be seen in the two cases where parents' views differed significantly from their children's views in determining their children's future aspirations (refer to Table 6.7 in the previous chapter). One of the cases can be seen in Ethan's story where his mother did not view him as capable of holding a full time job. Instead, his mother's view was influenced by his work experience whilst at school (contextual factor, according to Burchardt) at a cafe and he was seen as only capable of working part time in such a job. I argue that if Ethan had undergone work experience as a football coach, perhaps his mother might say that he too could become a football coach in the future. Another example can be seen in Chloe's case when she said that she

was interested in working with children with mental health issues. This was because she herself has had experience of this before (individual characteristics, according to Burchardt) and thus decided to be involved in the same line of work. This suggests that the young people's future aspirations can also be influenced by their own experiences.

As mentioned earlier, the young people's future should be directed towards what they want in their life and to work towards achieving their aspirations. The young people need to be given options for what they want to be, as they cannot make a decision without the information about what is available and support from all the people around them. However, the current findings show that the young people have not been asked about or given any other alternatives apart from college. This raises the question of their right to getting post-school options in order to make the right decision. As Morris (2002) has noted, young people need information about options, need to be consulted and listened to, and need to be supported, in order to make choices and decisions. Not only the young people, their families also need support to think about the options and to make decisions about their future (Townesley, 2004). Similarly, Routledge (2000) points out that not only do the young people need assistance to pursue their goals and aspirations, their parents and families also need support during the transition into adulthood. In Alban's case, although his mother was supported by the transition worker from the Social Work Department, her initial wish to see her son stay on at school until the sixth year was not met, as mentioned earlier. Although at Alban's age, he has the right to make his own choices, this suggests that the right to have choices was likely to have been denied or not met as both Alban and his mother wanted him to carry on at school, but did not even have an option if he chose to stay at school. This raises the questions of what kind of support they deserve to receive and how to convince them that the decision to go to college was not wrong either.

Whilst the current findings reveal that a few of them had no experience of going to the link course at college, all of them were still anticipating to go to college post-school. The decision to go to college, as found in the current study seems to have been made for them by the school with consent from the young people themselves and their parents. Although the decision was agreed by both the young people and their parents, I argue whether the decision made was really in their best interests or simply because there were no other options available? As Cowen (2001; cited in Morris, 2001) has noted, the young people might have low expectations for themselves and thus just simply agree to whatever service is suggested to them. In addition, Ward, et al. (2003) point out that the direct move from school to college seems to be what was expected, rather than something the young person had actively chosen to do. Previous research indicates that a college placement or a day service place are the two most common pathways for the young people post-school, and even employment is rarely chosen as a next step (Beyer, 2008).

As stated earlier, some of the young people also underwent work experience while at school. However, it should be noted that not all of them had the experience of job tasters or work experience (Mitchell, 1999) during their last year at school. Whereas Stalker (2002), suggests that work experience opportunities need to be developed for all young people with disabilities, including those at special schools. The current results show that only two young people from the special school mentioned the work experience that they had during their last year at school, as stated earlier. However, it was not known whether the other young people went through the same experience or not, as there was no direct question asked about that in the interview. In addition, teachers also highlighted the importance of the work experience, however, the same issue of limited opportunity remains.

Even so, as Beyer, et.al (2008a) found, those who had the work experiences were not followed up or fed back to the parents once they finished, for example asking what they had gained or learnt and how they were viewed by the employers and so on. Similarly, Winn and Hay (2009) noted that very little of what had occurred at the work experience was processed back in the classroom, and the 'rich' learning tasks that the young people experienced were rarely formally assessed and thus did not become part of the young people's learning outcomes. Beyer et al. (2008a) argued that parents need to know all this feedback about their child's work experience, including the welfare benefit implications of employment, so that they can make a decision about their child's employment interests and plan for the next step. By having all this information to hand, the young people and their parents could choose the best option, either to proceed to college or to go to work as their next step after leaving school. Although both the college link courses and work experience are regarded as a positive learning experience by both the teachers and the young people (Mitchell, 1999), ultimately, the young people and their parents have to make a decision as to which one suits them best. Successful transition is indeed dependent on how informed parents are about the available opportunities, and also the extent of their involvement in the process (Beyer, Kaehne, Grey, Sheppard, & Meek, 2008b; Kaehne & Beyer, 2008).

On the other hand, although the current study shows that all of the young people went to college after leaving school, there are still uncertainties among parents as well as the young people themselves about what the next step would be for them after college. For example, although Alban and Chloe have expressed their interest in arts and sports respectively, they are still uncertain about their future direction after finishing college. Perhaps a special coordinator could be appointed by the college to coordinate the career related plan for the young people at the college. This can probably be done using a

person-centred approach. Besides, the cooperation from other service providers such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS) can also be sought to help the young people make progress to gain work. It is unfortunate that there is no clear legislation put in place for the transition after college in terms of what should be done and who is responsible for it, leaving young people with no guaranteed job or definite direction after several years of study. Hudson (2006) has called the transition from school to college a *visible transition*, whilst the transition after college is termed an *invisible transition* as there is no specific guidance put in force to support the young people post-college.

Mitchell (1999) noted that the employment opportunities among the disabled young people are not very promising in a practical sense, even though many of them and their parents do value and aspire to 'having a job'. This is supported by Smyth and McConkey (2003) who state that the young people have fewer chances to be in paid work in comparison to their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, research has shown that people with disabilities are up to three times more likely to be unemployed in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts (Mitchell, 1999; Thornton & Lunt, 1995). In addition, the 2010 eSAY statistics report that only around 14% of adults with learning disabilities are presently in employment or on a work or training placement (Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability, 2011). By taking these factors into account, it could be argued that if parents are properly advised and thoroughly informed about the fortune of college leavers, especially in light of the uncertainty and there being no guaranteed paid job after college, as shown in Kaehne and Beyer's study above, perhaps it might help parents to encourage their son or daughter to go to college.

### 7.2.3 Role of parents and teachers

Parents play a vital role in identifying the path for their child's future, particularly when the child is unable to communicate his or her desires (Goupil et al., 2002). In fact, as Jindal-Snape et al. (2012) point out, the role of parents is not only restricted to getting involved in school activities and school governance, but also providing role models and aspirations for the child. Research shows that the impact of parents' aspirations for their child also affects the child's decision in their educational and career-related choices (Jindal-Snape *et al.*, 2012). This was true when looking at Alban's case, where his mother hoped that he would engage in the field of arts, just like his grandfather, who used to be a musician and published books and poetry.

The current study reveals that teachers ranked parents' role as important as the role of the Principal Teacher Support for Learning, which means that they perceive parents as the second most significant person after the Guidance teacher. Although some issues regarding parents' disengagement were also reported by the teachers and the other professionals for various reasons, by and large the study found that teachers and the other professionals had a good relationship with the parents and they were trying their best to help and support each other for the benefit of the young people concerned.

Indeed, parents and teachers are meant to help each other and have a mutual understanding of each other's role in order to create a smoother transition for the young people. The current study suggests that where parents' help is put in place at the right place and time, it is more likely that the transition process will be smoother. This can be seen in the case where parents were offering help to the teachers to collect their children from the college during the link course, as well as accompanying their children to visit

the college with the teachers. This demonstrates how important the collaboration is between parents and teachers in easing the transition process of the young people.

#### **7.2.4 Delivery of information and collaboration among multi-agency**

This study suggests that there is still a gap between what teachers should know about transition, especially information about what is available post-school and the availability of information about the post-school transition. A previous study shows that the ability to help young people and their families effectively is extremely limited if the stakeholders involved, including teachers and other service providers, are not familiar with the range of options available from the different agencies involved (Tarleton & Ward, 2005). This is coupled with the poor coordination between services, especially with regard to the transition from child to adult services (Bhaumik et al., 2011). The current findings reveal that all the information about the transition presented to all the school staff was not widespread and pervasive, and they have little knowledge of what is available. This might be due to the fact that all the information about the post-school transition is spread out among various other agencies and service providers instead of the school. Therefore, it is seen as difficult for the school to gather all the information at once. In order to ensure all the school staff members know what is happening and are aware of all the up-to-date information about the post-school transition, a consistent and reliable mechanism need to be created so that all the information can be clearly delivered to the young people and their parents. The role of multi-agencies is very important in this regard.

As Barnes (2008) has noted, an effective multi-agency collaboration requires effective communication and the sharing of information. Therefore, cooperation between all the

agencies involved and the school in giving and sharing as much information as possible about the opportunities available post-school for the young people is very crucial in this regard. For instance, agencies like Careers Scotland, MCMC and 16+ Learning Choices could play a bigger role in disseminating the information through schools and ensuring that the information reaches the target group. One of the aims of the MCMC for example is very good to ensure that the young people get the information and guidance in order to progress post-16 (The Scottish Government, 2010d). Likewise, Careers Scotland, on the other hand, should play their role by assisting young people and their parents to identify the most appropriate post-16 provision, provide counselling and support, and have continued supervision and information on the young people's choices (Beyer et al., 2008a). In the case of Alban, if his mother knew about the various other services available, including Skills Development Scotland, perhaps she could have received better information about post-16 options, as well as better support and counselling services other than just the school. However, the current findings indicate that there is a lack of coordination among the agencies involved and the school in delivering information to the school. This can be seen in three cases where the professionals reported the difficulty in implementing the government programmes at the school level due to the lack of coordination from the school side (refer to Table 4.4 in Chapter 4). To blame the issue on the schools alone seems to be unfair, as the schools themselves have their own duties and responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. However, if the information about the available opportunities for the young people is not delivered to them, it also seems to be unfair as they need to know what is on offer so that they can make the best choice for themselves. In addition to that, the current findings also revealed that the information about the transition process was inconsistent and not standardised among the school staff (refer to Table 4.2 in Chapter 4). If this situation

continues, it is feared that more young people will be affected due to the lack of access to the right and clear information about post-school options.

What is more important here is that all service providers need to ensure that the information reaches the target group. Perhaps one of the ways is to appoint a special coordinator among the teachers such as the Guidance teacher, to deliver the information to the target group and also to the parents, so that the information can be delivered comprehensively in the correct manner.

One of the main issues of transition is the lack of easily accessible information for parents and the young people with learning disabilities (Tarleton & Ward, 2005). Previous research has shown that families wanted to know more information about post-school options while at school, including college, employment or training and in particular, the specific support arrangements that are available within the options (Beyer et al., 2008a). Without complete and comprehensive information, it is difficult for parents and the young people to make the right choices for their future (Tarleton & Ward, 2005). The current findings reveal that eight out of nine parents said that they were not given any other choices apart from college as a post-school option. It is recommended, therefore, that the school could be a 'one-stop centre' for all the information concerning post-school options so that parents, in particular, do not have to rush here and there to seek information as they will know where to find it if they need it. What happened, as the current study reveals, is that the school (teachers) can only provide the link for parents to the other service providers, and it is up to the parents' own initiative to get the sources that they want. This can be seen in Kian's case, where his mother had to take him on her own when dealing with one service provider and eventually ended up having an unpleasant incident. It should be noted that not all

parents are able to get the sources by themselves, as they also need to think about other factors such as the cost, time and transport. As Taub (2006) has noted, parents' involvement may be prevented due to a lack of transportation, lack of child care and work schedule. Previous research shows that parents felt confused and daunted when approaching service providers away from the school, such as the local education authority (LEA) (Grewal, McManus, Arthur, & Reith, 2004). However, if the school could act as the 'one-stop centre' as previously mentioned, parents will just be able to go to the school and get everything there in one go. According to Grewal et al. (2004), service providers who work at the school recognised that the school also needed to function as a parent resource and meeting centre. They further state that one of the factors that were identified as helpful in easing the transition is to provide an appropriate type and level of on-site services at educational settings, in a flexible way.

#### **7.2.5 A parent's concerns were not listened to**

The issue of parents who felt that they did not have a voice and were not listened to has been mentioned in the Scottish Government's (2011) report which indicates how this issue has been underestimated over the years and thus needs serious attention. The same issue was also raised by Ethan's mother, as illustrated in Ethan's story. If Ethan's mother's voice had been heard and noted in the meeting, perhaps the bullying could have been avoided when he started college full time. There seems to be a relationship gap as well as a communication gap between Ethan's mother as a parent and the professionals in this case. This can be seen when Ethan's mother said that she tried to voice her concern during the meeting and was then reassured that the bullying case would not happen again but it still happened. On the one hand, when she was reassured by the college staff in particular, that the case would not happen again, she might have

thought that the case would really stop and the college staff, as professionals, should know what to do and how to handle the case. As a parent, she probably thought that she would not need to interfere any further after reporting the case and after being reassured by the college staff, and her interference stopped there. The question of what and how action might be taken to handle the case was probably not clearly explained to her even though she deserved to know about it. This shows the existence of a relationship gap between the parent and the professionals who should be transparent to the parent. On the other hand, what she was probably trying to say was not clearly understood by the professionals. Perhaps her right to make sure that her son's safety was guaranteed is not well delivered or understood by the professionals and thus lead to the communication gap between the parent and the professionals.

Another issue that can also be highlighted in this regard is what happened to one young person who eventually left home, which left her parent in a dilemma, as they did not know what to do or who to refer to for help. Some of the issues faced by the young people and their parents in the current study, including the two stories that have been demonstrated above, illustrate the need for an advocate, or someone who can act as a mediator for the young people and their family. Evidence shows that some people need extra help to negotiate their support as well as an advocate to aid them (Department of Health, 2008). McGinty and Fish (1992) suggest that in a situation where parents/carers are not capable, for any reason, to take a constructive role in planning their children's future, the school should identify or appoint an advocate who is suitable for the young person in order to steer them through the maze of transition possibilities. Previous research shows that families wanted one single and trusted source of information and guidance so that they could fine-tune or fit in this difficult time (which, in this case, could be an advocate) (Beyer et al., 2008a). Grewal et al. (2004) suggest a named

coordinator of services or key worker to be a single source of clear and definitive information, where parents and young people can obtain knowledge about what their entitlements and options are. They believe this coordinator could successfully engineer and facilitate effective inter-agency working and communication for both the young people and their parents and thus ease the transition. I strongly believe that if all the young people, particularly in Ethan's and Alban's cases had their own advocates, it might have been possible to ease their problems and support their parents in terms of thinking about the post-school options that are available for them and what to do next. In fact, the significant role of a *Named Person* or a *Lead Professional* has also been emphasised in the GIRFEC policy as well as the Warnock Report. One of the ways to solve the issue of parents' voices not being listened to is through the person centred approach which will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **7.2.6 Involvement in the transition meeting**

A transition meeting serves as the core of the official plan in determining whether or not the young person's transition is effective and successful. Various factors need to be considered and taken into account to ensure an effective and meaningful transition meeting is in place. As Carnaby *et al.* (2003) have noted, all the decisions that are possible to set the basis for adult life need thorough consideration. These include the young person as the main actor and all the significant people in the young person's life, the readily available resources, especially the post-school options, as well as the support network in the process. Failure to identify any one of these aspects will affect the smoothness of the transition process of the young people. The findings of this study reveal that out of nine young people interviewed at the second stage, only seven said that they attended the transition meeting.

Evidence from research indicates that making a video recording and taking photographs while visiting the options available to the young people could increase active and meaningful involvement and choice-making in the transition meeting (Carnaby & Lewis, 2005; Carnaby et al., 2003). Carnaby *et.al.* further state that this technique would be a useful tool when they return to school so that they can discuss further with the teachers about their experiences and whether or not they would like to proceed or be there on a long-term basis. This ‘note-taking exploration’ serves as the main visual aids and could have been really helpful when they went to the meeting, so that they could show what they were interested in most, (providing they have at least more than one option). Ultimately, this could help all the people in the meeting to draw conclusions and to make the best decision based on the young people’s best interests. As Carnaby *et. al.* have noted, these visual aids can prepare the young people, not only to be more confident and more informed about what is expected of them, but also to ensure that discussion begins and continues to focus on their perspectives during the transition meeting. This idea seems to be almost similar to that of the current study in which one teacher suggested a diary should be kept by the young people, in case they could not express themselves verbally, so that it could be referred back afterwards. On the one hand, this diary could be useful as a primary tool to write down whatever they want for their future. On the other hand, it could be used, more importantly, for making a career-related decision post-school, especially during the transition meeting. In a way, the diary (or the video recording and photographs, as mentioned earlier) could be ‘something’ that the young people could take to the meeting in order to discuss their future life course, rather than coming empty handed (and probably with an empty mind as well) and simply sitting silently, as can be seen in the current findings. It should be noted that writing a diary could be done as early as when the young people enter secondary school, as they tend to keep changing their wishes as they grow older. This

changing could be significant and should be taken into account when deciding about their later preferences, particularly in relation to their career choices. Indeed, the diary entries could be strong evidence to be considered in the transition meeting to highlight any changes in the young people's life which is key to determining their future life course. It should be noted that the choices for their future should be flexible enough that they can change as the young people change (The Scottish Executive, 2006). However, research shows that less attention was paid to people changing their minds or not liking in the future something that they appeared to like now during the transition meeting (Carnaby & Lewis, 2005; Carnaby et al., 2003).

Another example that can be used here is the one that has been illustrated in Kian's story, where he shows how obsessed he was about art, especially when drawing the characters from his favourite movie, 'The Lord of the Rings'. His drawing book can be used as one of the main tools in the transition meeting to show his main interest, or the thing that he aspires most in the future. In this regard, parents or family members, teachers or even friends always seem to be in a better position, although it is not true in every case, to judge the young person's best interests. All of this may be done and planned through a person centred approach which will be considered next.

### **7.2.7 Person centred planning**

Person centred planning was first, proposed by the Government in the White Paper, *Valuing People* in which people with learning disabilities and their families are put at the centre of the planning process (Department of Health, 2001). According to Coyle and Lunt (2010), person-centred planning has a significant influence on the service policy and delivery since the incorporation of person centredness within policy in the

UK through *The Same As You?* in Scotland, *Valuing People* in England, and subsequently *Fulfilling the Promises* in Wales and *Equal Lives* in Northern Ireland. The Learning Disability Partnership Board which is based in each local authority is responsible for administering the implementation of this plan by proposing the framework of how the young people will be supported to plan for themselves (Wertheimer, 2007). In simple terms, person centred planning is:

*A way of discovering what people want, the support they need and how they can get it. It is evidence-based practice that assists people in leading an independent and inclusive life. Person centred planning is both an empowering philosophy and a set of tools for change, at an individual, a team and an organisational level. It shifts power from professionals to people who use services (Department of Health, 2010b, p. 3).*

The basis for person centred planning is person centred thinking tools which can bring immediate changes to people's lives and in the way professionals and staff supporting people work (Department of Health, 2010b). Details about the person centred thinking tools will be discussed later in this section. Another key approach in person centred planning is a person centred review that forms the basis for the annual transition reviews for the young people. Originally, the person centred review was designed to replace the existing Year 9 reviews in England and after the first review done in a school in Hull, this review was piloted by the Department of Health's Valuing People Support Team in four London boroughs which eventually led to a national roll-out of the approach to each local authority in England (Department of Health, 2010a). Generally, a person centred review is a specific process which takes between an hour and a quarter, and an hour and a half, and requires a trained facilitator who helps at the

meeting by answering specific questions (Department of Health, 2010a, 2010b). The specific questions asked are shown in *Box 7.1*.

**Box 7.1** Specific questions used by facilitator at the person centred review meeting

- What do we appreciate about the person (this may be called ‘like and admire’)?
- What is important to the person now?
- What is important to the person in the future?
- What is the ‘best support’ for the person, to stay healthy and well?
- What are the questions to be answered/ issues to resolve for this person?
- What is working and not working from the person’s perspective?
- What is working and not working from the family/carer’s perspectives?
- What is working and not working from the staff and manager’s perspectives?
- What is working and not working from other people’s perspectives (e.g. health professionals, care managers)?

(Department of Health, 2010b, p. 20)

Available evidence shows that the person centered review is really effective in helping the young people with their transition planning. Not only are the young people happy with the approach in which they have become the centre of the discussion, but also all the people around them including the family members, felt fully included (Department of Health, 2010a). The feedback from all the stakeholders found in Wertheimer’s (2007) report as shown in *Box 7.2*, indicates how well the person centred review works, from their viewpoints. In short, the contribution and cooperation from all the people around the young people, including their family members and friends in using the person centred approach, could help to support the young people with achieving their aspirations.

The feedback shown in *Box 7.2* was derived from the National Programme (Phase 2: 2005 – 2006), as reported by Wertheimer (2007) that worked with 70 local authorities

across all 9 regions in England. What is apparent from the feedback is that it clearly shows a positive response and how well accepted the person centred approach is among all the stakeholders involved in the transition planning of the young people. This means that the person centred approach is really helpful in supporting the young people to achieve their aspirations. A study conducted by Robertson et al. (2005) clearly indicates that person centred planning has a positive benefit on the life experiences of people with learning disabilities. Robertson *et.al.* identify four areas where the person centred planning is of benefit; community involvement, contact with friends, contact with family and choice, while Sanderson, Thompson, and Kilbane (2006) added two additional positive changes, namely social network and scheduled activities as a result of introducing the person centred planning.

**Box 7.2** Some feedback about the person centred review by stakeholders

“Jenny had a table at the back of the room where she sat for some time with Rene. She was clearly listening very carefully as sometimes she got up and indicated very clearly that her mum or teacher should write something on the large sheets around the room. She also added some things of her own.”

*Young person’s experience*

“It was great for my daughter to say so much; it was lovely to have the time to hear what she wanted to say about the things we had not thought about. It was good to be able to talk about her loneliness; it’s process like this that really help my daughter with her self-esteem.”

*Parent’s experience*

“Jason younger brother and sister were involved in the meeting, and they contributed fully throughout, saying what they liked and admired about Jason... and writing and drawing on the posters in the ‘mingling’ session. Their contribution was really important because they spoke about Jason as a brother and a person – not as a pupil or someone who needs support.”

*Sibling’s experience*

“It’s the first time in my teaching career that I have seen a young person one hundred percent engaged in their review – I haven’t seen this before!”

*Professional’s experience*

“”It was cool because it was all about my best friend.”

“[I] really love coming to these annual reviews to support my mates.”

*Friend’s experience*

(Wertheimer, 2007, pp. 19,21,23)

On the other hand, Robertson *et.al's* (2005) and Sanderson *et.al's* (2006) research also shows that the person centred planning had no apparent impact on building inclusive social networks, employment, physical activity and medication, thus leading to the question of the effectiveness and impact of the planning as a whole. Their research further found that the person centred planning works better for some people than others, who were less likely to get a plan, especially those who had mental health, emotional or behavioural problems, autism, health problems or restricted mobility. However, it should be noted that their research was carried out in the early stages of the implementation of person centred planning in English services (Sanderson *et al.*, 2006). A more recent study by Kaehne (2010) indicates that the person centred planning is now broadly accepted as the most appropriate way of organising and delivering transition services to young people with intellectual disabilities.

Although evidence suggests that the person centred approach is really effective and useful in helping the young people in the transition planning, the current study, on the other hand, shows that it was not implemented appropriately. The reason why it was not implemented as found and seen in the current study could be due to either the school not knowing about the approach which is quite unlikely, as the approach was introduced at the national level more than a decade ago, or there not being enough facilitators or funds to carry out the planning, which is quite reasonable, considering the current economic situation. This is acknowledged by Elson (2011) who states that the person centred approach is not used at the local level due to a lack of funding.

My own observation while attending the transition review meeting clearly shows that the meeting was held in a rather traditional, formal way (see Figure 7.1), where all the people sat around a table to discuss the young person's future needs, and the worst part

was that the young person himself did not attend the meeting despite being invited, as in the case of Ethan who chose not to attend the meeting although he was invited. Perhaps this was due to his perception of them that did not make it conducive or safe for him to feel okay about attending the meeting. This might suggest that the young person felt that he was not that important or that the meeting had just been an ‘adult matter’ and there was nothing much that he could contribute even if he attended the meeting. It should be noted that attending the meeting is the person’s right and thus the staff need to work it out to make it as accessible as possible (Sanderson, undated). In fact, the right to have the opportunity to be heard and involved in decisions which affect them is also stressed in the 8 well-being indicators under the GIRFEC’s policy (refer to Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2). Thus, teachers in particular, really need to encourage and find ways to ensure that the young people attend and are involved in matters that might affect their future life. Perhaps if the person centred approach is used (see Figure 7.2), where the young person is the most important person at the meeting, and has the right to choose who he wants to attend the meeting with, and how he wants the meeting to be held, the issue of the young person not attending the meeting might not arise.

The two different approaches of handling a review meeting, as shown in Figures 7.1 and 7.2, do not only provide the difference in terms of the methods used, but rather the impact the two approaches could have had on the young people’s future life based on what they want to achieve, could also have made a big difference. Evidence illustrated in the four case studies discussed at the beginning of this chapter shows how the young people could have been helped more with deciding what they want to be in the future if the person centred approach was implemented. For instance, Ethan’s aspiration to become a football player could be supported more by inviting his siblings, who always play football with him to the meeting to show how good or how serious he is about becoming a football player. Similarly, Kian, could have brought his drawing book to the

meeting, as mentioned previously, as primary evidence of how keen he is about art. This in turn, can help them to make more informed decisions about their future. Not only would the young person become the centre of attention in the person centred approach, their families could also play a central role in the meeting.



**Figure 7.1** An illustration of a traditional review meeting



**Figure 7.2** An illustration of a person-centred review meeting

Evidence shows that families would feel more involved and more able to ask questions about the issues that concerned them, and more importantly, they would feel on a more equal footing with professionals (Wertheimer, 2007). Kilbane and Sanderson (2004) suggest that many professionals are attached to the young people with learning disability as friends, outside of any formal role and they may be invited to contribute to a plan in the same way as any friend would. This would make the relationship between the young person or their family and professional more informal and open. In this regard, in Ethan's mother's case, who felt that she was less involved in the meeting and was not listened to, could probably be better helped by using this approach, as she would have more opportunity to voice her concerns, and at the same time it could also reduce the relationship gap between parents and professionals. In fact, a research study by Robertson et al. (2005) found that families could also lead the planning by working with their family member while valuing the contribution of local staff to help access resources and services. This family-led approach was found to be helpful as reported by families and resulted in positive outcomes.

As earlier noted, the foundation of the person centred planning is the person centred thinking tools. Taking the summary of the person centred thinking tools drawn from the report by the Department of Health (2010a, 2010b), Table 7.1 summarises some of the person centred thinking tools and how they can be used or applied to the current findings, as illustrated in the case studies. It should be noted that some of the 'tools' have already been mentioned in *Box 7.1* above, which indicates the interconnected approach used in the person centred planning.

**Table 7.1** Summary of some of the person centred thinking tools and how they can be used by the young people in the current study

<b>Person centred thinking tool</b>	<b>What it can do</b>	<b>How it can be used by the young people in the current study</b>
What is important TO you and FOR you?	Identify what matters to the young person and what is important for them to stay healthy and safe and find a balance between these.	This can be done by creating a one-page profile of all the things that are important to and for the young people, e.g: playing football and going off riding are two important things to Ethan. This profile can be the basis of a person centred plan.
What is important in the future?	Capture the young person's dreams and aspirations for the future.	As a chance to share information about what is possible and important in the future for the young people, e.g: Ethan aspires to be a footballer, but his mother did not realise about his dream to be a footballer in the future. Also, Alban did not know what to be in the future, however, his mother noticed his interest in art. These examples can be used to work towards how to make things possible based on the young people's dreams and aspirations.
What is important about work?	Explain the importance of contributing through work.	Build a personal profile to record the young person's individual strengths, interests and skills, e.g: Ethan's work experience can be recorded in this profile to show what he is capable of and this will be useful to a future employer.
What is working/not working?	Help a young person to reflect on their life experience and continue with what is working and change what is not working.	Can be used in Chloe's case when she found that she was no longer interested in her current course and also in Ethan's case when he was bullied on the life skills course, and work on what needs to be changed.
Like and admire	Provide a means to appreciate the positive qualities about the young person.	Create a 'feel good' folder for the young people about what other people appreciate and admire about them, rather than focusing on what is 'wrong with' them. This could be part of the one-page profile and person centred review, e.g: Kian's talent in drawing could be supported as one of the ways to work towards his future aspiration.
Relationship circle	Identify who is important in the young person's life.	Helps to identify who is close and important to the young person and how to strengthen or support the relationships, e.g.: Ethan has a best friend who went to the same college as him but after being transferred to another course, both of them were separated.
Communication charts	Provide a simple way to describe how the young person communicates whether through words or not.	Can be used, particularly when the young person's action communicates a message more clearly than their words to convey information, e.g.: is more useful for those who did not speak much, as in the case of Alban and Kian who seem rather shy and introverted.

Matching staff	A structure to look at both what skills/supports and what people/characteristics make for good matches.	Helps people think about what kind of support and skills they need and want and match with the personality or characteristics that are required, e.g.: Chloe's initial dream to work with children with mental health issues was due to her own experience that she went through. Consequently, this experience can inform the family and professionals' support plan.
The doughnut	Identify specific responsibilities – what is core, where judgement and creativity can be used, and what is not part of the job of paid staff.	To clarify teachers' or other professionals' responsibilities in the young people's lives. Could also prevent the young people or parents from depending on only one source to get all the information, e.g.: Alban's mother could have used her own initiative and judgement to find other alternative provisions for her son if what she was looking for could not be found from the school.
Learning blog	Directs people to look for ongoing learning. A structure that captures the details of learning within specific activities and experiences. As a way of recording information about what needs to remain and what needs to change.	Provides a more structured way to record ongoing activities like what the young person did like/did not like about the activity and what needs to be different next time. Can replace traditional notes such as a diary to record the daily activities. Also, as a reflection on and evaluation of progress and learning with a young person on specific issues, e.g.: Kian has difficulty with his handwriting, or Chloe, who was a 'routine person' and did not like change and has never tried independent travel.

Table 7.1 clearly shows how the person centred planning, and in particular, the person centred review could fit nicely and be suitable if it was used in the current study. The review can then generate the person centred information which will be used to create a one-page profile and consequently start the person centred plan (Department of Health, 2010b). This could help all the people involved in the transition process of the young people to have a better understanding of what the young people want and need and to work towards achieving what they want in their lives. This approach could also help the young people to feel and develop more self-worth, and to feel valued and confident and at the same time could encourage them to attend the review without giving any excuses about not attending, as found in the current findings. Overall, the person centred planning can initiate actions that will change and improve the young people's lives in a positive way and deliver a more person centred service (Department of Health, 2010b; Robertson *et al.*, 2005; Sanderson *et al.*, 2006).

### **7.2.8 Differences of opinion between the young people's and parents' aspirations**

The current findings suggest that there are differences between the young people's aspirations and their parents' beliefs about their ability, as reported in two cases (refer to Table 6.7 in Chapter 6). In both cases, the parents' beliefs do not seem to be in favour of the young people's aspirations, as illustrated in Ethan's case. In my view, the difference of opinion, as found in the current study, does not mean that parents do not support the aspirations of their own children. Rather, it was seen as more of a conflict between a reality and an ability to reach the aspirations. Parents might see their children's aspirations as out of reach based on their own (young people) capabilities, as can be seen in one case where the young person wanted to become a teacher, whereas his parent perceived him as not capable of holding a higher level job (refer to Chapter 6).

This is not surprising as previous research shows that some parents are unsupportive of their child's occupational aspirations as they seem to have low expectations of their child and perceive the aspirations to be unrealistic (Mitchell, 1999; Shah, 2008; Smyth & McConkey, 2003). According to Shah (2008), the low expectations from parents is rather an individual issue than one with society. She argues that parents have a tendency to focus on how to fit their child into societal structures like the labour market, rather than how to adapt the structure to fit their child's choices. In some cases, parents did try to provide encouragement to their children (as shown by the other parents in this study), however, they themselves lack the knowledge or education to make an effective intervention (Burchardt, 2004). This could lead parents to have emotional conflict, which is a dilemma between wanting to encourage aspirations and fearing undue disappointment for their child (Mitchell, 1999). Burchardt (2004) suggests that whenever there is an educational disadvantage at home schools and colleges should be able to compensate the shortcoming. In contrast, evidence also suggests that some parents have too ambitious expectations and are unrealistic about their child's future profession (Kauppila, 2012). However, the current study did not show that parents were too ambitious, but rather that they seem to be supportive towards their children's aspirations and had similar expectations of what their children wanted to be as can be seen in Table 6.7 in Chapter 6.

In addition, the young people's self-belief, determination and the support of significant others (Shah, 2008) are extremely crucial in helping them to address the negative perception directed against them, including their own parents. Here lies the importance of understanding the theory, such as self-esteem and resilience, which could help reduce any risks that the young people may face. Without self-belief and encouragement, as Burchardt (2004) argues, the young people's aspirations are too likely not to be put to

good use. Thus, she proposes that having higher aspirations can be a pushing factor for educational attainment and the motivation to overcome difficulties encountered along the way. Shah (2008) further suggests that teachers, peers, extended family members and alternative agents like link workers, could be the main source of support to encourage the young people to pursue their dreams and aspirations. This can be seen, for example, in Ethan's case when his mother did not think that he could become a professional footballer, even though that was his dream. In this case, he had strong support from his siblings (who could probably be the external support network) who always played football with him and knew about his ability in playing football. Indirectly, this support could also enhance the young people's resilience that focuses on the external support network. Available evidence suggests that where parents lack the confidence or knowledge to provide effective advice to their children, advice services should take the lead and be extra proactive in providing effective advice to the young people (Burchardt, 2004).

### **7.2.9 Friendship and socialisation**

Friendship is one of the main issues faced by the young people in transition. In fact, research shows that parents of children with disabilities might be more concerned about their child's abilities to make and keep friends (Taub, 2006). This proved to be true, as occurred in the current study, in which two parents (one of them being Ethan's mother) were concerned about their son's friendships and hoped that they would be able to have more friends than what they already had. As Taub (2006) has noted, these concerns are based on the possibility that the children might be socially immature, have communication difficulties or have frequent school absences due to health problems, making it difficult for them to make and remain friends. Taub's view coincides with the

experiences of Chloe who has a number of mental health problems that may prevent her from establishing any friendship networks. Riddell *et al.* (1993) point out that some young people who continued to stay at home would find establishing friendship networks particularly difficult.

Available evidence suggests that young people with disabilities and their families often acknowledge that making and keeping friends is the most significant aspect in their lives (Knox & Hickson, 2001; Morris, 2002). However, the current study reveals that the young people have problems with making and keeping friends during the transition. Although some of them were able to make new friends as in the cases of Kian and Chloe, their friendships seem to be limited to the college boundary, and have never gone further than that. The finding is consistent with the research which shows that the young people find it hard to spend time with their friends in the absence of their family members (Townsend, 2004). Similarly, Smyth and McConkey (2003) found that despite being actively involved in leisure activities, most young people preferred to be accompanied by members of their families to those activities. This proved to be true in the case of Ethan, who was more comfortable with going out with his siblings than others, for leisure activities such as playing football. A past study also shows that very few of them had strong relationships with anyone else apart from their immediate family, paid staff or other people with similar disabilities (Richardson & Ritchie, 1990). Ward, *et al.* (2003) concur that many of the young people's friendship networks were constantly disrupted when they left school. On the other hand, the findings also indicate that some of the young people have a problem with making new friends despite effort being made, as in the case of Ethan, while in some other cases, the young people would rather stay attached to their old friends than make new friends, as in the case of Alban. In sum, there are a few factors that could be associated with the problems in

establishing friendships among the young people as found in the case studies. These factors include the lack of social, verbal and communication skills, the lack of self-confidence, their limited social network, as well as fewer friendship-related activities, which can be observed quite clearly during my interview sessions with the young people.

### **7.2.10 Bullying issue**

The study reveals that two bullying cases occurred during the link course. In one of the cases, the young person was invited to attend the summer programme following the link course, which was organised by the college for those who would be taking the life skills course that year. Due to the bullying, the young person felt scared and finally decided not to attend the programme. However, he finally found out that the person who had bullied him also did not attend the programme.

Similarly, in Ethan's case, the bullying case eventually led to him moving to a lower course. This meant that he had to take an extra year simply because of the bullying, before he could finally enrol in his actual course. This raises the question of whether he deserves to be on that course, albeit he and his parent agreed with the decision. It seems that he was penalised in a way. What was the rationale for giving him a lower course? Was it just to prevent him from being bullied again? Had he been given the right to have any other choices? It could also be that he had to agree with the decision merely because there was no other choice or else he could end up staying at home or having to wait for another year before enrolling again on his actual course. In some ways it shows that his decision to go to college did not seem to serve its purpose as it led to bullying. As West (1991) has noted, despite the variety of disabilities that the young people might have,

they share similar expectations of life as any other young people who are making the transition to adulthood, and therefore should have the right to be able to attend college and go about their daily lives safely. Maybe this is only an isolated case, however, an action plan should also be created by the college should this case continue in the future, and the same procedure of transferring the 'victim' to a lower course, as in Ethan's case, should not be seen as the only solution to solving the problem. In this case, there seem to be a few unresolved things that could still be argued and need further research. Theoretically, the negative experiences faced by both of the young people, including Ethan as described above, suggests that the environment was not supportive enough for them to cope with the transition. When this was coupled with bullying, indirectly, their sense of worth, self-esteem, motivation, and their ability to face the new environment might have decreased, which might well cause depression if prompt action is not taken. This was very true in Ethan's case when his mother said that he would cry in his bedroom, which indicates how stressed he was, and refused to go to the college. This is where positive support networks (the external protective factor), such as parents, siblings or peers play a very important role in supporting the young people going through a difficult time and consequently reducing any risks that they might face during the transition. Perhaps, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), which emphasises the multi-layered dimensions (the close people around him, in this case) might be best applied to Ethan in this regard. In addition, the existing policy, particularly in Scotland, has clearly stated how the young people can be helped and supported. This can be seen through the GIRFEC approach, as one of its goals is to enable young people to become successful learners. In one of its eight well-being indicators (refer to Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2), namely achieving, the young people (such as Ethan in this case) will be supported and guided in his learning and the development of his skills, confidence as well as self-esteem either at home, at school or in the

community. By incorporating this as one indicator of the ways to support him, perhaps Ethan's transition experience (especially with regards to the bullying case) can be managed more effectively.

### **7.2.11 Effective transition planning**

A report from the The Scottish Government (2011) provides some examples of good practice put in place in some local authorities with respect to effective transition planning. Interestingly, according to the report, the key point for these successful interventions was the strong vocational elements, in which a long term view regarding 'getting a job' has been the main focus from the very beginning. The report further states that the young people engaged enthusiastically when appropriate support was put in place to achieve this goal. An example of this is shown in *Box 7.3*.

#### **Box 7.3** An example of one good practice of effective transition planning

##### **Work experience and training for young people at Glencryan School, North Lanarkshire**

The focus on 'getting a job' as the main outcome from education has resulted in effective transitional planning for the young people with learning disabilities at Glencryan School.

A series of work bases had been developed within the school as part of their Curriculum for Excellence development. It ran a successful Bistro, which was open to the public and the young people gained practical work experience with support from a trained chef. The school also offered practical experiences through its in-house beauty therapy salon, functioning laundry and a horticultural activity. In addition to the practical experiences, the young people could also access relevant national qualifications.

Links to outside work experiences were also being developed to widen the choices available to the young people.

(Adapted from the Scottish Government, 2011)

This report is consistent with the current study which shows a recommendation from one teacher to have more support for the workplaces for the young people as one way to overcome the lack of places at college. This could be done by providing more vocationally oriented subjects at the school level for the young people, so that they will have more opportunities and choices of what they want to do in their future. Consequently, the young people could go directly to work, providing supported employment is fully given, after leaving school. In this way, the young people could skip spending time at college year after year, with little or no sense of future progression into work for the majority (P. Heslop & Abbott, 2008), which finally makes them give up and suffer at home (The Scottish Government, 2011). However, the main obstacle in this regard is the facilities and financial constraint as described by the teacher.

The report also presents a model known as Project Search (see *Box 7.4*) which was derived from the United States to show how supported employment is developed for young people with learning disabilities. This model has attracted a number of local authorities in developing an approach which aims to train the young people for a job through an internship arrangement with a large local employer (The Scottish Government, 2011).

**Box 7.4 A Project Search model****Project Search**

Project Search is a model that originated in the United States, which represents and extends the principles of supported employment for young people with learning disabilities. It has been running in the United States for over 10 years and has supported people with learning disabilities into full time paid employment - in some areas, with 100% success.

This model has been trialled in England and continues to develop. In Scotland, the North Lanarkshire Council in partnership with Lanarkshire Health Board, Motherwell College and SDS introduced the model in September 2010, with good participation from the young people. .

The model requires tight adherence to the criteria of operation, including:

- a series of workplace training opportunities in a work setting
- young people are considered employees in training – the ‘interns’
- young people are supported in the work setting at the start and end of each day by a college lecturer
- a job coach prepares staff in the work setting to provide appropriate support for the young person
- a partnership between the host employer, local authority and college
- the work setting must be large enough to offer a range of experiences
- a guarantee that the intern will be employable after the one year programme
- the ‘business’ should have a reasonable staff turnover and regular job vacancies.

(Adapted from the Scottish Government, 2011)

The two examples above show that there are good practices taking place in some of the Scottish local authorities in ensuring effective transition planning for the young people. However, these good examples are not widely implemented in all 32 local authorities throughout Scotland. In fact, it seems an effort made by an individual local authority rather than a joint initiative. Thus, it is recommended that these best practices are widespread and shared with all local authorities by inviting all the key stakeholders involved in the transition to come and see its effectiveness, so that each and every local authority can implement it in their respective local authorities. However, it should be noted that progress is likely to be made when learning by doing and reflection is encouraged, rather than by attempting to replicate what has been successful elsewhere (F. Mitchell, 2012). Perhaps this project can also be emulated by the local authority in which the current study was conducted. For instance, Ethan’s work experience could be

a good platform to kick start this project. Perhaps the employer where he used to work could start by offering him specialized training while at work, and he could be supervised and supported by a special coach who might be hired by the employer, for a certain period of time until he is able to do the work on his own without any supervision. In general, employers and communities should keep in mind that their attitudes towards young people with disabilities need to be changed by increasing acceptance and recognising the skills and talents that the young people bring, a point that has long been highlighted in the Warnock Report (DES, 1978). In fact, one of the ways to show support to the young people is to focus on what they can do, rather than their inability, as well as letting them try out new things (Wellard, 2008), something that can also be considered by the employer. It should be noted that this training could either be done while he was still at school as part of the work experience programme, or while he was studying at college. Perhaps later, in light of his performance, he might be offered a job as a full time employee. This is not impossible because past research has shown that young people were able to get a paid job with the same company they were working for during the work placement programme (Heslop *et al.*, 2002). This, indirectly, could help with reducing the unemployment rate or the uncertainty of getting a job (an ongoing issue which is still unresolved) among young people after completing their college course, as discussed earlier. It should also be noted that in order to implement this project, young people should be given the chance to exercise their own choices. Together they can support and make the best choice for the young people and their parents. In considering different options for them, as Heslop and Abbot (2008) point out, it is hard for the young people to make real choices without having the chance to try and find out about things, however, these chances to explore future life choices are unfortunately not extended to all young people.

### 7.3 Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of the post-school transition planning and preparation of young people with learning disabilities in both special and mainstream schools. This study has provided a detailed discussion about the young people's journeys from school to post-school, as demonstrated in the case studies in this chapter. Their unique experiences suggest that different approaches are required for a thorough and comprehensive planning and preparation in order to achieve a smooth and seamless transition for each individual. Indeed, it has been a policy and the aspiration of the government that every young person is helped throughout their post-school transition in order to achieve their full potential (DfEE, 2000; cited in Burchardt, 2004).

In general, the findings suggest that the limited post-16 option for the young people is still an ongoing issue even though this has been going on for a long time. College is by far the most popular destination for the young people post-school. The link course seems to be beneficial in easing the young people's transition to college. The work experience is also good exposure and could have a strong impact on the young people's choice in the future. However, the data was limited to the exposure to the work experience of two young people from the special school, as no direct question about that was asked. In relation to the work experience placement, it is suggested that the young people are given options to choose which placement they would like to go on with the school playing a role in making a decision for the young people about what is actually most suitable for them.

The study suggests that the parents' role is as important as the teachers' role in the transition process of the young people. Despite some reports regarding the disengagement of parents, on the whole the study suggests that the relationships

between parents and teachers as well as other professionals are good and this helps to ease the transition process of the young people.

In addition, the study found that the school staff members lack information, particularly about the post-school options. There was also a lack of coordination between multi-agencies and the school in delivering the information. As such, it is important to note that the cooperation of all the stakeholders in disseminating the information to the target group is very crucial in easing the transition process. It is also suggested that the school acts as a 'one-stop-centre' for all the information about post-school options so that the young people and their parents in particular can easily access the information they are seeking. This study also suggests the need to have a key worker or a named person who can act as a mediator in order to resolve any issues or conflicts that the young people or their parents might have had.

The involvement of the young people in the transition meeting is another key factor in the transition planning. The incomplete attendance of the young people at the transition meeting at school raises the question of whether they were really informed and understood the importance of their presence as the main actor in the meeting. Despite the fact that the professionals find different ways of listening to the voices of the young people, it is suggested that the young people should be equipped with various 'tools' such as a diary or photograph prior to attending the meeting to make them more prepared and more participative in the meeting.

My observation of the transition meeting suggests that the meeting was held in a traditional, formal way. For a more effective outcome, it is recommended that the meeting should be conducted in a person centred style to attract and support the young

people to voice their opinion. However, a lack of funding (Elson, 2011) might be the main reason this approach was not implemented in the current study.

The current study also suggests that there are differences of opinion about the young people's future aspirations between the parents and their children, despite the majority of the parents seem to be supportive and in agreement about their children's future aspirations. These differences seem to be more of a conflict between the reality and the ability of the young people to achieve their aspirations.

The current findings also reveal that some young people have a problem with making and sustaining friends. This suggests that more effort needs to be made to ensure that they are able to make new friends and at the same time do not lose their existing friends. In addition, effort should also be made in order to avoid any bullying incident from happening, as found in the current study. Although the two cases of bullying might be seen as rather isolated cases, an action plan should be drawn up to ensure that the same case will not be repeated in the future. Also, I argue that the action taken by the college to those who were bullied should be constantly revised so that young people attending college will not face any further consequences.

Despite all the young people going to college, there are still worries among parents as to what will happen to them after college, as the college does not guarantee them a job. The current findings suggest the importance of providing more workplace support for the young people in order to overcome the lack of places at college by having more vocationally oriented subjects at school. Some evidence indicates that the strong elements of vocational subjects could lead to a job on a long term basis for the young people. However, similar to the person centred planning, the facilities and financial

problems are the main issue that could hinder implementation in each and every local authority in the current study.

In short, this study has given a new insight into the importance of focusing more on the needs of young people and their parents by all the stakeholders involved in the post-school transition in order to improve the planning and preparation and ultimately to achieve a fulfilling and rewarding future life course.

## Chapter 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indeed, the research on the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities has been discussed and studied for many years and many changes and improvements have been made since then. The current study in particular was conducted with the aim of looking at the views of the young people, parents and professionals in terms of the planning and preparation of the post-school transition of the young people with learning disabilities. The study also aims to explore the transition experiences of the young people and their parents. In addition, the role of parents and professionals in facilitating a smooth transition was explored and finally the time and duration of the plans for the transition of the young people were examined.

Overall, all the objectives of this study were achieved despite the number of participants being small. Whilst the results suggest that despite all of them going to the same destination (i.e. the college), the young people had a variety of experiences as illustrated in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This was due to various factors associated with the young people and the school that they went to. In terms of the issues encountered, it is apparent that almost all the issues mentioned in the current study are recurring issues which have still not been resolved, despite them being continuously discussed in the literature.

#### **8.1 Strengths and limitations of the study**

As with all the other research studies, the findings of this study should also take into account the strengths and limitations of its own (Robertson *et al.*, 2005). I consider these to be the main strengths of this study:

- The use of various methods of data collection (semi-structured interviews with participants, questionnaires sent to the parents and direct observation of two transition meetings). For instance, the data obtained from the questionnaires answered by the parents was then explored further in the interviews with the parents to gain more valuable data.
- The use of the mind mapping technique and pictures as alternatives to the text-formed interview schedules (see appendices 12, 13, 14 and 17), (Aziz, 2012b), as can be seen in Stage 2 and Stage 3. The strength is that at both stages, more data were obtained from the young people in comparison to the data obtained at Stage 1. This suggests that the techniques can help not only in terms of increased data, but also, more importantly, gives the young people the opportunity to express their voices in a more relaxed and flexible way.
- The undertaking of three stages of a longitudinal study (covering a period from September 2010 to January 2012). Its strength lies in the increased data from the participants obtained in the second and third stages, which could not have been obtained if it was just conducted in one stage.
- The involvement of four different groups of participants in one single study (the young people, the parents, the school staff and the other professionals).
- The inclusiveness of various types of school (the ‘Academy’-type school, the ‘High School’-type school, the ‘Roman Catholic’ (RC)-type school and the ‘special’-type school).

On the other hand, the study also has some limitations. I consider the following as the limitations of the study:

- The small number of participants makes it difficult to generalise the findings to a larger population. However, those involved, particularly the young people, came from various types of schools. This allowed us to see how the various types of schools are planning and preparing the young people for post-school transitions.
- The involvement of only one local authority in this study has prevented it from being generalised across the board. Ideally, the study should be widened across other local authorities so that more data and findings can be gathered and analysed. However, due to time constraints, the distance from one local authority to another as well as financial factors, this study was limited to only one local authority.
- As an adult researcher, I feel that there is also tension when interacting with the young people, due to the inevitable issue of power imbalance or power dynamics between the adult researcher and the young people. For example, it is unknown whether the young people are happy or comfortable with the questions asked, or whether they are simply responding to the questions to please the adult researcher. While the power imbalance issue can never be completely eradicated (Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011), other steps such as pictures and symbols were used to facilitate the interaction with the young people and consequently to minimise the impact on their responses or consent. Future research should consider ways to improve interaction and to minimise the impact of the power imbalance between the adult researcher and the young people. Another limitation of the current study is concerning the return rate of the questionnaires from the parents in the second stage. Despite various attempts being made to get back the questionnaires, the poor return rate has made the findings difficult to be generalised. However, this problem was overcome by using a semi-structured interview with the parents in the third stage.

- The study was also limited to only two observations of the review meeting at the special school. However, again, time constraints have been the main factor of why observation could not be extended to the other schools.
- The scope of the study was limited to the planning and preparation of the post-school transition of the young people with learning disabilities based on the perspectives of the young people themselves, their parents and other professionals from only one special school and five mainstream schools. Thus, it is relatively difficult to compare the data gained statistically due to the small number of participants involved. Therefore, future research should take into consideration the involvement of a larger population from different types of schools in order to investigate the possible relationships in every ecological systems layer.
- The current study was limited to exploring the post-school experiences of young people until the first year of college. Future research should consider a longitudinal study that collects data up to post-college stage, which could lead to a better understanding of the nature of the transition experiences of young people with learning disabilities and their unique destinations post-college.

## **8.2 Implication for practice and policy**

The main points of the current study and recommendations are summarised as follows:

### **8.2.1 The lack of information**

Despite the fact that many changes and improvements have been made in order to improve the transition process for the young people, including the amendment of the ASL Act 2004 to 2009, the findings revealed that there was still a lack of information

about the provisions for the young people post-school among the school staff as well as other professionals. In fact, I argue that not all school staff in particular, are made aware of all the changes and provided with up-to-date information about the post-school transition. If the school staff themselves do not have all the information, how could they possibly pass on the up-to-date information to the young people and their parents who were depending on them as the main source of providing information? I suggest that there should be a regular update about the up-to-date information about post-school transition, including the post-school provision for the young people and the Head Teacher, as the head of the school should make sure that all the information reaches the teachers concerned. It should also be noted that not all the findings concerning the transition process of the previous studies were made known to the school staff in particular. As such, it is not impossible that many of the school staff are not aware of the up-to-date information about the post-school options. Therefore, the education department of the local authority (at the strategic level), should ensure that the information is fully delivered to its target group (in this case, the school staff at the school level), so that they can pass it on to the young people and their parents. This is important because the school is the first place at which the formal transition process begins. Also, there should be a good collaboration between the education authority and the researchers so that all the findings can be spread and disseminated fairly to all the people concerned.

### **8.2.2 Post-school destination**

The post-school destination issue remains one of the main issues discussed in the post school transition of the young people. Inadequate and inappropriate placement post-school for the young people means the choices for them are really limited. This issue

has frequently been discussed in past literature and apparently it is still ongoing and no absolute solutions have been found. The findings from the current study show that college remained the most popular destination for the young people post-school and turned out to be the only choice that was offered to them. It could be argued that this was due to the sampling in the current study which, focused on those who were going to the college post-school. However, it appeared that the young people were not given any other choices apart from the college. Even those who had undergone work experience whilst at school were not encouraged to further explore whether they would like it or not and what should be the next action. This makes college such a mandatory place for the young people after leaving school. I suggest that the young people and their parents in particular, should be thoroughly informed and clearly told about the pros and cons of going to college, including the potential of getting employment after leaving college, so that they can make a better decision about whether or not to proceed to college or somewhere else. What was found in the current study was that the decision about going to the college seemed to have already been made by the school for the young people and there was no further discussion about whether they still wanted to go to college or if they might want to do something else. This clearly shows that the young people just followed what had been determined for them without any objections or further discussion, even though in principle they seemed to agree with the decision. I argue that if the person centred approach is used in this situation, perhaps a better decision could have been made, once all the factors have been considered. Therefore, the person centred approach is highly recommended for use in this situation so that the young people could have more options rather than just one.

### **8.2.3 Role and support**

The results of the current study suggest that the school staff, the other professionals and the parents were trying their very best to support the young people going through the transition process. Providing information to the young people, identifying potential names for college, taking young people for a visit to the college and inviting speakers from college to school are among the support offered by the teachers. Similarly, the other professionals also offer support such as making home visits, referring to the right agency, having an induction programme and a transition programme for the young people. Parents' support can be seen through their participation in the school events, helping teachers to pick up their child from the link course, visiting college with the teachers and their child as well as having a good relationship with the teachers. However, despite the effort made by the school staff and the other professionals in supporting the young people going through the transition process, the findings also showed that a few parents were not happy with the support they received from the school and other professionals, and would expect more support to be offered to them and their children. In this regard, the suggestion from Carnaby and Lewis (2005) to have presentations from relevant professionals and representatives from adult learning disability services, as well as involving other parents of young people with learning disabilities who have already experienced the transition process seems to be very helpful to improve the quality of the transition process.

### **8.2.4 Planning time**

There is a mix of views in terms of when the transition planning period should start, as reported by the participants. Even though the majority said that they agreed with the time stipulated in the Additional Support for Learning Act (Scotland) 2004, which is

when the young person is 15 years old, there are some who suggested the planning period should either start earlier or later. The differences in the planning period varied from as early as when the young people were in primary 7 to as late as just a few months before leaving school. The rationale for the different timing is that it depends on the young people's circumstances, as each and every one of them is different, some may need more and some may need less time to plan. While one teacher even argued that there was no point in starting much earlier if the young people were not able to understand the process due to their level of maturity, four other professionals suggested that the planning should start much earlier than S3, especially for those with profound needs from the special school so as to reduce the anxieties that they may experience throughout the process. On the other hand, another professional argued that the young people's mind should not only be focused on the issue of leaving school, but also on how to make the best use of their time whilst at school.

### **8.3 Implications and recommendations for future research**

The study was limited in some areas that could practically be explored more and would be worthy of further research. The difference in practices between the special and mainstream school requires further exploration. Since there was only one special school involved in the current study, no comparison can be made with other special schools to identify any differences or similarities in the services provided for the young people in particular, and their families, in general. However, the different practice can be seen between different 'school-type' schools in the current study. For instance, in one case, one parent reported about her son's school (a 'Roman Catholic'-type school) which only had provision until fourth year for young people with learning disabilities, whereas at the other school (the 'Academy-type school), the provision was run until the sixth

year), thus providing more opportunity for young people who want to stay on until the sixth year without worrying about having to move schools.

It would also be interesting to explore and extend the study to a larger population, for example, including more local authorities so as to see the different approaches and practices taken or implemented in the post-school transition of the young people. By involving more local authorities, more data could be gathered for further comparative study, not only between special schools in different local authorities as earlier stated, but also between mainstream schools. For instance, the current study found that work experience was not fully implemented or made compulsory for all the young people, especially in the mainstream school, even though the past literature did stress developing work experience for all the young people (see, for example, Stalker, 2002) in both, the mainstream as well as the special school. This can be seen in one example where one parent said that her son's school was considering work experience for him, but was not sure whether it was going to work for him or not and finally suggested the college as an alternative.

Similarly, one of the teacher's suggestions in the current study to have more vocationally oriented subject choices in school so that the young people could gain more skills and have exposure to a working environment could also be explored further to see the impact of integrating vocational elements subjects on the young people's readiness to enter the employment market. I argue that if this practice was found to be effective in enhancing the young people's job skills, as well as improving their chances of getting a job, why can't it be extended to all existing schools within that particular local authority?

It could be interesting to conduct further research into the report from two teachers who said that parents also have learning disabilities in order to see the impact on how their children might be helped and supported in going through the transition process. Also, the research could look at the support system that the family might receive and whether or not they have extra help in such circumstances. In addition, the experience of one parent having other children without learning disabilities moving on from school to college as illustrated in Ethan's story, would also be worth further exploration, to see the differences in the transition process between young people with and without learning disabilities and its impact on the family as a whole.

The issue of bullying among young people with learning disabilities, especially in college, as reported in two cases in the current study, is another issue that merits further study. A further study would be worthwhile to explore whether or not the bullying issue is a 'normal' phenomenon in college among young people with learning disabilities and to what extent the action taken could have an impact on the young people's life whilst at college or even in the longer term. It would also be interesting to see, to what extent the college's action by transferring the young person to a lower course, as in Ethan's case, would be worthwhile and helpful for the young people long term at college and whether or not it has a psychological or emotional impact on the young person and their family overall.

Another issue that would be worthy of further research is the summer transition programme, as reported by one professional. This programme was held over the summer holiday for a six week block for the young people who were selected to go on a full time course at college. The main aim of this programme was to provide a taster for the young people as well as to give them a real experience of what the life skills course

was all about by bringing all the staff who were going to work with them in the actual course and involving them in all the actual activities that they were going to experience on the life skills course. Also, this programme would serve as final preparation before moving on to college full time. Further research into this programme would be worthwhile to see how effective this programme is, and whether or not it would be worthwhile for all the young people to take part in this programme before embarking on the actual course.

The inconsistency of support provided for the school leavers and the college leavers is another main issue that needs further research. The suggestion made by one professional in the current study to create a local coordinator to support the young people, particularly after leaving college would be worth pondering. As Dee and Byers (2003) point out, often there are no transition procedures put in place to support the young people when they leave a placement such as college. There seems to be an imbalance between the support services for these two groups, the school leavers and the college leavers. The present system seems to only focus on the school leavers whilst the college leavers are generally left alone to decide their career path and what to do next. While a lot has been done for the 'post-school transition' of the young people, there is no such thing as 'post-college transition' for the young people after leaving college. As Carnaby and Lewis (2005) have noted, there was generally little attention paid to what the future possibilities might be for the young people post-college. This has led to a new term called 'invisible transition' as referred to by some researchers (Hudson, 2006; Kaehne, 2010). As such, a further study on this issue is needed.

#### **8.4 Concluding remarks**

Although many studies on the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities have been conducted in the past, there are few relating specifically to the Scottish context. Hence, this study was able to fill the gap by involving four different groups of participants in one single study. This highlights my unique contribution to this field. In addition, the voice of these four different groups of participants shows the comprehensiveness of this study by taking into account various perspectives. I believe that in order to make a change or improvement, listening to the voices of those who are directly involved should be made a priority. It also indicates how important their views are in terms of implementing the planning and preparation of the post-school transition.

Despite the number of participants being small, the involvement of different types of school underlines the exclusivity of this study as compared to the previous studies. This indicates that each different school has its own rules and practices despite all being governed by the same local authority and national legislation. For example, the findings show that one of the schools (the mainstream faith school) only had a provision for Additional Support Needs until the fourth year, which suggests that parents should ensure that they choose the right school for their son or daughter before enrolling them and check that the criteria suit their needs.

My experience during Stage 1 where less data were obtained made me realise that words alone were not enough to gain more information from the young people in my study. Thus, changing the techniques used to include mind maps and pictures in the interview schedules in Stages 2 and 3 has been successful in helping me to obtain more information from the young people. This technique suggests the importance of images for interpreting meanings and simplifying the process of delivering information than

just using words. This also highlights the unique and original contribution in this study, besides suggesting the importance of diversity or utilising various techniques to collect data from the young people. Professionals can create similar instruments to listen to what the young people say about the transition.

Although the policy for the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities is already in place, there is still room for improvement to make sure that young people have a more fulfilling life in the future. Exposure to the link course and work experience is extremely essential for the young people so that they can get a taste of what the real setting is like. However, I believe that they should have the right to be exposed to as many options as possible post-school and not just one or two, as this seems to be pre-determined, very limited and unfortunate for the young people. Finally, their decision of where their next destination is should depend on what they want to do in the future. This study has also created awareness of the importance of providing various options to the young people before the final decision about their post-school destination is made.

Research suggests that if early transition goes wrong, it can have an impact on later transitions. At other educational stages such as pre-school, as they are still moving within the same education system, support is in place. Whereas at the post-school stage, there are complexities due to lack of clarity about who is responsible for the successful transition. However, their decision to choose further education, training or work, and to be able to live independently will definitely have a big impact on their future life course. My experience of interviewing the parents in this study demonstrated how concerned they were about their children's future. In addition, it is also important as it involves the transfer of children's services to adult services which requires very careful and

organised planning. Thus, this study has shown that a study on post-school transition is really essential to ensure that young people are not left marginalised but rather equipped with adequate skills and knowledge to face future challenges.

Overall, this study has taught me a lot about how to be more sensitive to, and concerned about the needs of the young people with learning disabilities when it comes to leaving school and entering the next phase of their lives. Indeed, thorough planning and preparation, an appropriate approach, adequate information, full support and cooperation from all the parties involved are among the essential components to ensure a smooth transition is in place. In other words, it is a collective responsibility that requires a high degree of support, awareness and cooperation from all the people involved. By having all of these components, the chances for the young people to study further, go for training or work, enjoy social and leisure activities and have a better and meaningful life will hopefully be much easier to achieve. Also, the support for their families, especially their parents, is extremely important to ensure that they will not feel alone when going through this challenging period. Finally, this study has led to the creation of new knowledge, informing future policy and practice in the field of the post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities that has not been carried out previously.

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Appendix 1 Approval from the Local Authority's Education Department



Azehar Aziz  
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education  
University of Dundee

Director  
Tel  
Fax  
E-mail  
Our Ref  
Your Ref  
Date

Dear Mr Aziz

RESEARCH

I refer to your recent enquiry with regard to data collection.

I confirm that you have my permission to contact secondary schools in City Council. I must advise you that it is up to individual Head Teachers to decide whether or not to participate.

Yours sincerely



Head of Secondary Education

Please take the enclosed leaflet to help you understand the letter better.

آزہار عزیز کے لیے درخواست کی گئی ہے کہ وہ اسکولوں سے تعلیمی ڈیٹا جمع کرنے کے لیے اسکولوں سے رابطہ کر سکیں۔

اس بات کی تصدیق کی جا رہی ہے کہ آپ نے اسکولوں سے تعلیمی ڈیٹا جمع کرنے کے لیے اسکولوں سے رابطہ کرنے کی اجازت دی ہے۔

اس بات کی اطلاع دی جا رہی ہے کہ اس کے لیے اسکولوں کے سربراہان کو اس بات کا فیصلہ کرنا ہے کہ وہ یا نہیں شرکت کریں۔

如果您對英語理解有困難，請聯絡以下地址。



Dundee Teacher & Integration Service / Central Library, The Foregate Dundee, DD1 1DD. Tel: 01382 427321 / 427342. Fax: 01382 427322



## Appendix 2 Approval of the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (Stage 1)



School of Psychology

### University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

Azahar Aziz,  
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education,  
University of Dundee,  
Nethergate,  
Dundee, DD1 4HN.

5 August 2010

Dear Azahar,

**Application Number: UREC 10036**

**Title: Post-school transition of pupils with learning disabilities in one local authority in Scotland.**

Your application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee, and there are no ethical concerns with the proposed research. I am pleased to confirm that the above application has now been formally approved.

You submitted the following documents:

1. Interview questions for stakeholders	2. Interview questions for YP
3. Questionnaire - parents	4. research proposal
5. UREC FORM	6. PARENTS INFO SHEET 5-8-10
7. professionals info sheet 5-8-10	8. research proposal 5-8-10
9. YOUNG PEOPLE INFO SHEET 5-8-10	

Yours sincerely,

**Peter Willatts**  
Digitally signed by Peter Willatts,  
DN: cn =Peter Willatts, o=University of  
Dundee, ou=School of Psychology,  
email =pwillatt@dundee.ac.uk, c=GB  
Reason: I am the author of this  
document.  
Date: 2010.08.05 17:35:05 +01'00'

Dr Peter Willatts  
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

**Appendix 3** Young people information sheet – Stage 1**YOUNG PEOPLE INFO SHEET****POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE – HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?**

Leaving school and becoming an adult is one of the most important parts in one's life. I'm trying to find out whether you feel ready to leave and how things can be made better.

The main things I'm trying to find out are:

What has it felt like to you?

Have your school, or other people, helped you to get ready?

Have people helped you make plans for what's going to happen?

Do you know what you'll be doing after school?

I will be talking to you in September 2010, May/June 2011 and possibly September 2011 to follow your journey from last year at school to the first year at college. I would like to talk to you before you leave school (May/June 2011) and after you start at college (September 2011). I already have permission from the \*name\* City Council Education Department and University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee to conduct this research.

It will take us about **30-40 minutes** to go through my questions. **Your views are very important.** If you need any help answering questions, please let me know. You can have a teacher or your parent present at that time.

Anything you say to me will be kept secret. I won't tell anyone in the school or your family, so you can say whatever you feel. The only time I would have to tell someone about something you've said, would be if I thought you or somebody else might get hurt.

This interview will be audio recorded. It will then be written down for the purpose of this study. They will be kept for about three years upon the completion of my PhD before they are destroyed. Only the researcher and the supervisors of this study will listen to the audio recording. The data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure room at the University of Dundee. It will be used for the research purpose and any publications related to the study.

You will be asked to respond to a variety of questions about your preparation and experience in relation to leaving school.

I need your permission for your participation. You will have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Non-participation in this study will have no negative effect on the services they receive from the school. Your participation is voluntary.

Are you happy to go ahead with the interview?

Yes

No

You don't have to tell me your name if you don't want to, but I'd like to ask:

Name or identifier: .....

**Appendix 4** Young People Consent form – Stage 1**POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE– HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?**  
(Consent form)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2. I confirm that I have read the information sheet related to my participation in the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without any negative effect to the service provision for me.	
4. I agree to take part in the above study.	

**Name of Child** \_\_\_\_\_**School** \_\_\_\_\_**Name of Parent/Carer** \_\_\_\_\_**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_**Date** \_\_\_\_\_**Name or identifier** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 5** Parent Information sheet – Stage 1*PARENT INFORMATION SHEET***POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE– HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?**

Preparing for the life after school has a great impact on the pupils and their parents. There are many things one needs to go through to make the transition process from school to post-school settings seamless. You as parents as well as professionals working with your child would already be involved in planning for the move. This is an opportunity for you as parents to give your feedback concerning the transition process of your child. Our main objectives are:

To explore the pupils, parents and professionals' experiences of transition planning and preparation for young people with Additional Support Needs in special and mainstream schools.

To explore the pupils, parents and professionals' experiences of transition from secondary school to vocational education.

I will be collecting data from pupils in September 2010, May/June 2011 and possibly September 2011 to follow their journey from last year at school to the first year at college. I would like to collect data from you before they leave school (May/June 2011) and after they start at college (September 2011). I already have permission from the \*name\* City Council Education Department and University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee to conduct this research.

I need your permission for your and your child's participation. Any information you or your child provide me, will be confidential and made anonymous before a report is written. You and your child will have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Non-participation in this study will have no detrimental effect on the services they receive from the school. Your and your child's participation is voluntary.

If you would like more information about this research, please contact me by email or telephone.

Yours sincerely

Azahar Aziz  
Research Student,  
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education,  
University of Dundee.

Phone 01382-381526

Email [a.aziz@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:a.aziz@dundee.ac.uk)

**Appendix 6** Parent Consent form – Stage 1**POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE– HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?**

(Consent form)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2. I confirm that I have read the information sheet related to my child's participation in the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
3. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that s/he is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without any detrimental effect to the service provision for my child.	
4. I agree to my child taking part in the above study.	
5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without any detrimental effect to the service provision for my child.	
6. I agree to take part in the above study.	

**Name of Child** \_\_\_\_\_**School** \_\_\_\_\_**Name of Parent/Carer** \_\_\_\_\_**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 7** Professionals information sheet – Stage 1**PROFESSIONALS INFO SHEET****POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE – HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?**

Preparing for the life after school has had a great impact on the pupils and their parents. There are many things one needs to go through to make the transition process from school to post school settings seamless. You as professionals working with young people would already be involved in planning for the move. This is an opportunity for you as professionals to give your feedback concerning the transition process. Our main objectives are:

To explore the pupils, parents and professionals' experiences of transition planning and preparation for young people with Additional Support Needs in special and mainstream schools.

To explore the pupils, parents and professionals' experiences of transition from secondary school to vocational education.

I will be collecting data from pupils in September 2010, May/June 2011 and possibly September 2011 to follow their journey from last year at school to the first year at college. I would like to collect data from you before they leave school (May/June 2011) and after they start at college (September 2011). I already have permission from the \*name\* City Council Education Department and University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee to conduct this research.

The interview will take about **45 – 60 minutes** of your time. **Your views are very important.**

This interview will be audio recorded. It will then be transcribed for the purpose of this study and further be kept for about three years upon the completion of my PhD before they are destroyed. Only the researcher and the supervisors of this study will listen to the audio recording. Apart from the researchers, nobody else will listen to the recording. The data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure room at the University of Dundee. It will be used for the research purpose and any publications related to the study. Electronic data will be securely stored and retrieved only through a password protected computer at the University of Dundee.

You will be asked to respond to some open-ended questions regarding your understanding and experience of the transition process and how the system works.

I need your permission for participation. Any information you provide me, will be confidential and made anonymous before a report is written. You will have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Non-participation in this study will have no negative effect on the services they receive from the school. Your participation is voluntary.

By responding to the questions, you are indicating that you are agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have any questions, please contact me, on 01382-381526 or by e-mail [a.aziz@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:a.aziz@dundee.ac.uk)

**Appendix 8** Professionals consent form – Stage 1**POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE– HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?**

(Consent form)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2. I confirm that I have read the information sheet related to my participation in the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without any negative effect to the service provision for me.	
4. I agree to take part in the above study.	

**Name of Professional** \_\_\_\_\_**Department** \_\_\_\_\_**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 9** Young people’s interview schedule – Stage 1

**Young peoples' views and experience regarding the process of transition.**

Questions 1 – 7 require you to choose an answer from the list provided; questions 8 – 14 provide you with space to express your views in detail. Although we would like detailed information, you have the option not to answer all the questions.

1. What school do you go to?

- |                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| *name* Academy         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* Academy         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* High School     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* Academy         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* Academy         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* High School     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* Academy         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* High School     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* Academy         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *name* School          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

.....

2. Has anyone talked to you about what will happen when you leave school?

Yes  No

If ‘Yes’, was what they said helpful?

Yes  No

Do you know who they were?

- |                                     |                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Class Teacher (School)              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Guidance Teacher (School)           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Support for Learning Staff (School) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Head Teacher (School)               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Careers Staff (School)              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Careers Staff (outside School)      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| College Staff                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Social Worker                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Educational Psychologist            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speech Therapist                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Occupational Therapist              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Anyone else? (please specify):      | <input type="checkbox"/> |

.....

3. How old are you?

15 – 16	<input type="text"/>
16 – 17	<input type="text"/>
17 – 18	<input type="text"/>
18 – 19	<input type="text"/>

4. Can you tell me your school year?

S1	<input type="text"/>
S2	<input type="text"/>
S3	<input type="text"/>
S4	<input type="text"/>
S5	<input type="text"/>
S6	<input type="text"/>

5. Can you remember when someone first talked to you about leaving school?

Last year (2008 – 2009)	<input type="text"/>
This year (2009 – 2010)	<input type="text"/>

6. Do you go to college for some of the time at the moment?

Yes  No

If yes, what is the name of the college?

.....

What do you do at college?

.....

7. I want to ask you about getting ready to leave school. I'm going to say some things and I want you to tell me if you agree with them or not (you can use the cards if you want to).

Statements	Yes	No	Don't Know
I think I know what it will be like to leave school.			
I felt happy about how people talked to one another about leaving school.			
I am happy with how the school has helped me get ready.			
The school has given me lots of time to get ready for leaving school.			
I am happy with the way the school spoke to me about what leaving school would be like.			
The school knew all the people who could help me do what I want after finishing school.			
I feel ready to leave school and be an adult.			
I have had the chance to talk about lots of different things I can do when I leave school.			

8. How do you feel about moving on after school? (Optional)

9. What is it that excites you most? (Optional)

10. What is it that worries you? (Optional)

11. What was the best thing that the school did to help you get ready to leave/move on?  
(Optional)

12. Could the school have made things any easier? How? (Optional)

13. Could you have done anything better to get ready? (Optional)

14. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me? (Optional)

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you.

If chosen, would you be happy for me to come and talk to you again after you've left school to see how you're getting on?

Yes

No

If 'Yes':

Name:.....

Address: .....  
.....

Phone number: .....

## Appendix 10 Professionals interview schedule – Stage 1

**Interview questions for stakeholders (professionals, careers/guidance staff and support for learning staff). Questions 1 – 9 are the main questions followed by the probe questions. Although we would like detailed information, you have the option not to answer all the questions.**

1. What is your understanding of the transition process?

The process of change

How do you expect the change would be? Seamless? Guided? Assisted?

Are you aware of the process?

2. What is your experience of the transition process?

What are your views?

What are the difficulties that you face?

How do you overcome it?

3. When did the transition planning for this year's school leavers start?

Is the planning time adequate?

What is your preparation to make the transition runs smoothly?

4. At what stage does this process take place?

When is the best/suitable time to think about the process?

What are the factors influencing the process of transition?

What is your role in the process?

5. Who are the people involved in the process of transition?

Who do you think the people should be?

How do they work/interact among each other?

How do they involve other people? E.g. college people, social workers, etc.

6. Does the transition process prepare the young people for adult life?

What are the opportunities that they might get?

How can they benefit from such opportunities?

How can you make sure that it can be guaranteed?

What about if it is a transition to college or work?

7. How do you think the system works?

Do you think the current system adequately prepare school leavers for transition?

Is there any standard policy that the young people can follow or be guided?

If so, who is the person in charge of the process/ who is the responsible person?

Who is the most significant person to deal with in relation to transition process?

What needs to be changed or improved?

8. Have you been given enough information concerning the transition process?

What kind of information do you get?

How do you get the information/resources?

Is it really helpful or supportive? In what way?

Is it up to date?

9. Do you have any other thoughts or comments on any aspect of the transition process of the young people with ASN?

**THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO INTERVIEW YOU.**

**Appendix 11** Approval of the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (Stage 2)



School of Psychology

**University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee**

Azahar Aziz,  
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education,  
University of Dundee,  
Nethergate,  
Dundee, DD1 4HN.

26 April 2011

Dear Mr Aziz,

**Application Number: UREC 11034**

**Title: Post-school transition of young people with learning disabilities in one local authority in Scotland.**

Your application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee, and there are no ethical concerns with the proposed research. I am pleased to confirm that the above application has now been approved.

You submitted the following documents:

1. Research Proposal - Stage 2. 23.3.2011	2. UREC Form - Stage 2
3. YP Info sheet - Stage 2. 23.3.2011	4. Feeling icons
5. mind map (boy)	6. mind map (girl)
7. Parents Info sheet and consent form - stage 2	8. Research Proposal - Stage 2. 18.4.2011
9. UREC Form - Stage 2	10. YP Info sheet - Stage 2. 18.4.2011

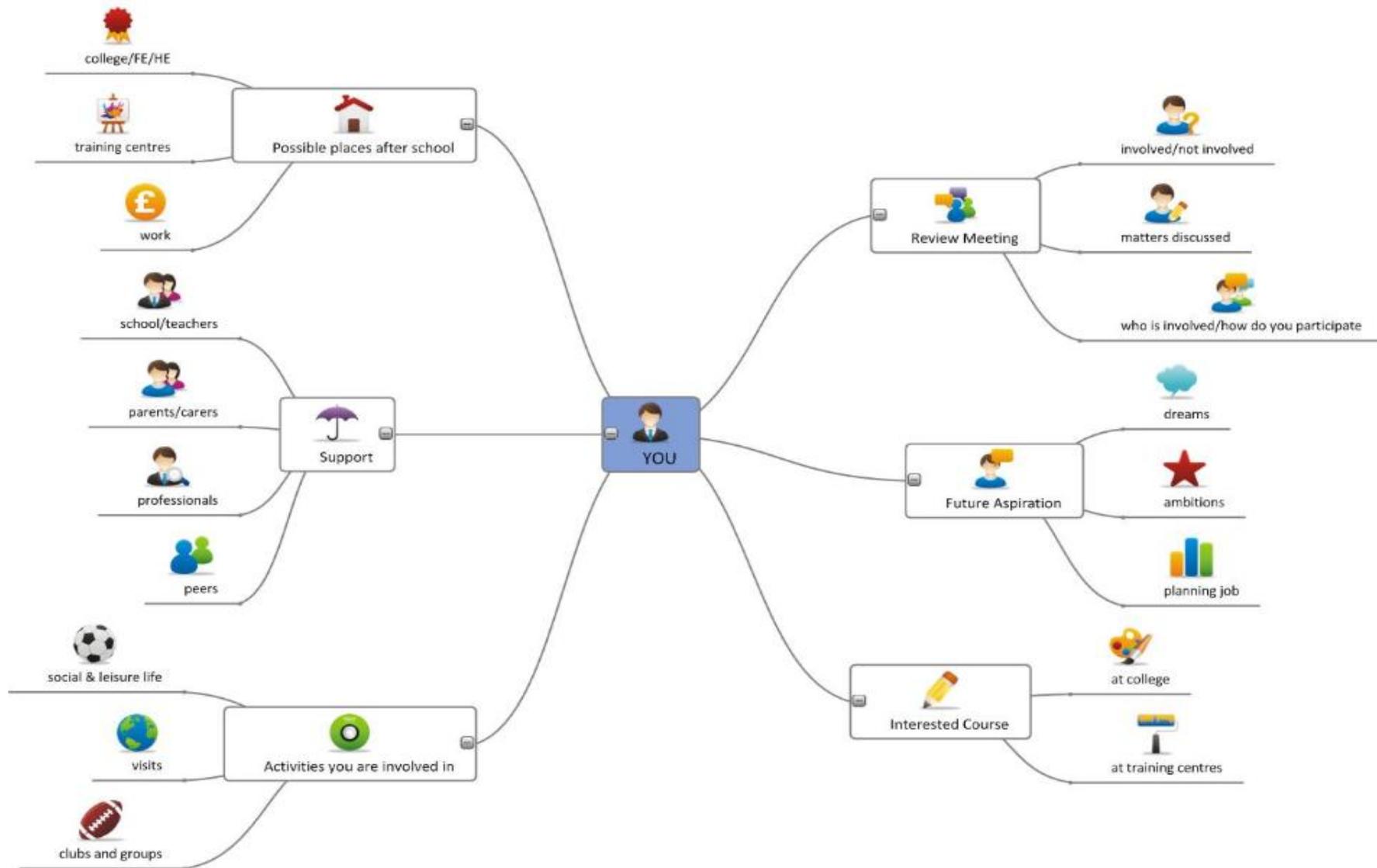
Yours sincerely,

**Peter Willatts**

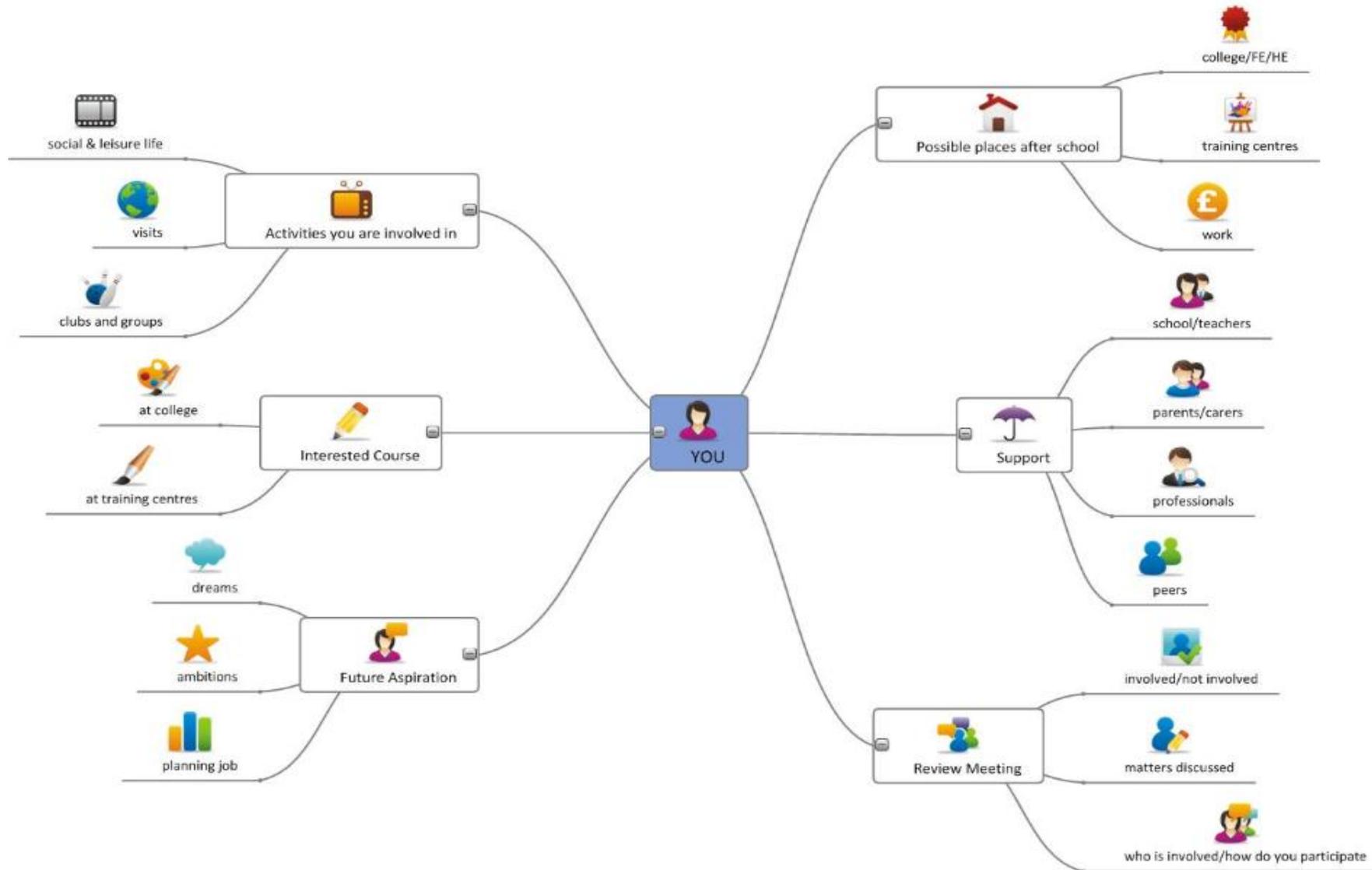
Digitally signed by Peter Willatts  
DN: cn=Peter Willatts,  
o=University of Dundee,  
ou=School of Psychology,  
em=p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk,  
c=GB  
Reason: I am the author of this document  
Date: 2011.04.26 10:21:08 +0100

Dr Peter Willatts  
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 12 Mind map (male version)



Appendix 13 Mind map (female version)



## Appendix 14 Feelings icons

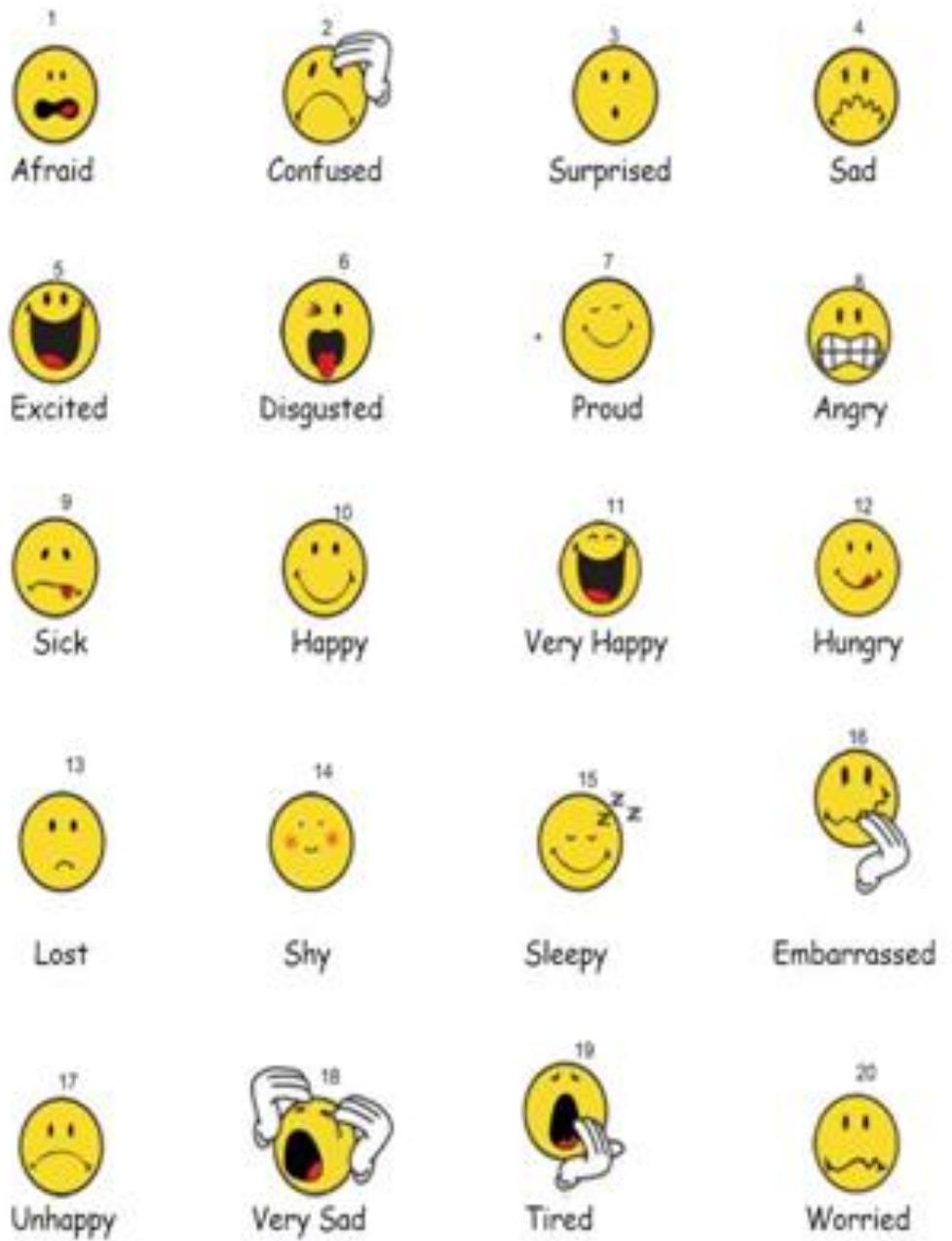


Figure 1  
Retrieved from: <https://e.e.uoi.edu/wiki/images/b/b0/Emotions.JPG> on 11.3.2011

**Appendix 15** Parent questionnaire

**Parents' views and experience regarding the process of transition**

Questions 1 to 2 require you to choose an answer from the list provided; questions 3 to 10 provide you with space to express your views in detail. Although we would like detailed information, you have the option of leaving questions 3 to 10 blank.

**1.** My child is attending:

- \*name\* Academy
  - \*name\* Academy
  - \*name\* High School
  - \*name\* Academy
  - \*name\* Academy
  - \*name\* High School
  - \*name\* Academy
  - \*name\* High School
  - \*name\* Academy
  - \*name\* School
- Other (*please specify*)
- .....

**2.** The staffs who have been most involved in the transition process, and have communicated with me, are: (*Optional*)  
(*select all that apply*)

- Class Teacher (School)
  - Guidance Teacher (School)
  - Support for Learning Staff (School)
  - Head Teacher (School)
  - Careers Staff (School)
  - Careers Staff (outside the school)
  - College Staff
  - Social Worker
  - Educational Psychologist
  - Speech Therapist
  - Occupational Therapist
- Other (*please specify*):

**3.** Below are statements regarding your child and your experience of the transition process as a result of the work done by the School. Please choose the relevant response to each statement:

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
<b>a.</b> I have been informed clearly about the transition process of my child by the school.					
<b>b.</b> The information given was very helpful for me as a parent.					
<b>c.</b> The information given was very helpful for my child.					
<b>d.</b> The information given was up to date.					
<b>e.</b> I am aware of and understand the transition process clearly.					
<b>f.</b> The transition process was carried out smoothly by the school.					
<b>g.</b> The preparation by the					

school for the post-school transition was helpful to me as a parent.					
<b>h.</b> The preparation by the school for the post-school transition was helpful for my child.					
<b>i.</b> I am happy that the school has done its best to make the transition process of my child as smooth as possible.					
<b>j.</b> The school has given my child ample time to prepare for the transition process.					
<b>k.</b> The school has played its role effectively in the transition process of my child.					
<b>l.</b> The school has interacted well with me as a parent in the transition process.					
<b>m.</b> The school has good links with the people involved in the transition process (college, social workers, etc.)					
<b>n.</b> The transition planning has prepared my child for his/her adult life.					
<b>o.</b> The transition preparation has provided my child with many post-school opportunities.					
<b>p.</b> The current school system adequately prepares the school leavers for transition.					

**4.** What, if any, difficulties might you or your child experience as a result of post-school transition?

Please explain as far as possible the experience and time scale. (*Optional*)

**5.** What, if any, plans have you put in place to overcome any difficulties? (*Optional*)

**6.** What, if any, are the most beneficial aspects of the work that the School did to assist you or your child with the transition process? (*Optional*)

**7.** What, if anything, could the School have done to make the transition process better for your child? *(Optional)*

**8.** What, if anything, could the School have done to make the transition process better for you as a parent? *(Optional)*

**9.** What, if anything, could you have done to make the transition process better for you or your child? *(Optional)*

**10.** Do you have any other thoughts or comments on any aspect of transition planning and preparation for young people with learning disabilities? Please use the box below to give your views. *(Optional)*

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact me, on 01382-381526 or by e-mail [a.aziz@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:a.aziz@dundee.ac.uk)

**Appendix 16** Approval of the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (Stage 3)



School of Psychology

**University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee**

Azahar Aziz,  
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education,  
University of Dundee,  
Nethergate,  
Dundee, DD1 4HN.

3 November 2011

Dear Mr Aziz,

**Application Number: URE C 11097**

**Title: Post-School Transition Of Young People With Learning Disabilities In One Local Authority In Scotland.**

Your application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee, and there are no ethical concerns with the proposed research. I am pleased to confirm that the above application has now been approved.

You submitted the following documents:

1. Interview Questions for YP (Phase 3) 10.10.11
2. Research Proposal - Stage 3 10.10.11
3. UREC Form - Stage 3
4. Interview Questions for Parents (Phase 3) 10.10.11

Yours sincerely,

**Peter  
Willatts**

Digitally signed by Peter Willatts  
DN: cn=Peter Willatts,  
o=University of Dundee,  
ou=School of Psychology,  
email=p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk,  
c=GB  
Reason I am the author of this  
document  
Date: 2011.11.03 19:25:22

Dr Peter Willatts  
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

**Appendix 17** Interview questions for young people (Stage 3)**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE (PHASE 3)****Young People's views and experience regarding the process of transition**

This interview is based on **SIX** main themes. Although I would like detailed information, you have the option not to answer any of the questions.

**COLLEGE LIFE**

- Were you attending any sessions at the college whilst you were still at school?
  - Did that make any easier for you in some way? How?
- What do you like most about being in college?
  - What do you not like about being in college?
- How do you feel about being a college student?
- Has your life changed much since becoming a college student? In what ways?
  - E.g. Being more independent, timekeeping, etc.

**SUPPORT**

- Who supports you at college?
- What kind of supports are they giving you?
  - E.g. learning support, moral support, facilities, etc.
- What do you think of the support?
  - Are you happy with the support? Why?

**FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIALIZATION**

- Have you made new friends at college?
  - Where are they from?
  - Do you mix with them after class or during weekend?
  - What about your old friends, do you still see them?
- Do you enjoy having new friends and new environment?
- Do you join any other activities apart from the class? What are the activities?

**DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES**

- Have you had any difficulties or challenges in college?
- What did you do then?
- Does anyone help you with the difficulties?

**TRANSPORTATION**

- How do you travel to and from college every day?
  - Is it the same for every day?
  - Do you go on your own or with your friend?
  - Do you get paid for the travel cost? Who pays you for that?

**COURSES LEARNED AND FUTURE ASPIRATION**

- What do you learn at college?
  - Do you enjoy the course?
  - Does it suit you well?
- What do you plan to do when you leave college?
  - What kind of job do you most prefer?
- Is college preparing you for the job you want to do?
  - Are they advising you with regard to job prospects?
- Has anybody talked with you about your future plans?

**FINAL QUESTION**

- Is there any other thing that you would like to say or comment in terms of your college life, future planning, etc.?

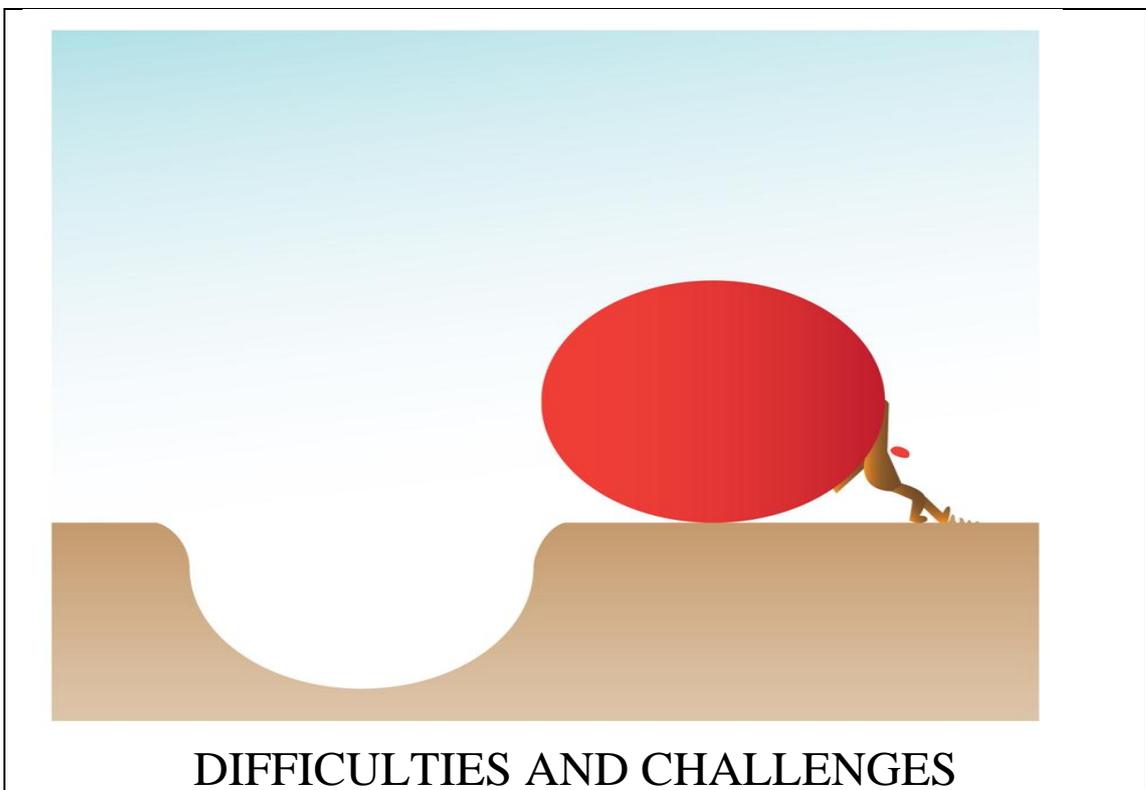
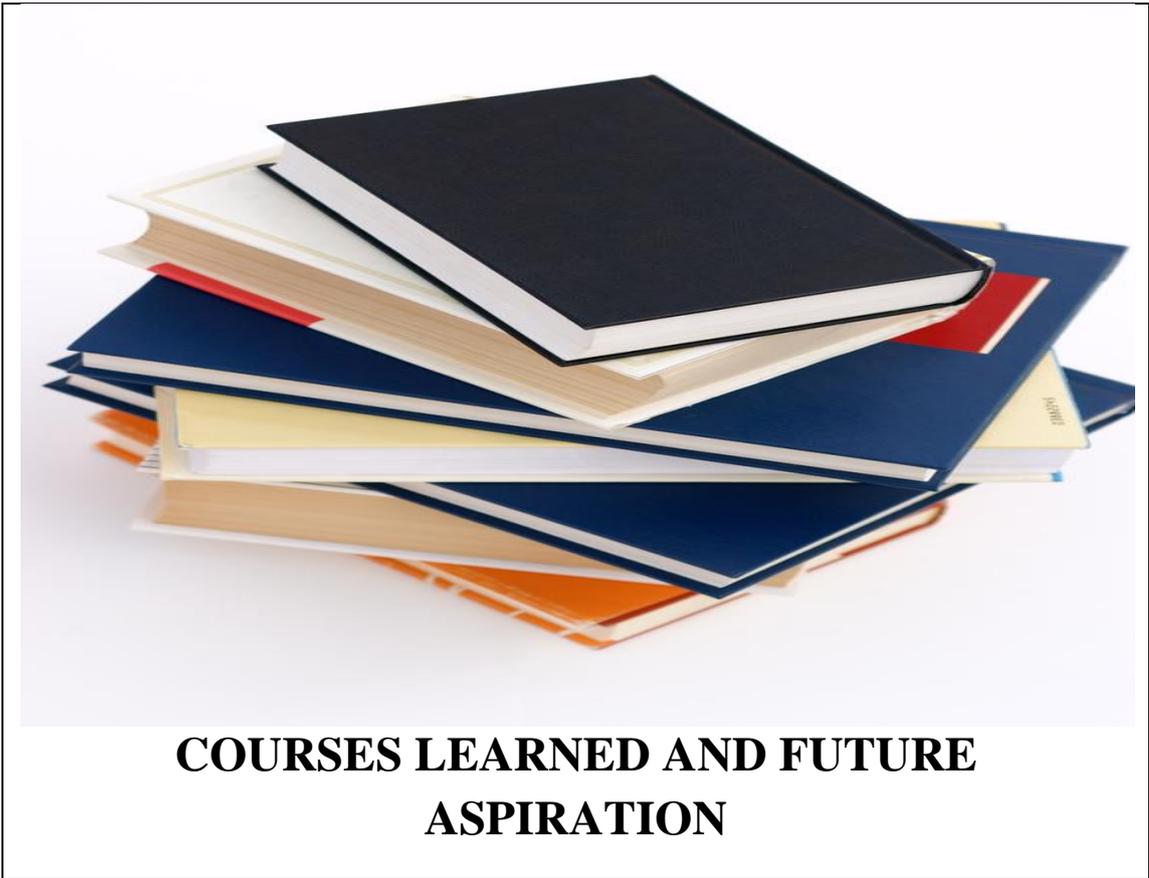
**THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO INTERVIEW YOU.**

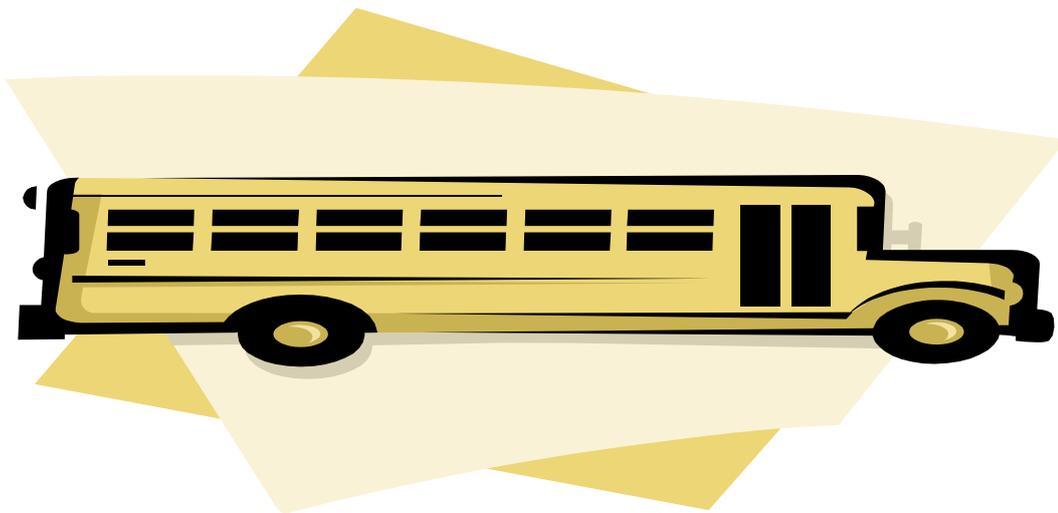


**COLLEGE LIFE**



**SUPPORT**





**TRANSPORTATION**



**FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIALIZATION**

**Appendix 18** Interview questions for parents (Stage 3)**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS (PHASE 3)****Parents' views and experience regarding the process of transition**

This interview is based on **FIVE** main themes. Although I would like detailed information, you have the option not to answer any of the questions.

**1. TRANSITION PROCESS**

1. Can you share your experience of your child moving on from school to college?
  - How do you feel about it?
  - Did you face any problems or difficulties during that period?
  - Has his/her life changed much since becoming a college student? In what way? E.g. time keeping, level of thinking, more independent, etc. Any significant changes?

2. Do you think you have had enough involvement in the transition process of your child? E.g. attending the transition meeting, getting information, etc?
  - Is there any gap between your expectation and reality?

3. Has your child been properly guided through for a post school placement? Can you please give some examples?

4. Do you think that you could have played a more significant role in his/her transition?

**2. SUPPORT**

5. What level of support in terms of learning does s/he receive from college?  
- Who supports him/her at college?

6. How do you find the overall support from the college?  
- The staff, students, facilities, surroundings, etc.

7. How happy are you with the support? What's worked well? What's not worked so well?

**3. COURSES LEARNED AND FUTURE ASPIRATION**

8. Does s/he enjoy his/her current level of study?

9. What is his/her plan after completion of this course?

10. Has s/he been advised by the college with regard to the careers prospects?

- Is college helping or preparing him/her for the job s/he wants to do?

11. What level of discussion do you two usually have with regard to his/her future planning?

- What kind of job does s/he most prefer?
- Is it a kind of skills based, vocational based, managerial, clerical jobs, etc.?

12. Is anybody else involved in guiding him/her about his/her future careers?

- Apart from parents and college.

**4. FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIALIZATION**

13. How does s/he get along with the new environment at college?

- Does s/he experience any problems adapting with the new environment?
- How does s/he cope with that?

14. Does s/he make many new friends at college?

- How much time s/he usually spends with his/her friends after class or during weekends?
- What about his/her old friends at school? Does s/he still see them?

**5. TRANSPORTATION**

15. How does your child travel to and from college every day?

- Is it the same for every day?
- How does s/he manage his/her travel cost?
- Does he get paid?

16. Does s/he experience any problems travelling to and from college every day?

- How do you solve it?

**Final question**

- Is there any other thing that you would like to say or comment in terms of his/her college life, future planning, etc.?

**THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO INTERVIEW YOU.**