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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

School of Psychology

Volume 1 of 1

**Supporting the Attachment Needs of Looked After Children in Education Settings**

by

**Kelly-Marie Underdown**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology

17<sup>th</sup> January 2016



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**ABSTRACT**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Doctorate in Educational Psychology

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology

**SUPPORTING THE ATTACHMENT NEEDS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN  
IN EDUCATION SETTINGS**

By Kelly-Marie Underdown

For decades, researchers have identified looked after children (LAC) as a particularly vulnerable group with regards to both their academic attainment and social, emotional and mental health outcomes (McAuley & Davis, 2009). This is often attributed to the impact of adverse early life experiences on their attachment relationships with primary caregivers. Given encouraging findings regarding the impact of teacher-student relationships on children's learning and behavioural outcomes (see McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015), in chapter one the current researcher conducted a systematic approach to a literature review examining implications for education professionals in supporting the attachment needs of LAC. Eleven texts were identified which provided implications for staff in supporting students' learning and behaviour. Furthermore, the texts suggested a possible lack of understanding of attachment theory among education staff; hence, providing a potential training role for Educational Psychologists (EPs). Given the lack of empirical studies identified there is a call for more robust research in this field.

Secondly, the empirical study (chapter two) explored one of the recommendations for supporting LAC in schools; namely, the practice of implementing staff as 'key adults' (who are intended to provide an additional attachment figure). As there is a lack of research in this field, the researcher explored the experiences of secondary school staff acting as key adults for LAC in one local authority in south-east England. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed a rich picture of experiences captured within five interrelated themes: professional responsibilities; approach to the role; personal perspective; knowledge/understanding of LAC; and the wider school context. The findings provided implications for education professionals (e.g. EPs) in supporting both the policy and practice of key adults working with LAC. Additionally, suggestions were made for researchers to further explore whether this relationship fulfils an attachment function (as intended theoretically).



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# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, KELLY-MARIE UNDERDOWN declare that this thesis, ‘**Supporting the attachment needs of looked after children in education settings**’ and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission;

Signed: .....

Date: .....



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## Definitions and Abbreviations

BESD	Behavioural, Social and Emotional Difficulties
BRIEF	Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function
CASP	Critical Appraisal and Skills Programme
CP	Child Protection
DCPC	Designated Child Protection Coordinator
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DLACT	Designated Looked after Children Teacher
EP	Educational Psychologist
HM Government	Her Majesty's Government
ISRs	In School Review meetings (a multi-professional meeting)
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (qualitative research)
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked after children
<i>n</i>	Number of participants
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or training
<i>p</i>	Probability (significance of a test statistic)
PEP	Personal Education Plan (legal document required for LAC)
PRISMA statement	Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses
SD	Standard Deviation
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health needs
SEN	Special Educational Needs

SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SSIs	Semi-Structured Interviews
VIG	Video Interactive Guidance (an attachment intervention)
VIPP	Video feedback intervention to promote positive parenting
WOS	Web of Science (search engine)
YP	Young person





# **Chapter 1: Literature Review- Implications for education staff in supporting the attachment needs of looked after children**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This review aims to identify how education staff can support the attachment needs of looked after children (LAC). It will begin by defining the term LAC and exploring research around outcomes for these young people. The author will then define attachment theory and ascertain why this perspective is particularly important when considering support for LAC. The introduction is followed by a systematic approach to a literature review which critically evaluates research regarding support for the attachment needs of LAC in education settings. Finally, the paper will discuss the findings and provide recommendations both for future researchers and education professionals working with LAC.

It should be acknowledged from the outset that the author recognises LAC as a heterogeneous group (with some LAC demonstrating remarkable resilience); hence, this review is not intended to label *all* LAC as experiencing difficulties with learning or behaviour. Instead, the author hopes the current paper will highlight issues experienced by *some* LAC and more importantly will shed light on the role of professionals supporting these young people within education settings.

### **Looked After Children (LAC)**

On 31 March 2014, there were 68,840 LAC in England (including adopted children and care leavers) (Department for Education [DfE], 2014a). LAC are defined in section 22 of the Children Act (HM Government, 1989) as children or young people under the age of eighteen who are: “(a) in their (local authority) care; or (b) provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions (in particular those under this Act)” (p. 17). There are four categories of LAC: parental voluntary agreement; care order; emergency order (for their protection); and those accommodated compulsorily (HM Government, 1989). Therefore, the legal term ‘looked after’ refers to a heterogeneous

group of individuals who live in very different environments (including foster care and residential settings) (DFE, 2014a). Furthermore, young people enter the care system due to a variety of circumstances; although, the majority (62%) of LAC entered care as a result of abuse and neglect last year (DFE, 2014a). Moreover, this has been relatively stable since 2010 (DFE, 2014a).

### **Outcomes for LAC**

Since the 1980s, researchers have acknowledged that the education of LAC has not been given sufficient emphasis in the UK (Dymoke & Griffiths, 2010; Sugden, 2013). As a result, LAC consistently achieve poorer educational outcomes than their non-looked after peers (DfE, 2014b). In recent years, the government has given this matter increasing priority; for example, the Children's and Families Act 2014 (DfE, 2014c) placed a legal duty on all local authorities to employ an officer to promote the educational attainment of LAC (known as the virtual school head teacher). This individual is required to champion the education of all LAC in the local authority. In addition, previous government guidance recommended schools nominate a teacher (known as the designated LAC teacher [DLACT]) who is responsible for monitoring the attainment and wellbeing of the LAC in their school (see Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2009a).

However, educational outcomes for LAC remain a national concern. Statistics for the year ending 31 March 2014, revealed only 12% of LAC achieved five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) including English and maths, compared with 52.1% of their non-looked after peers (DfE, 2014b). Furthermore, statistics from 31 March 2014 revealed 38% of 27,220 former care leavers were not in education, training or employment aged 19, 20 or 21 (NEET) (DFE, 2014a). Moreover, Driscoll (2013) stated life outcomes for LAC include higher rates of depression or anxiety; a higher risk of poverty, unemployment and homelessness; and a greater likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system, than their non-looked after peers.

### **Attachment Theory**

Although there is debate regarding the complex and multiple mechanisms responsible for the historical poor outcomes of LAC, some researchers (e.g., Webster & Hackett, 2007) have argued that attachment theory is a useful framework for understanding these findings. Bowlby (1969; 1988) proposed that from birth we are predisposed to seek

and make emotional bonds with a caregiver (Geddes, 2006). According to Bowlby, these proximity seeking behaviours are an innate affect-regulation mechanism, aimed to alleviate distress and to protect an individual from physical and psychological threats (Mikulincer, Shaver & Pereg, 2003). Bowlby argued that successful accomplishment of these affect-regulation functions would result in a sense of attachment security (Mikulincer et al., 2003). However, in order to achieve attachment security, the caregiver (described as the attachment figure) must be readily available at times of distress; provide a source of support and comfort; and act as a safe base from which infants can explore (Geddes, 2006). Research has suggested that infants establish their attachment response to their primary caregiver by the age of 10 months to one year (Geddes, 2003).

Despite being most critical in the early years, Bowlby proposed that this attachment system is active across the life span and is manifested in our thoughts and behaviours regarding help-seeking (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Specifically, Bowlby proposed that individuals construct mental representations of relationships (known as internal working models) based upon their experiences with a primary caregiver (Webster & Hackett, 2007). These representations are viewed as “guiding and structuring cognition, language, affect, and behaviour through the development of strategies, both adaptive and maladaptive, for coping with stress and seeking social support” (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004, p. 248). Hence, if caregivers are available and responsive, the infant tends to use the primary caregiver as a secure base from which to explore and seeks contact with her following separation (as established through the Strange Situation procedure developed by Ainsworth and colleagues) (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). This is conceptualised in the literature as a ‘secure’ attachment style. As a result, infants with a secure attachment style typically develop an internal working model whereby they have a positive view of the self and positive expectations about the availability of others (Mikulincer et al., 2003; Webster & Hackett, 2007). Furthermore, individuals with a secure attachment style have been found to cope more adaptively in stressful situations, for example through using more positive self-disclosure strategies than individuals with disorganised attachment styles (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991).

However, unfortunately, some children (including many LAC) experience caregivers who are unavailable or unresponsive to their needs. These early experiences often result in the individual developing an ‘insecure’ attachment style. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) initially conceptualised two insecure attachment styles: insecure-ambivalent (later

called 'resistant') and insecure-avoidant. During the strange situation experiments, infants with a resistant/ambivalent attachment style were unable to use their mother (their primary caregiver) as a secure base and responded with anger, pushing her away upon reunion (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Researchers have established that children with resistant/ambivalent attachment styles often experience attachment figures who are inconsistent in their responses, perhaps as they frequently report mental health difficulties (e.g. anxiety or depression) and/or relationship difficulties (Stevenson-Hinde & Verschueren, 2002). As a result, children with ambivalent attachment styles often display exaggerated behaviours (e.g. anger or helplessness) to elicit a response from the caregiver (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). In contrast, during the strange situation tasks, infants with an avoidant attachment style responded to not being able to use their mother as a secure base with avoidance upon reunion (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Researchers have established that children who develop avoidant attachment styles usually have attachment figures who are insensitive and rejecting (and thus, are frequently unavailable when the child is upset) (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Hence, the child experiences a conflict between a need for the attachment figure but also experiences feelings of anger (due to rejection). As a result, these children typically suppress their anger so as not to be rejected and thus, respond in an avoidant manner (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Later, Main and Solomon (1990) added a third insecure attachment style, disorganised/disoriented attachment, whereby infants did not display a predictable pattern of eliciting caregiving when distressed (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Specifically, researchers have established that children with disorganised attachment styles present with either under-controlled emotional reactions (such as verbal or physical aggression) or over-controlled emotional responses (such as withdrawal) (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Typically, these young people have often have primary caregivers who are psychologically distressed and hence, either present to their children as frightened or frightening (Main & Solomon, 1990).

Thus, young people with an insecure attachment style develop an internal working model whereby they have negative representations of themselves and others and develop strategies of affect regulation other than proximity seeking (Mikulincer et al., 2003). According to Shaver and Mikulincers' model, the absence of an attachment figure (either external or internalised) results in attachment insecurity and leads to a decision about the viability of proximity seeking as a means of self-regulation (Mikulincer et al., 2003). If this is deemed possible this results in hyperactivity strategies associated with attachment

anxiety; whereas, if proximity-seeking is not seen as possible this results in deactivating strategies associated with attachment-avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). (See figure one).

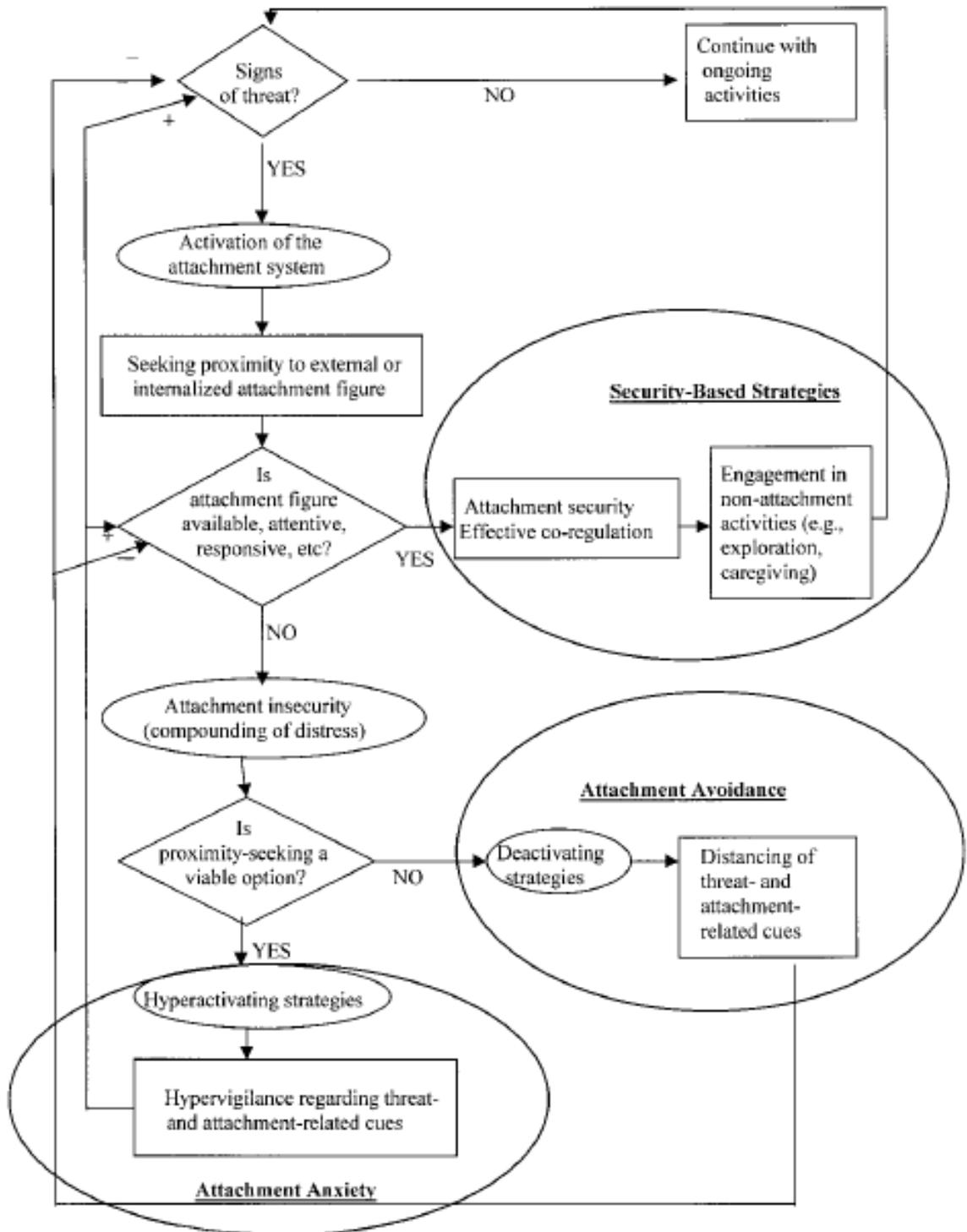


Figure 1. Shaver and Mikulincer’s model of the activation and dynamics of the attachment system. From “attachment theory and affect regulation: The dynamics, development, and

cognitive consequences of attachment-related strategies. By M. Mikulincer, P.R. Shaver, & D. Pereg. (2003). *Motivation and Emotion*, 27 (2) p.81.

Importantly, researchers have established that approximately 50-60% of children develop secure attachment styles; 20-25% of children develop avoidant attachment styles; 10-15% display resistant/ambivalent attachment behaviours; and 10-25% disorganised attachment (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). However, interestingly, studies suggest that there are a higher proportion of children with disorganised attachment styles among high risk samples (whereby children are exposed to there are social risk factors such as, depression, substance misuse and maltreatment) (Bergin & McCullough, 2009). Despite these findings it is important to recognise that there is some debate among researchers as to the nature of attachment classifications (Fraley & Speiker, 2003). Specifically, some researchers propose two categories (secure and insecure) whereas others use a continuum rather than a categorical model. However, the current paper has referenced the four category model as this is most commonly recognised and accepted in the literature.

### **Implications of Attachment Styles**

Researchers have established that attachment security with a primary caregiver in infancy is associated with important aspects of adjustment and functioning throughout childhood and into adulthood (Sroufe, 2005). Findings suggest that secure attachment is not a guarantee of healthy development, but acts as a protective factor buffering from the effects of environmental risk factors (e.g., poverty) (Belsky & Fearon, 2002; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Sroufe, 2005).

Attachment styles are related to teaching and learning as they influence children's self-esteem and motivation, social competencies and metacognition (Cyr & van Ijzendoorn, 2007). For example, in a 30 year longitudinal study, Sroufe and colleagues found that secure attachment was related to self-reliance, social competence and the capacity for emotional regulation (Sroufe, 2005). Furthermore, Bernier, Carlson, Deschênes and Matte-Gagné (2012) found that attachment security at 1 and 2 years of age was related to working memory and cognitive flexibility at 3 years of age. Lastly, van Ijzendoorn, Dijkstra and Bus (1995) found a robust relationship between attachment and language competence, with securely attached children being more competent on a range of

language measures. Furthermore, attachment is also related to behavioural outcomes. For example, findings from a meta-analysis demonstrated that infant attachment insecurity was significantly associated with higher levels of externalising behaviour difficulties (Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley & Roisman, 2010). These findings are supported in the literature (see Bergin & Bergin 2009).

These findings are important, considering that longitudinal studies indicate that attachment patterns can be relatively stable over time (Waters, Weinfield & Hamilton, 2000) and serve as a template for future relationships (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). However, attachment patterns can change due to adverse events (such as, abuse or loss of a parent) (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell & Albersheim, 2000).

### **LAC and Attachment**

Researchers have established that child maltreatment is associated with insecure-disorganised attachment (Sroufe, 2005; van IJzendoorn, Scheungel & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1999). This is important to acknowledge given statistics which illustrate that the majority of LAC in England are taken into care due to abuse or neglect (DFE, 2014a). Hence, this suggests that disorganised attachment is likely to be a pertinent issue when considering the needs of many LAC. Unfortunately, findings suggest that disorganised attachment predicts the poorest life outcomes of all the attachment classifications (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). For example, researchers have found that disorganised attachment is associated with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, such as aggressive behaviours and social isolation (Carlson, 1998; Lyons-Ruth, Alpern & Repacholi, 1993). Moreover, children who have experienced such traumatic events are at significant risk of developing complex trauma reactions (O'Neill, Guenette & Kitchenham, 2010). O'Neill and colleagues reported the effects of trauma on the brain are yet to be understood in detail; however, findings suggest that the experience of trauma in childhood can influence a range of domains (e.g., cognition, behaviour and affect) later in life. Therefore, children who have experienced trauma are at risk of developing psychiatric disorders (O'Neill et al., 2010).

Furthermore, LAC are likely to have experienced social and economic adversities prior to being taken into care (such as poor housing, parental mental health issues and parental substance misuse) (Phillips, 2007). Moreover, once in the care system, many LAC

experience frequent placement moves (which are associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties) (Fernandez, 2008) and means many LAC have a history of interrupted schooling placements (Phillips, 2007). Hence, these findings certainly suggest that many LAC are likely to require additional support during their time at school. This is supported by national statistics which indicate a very high proportion of SEN among LAC (DfE 2014b).

### **Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties**

Bowlby's original theory proposed that children develop their attachment behaviours with a primary caregiver during a critical period of development (specifically, by around 18 months old) (Prior & Glaser, 2006). As mentioned previously, researchers have already established that attachment styles can shift from secure to insecure due to adverse life events (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell & Albersheim, 2000). However, more recently researchers have proposed that attachment patterns can shift from insecure to secure after this critical period of development (i.e. in the presence of 'good enough' relationships).

This important claim has been supported by neuropsychology theory and research. Neuroscientists such as Schore (2003) proposed the importance of both biology and environment on brain development. Fundamentally, neurological research has identified plasticity in the brain, which means that brain organisation and development can be altered in response to new experiences (Schore, 2003). More specifically, Siegel (2001) explained that negative experiences or lack of experiences can lead to extinction or pruning of synaptic connections in the brain (resulting in the aforementioned effects on children's learning and social/emotional development). In contrast, Siegel (2001) stated that interactions with others can lead to synaptic strengthening and/or the development of new synaptic connections in the brain (i.e. which can mitigate the effects of insecure attachment).

Importantly, it has been suggested that this plasticity remains throughout the lifespan (Lenroot & Giedd, 2006); hence, suggesting that it may be possible to alter an insecure attachment style by changing their environment. Furthermore, neuroscientists have identified an additional sensitive period of brain development during early adolescence (Kennedy, 2008). During this period early adolescents' brains demonstrate enhanced plasticity and adaptability and they experience rapid brain development (whereby they develop formal operational thinking) (Kennedy, 2008). Hence, researchers, such as

Kennedy (2008) have proposed that this may be a useful time for attachment based interventions (in addition to early intervention).

However, it is important to acknowledge that the advances in neurobiology are still relatively recent. Hence, Allen (2012) argued that both practitioners and researchers should be wary of focusing too closely on the neuroscience of attachment. Nonetheless, researchers have begun to develop interventions to support children to develop more positive internal working models through building relationships with significant others (Egeland, 2004). As expected, many attachment interventions focus on early intervention with parents. Encouragingly, results illustrate that some interventions (for example, Video Interactive Guidance [VIG], Video feedback intervention to promote positive parenting [VIPP] and Family-Nurse Partnership) can effectively promote sensitive parenting and secure attachment (Cyr & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Moullin, Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2014).

### **Supporting Students' Attachment Needs in Education Settings**

In previous years there has been a reluctance to accept the role of education staff in supporting children's social and emotional development in the UK (Dent & Cameron, 2003). However, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (1979) children exist within multiple social contexts, which interact and influence their development. Hence, theorists such as Cyr and van IJzendoorn (2007) and Kennedy (2008) have argued that attachment networks should involve relationships in the school context. This argument has been supported by resilience theorists (e.g., Gilligan, 1998; Rutter, 1991) who proposed that schools can act as a protective factor for vulnerable young people with few other sources of support (Rutter, 1991). Moreover, studies investigating the perspectives of high-achieving LAC have identified relationships with a key adult in school as an important protective factor buffering the effects of students' adverse early life experiences (e.g., Harker, Dobel-Ober, Lawrence, Berridge & Sinclair, 2003; Jackson and Martin, 1998).

Therefore, in the past two decades, attachment researchers have shifted their focus towards exploring teacher-student relationships. There has been debate as to whether these relationships can be considered to be attachment relationships, given that not all positive relationships involve attachment (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Specifically, we know that attachment is defined as a long-enduring affectionate bond in which the individual cannot

be easily interchanged or replaced by another (Vershueren & Koomen, 2012). However, typically children change teachers every year and are expected to share the relationship with their classmates; moreover, in secondary schools students are taught by multiple teachers every day (Vershueren & Koomen, 2012). Furthermore, researchers have argued that the nature of parent and teacher relationships vary in terms of relatedness, with teacher relationships tending to be more instructional than relational (Vershueren & Koomen, 2012). Nonetheless, despite these arguments, researchers have found similarities between parent-child and teacher-child relationships. For example, Howes and Ritchie (1999) found that these relationships both vary along dimensions of harmony and comfort seeking and resistance and avoidance. Furthermore, meta-analyses provide strong empirical evidence that teacher-student relationships are predictive of both students' affective and behavioural outcomes (see Cornelius-White, 2007) and academic engagement and achievement (see Roorda, Koomen, Spilt & Oort, 2011). Similarly, a recent meta-analysis by McGrath and van Bergen (2015) established that positive teacher-student relationships can serve a protective function for 'at risk' students (such as, students from families with low socio-economic status and students with behavioural and/or learning needs). Given these findings researchers have concluded that some (but not all) teacher-student relationships may have an attachment component, therefore, researchers commonly refer to these relationships as 'attachment-like' (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Vershueren & Koomen, 2012).

As a result of these findings, researchers (e.g., Hughes, 2012; Sabol & Pianta, 2012) proposed the second phase of research in this field should involve training teachers at a relational level. Encouragingly, several researchers (e.g., Landry et al., 2014; Owen, Klausli, Mata-Otero & Caughy, 2008) have found relationship-focused interventions (based on the principles of attachment theory) were successful in developing more positive teacher-student relationships in disadvantaged pre-school settings in the U.S. context. Moreover, both studies also found the intervention resulted in significant benefits for students' social, emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Similarly, U.K. researchers have begun to develop ways to support students' attachment needs in school settings. This includes the publication of teacher handbooks designed to explain the implications of attachment difficulties and provide recommendations regarding supporting students' attainment (e.g., Geddes, 2006) and social-emotional and behavioural wellbeing (e.g., Bombèr, 2007). In addition, some schools implement attachment-focused interventions, the most widely recognised of these

being nurture groups (see Hughes & Schlösser, 2014) and therapeutic story writing interventions (Waters, 2012). According to Ubha and Cahill (2014) these interventions “focus on the secure base concept; that is, they specifically aim to enhance detection of the child’s signals of need for closeness and sensitive responsiveness to those signals, which are the keys for promoting a secure attachment” (p. 288). Encouragingly, a systematic review revealed school-based nurture groups were effective in improving students’ emotional wellbeing (Hughes & Schlösser, 2014); however, the review only identified 13 relevant papers, therefore, there was a call for future studies (particularly in the secondary school context).

These conclusions fit with those of Ubha and Cahill (2014) who stated, “despite the wide implications of attachment theory there remains a lack of research exploring interventions which encapsulate the principles of an attachment- based framework in the school context” (p. 272). Similarly, Cyr and van IJzendoorn (2007) proposed the use of attachment interventions commonly used with parents (e.g., VIPP) being adapted for use in education contexts; and stated such efforts have not be reported in published research. Thus, findings suggest that schools can provide a context for supporting students’ attachment needs; however, there is a call for further empirical studies testing the effectiveness of attachment-based interventions in this field.

### **Aims of the Current Review**

The current paper has proposed education settings as a fundamental context for supporting the development of students’ social and emotional wellbeing. Given these findings, this paper aims to add to the literature by exploring the education setting as a context for supporting the attachment needs of LAC. Hence, the current review question is: How are education staff implicated in supporting the attachment needs of LAC? The author uses a systematic review approach to critically analyse literature in this field. These findings will be used to make recommendations for both researchers and educational professionals supporting LAC.

## **1.2 Review Methodology**

### **Identification and Selection of Studies**

The studies included in the current review were identified using a robust systematic approach, following guidelines from the University of York (2008) and the PRISMA statement (Liberati et al, 2009). Specifically, the studies were identified through searches using three electronic databases: PsychINFO (through EBSCO host); Web of Science Core Collection (WOS); and Delphis (a meta-search engine used by the University of Southampton). These searches were conducted during the period from 17<sup>th</sup> October 2014-7<sup>th</sup> February 2015. In addition, studies were identified through citation searching and through visually scanning reference lists of the articles included in the review. Relevant books were identified via the University of Southampton library search engine (WebCat).

Search terms were generated and alternative terms created using the databases' thesaurus functions. The following combinations of search terms were used:

<p>Foster care OR foster children OR child welfare OR looked after children OR public care OR residential care</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p>Schools OR school environment OR classrooms OR classroom environment OR education OR school learning OR learning environment OR school psychology OR teachers OR school based intervention</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p>Attachment behaviour OR attachment disorders OR attachment theory</p>
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*Figure 2.* Search terms for electronic databases

Studies were selected using a staged process involving an initial screening of titles and abstracts followed by a deeper screening of full text articles. A total of 414 potential studies were identified through search engines; a further 29 through citation searching and scanning reference lists of included studies; and two books. Hence, 60 texts met the criteria for a full text review and 11 met the overall criteria. This process is visually represented (see appendix A).

Studies were screened using inclusion and exclusion criteria related to the aims of the current review (see appendix B). Only texts published after 1995 were included. This specific date was chosen given many of the studies focusing on LAC and education were published in the late 1990s/early 2000s (see Goddard, 2000, for a review of the LAC literature). Considering this literature is relatively sparse, the research team decided to have

wide criteria in terms of the nature of the texts included in the review (in order to gain as broad an understanding of the current literature as possible). Specifically, articles were required to have been published in a peer-reviewed journal; however, the nature of the article could vary (e.g., this could include empirical papers, opinion pieces and service reports). Nonetheless, articles published in non-peer reviewed journals, unpublished dissertations and book reviews were excluded. In addition, the research team decided to include two books in the initial screening as they were practical handbooks for teachers on supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools; hence, this was an important addition to the small evidence base identified.

The phrase ‘attachment needs’ was operationalised as the experience of insecure attachments and the implications this may have on students’ learning and social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing. Hence, this definition was used to guide the inclusion/exclusion criteria. The initial search revealed several studies related to LAC which referred to resilience theory but did not specifically refer to attachment; therefore, given the criteria these studies were excluded.

Furthermore, given the review question, participants were either required to be education staff or young people in local authority care and of school age (excluding those in higher education). Studies relating to attachments between LAC and non-education professionals (e.g., foster carers) were excluded, as were studies that did not refer to implications for school staff. In line with the definition of LAC stated earlier in this review (from HM Government, 1989), young people who were not considered to be in local authority care (including those in kinship care and adopted children) were also excluded. For example, this criteria meant a book (Geddes, 2006) was excluded as it referred to school staff supporting children with attachment difficulties but did not refer to LAC. (For further details see appendix B).

### **Data Extraction**

Key data regarding the study characteristics are summarised in a data extraction table (see appendix C). In line with the guidelines from the University of York (2008) the specific data extracted was decided based on the review question and the method of data synthesis used.

### **Quality Assessment**

Given the heterogeneity of the texts identified, different quality assessment methods were used depending on the nature of the document and the research design. These will now be explained separately.

**Empirical studies.** The methodological quality of qualitative studies was evaluated using a checklist from the Critical Appraisal and Skills Programme (CASP, 2015; see appendix R). This checklist consisted of ten items and required the researcher to rate each item using one of three responses ('yes', 'no' or 'can't tell'). The checklist does not produce a quantitative score of quality assessment but did allow the researcher to compare responses across the studies assessed.

Quantitative studies were quality assessed using the Downs and Black checklist (1998) (see appendix S). Items required the researcher to give a quantitative score (e.g., yes=1, no=0). The checklist contains 27 items with a possible maximum score of 32. As the studies included in the current review varied in research design, not all items were relevant (particularly when assessing studies using cross-sectional designs, as items referred to intervention groups and follow-up measures). Hence, scores were stated out of a possible score for the relevant items (e.g., x out of a possible x items).

**Service reports.** As the report by Lansdown, Burnell & Allen (2007) used quantitative methodology, this paper was quality assessed using the Downs and Black checklist (1998) as described above. However, as the paper by Phillips (2007) was purely an opinion piece, no formal quality assessment tool was used. Instead, the researcher considered the weight of empirical evidence for and against the author's arguments.

**Opinion pieces.** Due to the nature of these texts, no formal quality assessment tool was used. However, the researcher considered the weight of empirical evidence for and against the authors' arguments.

**Books.** The book was not quality assessed using a formal method (given book reviews are a separate style of document). However, the researcher considered the weight of empirical evidence included and implications for policy and practice.

## Data Synthesis

The review adopted a robust systematic approach. A more formal systematic review design was not possible considering the heterogeneity of the methodology of texts identified (meaning it was very difficult to formally quality assess all the texts included in the review). Hence, findings were synthesised using both a quantitative and a narrative synthesis approach (which is deemed acceptable according to systematic review guidelines by the University of York, 2008). Specifically, papers using a quantitative design were quality assessed using a tool which created a quantitative score (Downs & Black, 1998). In addition, the researcher included a narrative synthesis which commented on the robustness of the other texts and explored findings within and between studies.

### 1.3 Results

This section will begin with a critical analysis of the main characteristics of the 11 texts included in the review (full details of data extraction can be found in Appendix C). The author will then move on to discuss the findings in order to answer the review question.

#### Overview of the Texts Included

The review resulted in a diverse range of texts: six empirical studies, two opinion pieces, two service reports and one book. As explained previously, the texts were reviewed using different methods depending on their nature and design; therefore, they will be discussed separately below.

**Empirical Studies.** The review revealed six empirical studies: Brewin and Statham, 2011; Fernandez, 2008; McLean, Kettler, Delfabbro and Riggs 2012; Webster and Hackett, 2007; Greig et al., 2008; and Sugden (2013).

**Research design.** A number of different research designs were adopted by the empirical papers: three qualitative studies (all used semi-structured interviews and Brewin & Statham used an additional focus group); two quantitative studies (using quasi-experimental, between-subjects designs); and one mixed-method study (using a cohort study and a qualitative study).

**Geographical context.** The studies were conducted across different countries: one in Scotland; one in Wales; one in the UK (the country was not specified); two in Australia;

and one in the USA. As studies were conducted across a variety of geographical contexts, this may be a limitation when considering their generalisability (i.e., because their social care and education systems differ from those in England).

**Sample.** Five of the six studies reviewed used LAC as participants, with one study solely examining the perspectives of professionals working with LAC (McLean et al., 2012). However, four of the studies (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Fernandez, 2008; McLean et al., 2012; Webster & Hackett, 2007) triangulated data using a multiple informant design (e.g., LAC, parents/carers, education staff and/or social care professionals). This method can help reduce bias (Robson, 2002), however, it should be recognised that there was poor reporting of the characteristics of adult participants (e.g., foster carers/teachers) in three of these studies. Although, inadequate reporting does not necessarily reflect the quality of the methods (University of York, 2008) it might reflect threats to external or internal validity.

Some studies provided helpful data regarding the LAC participants. For example, four studies provided data regarding the nature of the social care placement (Fernandez, 2008; Greig et al., 2008; Sugden, 2013; Webster & Hackett, 2007) and two studies included reasons why young people had been taken into care (Fernandez, 2008; Webster & Hackett, 2007). Both of these samples fit with patterns found in recent national statistics (DfE, 2014a), for example, the majority of young people in the samples were placed in foster care and participants had experienced adverse early life experiences (such as abuse and neglect). Furthermore, it is important to note Webster and Hackett (2007) recruited a sample of LAC who had been referred to mental health services for psychological assessment, which may have implications when considering the generalisability of findings (given the heterogeneity of the LAC population). Lastly, it was interesting to find that all studies focused on LAC of a primary and/or secondary school age (i.e., there were no texts regarding support for pre-school aged pupils).

**Attachment measures.** Of the three quantitative studies included in the review, two of these included a measure of attachment (Greig et al., 2008; Webster & Hackett, 2007). However, it should be acknowledged that Greig and colleagues (2008) used the measure to assess narrative coherence rather than as an attachment classification method.

**Quality assessment.** The three quantitative studies were quality assessed using the Downs and Black (1998) checklist. The study by Fernandez (2008) achieved a score of 13 out of a possible score of 23 and the studies by Webster and Hackett (2007) and Greig and

colleagues (2008) both achieved scores of 13 out of a possible score of 15. The checklist was more relevant to the study by Fernandez as this used a cohort design (whereas the other researchers used cross-sectional designs). Nonetheless, the results revealed some helpful findings. Firstly, none of the studies included a power calculation; and both Webster and Hackett and Greig and colleagues employed relatively small sample sizes, which may limit the power to detect a significant effect. Secondly, all studies included limited details regarding the population from which samples were recruited, which presented as a possible threat to external validity. Lastly, Fernandez included limited information regarding compliance with the intervention (i.e., whether participants changed foster placements during the intervention period) and limited details regarding losses of participants at follow-up; hence, this represented a threat to the internal validity of the findings.

The three qualitative studies were quality assessed using the CASP checklist for qualitative papers (see appendix R). This revealed several key strengths, for example: all studies stated clear aims for the research; justified why a qualitative design was appropriate; clearly stated the method of data analysis used; and included a clear statement of findings and implications. Furthermore, all the researchers had sought appropriate ethical permission; a key component when designing and conducting research (Willig, 2013). However, several weaknesses were also identified. Notably, none of the studies reviewed included discussions of reflexivity, which acknowledged how the researchers shaped the research (either personally or epistemologically). In addition, two of the studies (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Sugden, 2013) included limited details regarding coding (specifically, whether or not multiple coders were used or credibility checks were conducted). Therefore, this calls into question the reliability of the findings and the potential influence of the researcher.

Lastly, Fernandez (2008) used a mixed method design (a cohort design and a qualitative design). With regards to the qualitative study, the researcher reported very limited details (for example, minimal details were provided regarding the qualitative research design, recruitment process, data collection, analysis and findings). It can be hypothesised this may be because the data reported was part of an ongoing longitudinal study.

**Reports.** Two service reports published in peer-reviewed journals were included in the review: Phillips (2007) and Lansdown and colleagues (2007).

**Geographical context.** Both the reports were written by services based in the U.K. context, hence, the findings were relevant for young people in U.K. schools.

**Sample.** Lansdown and colleagues (2007) used a sample of LAC who had been referred for psychological assessment and intervention due to risk of placement breakdown. Therefore, this has implications when considering the generalisability of findings (given the heterogeneity of the LAC population). In contrast, Phillips (2007) refers more generally to LAC and adopted children in primary and secondary school settings.

**Quality assessment.** The paper by Lansdown (2007) was quality assessed using the Downs and Black (1998) checklist. This achieved a score of five out of a possible score of 12. In terms of relative strengths, the researchers had specific aims, used valid and reliable measures and reported means and standard deviations. However, there were many methodological flaws. Firstly, given the paper was a service report (rather than an empirical study) there was poor reporting of the methods (e.g., regarding participants, potential confounders and the procedure). In addition, there was no statistical analysis conducted on the findings (merely the mean scores were reported with no consideration of the influence of participants' characteristics, such as gender, age or years in care). Lastly, the researchers did not refer to the limited external validity of findings (given we know the sample was not representative of the wider LAC population).

In contrast, no formal quality assessment tool was used to assess Phillip's (2007) paper (given it was an opinion piece). However, through reading the text it is possible to identify some strengths and weaknesses. Namely, the author highlights the poor education outcomes of LAC and adopted children and refers to relevant psychological theory to explain this (e.g., the impact of trauma and abuse on brain development). Similarly, the author highlights relevant strategies for teachers regarding supporting the attachment needs of LAC and adopted children. However, how these strategies were identified and a critical appraisal of these is not included. Furthermore, there are little references to empirical literature to support the author's recommendations for teacher practice.

**Opinion pieces.** Two opinion papers (published in peer-reviewed journals) were identified: Gilligan (1998) and Dann (2011).

**Geographical context.** Both papers were written in the U.K. context (Gilligan in Ireland and Dann in England). Hence, the authors' arguments and recommendations were relevant to the U.K. education system.

**Sample.** Dann (2011) focuses specifically on support for primary-school aged pupils, whereas Gilligan (1998) does not refer to a particular age group.

**Quality assessment.** Dann (2011) provides an accessible text for teachers regarding the possible impact of early trauma and insecure attachments on the learning and behaviour of LAC in schools. However, the paper cites very few references, particularly when providing recommendations for supporting LAC in the classroom (which are not supported by empirical evidence). Similarly, Gilligan (1998) states a strong argument for schools in supporting children known to child welfare services; however, there is little reference to empirical evidence to support the argument (instead the author tends to rely upon other opinion papers to support their view). Therefore, this should be acknowledged when considering the implications of the findings.

**Books.** One book was included in the review: Bombèr (2007). The researchers acknowledge it is unusual to include a book in a review paper, however, it was decided to give it honourable mentions considering the lack of texts identified from the literature search. Moreover, the purpose of the book is to provide recommendations for staff supporting pupils with attachment needs (including LAC) in schools, thus, it was very relevant to the review question. Reference is made to theoretical and empirical literature (for example, around attachment theory and the impact of trauma on brain development e.g., Schore, 2001; Gerhardt, 2004). Furthermore, the recommendations are practical and are designed for implementation in the U.K. education context. However, there is no reference to the evidence-base for the recommendations or any efforts to test the effectiveness of these empirically.

### **Implications for School Staff**

In order to answer the review question the researcher explored the implications of the studies. Specifically, the studies fell into four themes: understanding of attachment theory; support for learning; support for social, emotional and mental health; and

implications for multi-agency working. These themes were identified using expert opinion backed up by the ideas that were found in the texts (hence, an a priori system of classification was not used).

**Understanding of attachment theory in schools.** Before considering ways school staff can support the attachment needs of LAC, it is important to acknowledge that six of the 11 texts reviewed referred to a possible lack of understanding of attachment in the school context. In a qualitative study, Mclean and colleagues (2012) conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, foster carers and social care professionals (n=92) regarding their understanding of the behaviour of LAC. Thematic analysis revealed six key themes through which professionals expressed diverse beliefs about the origins and solutions to challenging behaviour among LAC. However, as a group, teachers' accounts tended to focus on behaviour as a personal choice and placed responsibility of behaviour with the young people. Moreover, the researchers noted a lack of accounts attributing behaviour to traumatic experiences or adverse early life events. This suggests a possible lack of understanding of attachment theory among education professionals. However, this should be interpreted with caution given the research was conducted in an Australian context, moreover, the researchers highlighted the teachers' views were aligned with predominant ethos in the Australian education sector.

Nonetheless, the current review revealed similar findings in the U.K. context. For example, in a qualitative study exploring support for primary to secondary school transition in Wales, Brewin and Statham (2011) hypothesised that some teachers may have a lack of awareness of the wider implications of being a child in care. This was based upon reports from teachers stating that LAC might find the transition to secondary school easier, given they have already experienced a high level of change in their lives (i.e., hypothesising they would be used to coping with such transitions). However, these comments contradict the findings regarding attachment and transition in the wider literature (see Dent & Cameron, 2003). These findings were supported by discussions in four further texts (Bombèr, 2007; Dann, 2011; Phillips, 2007; Webster & Hackett, 2007). Therefore, before considering how school staff can support the attachment needs of the LAC in their care, it is imperative that relevant professionals ascertain staffs' current knowledge of attachment theory.

**Support for learning.** Four of the studies included in the review referred to implications for education staff in supporting the learning of LAC. Firstly, Lansdown and colleagues (2007) presented a report by the Family Futures Consortium (who provide multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment to LAC and adopted children who are at risk of placement breakdown). Data collected regarding participants' executive functioning skills (using the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function [BRIEF] questionnaire, Gioia, Isquith, Guy & Kenworthy, 2000) confirmed that all participants (n=86) were in the clinically worrying range (as rated by teachers and parents). This finding fits with broader studies which have found an association between executive functioning and attachment security (e.g., Bernier et al., 2012). As executive functioning incorporates a range of skills (such as planning, organisation, working memory and emotional control) the researchers recommend pupils undertake an executive functioning assessment to clarify the skills they need to acquire (such assessments are usually conducted by professionals, such as, Educational Psychologists [EPs]). Recommendations can then be implemented by the teacher depending on the nature of the difficulties. For example, the authors suggest that teachers can support pupils with organisational difficulties with strategies such as providing visual timetables and equipment to support organisation.

Similarly, Greig and colleagues (2008) found a matched control group of non-LAC (n=17) significantly outperformed foster children aged four to nine years old (n=17) on tests of narrative coherence (p=0.029), avoidance (p=0.025) and intentionality (p=0.02). The researchers argued these assessments tap into skills required for literacy, such as story sequencing, quality and quantity of narrative and the ability to imagine different perspectives. Again, these findings fit with the wider literature as previous researchers have found that children's performance on language based assessments was impaired due to attachment insecurity (van Ijzendoorn et al., 1995). Hence, Greig and colleagues argued this has implications for teachers, in terms of understanding the impact of early trauma on learning potential.

Dann (2011) further explored the possible effects of early trauma and insecure attachments on brain development and discussed the implications of this for learning in primary school. On the principle that good parenting is often not enough for emotionally disturbed children (Lieberman, 2003) Dann states that good teaching is not good enough for LAC; and thus, proposes that teachers need to understand the impact of early trauma and how they might respond to this. Suggestions are made regarding supporting the self-

esteem of LAC, for example, through positively re-framing difficulties and supporting a sense of identity within the class. Furthermore, Dann recommends differentiating learning tasks given the LAC may not be intrinsically motivated to learn (due to their early experiences).

Lastly, Sugden (2013) conducted a qualitative study investigating the perspectives of six LAC aged eight to nine years old regarding what supports them to learn. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). All participants cited teachers as the main source of support for their educational progress. This fits with previous researchers findings from the resilience literature (e.g., Brodie, 2010; Harker et al., 2003). Furthermore, Sugden argued the findings support the suggestions of Winter (2010) who suggested the teacher-student relationship may provide a context for supporting LAC to overcome unresolved feelings of loss and guilt. Thus, the research reinforces the important role teachers can play in supporting LAC. Hence, it is fundamental school staff are aware of this and are signposted to such research with practical suggestions for supporting LAC.

Overall, in agreement with broader attachment findings, the studies reviewed suggested that insecure attachment difficulties and trauma impact on the cognitive development of LAC (for example, on cognitive functions such as executive functioning and narrative coherence, which are fundamental for classroom learning). Thus, researchers recommend some practical implications for teachers. However, it was interesting to note that none of the studies reviewed refer to an evidence-base for the strategies suggested. There were also implications for multi-agency working which will be discussed later in this section.

**Support for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH).** Seven of the studies included in the review discussed implications for teachers regarding supporting the social, emotional and mental health of LAC. Two of the studies adopted quasi-experimental designs and found LAC samples experienced externalising behaviour difficulties. Specifically, Fernandez (2008) found a LAC group had significantly higher scores for externalising behaviour ( $p=0.019$ ) and aggressive behaviour ( $p=0.013$ ) compared to a matched control group (according to teacher report). Similarly, Webster and Hackett (2007) found a significant difference between LAC with unresolved attachment representations ( $n=14$ ) and LAC with resolved attachment representations ( $n=20$ ) on three

composite scales (externalising problems [ $p < 0.01$ ], behavioural symptoms [ $p < 0.01$ ] and adaptive skills [ $p < 0.05$ ]) according to parent/carer ratings. Specifically, the parents/carers of LAC with unresolved attachments rated their children higher on measures of hyperactivity, aggression, depression, atypicality and attention problems than the parents/carers of adolescents with resolved attachment representations. This was supported by adolescent self-report findings, whereby young people with unresolved attachments achieved significantly higher scores on measures of clinical maladjustment ( $p < 0.01$ ) and emotional symptoms ( $p < 0.01$ ) and lower scores on measures of personal adjustment ( $p < 0.01$ ) than LAC with resolved attachment representations. These findings fit with wider research around insecure attachment and externalising behaviour difficulties (e.g., Fearon et al., 2010).

With regards to implications, Fernandez (2008) conducted a two-year follow up of the LAC sample (who were placed in long-term foster care) and the matched control group. Teacher reports indicated participants in both groups had significantly reduced their scores on the problem subscales and significantly increased their scores on the adaptive behaviour subscales. Similarly, carer reports indicated a significant decrease in internalising difficulties ( $p < 0.05$ ) and anxiety and depression ( $p < 0.05$ ) at time two for the LAC. The authors argued this provides evidence for placement stability (both home and school placements) as providing a protective factor for LAC.

These empirical findings fit with the view of Gilligan (1998) who proposed that schools can act as a secure base and a capacity builder for children. Furthermore, Gilligan refers to research which has found relationships with teachers may help compensate for a lack of supportive relationships for young people recovering from abuse or neglect (e.g., Galbo, 1986) and may help build self-confidence and develop new coping mechanisms for dealing with stress (Robson, Cook & Gilliland, 1995).

In addition to the protective factors of schools, some of the studies reviewed refer to practical implications for teachers supporting LAC with behaviour difficulties. Phillips (2007) advocates for supporting teachers to understand some of the behaviour difficulties which may arise as a result of attachment difficulties, so that they can understand the communicative functions of the behaviours and can respond appropriately. For example, Phillips refers to the effects of early adverse experiences on many students' interpersonal skills, thus, often affecting their social relationships with peers. Furthermore, Landsdown

and colleagues (2007) discuss the implications of executive functioning on pupils' behaviour (particularly in unstructured times, such as lunchtimes) given emotional control is a key component of executive functioning. Hence, practical strategies are suggested, such as, preventative measures (e.g., special responsibilities) and cognitive behavioural anger-management strategies.

In addition, Bombèr (2007) recommends school staff provide appropriate differentiation for children with attachment difficulties given that they are likely to have developmental vulnerabilities as a result of experiences of trauma and loss. Specifically, Bombèr recommends school staff provide differentiation in three ways: through the way staff relate to the child (i.e., interpreting their behaviour as communication; through the language staff use; and through providing social and emotional targets and intervention). Furthermore, Bombèr advocates for school staff providing children with attachment difficulties with a 'key adult' in school. Specifically, the role of this key adult is to create a genuine, empathic relationship with the child, which Bombèr proposes will fulfil the role of an additional attachment figure. Hence, theoretically, Bombèr proposes the relationship with the key adult will: form building blocks for the child's capacity to self-regulate; reduce the presence of cortisol in the child's system; and form neural connections in the child's brain. Practical suggestions are provided for school staff acting as key adults for LAC (e.g., regarding supporting transitions and providing social skills and emotional literacy support).

Lastly, Brewin and Statham (2011) investigated the factors which support the transition from primary to secondary school for LAC (from multiple perspectives). The researchers proposed that LAC are likely to experience difficulties at times of transition as they are less likely to have developed secure attachments, which can increase the risk of experiencing problems at times of change. Framework analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed no single factor or set of factors was perceived as supporting LAC at this transition, instead the researchers proposed interacting factors at different systemic levels are involved. However, four key principles for supporting this transition were emphasised: the importance of planning and information sharing between key stakeholders; minimising the difference between LAC and their non-looked after peers so they are not made to feel different; providing individualised support; and ensuring support is holistic (Brewin & Statham, 2011).

Overall, two of the studies provided empirical evidence that LAC experience externalising behaviour difficulties. This fits with wider research around insecure attachment and behavioural outcomes (e.g., Fearon et al., 2010). With regards to support, several researchers proposed the school context as a protective factor for LAC. Furthermore, practical recommendations were made regarding supporting the social and emotional development of LAC (such as, supporting emotional regulation, social skills and transitions). Lastly, Bombèr (2007) proposed LAC experiencing attachment difficulties should be provided with a key adult in school to act as an additional attachment figure. Similarly to the findings regarding support for the learning outcomes of LAC, there was a lack of reference to an empirical evidence base for the suggestions provided.

**Implications for multi-agency working.** Lastly, eight of the texts included in the review recommended teachers working collaboratively with others to support the attachment needs of LAC. Firstly, five articles referred to EPs supporting teachers in a number of ways. For example, several researchers suggested that EPs could support school staff to understand the implications of attachment difficulties and early trauma on students' learning and behaviour either through providing training (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Greig et al., 2008; Sugden, 2013; Webster & Hackett, 2007) or through attending multi-agency meetings (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Sugden, 2013). In addition, several researchers suggested that EPs could assist schools in implementing attachment interventions (e.g., nurture groups) to support LAC to be emotionally ready for learning (Greig et al., 2008; Sugden, 2013). Lastly, Lansdown and colleagues (2007) suggested EPs could conduct individual assessments (e.g., of pupils' executive functioning skills) and provide recommendations for teachers.

In addition, Gilligan (1998) referred to a lack of understanding among social care professionals regarding the fundamental role schools and teachers can play in supporting the wellbeing of vulnerable young people (such as LAC). Hence, Gilligan advocated for more joined up working between education and social care staff. In support of this, Mclean and colleagues (2012) found a lack of consistent views regarding the understanding the challenging behaviour of LAC among educational and social care professionals. Thus, the researchers made similar recommendations and proposed joint training as a way of developing a 'common language' among professionals supporting LAC. Despite Gilligan's paper being relatively old, these ideas regarding multi-agency working can still be considered relevant, especially considering the recent special educational needs (SEN)

reform which calls for a holistic approach to understanding the education, health and social care needs of children with SEN (DfE, 2015). Finally, Fernandez (2008) recommended teachers form positive working relationships with foster carers, given placement stability was found to support the SEMH of LAC.

## 1.4 Discussion

Overall, the review revealed 11 texts which varied in their nature and methodological design. Despite the relatively sparse literature revealed, the texts provided some implications for school staff regarding support for the attachment needs of LAC in education settings. Firstly, support was identified to support the learning outcomes of LAC, for example, practical recommendations were provided to support pupils' executive functioning skills. Secondly, implications were identified to support the social, emotional and mental health needs of LAC, for example, by providing LAC with a key adult in school; providing intervention for emotional regulation; and support for transitions (e.g., from primary to secondary school). Thirdly, several of the papers made reference to implications for school staff engaging in multi-agency working. Many of these papers referred to joint working with EPs, for example suggesting EPs provide training to school staff on attachment difficulties and early trauma. There was also reference to EPs supporting the implementation of interventions (e.g., nurture groups) to support LAC to become emotionally ready to learn. In addition, several papers recommended strengthening links between education and social care professionals to ensure holistic support for LAC.

Furthermore, it was interesting to find that many of the texts reviewed revealed a possible lack of understanding of the implications of attachment theory among school staff. Therefore, this suggests an important implication for educational professionals (such as EPs or virtual school head teachers) in ensuring school staff understand the communicative function of students' behaviours. This is particularly important given researchers have found students' behaviours have a strong influence on teacher-student relationship quality (McGrath & van Bergen, 2015). Hence, a lack of understanding of insecure attachments may mean teachers respond in an insensitive manner which reinforces the child's negative internal working model (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Moreover, previous researchers have found positive teacher-student relationships can have a predictive function both for students' social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing and their academic engagement and

achievement (McGrath & van Bergen, 2015). In addition, teacher-student relationships can also have a protective function, particularly for ‘at risk’ students (of which LAC share many of these risk factors) (McGrath & van Bergen, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that school staff working with LAC have an understanding of the implications of insecure attachments so that any behavioural difficulties experienced do not impact on the teacher-student relationship. Hence, this may provide a role for EPs in shifting the perceptions of school staff, for example through training on the implications of attachment on children’s learning and behaviour.

Interestingly, the review revealed no texts which discussed implications for staff supporting the attachment needs of children in preschool settings. This is particularly concerning given meta-analyses have established that teacher-student relationships are particularly important in pre-school aged children (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). For example, previous researchers have found that negative teacher-student relationships in preschool can have lasting effects on students’ adjustment (e.g., Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995), engagement and perceptions of school (e.g., Doumen, Koomen, Buyse, Wouters, & Verschueren, 2012; Silva et al., 2011) and their educational achievement (Silva et al., 2011). Furthermore, researchers have found that teacher-student relationships in preschool predict subsequent student-teacher relationships in primary school (O’Connor, 2010). Hence, this has implications for future researchers (which will be discussed later in this review).

### **Limitations**

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the lack of texts identified in the current review. This is somewhat surprising given there is a long standing history of poor outcomes associated with many LAC (Dymoke & Griffiths, 2010). Moreover, a broader literature base was expected given the high profile of LAC and the recent efforts of government policy in improving outcomes for these children and young people. Furthermore, in recent years, researchers in both the attachment and resilience literature have provided strong arguments for staff in education settings supporting the attachment needs of pupils (e.g., Cyr & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Gilligan, 1998; Kennedy, 2008; Rutter, 1991). However, the relative lack of texts identified in the current review does fit with wider findings in the literature, whereby there is a lack of empirical evidence investigating the effectiveness of attachment-based interventions in the school context (Ubha & Cahill,

2014). It can be hypothesised that this might be explained by a focus on attainment and a reluctance to support the social and emotional development of students' in education settings in previous years (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Or, alternatively, this may be influenced by methodological issues, such as, relatively small samples of LAC in individual schools and difficulties gaining informed consent to include LAC in studies (i.e., due to having to having to seek consent from social workers and/or birth parents).

In addition to the lack of texts identified in the current review, many of the papers identified were not empirical studies; hence, this resulted in several methodological limitations. For example, the review revealed two opinion papers (Dann, 2011; Gilligan, 1998) which had little reference to empirical evidence to support the authors' arguments and recommendations. Furthermore, the researchers identified two service reports (e.g., Lansdown et al., 2007; Phillips, 2007) which provided rich data sets but were methodologically flawed (e.g., due to poor reporting and a lack of statistical analysis).

Moreover, of the few studies identified which included quantitative designs, these tended to be quasi-experimental designs (due to the nature of the literature) and used small sample sizes. Although such designs can provide advantages in terms of ecological validity, the findings are generally more susceptible to bias and the conclusions drawn are more tentative than those from experimental studies (University of York, 2008). In addition, two of the texts identified (Lansdown et al. 2007; Webster & Hackett, 2007) recruited samples of LAC who had been referred to mental health services for psychological assessment. This could be considered a limitation in terms of generalisability, given we have acknowledged that LAC are a heterogeneous group (hence, there will be some LAC who are resilient and do not require such support). Furthermore, only two of the studies identified used an attachment measure (however, one of these did not use this to classify attachment as intended). Hence, researchers did not always establish the attachment classifications of participants. This is important considering we cannot presume all LAC have insecure attachments. Similarly, there are many non-LAC (who are often in control groups) who may also have insecure attachment styles. These limitations fit with Rees (2012) who warned that studies investigating outcomes for LAC should be treated with caution, as they often involve small, unrepresentative samples and non-longitudinal designs.

Despite the efforts made by the current researcher to implement a systematic approach, there were a number of weaknesses in the review design which should be acknowledged. Firstly, the heterogeneity of texts identified posed difficulties in terms of quality assessing the texts and meant that it was not possible to use a more formal systematic review design. In addition, it was difficult to establish the best means to assess non-empirical studies (such as, opinion pieces and books) and this led to further difficulties when generalising the findings (given the heterogeneity of texts and variation in quality assessment tools used). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the current review was conducted by a single researcher supported by a supervisor. As a result, reliability checks were not conducted when quality assessing studies, hence, this could potentially reduce the reliability of the findings. Lastly, the current review only included published research, which could result in publication bias.

### **Implications for future research**

Given the lack of texts identified in the current review there is a call for empirical studies in this field. More specifically, there is a need for researchers to use robust research designs; to use attachment measures in order to establish the attachment classifications of participants (rather than presuming all LAC have attachment needs); and to seek broad representative samples of LAC. Considering the potential difficulties recruiting LAC samples, future researchers might be able to seek data sets from services working with LAC (such as those identified by the service reports in the current review). However, if this is the case, researchers should acknowledge whether the samples are representative of the wider population of LAC.

Furthermore, the review revealed several practical recommendations for school staff in supporting the learning and social and emotional and mental health of LAC. However, very few of the studies reviewed referred to an empirical evidence base for the interventions or recommendations provided. Therefore, it is important that future researchers establish the effectiveness of such recommendations. For example, Bombèr (2007) proposed that school staff should provide children with attachment difficulties with a key adult in school. Theoretically, Bombèr proposed that this adult would act as an additional attachment figure for LAC and thus, would help them to build a secure attachment. Further research is needed to explore how this is being implemented in schools; whether these adults indeed provide an attachment function; and the effects of this

intervention on the learning and behavioural outcomes of LAC. This research is particularly important given researchers are yet to establish whether teacher-student relationships can act as a buffer against the risk factors associated with adverse early caregiving experiences (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

In addition, as discussed previously, no studies were identified which discussed implications for preschool staff supporting LAC. Randomised controlled trials in the U.S. context have found promising findings in terms of the effects of relationship-focused interventions for developing more positive teacher-student relationships and improving students' social, emotional and behavioural outcomes in disadvantaged pre-school settings (Landry et al., 2014; Owen et al., 2008). Hence, future researchers could consider the implementation of such interventions in the U.K. context.

Lastly, the current review found no studies implementing the effectiveness of school-based attachment interventions for LAC (e.g., nurture groups or therapeutic story writing interventions) despite promising findings of such interventions for young people with attachment difficulties (e.g., see Hughes & Schlösser, 2014). Similarly, the researcher is aware of local authority educational psychology services using evidence-based attachment interventions typically used with parents (e.g., VIG) with LAC and school staff; therefore, there is a call for such efforts to be published.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Overall, the current review explored implications for education staff in supporting the attachment needs of LAC. Implications were identified to support students' learning and behaviour, many of which included staff working with other professionals. It is fundamental that professionals (e.g., EPs) provide school staff with an understanding of the implications of attachment difficulties given many of the papers suggested school staff may be unaware of this. Interestingly, there were a lack of texts identified; therefore, there is a call for empirical studies using robust designs. Furthermore, researchers should focus on testing the evidence-base of recommendations; using evidence-based attachment interventions in education settings; and exploring support for the attachment needs of LAC in preschool settings.

## **Chapter 2: Empirical Study- An exploration of secondary school staffs' experiences acting as a key adult for looked after children**

### **2.1 Introduction**

LAC are defined as children or young people who are: “(a) in their (local authority) care; or (b) provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions (in particular those under this Act)” (HM Government, 1989, p. 17). There are four categories of LAC: parental voluntary agreement; care order; emergency order (for their protection); and those accommodated compulsorily (HM Government, 1989). Therefore, LAC live in a variety of different environments (including foster care and residential settings) (DFE, 2014a). Furthermore, young people enter the care system for various reasons; although children in England predominantly enter care as a result of abuse or neglect (DFE, 2014a). In addition to these experiences, LAC are likely to have experienced several other adversities which may threaten their well-being, including, social and economic risk factors (such as, poor housing, parental mental health issues and parental substance misuse) and trauma (O’Neill et al., 2010). Moreover, once in care, many LAC experience frequent placement moves which means they often have a history of interrupted schooling placements (Phillips, 2007).

Government policy has focused on improving outcomes for LAC since the 1989 Children Act (McAuley & Davis, 2009). However, outcomes for LAC remain a national concern. For example, LAC consistently achieve significantly poorer academic qualifications than their non-looked after peers (see DfE, 2014b). Furthermore, a high proportion of care leavers are not in education, training or employment aged 19-21 (NEET) (see DFE, 2014a). In addition, researchers have found worrying statistics regarding the mental health needs of LAC. For example, Meltzer, Corbin, Gatward, Goodman and Ford (2003) found 45% of LAC aged 5-17 years old had a mental disorder (compared to just 10% of their non-looked after peers). Hence, according to Goddard (2000) “few social groups exhibit as many of the indicators of social exclusion (homelessness, joblessness, poor qualifications) as those young people who have been through the care system” (p.82).

However, it is important to recognise that not all LAC experience poor life outcomes. Therefore, in recent years researchers have been investigating resilience among LAC (see Dent & Cameron, 2003). Interestingly, researchers have found that LAC often cite school as a protective factor (buffering against the impact of their early experiences) (e.g., Höjer & Johansson, 2012; Jackson & Martin, 1998). For example, researchers investigating the views of 80 LAC (aged 10-18 years) in England concluded that education was a significant gateway for development and change for many participants (Harker et al., 2003). Moreover, participants frequently reported teachers as a source of both academic and emotional support.

Given these findings, over the past two decades researchers have been investigating the influence of teacher-student relationships on students' outcomes (see Vershueren & Koomen, 2012). Encouragingly, findings from meta-analyses provide strong empirical evidence that teacher-student relationships are predictive of both students' affective and behavioural outcomes (see Cornelius-White, 2007) and their academic engagement and achievement (see Roorda et al., 2011). Furthermore, a recent meta-analysis by McGrath and van Bergen (2015) established that positive teacher-student relationships can serve a protective function for 'at risk' students (e.g., students from families with low socio-economic status or those with behavioural and/or learning difficulties).

Theoretically, teacher-student relationships are hypothesised to fulfil an attachment function (Vershueren & Koomen, 2012). According to Bowlby (1969; 1988), from birth we are predisposed to seek and make emotional bonds with a caregiver (Geddes, 2006). Bowlby proposed that these proximity seeking behaviours are an innate affect-regulation mechanism, aimed to alleviate distress and to protect an individual from physical and psychological threats (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Thus, successful accomplishment of these affect-regulation functions result in the individual becoming the significant attachment figure (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Bowlby stated that the attachment figure must serve several key functions, they must be: readily available at times of distress; provide a source of support and comfort; and act as a safe base from which infants can explore (Geddes, 2006).

Importantly, Bowlby proposed that this attachment system is active across the life span and is manifested in our thoughts and behaviours regarding help-seeking (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Specifically, he proposed that individuals construct mental representations of relationships (known as internal working models) based upon their experiences with a

primary caregiver (Webster & Hackett, 2007). Hence, if caregivers are available and responsive, the infant develops positive expectations about the availability of others and a positive view of the self (Mikulincer et al., 2003; Webster & Hackett, 2007) (conceptualised as a secure attachment style) (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). In contrast, children whose caregivers are unavailable or unresponsive to their needs (e.g., LAC) often develop an insecure attachment style, which means that they develop negative representations of themselves and others and develop strategies of affect regulation other than proximity seeking (Mikulincer et al., 2003). These insecure attachment styles are conceptualised in the literature as insecure-avoidant, insecure-resistant/ambivalent and insecure-disorganised (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). (For further details regarding individual attachment styles see Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Researchers have established that attachment security is linked to a number of important learning and behavioural outcomes throughout childhood and into adulthood (see Cyr & van IJzendoorn, 2007 or Bergin & Bergin, 2009 for a summary). Unfortunately, insecure-disorganised attachment styles (usually associated with LAC) predict the poorest outcomes of all (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). For example, studies have found that disorganised attachment is associated with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties (e.g., aggressive behaviours and social isolation) (Carlson, 1998; Lyons-Ruth et al., 1993).

Nonetheless, building upon Bowlby's original theory, more recent researchers have proposed that attachment styles can be shifted from insecure to secure patterns after the critical period in infancy (Kennedy, 2008). Specifically, neuroscientists have identified plasticity in the brain (which means it has the ability to adapt in response to new experiences) (Schoore, 2003a, 2003b). Siegel (2001) has established that synaptic connections are pruned in the presence of negative caregiving (or an absence of caregiving); whereas, new synaptic connections can be made in in the experience of 'good enough' relationships. Importantly, researchers have suggested that this plasticity remains throughout the lifespan (Lenroot & Giedd, 2006). Moreover, neuroscientists have identified an additional sensitive period of brain development during early adolescence (Kennedy, 2008). Hence, Kennedy (2008) proposed that this may be a useful time for attachment based interventions.

In recent years, many attachment researchers have advocated support for students' attachment needs in education settings (e.g., Cyr & van Ijzendoorn, 2007). Moreover, Kennedy (2008) developed a framework proposing teacher-student relationships can help

students to develop more positive internal working models (particularly the sensitive period during middle childhood/early adolescence). Previously, there has been debate as to whether all teacher-student relationships can be considered to be attachment relationships, given children usually change teachers on a yearly basis; moreover, in secondary schools students are taught by multiple teachers every day (Vershueren & Koomen, 2012).

However, researchers have established similarities between parent-child and teacher-student relationships in terms of them both varying along dimensions of harmony and comfort seeking and resistance and avoidance (Howes & Ritchie, 1999). Furthermore, as mentioned previously, meta-analyses have established that teacher-student relationships can serve both a predictive and protective function in terms of student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). Hence, findings suggest that some but not all teacher-student relationships involve an attachment component and thus, refer to these relationships as ‘attachment-like’ (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Vershueren & Koomen, 2012).

Given the findings in the broader attachment literature, experts in child development (e.g., EPs) recommend providing LAC with a ‘key adult’ in school. Bombèr (2007) argued, “the key adult’s task is to create a genuine, empathic relationship with the child, becoming their additional attachment figure (in addition to the child’s primary attachment figure, their parent or carer)” (p. 84). Theoretically Bombèr proposed this attachment relationship will: form building blocks for the child’s capacity to self-regulate; reduce the presence of cortisol in the child’s system; and form neural connections in the child’s brain.

Hughes and colleagues (2009) reported that the key adult role is commonly implemented within the routines in primary schools. However, this becomes more difficult to implement in secondary schools, due to nature of the secondary school environment. Nonetheless, findings suggest such support may be fundamental at this time. For example, researchers have found that teacher-student relationships often decrease in quality in secondary schools (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997), while disruptive behaviour increases (Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2007). Furthermore, findings from a meta-analysis suggest that student-teacher relationships are especially important for school engagement and achievement in secondary school (Roorda et al., 2011). Moreover, Hughes and colleagues (2009) argued children with attachment difficulties are likely to experience difficulties coping with the multiple transitions associated with secondary schools due to their experiences of trauma and loss.

The allocation of a key adult is supported by previous government guidance for raising attainment among LAC in secondary schools (DCSF, 2009b). This document describes the duties of the Designated Looked After Children's Teacher (DLACT). These include to monitor the attainment of LAC; to implement interventions to support attainment and social and emotional wellbeing; and to work collaboratively with other professionals. In addition, this guidance suggests the DLACT should 'engineer' a key adult (referred to as a mentor) to act as an advocate and confidant for the young person. The author recommends that LAC should have 'regular and easy contact' with their key adult, but that this can be implemented in a flexible manner (e.g., through a drop-in arrangement). Furthermore, this guidance states that the role of key adult can be fulfilled by a variety of school staff; hence, this role is often not a job description in its own right and is an additional responsibility undertaken by school staff.

Hughes and colleagues (2009) have developed more detailed guidance regarding implementing the key adult role for secondary school pupils. They state that the key adult should be, "a member of staff who is physically and emotionally available to take on this essential role, ideally for at least two/three years" (p. 39). Furthermore, Hughes proposed LAC should have regular timetabled support (at least one lesson a week) which should be tailored to the individual child but usually involves identity work, social skills practice, organisational skills support and curriculum catch-up. Furthermore, Hughes proposed the key adult should 'meet and greet' the young person every morning and should ensure opportunities for regular 'check-ins'.

Despite the guidance discussed, there appears to be little published research regarding how this key adult role is being implemented for LAC in schools and, crucially, whether these individuals are fulfilling an attachment role for LAC (as intended theoretically). Similarly, a literature search revealed no published research investigating the views of school staff acting as key adults for LAC. This fits with the broader attachment literature, as researchers (e.g., Edwards, 2013; Goddard, 2000) acknowledge that there is very little research investigating the perspectives of teachers working with LAC (despite the fundamental importance of supporting these young people). Hence, the current author argues such research is an important addition to this field.

### **Aims of the Present Study**

Given the gap in the literature, this study aims to investigate the practice of implementing key adults for LAC in secondary schools in one local authority in South-East

England. This research is deemed an important addition to the current literature given the poor outcomes associated with many LAC and the encouraging findings from the broader teacher-relationship attachment literature (demonstrating teacher-student relationships can provide a predictive and protective function for students' outcomes) (McGrath & van Bergen, 2015). As there has been no previous published research in this field, this study will be exploratory and will adopt a qualitative design in order to answer the primary research question: 'How do key adults for LAC experience their role?' This will provide the researcher with an understanding of the lived experiences of participants, which can be compared to the existing guidance and psychological theory underpinning the intervention. Hence, the researcher can discuss whether participants' experiences suggest they are indeed providing an attachment-type role for LAC. It is hoped that the findings will provide implications for both future researchers and educational professionals.

However, as explained previously, the role of key adult for LAC is not a specific job title and can be fulfilled by a number of different school staff. Hence, in order to answer the primary research question we first need to understand who is fulfilling this role in the local authority under investigation. Therefore, the primary research question will be: 'how do key adults for LAC experience their role?' And the secondary research question will be: 'who is providing the role of key adults for LAC in secondary schools?'

## **2.2 Method**

### **Design**

Given the nature of the research questions, the study adopted a fixed mixed-methods design, using a quantitative survey to obtain data necessary for sampling participants for the subsequent qualitative study. "Sampling refers to situations in which one approach is used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 62).

In the quantitative study, designated teachers were asked to complete an online survey using a structured questionnaire in order to answer the secondary research question: 'Who is providing the role of key adults for LAC in secondary schools?' According to Creswell (2014), survey research provides a quantitative description of trends of a population (through investigating a sample of the population). This method was deemed appropriate to answer the research question, which sought to identify potential participants

for the qualitative study by asking for a number of facts relating to provision for LAC in participants' schools. Hence, a more in-depth method (e.g., interviews) was not required.

The responses from the questionnaire facilitated the identification of potential participants to answer the primary research question: 'How do key adults for LAC experience their role?' A qualitative design was chosen as there has been little research in this area; therefore a hypothesis-generating approach was more suitable than a hypothesis-testing approach (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2009; Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, a qualitative design was required as the researcher aimed to understand the lived experience of participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2009; Willig, 2013).

Given the primary research question, the researcher adopted a critical realist epistemology. Critical realists aim to understand the true nature of psychological events but propose that the data needs to be interpreted in order to fully understand the psychological phenomena under investigation (Willig, 2013). In relation to the current research question, it can be assumed it is not enough just to accept participants' responses regarding how they experience their role at face value. Instead, the researcher will need to interpret wider factors which may influence their experiences. The author acknowledges there were other epistemological stances which could have been taken, for example, a phenomenological approach. However, a critical realist position was deemed more appropriate, as although the research question explored the experience of participants, it aimed to explore 'real' factors which may influence participants' experience rather than just focusing on individual's experiential worlds (Willig, 2013).

In order to answer the primary research question, the researcher used semi-structured interviews (SSIs). According to Robson (2002) SSIs are defined as an interview which has "...predetermined questions, but the order can be modified based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate" (p.270). Therefore, this is a flexible approach, which suited the explanatory nature of the research question. Moreover, SSIs were chosen as they enable the researcher to develop an understanding of the meaning of participants' experiences within a specific context (Robson, 2002). The researcher acknowledges alternative data collection methods (such as focus groups) however, SSIs were deemed more appropriate as the research question required an understanding of individual's experiences and this can be difficult to ascertain through group methods (Robson, 2002).

## **Participants**

## EXPERIENCES OF KEY ADULTS FOR LAC

For the quantitative study (investigating who is providing the role of key adults for LAC in secondary schools), the researcher contacted 25 DLACTs across all 17 mainstream secondary schools in one South-East England local authority (some schools had more than one staff member named as DLACT). A total of seven participants (from seven different schools) completed the survey. From these responses, seventeen individuals (across seven schools) were identified as key adults for LAC (this will be further explored in research question one in the results section).

For the qualitative study (investigating how key adults for LAC experience their role), participants were mainstream secondary school staff acting as key adults for LAC in the chosen local authority. In order to ensure richness of material, participants were required to have been acting as a key adult for a LAC for a minimum of one school term. In order to capture as wide a variety of experiences as possible, participants were recruited using maximum variation sampling. According to Patton (1990) maximum variation sampling is a type of purposeful sampling used in qualitative research whereby researchers purposefully choose participants with a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest. Specifically, in this case the researcher aimed to interview participants from a wide variety of experiences (e.g., in terms of their job role, years of experience and number of LAC they were key adults for).

The researcher initially aimed to recruit participants for the qualitative study until theoretical saturation was achieved. This is where “the researcher continues to sample and code data until no new categories can be identified, and until new instances of variation for existing categories have ceased to emerge” (Willig, 2013, p.71). Overall, a total of 25 potential participants were invited to participate in interviews; 18 declined and seven agreed to participate (see table one). Despite the researcher’s efforts, it was not possible to reach theoretical saturation within the time limits of the thesis.

A total of seven participants (from seven different schools) were recruited for the qualitative study (see table two). Four of these participants were identified via the i-survey and three using snowball sampling. According to Robson (2002) snowball sampling is a type of purposive sampling used in qualitative research whereby participants are used as informants to identify other potential participants. This type of sampling is commonly used when there is difficulty identifying members of a population (Robson, 2002). Specifically, snowball sampling was used by the researcher asking participants if there were any other

potential participants in the school at the end of the interview. In addition, the researcher asked their EP colleagues if there were any potential participants in their schools.

Table 1. *Details of the researcher's recruitment efforts*

<u>Number of individuals invited to interview</u>	<u>Method of identification</u>	<u>Number who agreed to participate (if not state reason)</u>
16	Online survey	4- yes 12- no (no responses to multiple email requests)
3	Snowball sampling- Asking participants for details of any colleagues who also act as key adults for LAC in their schools	3- no (one was leaving the school; the second reported she had too many commitments; and the third did not respond to email and telephone messages)
6	Snowball sampling- Identified via EP colleagues	3- yes 3- no (they did not respond to email and telephone messages)

Table 2. *Participant characteristics*

<u>Participant no.</u>	<u>Job title</u>	<u>Years as a key adult</u>	<u>No. children they are key adult for</u>	<u>Method of Identification</u>
1	Associate Head teacher/DCPC/DLACT	2 years	1	I-survey
2	DLACT/SENCo	7 years	9	I-survey
3	DLACT & Deputy SENCo	1 and a half terms	9	I-survey
4	DLACT & Assistant SENCo	2 years	17	I-survey
5	Learning Support Assistant	3 years	1	Link EP
6	Complex Needs Coordinator	6 months	8-10	Link EP
7	DLACT/DCPC	1.5 years	5	Link EP

As illustrated in table two, the participants were a diverse group. Five of the participants were the DLACT for their school, whereas two participants (participants five and six) were not qualified teachers. Interestingly, all of the individuals who were the DLACT had other roles/responsibilities in the school (e.g., as Special Educational Needs Coordinator [SENCo] or Designated Child Protection Coordinator [DCPC]). Furthermore,

participants varied in their years of experience in the role and there were vast differences in the number of LAC they were responsible for (see table two).

### Measures

In the quantitative study (investigating who is providing the role of key adults for LAC in secondary schools), participants completed an online survey. The questions were developed by the research team in order to explore the practice of implementing key adults for LAC across the schools and to identify potential participants for the qualitative study (see appendix F).

In the qualitative study (investigating how key adults for LAC experience their role), SSIs were used to explore participants' experiences. The interview topic guide was created in line with the relevant literature around developing and conducting SSIs (specifically, from Robson, 2002 and Smith, 1995). For example, with regards to the specific questions, the researcher followed guidance from Robson (2002) and aimed to use more open questions as they promote more in-depth responses. Furthermore, in line with Robson's guidance, a range of non-leading probes were used to encourage participants to expand upon their responses. In addition, when developing the questions, the researchers referred to theoretical and government guidance for supporting LAC in secondary schools (DCSF, 2009b; Hughes et al., 2009). However, as the researcher used an inductive approach (whereby the themes identified are data-driven rather than being captured using a pre-existing coding framework; Braun & Clark, 2006), the interview was non-directive and allowed for the exploration of participants' experiences (as advised by Smith, 1995). Furthermore, as suggested by Smith (1995) the participant was viewed as the 'expert' and was given maximum opportunity to tell their story. In order to promote this, the researcher was aware of the importance of establishing rapport with participants and attempted to do so throughout the process.

The topic guide was piloted on two occasions; once, with a trainee EP colleague and a qualified EP colleague and secondly with a senior EP colleague. Given the population under investigation was relatively small, it was decided that the researcher would pilot the topic guide with professionals who have experience working with LAC (so as not to reduce the number of potential participants). Minor changes were made to the topic guide following the pilot interviews (see appendix J). Further changes were made to the topic guide during the process of data collection (e.g., to prompt the researcher to focus

on particular questions and to further explore possible themes that were emerging). A copy of the final topic guide is available in appendix I.

### **Procedure**

The researcher sought ethical approval and research governance from the University of Southampton Ethics Committee (see appendix D) and Research Governance approval from the local authority in which the research was conducted. For the quantitative study (investigating who is providing the role of key adults for LAC in secondary schools), potential participants were accessed via the Virtual Head teacher for the local authority (LA). In October 2014, the researcher attended a meeting with designated LAC teachers and delivered a brief presentation to explain the research and aid recruitment (see appendix L). Following ethical approval, the researcher emailed the 25 designated LAC teachers in mainstream secondary schools in the LA (obtaining email addresses from the virtual head teacher). In this email, individuals were provided with a quantitative study participant information sheet (see appendix E) and a link to the i-survey (an online questionnaire) (via [www.isurvey.soton.ac.uk](http://www.isurvey.soton.ac.uk)). Seven participants completed the i-survey between 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and 17<sup>th</sup> November 2014. Completion of the survey took participants between one minute, 18 seconds and 23 minutes, 11 seconds. All participants were required to give informed consent prior to completing the survey. Following the survey, participants were provided with a written debriefing form. All data was confidential and was stored on a password-protected computer.

After participants had completed the i-survey, the researcher contacted the 16 individuals identified as key adults for LAC (who met the inclusion criteria for the qualitative study) and invited them to participate in interviews for the qualitative study (investigating how key adults for LAC experience their role). However, due to the low response rate from the i-survey, potential participants for the qualitative study were also identified using snowballing sampling. Specifically, following the interviews, the researcher asked participants if there were any other potential participants in the school. In addition, the researcher asked their EP colleagues if there were any potential participants in their schools.

The researcher contacted all individuals by telephone and/or email to ask them to participate in interviews. Individuals were sent a qualitative study participant information sheet (appendix G) and were offered an incentive for participation (a £5 book voucher). In order to enhance sample size, participants were offered a choice of interview style (face-to-

face or telephone) and location (school site or LA offices). All participants opted to complete interviews face-to-face at their individual school site. Prior to the conduction of the interviews all participants were required to give written informed consent (appendix H). Following the interview participants received a written debriefing statement (appendix K).

Seven interviews were conducted between 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2014 and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015. The interviews lasted between 14 minutes and one hour. However, it is important to note that the 14 minute interview was an anomaly (perhaps because it was the first interview conducted and as there was only one LAC in the school). The average time for the other six interviews was 40 minutes. Consent was agreed for all interviews to be audio recorded. The interviews were anonymised and transcribed verbatim using a transcription service (due to the time constraints of the thesis). Electronic recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after publication.

## **Data Analysis**

As the research question explored an under-researched literature, data analysis was inductive. According to Braun and Clark (2006) inductive analysis is, “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven” (p. 83). Hence, the researcher aimed to identify themes directly from participants’ responses without being influenced by their previous knowledge of government guidance and attachment theory. Data was analysed using thematic analysis, which involves analysing and reporting the experiences and meanings given by participants to their own realities (Willig, 2013). This method of analysis was chosen as it is compatible with the critical realist epistemology. The researcher acknowledges the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis (Willig, 2013); therefore, themes were identified in line with the researcher’s epistemological stance. For example, rather than just organising the data to identify patterns (semantic themes) the researcher identified interpretative themes, which aim to analyse the significance of findings and their wider implications (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The researcher acknowledges previous criticisms of thematic analysis whereby researchers have omitted how data analysis was conducted (see Fielden, Sillence & Little, 2011). Hence, the researcher followed the stages of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun

and Clark (2006) as they provide a clear, replicable and transparent method (Fielden et al., 2011). In order to enhance the quality of the analysis, the researcher followed a checklist of criteria for ensuring 'good quality' thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 96) and the CASP (2015) quality assessment checklist for qualitative studies (see appendix R). The stages of thematic analysis will now be discussed individually in line with the guidelines from Braun and Clark (2006, p.87). For a more detailed timeline illustrating this process (and the use of Nvivo) see appendix P.

**Familiarising oneself with the data.** As a transcription service was used, the researcher listened to the interviews several times and checked all transcripts against the electronic recordings for accuracy. The researcher then read and re-read the transcripts; noted down initial ideas in the margins; looked back at their field notes (which were written after conducting each interview); and wrote a summary of the key ideas from each interview.

**Generating initial codes.** The field notes and summaries for each interview were compared against each other to generate initial coding ideas. Copies of the transcripts and the initial coding ideas were shared with a supervisor in order to ensure the researcher was not producing an idiosyncratic or highly selective interpretation of the findings (Braun & Clark, 2009). Following the supervisor's feedback, the researcher created an initial coding framework and used this to code the transcripts. For reasons of practicality, the researcher used a computer software package (Nvivo10) to help manage the thematic analysis process (for an example of the use of Nvivo see appendix Q).

**Searching for themes.** Initial theme ideas were generated through the coding process using the field notes and summaries. Whilst looking for themes the researcher adapted the initial coding framework and created an initial draft of the thematic map. These were shared with a supervisor.

**Reviewing themes.** Following supervisor feedback, the researcher adapted the coding framework, for example, by breaking bigger ideas (such as professional responsibilities and the wider school context) into subthemes. Next, the researcher checked if the theme ideas worked in relation to the coded extracts and then went back and compared the theme ideas to each transcript. The amended coding framework and thematic map were shared with a supervisor once again.

**Defining and naming themes.** Following supervision, the researcher created the final versions of the coding framework and the thematic map. Five themes and 21 sub-themes were generated. The researcher checked these fit with the whole data set and the coded transcripts. The final names of the themes and sub-themes were created.

**Producing the report.** The researcher wrote the results section using the coding framework. This was written in line with guidelines for good thematic analysis from Braun and Clark (2006, p.96).

### 2.3 Results

#### **Research question one: Who is providing the role of key adults for LAC in secondary schools?**

A total of seven participants completed the online survey. The results of the survey are displayed in table three. As illustrated in the table, the number of LAC on the school roll varied from one to 17 children across the seven schools. Schools with a higher number of LAC named several individuals as key adults whereas schools with fewer LAC named fewer key adults. However, this was not the case for participant two, who was the only key adult for nine LAC in one school.

Participants named as key adults for LAC came from a variety of different roles, several of whom you could assume might be members of the schools' senior leadership team (as they were assistant head teachers or assistant principals). Furthermore, seven of the individuals named as key adults were DLACTs; interestingly, all of these individuals had other responsibilities within the school (e.g., as Special Educational Needs Coordinator [SENCo] or Designated Child Protection Coordinator [DCPC]). Lastly, participants varied widely in the time they had been acting as a key adult for LAC (from one month to 20 years). Hence, overall the results from the survey suggested a diverse picture in the characteristics of individuals acting as key adults for LAC (in one local authority).

## EXPERIENCES OF KEY ADULTS FOR LAC

Table 3. *Results from online survey*

<u>Participant no.</u>	<u>No. LAC on school roll</u>	<u>No. key adults identified</u>	<u>Job title</u>	<u>Years as a key adult</u>	<u>No. children they support</u>
1	1	1	Associate Head teacher & DCPC & DLACT	2 years	1
2	9	1	DLACT & SENCo	7 years	9
3	9	4	DLACT & Deputy SENCo	1 and a half terms	9
			SENCo	<i>Unknown</i>	9
			Director of Learning	<i>Unknown</i>	9
			Assistant Director of learning	<i>Unknown</i>	9
4	17	7	DLACT & Assistant SENCo	2 years	17
			House manager	2 years +	3
			House manager	2 years +	3
			House manager	2 years +	6
			Assistant House manager	2 years +	3
			SENCo	2 years +	17
			Student services manager	2 years +	17
5	1	2	DLACT & SENCo	4.5 years	1
			Assistant principal (pastoral)	20 years	1
6	3	1	DLACT & Assistant principal	3 years	3
7	2	1	DLACT & SENCo & Assistant head teacher	1 month	2

**Research question two: How do key adults for LAC experience their role?**

Thematic analysis of the seven interviews revealed five over-arching themes and 21 sub-themes. The author acknowledges the high number of subthemes identified; this will be explored in the discussion. The five themes identified were: professional responsibilities; approach to the role; personal perspective; knowledge/understanding of LAC; and the wider school context. These themes were interrelated (i.e. ideas expressed in one theme influenced participants’ responses in other themes). This is illustrated in the thematic map (see figure three).

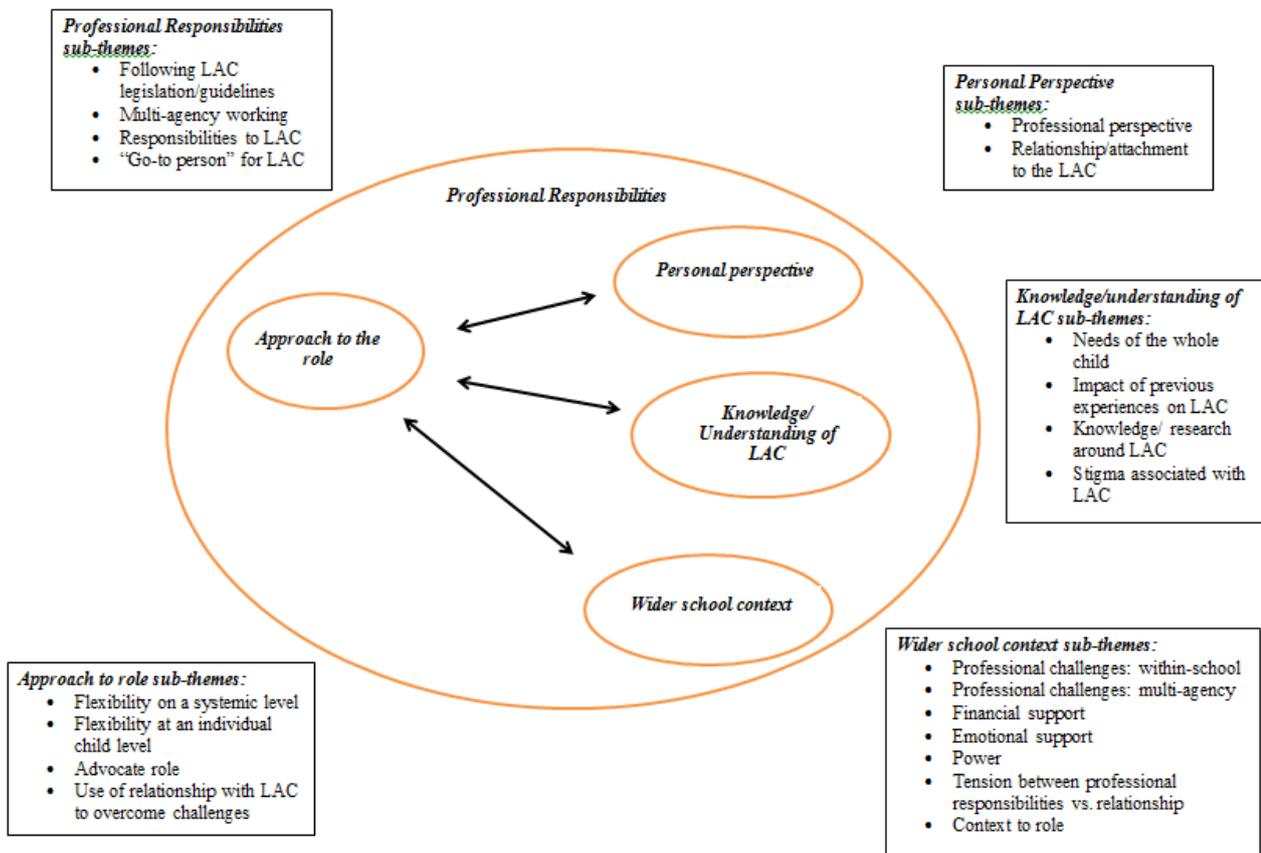


Figure 3. Thematic map (final version)

*N.B. please note the themes are named within the orange ovals and the accompanying subthemes within the black rectangular boxes (outside of the map).*

Specifically, the thematic map identifies participants’ professional responsibilities as an over-arching theme relevant to all participants. However, how participants experience their role is influenced by four interrelated themes, namely how they approach to role; their

personal perspective (i.e. if they view their role as purely a professional responsibility or as including a relationship with the child); their knowledge/understanding of LAC (both of the wider LAC population and the individual children they support); and factors within the wider school context (such as, their additional responsibilities and the level of financial and emotional support they receive from their colleagues). In order to explore these ideas further, the paper will now present each theme and their associated subthemes, with brief examples of coded extracts. For further details see the appendices section for a table with details of the themes (appendix O) (including category descriptions of themes); a copy of the final coding framework (appendix M) (which includes descriptions of the individual subthemes); and an example of a coded transcript (appendix N).

**Theme one: Professional responsibilities.** The first theme was identified to describe the key responsibilities elicited from participants regarding their role as key adult for LAC. The data for this theme is organised into four sub-themes: Following LAC legislation/guidelines; multi-agency working; responsibilities to LAC; and acting as a “go-to person” for LAC.

*Sub-theme one: Following LAC legislation/guidelines.* The majority of the participants referred to following both national and local legislation and guidelines for LAC. “I follow obviously the procedure, the policy, for looked after children, the guidelines” (participant three). Participants referred to coordinating personal education plan (PEP) meetings and attending LAC review meetings as two of their key responsibilities. In addition, participants described administration duties, including completing paperwork for the local authority virtual schools, allocation of pupil premium money (an allocated fund for vulnerable pupils) and monitoring the educational attainment of LAC.

The main things with the student would be the PEP, preparation for that, the conduction of it, carrying it out, making sure she gets what she needs in terms of resources and the pupil premium money spent on things that she needs, they would be the main things that I would do to support her (participant one).

*Sub-theme two: Multi-agency working.* Secondly, all of the participants referred to working collaboratively with other professionals. This included liaison with school staff and external professionals (particularly foster carers and social workers). This tended to be on a frequent basis (via telephone and email) as well as at formal meetings. Some of the participants also appeared to act as a gatekeeper to information regarding the LAC in their

school. For example, “being that contact between social workers, other professionals, foster carers, they all know that I’m the first point of contact if it’s a looked-after child and generally adviser for the pastoral team” (participant four).

***Sub-theme three: Responsibilities to LAC.*** In addition, all participants spoke about responsibilities to the LAC in their care. In contrast to the previous duties discussed, these experiences seemed to vary more broadly across participants. However, the key responsibility appeared to be meeting with the young people prior to formal meetings in order to elicit the students’ views.

And then we discuss about the targets they were meeting for the previous PEP and see if they need to be ongoing or not. And if there is any other thing they would like support with, not just academically, and that’s when they say, “I’d like guitar lessons, I’m really into that”, or there are some others that have got singing lessons, for example (participant three).

In addition, some participants spoke about communicating with the young people, for example, to inform them of key meetings or important events. Finally, a few of the participants talked about implementing interventions to support the LAC they are responsible for. This included a wide range of interventions to support both the academic needs of pupils (e.g., tutoring) as well as support for their social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing (e.g., social skills groups, a self-harm intervention, and group events to promote peer support). It was encouraging to hear all participants who referred to interventions described them as a means for enacting positive change for LAC.

And at his first PEP he was absolutely beaming that he loved his teachers, they had all welcomed him in, and that he’d had a friendship group, he had a buddy that worked with him and he loved his activity holiday and made loads of friends there. And he said that coming to this school it wasn’t about PEPS it was coming to this school was the best decision he had ever made (participant four).

***Sub-theme four: “Go-to person” for LAC.*** Lastly, the majority of participants described themselves as a key adult within the school for LAC. This role was described by participant seven as the “go-to person” for LAC. This sub-theme was separated from the subtheme previously discussed as it involved a passive approach on the part of participants (i.e., rather than responsibilities requiring action, such as, implementing interventions). Instead, this sub-theme was characterised by a sense of the participants as a ‘safe base’ for

LAC (i.e., an adult who they can seek out in times of distress). For example, participant seven stated, “it’s like, wait for them to calm down, they’ll come here; it’s a safe place”. Similarly, participant six said, “I was the person that she went to when it all went wrong”. In addition to being a source of support in negative times, some participants also spoke about young people approaching them to share positive news.

Some of them I see every day and they’ll come down to my office, they’ll say good morning and then they’ll tell me about what they’ve been doing the night before and what they’re going to do, so I am their point of contact, their main teacher (participant four).

Many of the participants referred to a sense of trust and understanding between themselves and the young people. This sub-theme appeared to be influenced by participants’ personal perspective (which will be described in theme three).

**Theme two: Approach to the role.** The second theme was identified to describe how participants approached their professional responsibilities. This involved an active role on the part of participants. There were four sub-themes identified within this theme: flexibility on a systemic level; flexibility on an individual level; advocate role; and use of relationship with LAC to overcome challenges. They will now be explored individually.

*Sub-theme one: Flexibility on a systemic level.* Some of the participants referred to there being a sense of flexibility in terms of how they approached their role at a school systems level. It appeared that this flexibility was based on consideration of the needs of LAC. A few participants talked about their schools adapting their practices to ensure consistency for LAC, for example, “she is pleased that it’s not going to a different person just because she is in a different year group, and she is pleased that I’ll be with her through to the sixth form...” (participant one). Similarly, two of the participants referred to consciously planning their transitions to their role as DLACT with consideration of the needs of LAC in mind. For example, participant four stated, “So because they are quite vulnerable students and attachment is important, building relationships is important, there was quite a length handover. It was about four weeks which in this school is quite a long time”. However, it is important to note that this was not the case for all participants and appeared to be particularly influenced by factors in the wider school context (described in theme five) and participants’ knowledge and understanding of the needs of LAC (described in theme four).

***Sub-theme two: Flexibility at an individual child level.*** In addition to flexibility at the school systems level, the majority of the participants also spoke about adapting their practices at an individual child level. This was very much based on a consideration of the needs of the individual young person.

I'll pop a confidential note in her planner or go up to see her in her form room to arrange a time that's suitable for her and me because she doesn't really like coming out of her lessons and things like that (participant one).

Similarly to the previous sub-theme discussed, this flexibility was heavily influenced by participants' knowledge and understanding of the needs of LAC (as described in theme four). For example, several of the participants referred to adapting their approach to interactions with young people if they were aware that they did not want to be identified as a LAC.

What we do have though is some Looked After Children who don't want to be classified as Looked After Children so – and the philosophy that I work by is – and the research has shown that Looked After Children don't want to be looked after children, they just want to be like any other child and just want to be treated as such. So it is very low key. My colleague who meets with the Service children will do announcements and so on but I don't do anything like that. It's very much on a personal and individual basis going around to see them (participant two).

This sub-theme also captured the flexible nature of the role in terms of providing informal support for young people (in addition to the formal support captured in the professional responsibilities theme). For example, many participants described regularly seeing their key children informally around the school and some referred to informal 'catch ups'.

She's gone. She's flown and I think it's a long term placement now so now I sometimes find a crappy lesson that she hates and we'll call her in just for half an hour just to, "How are things? Have you heard anything from the family?" and we just touch base (participant seven).

***Sub-theme three: Advocate role.*** There was a consensus among the majority of participants that they provided an advocate role for LAC. For example, several participants made reference to representing the voice of the child to other school staff and professionals. This included challenging their colleagues' practices and intervening when an issue arose in school regarding a LAC. For example,

And then we had a few issues with her as well in the last couple of weeks of other students being mean to her. Again she can be very mean as well, but she was in a situation where others were repeatedly – and so I had to send an email to all staff saying, you know, this person’s very vulnerable. I know she can put herself in situations, but please be extra vigilant that this is not happening (participant three).

Similarly, participant seven stated,

We fight their corner for them and often once we've explained to the- you know, the member of staff go, “Had a rough-?” “Oh, forget it, forget it. Forget it” you know and it is, it’s just like putting across their case (participant seven).

As a result of this approach to their role, some participants made reference to being known as the ‘key adult’ for LAC by their colleagues.

I guess if there was an overall issue, if anything every cropped up with regards behaviour or homework, things like that, or attainment they would probably come straight to me rather than her head of year because they know that I’m the designated adult (participant one).

However, whether participants adopted this advocate role appeared to be influenced by other factors, notably their personal perspective (theme three), their knowledge and understanding of LAC (theme four) and issues in the wider school context (theme five).

*Sub-theme four: Use of relationship with LAC to overcome challenges.* Lastly, a few of the participants made reference to using the rapport they had developed with the young people in order to overcome challenges (particularly when dealing with social, emotional and behavioural issues). This appeared to be influenced by participants’ personal perspective (theme three).

And the ones that might just be- and sometimes you can explain, you go, “They’re having a really rough time. Can I catch up with you later?” and often, they show empathy and that, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s fine Miss, yeah.” By the time I’ve got to them, sometimes they’ve sorted it out in their own head and I go, “oh, that’s brilliant. I’m glad you’re feeling better” (participant seven).

**Theme three: Personal perspective.** This theme was characterised by participants’ perspective towards the LAC they were responsible for. This involved data describing participants’ thoughts and feelings about the young people and accounts of how/if the role

impacted on their personal life. Two sub-themes were identified: professional perspective and attachment/relationship to the LAC.

***Sub-theme one: Professional perspective.*** One of the participants (participant two) appeared to take a professional perspective to their role, which was characterised by a focus on the professional responsibilities, rather than building a relationship with the LAC they were responsible for. For example, this involved consciously maintaining a professional distance from the young people.

I'm not a friend, I'm not a pal, I'm not – I am – I try and keep a step distance away from young people although the young people themselves are often looking for additional role model support for themselves. So it is professional (participant two).

Furthermore, this involved a denial of the impact of the role on the participant's emotions and personal life.

Rewarding is a strange word; it's looking for self-gratification. I don't normally work like that. What I do is if a child has got difficulties then try to resolve those as well as I can and I don't have time to dwell on patting myself on the head because then I need to move on to the next issue (participant two).

***Sub-theme two: Relationship/attachment to the LAC.*** In contrast, the majority of participants appeared to view their role as a relationship or attachment to the LAC they were responsible for. This involved participants describing a sense of personal responsibility for the young people (i.e., indicating their role was more than just a professional responsibility for them). Thus, several participants associated the young people they were responsible for with a positive emotional response (describing genuinely caring for them and finding positive outcomes personally rewarding). For example, "I think she is extraordinary and I'm very proud of her" (participant one). As a result, participants taking this perspective often made reference to acting in a way so as not to damage the relationship or reject the young people.

And I step in only when I think I need to and also – not just because maybe I need, but also to give a message to the student that I care, I'm there, you know, and I know about it if you want to come and talk about it, you know. I mean, I don't need to know more. Just know that I'm there and if you need, you can come and talk to me about it (participant three).

However, given the impact of prior experiences on many LAC, a few participants also described a negative emotional impact. For example, participant five referred to finding a young person's challenging behaviours as having a detrimental emotional impact on her. More commonly, several participants made reference to worrying about the young people, particularly when they left the school.

I'm a little bit mumsy, I'm not supposed to be, but you do feel very responsible for them. Because you are so involved in their lives it's far more involvement than you would as a subject teacher or as a head of department or anything like that because you've got that pastoral impact as well, you know their background, you know the difficulties, sometimes, not always, you meet their families that they're trying to build relationships back up with. I do feel a lot more emotionally responsible for them so I worry over them probably more than I should. But it also makes you good at your job if you genuinely care so, yeah, I care about them. They are mine. I always call them, 'Is that one of mine?' So I am quite possessive over them (participant four).

This sub-theme appeared to influence participants' approach to their role and professional responsibilities. In particular, participants who took an attachment/relationship approach would be more likely to fulfil the role as "go-to adult" for LAC and use relationships to overcome challenges than those participants who took a purely professional perspective.

**Theme four: Knowledge/understanding of LAC.** This theme encapsulated participants' knowledge and understanding of LAC; both of the wider population of LAC and of the young people they were responsible for. This included four separate sub-themes: knowledge/research around LAC; needs of the whole child; impact of previous experiences on LAC; and stigma associated with LAC.

**Sub-theme one: knowledge/research around LAC.** This subtheme included references to theoretical and empirical literature focusing on LAC. For example, "and the research has shown that Looked After Children don't want to be "Looked After Children", they just want to be like any other child and just want to be treated as such" (participant 2). Interestingly, there were fairly few references captured within this subtheme (much less than the subthemes which included references related directly to the LAC in participants' care).

***Sub-theme two: Needs of the whole child.*** Some participants expressed a holistic understanding of the needs of LAC. For example, participants talked about the importance of supporting both students' attainment and their social, emotional and mental health needs. "So I make sure that the looked after children in our school are progressing in school and are supported as they need to be supported, so both emotionally and pastorally and academically" (participant three). Ideas expressed in this subtheme influenced the nature of the interventions implemented for LAC (as described in theme one, responsibilities to LAC subtheme).

***Sub-theme three: impact of previous experiences on LAC.*** This subtheme captured an understanding of the impact of adverse early life experiences on the learning and behaviour of the LAC they were caring for. Hence, rather than just viewing behavioural issues as within-child difficulties, several participants made reference to the possible reasons why the young person may respond in that way.

And also finding out what pushes their buttons, it could be something ridiculous and you think, if only we had known that in the beginning. It could be a name, a place in history. We've had a child that's reacted to a place because of the incident, and again it was like, well of course you'd react to that, we just didn't think of that, and that's us being stupid, of course you would react. So that's not your fault, that's us, we shouldn't have put – but we just didn't think of it and we are sorry (participant seven).

This subtheme included a high number of references and suggested participants had an in-depth understanding of the needs of the young people in their care. This insight often influenced how participants supported the young people in their care. For example,

So really it's just trying to find the right balance between, you know, treat them fairly and as a normal teenager, but at the same time being aware that obviously they have suffered more than others and might have also more – they might be more disadvantaged from an academic point of view because of events happened in the past, really (participant three).

Furthermore, ideas captured within this subtheme influenced participants' approach to role, particularly regarding the subthemes related to flexibility and advocating for the young people (as described in theme two).

***Subtheme four: Stigma associated with LAC.*** The majority of participants talked about their experience working with young people who did not want to be identified as LAC. Hence, this stigma often acted as a barrier to the support participants could provide.

Others would much rather I didn't exist because it's almost a bone of contention that they're in care, they don't want to be different from anybody else, and the fact that I'm there and I'm there for them and not for everybody makes it difficult for them (participant four).

This sub-theme had a strong influence on participants' approach to their role, particularly in terms of the flexibility of support at an individual child level (as discussed in theme two).

**Theme five: Wider school context.** Lastly, this theme referred to a variety of factors within the wider school context which influenced participants' experiences. This included participants' personal context to the role; the support they received from their schools; and the challenges they have experienced. Ideas were captured in seven separated sub-themes: context to role; financial support; emotional support; power; professional challenges (within school); professional challenges (multi-agency); and tension between professional responsibilities and relationship. These will now be explored separately.

***Sub-theme one: Context to role.*** Some participants spoke about their personal experiences and previous employment history which may have influenced their approach to the role. For example, participant one explained that she is a trained psychotherapist; participant six had experience working in the social care context and participant four disclosed that some of her family members were LAC. Furthermore, participants also referred to factors in their professional context which influenced their experiences. For example, the majority of participants had other job responsibilities within the school (for example, as the SENCo or DCPC). This crossover with other duties appeared to place pressure on participants' key adult role. For example, "I would love to have time, for example – I'm a form tutor too..." (Participant three).

***Sub-theme two: Financial support.*** The majority of participants made reference to the level of financial support provided to them by their school. This varied among participants, with some describing a high level of financial support from the school's senior leadership team. This included financial support for the LAC as well as support for the participants (for example, to attend meetings and training sessions). "The school is

willing to spend every single penny on them; they are not tight with it at all” (participant seven). In contrast a few participants spoke about having a lack of financial support from the school they were employed by. For example, “I am regularly told we cannot have more staff and that would be the only way to give me the time” (participant six).

***Sub-theme three: Emotional support.*** Similarly, all of the participants spoke about the level of emotional support they received. Again, this varied immensely between participants. A few participants referred to formal support, for example, through line management meetings, supervision and in-school multi-professional meetings. However, the majority of participants referred to informal support, such as seeking advice from colleagues in relation to particular issues. For example, “well to be fair we sort of all help each other out; you will go and pick brains. I always say, “Do you know what I can put in place for this kid?” (participant seven). In addition, some participants described a team approach, whereby they could call upon the help of colleagues when needed or could work collaboratively alongside colleagues.

Yeah, I’ll always have an induction meeting with them and that will normally be with their house team as well. So if I’m not available the house team is so they know they’re both responsible so it’s not purely one person, because if I’m not there, if I’m out on training, if I’m doing something else they need to have somebody else to go to, so we do that (participant four).

More broadly, a few participants spoke positively about the support they received outside of the school context, for example from the local authority virtual head teacher and from other DLACTs in the local authority. In contrast, two participants (participants five and six) spoke about a lack of emotional support. These participants both referred to a sense of being isolated (i.e., they did not have supportive colleagues to turn to for support). For example, “you’ve got no one to bounce ideas off of or ... yeah” (participant five).

***Sub-theme four: Power.*** Similarly, participants’ experiences regarding their position of power within the school varied widely. It appeared that some participants were placed in a position of power. This tended to be individuals with additional job roles which meant they were in the schools’ senior leadership team (e.g., as Assistant Head teacher) or those who had been in role for a long period. Participants with this sense of power made reference to respect from other staff members, for example they would seek their advice regarding support for particular LAC. “They’ll come and say like before- I remember when

they- members of staff they go, “Really, should put this sanction in place, do you- is it, should I or do you reckon it’s a bit ...?” (participant seven).

However, in contrast, two participants made reference to feeling a sense of powerlessness within the school system (participants five and six). Interestingly, these participants were the same as those who expressed having little emotional support from colleagues. Furthermore, both of these participants were the only individuals who were not qualified teachers (and hence, were not the DLACT). Participant six explained that she was acting as the role of DLACT unofficially but could not be named as such as she did not have qualified teacher status. As a result, she experienced little power within the school system: “technically it’s officially the Assistant Head and unofficially it’s me that everyone will come to but due to my not having time they... in actual fact that’s not really... most of them don’t even know it’s me” (participant six). Similarly, participant five described a lack of power, in terms of personal responsibility for her duties, as her manager (the SENCo) would often take over the professional responsibilities: “we used to have telephone calls and things but a lot of the time SENCo would take that over” (participant five).

***Sub-theme five: Professional challenges: within-school.*** Many of the participants talked about the professional challenges they experienced within the school context. This included practical difficulties in terms of communicating with colleagues in a busy secondary school; not having enough time to carry out all their duties; pressures regarding the amount of paperwork; and a lack of administration support. Hence, ideas expressed in this sub-theme were linked to participants’ context to role, power and the level of financial support.

At the moment we have a problem with admin who’s the main attachment to it, because the person that was attached to my role as admin, my admin assistant, is doing a lot of child protection (CP) issues. She’s the assistant to the CP officer, and at the moment we have so many CP issues that all her time is taken. So I haven’t been able to put all those targets on SIMs. But that’s what I want to do (participant three).

***Sub-theme six: Professional challenges: multi-agency.*** Some of the participants referred to professional challenges outside of the school context (working with other professionals). Specifically, several participants spoke about concerns regarding the quality

of foster carers. Similarly, some participants made reference to practical difficulties contacting social workers.

I think the only difficulties that we have is any difficulty that you have with working with multi-agency. It's contacting people, hours, social workers are so busy and if you've got an urgent request, if there is something wrong, if your child is hurt or if you are worried about them getting in contact can be a difficulty (participant four).

In addition, a few participants spoke about difficulties evidencing the impact of intervention (as required for claiming pupil premium money in the local authority in which the research was conducted). This difficulty was particularly relevant when evidencing impact on students' social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing (i.e., rather than academic impact which can be easily evidenced through measuring pupils' attainment).

Because things have changed and the pupil premium money at the end has changed and although they've chained us up as much as we can, it varies. It can be very difficult how to prove someone's time, because sometimes what people do is sort of hidden (participant seven).

***Sub-theme seven: Tension between professional responsibilities vs. relationship.***

Lastly, two of the participants referred to a sense of tension between the professional responsibilities and their relationship with the LAC. For example, participant four referred to the tension between her emotional attachment to the young person and her professional status.

I care about them. They are mine. I always call them, 'Is that one of mine?' So I am quite possessive over them. But also professional because I have to have that step back. I can't have that emotional response in any of their meetings in front of them or anything. I worry behind closed doors. So I have to be that official looking person in that meeting for them so that other professionals will take my advice seriously and so that student knows that I'm their advocate, basically (participant four).

In addition, both participants four and six spoke about professional challenges within the school (i.e., lack of time and the demands of paperwork) placing tension on their relationship with the LAC.

Interviewer: So how would you describe your relationship with the young people that you are key adult for?

Respondent: Ah well that's the problem. It's extremely limited because I don't have the time to formulate them. There was, until recently, one particular looked after child who did go wrong every week who we had to give working relationship with because I dealt with her a lot. Unfortunately there isn't much with the others. In fact, some of them don't even know who I am and I haven't even been able to introduce myself (participant six).

Moreover, it appeared that this tension was further influenced by other sub-themes within the wider school context theme (namely, participants' position of power and context to their role).

There's so many high-end things that I'm supposed to deal with and I'm pulled to do all of them at one go I wouldn't say it impacts, it's just whoever shouts the loudest I deal with it. It's just another strand that I need to do. I think the biggest impact probably is that I feel bad that I'm not able to give them the time that they need (participant six).

### **Summary**

Overall, the interviews revealed a rich picture of participants' experiences acting as key adult for LAC. These were summarised into five main themes (professional responsibilities; approach to the role; personal perspective; knowledge/understanding of LAC; and wider school context). These themes were interrelated and influenced each other (as illustrated in the thematic map, see figure 3).

## **2.4 Discussion**

The first research question aimed to identify who was fulfilling the role of key adults for LAC in mainstream secondary schools in one local authority in South-East England. The main purpose of this research question was to identify potential participants in order to answer the primary research question: 'how do key adults for LAC experience their role?' The responses from the online survey revealed a diverse picture of the characteristics of individuals acting as key adults for LAC (in terms of the number of years individuals had been acting in the role and individuals' responsibilities within the school). This diversity fits with government guidance (DCSF, 2009b) which suggests that key adults can be acting within a variety of job roles. However, it is important to acknowledge

that these findings are only representative of seven of the seventeen mainstream secondary schools in the local authority. Moreover, it is difficult to generalise these findings to other local authorities, as they may well have different systems in place for supporting LAC. Nonetheless, the survey fulfilled the intended purpose to identify participants to answer the primary research question.

With regards to the qualitative study, thematic analysis of the seven interview transcripts revealed five over-arching themes and 21 sub-themes. The five themes identified were: professional responsibilities; approach to the role; personal perspective; knowledge/understanding of LAC; and the wider school context. These themes were interrelated (ideas expressed in one theme influenced participants' responses in other themes). For example, the way participants carried out their professional responsibilities was influenced by four interrelated themes, specifically, their approach to their role; their personal perspective (i.e. if they view their role as purely a professional responsibility or as including a relationship with the child); their knowledge/understanding of LAC (both of the wider LAC population and the individual children they support); and factors within the wider school context (such as, their additional responsibilities and the level of financial and emotional support they receive from their colleagues).

Given the researcher adopted an inductive approach to analysis, it was interesting to note that some of the practices described by participants fit well with previous government guidance for raising the attainment of LAC in secondary schools (DCSF, 2009b). For example, the main duties described within the professional responsibilities theme fit with the responsibilities of DLACTs described in the guidance. Similarly, the sub-themes within the approach to role theme fit well with government guidance that support should be flexible and tailored to the needs of the individual young person. Furthermore, the government guidance suggested that the DLACT engineer a relationship between the young person and a key adult (referred to as a mentor) who would act as an advocate and confidant for the child. This relationship was described as one built on trust and respect and was an individual with whom the young person met regularly (DCSF, 2009b). Hence, the characteristics of the relationship described in the government guidance were similar to many of the relationships described by participants. As the researcher was previously aware of the government document this may have unconsciously influenced the coding process. Alternatively, it might be that school staff were familiar with the document and implement this in their practice.

However, in contrast to the guidance, many of the participants interviewed were DLACTs but were also required to fulfil this key adult role, in addition to their other responsibilities in the school. Therefore, this may explain some of the challenges identified within the ‘professional challenges within school’ sub-theme (such as time constraints). Furthermore, the government document (DCSF, 2009b) emphasised the importance of supporting LAC during transition (e.g., from primary to secondary school and later from school to college or further employment). This issue was touched on by one participant, however, it was not a prominent theme identified from the interviews. This fits with previous findings, for example, in a qualitative study investigating support for LAC during the primary to secondary transition, Brewin and Statham (2011) found teachers had a lack of awareness of the difficulties many LAC experience during transitions (as a result of their attachment needs). Hence, this might provide a suggestion for professionals (such as EPs) to inform individuals working with LAC as to the importance of supporting transitions. This is particularly relevant when considering the transition from secondary school given the high number of carer leavers who are NEET (DFE, 2014a).

In addition, Hughes et al. (2009) developed guidance for implementing the key adult role in secondary schools. Hughes recommended closer contact than that suggested in the government document, for example, suggesting daily ‘meets and greets’ and weekly timetabled support (e.g., identity work, social skills practice, or curriculum catch-up). Findings from the interviews varied in terms of how well they matched these requirements, with some participants fulfilling these criteria and others not. This was influenced by factors captured within the ‘wider school context’ theme, particularly, ideas expressed regarding participants’ context to role (i.e., their other responsibilities within school), financial support and their position of power within the school system.

Given the theoretical assumption that the key adult has an attachment function, one goal of the current study was to explore whether participants responses suggested this was the case. Howes (1999) identified three criteria for identifying additional attachment figures: a consistent presence in the young person’s life; provision of both physical and emotional care; and an emotional investment in the young person. Furthermore, Howes proposed that this attachment figure may provide exploration from a secure base and a safe haven in times of difficulty. Analysis of the interviews revealed some of the participants may well meet these criteria. For example, the ideas expressed in the ‘go-to person for LAC’ theme related closely to the idea of attachment figures providing a safe base to retreat to in times of distress. In addition, participants expressed a sense of trust between

themselves and the young people, which has been found to be an important factor in attachment relationships (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). However, the extent to which participants met the criteria for an additional attachment figure was influenced by the ideas expressed in the ‘personal perspective’ theme. Specifically, whether participants took a professional approach to their role (and distanced themselves emotionally from the young people) or viewed their role as a relationship with the young people. It was interesting to note that only one participant took the professional perspective described (and this participant was the only male in the study). Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the influence of participants’ gender on their perspective. However, it may well be that gender was not the influencing factor. Previous researchers have found that adults own attachment styles impact on their interactions with young people (see McGrath & van Bergen, 2015). For example, studies have shown teachers with insecure attachments themselves may find it difficult to manage the behaviours of young people with insecure attachments (McGrath & van Bergen, 2015). Therefore, this suggests there needs to be careful consideration of the adults chosen to act as key adults for LAC.

In addition to the attachment literature, participants’ responses within the ‘understanding/knowledge of LAC’ theme coincided with previous research around LAC. For example, participants identified being looked-after was a stigma for some young people. This fits with previous literature (e.g., Davies & Wright, 2007; Stanley, 2007). Therefore, it is important for school staff and professionals working with LAC to be aware of this stigma and to adapt support in respect with the individual young person’s wishes (which was the case among many of those interviewed in the current study, as captured in the flexibility subthemes).

Lastly, it was positive to see that many of the participants appeared to have an awareness of the potential impact of adverse early life experiences on the learning and behaviour of LAC. Moreover, this influenced the practice of several participants who advocated for the young people and challenged their colleagues’ practice. However, there were relatively few references to the theoretical and empirical literature. For example, only one participant acknowledged attachment theory. In addition, participant seven referred to difficulties managing a young person who was displaying insecure attachment type behaviours and requested support on how to manage this. This fits with findings from previous researchers (e.g., Mclean et al., 2012) who reported a lack of understanding of attachment theory among adults working with LAC. Therefore, this suggests a potential training role for EPs (which will be discussed further in the implications section).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this was predominantly a qualitative study (i.e., generalisability is not paramount) it is important to acknowledge that the research was conducted in a small unitary authority. Thus, both the demographics of the area and the policies of the local authority will have influenced participants' experiences. In addition, (despite the efforts of the researcher) it was not possible to reach theoretical saturation in terms of recruitment; hence, it is possible that the interviews did not capture all possible themes. Furthermore, participants' responses may have been influenced by the interviewer's characteristics (Smith, 1995) (e.g., as they were known to some participants as the schools' link EP). Finally, the author acknowledges the potential limitations of using thematic analysis. Although the theoretical flexibility enables it to be used with different epistemological perspectives, previous researchers have been criticised for omitting details regarding the stages of data analysis (see Fielden et al., 2011). Similarly, others have criticised thematic analysis for blurring data collection and analysis, therefore, potentially limiting the validity of the findings (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In order to overcome these criticisms, the current author followed the stages of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clark (2006) and referred to their good practice guidance for thematic analysis (p.96).

### **Reflexivity**

Qualitative researchers are viewed as active in the research process and acknowledge their influence on the process and findings of the study (Willig, 2013). This is described in terms of personal reflexivity (how researchers' experiences influence the research process) and epistemological reflexivity (how the epistemological position influences the findings) (Willig, 2013). From a personal perspective, I am a trainee EP and have prior experience working with LAC in residential care, therefore, this will have influenced my approach to the current study (despite efforts to reduce these biases). For example, my experiences working in residential care consciously influenced my decision to undertake my doctoral research in this field (as I have a vested interest in this area). Furthermore, due to the nature of my doctoral studies, I had an understanding of attachment theory prior to the research. Therefore, it is possible that this will have influenced how I coded and interpreted the data. Additionally, the analysis will have been influenced by the epistemological position I adopted, for example, as I took a critical realist perspective this meant themes were interpretive (not just semantic).

In order to try and minimise such biases, I ensured I worked closely with my supervisors, sharing all versions of my coding framework and thematic maps throughout the analysis phase. This was an iterative process, which involved multiple, in-depth discussions, from which I made amendments to my coding framework and thematic maps. I also reflected upon my thoughts throughout the process in supervision with a senior EP (as part of my trainee EP placement). Furthermore, I took a break between the analysis phases, in order to gain some space from the data and to ensure my themes were consistent over time. It is important to note that my main supervisors were not EPs themselves, therefore, they brought different perspectives to the research (from clinical and health psychology).

### **Implications**

The author acknowledges the richness of the findings, particularly with regards to the large number of sub-themes identified. It appears that this diversity in experience arose because of variation among individuals (e.g., their personal perspectives and understanding of LAC) and due to diversity in practice across schools. With regards to variation across schools, the findings suggest that the role of key adult for LAC is not yet clearly defined in the local authority under investigation; therefore, schools have created their own versions of this role (often incorporating this with the duties of the DLACT). Hence, how the role is conceptualised is heavily influenced by wider factors in the school context (such as participants' position of power in the school system and the level of financial and emotional support available to them). In turn, this influences the level of challenges experienced by participants. Nonetheless, the challenges and tensions identified may provide a basis for practical implications for professionals supporting the development of key adults for LAC (e.g., EPs and the virtual school head teacher). For example, the findings from the current study could be used to create a local authority guidance document on good practice for key adults supporting LAC in secondary schools. This could be shared with DLACTs during their regular meetings with the virtual head teacher. Moreover, as the study was only conducted in one local authority, it may be useful for future researchers to conduct similar research in other areas in order to establish if similar conclusions are drawn. This could be used to add to existing national guidance regarding good practice for supporting LAC in secondary schools. Such guidance is needed given the poor outcomes associated with many LAC (DfE, 2014a).

Furthermore, as discussed previously, the findings suggest that some key adults may be fulfilling attachment criteria for LAC; however, this requires further exploration. Future researchers could use attachment measures to quantitatively explore this relationship. However, it is important that this is considered from the perspective of both the key adult and the young person themselves, as they may have different views of the relationship. If an attachment relationship is established, researchers could then begin to investigate the impact on students' learning and behaviour. Such research is needed as researchers are yet to establish if teacher-student relationships can buffer against the impact of adverse early life experiences (McGrath & van Bergen, 2015).

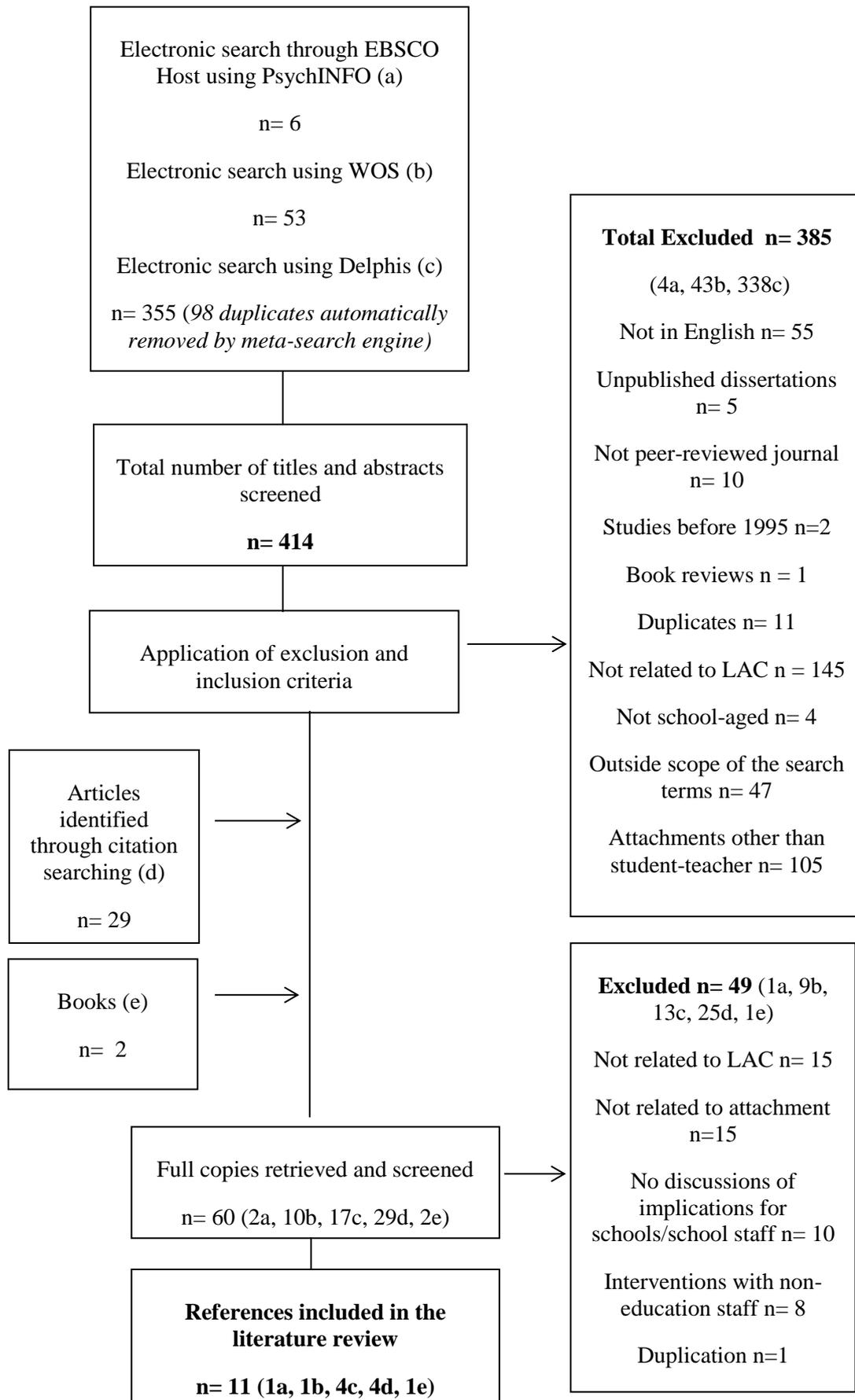
Lastly, although many of the participants showed an awareness of the impact of adverse early life experiences on young people's learning and behaviour, there was very little reference to the theoretical literature. Hence, this suggests a possible lack of understanding of the implications of attachment theory. This is important to consider because according to attribution theorists we have a need to impose meanings on the events that occur in our lives (making causal links between what happens and why we believe they happen) (Norgate, Batchelor, Burrell & Hancock, 2012). Therefore, if adults working with LAC do not understand the implications of attachment theory they are likely to interpret the students' behaviours as due to within-child factors which are beyond their control (rather than as a result of their adverse early experiences) (Grieve, 2009). Moreover, researchers have established that our beliefs influence our practice (Grieve, 2009), therefore, how adults perceive children's behaviours will influence their approach to behaviour management. Hence, this suggests a potential role for EPs in shifting the perspectives of staff working with LAC. This could be approached through training around attachment theory; however, there will need to be careful consideration of how this is delivered (in order to effectively shift perspectives and promote a change in practice). One potential solution could be using the multi-element model of behaviour (LaVigna & Willis, 1995), which emphasises the communicative function of behaviour. This involves a model of positive behaviour management which incorporates four elements: environmental change; teaching new skills; reinforcement; and reactive strategies. This could be used in conjunction with research around attachment theory in order to challenge existing beliefs and develop positive behaviour management strategies. However, the EP should consider the most appropriate method of delivering this training (e.g., basing practice on a learning model, such as, Kolb's model of reflection) (see Buch & Bartley, 2002).

## 2.5 Conclusion

Overall, the current paper provided an understanding of the lived experiences of secondary school staff acting as key adults for LAC (in one local authority). The findings revealed a diverse picture in terms of how this role is conceptualised and implemented, which was influenced by both participants' individual perspectives and the wider school context. Key implications are suggested for the development of policy for key adults working with LAC; for EPs in supporting staff working with LAC to understand attachment theory; and for future researchers to establish whether key adult relationships are indeed fulfilling an attachment function for LAC.

# Appendices

## Appendix A Systematic Review Flow Diagram



## Appendix B Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

<u>Study Item</u>	<u>Inclusion Criteria</u>	<u>Exclusion Criteria</u>
Language	Published in English	Published in any other language than English
Nature of the text	Published studies in peer-reviewed journals Published books	Articles in non peer-reviewed journals Book reviews Unpublished dissertations
Date of Publication	Studies published after 1995 and before 7/2/15 (the cut of date for the literature search)	Studies published before 1995 or after 7/2/15
Participants	Education staff  AND/OR  Children looked after in local authority care who were of school-age (i.e. pre-school, primary school, secondary school and college-aged young people)	Non-education professionals  Children not looked after by the local authority (including children on child protection plans, young people in kinship care and adopted children)  Looked after children over the age of 18 (including university students and care leavers)
Attachment Criteria	Research focusing on attachments between LAC and education staff  Interventions to support attachments between LAC and education staff  Research focusing on implications of insecure attachments for LAC & how schools can support their learning and social/emotional wellbeing	Research around attachments between LAC and non-education staff (e.g. parents, foster carers, social workers, residential care workers, etc.)  Interventions to support attachments between LAC and non-education staff  Research around the implications of insecure attachments with no reference to implications for education staff  Research related to resilience and not referring to attachment theory
Scope of search terms	Topic related to <u>all three</u> search terms (i.e. attachment theory & looked after children & schools/school staff)	Topics related to only one search terms (e.g. validity of an attachment scale).  Topics related to only 2 of the search terms (e.g. implications of attachment for foster care settings).



## Appendix C Data Extraction Table

<u>Author &amp; date of publication</u>	<u>Aims/Objectives</u>	<u>Geographical context</u>	<u>Nature of text</u>	<u>Sample</u>	<u>Age range of LAC</u>	<u>Findings</u>	<u>Implications for school staff</u>
Fernandez (2008)	To explore the impact of a permanent foster care programme on the emotional, behavioural and educational outcomes of LAC	Australia	Empirical study: Mixed method-qualitative & cohort study (longitudinal, repeated-measures, multi-informant design) <i>(N.B. this was a strand of a larger longitudinal study)</i>	LAC in a permanent foster care programme n=59 (total sample at time 1) Control group (non-LAC) n=? Teachers n=? Foster carers n=?  <i>N.B. ? means missing data (due to a lack of reporting)</i>	4-15 years (average age 8.8 years)	<i>Quantitative study:</i> At time 1, LAC group had significantly higher scores for externalising behaviour (p=0.019) and aggressive behaviour (p=0.013) compared to a matched control group (according to teacher report). There was a significant difference in scores at a 2 year follow-up (reduced problem behaviours and increased adaptive behaviours). <i>Qualitative study:</i> findings unknown (due to lack of reporting).	Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) & multi-agency working
Greig et al. (2008)	An investigation of narrative coherence in LAC in primary school	Scotland	Empirical study: Quasi-experimental, between-subjects design (cross-sectional study)	n= 34 (n=17 LAC in foster care and n=17 non looked-after matched control group)	4-9 years old	The LAC group were significantly outperformed by the control group on measures of narrative coherence (p=0.029), avoidance (p=0.025) and intentionality (p=0.02).	Learning & multi-agency working

Webster & Hackett (2007)	Exploring the relationship between attachment representations and behaviour difficulties among LAC	California, USA	Empirical study: Quasi-experimental, between-subjects design (cross-sectional study)	LAC n= 34 (with a history of maltreatment referred to a mental health clinic)  n= 19 foster care, n=4 therapeutic foster homes, n=9 group homes, n=2 adoptive homes  Parents/carers n=? (not reported)	11.67-17.92 years (Mean age 14.30 years)	LAC with unresolved attachment representations had significantly higher scores on measures of externalising problems (p<0.01) and behavioural symptoms (p<0.01) and lower scores for adaptive skills (p<0.05) than LAC with resolved attachment representations (according to parent/carer measures). These findings were supported by adolescent self-report measures.	SEMH, multi-agency working & understanding of attachment theory
McLean, Kettler, Delfabbro & Riggs (2011)	Exploring stakeholders understanding of challenging behaviour in children in out-of-home care	Australia	Empirical study: Qualitative (semi-structured interviews analysed using thematic analysis)	n=92 professionals in the out-of-home care sector (teachers [n=18], foster carers [n=26], statutory child protection workers [n=19 case managers and n=17 residential care workers] and child and adolescent mental health workers [n=12])	N/A (adult participants)	Six key themes were identified regarding ways of understanding challenging Behaviour. The themes captured diverse views amongst key stakeholders working with LAC. Teachers' views tended to focus on behaviour as a personal choice and placed responsibility of behaviour with the young people.	Multi-agency working & understanding of attachment theory
Sugden (2013)	Exploring the views of LAC regarding what supports them	UK	Empirical study: Qualitative (semi-	LAC n=6 (n=5 in long-term	8-9 years	Three super-ordinate themes were identified	Learning and multi-agency working

	to learn		structured interviews analysed using IPA)	foster placements and n=1 in a respite placement)		regarding support for learning in school: 'a place where I am accepted'; 'a place where I can make choices'; and 'a place which personalises learning'. All participants identified teachers as the main source of support for learning.	
Brewin & Statham (2011)	A multi-informant perspective of factors which support the transition from primary to secondary schools for LAC	Wales	Empirical study: Qualitative (semi-structured interviews analysed using framework analysis and a focus group)	n=14 LAC n=22 foster carers n=3 LAC education support officers n=? social work managers ( <i>not reported</i> )	10-12 years	No single set of factors was identified but there were four key principles: individualised support; holistic support; minimising LAC's differences; and the importance of planning and information sharing between key stakeholders.	SEMH, multi-agency working & understanding of attachment theory
Lansdown, Burnell & Allen (2007)	Investigating executive functioning among a LAC sample at risk of care placement breakdown	UK	Report published in a peer-reviewed journal from Family Futures Consortium (an assessment and treatment service for LAC)	LAC n= 86 referred for psychological assessment due to risk of placement breakdown	6-18 years	All LAC were rated as having executive functioning scores within the 'clinically worrying' range (according to parent and teacher measures using the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function [BRIEF]; Giola, Isquith, Guy & Kenworthy, 1996).	Learning, SEMH & multi-agency working
Phillips (2007)	Highlighting limited support for	Scotland	Report published in a peer-reviewed	LAC and adopted children	Primary and secondary	The paper highlights the lack of support for the attachment	SEMH & understanding

	education regarding how the attachment difficulties of LAC & adopted children affects their schooling (& promotion of their own published resources)		journal by PACS (Post adoption central support)		schools	needs of LAC and adopted children in education settings.	of attachment theory
Dann (2011)	The paper explores some of the possible effects of early life traumas and insecure attachments on brain development and subsequent learning in primary school for LAC.	UK	Opinion piece (published in a peer-reviewed journal)	LAC and adopted children	Primary school	The paper identifies some potential difficulties associated with learning and argues these are often a result of trauma and attachment difficulties. Suggestions are made regarding support for children's learning and self-esteem.	Learning & understanding of attachment theory
Gilligan (1998)	The paper advocates for the importance of schools (and teachers) in supporting LAC	Ireland	Opinion piece (published in a peer-reviewed journal)	Young people in child welfare	Unknown	The author argues the role of schools in supporting LAC has been neglected by the social care system in previous years. Hence, the author proposes schools (and teachers) can play a key role in supporting the resilience of LAC (e.g. by providing a secure base).	SEMH & multi-agency working

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Bombèr (2007)	Practical guide for teachers supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools	U.K.	Book (practical handbook for teachers)	Children with attachment difficulties (including LAC)	Primary and secondary schools	The author proposes LAC should be provided with a 'key adult' in school to provide an attachment function (as a secondary attachment figure)	SEMH & multi-agency working & understanding of attachment theory
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## Appendix D University Ethics Approval

**From:** ERGO [ergo@soton.ac.uk]

**Sent:** 07 October 2014 11:25

**To:** Underdown K.

**Subject:** Your Ethics Submission (Ethics ID:12258) has been reviewed and approved

Submission Number: 12258

Submission Name: What is the key to being a 'key adult'? An exploration of secondary school staffs' experiences acting as a key adult for looked after children (LAC)

This email is to let you know your submission was approved by the Ethics Committee.

You can begin your research unless you are still awaiting specific Health and Safety approval (e.g. for a Genetic or Biological Materials Risk Assessment)

Comments

None

[Click here to view your submission](#)

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ERGO : Ethics and Research Governance Online

<http://www.ergo.soton.ac.uk>  
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DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL

# Appendix E Quantitative Study Participant Information Form



## QUANTITATIVE STUDY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Version 1, 06/09/14)

**Study title:** What is the key to being a ‘key adult’? An exploration of secondary school staffs’ experiences acting as a ‘key adult’ for Looked after children (LAC)

**Researcher:** Kelly-Marie Underdown (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

**ERGO Study ID:** 12258

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.**

### What is the research about?

I am a third year student completing my Doctoral training in Educational Psychology at the University of Southampton. As part of my training I have been completing a two year placement at XX Educational Psychology Service (2013-2015). Having previously worked as a residential support worker for children in care, I have chosen to focus my doctoral research on exploring the support for looked after children (LAC) in the local authority. Specifically, I am interested in how staff are providing LAC with ‘key adults’ in secondary schools. I feel this is an important area to investigate as previous researchers have identified that LAC are a particularly vulnerable group of young people. However, there is a lack of research investigating how support is provided to LAC in schools.

### Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate in this study as you are the designated teacher for looked after children (LAC) in your school.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the proposed study you will be asked to:

- ❖ Complete a brief online questionnaire via [www.isurvey.soton.ac.uk](http://www.isurvey.soton.ac.uk).
- ❖ The questionnaire will approximately 15 minutes to complete
- ❖ You will asked to provide details about the staff members acting as ‘key adults’ for LAC in your school. I will be selecting some of these individuals and will be inviting them to participate in interviews, further exploring their role. However, they will be asked for their own consent to participate in this extension of the study.
- ❖ *N.B. a ‘key adult’ is the term used to refer to a staff member with whom the young person develops a warm, trusting relationship and can speak to when they need support or guidance. I understand this is not a set job role and is being implemented in different ways across different schools (depending on the needs of the young people).*

**Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

It is hoped that this study will provide directions for future research. Furthermore, the study may result in practical implications for education professionals (e.g. school staff and EPs) supporting LAC in the local authority under investigation.

**Are there any risks involved?**

The proposed research is considered to be non-invasive, non-threatening and does not involve any form of deception. Prior to the study, the researcher will conduct a risk assessment to ensure any potential risks are minimised. Furthermore, the proposed study is subject to ethical and research governance approval from the University of Southampton. Copies of these documents can be made available to you upon request.

**Will my participation be confidential?**

In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) all data gathered from participants will remain confidential and will either be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked cabinet. Access to these files will only be granted to members of the research team (researchers and supervisors).

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You may withdraw your consent for your involvement at any time (prior to the publication of the research) without your legal rights being affected.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

This research is to be conducted in accordance with ethical conditions as set out by the University of Southampton. In the unlikely case of concern or complaint regarding the researchers actions, please do not hesitate to contact the chair of the Southampton University Ethics Committee as detailed below:

Chair of the Ethics Committee,

School of Psychology,

University of Southampton,

Southampton,

Hampshire.

SO17 1BJ

Tel: (023) 8059 5578.

Email: [slb1n10@soton.ac.uk](mailto:slb1n10@soton.ac.uk)

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have any further questions regarding the proposed research project, or would like more information please contact the researcher by email:

Researcher: Kelly-Marie Underdown

Email Address: XX

Alternatively, any concerns or issues can be directed to Dr Nick Maguire, Research supervisor, University of Southampton.



## Appendix F Online Survey Template



### QUANTITATIVE STUDY ONLINE SURVEY TEMPLATE

*(Including participant information, informed consent form & questionnaire)*

*(Version 1, 06/09/14)*

**Study title:** What is the key to being a ‘key adult’? An exploration of secondary school staffs’ experiences acting as a ‘key adult’ for Looked after children (LAC).

**Researcher name:** Kelly-Marie Underdown

**ERGO Study ID number:** 12258

#### **Participant Information**

Please read this information carefully before deciding whether to take part in this research. You will need to indicate that you have understood this information before you can continue. You must also be aged over 16 to participate. By ticking the box at the bottom of this page and clicking ‘Continue’, you are consenting to participate in this survey.

You have been asked to participate in this study as you are the designated teacher for Looked after children (LAC) in your school. As part of my Doctoral thesis in Educational Psychology, I am exploring the support for LAC in the Local Authority. Specifically, I am interested in how schools are providing LAC with ‘key adults’ in secondary schools.

You will be asked to provide details about the staff members acting as ‘key adults’ for LAC in your school. I will be selecting some of these individuals and will be inviting them to participate in interviews, further exploring their role. However, they will be asked for their own consent to participate in this extension of the study.

For your information, all data will be confidential and will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Data will be anonymised so that the final study will not include any details that might identify you, including your school’s name and location.

Please note you are not under any obligations to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with and are free to withdraw your participation at any time by closing the webpage (without giving an explanation for this).

We have tried to ensure that the questions in this study do not cause any distress. However, it is not uncommon to experience some anxieties or concerns when completing questionnaires about sensitive topics (such as looked after children), and support is available. If participating in this study raises any issues for you, we recommend that you contact the NHS Direct website (<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>).

**Statement of Consent**

I have read and understood the information about this study. In consenting, I understand that my legal rights are not affected. I also understand that data collected as part of this research will be kept confidential and that published results will maintain that confidentiality. I finally understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a participant in this research, or if I feel that I have been placed at risk, I may contact the chair of the Ethics Committee, Psychology, University of Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK. Phone: +44 (0)23 8059 4663, email [slb1n10@soton.ac.uk](mailto:slb1n10@soton.ac.uk)

I certify that I am 16 years or older. I have read the above consent form and I give consent to participate in the above described research.

**Questionnaire**

As explained above, as part of my Doctoral thesis in Educational Psychology, I am exploring the support for looked after children (LAC) in the Local Authority. Specifically, I am interested in how schools are providing LAC with ‘key adults’ in secondary schools (as recommended by government guidance and the theoretical literature).

The ‘key adult’ is a staff member with whom the young person develops a warm, trusting relationship and can speak to when they need support or guidance. I understand this is not a set job role and is being implemented in different ways across different schools (depending on the needs of the young people). Therefore, please be reassured that there are not any right or wrong answers; I would just like to understand the range in practice across schools.

**1. How many Looked after children (LAC) are currently on your school roll?**

.....

**2. Which staff members are acting as a key adult for LAC?**

Name .....

Designation .....

**3. How long has each staff member been acting as a key adult for LAC?**

Initials of staff member .....

Number of years.....

**4. How many LAC are they currently acting as key adults for?**

Initials of staff member .....

Number of pupils .....

**Thank you for your participation in this research.**

The aim of this survey was to understand how the ‘key adult’ role for LAC is being fulfilled by secondary school staff in the local authority. However, the overall aim of

this research is to explore the lived experience of individuals acting as a 'key adult' for LAC in secondary schools; hence, some of the individuals named in your responses will be invited to participate in an interview exploring their experiences supporting LAC.

There is currently a lack of published research in this field; therefore, it is likely that the findings will provide numerous directions for future research. Furthermore, the findings may provide implications for the development of local authority guidance for the role of the key adult and may also provide practical implications for the work of Educational Psychologists (EPs).

Once again, results of this study will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics. The research did not use deception.

You may have a copy of this summary if you wish. You are also able to request a summary of the research findings once the project is complete (from July 2015).

If you have any further questions please contact me, Kelly-Marie Underdown via email at: XX

***If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee, Psychology, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ. Phone: +44 (0)23 8059 4663, email [sbl1n10@soton.ac.uk](mailto:sbl1n10@soton.ac.uk)***

# Appendix G Qualitative Study Participant Information Form



## QUALITATIVE STUDY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

*(Version 1, 06/09/14)*

**Study title:** What is the key to being a ‘key adult’? An exploration of secondary school staffs’ experiences acting as a ‘key adult’ for Looked after children (LAC)

**Researcher:** Kelly-Marie Underdown (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

**ERGO Study ID:** 12258

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.**

### **What is the research about?**

I am a third year student completing my Doctoral training in Educational Psychology at the University of Southampton. As part of my training I have been completing a two year placement at XX Educational Psychology Service (2013-2015). Having previously worked as a residential support worker for children in care, I have chosen to focus my doctoral research on exploring the support for looked after children (LAC) in the local authority. Specifically, I am interested in how staff are providing LAC with ‘key adults’ in secondary schools. I feel this is an important area to investigate as previous researchers have identified that LAC are a particularly vulnerable group of young people. However, there is a lack of research investigating how support is provided to LAC in schools. It is hoped that this study will provide directions for future research. Furthermore, the study may result in practical implications for education professionals (e.g. school staff and EPs) supporting LAC in the local authority under investigation.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen to participate in this research as you have been identified by the designated looked after children (LAC) teacher in your school as someone who acts as a ‘key adult’ for a LAC.

Please note, ‘key adult’ is the term used in the literature to describe a staff member with whom the young person develops a warm, trusting relationship and can speak to when they need support or guidance. I understand this is not a set job role and is being implemented in different ways across different schools (depending on the needs of the young people).

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you agree to take part in the proposed study you will be asked to:

- ❖ Take part in one semi-structured interview about your experience working with looked after children (LAC).
- ❖ This interview will last between 40-60 minutes.
- ❖ You can decide whether you would prefer to carry out the interview face-to-face or via telephone
- ❖ If you decide to opt for face-to-face interviews this will take place either at the school you work at or the Local Authority offices (where the Educational Psychology Service is based). You can decide which venue is more convenient for you.
- ❖ You will be asked for your permission to audio record the interviews (so the interviewer can transcribe your responses)
- ❖ Once transcribed the interviewer will anonymise the interviews, so your identity cannot be traced back to you.

**Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

If you agree to take part in the current study, you will be given a £5 book voucher to thank you for your time.

**Are there any risks involved?**

The proposed research is considered to be non-invasive, non-threatening and does not involve any form of deception. Prior to the study, the researcher will conduct a risk assessment to ensure any potential risks are minimised. Furthermore, the proposed study is subject to ethical and research governance approval from the University of Southampton. Copies of these documents can be made available to you upon request.

**Will my participation be confidential?**

In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) all data gathered from participants will remain confidential and will either be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked cabinet. Access to these files will only be granted to members of the research team (researchers and supervisors).

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You may withdraw your consent for your involvement at any time (prior to the publication of the research) without your legal rights being affected.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

This research is to be conducted in accordance with ethical conditions as set out by the University of Southampton. In the unlikely case of concern or complaint regarding the researchers actions, please do not hesitate to contact the chair of the Southampton University Ethics Committee as detailed below:

Chair of the Ethics Committee,

School of Psychology,

University of Southampton,

Southampton,

Hampshire.

SO17 1BJ

Tel: (023) 8059 5578.

Email: [slb1n10@soton.ac.uk](mailto:slb1n10@soton.ac.uk)

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have any further questions regarding the proposed research project, or would like more information please contact the researcher by email:

Researcher: Kelly-Marie Underdown

Email Address: XX

Alternatively, any concerns or issues can be directed to Dr Nick Maguire, Research supervisor, University of Southampton.

# Appendix H Qualitative Study Informed Consent Form



## QUALITATIVE STUDY CONSENT FORM

(Version 1, 06/09/14)

**Study title:** What is the key to being a ‘key adult’? An exploration of secondary school staffs’ experiences acting as a ‘key adult’ for looked after children (LAC).

**Researcher name:** Kelly-Marie Underdown

**ERGO Study ID:** 12258

Please *initial* the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (version 1, 06/09/14) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

I agree for the interview to be audio recorded by the researcher.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

**Data Protection:** I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored either in a locked cabinet or on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

## Appendix I Interview Topic Guide (Final Version)



### INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE (*Version 3, 23/10/14*)

**Study title: What is the key to being a ‘key adult’? An exploration of secondary school staffs’ experiences acting as a ‘key adult’ for Looked after children (LAC)**

**ERGO Study ID: 12258**

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview about your experiences acting as a key adult for a Looked after Child (LAC). Can I begin by reassuring you that all information collected during this interview will be stored confidentially and will be anonymised so that it cannot be traced back to identify you. You will be able to access your data or withdraw participation up to the point that your data is anonymised.

I do not have permission to discuss any young people, so our discussions must take place on a no names basis. Therefore, can I please ask that you do not name any of the young people you work with (you can use pseudo names if that will help?) However, in line with safeguarding procedures, if our discussion leads me to believe that a child is at risk I will have to identify the school’s child protection officer.

Please note, you are not under any obligations to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with and are free to pause, stop or withdraw at any time during the interview without giving an explanation for this.

Do you understand? Before we start the interview, are there any questions you would like to ask?

As you may be aware, you were initially identified as acting as a key adult for LAC through an online questionnaire which I asked the designated LAC teachers at all secondary schools in the local authority to complete. This is just to get an idea how the key adult role is being operated across the local authority. I will begin by reading through the information your designated LAC teacher has provided me with, just so you can check it is correct. (*Read answers from online questionnaire*).

*\* Reminder- first use ‘can you tell me anything else?’ before using pre-prepared prompts*

**1. Tell me about how you became a key adult for a child looked-after (LAC)**

*Prompts:* Were you asked by another staff member to take on this role? If so who? Was the young person involved in selecting you to support them?

*Probe:* What were the motives behind providing this young person with a key adult (e.g. were they experiencing learning or BESD (behavioural, emotional, social difficulties) at school?)

**2. Can you describe what you do in your role as a key adult?**

*Prompt:* What would a typical day look like for you?

*Probes:* What does being a key adult mean to you? Are you given any guidelines (e.g. a job description) outlining your duties?

What skills do you feel you utilise (e.g. nurturing vs. organisational skills)

**3. How you would describe your relationship with the LAC you are key adult for? (Key question- explore in depth)**

*Probe:* What role do you think you are fulfilling for the young person? How do you feel about them?

How do you think they feel about you?

Does this impact on your personal life? (I.e. how do you manage your feelings outside of work?)

Does this impact on your professional life?

How do you think other people in the school see your role (as a key adult)?

**4. Tell me about how you meet with your key child**

*Prompts:* How do you arrange to meet your key child? (E.g. regular check-ins/timetabled sessions arranged by you? Or drop in sessions when the young person needs to talk?)

*Probes:* Approximately how many times would you meet them in one week/one month?

**5. If you arrange timetabled sessions, what do these look like?**

*Prompts:* Emotional support?

Social skills practice?

Therapeutic intervention?

Organisational skills support?

Curriculum catch-up/academic support?

Other?

*Probes:* Did you receive any training for this?

**6. Without naming names, could you describe an interaction with a Looked After Child that you found particularly rewarding?**

*Prompts:* think about a time where you felt you had made a difference for a key child.

*Probes:* What were the outcomes for the LAC? (I.e. academic or BESD)

What was it specifically about your role that you feel made a difference for this young person?

**7. Without naming names, could you describe an interaction with a key child that you found particularly challenging? And, in hindsight how would you have changed this?**

*Prompts:* what was it that made it particularly challenging?

*Probe:* How did you overcome this?

**8. What does your school offer to help you to support your key child?**

*Prompts:* Supervision

Support from colleagues

Clear expectations/ procedures

Opportunities to debrief

Training

*Probe:* Is there anything that has been particularly useful? If you could have any kind of additional support what would this look like?

**9. How do you share information about a LAC you are supporting with their parents/carers?**

*Prompts:* do you have a home/school communication book?

Do you make phone calls/emails home?

Do you meet with their parents/carers?

*Probe:* How do they handle confidentiality? Do they tell the YP they will have to share this information? If so, does this affect the relationship?

**10. Tell me about your involvement with other agencies for a LAC you are supporting**

*Prompts:* Do you have involvement with Social Workers/Educational Psychologists etc.?

*Probes:* do you have any specific responsibilities liaising with/meeting other professionals regarding your key child? E.g. at PEPs/ ISRs

**11. Lastly, can I ask you if you think there is any aspect of acting as a Key adult for Children Looked After that you feel has not been discussed in this interview?**

*Probe:* is there anyone else in the school that is fulfilling the role of key adult who you feel it may be useful for me to speak to? If so, do you have different/defined roles?

## Appendix J Notes from Pilot Interviews

### Notes from Interview Pilot 1 (21/10/14)

- Pilot with 2 EP colleagues- 21/10/14 (trainee EP and experienced EP)
- Define key adult role in introduction or ask participants their perspective on what they think a key adult is?
- Question 3- questioned around the appropriateness of the wording 'relationship'. Is this too emotive? Or is this appropriate?
- Expand more upon question 3 (explore whether this is an attachment?) E.g. question- how do you protect yourself? (i.e. manage their feelings at home)
- Question 4- explore how they meet their key child i.e. is this formal & pre-arranged or informal i.e. YP can come to them?
- Question 7- after asking about a challenging experience ask- 'in hindsight how would you have changed this?'
- Question 8- if they mention training ask- if you could have any kind of training what would you have? (i.e. miracle question)
- Question 9- consider confidentiality- do they tell the young person if they are sharing information? If so, how does this affect the relationship with the young person?
- Question 10- i.e. involvement in PEPs/ISRs (as schools have to raise LAC)
- Look at different perspectives of DLACT and the individual who deals with the day to day role? How does DLACT support the key adult?

### Editing process

- Edited question 2- added a probing question re: asking what being a key adult means to the interviewee. I decided not to give a definition of this in the introduction as I did not want to influence participants' responses.
- Edited question 3- reminder that this needs to be explored in depth i.e. are they fulfilling an attachment role? Explore how it impact on their home life etc.
- Edited question 4- broadened the question to further explore their meetings
- Edited question 7 (see comments above)
- Edited question 8 (see comments above)
- Edited question 9- additional probe (see comments above)
- Edited question 10 (see comments above)

### Notes from Interview Pilot 2 (23/10/14)

- Pilot with a senior EP colleague- 23/10/14
- Prompts- first use "can you tell me anything else?" before using pre-prepared prompts
- Question 2: prompt- ask about what skills they utilise (e.g. nurturing vs. organisational skills)
- Question 3:
  - ask how other people in the school see their role
  - Ask about impact on professional life
- Final question- ask if there is anyone else in the school who is fulfilling the key adult role that I should be speaking to? If so, ask if they have different/defined roles?

## Appendix K Qualitative Study Debriefing Form

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Southampton**

**Written Debriefing Statement** (*Version 1, 06/09/14*)

**Study title: What is the key to being a ‘key adult’? An exploration of secondary school staffs’ experiences acting as a ‘key adult’ for Looked after children (LAC)**

**ERGO Study ID: 12258**

The aim of this study was to firstly understand how the ‘key adult’ role for looked after children (LAC) is being fulfilled by secondary school staff in the local authority under investigation. However, the primary aim of the study was to explore the lived experience of individuals acting as a ‘key adult’ for LAC in secondary schools. There is currently a lack of published research in this field; therefore, it is likely that the findings will provide numerous directions for future research. Furthermore, the findings may provide implications for the development of local authority guidance for the role of the key adult and may also provide practical implications for the work of Educational Psychologists (EPs).

Once again, results of this study will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics. The research did not use deception.

You may have a copy of this summary if you wish. You are also able to request a summary of the research findings once the project is complete (from July 2015).

If you have any further questions please contact me, Kelly-Marie Underdown via email at: XX

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee, Psychology, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ. Phone: +44 (0)23 8059 4663, email [slb1n10@soton.ac.uk](mailto:slb1n10@soton.ac.uk)*

## Appendix L Recruitment Presentation



CHILDREN'S SERVICES



### Doctoral Research into support for Looked-After Children (LAC)



Kelly-Marie Underdown  
Trainee Educational Psychologist  
[REDACTED] Educational Psychology Service



CHILDREN'S SERVICES



### Focus of Research



- Support for LAC in secondary schools
- Investigating the role of the 'key adult' for LAC:
  - What does this look like in schools?



CHILDREN'S SERVICES



### The Study



- A) Online survey completed by designated LAC teachers
  - 4 questions
  - 5-10 minutes to complete
  - Complete via I-Survey
- B) Interviews with 'key adults'





**Thank you for listening!**

Any Questions?



Contact details:



## Appendix M Coding Framework (Final Version)

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Sub-theme</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Example quotes</u>
Professional responsibilities	Following LAC legislation/guidelines	<p><b>This subtheme refers to following local and national guidance and legislation and incorporates the following duties:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following national/local legislation/guidelines for LAC (including social care procedures)</li> <li>• Completing paperwork in line with guidelines/timescales (e.g. for LAC reviews)</li> <li>• Attending PEP meetings/LAC review meetings</li> <li>• Allocation of pupil premium money</li> <li>• Monitoring educational attainment of LAC</li> </ul>	<p><i>“I follow obviously the procedure, the policy, for looked after children, the guidelines” (participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>“The main things with the student would be the PEP, preparation for that, the conduction of it, carrying it out, making sure she gets what she needs in terms of resources and the pupil premium money spent on things that she needs, they would be the main things that I would do to support her” (participant 1)</i></p>
Professional Responsibilities	Multi-agency working	<p><b>This subtheme captures participants’ professional responsibility to liaise with colleagues and external professionals. Specifically:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaising with parents and carers</li> <li>• Liaising with social workers and other professionals</li> <li>• Referral to outside agencies for support</li> <li>• Liaising with school staff</li> </ul>	<p><i>“And then I’m invited to the LAC reviews, where I meet the other professionals around the looked after child. I liaise with all the key members of staff that have a relationship with the looked after student, for example form tutor, director of learning or assistant director of learning, that’s our pastoral structure, or subject teachers. And of course in close contact with social workers and foster carers” (participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>“Being that contact between social workers, other professionals, foster carers, they all know that I’m the first point of contact if</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information sharing with staff/professionals</li> </ul>	<p><i>it's a looked-after child and generally adviser for the pastoral team" (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>"Obviously I act as a filtering system because a lot of the information from Looked After Review Meetings isn't – shouldn't necessarily be shared. So as and when is necessary, what's appropriate for them. What happens is we have a central filing system whereby any documentation regarding the individual is stored and then that is accessed by any people who are working with that particular child. It's always locked up and so I give them the bare bones and if they want to find out more they come and access it themselves or see me for further details" (participant 2)</i></p>
Professional Responsibilities	<p>Responsibilities to LAC</p> <p><b>This sub-theme presumes an active role on the part of the key adult in the best interests of the LAC they are responsible for. It includes the following duties:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with young person re: their views for the PEP/LAC review (e.g. involving LAC in how pupil premium money is spent)</li> <li>Liaison with LAC (e.g. informing them of meetings/visits etc.)</li> <li>Induction meeting with new LAC students</li> <li>Support for transition post-16</li> <li>Setting up interventions for LAC (e.g. peer support group, social skills, self-harm intervention)</li> <li>Impact of interventions/support in place for LAC</li> </ul>	<p><i>"...but before the PEP we do a pre-PEP where I just have like an informal chat with the student in view to support them even better with the PEP, where we set targets..." (participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>"I've communicated to the child to say that the social worker is coming in. I gave her the name and details because they may not have met her so far and explained that, "She's meeting your brothers and sisters as well but she's also wanting to meet you as well and so she'll be in at this time..." (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>"we also provide a range of activities for them as well, so in the past we've done a residential activities weekend where they've been rock climbing and canoeing and that sort of thing and we also lay on activities – we're coming up to Christmas, we've got a Christmas party for our Looked After Children and our young carers and we have a magician and Christmas presents for the children and a lunch – well a Christmas dinner for them". (participant 2)</i></p>

*“and at his first PEP he was absolutely beaming that he loved his teachers, they had all welcomed him in, and that he’d had a friendship group, he had a buddy that worked with him and he loved his activity holiday and made loads of friends there. And he said that coming to this school it wasn’t about PEPS it was coming to this school was the best decision he had ever made”.* (participant 4)

*“And it could have gone badly for him but because we’ve got those extra things that we can put into place for him he has settled in really well and people do look out for him. So that’s a really good one”.* (participant 4)

*“Yeah, because he wanted the exit pass and he wanted more support, because he thought he was struggling. He was. And so this has worked really well. And now when I see him around I just ask him, “Alright? Everything’s fine? Are you working well?” And he’s always much, much calmer. So that’s, yeah, something that’s worked, yeah”.* (participant 3)

Professional  
Responsibilities

“Go-to person” for LAC

**This subtheme assumes a passive role on the part of the key adult and focuses on how they believe the LAC perceive their role. It incorporates the following ideas:**

- Key adult as their “Main teacher”/ “go-to person”/“their person that is on their side”/“our teacher”
- Key adult as a person to share happy events with (“being an ear for her to talk to”) and a safe base (young

*“It’s their go-to person”.* (participant 7)

*“I think she sees me as, yeah, just a responsible adult that she can trust and go to if she needs to”* (participant 1)

*“Some of them I see every day and they’ll come down to my office, they’ll say good morning and then they’ll tell me about what they’ve been doing the night before and what they’re going to do, so I am their point of contact, their main teacher”*

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people seek out key adult when upset)

- Assumes a sense of trust between adult and LAC

(participant 4)

*“And sometimes if it’s just gone a bit wrong and they can bring their work down and sit here and we will go through it. I think it’s just like the friendly face; you are not their friend, because that’s not an appropriate relationship but you are their friend if you understand what I mean, you are their person that is on their side, you are their team” (participant 7)*

*“And he has got a sibling here now as well and his sibling he brought over and said, ‘This is Miss (name). This is what she does. She is our teacher.’ And it’s very sweet that they will come to your door and they’ll look in and they’ll tell other people, ‘That’s my teacher.’ I’m exclusively theirs” (participant 4)*

*“it can be just for a chat, I think, just to like share something happy as well happened, not just for issues, or show me a picture or something, or tell me that she’s going to the cinema at the weekend, you know” (participant 3)*

*“So I was someone she could rely on” (participant 5)*

*“I was the person that she went to when it all went wrong which was weekly at least. Had a lot of mental health issues, all over the place, personality disorders, so she was a big mess in her head all the time and she often needed to go, “Yerrrr” kind of thing” (participant 6)*

*“It’s like, wait for them to calm down, they’ll come here; it’s a safe place” (participant 7)*

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Approach to the role	Flexibility at a systemic level	<p><b>This subtheme refers to practical decisions at a systemic (wider school) level regarding implementing support for LAC. Hence, these decisions are often made by the school’s senior leadership team (i.e. the key adult is not necessarily involved in making these decisions):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocation of key adult based on consideration of the needs of the young person</li> <li>• Participants’ transition to their role based on consideration of needs of LAC</li> </ul>	<p><i>“She is pleased that it’s not going to a different person just because she is in a different year group, and she is pleased that I’ll be with her through to the sixth form because she is very keen for people not to know that she is looked-after”. (participant 1)</i></p> <p><i>“So because they are quite vulnerable students and attachment is important, building relationships is important, there was quite a length handover. It was about four weeks which in this school is quite a long time” (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>“I was always on the safeguarding team and then we found a lot of our LACs were often started at either at a CHIN, child protection and then was moved over to a LAC and being removed from the family- and because we already had a lot of involvement with that child, it just made sense to carry on supporting the child, the friendly face, the trust that had been built over the time we’ve known each other” (participant 7)</i></p>
Approach to the role	Flexibility at the individual child level	<p><b>This subtheme refers to key adult’s adapting the way they provide support based on consideration of the individual student’s needs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to contact with young person influenced by their individual needs/views/wishes</li> <li>• Support for young person based on their individual needs/views/wishes</li> <li>• Informal contact with LAC (in</li> </ul>	<p><i>“I’ll pop a confidential note in her planner or go up to see her in her form room to arrange a time that’s suitable for her and me because she doesn’t really like coming out of her lessons and things like that” (participant 1)</i></p> <p><i>“I’ll go and see her and I’ll say, “Look we’re meeting, do you want to come along?” every time she says, “No”. But the offer is there for her if she should do” (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>“...and I think that is it, giving them some control. Like I said,</i></p>

addition to the formal meetings)

*it's choosing the battles really. Alright she's not wearing uniform, she's got some of it on, I know it's not appropriate but let's look where we are getting and where we were sort of thing. So yeah it's trial and error really. It's not that you would do something different, it's just finding out what suits that child". (participant 7)*

*"It would be different if you had a different young person with different needs." (participant 1)*

Approach to the role

Advocate role

**This subtheme refers to the key adult as acting as an advocate for the LAC when liaising with colleagues and external professionals:**

- Representing voice of the child to other staff/professionals (e.g. challenging staff members, intervening when an issue arises to advocate for a LAC)
- Representing the needs of LAC to other staff/professionals (e.g. training)
- Key go-to person for staff re: LAC

*"And then we had a few issues with her as well in the last couple of weeks of other students being mean to her. Again she can be very mean as well, but she was in a situation where others were repeatedly – and so I had to send an email to all staff saying, you know, "This person's very vulnerable. I know she can put herself in situations, but please be extra vigilant that this is not happening." (participant 3)*

*"I bother other staff a lot but I think that's important. I'm a little bit like a broken record but it's so that they remember who those students are, what their needs are and it refreshes their mind of who they should be looking out for and being careful for" (participant 4)*

*"...we fight their corner for them and often once we've explained to the- you know, the member of staff go, "Had a rough-?" "Oh, forget it, forget it. Forget it" you know and it is, it's just like putting across their case". (participant 7)*

*"So sometimes you will give enough information for them to*

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			<p><i>understand that if that project is coming up then we will remove them from that one because they don't need that at this present time". (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>"I guess if there was an overall issue, if anything every cropped up with regards behaviour or homework, things like that, or attainment they would probably come straight to me rather than her head of year because they know that I'm the designated adult..." (participant 1)</i></p>
Approach to role	Use of relationship to overcome challenges	<p><b>This subtheme refers to the way participants approach their interactions with the LAC they are responsible for. Specifically, it incorporates the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of rapport to overcome difficulties</li> <li>• Using own experiences in work with LAC</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I said, if it makes her happy - you know, "Just go, have a look. It is not going to hurt you to learn English or to reinforce, you know. Just go to it for me and I'll buy you chocolate tomorrow. What chocolate do you like?" So I tried to divert her attention with chocolate, what do you like, what do you not like, just to make something positive out of it. And it worked, you know". (participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>"And the ones that might just be- and sometimes you can explain, you go, "They're having a really rough time. Can I catch up with you later?" and often, they show empathy and that, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's fine Miss, yeah." By the time I've got to them, sometimes they've sorted it out in their own head and I go, "Oh, that's brilliant. I'm glad you're feeling better," which is what we want, coping skills". (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>"But a nurturing way and sometimes that's what they need, a little bit of nurturing, kindness. A bit of kindness when you have mess up. You just know, don't you, sort of thing yourself that you don't forget anyone that's nice to you, you also don't forget anyone that's sort of- you know, you remember from being a child</i></p>

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			<i>yourself, you don't forget when someone's horrible to you either". (participant 7)</i>
Personal perspective	Professional approach	<p><b>This subtheme encapsulates a purely professional perspective of the role of key adult (i.e. and does not see the role as involving a relationship with the young people in their care). Hence it incorporates the following ideas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional distance from young people (participant 2)</li> <li>• Denial of impact of role on themselves/their personal life/their emotions</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I'm not a friend, I'm not a pal, I'm not – I am – I try and keep a step distance away from young people although the young people themselves are often looking for additional role model support for themselves. So it is professional" (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>"Rewarding" is a strange word; it's looking for self-gratification. I don't normally work like that. What I do is if a child has got difficulties then try to resolve those as well as I can and I don't have time to dwell on patting myself on the head because then I need to move on to the next issue." (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>"I'm not really the sort of person that needs to. I think when I started in this work it was the residential and once – that was quite a big shock to the system, fresh out of university, going into that sort of role but once I got used to it within a few months that's just what I do really. Go home and that's it. (Participant 6)</i></p>
Personal perspective	Relationship/attachment to LAC	<p><b>This subtheme captures participants' view of their role as involving a relationship or attachment to the young person in their care. Hence it has the following implications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The adult has a sense of personal responsibility for LAC</li> <li>• Perception of LAC indicate a sense of caring about the young person (i.e. associate them with positive</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I'm a little bit mumsy, I'm not supposed to be, but you do feel very responsible for them. Because you are so involved in their lives it's far more involvement than you would as a subject teacher or as a head of department or anything like that because you've got that pastoral impact as well, you know their background, you know the difficulties, sometimes, not always, you meet their families that they're trying to build relationships back up with. I do feel a lot more emotionally responsible for them so I worry over them probably more than I should. But it also makes you good at your job if you genuinely care so, yeah, I care about them. They are mine. I always call them, 'Is that one of mine?'</i></p>

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	<p>feelings/emotions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants view themselves as a role model/parent type figure</li> <li>• Participants act in a way so as not to reject YP</li> <li>• Emotional impact of working with vulnerable young people (e.g. if they say hurtful comments/worrying about them)</li> </ul>	<p><i>So I am quite possessive over them". (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>"I'm trying to just find an alternative just so that I don't say, "No, I can't," or giving that impression". (participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah, I think the one that was excluded... We were talking about moving on and when she left school before she knew she was going immediately, "You will keep in contact with me. We can do this on Facebook." I only met her in the September. That was because the first time she met me, "I don't like people," and that was it but then within a couple of months, "But you'll remember me, you'll come and see me, won't you?" So that was good" (participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>"And we sort of try to fire fight, sort of thing and deal with the ones most distressed and then eventually get round so no one feels left out and no one feels neglected, or that they can't come here" (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>"It's sad when they go back, like I said, that young girl, that was sad because we've put so much time and effort and that's our issue, that was, "Oh you were smashing it" we were really there. I bumped into a carer who's got another student now that's here, so that's good because you start building up networking with other carers and things like that which is good, and I said "Oh have you heard anything?" She said, "Yeah she wants to come back to visit" which is really nice but she went, "She's not in school" and you think "Damn it." Just from a social side, I don't want her being lonely" (participant 7)</i></p>
<p>Knowledge/unders tanding of LAC</p> <p>Needs of the whole child</p>	<p><b>This subtheme incorporates an understanding the needs of the whole</b></p>	<p><i>"Just because they are a LAC and looked after though, it doesn't mean they are brain of Britain. It doesn't mean they are suddenly</i></p>

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**child (i.e. their social, emotional and mental health needs and well as learning/attainment)**

*going to evolve into this person that is going to come out with all these GCSEs. No. It's building their self-esteem and making them have a goal and making them have a purpose. Making them feel that they have a purpose to come to school because somewhere along there you will learn something each day. Even if it's to avoid that kid because he's horrible, you've learnt something. You know what I mean? So I think that it is giving a child a purpose in school, making them feel safe and making them live with something. Even if it's just their own self-worth. The rest will fall into place. If they want to go onto college afterwards, when the time is right, they will engage". (participant 7)*

*"So I make sure that the looked after children in our school are progressing in school and are supported as they need to be supported, so both emotionally and pastorally and academically". (participant 3)*

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Knowledge/understanding of LAC	Research/knowledge around LAC	<p><b>This subtheme focuses on participants' knowledge of the wider population of LAC. Specifically:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of research around LAC</li> <li>• Knowledge of the social care system (in relation to LAC)</li> </ul>	<p><i>“and the research has shown that Looked After Children don't want to be “Looked After Children”, they just want to be like any other child and just want to be treated as such” (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>“they are quite vulnerable students and attachment is important, building relationships is important” (participant 4)</i></p>
Knowledge/understanding of LAC	Stigma around LAC	<p><b>This subtheme captures ideas related to a negative stigma among some young people around being a LAC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement that some young people do not want to be known as LAC</li> <li>• Stigma of LAC as a barrier to support</li> </ul>	<p><i>“she is very keen for people not to know that she is looked after” (participant 1)</i></p> <p><i>“Others would much rather I didn't exist because it's almost a bone of contention that they're in care, they don't want to be different from anybody else, and the fact that I'm there and I'm there for them and not for everybody makes it difficult for them”. (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>“She doesn't want to be included in those either. She'd rather be in lesson and not taken out but I- you know, she just doesn't want to be that different person, that looked after child I feel”. (participant 5)</i></p>
Wider school context	Professional challenges: within-school	<p><b>This subtheme captures professional challenges experienced by participants within the school context. Specifically regarding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time e.g. meeting deadlines</li> <li>• Amount of paperwork and lack of admin support</li> <li>• Communication with colleagues in a busy secondary school environment</li> </ul>	<p><i>“The staff know my role and they usually confer and inform me of what's going on – not always! But that's the nature of adults being in a high pressure environment”. (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>“At the moment we have a problem with admin who's the main attachment to it, because the person that was attached to my role as admin, my admin assistant, is doing a lot of CP issues. She's the assistant to the CP officer, and at the moment we have so many CP issues that all her time is taken. So I haven't been able</i></p>

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		(e.g. re: PEP targets)	<i>to put all those targets on SIMs. But that's what I want to do".</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of impact from school funds</li> </ul>	<i>(participant 3)</i>
			<i>"The school is willing to spend every single penny on them; they are not tight with it at all but they want to see that it's going to... Sometimes it's difficult to prove that this might have an effect, the impact that we've spent money on is our day impact on the child. Sometimes you can't lie. That's the frustrating thing".</i>
			<i>(participant 7)</i>
<hr/>			
Wider school context	Professional challenges: multi-agency	<p><b>This subtheme captures professional challenges experienced by participants with regards to multi-agency working. Specifically:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns re: foster carers</li> <li>Difficulties contacting social workers</li> <li>Evidencing pupil premium money spent of SEMH needs to the LA</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I think the only difficulties that we have is any difficulty that you have with working with multi-agency. It's contacting people, hours, social workers are so busy and if you've got an urgent request, if there is something wrong, if your child is hurt or if you are worried about them getting in contact can be a difficulty. But I think that's with any multi-agency and not exclusive to LAC".</i></p> <p><i>(participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>"You can never get hold of a social worker" (participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>"I don't know if that, to be fair, that seems to me crazy, that I understand that you are based, wherever the child has popped up, like an asylum seeker. Wherever they've popped up in England is where their main base is. That's crazy for the social worker, isn't it? I just think, "Oh come on!" Because then it's not - if they are having a rough time, sometimes we've said, "Do you reckon you can come in and see them because it's not working for me?" I am not the person they want to stay. To be fair, I can count on one hand when we've asked that. But how are they supposed to build up a rapport with a social worker</i></p>

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			<i>that's based in Warwickshire? And how is that poor person meant to come all the way down for a LAC review or something that's just..." (participant 7)</i>
Wider school context	Financial Support	<p><b>This subtheme focuses on the financial support described by participants.</b>  <b>Specifically:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial support from school e.g. to buy resources for LAC; financial support for participants to attend training/ claim mileage etc.</li> <li>Lack of financial support for staffing or training</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Oh I'm able to claim expenses if I'm going – every week I'm off site a couple of times a week doing home visits, so attending annual reviews, PEP meetings, Core meetings of one sort or another and I'm allowed to claim mileage for that" (participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>"The school is willing to spend every single penny on them; they are not tight with it at all" (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>"I am regularly told we cannot have more staff and that would be the only way to give me the time" (participant 6)</i></p>
Wider school context	Emotional support	<p><b>This subtheme focuses on emotional support described by participants.</b>  <b>Specifically:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional support from colleagues</li> <li>Team approach- working alongside colleagues (e.g. pastoral staff, heads of year)</li> <li>Seeking advice re: support for young people from colleagues</li> <li>Supervision &amp; line management</li> <li>Support from virtual head teacher and other DLACTs in the local authority</li> <li>Support from other professionals e.g.</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Well to be fair we sort of all help each other out, you will go and pick brains. I always say, "Do you know what I can put in place for this kid?" (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah, and I think it's also knowing your staff, knowing their qualities and going, 'That's the person for him.' So, yeah, it was team work that got us through on that one". (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>"No, so it's quite handy when somebody comes along and goes, 'Oh, have you tried this?' So, yeah, it's word-of-mouth. It's not always very well advertised. So the more people I work with the better". (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah. And also even though you've got me, they always have</i></p>

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		<p>specialist referrals and working jointly with foster carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of emotional support from colleagues</li> </ul>	<p><i>other go-to people to go to. Like other staff they have got a good relationship with. So you could place them with them” (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>“So you’ve got no one to bounce ideas off of or ... yeah”. (lack of emotional support- participant 5)</i></p> <p><i>“We’re still- due to the PEPs changing, and- but we get immense support from [Name] (virtual head teacher)” (participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>“I deal with all the main part. They’ve all got go to people. It’s just a safety, it’s a back-up. We always like a back-up plan. If I am not here, then it goes hideously wrong, don’t walk off, go there or there or there. We instil it into them. “Where will you go? Yes, well done.” (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>“ Yeah, I’ll always have an induction meeting with them and that will normally be with their house team as well. so if I’m not available the house team is so they know they’re both responsible so it’s not purely one person, because if I’m not there, if I’m out on training, if I’m doing something else they need to have somebody else to go to, so we do that”. (participant 4)</i></p>
Wider school context	Power	<p><b>This subtheme captures references to a sense of power/powerless with regards to participants’ roles.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of power e.g. being involved in decisions re: position, colleagues aware of role, colleagues seek advice/guidance from participant re: LAC</li> </ul>	<p><i>“I’ve been here seven years so established, the staff know my role and they usually confer and inform me of what’s going on” (participant 2- sense of power)</i></p> <p><i>“They’ll come and say like before- I remember when they- members of staff they go, “Really, should put this sanction in place, do you- is it, should I or do you reckon it’s a bit ...?”</i></p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of power e.g. colleagues unaware of role, colleagues with more power (e.g. SENCo) will take over aspects of the role, participant carrying out role but colleague named as DLACT as not a qualified teacher (participant 6)</li> </ul>	<p>(participant 7- sense of power)</p> <p><i>“Technically it’s officially the Assistant Head and unofficially it’s me that everyone will come to but due to my not having time they... in actual fact that’s not really... most of them don’t even know it’s me”.</i> (participant 6- lack of power)</p> <p><i>“we used to have telephone calls and things but a lot of the time SENCO would take that over”.</i> (participant 5- lack of power)</p>
Wider school context	Context to role	<p><b>This subtheme describes the context to participants’ roles as key adult for LAC. Specifically:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How participants came into their role</li> <li>Crossover with duties from other roles within the school (e.g. SENCo, personal tutor, mentor role)</li> <li>Professional challenges due to pressures of different roles/responsibilities</li> </ul>	<p><i>“then I’m also personal – we have a personal tutoring system in the school so every child has a member of staff who’s responsible for them who is supposed to monitor their academic and social welfare and I am also the personal tutor for a number of – but not all of those Looked After Children. So I’m meeting with them on a regular basis to discuss academic progress”.</i> (participant 2)</p> <p><i>“And it wasn’t an interviewed position because it was voluntary at the time. and so I had a sit-down discussion and talked about it a little bit more with my headteacher, had an interest in it anyway because I’ve got family members that were in children’s homes, and so it was something that I’m quite passionate about, had already planned for my looked-after children that I already taught, so took it on”</i> (participant 4)</p> <p><i>“I’m between three roles. I am the DLACT, I’m also assistant SENCO, and that is quite common because there is a high proportion of SEN in looked-after children so it makes sense. And I’m also an art teacher here as well”.</i> (participant 4)</p>

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			<p><i>“They were re-jigging the SEN team and working out who did what and because I’ve got social care and residential background I was the logical person”. (participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>“ I’m regularly told we cannot have more staff and that would be the only way to give me the time and I don’t have the time to do the other roles there is”. (participant 6)</i></p>
Wider school context	Tension between professional responsibilities vs. relationship	<p><b>This subtheme refers to a sense of tension between participants’ professional responsibilities vs. a relationship with the young people. It also incorporates references to professional challenges putting tension on relationship with young people (e.g. due to lack of time/paperwork).</b></p>	<p><i>“I care about them. They are mine. I always call them, ‘Is that one of mine?’ So I am quite possessive over them. But also professional because I have to have that step back. I can’t have that emotional response in any of their meetings in front of them or anything. I worry behind closed doors. So I have to be that official looking person in that meeting for them so that other professionals will take my advice seriously and so that student knows that I’m their advocate, basically.” (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>“It’s almost like having a mentor or some kind of buddy with you wherever you are and somebody that they can go to. Unfortunately a long part of the role at the moment is paperwork”. (participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>“There’s so many high-end things that I’m supposed to deal with and I’m pulled to do all of them at one go I wouldn’t say it impacts, it’s just whoever shouts the loudest I deal with it. It’s just another strand that I need to do. I think the biggest impact probably is that I feel bad that I’m not able to give them the time that they need”. (participant 6)</i></p>

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## Appendix N Example of a coded transcript

*N.B. The following extracts are taken from the transcript for participant one.*

Interviewer: So can you describe what you do in your role as a key adult?	
Respondent: The main things with the student would be the PEP, preparation for that, the conduction of it, carrying it out, making sure she gets what she needs in terms of resources and the pupil premium money spent on things that she needs, they would be the main things that I would do to support her.	Comment [K7]: Following guidelines/legislation
Interviewer: Okay. And how would you describe your relationship with the looked-after child that you are key adult for?	
Respondent: I think her relationship with all of her teachers is excellent. She is such a lovely young lady. She knows that she can come to me if she needs to which she often does. She needed some forms filling in and a letter written in terms of her being deported back to Nigeria and she came to me, we did that together, we worked on that. So I'd say the relationship is very good. And she is pleased that it's not going to a different person just because she is in a different year group, and she is pleased that I'll be with her through to the sixth form because she is very keen for people not to know that she is looked-after.	Comment [K8]: Relationship/attachment Comment [K9]: Go to person for LAC Comment [K10]: Attachment/relationship Comment [K11]: Flexibility at systemic level Comment [K12]: Stigma re: LAC
Interviewer: So what role do you think you are fulfilling for the young person?	
Respondent: I guess that for her and her life she has a stable adult; her foster carers are very good and she gets on very well with them, so I don't think I'm necessarily the key adult overall in her life. But for her she knows that there is that one person who knows that she is looked-after that she can go to and it's not a problem, and she is very keen for me to keep that confidential as well, and I guess she trusts that. She is obviously aware that her teachers need to know but she doesn't want any other students to know.	Comment [K13]: Safe base Comment [K14]: Stigma re: LAC Comment [K15]: Go to person Comment [K16]: Stigma re: LAC
Interviewer: And how do you feel about this young person?	
Respondent: I think she is extraordinary. Yeah, as I say, she is one of our top students in year eleven. She wants to be a lawyer and that's well within her capabilities.	Comment [K18]: Relationship/attachment
Interviewer: That's fantastic to hear.	
Respondent: She works very, very hard and she knows which subjects she needs to do to go into law. She has done all that research. She works quite closely with her history teacher to make sure that she wants to get her A* grade in that. I think she is extraordinary and I'm very proud of her.	Comment [K19]: Relationship/attachment
Interviewer: And how do you think that she would feel about you?	
Respondent: I don't know. I think she's probably take, 'Miss is quite cool.' She always will make a point of smiling and saying hello when I pass her in the corridor. It's almost as if she is – I think she sees me as, yeah, just a responsible adult that she can trust and go to if she needs to.	Comment [K20]: Relationship/attachment Comment [K21]: Safe base

## Appendix O Themes Table (Final Version)

<i>Theme headings &amp; descriptions (total=5)</i>	<i>Sub-themes (total =21)</i>	<i>Number of sources</i>	<i>Total number of references</i>
<b>Professional responsibilities</b> <i>This theme describes the key responsibilities elicited from participants regarding their role as key adult for LAC. It includes references to local/national guidance and legislation. Specifically, it includes responsibilities working with others (i.e. colleagues/external professionals) &amp; responsibilities to the young people in their care.</i>	Following LAC legislation/guidelines	5	19
	Multi-agency working	7	29
	Responsibilities to LAC	7	34
	“Go-to person” for LAC	4	43
<b>Approach to the role</b> <i>This theme captures how participants approached their professional responsibilities. This involves an active role on the part of participants. It involves approaches to the role at different systemic levels (i.e. at a wider school level and at the individual child level).</i>	Flexibility on a systemic level	5	13
	Flexibility at an individual child level	6	51
	Advocate role	7	27
	Use of relationship with LAC to overcome challenges	4	27
<b>Personal perspective</b>	Professional perspective	2	6

<p><i>This theme focuses on how participants view their role as key adult for LAC (i.e. as a purely professional role or as involving a relationship with the young person). It involves references to participants' thoughts and feelings about the young people and how/if their role impacts on their personal life.</i></p>	Relationship/attachment to the LAC	6	43
<p><b>Knowledge/understanding of LAC</b>  <i>This theme includes references regarding participants' knowledge and understanding of LAC; both of the wider population of LAC and of the young people they are responsible for.</i></p>	Needs of the whole child	4	16
	Impact of previous experiences on LAC	6	45
	Knowledge/ research around LAC	5	11
	Stigma associated with LAC	5	17
<p><b>Wider school context</b>  <i>This theme refers to a wide range of factors within the wider school context which influenced participants' experiences (e.g. context to the role/power/financial support/emotional support). It also includes references to challenges experienced by participants in their role as key adult for LAC.</i></p>	Professional challenges- within-school	5	17
	Professional challenges- multi-agency	6	21
	Financial support	6	8
	Emotional support	7	54
	Power	6	14
	Tension between professional responsibilities vs. relationship	2	8
	Context to role	7	33

## **Appendix P    Timeline for thematic analysis process (and use of Nvivo)**

- 21/10/14 - Pilot interview one conducted;
- 23/10/14- Pilot interview two conducted;
- 23/10/14 and 3/2/15- Seven interviews conducted. Field notes written following each interview. Emerging coding/theme ideas discussed in supervision on 1/12/15 (with supervisor one) & 18/1/15 (with supervisor two);
- Start of February-end of March 2015- break from empirical paper (to focus on literature review).

### ***Familiarising oneself with the data***

- April 2015- re-focus on empirical paper (specifically on analysis);
- 8/4/15-9/4/15- Re-read transcripts; listened to interviews; and re-read field notes. Wrote summaries of each transcript.

### ***Generating initial codes***

- 9/4/15- Initial coding ideas developed from field notes & summaries;
- 13/4/15- supervision with supervisor two (where we discussed initial coding ideas);
- 13/4/15- developed coding framework version one (from initial coding ideas and discussions in supervision);
- 13/4/15-15/4/15- Started use of Nvivo to code data using coding framework version one.

### ***Searching for themes***

- 15/4/15- created thematic map version one using initial coding framework and ideas from field notes and summaries.

### ***Reviewing themes***

- 16/4/15- Adapted coding framework to create version two and coded transcripts with this framework using Nvivo;
- 16/4/15- created thematic map version two;
- 20/4/15- Supervision with supervisor two (where we discussed my progress with analysis & I shared version two of the coding framework & thematic map);

- 24/4/15-26/4/15- Adapted coding framework following supervision to create version three. Used Nvivo to code data using coding framework version three.
- 26/4/15- created thematic map version three;
- 28/4/15- thesis supervision with supervisor two (to discuss the third versions of my coding framework and thematic map);
- 2/5/15- Adapted coding framework following supervision. Used Nvivo to code data using final coding framework (version four).

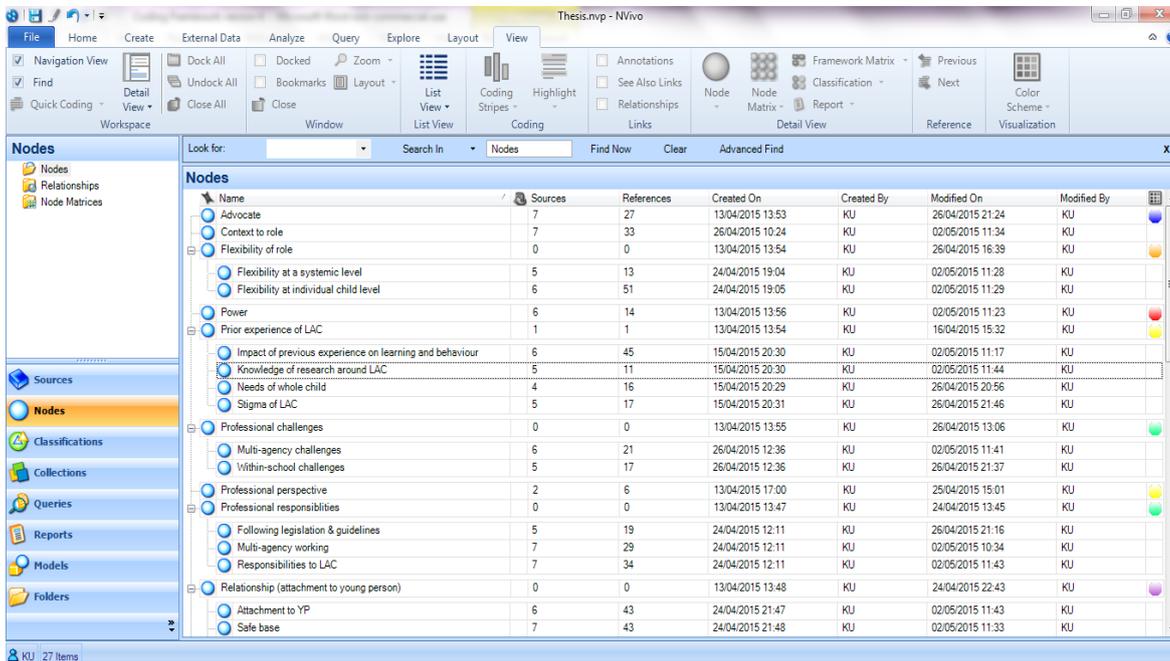
#### ***Defining and naming themes***

- 2/5/14- created final thematic map (version four). Defined and named final themes.

#### ***Producing the report***

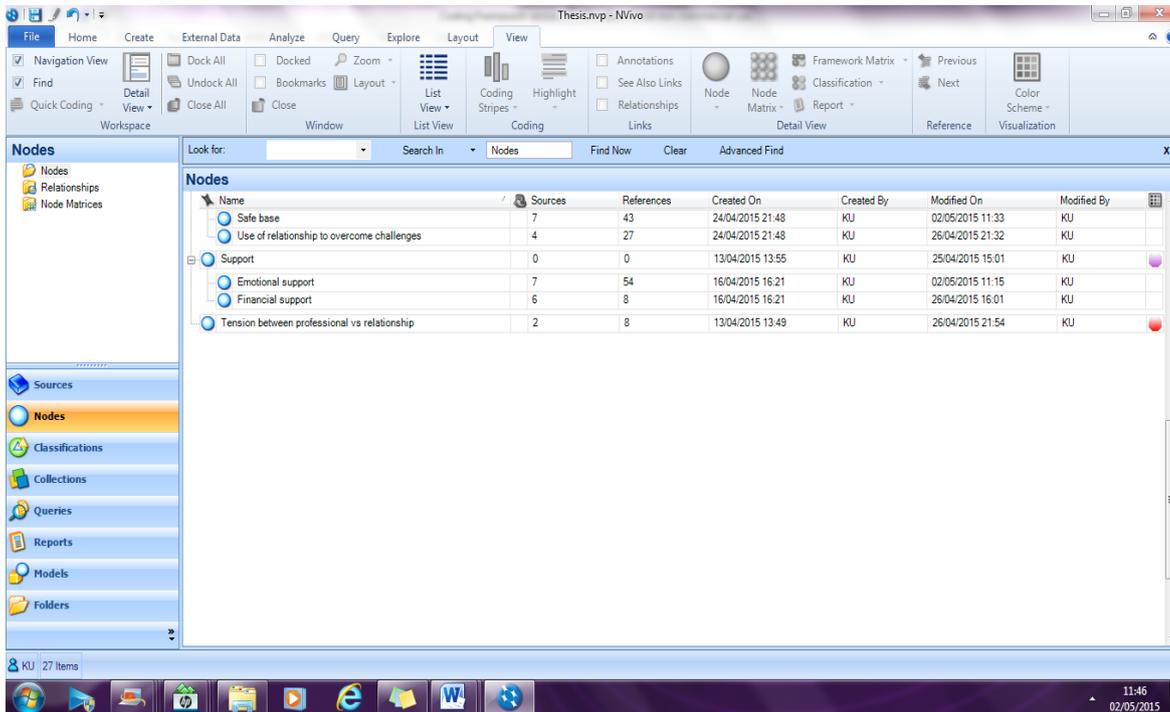
- 2/5/15-4/5/15- Wrote the results section of the empirical paper;
- 18/5/15- Supervision to discuss feedback regarding the first draft of my empirical paper (with supervisor two);
- 23/5/15-24/5/15- Edited empirical paper following feedback from supervisor two;
- 26/5/15- Supervision to discuss feedback regarding the second draft of my empirical paper (with supervisor three);
- 26-27/5/15- final editing to empirical paper following feedback from supervisors.

## Appendix Q Example of Coding in Nvivo



The screenshot shows the Nvivo interface with a list of nodes. The nodes are organized into a tree structure on the left, and a table displays the details for each node, including its name, sources, references, creation date, creator, and modification date.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Advocate	7	27	13/04/2015 13:53	KU	26/04/2015 21:24	KU
Context to role	7	33	26/04/2015 10:24	KU	02/05/2015 11:34	KU
Flexibility of role	0	0	13/04/2015 13:54	KU	26/04/2015 16:39	KU
Flexibility at a systemic level	5	13	24/04/2015 19:04	KU	02/05/2015 11:28	KU
Flexibility at individual child level	6	51	24/04/2015 19:05	KU	02/05/2015 11:29	KU
Power	6	14	13/04/2015 13:56	KU	02/05/2015 11:23	KU
Prior experience of LAC	1	1	13/04/2015 13:54	KU	16/04/2015 15:32	KU
Impact of previous experience on learning and behaviour	6	45	15/04/2015 20:30	KU	02/05/2015 11:17	KU
Knowledge of research around LAC	5	11	15/04/2015 20:30	KU	02/05/2015 11:44	KU
Needs of whole child	4	16	15/04/2015 20:29	KU	26/04/2015 20:56	KU
Stigma of LAC	5	17	15/04/2015 20:31	KU	26/04/2015 21:46	KU
Professional challenges	0	0	13/04/2015 13:55	KU	26/04/2015 13:06	KU
Multi-agency challenges	6	21	26/04/2015 12:36	KU	02/05/2015 11:41	KU
Within-school challenges	5	17	26/04/2015 12:36	KU	26/04/2015 21:37	KU
Professional perspective	2	6	13/04/2015 17:00	KU	25/04/2015 15:01	KU
Professional responsibilities	0	0	13/04/2015 13:47	KU	24/04/2015 13:45	KU
Following legislation & guidelines	5	19	24/04/2015 12:11	KU	26/04/2015 21:16	KU
Multi-agency working	7	29	24/04/2015 12:11	KU	02/05/2015 10:34	KU
Responsibilities to LAC	7	34	24/04/2015 12:11	KU	02/05/2015 11:43	KU
Relationship (attachment to young person)	0	0	13/04/2015 13:48	KU	24/04/2015 22:43	KU
Attachment to YP	6	43	24/04/2015 21:47	KU	02/05/2015 11:43	KU
Safe base	7	43	24/04/2015 21:48	KU	02/05/2015 11:33	KU



The screenshot shows the Nvivo interface with a filtered list of nodes. The nodes are organized into a tree structure on the left, and a table displays the details for each node, including its name, sources, references, creation date, creator, and modification date.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Safe base	7	43	24/04/2015 21:48	KU	02/05/2015 11:33	KU
Use of relationship to overcome challenges	4	27	24/04/2015 21:48	KU	26/04/2015 21:32	KU
Support	0	0	13/04/2015 13:55	KU	25/04/2015 15:01	KU
Emotional support	7	54	16/04/2015 16:21	KU	02/05/2015 11:15	KU
Financial support	6	8	16/04/2015 16:21	KU	26/04/2015 16:01	KU
Tension between professional vs relationship	2	8	13/04/2015 13:49	KU	26/04/2015 21:54	KU

## Appendix R Quality Assessment tool for Qualitative Studies

1. *Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
2. *Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
3. *Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
4. *Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
5. *Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
6. *Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
7. *Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
8. *Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
9. *Is there a clear statement of findings?*  
Yes/No/Can't tell
10. *How valuable is the research?*

N.B. This criterion is adapted from the critical appraisal checklist for quality assessing qualitative research. By CASP (2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.casp-uk.net/#!checklists/cb36>



## Appendix S    Downs and Black (1998) Quality Assessment Tool

### *Reporting*

1. Is the hypothesis/aim/objective of the study clearly described?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
2. Are the main outcomes to be measured clearly described in the Introduction or Methods section?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
3. Are the characteristics of the patients included in the study clearly described?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
4. Are the interventions of interest clearly described?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
5. Are the distributions of principal confounders in each group of subjects to be compared clearly described?  
*Yes- 2/partially-1/No-0*
6. Are the main findings of the study clearly described?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
7. Does the study provide estimates of the random variability in the data for the main outcome?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
8. Have all important adverse events that may be a consequence of the intervention been reported?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
9. Have the characteristics of patients lost to follow-up been described?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*
10. Have actual probability values been reported for the main outcomes except where the probability value is less than 0.001?  
*Yes- 1/No-0*

### *External Validity*

11. Were the subjects asked to participate in the study representative of the entire population from which they were recruited?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

12. Were those subjects who were prepared to participate, representative of the entire population from which they were recruited?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

13. Were the staff, places, and facilities where the patients were treated, representative of the treatment the majority of patients receive?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

*Internal Validity- Bias*

14. Was an attempt made to blind subjects to the intervention they received?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

15. Was an attempt made to blind those measuring the main outcomes of the intervention?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

16. If any of the results of the study were based on “data dredging” was this made clear?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

17. In trials and cohort studies, do the analyses adjust for different lengths of follow-up of patients, or in case-control studies, is the time period between the intervention and outcome the same for cases and controls?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

18. Were statistical tests used to assess the main outcomes appropriate?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

19. Was compliance with the intervention reliable?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

20. Were the main outcome measures used accurate (valid and reliable)?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

*Internal Validity- Confounding (selection bias)*

21. Were the patients in different intervention groups or were cases and controls from the same population?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

22. Were study subjects in different intervention groups or were the cases and controls recruited over the same period?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

23. Were study subjects randomised to intervention groups?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

24. Was the randomised intervention assignment concealed from both patients and health care staff until recruitment was complete?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

25. Was there adequate adjustment for confounding in the analyses from which the main findings were drawn?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

26. Were losses of patients to follow-up taken into account?

*Yes- 1/No-0/Unable to determine-0*

*Power*

27. Did the study have sufficient power to detect a clinically important effect where the probability value for a difference being due to chance is less than 5%?

Adapted from: Downs, S. H., & Black, N. (1998). The feasibility of creating a checklist for the assessment of the methodological quality both of randomised and non-randomised studies of health care interventions. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 52(6), 377-384.



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