

*A Qualitative Exploration of Persistent Non-Attendance in a South West Local Authority Area.*

Submitted by Charlotte Orme-Stapleton to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Child and Community Psychology. May 2017.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.



(Signature) .....

Word Count: 34617.

## Table of Contents:

<b>Table of Contents:</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Perspective:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract:</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>List of Tables and Figures:</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1.Introduction:</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1.2.Review of Literature:</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1 Research Aims and Objectives:</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<i>Aims:</i> .....	34
<i>Objectives:</i> .....	34
<i>Research Study Part 1 Aims:</i> .....	34
<i>Part 1 Research Questions:</i> .....	35
<i>Research Study Part 2 Aims:</i> .....	35
<i>Part 2 Research Questions:</i> .....	35
<b>3.1. Designs and methods:</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<i>Methodology:</i> .....	38
<i>3.2. Sampling and participants:</i> .....	39
3.2.1. Part 1: Participants: .....	39
3.2.2. Part 2: Participants: .....	40
3.3.1 <i>Ethics:</i> .....	43
3.3.2 <i>Instruments:</i> .....	46
3.3.2 <i>Analysis procedures:</i> .....	49
<b>4.1.Findings:</b> .....	<b>51</b>
4.1.1. <i>Part 1 Descriptive Data:</i> .....	51
4.1.1. <i>Part 1 Findings:</i> .....	52
<b>4.2. Part 2 Findings:</b> .....	<b>80</b>
4.2.1. <i>Descriptive Data:</i> .....	80
4.2.2 <i>Part 2 Findings:</i> .....	81
<b>5.Discussion.....</b>	<b>99</b>
5.1. <i>Part 1 Discussion: Summary in relation to research questions and previous literature.....</i>	99
5.2. <i>Part 2 Discussion: Summary in relation to research questions and previous literature.....</i>	104
5.3. <i>Intergration and contribution to knowledge.....</i>	110
5.4. <i>Evaluation of strengths and limits of study.....</i>	112
5.5 <i>Conclusion and implications for practice.....</i>	118
<b>References:</b> .....	<b>123</b>
<b>Appendixes</b> .....	<b>133</b>

## Overview:

This thesis is made up of two parts, each exploring different groups perceptions and experience of persistent non-attendance. Part 1 explores professionals' perceptions and experiences of persistent non-attendance from primary and secondary perspectives. Part 2 explores the lived experiences of children and families who have experienced persistent non-attendance.

## Perspective:

Prior to my training to become an educational psychologist, I was a post 16 lecturer, lecturing across a range of subjects relating to psychology, child development and counselling. My previous experience of working with teenagers who have a history of attendance difficulties and adult learners, who have had negative experiences of education, has influenced my perspective and the role I believe educational providers have in supporting good attendance. This previous experiences has influenced the perspective from which I approach research and educational psychology in general, with my counseling experience particularly influencing me towards a person centred approach to working. Furthermore the variety of factors I have seen to be relevant in affecting an individual's experience of learning has drawn me to a systemic/ecological model of understanding, that recognises these different levels of influence and the dynamic levels at which they interact.

## **Abstract:**

This research qualitatively explores persistent non-attendance (PN) in a southwest local authority area. Part 1 explores professionals' conceptualisations of PN, language use and approaches to support. Part 2 explores the lived experience of non-attendance for children and families; how they make sense of the issue, the support they received and the characteristics of support that they found effective. Part 1 findings suggested no one explanation was used to make sense of PN, instead an individualistic approach was used to make sense of cases, using an ecological/systemic framework. This approach therefore influenced the support that was provided by schools. There was consistency in the language used by professionals, influenced by governmental policy and recommendations, with 'persistent absence' being the most prevalent term used. Part 2 findings exploration of the lived experiences of families found that PN had had an impacted on all families, in a variety of ways. In line with part 1, no one explanation was put forward for why the PN had occurred, however themes of anxiety and ASD were prevalent. Part 1's recommendations for practice focus the use of individualised approaches to understanding and support, using an ecological/systemic model. Part 2's recommendations related to the importance of communication between school and home, and responding to the families individual needs.

## List of Tables and Figures:

<b>Figure</b>		<b>Page</b>
1	<i>Research conceptual diagram.</i>	<i>p.6</i>
2	<i>Historical persistent absence data thresholds.</i>	<i>p. 8</i>
3	<i>Systemic/Ecological Model.</i>	<i>p. 27</i>
4	<i>School Data.</i>	<i>p. 40</i>
5	<i>Mindmap.</i>	<i>p. 45</i>
6	<i>Levels of questioning examples.</i>	<i>p. 46</i>
7	<i>Interview Data.</i>	<i>p. 50</i>
8	<i>Explanations of PN themes.</i>	<i>p. 51</i>
9	<i>Subordinate theme breakdown.</i>	<i>p. 52-53</i>
10	<i>Waves of intervention.</i>	<i>p. 58</i>
11	<i>Family explanations of PN.</i>	<i>p. 82-83</i>
12	<i>Waves of intervention.</i>	<i>p. 85</i>
13	<i>Positive and negative experiences.</i>	<i>p. 89</i>

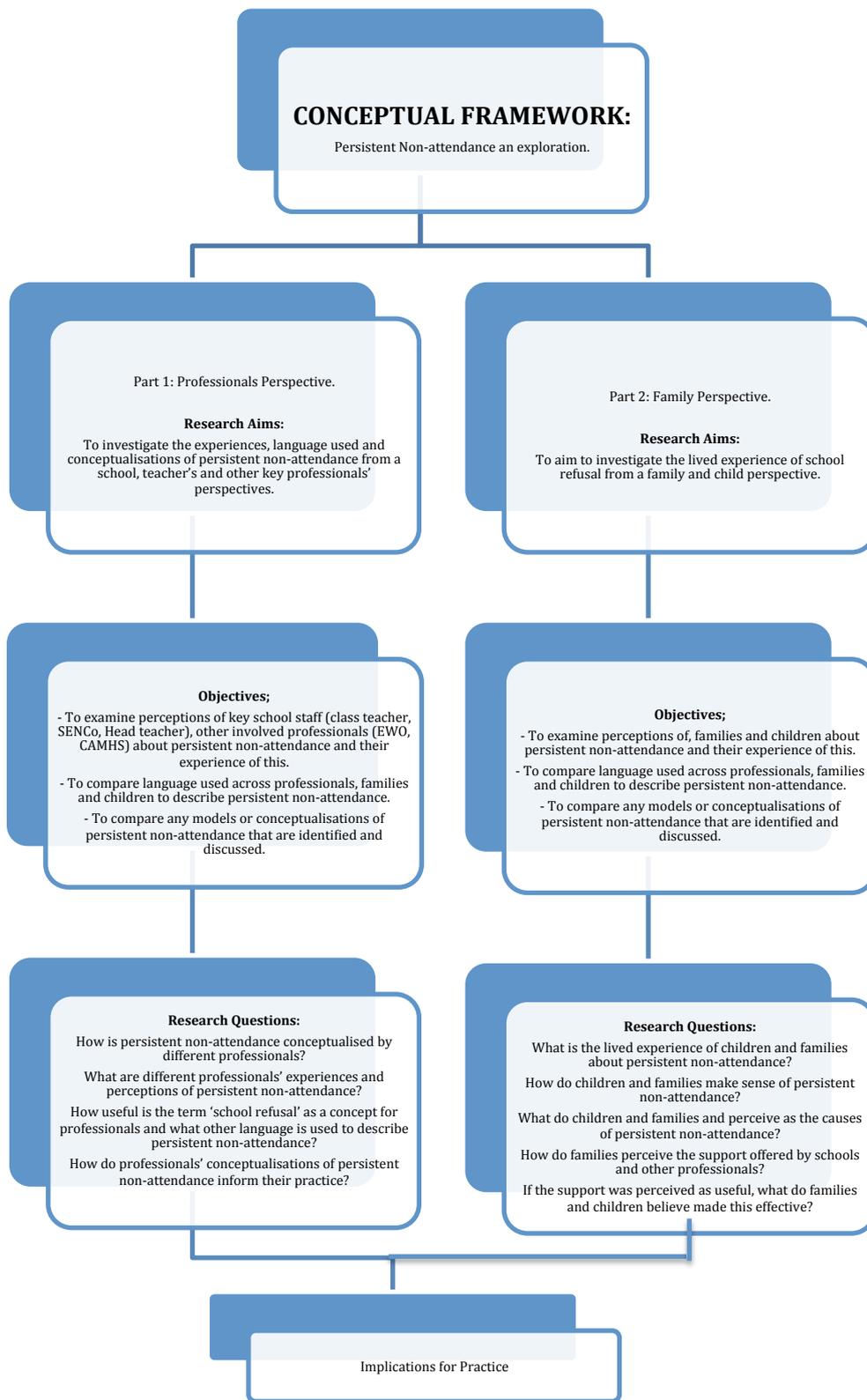


Fig 1: Conceptual map of the research.

## **1.1.Introduction:**

School attendance has been highlighted by the current government as a key area for development within education, with regular attendance being seen as key to achievement for all and initiatives being put in place to support this. However 3.6% of all students in England who attend state funded primary, secondary and special schools are still being absent at a level that is considered persistent. The Department For Education (DFE, 2015 p. 3) identifies that ‘Persistent absentees are defined as those pupils missing around 15 per cent or more of possible sessions. The persistent absence threshold is identified as 15 per cent or more of the typical amount of possible sessions across a given period’. An additional challenge with persistent absenteeism is that many students respond to the physical experience of entering the school with anxiety and therefore a single approach is often unsuccessful (Reid 2008).

## **1.2.Review of Literature:**

### ***Introduction:***

Through this review I plan to analyse key literature relating to the area of persistent non-attendance, making an argument for the importance of its further exploration and the relevance of the educational psychologist (EP) in this. Literature has been sourced from published governmental documentation and academic online search engines including; The British Education Index, EBSCO E-journals, JSTOR, PsychINFO and PsychArticles. Search terms used included; school refusal, school phobia, non-attendance, absenteeism and truancy. Literature was selected on the basis of relevance to the research area, availability of the full text and recency of publication. The review is separated into five sections; the challenge of non-attendance, challenges of definitions and a lack of shared language, theoretical perspectives and models,

approaches to intervention and finally I will conclude with my rationale for my research and how this meets a current gap in the literature.

***Defining Persistent Non-Attendance:***

Governmental definitions of persistent absenteeism have changed over time, with the level of absence being moved from 20% to 15% in October 2011 (DFE, 2011) and to 10% for the year 2015/16. The Department For Education (DFE, 2015 p. 3) identified that ‘Persistent absentees are defined as those pupils missing around 15 per cent or more of possible sessions. The persistent absence threshold is identified as 15 per cent or more of the typical amount of possible sessions across a given period’. According to the 2011 governmental publication the decision to move from the 20% to 15% level was due to the view that once a child reaches the 20% level that it is ‘too late’. The Department of Education present clear evidence for the importance of attendance linked to achievement, across level 2, including English and maths. Providing evidence that ‘pupils who miss between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of school, only 35 per cent manage to achieve five A\* to C GCSEs including English and maths’ (DFE, 2011 p. 2) compared with 73% when attendance was 95% or over. Below is a table representing historical persistent absence measures (DFE, 2017 p. 14).

Description of persistent absence measure	Academic years
10% or more of sessions missed (based on each pupil’s possible sessions)	2015/16 onwards
Around 15% or more of sessions missed (based on a standard threshold)	2010/11 to 2014/15
Around 20% or more of sessions missed (based on a standard threshold)	2005/06 to 2009/10

*Fig 2: Historical Persistent Absence Thresholds.*

### ***The Challenge of Non-Attendance:***

School attendance has been highlighted through policy and legislation by the current government as a key area for development within education, with regular attendance being seen as key to achievement for all and initiatives being put in place to support this. However based on the most recent data (using the 10% level) average national persistent absence levels are 8.2% in primary and 13.1% in secondary schools.

The current research base is varied in the language used to describe non-attendance with truancy, school refusal and school phobia being used inconsistently and interchangeably. Furthermore different psychological models have been presented as ways of understanding the complex set of behaviours associated with persistent non-attendance. Additionally researching these behaviours has been approached from different methodological standpoints including correlative studies, case study enquiry and large-scale medical samples.

Non-attendance is of great interest in psychological research due to its well-documented negative effects with Hughes, Gullone, Dudley, and Tonge (2010), Reid (2008), King and Berstein (2001) and Kearney (2008) highlighting the negative impact of school refusal and Eskstrand (2015, p. 460) stating that;

“Research indicates that the road to criminality, drug abuse, and social exclusion is open (Nelson and Baldwin 2004; Henry, Thornberry, and Huizinga 2009) and that there is a straight line from truancy to dropout, youth crime, gang membership, teenage pregnancy, poor health, and reliance on social service (Kronholz 2011).”

Kearney (2008, p. 452) further states that;

“Absenteeism from school is a serious mental and physical health concern for many children and adolescents. Absenteeism or placement in alternative educational settings, usually for absenteeism, is a key risk factor for suicide attempt, perilous sexual behavior, teenage pregnancy, violence, unintentional injury, driving under the influence of alcohol, and alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and other substance use (Almeida, Aquino, & de Barros, 2006; Chou, Ho, Chen, & Chen, 2006; Denny, Clark, & Watson, 2003; Grunbaum et al., 2004;

Guttmacher, Weitzman, Kapadia, & Weinberg, 2002; Hallfors et al., 2002; Henry & Huizinga, 2007).”

Hughes et al (2010) identify that the effects of school refusal can be short term and long term, affecting educational achievement, mental health and outcomes in adulthood. King and Bernstein (2001) discuss the impact of non-attendance on adolescents, identifying negative effects for mental health, social integration and educational achievement. Furthermore the presence of both short term, (anxiety) and long-term effects, such as reduced life prospects, highlights the importance of ongoing understanding of the experience. Furthermore the effects may indicate that ongoing support is required and the form that this may take. Disengagement with education has been identified as being a risk factor for many other social issues, with young people who are identified as NEET (not in education, employment or training) being seen as some as the most vulnerable in terms of future employment, poor mental and physical health (Impetus-PEF 2014). It is clear from the literature that non-attendance can have an ongoing effect on an individual’s life, not just academically but in terms of mental, physical and social health (Daniels 2014). I therefore argue that understanding persistent non-attendance while a child or young person is in education is key to preventing such difficulties. This could be addressed by identifying risks, supporting prevention, understanding contributing factors and creating supportive environments that promote attendance.

Now I have established the impact of persistent non-attendance, I will consider the challenges that various definitions of the issue and lack of shared language presents.

### ***Psychological Definitions and a Lack of Shared Language:***

The complex issue of persistent non-attendance has been defined and discussed using varied language. It is therefore important to understand these definitions’ focus and usage. Psychiatric understandings of non-

attendance have long been recognised Berg, Nichols and Pritchard (1969, p. 123) defined a child as being diagnosable with 'school phobia' when they demonstrated:

(1) Severe difficulty in attending school—often amounting to prolonged absence.

(2) Severe emotional upset—shown by such symptoms as excessive fearfulness, undue tempers, misery, or complaints of feeling ill without obvious organic cause on being faced with the prospect of going to school.

(3) Staying at home with the knowledge of the parents when they should be at school, at some stage in the course of the disorder.

(4) Absence of significant anti-social disorders such as stealing, lying, wandering, destructiveness and sexual misbehaviour.'

Further discussions of the issue by Berg (1997) have built upon Berg, Nicholas and Pritchard's (1969, p. 90) definition, clarifying school refusal as;

'refusal to attend school resulting in prolonged absence, remaining home during school hours with parental knowledge, severe emotional distress at the prospect of going to school, absence of antisocial behavior, and reasonable but ineffective parental efforts to enforce school attendance'

Berg's expanded definition of school refusal acknowledges the role of the parents in school refusal, that it takes place with their acknowledgment and separates school refusal from truancy, furthermore it places the individual's psychological experience at the centre of school refusal. While Berg's definition provides a clear definition of when school refusal can be diagnosed from a medical model of understanding, it adopts a within child model of understanding without including environmental factors or the role of the family. Furthermore Berg does not indicate potential causes of the anxiety and how this becomes associated with the experience of attending school which I believe to be a limitation of the definition.

Evans (2000) also adopts a medical model of understanding school refusal, however expands this by undertaking a functional definition of school refusal. Evans suggests that all school refusal behaviour has a function and that these can be categorised into three discrete subtypes;

Anxiety, Avoidant and Malingering. Each subtype has its own definition, characteristics of behaviour and causes suggesting the following;

*'Anxiety Subtype.* Chronic school refusal due to anxiety can be defined as a developmentally inappropriate reaction to the perceived danger or consequences of an event (Greiger & Boyd, 1983). The anxiety persists over an extended period of time, is out of proportion to the situation's demands, and causes the student to miss school. The anxiety cannot be explained or reasoned away and is not under the student's voluntary control.'

*'Avoidance Subtype.* Chronic school refusal due to avoidance is defined as an unadaptive reaction to a perceived negative aspect of school, that persists over an extended time, and results in the student missing school. Physical complaints rather than fear are often reported to successfully avoid undesired situations. These physical symptoms are most often exaggerated or not present. The avoidance reaction is under voluntary control, and the avoidance is the preferred, but not required, coping strategy.'

*'Malingering Subtype.* Chronic school refusal due to malingering can be defined as the persistent and unadaptive attraction to positive, non-school activities that results in the student missing school.'

The different subtypes suggested by Evans (2000) provide distinctive definitions of a child's individual school refusal behaviour and suggest potential causality. Evans argues in his work, that these subtypes are closely linked to empirical research, therefore strengthening his argument for their use, highlighting the value of distinguishing differences in causality, of school refusal behaviour. Furthermore Evans' definition includes more of the persistent non-attending population than Berg's definitions due to the acknowledgement of wider forms of non-attending behaviour and consideration of causality. Therefore expanding the definition of persistent non-attending behaviour and potentially its usefulness across a wider range of cases.

Carroll's definition expands on Evans' (2000) definition to include young people whose difficulties include staying in classes for an entire day and therefore naturally would include more children and young people than the previously discussed definition;

*"a child-motivated refusal to attend school or difficulty remaining in classes for an entire day" and covers "prior descriptions of this population, including truancy, psychoneurotic truancy, school refusal, school phobia, and*

*separation anxiety”.* Carroll (2015, p. 50)

This definition encompasses wider aspects for consideration and is inclusive of previously used definitions. Similar to the previously discussed definition by Berg however, Carroll focuses on the child-motivated nature of the behaviour and does not consider the potential role of the environment in the behaviour or the role of the parents such as school environment, teacher attitude or bullying. Carroll’s (2015) definition is therefore similar to Berg’s definition as it focuses on those who experience anxiety in relation to their non-attendance and acknowledge alternative contributing factors.

A medical model focus on the individual child and their internal characteristics, often these approaches focus on treatment, and use medicalised language such as ‘phobia’ and ‘therapy’. Kearney (2008, p. 457) challenges the use of medical definitions, “Because problematic absenteeism is not a formal psychiatric diagnosis, debate continues to occur as to how the behavior should be defined and classified.” The adoption of a medicalised model of understanding, school refusal is further limited due to the situational occurrence of the behaviour, as it does not provide a medical explanation for why this anxiety is related to the school setting. It is also important to raise that this definition only includes children and young people who are not attending due to anxiety reasons and therefore does not include those who have attendance below 85% but do not experience anxiety around attending school, or this is not the primary reason for their non-attendance. This will therefore exclude them from the definition and so lead to not exploring the causes of their non-attending behaviour.

Pellegrini’s (2007) UK research analyses the discourse around school non-attendance, particularly the use of the terms ‘school refusal’ and ‘school phobia’. Pellegrini highlights the terminology debate suggesting that ‘school refusal’ has previously been used as a catchall term to

cover all forms of extended school non-attendance regardless of the underlying cause. But this term does not differentiate between different causal factors leading to non-attendance such as anxiety, lack of motivation and/or aspiration. Due to the lack of clarity and consistency around terminology, Pellegrini argues for the term 'school refusal' to be replaced with 'extended school non-attendance' as it describes, rather than attempts to explain the behaviour. It is further argued by Pellegrini that more comprehensive assessment would be needed to attribute a term such as 'school refusal' or 'school phobia' and therefore an additional term is needed to provide a description of such persistent non-attendance.

Pellegrini's assertions could be seen as opposed to previously identified definitions, as some may argue that the use of specific terms is useful to clarify the role of fear in the refusal behaviour. Furthermore I would argue that 'extended school non-attendance' is too general a term and ignores the complexity of individuals' situation, reasons behind non-attendance and impact on the family. Pellegrini further comments that 'school refusal' suggests a within child explanation for the behaviour, as the child is seen as actively refusing to attend school. This reduces the considerations of wider contextual issues relating to their non-attendance behaviour and how best to address them. However it can be argued that Pellegrini's approach ignores research and definitions that adopt a medical approach and the treatment that these recommended.

Pellegrini's suggestions aim to bring together through shared language a subject that has been discussed from various perspectives; psychological, psychiatric, educational and sociological, often without a shared meaning or discourse, describing it appropriately, without attributing causation before adequate assessment has been conducted. This I believe encourages a clearer discourse between professionals and allows for different models of understanding to be used to

understand the individual child. Furthermore it indicates the need for further assessment to take place before causation is attributed, encouraging a child based approach to understanding the behaviour. He therefore makes the argument for increased consistency across literary and practical language, to inform and develop shared practices and understanding of the complex behaviour of persistent non-attendance.

Ekstrand's (2015) Swedish literature review further discusses a shift in psychological language from truancy to 'school refusal behaviour' (p. 461), where the child is perceived as 'being over-anxious or as having other mental problems' (p. 465) and provides additional consideration to the psychology used in supporting this. The shift in language described by Ekstrand highlights the focus on behaviour and consideration of the role of mental health, therefore continuing Pelligrini's consideration of additional factors in non-attendance. However Ekstrand suggests that despite changes in language the psychology around the issue has not altered. Ekstrand's work provides an additional consideration to the use of language and whether this impacts on the psychology used by professionals to understand the complex factors around non-attendance and to support children and young people. Ekstrand calls for more research into schools and communities around the issue of attendance, particularly an ethos of schools as communities supporting attendance, rather than avoiding truancy. Therefore moving understanding of the behaviour from a within child model, to an ecological perspective, where the role of the environment is acknowledged and explored as a supportive factor. Ekstrand's literature review includes literature from a range of countries, therefore providing a multi-cultural perspective on understanding persistent non-attendance and supports Pellegrini's view of exploring the issue from various perspectives; psychological, psychiatric, educational and sociological to understand how to support attendance in schools. Furthermore Ekstrand's work implies a positive, preventative approach to issues with attendance, recommending

addressing school ethos and removing elements of this that might be contributing factors.

As identified, varied language has been used to describe the complex issue of persistent non-attendance, often as results of different models of understanding. Now we have considered the challenges this varied language presents I will now review some of the current theories of understanding which can broadly be categorised into medical models, socio-medical models and systemic perspectives.

### ***Theoretical Perspectives and Models:***

Research into persistent non-attendance can be broadly categorised into three theoretical perspectives, each suggesting a particularly epistemology and therefore causation of behaviour. While the research discussed does not identify itself as fitting within these frameworks, analysis of their methodological approaches to understanding persistent non-attendance does indicate that they fall into three broad models; medical, socio-medical and systemic.

### ***Medical Model:***

Medical models draw on within child models of understanding by focusing on assessment of the child's behaviour and their psychiatric presentation. Such approaches fit a broadly positivist model of epistemology and focus on making generalisations about those who experience persistent non-attendance.

Berg (1969) discussed 'school phobia' as a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, Blagg (1987) discusses in depth the diagnosis and treatment of school phobia, from a number of psychological perspectives. Carroll (2015) identifies it as a child motivated behaviour and Ekstrand (2015) highlights the common presence of anxiety in relation to persistent non-attendance. Gregory and Purcell (2014) however argue that school refusal is a complex area that has, at times, been over simplified, by the

focus on a medical model of understanding; focusing on a within child explanation and, in order to develop treatment. Hughes, Gullone, Dudley and Tonge (2010) further emphasize the relationship between anxiety and non-school attendance and discuss the potential causal effect between the two. Psychiatric approaches to persistent non-attendance make clear the cause of absence as anxiety or fear, identifying this as a causal factor in the child's non-attendance. Nonetheless the cause of this anxiety is not necessarily clear or identified through these theories; bullying, fear of failure, separation anxiety and agoraphobia may all elicit anxiety in relation to the school context. However the approach to support that is needed in these situations may be different, as might the ongoing nature of this support.

### ***Socio-Medical Model:***

Socio-medical models expand on a purely medical model of understanding, by including the role of the social environment on persistent non-attendance. I argue that the inclusion of the social environment is crucial in understanding persistent non-attendance due to the social context in which it occurs, (schools) and the wider influences of this social context in how children interact with those around them and learning.

Kearney and Albano (2004) discuss the Kearney and Silverman (1990) functional analysis model to understanding school refusal behaviour, which is linked to assessment and suggests prescriptive treatment strategies. Kearney and Albano (2004 p. 149) discuss the various functions that the school refusal behaviour may serve, identifying 5 distinctive types;

*'refusing school to (a) avoid school-related stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (i.e., anxiety and depression); (b) escape school-related aversive social and/or evaluative situations; (c) gain attention from significant others (e.g., parents); and/or (d) pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (e.g., shopping, playing with friends, or drug use).'*

This theory of school refusal, while adopting a predominantly behavioural analysis, considers a wide range of motivators behind the child or young person's non-attendance. Furthermore Kearney and Albano evaluate the use of the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS) for its usefulness in the assessment, understanding and treatment for young people, highlighting the importance of looking at the type and function of non-attendance when assessing and understand individuals' behaviour. A limitation of Kearney and Albano's research is however that it was only conducted in the USA therefore only using young people engaged with the USA education system and support systems available. However the research involved 143 young people and their families, including child and parents perspectives on the assessments used. Additionally the assessment tools used, the SRAS and diagnostic interview provide high levels of validity through their standardisation and the high levels of training of those implementing them (doctoral level or advanced graduates).

Brandibas, Clanet, and Fouraste (2004) move away from a purely medical model, suggesting a role of social desirability in some children's non-attendance, particularly in relation to separation anxiety and attention-getting behaviours from care givers. They suggest that assessment should be moved from a behavioural analysis towards identification of psycho-affective symptoms of anxiety, using recognised measures of state-trait anxiety and separation anxiety. While limited by its focus on only French students at technical college, who are identified by the authors as 'well known for deviance, for not being motivated to attend school and for preferring activities offering immediate pleasure' (Brandibas, Clanet, and Fouraste 2004, p. 119), it suggests an alternative way of measuring and understanding the child's experience of non-attendance, by shifting the measurement of behavioural traits, focused on by the SRAS to psycho-affective symptoms of anxiety using standardised psychological assessment methods such as the STAI-Y (state-trait anxiety inventory) and SASI (separation anxiety symptom

inventory). Furthermore this approach acknowledges the role of the wider social environment and the reinforcement this provides on whether a child attends school. Additionally the social environment of the home is analysed and how factors other than school may drive a child's non-attendance.

McShane, Walter and Rey (2001, p. 825) adopted a socio-medical model of identifying common characteristics between Australian school refusers finding that, 'Young people with school refusal in this group mainly had anxiety and depressive disorders. Family or peer conflict and academic difficulties were the major stressors associated with the onset of the problem.' While these characteristics were identified within a medical setting in Australia, the relatively high levels of participants (192) of varied ages (10-17) provides a valid analysis of the characteristics shared by this varied group.

While the sample selection may be limited as it only included those gaining support from a medical facility, McShane, Walter and Rey's research goes beyond the within child medical model considering the time of the non-attendance, the school environment, family dynamics and psychiatric history. While Berg et al (1969), Ekstrand (2015) and Hughes et al (2010) also acknowledge the role of anxiety in persistent non-attendance and recognises the child's agency in its own behaviour, it can however be argued this focus on within child factors removes the individual experience of children and the potentially varied nature of the anxiety they experience. It can be argued that a medicalised approach (based on diagnosis and treatment) presumes homogeneity between persistent non-attenders and shared characteristics without considering the complexity of the world around them. Furthermore within child approaches can reduce the exploration of external contributing factors, environmental characteristics and support networks, which can provide additional understanding to the individuals' non-attending behaviour, but also provide structural information about the environment in which the

behaviour is taking place.

***Systemic Model:***

Systemic models of understanding expand on socio-medical models by looking at the wider systems around the child; they can include medical, social and systemic information. Such models consider the complexity of issues on multiple levels and are not limited to one type of data collection.

Strand and Cedersund (2013, p. 338) suggest that what school culture values and the language that staff use to describe pupils, are important and therefore should be understood in relation to persistent non-attendance. An additional consideration is, that the language used may then lead to a child being given a label of for example; emotionally based school refuser (EBSR), persistent absentee, truant or school phobic. The effect of labelling can be a strong one as discussed by Broomhead (2013), especially when labels indicate different causes for behaviour, or attribute 'blame' to external or other factors. Therefore variation of language is important to explore as it can suggest a schools' ethos, perception of persistent non-attendance, or indicate the way in which that child may be labelled and understood. A large challenge of understanding persistent non-attendance is that it is primarily defined behaviourally, through the lack of school attendance. This can present great challenges in language use, as initial identification often does not provide a clear rationale for the absences, but indicates the need for further assessment and understanding.

Whilst a number of researchers (Baker and Bishop (2015), Berg (1997), Hughes et al (2010), Carroll (2015) and Ekstrand (2015)) have considered persistent non-attendance from the child's point of view, Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg (2014) investigated school refusal from the perspective of the parent. They identified a number of factors that the parents believed had contributed to their children's school refusal,

specifically three major themes; demanding factors in school, teachers support and the support from other students (including other supportive factors at the school level). The researchers adopted an approach which moved away from a within child perspective, towards an ecological approach, considering the role of the school environment, the individuals who work and learn there. Furthermore they bring the views of the parent to the fore and value their experience of their child's school refusal, valuing the perspective of parents and the insight that they may have into their child's experience and how this may differ from the professionals and other students around them. The research used a convenience sample from special schools and a specialist provision for children who have experienced school refusal, and is therefore limited as it does not include the parents of children who are in mainstream school. This limitation reduces the generalisability of findings as they are not representative of school refusers in the country of research, Norway. Additionally Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg's sample was small; 17 parents from seven communities in the south west of the country, therefore limiting the generalisability of the data to Norway and further to a UK sample.

While Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg considered the school environment in which a child exists as a factor, Bright (2011) considers the sociological environment in which a child is raised as an influential factor on the manner in which they engage with education. Bright looked specifically at the experiences of young people being raised in a former English coal field and identified the presence of 'complex continuities between contemporary school refusal and a local historical culture' (Bright 2011, p. 512). While Bright's findings cannot be generalised across all locations due to the specificity of his research, it does raise the importance of understanding school refusal from a sociological perspective. As identified by Bright different areas can have unique and different social histories and these can affect the way in which families engage with institutions such as schools. Bright (2011, p. 512) calls for

a 'Rethinking school disaffection' that challenges 'disengagement as a pathological failure of aspiration and 'behavioural difficulty' as evidence of a congenital tendency to violence' and 'a body of scholarship that veers too easily between lionising and loathing the affective jolt of young people's refusal.' As school refusal 'might yet be articulated as a dignified process of non-servile challenge from below'. Bright's challenge poses an interesting question as to whether we should be viewing some school refusal as part of a complex system whereby children are not only viewing education through their own experiences but also through the experiences of their parents and extended family.

In contrast to previous approaches Baker and Bishop (2015) adopted a qualitative approach to understanding the experience of non-school attenders. They adopted an individualistic perspective, conducting in-depth interviewing in students' own homes. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to attempt to uncover the unique individual experiences of non-attenders, with the aim of informing practice.

What they found was that each person's experience of school refusal was different and should therefore be understood on an individual basis, supporting the argument made by Carroll (2015) and Kearney (2008), that non-attenders are a heterogeneous group. Importantly they found that external factors influenced the child's experience of persistent non-attendance; affecting their perception of self and of others, particularly in relation to how they see their non-attendance. This supports a systemic approach to understanding non-attendance, that acknowledges the complex role of the social and environmental systems around the individual non-attender.

Baker and Bishop (2015) lead us away from a within child understanding of persistent non-attendance, drawing us into a wider contextual understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the child and the role that others play in this. Their work highlights the value

of including the qualitative lived experience of individuals in research to shed light on a complex issue and provide greater understanding. However Baker and Bishop acknowledge that their work was undertaken with a small number of participants (4) limiting the extent to which their work can provide generalisation. However generalisation of results was not something that was aimed for in this research, rather to provide in-depth qualitative understanding around a complex issue, thus highlighting the complexity of individual cases. This small sample means that the assumption of heterogeneity cannot be made. Baker and Bishop therefore recommend the importance of conducting research in other local authorities due to the variations that exist across localities in the experience of their residents, their service and the resources that are available. While this research is limited by its sample size it does highlight the value of approaching the issue of persistent non-attendance from a qualitative perspective and the complexity of each individual's experience. Additionally Baker and Bishop suggest the value of conducting subsequent work that looks at the experiences of professionals alongside parents and children to further triangulate their work and consider the wider contextual issues that effect and contribute to an individual's experience of persistent non-attendance.

Now that I have established that there are different models and perspectives that attempt to explain persistent non-attendance, I will consider how these have influenced practice and approaches to intervention. Furthermore I will consider any evidence of success from these approaches.

### ***Approaches to Intervention:***

Broadly speaking approaches to intervention can be categorised in terms of the three models previously discussed in their approach to managing persistent non-attendance. Despite researchers not making these identifications in their work, it is possible to categorise them based on the approaches they recommend and the underlying

epistemology that such approaches rely on. Categorising these approaches is useful as it forces the reader to look at the underlying assumptions made by the proposed interventions and therefore the suggested causality of the original behaviour of persistent non-attendance. This process of categorisation is further useful in identifying any limitations in approaches and their success/failure rates.

***Medical Model:***

Moffitt, Chorpita, and Fernandez (2003), explored the use of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in '*the treatment of a preadolescent child with school refusal behavior*' (Moffitt, Chorpita, and Fernandez, 2003 p. 51). As is clear from the language used the focus is on treating the individual child and views the behaviour as something with is within the child. The approach adopted by Moffitt, Chorpita and Fernandez (2003) required adapting due to the individual needs of the child taking an intensive, rather than longitudinal approach. As a medical approach may suggest assessment of outcomes of the CBT were assessed using rating scales, presentation and subsequent attendance. While some impact was found from the intensive therapy, Moffitt, Chopita and Fernandez (2003) acknowledge the role of systemic issues in the child's attendance difficulties prior and subsequent to the therapeutic intervention.

The treatment of school refusal has also been approached from a psychodynamic perspective, which Christogiorgos and Giannakopoulos (2014) present a case study example of. They make an argument for evidence of a link between separation anxiety, the complexity of the relationship between mother and child, and school refusing. Psychoanalytical therapy for the child and family is then used in attempting to resolve the issue and change the relationship between parent/child and therefore address the school refusal. This approach due to its focus on the parent child relationship, is based on a familial

approach, rather than addressing any school based issues. However for cases where parent/child relationship is addressed as being core to the non-attendance this is an alternative response to a medical diagnosis.

***Socio-medical model:***

These approaches can be combined due to their co-existence in literature and the assessments adopted. Socio-medical models and functional analysis draw on within child models of understanding by focusing on assessment of the child's behaviour and their psychiatric presentation, while also considering some of the social factors that may be influencing the child. Such approaches use standardised questionnaires and behavioural analysis which fit a broadly positivist model of epistemology, however can also be informed by other information.

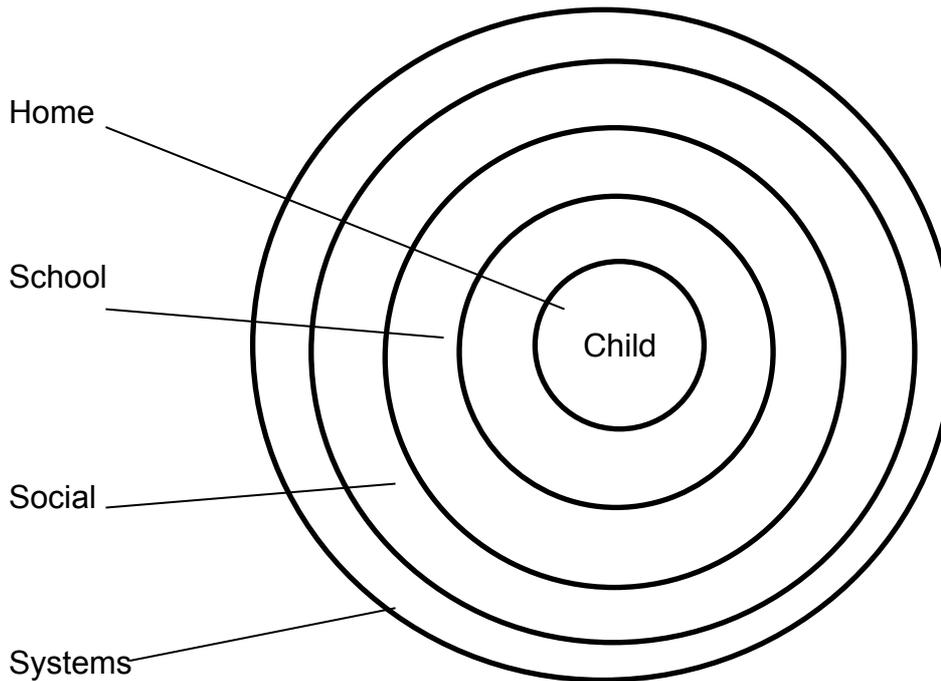
Gregory and Purcell (2014, p. 38) discuss best practice when working with school refusal and the use of The School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS, Kearney & Silverman, 1993) in the UK. Gregory and Purcell aimed to explore the experiences of the children and families who had electively home educated, due to their previous school non-attendance; these experiences were then used to develop best practice within the local authority. Gregory and Purcell (2014) investigated the children and families of the four key areas previously outlined by Kearney and Silverman (1993); anxiety in relation to the school setting, social anxiety, attention seeking and tangible reinforcement at home.

Gregory and Purcell (2014) suggest that the EP is particularly well placed to understand the individuals the complex experience and provide support, due to their skill base and understanding. While Gregory and Purcell (2014) has been used to inform based practice their findings are limited due to their focus on those who have as a result of their school refusal been electively home educated. This focus

therefore only includes those for which school refusal has reached such a level that alternative educational provision has had to be provided and excludes those who have returned to consistent school attendance or are currently experiencing school refusal but are not home educated. Furthermore the role of the medical model may suggest that the sample chosen by Gregory and Purcell is focused towards anxiety based non-attendance, excluding other forms. However the focus on a subgroup of persistent non-attendance could be an advantage of the research due to the recognised heterogeneity of this issue. I nevertheless argue that for informing best practice, those who have experienced persistent non-attendance and are now attending regularly are an important source of information that have not been included in this work. Furthermore their perspective may differ from the hypothetical recommendations of those who have not reintegrated with the school system and may indicate further areas of exploration on the issue of persistent non-attendance.

***Systemic Ecological Approach:***

A systemic or ecological approach to understanding persistent non-attendance looks at the roles and responsibilities of all of those involved in a phenomenon, in this case persistent non-attendance. Such approaches look at factors from all levels of the persons' ecology, the personal, the environmental, social and systems. Such approaches aim to integrate understanding of all these individual factors so as to make sense of the whole picture for the individual and synthesise the information this analysis provides. Complex situations can be unpicked using this approach to understand the unique experience of the individual, rather than assuming homogeneity of experience. Below is a simplistic diagram of how this approach may be viewed conceptually.



*Fig 4: Systemic/Ecological Model.*

Carroll (2015, p. 47) argues that due to the heterogeneity of those with attendance issues that the EPs 'have the appropriate knowledge and skills for dealing with pupil absenteeism at both the individual and group level'. Carroll provides this clear rationale for EPs being not only involved in supporting young people and their families but also in supporting organisations with changing systemic issues which may impact on attendance. Carroll's assertions have strong validity, due to the amount of literature he calls on to support them and the varied areas of absenteeism he has drawn on. Carroll looks at the different approaches to understanding persistent non-attendance that EPs have adopted including; functional analysis, the constructionist model of reasoned action (COMOIRA), CBT, environmental correlations, family therapy, motivational interviewing and solution focused approaches.

Carroll's inclusion of such a variety of approaches I assert supports his argument for the value that an EP can bring to absenteeism, as it

demonstrates the flexibility of the work an EP can do and the manner in which an EP can adapt to the needs of individual families. While I do not suggest that only EPs are flexible in the work that they do, I support Carroll's perspective that the knowledge that an EP has allows them to draw on different models and frameworks to support change at varied levels. Furthermore an EPs' unique position as a professional working across education, health and care supports multi-disciplinary collaboration which can support child centred thinking.

Carroll's (2015) work, I argue, highlights the psychological basis for EP involvement in the area of school refusal, to increase understanding of individuals' experiences, provides support to schools and families. In his review Lauchlan (2003) further suggested that while various approaches had been adopted for working with non-attendance, no one approach had been shown to be conclusively successful. Lauchlan suggests that this may be due to the individual needs of children showing persistent non-attendance and the varied approaches professionals have adopted in working with children and their families. Lauchlan (2003, p. 144) therefore suggests an 'individualised intervention programme, according to a pupil's particular needs, but involving a multi-systems approach', including parents, school and educational psychologist. Lauchlan's recommendations supports Carroll's view of the EP being well placed to work with the needs of children, young people and their families in their experience of persistent non-attenders. With the EP bringing together those who are involved in a child's life and understanding the child's needs in an individualised manner. Nuttall and Woods (2013) further support this individualised approach through their case studies, highlighting the value of a case study methodology when exploring persistent non-attendance and the value of doing so to gain rich and detailed data. Additionally Nuttall and Woods (2013) supports Lauchlan and Carroll's assertion of the value of the EP in relation to supporting young people

and their families through the adoption of an ecologically situated model of support.

***Additional approaches to intervention: legal punitive and behavioural approaches:***

As previously identified explanations of persistent non-attendance and therefore its management have fallen predominantly into three psychological models, medical, socio-medical and systemic. These approaches are not however the only used in attempting to manage persistent non-attendance, legal punitive and behaviour approaches follow the idea that if we punish people their behaviour will change. This approach has been applied to persistent non-attendance through the use of fines and legal action against parents when child's attendance fails to meet certain levels. These approaches assume that the parent is able to get their child to school and that the threat of prosecution will encourage them to do so. Such approaches adopt a very simple cause and effect model of behaviour and focuses on the parents' responsibility to ensure their child attends school regularly and sees the parent as the person in control of the non-attending behaviour. Such approaches have been a focus in recent years in the media in relation to holiday taking during term time and the perception of what is considered regular attendance under a legal framework.

Waddington (1997) examines the legal approach to persistent non-attendance through eliciting the views of education welfare officers (EWOs) in the prosecution of parents whose children are not attending school and the value of threatened and actual prosecution. Waddington's (1997) research views the issue through a different lens as it focuses on the legal requirement of parents to ensure their children receive an education and the discomfort that some EWOs may feel in having the pursuit of prosecution as part of their casework. Waddington (1997, p. 340) present the challenge that 'the bulk of the existing literature centres on parental or pupil rights, rather than duties' and

challenges that 'one cannot take it for granted that all parents have full knowledge of their responsibilities and the legal implications contained within them'. This statement would suggest that a reason for children not attending is that they do not understand or are not aware of their legal requirements as parents, and therefore by making them aware their child's attendance will improve.

I believe that Waddington's challenge raises an important consideration of legal responsibilities, parents' awareness of these and the ways in which professionals raise such issues. However Waddington (1997) does not clearly link the prosecutorial punitive approach to a psychological framework for change and therefore does not provide a clear rationale for why this approach may be effective. While Waddington's research was conducted a number of years ago, I believe the issues of legality raised are still relevant, particularly in the issues it raises in working with families and the maintenance of professional relationships. Interestingly Waddington (1997) found that EWOs generally felt that prosecution or the threat of prosecution had little effect on the professional relationship and could be useful to working with clients when used at the right time. Therefore indicating that for some the raising of legal issues did change something for these families. While these findings are limited by the age of the research, the limited number of EWOs involved (29) and the focus a purely EWO perspective, it does raise an important issue in the legality of persistent non-attendance. However it would be interesting to explore the perceptions of parents in such cases, as to whether they have felt the threat of or actual legal action has affected their relationship with the EWO service and the support that they have received.

As previously identified persistent non-attendance is different from truancy due to the parents' knowledge of the non-attendance and therefore can be viewed as having legal implications, Waddington's question as to whether parents are always aware of their legal duties,

raises an important issue when working with parents and the conversations that may need to be had with them around the law and supporting their child back into consistent school attendance. Davis and Lee (2006) however discuss the value of viewing school through a compulsory lens challenging Waddington's (1997) view. Instead Davis and Lee suggest that school attendance is viewed as a contract between school and family and that in cases of persistent non-attendance that contract has broken down. The perspective of Davis and Lee of viewing school attendance as a contractual obligation between child and school I believe reconceptualises the issue as something for which both parties must come together to address. That if a child makes changes, but the school ethos is inflexible in their approach, then these will be devalued and if a school adapts but the child is unwilling to, then neither outcome will be positive. I believe such recognition of the role of both parties in non-attendance, goes someway to addressing the power imbalance that may exist between a school and a child and promotes discussion. It further acknowledges the role that environmental; social and organisation structures of the school might have on an individual and their school attendance.

***Summary, identification of a gap and study justification:***

To summarise, this review has discussed the different conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance that have been used to define a complex set of behaviours, each with their own definitions and discourse. Due to the varied models of persistent non-attendance and language used, I believe it is important to clarify how it is currently conceptualised within the local authority. It is due to a lack of knowledge on how persistent non-attendance is conceptualised in the authority that my research has an illuminatory focus.

Additionally different approaches to intervention have been adopted across the field, dependent on whether the intervention is based on

medical, socio-medical or systemic models. However, there appears to be a consensus from the literature as to the heterogeneity of those dealing with persistent non-attendance and the need for a individualised approach to providing support. Furthermore these variations and our lack of knowledge about the approaches used in the local authority, support the undertaking of an illuminatory project. Aiming to explore the complex picture of persistent non-attendance specific to this local authority and understand current practice.

Previous research provides multiple perspectives on understanding school refusal; professional, family and the child. In my research I aim to bring together and describe the perspectives of professional, family and child to provide a cohesive picture of those experiences. Previous research, has looked at one or a combination of the perspectives, but not combined all three to provide a full local picture. I believe this triangulation will highlight any differences in perspectives on the issue of persistent non-attendance, the impact of the experience and the contextual situation in which it arises. I argue that understanding the different perspectives of those involved in persistent non-attendance, including the child, will help illuminate the complex dynamic of persistent non-attendance in the local area and indicate areas of development in practices. Gaining information from different stakeholders in the local area fulfils a need of the local authority and fills a current gap in the research literature.

***Rationale:***

My research plans to provide an in depth picture of persistent non-attendance in a local context, to understand the complex experience of the phenomenon from 3 primary and 3 secondary schools perspectives. The second part of my research is nested within part 1 and aims to explore the individual experiences of children and families from these schools. I aim to understand their experience of persistent non-attendance and further compare this within the context of the

understanding of the schools. A subsequent hope for the research is to identify any systemic contributing factors that may be present within the individual schools and feed these back to them in the hope that early intervention is possible when indicators of possible persistent non-attendance are highlighted. Such a preventative approach will allow for more children to be supported, before persistent non-attendance occurs and promote a systemic understanding of the individual challenges persistent non-attendance brings (Baker and Bishop 2015). Furthermore I aim to make schools aware of the possible role an EP can hold in relation to persistent non-attendance (Carroll 2015 and Lauchlan 2003) and open up a dialogue between schools and myself on this issue. An additional outcome of this study is to inform countywide guidance for the local authority on school refusal and include the support available from EPs in the service brochure.

## 2.1 Research Aims and Objectives:

### Aims:

- To investigate the experiences, language used and conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance from a school, teacher's and other key professionals' perspectives.
- To investigate the lived experience of school refusal from a family and child perspective.
- To integrate the experiences and perspectives of the school, family and child about persistent non-attendance into a shared understanding that can inform the design Local Authority (LA) guidance.

### Objectives:

To examine perceptions and experience of key school staff (class teacher, SENCo, head teacher), other involved professionals (EWO, CAMHS), families and children about persistent non-attendance.

To compare language used across professionals, families and children to describe persistent non-attendance.

To compare any models or conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance that are identified and discussed.

### Research Study Part 1 Aims:

To investigate the experiences, language used and conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance from a school, teacher's and other key professionals' perspectives.

Objectives;

- To examine perceptions and experiences of key school staff (class teacher, SENCo, Head teacher), other involved professionals (EWO, CAMHS), families and children about persistent non-attendance.

- To compare language used across professionals, families and children to describe persistent non-attendance.

- To compare any models or conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance that are identified and discussed.

#### **Part 1 Research Questions:**

- How is persistent non-attendance conceptualised by different professionals?
- What are different professionals' experiences and perceptions of persistent non-attendance?
- How useful is the term 'school refusal' as a concept for professionals and what other language is used to describe persistent non-attendance?
- How do professionals' conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance inform their practice?

#### **Research Study Part 2 Aims:**

Relating to aim to investigate the lived experience of school refusal from a family and child perspective. Objectives;

- To examine children and families perceptions and experiences of persistent non-attendance.
- To compare language used across professionals, families and children to describe persistent non-attendance.

#### **Part 2 Research Questions:**

- What is the lived experience of persistent non-attendance for children and families?
- How do children and families make sense of persistent non-attendance?
- What do children and families and perceive as the causes of persistent non-attendance?
- How do families perceive the support offered by schools and other professionals?

- If the support was perceived as useful, what do families and children believe made this effective?

### 3.1. Designs and methods:

#### Epistemological Standpoint:

I have adopted a constructivist approach in the development of this research and its undertaking. Kim (2014, p. 541) identifies that “social constructivism focuses on the construction of meaning in terms of the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of understanding in order to make sense of human experience.” Reality is therefore seen as subjective based on these dimensions and that there is no objective reality to be discovered; instead the manner in which individuals construct reality can be explored. Due to this epistemological standpoint, positivist approaches that attempt to uncover truths in an objective manner are rejected in favour of subjective explorations of experiences. With Kim (2014, p. 541) suggesting that “social constructivist theorists tend to identify qualitative research as discovering meaning and understanding through the researcher’s active involvement of the construction of meaning.” McGhee (2001, p.7) values the researchers experience of an issue and ‘that learners actively contribute to the process of learning’. As a researcher I feel that I am fundamentally a learner and that is particularly the case on an issue where there is much to learn, such as persistent non-attendance. This epistemological stance has therefore influenced my research at all levels, from its conception, to analysis, through to its interpretation of contribution to the field of educational psychology. Due to my role as a trainee educational psychologist, and previous roles I have held, I have experiences of persistent non-attendance. These have therefore formed views about the issue, how it affects others and how professionals work to resolve it. I therefore believe that my own experiences and understanding of the issue is important as I am also a professional who has worked with young people who are persistently non-attending, as are many of my participants. In keeping with my constructivist epistemology I am therefore acknowledging this experience at the

outset and the value that this can bring to an exploratory project with an illuminatory focus.

### **Methodology:**

The methodological approach of this research is exploratory; currently persistent non-attendance has been identified as an issue across the country, however the specific nature of this in the identified local authority has not. An exploratory project was chosen due to a gap in specific information in relation to the identified local authority and a presence of anecdotal discussion of its increase. I therefore felt that an exploratory project was most appropriate to identify if persistent non-attendance is an issue in the local authority, if it is to increase understanding of the nature of the issues, and provide a clearer picture of the themes (if any) that presented themselves. An exploratory approach fits into a constructivist epistemology as discussed in Thomas (2013) that suggests that the individuals who experience a phenomena do so differently, and it is their experiences combined that truly describe that phenomena. Previous research has investigated persistent non-attendance at a number of levels and from a number of perspectives including; the professional, school, child and parents, however none provide a rich picture of the current local context and challenge. Therefore this research aims to bring all these experiences together to provide an in depth local picture of the persistent non-attendance.

Due to the exploratory methodology a qualitative method of data collection was chosen to enable rich, in depth information from those who experience persistent non-attendance. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing open questions, to which participants can share their own unique experiences at the level at which they are comfortable. Furthermore this method allows the researcher to adapt to the individual they are interviewing and follow lines of interest as they arise, or move on from areas which are not relevant to that individual.

## 3.2. Sampling and participants:

### 3.2.1. Part 1: Participants:

Participant schools were drawn from one local authority area, schools were identified through publically available online data on the Department of Education website with those schools who had the highest levels of persistent non-attendance (below 85%) being approached in writing and with follow up phone calls. Initially the 6 secondary and 6 primary schools with the highest levels of persistent non-attendance were approached with the aim of including 3 of each. While selection was based purely on levels of persistent non-attendance, consideration was also given to the size of the schools approached due to the great variation in the locality and their geographical location. However once these schools were identified I felt comfortable that they were of varying size and geographical location so as to not provide skewed information. Each school was asked for whole school consent to take part in the research and to identify the key members of staff they felt would be most appropriate to take part. Each school was also informed as to the plans for part 2 to ensure they felt comfortable and able to provide participants for each part of the research. From this first recruit drive of 12 schools with the highest levels of persistent non-attendance 3 schools were recruited, 1 primary and 2 secondary.

Due to not gaining all required participant schools from the first approach the further 3 schools were recruited through professional discussion with colleagues and schools with whom I was already involved. 1 primary school was put forward by a colleague and the further 2 schools were recruited through my current work with them and where therefore a convenience sample. Below is a break down of basic information about the schools recruited. (DFE data: 2015-2016).

School ID	Type of school	No. Pupils	Absence (Nat Av.)	Level of PN. (Nat. Av.)	Ofsted rating
Primary 1	Community school	74	4.2% (4.0%)	18.5% (8.2%)	Good
Primary 2	Foundation school	404	4.2% (4.0%)	8.4% (8.2%)	Outstanding
Primary 3	Foundation school	247	4.4% (4.0%)	7.7% (8.2%)	Good
Secondary 1	Academy Converter	936	4.9% (5.2%)	12.3% (13.1%)	Not Published
Secondary 2	Foundation school	640	5.1% (5.2%)	13.5% (13.1%)	Requires improvement.
Secondary 3	Foundation school	1017	4.4% (5.2%)	9.1% (13.1%)	Good

Fig 4: School Data.

### 3.2.2. Part 2: Participants:

For the second part of the study participants were sought through discussion with the schools in part one and the professionals who work with them. Families, one from each school was sought where at least one child has an attendance of 85% or lower or had experienced difficulties attending. Families were initially approached by the school to ask if they wish to contribute to the research and inform later practice, if they agreed then they were contacted by myself. If an EP had been involved previously or was currently working with the family, they were also be included in discussion with the school as to whether they feel involvement would be appropriate.

Across the 6 schools, 10 families were approached by myself, once they had consented with their school for their contact details to be shared. Each primary school put forward 1 possible family, due to their size and the limited cases of persistent absence that they experienced,

all of these identified families took part in the project. Recruitment from secondary families was more complex, with only 1 out of the 7 approached taking part. Secondary school 1 passed on the details of one family, after stating that they had considered multiple participants and thought they would be most suitable and said they were willing to take part. However when they were contacted on multiple occasions calls were not answered or returned and therefore they did not take part. Secondary school 2 over the course of the research put forward 3 families, 2 of the families did not attend original pre-arranged meetings, with 1 of these then not attending a second, and the third family re-arranged visits 4 times. None of these families ended up contributing to the research. Secondary school 3 put forward 3 families, 1 of whom ended up taking part, another chose not to take part and the third had to cancel due to health reasons. Due to multiple cancellations and time constraints of the project it was not possible to pursue additional recruitment for this stage.

### *Reflection*

*The lack of engagement of participants in the second part of my research was very challenging, for a number of reasons. While I had planned for some flexibility in data collection, the time constraints of my research plan and the need to allow for enough time to write up the project left me with conflicting priorities. Ensuring that I collected enough data to make my work meaningful was obviously very important, however I was also under pressure to make sure that the write up of the work did not suffer for this. The issue of data collection was further complicated due to appointments being cancelled, rescheduled and then cancelled again. This meant that while I was proactive in engaging participants and arranging interviews that this did not translate into participation. Furthermore having contact with the schools and families gave me the perception of engagement; therefore leaving me feeling I was on track when this wasn't the case. These conflicting priorities left me feeling quite stressed and unsure what to*

*prioritise. Support from the my supervisor helped me to set myself a deadline at which I would stop data collection and then go with analysing the data that I already had. This was a tough decision for me, particularly as it involved the contribution of the young people and their families, which I felt was crucial to the work.*

*On reflection I feel that my experiences of struggling to engage with families, is mirrored in other professionals' experiences and therefore highlights the challenges that working with such families presents. If I was to conduct this research again I feel that alternative methods of recruitment would need to be sought. I found that recruiting participants from my own caseload was the most successful and therefore this would be how I would approach this. While this does present its own challenges, in terms of possible bias of data, I believe that a pre-existing relationship was a major factor in engagement and that this may also be the case for other professionals wishing to work with families experiencing persistent non-attendance.*

### 3.3.1 Ethics:

*Ethical approval from the University and the local authority can be found in the appendices, as can examples of all consent and information forms.*

Informed consent was obtained in line with the HCPC standards of proficiency, with all participants in the research being fully informed of the aims and purpose of the research. All participants were asked to provide written consent in the form of two signed consent forms prior to the research being undertaken, one copy which was taken for my records and one copy that was given to the participant. While informal interest in the project may be acquired before this through discussion, no research took place until ethical approval was been obtained and consent forms are signed. Copies of the consent forms were given to the participants for their own records, which included my contact details to allow them to follow up the research and remove their data at any point if they chose. Furthermore on request individual transcripts of interviews would have been sent to participants to allow them to make any amendments, to ensure the accuracy of their responses and allow them to remove anything that on reflection they have decided they wish not to share. Where this was not possible due to the age of participant's transcripts would have been sent to their parents on request to go through with their children. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at anytime, not answer any individual questions or change their mind about their answers during the course of the interviews. The retrospective and reflective nature of the study ensured that there was little manipulation from the researcher and the participants were be fully informed of the nature and quality of the research prior to taking part.

Confidentiality, as outlined in the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of ethics will be maintained throughout the research by using codenames to refer to schools and families. All transcripts and data will be anonymised before use, with any distinguishing characteristics being

removed. Furthermore the local area will be referred to generally to avoid any possible identification of individual families or schools. All information will be kept securely and will only be accessible by myself as the researcher, the local authority and the university. All areas of confidentiality were put in writing in the consent form, with any additional questions being answered by me. It was made clear to the individual families that while their contributions will be written up, they will not be shared directly with the individual child's school. For part one attendance data will not be requested on an individual basis, but in the form of general percentages, whole school consent was obtained from the head, rather than on an individual pupil basis and from the professionals taking part.

The explorative methodology follows an inquiry approach and will therefore be used to capture the already existing experiences of schools and families, therefore reducing any likely harm. The retrospective and reflective nature of the study ensures that there is little manipulation from the researcher and the participants were fully informed of the nature and quality of the research prior to taking part.

The sensitive nature of persistent non-attendance presents challenges that need to be considered when designing research. There are varied reasons for persistent non-attendance, all of which can affect children and young people differently. It is important to acknowledge that a high number of students who are persistent non-attenders have issues around mental health and anxiety. It is therefore crucial to understand the role of mental health in persistent non-attendance and to be sensitive to the individual's experience as a researcher. To reduce any long-term harm from the research I planned to work closely with other professionals involved with the children and their families to ensure that those recruited are able to engage with the research without lasting psychological concerns. While discussing persistent non-attendance is likely to be emotive I approached the interviews in a client-centred way,

encouraging them to ask for breaks when needed, to ask questions and only discuss what they are comfortable with. I furthermore used my previous counselling experience to ensure that I conduct check ins at the beginning of interviews to ensure that the participants are in the right frame of mind to engage, and check outs to ensure that they are feeling safe in what they have discussed and that any negative feelings are acknowledged and dealt with. If at any point a child or family member was upset I asked if they wanted to continue, or if they are showing signs of distress I would have terminated the interview myself.

While using an investigative approach as identified, there was a low risk of harm to participants, the interviews contained questions allowing individuals to contribute as much or little as they wish and any questions can be skipped. However there is the possibility that some individuals may have found the issue of school refusal difficult to discuss, particularly the participants in part 2, parents and children. Participants were protected from harm by ensuring that the questions were thoughtfully written, asked and followed up. Furthermore questions were drafted to ensure that they were appropriate for the individual participants, for example ensuring they were age appropriate. I also ensured that if during any part of the interviews that parents or children were getting upset that breaks were taken, or the interview was stopped all together. Were an individual to become distressed during the interview I would have ensure that they were okay and supported before my leaving and follow this up with a phone call no more than a week later.

As a researcher it is possible that I may have been at risk of physical harm due to conducting research in participants homes. I was protected from harm by ensuring that the local authority database was checked prior to any visits to ensure that the home was safe for me to visit, using same risk assessment conducted by social care. I provided the office with details of the address that the interview was conducted at; called

them prior to my arrival and on my leaving to confirm my safety. Additionally I made a family member aware of the time of my intended interview and contact them once it is completed. If any difficulties were to arise I planned to follow the local authority procedure of calling and asking for the 'red folder', where local procedure will be followed to ensure my safety, however this was not needed.

### **3.3.2 Instruments:**

*The concept map and sample interview schedules can be found in the appendices.*

Hierarchical focusing (Tomlinson 1989) was used to examine my perception of the issue of PN and develop the interview schedules. The following process was used to develop was followed as suggested by Tomlinson (1989).

1. Initial analysis of the domain:

This was done through the use of mindmapping the issue as I saw it and then putting this into a hierarchical concept map. Below is the initial mindmap, the concept map can be found in the appendices.

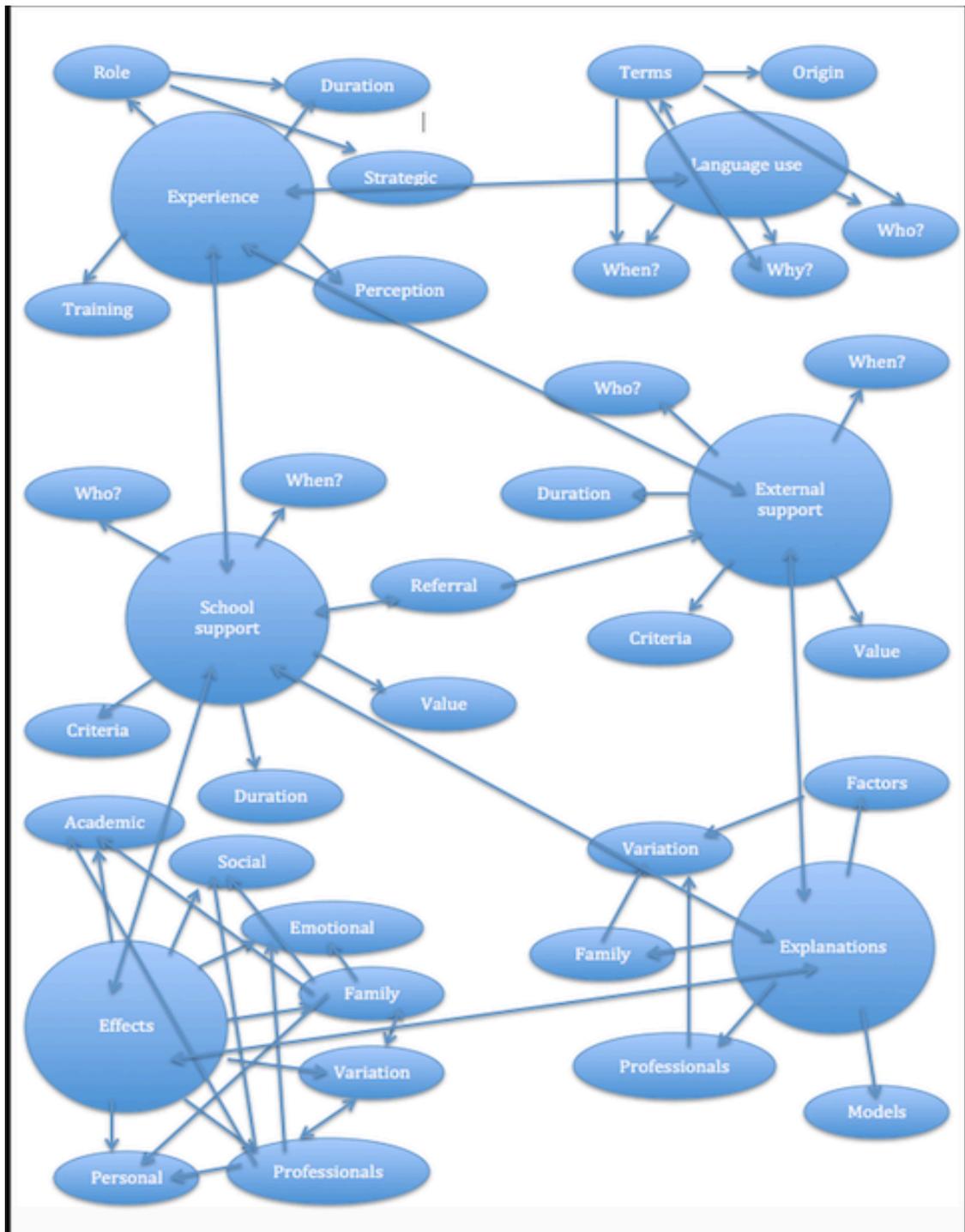


Fig 5: Mindmap.

2. Selection of research interview subdomain:

Due to illuminatory nature of this research and the wish to gain insight into the overall experience of PA, no subdomain was selected at this point. Instead questions were asked across these areas.

3. Construction of the interview agenda:

Each specific areas was then identified and expanded on up three levels; order one was very general, order two was more focused and order three was more specific. An example of which can be seen below;

L1	L2	L3
<i>What language do you use to describe attendance below 85%?</i>	<i>Why do you use these terms?</i>	<i>What distinctions do you make between x and Y?</i>

*Fig 6: Concept map levels example.*

The concept map was then reviewed in full to ensure that all research questions were covered and that these were explored at different levels.

All interviews were developed from the initial concept map to ensure that each interview schedule met the research questions outlined. The schedules were then adapted dependent on role and differentiated to ensure that they were appropriate for each participant group and were phrased in a way that was clear, using appropriate language. Once completed the interview schedules were then trialed with the first two participants for suitability and feedback was sought to ensure clarity and appropriateness. The same process was planned for part two's participants, however due to drop out and time constraints planned trialing of the interviews was not possible. Instead less formal feedback was sought at the end of the interviews to ensure that participants were happy with the questions asked and the information that was being sought.

The style of interviewing that I adopted aimed to be professional, yet informal and relaxed. My interviewing technique followed a conversational style and started with some rapport building, to relax the participant before the recorded interview took place. Each interview was recorded using a voice recorder and notes were taken incase this failed.

During the interviews if participants wanted to take a break for any reason, or the interview was interrupted the tape was paused. All participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add at the end of their participation and were thanked for taking part. It is also important to note that due to the sample some of the participants I already had a working relationship with, (2 out of the 6 schools and 2 out of the 4 families) and therefore this may have had an impact on how relaxed they felt during the interviews, how they conversed with me and the information they felt able to share.

### 3.3.2 Analysis procedures:

I have chosen thematic analysis as an analytical approach due to its flexibility and lack of ties to any one specific epistemology. Due to my constructivist epistemology it was important to choose an analytical method that was in keeping with this and could acknowledge the impact of the researchers conceptualisation of an issue on the research itself. The following process was used inline with Braun and Clarke (2006)

1. **Transcription:** The majority of the transcriptions were completed by myself, however some interviews were transcribed by paid secretarial staff. All transcriptions were then reviewed for accuracy from the original tapes. This process enabled my submersion into the data sets and allowed me to become familiar with each interview and start to form some views about findings.
2. **Coding:** All transcripts were coded using the same themes based on the hierarchical structure initially completed at the beginning of the research process, as proposed by Tomlinson (1989). All data relating to the themes were coded, regardless of where they arose during the interviews or if they were repeated. This process further familiarised myself with the individual experiences of those interviews and also commonalities between

them. This initial stage also flagged up areas that required additional exploration and suggested sub themes within the core theme areas.

3. **Analysis:** These initial themes were used as a starting point to analyse the data sets for core themes and were then deconstructed further to explore sub-ordinate themes. As the same themes were coded for across the data, analysis was able to be undertaken at different levels of the study; part 1, primary and secondary, part 2 and across study. This process allowed for analysis to take place of the previously identified themes that arose from coding where over arching themes were identified and sub-ordinate themes explored in more depth. Interpretation of the data was now undertaken to pull together what these findings meant and how this could best be made sense of. Examples were then chosen from the rich data sets to illustrate each theme, as good representations of the theme and its interpretation. Attention was also paid to ensure that no one participants' data was unduly represented or an others excluded, the same was ensured across school and role.

The analysis that was conducted provided a rich picture of the data set, and look for semantic themes to inform practice. It was theoretical in its approach due to my own interest and reading on the subject matter and was therefore influenced by my own experiences and expectations.

## 4.1.Findings:

### 4.1.1. Part 1 Descriptive Data:

I collected data from six schools, three primary and three secondary. Below is a table that illustrates a breakdown of the professionals from whom data was collected and the roles that they held within the school. It is important to note that the number represents the job roles of those interviewed in schools with the number of staff in brackets. This was due to the some staff holding multiple roles and some professionals working with multiple schools.

School /Role	Prim 1	Prim 2	Prim 3	Sec 1	Sec 2	Sec 3	Total
Head Teacher	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Deputy Head	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Assistant Head	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
SENCo	1 (0)	0	1	1	1	1	5(4)
Assistant SENCo	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Learning Mentor	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Pastoral Support	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
EWO	1	0	1	1	1(0)	1(0)	5(3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 (2)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19 (17)</b>

Fig 7: Interview Data.

Additionally schools used some job roles interchangeably, a good example of this is the (EWO) role. Two of the EWOs I interviewed were part of the local authority Education Welfare Service, however one was not and was employed directly through the school. Each school that

was part of the data set was asked to volunteer those they felt would be most able to contribute on the subject of persistent non-attendance, which is reflected in the numbers of participants and the roles that they covered. One of the sample schools in particular was very small and therefore one person held many roles and in another a key member of staff was unable to take part due to ill health.

#### 4.1.1.Part 1 Findings:

**Findings to the research question: *How is persistent non-attendance conceptualised by different professionals?*** (Full interview questions can be found in the appendix, as can a break down of how each question was related to the three specific research questions).

When analysed four core themes arose for why PN occurred, reasons relating to the child, home, school and society. Each of these themes could then be broken down into subordinate themes, a break down of which is illustrated below;

Research Question:	Themes	Subordinate themes
Conceptualisation of PN	Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness</li> <li>• Mental Health/Anxiety</li> <li>• ASD</li> </ul>
	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental Health/Mental Health Anxiety</li> <li>• Parenting Difficulties</li> <li>• Parental Substance Use</li> <li>• Holidays</li> <li>• Priority</li> <li>• Finances</li> </ul>
	School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmet Learning Need</li> <li>• Learning Environment</li> <li>• Relationships Peer/Teachers</li> <li>• Bullying</li> </ul>
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations</li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Social Media</li> </ul>

Fig 8: Explanations of PN themes.

The above table illustrates an analysis of the range of explanations that were presented by professionals, broken down into thematic areas and subordinate themes. From the raw interview data it became clear that there was a wide variety of explanations put forward by professionals across primary and secondary provision for why PN occurred. Further analysis of this data suggested an ecological framework, helped to make sense of this data and the four identified core themes. Interestingly no one professional only described explanations from one theme, or focused on one subordinate theme, instead all offered explanations across theme areas, which I have interpreted as a finding in itself. These findings I argue present a strong argument for an ecological conceptualisation of PN from professionals, that no one explanation can be provided and therefore it is best understood through this framework.

Examples of each core theme and subordinate themes are illustrated in the table below;

<b>Core theme</b>	<b>Subordinate theme and examples.</b>
<b>Child:</b>	<p><b>Illness;</b> <i>“Like illness, sometimes there is a medical condition, that would make them persistently absent.” Primary EWO 1.</i></p> <p><b>Mental Health/Anxiety;</b> <i>“school refusal because of anxiety” Secondary Pastoral 1</i></p> <p><b>ASD;</b> <i>“school refusers with ASD” Secondary Assistant Head 3</i></p>
<b>Home:</b>	<p><b>Parental Health/Mental Health Anxiety;</b> <i>“Recently we had one dad that was mentally unwell and they went to stay with his parents.” Primary SENCo 3.</i></p> <p><b>Parenting Difficulties;</b> <i>“parents can’t parent their child to come into school, so issues at home.” Secondary Assistant Head 3.</i></p> <p><b>Parental Substance Use;</b> <i>“Issues with parents, as in alcohol misuse, drugs” Primary EWO 1.</i></p> <p><b>Holidays;</b> <i>“unauthorized holidays at the moment.” Primary Learning Mentor 3.</i></p>

	<p><b>Priority;</b>  <i>"we've had a couple of families where the parents have taken a very lax attitude to schooling."</i> Primary Head Teacher 1.</p> <p><b>Finances;</b>  <i>"2nd part of it is very much lined to financial, so that other kind of category, which is all about barriers as simple as not having the right school shoes that day, therefore easy not to attend school. Or not having money for food, therefore stay at home, so it can be very small financial issues, but they become easy to take a day of."</i> Secondary Deputy Head 2.</p>
<b>School:</b>	<p><b>Unmet Learning Need;</b>  <i>"But with special educational needs I think we often find that incidences of school refusal or non-attendance are really quite high because of the anxieties that children have around their difficulties and not being able to access the curriculum"</i>  Secondary SENCo 2.</p> <p><b>Learning Environment;</b>  <i>"Children who don't find the school environment very easy. Some do, some don't. School suits some and not others."</i>  Primary Head 3.</p> <p><b>Relationships Peer/Teachers;</b>  <i>"could be that they've got an issue with a member of staff, other students, could be an issue with a lesson itself"</i>  Secondary Assistant Head 3.</p> <p><b>Bullying;</b>  <i>"Anxiety about being bullied in school, either the fact of being bullied or the fear of being bullied."</i> Secondary Pastoral 1.</p>
<b>Social:</b>	<p><b>Expectations;</b>  <i>"Yeah, travellers. We do sometimes. Travellers don't always see the importance of school or may be as much as some of the other people we have. We do often find that our travellers will have low attendance and that's not just because they travel. You know if they're travelling that's one thing cause they might be into different schools or home schooling, but its not, its just they just don't necessarily see the point and that's particularly a patterned absence like, we don't come in on Mondays or we don't come in on Fridays."</i> (Primary SENCo 3)</p> <p><b>Poverty;</b>  <i>"Em I think its endemic in the area, linked very much to low income."</i> Secondary Deputy Head 2.</p> <p><b>Resources;</b>  <i>"They may have to travel a fair way to school by public transport and that public transport is late"</i> Primary Deputy SENCo 2.</p> <p><b>Social Media;</b>  <i>"Lack of sleep for some students as a result of using social media late at night"</i> Secondary Assistant Deputy Head 3.</p>

Fig 9: Subordinate Theme Breakdown.

As can be seen from the examples above, each school provided a range of explanations that they felt could be given for persistent non-attendance. Furthermore a number of the explanations that they provided were categorised under a number of the themes, illustrating the complexity of the issue and the variety of cases they had encountered. Due to the variety of explanations suggested by the participants, the number of roles that they had at the various levels at which PN was explained, my interpretation of this is that the ecological model previously suggested is the best psychological framework through which to view the issue.

As can be seen from some of the examples above participants provided explanatory examples for PN, rather than suggesting a theoretical framework of understanding. This is to say that professionals provided reasons for why it happened from a variety of levels, rather than an overall theoretical explanation, for its existence. Furthermore a number of professionals highlighted the variety of reasons that PN occurs and therefore the need for an individualised 'unpicking' of the issue, furthermore indicating that professionals are using an explanatory for understanding PN, based on the individual needs of the child and family.

Two psychological models were explicitly discussed by professionals as explanations of PN, specifically these were medical and attachment. Examples of which are below;

### **Medical;**

*"if someone is absent for a long period of time through medical reasons we then have to seek the advice of a medical professional in regard to how we are best placed to deal with that young person"* Secondary EWO 3.

### **Attachment;**

*"attachment, whether you mean attachment, emotional resilience all that sort of stuff"* Secondary Assistant Head 3.

*“the ones around attachment because obviously with a child with massive attachment issues you can quite often a by-product of that is school refusal and that’s probably the only real clear model you’ll have with that”* Secondary EWO 2.

While these models were discussed, this discussion was limited and most professionals were not aware of any explicit models of PN. Despite this different models were alluded to when explanations of why PN occurred were discussed, these were seen as contributing factors, rather than providing over arching explanations as previously discussed. Instead participants discussed gave a variety of explanations, which may make sense of an individuals PN, which could be categorised broadly under the four themes as previously identified.

### *Reflection*

*The use of models in education it can be argued is a relatively academic endeavour, and can be quite abstract when these models are theoretical in their nature. Models such as medical, socio-cultural and systemic are theoretical constructions, which are used to make sense of complex behaviours and are often not explicitly named. Furthermore as overarching models of understanding they may not be thought of as relating to persistent non-attendance. On reflection the questioning aimed to illicit the discussion of such models, may not have been clear and therefore it is not assumed that those interviewed are not aware of such models, nor that they do not use them as frameworks for understanding. Instead a question that asked them about these models might have been more useful, with follow up questions about how they felt these models help support understanding or not.*

*The discussion of attachment as a model of understanding was to be expected as all schools in the local authority had recently had training on this model and specific interventions in this area. It is therefore likely that this was at the fore of the participants’ consciousness at this time. The medical model is as previously discussed often predominant in the discourse around PN and its likely hood of discussion if further*

*heightened by the coding around attendance, with medical issues being accepted as authorised absence.*

Additionally to these identified themes an overarching theme emerged which had been anticipated prior to my data collection, due to my professional experiences of PN and reading, that was anxiety. On analysis I consider anxiety to be an overarching theme in relation as to how professionals conceptualise PN, both as a mediating factor and as a result of PN. Professionals discussed anxiety across an ecological framework considering anxiety causing factors across theme areas and individuals (child and parent) experiences. The term 'anxious school refusal' was also used by some for specific cases where anxiety was the primary reason for non-attendance (this is discussed further in relation to language), with some feeling that this was a distinctive type of PN, which required labelling. Anxiety was however also seen as an issue that could be related to any of the other themes, for example poverty, bullying, relationships or unmet learning needs. In these cases the anxiety was seen as a result of these issues and the PN held the function of avoiding that issue and the anxiety it caused. The function of PN also relates to previous writing on this issue and many participants discussed the need to 'unpick' the reasons behind PN in relation to the complexity of the individuals experience and the potential factors influencing their behaviour. The individual nature of PN also came through in the participants explanations of behaviour and is well illustrated by the range of explanations that were provided.

**Findings to the research question: *What are different professionals' experiences and perceptions of persistent non-attendance?***

***Experience of persistent non-attendance:***

The extent to which professionals felt that there was an issue with persistent non-attendance varied slightly across those interviewed, with the following themes being identified;

- **PN being an issue.**

*"It's quite a big issue" Secondary SENCo 2.*

*"Em I think its endemic in the area, linked very much to low income." Secondary Deputy Head 2.*

- **PN not being an issue.**

*"Currently it is not an issue." Primary Learning Mentor 3.*

- **PN being an increasing issue.**

*"There does seem to be a lot more of it than there ever has been I guess. Or may be its because were noticing it more, you know, the reasons for the refusal." Primary EWO 1.*

- **PN being a decreasing issue.**

*"Its not as high an issue as it was and I think this school has made some really good steps towards reducing that." Secondary EWO 1.*

- **Differences between primary and secondary.**

*"I think particularly at secondary its a big issue, becoming bigger all the time." Primary EWO 1.*

Within these themes some felt that it was an issue for only a small number of children, others reported it as a whole school issue and others saw it as something that they were doing well at tackling. Professionals varied again in their knowledge of how their schools persistent absence (PA) data compared with others locally and nationally, the majority were unsure how their statistics compared with others, however some were aware of local and national comparisons.

Across professionals who worked in primary settings, their experience of school refusal/persistent absence was limited. Cases of school refusal were seen as unusual and odd isolated cases. The only exception to this was EWOs who worked with primary schools, which with their job role would be as expected, as this is their criteria for involvement.

Secondary schools had had much greater experience of PN than their primary counterparts and this was true across all the professionals that I interviewed. Their experiences range from direct work with pupils who had experienced PN to strategic responsibility for attendance across school. These professionals included pastoral support workers, SENCo's, EWOs and senior managers. The extent to which secondary participants felt PN was an issue varied, some felt that *"its endemic in the area"* (Secondary School Deputy Head 2), where as others felt that *"very few children persistently non-attend"* (Secondary School SENCo 1). There were variations in how these schools felt that their PN levels compare with other schools locally and nationally, some felt they were in line with local and national averages, however others felt that their PN was higher. The school that felt their PN was higher than average, attributed this to the rurality of their setting and the social deprivation that surrounded them.

***Experiences of Intervention and Dealing with PN:***

***Internal (within school) support:***

The approaches to dealing with PN could broadly be categorised into the three waves of intervention:

<b>Wave 1: Full School Approaches.</b>	<b>Wave 2: Small Group/targeted interventions.</b>	<b>Wave 3: Specific Individualised intervention.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole school attendance tracking.</li> <li>• Whole school attendance strategies.</li> <li>• Whole school incentives.</li> <li>• Differentiation.</li> <li>• Anti-bullying policies.</li> <li>• Senior leaders responsible for attendance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist staff, support staff and over strategic leads.</li> <li>• Breakfast club.</li> <li>• High staff to child ratios.</li> <li>• Automatic letters home when attendance drops.</li> <li>• Attendance clinics.</li> <li>• Small group interventions such as</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative provision.</li> <li>• Alternative curriculum.</li> <li>• Part-time timetables and gradual integration.</li> <li>• Flexi-school/working from home</li> <li>• 1:1 support work.</li> <li>• Additional provision.</li> <li>• Providing resources to the family.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental communication about attendance.</li> <li>• Assemblies that focus on attendance.</li> <li>• Motivating all students to take responsibility for own attendance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social skills, confidence building, nurturing environments.</li> <li>• Specific targeted attendance interventions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet and greet.</li> <li>• Parental meetings.</li> <li>• Home visits.</li> <li>• Individual target setting.</li> <li>• Individual incentives.</li> <li>• Transport support.</li> <li>• Counselling.</li> <li>• Family support.</li> <li>• EWO support.</li> <li>• Key staff member.</li> <li>• External agency support.</li> </ul>

Fig 10: Waves of intervention.

Schools varied on how they dealt with PN and the processes that they had in place for dealing with the issue. Each school engaged parents in the process of attendance when they had concerns; initially this might be through letter or phone communication and then with meetings if the issue was not resolved. The role of the EWO was also discussed at this stage and how these services might be engaged if school level intervention did not resolve the issue. All schools had a senior member of staff who was involved in attendance and had an overall strategic role. As can be seen from the above figure there were more wave 3, individual interventions described than any other. This may be explained by the heterogeneity of the issue of PN as previously identified. If PN occurs for varied, very individual reasons, then it would logically follow that effective intervention (and therefore the intervention offered) would also be individualised. Due to this need for individualised understanding and therefore intervention, wave 3 interventions would be most appropriate due to their very nature. Furthermore many of the wave 2 interventions identified, while tackling small groups of children with attendance difficulties, did work in highly individualised ways and involved expert staff responding to the varied needs of the children with whom they worked. The wave 1 interventions, which applied to whole school, were more focused on attendance encouragement and PN prevention as one senior leader commented;

*“But we try and encourage attendance rather than address the non-attendance if you know what I mean.” Secondary Deputy Head 1.*

These wave 1 approaches were also used to communicate with parents and get the on-board with attendance policy of the school and communicate with them the importance of attendance in relation to achievement.

Support that was available in schools varied greatly, however all monitored whole school attendance closely. Key to this process was identification through tracking;

*“So the first thing is when we can see a child that is becoming a non-attender we start tracking around, we track all the time. When a child falls below into a 92/93% bracket we start kind of putting them at risk of becoming a PA (Persistent Absentee).” Secondary Deputy Head 1.*

Being aware of individual children’s attendance was seen as a key first step in supporting children, however once a difficulty had been identified it was seen as crucial to look beyond the data and a range of approaches were used to do this which could be categorised using three themes; child focused, school focused and family focused.

**Family focused** approaches focused on changing something at a familial level. An example of this that was discussed by all three secondary schools, was the importance of engaging parents in attendance concerns and having regular meetings with them around the issue;

*“We have an AIMs which is an attendance improvement meeting, which the year team leader for that student would lead, with the parent ideally and in most cases with the parent, we look at what might be the barriers... For the majority of our students that works, it’s just about refocusing them and refocusing parents and raising the profile.” Secondary Deputy Head 2.*

Family focused strategies involved meeting the needs of families, which may include financial support to buy things that would enable children to come to school, support with transport;

*“part of the AIMS might pick out that there is a need for family support worker to go and work with the family at home. Again their real remit is about removing barriers. We target our family support worker work around pupil premium students where we can. But that doesn’t mean, it’s not exclusive.”* Secondary Deputy Head 2.

**School focused** approaches focused on the adaptation of the school environment. One school described a full school attendance policy that had many tiered approaches, starting with a whole school drive. This included attendance focused assemblies, an expectation of full attendance and each child being expected to know their own attendance and self monitor this. Rewards were also in place for those who had 100% attendance, or had drastically improved their attendance and year groups ran mini competitions. When there were concerns the school highlighted the importance of an individualised approach that;

*“Its basically finding out what the children like to then act as a target for them which is achievable and once they get it building on that as well”* Secondary Deputy Head 1.

Sometimes the adaptation of the school environment meant the inclusion of additional internal provision;

*“They can have time in our Oasis, they can have time in our ELC, which are small nurture groups for want of a better word, where they can go work without the pressures of the bulk of the students in the school and keep the social anxiety side down. Some we’ve had come in and work through the ELC, we have a young lady at the moment who uses a separate exit, entrance to the school she comes in completely separately, she comes in through a different pathway and she meets with her pastoral head so that she feels comfortable and non-threatened by the school in the mornings”* Secondary SENCo 3.

Or the school may put in place reduced timetables or flexible options;

*“We are able to reduce timetables, do gradual reintroductions.”* Secondary SENCo 3.

**Child focused** approaches focused on individual support for the child, which was often in the context of a wider support system;

*“The first point of call is often the pastoral support worker. So they will offer 1:1 support. We’ve also got the integrated health centre, the XXXX centre where they’re offered support for vulnerable pupils. We would ask any student who was having a problem if they had a nominated member of staff that they felt could help them. So they could have 1:1 support from the member of staff that they chose……The head of year oversees attendance as well. And they offer 1:1 support as well.” Secondary Deputy Head 1.*

The SENCo further expanded on the support available for those who really struggled to attend;

*“I run the inclusion centre which is an alternative. We do have children there who perhaps can’t just access the timetable at the moment. Can’t access school, so they’ll do some 1:1 work with us.” Secondary SENCo 1.*

Therapeutic work was also available in a number of schools;

*“We have a full time school counselor which we restructured our student services two years ago and we budgeted specifically for a full time school counsellor to try and deal with the anxiety elements around education.” Secondary Deputy Head 2.*

Secondary schools by contrast to their primary counterparts discussed the use alternative provision to support their young people with PN; examples of alternative provision included the engaging of charity organisations, outdoor educational provisions, Cyber School and special school outreach. The schools were very keen to seek out alternative provision that would meet the needs of their young people and either provides additional or different input to what they could provide in their setting. Some schools described this as a way reengaging the student with the school, however other saw this as a long-term alternative provision provider that complemented or replaced the school setting.

### ***Experiences of External Support:***

All professionals interviewed discussed external agencies that provided support for PN, however the agencies used varied. All schools discussed the use of the County Educational Welfare Service and one school also had their own EWO role, funded by the school. Other external agencies used included, social care, educational psychology services, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), child health education service (CHES), children linked to and experiencing abusive relationships (CLEAR), Early intervention psychosis team, alternative provision academies (APA), and charity organisations that work with children for a range of reasons including PN, anxiety and special educational needs.

The support work that was provided by these external agencies varied greatly from *“practical things like getting beds and white goods into people’s houses to make sure they are comfortable at home”* (Secondary EWO 3) to *“look for almost assessment of if there were learning barriers as much as anything else, conditions that may affect their ability to be in school”* (Secondary Deputy Head). Other work included providing advice, conducting 1:1 work, providing alternative provision, taking legal action, and funding transportation.

**Below are some case examples of this work:**

*“We use CAMHS all the time, we have got a child whose not school refusing but is absent from school through illness, we’ve just referred her to CHES. She’s got a very rare I don’t even know what its called, but she’s got a rare disorder where she has excruciating migraines is how they present. So we’ve tried to give her a very small timetable, but we just don’t know when its going to hit. So for her own, for her to build up her strength we’ve decided to engage CHES and hopefully with the summer holidays on top we hope she’ll re-engage in September”* Secondary SENCo 1.

*“social care were funding transport so that was helpful, a family support worker who has helped parents attend meetings with school which has then increase positive engagement and that has had a knock on effect with attendance, that’s been very helpful as well. And with CAMHS and other mental health workers, just sort of helping to support the mental health needs of a child that then gave them more confidence in attending.”* Secondary SENCo 2.

*“CAMHS, a child may be depressed, may be anxious, they will do an assessment and advise the education providers what should be done as a*

result, education welfare service obviously will call and education planning meeting if the attendance is that low and then the education planning meeting will look at what needs to be done and once that's done if its still, we'll go down the prosecution route. Sometimes we've obviously had to refer to social care if there's bigger things going on at home and then they will put in the usual things in place to enable parents to parent their children to get them into school and support them in the right way." Secondary Assistant Head 3.

### **Positive experiences;**

*"Certainly for the young lad we had, about 4 years ago, he had a support worker, from CAHMS, who worked with him at home, came to see him in school and worked with me quite closely so that when he couldn't come in I could carry on the same work and then give him feedback so that worked really well for a while" Primary Learning Mentor 3.*

*"Supporting the child themselves, so we've had them come in and talk to the child, talk to the families. We've had them working with the class teachers to provide support in the classroom. So yeah basically getting as much communication between as many different people to put the right support in place really." Primary Deputy Head 2.*

*"I know that we've had quite a few children where family support workers have gone in and I will say on the whole it's been very positive. There are some cases where family support workers gone in and perhaps the parents have felt it's almost a waste of time but it's from my perspective that on the whole they do a good job and they do support the families in their need." Primary Deputy SENCo 2.*

*"It's mainly advice about how you can approach things, different methods to try with different children, but that can mean courses, it can mean individual support. It's a range of that sort of thing but some of it's guidance for us as a school and some of it's guidance for the family, and it's a balance between the two." Primary Head 3.*

Each school had a different view on the provision that they would like to be available for dealing with PN, key themes in the support that school wanted were; expanding provision, the type of education that is available, and greater social emotional mental health support.

### **Example of expanding provision:**

*"I would like to have a facility in our school which is more nurturing, so a nurture group. Where we've got that whole classroom set up, so you've got your sort of little soft nurture group chairs, which is where the students come in and sit there and it's a little more homely so they haven't got that big break from home and that becomes their home area." Secondary SENCo 2.*

*"I think it's really a case of more of the same, you know we, everything takes such a long time. So you can identify a need, you know the route to go to get the support, obviously they've got so many cases they're trying to deal with, so many schools that they're supporting. We need more people I think, more of the resources that we've got a spattering of I suppose." Primary Deputy Head 2.*

### **Example of alternative types of available education and provision:**

*"like I say, when apprenticeships come up, again they change or they don't exist anymore, or there's now a fee or, back in the glory days of where there was a lot more vocational stuff that young people could go on to. Because obviously a lot of kids aren't academic, they're more vocational.....apprenticeships and everything like that, I think it's a tragedy really that that field isn't open to them anymore but that's where we are isn't it?" Secondary EWO 3.*

*"There's a lot of, massive concern about children who haven't got an education, health and care plan but are on the SEN register and they float within the secondary system without any support. And they then end up dropping out because they won't get into school, they won't come into school, parents struggle to get them into school and there's all sorts of problems there and eventually the parents go "You know what I'll home ed you then". Or they just disappear and there's a massive concern around that and I just feel that some of that could be stopped if there was a service within the early help hub that could or FIP or whoever it is that could be called upon to go to the home as an independent body and find out what the concerns of mum and dad or parents or carer or whoever it is." Secondary EWO 2.*

*"Probably needs, either a specialist school or a dedicated area within a mainstream school, where students can come and access a fully integrated nurture group, with a specialist teacher, working within the school to work with those students, so they come in, they feel safe." Secondary SENCo 3.*

### **Example of social, emotional and mental health support:**

*"I think there needs to be more emotional, social wellbeing support within the home that done. Because I think that one of my frustrations is CAMHS threshold is so high now..... But I think having a service that would provide that emotional, social support that could go into the homes of children like this and discuss with the families with the children, you know where do you think that barrier is? What do you think the school or other services can do to help?" Secondary EWO 3.*

*"I think sometimes it would be good to have and I know you can get family support workers that go in in the morning. But if it was easier to get something to put in place to break that cycle of bad morning routines and put a good routine into the home before children get here. Because I think all too often it goes wrong just before school, I think the night before they're fully intending to come to school and then in the morning, either the alarm doesn't go off, they don't get up, the routines aren't there and they just don't come in. And I think to have that routine in place and that's something we can encourage, but we're not there. So it does make it quite difficult, so that would be quite good something around that morning routine." Primary SENCo 3.*

The manner in which professionals felt support should be provided was varied as can be seen from above, some felt this should come from the local authority, be linked to CAMHS and the Early Help Hub. Others however felt that there was more that they could provide within their own system with more funding. An issue that was raised by a number of the schools was a lack of provision for students who struggle to access

mainstream settings, particularly those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and how a specialist setting would reduce PN for these young people. All schools felt that external professionals would be able to contribute to supporting PN, those mentioned included; CAMHS, outdoor education providers, EPs, school nurse CLEAR, EWO, the local authority and charity organisations.

Schools also felt that the way that this support could be provided should vary dependent on the individual situation with one participant saying,

*“As every child is an individual to us in the school, we need to ensure that every child is treated as an individual and each individual problem needs to be taken on its own merit” Secondary SENCo 3.*

Support work professionals would like included; 1:1 work with children and families, workshops, coaching and training for staff. All schools felt that the barrier to providing this provision was financial with a Secondary Deputy Head saying, *“I think those that we use are the right agencies. I just think just that some of them are expensive, too expensive for schools.”* A knock on concern of this was waiting lists and the capacity of certain services. Many of the professionals felt that there was a lot of expertise in their school and from the professionals that they work with, however they wanted more of this. All schools said that finances were the barrier to them or the local authority providing this. All schools felt that external agencies could support in providing the support they would like for children and families, and that they would like them to provide a variety of support including Direct with families, 1:1 with the child, supervision and coaching for staff.

### ***Case Examples of Improved Attendance:***

Each school (except 1 due to their limited experience of PN) provided examples of children who had been supported to make improvements in their attendance, below is a detailed example from each school that is analysed against some of the key themes that have arisen throughout the research;

### **Primary 1:**

*“Yes, one I’m particularly thinking of was very poor attendance. I think its an over determined issue because the family aren’t or the two children I’m particularly thinking of there was a big family break up. Each parent blamed the other for keeping the child off school, its one where I think it was a parental choice to keep the child off school. Each parent blamed the other, the EWO was involved and I think once her involvement then the attendance went above 95%. And I think it was the realization of court orders and that kind of thing that made the parents wake up to the fact that the child had to attend school. It was also just making sure that the school were making sure the school were putting in the support I think. It’s further complicated because the issue was also one around transition so the attendance also improved when they were in year 7. And there were TAC meetings that’s why I was aware of them, there were TAC meetings that I attended around the child because there were all sorts of child protection issues with the parents splitting up and all sorts of things. So I know that attendance did improve for both children, we had one here and one that transitioned from here to XXXXXX and I think it was just the fact that the authorities got involved actually that made the difference.” Primary Head 1.*

Within the above example the causes of the PN were perceived as the familial circumstances and parental choice. School support is alluded to through the statement “making sure the school were putting the support in”, the engagement of the EWO, TAC meetings and involvement of the local authority. Furthermore the parents being made aware of the legal implications of non-attendance were seen as a positive and a responsibility that perhaps required highlighting with the parents as a priority. Within this example a multi-disciplinary and multi-tiered approach is evident, with the school utilising internal and external resources to support the child and family with addressing the issue of PN. Furthermore across school working is mentioned, with transition being raised as a supportive factor, potentially allowing the children/family to make a fresh start. But also highlighting the importance of across school collaboration in providing support and also providing information that can be useful in identifying and addressing PN.

### **Primary 3:**

*“Actually, we’ve got a lovely little girl who, again, was one I was picking up and bringing to school every morning to try and break that cycle of not coming or coming in very late, lateness is still an issue, but she’s here pretty much*

*every day. And that was really about engaging with mum and getting her to feel that actually, we weren't judging her and that we would support her and her child. And up until the middle of last week she had 100% attendance this term, coming from a whole school history of 70% attendance. So, it is great, just need to get her here on time now." Primary Learning Mentor 3.*

In this example the perceived reason behind the PN is due to parents difficulties in organisation and morning routines. In this example the support that was provided is a within school approach involving targeted individualised support, at wave 3. In this case key to supporting the parent in enabling her child to attend, was the school working with her and making clear that the school was not judging her. As previously identified the importance of getting parents 'on side' with the school was seen as a crucial part in any intervention in supporting PN, at any level. Furthermore this case illustrates a longitudinal approach to PN and supporting attendance generally, now the child's attendance is 100% the school still want to work on punctuality with the family as this can still impact on missing aspects of learning.

### **Secondary 1:**

*"My other one is the lad who went on the horticultural, he was here on a very part time timetable, everyday, but just refusing to engage. He wouldn't engage with the TA, he would only, severe attachment disorder so he would only talk to a very small number of adults. In fact he spent the first 3 years talking through his bag with his bag up here. And in primary school he would talk through a toy rabbit. So we just didn't see the value of him being here. And just sat there, it was no good for him and it was having an impact on his self-esteem. So we put several placements, a couple of them were horticultural but we also had a part time contract with XXXX, so he went down to XXXX every day. His attendance was really good, so it was just finding that right balance for him, of where he would feel he was, because he's a reasonably bright boy. But just couldn't access mainstream. He was obviously excelling there, he attended for a term pretty much every day and engaged and that was the difference." Secondary SENCo 1.*

In this example the reasons for PN and lack of engagement while in school are identified as being due to the child having a pre-existing attachment disorder. The complexity of the attachment disorder and the impact this has on the child's ability to develop relationships with adults and engage with education are named as the key factors in the PN. Approaches to intervention are discussed by the school, all at a wave 3, individualised level; including a part-time timetable and teaching

assistant support, all of which were unsuccessful in supporting engagement. In this case alternative provision commissioned by the school that met the individual needs of the students, by appealing to their interests were successful in improving attendance and engagement in learning. This case raises an issue that is not covered in this research project, however may be seen as related to PN and that is disengagement with learning, despite attendance. In such cases the child or young person is attending school regularly, however they disengage with their learning through refusal while in the educational setting. While this issue is not covered by this research project, again it may indicate a further avenue of investigation in relation to how schools manage and what is seen to cause such disengagement.

### **Secondary 2:**

*“Lots. Ok so we had a female year 8 at the time who wasn’t attending for more than, I think her attendance got down to high 70’s. We had some concerns that family unit was not healthy for her, so we used our EWO to do some home visits, to look at family living conditions. Transpires that mum wasn’t very well at all and probably not fit to be able to look after her. So we then worked with social services to be able to make assessment on the house and mum’s ability to care for her, child then went into care and we then worked with her, we did a small intervention program with a group of 6 girls who had very similar barriers that were about self esteem, she didn’t feel very good about herself, so she didn’t really want to be in school and make to feel worse. And that was really good, so she did understanding themselves, we took them to XXXX owl sanctuary to work with horses to get that just different environment to feel more positive. She is now in year 10 and she turns up to school every day, her attendance is high 90’s, she’s her academic performance has risen considerably and she’s found some subjects that she really enjoys and has some real aspiration for her future.” Secondary Deputy Head 2.*

This case example provides a very clear description of a child who is unable to attend due to being a young carer. In this case the intervention work that was done initially was school based, wave 3 from the school employed EWO and then external agencies stepped in, namely social care and the local authority. In this instance, again support was short term, long term and longitudinal. The local authority made changes for the family by taking the child into care, due to an unsuitable living environment and the school provided wave 2 and 3 support subsequently. This case provides another clear example of the

importance of multidisciplinary working, targeted support, which meets individual needs and the importance of relationships between school and child.

### **Secondary 3:**

*“Yea, we’ve had quite a few, which have used the pathway through the Oasis, that is our predominant go to because it’s a quiet, safe place. Students will come in, they’ll work on a flexi-timetable. We have one young man at the minute who went into, he has been recently diagnosed with on the spectrum, but his area on the spectrum is multi-sensory issue. He has gone on a flexi timetable to slowly reintroduce him to school, he has certain lessons where he is in the Oasis and his favourite lessons he goes to. He is now fully integrated back into the school timetable. There are the odd blip, he had a day off last week but other than that over the last three to 4 weeks his attendance has become much higher.” Secondary SENCo 3.*

In this case example the main identified factor is the child’s ASD and associated sensory issues, due to this the schools interventions were predominantly around altering the learning environment to respond to these identified needs. This example provides an example of wave 2 intervention; the use of small group specialist provision (the Oasis) and wave 3 individualised targeted support (flexi-timetable). This demonstrates a multi-level individual response to the individual child’s needs, where the child was supported through the use of in school resources and flexibility.

### **EWO experiences:**

EWO experiences are also included in here due to their cross-school working and the wealth of experience they bring to the issue.

*“I’ve got one, a couple of years ago a lad hit year 7, having come from primary into secondary and just completely had a melt down and wouldn’t come into school. And we got CAMHS involved and got a diagnosis of autism with an anxiety around school and because school were the aware of this they worked with the CAMHS team. He then came back into school and managed really, really well. So that’s one definite and actually the early support service has used him as a case study because it went so well. And that was brilliant.” Primary EWO 1.*

As with some of the previous examples, the primary reason for non-attendance was around a child's ASD, difficulty adapting to a new environment and associated anxiety. In this case the EWO provides a case example of a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting attendance that includes the EWO service, CAMHS and the school. In this case multiple professionals have contributed to supporting the child and family, in reducing the anxiety associated with the learning environment and taking steps to enable the child to attend. This case also demonstrates the value of sharing good practice, once it is identified.

*"Now, it can be a mixture of, because of the welfare side of it, the pastoral side of it. However, a lot of what it's to do with is that there is a consequence to them not coming into school. So you do find that when a school doesn't have education welfare you will have a lot of children that aren't attending. They will feel they are getting away with it because nothing happens. However, once you get to first warning, educational planning meeting, final warning, it is then that children think, oh hang on, there is a consequence, or parents think, there is a consequence and suddenly get the kids back into school. You know, carrot, stick, bribery, you know, it's a combination of those three really, that gets them back in." Secondary EWO 3.*

In this case example the factors that support individual children to attend are seen as varied. The value of pastoral support from specialist professionals (EWO) is identified, while also valuing the formal legal process of educational planning meetings and legal proceedings. Here the EWO discusses the importance of the "mixture" and the role of the EWO.

The case study examples of improved attendance were chosen due to their representation of those interviewed and illustrated the varied nature of the cases that schools experience. A consistent theme across professionals was the importance of good relationships between school, home and other involved professionals. I infer from these varied examples that relationship building was seen as fundamental characteristic of successful support, with all other elements being secondary to this. While a variety of characteristics were seen to make support successful, there was multiple mention of; flexibility, tailored

support, workers personality, understanding of the families background, being non-judgemental, consistency, collaborative/multi-disciplinary working, building of trust with families and working closely with them.

***Role of the EP in supporting PN:***

Whether or not schools would engage an EP in supporting a child or family was a theme that arose out of the interviews, with participants' views being varied. Two out of the three secondary schools felt that they would engage the EP with these cases where they thought there were unanswered questions around the cause of the PN and gaining the child's voice;

*"Where I've got a child who despite intervention is not engaging I would ask the EdPsych to become involved." Secondary SENCo.*

*"We use the EdPsych service to give us information with regard to the child's well-being and how we can reintegrate them back into school" Secondary SENCo 1.*

While others felt that EPs would not have a role in such cases;

*"If we were to ring up and ask to see an EP because of a persistent absence we wouldn't get an EP for that. I mean certainly as a school they wouldn't be able to fund just for that. If it was a bigger issue, if we were able to say that part of what were getting is that there's concerns, are that is being manifested as non-attending, then it would be different. But we tend to get our EPs in through other issues that are going on within school and around education, such as perhaps some disruptive behaviour or some concerns around accessing learning or processing or whatever it might be. But just specifically for to call an EP in around non-attendance we wouldn't do it because the service is so expensive anyway and we have such a limited time scale." Secondary EWO 2.*

While analysing the interviews I understood that some of the professionals felt and said that they saw EPs as having a role in supporting children, their families and the schools in dealing with PN, and this is very much reflected in the work that schools I work with request. However the school that did not feel that they would engage with the EP service saw the EP role as being firmly within learning, rather than any of the other factors which may effect a child's ability to attend. As can be seen in the above quote this professional did not feel that they would be able to engage an EP in PN cases, unless they were other concerns and that that had manifested itself in attendance

difficulties. Another concern was the cost of engaging the EP service and waiting times, that it would be too expensive to engage an EP for cases of PN and that the service itself would not necessarily have capacity if a referral were made.

EPs involvement in PN cases is an area that may warrant further exploration as to why schools may have formed beliefs that EPs do not work with PN cases, what perpetuates these beliefs and whether there is a general reluctance from EPs to engage with such work. Anecdotally from my own case load and informal discussion with EPs within the local authority PN was an issue that many had had experience with and had been the key factor in referrals being made to the service. It is also important to add that primarily 1 school made these statements and therefore it cannot be assumed that this is representative of all schools views of EPs roles in PN cases across the local authority.

**Findings to the research question: *How useful is the term ‘school refusal’ as a concept for professionals and what other language is used to describe persistent non-attendance?***

Professionals used a range of language to describe attendance below 85%, these included: Persistent absentee, persistent absence, anxious school refusal, below expected, at risk, poor and very poor attendance. This language had been chosen because:

**Persistent absentee:**

*“I don’t know if it’s the school here used it or its part of the system XXXX thing, it’s a SIMs thing, just that’s what we use.” Primary Deputy Head 2.*

*“I guess the language that we use within education, it how the government categorise it so we use the same term.” Secondary Deputy Head 2.*

*“in line with government.” Secondary Deputy Head.*

**Persistent absence:**

*“I think its things that we, yea its just the language that’s used in the council service I suppose.” Primary EWO 1.*

*“So it is persistent absence because they’re away a lot” Secondary Assistant Head 3.*

*“Well that’s come from the government, that’s government lead.” Secondary Pastoral 1.*

### **Anxious school refusal:**

*“Because somebody told me to, the educational welfare officer.” Primary Learning Mentor 3.*

### **Poor attendance:**

*“I think it’s the guidelines that we’re given and I’d use it above 85% as I said anything below 90% I’d be looking at as poor attendance, obviously sometimes there is a reason for it, you know sickness or illness, but yeah that’s considered poor attendance I would say.” Primary SENCo 3.*

### **Very Poor:**

*“Just adopted them I suppose, its common parlance.” Primary Head 1.*

### **Below expected:**

*“I just suppose its years of doing attendance and knowing about children and talking about what’s expected..... so this is just genuinely known vocabulary I suppose.” Primary Head 3.*

### **At risk:**

*“I suppose it reflects 1 at risk because it makes them vulnerable if they’re not in school. But also at risk of not making required progress.” Secondary SENCo 1.*

This language had come from a number of sources, experience of common parlance of professionals, coding of SIMs database, training from other professionals (EWO) and governmental recommendation. Participants felt that they would use other language if it were in common parlance and if it added meaning to the description of the child’s attendance difficulties. Based on this the term ‘anxious school refusal’ was seen as useful as was ‘school refusal’ in extreme cases, however this was not a term used regularly. One participant comment that:

*“school refusal to me is a deliberate thing that they are doing, where as when it’s anxiety based I think refusal is not a good word to use” Primary EWO 1.*

'Truancy' was however not a word that was used and this was felt to be particularly not relevant in primary settings due to the level of autonomy primary children have and the role of the parent in ensuring their attendance.

There was a level of consistency with the language used with 'persistent absence' or 'persistent absenteeism' being the term most used by professionals, which was inline with governmental guidance. With a secondary SENCo saying "*We use the language laid out by the educational welfare officers, to ensure that its linked or standardised across the UK.*" Other professionals did use terms such as "at risk" to describe attendance, due to the safeguarding concerns associated with the non-attendance and the impact on educational attainment.

'School refusal' was not however a term that was regularly used to describe persistent non-attendance. Professionals discussed that different situations may require different language and that this would influence how they described a child's absence

*"I think it would depend on the context in which we were discussing it, if it was a less formal setting then we may use sort of a wider range. But if it was in an incidence where we were talking to again EWO or in a multi agency meeting for example, when the police are involved, social care are involved we would probably use the more define terms that are current across the table."*  
Secondary SENCo 3.

This quote highlights the importance of context in the language used and how this may change when professional meetings, or legal action are involved. It also highlights the importance of consistency in clarity as to parents about their legal obligation to ensure that their children regularly attend school and the consequences of them not meeting this obligation. I believe this indicates the importance of language use and its accuracy when dealing with the legal issues that surround persistent non-attendance. The legal requirement of parents to ensure that their children attend school introduces an additional dimension to the importance of language use, which may not be present in other school

issues. Furthermore it highlights the awareness of schools in ensuring they use the correct language when discussing attendance with parents and other professionals.

While there was consistency in the language used, there was also an acknowledgement that different language may be used once this clarification of why a young person was absent or when talking informally with colleagues or students (as discussed above). Furthermore the limitations of 'school refusal' as a term was discussed;

*"I think when you talk about school refusal you're talking about a child making a choice and I think a lot of schools try to do is recognise that for lots of those children it's not about a direct decision not to come to school and we recognise that actually if you can help and support them with the difficulty that's causing them not to want to come to school you can often sort of make some progress. So I think it's just trying to be less antagonistic in terms of language really." Secondary SENCo 2.*

This quote suggests that there may be a loaded nature to the term 'school refusal' and that using that description of behaviour that indicates choice can be misleading. As the above quote suggests 'school refusal' may be interpreted as child or young person is refusing to attend, rather than there being genuine reasons as to why attendance is difficult, or that parents may be refusing school for their children. Furthermore the term 'school refusal' was seen as being antagonistic;

*"I said really to not try and be too antagonistic around it and show a recognition that we understand that the reasons behind not attending are quite complex and that's what needs support rather than sort of dragging a child through the school gates basically." Secondary SENCo 2.*

### **Summary of Findings Part 1:**

#### **Findings to the research question: *How is persistent non-attendance conceptualised by different professionals?***

Professionals provided varied explanations for why PN might occur and this fitted well within a systemic/ecological model of understanding, with

explanations at child, home, school and social levels. No professionals provided a singular conceptualisation of the issue, instead suggesting it to be a heterogeneous issue that occurred for various, individual reasons.

**Findings to the research question: *What are different professionals' experiences and perceptions of persistent non-attendance?***

Professionals varied in their experience of PN and their perception of the presence or extent of the issue. A key theme was that secondary professionals had a greater experience of PN than their primary counterparts. Interventions that were used by schools to prevent and address PN were evident across wave 1,2 and 3, and the use of external agencies. From this it was found that the greatest amount of interventions were in wave 3, individualised intervention and that this fitted in with previous findings about professionals' conceptualisations of PN as a heterogeneous issue, therefore requiring individual support. Case study examples illustrate the variation of the support that schools are providing and the multidisciplinary way in which this is delivered. Furthermore, experiences of external support varied in positivity and schools suggested that they want more access to external support, greater provision and specialist provision to meet the needs of young people who are struggling to access mainstream environments.

**Findings to the research question: *How useful is the term 'school refusal' as a concept for professionals and what other language is used to describe persistent non-attendance?***

There was found to be a consistency in the language used across professionals with 'persistent absence' or 'persistent absenteeism' being used most commonly. Professionals reported that this was due to governmental thresholds and definitions, and also to ensure consistency across those involved. Specialist terms were used once further analysis had taken place for example 'anxious school refusal'

and were used to provide further clarification of the difficulties that the child experienced. 'School refusal' was not seen to be a useful term by those professionals interviewed, with many raising concerns about this term suggesting the behaviour was voluntary, rather than a result of other difficulties.

### *Reflection*

*The findings of this section of the research reflected my own experiences of working with professionals who engage with the issue of PN. The awareness of many, often co-existing reasons for PN and the complexity of the issue felt very clear. As did the multiple influences of this issue, rather than a within child focus. I was not surprised by the finding that primary schools had less experience of PN than secondary, however I was pleased to be able to find out about primary staff's awareness of the issue and an acknowledgement that often attendance could start to become an issue at this time. The findings of consistent language use I felt was really positive, it reflected the literature and guidance from the government that on the issue and did not place responsibility onto the child. The use of more specific terms I also felt was useful as this demonstrated the professionals wish to understand the behaviour further and therefore how best to provide support.*

*During this work I felt a high level of engagement from the professionals that I interviewed. They engaged with me enthusiastically and shared their experiences with me with honesty and candour. While it is always possible that professionals will be have a positivity bias towards their own practice, the examples appeared genuine and were supported by case examples and were mirrored across the professionals interviewed.*

## 4.2. Part 2 Findings:

### 4.2.1. Descriptive Data:

Data for part 2 of the research was obtained from 3 primary parents, 1 secondary parent and two primary children. All primary families put forward by schools took part, with only 1 child opting not to take part. Each of the secondary schools verbally recruited participants, with some passing on the details for 2 families. Drop out occurred in a range of ways; Two families did not take calls, return them or respond to text messages. Two families did not attend an arranged meeting at the school, despite verbal consent. One of these families then agreed to a home visit, however did not answer the door on my arrival or respond to phone calls. A further family rescheduled visits over a number of months and then did not respond to contact. As identified in part 1's findings, PN appears to be a greater issue for secondary students and their families, which may therefore explain why participants from this area were more difficult to recruit. Out of the 4 families that were interviewed persistent non-attendance was an ongoing issue for 3 of them, 2 of them were currently persistently non-attending and 1 had left to be home schooled due this. During the course of the research another student had also left to be home schooled due to persistent non-attendance and another had transferred to an alternative school. The family of the one child who was regularly attending was on a reduced timetable, he also had an older brother who had persistently non-attended and was home schooled.

Due to the gaps in the data that I was able to obtain it was not possible to analyse primary and secondary data separately, therefore results from parents and children from both are presented together as a data set. Data from the parent from primary 2 however does span both primary and secondary as this family included two children for whom attendance had been challenging, 1 who was in primary provision and a second who was of secondary age but was accessing Cyber School.

#### 4.2.2 Part 2 Findings:

**Findings to the research question: *What is the lived experience of persistent non-attendance for children and families.***

##### ***Lived experience:***

The four parents interviewed stated that PN had had a large impact on their life, the child's and the families as a unit;

*"It's become all consuming. Not so much now because we're not in that situation but it was just a nightmare." Primary Parent 1.*

*"Good days she'll moan from bedtime onwards and as soon as she wakes up in the morning she'll moan about going to school. That's a good day and a bad day she'll make out she's poorly and she'll cry and she'll beg me all the way to school to turn the car around." Primary Parent 3.*

*"Because if things weren't right in school it would impact on at home, when he came home...Yes, so I would be getting the backlash." Primary Parent 2.*

The impact on the child and family was particularly clear in relation to parents trying to physically get their children into school when they were highly anxious;

*"I was always practically dragging him off to school sometimes" Primary Parent 2.*

*"Then I'm literally dragging her through the school to get her to the office." Primary Parent 3.*

*"Yes, so he was basically getting ready and going up there. Umm, and when we got there you could just see the fear on his face. He'd panic, he'd cry he'd get out and he'd run. He was just running home, to his bedroom, because it was his safe space" Primary Parent 2.*

Effects on the child that parents described came under themes physical and mental health symptoms that their children had had in relation to PN,

##### ***Physical;***

*"He started getting lots of headaches and tummy aches and sickness and was always going to the doctors because of the headaches" Primary Parent 2.*

*"Yes. Erm, we start with tears, feeling sick, to the point of getting hysterical." Primary Parent 1.*

*“it’s been quite difficult at times with the tears and the sickness and um, saying she generally feels unwell” Primary Parent 3.*

These descriptions of the physical symptoms expressed by children raises the issue of determining the causes behind such feelings as one parent described;

*“As a parent, yes you want to keep the child home and, you know, because they’re saying that they’re poorly but at the end of the day you know that she has to go to school and it’s your job as parent to get her to school and when you realise that okay, maybe, maybe she isn’t poorly and there is a reason why she doesn’t want to go to school, which we all know the reasons. But yes, it’s difficult, because you know, some days she might be poorly and I’m sending her to school.” Primary Parent 3.*

As this parents states the issue of illness can present a real challenge to parents as they are faced with trying to determine whether or not the child is physically ill, or whether these are symptoms of anxiety caused by not wanting to go to school as described below;

*“so he was basically getting ready and going up there. Umm, and when we got there you could just see the fear on his face. He’d panic, he’d cry he’d get out and he’d run. He was just running home, to his bedroom, because it was his safe space.” Primary Parent 2.*

### ***Mental Health;***

Parents also raised mental health effects on the child;

*“Upset because I know that I’m going back the next day and I’m going to be feeling ughh!” Primary Child 3.*

*“I’ve been really upset.” Primary Child 3.*

*“Umm, she’s anxious, she’s uptight, she’s angry.” Primary Parent 3.*

*“I guess personally would be things like mental health, self-esteem” Primary Parent 2.*

*“He spends all his time up in the bedroom. He’s eating more. He’s depressed. It’s horrible really.” Secondary Parent 3.*

Two parents also discussed harmful behaviour. One had experienced physical resistance from her child in response to trying to make him go to school;

*“....because where he would get violent and come towards me with knives and things like that” Secondary Parent 3.*

This quote highlights the challenges that some parents face when trying to support their children to attend and the severity of some of the behaviour that they can experience in opposition to this. Violence towards parents was raised by only one parent, however others described behaviour dangerous to the child;

*“...and eventually, where he tried to throw himself out of the car, while it was moving, on the way to school.” Primary Parent 1.*

Both children interviewed stated that they did not like school, saying, “I didn’t really like it, didn’t enjoy it” (Primary Child 1) and “I don’t like school” (Primary Child 3).

Wider effects on the child and family of trying to get their children into school were also raised;

*“Because they’re threatening you with court, fines and all that sort of stuff umm, so you’re in a position where you’re the parent and you’re meant to get them there.” Primary Parent 2.*

*“They sent Community Police around to try and help to get him to school. And really, looking back, when you’ve got anxiety like that it was just too much. You know?” Primary Parent 2.*

### **Language use:**

A further aspect of the lived experience was the language used that parents and children heard to describe the persistent non-attendance, the terms heard by these families were ‘persistent non-attendance’ and ‘poor’.

### **Persistent Non-Attendance:**

*“Persistent non-attendance I think, is the one phrase that I’ve heard.” Primary Parent 1.*

*“Persistent non-attendance. Whereas to me, the anxious one would be better, it just sounds better doesn’t it?” Secondary Parent 3.*

### **Poor:**

*“she said it was very poor, well, not very poor but I, I need to start coming to school more.” Primary Student 3.*

*"I've had letters in the post to say that her attendance is poor. Umm, teachers in school have just said that her attendance is very poor and we need to address it." Primary Parent 3.*

As can be seen from the quotes different families experienced different language and for some this was related to how they explained the difficulties with attendance, for example;

*"I suppose it sums up how he was." Primary Parent 1.*

*"Whereas to me, the anxious one would be better, it just sounds better doesn't it? Rather than say..... There's a reason why he's refusing and its because he's anxious, depressed and that's why he's refusing." Secondary Parent 3.*

In summary the lived experience of PN was different for all families interviewed, however there were themes that ran through all their experiences: The wide ranging impact of the PN, the impact on physical and mental health, the wider implications of PN and the language that was used by professionals to discuss this with them.

**Findings to the research question: *How do children and families make sense of persistent non-attendance? What do children and families and perceive as the causes of persistent non-attendance?***

A number of explanations were put forward by parents and children for why PN occurs under 2 of the core themes identified in part 1. Child and School. Subordinate themes included; mental health/anxiety, ASD, unmet needs, specific lessons, learning environment, relationships with peers/ teachers and social factors. Below is a table illustrating the core and subordinate themes:

<b>Core theme</b>	<b>Subordinate theme and examples.</b>
<b>Child:</b>	<p><b>Mental Health/Anxiety;</b>  <i>"But actually, looking back now, now I've got so much more knowledge, it was classic anxiety really, you know." Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"I've got anxiety, erm, cause I didn't really like school. And that's it." Primary Child 1.</i></p>

	<p><i>"Mental health isn't it really?" Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"I think its because there's obviously anxieties" Secondary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><b>ASD;</b></p> <p><i>"Only to do with the autism side. The autism and the sensory issues." Secondary Parent 3.</i></p>
<p><b>School:</b></p>	<p><b>Unmet Learning Need;</b></p> <p><i>"if I had to pin point it I would say it's totally because they didn't check to see if he was dyslexic and I kept saying there's a problem. They knew he had learning difficulties and he'd never had a problem up until the point where there was this new teacher and it started in the September, and we then left in probably February/March. And he just felt, well, in his words, he felt stupid, and thick, and it's just built up this whole wall now. And we've got these problems going on." Primary Parent 1.</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers going too fast, not explaining things, not giving him time to process it because he's got a processing issue. So, he's not having time to process anything and then he gets himself in such a state." Secondary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><b>Learning Environment;</b></p> <p><i>"being in such a large classroom with lots of children. She doesn't like being, you know, in such a large classroom basically. She feels enclosed." Primary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"when he went to secondary school, that was it. It just, things just, that was it, it was too much for him, he just couldn't cope." Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"He doesn't like the lessons. The classrooms are an issue because obviously, yes, they're in small groups, but there's too much noise going on and children shouting." Secondary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"You have maths every day don't you and you find it really hard." Primary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"PE's another one, that's becoming quite an issue at the moment." Primary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><b>Relationships Peer/Teachers;</b></p> <p><i>"it could be something to do with the teachers" Secondary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"I wouldn't say bad relationship with her teacher, but not a very good relationship with her teacher doesn't help because she has to see that teacher every day." Primary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"He was made to feel stupid because he was put into the baby class and therefore, had built this barrier against any kind of school work and that was the start of it." Primary Parent 1.</i></p>

Fig 11. Family Explanations of PN.

As the above table indicates, while each family had their own individual experiences of PN, these experiences came under 2 themes, child and school. Under these two themes were subordinate themes in line with those put forward in part 1. Some of the families felt quite clear as to what had caused the PN, for example anxiety or unmet learning needs, however others felt unsure. For each of these families though, even when they felt clear on why the PN had occurred it was not seen as straight forward or one-dimensional. As can be seen from the examples above, elements such as anxiety or unmet learning needs were viewed as having a knock on effects on other areas such as confidence and self-esteem, exacerbate the already existing issue. Similarly the school environment was a complex factor, which is explored later in more detail in relation to the support that families received, the actions that the school took to try and resolve the PN and the perceived success of this.

Interestingly none of these family focused on familial or social factors, as were raised in part 1 by professionals. While the small number of participants that contributed to part 2 and the unique characteristics of their experiences may explain this difference, it may also represent a bias in the families' perspectives. Participant families may have been less likely to identify familial contributory factors to non-attendance for a number of reasons, not wanting to be judged, not feeling an issue exists or seeing them as secondary, rather than causal factor. However what can be seen from these findings is that for the 4 families interviewed the explanation of the children's' non-attendance was identified as relating to characteristics of the child and/or school.

**Findings to the research question: *How do families perceive the support offered by schools and other professionals?***

***School Based Support:***

The families’ experience of school based support varied greatly across those who were interviewed. However the support discussed came under 2 core themes, wave 2 and 3 interventions, as can be seen in the table below.

Wave 2: Small Group/targeted interventions.	Wave 3: Specific Individualised intervention.
<p><i>“She has been put into a smaller group in maths but it obviously needs some tweaking there.” Primary Parent 3.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“My mum came into school” Primary Child 1.</i></li> <li>• <i>“we have our TAC meetings and obviously they do ask if there’s anything I’m concerned about or if there’s anything he needs help with” Secondary Parent 3.</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yes, she goes to reception and gets walked into class by Miss XXXX.” Primary Parent 3.</i></li> <li>• <i>“he can use a time out card and that he could go and do his lessons in the XXXX if he’s struggling.” Secondary Parent 3.</i></li> <li>• <i>“they’ve tried putting things in place where he can do a flexi timetable, can come in over the half term to have a look around, introducing people from outside to come and talk”. Secondary Parent 3.</i></li> <li>• <i>“trying to make it more regular timetable so he knew who he was going to be with. Umm, but it still wasn’t working 100% and I think that’s when they decided that actually, new term we need a solid foundation and a consistent person to be with him. And obviously, this is what we’ve come back to so and so far so good.” Primary Parent 2</i></li> </ul>

Fig 12: Waves of Intervention.

Interestingly all the support that was discussed by families came under either wave 2 or 3 intervention, with the majority of this being wave 3, individualised support. No families discussed wave 1, whole school support, in the support that they received and only 1 described wave 2,

targeted small group work. What the school-based support looked like for these families varied greatly and this would fit in with the varied explanations that the families provided for why the PN had occurred in the first instance. Each school had supported the families in different ways, responding to the individual needs of the child. An underlying theme that can be inferred from these findings is the importance of understanding the individual child and family in the providing of the interventions, as if this was not present then the wave 3 support provide might be inappropriate and therefore unsuccessful.

***External Support:***

All the families interviewed had experienced some form of external support, the level of support and the agencies involved varied in terms of the duration of involvement and point at which external support was sought. The complexity of one families experience is described below;

*“We had to pay for an ed psych report. We then had to pay for a child psychologist in XXXX, which was £150 for 40 minutes. So, he stopped going to school about Easter, eventually CHES got involved in the summer, and have given us a tutor until Christmas, then that was reviewed and then from Christmas until Easter we’ve got them and then it’s being reviewed and then they don’t think that we will then get CHES again because they like to just do short periods with the hope that they will then get the child back into school but I don’t think XXXX will ever go back to XXXX School. And we have just got CAMHS. We were referred to CAMHS and we have just got this in the last month. Which has taken nearly a year.” Primary Parent 1.*

This family had had quite a complex experience where their child had originally been educated at an independent school where issues with attendance had developed due to an unidentified learning need. Once the family had moved to a local authority, additional support had been sought, however they had experienced a long wait and the situation had escalated quickly. Due to this wait the parents were now self-funding two days a week and an independent special school to try and re-engage their child with education and are now working with specialist services such as CAMHS. A wait for services was also experienced by other families;

*“External? Well, for XXXX, yes, (EP). So, and actually, yes, she came out for YYYY and she opened everything up for me, basically. So, while I was in the school we never got to see (EP) with YYYY. It was only at the end when I’d taken him out and they said, we did say that we would see YYYY to see an educational psychologist so we’re still going to honour that and that was once I’d taken him out. And then she opened everything up for me after speaking to her. Whereas if that had happened two years before that, you, then actually we might have been a lot further ahead.” Primary Parent 2.*

This family included two young people who had struggled with attendance and two very different experiences of support. EP involvement as described above was greatly valued by this parent and the understanding this had brought. Other support had also been provided by specialist social care projects;

*“She’s from a SKIP project so she’s helping out in school and at home. And has kind of made us all a bit more aware of his needs, complex sensory needs and how important those sensory breaks are” Primary Parent 2.*

Alternative provision had also been used by this family and other agencies such as EWO, CAMHS and police had been involved;

*“eventually got online school, took along time, had to be registered, school wouldn’t take him on due to number and statistics. Online is OK, quite a fuffed way of doing things. Send word docs-write it up-can be long-winded. Can do work, takes time to write it up.” Primary Parent 2.*

A third family had also had a number of external agencies involved, including CAMHS, EP, EWO, family support and the ASD team;

*“From other professionals, it was obviously from the autism team and we saw the psychologist lady down at XXXX. Myself and the school, obviously the EWO and obviously because of the bereavements in the family.” Secondary Parent 3.*

*“CAMHS were involved for a little bit and they sort of disappeared. And then there was, umm, I think he had a youth worker, I think, came in and tried to do stuff with him and obviously a family support worker we had here for a little bit. XXXX is it? She’s on the ball with us now. And now finally, the autism team have now engaged him” Secondary Parent 3.*

***If the support was perceived as useful, what do families and children believe made this effective?***

The interviews indicated that support experienced by families had been varied, some had been positive and others negative, with some being thought to be damaging. The below table breaks these experiences down under the two headings;

<b>Positives:</b>	<b>Negatives:</b>
<p><i>"Just the CHES really." Primary Parent 1.</i></p> <p><i>"You went to XXXX, you enjoyed that. He used to go to BF adventures, on a Monday. You really enjoyed that didn't you? It's all being positive. Is there anything that didn't work XXXX? No, I don't think so, not here anyway." Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"You don't, you prefer to be dropped off to Miss XXXX in the office than go straight into class?" Primary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"They calm you down don't they? When you're anxious and XXXX takes you out, not XXXX, Miss XXXX takes you out for a run around the playground....Yes, but she does if you need to, because you were quite angry one day weren't you?....Umm, I think they understand you as well don't they? Sometimes they understand you." Primary Parent 3.</i></p> <p><i>"Lots of positives with XXXX, EP suggestions to keep anxieties down, keep him here. ZZZ comes to school to see XXX, he really likes her" Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"Just that he was quite understanding with XXXX needs or his problems that he had in going to school." Primary Parent 1.</i></p> <p><i>"Schools more fun. I get to go outside. The lessons are fun." Primary Child 1.</i></p>	<p><i>"Mum drops me off in the office but it, that still doesn't work, it just makes life worse." Primary Child 3.</i></p> <p><i>"I just, seeing my mum there, and then like, it just makes me really upset and I just want to go home." Primary Child 3.</i></p> <p><i>"Umm, and to be honest, they weren't much help up there, to be fair, I didn't think at the time. So yes, he ended up going like into the side unit and part time table and things like that. But it was almost like I was forced to drag him to school." Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"Looking back now I think that's completely the wrong thing to do. Because they're threatening you with court, fines and all that sort of stuff umm, so you're in a position where you're the parent and you're meant to get them there. Yes, so with him it was kind of a lot of pressure really and like I say, it just got to a point in the end, with him, he was, like, having... (interruption). Yes, so that was it with YYYY. Umm, basically, we were getting to the, he was getting ready, I mean, we had police involved and everything. They send Community Police around to try and help to get him to school. And really, looking back, when you've got anxiety like that it was just too much." Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"Of course we had loads of people coming knocking on the door, knocking on his bedroom door trying to get him out – Head, Assistant Head Teacher, you know, the admissions lady, whatever</i></p>

	<p><i>they're called, everyone was coming knocking on his door. And I think actually none of that helps. Umm, everyone was like, he was shut down in his kind of safe space and everyone came knocking on his door." Primary Parent 2.</i></p> <p><i>"The one that sticks in my mind which I didn't appreciate and obviously the school said it shouldn't have been done, was when XXXX turned up here at half past 8 in the morning and walked in with XXXX from in the XXX , so obviously, that relationship, that's a no no. Well sorry, that is unacceptable and not to be told about it, that really put my back up because I thought, no, that could have really been done differently. And then the same I think, was with XXXX, when she turned up and said to me one day that I had to go in at quarter past ten, she said to me, or we're gonna be in your house in 15 minutes, can you go home." Secondary Parent 3.</i></p>

Fig 13: Positive and Negative Experiences.

While there was a lot of discussion of positive experiences that families had had, there were also examples of support that had not been so successful and for some families, some attempted support strategies had made the situation worse. Other professionals going to the home was also discussed by this parent as an ineffective strategy, particularly if this was the police, or members of staff from the school. Professionals turning up at the home was seen as an ineffective strategy for another parent, particularly when this was unannounced or involved a member of staff from school that the young person did not have a good relationship with.

The above table illustrates some of the challenges that parents are presented with when schools try different approaches to encourage children to attend school, particularly when that child is of secondary age. As the above quote suggests some attempts to bridge the gap

between home and school are ineffective, especially if the parent has not had the opportunity to prepare the child for the visit. As has been previously mentioned by a parent who has two children who have experienced attendance difficulties if a child is anxious then unexpected arrivals of professionals (either from school or other organisations) can be extremely anxiety producing and damage the relationship between school and home further. The issues with school visiting young people at home, I believe can be linked to the causes of the absence in the first instance, particularly if it is a result of anxiety, be that related to the school environment or learning in general. If the function of the persistent non-attendance for the young person were to avoid environments, people and situations that they found distressing, then it would logically follow that these people being brought into the home may cause further stress and anxiety.

### ***Experiences of Legal Approaches:***

Legal approaches that were not perceived as helpful by parents or children despite all of those interviewed having had some experience with the education welfare service. One child had been particularly distressed by some of the discussions that had take place around the parents' legal requirement to ensure that their children attend school;

*"Or else my mum will go to prison and I don't want that. I need my mum."*  
Primary Child 3.

Further issues with legal approaches had been when police officers had arrived at a parent's house, with the aim of taking the child to school;

*"They send Community Police around to try and help to get him to school. And really, looking back, when you've got anxiety like that it was just too much. You know?"* Primary Parent 2.

### ***Support Families Would like:***

To further understand effective support from a family's perspective, they were asked about the support they would like to see for PN and what

form they would like support to take. One parent felt that those involved were helpful however they should have been involved sooner and for longer;

*“I think, when we go back to like YYYY, its, people being involved quicker. We seem to be like, pushing this person to that person or they're in, discharged, gone again, but actually it needed deeper” Primary Parent 2.*

This was supported by another parent who felt that time scales needed to be different to support families effectively;

*“Well I would just like for there to be more help and support and stuff in place to gradually do things rather than to say I want, in the next 6 weeks for him to be back on a full timetable, which is a lot to ask.” Secondary Parent 3.*

The theme of support being rushed or adhering to too tight a timescale once professionals were involved came through with a number of families with one wanting things to be;

*“Just to be a bit more flexible I suppose.” Secondary Parent 3.*

One parent felt that there was greater understanding needed of the issue of PN;

*“Just to understand the problems with the child” Primary Parent 1.*

And a further parent felt that the individual child's personal reasons for not attending had to be understood, and for those issues to be addressed;

*“You need to get those reasons sorted out so the child feels happy to go to school” Primary Parent 3.*

The issue of co-ordination of services were discussed by one parent, with waiting lists of assessment being a barrier to understanding the individual needs of the child;

*“Because sometimes, like there’s other things, like the ASDAT (Autistic Spectrum Disorder Assessment Team) waiting list was 18 months, you know and sometimes you need that support there and then. You don’t need to wait 18 months, and it’s a long time.” Primary Parent 2.*

How families wanted services delivered was varied, one suggested a specialist organisation like CAMHS, but focused on attendance and able to step in once attendance became an issue;

*“If there was an organisation like CAMHS that would help sooner rather than later.” Primary Parent 1.*

While another supported something similar where parents could get some advice or help the parents in the home;

*“Umm, someone they can ring first thing in the morning if they can’t get the child to school. You know, for advice. Maybe someone coming to get them if they can’t get them to school” Primary Parent 3.*

Along side findings in relation to the research questions, over arching themes were also identified, which are discussed below;

### ***Anxiety as a Theme:***

The link between the PN and anxiety was a theme that was discussed by parents and children throughout the interviews. This was often seen as the primary cause of the PN from both a child and parent perspective;

*“Erm, ive got anxiety, erm, cos I didn’t really like school. And that’s it. Primary Child 1.”*

*“Now I’ve got so much more knowledge, it was classic anxiety really, you know” Primary Parent 3.*

*“I think its because there’s obviously anxiety’s” Secondary Parent 3.*

*“I think she’s got to the point now where she comes home from school and she dreads the next day that bad that she won’t eat and she will go to bed.” Primary Parent 2.*

A further element of anxiety was trying to understand where this came from and how best to support the child or young person;

*“Why is he being anxious? Is there more stuff that we can do to get him to overcome that? I know he doesn’t want to respond and is not engaging, but why?” Secondary Parent 3.*

*“So there’s obviously what causes the anxiety to make them be like this and it’s trying to deal with that before it gets out of control” Primary Parent 3.*

The theme of anxiety is one that has run through both parts of this research and has been identified as a multi-dimensional issue, in that it has been seen as causal, contributory and as a result of the PN. Due to the complexity of the discussion of anxiety, it has been mentioned throughout the findings, however I felt it important to identify it as an over arching theme in its own right. While this research’s focus was not purely on anxiety related PN, it is understandable that this has emerged as a core theme, the impact of which it is not possible to over play in its relevance and impact.

#### ***ASD as a Theme:***

ASD was also a theme that came out of the research which was not directly asked about, with two out of the four families interviewed having young people in them who had a diagnosis of ASD, and this being raised as factor in their attendance difficulties. An added element of challenge when it comes to anxiety based school refusal was around ASD and how this can affect a young person and their ability to attend school;

*“And then I thought, you’re working with an autistic child here, you can’t just turn around and turn up at my house, I’ve got to pre warn him, and tell him that these things are happening. So, I think there, that has burnt bridges with them trying to build up a relationship again with him. I know he can be stubborn and he can be a pain in the backside but I just think sometimes things could be handled a bit different. And the same with the EWO, I think with her coming around, you know, I think, yes he’s worried about it, it’s like he’s worried about that there’s consequences for me but he can’t see how to overcome that, apart from going in, which obviously, at the moment, he’s petrified to do.” Secondary Parent 3.*

The above quotes highlights a further challenge for schools and parents as the child gets older, that of their ability to make choices and express their wishes. As a child gets older and becomes a young person their

ability to make choices expands as does their ability to ensure that these choices are made. Many of the agencies that support young people and their families with persistent non-attendance rely on the child and families engagement to provide support, and therefore if a young person refuses to engage with services (as is the case in the above) then the services are left unable to provide some aspects of their support. If a young person refuses to engage then it also presents parents with a challenge as while it is still their legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives an education, once that child gets over a certain age then making them attend school can become very challenging.

### ***EHE as a Theme:***

Out of the four parents interviewed, 3 had a child who is now being home schooled due to their experiences of persistent non-attendance. The issue of elective home education (EHE) appears to relate to the issue of PN, however as this was not the focus of the research, parents were not specifically asked about EHE, however it was raised. For one family EHE had allowed them to look at different educational provision for their child, which was not available to them at the time through the local authority;

*“like, we’ve managed to find the school, XXXX, because I think that every child learns differently and for XXXX it’s just clicked. There’s a lot of forestry school, they do a lot of manual things. And for him, it’s perfect, but we have to pay for it. You can get funding from XXXX Council but with a situation like XXXX, with his anxiety, he’s really low down on the ranks. There are children there with autism and Downs Syndrome. But it just suits his learning. But we don’t have a statement, and to get a statement, that could take a year so everything just seems to be a very long process, a very long process.”*  
Primary Parent 1.

As the quote suggested the parent wanted their child to attend this specialist provision, however they felt that this was not possible at the moment for it to be funded by the local authority. Furthermore the family was not willing to wait for their child to access provision and felt that funding was a barrier to this;

*“Yeah, I suppose if they had more funding, the local councils and things and education, you know, to speed up. We have been told that if we want to get a statement done, it’s going to take a year. Well, that’s ridiculous. That’s another year gone of his education.” Primary Parent 1.*

Furthermore for this family as the provision the child was accessing was a privately run specialist school, there would be no guarantee that the local authority would place the child in this setting, therefore the family are currently self funding his place. As previously identified another family were accessing Cyber School for their child and subsequent to the interviews being conducted a further family have removed their child from school in favour of EHE. While this was not the focus on the research the relationship between PN and EHE may be an area for future investigation and whether there is a correlation between PN and subsequent EHE.

## ***Part 2: Summary of Findings:***

### ***Findings to the research question: What is the lived experience of persistent non-attendance for children and families.***

The lived experiences of PN for the families interviewed varied, however all said that PN had impacted on the child and family. Two key themes arose out of the lived experience of the child and families, physical and mental health effects.

### ***How do children and families make sense of persistent non-attendance? What do children and families and perceive as the causes of persistent non-attendance?***

Explanations that made sense of PN for families came under two main themes, child and school factors. Under these core themes, subordinate themes were identified: Child; Mental health and ASD. School; Unmet learning needs, the learning environment and relationships with peers and teachers.

***How do families perceive the support offered by schools and other professionals?***

Families discussed predominantly wave 3, individualised and external professional support that they had experienced. The support that the families had experienced had been both positive and negative. Positive experiences were explored in further detail under the next heading. Negative experiences described included legal interventions and those that involved uninvited professionals visiting the house.

***If the support was perceived as useful, what do families and children believe made this effective?***

The experiences of support that were perceived as effective understood and responded to the individual families needs; this was also mirrored in the support that the families wanted. Characteristics that were seen as important were flexibility, individually tailored and communication between those involved.

***Additional Themes:***

Additionally to areas focused on by the research questions, three additional over arching themes emerged, Anxiety, ASD and EHE. While these were not targeted by the research questions, their occurrence throughout part 2 suggests their relatedness to PN, specifically for those children and families interviewed.

## 5. Discussion.

The discussion section reviews the findings to the research questions in the context of previous research findings. Strengths and limitations of the study are also discussed, the impact of the findings on EP practice, work in schools and future possible areas of research.

### 5.1. Part 1 Discussion: Summary in relation to research questions and previous literature.

#### ***Conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance and their themes.***

A theme from schools was that their conceptualisation of PN was very flexible and that no one single explanation of the issue was therefore suitable. PN was seen as multi-determined, with factors at different systemic levels, which interact, an approach that is supported by Nuttall and Woods (2014). These systemic levels were identified as;

1. Child: These included issues relating to mental health/anxiety and ASD.
2. Home: These included a range of issues from resources to parental health (mental/physical) to parenting difficulties.
3. School: These related to the school environment, socially, physically and academically.
4. Social: These related to expectations and social norms.

All professionals interviewed felt that PN occurred for a multitude of factors and therefore no one theory or explanation fitted an overall understanding. One of the key findings from my research was that professionals offered very few theoretical frameworks as a way of understanding PN, with a suggestion from some that this was due to it being such a diverse issue. Schools were, instead using an individualistic approach, analysing the child's individual circumstances before any models of understanding were used. When the issue of PN was further discussed with professionals it became clear that different

theoretical frameworks were being used, once the underlying issue had been identified. At this level schools discussed the use of theoretical models such as attachment, separation anxiety, mental health, social, environmental and medical.

The finding of no one theoretical model being used by schools is in line with the suggestion by Carroll (2015) that non-attenders are a heterogeneous group, therefore no one theoretical model of understanding in isolation would be suitable. This finding may also suggest why questions about what makes sense of PN and what reasons are given for PN were answered in the same way, as it may indicate that professionals view these as often being the same thing. While no one model of understanding was put forward as an overarching model by professionals, the three key models discussed in the literature review, medical, socio-medical and systemic were alluded to throughout professionals' interviews. What was key for the professionals was understanding the problem that the PN solved for the child, be that avoiding something negative, enabling something positive or if the PN itself had become habitual. While no evidence of a formalised assessment of functionality of PN behaviour was found, such as the SRAS of Kearney and Silverman (1990), instead findings suggested that schools were unpicking the issue with children and their families through building relationships and encouraging open conversations.

### ***Language use and usefulness of 'school refusal'.***

The language use of schools was found to be very consistent across those interviewed and this was heavily informed by governmental guidance. 'School refusal' was not a dominant phrase used, instead persistent absenteeism or persistent non-attendance was prevailing. Schools used the term 'school refusal', however this was reserved for a particular type of behaviour where the child or young person had completely stopped attending school and this was sometimes

associated resistant behaviour such as absconding, withdrawing or physically challenging behaviour. A number of schools felt that in these cases terms such as 'emotionally based school refusal' or 'anxious school refusal' were preferred as they provided clearer explanation of why the refusal was occurring and removed the suggestion that this was a choice by the child or young person.

The findings of consistency of language and the focus on accurately describing the non-attendance is in line with Pelligrini's (2007) discourse analysis recommendations and indicate a development in the use of language within the educational community. Pelligrini's findings that 'school refusal' was being used as a catch all term were not found in this work, instead schools were using language similar to the suggested 'extended school non-attendance' (persistent absence/non-attendance) in the first instance and then progressing to more specialist language once the issue had been further analysed. My findings suggest a positive shift towards Pelligrini's recommendations for language use by professionals when dealing with PN, with terms being used that do not attribute cause without assessment. Supporting the importance of describing a behaviour without jumping to an explanatory framework in the absence of sufficient evidence.

The influence of governmental regulation was a clear theme throughout this research, particularly in relation to the language used by professionals and the criteria they used to define PN (as previously mentioned the definition of PN was change during the conducting of this research, from 15% to 10%). The Department of Education has published many documents on the importance of attendance and the impact this has on achievement, a number of which have been discussed previously in this work. Schools were very aware of the importance of attendance, and that this had been an agenda for both OFSTED and the government. However while schools were very clear on the importance of attendance there were also allusions to some of

the pressures that such expectations placed on schools. While this pressure was not a theme that came across from all schools, there was discussion of cases where schools felt that they had their hands tied with cases of PN, where they felt their setting was not appropriate for individual students, however alternatives were not available. Additionally some individuals mentioned cases where they felt they had had to move towards prosecution because the attendance had not improved, despite intervention and in response to this children had been entered into EHE to avoid such prosecution. These are issues that are discussed further in regards to findings from part 2.

### ***How do conceptualisations inform practice?***

Professionals' conceptualisations of the heterogeneity of PN were found to directly influence the approaches that were used with children, young people and their families, as understanding was seen as key for each case. The individualised understanding of PN based on the child or young persons' unique situation and experience was mirrored by the individualised approaches to support that were implemented. Each school that was involved in the research put forward multiple examples of the varied support they had offered specific young people who had struggled with attendance and were able to provide clear rationales for why such approaches and provision were used. While there was variation in the way that support and provision looked, there were the following commonalities behind them;

1. Approaches were individualised and met specific needs of children, young people and their families, as suggested by Lauchlan (2003), and Nuttall and Woods (2013).
2. Approaches were flexible and included embedded review of suitability and how best to build on progress, an approach advocated by Kearney, Pursell and Alvarez (2001).

3. Communication was at the centre of all support and this involved the school, family and other relevant professionals, as advocated by Gregory and Purcell (2014), and Baker and Bishop (2015)

Findings of individualised approaches being used at schools is inline with the recommendations of Lauchlan (2003, p. 144) that an 'individualised intervention programme, according to a pupil's particular needs, but involving a multi-systems approach', is needed when dealing with PN. Key to these individualised programme was responding to the specific needs of the child, young person and their family, while also ensuring that that communication was at the centre of the process. The finding that schools in the local authority are working in the way recommended by Lachlan is positive and provides a strong basis for sharing good practice.

## 5.2. Part 2 Discussion: Summary in relation to research questions and previous literature.

### ***The lived experience of persistent non-attendance.***

The lived experience of the families that were interviewed was varied, however what was consistent between them was that PN had impacted greatly on all of their lives, with one even commenting that it had taken over the whole family. These findings would suggest that the PN does have a large impact on the families that experience it and therefore the whole family should be considered when planning interventions. Furthermore with 3 out of the 4 families were engaging in some form of elective home education, the demands of which cannot be ignored. As once a child is electively home educated, parents are required to take on all the responsibilities associated with education, it can make it difficult for a parent to work and also provide their child's educational needs. While I recognise that this is sample of families is in no way representative, it does suggest an interesting link and the wider ranging impact of PN.

### ***How do families make sense of persistent non-attendance.***

As with the professionals families made sense of their child's PN in different ways, which supports Baker and Bishop's (2015) findings that each PN case is unique. However within these differences parents used understandings that are linked to these academic type models; medical, socio-medical and systemic models. For some families the explanation of their child's PN was for one very clear reason, for example anxiety or unmet learning needs, however for others it involved a multitude of factors. For all families regardless of whether the PN had initially occurred due to one specific factor, the effects of this had extended past this initial issue. This finding therefore supports the suggestion of Baker and Bishop (2015) that a within-child understanding of PN must be moved away from in favour of an approach that acknowledges the complexity of individual cases and the impact of PN As previously identified due to the limited numbers of

families involved in the research it is not possible to make generalisations to all other families, however it does support an individualistic approach to understanding and therefore support. Furthermore the findings support a systemic approach to understanding, which takes into account the needs of all the family as the impact was felt by them all. Additionally the use of a systemic approach to understanding allows for the inclusion of all other models and acknowledges the impact of PN at all levels, individual, family and community.

### ***Language use.***

Interestingly there was not a large focus on the language used to describe PN by either schools or families, with many participants at each stage commenting that they had never really thought about the language they or others used. A clear finding from all schools was that governmental policy determined the language that they used, especially when that had implications for the families legally or for OFSTED. The consistency of language used may therefore explain why individuals had not thought much about its selection as this decision had been made at a governmental level and they felt clear on its use. However this may also have had a negative effect, leading them not to further examine the functional nature of the PN, or explanations. The use of clear language of persistent absence or persistent non-attendance may also explain why parents did not have strong views of the language that had been used to describe their children's attending as it remain objective in it's description of the issues and did not attach causation. Where more specific language had been used such as 'school refusal' or 'anxiety based school refusal', parents interviewed acknowledged the role of their child's agency in their non-attendance, however did not see this as purely based on choice.

A gap in the research evidence that must be discussed is that whilst a number of families had accessed CAMHS to support their child or

young person with their PN, they were not included in the research. This omission occurred for a number of reasons;

- Current access to CAMHS is limited and therefore recruitment was seen as a challenge.
- CAMHS tended not to work in the schools, but directly with the child and family.
- The threshold for CAMHS involvement is high and therefore not open to all children and young people experiencing PN.
- CAMHS would only be relevant for those children and young people where the PN was seen to be related to a mental health issue, therefore their experience would likely be skewed in this direction.

The lack of CAMHS involvement is however a limitation as the language that they use to describe PN and is not included in this research and nor is their perspective on the wider issue. The perspective of CAMHS would be very valuable as all schools mentioned their involvement, as did a high proportion of the parents interviewed (3 out of 4). Furthermore the CAMHS would provide a health perspective on the issue of PN, which may be different from the educational focus of this research. This limitation may therefore suggest a further area of discussion for future research.

### ***Perceptions of support and what made it effective.***

As with all other findings the perceptions of support were varied, with it being acknowledged by many that there had been pro's and con's in the support that they had received. For some families early adaptation such as alternative starting times or arrival processes had made things easier, however one of the children had felt that this made leaving her mum harder. The relationship between the school and family was key for any of the support to be effective and it was important to all the families that the school understood and were responsive to the child/young persons individual circumstances and difficulties.

Communication between school and home was also seen as crucial in maintaining effective support, so that all parties involved were aware of the challenges that were being experienced, what was working well and how the child felt about the current situation.

Ineffective support also had some consistent themes, including a lack of communication, support being inappropriate or poorly timed. Families explored situations where communication had broken down and the impact unexpected visits had had on the child and family as a whole. My findings are opposed to those of Waddington (1997) who argued for the importance of raising the legal requirement of school attendance with parents, as this was not something that parents are always aware of. Instead my findings were that all parents were not only aware of this responsibility, but also felt a personal duty to ensure their child received an education. However some the parents interviewed did not believe that attending school and having a positive educational experience were synonymous, with some even feeling school attendance was damaging to their child, their learning and mental health. The legal interventions that the families had experienced were viewed overwhelming in a negative way and for none had resulted in increased attendance. Instead in these cases parents had taken full responsibility for their child's education and where home schooling or using alternative provision.

The use of the word 'support' is one that is potentially contentious, if the experiences of the family are not one of support. As was previously discussed in part 2 findings, many of the approaches used to attempt to improve attendance were not perceived as supportive and therefore it may be disingenuous to call such approaches 'support'. While this was the word used in the interviews, on reflection an alternative wording of the question may have been better, for example using a terms such as 'interventions', 'actions' or 'approaches'. Using an alternative term may have been more effective and then opened up further discussion of the

positives and negatives of such interventions. It may have been a biased on my part to assume that intervention was 'support' and that it was perceived as such by families. For further research the use of the word 'support' is something that I would review and consider whether it is appropriate, perhaps a question of "what was supportive that the school/professionals did?" would be more suitable.

While my findings suggest a negative experience of legal intervention in PN I acknowledge that my sample was limited and therefore the perspective may be biased. As previously identified those families that were interviewed were those who were willing to engage and had had ongoing involvement from various professional agencies, this may therefore suggest that they come from a place of engagement where aware of their legal responsibility and that this is not a factor in their child's PN. It is possible and some may argue likely that for other families the legal approach is useful, particularly when PN is not due to an issue of mental health or an unmet learning need as was the case for a the majority of my sample. However I would argue that in such cases where PN is due to mental health or an unmet learning need then the legal approach has little to offer, as the cause of the PN is not lack of awareness or value for education but something all together different. Furthermore all the parents interviewed who had had some experience of the legal approach said that this had placed some level of additional stress on the family, as they were not only worried about the child but also the threat of prosecution. In these cases parents argued that they were placed in a very challenging situation where they did not know what to do in the best interest of the child, as in some cases attempts to force the child into school had resulted in physical danger to the child or parent. In these such cases, parents felt that they were potentially in a loose loose situation where they had to decide between their child's mental/physical health and the law.

As previously acknowledged I recognise that my sample may not be representative of all families who experience PN, therefore it is not reasonable to assert that the legal approach in itself is not of value. However it may suggest that it is not always effective and therefore not always appropriate. The lack of perceived value for the legal approach in this situation I believe provides further support for an individualised framework for understanding PN as it allows for different approaches to be adopted dependent on the individual factors in each case. Furthermore I would argue that it would provide schools with flexibility when dealing with cases as support options could be analysed more closely for suitability and not result in ineffective strategies being continued.

### 5.3. Intergration and contribution to knowledge.

#### ***Differences between primary and secondary.***

A key finding was that there was a perceived difference in the experiences of professionals working with primary and secondary aged children. Professionals interviewed who worked with secondary schools reported a greater experience of PN, with primary professionals reporting limited numbers of isolated cases. Through a search of literature I have been unable to find any research that compares the incidences of PN in primary and secondary schools or examines the nature of PN in these different contexts for similarities or differences. The case study data that I obtained suggested that primary cases of PN were rare and that when it did occur the causes tended to be less varied; for example they were due to unmet need such as ASD or were due to parenting issues. There was speculation from those working in primary schools that this was due to the level of supervision that primary children had, with children having limited independence and any the level of control that parents have over their children at this stage of their education. Therefore cases where PN had become of concern tended to be due to more extreme child motivated behaviour, and/or parenting skills were a factor.

A further factor that was not directly raised however was alluded to, was the level of consistency available in primary schools that is not possible in secondary. As children tend to have only one teacher in primary settings, limited members of additional staff and the environment tends to be more nurturing, therefore some issues could be identified earlier on and addressed. Furthermore due to the flexibility in primary settings some of the school-based issues observed in secondary may have been able to be addressed earlier or their impact minimised. Additionally the parent/school relationship tends to be closer when a child is at primary school, which can encourage greater discussion of issues that may relate to attendance or learning in general, therefore reducing a chance for escalation, which may result in PN.

### ***Role of the EP.***

The role of the EP was discussed by a number of professionals and families during the course of the research. Some schools felt that EP's were often involved with complex cases of PN where familiar strategies had already been used and had unfortunately not been successful. In these cases the EP was seen to have an important role in unpicking the reasons behind the PN, supporting Carroll's (2015) argument of EP's being well placed to contribute on the issue. One school however did not feel that EP's would be involved in case of PN, unless it was felt that there was an unidentified learning need. This difference in opinion on the role of the EP was relatively unbalanced, with all but one school feeling that EP's would be involved in cases of PN. It is unclear why this difference in opinion may occur, however it appeared that it may be due to a more traditional view of the role of the EP, where an EP's expertise is seen as primary around assessing learning needs, rather than being able to understand the child from a systemic, ecological perspective.

Out of the four parents interviewed all had had some contact with an EP; three of them were from the local authority and one private. It is also worth noting that the family who had accessed a private EP to conduct an assessment, their child had previously been attending a private school and this may therefore have been a factor in a local authority EP not being involved during this time or subsequently. The feedback from all the parents was positive about their interactions with their EP, with one commenting that it had opened up the situation for her. Others had felt that the EP had helped them to understand their child's learning needs and the impact that they may have had on the child's education and experiences of this. The positive experiences of these parents further supports Carroll's (2015) argument for the value that EP's can bring to a case of PN and the variety of work that they can conduct in this context.

#### 5.4. Evaluation of strengths and limits of study.

##### ***Strengths.***

A core strength of my research was the variety of professionals from which the data was collected, which is detailed in the participant data. Information was collected from senior managers, SENCo's, support staff and EWOs, this variety of data ensured that the perspectives of a variety of professionals working at different waves of intervention and was not skewed at any level. Furthermore when analysis was conducted no data was given priority or stronger weight in terms of their relevance, this ensured that the experience of all the professionals interviewed were given the same value and therefore equally represented. Data was collected across primary and secondary provision to ensure that both were represented in their views and experiences. Additionally data was collected across geographical areas of the local authority researched, to ensure that one area was not over/under represented. These data strengths therefore support the validity of the data and its representation of the issue across the local authority.

A further strength of the research was the use of a qualitative method of data collection and the open nature of the interview questions. This approach allowed professionals to share their own unique experiences of PN and the factors that they felt was most relevant. Due to the open nature of the data collection, participants' responses are highly valid and less likely to be influenced by researcher bias. Furthermore the use of thematic analysis fitted well within the methodological approach used and the method of data collection. It allowed for the unique experiences of the individual participants to be communicated, through identified common themes, without the rich nature of these being lost. This methodological approach and data collection allowed me to stick to the exploratory/illuminatory intent of the research as I was able to use the direct rich data of the participants' unique experiences and present this in a cohesive manner.

### ***Limitations.***

One of the clear overarching limitations of this study are the limited numbers of schools and families that took part, while the aim of this work was illuminatory rather than to make generalisations, however 6 schools do not provide a full picture from a local authority and it is possible that these 6 schools were not representative of practice across the area. Additionally due to time constraints a maximum of 5 professionals were interviewed from each school, it therefore follows that perspectives were not obtained from all of those who may have an opinion on the issue of PN or have experienced this. The issue of participant numbers is a particular limitation in relation to the families that took part as they this was skewed towards primary parents, despite the PN being identified as a issue that is particularly an issue for secondary schools. My experience was that the primary families engaged with the research to a greater level and this is therefore represented in the data that I was able to obtain.

Based my experiences as a researcher, trying to engage secondary families was extremely challenging, a theme that I believe mirrors the experiences of schools. Families often expressed interest in taking part initially, with some handing their details to the school to be passed on to me and others even booking appointments. However once this initial interest did not translate into participation, with some ignoring calls, blocking calls, cancelling appointments or not attending meetings. My experiences with this families appears to be in line with what schools and external support agencies experience, there is an initial interest in support and changing the situation, however this does not always translate into engagement and improved attendance. Nevertheless as these families did not directly contribute to the research this is an assumption based on my own experiences and feedback from professionals, rather than a finding based on evidence.

An important limitation is the potential for reporting bias in the cases that the school shared with me due to individuals wanting to show their schools provision in a positive light. This may be due to a natural wish to want to share good practice, cases of success and communicate the hard work they are putting in. However while this may be positive in sharing good practice it may lead to cases where support had been less successful may have been less likely to be shared. While many participants raised issues that were challenging and cases where intervention had not been successful, it is important to highlight this as a potential issue that may skew the data that was obtained from the interviews.

My role as a trainee educational psychologist is also a potential limitation as participants felt pressure to be positive due to my working for the local authority and in some cases with their school. It is difficult to ascertain whether my working with some of the schools affected the data, be that positively or negatively. It is possible that those schools that I work with felt more comfortable sharing with me, due to the professional relationships I have developed with them, or if they felt pressure to please also due to this. It did however appear from the analysis of the data that themes were present across the schools from which participants were interviewed, therefore suggesting that there was a level of consistency with these experiences, not just from those with whom I already had a professional working relationship. My relationship with participants may also be an influencing factor with the families that participated in the research, as 2 out of the 4 were working with me prior to their participation in the research. Similarly to the participants in part 1 it is possible that they felt some pressure due to our pre-existing relationship, however it is also possible that they felt more comfortable contributing and were therefore more due to this.

A further limitation of the research was that the threshold of persistent absenteeism was changed during the designing and completion of the

research, to 10% during for the academic year 2015/16, from the original 15% figure. During the designing of the research and instrument development 15% was used due to issues of consistency and use of retrospective data. While this was the measure explicitly said during the interviews, many participants did highlight the change and refer to the 10% level. This alteration in governmental policy and the level at which schools persistent absence figures are generated may have effected the way in which questions were answered and the cases examples that were discussed. Due to the change in threshold of PN it is possible that more children are included in the discussion than would have been if the 15% threshold were still being used and therefore data about more children was included. However this may have resulted in less focus being put of the children with much lower attendance levels, due to a larger number coming under the heading of persistent absence with this new measure. Due to the timing of the change it is also important to raise that there may be issues with comparison between persistent absentee levels over time due to the historical changes that have taken place. There has been effort made throughout this work to be clear on the thresholds used at each stage, and in statistics used in this research, however due to the availability of data prior to the change and their over lap in participants consciousness it is difficult to ascertain how effective this was. This change is however acknowledged and therefore included in this review for completeness and also to illustrate the challenges of researching such an area when thresholds and definitions are subject to change.

### *Reflection*

*Changes to my project were required due to the time constraints previously discussed and my own expectations of the project. I had wanted a greater representation of parent and child/young person contributions, however I made the most of the contributions that I had been able to collect. On reflection in light of these changes there may have been value in using an alternative analysis method, for example*

*IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis), as this may have provided more of the unique qualitative experience of the individual families. However as I started analysing while data collection was on going and having intended to have a lot more data, thematic analysis was used. While I believe there would have been value in using an alternative analysis method, I was happy with the data I did get from the interviews using thematic analysis and felt that this conveyed the experiences of the participants.*

*Changes to the definitions of PN during the course of my research was also challenging as this effected establishing a shared understanding between participants and myself. I felt that this raised issues as the interviews spanned two academic school years and the data available was under both thresholds. While a great deal of the discussion was around PN, which was at a higher level than either of those thresholds, it is possible that it was not as much of an issue as I perceived it. However I definitely felt that this issue presented me with challenges and may have affected the interactions with participants and the cases that they drew on.*

*As a trainee educational psychologist I was an active participant in this research, something, which I acknowledged through my social constructivist approach. I have my own experiences of PN through my current and previous roles, which informed my approach to the research throughout. Furthermore due to my current role I had previous relationships with some of the participants, which I believe supported the communication between us. I felt that I was an open participant in this research, who was very flexible in their thinking around the subject. While I felt informed by my own experiences and research of current literature in the subject area, I tried to not let this influence my perceptions of what others were saying. Instead I tried to actively listen to what they were bringing to the interview and ask for clarification when I was unsure. It was my intention to stick as close to the data the*

*participants were sharing with me, be informed by my own experiences but not let them cloud my perception.*

### 5.5 Conclusion and implications for practice.

The findings from the research indicate that good practice from schools' perspectives are based on adapting to the individual needs of children and their families, using an ecological/systemic model of understanding. Schools shared a range of how this has been done in the past across the 3 waves of intervention and use of external agencies; ranging from the providing of basic household items, to complex adaptations the provision. Based on these findings and their consistency within the evidence base as previously identified, I believe that the use of an individualised framework, based on an ecological/systemic model for dealing with PN would be recommended as good practice, in line with Gregory and Purcell's (2014) recommendations. Currently I am unaware of any explicit frameworks or models for dealing with PN which outline this process that can be followed by schools and share good practice, however as previously identified such an approach does sit well within the current literature base. A future outcome of this research may therefore be to formalise such a framework that takes a school through the process of dealing with PN which is focused on the individual needs of the child and family, while also taken a systemic approach to understanding.

While these findings suggest some good practice from the schools, it is difficult to ascertain whether those specific families had also found this to be a positive experience, due to the design of the research and the limited recruitment for part 2. However discrete feedback from parents about the importance of responding to the individual needs of their child to enable them to engage with education, and the success of alternative provision would indicate the value of such an approach.

Based on my findings that families overwhelming viewed the legal route of dealing with PN negatively and the literature base I would argue that a legal approach to supporting families is not suitable when PN is due to mental health or an unmet learning need as familial control over

these issues is limited. Instead in these cases individual intervention as argued for by Lauchlan (2003) and Nuttall and Woods (2013) should be used to further understand the issue and determine appropriate support. If this is not possible in the current setting due to the child's mental health or learning need, then other options should be explored and provision put in place. This approach would however put pressure of the local authority and schools to provide more flexible options to provision and not assume that standard educational environments are suitable for all. A further implication of such an approach may also be increased collaborative working between health, care and education, so that the responsibility is not just on the parent but the system as a whole, to ensure adequate educational provision is available and accessible to all.

Further implications for practice are around language use and the importance of consistency. What was consistent in language use was that "school refusal" was no longer widely used as a term, "anxious school refusal" was used in specific cases where anxiety was identified, however initial language focused on the level of attendance, rather than attributing cause. While governmental policy advocates the use of 'persistent absence' as a term, other terms are still widely in use, some for the same and some for alternative purposes. While the use of these terms are well justified by professionals in terms of expressing concern, making the situation clear or providing a clearer explanation of the child's behaviour, there is still variation. A further complexity of term use is the lack of consistency in definition, with "persistent absence" thresholds being at 3 different levels over the past 10 years alone, and therefore holding 3 different things. Such alteration to widely used terms can cloud the understanding of those who use them and the families with whom they use them. A recommendation may therefore be made that while a consistency of language is important in terms of clarity, the ensuring of understanding for professionals and families is of equal importance. Many professionals described the breaking down of

complex data into understandable examples for parents, for example the number of days a year absence equates to, or the differences in achievement levels based on attendance. Such approaches it were felt re-framed the data for families making it more understandable; for example 20% absence as one day a week missed of education, a lower likelihood of reaching 5 A\* to C grades.

### ***Where next?***

As discussed previously the development of a model of individual PN analysis, based on an ecological/systemic framework to be used by schools, could be a next step from this research. Such a framework could provide professionals with a specific framework for practice that could be followed to enable staff to analyse the PN at all systemic levels and therefore design individualised support that addressed these needs. Different professionals could adapt this framework to include up to date best practice and be flexible so as to be useful in different school settings.

During the course of the research there were some findings that related to PN, however had not been targeted in the research questions which were very interesting and may suggest further areas for research. A theme that came out of the research was a lack of specialist ASD provision, its relationship to PN and EHE, with both parents and schools raising this as an issue. The strength of any relationship between these three issues is difficult to ascertain from this research due to its case study nature, however the theme of trying to meet the needs students with ASD within mainstream settings was raised by a number of professionals. Due to the nature of the research design this issue of meeting the needs of students with ASD in a mainstream setting and some of the limitations of this may only relate those schools who raised it, or it may be a unique aspect of the local authority in which the research as undertaken. However any link between meeting the needs of students with ASD in mainstream settings, a lack of specialist ASD

provision when this breaks down, PN and resulting EHE may be an area for further investigation and research.

Although not a focus of the research the use of the legal system in the management of PN was a theme that was raised throughout the interviews, from schools, parents and children. While some professionals felt that the use of the legal route was at times useful and necessary, all the families interviewed disagreed with this. All the families that were interviewed and had had experiences of the legal route being used or discussed saw this negatively and for a number of the children very distressing. While some of the professionals interviewed suggested that the use of legal powers were useful and important in ensuring parents understood their responsibilities in terms of their child accessing education, none of the families interviewed felt this was of value. All of the parents interviewed in this research understood their legal obligations and from their perspectives this was not a factor in their child attending school. It is recognised that this sample of parents is not a representative one for many reasons, the way they were recruited, their geographical location and their level of engagement with other professionals. However these findings do suggest that the legal punitive approach is being used in cases where parents are fully aware of their responsibilities, are extremely eager for their children to attend and are doing everything within their power to ensure this happens. The use of the punitive legal approaches in these cases I argue is not suitable and does not encourage attendance, instead it leads parents into making decisions that they may not wish to have to make. As previously identified in the findings, out of the four families interviewed three have now removed their child from local authority education and are considered electively home educating. The correlation between PN and the choice to home educate is an area that I believe should be further explored as it challenges the effectiveness of a legal approach in including children and whether it further isolates

children and their families and denies them their right to fit for purpose educational provision.

## References:

Antoniou, M. & Stierer, B. (2004). Review essay. *Teaching In Higher Education*, 9(3), 377-383.

Ayiro, L. P. (2012). *A Functional Approach to Educational Research Methods and Statistics : Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press.

Baker, M., & Bishop, F. (2015). Out of school: a phenomenological exploration of extended non-attendance. *Educational Psychology in Practice: theory, research and practice in educational psychology*, 31(3),1-15 DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2015.1065473

Berg, I., Nichols, K. & Pritchard, C. (1969). School Phobia: It's classification and relationship to dependency. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, (10)2, 123–141.

Berg, I. (1997). School Refusal and Truancy. *Archives for Disease in Childhood*, 76(2), 90-91 doi:10.1136/adc.76.2.90.

Blagg, N. (1987). *School Phobia and its Treatment*. London: Croom Helm Ltd.

Bozic, N. (2013). Developing a strength-based approach to educational psychology practice: A multiple case study. *Educational & Child Psychology, 30*(4), 18-29.

Brandibas, G., Clanet, C. & Fouraste, R. (2004). Truancy, school refusal and anxiety. *School Psychology International, 25*(1), 117-126.

Bright, N. (2011). 'Non-Servile Virtuosi' in Insubordinate Spaces: School Disaffection, Refusal and Resistance in a Former English Coalfield. *European Educational Research Journal, 10*(4), 502-515. doi:10.2304/eej.2011.10.4.502

Broomhead, K. (2013). Blame, guilt and the need for 'labels'; insights from parents of children with special educational needs and educational practitioners. *British Journal of Special Education, 40*(1) 14-21. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8578.12012.

Carroll, T. (2015). Pupil absenteeism and the educational psychologist. *Educational Studies, 41*(1-2), 47-61, DOI: 10.1080/03055698.2014.955731

Daniels, H. (2014). Editorial. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 19*(2), 129-130. doi:10.1080/13632752.2014.908028

Davies, J. D. & Lee, J. (2006). To attend or not to attend? Why some students chose school and others reject it. *Support for Learning*, 21(4), 204-209.

Department of Education. (2017). A guide to absence statistics.

Accessed from

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/602572/Guide\\_to\\_absence\\_statistics\\_2203217.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/602572/Guide_to_absence_statistics_2203217.pdf) on 12.05.17.

Department for Education. (2015). Statistical first release: Pupil

absence in schools in England: 2013 to 2014. A National

Statistics Publication. Accessed from

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/416343/SFR10\\_2015\\_text.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416343/SFR10_2015_text.pdf) on 26.11.15

Department of Education. (2014). School attendance: Departmental

advice for maintained schools, academies, independent

schools and local authorities. Accessed from

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/361008/Advice\\_on\\_school\\_attendance\\_sep](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361008/Advice_on_school_attendance_sep)

[t\\_2014.pdf](#) on 26.11.15

Department of Education. (2011). Persistent absence: government changes definition to deal with reality of pupil absenteeism in schools. Accessed from:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/persistent-absence-government-changes-definition-to-deal-with-reality-of-pupil-absenteeism-in-schools> on 12.05.17.

Egger, H., Costello, J., & Angold, A (2003). School Refusal and Psychiatric Disorders: A Community Study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 42(7) 797-807.

Ekstrand, B. (2015). What it takes to keep children in school: a research review. *Educational Review*, 67(4), 459-482, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2015.1008406

Evans, L. (2000). Functional School Refusal Subtypes: Anxiety, Avoidant and Malingering. *Psychology in the Schools*, 37(2), 183-191

Graham, A., Powell, M. A., & Taylor, N. (2015). Ethical Research Involving Children: Encouraging Reflexive Engagement in Research with Children and Young People. *Children & Society*, 29(5), 331-343. doi:10.1111/chso.12089

Christogiorgos, S & Giannakopoulos, G. (2014) School Refusal and the Parent-Child Relationship: A Psychodynamic Perspective, *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 13:3, 182-192, DOI: 10.1080/15289168.2014.937976

Gregory, I. R., & Purcell, A. (2014). Extended school non-attenders' views: developing best practice. *Educational Psychology In Practice*, 30(1), 37-50. doi:10.1080/02667363.2013.869489

Havik, T., Bru, E. & Ertesvåg, S. (2014) Parental perspectives of the role of school factors in school refusal. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 19(2), 131-153, DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2013.816199

Health and Social Care Council. (2010). Standards of Proficiency:

Practitioner Psychologists.

Hughes, E., Gullone, E., Dudley, A., & Tonge, B. (2010). A Case-Control Study of Emotion Regulation and School Refusal in Children and Adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 30(5), 691-706.

Impetus-PEF. (2014). Make NEETs History in 2014. An Impetus Private Equity Foundation. Accessed from [http://impetus-pef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Make-NEETs-History-Report\\_ImpetusPEF\\_January-2014.pdf](http://impetus-pef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Make-NEETs-History-Report_ImpetusPEF_January-2014.pdf) on 24.03.16

Kearney, C. (2008). School absenteeism and school refusal behavior in youth: A contemporary review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28(3), 451–471. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2007.07.012

Kearney, S. & Albano, A. (2004). The Functional Profiles of School Refusal Behaviour: Diagnostic Aspects. *Behaviour Modification*, 28 (1) 1147-161 DOI: 10.1177/0145445503259263

Kearney, S., Pursell, C. & Alvarez, K. (2001). Treatment of school refusal behaviour in children with mixed functional profiles. *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 8, 3-11.

Kim, M. S. (2014). Doing social constructivist research means making empathic and aesthetic connections with participants. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22(4), 538-553. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.947835

King, N. & Bernstein, G. (2001). School Refusal in Adolescence: A review of the past 10 years. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 40(2), 197-205.

Lauchlan, F. (2003). Responding to chronic non-attendance: a review of intervention approaches. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 19(2), 133-146.

Maggetti, M., Radaelli, C., & Gilardi, F. (2013). *Designing Research in the Social Sciences*. London: Sage Publications DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473957664>

McShane, G., Walter, G. and Rey, J.M. (2001) Characteristics of Adolescents with School Refusal. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 35, 822-826.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2001.00955.x>

McGhee, P. (2001) *Thinking Psychologically*. Hampshire UK: PALGRAVE

Nuttall, C., & , K. (2013). Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour. *Educational Psychology In Practice*, 29(4), 347-366. doi:10.1080/02667363.2013.846848

Pellegrini, D. (2007). School Non-attendance: Definitions, meanings, responses, interventions. *Educational Psychology In Practice*, 23(1), 63-77.

Reid, K. (2008). The causes of non-attendance: an empirical study. *Educational Review*, 60(4), 345-357.

Reid, K., & Ken, R. (2006). The views of education social workers on the management of truancy and other forms of non-attendance. *Research In Education*, (75), 40-57.

Strand, A-S. & Cedersund, E (2013). School staff's reflections on truant students: a positioning analysis. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 31(4), 337–353,  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2013.835858>

Smeyers, P. (2013). Making Sense of the Legacy of Epistemology in Education and Educational Research. *Journal Of Philosophy Of Education*, 47(2), 311-321.

The British Psychological Society. (2009). Code of Ethics and Conduct: Guidance published by the Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society.

Thomas, G. (2013). *How to do Your Research Project*. London: Sage.

Tomlinson, P. (1989). Having it Both Ways: hierarchical focusing as a research interview method. *British Educational Research Journal*, 15 (2), 155-176. (AN: BEI.64645)

Waddington, C. (1997). The use of legal proceedings in cases of non-attendance at school: perceptions of education welfare officers. *Educational Research*, 39(3), 333-341.

## Appendixes

Concept Map

Interview Schedules;

- Professionals
- Parent
- Young person
- Child

Ethical Approval;

- University
  - Ethics form (including consent forms)
- Local Authority
  - RGF form

Thematic Analysis;

- Nvivo Nodal Structure
  - Part 1
  - Part 2
- Examples of raw interview data analysed

**Concept Map:**

1st	2nd	3rd
What is your experience of school refusal?		
	In what capacity (role) did you experience this?	
What language do you use to describe attendance below 85%		
	Why do you use these terms	
		What distinctions do you make between X and Y?
	Would you consider using other terms; absentee, truancy, school refusal, persistence non-attendance, anxious school refusal?	
		Why use / why not use?
		Are there any other terms you use?
	Why do you use the language you do to describe attendance below 85%	
	Where did you come across the terms you use?	
		Training, reading on the subject, past experiences, perceptions of cause....
What explanations or reasons do you think make sense of persistent non-attendance?		
	Can you explain in more details Please give case examples:	

		models?
To what extent do you believe persistent non-attendance (below 85%) is an issue in your school?		
	How do you feel this compares with other schools? Locally and nationally?	
		Why do you think this is the case? (Similarity/difference).
How does your school deal with persistent non-attendance?		
	Who leads on this? And which other members of staff are involved?	
	What school-based support is there for persistent non-attendance?	
How are students affected by having attendance very low attendance (below 85% and if so how)?		
	Academically,	
	Socially	
	personally	
		Are there any other ways you think students are affected by having attendance below 85%?
From your experiences what explanation's can be given for attendance below 85%		
	Illness, family holiday taking, anxiety (mental health), parental health/mental health, lack of engagement, transport, social isolation.	

	Give case examples to illustrate your answer	
		Are there any other factors you think are relevant?
What external support are you aware of that support professionals and young people with persistent non-attendance?		
	EWO, EPs, charity organisations, CAHMS, CHES,	
		What do they do in this support work? Ask for case examples again
		What was your experience of this? Ask for case examples here too
Can you tell me about any cases where students who have attendance below 85% have been successfully supported to improve this?		
	Could you provide two contrasting examples of this?	
	Who provided this?	
	What did they do?	
	What were the characteristics that made this support successful?	
		What relationships were important in providing this?
What support would you like to see provided for students and their families with attendance below 85%?		

	What form would this take?	
	Why do you believe it would help?	
	What are the barriers to providing this?	
	Who are the people in your school that would be key to providing this?	
	Are there any external agencies that you think would be able to contribute to this?	
		How would you like these agencies to provide support? Direct with families, 1:1 with the child, supervision, coaching?
Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences of persistent non-attendance?		

**Professionals Interview Schedule:**

<b>1st</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3rd</b>
What is your experience of school refusal?		
	In what capacity (role) did you experience this?	
What language do you use to describe attendance below 85% ?		
	Why do you use these terms?	
		What distinctions do you make between X and Y?
	Would you consider using other terms; absentee, truancy, school refusal, persistence non-attendance, anxious school refusal?	
		Why use / why not use?
		Are there any other terms you use?
	Why do you use the language you do to describe attendance below 85%	
	Where did you come across the terms you use?	
		Training, reading on the subject, past experiences, perceptions of cause?
What explanations or reasons do you think make sense of persistent non-attendance?		
	Can you explain in more details? Please give case examples;	
		What other models or explanations have you heard about?
		Where did you find our about these

		models?
To what extent do you believe persistent non-attendance (below 85%) is an issue in your school?		
	How do you feel this compares with other schools? Locally and nationally?	
		Why do you think this is the case? (Similarity/difference).
How does your school deal with persistent non-attendance?		
	Who leads on this? And which other members of staff are involved?	
	What school-based support is there for persistent non-attendance?	
How are students affected by having attendance very low attendance (below 85% and if so how)?		
	Academically?	
	Socially?	
	Personally?	
		Are there any other ways you think students are affected by having attendance below 85%?
From your experiences what explanation's can be given for attendance below 85%?		
	Illness, family holiday taking, anxiety (mental health), parental health/mental health, lack of engagement, transport, social isolation.	

	Can you give case examples to illustrate your answer?	
		Are there any other factors you think are relevant?
What external support are you aware of that support professionals and young people with persistent non-attendance?		
	EWO, EPs, charity organisations, CAHMS, CHES?	
		What do they do in this support work? Can you give examples of this?
		What was your experience of this? Can you give examples of this?
Can you tell me about any cases where students who have attendance below 85% have been successfully supported to improve this?		
	Could you provide two contrasting examples of this?	
	Who provided this?	
	What did they do?	
	What were the characteristics that made this support successful?	
		What relationships were important in providing this?
What support would you like to see provided for students and their families with attendance below 85%?		

	What form would this take?	
	Why do you believe it would help?	
	What are the barriers to providing this?	
	Who are the people in your school that would be key to providing this?	
	Are there any external agencies that you think would be able to contribute to this?	
		How would you like these agencies to provide support? Direct with families, 1:1 with the child, supervision, coaching?
Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences of persistent non-attendance?		

**Parent Interview Schedule:**

1st	2nd	3rd
What is your experience of school refusal?		
	In what capacity (role) did you experience this?	
How did/do you describe your child's difficulties with attendance?		
	Why did you use this language?	
		What distinctions do you make between X and Y?
What language did you hear to describe your child's attendance difficulties?		
	Did you hear other terms; absentee, truancy, school refusal, persistence non-attendance, anxious school refusal?	
		What do you think and feel about these terms?
What explanations or reasons do you think make sense of your child attendance difficulties? persistent non-attendance?		
How does your school deal with this? persistent non-attendance?		
	What staff were involved?	
	What were the school-based support that was available?	
How was your child affected by having attendance very low attendance (below 85% and if so how)?		
	Academically?	

	Socially?	
	Personally?	
		Are there any other ways you think your child was affected by having low attendance?
From your experiences what can explain your child's attendance difficulties?		
	Are there any other factors you think are relevant?	
What external support was available to support you and your family?		
	EWO, EPs, charity organisations, CAHMS, CHES?	
		What do they do in this support work? Can you give examples of this?
		What was your experience of this? Can you give examples of this?
Can you tell me about any support you received that you found effective?		
	Could you provide any examples of this?	
	Who provided this?	
	What did they do?	
	What made this support successful?	
		What made it successful?
Can you tell me about any support you received that you did not find effective?		
	Could you provide any examples of this?	
	Who provided this?	
	What did they do?	

	What were the characteristics that made this support successful?	
What support would you like to see provided for students and their families with low attendance?		
	What form would this take?	
	Why do you believe it would help?	
	What are the barriers to providing this?	
	Who would be key in providing this?	
	Are there any external agencies that you think would be able to contribute to this?	
		How would you like these agencies to provide support? Direct with families, 1:1 with the child, supervision, coaching?
Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences of persistent non-attendance?		

**Young Person Interview Schedule:**

<b>1st</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3rd</b>
Can you tell me about school?		
What language did you hear to describe your attendance?		
	What do you think about these terms?	
Why do you think it was difficult to attend at times?		
How did school try and help you?		
	What helped you?	
	Who helped you?	
How did not attending affect you?		
	Academically?	
	Socially?	
	Personally?	
		Are there any other ways you were affected by having low attendance?
How do you explain your attendance difficulties?		
	Are there any other factors you think are relevant?	
Did anyone else try to help you?		
	What did they do?	
		Did this help? And if so how?
		If not what about it wasn't helpful?
What do you think would have helped		

you?		
	Who would you liked to have helped you?	
	What would you have liked them to do?	
	Why do you think this didn't happen	
Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences?		



**Child Interview Schedule:**

1st	2nd	3rd
Can you tell me about school?		
What did people say about your attendance?		
Why do you think it was difficult to attend at times?		
How did school try and help you?		
	What helped you?	
	Who helped you?	
How did not attending affect you?		
		Are there any other ways you were affected by having low attendance?
Did anyone else try to help you?		
	What did they do?	
		Did this help? And if so how?
		If not what about it wasn't helpful?
What do you think would have helped you?		
	Who would you liked to have helped you?	
	What would you have liked them to do?	
	Why do you think this didn't happen	
Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences?		

**CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

Academic Unit: Graduate School of Education

Title of Project: Persistent Non-Attendance in a South West Local Authority Area; a Case Study.

Research Team Member(s): Charlotte Orme-Stapleton

Project Contact Point: [Co285@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:Co285@exeter.ac.uk)

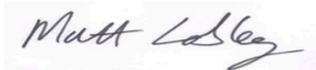
Supervisors: Brahm Norwich; Margie Tunbridge

This project has been approved for the period

From: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016  
To: 9<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Ethics Committee approval reference: 201516-061

Signature: Date: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016



(Matt Loble, Chair, SSIS College Ethics Committee)

**COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

When completing this form please remember that the purpose of the document is to clearly explain the ethical considerations of the research being undertaken. As a generic form it has been constructed to cover a wide-range of different projects so some sections may not seem relevant to you. Please include the information which addresses any ethical considerations for your particular project which will be needed by the SSIS Ethics Committee to approve your proposal.

Guidance on all aspects of the SSIS Ethics application process can be found on the SSIS intranet:

**Staff:** <https://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/research/researchenvironmentandpolicies/ethics/>

**Students:** <http://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/student/postgraduateresearch/ethicsapprovalforyourresearch/>

All staff and students within SSIS should use this form to apply for ethical approval and then send it to one of the following email addresses:

[ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

[ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and students in the Graduate School of Education.

Applicant details	
Name	Charlotte Orme-Stapleton
Department	Educational Psychology
UoE email address	Co285@exeter.ac.uk

Duration for which permission is required		
You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. The start date should be at least one month from the date that you submit this form. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that <u>retrospective ethical approval will never be given.</u>		
Start date:06/06/2016	End date:09/01/2018	Date submitted:22/01/2015

Students only	
All students must discuss their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. The discussion may be face to face or via email.	
Prior to submitting your application in its final form to the SSIS Ethics Committee it should be approved by your first and second supervisor / dissertation supervisor/tutor. You should submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of their email approval.	
Student number	60039305
Programme of study	DEdPsych
Name of Supervisor(s)/tutors or Dissertation Tutor	Brahm Norwich and Margie Tunbridge

N:\Research\23. Ethics\1. Applications\_ 2014 Onwards\2. Outstanding\Orme-Stapleton\_201516-061\Orme-Stapleton\_Ethics Application\_approved Jun 16.docx

Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	25/09/2015
--	------------

**Certification for all submissions**

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change radically I will complete a further ethics proposal form.

**Charlotte Orme-Stapleton**

Double click this box to confirm certification

*Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.*

**TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT**

**Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

**ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE**

Cornwall Council

**MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005**

n/a

**SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

*Maximum of 750 words.*

This work aims to investigate the different conceptualizations of 'school refusal' and to identify how, why, when and by whom this term is used. With language being such an important aspect of the work that we do I believe it is important to clarify what is meant by the term 'school refusal' in the locality and what it means to those who use it. As 'school refusal' has been raised as an important issue in the locality then examining the antecedents, contexts and impact of such an experience is valuable to provide a school, professionals and familial perspective to inform practice and to inform countywide guidance. As can be seen from the previous research multiple perspectives have been sought when investigating school refusal and I aim to triangulate information from professionals, parents and children. I believe this triangulation will highlight any differences in perspectives on the issue of school refusal, perception of the impact of the experience and the contextual situation in which it arises. I argue that understanding the different perspectives of those involved in school refusal including the child, parent and school will help shed light on the complex dynamic of persistent non-attendance in the local area. Previous research as discussed has looked at one or a combination of the perspectives, but not combined all three to provide a full local picture. Gaining information from different stakeholders in the local area fulfils a need of the local authority and fills a current gap in the research literature; through its methodology and the focus including school, parental and child perspectives. Previous research has not used a case study methodology across a number of schools in a local authority, nor then conducted follow up case studies with families from those schools. My research plans to provide an in depth picture of persistent non-attendance in a local context, to understand the complex experience of the phenomena from 3 primary and 3 secondary schools perspectives. The second part of my research is nested within part 1 and aims to explore the individual experiences of children and families from these schools. I am to understand their experience of persistent non-attendance and further understand this within the context of the understanding of the school. A subsequent outcome of the research may be that early intervention is possible when

indicators of possible persistent non-attendance are highlighted and therefore reduce its likelihood in the future. Furthermore the aim is to inform countywide guidance from the local authority.

**Aims:**

- To investigate the experiences, language used and conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance from a school, teacher's and other key professionals' perspectives.
- To investigate the lived experience of school refusal from a family and child perspective.
- To integrate the experiences and perspectives of the school, family and child about persistent non-attendance into a shared understanding that can inform the design Local Authority (LA) guidance.

**Objectives:** To achieve the broad aims I will do the following:

- To examine perceptions of key school staff (class teacher, SENCo, Head teacher), other involved professionals (EWO, CAMHS), families and children about persistent non-attendance and their experience of this.
- To explore the level of service that individual schools access from the education welfare service, the level of engagement with the service and their perceptions of the value of this.
- To compare language used across professionals, families and children to describe persistent non-attendance.
- To compare any models or conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance that are identified and discussed.

**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH**

N/a

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

The methodological approach adopted in this study is that of mixed methods. The case study approach I feel will allow a genuine enquiry into the schools' experience and will allow me to adapt to the individual experiences of the school, for example the staff who are involved in dealing with attendance and the local services that they access. Furthermore a case study approach I felt would be most useful at this stage in the localities exploration of persistent non-attendance as they look to review their countywide guidance on the issue. Practical concerns have also informed case studies being adopted as an approach and the schools chosen being closely located due to the large geographical area and mainly rural nature of the local authority, as this allows for multiple visits to be made to the schools to conduct interviews so as to fit in with the needs of the school and their staff.

**Part 1: Data Collection: Summer term 2016.**

Background data will be requested from the local authority and EWO service about the school demographic, intake, ages, socio-economic status and background to identify the participant schools. Once the schools are identified, attendance specific data will be requested in terms of class data and whole school data. These data will include percentage level of attendance, number of authorized/unauthorized absences coded in line with the shared school and EWO coding. Semi-

structured interviews will be conducted in individual schools at a time agreed with them during the summer term of 2016. These interviews will be conducted with the SENCo, EWO contact, Head teacher and any other members of staff that are involved in attendance monitoring for example a pastoral head or student services member. This will ensure focus but allow for contributions and discussion to be varied, they will allow for enquiry to take place into the experiences of the staff and their unique perceptions.

Questions will be asked in the following areas:

- Experience of school refusal.
- Language used.
- Explanations/reasons that make sense of persistent non-attendance.
- The extent to which persistent non-attendance (below 85%) is an issue in your school.
- How non-attendance is dealt with.
- How it affects individuals.
- Individual experiences and examples.
- What external support is available and what would you like to see.

The interviews will take no longer than an hour, will be recorded by digital recorder and additional notes will be taken. Copies of transcriptions will then be sent to schools to sign off and make any amendments they feel necessary if requested. Nvivo will then be used to analyse the data under each question to gain a rich picture of the schools experience and perceptions of school refusal.

#### **Part 2: Data Collection: Autumn Term 2016.**

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with members of the family at least one parent and the child, these interviews will be based on the school interview schedule but adapted for the adult family members and the child. Interviews will be conducted in the family home during the autumn term of 2016. Background data about the child's attendance, engagement with services and any other relevant information will also be sought from the family and school. In cases where parents wish to contribute but children do not; parental data will be used as a stand-alone case study. Where this is the case a second family from this school will be sought where possible, to provide a child and family perspective.

#### **Data and Information Analysis:**

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis will then be combined to produce the individual school case studies and combined to provide an overall case study picture. The quantitative data will identify case study schools for inclusion and provide contextual background information; qualitative interview data will then provide individual perspectives on the experience of persistent non-attendance those who work with this as a phenomenon.

Quantitative analysis will involve descriptive statistical analysis to allow for comparison between school attendance data between the classes within the school, the locality area, countywide and at a country level. School data should be available through published statistics, however more detailed breakdowns of the school picture may be need to be conducted to understand specific school dynamics and contextualise individual students/classes attendance. These data will then be used to provide a detailed picture of the attendance of those attending the school, the level of EWO involvement the school have had, the number of students who have been supported by the EWO service and any quantitative outcomes from the EWO involvement. The quantitative data will then allow for comparisons to be made between the schools involved in the research, the unique profiles of their pupils and their attendance. This quantitative analysis will then provide background information, which will provide context for the semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interviews will be analysed at an individual study level, for both part one and two, and then on an overall level across the two parts. The interviews will be designed to cover issues from the individuals varying perspectives to allow for this analysis and ensuring that appropriate comparisons are taking place. All interviews will be developed from the same interview structure and will then be adapted dependent on role and analysed using thematic analysis. Where shared experiences are presented from different perspectives, this information will be presented from each perspective. Commonalities will then be highlighted as examples of shared understanding and differences will be discussed to understand these differing perspectives.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

##### **Part 1: Participants:**

Part one will involve recruiting schools with the aim of having schools confirmed in writing by June 2016. 6 schools in the locality area will be recruited through professional discussion and planning meetings, 3 primary and 3 secondary. These schools will be identified based on their location in the authority and the attendance statistics. Schools will be approached who have the highest percentage of students who are below 85% attendance in the locality, this will identify schools who have the greatest experience of persistent non-attendance, these data will be requested from the local EWO service. Requests will be made to the school to conduct semi-structured interviews between March and June with key members of staff, SENCo, EWO contact, Head teacher and any other members of staff that are involved in attendance monitoring for example a pastoral head or student services member.

##### **Part 2: Participants:**

The second part of the study will be sought through discussion with the schools in part one and the professionals who work with them. Case families, one from each school will be sought where at least one child has an attendance of 85% or lower. Families will then be approached with support from the school to ask if they wish to contribute to the research and inform later practice. If an EP has been involved previously or is currently working with the family, they will also be included in discussion with the school as to whether they feel involvement would be appropriate. Families will be approached in writing by July of 2016 with follow up phone calls if appropriate, the aim will be for these families to be recruited from the schools in part one, however if that is not possible families will be recruited based on discussion with the EWO service or approached based on their previous EP involvement due to persistent non-attendance.

#### **THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION**

I argue that understanding the different perspectives of those involved in school refusal including the child, parent and school will help shed light on the complex dynamic of persistent non-attendance in the local area. Previous research as discussed has looked at one or a combination of the perspectives, but not combined all three to provide a full local picture. Gaining information from different stakeholders in the local area fulfils a need of the local authority and fills a current gap in the research literature; through its methodology and the focus including school, parental and child perspectives.

Conducting research with children presents its own set of ethical considerations, particularly around informed consent, as discussed in Graham and Powell (2015). I will address the additional ethical concerns of working with children by not only obtaining consent from parents for their

family to be involved, but will also request consent from the child. I will produce an age appropriate consent form (see attached) to be signed by the child, alongside which I will verbally let them know what the aims of the study are, that they can withdraw at any time and that they do not need to answer any questions that they feel uncomfortable with or don't know the answer. I will furthermore ensure that I use up to date research to inform the approach I take and the tools I use when working with the child participants, to get the best from them and work in the best way possible.

#### **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Interviews will be adapted to be age appropriate and will be conducted in places that suit individual needs. Background information will be sought on the families from the other professionals that work with them to ensure any special arrangements are required. It is expected that interviews with families will take place in the family home, therefore I will let colleagues know when I am conducting the interviews and where I will be and the times. Furthermore I will take a phone with me in case any difficulties arise.

#### **THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION**

Informed consent will be obtained in line with the HCPC standards of proficiency, with all participants in the research being fully informed of the aims and purpose of the research. All participants will be asked to provide written consent in the form of two signed consent forms prior to the research being undertaken, one copy which will be taken for my records and one copy that will be given to the participant. While informal interest in the project may be acquired before this through discussion, no research will take place until ethical approval has been obtained and consent forms are signed. Copies of the consent forms will be given to the participants for their own records, which will include my contact details to allow them to follow up the research and remove their data at any point if they choose. Furthermore on request individual transcripts of interviews will be sent to participants to allow them to make any amendments, to ensure the accuracy of their responses and allow them to remove anything that on reflection they have decided they wish not to share. Where this isn't possible due to the age of participant's transcripts will be sent to their parents on request to go through with their children. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw at anytime, not answer any individual questions or change their mind about their answers during the course of the interviews. The retrospective and reflective nature of the case study ensures that there is little manipulation from the researcher and the participants will be fully informed of the nature and quality of the research prior to taking part.

Confidentiality, as outlined in the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of ethics will be maintained throughout the research by using codenames to refer to schools and families. All transcripts and data will be anonymised before use, with any distinguishing characteristics being removed. Furthermore the local area will be referred to generally to avoid any possible identification of individual families or schools. All information will be kept securely and will only be accessible by myself as the researcher, the local authority and the university. All areas of confidentiality will be put in writing in the consent form, with any additional questions being answered by me. It will be made clear to the individual families that while their contributions will be written up, they will not be shared directly with the individual child's school. For part one attendance data will not be requested on an individual basis, but in the form of general percentages, as this is data that is readily available to the school and the EWO service, whole school consent will be obtained from the head, rather than on an individual pupil basis and from the professionals taking part.

#### ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

The case study methodology follows an inquiry approach and will therefore be used to capture the already existing experiences of schools and families, therefore reducing any likely harm. The retrospective and reflective nature of the case study ensures that there is little manipulation from the researcher and the participants will be fully informed of the nature and quality of the research prior to taking part.

The sensitive nature of persistent non-attendance presents challenges that need to be considered when designing research. There are varied reasons for persistent non-attendance, all of which can affect children and young people differently. It is important to acknowledge that a high number of students who are persistent non-attenders have issues around mental health and anxiety. It is therefore crucial to understand the role of mental health in persistent non-attendance and to be sensitive to the individual's experience as a researcher. To reduce any long-term harm from the research I plan to work closely with other professionals involved with the children and their families to ensure that those recruited are able to engage with the research without lasting psychological concerns. While discussing persistent non-attendance is likely to be emotive I will approach the interviews in a client-centred way, encouraging them to ask for breaks when needed, to ask questions and only discuss what they are comfortable with. I will furthermore use my previous counselling experience to ensure that I conduct check ins at the beginning of interviews to ensure that the participants are in the right frame of mind to engage, and check outs to ensure that they are feeling safe in what they have discussed and that any negative feels are acknowledged and dealt with. If at any point a child or family member is upset I will ask if they want to continue, or if they are showing signs of distress I will terminate the interview myself.

While using an investigative approach as identified there is a low risk of harm to participants, the interviews will contain questions allowing individuals to contribute as much or little as they wish and any questions can be skipped. However there is the possibility that some individuals may find the issue of school refusal difficult to discuss, particularly the participants in part 2, parents and children. Participants will be protected from harm by ensuring that the questions are thoughtfully written, asked and followed up. Furthermore questions will be drafted to ensure that they are appropriate for the individual participants, for example ensuring they are age appropriate. I will also ensure that if during any part of the interviews that parents or children are getting upset that breaks will be take, or the interview will be stopped all together. Were an individual to become distressed during the interview I would ensure that they were ok and supported before my leaving and follow this up with a phone call no more than a week later.

As a researcher it is possible that I may be at risk of physical harm due to conducting research in participants homes. I will be protected from harm by ensuring that the local authority database is checked prior to any visits to ensure that the home is safe for me to visit, using same risk assessment conducted by social care. I will provide the office with details of the address that the interview will be conducted at; call them prior to my arrival and on my leaving to confirm my safety. Additionally I will make a family member aware of the time of my intended interview and contact them once it is completed. If any difficulties were to arise I will follow the local authority procedure of calling and asking for the 'red folder', where local procedure will be followed to ensure my safety.

#### **DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE**

- Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.
- Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.
- Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick, backed up using Dropbox and transferred to and stored on the University's U-drive as soon as possible. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.
- Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.

#### **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There are no commercial interests in this project. The information will be used to produce my thesis, and by the local authority to inform practice and support guidance.

#### **USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK**

All participants will be given the option as to whether or not they would like to review their interview transcript to make amendments. If they opt to do this, their transcripts will be sent to them and their amendments will be included.

#### **INFORMATION SHEET**

##### **LETTER TO HEAD TEACHERS**

Dear Head teacher,

Subject: Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.

We are writing to let you know about a study, which will be conducted in the upcoming academic year into persistent non-attendance in primary and secondary schools.

This will be undertaken with the co-operation of Cornwall Council.

Phase 1: Interviews with school staff and other professionals working with students who are identified as persistent non-attenders.

Phase 2: Interviews with families and children who have been identified as persistent non-attenders.

We are writing to find out if you are interested in your school participating in phase 1. This will involve conducting interviews with key members of staff in the school and suggesting families for part 2;

i. SENCo, head of pastoral support, member of staff responsible for attendance and EWO contact. The researchers will do these interviews over a period that suits these members of staff.

What will your school get from participating?

I will summarise the overall findings in an anonymous report which will be circulated to all schools involved, furthermore this information will be used to inform countywide guidance for professionals on persistent non-attendance.

Yours sincerely  
Charlotte Orme-Stapleton.

**PLEASE RETURN THE FOLLOWING:**

I wish to take part in the research into persistent non-attendance and am happy to allow the following members of staff to take part in this.

SENCo.....

Pastoral Support.....

Attendance Monitoring.....

EWO Contact.....

I also agree to identify children/families to take part on phase 2

Head Teacher.....

School.....

Contact Telephone.....

**CONSENT FORM**

**Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

**Details of Project**

*This project aims to get individuals views about persistent non-attendance from a professional, parental and child perspective. This information will then be used to inform professionals on the issue of persistent non-attendance through informing countywide guidance and professional practice. Specifically;*

- *To investigate the experiences, language used and conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance from a school, teacher's and other key professionals' perspectives.*
- *To investigate the lived experience of school refusal from a family and child perspective.*
- *To integrate the experiences and perspectives of the school, family and child about persistent non-attendance into a shared understanding that can inform the design Local Authority (LA) guidance.*

**Contact Details**

For further information about the research /interview data please contact:

Name: *Charlotte Orme-Stapleton*

Postal address: *Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU*

Email: *co285@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Professor Brahm Norwich, Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU

**Confidentiality**

*Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.*

**Data Protection Notice**

- *Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.*
- *Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick and backed up using Dropbox transferred to and stored on the University's U-drive as soon as possible. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.*
- *Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.*

**Anonymity**

*Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.*

**Consent**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.  
I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....  
(Signature of participant) (Date)

.....  
(Printed name of participant) (Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....  
(Signature of researcher) (Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

#### **PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

##### **Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

##### **Details of Project**

*This project aims to get individuals views about persistent non-attendance from a professional, parental and child perspective. This information will then be used to inform professionals on the issue of persistent non-attendance through informing county wide guidance and professional practice.*

##### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research /interview data please contact:

Name: *Charlotte Orme-Stapleton*

Postal address: *Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU*

Email: *co285@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

*Brahm Norwich, Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU*

##### **Confidentiality**

*Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.*

##### **Data Protection Notice**

- *Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.*
- *Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick and backed up using Dropbox and transferred to and stored on the University's U-drive as soon as possible. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.*
- *Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.*

##### **Anonymity**

*Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.*

##### **Consent**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw\* their participation;

- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my daughter / son;
- Any information which my daughter / son gives will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- If applicable, the information, which my daughter / son gives, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- All information my daughter / son gives will be treated as confidential;
- The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my daughter's / son's anonymity.

*Note: \* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place.*

.....  
(Signature of parent / guardian) (Date)

.....  
(Printed name of parent / guardian) (Printed name of participant)

.....  
(Printed name of researcher) (Signature of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants' parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

**YOUNG PERSON INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

**Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

**Details of Project**

*This project aims to get individuals views about persistent non-attendance from a professional, parental and child perspective. This information will then be used to inform professionals on the issue of persistent non-attendance through informing county wide guidance and professional practice.*

**Contact Details**

For further information about the research /interview data please contact:

Name: *Charlotte Orme-Stapleton*  
Postal address: *Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU*  
Email: *co285@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

*Brahm Norwich, Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU*

**Confidentiality**

*Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you*

can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

**Data Protection Notice**

- Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.
- Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick and backed up using Dropbox and transferred to and stored on the University's U-drive as soon as possible. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.
- Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.

**Anonymity**

Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.

**Consent**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.  
I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw\* their participation;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about myself
- Any information which my I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- All information I give will be treated as confidential;
- The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

*Note: \* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place.*

..... (Young Person)	..... (Date)
..... (Printed name of Young Person)	..... (Printed name of participant)
..... (Printed name of researcher)	..... (Signature of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant, parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

**CHILD INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

**Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

**Details of Project**

*We are interested in asking you about going to school. I am going to ask you questions about your time at school, when you went and when you didn't. This will be used to help schools and other children.*

**Consent**

- I have been told about the project
- I do not have to take part and if I do I can stop at anytime.
- What I say will not be shared unless I or someone else is at risk.

.....  
(Young Person) (Date)

.....  
(Printed name of Young Person) (Printed name of participant)

.....  
(Printed name of researcher) (Signature of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants' parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

**SUBMISSION PROCEDURE**

Staff and students should follow the procedure below.

**Post Graduate Taught Students (Graduate School of Education):** Please submit your completed application to your first supervisor. Please see the submission flowchart for further information on the process.

**All other students** should discuss their application with their supervisor(s) / dissertation tutor / tutor and gain their approval prior to submission. Students should submit evidence of approval with their application, e.g. a copy of the supervisors email approval.

**All staff** should submit their application to the appropriate email address below.

This application form and examples of your consent form, information sheet and translations of any documents which are not written in English should be submitted by email to the SSIS Ethics Secretary via one of the following email addresses:

[ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

[ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and students in the Graduate School of Education.



## **APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH OR CONSULTATION PROJECT**

Please ensure that all sections of this form are completed to enable us to deal with your request promptly.

Before completing this form please read the guidance notes that accompany it.

If you have any queries regarding the completion of this form please contact the Research Governance Co-ordinator on ☎ 01872 326324

If you have any queries regarding Data Protection Issues please contact the Data Protection Officer on ☎ 01872 322038

Please return the completed form to the Research Governance Coordinator

**This document is available in large print  
and in other formats on request. Please  
contact the Research Governance  
Coordinator.**

SECTION 1

Details of applicants

---

**1. Title of Project**

Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.

---

**2. Department work is being undertaken for**

**Children's Early Help, Psychology and Social Care Services.**

**Section: Educational Psychology**

---

**3. Applicant** (all correspondence will be sent to this address unless indicated otherwise)

Surname:- Orme-Stapleton      Forename(s):- Charlotte Elizabeth  
Title:- Miss

Job title of applicant:- Trainee Educational Psychologist

Address:- 2nd Floor, Council Offices, Dolcoath Avenue, Camborne, TR14 8SX

Tel:- 01872326994

Email:- corne-stapleton@cornwall.gov.uk

**Originator** (where different)

Surname:-                                      Forename(s):-  
Title:-

Job title of originator:-

#### **4. Other workers and departments/institutions involved?**

Exeter University.

---

---

#### **5. What is the estimated financial and staff cost to the council of this research/consultation? Please include costs for preparation, conducting, analysing and communicating your findings.**

No financial costs. Staff costs may be present as key members of staff, SENCo, EWO contact, Head teacher and any other members of staff that are involved in attendance monitoring for example a pastoral head or student services members will be interviewed. These interviews will last a maximum of one hour, this participation will however be voluntary and will be conducted at a time that is convenient for those staff to minimise cover costs. Preparation, conduction, analysis and communication of finding will be conducted in my own time and supervised by Exeter University.

---

#### **6. Please give details of the relevant experience and qualifications of the main researcher**

I am currently undertaking the Doctorate in Educational Psychology and am directly supervised by Professor Brahm Norwich and Margie Tunbridge from Exeter University. Additionally I hold a Bsc (Hons) in Psychology and masters levels modules in education.

---

#### **7. Outline of the project** (please attach extra pages if necessary)

This work aims to investigate the different conceptualisations of 'school refusal' and to identify how, why, when and by whom this term is used. With language being such an important aspect of the work that we do I believe it is important to clarify what is meant by the term 'school refusal' in the locality and what it means to those who use it. As 'school refusal' has been raised as an important issue in the locality then examining the antecedents, contexts and impact of such an experience is valuable to provide a school, professionals and familial perspective to inform practice and to inform countywide guidance.

##### Previous Literature:

The Department For Education (DFE, 2015 p. 3) identifies that 'Persistent absentees are defined as those pupils missing around 15 per cent or more of possible sessions. The persistent absence threshold is identified as 15 per cent or more of the typical amount of possible sessions across a given period'.

##### Definitions of Attendance and Language:

Berg, Nichols and Pritchard (1969, p. 123) definition of 'school phobia', Carroll (2015).

However the characteristics of the behaviour remain stable.

- Prolonged absences (Block absences, sporadic non-attendance, leaving school early or arriving late.)
- Parental knowledge of the prolonged absence
- Anxiety.

Pellegrini (2007). Ekstrand's (2015) on language.

#### Theories of Persistent Non-Attendance:

Berg (1969), Ekstrand (2015), Hughes, Gullone, Dudley and Tonge (2010) Baker and Bishop (2015), Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg (2014)

#### Impact of Non-Attendance and Intervention:

Hughes et al (2010), Reid (2008), King and Berstein (2001) and Kearney (2008) review the negative impact of school refusal, with Reid (2008) highlighting the challenge of understanding of long term effects of persistent non-attendance. Carroll (2015), Gregory and Purcell (2014).

As can be seen from the previous research multiple perspectives have been sought when investigating school refusal and I aim to triangulate information from professionals, parents and children. I believe this triangulation will highlight any differences in perspectives on the issue of school refusal, perception of the impact of the experience and the contextual situation in which it arises. I argue that understanding the different perspectives of those involved in school refusal including the child, parent and school will help shed light on the complex dynamic of persistent non-attendance in the local area. Previous research as discussed has looked at one or a combination of the perspectives, but not combined all three to provide a full local picture. Gaining information from different stakeholders in the local area fulfils a need of the local authority and fills a current gap in the research literature; through its methodology and the focus including school, parental and child perspectives. Previous research has not used a case study methodology across a number of schools in a local authority, nor then conducted follow up case studies with families from those schools. My research plans to provide an in depth picture of persistent non-attendance in a local context, to understand the complex experience of the phenomena from 3 primary and 3 secondary schools perspectives. The second part of my research is nested within part 1 and aims to explore the individual experiences of children and families from these schools. I am to understand their experience of persistent non-attendance and further understand this within the context of the understanding of the school. A subsequent outcome of the research may be that early intervention is possible when indicators of possible persistent non-attendance are highlighted and therefore reduce its likelihood in the future. Furthermore the aim is to inform countywide guidance from the local authority.

#### Aims:

- To investigate the experiences, language used and conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance from a school, teacher's and other key professionals' perspectives.
- To investigate the lived experience of school refusal from a family and child perspective.

- To integrate the experiences and perspectives of the school, family and child about persistent non-attendance into a shared understanding that can inform the design Local Authority (LA) guidance.

#### Objectives:

To achieve the broad aims I will do the following:

- To examine perceptions of key school staff (class teacher, SENCo, Head teacher), other involved professionals (EWO, CAMHS, CHES, school nurse and primary mental health workers), families and children about persistent non-attendance and their experience of this.
- To explore the level of service that individual schools access from the education welfare service, the level of engagement with the service and their perceptions of the value of this.
- To compare language used across professionals, families and children to describe persistent non-attendance.
- To compare any models or conceptualisations of persistent non-attendance that are identified and discussed.

#### Methodology:

##### Research Design:

The methodological approach adopted in this study is that of mixed methods. Ayiro (2012) suggests that mixed methods methodologies are 'practical' and leave the researcher 'free to adopt all methods possible to address a research question' (p. 499), adopting multiple worldviews and acknowledging the contributions of their associated epistemologies. It was felt based on the research questions and the local nature of the questions that an illuminatory case study as identified by Thomas (2013), and is further discussed by Antoniou and Stierer (2004), was most appropriate to gain understanding of complex phenomena of persistent non-attendance in the local context. Previous research has investigated persistent non-attendance at a number of levels and from a number of perspectives including; the professional, school, child and parents, however none provide a rich picture of the current local context and challenge.

Case studies allow for a rich, in-depth picture to be developed from which conclusions can be drawn about individual experience. Case studies can allow for multiple data sources including quantitative, qualitative and contextualising information to be integrated to give a well-rounded picture of a schools experiences of persistent non-attendance. The case study methodology fits into a constructivist epistemology as discussed in Thomas (2013) that suggests that the individuals who experience a phenomena do so differently, and it is their experiences combined that truly describe that phenomena. The challenge with a case study methodology is that generalization to the wider population is not possible due to the uniqueness of single cases and the degree to which they may vary from similar cases around them.

The case study approach I feel will allow a genuine enquiry into the schools' experience and will allow me to adapt to the individual experiences of the school, for example the staff who are involved in dealing with attendance and the local services that they access. Furthermore a case study approach I felt would be most useful at this stage in the localities exploration of persistent non-attendance as they look to review their countywide guidance on the issue. Practical concerns have also informed case studies being adopted as an approach and the schools chosen being closely located due to the large geographical area and mainly rural nature

of the local authority, as this allows for multiple visits to be made to the schools to conduct interviews so as to fit in with the needs of the school and their staff. The research will follow a 2 part nested case study design. In part 1 will be 6 case study schools, 3 primary and 3 secondary, which will be example cases from the local authority selected based on their experience of persistent non-attendance. It is assumed at this stage that these experiences will vary, however to get a snap shot of experience in the area I feel it is important to gain a primary and secondary perspective. Qualitative data will then be obtained through semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in attendance, the head teacher, SENCo, Education Welfare Officer and where appropriate other staff members.

The same case study methodology has been chosen for part 2 of the research. These case studies families will each be from the case study school, where at least one child has been identified as a persistent non-attender due to their attendance being below 85%. The second part of the study will provide information of individuals' experience of persistent non-attendance, a focus that is identified as important through the literature. The approach will include secondary quantitative data about the pupil from their records including; attendance data, previous amount of support they have received and amount of involvement they have had with additional services to provide context. The primary data will be qualitative unique experiences of the child and their parents, elicited through interviews. As previously stated, it is not the aim of the research to make generalisations from these individual experiences of persistent non-attendance, but to understand the individuals' experiences and what we can learn from them. While the case studies will stand alone as a valuable study, they will also provide an important comparison to the information gained from their schools.

#### Data and Information Analysis:

Quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS. This analysis will involve descriptive statistical analysis to allow for comparison between school attendance data between the classes within the school, the locality area, countywide and at a country level. School data should be available through published statistics, however more detailed breakdowns of the school picture may be need to be conducted to understand specific school dynamics and contextualise individual students/classes attendance. These data will then be used to provide a detailed picture of the attendance of those attending the school, the level of EWO involvement the school have had, the number of students who have been supported by the EWO service and any quantitative outcomes from the EWO involvement. The quantitative data will then allow for comparisons to be made between the schools involved in the research, the unique profiles of their pupils and their attendance. This quantitative analysis will then provide background information, which will provide context for the semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interviews will be analysed with Nvivo, using the domains identified in the hierarchical structure initially completed at the beginning of the research process, as proposed by Tomlinson (1989). I have chosen a constructivist approach to analysis due to the epistemological standpoint I have adopted which acknowledges the impact of the researchers conceptualisation of an issue in its research, and the importance of the researcher acknowledging this to themselves. This approach suggests that it is not possible to conduct truly object research and therefore makes the researchers perspective explicit. Nvivo analysis

will be undertaken at an individual study level, for both part one and two, and then on an overall level across the two parts. The interviews will be designed to cover issues from the individuals varying perspectives to allow for this analysis to take place and ensuring that appropriate comparisons are taking place. All interviews will be developed from the same interview structure and will then be adapted dependent on role. The interviews will then be analysed using network analysis as outlined in Thomas (2013, p. 236, this approach will lend itself well to data obtained using hierarchical focusing as it 'aims to show how one idea is related to another using a network'. Network analysis will allow me to uncover individuals constructs and how these are linked together through a network, furthermore I will then be able to see if and how these constructs build themes within the case studies and how they are related to one another. These networks can be produced using word and then be used to provide nodes for Nvivo, where examples of each can be organised.

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis will then be combined to produce the individual school case studies and combined to provide an overall case study picture. The quantitative data will identify case study schools for inclusion and provide contextual background information; qualitative interview data will then provide individual perspectives on the experience of persistent non-attendance those who work with this as a phenomenon.

---

---

## **8. How will the findings be used?**

The findings will be used to inform practice working with children and families who are affected by persistent non-attendance. This information will inform countywide guidance on the issue and will be distributed to professionals across education, health and social care. Additionally if felt appropriate this research project will be edited for publication to influence educational psychology nationally, building upon the body of knowledge that currently informs practice.

---

## **9. How will the data be finally presented?** (e.g. Report; in a return)

The data will be presented in a thesis paper, which will be sent to the county service.

---

## **10. How will your results be disseminated and to whom will they be sent?**

Each participating school will receive an individual report. Findings will be shared with the educational psychology service through a copy of the full report and contribution of countywide multidisciplinary guidance on the issue.

---

**11. How will you feed back to respondents?**

All participants will be given the option as to whether or not they would like to review their interview transcript to make amendments. If they opt to do this, their transcripts will be sent to them and their amendments will be included. Participant schools will get an individual report and both participating schools and families will be able to see the final report on request.

---

**12. Will you be putting the final document/findings onto the COUNCIL website?**

No, due to the extensive nature of the completed thesis. If requested an edited version could be uploaded.

**Will you be putting the final document/findings on any OTHER website?**

No as above.

---

---

**13. Have service users/carers been involved in the design of this project?**

No due to the illuminatory nature of the project.

---

SECTION 2
-----------

Details of project
--------------------

---

**14. How will the data be stored, and what consideration has been given to the relevant Data Protection issues?**

- Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.
- Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.
- Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick and backed up on the secure university server. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.

•Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.

---

**15. How will the sample be selected, approached and recruited? What inclusion and exclusion criteria will be used? If relevant, how many participants will be recruited and what ages will they be?**

Part 1: Participants:

Part one will involve recruiting schools with the aim of having schools confirmed in writing by January 2016. 6 schools in the county will be recruited through professional discussion and planning meetings, 3 primary and 3 secondary. These schools will be identified based on their location in the authority and the attendance statistics. Schools will be approached who have the highest percentage of students who are below 85% attendance in the locality, this will identify schools who have the greatest experience of persistent non-attendance, these data will be requested from the local EWO service. Requests will be made to the school to conduct semi-structured interviews between March and June with key members of staff, SENCo, EWO contact, Head teacher and any other members of staff that are involved in attendance monitoring for example a pastoral head or student services member.

Part 2: Participants:

The second part of the study will be sought through discussion with the schools in part one and the professionals who work with them. Case families, one from each school will be sought where at least one child has an attendance of 85% or lower and their attendance is of concern. Families will then be approached with support from the school to ask if they wish to contribute to the research and inform later practice. If an EP has been involved previously or is currently working with the family, they will also be included in discussion with the school as to whether they feel involvement would be appropriate. Families will be approached in writing by July of 2016 with follow up phone calls if appropriate, the aim will be for these families to be recruited from the schools in part one, however if that is not possible families will be recruited based on discussion with the EWO service or approached based on their previous EP involvement due to persistent non-attendance.

---

**16. Will any of the sample be reimbursed – either in cash or in kind – for taking part in this project?**

No, each school however will receive an individual report.

---

SECTION 3

Consent

---

**17a. Is written consent to be obtained?**

Yes please find attached the consent and information form.

## **TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS CONSENT FORM**

### **Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

#### **Details of Project**

This project aims to get individuals views about persistent non-attendance from a professional, parental and child perspective. This information will then be used to inform professionals on the issue of persistent non-attendance through informing countywide guidance and professional practice.

#### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research /interview data please contact:

Name: Charlotte Orme-Stapleton

Postal address: Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU

Email: co285@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Professor Brahm Norwich, Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU

#### **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

#### **Data Protection Notice**

- Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.
- Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick and backed up using Dropbox. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.
- Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.

#### **Anonymity**

Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.

#### **Consent**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;

- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....  
 (Signature of participant)

.....  
 (Printed name of participant)(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....  
 (Signature of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
 Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

**PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

**Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

**Details of Project**

This project aims to get individuals views about persistent non-attendance from a professional, parental and child perspective. This information will then be used to inform professionals on the issue of persistent non-attendance through informing county wide guidance and professional practice.

**Contact Details**

For further information about the research /interview data please contact:

Name: Charlotte Orme-Stapleton  
 Postal address: Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU  
 Email: co285@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:  
 Brahm Norwich, Exeter University St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Rd, EX1 2LU

### **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

### **Data Protection Notice**

- Individuals have a right to remove their data from the study, review their own interview and make amendments.
- Raw data will be kept on an encrypted USB stick and backed up using Dropbox. This data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.
- Data will be used to inform practice, however this will be anonymised and therefore individuals will not be identifiable.

### **Anonymity**

Anonymity will be maintained by using codenames for schools and families, keeping this key separate from the raw data. Furthermore anonymity will be maintained by removing any distinguishing features that would allow that school/family to be identified.

### **Consent**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.  
I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw\* their participation;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my daughter / son;
- any information which my daughter / son gives will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information, which my daughter / son gives, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information my daughter / son gives will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my daughter's / son's anonymity.

Note: \* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place.

.....  
(Signature of parent / guardian)

...  
(E

.....  
(Printed name of parent / guardian)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants' parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

## CHILD INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

### Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.

#### Details of Project

*This project aims to find out about your experience of non-attendance, to help adults understand and help other children.*

#### Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- I do not have to take part, if I do choose to, I may at any stage withdraw\*.
- I have the right to refuse your use of my information.
- My information will only be used for this project.
- All information I give will be treated as confidential;
- The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

*Note: \* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place.*

.....  
(Young Person)

.....  
(Date)

.....  
(Printed name of Young Person)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

.....  
(Printed name of researcher)

.....  
(Signature of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants' parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

#### **17b. If "yes", from whom will the written consent be obtained?**

School, parent and child.

---

**18a. Does the study include subjects for whom English is not a first language?**

Potentially.

**18b. What arrangements have been made for those who will require an alternative format? (e.g. visual impairment).**

Consent forms can be provided in larger fonts or as recordings when needed. If a participant has English as a second language interpretation will be sought to ensure consent is informed and documented.

Interviews will be adapted to be age appropriate and will be conducted in places that suit individual needs. Background information will be sought on the families from the other professionals that work with them to ensure any special arrangements are required. It is expected that interviews with families will take place in the family home, therefore I will let colleagues know when I am conducting the interviews and where I will be and the times. Furthermore I will take a phone with me in case any difficulties arise. Consent also will be able to be given verbally and recorded.

As a researcher it is possible that I may be at risk of physical harm due to conducting research in participants homes. I will be protected from harm by ensuring that the local authority database is checked prior to any visits to ensure that the home is safe for me to visit, using same risk assessment conducted by social care. I will provide the office with details of the address that the interview will be conducted at; call them prior to my arrival and on my leaving to confirm my safety. Additionally I will make a family member aware of the time of my intended interview and contact them once it is completed. If any difficulties were to arise I will follow the local authority procedure of calling and asking for the 'red folder', where local procedure will be followed to ensure my safety.

---

**19. Will the subjects be given a written information sheet or letter?**

**LETTER TO HEAD TEACHERS**

Dear Head teacher,

**Subject: Persistent non-attendance in a South West local authority area; a case study.**

We are writing to let you know about a study, which will be conducted in the upcoming academic year into persistent non-attendance in primary and secondary schools.

This will be undertaken with the co-operation of Cornwall Council.

Phase 1: Interviews with school staff and other professionals working with students who are identified as persistent non-attenders.

Phase 2: Interviews with families and children who have been identified as persistent non-attenders.

We are writing to find out if you are interested in your school participating in phase 1. This will involve conducting interviews with key members of staff in the school and suggesting families for part 2;

i.SENCo, head of pastoral support, member of staff responsible for attendance and EWO contact.

The researchers will do these interviews over a period that suits these members of staff.

What will your school get from participating?

I will summarise the overall findings in an anonymous report which will be circulated to all schools involved, furthermore this information will be used to inform countywide guidance for professionals on persistent non-attendance.

Yours sincerely  
Charlotte Orme-Stapleton.

**PLEASE RETURN THE FOLLOWING:**

I wish to take part in the research into persistent non-attendance and am happy to allow the following members of staff to take part in this.

SENCo.....

Pastoral Support.....

Attendance Monitoring.....

EWO Contact.....

I also agree to identify children/families to take part on phase 2

Head Teacher.....

School.....

Contact Telephone.....

---

## **20. Ethical considerations**

Informed consent will be obtained in line with the HCPC standards of proficiency, with all participants in the research being fully informed of the aims and purpose of the research. All participants will be asked to provide written consent in the form of two signed consent forms prior to the research being undertaken, one copy which will be taken for my records and one copy that will be given to the participant. While informal interest in the project may be acquired before this through discussion, no research will take place until ethical approval has been obtained and consent forms are signed. Copies of the consent forms will be given to the participants for their own records, which will include my contact details to allow them to follow up the research and remove their data at any point if they choose. Furthermore individual's will be given the option to review their own transcripts to allow them to make any amendments if they wish, to ensure the accuracy of their responses and allow them to remove anything that on reflection they have decided they wish not to share, where this isn't possible due to the age of participants transcripts can be sent to their parents to go through with the children, if the child requests this. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw at anytime, not answer any individual questions or change their mind about their answers during the course of the interviews. The retrospective and reflective nature of the case study ensures that there is little manipulation from the researcher and the participants will be fully informed of the nature and quality of the research prior to taking part.

Confidentiality, as outlined in the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of ethics will be maintained throughout the research by using codenames to refer to schools and families. All transcripts and data will be anonymised before use, with any distinguishing characteristics being removed. Furthermore the local area will be referred to generally to avoid any possible identification of individual families or schools. All information will be kept securely and will only be accessible by myself as the researcher, the local authority and the university. All areas of confidentiality will be put in writing in the consent form, with any additional questions being answered by me. It will be made clear to the individual families that while their contributions will be written up, they will not be shared directly with the individual child's school. For part one attendance data will not be requested on an individual basis, but in the form of general percentages, as this is data that is readily available to the school and the EWO service, whole school consent will be obtained from the head, rather than on an individual pupil basis and from the professionals taking part.

---

## **21. Are there any potential hazards to subjects or researchers?**

The case study methodology follows an inquiry approach and will therefore be used to capture the already existing experiences of schools and families, therefore reducing any likely harm. The retrospective and reflective nature of the case study ensures that there is little manipulation from the researcher and the participants will be fully informed of the nature and quality of the research prior to taking part.

The sensitive nature of persistent non-attendance presents challenges that need to be considered when designing research. There are varied reasons for persistent non-attendance, all of which can affect children and young people differently. It is important to acknowledge that a high number of students who are persistent non-attenders have issues around mental health and anxiety. It is therefore crucial to understand the role of mental health in persistent non-attendance and to be sensitive to the individual's experience as a researcher. To reduce any long-term harm from the research I plan to work closely with other professionals involved with the children and their families to ensure that those recruited are able to engage with the research without lasting psychological concerns. This will include the schools suggesting who they believe would be most appropriate to take part, gaining informed consent from all those involved and leaving participants with my contact details if they have any concerns.

While discussing persistent non-attendance is likely to be emotive I will approach the interviews in a client-centred way, encouraging them to ask for breaks when needed, to ask questions and only discuss what they are comfortable with. I will furthermore use my previous counselling experience to ensure that I conduct check ins at the beginning of interviews to ensure that the participants are in the right frame of mind to engage, and check outs to ensure that they are feeling safe in what they have discussed and that any negative feels are acknowledged and dealt with. If at any point a child or family member is upset I will ask if they want to continue, or if they are showing signs of distress I will terminate the interview myself.

While using an investigative approach as identified there is a low risk of harm to participants, the interviews will contain questions allowing individuals to contribute as much or little as they wish and any questions can be skipped. However there is the possibility that some individuals may find the issue of school refusal difficult to discuss, particularly the participants in part 2, parents and children. Participants will be protected from harm by ensuring that the questions are thoughtfully written, asked and followed up. Furthermore questions will be drafted to ensure that they are appropriate for the individual participants, for example ensuring they are age appropriate. I will also ensure that if during any part of the interviews that parents or children are getting upset that breaks will be taken, or the interview will be stopped all together. Were an individual to become distressed during the interview I would ensure that they were ok and supported before my leaving and follow this up with a phone call no more than a week later and this information shared with another involved professional to follow up.

---

## **22. Do you have a destruction policy?**

All raw data will be deleted after 5 years.

---

## **23. Signatures of relevant bodies**

*I agree to comply with the recommendations of the RGF Panel and RGF principles throughout this project, and that the details given are correct.*

Signature of applicant: *Charlotte Orme-Stapleton* Date 02.02.16

Name in capitals CHARLOTTE ORME-STAPLETON

Signature of originator ..... Date  
.....  
(if different)

Name in capitals .....

---

SECTION 5	Accompanying documentation
-----------	----------------------------

---

**24. Accompanying documentation** (please check you have included, and then tick all that apply)

- Additional pages for question no(s).
- Copy of questionnaire
- Copy of information/letter for participants
- Copy of University/College ethical approval
- Copy of parental consent form
- Copy of informed consent form
- Code of conduct
- Other (please specify)

***Data Protection Statement***

Any personal information you provide on this form will be held by Cornwall Council. It will be used solely for the purposes of processing your RGF application and will not be used for any other purpose, or passed on to a third party. All personal information held by Cornwall Council is held safely in a secure environment.

---

## Part 1: Nodal Structure:

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	Color
Support you would like	16	17	6 Oct 2016, 13:19	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:14	COS	
why believe would help	8	8	6 Oct 2016, 13:39	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:15	COS	
what form	6	7	6 Oct 2016, 13:39	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:14	COS	
More	0	0	29 Apr 2017, 12:35	COS	29 Apr 2017, 12:35	COS	
Alternatives	0	0	29 Apr 2017, 12:35	COS	29 Apr 2017, 12:35	COS	
key people in school pr...	11	11	6 Oct 2016, 13:40	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:16	COS	
external agencies cont...	14	18	6 Oct 2016, 13:40	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:16	COS	
type of support	12	15	6 Oct 2016, 13:40	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:16	COS	
barriers	14	19	6 Oct 2016, 13:39	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:15	COS	
School management	15	26	6 Oct 2016, 13:17	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:04	COS	
Support available	14	21	6 Oct 2016, 13:30	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:05	COS	
Wave2	12	25	29 Apr 2017, 12:33	COS	1 May 2017, 18:28	COS	
Wave1	10	21	29 Apr 2017, 12:33	COS	1 May 2017, 18:29	COS	
Wave 3	14	53	29 Apr 2017, 12:33	COS	1 May 2017, 18:29	COS	
Leads	15	15	6 Oct 2016, 13:30	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:04	COS	
Language used to descri...	16	18	6 Oct 2016, 12:11	COS	19 Jan 2017, 12:58	COS	
Would you consider ot...	13	13	6 Oct 2016, 13:26	COS	19 Jan 2017, 12:59	COS	
why	6	6	6 Oct 2016, 13:26	COS	17 Jan 2017, 11:18	COS	
are there any other t...	2	2	6 Oct 2016, 13:27	COS	18 Jan 2017, 16:15	COS	
Why these terms	12	21	6 Oct 2016, 13:24	COS	19 Jan 2017, 12:59	COS	
Why distinguish	7	10	6 Oct 2016, 13:25	COS	18 Jan 2017, 16:16	COS	
Where did this languag...	13	20	6 Oct 2016, 13:27	COS	18 Jan 2017, 16:16	COS	
How yp are affected	14	20	6 Oct 2016, 13:18	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:05	COS	
Socially	7	7	6 Oct 2016, 13:31	COS	17 Jan 2017, 13:42	COS	
Personally	5	5	6 Oct 2016, 13:31	COS	20 Dec 2016, 15:12	COS	
Any other ways	8	9	6 Oct 2016, 13:31	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:06	COS	
Academically	6	8	6 Oct 2016, 13:31	COS	17 Jan 2017, 13:42	COS	
external support	16	17	6 Oct 2016, 13:38	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:07	COS	
which agencies	16	28	6 Oct 2016, 13:38	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:07	COS	
what did they do	16	26	6 Oct 2016, 13:38	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:10	COS	

● examples	12	20	6 Oct 2016, 13:38	COS	18 Jan 2017, 16:23	COS
● Extent of issue	16	25	6 Oct 2016, 12:13	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:03	COS
● How do feel this comp...	15	17	6 Oct 2016, 13:29	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:03	COS
● Why do you think thi...	9	9	6 Oct 2016, 13:30	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:04	COS
● Not issue	3	3	29 Apr 2017, 12:32	COS	1 May 2017, 14:53	COS
● Issue	7	8	1 May 2017, 14:55	COS	1 May 2017, 15:00	COS
● Increasing issue	1	3	29 Apr 2017, 12:31	COS	1 May 2017, 14:53	COS
● Differences prim...	1	1	1 May 2017, 14:54	COS	1 May 2017, 14:59	COS
● Decreasing issue	3	4	1 May 2017, 14:57	COS	1 May 2017, 15:01	COS
● Explanations of PNA	16	42	6 Oct 2016, 12:12	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:06	COS
● Can you explain in mor...	16	41	6 Oct 2016, 13:28	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:07	COS
● Where did you find...	3	3	6 Oct 2016, 13:28	COS	17 Jan 2017, 11:41	COS
● Models	10	11	6 Oct 2016, 13:28	COS	18 Jan 2017, 16:18	COS
● Social	5	8	29 Apr 2017, 12:30	COS	29 Apr 2017, 13:20	COS
● School	9	15	29 Apr 2017, 12:30	COS	29 Apr 2017, 13:34	COS
● Home	12	46	29 Apr 2017, 12:43	COS	29 Apr 2017, 13:34	COS
● Child	13	29	29 Apr 2017, 12:30	COS	29 Apr 2017, 13:35	COS
● Experience of SF	14	21	6 Oct 2016, 12:11	COS	18 Jan 2017, 16:34	COS
● Capacity	16	17	6 Oct 2016, 13:24	COS	19 Jan 2017, 12:57	COS
● EWO role	3	7	6 Oct 2016, 14:07	COS	20 Dec 2016, 15:56	COS
● Case studies improved	15	18	6 Oct 2016, 13:19	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:10	COS
● who provided this sup...	10	13	6 Oct 2016, 13:36	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:11	COS
● what did they do	6	10	6 Oct 2016, 13:36	COS	20 Dec 2016, 15:57	COS
● contrasting examples	6	8	6 Oct 2016, 13:36	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:11	COS
● characteristics that ma...	13	16	6 Oct 2016, 13:36	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:11	COS
● Additional comments	7	7	6 Oct 2016, 13:20	COS	19 Jan 2017, 13:17	COS

## Part 2: Nodal Structure:

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modifi
▼ ● School based support	6	15	1 Mar 2017, 16:11	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:39	
● Who was involved	3	3	1 Mar 2017, 16:11	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:38	
▼ ● Liked support	6	10	1 Mar 2017, 16:22	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:46	
● Why it would help	4	5	1 Mar 2017, 16:23	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:45	
● Who	1	1	1 Mar 2017, 16:23	COS	10 Mar 2017, 11:54	
● Like to provide	2	3	1 Mar 2017, 16:24	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:46	
● Form	2	2	1 Mar 2017, 16:23	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:45	
● External agencies	4	4	1 Mar 2017, 16:24	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:45	
● Barriers	1	2	1 Mar 2017, 16:23	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:45	
▼ ● Language	5	11	1 Mar 2017, 16:10	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:34	
● Why	2	3	1 Mar 2017, 16:10	COS	9 Mar 2017, 15:23	
● Other Language	0	0	1 Mar 2017, 16:10	COS	1 Mar 2017, 16:10	
▼ ● Ineffective support	3	8	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:44	
● Who	0	0	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	COS	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	
● What did they do	0	0	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	COS	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	
● Examples	0	0	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	COS	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	
● Characteristics	0	0	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	COS	1 Mar 2017, 16:17	
▼ ● External support	5	14	1 Mar 2017, 16:13	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:41	
● Who was involved	4	8	1 Mar 2017, 16:13	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:41	
● What made it successful	2	3	1 Mar 2017, 16:14	COS	10 Mar 2017, 11:42	
● What did they do	3	6	1 Mar 2017, 16:14	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:41	
● Explanations	6	20	1 Mar 2017, 16:11	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:40	
▼ ● Experience of SR	6	13	1 Mar 2017, 16:09	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:32	

● Role	4	4	1 Mar 2017, 16:10	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:31
● Effects	6	25	1 Mar 2017, 16:12	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:40
▶ ● Effective support	6	9	1 Mar 2017, 16:15	COS	13 Mar 2017, 19:43

Part 1: Example of fully coded transcript.



1st	2nd	3rd
<p>What is your experience of school refusal?            Em I think its endemic in the area, linked very much to low income. It's tends to be kind of two real main categories from our experience her, which is , 1: With parent apathy, poor experience of education themselves. Therefore limited value in education with a lack of desire to push a child into coming into school if its that kind of apathy around it. 2<sup>nd</sup> part of it is very much lined to financial, so that other kind of category, which is all about barriers as simple as not having the right school shoes that day, therefore easy not to attend school. Or not having money for food, therefore stay at home, so it can be very small financial issues, but they become easy to take a day of. And then actually I've missed some work so it becomes a cycle.</p>		
	<p>In what capacity (role) did you experience this?            As a deputy head.</p>	
<p>What language do you use to describe attendance below 85%?            Persistent absenteeism.</p>		
	<p><u>Why do you use these terms?</u>            I guess the language that we use within education, it how the government categorise it</p>	

There did the language come from  
 Barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 key profile in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 home  
 how yr are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue  
 Support available  
 characteristics that make it successful  
 Why do you think this is the case  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 Senior management  
 Experiences of PNA  
 who provided the support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples  
 What 3  
 Coding Strategy

	so we use the same term. I guess not really given a lot of thought to it before, it's just how we use it.	
		<a href="#">What distinctions do you make between X and Y?</a>
	<p><a href="#">Would you consider using other terms: absentee, truancy, school refusal, persistence non-attendance, anxious school refusal?</a></p> <p>Yes and I think we do, we would use persistent absenteeism in terms of the broad category, but then within that we would categorize the students further into the reasons behind it. We don't use truancy very often, because actually I would say a lot of our children don't truant. There's other reasons, so anxious school refuser is a good example of a reason why a child might on the surface be seen to be truanting but we tend not to use that term at all. But the others we tend to categorise in our day to day language we would talk about them as that in school.</p>	
		<a href="#">Why use / why not use?</a>
		<a href="#">Are there any other terms you use?</a>
	<p><a href="#">Why do you use the language you do to describe attendance below 85%</a></p> <p><a href="#">Where did you come across the terms you use?</a></p> <p>I don't know. I think its just about</p>	

Where did this language come from  
 barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 home  
 how yr are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 external issue  
 support available  
 characteristics that made it successful

**Why do you think this is the case**

relationships important  
 additional comments  
 support you would like  
 which agencies  
 school management  
 Explanations of N/A  
 who provided this support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples

Wave 3  
 Coding Density

	understanding the behaviours of the child, not necessarily that we've plucked them from anywhere. Its just the language we would use.	
		<a href="#">Training, reading on the subject, past experiences, perceptions of cause?</a>
<a href="#">What explanations or reasons do you think make sense of persistent non-attendance?</a> I guess some of the ones I said before, the financial one is a big one for us.		
	<a href="#">Can you explain in more details?</a> <b>Please give case examples:</b> Specifically with certain children, we have children where parents work shift work so actually in a morning there isn't someone at home to get them up, to get them into school. They don't often have alarm clocks so its easy for them to be late and therefore because they don't have strong attachments to school, its easier to take the day of school than turn up late and feel embarrassed. Urm, we then have a small group of students who I would describe as school anxious. Which are for a range of different reasons, can be through bereavement, either through death or through break up of a family. That actually become quite anxious about dealing with the kind of challenge of school on top of everything else going on in their lives. And that sort of	

Coding Density Wave 3

where did the language come from  
 barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 Home  
 How yr are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue  
 Support available  
 characteristics that make it successful  
 What do you think this is the core  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 School management  
 Expectations of PNA  
 who provided this support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more details, examples

	manifests itself and we don't always spot it until it's become a significant issue and then it's really hard to unpick. Does that answer your question?	
		<a href="#">What other models or explanations have you heard about?</a> No.
		Where did you find our about these models?
	To what extent do you believe persistent non-attendance (below 85%) is an issue in your school? Far less of an issue than it used to be, we have a cohort well our roll of students, we serve an area that is kind of, I think we're 5 <sup>th</sup> in economic deprivation in XXXX. But our persistent absenteeism is in line with national norms for all children. So its no bigger an issue for us now than it is against national which is a good think. Which means we're over coming some of the barriers for our students. It has a profound impact on students achievement and we can track that very easily in terms of a child that's not attending school, doesn't achieve. It's how you would expect, but it's quite stark. And a school that hasn't got great achievement yet, it's getting the children into school is the first barrier, making them stay by improved quality of teaching is the second part	

Where did the language come from  
Barriers  
Would you consider other terms  
why  
Type of support  
Key models in school providing  
external support  
external agencies contributions  
Home  
How you are affected  
what did they do  
examples  
External issue

Support available

characteristics that made it successful  
Why do you think this is the case  
relationships important  
Additional comments  
Support you would like  
which agencies  
School management  
Explanations of PNA  
who provided the support  
what did they do  
contrasting examples  
Case studies improved  
Can you explain in more detail, examples

Wave 3  
Coding Scheme

of that. It is an issue, but no greater than national norms.	How do you feel this compares with other schools? Locally and nationally?	
		<p>Why do you think this is the case? (Similarity/difference).          So this time last year the local authority released data which suggested that we were in the top 5, we were 3<sup>rd</sup> against the 31 schools for our persistent absenteeism in a good way. We know that we compare favorably against the local authority. Nationally we get our data in December for attendance in terms of persistent absenteeism in comparison against country, so that will tell us. So we bench mark against previous year, which would tell us that our current percentages would put us in line with national. The reasons for that are we have a really, we've spent the last two years working really hard on a strong attendance policy, that is well communicated with our parents. There are very clear processes and procedures that will challenge under performance around attendance. And then when we find there is a barrier, we have a team that work on removing those barriers and they're doing that really quite successfully. So we've got some real good case studies of students who were may</p>

Where did this language come from  
 Barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 Home

How do we succeed

what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue

Support available

characteristics that make successful

Why do you think this is the case  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments

Support you would like  
 which agencies

Senior management  
 Explanations of why  
 who provided the support  
 what did they do

contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you assist in more details, examples

View 3

Colling District

<p><b>How does your school deal with persistent non-attendance?</b>  A range of different ways. So the first thing is when we can see a child that is becoming a non-attender we start tracking around, we track all the time. When a child falls below into a 92/93% bracket we start kind of putting them at risk of becoming a PA. Do at that point we have an AIm which is an attendance improvement meeting, which the year team leader for that student would lead, with the parent ideally and in most cases with the parent. We look at what might be the barriers, we offer TAC process if there are external factors that might need to bring other people to it. And we'll set targets for attendance and then that's tracked over a 4-week period. And then we'd recognize that with reward at the end of that. For the majority of our students that works, it's just about refocusing them and refocusing parents and raising the profile. <b>When that doesn't work we would then look at using XXXX our EWO to be able meet with the family to look at what the barriers are before we get to any formal process.</b> And if</p>		<p>be attending 70 sort of percent two years ago, who are now in the high 90's which has made a big impact on them.</p>
--	--	---

When did this language come from  
Business  
Would you consider other terms  
why  
Type of support  
key people in school providing external support  
external agencies contributions

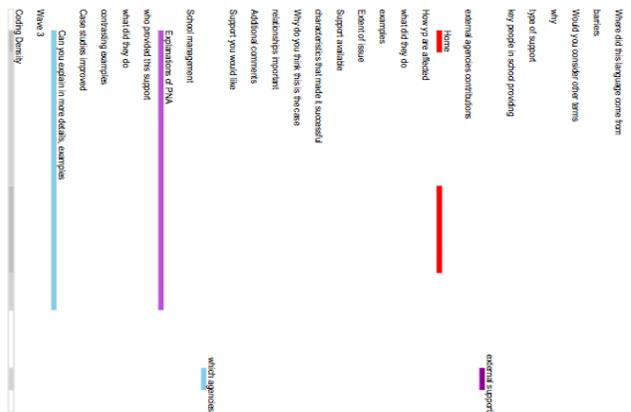
How is it affected  
what did they do  
examples  
Essential issue  
Support available  
characteristics that make it successful  
Why do you think this is the case  
relationships important  
Additional comments  
Support you would like which agencies  
School management

who provided the support  
what did they do  
controlling examples  
Case studies involved

Experiences of PA

Wave 3  
Can you explain in more detail, examples  
Coding Density

<p>there are some obvious barriers we would remove those. Like uniform costs, transport sometimes can be an issue. We kind of do that soft approach and then if we, once we feel that we've kind of met that, that need or those needs as many as there might be. We would then start formalizing that process in terms of issuing a first warning letter to make parent aware that their attendance is of concern, we then have an education planning meeting, which again targets we set out. So it's a more formalized AIMS and then the third part of that would be a final warning, which again if we're not seeing parents taking the steps to do what they need to do, we'd then look to prosecution.</p>		
	<p>Who leads on this? And which other members of staff are involved? Urm, different people at different stages. So year team leaders at the kind of 92/93% mark. Child drops then into 87%ish it would become our EWO and then EWO would take that through to prosecution at that point. Over seen by the leadership of that I guess.</p>	
	<p>What school-based support is there for persistent non-attendance? Urm, a range I guess. You've got we have a family support worker and part of the AIMS</p>	



	<p>might pick out that there is a need for family support worker to go and work with the family at home. Again their real remit is about removing barriers. We target our family support worker work around pupil premium students where we can. But that doesn't mean, it's not exclusive. We have a full time school counselor which we restructured our student services two years ago and we budgeted specifically for a full time school counselor to try and deal with the anxiety elements around education. We then have 5 year team managers who do daily tracking of attendance, they'll make referrals to external agencies and then we have an EWO, obviously. And again we have a full time EWO and we have we purchase from the local authority a service level agreement for a EWS service, who then supports our EWO, so we have kind of a multi layered approach.</p>	
<p>How are students affected by having attendance very low attendance (below 85% and if so how)? Underachievement, so they're less likely to achieve kind of basic standards in English and maths and 5 good GCSE passes. They get behind with their work very quickly and then that can create an anxiety about getting told</p>		

Where did the language come from  
Barriers  
Would you consider other terms  
why  
Type of support  
Key people in school providing  
external support  
external agencies contributions  
Home  
How far are affected  
what did they do  
examples

Extent of issue  
Support available  
characteristics that make it successful  
Why do you think this is the case?  
relationships important  
Additional comments  
Support you would like  
which agencies  
School management  
Explanations of PNA  
who provided this support  
what did they do  
controlling examples  
Case studies improved  
Can you explain in more detail, example  
Wave 3  
Coding Diversity

off when they go into a lesson, because member of staff has forgotten about the fact that they might have missed X number of lessons. That can then breed poor behaviour because they haven't got their homework because they weren't there when they did it, they get a detention for it, so that becomes a barrier. Urm they're less likely to make sustained friendships so that can again start to create anxiety, because it's a reason not to attend because they don't want to feel left out, because the children that are here will kind of move on and form other groups without them. Urm, yeah I think they're the main issues.		
	Academically?	
	Socially?	
	Personally?	
		Are there any other ways you think students are affected by having attendance below 85%?
From your experiences what explanation's can be given for attendance below 85%?		
	Illness, family holiday taking, anxiety (mental health), parental health/mental health, lack of engagement, transport, social isolation. Can you give case examples to illustrate your answer? Can I say all of them? I'm just looking at your list to see if there is anything there in	

When did the language come from

biases

Who provided this support

What did they do

Context of issue

Support available

Outcomes that made it successful

Why do you think this is the case

Relationships important

Additional comments

Support you would like

Which agencies

School management

Expansions of PM

Can you outline in more detail, examples

What is

Coulding Creativity

Who provided this support

What did they do

Context of issue

Support available

Outcomes that made it successful

Why do you think this is the case

Relationships important

Additional comments

Support you would like

Which agencies

School management

Expansions of PM

Can you outline in more detail, examples

What is

Coulding Creativity

	<p>particular that is. I would say uniform and food are big barriers for us, so I don't know how you would classify those, yea, not having the right equipment for school. Not having the right uniform, because they create anxiety and when we, we had a massive push, our persistent absenteeism has reduced massively in the past 2 years. And we had a really big push around removing those very simple barriers to start of with and it was surprising the impact that that had. And parents, particularly those who would be free school meals parents or children will contact us now and work with us to let us know that things are hard. We've done things like food can be an issue, so we have access to, links to the food bank so we can get a family fed, so a child can feel like they can manage a whole day at school because they can feel ill, but actually their feeling hungry. So sad when you think about it, that's we certainly had some cases two years ago, 3 or 4 children that that was a massive issue.</p>	
<p>What external support are you aware of that support professionals and young people with persistent non-attendance?</p>		<p>Are there any other factors you think are relevant?</p>

- Where did this language come from
- barriers
- Would you consider other terms
- why
- type of support
- key people in school providing
- external support
- external agencies contributions
- home
- how/ps are affected
- when did they do
- examples
- Essential issue
- Support available
- characteristics that made it successful
- Why do you think this is the case
- relationships important
- Additional comments
- Support you would like
- which agencies
- School management
- Expansions of PMA
- who provided the support
- what did they do
- contrasting examples
- Case studies improved
- Can you explain in more detail, examples
- What 3
- Outing Details

<p>I guess directly we would use the local authority, but more as a sounding board for process, rather than specific over coming need at this point I would say. Urm, I mean we have a number of indirect, so like we would make CAMHS referrals if we needed to, we would make referrals to Early Help to look for things like youth workers, we would use Educational Psychologists, we would use things like Dreadnoughts or CLEAR counseling or. They're not always the sole reason why a child's not attending, but its again I mean talking about the barriers, there examples of where we would look to other organisations to help. Yea there the kind of main ones we would work with.</p>	<p>EWO, EPs, charity organizations, CAHMS, CHES?</p>	
		<p><u>What do they do in this support work?</u>  <u>Can you give Ask-for-case examples of this?</u>          Urm different for different ones I guess. You've got like CAMHS and EPs would look for almost assessment of if there were learning barriers as much as anything else, conditions that may affect their ability to be in school. So for instance we've got a child in school at the moment who wasn't attending school and we had some concerns that they were displaying</p>

Where did the things come from  
 barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 Home  
 How ya are detected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue  
 Support available

Why do you think this is because  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 what agencies  
 School management  
 Experiences of PA  
 who provided the support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting example  
 Case studies improved

Characteristics that make it successful

Wave 3  
 Coding Trinity  
 Can you explain in more detail, example

Where did this language come from  
 barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 home  
 how/ps are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Essential issue  
 Support available  
 characteristics that made it successful  
 Why do you think this is the case  
 red/other/important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 School management  
 Explanations of PNA  
 who provided the support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved

View 3  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples  
 Coding Priority

		<p>some autistic tendencies, had relatively recently moved into the area and so, through CAMHS looked to get them assessed to look at and we think they'll get a diagnosis. But in the meantime we are using CHES to provide education because they're not actually well enough to be in school. There's some mental health issues alongside the autism traits, so it's not just about forcing a child to be back in full time education as that's not always what is appropriate. So it's working with those to be able to meet the full package of needs. <a href="#">again</a></p>
<p>Can you tell me about any cases where students who have attendance below 85% have been successfully supported to improve this?      Lots. Ok so we had a female year 8 at the time who wasn't attending for more than, I think her attendance got down to high 70's. We had some concerns that family unit was not healthy for her, so we used our EWO to do some home visits, to look at family living conditions. Transpires that mum wasn't very well at all and probably not fit to be able to look after her. So we then worked with social</p>		<p>What was your experience of this?  <a href="#">Can you give examples of this? Ask for case examples here too</a></p>

<p>services to be able to make assessment on the house and mum's ability to care for her, child then went into care and we then worked with her, we did a small intervention program with a group of 6 girls who had very similar barriers that were about self esteem, she didn't feel very good about herself, so she didn't really want to be in school and make to feel worse. And that was really good, so the did understanding themselves, we took them to XXXX owl sanctuary to work with horses to get that just different environment to feel more positive. She is now in year 10 and she turns up to school every day, her attendance is high 90's, she's her academic performance has risen considerably and she's found some subjects that she really enjoys and has some real aspiration for her future. And then we have a year 10 boy who is, he moved to us at the start of year 8 and very quickly was missing days off school and when he was in school having fights with other students. Because of that social interaction didn't really know how to interact. We provided Drednoughts for him, because we felt he wasn't really dealing with his emotions and building relationships. He's also very musical so we supported him to get music lessons, because we felt that might give him</p>		
--	--	--

- Where did the language come from
- barriers
- Would you consider other terms
- why
- type of support
- key people in school providing
- external support
- external agencies/organizations
- home
- How you are affected
- what did they do
- examples
- External issue
- Support available
- characteristics that made it successful
- Why do you think this is the case
- releasable impact
- Additional comments
- Support you would like
- when agencies
- School management
- Expectations of PTA
- who provided the support
- what did they do
- contrasting examples
- Case studies improved
- Can you explain in more detail, examples
- View 3
- Childing Directly

<p>something he could grow his self esteem over. His academic performance went up by, I did him as a case study last year, by 2 grades in 12 months and he's another child who's attendance is above, we set a target for our students of 97% attendance and he's been in that area for the last 12 months.</p>		
	<p>Could you provide two contrasting examples of this?</p>	
	<p>Who provided this?</p>	
	<p>What did they do?</p>	
	<p>What were the characteristics that made this support successful? I think they were specific to what the child needed and they were holistic, we looked at every angle as to what would be the barrier. So with the girl our instincts were telling us the family home wasn't right, so we used that to start off with. And then that opened up a whole range of other issues. Where the young man was concerned the family were much less of a concern. Dad was very supportive and he was, we also got him playing rugby for the school as well, which gave him a channel for that aggression. It was the personalized aspect that made a difference and also that we've got a real acceptance, appreciation within our pastoral team that small things make a</p>	

Where did this support come from

Would you consider other forms

Why

Type of support

Key people in school providing external support

external support

external agencies contributions

Home

How far are affected

what did they do

examples

Extent of issue

Support available

characteristics that make it successful

Why do you think this is the case

relationships important

Additional comments

Support you would like which agencies

School management

Explanations of PNA

who provided this support

what did they do

contrasting examples

Case studies improved

Can you explain in more detail, example

Wave 3

Coding Dexterity

Supports

Where did the language come from  
 - barriers  
 - Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 type of support  
 external support  
 key people in school providing  
 internal agencies contributions  
 Home  
 How far are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue  
 Support available  
 characteristics that make it successful  
 Why do you think this is the case?  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 School management  
 Explanations of N/A  
 who provided this support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples  
 Wave 3  
 Coding Dexterity

	<p>difference. It isn't about trying to find the magic cure. It might take two or three different interventions to make the impact for that child. So we don't naively think, ok they've got that why aren't they now attending. It's a suite of interventions often, particularly when your talking about persistent absentees, because there is likely to be some real entrenched issues.</p>
	<p>What relationships were important in providing this?          I think people knowing when to refer to the right people. So in the first instance the head of year meeting with the parent and understanding that, almost making an assessment whether home life is a challenge for the child and then when that wasn't an issue making the right referral at the right time. So going to talk to the child about what they like, what they don't like, we often get children to colour code their timetable. So they'll red, amber, green it, we'll then have discussions about why the greens are green and why the reds are red. Which helps us to look for hooks into something, so for that child PE and music were really strong areas that</p>

- Where did the language come from
- Barriers
- Would you consider other terms
- Why?
- Key people in school providing
- external support
- external agencies/organizations
- Home
- How yr are affected
- what'd they do
- examples
- Extent of issue
- Support available
- characteristics that make it successful
- Why do you think this is the case
- relationships important
- Additional comments
- Support you would like
- which agencies
- School management
- Expectations of PNA
- who provided the support
- what'd they do
- contrasting examples
- Case studies improved
- Can you explain in more detail, examples
- What's 3
- Coding Diversity

	they really liked, which was actually quite surprising to us, that wasn't really obvious. But having that colour coding exercise meant that we could then go and talk to someone in PE to be able to build a relationship, someone in music that could then give him a way in. The key part of Dreadnoughts was then being in communication with them about the impact that was having and whether or not they felt that was making a difference. And then keeping the parent in the loop so they could then praise at home, I think that was really important.
What support would you like to see provided for students and their families with attendance below 85%? Em, loads of things. I think one of our barriers tends to be when we make a referral because we're concerned about living conditions and they might not meet a threshold for social services assessment and actually its quite scary to think social services are involved in their family so that becomes an instant blocker. And early help have helped with that, but sometimes it can be really hard to get anyone to take that case up. So we feel that sometimes the child's attendance gets a lot worse when it could have been arrested	

<p>sooner and there's so much capacity a school can offer. I think often we're expected to operate an element of social services work, which can be really, it's not our game, we're education. So I think access for parents within the community of help systems like, when their struggling with getting uniform who can help with that. And when they can sign post to get financial support, or actually counseling services. You know people like Relate do good work with adults, they've just got some funding their going to work with us with some young people as well. But it definitely we see a lot of young people who become anxious or become angry because of family break down and we know that separation, divorce are higher than its ever been. That can manifest itself in attendance issues, but the child kind of gets told off for that and its wrong, because their a product of their circumstances. So I guess earlier support for families in those situations I think would have an impact on attendance.</p>	
<p>What form would this take?</p>	
<p>Why do you believe it would help?</p>	
<p>What are the barriers to providing this? Usually funding. Capacity of service, services that are full. I mean CAMHS is a classic</p>	

<p>When did this language come from</p>	<p>barriers</p>
<p>Would you consider other terms</p>	<p>why?</p>
<p>Scale of support</p>	<p>any profile in school providing</p>
<p>external support</p>	<p>external agencies contributions</p>
<p>Home</p>	<p>How yr are affected</p>
<p>what did they do</p>	<p>examples</p>
<p>Extent of issue</p>	<p>Support available</p>
<p>characteristics that made it successful</p>	<p>Why do you think this is the case</p>
<p>relationships important</p>	<p>Additional comments</p>
<p>Support you would like</p>	<p>which agencies</p>
<p>School management</p>	<p>Explanations of PNA</p>
<p>who provided the support</p>	<p>what did they do</p>
<p>contrasting examples</p>	<p>Case studies improved</p>
<p>Can you explain in more detail, examples</p>	<p>What's 3</p>
<p>Colling District</p>	

Where did the language come from  
 Barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 Type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 Home  
 How yr are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue  
 Support available  
 characteristics that make it successful  
 Why do you think this is the case  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 School management  
 Explanations of PNA  
 who provided the support  
 what did they do  
 contrasting examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples  
 What 3  
 Coding Sheet 1

<p>example of, it's a bit like winning the golden ticket to get a CAMHS referral uptake for a child. Where as we know that for some children that's a massive barrier and it can take a really long time to get that kind of help. I mean CAMHS is an underfunded service even with the government investing money into it, we could benefit from a lot more of it in XXXX.</p>	
<p>Who are the people in your school that would be key to providing this?      I guess it would be about who would make referrals the answer to that then. It would so, we have year team managers who are specifically. We have a year team manager and year team leader role, so our year team leaders are teaching positions who have an oversees, strategic year group work. Our year group managers work on kind of operational day to day, they would make referrals if a child needed a CAMHS referral, they would make that, if we needed early help they would make that contact. So their our kind of key middle person who would refer on and then XXXX as our EWO or XXXX as our family support worker might then take it to another tier.</p>	
<p>Are there any external agencies that you think would be able to contribute to this?      I think those that we use are the right</p>	

Where did this language come from  
 barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 Type of support  
 key people in school providing  
 external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 Home  
 How is an address  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 External issue  
 Support available  
 circumstances that made it successful  
 Why do you think this is the case  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 School management  
 Expectations of PMK  
 who provided the support  
 what did they do  
 contextualizing examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples  
 View 3  
 Coding Density

	<p>agencies. I just think just that some of them are expensive, too expensive for schools. For instance CLEAR do wonderful work with young people who have experienced domestic violence and unfortunately a lot of children have had that to deal with, but it's a really expensive therapeutic work. So we have to make decisions about who would receive that and just morally is wrong. But the reality is that we don't have the funding to provide everything that is needed, so, and then capacity on their side is another barrier. Because that's funding on their capacity, so its. Yea from both ends its what we can afford to provide but also if you refer into a service their capacity because of their funding.</p>
	<p>How would you like these agencies to provide support? Direct with families, 1:1 with the child, supervision, coaching?      A range, all of those I think. It very much depends on need. When we restructured student services we created the family support worker as well as a post and that was really important because obviously works for us and the parents probably know that. But it does provide direct work with families for a distance from the school and that has some really big impacts with families that have worked with</p>

When did the things come from barriers  
 Would you consider other terms  
 why  
 Type of support  
 key people in school providing external support  
 external agencies contributions  
 Home  
 How far are affected  
 what did they do  
 examples  
 Extent of issue  
 Support available  
 characteristics that make it successful  
 Why do you think this is the case  
 relationships important  
 Additional comments  
 Support you would like  
 which agencies  
 School management  
 Explanations of PA  
 who provided this support  
 what did they do  
 outstanding examples  
 Case studies improved  
 Can you explain in more detail, examples  
 Wave 3  
 Coding Density

<p>XXXX. But when you talk about CLEAR its 1:1 with the child. I don't really use coaching I suppose, that something that. Yeah I don't really use that, it is a range. Its not one size.</p>	
	<p>Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences of persistent non-attendance?        No I don't think so, I think the key part for me is that we really need to know, break down what the needs of the child are. Not start from the position of the parents are not doing what they should be doing therefore we need to prosecute the parent. We prosecute very very rarely and that's only when we feel that we have taken away every barrier and the parent is not prepared to work with us, because ultimately we shouldn't be allowing a parent to prevent a child from getting an education. And they tend to be the cases where we would prosecute where we genuinely feel that for whatever reason a parent is making a decision that a child doesn't need an education because that is harming them in the future and that is where I think our moral responsibility lies. So yea our approach has been to solve the barriers and that's worked, its making a difference. But we've still going our PA figure today is 11% and that's a lot of</p>

Where did the language come from
Barriers
Would you consider other ways
Why
Type of support
Key people involved providing
external support
external agencies contributions
Home
How you are affected
what did they do
examples
Extended issue
Support available
characteristics that make it successful
Why do you think this is the case
relationships important
Additional comments
Support you would like
which agencies
School management
Expectations of N/A
who provided this support
what did they do
contrasting examples
Case studies improved
Can you explain in more detail, examples
What 3
Coding Diversity

children that still aren't in school all the time. And it fluctuates, it was 8% last week, so but there are always children that are crossing that boundary. I think our mission is we will never be satisfied until we get it really, I'd like to say nothing at all but that's important to remember your dealing with a child, a family and human beings. That it's not just a case of we're not here, because we're being difficult and cant be bothered to come to school, there's usually a reason.	
---	--



<p>much help up there, to be fair, I didn't think at the time. So yes, he ended up going like into the side unit and part time table and things like that. But it was almost like I was forced to drag him to school. Looking back now I think that's completely the wrong thing to do. Because they're threatening you with court, fines and all that sort of stuff umm, so you're in a position where you're the parent and you're meant to get them there. Yes, so with him it was kind of a lot of pressure really and like I say, it just got to a point in the end, with him, he was, like, having... (Interruption). Yes, so that was it with YYYY. Umm, basically, we were getting to the, he was getting ready, I mean, we had police involved and everything. They send Community Police around to try and help to get him to school. And really, looking back, when you've got anxiety like that it was just too much. You know? We set up meetings. (Interruption). (Talking in whispers about another pupil).</p> <p>Interviewer : Umm, you said about your experience of school refusal.</p> <p>Yes.</p>		
--	--	--

Coding Directory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intervention support</li> <li>Supports</li> <li>Outcomes</li> </ul>

<p>Interviewer : And you were talking about YYYY.</p> <p><b>Yes. Yes, so he was basically getting ready and going up there. Umm, and when we got there you could just see the fear on his face. He'd panic, he'd cry he'd get out and he'd run. He was just running home, to his bedroom, because it was his safe space. Of course we had loads of people coming knocking on the door, knocking on his bedroom door trying to get him out— Head, Assistant Head Teacher, you know, the admissions lady, whatever they're called, everyone was coming knocking on his door. And I think actually none of that helps. Umm, everyone was like, he was shut down in his kind of safe space and everyone came knocking on his door. I'm like I say, forced to take him so I was always practically dragging him off to school sometimes and in the end I said enough's enough and I took him out of school. I said his education's important to me but actually, his health's more important to me. So that was basically it with YYYY and he's been out for three years.</b></p> <p>Interviewer : Yes.</p> <p>Is he back?</p>		
---	--	--

Coding Density	Explanans	Intrinsic support	Experiences of SR	Effects	External support	School based support	What did they do	Education support	Language	Lead expert	External agencies	Who was involved	Why it would help	What makes it successful	How to provide	Who was involved	Role
----------------	-----------	-------------------	-------------------	---------	------------------	----------------------	------------------	-------------------	----------	-------------	-------------------	------------------	-------------------	--------------------------	----------------	------------------	------

	<p>And In what role did you experience this as? What do you mean?</p> <p>Interviewer : So, you're in what role? So I guess, you're his parent. So as a parent.</p> <p>Yes. <b>As a parent.</b></p>	<p>And how did you, how do you describe your child's difficulties with attendance? How would you describe it?</p> <p><b>I think looking back now, it was all anxiety based for YYYY and the same with XXXX.</b></p> <p>Interviewer: yes?</p> <p><b>But I can get XXXX here... That's the difference. I think the difference is with XXXX, he was able to talk... YYYY never did. He could never verbalise what was wrong or... or what was going on. And we were just assuming, are you being bullied? Are you this? Are you that? Whereas XXXX was more able to say, like this isn't working or that isn't working or... and we could work around it. So we've managed to keep him actually in school. I mean, it did good to talk with XXXX where he was refusing to come in and, I????? with it now. But we always, I always managed to get him in, well, like a few days I didn't like the first day back at term, when it's new...</b></p> <p>Interviewer : Yes?</p>
--	--	---



		<p><b>They're hard days to come in.</b></p> <p>Interviewer : Yes.</p> <p><b>Umm, but here they've put lots of things in place for XXXXX which has enabled him to keep coming.</b></p> <p>Interviewer: That's great.</p> <p><b>I think that's the main thing, is having the school on board really.</b></p> <p>Interviewer : Yes. That's brilliant.</p>
What language do you use to describe attendance below 85% ?		
	<p>And why do you use, did you use this language to describe the difficulties with attendance. Because you said anxiety?</p> <p>Well because now YYYY has obviously been diagnosed with severe social anxiety and depression and is on medication.</p>	
What language did you hear to describe your		What distinctions do you make between X and



<p>child's difficulties with attendance?</p> <p>I'm probably not going to get half of this because I'm really not very good!</p> <p>Interviewer : No, no, no, it's your experience.</p> <p>Right okay.</p> <p>Interviewer : So there's no right or wrong it's just if there's anything that you, words that you heard describing XXXX or YYYY's attendance.</p> <p>Words they used, what, other people?</p> <p>Interviewer: Yes.</p> <p>I can't even remember what they used with YYYY because I don't think anyone thought he had anything wrong with him at the time... I think they just thought it was, umm, classic school refusal. He just didn't want to come. Do you know what I mean?</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes. So that's the sort of language you heard, so classed as sort of school refusal?</p>		<p>Y?</p>
--	--	-----------

Coding theme?	Explanations	Inference support	Ethics	Experience of SR	External support	School based support	What did they do	Effective support	Lead support	External appraisals	Who was involved	Why it would help	What made it successful?	Like to provide	Who was involved	Who	Reason
---------------	--------------	-------------------	--------	------------------	------------------	----------------------	------------------	-------------------	--------------	---------------------	------------------	-------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	------------------	-----	--------

<p>Yes.</p> <p>Interviewer : Okay.</p>		
	<p>Did you hear any other terms? Things like; absentee, truancy, school refusal you said, persistence non-attendance or anxious school refusal – was any of that language used.</p> <p>No. Not that I can remember.</p>	
<p>What explanations or reasons do you think make sense of your child's attendance difficulties?</p> <p>I don't know. Can I look at it while you're saying it? If it's in front of me I ...</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes, of course. Sorry!</p> <p>If it's in front of me I...</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes, so What explanations or reasons do you think make sense of your</p>		

- Role
- Who
- Who was involved
- Like to provide
- What made it successful
- Why it would help
- Who was involved
- External agencies
- Local support
- Language
- Effective support
- What did they do
- School based support
- External support
- Experiences of SR
- Effects
- Interventive support
- Explanations
- Coding Density

<p>child's attendance difficulties? So what explains it? Why they find it difficult?</p> <p>Umm, sorry. ????? when it's there. I think it's best if I let her deal with it. Yes, ??? and I don't really understand that one.</p>		
<p>Interviewer : No? That's fine. How does you school deal with supporting XXXX?</p> <p>xxxxx. We're doing that one because he's here!</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes.</p> <p>They started to put lots of things into place because he was not going into class. So he was having one to one, it was with different people. It was like ????</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes, yes, yes.</p> <p>But then trying to make it more regular so it's ??? timetable so he knew who he was going to be with. Umm, but it still wasn't working 100% and I think that's when they decided that actually, new term we need a solid</p>		



<p>foundation and a consistent person to be with him. And obviously, this is what we've come back to so and so far so good.</p> <p>Interviewer : That's brilliant.</p>		
	<p>What staff are involved in that support?  <b>Head, Assistant Head, what do they call it, the Sen...</b></p> <p>Interviewer : Senco?</p> <p>Yes. I think they were the main people setting it up.</p> <p>Interviewer : Great.</p>	
	<p>And I think you've said this - What school-based support was available – so there's one to one and, umm, anything else?</p> <p><b>Yes. Of course, we've now got somebody called Kay involved. She's from a SKIP project so she's helping out in school and at home.</b></p> <p>Interviewer : That's great. Lovely.</p>	



	<p>And has kind of made us all a bit more aware of his needs, complex sensory needs and how important those sensory breaks are.</p> <p>Interviewer : That's great.</p> <p>So we're using like, visuals and more sensory breaks and, just to try and keep him on a more even, you know, calm. (laughs).</p> <p>Interviewer: Yes, no, that's great. Thank you.</p> <p>Because if things weren't right in school it would impact on at home, when he came home.</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes, of course. Yes.</p> <p>Yes, so I would be getting the backlash.</p> <p>Interviewer : So that's great you've had that joined up.</p> <p>Yes.</p>	
<p>How was your child affected by having very low attendance or attendance below 85%? How were they affected?</p>		



<p>I'm not sure XXXX's has gone below. Because he always been in at a quarter to nine but... (break in tape)</p> <p>(New tape)</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so, the last one we said was : is there any ways you think your child is affected by having, with his attendance difficulties, so academically, socially or personally?</p> <p>For both of them really. Yes, because YYYY missed out on years of school work because I then had to fight funding to get him online school at home which is, umm, that started September/October time. So yes, he's missed out massively on education.</p> <p>Interviewer : Okay.</p> <p>Obviously XXXX's in now but it's more about keeping him positive in school so he's not actually been in his class since September, so yes, he's missed out on education as well. What was the other one?</p>		
---	--	--

- Role
- Who
- Who was involved
- Like to provide
- What made it successful
- Why's would help
- Who was involved
- External agencies
- Local support
- Language
- Effective support
- What did they do
- School based support
- External support
- Experience of SR
- Explanations
- Ineffective support
- Coding Density

Ethos

		<p>So there's obviously what causes the anxiety to make them be like this and it's trying to deal with that before it gets out of control and I think YYYY's I think we were kind of missed along the way if you know what I mean so it wasn't picked up on straightaway until it was really, really bad. Umm, and I think maybe if that was, if schools were more aware to find those little signs, do you know what I mean? To see what was going on then we might have like, ended up seeing CAHMS a lot earlier and things like that. So, yes, I think the school could do more to help really— not this school (laughs)</p> <p>Interviewer : You mean schools generally.</p> <p>Yes, yes. In my experience I've had a good one and not so good one so it's, you know, here it's like, we've been massively supported. Up there we weren't. So we've seen it from both sides.</p> <p>Interviewer : Thank you.</p>
<p>From your experience what can explaination you child's attendance difficulties?</p>		



<p><b>Mental health isn't it really?</b></p>		
<p>Interviewer : Thank you.</p>	<p>Illness, family holiday taking, anxiety (mental health), parental health/mental health, lack of engagement, transport, social isolation. Can you give case examples to illustrate your answer?</p>	
		<p>Are there any other factors you think are relevant? Umm, obviously, from... Interviewer : For you, yes.  Mental health and, I would say, I don't know how to put it, lack of something from the other school. Yes. I don't know what. Because here we have regular meetings and we put things into place. We started our meetings up there but it was nothing like what's given here, you know, its... Interviewer : That's great. Thank you.</p>
<p>What external support was available to you and your family? So for example, the</p>		

- Role
- Who
- Who was involved
- Like to provide
- What made it successful
- Why? would help
- Who was involved
- External agencies
- Local support
- Language
- Education support
- What did they do
- School based support
- External support
- Experience of SR
- Effects
- Indirect support
- Operators
- Outing Delivery

<p>Education Welfare Officer, Education Psychologist, charity organizations, CAHMS or CHES?</p> <p>External? Well, for XXXX, yes, [EP]. So, and actually, yes, she came out for YYYY and she opened everything up for me, basically. So, while I was in the school we never got to see [EP] with YYYY. It was only at the end when I'd taken him out and they said, we did say that we would see YYYY to see an Educational Psychologist so we're still going to honour that and that was once I'd taken him out. And then she opened everything up for me after speaking to her. Whereas if that had happened two years before that, you, then actually we might have been a lot further ahead.</p> <p>Interviewer : That's great that that happened.</p> <p>Umm, what else was there?</p> <p>Interviewer : You've got CAHMS, charity organisations, CHES and Education Welfare Officer.</p> <p>CAHMS for YYYY.</p>		
--	--	--

Coding Density	Explanations	Ineffective support	Ethics	Experience of SR	External support	School based support	What did they do	Effective support	Language	Linked support	External agencies	Why? would help	What made it successful	Like to provide	Who was involved	Who	Role
----------------	--------------	---------------------	--------	------------------	------------------	----------------------	------------------	-------------------	----------	----------------	-------------------	-----------------	-------------------------	-----------------	------------------	-----	------

<p>Interviewer : Yes.  <b>Obviously SKIP for XXXX.</b>  Interviewer : Yes?  <b>Umm, it's not CHES but it's similar to CHES for YYYY.. We didn't do CHES because they needed to meet with him and he wouldn't.</b>  Interviewer : Yes, so it's online.  <b>Yes. It's Acorn Academy.</b>  Interviewer : Okay. Lovely</p>		
	<p>EWO, EPs, charity organizations, CAHMS, CHES?</p>	
		<p>What do they do in this support work?  Can you give examples of this?  I think the Educational Psychologist has given great suggestions for XXXX which has enabled him to be here still!  Interviewer : Great.</p>

Role  
Who  
Who was involved  
Like a prode  
What make it successful  
Why it would help  
External agencies  
School based support  
External support  
Experience of SR  
Ethics  
Involvement support  
Expenditures  
Coding Strategy

Who we involved  
Who did they do

		<p>I'm just trying to think.</p> <p>Interviewer : So CAHMS?</p> <p>Well, it like obviously, YYYY is now on medication (tape finished)</p> <p>Great, eventually got online school, took along time, had to be registered, school wouldn't take him on due to number and statistics. Online is OK, quite a fuffed way of doing things. Send word docs-write it up-can be long-winded. Can do work, takes time to write it up.</p> <p>CAMHS: Dr that comes out, weekly nurse.</p> <p>EWO: Main contact, police involved.</p>
		<p>What was your experience of this? Can you give examples of this?</p> <p>What made this support successful?</p> <p>Umm, well again, it's the suggestion of ideas and, you know, things to help.</p> <p>Interviewer : That's great.</p>
	<p>Can you tell me about any support you've received that you've found effective? So do you feel you've me some examples of that that you are happy with? So you said about ZZZ from SKYP</p> <p>Lots of positives with XXXX, EP suggestions to keep anxieties down, keep him here. ZZZ comes to school to see XXX, he really likes her</p>	

Role  
 Who  
 Who was involved  
 Like to provide  
 What made it successful  
 Why it would help  
 Who was involved  
 External agencies  
 Lead support  
 Language  
 What did they do  
 School based support  
 External support  
 Experience of SR  
 Ethics  
 Inclusive support  
 Equivalence  
 Coding clarity  
 External support  
 External support

	<p>and she make good suggestions.</p> <p>ZZZ from SKYP, yes she's been brilliant.</p> <p>Interviewer : and... the EP?</p> <p>Sue (EP) you like (EP), XXXX, don't you?</p>	
	<p>Can you tell me about any support you received that you didn't find effective?</p> <p>I don't know, umm. I think everything's being effective really. <b>You went to Dreadnoughts, you enjoyed that. He used to go to BE adventures, on a Monday. You really enjoyed that didn't you? It's all being positive. Is there anything that didn't work XXXX? (Laughs) No, I don't think so, not here anyway.</b></p>	
<p>What support would you like to see provided for students and their families with attendance difficulties, or low attendance?</p> <p><b>I think, when we go back to like YYYY, its, people being involved quicker. We seem to be like, pushing this person to that person or they're in, discharged, gone again, but actually it needed deeper, do you know what I mean,</b></p>		

- Role
- Who
- Who was involved
- Like to provide
- What made it successful
- Why it would help
- Who was involved
- External agencies
- Language
- What did they do
- School based support
- External support
- Experience of SR
- Effect
- Interview support
- Expectations
- Coding/ Density
- External support
- External support

looking at?		
	<p>And what form would you like this take?</p> <p>As in?</p> <p>Interviewer : What would you like that to look like, I guess, the support? Just in earlier?</p> <p>Yes. Really, yes.</p> <p>Why do you believe that would help?</p>	
	<p>Because sometimes, like there's other things, like the ASDAT waiting list was 18 months, you know and sometimes you need that support there and then. You don't need to wait 18 months, and it's a long time.</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes, definitely.</p> <p>It's a....</p>	
	<p>What are the barriers to providing this? Do you think?</p> <p>Money (laughs). Funding.</p> <p>Who would be key in providing this?</p>	

Role

Who

Who was involved

How to provide

What made it successful?

Who was involved

External supports

Internal support

Language

External support

What did they do

School based support

External support

Experience of SR

Effectiveness

Internal support

Explanations

Coaching/ Mentality

Why it would help

	The Government? I guess (laughs)	
	<p>Are there any external agencies that you think that would help? Other than the ones you...</p> <p>No, I don't think so... I think maybe like, if there was one place that could tell you all the help that is available because sometimes you stumble across things. You know, like Dreadnoughts was one thing but then, XXXX had finished there but then Jo that worked with him still came to the TAC meetings and she was the one that put in the referral for SKYP and that's been massively helpful for us.</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes.</p> <p>So, I wouldn't have known about that, do you know what I mean, so...</p> <p>Interviewer : Yes.</p> <p>(Interruption)</p>	
		<p>How would you like these agencies to provide support? Direct with families, 1:1 with the child, supervision, coaching?</p> <p>All of the above</p>

Role

Who was involved

What made it successful

Why I would help

Who was involved

External agencies

Land support

Language

Emotions support

What did they do

School based support

External support

Experiences of SR

Ethics

Intercare support

Expatriates

Coding Density

Like to provide

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences of persistent non-attendance?

- Role
- Who
- Who was involved
- Like to provide
- What made it successful
- Why? would help
- Who was involved
- External agencies
- Local support
- Language
- Effective support
- What did they do
- School based support
- External support
- Experiences of SR
- Effects
- Ineffective support
- Explanations
- Outing Delivery