LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

An Investigation into the Transition Experiences of A-Level Students and Staff in a Further Education College.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Liverpool Hope University for the degree of Doctorate in Education

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Education.

Signed: ___N. Hunter_____ (Candidate) Date: _9th January 2023____

<u>Dedication</u>

For my dad, Dr John Patrick Hunter, who has continually been an inspiration. Thank you for your advice and unwavering support throughout this academic endeavour.

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Abstract

Post-16 transition is an inevitability in the life of every student. Yet post-16 educational transition in England has to date been under-researched. The age of participation in education in the United Kingdom was raised to 18 years in 2015, which along with concurrent reductions in funding have had ramifications for Post-16 transition provision and experiences. Transition experience impacts on students' future engagement with education and long-term economic wellbeing. The present research investigated the transition experience of four first year A-Level students in a Further Education college, and five members of staff. Data were collected from all participants, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), via semi-structured interviews in the first term. Data were further collected from the student participants in the second term, using semi-structured interviews and a form of photo elicitation. From the analysis, three super-ordinate themes were highlighted from the student participants: Relationships and Interactions, Influences which Impact on Transition and Transition in Learning. The three super-ordinate themes from the staff participants were: Teacher practices, Management and Transition Provision. The implications from the findings indicate that having a longer-term and well considered plan towards Higher Education and career pathways can enhance the transition experience of all students, particularly those who find the process confusing or difficult. The overarching conclusion is that transition can be a challenging process which requires greater attention from strategic leadership and the inclusion of both staff and students in the decision-making process.

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Introduction

Background:

This chapter introduces initially the background interests and concerns of the researcher, which have given rise to transition being the focus of the present research. Secondly the research context is detailed and the significance of the present research is discussed. Finally, the positionality of the researcher is highlighted, to provide the readership with a knowledge of the researcher from the commencement of this research study.

Since the 1970s educational transition has been of increasing interest to researchers because of its inevitability in the life of a student, yet the concept of and value attributed to transition remains debatable and unresolved, (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010). Traditionally, transition was perceived as a one-off event, whereby a student moved from one educational institution or sector, to another with little or no consideration given to the event. Since 2014 there has been a change in the narrative around transition, which perceives transition as on-going, to, through and beyond a particular institution, (Matheson et al. 2017). Due to a variety of academic definitions and a lack of an agreed understanding, the concept of transition differs notably and has given rise to ill-informed institutional understandings of transition which has produced significant differences in terms of how much planning, effort and resource, if any, each individual institution affords to the arrangements for transition. The literature suggests that the variability in transition policy, planning and processes

have impacted significantly on transition experience for students and staff. For the purposes of the present research transition will be understood as a process where students experience and undergo change in their educational journeys to, through and beyond the education continuum. In addition, consideration of the attitudes and experiences of staff will provide important data to enable a broader depth of analysis to identify how the process of transition can be considered and improved.

Context:

This research interest is important because it explores the lived transition experience of participants who are first year A-Level students and staff, in a General Further Education College (GFE) in the North West of England. Transition at key periods, such as the transition to primary education, transition to secondary education and increasingly transition to Higher Education (HE), has attracted considerable attention from researchers, (Carey et al. 2017; Coelho and Romao, 2016; Matheson et al. 2017). Fewer studies however have focused on Post-16 transition and fewer still on transition to Further Education (FE) in the United Kingdom (UK). Notably the majority of academic (A-Level) post-16 students in England, remain in school or at a sixth-form college (SFC) to study A-Levels, which is the dominant route to university, (Hupkua et al. 2016). Nevertheless, for some students the route to university or career employment is best achieved through further education, with overall success rates for GFE in 2018/19 of 86.7%, which outperformed SFCs by 1.7%, (Association of Colleges, 2021). In both sectors the more interesting finding is the numbers who do not progress. Hence the present research aims to provide an in-depth examination of the transition experiences of a very particular set of students and staff

that are under-researched, in order to inform greater understanding of transition and improvement.

There are myriad reasons why a student will opt to attend a FE college as opposed to a SFC or to remain in school, which include factors such as, grades, experience of school, parental influence, peer influence and personal choices. Each of these may contribute, to differing degrees, to the success or failure of their future engagement with education and as such form the core to this research.

Furthermore, significant changes to the funding regime in post-16 education in the UK since 2010, have led to institutions taking an increased marketised approach to their recruitment practices. The traditional academic and vocational trajectories have been obfuscated; SFCs have developed vocational B.Tech programmes while FE colleges have developed their range of academic courses. This considerable change in course offerings has given rise to an increase in competitive recruitment behaviours and, as a consequence, funding within institutions has been refocused from personalised support and student care to a more deliberate and singular emphasis on progression, (Craig and Openshaw, 2018). These developments have made the present research relevant in the face of competing financial pressures and external bureaucratic requirements in the sector, to which institutions must pay attention. Importantly, this has led to the present research's inclusion of staff, as well as student participants, to gain further insight into transition experience and the impact recent and ongoing institutional changes have had on transition experience. The intention is that qualitatively different phenomena that students will be

experiencing in relation to transition, in comparison with staff, will offer a wider insight into transition experience.

Significance of the Present Research:

When post-16 transition is successful, future engagement with education and the future economic wellbeing of students are enhanced, (Hodgson and Spours, 2014). The present research, aims to highlight the factors which influence transition experience and have implications which may lead to improved practices to support successful transition. Article 12 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), prescribes that children (18 years and below) have the right to have a say when adults are making decisions which affect them; yet there is an absence of empirical evidence of student involvement in decision making when institutions are planning for transition. Through the exploration of participants' transition experience, the present research approach, enables participant voice, and therefore intends to include student involvement when decisions are made which impact on them.

The present research also will assist in redressing the paucity which exists in research with a focus on Post-16 (FE) transition. The FE sector has been a neglected area of research, which has made the sector an easy target for the incessant reductions in the allocation of funding, (Hodgson, 2015). In 2010, the then Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable, claimed that government officials sought to axe all FE colleges in England and Wales in order to save money, (bbc.co.uk). Many scholars have highlighted the absence of an identity or purpose of the FE sector and the diversity of institutional approaches have added

to the instability experienced in the sector since the early 1990s, (Lucas and Crowther, 2016). It is intended that the present research will inform and stimulate further scholarly endeavours in this area and highlight a crucial stage of students' educational journeys.

Methodological Framework:

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the methodological approach of the present research. IPA since its inception in the 1990s, has been used extensively in psychology and anthropology, however this approach in educational research is increasing. IPA draws on three epistemological frameworks, phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. This framework has been adopted for the purposes of the present research because it gives voice to the participants, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), which is a central tenet of the present research. Additionally, IPA necessitates deep reflexivity and consideration of positionality on the part of the researcher, which is akin to the purpose of the Doctorate in Education with its focus on extensive professional and reflective practice. The researcher is an experienced practitioner in post-16 education and was employed in the college where the research took place. IPA allows for the particular phenomenon of transition to be explored and interpreted in great depth and to draw findings which are both credible and trustworthy.

Positionality:

IPA rests on phenomenological assumptions that the researcher perceives knowledge as subjective and interpretative, therefore, the positionality of the researcher is significant when conducting IPA research, (Smith et al. 2009). The researcher perceives knowledge as subjective and individual, which has led to the adoption of IPA to approach this particular research. Positionality is understood as the researcher's world view, which informs the approach and position they adopt when undertaking research as well as its political and social context, (Holmes, 2020). Rowe (2014) highlights that the positionality of the researcher will influence both how research is conducted and how the results are interpreted. Greenback (2002) noted that the values, or (in other words) the axiological position, held by a researcher will inform their ontological and epistemological positioning. The left-liberal upbringing and Anglo-Irish background of the researcher, coupled with a concern for social justice and pedagogy underpin the values, in the present interpretivist research. The researcher's values stem from an interest in inclusion and the concern to have the students at the heart of processes, when reaching decisions and setting directions to inform improvement. Inherent in this is the belief that all students with the appropriate support can achieve and realise their aspirations.

Savin-Baden and Major, (2013) identified three methods for researchers to develop and identify their positionality, these are positioning themselves in terms of the subject, in terms of the participants, and in terms of the research context and process. In terms of the 'subject' and 'participants', the researcher as an experienced practitioner in post-16 education has maintained a strong interest in transition

because of the variability in practices experienced in institutions and the resulting impact on students and staff. In terms of the research context and process, the researcher was employed by the college where the research was conducted, and has previously conducted post-graduate research on the topic and perceives transition to be an important area of post-16 education which is often afforded insufficient attention by institutions in terms of resourcing and planning. Of particular interest to the researcher is how diminishing funding in FE since 2010 is impacting transition experiences for students and staff.

Having worked in Post-16 education for over a decade, the researcher is passionately motivated by working with students and colleagues to improve practices and outcomes. As a teacher and team leader in FE, the researcher has established positive working relationships with students and staff; however, great care has been given throughout the conduct of the present research to limit and address the insider knowledge of the researcher. Yet at the same time, this research area has been selected because the researcher is passionate about transition and working in the field has afforded access to staff and student participants in a known context. A reflexive research journal (appendix 12) has been maintained throughout every stage of the research process, to enable the researcher to critically consider the impact of tacit knowledge on the research. The reflexive journal has also been maintained to explore and consider the impact of the researcher's positionality on methodological decisions, selection of participants and data analyses. For instance, the initial use of the reflexive journal aided the researcher to consider the issue of transition in the particular research context, and to select IPA as the approach which would best achieve the ambitions of the present study. It is understood by the

researcher that the research will indeed be influenced by the researcher's positionality; however, steps will be taken to confront these influences throughout, via the reflexive journal and critical academic discussion, (Holmes, 2020).

In summation, the process of transition as experienced by students and viewed by staff are central to the outworking of this research focus and to the findings and conclusions reached.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

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2.1 Introduction

This literature review will critically examine how post-16 educational transition is understood by scholars and the different approaches researchers have taken to study the phenomenon. The review has been structured under four subsections to enable an understanding of the process of post-16 transition and its significance to educational outcomes and experiences.

Prior to consideration of relevant research on post-16 educational transition, the chapter begins by highlighting the key sources and methods applied to conduct the literature review. Thereafter the concepts of educational transition are examined to present a wider understanding of transition, and highlight a definition, which will be adopted in the present research. The review will then critically examine research in further education, to provide a context for the research setting, before focusing on the more limited research on post-16 transition. The review will then examine the influences on transition and the factors which enhance or inhibit the success of transition experience. Throughout this review the focus will be on post-16 educational transitions, however, because of the paucity of research that exists in this domain, research from other relevant transition stages will be drawn upon, examined and justified, where possible, in support of the present research. Whilst the uniqueness of the post-16 transition will be highlighted, the commonalities in experience at different transition stages, such as changes in identity, environment and expectations, offer useful insights to the present research. In doing this, efforts

will be made to draw parallels between transition contexts in order to focus more fully on the research which drive the line of argument of this research. The literature review will conclude by examining the limitations of current research but underline its contribution to the current debate of this significant educational research area.

2.2 Key Sources

The key sources used in this literature review were the university's Online Library, Scopus and Google Scholar; the two principal journals which were explored were the *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* and the *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. Search terms included: *transition to FE, transition to college, further education, post-16 transition, educational transition, transition and identity, mainstream transition, transition from GCSE to A-Level, belonging, psychological impact of transition, sociological impact of transition, transition to adulthood, adolescence, HE, primary, secondary, adjustment and emerging adulthood.* A systematic search was conducted into the policies, legislation and national guidelines on educational transition, from the Department for Education, using the following search parameters: *Further Education, transition to college, post-16 transition, funding in FE, retention in FE, social mobility, participation in FE and post-16 providers.* As the present research is phenomenological in its approach, the results and discussion will be led by the lived experiences of the participants. Therefore, the present research will not focus solely on comparing transition experience in terms of gender, background or comparing transition to sixth form with transition to FE, yet these will be acknowledged as factors which may influence transition experiences. Additionally, the literature review will predominantly focus on

qualitative research because of the present research's qualitative approach, however relevant quantitative research will also be examined. In the conduct of this review, the results of relevant literature, the philosophical approaches, and the methodologies employed to conduct research will be critically examined, to give further justification for the present research and its approach.

2.3 Understandings of Educational Transition

Transition in education has been of scholarly interest to researchers from a range of different disciplines; psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and educationalists, because, as argued by Stringer and Dunsmuir (2012) and Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes (2010), transition is a fundamental in social life. Researchers have considered transition, from the foundation of their respective disciplines, that has given both richness and diversity to the concept, (Bone, 2016; Morris and Atkinson, 2018; Thompson, 2017), which will be explored in this section of the review. Nevertheless, within educational research, the concept of and value attributed to transition remains contentious, (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010). This section will consider the tensions and variances in the understandings of transition to inform a working definition of transition for the present research. This section of the review will draw on transition research from the broader educational research field, to critically examine how transition in education has evolved and is operationalised and understood. The purpose of this is to interrogate the transition experience as a central aspect of best practice in ensuring learning beyond and into the post transition stage.

The term 'transition' finds its etymological roots from the Latin word 'transire' meaning: to go across, which connotes death and rebirth. This alludes to a process and as such is time bound and relative to a pre and post transition period. Much of the interest in this period to date, highlights differing views of transition either as a continuous process or as a move from one setting to another. The question of a process or an event has considerable implications which institutions must consider and resolve to measure its impact on student experiences, (Matheson et al. 2017).

A broad notion of transition in education is proffered from the early research of Brofenbrenner (1979) albeit over 40 years old, this seminal piece of research on transition in education warrants consideration, as it demonstrates how notions of transition have developed and evolved. Brofenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory as noted by Packer and Thomas (2021) highlighted that transition involves a change in learners' roles, as well as their ecological setting. The adjective 'ecological' refers to the interrelationship between living organisms and their surroundings, and therefore appears to adopt a more dynamic perception of transition. This is pertinent because it refers to the key participants who are involved in the transition process, namely the learners, the staff and the new ecological setting. Moreover, this definition highlights the differences in both ethos and culture between institutions. There are, however, limitations in the definition by Brofenbrenner (1979), which perhaps highlights its anachronistic perception, that transition is synonymous with 'change from one to another' and thus a one-off event, rather than a process. Whilst this definition has its merits, because of the outlined limitation, it shall not be used in isolation for the purposes of the present research.

It may well be that seeing transition solely as an event will not encompass or address effectively the impact on both short- and long-term retention of students, particularly those whose needs are not well provided for when an event approach dominates college planning. Exploring this question in particular, will do much to identify how to support students whose needs are greater. If the research pinpoints the central position which regards transition as a process then it follows that more research focus is needed into the complexities of the transition process.

Lexical choices differ among various researchers which demonstrates further the tensions in the understandings of transition, for instance Grant (2011) perceived transition in education, as the physical movement, from one educational institution or sector to another. Whereas for Galton, Gray and Ruddock (2003) the term 'transition' referred to the action of moving from one particular year group to another within the same setting, and the word 'transfer' is used to describe the movement of students between institutions. Conversely, the term 'transfer' within the FE context is commonly used to describe when learners change from one course to another, within the same institution. Therefore, employing this definition by Galton, Gray and Ruddock (2003) for the purposes of the present research may lead to unnecessary confusion. In general terms, transition is more commonly defined across the literature to refer to the movement of students from one institution to another, (Bluff et al. 2012; Morris and Atkinson, 2018; Thompson, 2017). Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes (2010) in their research, which focussed on agency, identity and structures during transition, identified the lack of an agreed definition for transition in education as problematic for institutions because transition can no longer follow the linear processes highlighted by previous research which focussed on institutional

pathways. At the outset it is clear that transition by its very definition alone will present differently within institutional settings in terms of planning and resource, due to variability in institutional understandings. This is a fundamental tenet underlined by the variety of approaches across colleges and if unresolved will continue contribute to the degree of retention and underachievement which colleges face. Further, if an accepted concept of transition is found it will enable consistency to develop across the post 16 system with better prospects of shared learning and outcomes.

A further tension in the understanding of transition is that it is conceptualised in terms of opportunities, to prepare learners for FE, HE and the world of work. This concept of transition as noted by Brunila et al (2011) and Rumberger (2008) has significant connotations, as it places an onus on educational institutions to 'prepare' or support learners through transition. Brunila et al (2011) argue that transition is a pedagogical moment and not just an institutional necessity. This raises the question of responsibility and accountability, because when transition is viewed as a pedagogical moment, it raises the profile of transition and places greater emphasis on institutions to support students to prepare for transition. This is a valuable definition to consider because the action of the verb 'to prepare', not only relates to the learners undergoing transition but also to those who are involved in the process. Significantly, what emerges from this notion of transition is the hypothesis that by providing support, the rate of achievement will increase, (Rumberger, 2008). This understanding moves the concept of transition to a belief that transition is conceived as a process, rather than a particular event. The question of the timing and purpose is thus emphasised, by connotation of the transitive verb 'prepare'. The understanding of transition in this instance takes on a more important stance

because of its wider implications; in other words, the need for institutions to create processes and support structures which enable students to be better prepared for transition. Critically, it is clear that transition is not sufficiently addressed presently across colleges and the question arises how will students overcome their challenges and succeed. This research, in focusing on the students' perspective will give evidence of how transition is ill-defined in colleges and therefore poorly prepared for.

Roberts (2009) rightly considered the need for transition to focus on the opportunity structures that surround young people, when undergoing transition, and thus reduce the level of subsequent drop-out rates. It is not the direct intention of the present research to examine whether such opportunity structures impact on retention figures, however, through the inclusion of staff participants in the present research this will be an area of substantial interest when analysing their experiences. There is an abundance of opinion among staff, albeit anecdotal but nevertheless important, that more could be done by focusing greater attention on transition.

As the present research explores the experiences of both the students who are undergoing transition and the staff involved in the process, the above understandings of transition from both Brunila et al (2011) and Rumberger (2008) are pertinent. Whether the concept of transition is perceived as an opportunity to prepare students for future learning and work, or simply as the movement from one institution to another, the question of whether transition is an on-going process or a one-off event is central to research. Downes et al. (2018) highlighted that transition needs consideration from a lifelong and holistic perspective as opposed to a singular or one-off event. This notion is similarly reinforced by Van Gennep's (2019) 'rites of

passage' theory which perceives an individual's life as a series of transitions. The significance of this is that adherence to either definition or understanding of transition is likely to have an impact on policy and practice, for example, in tracking students beyond the point of transition. More helpfully the process may differentiate students who require either a little or a lot of assistance and support to transition positively.

To gain a further insight into transition and the tensions which exist in the understandings of transition it is important to consider how transition is understood internationally. Lally and Doyle (2012) highlighted the tensions in understandings and the complex challenges of transition internationally, which included: social, emotional, developmental and cognitive changes that resulted in disorientation, alienation, disenchantment and resistance among young people. Lally and Doyle (2012, p.395) concluded that transition: 'encompasses a complex and contested nexus of processes, structures and systems.' Whilst these conclusions are akin to those of Downes et al. (2018) and Van Gannep (2019) above, Lally and Doyle (2012) focus on the processes which support transition and highlight the commonalities in experiences shared by students as they undergo transition. Similar notions on the complexities involved in transition, which draw attention to the wider structural and systemic implications involved, were previously highlighted by Looker and Dwyer (1998). Yet it may be argued that drawing attention to the complexities of transition do little to inform institutional practices and adopting a more simplistic definition of transition should still involve robust planning. Nevertheless, institutional understandings of the complexities of transition should raise the profile of transition and advance informed planning. Achieving a system-wide approach, however

farsighted will contribute even further to the potential of a new and innovative approach. It is on this basis that research can contribute more than it has previously.

The professional experience of the researcher, in the present research, resonates with Lally and Doyle's (2012) argument, whereby learners are often alienated and resistant when they are on the wrong courses or are feeling as though their post-16 choices, with regards to their post-16 trajectories are not their preferred choices. An intention of the present research is to validate, contradict or nuance this hypothesis. According to the literature, a majority of students will experience transition successfully at a younger age. Brostrom (2003) considered the barriers faced by children as they make their transition, from kindergarten to primary school and while their participants were younger children, they all had experienced transition. Brostrom (2003) found that the majority of young people were both educationally and socially equipped to successfully negotiate transition, however, a smaller minority lacked the necessary skills needed to negotiate transition and found the process daunting. While the latter cannot inform post 16 transition Brostrom's (2003) research raises the question that not all students transition in the same fashion and pace; this is an aspect which the present research will address. If some students fail or feel unsupported by current transition arrangements then it is critical to explore this and highlight how this can be addressed. In this endeavour, factors which may marginalise a student such as Special Education Needs (SEN) and/or Socio-Economic Status (SES), (Tieben et al. 2011; Prout, 1993) are considered in greater depth in the following sections of this review. This focus is later reinforced by Duchesne et al (2012) albeit at a different transition stage; the researchers here were examining the transition to secondary school [Middle School], their findings

focused on the impact on student experience rather than the factors which influence transition experience, and similarly noted that many students will adapt easily and with relatively few issues, however for some, transition will impact on social, emotional and academic adaptation. Kendall et al (2018) found that many students were optimistic about their post-16 transition and will assimilate successfully into their new setting. This raises the question for institutions, of whether planning and provision for transition should take a generic one size fits all approach, or should planning and provision be targeted to those students who are marginalised and therefore are more likely to experience difficulties during transition? This research takes the view that by focusing on individual students the above question will be answered.

Focussing on a Foucauldian genealogy to the concept of learning careers, or in other words, perceiving transition as an ongoing aspect of a student's educational journey, Goodlad (2007) highlighted her concern about a 'one size fits all' approach to policy because informal and initial teaching and learning activities in a new setting, which support transition, is overlooked in favour of acquisitions of qualifications. By way of conclusion, key areas of interest arise, which focus on how transition is defined, what actions arise from an agreed definition, who holds responsibility for action taken and what accountability is accepted to analyse and inform improvement. A student perspective will arguably give an insight into how improvement can be made and critically identify why transition should be more strongly considered.

The research setting, in the present study, did not have a transition policy in place during the conduct of the research, however, a range of administrative tasks were to

be completed with new students in the early weeks of term. This led to wide variances in initial transition activities, within the college. What will be investigated in the conduct of the present research is how this approach to transition impacted on the student and staff experience or, as noted by Goodlad (2007), has the informal initial teaching and learning practices been overlooked in favour of the acquisitions of qualifications and administrative necessities.

An additional tension in our understanding of transition is raised by Powell (2017) in her phenomenological research into the experiences of young people as they transition to FE. She noted that in order to fully comprehend the concept of transition (from a psychological perspective), one must consider the theories of identity and belonging to appreciate why some individuals find certain educational trajectories challenging, where other individuals do not. These themes of 'belonging' and 'identity' will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent subsections of this chapter.

A significant concept in our understanding of transition was raised by Yeboah (2002); his research considered the transition to primary school but notably, perceived the educational system as a continuum where there are significant differences in administration, policy, pedagogical practices and learning environments, at every stage: primary, post-primary and post-16. There is an inference raised by Yeboah (2002) that transition is intrinsic in the education system and an unavoidable experience for all learners. Coelho and Romao (2016) who researched the stress factors of students in Portuguese secondary schools, noted and affirmed the point that this 'unavoidable' experience of transition, is one of the most stressful events

that many students will experience. This challenges the view that students should be left to 'get on with' transition, with little intervention and support, (Brostrom, 2003; Duchesne et al, 2012). Furthermore, this suggests that it may be irresponsible to do so, as this may increase the chances of students experiencing transition negatively. Such conflicts in the assertions by the researchers (Coelho and Romao, 2016; Yeboah, 2002) and (Brostrom, 2003; Duchesne et al, 2012) have arguably added to the ambiguity in the understandings of transition, which may again lead to wide variances in transition practices, both in between and within institutions, highlighting further the complexities of transition. This research will aim similarly to identify the experiences of students in a college setting and the level of responsibility this implies.

A further tension in our understanding of transition, is the notion that transition should focus more purposefully on support and the processes which support students during transition. These support processes it is argued, are critically undervalued by institutions and students; Tett et al. (2017) noted that students must be proactive in seeking support during transition. In order for robust processes which support transition and the complexities involved, to be fully appreciated, an understanding of the different life-cycle stages must be understood, which will be further considered in the subsequent sub-sections of this review. In Matheson et al. (2017), the researchers focused on transition in higher education and raised the notion of belonging as being a central facet to the successfulness of transition. Matheson et al. (2017) offered some interesting findings which are appropriate for post-16 transition, namely that at different points in the transition process, there are different challenges, demands and expectations placed on the learner. This

perception reinforces the notion that transition is not a one-off event or indeed a singular construct, as in Brofenbrenner's (1979) view, but rather an on-going and cyclical process, inclusive of varying elements. Whatever the resolve, transition is highlighted as an area of scrutiny required to inform the perspectives and hence planning that institutions develop. How students feel about the new environment of college and of their sense of belonging is an area this research will explore.

A further notable implication raised by Matheson et al. (2017) suggests that provision and policy must be adept to meet the needs of learners undergoing transition, both at the point in which they move from one institution to another, and through their educational journey across sectors and institutions. This raises a further two points, firstly, the process of transition is not a smooth process but may show peaks, or aspects which are more stressful and challenging for some students at one or more points. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the consideration given to the students themselves and their input to the process is vital. The present research values the input of students as enablers of improvement in the transition process and, similar to Matheson et al. (2017), seeks to highlight the peaks and challenges in transition experiences, however, such peaks and challenges will be distinct from HE transitions and instead relate to the post-16 transition experience.

The notion of the student's life cycle is additionally considered by Lizzio (2011, p.1) as: 'the constellation of evolving identities, needs and purposes." This notion coupled with the earlier definition by Matheson (2018) compounds the notion of perpetual motion in educational transition. The verbs to 'cycle' and to 'evolve' both have connotations of travelling, moving or journeying, which are pertinent to transition.

Transition is not a singularity but rather an enduring journey through the education system, (Bridges and Bridges, 2017). This view challenges the traditional concept of transition held by institutions as the point in time where learners move to or from their institution. Most significantly this notion of transition places an onus on those practitioners who are involved in the transition process, to identify when transition is unsuccessful for a student and ensure that there are intervention mechanisms in place to quickly respond and support. Too often this is not common practice and can be considered as a contributor to drop out and retention levels. Unsuccessful transitions may have a negative impact on academic performance and wellbeing, (Packer and Thomas, 2021). In their work, Packer and Thomas (2021) considered transition from the perspectives of staff, parents/care givers and students, and found that acknowledging the interplay between the environment, relationships and culture, as influences on transition experience is critical in our understanding of the transition process and its impact. The present research extends this scope to uncover the key elements of transition from the viewpoint of the students and the part that staff play in the process.

In conclusion, the breadth of literature outlined above highlights the complexities of transition and importantly the need to research student participants' experiences of transition and also that of staff participants who are involved in the transition process. Therefore, the adopted definition of transition must allow for all key participants to be considered, because they each offer valuable contributions in our understanding of transition. Similarly, the concept of transition should consider the distinct differences in expectations and nature between that of a college learner and that of a school child. Thus, for the purposes of the present research, the concept of

transition is something which involves many key factors and is in many ways a complex interaction between them. The argument throughout this section is that in considering in detail how transition impacts on the lives of students, it is important that there is a clear understanding of the definition of transition, and of the implications of an agreed definition within a college and across all colleges. This research goes someway to make the argument that the level of responsibility rests firstly with each college and the students it serves. Of particular relevance is the research focus on transition as a process, on the experiences of students at the point of transition, before and beyond, and of staff and their awareness and experience of transition as an enabler to a more effective and reflective experience for all. Moreover, for the purposes of the present research, post-16 transition is understood, defined and operationalised as: a process whereby students undergo change, as part of their ongoing educational journeys, from school, to college and beyond. This understanding places an onus on institutions to prepare students for transition, support students during transition and enable them to make successful future transitions. The following section will consider the influences which impact on transition experience.

2.4 Contextualisation of Post-16 Education

This section will highlight the uniqueness of the post-16 transition. As indicated, research with a focus on post-16 educational transition, has been afforded significantly less attention, when compared to educational transitions at other key stages, like transition to primary, 11+ transition and transition to HE, (Powell, 2017; Hernandez-Martinez et al, 2011; Hodgson, 2015). The limited research on this

particular aspect of post-16 education is echoed by the more general limited research conducted in FE, when compared to the other education sectors, Hodgson (2015).

In the aftermath of Brexit and the Covid19 Pandemic, the role of Further Education has been identified as a key element in the UK Government's skills revolution, (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). Hubble et al. (2021) highlighted the significant role of FE, in addressing the skills shortage, as a result of Brexit; which brings FE to centre stage in the Government's planning. It is important therefore that transitions between institutions are effective.

Since the UK Coalition Government in 2010 and the subsequent Conservative Governments, the Post-16 sector has experienced financial cuts, much more sharply than the other educational sectors; primary and post-primary. Funding in FE has fallen by 8%, per student in sixth form by 21% and students who are 19+ by 45%, (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018). Overall, funding to sixth form and FE colleges has been reduced by one fifth since 2010, (Association of Colleges, 2021). Such cuts have placed additional burdens on the post-16 sector, which according to O'Leary (2014) have had ramifications on every aspect of resourcing and planning within the sector. Vital services such as Connexions were abolished in 2010/11 and Information, Advice and Guidance in schools and colleges have also been reduced and in some instances cut entirely, (Unison, 2014). The loss of these services has left a deficit in robust support, knowledge and guidance for young people embarking on their post-16 education and further research is required to understand the impact of marketisation and funding cuts to the sector. Arguably, this has given rise to an

increase in social inequality. An aim of the present research is to investigate the extent of which such cuts in funding for services and provision have had on transition experience, through interviewing teachers and pastoral staff.

Marketisation of the post-16 education sector has been increasing since the early 1990s, when the sector was removed from Local Education Authority (LEA) control by virtue of the Incorporation of Further Education Colleges Act (1992). In their work, Ball et al (1999) considered marketisation in FE and found that market-driven competitiveness was not a novel manifestation, as in the late 1990s the sector experienced the same issues it had faced some 10 years earlier, when the sector had broken away from LEA control. Ball et al. (1999) were critical of the trend in many GFE colleges that employed business and marketing managers, without having an educational background or experience. The concerns and implications raised by Ball et al. (1999) for transition provision, stem from outside factors where marketing by colleges is targeting potential students to attend the most cost-effective courses, rather than the most appropriate courses. The present research considers why student participants have chosen their particular course and what influences their decisions. The detrimental impact of removing colleges from LEA control was highlighted in Lucas and Crowther (2016), who argued that incorporation has blocked innovation and change in the sector; they highlight the instability experienced by the sector since Incorporation, which has meant that the FE sector lacks a strategic place and purpose. Nevertheless, The Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth White Paper suggests an interest by policy makers to strengthen and redefine the role of Further Education, (Department for Education, 2021).

The role and purpose of FE has been further deliberated by Hodgson (2015, p.223) who suggested that:

> 'further education is a neglected area for research and scholarship, due, in part, to its low status in the educational pecking order, the many shifts in policy and funding which have been visited upon it and an on-going lack of clarity over its role and purpose'.

Hodgson (2015) highlighted the importance of the FE sector having a clear and collective purpose and whilst this is beyond the scope of the present research, there are a number of inferences to be drawn from the above point. Research that has been conducted in HE has not prevented funding cuts from the Government and the recommendations from the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding (2019) for further financial cuts attest to this. A final inference raised by Hodgson (2015) is that the FE sector has become an 'easy target' for cuts to funding, and that the sector finds itself in an inescapable situation, where Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) must cut provision annually in order to survive. This gives greater credence to the argument that FE colleges should enjoy a more stabilised funding regime or indeed be brought back under LEA control, (FE Weekly, May 2009; Lucas and Crowther, 2015).

The issues outlined in Ball et al (1999), Lucas and Crowther (2016) and Hodgson (2015) have not dissipated nor are they confined to England. McMurray (2019) explored the impact of funding cuts to FE in Scotland and found that colleges were consequently offering a more limited range of subjects. Moreover, McMurray (2019) draws attention to the tension that now exists in FE between social inclusion and

employability; which calls into question the purpose of the FE sector, whether that is to create an employed and conforming workforce, or to address social inclusion and mobility? McMurray (2019) argued that the removal of some basic courses from many FE colleges in Scotland, failed to deliver on the social inclusion/mobility agenda because without the ability to study a basic course, students are prevented from progressing onto higher-level courses and employment. Whilst there is agreement between the findings of McMurray (2019) and Lucas and Crowther (2016), that the FE sector needs a clear purpose; an incongruence is brought to light with Cracking the Code (2014) and Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (2019) agendas and their drive to redress social inequalities and social mobilities through education, because of the practices of colleges removing the courses, that seek to do just that. Cuts in funding to FE focus college interest in meeting their financial burdens and by limiting their range of courses to try to achieve this. More crucially this suggests that transition is the victim in this case and levels of support, however limited, currently are in danger of disappearing altogether.

The marketised approach by colleges is additionally impacting on the quality of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) offered by institutions, which are often perceived to be in the business interests of institutions, rather than their students and their trajectories. Lally and Doyle (2012) pointed out that the conventional structures of transition in education have been obscured by marketised education, they argued that this offers an illusion of individual autonomy, when students are making decisions regarding their post-16 choices. The word 'illusion' used by Lally and Doyle (2012) suggested that little autonomy exists for young people and that, akin to the findings in McMurray (2019), young people are having their post-16 options

prescribed and limited; in other words, autonomy exists but it is false because course choice is limited to those courses which are the most financially viable. This trend was similarly highlighted by the earlier research of Biesta (2006) who noted that such lack of individual autonomy may result in disempowerment with regards to students' post-16 trajectories. The suggestion from Biesta (2006) is that when learners exert autonomy over their post-16 trajectories, they may experience transition more positively and remain engaged with education. The level of autonomy exerted by students with regards to their post-16 options will be a component of the present research.

While transition research over the last ten years has found that greater uniformity, structure and consistency, (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; The Scottish Government, 2012) to provision, will improve transition experiences; conversely, the earlier research of Furlong and Cartmel (1997) who took a Bordieusian view noted that where transition provision is highly structured it continues to reproduce class determined, gendered and unequal life chances. In other words, where transition provision is rigidly structured class stratification may be perpetuated, consequently, those with greater social capital are better supported through transition structures and conversely, those with less support or 'social capital' are further disadvantaged by transition structures.

The instability of the Post-16 sector is not just confined to FE institutions. Stoten (2014) took a mixed method approach to his qualitative research, into the impact that on-going policy changes and funding regimes are having on the sixth form sector, his participants were made up of senior leaders and governors in sixth form colleges.

Stoten (2014) found that the Education Act (2011) had led to the rules around setting up post-16 providers having become more relaxed, which encouraged new and non-traditional settings, which in turn, had further increased competitiveness between providers. Stoten (2014) also noted that sixth form colleges have widened their offer to include BTech and vocational courses, in order to make themselves more economically viable but adversely this has led to greater competition between providers and more tactically minded marketing teams. The present research is significant because of its focus on post-16 transition, and it has been conducted in a large GFE College, which offers students both academic and vocational qualifications; a specific research setting which has hitherto attracted fewer research studies.

In summation, choice and autonomy are important for post-16 educational transition, (McMurray, 2019; Lally and Doyle, 2012) and financial cuts (O'Leary, 2014) and competition (Stoten, 2014) are impacting on provision to support transition. Whilst not the main focus of the present research, this will be a topic of exploration, which may act to stimulate future research that focuses on the impact of marketisation on post-16 transition experience. What emerges strongly is that the tension to meet costs, impacts significantly on the area of transition and has enabled colleges to neglect this area and the responsibility to provide for the retention of all of its students; this notion supports the decision to include staff perspectives in the present research.

2.5 Other Influences on Transition Experience

This section of the review, considers other factors which influence transition experience. By exploring the range of influences on transition experience the concept of transition being understood as a process rather than as an event, will be further augmented. This section will be subdivided under five subheadings: Staff Influence and Support, Background Influences, Parental Influence, Learner Identity and Anxiety, and Belonging and Self-Conception. Through critically examining extant research in this domain, the methodologies employed and the philosophical frameworks which have been adopted, the present research will be further justified as original and important.

Staff Influence and Support

A limited range of research conducted since the early 1990s explored the transition experience of students and staff, in post-16 settings and highlighted the teacher as a key player in supporting and enhancing transition experience, (Prout, 1993; Caton and Kagan, 2005; Mallinson, 2009; Craig, 2009). Pastoral support during transition is an important aspect which may enhance transition experience. Prout (1993) conducted research on 'student' transition experience from school to tertiary college', using a phenomenological framework. The research highlighted many of the associated challenges that students experience during transition; and focused on the associated challenges for students who are marginalised. This research has warranted consideration in this review, despite the fact that the research was almost 30 years ago, there are similarities, with the present research, in terms of the cohort

of participants and the phenomena (transition post-16). Prout (1993) elucidates the experiences of her participants and based on her findings, made key recommendations for the amelioration of provision, which suggested creating a framework for transition, that placed the role of the pastoral team at the forefront of transitional thinking. Consideration of this helped inform the methodological decision to widen the scope of the participants in the present research, to explore the experiences of both students and teachers and also pastoral staff, as they are key players in transition. Prout (1993) offers insights which comment on transition where the focus is on the participants rather than a transition event. This helpfully supports the present research approach and line of argument, yet is distinct given the time period which has elapsed and the rolling changes in policy and provision, which may influence transition experience. For instance, raising the participation age to 18 years of age in 2017, for young people to remain in education, training or employment has widened participation in Post-16 education to in excess of 650,000 students attending post-16 colleges in England, (Association for Colleges, 2021).

Later studies on transition have considered the transition experience of students and included the experiences of staff in their analyses. Caton and Kagan (2005) conducted a large-scale study and sought to interview participants at various pivotal points throughout transition. Their participants included both the students undergoing transition and the staff involved in the process, in order to gain a holistic perspective on post-16 transition. In their analyses, the researchers linked the responses from students about their transition experience, with the experiences of staff on the provision itself; they found commonalities in responses from both sets of participants; for instance, when a student described feelings of confusion when they first came to

college, a teacher discussed not having enough time at induction to offer meaningful support. Implicit in their work is the intention of investigating the aspects of transition as a process and with variables at play, which implies the necessity of agreeing a definitive perspective as a key to planning and review of provision. Caton and Kagan (2005) also highlighted the problem of attrition in their research and discussed losing many participants through the course of their research.

The sharing of student information between educational institutions, has a significant effect on transition experience. This presents a substantial administrative challenge for both schools and colleges because often students come to college from a range of different schools or from different local authorities, which have variable processes in place to share information. Packer and Thomas (2021) highlighted that when colleges and schools foster a student-centred collaborative approach it facilitates better understanding of students' needs early in the transition process. Similar to the present research, Packer and Thomas (2021), employed an interpretive and participatory framework to explore the experiences of key stake holders during the transition process, however their participants were from four different FE settings in South Wales, as opposed to a single FE in North West England, as in the present research, therefore differences in experiences are expected due to differences in geographical locations, as highlighted in Evans (2017).

The findings in Packer and Thomas (2021) support the Communities of Practice Theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which suggests that learning is a social endeavour and is a consequence from our experiences of participating in life. This focuses the requirement for colleagues from the secondary and FE sector to work together to

enhance transition experience. Significantly, Mallinson (2009) found that early intervention with prospective students and early opportunities for students to build positive peer relationships, led to a more positive transition experience.

Similar to Caton and Kagan (2005), Mallinson's (2009) participants were both students and staff; her findings noted that good teaching and learning, positive attitudes and the effective sharing of relevant information were important for successful transitions. The present study will assess such findings, through questioning with a clear focus on integration and peer relationships. Despite Mallinson's (2009) research being a small-scale study and not as representative as that of Caton and Kagan (2005), her focus was more clearly on bringing to light those factors which enhance transition like 'good teaching and learning', rather than those aspects which inhibit the successfulness of transition, as in Evans (2017), whose research will be further examined in this review. Thus, the issues of definition and that of intervention are intertwined and need to be considered. In other words, how is transition defined and operationalised by institutions and how does this impact on transition processes and in turn, experiences? The present research explores the transition experience of the participants and seeks to highlight factors which both enhance and inhibit the successfulness of transition. Moreover, through the inclusion of staff participants, this research will examine the institutional understanding of transition and how these impact on transition processes.

A further notable piece of research by Craig (2009) was conducted in Scotland at the same time as Mallinson (2009) and similarly focused on Post-16 transition. Again, phenomenological in nature, Craig (2009) postulated through the thematic analysis

of transcripts, that students experience anxieties around fitting in, making friends and feeling safe when moving from school to college. Akin to the findings in Mallinson (2009), Craig (2009) noted that greater focus on student preparedness, by implication viewing transition as an on-going process in planning, enhanced successful transition experience. These findings are important because they elicit those real concerns, at aggregate level, that young people face as they undergo transition to college, from their perspective; whereas a teacher or researcher may look to external factors that may influence transition, like socio-economic status, as in Tieben (2011) and Tieben et al (2017) or marketing as in Lally and Doyle (2012). This reinforces the importance of enabling students to have a voice when transition processes are being planned. The present research is distinct from both Craig (2009) and Tieben et al (2017) as it aims to bridge the experiences of both staff and student transition experience and is supported by Packer and Thomas (2021) who highlight the value of stakeholder voices, which inform and enable successful transition.

Following the research by both Craig (2009) and Mallinson (2009), The Scottish Government (2012) created a national framework: 'Post-16 transition, policy and practice framework…' which sought to bring consistency to practice and provision on a national scale, and placed an onus on all providers to share pertinent information and reduce competition between providers. As alluded, the sharing of pertinent information between providers presents a considerable administrative challenge, which this national framework sought to reduce.

Geographical implications and proximity to larger urban centres have been highlighted as additional factors which influence post-16 transition. Evans (2017) in her research into post-16 educational transition in Wales, found that geographical locations both impact and impede learners when undergoing transition and making decisions regarding their post-16 trajectories. Evans' (2017) research was ideographic in nature, she noted that not only will a student's gender, age and social class affect their transition, but also their geographical location and proximity to employment and educational opportunities. According to Evans (2017, p.656):

'Those from the least socially advantaged homes are far less likely to pursue the most prestigious routes through post-16 education [A-Level] and to progress on to higher education that their more socially advantaged counterparts.'

Evans (2017) conducted her research in two different geographical locations in South Wales, which are socio-economically similar, however one of the locations was closer to a larger urban area, with more educational and employment opportunities. Evans (2017) found that those participants who lived nearer to the urban centre, made more successful and appropriate transitions because the participants had greater access to opportunities and choice. This bears relevance to the present research because of its research context in a post-16 institution, in an inner-city location, which suggests proximity may be a likely influence on the decision making and transition experience of the participants.

As indicated above, early interventions are important measures which can enhance transition experience, (Mallinson, 2009; Craig, 2009; Packer and Thomas, 2021). Yet distinctly, in England many students are underprepared for transition and do not consider their post-16 choices until year 11, (Department for Education (DfE), 2017). The DfE (2017) commissioned a large-scale study to give insight into the post-16 choices of students in England; the researchers took a mixed method approach and employed a large-scale survey and semi-structured interviews with 16-18-year-old participants in England, who were in post-16 education. In their findings, it was noted that the majority of young peoples' decisions regarding their post-16 trajectories were not made until Year 11; in other words, prior consideration about post-16 education (for the majority) had not been considered, even when selecting GCSE subjects. Students focus more on choice at sixteen than they do at eighteen, as their decisions regarding post-16 education will direct their educational decisions at eighteen, (Gorard and Smith, 2007). The present research will investigate the influences of participants, with regards to their post-16 choices.

The most common means of support were parents, teachers and friends, although for those who made use of Information and Guidance (IAG) services they found this useful, (DfE, 2017). Implicit is the detrimental impact that cutting such IAG services is having on students when making their post-16 decisions. Whilst it is not the sole focus of the present research to explore the impact of underfunding for IAG on transition experience, it is hoped, through the inclusion of staff participants, to explore their experiences of working with young people undergoing transition and how underfunding may impact transition experience.

Background Influences

There are many other factors which impact transition experience, such as students' background, socio-economic status (SES) and parental influence, (Tieben et al. 2011; Elffers et al. 2012; Moulton et al 2018). In the Netherlands, Tieben et al (2011) explored the socio-economic factors that influence transition; the researchers based their findings on the experiences of participants from a range of different socio-economic backgrounds, rather than the provision which support transition. Tieben et al. (2011) found that participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to drop out, in their first-year post-transition. Her later research conducted in Germany on transition to HE produced similar findings, albeit in a different country and at a different transition point, (Tieben et al. 2017). These initial findings were concurrent with findings from the Dutch Ministry of Education Culture and Science (2011) who noted that almost half of all students, from lower SES backgrounds, drop out from vocational programmes in the Netherlands, in the first-year post-transition. Similarly, in the UK, socially disadvantaged students are much less likely to have continued participation in FE, on this point, Orr (2020) suggested the redesigned role for FE should focus on engaging socially disadvantaged and non-traditional students. In other words, the role of FE should be act to enable those students who are otherwise marginalised, a route to, and through, FE and the world the of work.

Elffers et al. (2012) considered transition to vocational education in the Netherlands, her findings highlighted that learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds drop out more than those with higher SES backgrounds. Elffers et al. (2012) additionally noted that dropout rates were also higher for students with less well-educated

parents and for students from ethnic minorities. The findings from the Netherlands offer important considerations for the present research, because this research context is in an inner-city location with high levels of deprivation and a higher than national average ethnic minority population.

A number of scholars have drawn attention to the inequalities that exist in education systems and in particular, when making decisions about post-16 education, (Moulton et al. 2018; Elffers, 2012). Moulton et al. (2018, p.95) explored the effect of subject choices prior to transition at 16 years of age, using Next Steps data, suggested that learners from higher SES backgrounds are much more likely to take up what they had referred to as 'facilitating subjects'. Parental influence is quite likely the reason for this, as Elffers (2012, p.17) pointed out: 'parents in those [lower SES] families are less experienced with the educational system, and may find it difficult to support their children in their school careers for that reason'. Similarly, Gorard and Smith (2007) noted that students from less prestigious, lower SES and unemployed backgrounds are much less likely to continue their education Post-16. This point reaffirms the need for well-resourced IAG, to ensure that for those learners who do not have effective support at home are not being further disadvantaged. Arguably, the previously alluded decline in IAG and services which support transition, will have further contributed to learners from lower SES backgrounds being disadvantaged. Not only is there an awareness, in the literature, of the inequalities that exist in terms of SES (Elffers, 2012; Tieben et al. 2011), it has also been identified that decisions regarding post-16 education should be considered at an earlier stage, (DfE, 2017). The present research will explore the intervention stages of transition and the impact

such interventions have had on transition experience, in an inner-city location with higher than average, national rates of deprivation, in the UK.

Goldstone (2022) in his doctoral research focused on social class and the Post-16 transition; he employed a mixed method approach to explore the relationship between social class, transition and participation in FE. Following a Bordieusian theoretical approach, Goldstone (2022) highlighted how habitus determines post-16 trajectories for students and notably, that transition should be perceived as an opportunity for reigniting a positive learning identity and addressing the inequalities during transition as a result of social class.

Parental Influence

A plethora of research from the turn of the 21st century considered the role of the father in the successfulness of transition for young people; there is agreement that the greater degree of input from the father, the greater the likelihood of the student having a successful transition and future engagement with their education, (Moulton et al. 2018; Hawkins et al, 2002; Marsiglio et al. 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). The above points raised by Moulton et al. (2018) and Tieben (2017) are akin to Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural reproduction and social reproduction. Cultural and social reproduction is the notion that parents who are well educated will devote more time and energy to their children's education, as they are in a better position to provide cognitive stimulation to their children, transfer cultural resources, and are better equipped to meet the additional financial costs associated with learning, or in other words, possess cultural capital, (Bourdieu, 1973).

The degree of parental influence at different educational transition stages is variable, and whilst there is agreement across the research that parental input is significant in supporting transition; the impact this has on transition experience remains a relatively unexplored research domain. Furthermore, the degree of parental influence on transition is considered complex due to its conflicting effects on students, when undergoing transition and making educational and career decisions, (Bokhorst et al. 2010; Choi, 2017; Kleanthous, 2014; Workman, 2015). In his research, Workman (2015) found that the majority of participants positively experienced parental support during transition and when making educational decisions, yet notably, some experienced pressure from their parents. Kleanthous (2014) similarly highlighted the differences in parental influence in her research on indigenous and immigrant families. Taking a Bordieusian perspective, Kleanthous (2014) postulated that middle-class indigenous students were more positively disposed to studying in HE due to their middle-class habitus, whereas, immigrant students did not refer to their parental influence as a factor in their transition or decision making. According to Choi (2017), who took a life histories approach to researching educational transition and learner identity in higher education in Hong Kong, families that possess less cultural capital invariably had less educational aspirations for HE and an increased worry about failing other ambitious options. This raises an important implication for the present research, as the participants are studying A-Levels in a non-traditional (academic) setting, it is therefore the intention of the present research to explore how much the participants' cultural capital has impacted on their transition. More specifically, how has this impacted their choice to come to an FE college to study A-Levels? Such questions may offer useful insight into the variables which may impact on the transition experience.

Moreover, Jackson (2012, p.203) conducted research on ethnic inequalities in England and Wales and focused on transition from GCSE to A-Level and pointed out: '…the white majority is far from being the most advantaged group, with a transition rate higher than some ethnic minority groups, but lower than others.' This point by Jackson (2012) compounded the idea that the notions of cultural and social reproduction, (Bourdieu, 1973; Moulton et al, 2018), may not be easily applied to all uniformly, and certain variables such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) and 'second chance' students' experiences, are often dissimilar to these notions. The student participants in the present research context are a homogeneous group, who are working towards academic qualifications (A-Levels) in a vocational (FE) setting; they are perceived as 'second chance' students and do not fall neatly into either a vocational or academic category and come from a limited range of SES backgrounds, (Bernardi, 2012). Students studying A-Levels in FE are considered 'second chance students' because they often have not got the grades to remain in sixth-form, and studying A-Levels in a FE setting is perceived as a second chance, (Munns and McFadden, 2010). The so called 'second chance' status carries more negative connotations, when compared to A-Level students studying in a SFC or in school. FE is often seen as providing 'second chances' or indeed a 'last chance saloon' for students who have previously disengaged with education. This may be perceived as an unhelpful term because it fails to describe what students may be experiencing and carries negative connotations in terms of status when compared to A-Level students studying in sixth-form settings, nevertheless, there is a further paucity of research conducted on relatable students and their experiences of Post-16 transition, which gives the present research a significance worthy of investigation.

The impact of SES on transition, future engagement with education and improving social mobility, has been debated at national level in the UK. In 2014 *'Cracking the Code: how schools can improve social mobility'*, (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014), sought to address the identified social inequalities in the education system, nonetheless, such concerns in the UK, remain under researched. Notably, the EIF (2019) from Ofsted, appears to have taken into consideration findings and recommendations made by 'Cracking the Code' (2014). For instance, section 15 states: 'the framework is intended to be a force for improvement for all learners…all learners will receive a high-quality, ambitious education', and section 26: 'learners are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training'. (EIF, 2019). The impact of the directives from Cracking the Code (2014) remains to be seen, however the drive to tackle social inequality and mobility in the EIF (2019) places an onus on providers to ensure they are encouraging learners and institutions to be ambitious in their education and ensure learners are prepared for the next stage in their educational journey; in other words, prepared for transition. Whether this implies accountability for outcomes beyond the transition stage, if only to inform the process, remains questionable and is an element of the work of the present research.

A range of policies have been developed to increase educational engagement for students from lower SES backgrounds, which arguably have been unsuccessful, (Hutchinson et al. 2016; Thompson, 2017; Avis and Atkins, 2017). Hutchinson et al. (2016) found that policy initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of lower and middle SES students remains highly questionable in effectiveness. Furthermore, Thompson

(2017) pointed out that young people from lower SES backgrounds are at greater risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Based on his findings, Thompson (2017, p.760) suggested that this greater risk 'appeared rooted in social disadvantage and the broader marginalisation of families and communities'. This infers a national concern and lack of provision to tackle such social inequalities, which cannot be fixed by education alone.

Worryingly, Thompson (2017) noted that current provision which is aimed at preventing students becoming NEET has failed. Whilst the past seven years have seen an increase in research aimed at addressing social mobility (Cracking the Code, 2014) and NEET (Thompson, 2017), a noteworthy point is raised by Avis and Atkins (2017, p.177) that: 'In terms of empirical and theoretical work on youth transitions, no major studies have been undertaken since Hodkinson's influential study in over 20 years ago and Ball et al. in 2000', (Hodkinson et al. 1996). Whilst it is beyond the scope of the present research to focus solely on transition as a means of social mobility, as this would require longitudinal research, the present research will enhance the body of mounting research on social mobility and transition and may act to inform future research endeavours.

Learner Identity

Learner identity has been of growing interest and highlighted by scholars whose research has focused on educational transition, (Bone, 2016; Choi, 2017; Thompson, 2017). The focus of the present research is the exploration of staff and student experiences during transition, and adaptations in learners' self-concept and identity are particularly pertinent during transition periods, (Bone, 2016). The notion of identity and learner identity finds its roots in the early work of Erikson in the 1950s,

who described 'identity' as being the fifth stage of ego, whereby young people develop the sense of identity and later their sense of identities, (Erikson, 1959). This period of identity formation is often marked by increased anti-social behaviour and declines in grades, school engagement and self-esteem, (Bone, 2016). These behaviours appear to be applicable to all young people regardless of SES according to Thompson (2017), who considered the opportunity structures for families and communities, to be a much bigger influence on the behaviours and self-esteem of young people. Similarly, the earlier research by Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2011) explored the experiences of A-Level Maths students moving from school to college and found that transition was an opportunity for students to develop new identities through interaction, challenge and development. The present research is similar to Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2011) as it will explore such opportunities for integration, interaction and for the development and formation of identities, however the focus is distinct and on the whole experience of transition, as opposed to transition within a particular subject.

Learner identity and the construction of learner identity is sustained through reflexive strategies, which aid the development of adaptive capabilities, necessary to negotiate transition. There is an inference from Choi (2017) that learners not only need to have an identity, but they must also have an awareness of that identity, through reflection, in order to successfully transition. This raises implications for practice and provision during transition/induction periods. This notion will inform the topics of discussion in the interview schedule of the present research. A further important point is raised by Choi (2017, p.180) '…the types of school and higher

education institution one attends seem to bring to bear a potentially powerful impact on how they perceive themselves and are perceived by others, in terms of class and learner identity'. This suggests the notion of self-identity; cultural capital and the social environment are not mutually exclusive but are intertwined.

For those students who are successful in their studies up to GCSE, difficulties can nevertheless occur when negotiating the transition in learning, to A-Level and adapting to a new learner identity. Deuker (2014) conducted research in a sixth form college to explore the associated difficulties faced by young people when they transition between GCSE and A-Level. Through thematic analysis Deuker (2014) highlighted the changing identities for those who did well at GCSE and had confidence in their learning, finding difficulty in managing the leap in learning from GCSE to A-Level. Learner identity is of particular importance to the present research, not least in answer to the questions of: 'Why take the course? What do you hope to gain? Where do you see yourself when you have completed your course?' These questions will inform methodological decisions regarding the timing and topic of discussions for the data collection.

According to the literature, peer support, opportunities for integration and reflection on shared experience of transition are important means of supporting students' identity development. Crook (2013, p.46) explored what was important for learners' study experience and noted: 'a sense of reassurance from the co-presence of peers with common predicaments and goals'. Crook (2013) placed importance on the

influences on transition, his participants were not concerned with the physical spaces that the building afforded to them but more with the opportunities to interact with their peers; this enabled the learners to gain a social identity of being a student and feeling included. Whilst Crook's (2013) research focused on the study experience of his participants during transition; the present study takes a broader focus to additionally explore the social, emotional, pastoral and educational aspects of transition.

Assuming a new learner identity after transition is an opportunity for young people to accelerate or enhance their learner identity, (Hernandez-Martinez et al. 2011; Powell. 2017). Distinctly, Powell (2017) further noted the risks, which may be involved for some individuals undergoing transition, like isolation or alienation, nevertheless with the right support such learners can experience transition positively. In contrast, Hernandez-Martinez et al (2011) focuses solely on the opportunities presented during transition. This distinction may be explained by Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2011) narrow focus on participants who were studying Mathematics, whereas Powell's (2017) participants were following a range of A-Level subjects.

Anxiety, Belonging and Self-Conception During Transition

Anxiety, belonging and self-conception, and the implications these can have on transition experience, along with the influence on psychological health and wellbeing

have been highlighted across a range of literature, (Carey et al. 2017; Coelho and Romao, 2016; Frey et al. 2009). As suggested by Stringer and Dunsmuir (2012):

'Transitions are fundamental features of social life and represent periods of change and adaptation. However, change is situational, yet transition is psychological. It involves internalising and adapting to new situations brought about by change, and encompasses shifts in identity and agency'.

(Stringer and Dunsmuir, 2012, p.5)

This raises a number of further considerations, firstly, a clear distinction is drawn between the 'situational' and the 'psychological', yet both are interconnected through the processes of 'adapting' and 'internalising'. This point from Stringer and Dunsmuir (2012) highlights the complexities and draws attention to the extraordinary and multifaceted nature of transition.

Levels of anxiety experienced during transition may vary according to whether a student will study academic or vocational education post-16. Simmonds et al (2016, p.3) conducted a large-scale study which examined: 'how adolescents' anxiety, depressive symptoms, and positive functioning developed as they transferred from comprehensive school to further education, employment or training, or became NEET, at 16 years of age, in a longitudinal English national cohort study.' The researchers here found, contrary to their hypotheses, that FE students had increased levels of anxiety immediately post-transition, but interestingly they noted that this trend was less steep, than for their academic (A-Level) counterparts. This is

a particularly pertinent point for the present research, given the specificity of the 'second chance' student participants who are studying A-Levels in an FE setting.

Contrary findings were noted by Banks and Smyth (2015) in their research in Ireland, they found that academic adolescents had higher levels of anxiety and strain compared to their vocational counterparts. Likewise, a previous study conducted in Finland by Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) found that academic learners were at greater risk of burning-out because of the higher levels of anxiety they experienced, compared to vocational learners. The findings of both Banks and Smyth (2015) and Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) highlight an incongruence when compared to the national retention rates for Post-16 education in the UK, whose latest published data set in 2017, reported that A-Level courses retained 96.1% of their students; whilst Level Three Vocational programmes only retained 87.9%, (Department for Education, 2018). There are two implications for consideration here, firstly, retention data fails to capture those students who drop out in the first six weeks of their course. Secondly, academic learners are more likely to remain on their courses to completion, even with the high associated levels of stress and anxiety, (Symonds et al. 2016). Whether academic or vocational post-16 education, institutions which ensure successful transition, through supporting students to make informed choices, enable higher rates of engagement and retention, (DfES, 2007; Welsh Government, 2018).

A number of researchers have highlighted that earlier interventions, with new staff and the new setting, as well as, robust preparation for pre-transition pupils are required to enhance transition experience, (Symonds et al. 2016; Salmela-Aro and

Upadyaya, 2014). Symonds et al (2016), based on their findings raised a further notion, that comprehensive schooling is failing to psychologically prepare vocational adolescents. The researchers here suggested this 'failure to prepare' is often borne out from secondary schools prioritising core academic subjects. Moreover, Salmela-Aro and Upadyaya (2014) considered the 'environment fit' for vocational learners after transition and reported improvements in mental health, once students spend more time doing vocational learning activities, in a vocational (FE) environment. Given the specificity of the student participants in the present research, are the findings from Salmela-Aro and Upadyaya (2014) relatable? Do the participants' mental health improve akin to vocational learners? Or as in Symonds (2016) do they experience increased anxieties?

The highlighted juxtaposition, between the experiences of vocational and academic students, is further brought to light in the findings of Chmielewski et al (2013) which took an international perspective on students' self-concept in mathematics at a similar transition point, albeit in the United States. The researchers found that academic students experienced deterioration in mental health after transition because they moved into more homogenous groupings, where previously these students would have been grouped heterogeneously alongside lower ability learners, which lead to reduced feelings of self-worth. Thus, not only are the sociological and classroom dynamics negatively influencing transition experience, (Deuker, 2014) additionally, the psychological wellbeing of students is impacting negatively on transition experience.

The findings of aforementioned McCoy et al. (2014) may offer an explanation into the differences in such experiences between vocational and academic students, post-transition; the researchers conducted a large-scale longitudinal study and found that the higher levels of stress and anxiety experienced by academic learners may be due to feelings of pressure, in preparing for university and their next transition. These findings from McCoy (2014) are consonant with the findings of Matheson et al (2018) discussed earlier and reinforce the idea of transitioning 'through…' rather than transition 'to…' Together these notions support the developing concept of transition being process. The present research supports this understanding of transition and seeks to examine how holding such an understanding of transition, impacts on transition experience.

Central to learner identity, as discussed above, is the notion of belonging, which has been evolving since the 1990s when Baumeister and Leary (1995) devised the 'belongingness hypothesis'. The belongingness hypothesis, (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) perceives human relationships as paramount for development, maturity and growth; without our primary psychological sense of belonging, human beings are unable to have positive psychological, social and behavioural experiences.

According to Symonds et al (2016, p.6):

> 'Student feelings of 'belongingness' at school and how much they enjoy school may also be impacted by school [educational] transitions and affect child achievement'.

The above point highlights the importance of having a sense of belonging during transition periods. Bone (2016) in her doctoral thesis on 'Academic self-concept at post-16' suggests that transition periods are critical moments in young people's stories and making the right decisions are key to the success of transition. Bone (2016) notably draws attention to the fact that 16 –18-year olds are also undergoing physiological development and maturation of neurobiological processes, mainly in the pre-frontal cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for higher cognitive and social functions. The physiological development of young people is often overlooked when institutions are planning for transition; the findings from Bone (2016) further raises the profile, to include students in the decision-making processes for transition. Whilst there is an omission to address student involvement in decision making in Bone's (2016) research, the present research intends to redress this.

Student teacher relationships are an important element when considering belongingness, self-concept and wellbeing during transition, (Salisbury and Jephcote, 2008). Conversely, negative student teacher relationships, can negatively impact on transition experience. Banks and Smyth (2014) whose research considered academic stress and high-stakes testing in Ireland, found that for 16 – 18-year-olds, negative teacher student relationships were a perceived source of stress. This point raised by Banks and Smyth (2014) infers an additional onus on teachers to ensure that their time spent with learners is of good quality. A-Level teachers in the present research setting, on average have 4.5 hours per week, over a 30-week period in which to deliver an extensive A-Level syllabus, thus time is

precious. The early establishment of effective student teacher relationships are perceived by teachers to be an enabler to successful in their practices, (Salisbury and Jephcote, 2008). The present research, through its inclusion of staff participants, intends to explore the above findings and highlight similarities or differences in the experiences of the participants, from the different research contexts.

2.6 Transition to Further Education

As discussed there has been comparatively little research conducted on the transition to FE. Whilst the above studies such as Prout (1993), Caton and Kagan (2005) and Mallinson (2009) have considered the influences on transition experience, these are rare in their focus on the post-16 transition in the UK. More contemporary research is beginning to emerge with a focus on this particular phenomenon, (Bone, 2016; Crook, 2013; Kendall et al. 2018; Packer and Thomas, 2021; Rigby 2017; Salisbury and Jephcote, 2008), yet this remains an area which requires greater research endeavour.

In her findings, Bone (2016) noted that when students are afforded the opportunity to work with peers during transition, this positively impacts on their academic self-concept and their educational attainment. Additionally, Bone (2016), in line with the earlier findings from Crook (2013), highlighted the importance of togetherness and the positive impact that social spaces can have on the successfulness of transition and future engagement with education. This is an important point for this research, as the participants in Bone (2016) are from a similar cohort as the participants in the

present research and her work has helped to address the limited research conducted with such participants. As Bone's (2016) research was not a longitudinal study, the credibility of the point she raises with regards to learners' 'future engagement' with education, requires more research. Nevertheless, Bone's (2016) work offers useful insight into the experiences of young people undergoing post-16 transition. Bone (2016) took a psychological approach to her research and considered the role of educational psychologists, the present research builds on Bone's (2016) research as it will take a more experiential approach to consider transition from the perspective of students, teachers and pastoral staff.

Teacher understandings of transition in their particular context is important when enabling students to successfully negotiate their transition. Kendall et al. (2018) in their research into the readiness of FE students to transition to HE, focus on the teacher development as key in raising awareness and supporting non-traditional students to successfully experience transition. Kendall et al. (2018) suggest that teachers should demonstrate a reflective and thoughtful approach in their understandings of the purpose of FE, HE and transition itself, to enable non-traditional students to transition successfully through FE and onto HE.

The earlier research by Crabtree et al. (2006, p.2) noted: 'students had poor study skills when they entered further education [in other words] they had been taught what to think rather than how to think'. This notion is later confirmed in the work of Deuker (2014) who similarly noted, on the transition in learning, that learners were often underprepared for the different expectations in learning between school and college. Both Crabtree et al. (2006) and Deuker (2014) raise implications for

practice, together they have emphasised a distinction in pedagogical approaches between secondary and post-16 education, which warrants further research. The transition in learning will be a component of the present research and will be explored from the perspective of both the student and staff participants but unlike Deuker (2014) transition in learning will not be the exclusive focus.

Transition in learning is a significant aspect of post-16 transition and can present additional challenges for students during these periods. The transition in learning is further researched by Rigby (2017) who explored the transition experience of students from GCSE to A-Level Mathematics qualitatively. In her findings, Rigby (2017, p.510) noted that: 'the majority of students believed that the GCSE syllabus prepared them for the AS-Level syllabus but not to the extent that they would have hoped'. Based on the responses from her 28 participants she further noted: '…transition was hindered due to a lack of preparation before commencing AS-Level Maths, the syllabuses being too dissimilar'. Rigby's (2017) research was conducted concurrently alongside the Government's implementation of the reformed GCSE syllabus in 2015 and later the reformed A-Level syllabus in 2017, which purported to bridge the learning between both sets of syllabi. Rigby's (2016) research also recommended the avoidance of 'teaching to test' so that students could develop their critical skills, this point appears evident in the EIF (2019) with its similar foci, (Ofsted, 2019). The present research can only explore the experiences of students working towards their A-Levels under the new examination regime, yet through the inclusion of seasoned staff participants in the research process, insight may be offered and comparisons can be explored into the differences in transition experience, under both regimes.

To augment the transition in learning the student-teacher dynamic is significant. Devlin (2013) on the transition to HE, highlighted the importance of the pedagogical relationship between the student and the lecturer, which when fostered successfully, allowed students to grow in their confidence and challenge staff appropriately and academically. Whether this experience is common to the post-16 transition, will be addressed in the conduct of the present research. The student teacher relationship has been highlighted in research across the different transition stages routinely, which compounds its significance in the experiences of young people making their educational transition, (Deuker, 2014; Craig, 2009).

Consideration of research on transition in Higher Education (HE) offers valuable insight to the present research because of its parallels with transition to FE. Additionally, as accepted in the present research, transition is perceived as ongoing through the education continuum, therefore examining other transition periods in the life of a student offer relevant findings, which help inform understandings on the Post-16 transition. Conley et al. (2014) distinctly draw attention to the differences in experiences between the two. In their findings, it was noted that unlike previous transitions, the transition to university can be more complex because young people will often have moved away from home, have responsibility for their finances for the first time and live much more independently, (Conley et al. 2014). This point serves to highlight the different variables, which impact the experiences of transition, yet Conley et al. (2014) also draws attention to the ecological transition experienced by students which is analogous with the experiences researched at other transition stages, (Thompson, 2017). Importantly the key point is that variations in transition contexts exist and specific research is required to distinguish one from the other.

Tett et al. (2016) conducted a longitudinal piece of qualitative research and explored the experiences of 45 student participants and their transition experience from FE to HE. Tett et al. (2016, p.403) identified four critical moments, or significant transition points:

    i)   'The loss of a sense of belonging on coming to university

    ii)   Learning to fit in by the end of the first year

    iii)   Changing approaches to learning and belonging in the final years of study

    iv)   Changing selves in the years following graduation'

Tett et al. (2016) argued in their findings that transition is an on-going process, which develops as students move through university, rather than being a one-off event. This developing notion of transition as on-going, raises an implication for institutions who tend to target the specific transition periods in their strategic planning, rather than planning for the learners' journeys to, through and beyond their institutions. Additionally, Tett et al. (2016) found that the differences in experiences between students' FE College and their university had a negative impact on their self-confidence and identity formation as a university student; these findings are akin to those highlighted in Simmons et al. (2016) on the Post-16 transition. This point highlights commonalities in the transition experience at the various transition stages, which are of value. Tett et al. (2016) has helped to move the transition narrative on from being viewed as a one-off event. Transition as an ongoing process is similarly highlighted by Gale and Parker (2014) in their typology of transition to HE; based on their findings the researchers identified three notions of transition: transition as induction, transition as development and transition as becoming. While research

interest is growing it is evident that the greater focus on transition as a process is increasing and will be better placed to inform practice and policy.

What is suggested from the outlined research above, is that over the past ten years, the research on transition has had a change of narrative and there has been a move to view transition as an ongoing process rather than a singular event, (Tett et al, 2016; Devlin, 2013). When transition is perceived as being 'through' rather than 'to' (Matheson et al. 2017) an institution, students are better supported through research informed planning. Similar concepts of transition are underdeveloped for post-16 education, which highlights the research deficit in this domain.

2.7 Conclusions from the Literature Review

An exploration and discussion of the literature has revealed that our understandings of transition itself is variable. Transition is evidently complex and without an acceptable definition across colleges the many factors which inhibit students achieving remain notably untested. The significant impact of government cuts to funding have acutely changed colleges perspectives and are arguably negative for students whose needs could be better provided for within a more inclusive approach.

The range of influences discussed above on transition experience have been highlighted in this literature review. Consideration of an accepted definition as a process rather than an event, financial constraints, variation across colleges, geography, emotional wellbeing, cultural and social aspects, identity and a sense of belonging and wellbeing and student teacher relationships are interrelated and

significant determinants in every transition policy leading to practice. By critically examining the literature relating to post 16 educational transition understanding and influences, the arising conclusions indicate a complex variety of issues which affect outcomes and experiences. While parallels are not always exact, more precise interest in the transition area is required. This research aims to inform effective practice through its focus on bringing together the literature findings to inform a sharp research direction.

It is for the researcher to pursue the arising questions focusing on the voice of the student and the teacher. Current variability, financial constraints and lack of specific focus combine to suggest that the existing limited attention and resources at the transition stage will only deteriorate unless significant change is initiated.

The present research sets out to add to the limited body of research by focusing holistically on the participants' lived experiences of post-16 transition.

To conclude, the lack of research interest is indicative of the current wide variation in practice; the culture of competitiveness and struggle to meet economies have resulted in a focus by providers of responding to constraints and not individual profiles, ambitions and career pathways. This research also is designed to address this, and help inform and stimulate further research in the field and raise the profile of post-16 transition.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for the ontological and epistemological perspectives taken, followed by the methodology used in the present research. Given the positionality of the researcher as presented in chapter one, the use of IPA was considered an appropriate approach to conduct the present research because it enables the lived transition experiences of the participants to be examined and analysed in-depth and enables the participants' voice to emerge powerfully.

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Perspective

A qualitative methodology was selected for the present research because the researcher perceives 'reality' as subjective and unique to the individual, (Shaw and Frost, 2015). The ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher are allied with constructivism and interpretivism respectively because the researcher's position perceives knowledge as a construct, which is individual, subjective and interpretative. Punch (1998, p.170) noted these perspectives define how a researcher defines reality in terms of: 'what exists in the world…to the nature of reality'. Employing an interpretivist approach was additionally regarded as appropriate, the focus of the present research is to explore the lived experiences of post-16 transition and to foreground the participants' voice. In other words, the voice of the students and staff are central to the research intentions.

Lincoln and Guba (1998, p.110) note that a constructivist's perspective is where:

> '…realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially experientially based, local and specific in nature and dependant for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions.'

Two major competing paradigms within research methodology over the past 60 years have been constructivism and positivism. Positivism as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1998, p.109) is when: 'An apprehendable reality is assumed to exist, driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms.' This assumes that reality exists objectively and the researcher's role is to expose an objective truth. This positivistic perspective was critiqued by Popper (2002) who perceived the notion of truth in the hard sciences as mythical, conversely, he noted that truth is subjective and interpretative. The fundamental aim of positivistic research as suggested by Goodson and Sykes (2001) is to arrive at an understanding of truth or an 'immutable truth', the present research does not share this notion of truth. Instead, the researcher perceives truth as subjective, thus aligned with a constructivist's perspective. Whilst other paradigms regard truth as subjective, an interpretative or hermeneutical paradigm has been selected for the present research, to enable the exposure of participant voice, and allow for lived experiences to be analysed qualitatively, in-depth and from their perspectives. A key tenet of the present research is to enable participants to engage with the research, contribute to the outcomes and place participants and their experiences centrally within the research, (Noon, 2018). This approach has fewer hierarchical implications, in terms of the

power dynamics that exist between the researcher and the participants and seeks to place the participants as co-creators of knowledge.

Interpretative methods are best suited to this particular research because the intention is to seek knowledge or gain an understanding of how the participants made sense of transition. Greenback (2002) noted that the values, or (in other words) axiological position, held by a researcher will inform their ontological and epistemological positioning. The left-liberal upbringing and Anglo-Irish background of the researcher, coupled with a concern for social justice and pedagogy underpin the values, in the present interpretivist research. The researcher's values stem from the concern to have the students at the heart of processes, when reaching decisions and setting directions to inform improvement.

The researcher's contention is that an inclusive approach, whereby both staff and students are participants, will add to a richer understanding of transition. Therefore, a constructivist's paradigm, which is allied with a relativist's ontological perspective, is an appropriate approach to the present research, where the intention is to investigate the lived-experiences of participants, of a particular phenomenon. Significantly, the researcher assumes axiomatically, that one cannot circumvent one's own values, prejudices and biases in the conduct of the present research, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

3.2 Methodological Approach

As alluded, the phenomena under exploration in the present qualitative research is the lived-experience of post-16 transition, from a staff and student perspective. Brooks (2015) noted that when research designs are qualitative in nature they are habitually allied with interpretative paradigms, which are inspired by phenomenology.

Husserl (1859-1939) first established phenomenology as a school of thought in the early part of the twentieth century, he focused his work on the relationship and interaction between direct and subjective human experience. Husserl's concern was with 'how' rather than 'what' the experiences of participants were perceived to be, relative to a specific phenomenon. Husserl prescribed that researchers must describe their own experiences of the specific phenomena, and then exclude this in order to gain a fresh perspective which focuses on the participants' experiences. This approach process of excluding pre-existing views, knowledge and opinions of the researcher, is known as bracketing or epoché, (Nellickappilly, 2006). The process of epoché was critiqued by Heidegger (1962) who suggested that to bracket one's own preconception and prior knowledge entirely is unachievable.

Heidegger (1889-1976) developed Husserl's work; he noted that a person's interpretation or understanding of a phenomenon will be influenced by their relationships, language and culture. Heidegger also highlighted that the role of interpretation is key to understanding an individual's engagement with the world or experience of a phenomenon. This notion of 'interpretation' is also known as hermeneutics. Shinebourne (2011) noted that Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA) perceives the nature of phenomenological inquiry to be a hermeneutical (interpretative) process, this is why IPA was chosen for interpreting the data in the present research. IPA acknowledges the part played by the researcher's values in interpretation and that will inevitably mean that these values will affect how the researcher decides on the sample and interprets the data.

Schutz (1962) was interested in how a researcher can actually understand other's consciousness while they are 'trapped' in their own stream of consciousness, he noted that phenomenology can be categorised in two component parts: existential phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. Later Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggested that transcendental phenomenology is imbued with the questioning of taken-for-granted or common-sense assumptions in a person's everyday life. Cresswell (2013) built on these earlier notions (Schutz, 1962; Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and posited that phenomenological research should focus on drawing common meaning from multiple participants and their lived experiences of phenomena. In relation to the present research, by exploring the experiences of staff and students of the transition process, the results should highlight where challenges and positives exist and suggest direct conclusions to enable further research and inform an improved understanding of transition.

The Hermeneutic Cycle as described by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) refers to the relationship and interconnectedness between the 'part' and the 'whole'; the 'part' being the phenomena and the 'whole' being the subjective experiences respectively, for the purposes of phenomenological research. The researcher's role in IPA is to analyse and interpret data by attaching meaning to the lived experiences of the

participants. Inevitably, the researcher will use their own life experiences, as detailed in chapter one, when interpreting and attaching meaning to the data, this is known as double hermeneutics, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Essentially, the researcher will interpret the participants' own interpretations of transition and in doing so may draw conclusions to reflect clear insights and working experience. The use of the reflective journal and the reflexive approach of the researcher were of particular importance here, in order to address the influence of the researcher's positionality on the interpretations of the data. This means that the researcher's working relationship with the student and staff participants is evident and as such, enhances the credibility of the results.

3.3 Rationale for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA draws on three complementary philosophical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics and Idiography, (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). According to Tomkins (2017) IPA has a commitment to systematically explore personal experiences of participants. Noon (2018) adds two further commitments on IPA which are to 'give voice' and 'make sense' of participants and their experiences. Both postulations from Tomkins (2017) and Noon (2018) demonstrate consensus and place the participants centrally within the present research, these notions guided the researcher when making informed methodological decisions and adopting a suitable philosophical framework.

The decision to employ IPA as a philosophical framework in the conduct of the research has additionally been borne out of the central tenet, which was raised in the

literature review, to enable young people to have a voice and influence in decisions which affect them, by seeking to give the fullest representation of their voice. IPA shares a philosophical heritage with hermeneutics and phenomenology and is defined as:

'…phenomenological in attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, but recognises that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavour for both participants and researcher. Without the phenomenology there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomena would not be seen.'

(Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p 37)

Consideration was given to adopting a descriptive phenomenology approach for the present research, which was developed by Giorgi (2012), however this approach has been criticised because of its failure to capture the participants' voice, which remains a key focus of the present research, (Shinebourne, 2010). Contrastingly, Smith et al. (2009) further noted that adopting an IPA approach enables participants to have a voice and importantly also provides an insider perspective for the researcher. The significance of the 'voice' is strengthened when reading IPA, as in MacNeela and Gannon (2014) because verbatim responses from participants are provided alongside the researchers' interpretations which can contrast and enhance the arguments made. Through the triangulation of interpretations, with participants, the researcher enhanced the credibility of arguments being made in the discussion chapter. Consideration of a range of other IPA research informed the structure of the findings section of the present research, to similarly enable participants' voice to be

heard, (Burton et al. 2017; MacNeela and Gannon, 2014; Powell, 2017). This method of using verbatim responses, coupled with the researcher's analyses and interpretations help improve the quality and credibility of IPA research, (Smith et al. 2009).

The significance of participant voice is highlighted across a range of IPA studies. Gersch (2016) highlighted that the central aim of IPA research is to give participants a voice; akin to insider perspective as postulated by Smith et al. (2009). Through the interpretations and analyses of participants' interpretations of their experiences of transition, the researcher has followed a double hermeneutic cycle in an attempt to gain an insider perspective, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Contrastingly, Groenewald (2004) noted phenomenological research's principal aim is to accurately describe phenomena, whilst circumventing the researcher's preconceptions and remaining true to the facts. This notion, however, is contentious and akin to Husserl's epoché. In the planning and conduct of the data collection, conscious efforts will be made to bracket preconceptions, by avoiding leading questions and by actively not demonstrating agreement or disagreement during interviews with interjections or paralinguistic responses, (Gregory, 2019). However, from a Heideggerian stance, Hammersley (2004) made the point that researchers, following a phenomenological approach, can never truly detach themselves from their preconceptions. The double hermeneutic approach to the analysis, will help redress this tension and through a reflexive research journal, preconceptions will be confronted in the interpretations and assertions; rather than bracketed. This Heideggerian perspective was shared by Merleau-Ponty (1962) who further argued for a more contextualised phenomenology.

This present research is idiographic and thus concerned with the particular, which requires a thorough and systematic analysis, the details of which will be further discussed in the analysis section of this chapter. Additionally, the present research is idiographic because the participants will be selected from a relatively small and homogenous group of students who had recently moved from school to a particular college and were studying their first year of A-Level which brings them into the researcher's area of work. Similarly, the staff participants came from a group of teachers and pastoral tutors, in the same college, who work with the researcher and experience a common transition provision. Data from all case studies will be analysed in a finely textured manner (Smith et al, 1996) which will be further outlined in the subsequent subsections of this chapter.

The idiographic nature of this research will also establish from drawing understanding and knowledge from a particular case: the transition experiences of students and staff, in a particular further education college in North West England. This research is therefore not about gaining an understanding or creating knowledge through the universal or general, but instead from the particular which may inform and support a broader influence. This decision influences the choice of participating students and ensures the depth needed from the limited sample through extensive interviews with staff and student participants, because the researcher is able to focus on a smaller sample with greater depth. Idiography is highlighted as a critical tool when working with a constructivist paradigm, Crawford (2019) describes the idiographic nature of IPA research as a dual lens, which develops the understanding of particular phenomena, from both the perspective of the participant and the researcher. This notion informs the present research in terms of research design.

Essential throughout is the belief that a small in-depth study in one institution will influence, inform and incite future research and practice in this important field.

3.4 Research Method

Design

When considering the design of the present research an exploration of the following approaches in particular, were given significant consideration: adopting a life-history approach, a participatory research design and an action research design, before deciding that this research would take a phenomenological approach and in particular would adopt an IPA design.

A life-history approach was considered in the conduct of the present research because of the level of minutiae involved in this approach, (Goodson and Sykes, 2001). Consideration of a number of life-history research studies (Sykes et al. 2016; Wright et al. 2017) was engaging and gave a thorough insight into the experiences of participants because their voice and stories were illustrated extensively. However, consideration was given to the limitations of the present research in terms of time constraints and access to participants over a long period of time, which deemed a life-history approach inappropriate. Life-history designs are better suited to longitudinal/longevity research with a small number of participants and involve the researcher spending extended time with participants, therefore adopting this approach was further ruled out as it would not be feasible to conduct with the current

participants, given the student participants' relatively short and demanding time at college.

Taking an action research approach was also considered, in the planning stages of the present research. Levin (2012, p.137) postulated that action research can be seen as '…a strategy that aims at solving pertinent problems where the problem owners and engaged researchers learn together and reflect in the same co-generative process'. The idea of learning together was engaging, however, the core thrust of the present research is to expose the lived experiences of participants and through hermeneutics derive meaning. Action research is emancipatory (Levin, 2012) and this may be a perceived limitation of the present research, which is not emancipatory in a traditional sense, i.e., that all participants will be emancipated and gain an understanding of the processes, policies and theoretical underpinnings behind transition provision. Whilst the present research is focused on enabling participant voice, participant emancipation is beyond its scope, which deemed action research inappropriate. Nevertheless, it is argued that the participants will benefit and reflect on the area of interest and in time potentially recognise the impact on practice if it occurs.

Given the importance of participant voice as a central tenet of the research, a participatory approach was given consideration. Whilst there are several participatory elements to this research, like sharing and relaying responses from the student participants anonymously with the staff participants, and sharing questions and topics prior to interview with participants, this research is not participatory research. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) noted that participatory research treats

participants as though they are the experts in their own lives, which appealed to the researcher. Similarly, Christensen and James (2000) noted that participatory research should be conducted 'with' rather than 'on' participants. Whilst a participatory approach remained appealing for the reasons outlined above, it requires a greater degree of interaction between the researcher and participants and given the researcher's time-limited access to the busy staff and student participants, a participatory design was rendered impractical.

As the researcher has a dual role, and is a practitioner in post-16 education, the present research interest is not only in the participants and their experiences but also in how they are interpreting their experiences and how these relate to the experiences of the staff participants; given that they are experiencing the same phenomena but from different positions, perspectives and horizons. The point previously raised by Brooks (2015) that qualitative research designs are frequently connected with interpretative paradigms and inspired by phenomenology appealed because the psychological aspect of the participants' lived experiences can be examined in depth. A decision was taken to use interviews along with a visual-prompt/photo-elicitation exercise for the students at a second interview as a means of gathering qualitative data. This decision was based on the researcher's previous experience of using a form of photo-elicitation as a means of encouraging extended responses from teenage participants, who are not always ready to articulate their experiences. The photo-elicitation exercise entailed the student participants bringing along a range of images from Google Images which were self-selected and represented the different points in their transition experience. The student participants were informed about this approach prior to their second interview via the

researcher's university email address. Additionally, interpretations and emergent themes were shared with a number of participants to triangulate findings and seek (dis)agreement; this strategy helped make findings more solid and credible, (Flick, 2017). Alase (2017) suggested that triangulation of findings with participants is a necessity when analysing phenomenological data. Through the triangulation of findings with a number of participants, further informed discussions occurred, which supported the credibility of the findings. Conducting initial interviews with the student participants early in their initial college year, September and October, and again in the Spring term, enabled deeper and more considered responses from the participants. Having experienced the research topic at their initial interviews, in the second round of interviews, the student participants appeared more comfortable when reflecting on their experiences of transition, this personal observation was recorded in the research journal.

Staff participants only had one interview, because staff spoke extensively about their experiences, with fewer interjections from the researcher. The amount of data retrieved from the staff interviews was extensive, when compared to the more limited data retrieved from the initial student interviews. This reinforced the decision to conduct two sets of interviews with the student participants. It was also considered unnecessary to use a form of photo-elicitation with the staff participants, because of their ability to provide extended responses without the use of image prompts.

Prior to data collection, an interview schedule was created and shared with participants in order to limit the creation of a fragmented picture. In other words, the interview schedule enabled common aspects of transition experience to be

discussed across all interviews. The interview schedule enabled a few introductory questions to begin discussion, and to help nurture a conducive and purposeful atmosphere, which aimed to put the participants at ease. The interview schedule considered transition experiences in a chronological order, to cover pertinent aspects of the transition experience in a flowing order, while at the same time was not too prescriptive to limit the participants' elicitations. A limitation of qualitative research is that the structured nature of reporting methods may elucidate a fragmented picture, (Nevonen and Brogberg, 2000); whilst this may be perceived as a limitation, arguably such a 'fragmented picture' of the participants' transition experience may highlight the complexities of transition. The interview schedule not only helped to bring about a semi structure to the interview; it additionally ensured that the same range of topics were discussed in each interview.

Reflexive Journal

As alluded the use of the reflexive journal was imperative throughout the conduct of the present research. The researcher used the journal initially when constructing the interview schedule, to ensure questions were opened and the institutional knowledge of the researcher was not dominating questioning or eliciting favoured responses, (Holmes, 2020). The researcher sought to address the power imbalance that existed between the student participants, as a member of staff in a powerful position, and the staff participants as a colleague and middle manager. To do this, the researcher read through interview transcripts and listened again to recordings of the interviews, to determine whether responses could have been influenced by the participants' perspectives of the researcher who is additionally a member of staff.

For example, Appendix 12 is a reflexive journal entry which highlights how the reflexive journal was employed when analysing and interpreting data. This was principally used to ensure that the researcher, was not using tacit knowledge of the setting to influence responses and when interpreting responses; this was done in an attempt to remain as true as possible to the participants' responses. Throughout, the journal was also employed to consider the power imbalances that existed between the researcher and the participant. Yardley (2000) suggested that to ensure transparency in IPA research, reflexivity is important; by keeping an up-to-date reflexive journal throughout the research phase, the present research develops its openness and integrity.

3.5 Data Collection

In addition to conducting the semi-structured interviews as a means of collecting data for the present IPA study, as alluded, a decision was taken to go beyond this method, and use a form of photo-elicitation coupled with a reflective narrative, to gather more data from the student participants. As suggested by Smith et al. (2011, p.56): 'There is great room for imaginative work in collecting data for IPA'. A key feature of IPA is that it focuses on the participants' intimate experiences of a particular phenomenon and to be successful, requires 'rich data'. 'Rich data' as outlined by Smith et al. (2011) is produced when participants have been afforded the opportunity to speak freely and through reflection, tell their stories or narratives at length. This places significant importance on the expression of the views and impressions of participants and as such is thoroughly considered further below.

Observation as a tool to gather qualitative data, was given consideration in the research process. This technique was dismissed because it would be impractical given the researcher's full-time job role at the college and access to busy participants, as pointed out by Moser et al (2018) observation as a method requires a greater degree of interaction between the researcher and the participants. Moreover, observation would not fit well with IPA because its reliance on the double hermeneutical approach, in other words, the researcher's interpretations of the participants' interpretations of their transition experience. The intention to interpret responses from the participants may lead to this information not being deemed pure, in other words, participants' reflections may be altered by time and memory capabilities, (Smith et al. 2011). Whilst reflections from participants may have altered, how and why participants have elicited points are of interest.

Pilot Study

Prior to embarking on the present research, a small-scale pilot study was undertaken, which involved testing and comparing the efficacy of both individual semi-structured interviews and group interviews. The quality and quantity of both data collection methods, with a group of 16-18-year-olds were compared. The findings were broadly in line with the literature, that group interviews tend to lead to dominance among participants. In other words, those participants who were more extraverted, tended to lead and dominate the discussions, which in effect meant the more introverted participants failed to share their experiences extensively. Based on careful consideration of the pilot study, the decision was taken to conduct individual

semi-structured interviews, to better focus on the individual participant's thoughts, feelings and memories, unhindered by unnecessary influences, (Noon, 2018).

Interviews

Employing interviews as a means of collecting data is not a unique approach, but instead uses a tried and tested method to generate qualitative data. According to Seidman (2013) interviews have historically occupied a central position in qualitative research, and similarly so in educational research, as noted in Luft et al. (2011). Furthermore, Moser et al. (2018) placed interviews among the most frequently employed method of data collection for qualitative research. In line with the philosophical framework of the present research, Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) noted that interviews have traditionally been the preferred method of collecting data for IPA studies, although they highlight focus groups and observations have also been used as data collection methods in IPA research, (Smith et al 2011).

The purpose of a qualitative interview is to gather information specific to an individual; however, interviews can have a wider societal impact. In their consideration of the purpose of a qualitative interview, Kong et al. (2002) noted that interviews have become a tool of social reform. This infers a special status for interviews, which go beyond the practical aspects of information retrieval for research, to perceive the interview as a catalyst for social change. Furthermore, Fontana and Frey (2008) built on this notion and suggested that interviewing has become bound inextricably to the political, historical and contextual. This appealed because of the aforementioned liberal upbringing of the researcher which have

underpinned values of inclusion and social justice and significantly how these values, coupled with the professional experiences have influenced the interviews. These sentiments appear to elevate the role of the interview and encompass the role of the researcher and their human characteristics. This is important to the present research because of the dual lens aspect of IPA, (Crawford, 2019). There is an inference here that objective or positivistic data cannot as easily be gained in interviews and that the subjectivities of both researcher and interviewee, in terms of the political, historical and contextual, are unavoidable. Indeed, such subjectivities are necessary when conducting IPA research because IPA places emphasis on hermeneutics and the reflexivity of the researcher, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The stance taken in this research was to regard interviews as a collaborative exercise between the researcher and the participant, which enable phenomena to be co-explored. This stance was discussed with the participants prior to the commencement of the interviews and helped create an informal and conducive interview setting. Baker (1994) viewed the interview as a platform from which both the participant and researcher can explore their perceptions of the world. The interview was deemed an appropriate choice in the present research and the point raised by Baker (1994) gave credence to its employment. Moreover, the interview is a well-established and favoured means of collecting data in IPA research, (Moriah, 2018; Bone, 2016; Smith et al. 2011).

There are numerous different types of qualitative interviews. Smith et al. (2011) highlight two types of interviews, which are conducive to IPA research, namely: the in-depth interview and the semi-structured interview. One must caveat this point by

alluding to the earlier point raised by Smith et al. (2012), where Jonathan Smith, the so-called 'founding father' of IPA, appears to encourage new and creative approaches to gathering data in IPA studies. Given this line of thinking, the researcher concluded that it would be beneficial and credible to use the semi-structured interview as the main method for collecting data, but also to employ an ancillary method to enhance the approach: the Google Image task with a reflective narrative, to further enhance the quality of the information generated from the participants.

From a positivist's perspective, as in Jones (2004), interviews are seen to lead to the interviewer being a co-producer of knowledge. This suggests an allegiance between the paradigms, as the previously alluded ontological perspective of the researcher is constructivist, and therefore values such co-production of knowledge. From the onset, the intention of the present research is to have a beneficial effect on the participants, provide a clear sense of participation and have a professional impact on the researcher as an educational practitioner. Gersch (2016) makes the point that for qualitative research the co-production of knowledge can make a piece of research more credible through its hermeneutical approach. Overall, the data collection decisions were made to provide information that would add to knowledge about improving practice and informing provision.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To fully explore the phenomena of transition, the researcher contended that employing semi-structured interviews, would not restrict the flow of information from

the participants, as a more structured interview could possibly do. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and are adaptive, (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Swain (2016) suggested that the semi-structured interview is an effective method to gain an understanding of the world through language, culture and human interpretation; both language and interpretation are of particular importance when analysing in IPA research.

For Brown and Danaher (2019, p.77) the purpose of the semi-structured interview is to: 'ensure that the questions elicit open responses by the participants that enable lines of conversation to be developed in situ in ways that could not have been anticipated'. Based on this notion, Brown and Danaher (2019) and Smith et al. (2012) suggested researchers create a schedule for interview, which ensures that all intended topics are covered but allows for flexibility to explore unanticipated avenues as they arise. As indicated, an interview schedule was created prior to completing the interviews, which was discussed with the supervisory team and a critical ally. This approach allowed for flexibility during the conduct of the interviews. In terms of IPA research, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2011) note that interviews should be led by the participants' concerns and can tell the researcher something that they might not have anticipated. This is a key element of the research approach from the beginning because of concern surrounding the perceived power imbalance that existed between the researcher, as an employee at the college and the participants; both staff and students. The interview schedules (**Appendix 1**) were constructed with a focus on covering the same range of discussion points in each interview, which took into consideration, the setting and structures, timescale and importance of ensuring effective participation.

The interviews began deliberately with a few introductory questions, for example: 'Which A-Levels are you doing? Why did you pick these subjects?' This is an effective and proven approach as it quickly establishes a conducive rapport with the participants and sets the flow of the discussion, this also helped to address the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant as it demonstrated an informal tone to begin the interview. Moser (2018) suggested that the best way to conduct semi-structured interviews is to start with a few introductory and descriptive questions, to enable the participant to talk freely and thus build a friendly rapport. Creating the interview schedule also ensured the exploration of similar topics and aspects of transition with all participants, whilst not being too prescriptive or diverse. The schedule effectively helped to take a considered approach to the researcher's use of language; this was important to avoid asking leading questions, which may manipulate responses, or lead to closed responses, (Pastor et al. 2018). The important thrust was to ensure that the interviews went smoothly by enabling open conversation before getting to the depth of the interview purpose, and explore the participants' experiences of transition. Whilst there was an obvious power imbalance that existed between the researcher as a member of staff, and the participants, consideration of this was reflected upon continuously and the participants were reminded of the researcher's role during the interview and the aim of the research. Early reflections from the initial interview, found that thanking the participants for their valuable contribution to the research, helped reduce the impact of the power imbalance that existed. Putting the students at ease, and equating the questions to the students' understanding helped to provide a relaxed ethos on which answers could be best elicited. All of the participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at any point up to the submission date.

When constructing the interview schedule, consideration was given to a piece of IPA research by Shinebourne (2011), who recommended the researcher takes a neutral tone from the onset and formed questions in such a way to elicit unhindered responses, for example: 'Can you tell me what that experience was like for you? Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience?' In particular, the prompts that had been used in Shinebourne (2011) to delve deeper into the responses, like: 'Can you elaborate on that?' Or 'what was that like for you?', gave a firm structure to the interview technique and enabled the researcher to fully explore the detailed experiences of the participants in a natural and relaxed tone.

Prior to the interviews an explanation was given to each participant that they would direct the flow of the interview and should give an honest account of their experience of transition. It was stressed that there were no right or wrong answers. Additionally, it was made clear that the researcher was interested in their experiences and what they had to say, and that anonymity would be respected at all times. Using this approach enabled the interviewees to feel confident and understand that there was no pre-set agenda, (Smith et al. 2011).

Reflections on the Husserlian phenomenological approach of Epoché, helped to somewhat bracket the researcher's preconceptions of the institutional processes of transition during the information collection stage, (Gregory, 2019). In practical terms these reflections helped to avoid anticipating participants' responses or interjecting in such a way that demonstrated agreement or disagreement with the participants' responses. Such interjections may have manipulated responses and was something the researcher was keen to avoid. However, Fox and Allen (2014) raised the point

that all interpretivist research will on some level be informed by the researcher's point of view. While this may be the case during the analysis stages of the research, during the data collection and interview stages the aim was to be as rigorous as possible, in order to gain an insight into the relevant experiences of the participants, somewhat unhindered by any preconceptions. The maintenance of the reflexive journal aided the researcher to improve on interviewing technique and limit such interjections. Immediately after each interview the researcher transcribed the interview and then reflected on the approach in the research journal, this helped to hone the interview skills and each successive interview had fewer interjections and made use of pauses, as a means to elucidate extended responses.

As suggested, a key ethical issue the researcher was keen to avoid, was influencing responses from participants; as such, the student participants were made up of students with whom the researcher previously had little or no contact. Fine et al (2000) raised the point that when interviewers have prior knowledge of participants, this may lead to researchers influencing the responses from their participants, to further their own interests or agendas. Each individual participant was asked to suggest a place within the college where they would like the interview to take place, to give them some ownership of the research interview setting.

Throughout the interviews, the interview schedule was used as a rough guide and in a flexible manner, to help ensure a similar aspect of transition was explored with all participants, yet at the same time give the interview a flexibility to explore individual experiences and nuances, (Stewart, 2016). The researcher resisted the urge to interpret what was being expressed in situ throughout the interviews, in keeping with

the point raised in Smith et al (2009) that throughout the interview stage researchers should aim to maintain their neutral stance until they come to the analysis. Yet the use of supplementary and follow-up questions, ensured personal experiences were explored in sufficient detail, (Shinebourne, 2011).

On completion of the interviews with the student participants, interviews with the staff participants commenced. This afforded an opportunity to relay a range of anonymised responses from the student participants to the staff participants and ask for comments. To address this ethical issue, the student participants gave their permission prior for their responses to be shared. To do this the researcher selected responses from a range of student participants' responses on themes from the interview schedule such as induction and initial encounters with the college. This strategy was used by Caton and Kagan (2006) and was effective in demonstrating commonalities in transition experience; employing this strategy helped to make comparisons between how both students and staff were experiencing the phenomena, in the subsequent analyses.

Second Interviews (student participants) using Photo-Elicitation

After the first round of interviews with the student and the staff participants, a Google Image task and reflective interview with the student participants was conducted. The student participants were asked to select any six images they liked from Google Images and put them on a word document and bring it along to the interview. This method is similar to 'participant-generated photo-elicitation', (Richard and Lahman, 2013). Patton (2002) posits that such methods of data collection help the researcher

to capture their participants' thoughts, feelings and intentions'. Patton (2002) further noted that such techniques can provide a visual dimension to a participant's experiences that may otherwise be unobservable.

Additionally, Prosser and Schwartz (1998) noted that images could elucidate the indescribable attributes of phenomena, in other words images act as a metaphor, which enable participants to describe their experiences in detail. Akin to this notion, Geary (2012) pointed out that metaphors are an effectual method of shaping how we see and explain the world. Becker (1998) similarly considered the use of photographs in interviewing as an effective method to bring forth intriguing subjectivities of participants through visual metaphors. By asking the participants to bring along any images they had selected to represent their experiences, it gave them the opportunity to take time to consider and reflect on their transition; they were empowered and given agency to do so, (McLaren, 2009; Banks, 2007).

Forms of photo-elicitation have been used in IPA research previously. Burton et al. (2017) conducted IPA research into the quality of life for participants who suffer chronic pain. The researchers here employed a form of photo-elicitation, which acted as visual stimuli to guide the research interviews. Burton et al. (2017) found that the use of visual imagery helped their participants to recollect their experiences more succinctly and the interviews became participant led. Burton et al. (2017) additionally noted that the visual stimuli helped the researcher gain an 'insider' perspective as prescribed by Smith et al (2012) for IPA researchers. Similarly, this insider perspective is analogous to, and built on the earlier notion raised by Gadamer (1975), who suggested that researchers must identifying with the 'horizons' of the

participants. In other words, how the participant experienced the phenomena at that time compared to how they may reflect on the phenomena later, from a different horizon. Through selecting and discussing images that represent their journey through transition, the participants were encouraged to describe how they felt in the moment, during the key stages of transition, from year 11 decision making, to induction and enrolment.

Photo-elicitation offered participants a means of formally reflecting on their lived-experiences. Banks (2007) suggested that researchers should use photo-elicitation methods for interviewing when they want to bring focus to the interview, avoid awkward interviews and help participants to formalise their thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, Harper (2002) made the point that using photo-elicitation methods in interviewing helps to prevent miscommunication between researcher and participant and can evoke more emotional responses.

The interviews where the student participants described the images that they had produced and how they represented their experiences of transition were audio recorded. The student participants were also asked to keep an audit trail of where they had taken the images from via Google Images, (Google's Terms and Conditions, 2019). Smith et al. (2012) raised the issue that interviews may only provide the researcher with a 'snapshot' of the participants' attempts to articulate their experiences. However, the use of the photo-elicitation task coupled with the interview, helped to alleviate this concern by being conducted at different times and through different mediums.

Overall, an argument has been made for a creative methodology centralising on the use of interview as the most appropriate means of encouraging the participants to participate with confidence and understanding in the process. There is an awareness of the challenges which this approach poses but consideration of the literature in this regard, and the research setting suggest the appropriateness of interviewing with significant caveats as detailed above. Significantly, and by affording much time to preparing the interviews and streamlining their commitment to the research intentions, the methodology was appropriate. The outworking of the approach and the analysis to follow give further credence to the chosen design and provide a trustworthy set of data to progress the research conclusions.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for this research; as outlined by Patton (2002) purposeful sampling is used to enable a research study to gain an insight into a particular experience. Given the idiographic nature of IPA, the participants were selected from a group of students and staff who have experienced transition, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The purposeful sample, through asking a specific cohort of first year A-Level learners to volunteer to participate, helped to ensure that the selection process was informed by the participants' abilities to richly describe their experiences of transition, which improves the quality of IPA research, (Miller et al. 2018). The rationale for the inclusion of staff as well as student participants was to ensure the research exposed a holistic picture of transition from varying perspectives of the key players involved; this effective research practice was

previously highlighted in Craig (2009) and Caton and Kagan (2005), who were able to draw comparisons between their cohorts of participants.

In October 2018 all first year A-Level learners were asked to express an interest in being part of the research by emailing the researcher's university email account. An email was sent to every first year A-Level student, which gave a brief overview of the research, and students were asked to reply should they wish to take part. Out of the 240 first year A-Level students, there were four replies, all of whom were female and had come from different secondary schools across the Liverpool City Region. Whilst encouraged by the diversity of female participants from different schools and different parts of the City Region, the researcher was keen to encourage male participation. A justification for the higher response from female students may be because of the ratio of female to male A-Level students in the college. To counter this trend and encourage more male participation, the researcher used the final five minutes of the first-year assembly, to further explain the research intentions and the need for male participation to produce a more credible investigation of the phenomena. From this, another two male participants opted to be involved in the research, one of whom quickly dropped out, after two unsuccessful attempts to schedule an interview. Ultimately, from the student participants, there were four females and one male participant. Smith et al. (2009) recommends 4-6 participants for the IPA researcher, however, the concern of having such a small number of student participants was given significant consideration, and given the addition of the staff participants, this number was considered appropriate and in line with IPA research, (Smith, et al. 2009). Generalisability or replicability are not a facet of IPA research given its idiographic underpinnings, therefore four student participants and

five staff participants were considered sufficient to provide an ample data baseline for analysis.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was also used to select the staff participants for the research. In November 2018, an email was sent out to all staff who either teach first year A-Level students or are pastoral tutors and work with this cohort. There were seven responses to the researcher's university email account, from participants who wished to participate. From these seven responses, five participants were selected, these included: two female A-Level teachers, who teach different subjects, one male A-Level teacher, one female pastoral tutor and the Lead Pastoral tutor. The two additional respondent volunteers were also female A-Level teachers, who taught the same subjects as the other respondents, these both were thanked for volunteering and given an explanation appreciatively via email why they had not been selected, which was because of the overrepresentation from female teachers who taught the same subjects as they did. The high female participant responses can be understood and rationalised by the high ratio of female to male members of staff at the college.

Once all the participants had been selected, an email was sent to each of them which thanked them for volunteering. Arrangements were made to meet with the student participants for a brief discussion in November 2018, where the research information sheet was shared and the interview schedule was discussed. This gave the participants an opportunity to think about what would be discussed and offer advice on what they thought they could share about their experiences. For instance, one student participant proposed a change in the running order of the questions to

make the discussion more fluid; through reflection on the points made, the schedule was updated accordingly. Ethical considerations were also discussed, which will be explored further in the subsequent subsection. The researcher arranged to meet the five student participants the following week, at an agreed time and in a classroom which they selected and were familiar with. Along with the research information sheet, an informed consent form and a parental consent form was given to the participants **(Appendix 2)**, which as explained were to be returned prior to the interview.

During the selection and interview stages the researcher recognised the implications of the power imbalance that was in existence, both with the student and the staff participants, one of which was more senior, one was in the same job role and three were less senior. Therefore, a complexity of power dynamics and imbalances existed. During every interaction with the participants during the research, the role of the researcher was stressed as being distinct from that of a teacher/leader, all communication with participants was made via the researcher's university email account and the student participants selected were not taught by the researcher, to limit the impact of the power imbalance. Gallagher (2008, p.137) referred to the 'oppositional model of power', which perceives power to be held by the dominant researcher and exerted over the 'subordinate' participants. In terms of the student participation two further considerations are highlighted by Gallagher (2008, p.137):

i)   'Children may exploit, appropriate, redirect, contest or refuse participatory techniques.

ii)   Researchers may unwittingly reproduce the regulation of children by insisting upon certain forms of participation, in the belief that this constitutes empowerment.'

These notions raised by Gallagher (2008) acted as a reminder of the importance of critical review during the analysis of the interview transcripts and informed the conceptual commentary and themes on the table analysis; this will be explored further in the subsequent section. The reflective task using Google Images which was conducted in February 2019 further helped to redress the concerns with power relationships between the researcher and the student participants, because this gave the student participants the opportunity to direct the interview and they exerted autonomy and agency over the selection of images and hence directed the conversation unhindered by the researcher. As established in the literature review, the researcher understands transition as a process rather than an event, by conducting the second round of interviews and Google Image task in February 2019, this allowed over a full term of the student participants being at college and more familiar with the college setting. This also ensured that the student participants had a more consolidated view of their transition experiences. Conducting the Google Image interviews at this stage also acted as a means of reflection for the participants, who considered their experiences of transition from the beginning of the year and then again in February.

Similarly, the student participants were asked to comment on the usefulness of using images to aid their discussions which gave them the opportunity to critique the strategy, which gave them 'power' or ability to appraise the approach, and further

helped to redress the power dynamics. Gallagher (2008) offered a further suggestion, that researchers should alter their normative everyday practices, so as not to be perceived as authoritarian. A conscious effort was made to address all participants, at every exchange, as peers rather than students/colleagues.

Formation of Case Studies in IPA

There were nine participants in total who were interviewed in depth, four student participants and five members of staff. Three of the student participants were female and one was male, similarly, all but one of the staff participants were female. Each student participant had come from a different secondary school to the college. Pseudonyms have been given to all participants to protect confidentiality. The staff participants were all teachers and worked directly with students undergoing transition, two of the staff participants had additional roles, team leadership and pastoral duties respectively. In IPA studies it is convention for each participant and their data to be referred to as a case study, and data retrieved from each participant, at various points make up the case study, (Smith et al. 2009); this highlights and strengthens the importance of the participant's voice in IPA research and together with the depth of discussion anticipated indicates more precisely the value of the sample chosen. There were nine participants in total, or in IPA terms there were nine case studies. Figure two below provides an overview of the participants/case studies of the present research.

Figure 2: Overview of participants

Participant Pseudonym	Case Study	Teacher/Student
John	CS1	A-Level Student
Jill	CS2	A-Level Student
Megan	CS3	A-Level Student
Michaela	CS4	A-Level Student
Donna	CS5	Teacher
Chris	CS6	Teacher/Team Leader
Mary	CS7	Teacher
Marie	CS8	Teacher
Eileen	CS9	Teacher/Pastoral Leader

Limitations of IPA

A reliance of language has been noted as a factor which places limitations on IPA research. Willig (2013) highlights the risk that the researcher will find out more about the language being used to describe the phenomena rather than the actual experience. Through reflection in action (Schon, 1983) during interviews with participants, questions and language were amended, clarification was sought and the accommodation theory Giles et al. (2007) was employed to ensure appropriate lived experiences were elicited and discussed in detail. The accommodation theory

relates to the adaptation of language to accommodate or fully include participants in conversation.

A further limitation of IPA is derived from its commitment to hermeneutics. According to Noon (2017, p.75): 'as this [hermeneutical] process is invariably influenced and complicated by the researcher's own preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962), IPA recognises that is impracticable to gain access to the exact personal world of another completely or directly'. The aim of the researcher is not to gain complete or direct access to the lived experiences of the participants, but rather to obtain a description which is as close as possible to the participants' confirmed views, (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). In this manner the combined experiences of the participants enabled an in-depth analysis and interpretation to be carried out with effect. Of significant importance throughout the conduct of the present research was the reflexive journal, which was used to consider the positionality of the researcher to limit and consider the impact of the researcher's tacit knowledge. The size of the sample is often considered to be a limitation in IPA research, yet this is noted in Smith et al. (2009) as a contentious issue with no right or wrong answer, and the purpose of IPA research is the commitment to in-depth case study analysis.

3.6 Ethics

In October 2018, a first application for ethical clearance was sent to the university's Ethics Board. After making a few amendments in November 2018, a resubmitted ethical approval form was granted permission. Throughout the conduct of the present research, the researcher has been informed by both the British Educational

Research Association's (2018) Ethical guidelines for Educational Research and the university's Ethical Guidelines (2018). Consideration of both sets of guidelines have helped to shape many methodological decisions in terms of planning, conducting data collection, interacting with participants and the write up of this thesis.

Consideration throughout the conduct of this research was also given to the 'cost benefits ratio' as outlined by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992), the researchers here suggested that the rights of participants must never be dismissed, in the pursuit of actual views and/or experiences. This recommendation has remained a guiding principle throughout and through ongoing reflection and the maintenance of a research journal, participants' rights and welfare remained paramount. A range of early analyses and emergent themes were shared with participants to seek agreement and credibility, but also to ensure that they understood and were content with the analyses and interpretation of the responses offered.

Following consideration of Noon (2017) who highlighted IPA's commitment to 'giving voice' to the research participants and given the thrust to ensure that participants were enabled to have a voice through this research, consideration was given to the ethical standards raised by Singer (2011) who pointed out that participation in research should be enjoyable and enhance both the social and emotional aspects of the participants' lives. The researcher was keen to ensure that the participants felt as though they benefitted from their participation in the research and that their participation was not just for the researcher's benefit. To assess this, both student and staff participants were asked to reflect on their involvement in the research and

in particular the staff participants were very open, with regards to how their participation had been a useful means of reflection and 'catharsis'. Swain (2016) similarly described the need for mutual benefits for both researcher and participant in the conduct of ethical research, and consideration of this, led to participants being asked to reflect on their participation. Participants were asked to reflect in order to genuinely consider the impact that their participation had had on their transition experience. Additionally, at each interaction with the participants, how valuable their contributions were and how their participation will benefit themselves and their peers was expressed.

As alluded, all correspondence between all participants and the researcher has been via the university email account. This approach helped to illustrate that the researcher was acting on behalf of the university, rather than as a member of staff at the college. The researcher had sole access to this account and this helped ensure that any correspondence remained private and confidential. To reiterate, all participants under the age of 18, were asked to complete an informed consent form and have their parents/guardians complete a consent form prior to their participation in the research. Informed consent was given by all student participants and their parents/guardians before the data collection took place. Informed consent was also provided by all staff participants prior to their interviews. In addition to the guidelines from the university (2018), written permission to conduct the research within the sixth-form centre of the college, was sought and granted from the Assistant Principal. The researcher deemed this good practice, to ensure that senior management were aware that research was being conducted on site.

All participants and their parents (if under 18) were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point in the research up until August 2020. The right to withdraw was made explicit on the research information sheets, **(Appendix 2).** One original student participant took part in the first round of interviews and then dropped out from college at Christmas 2018. Attempts were made to contact the participant to suggest conducting the second phase of data collection, but there was no reply to emails or phone calls. After a discussion with the university supervisory team, the recording was deleted from the interview and the transcript. This was frustrating because this participant had obviously experienced transition in such a way that led to them dropping out from their A-Levels and the college, which would have given an interesting perspective to the research. However, on reflection on the point alluded to earlier by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992), that the rights of the participants must never be overlooked in the researcher's pursuit of lived experiences, it was decided that the participant's lack of response amounted to a withdrawal.

All interviews were recorded on the researcher's personal MacBook and once the interviews were over, the audio files were saved using an anonymous file name, which was password protected. The MacBook similarly has a password, which only the researcher can access, and which means that the data retrieved from the interviews were doubly password protected. As is standard practice in IPA, each file was named Case Study 1 to Case Study 9, (Smith et al. 2009). This technique further anonymised the participants and ensured confidentiality; each participant was made aware after each interview, that this was the method being adopted to safeguard their confidentiality, and they were happy with these safeguards.

During the transcription and analysis stages, all participants were given a pseudonym, either Case Study 1-9 or a random letter, used in the transcription, at no point was any real name used or any identifying information. When participants described another student or member of staff a pseudonym was used also, for example Mr. X or Peer A. Cresswell (2013) noted that ethical dilemmas may occur at any point over the course of the research, to limit this, every participant was reminded about their right to withdraw at any time up to August 2020. Additionally, a clear explanation was given to each participant prior to interview, that should they disclose any information which is potentially illegal or a safeguarding issue, then the researcher was obliged to contact the relevant authorities. No such issues occurred. As the research is phenomenological in nature, one cannot preconceive the intricacies of what participants will divulge during interviews. The researcher adopted seven ethical standards, which are based on both BERA's Ethical Guidelines (2018) and the university's Ethical Guidelines (2018), but are differentiated to suit the needs of present research. These were:

i) Each participant must volunteer freely to participate in the research.

ii) All participants must be given an information sheet about the research, which includes: the aims and objectives of the research, how their participation will be of benefit to themselves and others, how their data will be stored and analysed and their right to withdraw from the research up to 20th August 2020.

iii) All participants will complete an informed consent form and those participants under 18 will additionally have informed consent from their parents.

iv)   Permission will be granted by the Assistant Principal prior to conducting the research.

v)   Ethical permission will be granted from the University's Ethics Committee.

vi)   The university's Ethical Guidelines will be adhered to throughout the conduct of the research.

vii)   In the researcher's reflections, reflective research journal, analyses, interpretation, results and findings, ethical consideration remained paramount.

3.7 Data Analysis

Prior to taking the decision to employ the Smith et al (2009) approach to the data analysis, consideration was given to Miles and Hubenman's (1994) twelve-step approach to analysing qualitative data; however, as IPA requires a detailed level of analysis, applying Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach may have failed to capture the level of detail required for effective IPA research. Additionally, consideration was given to Hycner's (1985) approach to the analysis of the qualitative data, however, for similar reasons to the dismissal of Miles and Huberman (1994) and after critical discussions, a decision was taken to use the approach offered in Smith et al (2009), to ensure analysis was conducted to the necessary level of detail required to conduct effective IPA research.

Transcription and Case by Case Analysis

As IPA is committed to idiography, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by hand and analysed in-depth for all nine case studies individually, (Smith et al. 2009). When analysing the student participant interviews, both transcripts were brought together and analysed as one case study, Smith et al (2009) recommends this organisation of all data in this way to enable all analysed data to be traced right through the process, which is important because it enables the subsequent cross case study analysis to be conducted more effectively. The researcher listened to each audio recording five times and re-read the transcriptions, this enabled an immersion in the data and gave the researcher an extensive familiarity with each of the case studies. Tables for the analysis were created, which had the verbatim transcript in the middle column, the right column was used to write descriptive comments, language comments and conceptual comments, **(see Figure 1).** The left-hand column was then used for noting emergent themes, which were then grouped/clustered together into superordinate themes and their frequency noted, **(Appendix 3)**.

Figure 1: Table Analysis of Case Study One: John

<u>Emergent Themes</u>	<u>Transcript</u>	<u>Exploratory Notes</u>
	1. N: so what then, or what information do you get about a student before they	

	actually sit in your classroom?	Vulnerable or SEN learners further marginalised by ineffective systems and processes?
Marginalised students SEN	C: very little…before they sit in the classroom, if we are lucky we might get a profile of their grades or prior attainment…am if we go looking for it…and depending on the number of students you've got that becomes a real task and we don't get the information until 3-4 weeks in…if we are lucky… mental health needs and special educational needs. Variable.	
Transition positive (for some)		
Isolation		Positive transition means students feel supported from day one?
Negative experience of education		*'on their side' they are not isolated.*
Parental involvement SEN		*'they matter' shows empathy and caring.*

In the above figure, the right-hand column used underlined font for conceptual commentary, *italic* font for language comments and plain font for descriptive comments. This ensured that the emergent themes were created based on all three aspects of IPA analysis: language, concept and descriptive analyses. Once all case studies were individually analysed, the next stage was to carry out cross case analysis. This involved looking for patterns across the cases and clustering into

master themes, **(Appendix 4).** Polarisation was used to identify oppositional relationships, subsumption was used to develop superordinate themes from the subordinate themes, and numeration was used to identify the frequency of themes, (Smith et al. 2009). The frequency of themes was informative but not used in isolation, the language, descriptive commentary, emergent themes and superordinate themes from the analysis informed the results chapter.

The results chapter was structured by identifying the superordinate themes from both sets of participants. Then each superordinate theme was discussed with reference to the transcripts. The results chapter examined the results and the discussion chapter further discussed the results which was synthesised and nuanced with extant literature from the literature review.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Throughout the conduct of the present research there has been a commitment to the philosophical principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. As suggested by Miller et al. (2018) IPA research must adhere to all three aspects of its philosophical underpinnings. To demonstrate commitment and rigour, an attentiveness to participants was maintained throughout the present research. Yardley (2000) offered guidelines for ensuring credibility in IPA research; the four guiding principles include: Commitment and Rigour, Sensitivity to Context, Transparency and Coherence and Impact and Importance. Where possible participants were involved in the research process, either through discussions on the research topic prior to interviewing with all participants and through the Google

Images Task with the student participants. Ethical considerations remained paramount and participants were given the opportunity to discuss early interpretations of their responses.

To ensure rigour an independent reviewer and critical ally, generated themes from the data, which were then compared to the researcher's emergent themes, which demonstrated consensus. As suggested by Alase (2017) triangulation must be adopted in IPA research as a mechanism for the analysis of data. The researcher shared the analysis of two case studies and a selection of pertinent paragraphs from the results chapter, which included the researcher's interpretations of the interviews, with two staff participants. Both participants were asked to comment on the analysis and interpretations. These participants generally agreed with the analyses and interpretations, which gave the researcher the opportunity to justify the interpretations and discuss the phenomena further. In particular, this gave the researcher an opportunity to discuss individual words elucidated by the participants during interview and how these were perceived.

Sensitivity to context was demonstrated in this approach. The researcher reflectively considered the professional role within the institution and the relationship with both the staff and student participants. Steps were taken, as previously outlined, to address the power dynamics between the participants and the researcher with an emphasis on building rapport and trust.

3.8 Modifications and Improvements

The pilot study proved effective in assessing whether to use group or individual interviews. Nevertheless, this pilot study had a narrow focus and could have been improved by assessing a range of data collection approaches, including the use of the Google Image task. Student participants were asked to reflect on the use of this approach in their second interview, however, if the pilot study had a broader focus and prospective participants were asked to reflect on the effectiveness of a wider range of data collection methods, this may have facilitated a more participant informed and inclusive approach to methodological decision making.

The use of Google Images in the second round of interviews with the student participants proved effective in retrieving a greater quantity of data, through extended responses. This approach was employed solely with the student participants, however, should this approach have been adopted with staff participants, it may have led to additional data being retrieved from the staff.

3.9 Summary of Methodology

Following extensive consideration, the methodology for the present research was chosen with key components in mind, including the central determination to explore an area often neglected but of potential benefit to educational practice, understanding and improvement. With emphasis on the voice of participants (Gersch 2016) integral to the design, the overarching aim of identifying views and offering common meaning to the experience of transition is a clear perspective of the

methodology used. Husserl's views stand out by stressing the reliance on 'how' to help analyse how participants view the concept of transition. Small numbers meant an in-depth approach and, as argued, the interview schedule and the interview technique, including the reflective journal, gave a robust means of inquiry into the transition experience at the college. Ensuring confidentiality and enabling openness by addressing concerns of power imbalance gave the methodology a strength which participants appreciated and willingly responded to. In principle, the approach enabled staff and students to explore their views and offer opinions which they thought would help others and as such strengthen the focus on transition as a consequence.

Chapter Four: Results

Chapter Four

4.1 Introduction to the Results

This chapter provides an overview of evidence from the outworking of the interviews with the participants who have taken part in the research. The findings from analysis of the transcript data are presented, which have been examined using IPA, as detailed in Chapter Three. Interpretations in this chapter are drawn from the accompanying data from the participants, rather than supposition from the researcher's implicit knowledge based on professional experience. This is particularly challenging for researchers who engage with a professional doctorate and as such steps were taken to check with the supervisory team, for any tendency to draw implications from professional experience rather than from the research data. To endeavour in this approach, the research journal was employed principally during analysis as a form of self-reflection for the researcher, and to assess whether interpretations were remaining true to the responses from the participants. According to Rowe (2014) adopting a reflexive approach should enable a reduction of bias and partisanship, however the researcher understands, through the use of IPA that interpretations of interview data can never be objective understandings of the participants' lived realities, (Dubois, 2015).

Both super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes have been identified for each individual case study (participant) as well as for the group together. The numeration and extent to which participants described a particular topic have been examined on

both an individual case study basis, as well as collectively. The sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes, which have been identified, through cross case study analysis, will be discussed and comparisons from both sets of participants, students and staff, highlighted. The divergence and convergence of the identified clusters and patterns are examined and presented in this chapter, alongside a more detailed interpretation of the transcripts. The use of language has also been carefully examined with emphasis on the individual participant's unique experience. Verbatim responses are used throughout the chapter, followed by the researcher's interpretations. Corden and Sainsbury (2005) highlighted that participants like to have their spoken words used in research studies, which is mutually beneficial for the participants and the research itself as it also raises the profile of the participant's voice as a central aspect of the present research.

The case studies for the student participants, as alluded, were created by combining the transcripts from both interviews, which is accepted practice in IPA research studies, (Smith et al. 2009). An in-depth analysis of case studies one to four, with the student participants, highlighted three main super-ordinate themes: 1.) Relationships and Interactions, 2.) Influences and Psychological Impact of Transition, 3.) Transition in Learning, **(Appendix 5).**

Figure 3 below outlines the super-ordinate themes and their sub-ordinate themes, from the student participants, which were created from the transcript analysis of both the initial interview and the subsequent interview and Google image task.

Figure 3: <u>**Super-Ordinate and Sub-Ordinate Themes from Student Data**</u>

Relationships and Interactions	• Teacher relationships • Peer relationships • Belongingness
Psychological Impact of Transition	• Chaos and Confusion • Identity
Transition in Learning	• Educational focus • Trajectory
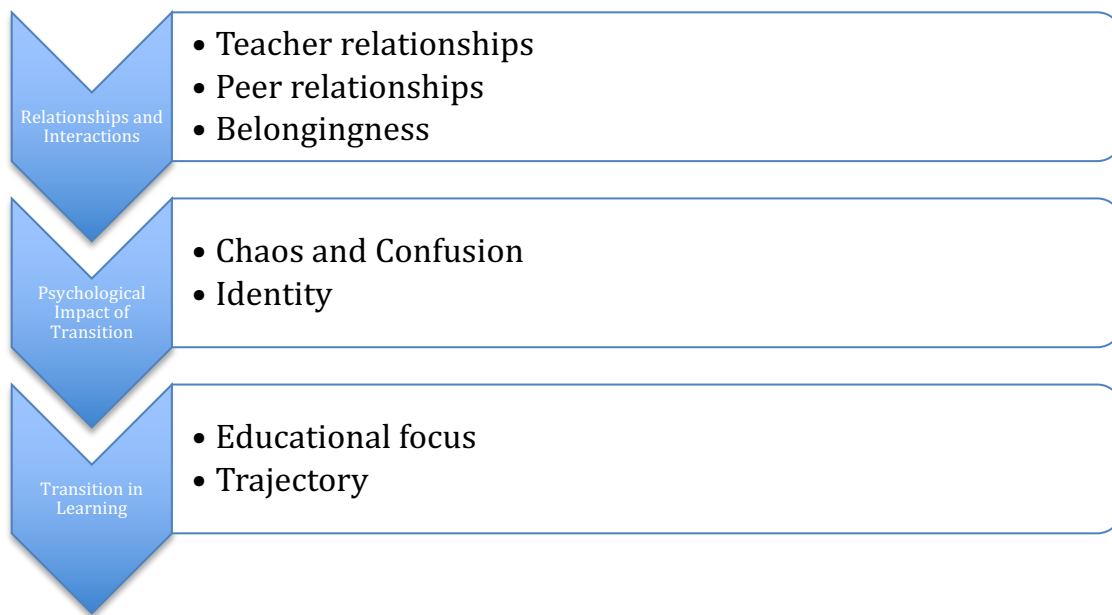
Many sub-ordinate themes were identified from examining and analysing the data **(Appendix 6)**, these were clustered together based on their numeration and the extent to which the participants discussed the topic, throughout the transcripts and were linked to their over-arching super-ordinate themes. In the analysis, the number of super-ordinate themes were reduced to three from each set of participants, which is recommended practice in IPA analysis, this was done to ensure the researcher achieved a more detailed and synthesised analysis of the transcripts, which is greater served by having fewer themes, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The reduction enabled the sub-ordinate themes to be clustered into the overarching super-ordinate themes which best addressed the research question.

With regards to emergent themes, a summary is provided in **(Appendix 6),** which highlights the clustering and creation of each sub-ordinate theme. This method was employed for each case study to summarise the sub-ordinate themes that emerged

from every case study. This helped in the cross-case analysis and in the creation of the super-ordinate themes, as this visually represents the data. Each super-ordinate theme and its corresponding sub-ordinate themes were given a specific colour, as demonstrated in the table analysis, **(Appendix 7)**. The reflexive journal was again maintained throughout this process, which enabled the researcher to focus on the data and limit the analysis being imbued by the researcher's institutional knowledge. In other words, this helped the researcher to interrogate the data more justifiably, (Smith et al. 2009).

Emerging from the above, the following subsections have been divided logically into their corresponding super-ordinate themes for the student participants, followed by the super-ordinate themes from the staff participants; these have been structured in order of dominance and importance, from the analyses. This chapter will finish by drawing together the evidence from the analyses to provide a conclusion, which highlights comparisons between the experiences of the students, with that of the staff. In this manner it is aimed that key findings will emerge to inform the transition debate and indicate areas for improvement.

4.2 Students: Relationships and Interactions

This super-ordinate theme was created from clustering together three sub-ordinate themes: Relationship with Teachers, Relationship with Peers and Sense of Belonging. The subordinate themes were created from clustering together emergent themes, which were related and relevant to the subordinate themes, as all of the

student participants, in their interview transcripts indicated the core relationship concept as it relates to their teachers, peers and their sense of security.

4.2.1 Students: Relationship with Teachers

All four of the participants were new to the college and in their first term of their two-year A-Level programme. Three of the participants, John, Jill and Michaela had met their teachers prior to starting their course, however Megan had started at a different Sixth-Form in September and only joined her current college, two weeks into term. Notably, three participants highlighted how the relationship dynamics had changed, between their relationships with their school teachers and their college teachers.

> *'…and some of the teachers [school] were like… negative relationships… like I was seen as smart there but am they tried to pressure me to make me stay…' (John, line 23)*

> *'…they [school teachers] kinda babied me there in a sense… like the Head Teacher was like come to sixth-form, come to sixth-form…' (Michaela, line 28)*

John's extract indicates his strong sense self-awareness, by saying: 'I was seen as smart', he was confirming that he perceives himself as smart, but by relaying that others regarded him as smart, reinforced this perception. The pause before 'negative relationships' suggests that he has thought about this and his reasons for feeling this way are explained by the 'pressure' placed on him to remain in the school's sixth-form. His decision to move to a new institution despite the 'pressure' may indicate

that John felt as though he had outgrown his school, he wanted a change and new challenges. John had strong opinions about his experiences of transition from school to college and this emerged in his interview answers, which also suggests, as does the responses of the other students, that they have considered their thoughts about their own transition experiences.

Michaela used the phrasal verb 'babied' to describe her relationship with her teachers at school. This infers she has gained a sense of independence and maturity and is no longer wanting or needing to be 'babied'. Her use of repetition '…come to sixth-form, come-to sixth-form', similar to John, highlights the pressure she felt from her teachers to remain at her school's sixth form. Her decision not to remain at her school's sixth-form further emphasises her emerging sense of independence.

Conversely, Megan spoke more positively about her relationship with her teachers in school.

> *'…we had so much support from our teachers and like am helped us … to get better grades in our GCSEs…we had loads of study sessions like every day after school, and for different subjects…' (Megan, line 23)*

Megan begins by affirming the positive support she felt from her school teachers, this is emphasised by the phrase 'so much' and the further remark: 'to get better grades…' indicates that she may have felt the support was academic rather than pastoral, or indeed useful in terms of supporting her with post-16 choices. Megan further remarks that her school did not have a sixth form and most students went to a

local sixth form, in close proximity. Megan explains that she firstly went to a sixth-form college in another county for two weeks and then to her current college, which is in a different local authority.

'…well at first, I went to [Name of Sixth Form], I just didn't like it, it wasn't really for me…and then I heard about this college from a few of my friends who came here and I thought it was really good…' (Megan, line: 33)

'…the subjects were different too at [Name of Sixth Form], but that didn't matter as much, because am… well I just didn't like it so I wanted to change…' (Megan, line 34)

While Megan spoke positively about the academic support she received in school, her experience of the false start in the other sixth-form, coupled with her decision to change and move to her current college at the beginning of term, may indicate the lack of appropriate support she received from school when making her post-16 decisions. Although she has not made this point explicitly, this is inferred through her focusing on the positive aspects of her teacher dynamics in school, and her omission with regards to the pastoral or IAG support from her teachers. This interpretation is further justified by her decision to change A-Level subjects entirely when moving from her original sixth form to her current college; notably the choice of A-Levels seemed less important in her decision to change post-16 provider. She clearly expressed the need for a new beginning and was open to develop new working relationships and learning pathways. Nevertheless, as she indicated her improved experience reflects on how she settled and was supported in doing so. A further

question arises as to what were the elements which provided her with a more positive feeling.

All four participants demonstrated a degree of consensus in their descriptions of their newly formed relationships with their college teachers. Jill and Michaela placed emphasis on the personable aspects of their teachers and the more adult relationships they now enjoy, whereas John placed more importance on the academic aspects of his teacher relationships.

> *'…'cause I love films and it's just like the lesson as a whole is enjoyable and [teacher's name] is really nice… am she's a good teacher and I knew I could go to her if I needed to…' (Michaela, line 10)*

> *'… [teacher's name] was really helpful and [teacher's name] was the person who really did it for me, so she was helpful and supportive.' (Michaela, line: 74)*

Michaela used her teacher's name repeatedly in her remarks above, she also used 'really' repetitively and with positive intonation, to emphasise the help and support she had experienced. Michaela discusses her positive relationship with her college teacher repetitively at different points in the interview, which suggests two things; firstly, that the relationship with her teacher is important to her and using the teacher's first name repeatedly, as is standard practice in FE, indicates that she perceives a more approachable or indeed equal status in her newly established relationship with her college teachers, that was contrary to the relationship with her

school teachers. Her repetition of 'really' stresses the level of support she felt from her teacher; this repetition is being employed as a persuasive technique and perhaps hyperbolising the level of support she has received, in order to demonstrate to the researcher that this teacher relationship that she has established has been instrumental. It may well be that the contact with the college staff, which has been expressed in a positive tone has helped her to develop a sense of maturity and to feel confident in the interview to express this. All in all, Michaela demonstrated in her interview a sense of being at ease and thus more willing to engage with staff.

When asked about her IAG experience in school, Jill responded:

'…no there wasn't much really, it was just like go to this sixth form… because of my sets it was just go there… there was some career conventions but they were just aimed at apprenticeships.' (Jill, line: 125)

Jill then compared this to her experiences of support from college:

'…I got a lot of support and I can always ask for help and I would feel a lot more supported.' (Jill, line: 127)

Jill explains her negative experience with IAG at school and felt as though it was mechanistic support, you either go to sixth-form or you do an apprenticeship. Jill on the contrary spoke of the positive support she feels at college; however, she is talking in the future tense: 'I would'. This indicates that she may not have had any need for additional support from her teachers, but is quite confident that should she

have any problems she has confidence in knowing, a good level of support is available.

> *'…there are lots of good teachers here who generally make lessons fun and that is something that I enjoy and it makes me want to do the lessons more.'*
> *(John, line: 99)*

John's extract focuses on his need for the lessons to be beneficial to himself and his academic progression, which indicates his relationship with his teachers. By indicating there are 'lots of good teachers' rather than 'all are good teachers', there is an insinuation that he may not have formed or benefited from good relationships with all of his teachers. The subsequent use of the adjective 'generally' to describe the fun lessons similarly implies that his positive experience with learning, since being at the college may not be consistent. The hedge terms 'lots' and 'generally' are suggestive of his overall positive experiences since coming to college, but may also suggest that not all of his experiences thus far, in terms of his relationship with his teachers, have been as positive as others. The pauses at each end of his extract, may demonstrate that he is giving a considered response and perhaps is eliciting or failing to elicit, by omission, his interpretation of his experience; perhaps because of the power dynamic that exists between him as the participant and the researcher, or alternatively, himself as a student and the researcher as a teacher and member of college staff. Despite this consideration and his use of hedge terms, his response in terms of his relationship with his college teachers is overwhelmingly positive. At the earlier stage of his interview he compared his teachers in school to his teachers in

college, which further suggests his positivity towards the new dynamics, he enjoys with his college teachers.

'…and everything seemed a lot stricter but less strict… like more focused-on education and being yourself, which made me really want to come here…'
(John, line 43)

'…this college cares more about the ways that you are learning…and this college cares more about where you're going in life instead of how you dress and how you speak, which is much more superficial'. (John, line: 45)

This extract highlights John's growing sense of maturity and his self-awareness. He is drawing parallels between his educational identity and that of his new college identity. He perceives his learning as his reason for being in both school and college and trivialises the issues like uniform, as being ancillary to his learning and the purpose of him being in education. This gives an insight into his college and personal development and implies some resentment for his old school and teachers for focusing on what he now deems unimportant or trivial. His focus is singly on his career, and the rules and regulations which surround school and college life, hold less value to him. The adjective 'superficial' indicates his academic focus and as he is reflecting on his experiences of his school teachers, he is demonstrating his changing identity, in terms of how he relates to, and interacts with his teachers at college.

Summary

Relationships and interactions emerged as a common theme, shared by all of the student participants who are undergoing transition at the college. The participants' relationships with their teachers and their peers was a recurring theme in all four case studies, with each participant highlighting their relationship with their teacher/s as an important factor which underpinned the success of their perceived experiences of transition. A developing sense of belonging was also an important factor, which was emphasised repeatedly across all four case studies. Additionally, all four participants shared the various experiences with IAG both at school and in college, in respect to their experiences of transition.

In essence, all participants stressed the benefits of having a positive working relationship as a foundation to their positive feelings of confidence and capacity to engage well with their course. At the initial stage of college entry, the students expressed the need to feel secure and be able to seek and ask for help and support when needed. This underlines the importance of ensuring that there are ample and transparent levels of support for students from the point of contact with the college and during their initial period of college life.

4.2.2 Students: Relationships with Peers

In the analysis from the interviews with the student participants, the relationship with peers was another common theme. Only two of the participants, had made their transition from school alongside friends. Megan and Michaela knew some students

who had come from the same school that they had respectively attended. Both John and Jill moved from different areas to the college and knew nobody else from their school who were coming to the same college.

> *'…I think friends and parents spoke about coming to [name of current college] … I mean like me mum wanted me to go to dead good schools, not like [name of false start college] and not to rough ones, she would like me to come here and like be with friends… who liked it here… (Megan, line: 36)*

This extract from Megan's transcript perhaps provides the influences on her rationale for changing colleges two weeks into term. It would appear that her unhappiness at her first-choice sixth-form was then compounded by her friends' positive reflection of their first-choice college, which acted an impetus for her to attend her current college. Megan later in the transcript describes it being: *'easier to make friends here' (Megan, line: 59),* which may illustrate that she had not previously considered the importance of having peer relationships, when undergoing transition. Having those friends who had moved from the same school, acted for Megan as a catalyst for making new friends in the new setting. Conversely, having a lack of existing friendships, in the two weeks she attended her first-choice college may have contributed to the negative experience and eventual breakdown of her placement there.

When describing her first impressions of college Michaela remarked:

'…big am… welcoming well I was a bit nervous but I had me two friends from [name of school] so they helped. (Michaela, line: 64)

Michaela's pause at the beginning of the extract indicates her considered response, from starting with it was 'welcoming' and then describing the experience as being 'a bit nervous'. She contrasts her feelings of nervousness in an almost dismissive fashion, by saying: 'but I had me two friends' which suggests that although she initially perceived her first impressions of college with a degree of nervousness, this was short-lived and quickly overcome through having her two friends. In some ways, this underlines the significance of students having friends to rely on when in a new setting which also may indicate the need for college planning to take into effect the sense of wellbeing intrinsic to a strange environment. While there is inevitably going to be a disparity in transition experiences between those who transition with friendship groups and those who do not, transition planning should consider this and identify where certain students may require additional support to settle into their new education environment.

John on the other hand, through his positive intonations, seemed quite pleased to be leaving his peers from school and embarking on a new journey to college, where he would not know any other students. Jill shared a similar experience.

'…they all stayed in sixth form or went to the college across the road…the people were a lot nicer [here] and everything seemed less strict.' (John, line: 61)

'…I didn't like the people there [in school] and I wanted to be more independent.' (Jill, line: 17)

Both participants above described their negative peer relationships in school. Their decision to attend a college which was further afield to their local sixth form, seemed influenced by this fact. Both participants separated themselves from their peers at school. John used the pronoun 'they' which highlights that he perceives himself differently to the other students in school. Similarly, Jill described her fellow peers in school as 'the people' which may suggest her feelings of separation from them, the omission of a possessive or collective pronoun by Jill may further hyperbolise the fact that she felt as though she did not belong there. Jill appears to be separating herself from her school identity and is now focused on developing her forming identity as a college student. She later describes her anxieties around meeting new people.

'…on my first day I met six people who were really nice and I got along with them…am…like we would go out after for lunch with but they were doing different subjects and I had to adjust to meeting new people again…' (Jill, line: 85)

Initially this extract would suggest that Jill found it easy to make new friends, however she chooses the noun 'people' as opposed to 'friends' to describe her new peers, indicating these were merely people she had spoken to on her first day and these remain 'people' rather than developing into friendships. The fact that she later 'had to adjust' infers her anxieties and perceived difficulties when making new friends, as she 'had to'; this is an imperative she placed on herself. For Jill, she may have felt as though she had to 'adjust' to the induction week, where she was beginning to establish friendships; only to have to readjust the following week with a whole new set of peers on her particular A-Level programme. What is evident is the changing nature of the identities and experiences of settling into a new setting and meeting new peers, day on day.

John takes a few opportunities to compare his peers at school with those at college.

> *'I feel like… there's a lot more people who I can relate to here than there [school]'. (John, line: 145)*

> *'…in high school it's always the same people and the same rigid structure as these same people with these same beliefs…but in college it always feels like it is different people, that always have different beliefs…which I think has made it feel more comfortable'. (John, line: 147)*

In both extracts John juxtaposes his experiences with his peers at school, to that of college, to highlight the contrast in his experiences. He disliked the conformity and rigidity he experienced in school and the perceived narrow mindedness he

associates with his school peers. He conveys his sense of broadmindedness at his exposure to 'different people' with 'different beliefs', which may allude to his sense of being separate from the others at school. Nevertheless, the diversity that he has been experiencing since coming to the college has made him 'feel more comfortable'. His positive intonations when expressing these sentiments and the extent to which he discusses this confirm his newfound identity in his chosen education establishment.

Summary

All four of the student participants highlighted the importance of peer relationships, when undergoing transition. The importance of this has been expressed positively for Michaela and Megan, who found having existing peer relationships beneficial when adjusting to their new college. Both John and Jill reflected negatively on their experiences with peers in their school but perceived their transition to college as an opportunity to establish new friendships, given the greater diversity of people they are exposed to in college. An overriding factor to emerge is the students' understanding of being in stronger control of their capacity to form relationships without the constraints of their previous school experiences. In general terms, this raises the issue of the student evolving his/her self-awareness and acceptance of the college environment with its more open regime as pertinent.

4.2.3 Students: Sense of Belonging

The theme of belonging arose significantly across all four student participants'
transcripts. When each participant was asked if they felt as though they belonged at
the college, they all answered in the affirmative and explained how feeling as though
they belonged was important during their transition.

> *'…because it is so diverse, I have a 19-year-old in my class and I am 16 and
> there is just so…much diversity around the college, which is better than [name
> of school] because everyone… there was only a few people who weren't
> white… and like so I guess in that sense yeah, I do feel like I belong…'*
> *(Michaela, line: 126)*

> *'…I didn't like feel like I belonged in school because I thought: why am I here?*
> *(Michaela, line 130)*

> *'It's very welcoming and I love the people around me and everyone is unique
> and friendly and…(pause) It just feels very homely.' (Jill, line: 207)*

For the participants, having greater diversity than they had previously experienced in
school, increased their sense of belonging and indeed their interest in their peers.
Both Michaela and Jill expressed this because of the range of visible differences in
their peers, there was more of a sense that they were all unique, but that did not
matter, because they all belonged together as fellow students. For Michaela, her
experience of diversity in school was a 'few people who weren't white', which

suggests that she is reflecting and perceiving her peers from school as one homogeneous group and perhaps something she never felt a part of, whereas she expresses college is 'better'. Michaela reflects on her time at school with the rhetorical question: '…why am I here?' This further highlights her inadequate sense of belonging at school, when compared to college. Jill uses emotive language to describe her experience of belonging in the college, 'I love the people around me'. Here Jill is demonstrating her positive perception of diversity and her excitement at meeting new and interesting people. By describing her feeling of belonging as 'homely', she is illustrating that she now perceives herself as confident and part of the college. She is no longer just a new student or a first year, she now appears to be identifying as a member of the college community. A sense of not being part of a minority grouping is expressed as giving a stronger sense of group awareness and sense of security.

For John, having a sense of belonging was highly important for him because it acted to remove anxieties. John through his own admission is an anxious young man and had experienced many anxieties regarding his transition to college, when asked about whether he felt that having a sense of belonging at the college was important, he replied:

> *'Yeah absolutely, because it is taking anxiety away because if you feel as though you don't belong…then it is going to be a lot harder to focus on your work cause then… there's emotional distress…but when you feel like there's people you can relate to, then there's people you can ask for advice… (John, line: 149)*

John relates having a sense of belonging to his abilities to focus and work harder, without which there is: 'emotional distress'. There is an indication here that John previously felt as though he did not settle or enjoy his time in his school and experienced 'emotional distress' as a result. He is concise in his use of this phrase, which may further indicate his negative past experiences, yet his sense of belonging at college is secure and a contrasting picture to his prior lack of a sense of belonging. Thus, it appears that developing a positive sense of belonging is a factor when students are undergoing transition and as they become familiar with a new setting. John further discusses involvement with extra-curricular activities, which have helped him to feel a sense of belonging:

> *'…I do like LGBT club which is 3-5 on a Wednesday. I would say it is just like a youth club, it is like just a lot of sitting around and talking for two hours… yeah definitely I enjoy that, I feel like…there's a lot more people who I can relate to here than there [school]….' (John, line: 152)*

For John, the LGBT club gave him a strong sense of belonging and helped him to adapt to college life. He positively remarks in the above extract that *'I definitely enjoy that',* which suggests that this is a new experience for him and has given him the opportunity to relate to other like-minded students.

Summary

A sense of belonging was highlighted as important for all student participants. The greater diversity of students at college, compared to that of school, enhanced

participants' sense of belonging.   Feeling a sense of belonging helped to mitigate anxieties that students experience during transition and the friendly and 'homely' atmosphere experienced, supported students during transition.

4.3 Students: Psychological Impact of Transition

From the student participants' accounts of their experiences of transition, there were over sixteen sub-ordinate themes, which emerged and which have been clustered under the super-ordinate theme: psychological impact of transition. The emerging themes included: anxiety, chaos, confidence, coping mechanisms, empathy, liberty, loss of control, nervousness, overwhelming, panic, self-assuredness, self-awareness, self-conscious, self-determination, self-worth and transition to adulthood. These emergent themes were then clustered logically into sub-ordinate themes of: Chaos and Confusion, and Identity, **(Appendix 5).**

4.3.1 Students: Chaos and Confusion

The theme of chaos and confusion was common across all four participants' transcripts and mostly emerged in the interviews when the student participants were discussing their subject choices, enrolment and induction. Two of the participants, Michaela and Jill, described their experiences of making their post-16 A-Level choices with a degree of confusion and frustration. Megan explained her passion for drama and her desire to study this at A-Level but was unable to because timetabling at the college did not allow for this.

'am… I wanted to do drama to be honest but I didn't know that didn't do drama as an A-Level. So the alternatives was like media and film because they are kinda like acting…' (Michaela, line: 6)

'...the induction process was a bit stressful in the sense like that I didn't know where I was going and then there was the whole… giving out badges and giving out numbers and then I didn't know where I was going so like that was stressful… (Michaela, line: 143)

Michaela was unable to do A-Level Drama because it was not offered at the college and could not do B.Tech Drama alongside her other A-Levels. Yet she repetitively throughout the interview describes her passion for drama, this was an initial source of stress and confusion for Michaela, which she referred back to throughout the interview.

'In a sense there's always the regret for not doing drama'. (Michaela, line: 58)

Her rationale for selecting Media and Film was because they are 'kinda like acting' suggests an impromptu decision, perhaps made when enrolling at the college. Evidently, Michaela's views on her transition were influenced by the inability to get on the course she desired. Nevertheless, she expressed a sense of acceptance but with regret. Moreover, this may infer the college's marketised approach to course offerings have meant Michaela is not studying the course that she initially hoped to study. Michaela's further remark on line 143 highlights her sense of confusion during induction. She repetitively uses 'I didn't know' to highlight her sense of confusion and frustration.

When asked about her choice of A-Levels, Jill remarked:

'I am interested in Film and I like to know how the world works and how

people view the world so Media was a good second choice and then

Geography… I just needed something academic.' (Jill, line: 5)

Notably, for Jill, her selection of Geography was because she 'just needed something academic…' Jill later describes changing from A-Level Geography to another subject which again suggests a lack of forethought, or indeed a lack of relevant support, when deciding on her A-Level choices and her confusion at the time of selection. The inference from both of Michaela and Jill is that subject choice and offerings at the college may be hindering learners from studying their chosen subjects. Learners' choices are limited to what will fit on their timetables and they may select subjects 'just' because they need to. It follows that the choice of a subject not personally desired could harbour some resentment which may result in a lack of interest in, and effort to achieve highly.

Three of the participants described the chaos and confusion experienced when describing their first impressions of the college.

'It was kinda confusing, because I think no one really knew what they were

doing… when we came in…'. (John, line: 85)

'Am, I had a welcome evening and it was quite chaotic but I liked it.' (Jill, line:

49)

'there were hundreds of people there… and everyone… I don't know everyone was loud and no one seemed to know what they were doing but I just didn't have a clue.' (Jill line 58)

John used the slang term 'kinda' to describe his confusion, which may infer the confusion was limited or not very confusing. However, he is reflecting on what now to him is a familiar setting from a new horizon, which at the time, and as a newcomer to the college may have been more confusing. His growing familiarity with the college, the staff and his peers may have reduced his memory of his feelings at the time. Yet he still maintains that this was a time of confusion for him, albeit 'kinda' confusing. Jill on the other hand, appeared to embrace the chaos and she describes 'liking' it. This gives the impression that the chaotic nature of her first impression of the college, was in-sync with her own feelings of confusion and disorientation, experienced during transition. There is an inference that she was reassured by the chaos, given the fact that she liked it. Jill casually remarks: '…but I just didn't have a clue'. It is likely Jill used the situation to sort out her confusion and sense of control over the transition process. She implies that the feelings were common to others and thus there was no expectation to have everything in order at once. Whilst Jill is magnanimous in her resolve, this suggests a failure gap in the strategic planning for transition.

In a similar vein John said:

'That was hectic and I would say that wasn't the fault of the college, I would say in general no one knew what they were doing…' (John, line: 87)

The participant in this extract is describing his experience of enrolling at the college. He chooses the adjective 'hectic' as opposed to his earlier use of 'chaos'. 'Hectic' connotes how busy or manic that experience was for him. After his criticism of the enrolment being 'hectic' he then alludes to this not being 'the fault of the college'. Is he eliciting a response based on what he thinks the researcher wants to hear? If it is not the fault of the college, then whose fault is it? This remark appears to be balancing his criticism of the enrolment, but the fact he then goes on to say: 'no one knew what they were doing…' may be a further criticism of the lack of organisation of the college and the staff. In his response, he is not specific to staff or students instead he says 'no one', this hyperbolises the confusion experienced by the participant during enrolment. Interestingly, John offers advice as to how this experience could have been improved.

> *'…am probably better organisation but it would be hard with a regular amount of staff to organise that amount of people… so with like what the college had they did the best they could.' (John, line: 91)*

> *'…I guess I feel like I was never informed and it was always like a panic frenzy at the last second'. (John, line: 94)*

The participant is showing maturity by recognising the difficulties when dealing with a large amount of people, yet still maintains that it should be 'better organised'; he refers to this period of confusion as expected. The hedge term 'probably' shows John's reluctance to criticise as does the comment 'they did the best they could', yet his experience tells of an unorganised and confusing event, where 'no one' knew

what they were doing. It is also likely that John's reluctance to criticise may be due to the power imbalance that existed between himself as a participant and the researcher as a member of the college staff. The use of the simile '…like a panic frenzy', suggests his experience was at points chaotic and challenging for John.

One participant, Megan, never described any such feelings of chaos or confusion and seemed well adept to meet with the demands of transition. Enrolment and the beginning of term for her were described positively.

> '…it was a good college like erm it was easier to make friends here… like erm the teachers are just so much friendlier here and am the subjects are like so much better… (Megan line 56)
> *'It was a nice building and a lot nicer than my old school.' (Megan, line: 69)*

Megan is comparing her experiences of school with her more positive experiences of college, she repetitively uses the phrase 'so much' to emphasise her more positive perception of college. Line 69 highlights Megan's first impression of the college. Rather than focusing on the staff or students, she considered the building itself. She compared the college to school and remained positive in both her intonation and subsequent remarks.

Summary

For three out of four of student participants, confusion was a shared experience when they first came to college. Two participants highlighted the lack of organisation

as a cause of confusion and another seemed to accept the chaos and confusion without any anxiety. One participant spoke about her first impression positively and in matter of fact terms. These divergent experiences of shared events infer that some learners will experience anxiety and confusion when undergoing transition while others may not. It is further evident that the anxiety felt may be short lived and responds to the level of support and staff contact available. However, the interviews reveal the sub theme of chaos and confusion as a contributor to how students experience their transition to college as a positive and somewhat frustrating process.

4.3.2 Students: Identity

Related to the previously discussed theme of belonging, a strong theme that emerged from the student participants' transcripts was their sense of identity and perception of themselves as they experience transition. Two of the participants describe the new-found sense of freedom, when coming to the college, in terms of their emerging identity and new-found autonomy as college students.

'…we have more freedom…that's the word freedom. (Michaela, line: 94)

Michaela uses repetition to emphasise her new-found freedom, she is considering how her identity has changed from being a school student to becoming a college student. By using the collective pronoun 'we', she is suggesting that this experience is common to herself and her year group. For Michaela 'freedom' is perceived as a facet of becoming an adult and enjoying the freedom and autonomy associated with adulthood. By saying 'we have more', she is comparing this to her perceived lack of

freedom, which she experienced at school. Megan selected the following image for her second interview and used this as a metaphor to discuss her identity:

(Megan, Google Image Interview)

> *'…both teddy bears are like me, the smaller one was when I started and the bigger one is me now.' (Megan, line: 144)*

> *'it was a bit hard at first but now like that it's a bit further into the year it's like…a bit easier cause like we're used to it now'. (Megan, line: 129)*

Megan describes her selected image as representing herself and her emerging sense of comfort at college. She remarks 'the bigger one is me now…' which suggests a growing sense of self identity and maturity. Megan is recognising that her identity as a college student is developing, she is describing her familiarity with her new college and expressing her acceptance of her new identity as a college student; 'used to it now'. However, the fact the Megan says: 'a bit easier cause like we're used to it now', may indicate that she feels that she has not fully transitioned and is in a stage of liminality, because by expressing it is 'a bit', may infer that there are still difficulties to overcome. This of course highlights in general terms the contrast

between a system where rules and control direct action, to a setting where it is expected that students think for themselves and make informed choices.

One participant Jill, brought along the image below to her second interview using Google Images, **(Appendix 8)** which had two different characters on it. One she described as anxious and the other as excitable.

(Jill, Google Image Interview)

 '…I felt a bit like both of them, on the one hand nervous and on the other hand excited…they were going through things and decisions and I felt like this represented me'. (Jill, line: 274)

Jill had used the figures in the above image to metaphorically represent her conflicting identities as a school student and college student. This metaphor represents her contrasting emotions during transition, being both 'nervous' and 'excited'. For Jill this image represents being on the interface between childhood and adulthood; along with the mixed emotions and liminal experiences during her transition and developing identities.

Another participant John, selected his images **(Appendix 9)** in a way that represented his experience of transition in chronological order. His final image is a sign that says: 'future' and 'next exit'.

(John, Google Image Interview)

'…I would say that I am quite grounded and if I keep working I would say I would achieve my goals as soon as possible…' (John, line: 244)

This picture is a metaphor, which John has selected to represent his experience of transition and where he sees himself now. He is demonstrating his self-determination here and looking to the future. His end goals are explained, which insinuates that he perceives his time in college as a step on a continuum. By describing himself as 'quite grounded', he is demonstrating self-awareness of his current identity as a sixth-form student, but is also inferring an awareness of his developing and evolving identity. John appears to view his identity as continuously evolving. This suggests

that John has a level of maturity whereby he recognises his current identity as transient. This indicates his opinion that transition is a process in which he has a sense of himself and his setting.

Summary

Students' identity and sense of changing identities are imbued with their developing sense of freedom and autonomy. The participants reflect on their identities by comparing how these have developed and altered from being a school pupil to becoming a college student. Students' identities are undergoing a liminal process, whereby their identities are reverting, back and forth, from previous held identities and newly formed identities in a simultaneous fashion. Different students experience their evolving identities at different rates and while three students were beginning to perceive themselves as college students; one student had recognised their identity as a college student, as well-established and evolving into future identities. This suggests it may take time to establish an identity as relationships, course choices and greater independence interact and develop. As such monitoring how well, students are settling into their new setting, their access to new relationships, a new sense of belonging and identity, and their background experiences, would suggest a more definite and timely monitoring is required.

4.4 Students: Transition in Learning

An emergent theme, with a high numeration and which was discussed extensively, across all four participant case studies, was the transition in learning. Evidently, all

participants expressed the difficulties and/or differences they experienced when moving from GCSE to A-Level. Three of the participants expressed how their expectations as students had changed significantly, while one participant noted the changes in learning and expectations were inconsequential. The consistent feeling of moving to a new and high education phase is evident from all participants, and offers in itself a sense of anxiety and expectation but also a desire to do well in preparation for the next stage of their careers or the world of work.

4.4.1 Students: Educational Focus and Trajectory

Two of the student participants expressed a clear educational focus in their interviews, with regards to their subject choices at A-Level and their identity as an A-Level student at the college. Whereas the other two students appeared less focused on their education and the purpose of their studentship at college. When discussing his educational trajectory John remarked:

> *'Yeah like I am wanting to go to university abroad hopefully…[or]…going to another university in England or perhaps like…off years.' (John, line 105)*

> *'I would like to study Psychology [at university], so then I could become a therapist…'. (John, line 115)*

From John's extract, it is apparent that he is focused on the upward trajectory of his education; he has decided that he would like to study Psychology, although he is not yet sure how best to achieve this. While his decision to study Psychology seems

quite firm in his mind, he has demonstrated that he is still considering which university he may attend, and indeed whether it will be abroad or not. This again demonstrates that he perceives his transition as ongoing. In the first term of his two-year A-Level Programme he has made decisions regarding the next step in his educational career. This focus on his future education has acted as an impetus for John to be successful in his A-Levels and make the most out of his time in college. This experience may well be typical although its continued positive development will be as a result of his further experiences in college and hard work.

Jill has similarly demonstrated that she has already begun to consider university and the next stage in her education. Conversely, her focus has been looking at different universities, rather than different degrees or subjects. Nevertheless, through this expression and consideration she has demonstrated her maturity and this offers an insight into the perception of transition being an ongoing process. By looking to her future HE options, she is beginning to prepare for her next transition in education.

> *'I have had a look at places [in university] but I don't know about the subjects yet so I don't quite know what is best'. (Jill, line: 145)*

For the other two participants, Michaela and Megan, they appear to be less anxious or indeed certain about their future educational trajectory.

(Megan Google Image Interview)

'Erm… I am not sure yet, I was thinking a gap year and then before I go to uni… for a bit of a break…but not sure yet.' (Megan, line: 191)

Megan's pauses throughout her response, indicates that this is something that she is still considering. Her plan is ultimately to go to university, but she has failed to specify which university or what she is likely to study. Megan selected the above image to represent how she would like to enjoy herself for a while before going to university. Again, no specificity as to what her 'gap year' may entail, it may just be a fleeting notion, which may demonstrate that she has given limited thought or consideration to her future transitions.

'…yeah… I think well…university I don't really see myself going onto but that might change because in every one of my lessons they're like 18 and I am like 16…' (Michaela, line: 98)

Michaela does not really see herself going to university. Yet she is doing A-Levels. Earlier in the interview she described the influence from her family to do A-Levels,

despite wishing to study drama. The natural progression from A-Levels is HE, the fact that she does not see herself going to university suggests she may be on the wrong educational trajectory. However, she does express: 'that might change'. This infers two things, that she is nonchalant with regards to her education and its direction or that she has identified that she is not happy with her current educational trajectory. Michaela may also feel unsure given her younger age.

Summary

What has emerged from the above, suggests that having an educational focus and an idea regarding future educational trajectories is important when students are undergoing transition to college. Some students remain in their school-like mindset, whereby they are reliant on others for direction, whereas others are proactive in their educational endeavours and consider the direction in which they see their education progressing. Having a clear plan in mind, like John, has helped him in his transition to college. Notably however, not having a clear plan with regards to their educational trajectory, like Megan and Michaela, does not appear to have negatively impacted on their transition experience. Jill's vague ideas for her plans after college has demonstrated her maturity, but not necessarily been a major influence in the successfulness of her transition, from her perspective. This indicates that students need access to support at different times, to help establish a learning pathway and set clearer targets for their educational future.

In summation, the interview transcripts provide sufficient data to indicate that by clustering the distinct themes, it highlights the different perspective of each student

while at the same time suggesting the need for actions necessary to make transition an improved experience for all. Paramount in this is the perspective and actions undertaken by staff. So far, the student interviews and evidence from the research journal identify key findings which should inform improvement and reflection within the college. In essence it emerged that:

- All four student participants, to various degrees, experience issues during transition;
- All four student participants bring their past experiences in school to influence their early integration into the working environment of the new college;
- Key factors including peer and staff relationships, identity and sense of belonging, and choices interact and play significantly during the outworking of the transition time.

These findings have presented a rich picture of the students' transition experiences which now will be set alongside the staff participants' experiences to provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of transition experiences.

Figure 4: <u>Super-Ordinate and Sub-Ordinate Themes from staff data</u>

To assist the data analysis of the staff participants' interviews and the information recorded the following core themes were identified as most prominent.

Teacher Practices
- Pressure
- Autonomy and Accountability
- Teaching and Learning: Theory vs Practice

Management
- Environment and Provision
- Transition in Learning
- Strategic Planning

Transition Provision
- Fiscal Focus
- Processes
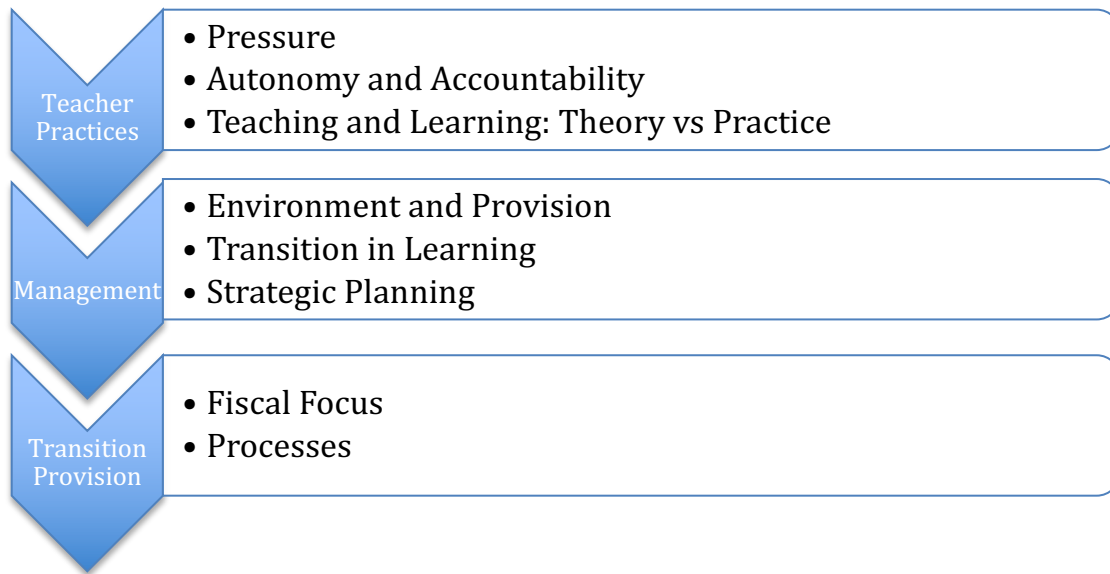
4.5.1 Staff: Teacher Practices

The Super-ordinate theme Teacher Practices was created from clustering three subordinate themes, these were: Pressure, Autonomy and Accountability, and Teaching and Learning (theory vs practice). These sub-ordinate themes were established from clustering together the emerging themes from the interview transcripts with the staff participants. These emerging themes included: Care, Collaboration, Establishment of Rapport, Pastoral, Poor Practices, Pressure, Student Wellbeing, following instructions, resilience, theory vs practice and trust. The clustering of themes and the creation of sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes are illustrated in **Appendix 10.**

4.5.2 Staff: Pressure

Each of the five staff participants described the significant degree of pressure they felt in relation to their experiences of student transition. Three of the participants,

Marie, Mary and Donna, who are full time teachers, expressed strongly the demanding pressure they felt during the transition stages, at the beginning of the year.

> *'…but yeah I find it difficult trying to get to know the students at first because there are so many of them… the classes are so full'. (Marie, line: 20)*

> *'…I think that we could do a lot better, I think there could be a lot more structure…am I think strategic things for the students don't work. I think that timetabling is an absolute mess.' (Mary, line: 24)*

> *'When I think about it, it is a tick box exercise…' (Donna, line: 28)*

For Marie, the pressure was felt most strongly at the beginning of the year and is due to the large numbers of learners at the point of admission. She uses the expression 'so' repetitively in her response to emphasis the high number of students; this indicates that she finds the number of learners overwhelming or at least challenging. Marie is explicit about finding this time of year 'difficult' and stressful and her use of the verb 'trying' suggests that she feels she is not succeeding, in her attempts to get to know all of her learners. Yet Marie demonstrated that she cares about her learners, and continued to mention her frustration at the high volume of learners and her perceived impossible task of getting to know each of them. Both Marie and Mary infer that having information or student interviews prior to student enrolment is an issue, which is central to the sense of pressure experienced.

Mary is quite critical in the above extract with regards to the perceived lack of structure and the strategic planning. Her use of the collective pronoun 'we' infers she considers the transition provision as a collective approach, both from herself and the college leadership. The repetition of 'I think' indicates she is basing her response on her own experiences and the pressure she feels during this time is because the *'strategic things don't work'*. By *'things'* we can infer she is referring to the processes around transition. Timetabling she describes as an: 'absolute mess', which suggests her poor reflection on the strategic planning or lack thereof. Thus, the pressure experienced during this period for Mary is directly related to the processes and practices, which are in place at the college.

Donna is quite dismissive about the induction process at the college, as she explains in her experience, the process is a tick box exercise. This infers that she feels the pressure felt at the beginning of term, when having to carry out administrative exercises on behalf of the college. She later describes what these 'tick box' exercises involve. There is an inference in the responses from Donna that she perceives her role as a teacher to be solely about teaching her curriculum, and these tasks she has to do with the new learners as being for the college's benefit, rather than her own, or her students. This is conveyed via her intonations which highlight her annoyance at the additional pressures she experiences at the beginning of the year, which she feels are not in her interests or her students. The three teachers agree that transition at the point of admission is made more complex by the inefficient arrangements in place to assist them.

For Eileen, who has pastoral lead duties and has responsibilities for transition processes and provision, the pressures she experienced during this period of transition is compounded by the lack of organisation and inconsistencies in practice.

'…it is chaos and things get lost in transit cause I have even spoke to students this year and they are on the wrong course.' (Eileen, line: 18)

The use of the adjective 'chaos' in the above extract indicates the lack of organisation during the transition period, and is akin to the findings from the analyses of the student participants' case studies. There is an implication that either staff with responsibilities for enrolling students are not carrying out their duties competently, or that processes are not sufficiently effective and therefore are enabling things to get 'lost in transit' or are having a detrimental impact on learners being enrolled on the right course. This remark is reflective and critical about the college's current approach to transition, and similar to Mary, Eileen is finding the processes to be a cause of pressure. Eileen remarks:

'They [enrolling staff] thought the course was one thing and it's not and there is one level one student who got put onto catering and is now [January] being transferred onto our Journey to GCSE course'. (Eileen, line: 19)

Eileen indicates she cares about the students at the college, her frustration is apparent because of the extreme example of a student being on the wrong course for almost half of the academic year. Nevertheless, the impression from Eileen's response is that the pressure she has experienced is due to the staff not carrying out

their duties properly. By expressing 'they thought', the participant is shifting and perhaps negating the responsibility for ensuring the students are on the right course, onto teaching staff, rather than strategic leadership. Whichever the case the interview transcripts suggest that the existing arrangements do not ease student entry and, in many ways, it was felt, added to the anxieties the students bring to their early days at college.

Another participant, Chris, discussed the actions he takes to manage the pressures during transition, his experience is more personal to himself and his practices, rather than a wider college approach.

> *'I find that a lot of the transition work that I do as an A-Level teacher tends to be graduated in terms of my subjects, so I will introduce them to new ideas, that they won't have come across at school'. (Chris, line: 18)*

In terms of his own approach to transition, Chris expressed a less pressurised experience of transition in comparison to the other participants. He spoke with positive intonations with regards to his classroom practices as a means of supporting students through transition. His use of the singular pronoun 'I', suggests this is an individual rather than a collective approach. His focus on 'new ideas' suggests he is considering transition, more in terms of learning and the different expectations there are on learning.

Summary

With the exception of Chris, the pressure felt by staff with regards to transition is expressed negatively by the other participants, as Chris is the only male staff participant this may indicate a gender difference in transition experience. Nevertheless, staff perceive transition events such as induction with varying significance and there is a view that induction is an administrative task for the college, rather than being of benefit to teaching and learning. An absence of competent administrative structures as perceived by the participants has increased pressure on teachers during enrolment and induction. One emerging conclusion is the failings in administrative and strategic planning, which indicate transition activities are perceived by strategic leadership as little more than administrative activities which are of institutional benefit. Pressure is common across staff during transition and the lack of attention to this does little to regard transition as a time to enable both staff and students to blend and progress a common learning pathway.

4.5.3 Staff: Autonomy and Accountability

'…we stop enrolment on the Friday and then induction is on the Monday and just working across the weekend, just to make sure that logistically I have got people [staff] in the rooms…' (Eileen, line: 19)

The above extract from Eileen highlights the intensity and pressure experienced at the beginning of term. By having to work over the weekend, Eileen is demonstrating that her role is extensive and her choice of language 'just' implies the additional and

extra work 'just' ensures plans are in place to support students and their transition to the college. Eileen's use of 'I' implies she alone feels accountable for ensuring that the first week of term is logistically planned. Eileen then appears to shift the accountability to the staff in their classrooms for conducting the necessary transition and induction processes. While these arrangements requires investigation, the continued reliance on the current process has inherent problems, which may impact negatively on both staff and students as shown in the example of the wrong placement of a student.

Three of the staff participants felt that the accountability for gathering prior information about their learners was their own. Whereas, two participants considered the college accountable for gathering information about the learners and then passing it on to them. When discussing the sharing of information two participants noted:

> *'I think it takes a long time before we can figure out what they need…it [issues] is not always picked up on until after the first term. (Marie, line: 30)*

> *'Very little…before that sit in the classroom, if we are lucky we might get a profile of their grades or prior attainment'. (Chris, line: 34)*

Both extracts show agreement that little information is shared with teachers about their learners, which enable them to plan effectively for transition. Marie expresses that a full term may elapse before she has attained the required information about her learners. Her use of 'not always' implies that generally, the majority of the

information she needs regarding learners will be picked up in the first term. Her use of 'we' suggests a collective responsibility to retrieve such information, yet she is demonstrating her autonomy in her attempts to find out relevant information about her learners, through her practices; which she later describes in detail.

The fact that 'very little' information is shared prior to transition with teachers, is frustrating for Chris. His remark 'lucky' suggests that he will not always be privy to the prior grades of his learners. Here Chris's use of 'we' gives an insight in his experiences and suggests that rather than this experience being individual to him; this experience is common practice. His frustrations are apparent in his intonation, which demonstrate care towards his learners, and perhaps a desire to improve their experiences of transition, through better preparedness. Furthermore, the problems arising from this practice are understood by the staff and yet little is done to provide a platform whereby the issues can be analysed. The staff in their responses, express their isolation and their criticisms are clear to read. This additionally suggests that the staff wish to maintain a standard which the current setting does not support.

All but one of the staff participants expressed strategies that they had employed in the classroom to support transition. The conclusion from across these five case studies, suggests that teachers felt as though their autonomy was restricted to their classroom practice without an ability to access and inform management actions. For example, Marie states:

'*…so yeah, I think I am concerned and I do care about them and with the*

pastoral side you can see, when it is not there, or you can see when they've

not had the opportunities to make friends and that they are on their own…'

(Marie, line: 34)

'…or put an arm around them and bring them into that group…I try to do that

quite skilfully…or I try to do that regularly. (Mary, line: 36)

Mary is conveying her previously alluded 'motherly' instinct by metaphorically putting an arm around her learners to include them in the lessons and support their transition. She confidently remarks that she does this 'skilfully' then pauses and corrects her remark by replacing it with 'regularly'; this implies her confidence in her practice at the same time as her modesty. The verb 'try' implies that this practice is not as consistent as she would hope, but her desire to adopt such strategies is apparent. What is notable is her anxiety to share her approaches with others including senior staff.

Marie is explicit in her care and concern for her learners; she is demonstrating her experience at spotting those students, for whom transition is not going well. This extract also highlights that the participant is aware of her accountability for both the education and pastoral care of her students. Repeatedly, the staff participants express the impact of the demands they have placed on them in carrying out their duties during transition and equally they find the lack of awareness of this; a frustration over which they have little control.

Summary

The five participants have illuminated that accountability is a shared concern for themselves as practitioners and the college as a whole. There is a feeling that autonomy for the teachers remains limited to their classroom and frustrations and pressure arises when the processes around transition, hinder their planning for effective transition, whereby students are well supported. As elucidated by Eileen, there is a perception from middle management that 'staff fail to follow guidance', which is incongruent with the views of staff, who have highlighted a lack of guidance from senior leadership. An obvious lack of shared responsibility and accountability is evident. A constant theme throughout this is the need to get 'things done', to complete logistics and in doing so, staff are not able to consider in depth the students' perspectives. This may account for Jill's associated anxieties when having to make new friends during induction week and again having to make different new friends when beginning her lessons. Indeed, much of what the staff have expressed in their desire to do more reflects on the students' sense of chaos and confusion.

4.5.4 Staff: Teaching and Learning (Theory vs Practice)

For three participants, the incongruence between theory and practice was made explicit. These participants discussed the differences between what the strategies for provision looks like on paper, and how it plays out in practice.

> '…which in theory I thought would have been wonderful… [further description] … I thought in practice that would be good…but it hasn't been executed properly'. (Donna, line: 22)

The participant is discussing target setting provision during induction week. She refers to the fact that the plans sounded 'wonderful' if learners had targets before their first lesson. However, as she noted the targets had not been 'executed properly', this infers that this strategy has not been beneficial in her experience. When subsequently asked whether the entire induction had been effective she replied:

'On paper it could be… but in practice no.' (Donna, line: 23)

Again, the participant is highlighting the contrast between planning and the practice she is being critical of the strategic planning involved. By suggesting the planning appears like it 'could' be good, she is inferring that it requires improving. Another participant clearly expresses the incongruence, between what should work in theory but fails in practice:

'I think it is quite weird, because enrolment is quite a structured process and
on paper it should work'. (Eileen, line: 29)

The adjective 'weird' suggests that the participant is unable to explain why the incongruence exists between the planning and the practice. Alternatively, the same adjective may infer a negation of her responsibility, as the person in charge of transition provision within the sixth form centre. Nevertheless, the extracts from both participants together infer a transition process, which is not as robust or successful as it could be. Indeed, the many failings noted, link to the pressures felt and the lack of opportunity to develop an accountable model of practice.

Summary

The analysis of this theme suggests the participants feel that strategic planning is ineffective and whilst there may be a view from middle/senior management that processes are in place; there appears to be little by way of assessing the efficacy of processes or indeed involvement from staff or students to inform process improvement. In summation, teacher practices are neglected and staff are aware of their shortcomings and inability to inform change. Similarly, as highlighted in the findings from the student participants, feelings of 'chaos' may be compounded or exacerbated by current transition processes. Notwithstanding the chaos which can exist for some staff, key questions emerge with regard to the quality of support not just for students but also for staff to enable them to reflect on and give time to, crucial aspects of transition. These findings suggest an area of development for strategic leadership, as it is felt that current processes are inept and teachers seem to deal with the challenges of transition as best they can.

4.6 Staff: Management

The super-ordinate theme of management was extensively represented in all of the staff participants' transcripts. From clustering the emergent themes, three sub-ordinate themes emerged: Environment and Provision, Transition in Learning and Strategic Planning. These sub-ordinate themes were created from clustering the emerging themes, which included: failures of management, failures of SLT, ineffective IAG, effective IAG, strategic leadership and planning, resource, detrimental impacts, reputation and forced trajectories. All participants to varying

degrees expressed their concerns over the lack of strategic planning and the level of resource to support transition. In all, management, which is core to development and improvement, is highlighted as an issue for considerable review and improvement during transition. This may also refer to the overall management view of transition as an event rather than a process.

4.6.1 Staff: Environment and Provision

In terms of the environment and provision for learners, two staff participants expressed that, in their experience they felt as though aspects of the college environment prevent students from integrating successfully.

> '…Maybe having something for them. Where they could meet other students in the same position, could be more supportive'. (Marie, line: 38)

> 'Maybe having some PSHE [Political, Social, Health Education] … really well thought about PSHE, things like mindfulness…coping strategies and mental health awareness'. (Mary, line: 38)

Both Mary and Marie draw attention to the perceived lack of resource that could support transition. Marie is considering students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and her concern for such students not having the opportunities to integrate with other students. Her use of the phrase 'something' implies that there is currently nothing in place for such learners or at least nothing in place that she is aware of. She is also suggesting that such opportunities 'could be more supportive',

which infers she is not fully convinced it will be more supportive, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the fact that the provision here is currently lacking for EAL learners.

Mary, on the other hand, is quite prescriptive with what she thinks would improve the transition experience for students. Her pause before suggesting types of PSHE shows her consideration for the topics that she feels would benefit the students undergoing transition. By suggesting the topics that could be covered in PSHE, she is confirming that these are not routinely covered in her experience. Once again, this raises the question of staff participation and opportunity to be heard.

Chris discussed creating a supportive environment within his classroom that could act as an introduction to his subject, which could support the students' transition.

> *'…They all have an opinion about what is going on in society… and allowing those students to be heard, or talk about their experiences, or comment on things that have happened to them… I think gives them a little bit more confidence...' (Chris, response: 20)*

Chris has used his subject as a means to get to know his learners and also to create a supportive environment, where the learners can discuss issues in society and get to know each other. Through his use of a broad subject 'society' he has facilitated discussions in which all learners can access and feel included. By referring to 'those' students, this suggests he is talking about students who may already feel marginalised.

Summary

Whilst Mary and Marie discussed the need for more to be done by the college to support transition, Chris approached the topic differently and discussed how he has altered his approach to enable integration and inclusion, which support the transition process. What is significant is the different practices in operation and the sense of being left to do things without accountability or a common approach. Whilst there is the perception amongst staff that they are enabled to exert autonomy within their classrooms, a lack of provision to support transition is highlighted as an area for improvement for the wider college environment. The need for a template to anchor key support actions is a consideration which could raise the level of interest among staff and provide for the development of a common set of expectations and principles. This suggests that for participants, current practices are at odds with the potential of making greater use of the setting and student environment.

4.6.2 Staff: Transition in Learning

The theme of transition in learning emerged powerfully for two staff participants in particular; this was similarly raised extensively by student participants as an area of concern. Both Mary and Chris explained the difficulties they experienced when managing the transition in learning, when learners are transitioning from GCSE to A-Level syllabi.

'They need some academic support in that first window'. (Mary, line: 40)

'I think we need to get stuck into the seriousness of A-Level from the start.
(Mary, line: 42)

'I will do mini workshops in that first half term but it's academic skill building.'
(Mary: line: 47)

Mary is discussing her difficulties when teaching new students, A-Level skills. Her use of 'they' in the first extract suggests that she feels the college should be doing more to support learners in their transition in learning from GCSE to A-Level. The second extract is inferring the ineffectiveness of induction, and the more pressing need for learners to begin learning the requisite skills for A-Level. The verb 'stuck' used in this context suggests the participant feels as though new A-Level students remain in their GCSE learning mindset. By expressing she carries out mini academic workshops in the first term, Mary is conveying that she has taken the decision to move away from her intensive curriculum requirements, to support the transition in learning by teaching skills which are not prescribed by any set of GCSE syllabi.

'…gives them the confidence to say 'yeah' I am beginning to understand the subject a bit.' (Chris, line: 22)

'So the targets I set are very realistic and I don't try and push them too hard, early on'. (Chris, line: 23)

The staff participants' underlying concern is to do what is best for the students and at the point of transition this is more significant. Their inability to do more is similarly

reflected in the students' developing wish to belong and strengthen their knowledge of their career trajectories.

Chris is demonstrating his awareness and experience of managing the transition in learning. By introducing relatable topics for discussion, he is opening dialogue with his learners, whereby he can support and guide their thinking and responses to a more critical approach to learning, required for A-Level. By quoting what students may say, *'yeah',* seems to insinuate this is a familiar or recurring experience for him. The verb 'push' in the second extract intimates the effort required to enable learners to make the transition in learning to A-Level. By finishing his remark with 'early on' he is inferring that he is aware of the change of mindset required for students to study A-Level, and is allowing time for learners to negotiate this development. What is apparent is the experience staff bring to their practices and their awareness of the need to be flexible in their teaching, to meet the individual needs of the students. Equally important is the frustration felt by the staff participants on their perceived lack of consideration given to informing the practices, which inform management planning and policy.

Summary

Transition in learning is an important issue for teachers, so much so that teachers take time away from their various curricula to support their students to improve their academic skills. The teacher participants have described their varying approaches and suggested provision that would support transition in learning. Frustration among staff is evident at the perceived lack of wider support and resource available to

support the transition in learning. Two student participants, Michaela and Jill, described randomly selecting course subjects because they 'just' needed another subject, which may account for or indeed contribute to teachers' frustrations at the lack of wider support and their need to go beyond their respective curricula to help their students develop the skills needed for A-Level study. A sense of teamworking and sharing of practice appears to be missing for these teachers missing and a factor which requires attention if transition is to be more supportive.

4.6.3 Staff: Strategic Planning

A common theme for all staff participants was strategic planning, in terms of processes and provision for transition. There is a frustration from four of the five participants with regards to the perceived ineffective strategic planning around transition. Interestingly, none of the five staff participants knew whether or not the college had a policy for transition. Two participants commented on the input from the SLT with regards to transition processes.

> *'I think we have always had some sort of emphasis on transition but I think that is has just been expected [from the SLT] … that it is happening properly and that's fine'. (Eileen, response: 58)*

> *'…there would be more opportunities for teachers to do enrichment programmes and there would be money available, but there is not'. (Donna, response 62)*

Eileen's extract suggests that the SLT take little interest in the transition process. She is inferring the SLT 'just' assume that it happens but have no interest in it. Her choice of phrase: *"some sort'*, implies that there is no strong or clear emphasis on transition, furthermore, the use of sibilance here may suggest her annoyance. By opening the same sentence with 'I think' she infers her statement lacks conviction and she may actually believe that there is no emphasis on transition from the SLT. This may relate to and indicate the sense of confusion experienced by the students and the difficulties they face. By contrast the support individual staff provide is a reflection more of their commitment to the students than the level of strategy provided at management level.

> *'…no I think they are too preoccupied with funding…I don't think they even think of all this… I think they think that the pastoral provision we have in place deals with all that and they just don't understand the big pictures at all…'*
> *(Mary line: 55)*

The contrast between staff's view of transition as a process to that of the management's view of transition as an event is further highlighted. Mary further describes the benefits that greater resource and strategic planning could have on transition and her perceived lack of interest from the SLT. Mary is suggesting that teachers would prefer the opportunity to do enrichment activities, which would support transition, but the lack of directed resource from the SLT is preventing this from happening. She is resolute in the final clause of her remark, which indicates through its absoluteness, that there is a lack of foresight from the SLT. She also

indicates a perceived unwillingness at management level to acknowledge the challenges of transition and their responsibility to support its smooth development.

> *'I think that transition provision could be potentially expensive and could be potentially time consuming and logistically it could be very difficult to plan. (Chris, line: 40)*

Chris in the above extract is demonstrating his understanding of the difficulties that surround transition planning and the possible reasons why little has been done to address these. The adverb 'potentially' suggests Chris perceives that it could but would need to be costed to improve provision. The participant later describes the benefits that successful transition may produce financially, in terms of retention, in an attempt to justify why he feels more resource should be afforded to transition.

Summary

There is agreement in the responses from the participants that the current provision requires development and resources to support student transition. For a number of the staff participants, experiences with students undergoing transition has enthused them with ideas to improve the experiences for their learners. Nevertheless, a frustration among staff at a perceived lack of input or interest from senior leadership is a shared experience. The notion of 'us versus them' emerges.

4.7 Staff: Transition Provision

The super-ordinate theme: transition provision, was created from clustering the sub-ordinate themes fiscal focus and processes. These sub-ordinate themes in turn were created from clustering the emergent themes from the interview transcripts and included: consistency, early engagement, IAG, strategic leadership, limiting choice, marketisation, NEET, ineffective and variable provision, subject choice and induction, **(Appendix 11).** Each of the five participants discussed their experiences of cuts and reductions in funding and the impact that it is having on transition. All of the participants share a common frustration with the lack of resource afforded to transition and importantly how resource can be used effectively to improve learning.

4.7.1 Staff: Fiscal Focus

There is a sense among the staff participants that the SLT's primary focus is financial and each participant expressed their clear annoyances at the lack of available resource for transition planning and programmes that would support students through transition.

> '…but you go to sixth-forms or school and there is a sense of community, the students stay in during their breaks and they get involved in enrichment programmes, we don't have enrichment unless teachers run them themselves'. (Donna, response: 58)

'I feel as though they [SLT] are so far removed from the shop floor, that they miss what we do…I think education is lost in that marketisation…' (Mary, response: 59)

Donna compares the college to other schools and sixth forms to highlight the disparities that exist. In her experience, she feels the college lacks a sense of community and by expressing that in other institutions the '*students stay in'*, infers that students at this college do not, because of the lack of enrichment and opportunities to socialise. In the final clause of Donna's extract, she caveats the fact that there is no enrichment 'unless teachers run them themselves'; the implication here is that there is no support or encouragement from management for enrichment and teachers who wish to run enrichment programmes must do so, over and above their contractual obligations. Donna's intonation when uttering this remark demonstrates her frustration with the lack of support from management and further indicates that she perceives enrichment as an opportunity to support transition and increase the learners' sense of belonging.

Mary uses the metaphor 'shop floor' to highlight the lack of interest and resource from the SLT, to support transition. She clearly has an educational focus in her practice and has juxtaposed this with the SLT's financial focus. By suggesting they 'miss what we do', she is inferring two things, firstly their lack of concern for teachers and learners, and secondly, the SLT are missing out on an opportunity to work more closely with teachers, which could help to improve practices that support transition. The opportunity to share best practice in this instance is missed. The participant also expresses that education is 'lost' in marketisation, with a sense of regret. This again

highlights that Mary feels the college is focused more on finances, than on the education of its students.

> *'I think unfortunately that comes down to individual teachers going above and beyond for those individual students, I don't think that there is the support'.*
> *(Chris, response: 31)*

Chris is describing the lack of mental health provision at the college and the onus placed on teachers to go 'above and beyond' to support needy students. The adverb 'unfortunately' illustrates his displeasure at the lack of provision for students with mental health issues. By highlighting the lack of mental health provision at the college Chris is inferring that a more robust provision would improve students' experiences of transition and would support those who feel marginalised because of their mental health.

Summary

Staff have directly felt the negative impact of cuts and reductions in funding. They share a concern for the impact the reduction in resource is having on teaching and learning. There is a perception among staff that the SLT are focused more on the financial, rather than the educational value and purpose of the college. The support individual staff provide reflects their commitment to the students rather than the level of strategy provided at senior leadership level. Conversely, the student participants appeared to have fewer concerns regarding the lack of enrichment opportunities and instead were much more concerned about how their choices and course contents

are sufficient to enable them to progress successfully. Resources are important in managing the college's capacity, however, what has emerged is the need to reflect upon practices to ensure that the most can be achieved for aligning resources more effectively. The voice of staff and that of students is an important means of achieving this.

4.7.2 Staff: Processes

Two participants described the processes that surround transition in unfavourable terms and two participants expressed how processes were having a detrimental impact on student transition.

> *'I think we lose them very quickly and I think that as an institution we don't deal very well with that at all…' (Mary, response: 24)*

> *'…so they're coming to a college where they're not monitored as much in terms of they're not passed from classroom to classroom.' (Marie, response: 30)*

Mary in the above extract is describing the issues around timetabling and the gaps on learners' timetables, which mean they have free time in college with nothing to do. The pronoun 'we' suggests Mary feels a collective responsibility for the processes and she is highlighting her perceived failures of the college by stating it is not dealt with 'very well'. Mary's frustrations are clearly expressed in this response,

her regretful intonation further highlights her feelings of helplessness at not being able to improve the situation for her students.

Marie is discussing marginalised learners in the above extract and her perceived view that the processes, which are in place, are having a detrimental impact on such learners. She is inferring that marginalised learners are not monitored effectively, which may lead to their further marginalisation in college. The phrase 'as much' is suggesting that in school these learners would have been monitored much more closely and the lack of monitoring processes at the college are perhaps making marginalised learners more vulnerable.

Summary

There is a common concern among participants that processes which are in place to support transition are counterproductive. Marginalised learners are perceived to be at greater risk of marginalisation through processes which fail to provide effective educational and pastoral support. Throughout staff participants express a frustration which indicates a sense of marginalisation; this could limit their contribution at least, or at worst further their feelings of isolation. The themes discussed provide an abundance of evidence to indicate that much more could be done to involve staff in the outworking of student transition.

4.8 Conclusion of the Results

The depth and extent of the information and considerations provided by both student and staff participants through the interview processes give an indication of the opinions held and concern felt about transition. Analysis of the data from the staff participants brought value and an additional perspective to the data and offered enriched understanding of the student experience of transition. Staff participants not only described their own experiences of transition but also considered the experiences of their students and demonstrated understanding and consensus, when anonymous student responses were relayed to them. The analysis of staff experiences of transition has provided a double lensed focus on transition in which three key findings emerge, firstly, both staff and students consider the transition provision and practices important in the early college lives of the students, and are an indication of how successful the process works. Integral to this is the individual efforts which staff make to assist students to settle and achieve a clear pathway to learning and career development.

Secondly, the central belief that the quality of working relationships is crucial to good practice and is concurrent in the impact this belief has on the staff and their students. Notably, the accessibility and support of staff is acknowledged by students and, while not regarded as a transition requirement, the practice is valued. This finding is well highlighted and has been drawn through the present research's involvement of both staff and student participants and their distinct transition experiences. What is a main factor, is the staff participants' acknowledgement that resources and time to provide support through well informed information is a practice not fully understood

or respected. Fundamental is the significant part staff play in being able to share their experiences and belief that their contributions will have an impact on evolving policy and hence improve practice.

Finally, the support and checks to enable students to make appropriate long-term choices are highlighted but recognised as lacking in the existence of an overarching college policy and common approach across all staff. While the practice, it can be argued, works well in the majority of instances; it is highly dependent upon the level of maturity and clarity of the students' longer term view of their future pathways to life beyond their current courses. In these findings, the need for discussion and debate is paramount and reflects notably the degree of consensus between staff and management and the insights, which the students bring to the transition process. Inevitably the results give rise to a range of key questions which challenge the current policy and practice in the college and point to the need to raise the profile of transition, through a platform of discussion and acceptance of the contribution, which should be inclusive of both staff and students.

The results have highlighted that transition can be an anxious and chaotic period for students; the feeling of chaos is similarly shared by staff who are involved in the transition process, particularly during the induction stage. However, rather than feeling anxious about transition like the students, staff felt more frustrated by the perceived ineffective planning for transition. Not all the participating students find the process of transition daunting; some take it in their stride, while others experience increased anxiety and nervousness. The level of support students experience during their transition has an impact on the successfulness of their transition and staff are

adept at identifying where support is needed, but in some instances this is not available for students when transition is not going well.

Students undergoing transition experience identity changes both socially and educationally. A number of participants were clearly aware of their new identity as an A-Level student and the differences in learning that that entailed, while one student appeared to remain in the school mind-set. This indicates that transition is not a one-time event and that different students will transition and develop at different periods. Staff adapt their practices in the beginning of the year to support transition; certain subjects like Psychology and Sociology enable teachers to plan for transition more easily, with better relevance to their curricula. Teachers felt a degree of autonomy within their classrooms to conduct activities to promote transition but showed clear frustrations with the lack of resource afforded to enrichment and out of class opportunities.

Throughout the findings above, a number of key questions are posed to challenge college staff to raise the focus currently on transition and of the benefits of doing so. Overall, 'balance', 'resource', 'time', 'teamwork', 'ethos' knowledge', combine to form discussion points for establishing an understanding of transition and enabling a template to emerge as a strategic principle. The road to improvement, however, is perceived to rest mainly with management and the agenda it sets for improvement in this important area.

Overall, the results indicate that transition can be a difficult process for both staff and students and requires a greater focus from strategic leadership and better

resourcing. Furthermore, transition is perceived an on-going process for learners to and through college and enrichment provision would improve the experience of transition for all. Transition is similarly perceived as a process by staff, yet this notion was perceived as incongruent with strategic leadership's view whose limited planning for transition suggests they perceived transition as an event.

Chapter Five: Discussion

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Chapter Five

Discussion

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5.1 Introduction to the Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to explore and investigate the Post-16 transition experience of college staff and A-Level students studying in a further education college. The in-depth analyses of the interviews with students and staff members provided a rich, idiographic and experiential account of the participants' experiences, which informed the results discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, the evidence highlighted the impact of how transition is perceived at management level and indicated the significance of transition as a process. The evidence from the staff interviews highlighted their concerns and at times frustration with how transition is perceived at management level. Staff perception seemed to indicate that management perceived transition as a tick box exercise and if any supportive activities had to be done, it was incumbent on staff to do this in their own time. The student participants perceived transition as ongoing and spoke about their transition in terms of the new identities as college students versus their previous identities as a school pupil, they also exhibited consideration and an awareness of their future education and trajectories.

The present research aimed primarily to address the following questions:

  i) What are the transition experiences of students as they move from school to a FE college?

 ii)   What are the experiences of staff who are involved in the transition process?

In answer to the first question, the main findings from the IPA analysis highlight that the transition experiences of students were shown to be complex and individual but a number of themes appeared common. These themes included: relationships, a sense of belonging, background influences and having a longer-term goal. In answer to the second question, staff demonstrated their frustrations at a perceived lack of resource for transition suggesting limited management consideration of support for students during transition. In other words, transition was considered an event by management and not a process. For the staff participants, transition planning at strategic level was considered to be in the interests of administration, rather than supportive of students undergoing transition. The staff participants accepted that transition, and planning for transition, are very important factors in settling some students into college and ensuring their confidence and pathway to progression. The findings from the IPA analysis of the student participants also highlighted commonalities, for instance the remarkable resilience to the chaos and forgiving nature towards teachers during induction.

This chapter synthesises the findings from both sets of participants and will address the above questions by discussing the findings of the present research, in order of significance. This chapter will further discuss the results in relation to extant literature. Finally, this chapter will consider the implications for teachers and managers in Post-16 Education, as well as students who will undergo transition to college. This will contribute to and offer insight for both practitioners and students alike, into a research domain which hitherto remains limited.

5.2 Relationships and Interactions

The theme of relationships and interactions was extensively discussed by all of the participants. For the student participants, having established good relationships with teachers and peers improved their transition experience. Staff similarly perceived the establishment and maintenance of a good rapport with students as a key means of supporting transition and improving experiences. Conversely, initial interactions during enrolment and induction were described in terms of chaos and confusion, which highlighted where processes hindered positive interactions and the establishment of good relationships. Implications arising are that this area is a major indicator of how well students perceive their admission to college and indeed their understanding of the newness of their environment. This further suggests the need for consideration of the outworking of how students and staff interact and the creation of spaces for positive student-to-student interactions.

5.2.1 Student-Teacher Relationship

A major finding in the research is the significance and central role of the student-teacher relationship. This was important for both the staff and student participants, and supports the findings in other studies, (Bank and Smyth, 2014; Gasser et al. 2018; Garcia-Moya, 2020). Gasser et al (2018) highlighted the importance of the supportive classroom and its usefulness in establishing positive early student teacher interactions. Albeit with a focus on younger students, Gasser et al (2018) found that student perceptions of teacher care fell, as they moved up year groups. These findings are inconsistent with the present research, which by contrast found

the student teacher relationship remains a crucial aspect of transition experience and was discussed extensively by both the student and staff participants. Similarly, Garcia-Moya (2020) highlights the importance of connectedness in the student-teacher relationship and its impact on student wellbeing. The student participants in the present research described how their feelings of confusion and anxiety were reduced once they met their teachers and peers in the classroom. This firstly suggests that it is unhelpful to regard transition as a one-off event and secondly, that the processes which surround transition should focus more on getting students into their course groups with continuous contact with their teachers, from the beginning of term. Large enrolment and induction events cause additional and unnecessary anxiety for some students and underlie thinking, that transition can be viewed within a timetabled one size fits all event.

The findings in the present research, were consistent with the findings in Bank and Smyth (2014) who found that negative relationships with teachers can lead to increased anxiety for students, and raised an implication for teachers to ensure that their time spent with learners was 'good quality' time. The student participants described their new relationship with their teachers at college positively and compared how the student-teacher dynamic had changed from school to college, for the better. Yet conversely, the teacher participants recognised that time spent with students should be of 'good quality' and not time bound, but demonstrated clear frustrations at the lack of opportunity to engage with the learners outside of the formal classroom setting. Mitchell (2020) defines good quality in post-16 education, using the earlier work of Sallis (2002), as having four imperatives; the moral, the professional, the competitive and the accountable. The staff participants in the

present research demonstrated a strong sense of both the moral and professional imperatives however, the competitive and accountable imperatives were perceived to belong to the remit of the institution and the SLT rather than to the individual teacher. However, three of the staff participants did feel a sense of accountability and autonomy, but this was limited to their classrooms.

According to Mitchell (2020) all four imperatives are essential for quality in post compulsory education, however the present research cannot attest to the 'competitive' imperative being essential, instead staff participants felt the marketised approach of FE was having a detrimental impact on transition experience, and two of the student participants described being on a course they had not selected. Caton and Kagan (2005) found that teachers expressed concern and frustration because they were unable to afford meaningful time to spend supporting students' transition. Time is undoubtedly a factor when ensuring positive student-teacher working relations and trust. This is supported by the findings in the present research where staff described their frustrations at the limited amount of time they had to get to know their students. If was felt that by enabling teachers to have greater opportunities to engage with students, it would improve the establishment of student teacher relationships and support transition processes. Meaningful engagement between staff, students and the SLT when devising transition policy would benefit all which markedly requires a better-informed view of the process which transition implies.

Other concerns expressed by the staff participants, particularly those who were experienced teachers, with regard to the lack extra-curricular opportunities, planned or informal, was expressed strongly. They noted the year on year decrease in

funding for enrichment planning and opportunities to engage purposely with students as a constraint, that links to the reduction in funding for FE, (O'Leary, 2018). Crook (2013) raised an implication of the importance of social spaces, which enable and encourage informal togetherness and an ethos of support, as having a beneficial impact on successful transition. Crook's (2013) findings show parallels with the experiences of the staff participants in the present research, yet notably, this was not as important for the student participants, who seemed to prefer their freedom and ability to go 'into town' whenever they liked, as more significant. It may be suggested that the students have little experience of social spaces and therefore place greater value on the social benefits of 'off campus' settings, however, this suggestion may be unique to the present research context. Nevertheless, both teachers and students appreciated the need to have contact and access to a shared communication approach; the priority for students was most likely at the point of need, whereas teachers recognised the impact of preparation and a longer planning strategy. It may well be that the value of shared social spaces could be explored further as an element of effective transition planning and subsequent research.

The findings in the present research suggest that the college's city centre location was perceived positively by the student participants, yet this notion was not shared by the staff participants who instead concentrated on the lack of opportunities or provision within college to enhance social interaction. Evans (2017) drew attention to location and proximity to college as being a crucial aspect of the educational trajectories and successfulness of transition for her participants, noting both the positive and negative impact that proximity to larger urban centres can have on educational opportunities. The question arises, has the college's urban location

limited the level of funding for enrichment provision? Or does the central location of the college enable students to have greater access to transport and inner-city amenities? Whilst these questions were not the focus of the present research, they suggest an area for future research. The student participants appeared unhindered by the perceived lack of enrichment opportunities, however it could be argued that as they have never experienced the level of enrichment, their views are narrowed, in other words, their perception is limited by their horizon, (Gadamer, 1975).

On the other hand, the staff participants, who had experience of the benefits of a much more robust enrichment programme when resource was better in previous years, felt the current students were missing out and disadvantaged. Given the breadth of transition experience of the staff participants, the location and proximity of the college should not act as a mitigating factor for the lack of enrichment or social spaces afforded to students to support and enhance their transition, (Crook, 2013).

Two of the teacher participants, Mary and Marie, referred to the lack of opportunities and suggested opportunities and activities that could support transition, like PSHE and enrichment. Their responses highlighted the lack of opportunity and social space students currently have at college. The implication raised in Matheson (2018) placed emphasis on institutions and policy makers to ensure that provision is adept in supporting learners during transition to and through educational institutions. Nevertheless, what this study showed was that the staff participants demonstrated their commitment to additional support through creating opportunities in their respective curricula to enrich the transition process. These included mini academic workshops and offering open discussions in subjects like psychology and sociology.

This reflected the teachers' resilience, autonomy and understanding of the positive impact, which a breadth of support provision could make. Despite the negative reflections from staff participants with regard to the lack of available resources to support transition, the student participants in the present research, akin to the findings in Salisbury and Jephcote (2008) and Kendall et al. (2018), were optimistic and positive about their post-16 transition experience and less concerned with the perceived lack of enrichment opportunity. The optimism and positivity portrayed from the student participants, which was contrary to the staff participants' more negative perceptions, may relate to the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants, whereby the student participants were reluctant to criticise given the researcher's dual role as a researcher and member of staff. Nevertheless, it remains arguable that enriched provision could ensure the greater inclusion of all students particularly those with the greatest need. For staff such provision would go towards their confidence in the process of transition as a solid means of enriching students' experiences.

Moreover, despite the lack of perceived input or support from strategic leadership, teachers willingly (in addition to the pressures of their curricula) spent further time conducting activities that supported transition. Akin to the findings in Bridges and Bridges (2017), who highlighted autonomous strategies employed by teachers, which enabled them to identify when transition is not going well for a student, and ensure effective support is available. This notion supports the finding in the present research, that teachers are developing strategies to compensate for the acknowledged lack of support from strategic leadership teams. In practice, the research showed that teachers are doing more than required to assist students to

feel at ease in college. This raises the question: could pre-planned time, dedicated and agreed social provision do more to make college settings a space for increased and improved achievement through an enhanced focus on social wellbeing? This question warrants further research, not least within a management policy which clarifies how transition is regarded and provided for.

5.2.2 Peer Relationships

The student participants expressed their concerns about making new friends when coming to college. The importance of peer support was consistent with the findings of Craig (2009) and Mallinson (2009), the participants in these studies highlighted the importance of the support gained from peers who had similarly experienced transition. In the present research two participants, Michaela and Megan, had friends and acquaintances from school and expressed fewer anxieties than Jill, when undergoing transition. Jill expressed the strategies she had employed to make new friends, like giving compliments and asking questions, whereas John saw transition as an opportunity to develop new friendships with like-minded peers. This supports the consideration raised in Powell (2017), that transition is a unique experience, which for some will be challenging and for others will not. This raises the need for practitioners to have an understanding of the changing identities of learners in order to support their transition, (Bone, 2016; Choi, 2017; Thompson, 2017).

The teacher participants demonstrated their frustration in terms of the lack of information about individual students that would enable them to prepare and support transition more effectively. The staff participants valued the opportunity to hear

student participant responses relayed to them, about their transition experience, and commented on how hearing student responses would be a useful means to improve transition planning and processes. Eileen drew attention to her experience of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) not being made available for teachers until the end of the first term and beyond. This highlights a perceived failure of enrolment provision and practice that directly inhibit teachers from planning effectively for transition. Similar findings were noted in both Craig (2009) and Mallinson (2009), which led to the creation of the Scottish National Framework: 'Post-16 transition, Policy and Practice framework, (The Scottish Government, 2012). This framework brought consistency to providers and ensured that information was shared between providers routinely and with sufficient time to support transition. No such framework exists in England; therefore, inconsistencies presented in this research exist in practices between post-primary and post-16 providers, with regards sharing relevant information. This is a pertinent point which can contribute to students failing to settle into the college environment.

While the Gatsby Benchmarks (2018) aims to redress the issues of Information and Guidance for schools and colleges, they are only guidelines and therefore have not been applied consistently or at all by individual providers. The feelings expressed by the staff participants with regards to the lack of information needed to plan for transition, is analogous to the national picture, and lack of current clear national policy. This suggests a lack of consideration and reflection of transition as a process by institutions, which is different from one student to another. When institutions conceptualise transition as an administrative event rather than an ongoing process, the resultant policies and processes can hinder transition experience. Similar to the

findings in Packer and Thomas (2021), the present research supports the notion that transition should be viewed as a process rather than an event.

Evangelou et al (2008) made the point that community membership is enhanced through peer support and this notion was similarly highlighted by a number of student participants. John for instance joined an LGBT+ club and found this a useful means of making new friends. This finding again raises the need for more opportunities for all learners to socially integrate outside of the formal classroom setting. Devlin (2016) noted that when students were afforded opportunities to develop their social engagement they adapted more successfully into their institution's community. Having peer support was important for the participants in the present research and having the opportunity to integrate with other LGBT+ students helped John to make a successful transition. Nevertheless, this experience was unique for John and what became apparent from the other participants, was the lack of opportunities to integrate with others outside of the classroom setting. As a student who identifies as LGBT+ John was able to access one of a few student managed clubs, which could support his inclusion and transition at the college. But what about other learners who are potentially marginalised because of other factors, such as socio-economic factors? Or special educational needs? Or for those with English as an additional language (EAL)? Staff participants have highlighted these issues and demonstrated their strong concerns at their perceived lack of provision for such marginalised learners. The breadth of evidence points to the significance of levels of support, which is both accessible and focused. This research reflects this position and highlights the need to give greater priority to the transition process as a means of addressing with greater emphasis, the importance of a fully inclusive range

of support to meet the needs of all students. Greater cohesion with community groups which support young people, would lead to improved institutional knowledge and informed policies and practices. Moreover, this may foster an environment whereby young people are enabled to have their voices and concerns considered. In other words, young people would be given a say in decisions which affect them, which remains a tenet of the present research and is further endorsed by the findings.

To reiterate the present research has found evidence that both students and staff perceive transition as an on-going process, as set out in the literature review, and when students are supported 'through' rather than 'to' the complexities of a new institution, they are better supported, (Matheson, 2018). The narrative expressed from the staff participants with regard to planning for transition, centred around enrolment and induction. This infers that institutionally, the college perceives transition as a singular event, a means to get routine and order into timetabling and course placement, rather than an on-going process, as in the early work of Brofenbrenner (1979). This notion is incongruent to the findings from the student participants, two of whom, John and Jill, discussed their transition in terms of their previous education and their future educational aims, and perceived their transition positively. Similarly, Michaela and Megan, although without full consideration of their future education trajectories, perceived their transition as ongoing beyond their college lives. This point highlights the incongruence between how the students perceive their transition in education as ongoing and how transition is viewed by the institution as an event. This change in narrative has emerged in higher education (Tett et al. 2016; Devlin, 2013), which has led to better-informed practices and

provision aimed at supporting transition. This narrative is developing in FE with the findings of Packer and Thomas (2021) and the findings in the present research which has highlighted that when transition is viewed as ongoing rather than a one-off event, it not only raises the profile of transition but also helps develop provision which is learner centred and provide opportunities for the development of peer relationships. One major finding is that there is insufficient attention given at a senior management level to the considerable impact of social space and social access among and between teachers and students. Reflection on transition support, provision and processes are at the heart of transition experience, (Karmelita, 2018). A further conclusion indicates that staff do not have access to contribute to policy and therefore improve practice.

5.2.3 Sense of Belonging

Powell's (2017) research raised implications for practitioners and policy makers to consider the sense of belonging for their students when making decisions, which affect them. Feeling a sense of belonging was important for all of the participants in the present research. The student participants, Jill and John, expressed having a strong sense of belonging and the diversity of the college population was a factor, which strengthened their sense of belonging. Symonds et al (2016) found that students' sense of belongingness affects their enjoyment and achievement in education which correlates with a finding of the present research. The student participants spoke positively about their sense of belonging at the college and their identity as a college student, which contrasted from their school experiences, a finding which was similarly highlighted by Gorard and Smith (2007). While the staff

perceived their own sense of belonging at the college as being more transient, they expressed their desire for students to develop a sense of belonging as important.

A sense of belonging was perceived as a means to reduce anxiety for the student participants. Akin to the belongingness hypothesis in Baumeister and Leary's (1995) view that human beings are unable to have positive psychological, social and behavioural experiences, without feeling as though they belong, is affirmed in the present research. John, for instance, felt able to focus more on his education, having a secure sense of belonging. The security implied in the state of belonging underpins the desire to belong and share identity. Sentiments expressed by the staff participants were divergent from the student participants. The staff participants expressed their concern for a lack of community and compared the college to similar institutions, which they perceived exhibited a stronger sense of community. This incongruence between the staff and student participants indicates that staff may be hyperbolising their perceived lack of opportunity for students to foster a sense of belonging, while from a student perspective there was a strong sense of belonging, despite the perceived lack of resource to support this. While it is no surprise that student and staff perceptions differ; what has emerged is that both groups have a view of belonging to the college as an integral aspect contributing to achievement and appreciation.

5.2.4 Autonomy and Accountability

The student participants had experienced a strong sense of autonomy when deciding on their choice of post-16 provider. Yet individually they described the

strong influence that their parents had on their decision-making. Megan and Michaela expressed how important their parents were in their decision to come to the college and study A-Levels, and to have a better future job opportunity. Elffers (2012) noted that parents from lower SES backgrounds were less able to support their children through their educational careers. For Megan and Michaela in particular, the experience of parental influence in coming to college had been instrumental. However, their subject choices and lack of clear understanding about the next step in their educational journey to HE or work, suggests a lack of understanding from both themselves and perhaps their parents, with regards to taking 'facilitating subjects', which will lead to onto greater opportunities for working life, (Moulton et al. 2018). This strengthens the profile for robust and tailored support and guidance for students undergoing transition and their parents; to enable better informed course decisions and choices.

The findings from the student participants shared similarities to a range of research, which looked at the influence of the father on transition, (Moulton et al. 2018; Hawkins et al. 2002). While John described a strong sense of autonomy, he also described the positive impact his father had on his decision-making and the level of support experienced during transition. During his interview John expressed the positive role played by his father during what he perceived to be a positive transition to college. Yet in contrast, the staff participants shared their limited or lack of experience of engagement with parents, during transition. This raises an implication for FE colleges in general, as parental influence may have a positive impact on transition. Whilst this may present a significant culture change in FE where students are regarded as young adults, the questions arise: is enough being done to engage

and inform parents, in their support for their children and their educational journey? Would better engagement with parents help them to support their children make informed decisions with regards to their education? Would better engagement with parents reduce the number of students taking up inappropriate subjects, like Michaela, which are not facilitating their future career opportunities? Could better engagement with parents help address social mobility? Akin to the Bourdieun view, (Bourdieu, 1977), better engagement with parents may help address where cultural capital is limited and therefore opportunities may be similarly limited. Such engagement would support the social mobility agenda, (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014). In addition, those students with little or no parental support or interest in their college choices, face further marginalisation than their well-supported peers. The compensation of peer support may be helpful but arguably should not be left to chance. Cracking the Code (2014) specifically recommended tailored strategies to engage parents. Yet the results from the staff participants significantly indicated a lack of engagement with parents.

The staff participants shared the belief that autonomy and thus their capacity to inform strategic thinking was restricted mostly, if not only, to the classroom. Both Mary and Donna described previous failed attempts at running clubs or enrichment activities that support integration, togetherness and transition. Mary and Donna expressed clear frustration at the lack of support for running such clubs because this involved extra work and contact time with learners, over and above their already busy work schedules, which was not valued by the leadership team. Through greater engagement with staff and value being afforded to extra-curricular activities, strategic leadership would be better positioned to devise effective policies and processes

which support transition. The perceived failure of the SLT to meaningfully engage with staff to inform strategic thinking emphasises the perceived authoritarian culture. Giroux (2017) argues that this new authoritarian culture has eroded dialogue and informed discussion. Whilst Giroux (2017) is making a more general point in relation to United States culture, his comments may be analogous to management styles being adopted more broadly.

Powell (2017) noted the experiences of isolation or alienation experienced by her participants when undergoing transition; her research recommended having effective and targeted support would limit such feelings of isolation or alienation. Whilst Powell's (2017) findings are supported in the present research, her research focused more on the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) in supporting transition, however, both sets of findings, from Powell (2017) and the present research, supports Goodlad's (2007) notion that a 'one size fits all' approach may be ineffective. Staff participants discussed experiences of student isolation and alienation, which they demonstrated through their despondence at their perceived lack of opportunity to offer extra-curricular support. Brunila et al (2011) and Rumberger's (2008) notion of transition inferred an onus on staff to prepare students for FE, HE and the world of work. A view that is shared with the results from staff participants. The staff participants wanted strongly to provide opportunities to benefit the students through transition, but perceived a lack of support to do this by the management. The benefits of having a greater focus on transition activities and enrichment opportunities for the SLT are similarly highlighted by Roberts (2009) who noted that by increasing a focus on such opportunity structures will reduce the rates of drop-out. Certainly, staff feelings of being undervalued when offering strategic

views is found, in both Roberts (2009) and the present research. Does this now challenge SLTs to respond to and enable action widely considered by staff as helpful to positive student –college participation?

The distinctions in the perception of autonomy and accountability, experienced by the staff and students are unambiguous, given their different horizons. For the student participants, this is likely to be the first time they have experienced autonomy in their educational decision-making, albeit for most with a strong parental influence. The student participants' strong sense of autonomy may be due to their lack of prior experience of autonomous educational decision-making. The staff participants expressed their perceived limited autonomy and their separation from strategic leadership in terms of activities and provision outside of their classroom. The staff participants demonstrated a strong sense of accountability for their students, which was demonstrated through their creative activities in the classroom. Nevertheless, staff felt little accountability for transition processes and provision outside of their classroom. One positive finding is the continued professional desire by staff to continue to do what can be done to ensure that students are better prepared for transition. Deuker (2014) found that students were often unprepared for the changes in expectations between school and college, and whilst the findings of the present research broadly support this finding, the staff participants showed less concern for student preparedness, as this was an aspect they thought they could address through relevant activities in their classrooms. All in all, staff considered planned enrichment activities, based on their contributions and knowledge, would improve their autonomy and the quality of practice.

5.3 Influences on Transition

5.3.1 Chaos and Confusion and Theory versus Practice

Three of the student participants experienced an increase in anxiety given their unfamiliarity with the new setting and culture. Simmonds et al (2016) noted the increased level of anxiety that young people experienced during transition, however these results showed a higher increase for vocational as opposed to academic students. Yet conversely Banks and Smyth (2015) noted the opposite, that academic learners experienced higher levels of anxiety than their vocational counterparts because of their perceived notions of the greater difficulty of their academic courses. Regardless of the ambiguity outlined above, what has emerged from the present research is that not all students experience increased anxiety during transition. The chaos and confusion expressed by staff were more reflective of their previous experience and sense of professional worth. In comparison, the experiences of the student participants seemed to indicate their sense of acceptance whereas for staff the impact was more considerable in increasing their isolation from the decision-making process.

Whilst the majority of student participants described their heightened anxieties during transition, one participant expressed little anxiety during the key events of transition: enrolment and induction. Michaela who was not doing the course she wished to do, had expressed her positive experience of coming to college, perhaps as a result of her getting onto any course rather than her preferred choice. Kendall et al. (2018) noted that students assimilate relatively quickly into their new setting and are

optimistic about their transition. Similarly, Duchesne et al (2012) noted that many young people experience transition with relatively few issues and adapt easily; yet for some transition will negatively impact on their social, educational and emotional wellbeing. The findings from the student participants in the present research do not attest to the latter notion in Duschesne et al (2012) because the social, educational and emotional wellbeing of the students do not appear to have been negatively impacted. Although, a more longitudinal piece of research would be required to investigate whether the educational outcomes were adversely impacted. Notwithstanding, the students did perceive the new environment as a challenge with degrees of anxiety; the point is that some can settle quickly while others cannot. These research findings suggest that having an institutional transition policy and allied practice might lead to a greater likelihood of less stress or confusion.

The theme of theory versus practice emerged strongly in the results from the staff participants and relates to distinctions between the policies and their enactment. The term 'theory versus practice' was used by three of the participants, which was then employed as the title for this particular theme, as is good practice in IPA research, (Smith et al. 2009). There was agreement that processes were not efficient and focused unduly on the requirements of college administration. Learners saw little benefit in the induction practices, nor did the staff. Coelho and Romao (2016) highlighted that transition for many is the most stressful event that students experience. The staff participants indicated that their experiences at the college failed to take this finding into account. Perhaps a more concerning theme to emerge was that the narrow process of induction was having a detrimental effect on some of the students.

'They [enrolling staff] thought the course was one thing and it's not and there

is one level one student who got put onto catering and is now [January] being

transferred onto our Journey to GCSE course'. (Eileen, line: 19)

In line with the findings of Coelho and Romao (2016) the results of the present research suggest that greater focus by SLTs is needed for transition, and provision must consider the wellbeing of the students in strategic planning and include opportunities for greater staff contributions.

5.3.2 Identity and Agency

A common theme to emerge during the analysis and results was that learners demonstrated a separation from their school peers. Transition for young people is a time of psychological development and identity formation, (Powell, 2017; Bone, 2016; Hernandez-Martinez et al. 2011). Three student participants reflected negatively on their relationship with their school peers and school teachers, which was juxtaposed with their more positive relationships with college staff and students. Michaela used the phrasal verb 'babied' to describe her experience of school. Simmonds et al (2016) drew attention to the failure of schools in preparing learners for post-16 education, which given the perceived lack of support experienced from the student participants, reinforces this notion by Simmonds et al (2016). This also highlights the culture of school versus the college ethos and the more relaxed rules and regulations of post-16 education.

The student participants expressed that they felt a strong sense of freedom since coming to college, in relation to their new identity as a college student. Those student participants who had a clear idea of their future educational trajectory had a stronger sense of their newly formed identity as a college student. Similar to the findings of Baillie et al (2013) where students undergo a liminal process of disorientation and ambiguity during transition, the participants in the present research expressed how the expectations on them had altered and the demands placed on them, through studying at A-Level, meant taking greater ownership and responsibility for their learning and socialisation. For example, Jill described the differences in expectation in terms of taking endless notes from books in school and writing key points from a PowerPoint at college. This point is concurrent with the Transition Curve by Fisher (2012), whereby students will progress along a spectrum at different paces and experience different emotions at different points as they transition and form new identities. The findings of the present research support the findings in Deuker (2014) in relation to the lack of preparedness of students for their transition to college and the differences in expectations.

The staff participants considered the burgeoning identities of their learners in terms of learning and the skills required to study A-Level, in other words their learner identities. Staff adapted their practices early in the academic year, to support students during transition. A number of the staff participants found that activities like academic workshops and critical discussions helped students to recognise the more analytical approach needed to study A-Level. This is supported by Land et al (2013) Threshold Concept, which suggests that once students understand the foundational aspects of their curriculum, it is likely to have a transformative effect on their

learning. Land et al. (2013) also highlight that this can be a troublesome and liminal process for learners. Similarly, Barradell (2013) suggested that once these tricky aspects had been mastered, this allowed teachers to deliver a streamlined curriculum by bridging the previous curriculum. The findings relating to the staff participants broadly support those of Land et al (2013) and Barradell (2013) who share similarities with the experiences of the staff participants, yet are distinct given the different transition stages. As alluded, the staff participants adapted their practices at the beginning of the year to support transition. It is notable that the change of studying a broad and extended school curriculum where the emphasis is on memory and retention, changes as the college student is more focused on the smaller subject range and therefore more likely to develop a reflective approach to understanding and analysis than simple recall. In other words, the school curriculum allows for a broader subject range of surface learning, whereas A-Levels involve deep learning of a smaller subject range, (Asikainen and Gijbels, 2017).

The staff participants were creative in their thinking to meet the requirements of their curricula, and also to give the students the chance to develop their learning skills. For example, by facilitating additional workshops or enrichment activities, which could support learners to develop more approaches to learning and adapt to their new identities as A-Level learners. The staff felt as though their views on learning approaches were neither questioned or appreciated by management and not considered within the learning processes of transition arrangements. What emerges here is the lack of an accepted shared practice approach and while this does not only refer to transition it raises the issue of staff access to a forum which draws on their experiences. There needs to be an explicit recognition of students' learning

development and identity formation and this should underpin the structures and processes in curriculum development and delivery. For instance, considering Perry's Student Development Theory (1968), when devising transition provision would lead to improved transition experience for students.

5.3.3 Management

The staff participants shared a frustration at the perceived dwindling resources and opportunities, which support transition. The cuts to funding in the post-16 sector have had negative ramifications on every aspect of resourcing and planning within the post-16 sector, (O'Leary, 2014). There was agreement among the staff participants that the focus from the SLT was mainly financial and not educational. Furthermore, there was agreement among the staff participants that the primary function of induction was for college administration and 'tick box exercises' that were not in the interests of the students. The market driven approach colleges take in terms of recruitment and sustainability has been an ongoing issue which was highlighted by Ball et al. (1999), whose research highlighted the targeted approach to promote 'cost effective' courses. The findings from the staff participants indicate that this market approach has not diminished over the last 20 years, as exemplified by Dominguez-Reig and Robinson (2019). Eileen in her responses drew attention to the many instances where students have ended up on courses that they did not wish to study and where courses with smaller numbers of students did not run as they were not cost effective. Similarly, two of the student participants said that they chose a subject just because they needed something academic (Jill), or they could not do the subject they wished to do (Michaela). The mismatch between some students and

their course acceptance is an issue which could be addressed more deliberately at the transition stage when time and communication could be afforded to better inform student career pathways.

McMurray (2019) similarly pays testament to the fact that the market driven issues have not dissipated in the post-16 sector, and noted that the recent cuts to the sector has meant that colleges are now offering a more limited range of subjects. The findings of the present research affirm the findings of McMurray (2019), which raises an implication for transition. Limiting the opportunity of subjects and courses for young people may be forcing young people towards trajectories and careers that they do not wish to pursue or are irrelevant for them. The questions that this implication raises are whether such limitations lead to an increase in attrition and disaffection? Are the limited course offerings increasing the number of young people deemed NEET? Are resource limitations addressing social inequality? Are such limitations of course choices preventing social mobility? The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of the research, yet by highlighting these implications, the present research is indicating where more research is needed, particularly at government level. Fundamental to all research foci in this area has to include the relevance of placing more emphasis on and action about the transition process and implications for practice for both students and staff. Furthermore, research here would help to redress the implications raised by Hodgson (2015) that the FE sector is a neglected area for research.

For the staff participants, there was little recognition of the national picture when discussing the lack of resource available to support transition. Hodgson (2015)

raised the point that senior leadership teams must cut provision annually in order to survive. Yet the staff participants did not share responsibility for the political decisions affecting funding in education, particularly at the transition stage. Instead, staff focused on the perceived failures of leadership, in terms of resourcing and provision. The staff participants indicated there was a strong separation between teachers and senior leadership. The SLT and their support for transition has not been expressed positively or indeed considered sufficiently to address the concerns held by the staff. All of the staff participants agreed that transition provision should be important for the SLT, yet all indicated that it currently was not. In essence, this points to a lack of understanding of transition or indeed to the evidence that there are major implications for practice which should address staff views and student needs.

The student participants spoke positively about their courses and teachers, despite the fact for some, they were studying a course they did not wish to study or pursue at HE or the world of work. Yet, the staff participants highlighted their serious concerns and expressed negatively how the current provision and opportunities for students were having a detrimental effect on the students' wellbeing and their future educational and career goals. These findings resonate with Thompson (2017) who highlighted that the very policies and provisions which are aimed at reducing the number of NEET young people are actually leading to increased numbers of those deemed NEET. Raising the focus on transition is an evident area for consideration.

An implication, which is brought to light from the findings of the research, suggests a perceived failure of senior leadership to address social inequality. Whilst Ofsted's EIF (2019) requires institutions to focus on addressing social mobility, the present

research highlights a perceived failure of SLTs to take steps, which promote social mobility and indeed to justify the lack of debate about the transition process. By implication senior leadership teams could find value in providing a greater focus and specific provision to transition. Both the Social Mobility Commission (2014) and the EIF (2019) place an onus on senior leadership teams to ensure that the national agenda, aimed at encouraging social mobility, is translated into practice, through robust policies and provision; transition planning should have the interests of the students as its core focus and the opportunities to progress.

5.4 Transition in Learning

5.4.1 Educational Focus, Trajectory and Teacher Practices

The results demonstrated that students with a clear educational and/or career goal had a better understanding of their transition to and through the college. For two of the student participants, their time at college was perceived as transient, or a means to further development. Yet for the other two student participants, who did not have a clear goal in mind, there was a perception that college was their life now and decisions about their future education or careers were something that did not need consideration at the present time. Whilst those without a clear goal are at higher risk of disaffection or drop-out, (DFE, 2017) the results of the present research did not confirm nor contradict this, given its limited timeframe. All of the student participants positively expressed their experiences of college and the relative success of their transitions appeared not to be determined by whether or not they had a clear goal.

Nevertheless, what these findings do suggest is that some students perceived having a clear long-term goal as unimportant during transition to post-16 education.

Whilst the majority of student participants recognised and grappled with the differences in expectations and learning between school and college; the staff participants raised concerns at the perceived failures of the school system and the GCSE curricula to prepare learners adequately for A-Level. Deuker (2014) noted that those students who performed well at GCSE would still experience difficulty in managing the leap to A-Level; this finding is supported in the present research. John in particular, described achieving high grades in his GCSEs, yet experienced difficulty in the transition in learning at A-Level.   Thus, a further impetus is placed on policy makers and strategic leadership teams to ensure that provision is robust and ensures that resource is afforded to supporting students making their transition in learning. Enabling teachers to spend meaningful contact time with students away from their respective curricula would facilitate academic workshops and A-Level skills to be taught. This similarly raises the necessity for greater cohesion between secondary and post-16 education. Whilst a number of the staff participants conducted activities, which supported the transition in learning, this was at the detriment of their curriculum guided learning hours and was not supported, or perceived to be supported, by the SLT.

5.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Transition is not a simple or easy to fix issue; this has been shown by the present research which consisted of analysing interviews with both staff and students.

The overarching research conclusion is how students experience transition differently yet at the same time there are consistent indicators of the areas that might be particularly problematic. For their part, staff experience alienation reflecting a distinct belief that their views and knowledge are not aligned with an observed bureaucratic approach to enrolling students into college courses. Transition is poorly acknowledged.

Throughout this discussion section a number of key findings emerge. IPA has enabled the present research to explore transition in extensive detail and draw conclusions, which are underpinned by the experiences of the key participants in the transition process. For the staff participants, the overarching sense of respect for their professional opinions and autonomy and capacity to inform better the learning aspects of college life and more importantly the social supports necessary for effective learning and preferred career pathways, is foremost in their responses. For this unique set of student participants, the findings suggest that three of them would adapt easily to the college environment, however there were indications that the experiences of meeting new peers and adapting to a new environment is a time of apprehension. Students may experience a sense of chaos and confusion during enrolment and induction events, which may trigger anxiety. The key factors to emerge in relation to enrolment and induction, included parental influence, a shared space, a sense of belonging and self-worth. From this research at a particular Post-16 college in the UK, and with a specific set of participants, made up from non-traditional or 'second chance' students, studying A-Levels in a vocational setting and staff who support in the transition process, these factors and their interplay are at the heart of the transition issue and as such should be more significant in the business

of senior management agendas and importantly, how the transition provision can ensure student confidence and enrich the working insights of staff in FE.

Transition was perceived by all participants as ongoing and a process, transition was discussed in terms of previous and future education and indeed towards the world of work. The two student participants who had clear goals for HE, demonstrated a greater awareness of their changing identities and viewed their transition experience as being to, and through, the college. Such findings reinforce the notion of transition being a process, as opposed to an event and one which will require access when needed to levels of support and guidance. Whilst staff participants similarly perceived transition as a process, their frustrations were abundant, at the perceived failings of strategic leadership and institutional level which appeared to view transition as an event. This finding supports Packer and Thomas (2021) whose research similarly considered post-16 transition in FE, and while the participants were both staff and students, akin to the present research, the uniqueness of the student participants, studying academic courses in a vocational setting, provides the present research with a distinctive quality and contributes to new knowledge, which builds on the findings of Packer and Thomas (2021).

A finding in the present research highlights the poor engagement with parents to inform their understanding and contribution to the transition process. There is a lack of shared space and provision for social interaction and teacher-student access. The feelings staff hold of being undervalued and unable to influence strategic discussion and debate are evident in respect of the central role of support as a positive wellbeing enabler. There is lack of awareness of the stressors to assist change and

improvement at the transition stage. There is a need for SLT to focus more purposefully on transition and learning to reduce levels of stress and indeed drop out and retention rates. There is potential of enabling students to progress their sense of autonomy, confidence, belonging and wellbeing. Finally, the refocusing of student career pathways support based on an assessment of need rather than on market forces, would ensure well considered choices are made. These factors are of course compounded by the impact of the current climate and the significant changes colleges should make within their structures and systems to secure staff and student wellbeing while complying with external directives. Nevertheless, the data indicates the need for a transition model which management promotes and enables.

In addressing the findings five key principles emerge to direct further the policy and practice which is necessary for transition to effect improvement and contribute to further research. These are:

1. **Transition provision should be viewed as a process and not an event. Transition provision should be well-considered, resourced and a fundamental priority for Post-16 providers, which is integral to leadership agendas. An accepted model of transition is a necessary first step in this endeavour.**

2. **Students' experiences and career pathways should be fully considered and not time bound in transition planning.**

3. Students' access to a resourced and transparent support system should include the student voice to enrich practice.

4. **Staff experience and knowledge should inform transition planning through an effective model to enable shared communication and responsibility to develop in a professional manner.**

5. **The sharing of information and advice to parents should be a strong consideration in the transition process. Their views and participation should be actively sought.**

It is finally concluded that actions to address the issues emerging from a review of transition policy and practice, must be set within a growing understanding of a changing educational and societal climate, which arises from both theoretical and empirical research and political directives. This research set out to contribute to the understanding of what constitutes an effective model of transition. The findings indicate where fundamental changes can be achieved.

Recommendations for Staff:

Throughout the conduct of the present IPA research, there has been a sustained focus on investigating the experiences of transition. Employing this methodological approach enabled certain insights to be gained which were unforeseen, for instance, practitioner perspectives of student's negative experience during certain periods of

transition, August and September, are often unfounded. Despite the recognition of the seemingly chaotic processes, students were largely well able to cope with their transition and gave greater focus to their new-found freedoms. Therefore, transition planning and provision should emphasise the distinct and positive aspects of being a college student, which on the one hand, involves greater autonomy in terms of freedoms, while on the other hand relates to the more autonomous approach to learning post-16.

The student participants valued their relationship with their teachers in college as wellbeing enablers, yet conversely, staff participants demonstrated their frustrations at the lack of meaningful time they could afford to spend with students during the early stages of transition. The staff participants felt the marketised approach in FE was having a detrimental impact on transition and the reduction in funding they have experienced annually, has meant that enrichment opportunities and activities, which support transition are no longer in place. The student participants demonstrated concern when forming new peer relationships. The findings highlight that transition is a unique experience for each individual student, which some participants found more difficult than others. The staff participants highlighted their frustrations at the lack of relevant student information which would enable them to better prepare for transition and in particular support those students who found the process more challenging.

Recommendations for SLT:

Despite a perceived lack of opportunity to foster a sense of belonging from the staff participants, the student participants demonstrated a sense of belonging, which is

paramount during transition. The student participants described feelings of alienation in their early transition experience, whereas the staff participants perceived the early transition stages as opportunities to engage with students and offer IAG; such opportunities were perceived as being undervalued by the SLT. This highlights that transition planning must be afforded greater interest, focus and resource from strategic leadership who should consider the opportunity structures transition presents.

The student participants' awareness of their changing identities was variable, however, those participants who had a longer-term plan for their education and future careers, perceived their identity as a college student as well established but transient. Two student participants who positively experienced the social aspect of transition, found difficulties in their transition in learning experiences. Staff participants adapted their practices during these key transition stages to support transition experiences for their students. The establishment of tutor groups, akin to that in SFC would enable teachers to spend more meaningful time with their students, which would not be at the detriment of their respective curricula.

From the staff perspective, transition is not given enough focus from strategic leadership and whilst teachers recognised the importance of transition, their approaches as perceived were organic aspects of their annual practices as teachers and not given specific forethought. The staff participants through their reflections of being involved in the research process enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on the importance of transition. It is for staff and students to recognise the contribution of the research benefits and for management to reflect on the implications of supporting

staff and students through the meticulous development of a much more highly considered transition process.

Recommendations for Researchers:

It is hoped that this work will stimulate further interest and research foci in such an important area of education. Research is limited in FE generally and transition to FE has hitherto attracted limited interest from researchers. More research is required in this area to enhance transition experience and improve outcomes for students. There is a paucity of research conducted on students studying A-Level in a FE setting, which given the ongoing changes to the sector would be beneficial.

5.6 Limitations of the Research

A limitation of the present IPA research is that it was conducted with a small number of participants, in a specific college in North West England, which means that a cautious approach must be taken to claim generalisability. Generalisability is not an aim of IPA research, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Nevertheless, the depth of analysis provides a strong reflection of what may emerge from a more extensive and long-term research investigation of the transition area. Giorgi (2011) has been highly critical of IPA as a philosophical paradigm because as he suggests, the approach is ambiguous in terms of phenomenological bracketing. The present research, in line with the Heideggerian view, perceives bracketing as unachievable and as the researcher in the present research was a member of college staff in the research

setting, interpretations may have unwittingly been influenced by institutional knowledge. However, at all times during the conduct of the present research a conscious effort was made to limit the researcher's institutional knowledge and maintain a commitment to the data, as prescribed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2012). During data collection bracketing was somewhat attempted by carefully planning questions and reducing responses from the researcher, which may have indicated (dis)agreement. The present IPA research acknowledges its hermeneutical underpinnings and through the use of a reflective research journal effort were made to ensure credibility.

Overall, it can be suggested that wider research, in this domain, has been short term and limited and would benefit from a more robust in-depth examination of the many factors which influence how transition impacts both students and staff. This study in particular offers insights into the variables at play when students move to the FE sector to study A-Levels. One conclusion of the literature search is that transition has not attracted sufficient interest from the research world, nor has it focused on the potential importance of evaluating what impact transition has for both students and staff. It is easy to acknowledge the failure of FE for some students in terms of drop out and poor retention rates but failure to analyse the reasons why rates do not reduce, reflects the concerns of resource and more importantly the possible lack of understanding of transition as a process, which includes a variety of variables. The present research is solely focused on the living example of transition experience in one college and with a particular set of participants, and while relatively small, it has the intention of informing thinking and planning, within and beyond the college leading to improvement. Moreover, the present research has highlighted where

further knowledge and research are required to inform better understandings and in turn better practices which support transition.

5.6.1 Credibility and Trustworthiness

In the present research there has been a commitment and adherence to the three philosophical principles of IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, (Miller et al. 2018). The researcher shared a number of interpretations of interview data with two participants, who were asked to comment. This led to informed and critical conversations and confirmed agreement. Whilst member checking and triangulation are not often employed in IPA, because of its hermeneutical approach; it was felt that this gave credence to the researcher's interpretations, (Alase, 2017). The maintenance of a reflexive journal throughout, enabled the researcher to remain as true as possible to the data in the analysis. Whilst not a traditional technique in IPA studies, triangulation was used as a further means of enabling participant voice, through sharing a selection of findings with two participants, which from the onset and throughout remained a central tenet of the present research. The use of a critical ally and independent reviewer helped to challenge and focus the analysis and results which gave an outsider perspective from an academic who was unfamiliar with the research setting.

Both strategies outlined above have adapted IPA, to meet the needs of present research and enriched the present research with more trustworthy findings, following Smith (2012) who encourages innovative and creative approaches to IPA.

5.7 Implications

Throughout the present research, the clear intention has been to explore the experiences that are present at the post-16 transition stage, which help or hinder successful engagement with further education. A major factor identified signalled the need for change in the management of the process and in the narratives that surround transition. The findings of the present research support the view that transition is a process, which creates an impetus for strategic leadership and policy makers to consider it as such, and in doing so, devise policy and provision that supports students' longer term educational and career goals. Based on the findings, greater focus and action are required if all students are to be supported to engage effectively in their college life and chosen courses and to enrich the efforts which staff make on their behalf. This recommendation is more significant when all in college education come to plan for greater outcomes and better educational experiences for students, at a time when education is increasingly recognised as a positive experience in an ever-changing societal climate.

Although variation is found in the transition experiences of the participants in the present research, it is important that thought and planning should address the issues, which give rise to negative experiences for both students and staff. For example, the experience of enrolment was a time of heightened anxiety for the majority of students, which suggests the need for careful planning to ensure that stressors that may heighten anxiety like chaos and confusion are addressed. The staff participants, in the present research indicated there was a strong separation from teachers to senior leadership. This suggests one of two implications, either that

the SLT are failing to communicate effectively with teachers in regards to the financial hardships the college and indeed the sector are facing, or alternatively the experiences of the staff participants, when working with the SLT, have led to a lack of trust or interest. This suggests that provision should be flexible and where practical personalised, to support students through transition by offering opportunities, along with effective IAG to support transition through college and beyond. The present research found that three of the student participants experienced transition with little difficulty, but at times required support from their teachers. This further suggests the need for better communication between SLT and staff, in terms of transition planning and for the inclusion of student representation in such planning events.

These findings also raise the question of access. For the student participants, the earlier their interactions with staff, the more confident they found their initial college experience. The implication suggests consideration needs to be given to finding ways to promoting supportive relationships to develop while ensuring safe contact.

The findings additionally raise implications for the need for future and targeted research, in particular for: Post-16 transition and the impact of SES, A-Level students in GFE, the impact of quality Advice and Guidance for Post-16 education.

5.8 Researcher Reflexivity on the Methodological Approach

Throughout the conduct of the present research, care has been taken to identify numerous research paradigms, in an effort to decide on the best approach for the work undertaken. In addition, the constraints in place, in terms of the college structure and current practices, directed the eventual methodology and, in most ways, gave the research a credible method of generating evidence to ensure reflexivity throughout.

As a researcher, I had initial reservations with regards to the interactions with both student and staff participants. Whilst I have extensive experience working with similar students who are 16-18 years old, I was keen to ensure a distinct approach to my pedagogical style. Through the initial discussion with the student participants, I reiterated my role as a researcher and took a more informal tone in the exchanges, to mitigate the impact of the power imbalance that existed with both the student and staff participants. Through recording a brief reflexive journal entry after each interview, from the analysis of case studies, it became evident that my approach developed with each successive interview. Each successive interview transcript, demonstrated fewer interjections from myself as the researcher and clarity was sought through my more succinct and directed researcher interjections. Through transcribing interviews with students and reflecting on the process, prior to conducting interviews with staff, I was aware of nuances in my language, for instance the use of fillers and the importance of allowing pauses. This ensured an improved approach with the staff interviews and later the Google Image interviews with the student participants. On reflection, if I had considered my interview

technique at the pilot study stage this might have led to a more refined approach, from the first interview.

Whilst reflecting on the Husserlian and Heideggerian tension of bracketing, I agreed that bracketing would be unachievable during the data analyses, however, I was keen during data collection, not to influence responses unwittingly through my institutional knowledge and therefore made conscious efforts to bracket my preconceptions and word questions in such a way to develop more open and trustworthy responses. I developed this approach by writing a brief reflexive diary entry after I transcribed and subsequently when analysing each interview, with specific consideration given to my use of language and how this may be skewed by institutional knowledge. Whilst the idea of bracketing has been criticised by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, Gregory (2019) suggested adopting some sort of bracketing in the early stages of research to produce credible results. By transcribing interviews immediately, I was able to reflect on, and develop my language and tone, in each successive interview, to limit any utterances which may have given insight to my preconceptions. This technique developed with each successive interview, which again could have been improved if considered at pilot study stage. As a researcher I now consider more greatly, the importance of the pilot study, which can have many benefits beyond its main focus.

I scheduled the interviews with participants, in such a way that allowed time for the interview to be transcribed by hand before the next interview. As alluded, this enabled reflection on the style of interviewing. In the first interview, I found it difficult to stop myself filling the silences and through immediately listening to interview

recordings I realised that the pauses were important. Being initially keen to fill awkward silences meant interrupting the participant a number of times, who then appeared to lose a train of thought or were keen to move on. By transcribing and then reflecting on my interview style immediately after the interview, I was able to improve on this for the next interview, where I embraced the pauses for longer, which proved more effective. Similarly, through transcribing interviews in a timely manner, I became acutely aware of my use of fillers like 'ahh' or 'umm', which on reflection may have unwittingly influenced responses from the participants, (Shinebourne, 2011; Gregory, 2019).

On reflection, the use of the Google Image photo-elicitation task in the second round of interviews with student participants worked well and led to more extensive discussions and insights of transition experience. This was a worthwhile method which provided extensive data for the IPA analysis. I decided not to employ this method with the staff participants as their interviews provided a rich data set, however, the students benefitted from using photo-elicitation, which suggests this may have been beneficial for staff participants too.

I found initial difficulty in separating my role as a member of staff and that of a researcher. My tone, register and style I consciously altered in an attempt to become more informal, less disciplinarian and encourage a relaxed environment whereby participants felt comfortable to elicit honest accounts of their experiences of transition. I found the use of a few introductory questions which were off topic or a little anecdote about myself, helped create a conducive atmosphere. This developed over the course of the interviews. In my future research endeavours, I will take more

time to consider and refresh my interview style prior to data collection, to limit any potential impact this may have.

During the analysis stage I found difficulty in separating my institutional knowledge and remaining true to the participants' experiences, however, working with a critical ally with an outsider perspective, limited interpretations which were unduly influenced by my knowledge of the intricacies of the research setting. Through the reflexive journal and the acknowledgement that my institutional knowledge could never be fully bracketed, (Cresswell and Poth, 2018), I was conscious to ensure that any tacit assumptions in my writing did not preclude the reader from fully understanding the interpretations and results.

Contribution to Knowledge: Impact

The present research originally arose out of an area of interest and was based on my experience of this area as one which was neglected in practice as being of little value. The concept of transition is largely viewed as an event in the lives of students moving from one phase in their education to another, (Morris and Atkinson, 2018). However, the evidence is sufficient to suggest that the early experiences of students during transition can for some be an indicator of future success or failure to adjust or remain in education. For this reason, identifying and considering what transition means for students can raise the awareness of the impact of the process and as such, should be regarded more by colleges when reviewing their retention and success rates. Unfortunately, in practice little has been done to explore transition beyond the event to the process. In this endeavour, it is the contention of this work

that colleges should explore with care, the transition experience of their students and the views of key staff, in order to consolidate better practice leading to improvement. Given the paucity of research conducted on post-16 mainstream transition, as outlined in the literature review, the impact and importance of the present research is elevated, and makes a significant contribution to new knowledge about the ongoing experiences of students' transition.

5.9 Future Research

The present research has identified areas where further scholarly endeavour is required. For instance, longitudinal research on transition would provide greater insight into the impact of transition experience over a longer period and access whether participants who experience difficulty during their Post-16 transition, experience further difficulty during subsequent transitions.

The present research's student participants were mainstream students and a broadly homogenous group, which therefore offers little insight for students who are marginalised. Future transition research could also address transition experience for students who are marginalised because of their ethnicity, language, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Looked After Children (LAC) status. This would enable better informed practices that would reduce the likelihood of transition practices leading to further marginalisation.

A finding from the staff participants in the present research suggests that the year on year reductions in funding and resource to support transition, has had a negative

impact on transition experiences of their students. Future research should focus on this area specifically, to explore fully the impact of reductions in funding on Post-16 transition experience for students.

A final question may be to address the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on transition experience. For instance, has the removal of big induction and enrolment events removed anxiety triggers for students?

The present research focused on the transition experiences of the staff and student participants and in doing so highlighted a range of important aspects which have influence transition experience, such as studying A-Levels in FE, SES, NEET status, course choice and parental influence, all of which require further academic research to fully explore how such factors impact and influence transition.

<u>Addendum</u>

The research was conducted prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic but is timely and appropriate in a climate where a constant pandemic poses major challenges to the process of educating young students and how best a system can be developed to secure their wellbeing and retain their interest in remaining in education.

The global pandemic has meant large enrolment and induction events are no longer feasible at the present time and providers have had to quickly adapt processes and enhance remote and online events, which has inadvertently removed these events which can trigger anxiety.

It may also be said that the issues of transition are ever present; the current pandemic has disrupted the provision of education and arguably may exacerbate the impact on transition.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

The questions below were used as a rough guide to ensure similar topics were explored in each interview.

Schedule for student participants' initial interview:

- Introductory questions

1) Tell me about your experience in year 11?

2) What was your first impression of the college?

3) Did you have any experience of the college before you came in September? Was this helpful?

4) Tell me about the support you have had when moving from school to college? (school/parents/college)

5) What influences were there on your decision to come to this particular college?

6) What advice and guidance did you get from school?

7) What advice and guidance did you get from college?

8) Did you feel supported by the college when you first started?

9) How was your experience of induction?

10) What aspects of induction supported your transition?

11) What would have made the first week better?

12) Do you feel you belong at the college? How? Why?

13) Anything else?

Schedule for staff participants' interviews:

1) How long have you been at the college?

2) How long have you been a teacher?

3) Why did you decide to become a teacher?

4) What was your own experience of post-16 transition like?

5) What is your experience of the college's transition processes?

6) What role do you play?

7) Is the college's transition provision effective? Why? Could it be improved? How?

8) What is collaboration like between the providers?

9) How much information is shared?

10) What is transition provision like for different types of students? (marginalised…)

11) Do you feel that students are supported at the college through their transition?

12) Is transition provision important for you? The college?

13) What is the support like from SLT?

14) Is there a transition policy? If so, what does it say?

15) What is induction/enrolment like?

16) What would make transition better?

17) Do you feel as though you belong at the college?

18) Anything else you would like to add?

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET for Staff

Outline of the research:

My research sets out to explore the experiences of students as they make their educational transition from school to college and the experiences of the staff who are involved in the process.

Who is the researcher?

Name: Nevan Hunter

Institution: Liverpool Hope University

Researcher's University email address: 14012228@hope.ac.uk

What will my participation in the research involve?

You will be asked to take part in an interview about your experience of the educational change from school to university, in either November or December 2018. For student participants this will also involve you being involved in a reflective task using images. You will be given interview questions beforehand and guidance on the reflective task.

Will there be any benefits to me to taking part?

1) It will give you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences
2) Your contributions may help to shape and improve future provision
3) Being involved will give you an insight into the conduct of educational research. This may be useful to those of you who wish to conduct research in the future.

Will there be any risks to me in taking part?

There are minimal risks involved when participating in this research. You are under no obligation to take part in this research and have no obligations to Liverpool Hope University or me. You can withdraw from the research at any time up to July 2020.

This research is being conducted under my capacity as a doctoral researcher at Liverpool Hope University and not as a member of staff at the City of Liverpool College.

There are minimal psychological risks involved as part of this research and should you need any support outside of the interview, you should speak to your Personal Tutor.

What happens if I decide that I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide that the information given should not be used?

There is no problem here. Should you wish at any point, prior to July 2020, that you no longer wish to participate in the research, you can email my university email account. There are no consequences for withdrawing. If you decide to withdraw all data relating to your contributions will be destroyed.

If you decide to withdraw at any point, this will have no bearing on my relationship with you as a colleague, or as a student. If you feel uncomfortable during interviews or reflections you can have a break or terminate the interview. You also have the choice of not answering any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

How will you ensure that my contribution is anonymous?

At no point will your real name be used in the conduct of this research. I will be following the British Education Research Association's (2018) ethical guidelines to ensure that the research is ethical at all times and that confidentiality is respected. I will use pseudonyms in the write up of this research.

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light that you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours which I may need to disclose to the appropriate authorities.

Appendix 3: Case Study Table Analysis Extract

Emergent Themes	Transcript	Exploratory Notes
		Descriptive comments: normal font *Linguistic Comments:* *Italics* Conceptual Comments: Underline
Teacher experience	2. N: okay thank you for agreeing to take part in my research, so a few introductory questions to begin, how long have you worked at the college?	
Teacher experience	3. C: I have worked at the college since 2010, so this is my 9th academic year….[working out] yeah 9 years…	Experienced teacher Introductory questions Experienced teacher

	4. N: okay and how long have you been a teacher?	
Cares	5. C: how long have I been a teacher am…10 years, so yeah 10 years…	Introductory questions
Passionate	6. N: okay and why did you decide to become a teacher?	Cares about students.

Passionate about English |
| Making a difference

Making a difference | 7. C: I have had a number of different careers beforehand and am… when I was working in both the civil service and leisure and management I realised… and really got involved with the training side there, I enjoyed the training | Evolved into a social science teacher |

Positive experience of transition	side and after I had a little career break I went and did a second degree in literature and trained to be an English teacher, because I was quite passionate about it at the time…and what happened was that I found that there was quite a lot of opportunities in my first degree area which was social sciences and I tended to evolve into a social science teacher, at the point…	Wanted to make a difference. Cares about students.
Second chance		Wanting to make a difference Pride Positive personal experience with education.
Making a difference	8. N: okay, so what was the impetus to become a teacher? 9. C: am… I think generally wanting to	Second chance. Wanting to inspire others? Engage the unengaged?

Positive experience of education	make a difference, I think as I …I spent much of my twenties working the private sector in very much profit related businesses, particularly night clubs and I didn't really enjoy it as much and I wanted a job, that I could am look back on with a little bit of pride and think I have made a difference and have done something worthwhile…when I came home at the end of the day and am…I was a student at this college and I remember fond times that I had here and am… and that seemed to be the way to go for	Wanting to make a difference. Improve the lives of kids.
Second chance		Personal positive experience of education.
Transition variable Trajectory		<u>had a second chance and wanted to help others?</u>

Making a difference	me, sort of working in further education, giving kids a second chance because I had been given a second chance in FE and that's why I picked FE rather than secondary.	
Results		Variable experience of transition. <u>Got on the right trajectory eventually, so using own experience to improve the experiences of others?</u>
Peer relationship	I think because that idea, I had a pretty negative experience with my a-levels, with certain teachers, like maths teachers who ~~weren't the greatest~~	Removed section as potentially identifiable information
Removed section as potentially identifiable information	teachers, but when I came and was taught by some good	
Fresh slate	teachers, later on in life, I began to reflect	Fresh slate.
Lack of confidence	on that and thought	Lacking confidence.
Administration	that's what I want to do and that's where I	<u>A large proportion of teacher's time is spent assessing prior knowledge? Placing</u>
Pressure on teachers	want to be…that's what I want to be seen	

Pressure on curriculum	as. I want to be seen as somebody who has made a difference in a kid's life…	further pressure on the teacher/curriculum?
Transition in learning		Transition in learning.
Transition in learning Integration	Removed section as potentially identifiable information	Students have strong opinions about sociology, which helps with the transition in learning?
Diversity	10. N: okay, thank you. What is your experience of the college's transition provision?	Opportunity to encourage integration? Diversity?
Building confidence		Important to build up student's confidence
Student voice	11. C: (8:03) our college? What in particular do you mean students coming in for GCSE or a-level?	
Building confidence		Important to listen to students. Students are not ordinarily listened to?
Results	12. N: yeah so just students coming from	Overlooked?
Core subjects		
Fresh slate	school and from the start to coming to	Important to build confidence?

	class… so what role do you play in that provision?	Results and core subjects.
Transition in learning	13. C: am … if we go back from the kinda marketing side, do you mean that? As a curriculum team leader, our role is to be	<u>Students do well in sociology often because it is new? Giving them a new interest or experience of learning?</u>
Transition in learning Expectations	involved in the open nights, to sell our	Curriculum.
	subjects to prospective students and to advise	Students having strong opinions.
Expectations	and guide them, on the potential routes that they might want to explore… and that's usually done 6-9	<u>Collective experience? Making the curriculum relevant and relatable</u>
Environment	months before	<u>helps with the transition in</u>
Educational focus	students come in, am… my own kinda personal view on it is	<u>learning?</u>
		<u>Teacher as a facilitator?</u>
Educational focus	that a lot of our students kinda show	

	up on the day… I see a lot of students	*'tend' not routinely.*
Transition gradual	throughout the year but don't see many of	<u>Ground rules set high expectations from the start?</u>
Transition in learning	them being converted	*So much more'*
Transition gradual	into actual students…am there is	*hyperbolised, and juxtaposed to highlight contrast.*
	probably a handful throughout the year. With teaching sociology and having kinda a large	<u>Creates a learning environment which is supportive and educationally focused?</u>
Environment	percentage of the	
	cohort coming through	<u>Positive reinforcement?</u>
Educational focus	my classes, I think it is about 30-40% of the	<u>Focus on education and teaching and learning?</u>
	cohort coming through	<u>Progression important?</u>
	my classes, who did	<u>Reassuring students?</u>
Informality	sociology, I see very few of them from those	<u>Improves the transition in learning by setting easier</u>
Building confidence	open days being transferred to A-Level	<u>targets early on?</u>
	students. I see more of	<u>Gradual transition in</u>
	them coming onto lower levels, so	<u>learning practices?</u>

	students come to us and say that they're not going to get their GCSEs and they will come in. and I do see	
Chaos	a lot who have moved am who you will see	Changes in environment.
Induction too short	being enrolled onto	Informality. <u>Focus on</u>
Quality	level one programmes	<u>education? Not ancillary</u>
Induction ineffective	early on, who have either been excluded	<u>things?</u>
	or self-excluded or they are in alternative	*Juxtaposed formal with relaxed, to highlight the*
Induction too short	provision and they kinda come in earlier	*difference between school and college.*
	than others, for the	<u>Relaxed approach</u>
Bombarding students	most part I would say that most students I	<u>important to help students settle?</u>
Fiscal focus	come into contact with,	<u>Building confidence</u>
Induction in college's	is during the enrolment	<u>important for a positive</u>
interests	period where we will have students who	<u>transition?</u>
	have not done quite as	
Processes ineffective	well as they would	
	have liked and so we	

Marginalised students	are giving them kinda advice and guidance as to what they can do. So we give them advice and get involved in their enrolment and find out why they are in the situation that they are in and am…and then they are for want of a better word 'processed' into students. In terms of that transition, in between this is school and this is college, I don't see much of that actual, it is not very formal. I find that a lot of the transition work that I do as an a-level teacher tends to be graduated in terms of my subjects, so I will	
Negative first impression		
Lack of strategic planning		*'for want of a better phrase'. Perhaps not wanting to offend SLT?* <u>Colleagues?</u>
Lack of strategic planning		chaos. Induction is chaotic. <u>Induction too short? Not enough time?</u>
Processes detrimental		<u>Quality ineffective?</u> <u>Induction is ineffective?</u>
Confusion		<u>Induction needs to be longer?</u>
Issues		
Trajectory forced		Over loading and bombarding students with lots of information during induction.
Chaos		<u>Eliciting lots of information? Not pertinent</u>

Processes unacceptable	introduce them to new ideas, that they won't have come across at school. Or I deal with some of the deficits	information for learning? Fiscal focus? Processes are ineffective at disseminating information. Often 6
Provision ineffective		
Processes having detrimental impact	that they come with, whether that be	months before information is transferred.
Provision impacting retention	through the way they write or how they contribute in class, or	Processes are ineffective? Processes are failing students?
Lack of IAG	some of the behaviours that they	Particularly marginalised students?
Lack of communication	have picked up in secondary school, and	Poor first experience of the college?
Theory vs practice	then we're trying to change those behaviours into college	Provision requires improvement. *Adj: 'slick' sharp' implying that is should cause minimal*
Processes ineffective	behaviours or a-level behaviours… so they	*disruption for the*
Induction ineffective	can fit into our college,	*learners?*
Failure of systems	am… trying to develop some of their self-esteem because particularly for some of these kids, we find that	Staff appear unprofessional because of lack of strategic planning? Lack of organisation?

Lack of resource	they come here because they have had a knock back from their school, they've only got five GCSEs or 6 GCSEs and not enough for them to take them on so they will come to us… 11:50 and that's knocked their self-esteem a bit, and I find that in those couple of	Timetable issues take too long to resolve. <u>Having a disruptive and detrimental effect on the learners' transition?</u> Confusion Timetable issues Forced trajectories Chaos induction
Lack of mental health provision	months during that period, if you call that the transition period, am… we are having to	<u>Students question themselves?</u> <u>Poor impression of the college?</u>
Belongingness hypothesis	almost build up their confidence a bit to get them to contribute…to make them a little bit	<u>I wouldn't accept this?</u> <u>Processes and provision is unacceptable?</u> <u>Provision is poor?</u>
Teacher resilience	more resilient and am… there's a lot of in	<u>Does this explain the rates of retention?</u>
Lack of support	those early months of people not doing their	

Failure of SLT	homework or not asking questions in class…because	Processes leading to disaffection and drop out? Lack of IAG?
Lack of mental health provision	they're afraid of failing or not been giving the opportunity or feeling they're failing, or they're in fear of the	Lack of communication? Theory vs practice?
Teacher training need	cycle of failure	Processes are
Lack of support	repeating itself…	ineffective?
Lack of mental health provision	14. N: So what do you do as a practitioner, to facilitate or enhance that transition in learning from GCSE to	Induction is ineffective? Systems failing to capture pertinent information? *'bazar' adj: highlighting the extent of the inadequate processes*
Lack of mental health provision	A-Level?	*and systems.*
Lack of mental health provision	15. C: I think for me individually as a practitioner…it's my subject and because it's one that many haven't studied	*Repetition of 'chaotic' emphasising lack of strategic management.* Lack of resource?
Lack of funding	before… and can	

Lack of mental health provision	come at students with a fresh slate… this is a subject you have never studied before… you have never	
Lack of mental health provision	studied this before… some of you may have some knowledge of GCSE sociology or some of you may have	Mental health and material deprivation are the two biggest issues with the cohort.
Lack of mental health provision	done something similar… but because it is a fresh slate, it	
Processes ineffective	gives us the ability to give some of them confidence, because a	*'we' pronoun implying we are in this together.* <u>Sense of belonging?</u>
Lack of communication	lot… of what I will spend my first two months teaching,	*'unfortunately: connotation of regret.*
Processes ineffective	whether it is A-Level or GCSE, is trying to	<u>Teacher resilience?</u> Teachers going above and beyond.
Teacher training need	assess the students' prior knowledge of what happens in society… and they	Lack of support for marginalised learners.

Teacher resilience	have a lot of knowledge, they have	*Hedge terms: not wanting to offend?*
Teacher training need	a lot of knowledge of what goes on in	*Repetition of 'above and beyond'* <u>this is not recognised by SLT?</u>
Overwhelmed	society, whether it's based on research or… whether it is just a common sense	<u>Mental health provision is lacking?</u>
Lack of mental health provision	approach, they all have an opinion about what is going on in society… and allowing	*'far' repeated to hyperbolise the amount of additional things teachers are doing? 'capable'* <u>is</u>
Lack of mental health provision	those students to be heard, or talk about their experiences, or comment on the things	<u>this dangerous? Beyond the capabilities of the teacher?</u> <u>Lack of support? Lack of</u>
Lack of mental health provision	that have happened to them… I think gives them a little bit of confidence…	<u>mental health provision?</u>
	16. N: agree.	<u>Inadequate counselling provision?</u>
Processes ineffective	17. C: all of a sudden	6 month waiting list for
Teacher resilience	here's a subject where	counselling.

Teacher administration Lack of communication Marginalised students Failure of processes Parental involvement Parental involvement Parental involvement Reliance on students SEN	someone is going to listen to them… their opinions are being backed up with a little bit of evidence, so it does give them a little bit of confidence…in Sociology and we find that those students who don't do so well, in the traditional or core subjects, actually do quite well in sociology because of that, because we are asking them about their experiences, particularly, when you look at the first two topics that we do in the first year are families and education, and a lot of them have very strong opinions about their own education.	*'tragic… really tragic…'* *emphasising the dire processes,* <u>and how they are failing students?</u> *'epidemic' connotes crises at national level.* <u>Lack of funding for FE?</u> Cuts to funding for mental health. Six months waiting time, for vulnerable students. <u>Processes and provision having a detrimental impact on learners?</u> *'horrific' adj:* <u>highlighting the serious failings?</u> <u>Processes ineffective?</u> <u>Mental health provision is failing our students?</u> <u>Lack of communication?</u> *'sad' show empathy.*

SEN	So we look at okay, why's a working class kid underachieves? Setting in class and streaming, and they will have all experienced that, whether it's positive or negative… so I think the ability to click with those ideas gives them the confidence to say 'yeah' I am beginning to understand this subject a bit… so in that case I am facilitating that…	<u>Processes are having a detrimental effect on learners?</u> *'struggling' verb: unable to cope.* <u>Training need for teachers? Failure of management?</u>
Failure of SLT		
Lack of information		
Failure of processes		<u>Teachers' resilience?</u>
Lack of strategic planning		<u>Teacher training need?</u>
Failure of processes		*'overwhelmed' nervous' emotive language descriptions: persuasive.*
	18. I also tend to do things like set early ground rules, for my learners, so I would much rather they try and fail, because I learn so much more about	*'social anxiety'* <u>provision failing vulnerable students? Lack of mental health?</u> <u>Unachievable for teachers?</u>

Lack of strategic planning	them when they fail, than when they succeed, even	*'difficult'* provision having a detrimental impact on learners?
Teacher resilience	students that I have had for a year, I say. To them that I learn so much more about you when you get a 'D',	Lack of mental health provision?
Lack of prior knowledge	than when you get a 'A', because we know what we need to fix, I try to develop an	
Lack of prior knowledge	environment where it is about learning and progressing, rather than about achieving,	Lack of information being shared? *'lucky' meaning this is the exception rather than the standard.* Teacher resilience? Onus on teachers to get information?
Processes having detrimental impact	at high level very early on. So the targets I set are very realistic and I don't try and push them too hard, very early on, I like them to feel their way in, not feel their way in… but we need to know	Teacher administration taking away from teaching and learning? Lack of communication?

Processes unacceptable	whether the mathematical target we set for them at the beginning is a realistic target… and that's my knowledge of A-Level provision. My knowledge of GCSE	<u>Vulnerable students are marginalised by processes? Variable?</u>
Processes having detrimental impact		3-6 months before pertinent information is transferred. Variable experience.
		<u>Parental involvement improves transition?</u>
Lack of information	and I have not taught GCSE for a few years, but my knowledge of GCSE is saying to them, okay this is a different type of	
Processes having detrimental impact		<u>Parental involvement improves transition?</u>
Processes ineffective	institution that you've got and change those ideas of like being	<u>Parental involvement improves transition?</u>
Lack of information	called sir, and sticking my hand up to go to	<u>Reliance on students?</u> Subject and exam focus.
Lack of information	the toilet. Or can I do this? Can I do this? I tend to take a step from that formal	
		SEN
Transition negative	secondary approach… to kinda of being more	Teacher practices

Issues	like right okay, taking a more relaxed approach, very early on to get them to open up a bit a make them feel a bit more comfortable, and confident within the	SEN
		Failing of SLT?
Marginalised students		
SEN		Reliance on students?
	classroom…	
Transition positive		

Appendix 4: Cross Case Analysis

Reading and re-reading x5

Initial Noting: Creating a table, left margin: Themes, middle: transcript, Right: Exploratory comments

Exploratory Comments:

Descriptive comments: normal text.

Linguistic comments: italics.

Conceptual comments: underlined

Developing emergent themes: from the conceptual, ideally using participants' own words

Abstraction of super-ordinate themes, through cross case analysis by extensiveness and numeration and formation. Creation of table.

Appendix 5: Subordinate Themes (example for a student participant)

Numeration, Clustering and Contextualisation of Emergent Themes:

Emergent Themes	Recurrence and extensiveness of Emergent Themes	Clustering	Second Cluster	Narrative Context
academic focus	7	🟩 green	🟩 light green	post-16 choices, enrolment
adaptability		🟦 blue		induction, college
adjustment		🟨 yellow		induction, college
agency	4	🟥 red		college
autonomy	4	🟥 red		college
babied		🟨 yellow		school
belongingness hypothesis	3	🟨 yellow	🟩 light green	college
blur		🟦 blue		enrolment, induction
childlike treatment	4	🟧 orange		school
cares about others	2	🟧 orange		school, college
chaos	2	🟦 blue		induction, enrolment
compromise		🟩 green	🟥 red	post-16 choices, enrolment
comfort		🟥 red		college
consistency and continuity	4	🟥 red		school, college

confidence	2	🟨		college
conformity		🟦		school
confusion	3	🟨		enrolment, induction
control	9	🟦		school
core subjects		🟩		school, college
course viability	4	🟩		post-16 choices, enrolment
daunting		🟦		enrolment, induction, college
dislikes rigidity		🟦		school
educational focus	5	🟩		post-16 choices, enrolment
educational maturity		🟥		college
embracing change	3	🟦	🟥	college
emotions		🟩		throughout
environment		🟥		college
excitement	2	🟨		enrolment, induction, college
expectations		🟥		college
extra-curricular	2	🟥		college
familiarity		🟥		college
fine	3	🟦		college
freedom	4	🟨		college
GCSE results	6	🟩	🟩	enrolment, induction, college
immaturity	7	🟨		school, college
incongruence		🟩		post-16 choices, enrolment
informality		🟦		college

interest focus			post-16 choices, enrolment
informed decisions	2		post-16 choices, enrolment
issues			college
lack of anxiety			post-16 choices, college
lack of IAG	12		school, college
lack of care	6		school
lack of organisation	6		college, induction
lack of support	3		school
loves college	3		college
maturity	8		college
natural progression			post-16 choices, college
negative IAG			school
negative reflection of learning			school
negative reflection of school	8		school
open-mindedness	3		post-16 choices, enrolment
organisation			induction, college
overwhelmed			enrolment, induction
parental influence	7		post-16 choices, college
parental support	3		post-16 choices, college
pedagogical knowledge	2		college
peer influence			post-16 choices, college
peer relationship	3		college, post-16 choices,
pleasing others	4		post-16 choices, college

pointless				induction
positive reflections of college	15			college
positive support				college
precociousness				post-16 choices, college
pressure	2			school
proximity	4			post-16 choices, college
reliance on others	3			throughout
representativeness				college
school protectionism	5			post-16 choices, college
sadness	3			college
self-assuredness	6			college
self-awareness	7			school, college
self-deprivation				college, post-16 choices,
self-motivation	2			college, post-16 choices,
separation from others	12			school
smooth				induction
social				college
stressful	6			enrolment, induction, college
struggle				post-16 choices, college
subject choice	11			post-16 choices, college
taking control				college
taking ownership				college

teacher influence	8			post-16 choices, college
teacher relationship	7			post-16 choices, college
trajectory				post-16 choices, college
trajectory considered	4			post-16 choices, college
trajectory unconsidered	4			post-16 choices, college
transition in learning	10			college
transition positive	2			college
transition to adulthood	8			college
uncertainty				post-16 choices, college

Appendix 6: Subordinate Themes Clustering (Student Participant Example)

| Cluster of Emergent Themes |
| --- |
| childlike treatment, cares about others, open-mindedness, parental influence, parental support, peer influence, peer relationship, pleasing others, reliance on others, separation from others, teacher influence, teacher relationship. |
| adjustment, babied, belongingness hypothesis, confidence, confusion, excitement, freedom, immaturity, lack of anxiety, maturity, overwhelmed, pressure, self-assuredness, self-awareness, self-deprivation, stressful, uncertainty. |
| academic focus, compromise, educational focus, GCSE results, interests focus, informed decisions, negative IAG, negative reflections of school, self-motivation, subject choice, trajectory, trajectory considered, trajectory unconsidered. |
| adaptability, blur, chaos, conformity, control, daunting, dislikes rigidity, embracing change, fine, informality, lack of care, loves college, positive reflection of college, positive support, precociousness, sadness, struggle, transition to adulthood. |
| agency, autonomy, compromise, comfort, consistency and continuity, educational maturity, embracing change, environment, expectations, extra-curricular, familiarity, pedagogical knowledge, positive reflections of college, representativeness, social, taking control, taking ownership, transition in learning, transition positive. |
| academic focus, belongingness hypothesis, core subjects, GCSE results, incongruence, issues, natural progression, organisation, proximity, school protectionism, smooth. |

Appendix 7: Superordinate Theme Clustering

Super-ordinate Themes
Relationships and interaction
Psychological Impact of Transition
Trajectory Focused Transition
Emotional and Developmental Transition
Acceptance and New Frontiers
Influences on Transition

Appendix 8: Jill's Images for Second Interview (Google Images)
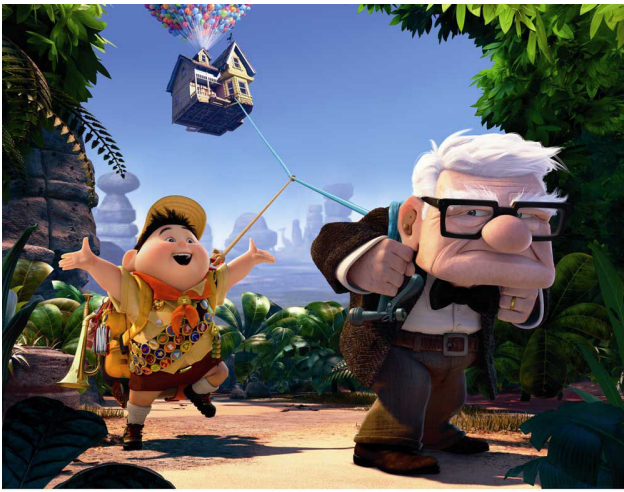
Appendix 9: John's Images for Second Interview (Google Images)

Self-Image of John receiving his GCSEs. Removed to maintain confidentiality.

Appendix 10: Super-Ordinate Themes (Staff Participant Example)

Super-Ordinate Themes
Teacher Practices
Management
Transition Provision
Student
Induction

Appendix 11: Subordinate Themes (Staff Participant Example)

Emergent Themes
bombarding students, building confidence, care, collaboration, expectations, identifying behaviours, informality, making a difference, passionate, positive IAG, pressure on curriculum and teachers, reliance on students, teacher: administration, experience, following instruction, influence, relationship, resilience, training need and under appreciation.
environment, failure of management and processes and SLT, fiscal focus, incongruence, lack of: communication, funding, IAG, information, mental health provision, organisation, prior engagement, prior knowledge, resources, strategic leadership and planning, marketing, processes, theory vs practice and trajectory forced.
early intervention, ineffective processes, issues, lack of IAG, lack of organisation, lack of strategic leadership, negative first impression, processes detrimental, ineffective, unacceptable, results retention, systems effective, transition: difficult, gradual, in learning, mutually beneficial, negative, positive, subject based, to adulthood, variable.
attendance, belongingness hypothesis, confusion, core subjects, educational focus, family influence, FE plan B, fear of failure, freedom, fresh slate, integration, isolation, marginalised learners, natural progression, negative experience of education, overwhelmed, parental involvement, peer relationship, second chance, self-esteem, SEN, Student voice, trajectory.
chaos, diversity, fear of failure, induction: gradual, in college's interests, ineffective, too short, lack of information, lack of mental health provision, requires improvement, time constraints.

Addendum 12: Excerpt from Reflexive Journal

Reflection on results and subsequent interpretations:

*'It was kinda confusing, because I think no one really knew what they were doing…
when we came in…'. (John, line: 85)*

'Am, I had a welcome evening and it was quite chaotic but I liked it.' (Jill, line: 49)

*' there was hundreds of people there… and everyone… I don't know everyone was
loud and no one seemed to know what they were doing but I just didn't have a clue.'
(Jill line 58)*

John used the slang term 'kinda' to describe his confusion, which may infer the
confusion was limited or not very confusing. However, he is reflecting on what now to
him is a familiar setting from a new horizon, which at the time, and as a newcomer to
the college may have been more confusing. His growing familiarity with the college,
the staff and his peers may have reduced his memory of his feelings at the time. Yet
he still maintains that this was a time of confusion for him, albeit 'kinda' confusing. Jill
on the other hand, appeared to embrace the chaos and she describes 'liking' it. This
gives the impression that the chaotic nature of her first impression of the college,
was in-sync with her own feelings of confusion and disorientation, experienced
during transition. There is an inference that she was not anxious by the chaos, given
the fact that she liked it. Jill remarks: '…but I just didn't have a clue'. It is likely Jill
used the situation to sort out her confusion and sense of control over the transition

process. She implies that the feelings were common to others and thus there was no expectation to have everything in order at once. Whilst Jill is magnanimous in her resolve, this suggests a gap in the strategic planning for transition.

Reflexive Commentary:

The issues of chaos in the early term are reflective of my experiences being at the college. I have always perceived my role and the role of the team to manage the chaos from our side with planning and our general disposition, so that the student's experiences would be smooth. During these periods as a professional I go out of my way to ensure that I am approachable and will talk to groups of students, to see how they are enjoying college so far and let them see a supportive face.

When asking the student participants about their early experiences at the college, I wanted to ensure that I wasn't interjecting or showing agreement or disagreement with their responses. This was difficult. I was wanting to tell them that their experiences were quite normal and if they ever needed any help they could come to me or another teacher. However, I resisted this urge and enabled them to speak freely. Initially for John, he appeared guarded and reluctant, however when he realised that I was not joining in and having a conversation with him, instead I wanted to know about his experiences, he talked very openly. I had addressed the fact at the beginning of the interview, that I am acting as a researcher on behalf of the university and not as a member of the college staff, which helped to limited the effects of power that I exerted over John as an adult and teacher.

The fact that Jill 'liked it' was a surprise to me. I had preconceived notions that the level of confusion as I had experienced it, must have made us staff looked like we didn't know what we were doing and very unprofessional. However, this made me think about her experience and the excitement that came with coming to college for the first time. She later talked about feeling as thought 'everybody was in the same boat', which again gave me insight in transition from her perspective. Listening back to the interviews when drawing interpretations, helped through intonation and the manner in which responses were made. Jill's tone almost insinuated her positivity about the chaos she had experienced. Whilst my feelings about these early experiences of our students at college, were entirely different to Jill's, I made sure that I was analysing her experiences and limiting my own tacit knowledge on the subject.