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**De Carvalho, Eloise**

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"How can I make a child go into a place that I've lost faith in?": An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the decision-making journeys of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into elective home education

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“How can I make a child go into a place that I’ve lost faith in?”: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the decision-making journeys of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into elective home education.

Eloise de Carvalho

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.

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## **Abstract**

Year-on-year, an increasing number of families are entering into elective home education in the United Kingdom. For many parents, this is a proactive choice based on philosophical or lifestyle reasons. However, others are reactively deregistering their children from school to enter into elective home education in response to their children's negative experiences of state schools; how these parents arrive at the decision to home educate is not currently well-understood. The present study uses interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the experiences and decision-making journeys of seven mothers who decided to deregister their children from school to enter into elective home education, and to consider how education professionals could have supported them along their decision-making journeys. Findings suggest that some parents may decide to deregister their children from school to home educate as a solution to a situation that they experience as unsustainable and as significantly affecting the mental health of their child. Their journey may begin with dissatisfaction with aspects of mainstream state schools that they perceive as insensitive to their child's individual needs; this, coupled with a lack of response to their child's needs from school-based and other local authority education professionals, may lead to a loss of trust in the ability of local authority education services to support their family. Findings also indicate that when supporting parents who are on a decision-making journey towards elective home education, specialist education professionals could consider embodying relational approaches, such as by creating a holding environment, recognising the family's individual needs, advocating for the family's concerns, and empowering parents to make an informed decision. The present study has implications for a range of education professionals and policymakers, particularly with regards to supporting the inclusion of children and young people within mainstream state schools.

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, and most importantly, I am incredibly grateful to the busy parents who volunteered their time to participate in my study. Thank you for all of your insightful contributions; I hope that I have been able to represent your thoughts and experiences in a way that is meaningful to you. I would also like to thank my thesis supervisors (Jak and Rob) as well as the supervisors who supported me on my service placement for their guidance and reflective space. And finally, an enormous thank you to all my family, friends and colleagues who have supported me on my journey to reach this point in my education and career; your care and encouragement means the world to me.

### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed: ..... Date: 02.09.2022

## **Glossary of Acronyms**

ADCS	Association of Directors of Children's Services
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health and Social Care
EBSA	Emotionally Based School Avoidance
EHC	Education, Health and Care (needs assessment, plan)
EHE	Elective Home Education
EOTAS	Education Otherwise Than at School
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ERIC	Education Resource Information Center
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
GP	General Practitioner
LA	Local Authority
NHS	National Health Service
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
QATSDD	Quality Assessment Tool for Studies with Diverse Designs
SALT	Speech and Language Therapist
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

## **Glossary of Terms**

### **Additional needs**

Circumstances that impact on a child or young person's development, which cause them to need additional support at school. Types of additional needs include circumstances relating to cultural differences, family circumstances, health and medical concerns, and special educational needs and disabilities. (Frederickson & Cline, 2015)

### **Alternative education**

Umbrella term for a range of pedagogical approaches that differ from those that are typically embodied within traditional school-based education. Types of alternative education include elective home education, forest schools and Montessori schools. (The Good Schools Guide, n.d.)

### **Education, Health and Care (needs assessment, plan)**

The process for children and young people aged up to 25 to access a greater level of support than is available through special educational needs support provided by mainstream state schools. Following an assessment of the child or young person's educational, healthcare and social care needs, a resulting Education, Health and Care plan documents their needs and sets out the additional support that is required to meet those needs. (Department for Education, 2022b)

### **Elective home education**

Education that is arranged by parents who decide to provide education for their children in some other way than by sending them to school full-time. (Department for Education, 2019b)

### **State schools**

Schools that receive funding through their local authority or directly from the government. Types of state school include community schools (also known as local authority maintained schools) and academies (which are run by not-for-profit trusts and are independent from the local authority). (Department for Education, 2022d)



**Special educational needs and disabilities**

Additional needs that make it significantly more difficult for a child or young person to learn compared to the majority of children or young people of the same age.

(Frederickson & Cline, 2015)

**Specialist education professionals**

Professionals, often from external agencies (including centralised local authority services), who support school-based professionals to deliver efficient and suitable full-time education for children and young people. These professionals include educational psychologists and those who work in education safeguarding/welfare services (e.g., education welfare officer, elective home education officer). (Clark, n.d.; Lyonette et al., 2019)

## Table of Contents

<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>i</b>
Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Author's Declaration .....	iii
Glossary of Acronyms .....	iv
Glossary of Terms .....	v
 <b>1 Introduction .....</b>	 <b>1</b>
1.1 Chapter Overview .....	1
1.2 Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom .....	1
1.3 Elective Home Education as an Alternative Education Practice .....	3
1.4 Engagement Between Centralised Local Authority Education Professionals and Electively Home Educating Families .....	3
1.5 Context and Rationale for the Present Research .....	5
1.6 Relation to My Personal and Professional Experiences .....	8
1.7 Aims of the Present Study .....	9
1.8 Structure of the Dissertation .....	10
 <b>2 Literature Review .....</b>	 <b>11</b>
2.1 Chapter Overview .....	11
2.2 Aims of the Literature Review .....	11
2.3 Introduction to the Literature Regarding Transitions to Elective Home Education .....	12
2.4 Literature Review Strategy .....	14
2.5 Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom .....	17
2.6 Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education .....	22
2.7 Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals .....	25
2.8 Assessing Quality in the Reviewed Research Studies .....	29
2.9 Data Collection Method Limitations in Elective Home Education Research .....	29

2.10	Sampling Strategy Limitations in Elective Home Education Research ....	32
2.11	Researcher Positionality Considerations in Elective Home Education Research .....	33
2.12	Key Findings and Implications for the Present Study .....	35
2.13	Chapter Summary .....	37
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1	Chapter Overview .....	38
3.2	Theoretical Underpinnings.....	38
3.3	Researcher Positionality .....	40
3.4	Consideration of Methodological Approaches .....	41
3.5	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis .....	42
3.6	Participants.....	45
3.7	Data Collection.....	50
3.8	Data Analysis .....	53
3.9	Ethical Considerations .....	56
3.10	Promoting Quality Within the Research .....	58
3.11	Chapter Summary .....	60
<b>4</b>	<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>62</b>
4.1	Chapter Overview .....	62
4.2	Interpretative Accounts for Individual Participants .....	62
4.3	Interpretative Account for the Sample .....	71
4.4	Overview of Superordinate Themes for the Sample .....	73
4.5	Theme One: Experiences of Dissatisfaction With Insensitive Mainstream State School Provision .....	74
4.6	Theme Two: Suggestions for Recognising the Individual Needs of Families .....	78
4.7	Theme Three: Experiences of Losing Trust in Local Authority Education Services .....	82
4.8	Theme Four: Suggestions for Responding to Parental Concerns.....	86
4.9	Theme Five: Experiences of Problem-Solving Unsustainable Situations.....	89

4.10	Theme Six: Suggestions for Empowering Parents to Make an Informed Decision .....	93
4.11	Chapter Summary .....	96
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>97</b>
5.1	Chapter Overview .....	97
5.2	Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Deregistration and Elective Home Education.....	97
5.3	Parents' Preferred Engagement With Specialist Education Professionals.....	99
5.4	Underpinning a Model of Engagement for Specialist Education Professionals.....	101
5.5	Embodying Relational Approaches When Engaging With Parents.....	102
5.6	A Reflective Tool for Specialist Education Professionals .....	106
5.7	Reflexive Note .....	109
5.8	Evaluation of the Present Study .....	111
5.9	Chapter Summary .....	117
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>118</b>
6.1	Chapter Overview .....	118
6.2	Revisiting the Aims of the Present Study .....	118
6.3	Contributions to Knowledge.....	120
6.4	Considerations for Practice.....	121
6.5	Dissemination of Findings.....	126
6.6	Suggestions for Further Research.....	128
6.7	Concluding Thoughts .....	129
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>131</b>
	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>145</b>
	Appendix A: Studies Included in the Literature Review .....	145
	Appendix B: Extracts From Research Journal .....	158
	Appendix C: Recruitment Invitation .....	162
	Appendix D: Recruitment Emails to Network Co-ordinators.....	163
	Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet .....	165

Appendix F: Consent Form .....	167
Appendix G: Interview Schedule .....	169
Appendix H: Example Analysis of a Participant's Account .....	171
Appendix I: Participant Representation Across Themes .....	173
Appendix J: Approved Ethics Application Form and Amendments .....	183

## Figures

Figure 1: Table of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for 'Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom' .....	17
Figure 2: Diagram of Search Process for 'Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom' .....	18
Figure 3: Table of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for 'Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education' .....	22
Figure 4: Diagram of Search Process for 'Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education' .....	23
Figure 5: Table of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for 'Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals' .....	26
Figure 6: Diagram of Search Process for 'Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals' .....	27
Figure 7: Table of Characteristics of Participants.....	49
Figure 8: Example of Timeline Structure for Participants' Experiences.....	52
Figure 9: Timeline of Anne's Experiences .....	62
Figure 10: Timeline of Charlotte's Experiences.....	64
Figure 11: Timeline of Emma's Experiences .....	65
Figure 12: Timeline of Harriet's Experiences.....	66
Figure 13: Timeline of Isabel's Experiences.....	67
Figure 14: Timeline of Maria's Experiences .....	68
Figure 15: Timeline of Nancy's Experiences .....	69
Figure 16: Timeline of Experiences Shared by Participants .....	72
Figure 17: Map of Superordinate Themes and Themes .....	74
Figure 18: Map of Themes for 'Experiences of Dissatisfaction With Mainstream State School Provision' .....	75

Figure 19: Map of Themes for ‘Suggestions for Recognising the Individual Needs of Families’ .....	79
Figure 20: Map of Themes for ‘Experiences of Losing Trust in Local Authority Education Services’ .....	82
Figure 21: Map of Themes for ‘Suggestions for Responding to Parental Concerns’ .....	86
Figure 22: Map of Themes for ‘Experiences of Problem-Solving Unsustainable Situations’ .....	89
Figure 23: Map of Themes for ‘Suggestions for Empowering Parents to Make an Informed Decision’ .....	93

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter will introduce the topic of ‘elective home education’ (EHE) and the reasoning for the present study. I will first define the term and consider its status within the United Kingdom (UK) as an alternative education practice. In relation to this, I will describe engagement between home educating parents and professionals who work in centralised local authority (LA) education services and the current guidance for practice that is available for specialist education professionals. I will then explain my interest in this area of research and articulate my rationale for the importance of this study, including its relevance to professional educational psychology. Finally, I will outline the aims of the present study and the structure for this dissertation.

## **1.2 Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom**

The Department for Education (DfE, 2019c, p. 5) defines ‘elective home education’ as “a choice by parents to provide education for their children at home or in some other way they desire, instead of sending them to school full-time”. Although illegal in some parts of the world, EHE is permitted in the UK under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 (p. 7), which states that “the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school *or otherwise*” [emphasis added]. This highlights the duty of parents to arrange an education for their child, which most exercise by relinquishing the responsibility to school professionals.

For clarity, EHE differs from education provided by an LA that is delivered outside of the school environment, which is sometimes referred to as ‘education otherwise than at school’ (EOTAS; DfE, 2019b). EHE also does not encompass the home learning that was undertaken by many families in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in which many children and young people (CYP) were taught remotely by school professionals while staying at home as part of national lockdowns (e.g., Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Families practise EHE through a variety of philosophies and methods, which vary widely in terms of their pedagogical processes. Approaches that are commonly

adopted by UK home educating families, which include experiential learning, project-based learning and play-based learning, tend to emphasise CYP's autonomy in their education (Fensham-Smith, 2021). Thus, the term 'home education' is often preferred to 'home schooling' in the UK to reflect the diversity of the practice and differences to school-based education (Devitt, 2020, July 30).

Families may enter into EHE for a variety of reasons, which will be explored in more depth in chapter two (section 2.5). For some families, the decision to home educate is a positive choice that suits their philosophy and lifestyle (Morton, 2010). However, an increasing number of parents in the UK are entering into EHE due to negative experiences of their child's schooling, such as perceiving that their child's academic, social or emotional needs are not being met (Morton, 2010; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted], 2019). How these parents arrive at the decision to deregister their child from school to enter into EHE is not currently well-understood (Ofsted, 2019).

### ***1.2.1 The Electively Home Educating Population***

The number of families who participate in EHE is increasing. The exact size of the population is unknown because there is no statutory register of these CYP and families are not required to report their status to their LA if their child has never been registered at a school (DfE, 2019a). A survey of English LAs by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS, 2021) estimated that around 115,542 CYP were home educated in England at some point during the 2020/21 academic year; this estimated population has grown by a third since the previous academic year. While the ADCS note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in accelerating this increase, they have been recording a 20% year-on-year growth of the home educating population since they began surveying LAs in 2016 (ADCS, 2021). This indicates that EHE continues to increase in popularity as a practice for families.

Research into the demographics of UK home educating families is limited. The most comprehensive and up-to-date information currently available is from Smith and Nelson's (2015) questions that were included in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey for six months of 2013. The data indicated that families who participate in EHE are a relatively diverse group (Smith & Nelson, 2015). Compared to the general population, UK home educating families are slightly more likely to hold university degrees and work in, or have worked in, managerial or professional occupations



(Smith & Nelson, 2015). The distribution of ethnic identities of UK home educating families is proportional to the general population (Smith & Nelson, 2015).

### **1.3 Elective Home Education as an Alternative Education Practice**

Despite its legality as an education practice and rising popularity in the UK, EHE is ultimately an ‘alternative’ method to the mainstream method of schooling. It is an individual decision that may be seen to juxtapose the collectively held belief in the value of school-based education, and as such, those who participate in it can be marginalised (Bhopal & Myers, 2016). In the public sphere, EHE is commonly discussed within a context of risk and child abuse, through case examples that highlight concerns such as neglect and religious radicalisation (Myers & Bhopal, 2018).

The ‘othering’ of the home educating population is also recognisable in everyday discourses. Pattison (2018) demonstrated how the use of language can construct EHE as opposing the mainstream, both by those who participate in it and those who do not. For example, attending school is often normalised as a universal social practice in the media and other public communications, while home educating parents often articulate themselves as a community and report self-censoring their views and practices to those who are not in the community to avoid expected criticism (Pattison, 2018).

Some home educators may embrace their alternative position; distancing themselves from mainstream society can support the formation of a new collective identity based on shared experiences and values (Pattison, 2018). However, due to the growing and heterogenous nature of the home educating population, this cannot be assumed as true for all. Polarising EHE from school-based education can prevent home educating parents from engaging with LA education services (Bhopal & Myers, 2016).

### **1.4 Engagement Between Centralised Local Authority Education Professionals and Electively Home Educating Families**

Nationally, the engagement of LA education professionals with home educating families is supported by non-statutory guidance created by the DfE (2019b), which outlines the role of centralised LA education services in EHE. In terms of detailed advice for engagement, the guidance describes the starting point of

involvement of LA education professionals with home educating families as when the LA are unclear about how the education is being provided for a child who is of compulsory school age; for example, the child is not attending a (state or registered independent) school full-time (DfE, 2019b). In these instances, the DfE (2019b) describe the task of LA professionals, who typically work in education safeguarding/welfare services, as determining how the child is being educated and whether the education satisfies the legal requirements described above (section 1.2). This includes making contact with parents, such as through telephone calls or home visits (DfE, 2019b). In instances where these professionals perceive the educational provision to be unsatisfactory and believe that the child should attend school, they may serve the parents with a school attendance order (DfE, 2019b). If the child does not attend school following this, the LA can seek further orders from the court that increase in the supervisory powers that are afforded to the LA (DfE, 2019b). This is in accordance with the Children Act 1989, which identifies restriction of development—including physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural—as a cause of significant harm. Thus, the LA role in EHE is considered to be within a safeguarding context. In instances where these professionals perceive the child's educational provision to be satisfactory, there is no further role for LA involvement (DfE, 2019b). Given that the LA responsibilities for EHE are in a safeguarding capacity regarding assessment of the parents' arranged educational provision, this can lead home educators to hold a suspicious perception of, and fraught relationship with, LA education professionals with whom they engage (Myers, 2020).

Many European countries implement restrictions on home educating parents. In the European Union, policies in all countries except the Netherlands describe monitoring and assessing the progress of home educated CYP, and in all countries but France, the Netherlands and Slovenia, policies describe requiring parents to obtain permission from (either central or local) authorities to enter into EHE (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2018). In comparison, UK regulation of EHE is minimal with policies describing no expectation for home educating parents to engage with their LA unless professionals become concerned that a child is not receiving an education (DfE, 2019b). UK home educating parents typically oppose the imposition of additional restrictions that are present in other European countries (Education Otherwise, 2021). This stance was highlighted in a court case where a parent sued her LA for requesting evidence of her children's

educational provision and issuing warnings for not providing evidence, despite them not having previous grounds for concern (Goodred v Portsmouth City Council, 2021).

Examples of more supportive interactions between home educating parents and LA education professionals are rarely discussed in the literature and research demonstrates an interesting discrepancy between LA professionals' typical offer of engagement and home educating parents' preferred means of support. LA professionals who work in education safeguarding/welfare services describe their current support in terms of giving advice on national guidance or local educational opportunities (ADCS, 2021). Yet, many home educating parents report that they would prefer for professionals who work within centralised LA education services to provide support in terms of receiving resources, such as funding for examinations, providing examination venues and facilitating events at community locations (Education Otherwise, 2021).

#### ***1.4.1 Engagement With Families who are Considering Entering Into Elective Home Education***

There is also relatively limited guidance and evidence regarding engagement between LA education professionals and families who are considering entering into EHE. Prior to a child becoming home educated, the DfE (2019b) recommends that, where possible, LA education professionals should encourage parents who are considering entering into EHE to discuss their intention and offer advice based on the family's individual motivations. However, the DfE (2019b) guidance does not specify national mechanisms that can support this engagement. This could be considered as disappointing given that in instances where LA education professionals have opportunities to discuss the decision with parents, they are able to identify additional support that could be put in place in schools, ensure that parents understand their responsibilities in relation to EHE, and explore alternatives to EHE (Ofsted, 2019).

### **1.5 Context and Rationale for the Present Research**

The description above of EHE as an alternative education practice whose participants have limited engagement with LA education services, aside from in a safeguarding capacity, demonstrates an opportunity for LA education professionals to redefine and reconstruct their relationship with the home educating community.

This may be particularly pertinent in the current context of accelerating growth of the home educating population following the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***1.5.1 Elective Home Education Following the COVID-19 Pandemic***

As noted by the ADCS (2021), there is evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of the home educating population in the UK. Due to a current lack of research studies in this area, the reasons for this are currently unknown apart from the ADCS's (2021) suggestions that it mainly pertains to parents' 'health concerns', although these are not explained in detail. Although the present study was proposed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting remote learning, it is important to recognise that these recent events are likely to impact on the current context of this study.

### ***1.5.2 Educational Inclusion Within Schools***

A broad range of reasons for entering into EHE in the UK is explored in detail in chapter two (section 2.5.4). However, the notion of CYP being removed from school as a result of parents' perceptions that their children's needs are not being met, as described above, suggests that in some cases, entry into EHE through deregistering from school could be viewed as an issue of inclusion. Although typically described in terms of disability, educational inclusion can be defined more broadly as "the right to education for all", regardless of an individual's needs, which includes values of participation, equity and fellowship, among others (Haug, 2017, p. 206). Indeed, unmet special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) of CYP is frequently cited in UK research as a reason for entering into EHE (e.g., Mitchell, 2020b). Given that inclusion pertains to the environment that a child is educated in, deregistering due to unmet needs suggests that some CYP may not be experiencing the benefits of the inclusive values; this may implicate LA education services, such as schools and centralised SEND support services (e.g., educational psychology services; EPSs), in some parents' decisions to home educate.

### ***1.5.3 Developing Relationships Between Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals***

Reframing the relationship between LA education professionals and home educating parents could be particularly important for parents who report entering into

EHE in response to unsustainable situations in their child's schooling as well as professionals who work in the state schools that the CYP are deregistered from (Ofsted, 2019). Parents who experience these challenges with their child's schooling may particularly appreciate support with getting their child's needs met in a school environment, which could prevent them from entering into EHE as a perceived last resort (Ofsted, 2019). This highlights a potential role and opportunities for specialist education professionals to engage with parents who are considering home educating to, for example, review school provision and the implementation of inclusive policies to promote the support of CYP who have additional needs within school-based education.

It is also important to recognise the brevity of some CYP's experiences in EHE, with high numbers returning to state schools throughout the academic year after a short period (ADCS, 2021). As well as suggesting that many parents who decide to home educate may continue to appreciate engagement with LA education services in relation to their child's education, the possibility of re-entry to the state school system also indicates a benefit of maintaining engagement with parents during periods of EHE for supporting transitions to school settings (Koonce, 2007). Given that frequent transitions between education settings can be disruptive for CYP (e.g., Prior & Leckie, 2022), support from specialist education professionals that either prevents CYP from being deregistered or supports re-entry to school-based education is likely to be beneficial.

#### ***1.5.4 Upcoming Changes to Policy***

Additionally, given policymakers' dissatisfaction with the current lack of regulations in the UK (e.g., House of Commons Education Committee, 2021), it is highly likely that the legal framework surrounding EHE, which has not changed since its introduction in the Education Act 1944, will be reviewed in the near future with an increase in LA involvement and regulatory powers. For example, as part of the Schools Bill, the DfE (2022a) are proposing the introduction of a register of CYP who are not in school (i.e., those who are home educated, flexi-schooled or receive provision at an unregistered setting) with the purpose of being able to monitor the educational provision that these CYP are receiving and identify CYP who are not participating in education. Under this, home educating parents would have a duty to provide information regarding their children's educational provision (DfE, 2022a). To

ensure that any new measures meet the needs of home educating families, it is important that such policies are evidence-based; for example, by being grounded in research that is conducted with parents who are in the EHE community.

## **1.6 Relation to My Personal and Professional Experiences**

As well as it being relevant within the current education context, my decision to investigate this topic also relates to experiences in my professional and personal life. While this is briefly described below, I explore the origins of my interest in parents' decision-making journeys towards EHE and their engagement with LA education professionals in more detail in a critical autobiography in Appendix B.

### **1.6.1 *Relevance to Professional Educational Psychology***

Educational psychologists (EPs) who are employed by an LA may only work with home educating families occasionally, given that much of their work is requested or commissioned by schools. In instances that they do work with home educating families, involvement is typically providing psychological advice as part of the LA's statutory duties in assessing SEND for Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans (DfE, 2019b). However, as described above (section 1.5.2), some home educated CYP might also have had difficulties engaging in education before their parents deregistered them from school. EPs, including those who work in both the public (i.e., employed by the LA) and private (i.e., employed by an academy trust or independent company or self-employed) sectors, are specialist education professionals who work with school-based professionals and families to support them to meet the individual needs of CYP and promote their inclusion within the school environment. Thus, EPs likely (and perhaps unknowingly) already work with CYP who are later deregistered from school. Given their role in supporting schools to meet the needs of CYP, they could be well-placed to provide early intervention and work with schools to support families who are considering entering into EHE (Arora, 2003).

### **1.6.2 *My Interest in Elective Home Education***

Many researchers of EHE are, or have been, involved in EHE themselves as a parent and/or child (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). However, I attended state schools

for the entirety of my compulsory education. My interest in EHE has developed from working with parents in both research and applied contexts.

For my undergraduate dissertation project, I interviewed home educated adolescents and their parents to better understand their social opportunities and experiences (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2018). In my conversations with the parents whose children had previously attended school, I was struck by the emotive nature of their experiences that led them to deregister their child to enter into EHE. It helped me to recognise that this decision is often preceded by a lengthy, difficult and escalating situation in the school environment that may include missed opportunities for intervention from services.

In my current role as a trainee EP on placement part-time in an LA EPS, I have worked with a small number of families who have deregistered their children from state schools, either to enter into EHE or to attend independent schools. This involvement has primarily occurred as part of the statutory role of an EP to provide psychological advice for EHC needs assessments. Similarly to my research with home educating families, discussions with these parents have included reference to their children's challenging experiences of state school as well as a perceived lack of support provided by school professionals. This further increased my interest in the role of children's experiences of state schools on parents' decision-making processes around their children's educational provision.

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

In this introduction, I have outlined the context of EHE in the UK. This has included an insight into the potential marginalisation of home educating families within society as well as current engagement between centralised LA education professionals and home educating parents. Due to the growing and increasingly heterogeneous nature of the home educating population, this represents an opportunity for LA education services to reframe their relationship with their EHE community, including with those who are considering entering into EHE. Some parents may be deregistering their children from state schools to enter into EHE based on a perception of unmet needs and lack of inclusive practice, and may value support from specialist education professionals on their journey towards EHE. Research in this area is thus of relevance to policymakers and LA education professionals, including EPs.

The aims of my research are two-fold. Firstly, I aim to better understand the decision-making journeys of parents who deregister their children from state school to enter into EHE. And secondly, I aim to identify opportunities along these journeys for specialist education professionals to engage with these parents, and explore the information, advice and support that parents may value at different stages.

## **1.8 Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter one, Introduction, has described the context of EHE in the UK. It has articulated the significance and relevance of the research topic to explain the rationale that underpin the aims for the present study.

Chapter two, Literature Review, explores the current research that investigates parents' decisions to enter into EHE as well as their interactions with LA education professionals. It summarises and critiques relevant studies and positions the present study within the research context.

Chapter three, Methodology, describes the methodology of the study. It unpicks its theoretical underpinnings before explaining the study design, including procedures for selecting participants, collecting data and analysing data.

Chapter four, Findings, analyses the data collected from participants. It considers participants' experiences individually and as a whole sample, and identifies common themes across their decision-making journeys of shared experiences and ideas for engagement for specialist education professionals.

Chapter five, Discussion, considers the findings within the research context to draw conclusions. It answers the research questions and proposes theoretical underpinnings for a model of engagement for specialist education professionals, and also evaluates the quality of the study.

Chapter six, Conclusions, summarises findings with respect to the original aims of the study and discusses additional considerations for research and practice. It finally reflects on the contribution of the present study to the issue of inclusion within education.



## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter will explore our current understanding of parents' decision-making journeys towards entering into EHE as well as their interactions with LA education professionals by reviewing relevant research literature. Before this, I will briefly introduce the wider research base and outline my approach to identifying the most relevant literature through a narrative review that is supported by systematic approaches. Due to the size and complexity of the EHE research base, I split the literature review itself into three sections that each explore a pertinent aspect of the literature. The first section explores why parents in the UK decide to home educate, the second considers how they come to this decision (i.e., the decision-making journey), and the third investigates engagement between home educating parents and LA education professionals. Each section outlines the search process employed and describes the reviewed studies in terms of their methodologies, populations and research findings. After these three sections, I then describe methodological limitations and considerations of all reviewed studies; these primarily relate to data collection methods, sampling strategies and researcher reflexivity and are representative of the wider EHE research base. To draw the chapter together, I will highlight key findings from the literature and outline how the reviewed studies have informed my thinking in developing the research questions of this present study.

### **2.2 Aims of the Literature Review**

As outlined in the previous chapter (section 1.7), the present study aims to better understand the decision-making journeys of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE. As part of exploring these journeys, the study also aims to identify opportunities for specialist education professionals to engage with these parents, including identifying the information, advice and support that parents would value at different stages of their journeys.

However, it is first important to overview the currently available knowledge on the topic of entering into EHE to position the present study within this research context. Thus, the purpose of this review is to summarise the published research literature that investigates parents' decisions to enter into EHE; this includes critically

appraising studies to comment on their quality, and by extension, identify limitations of the literature.

## **2.3 Introduction to the Literature Regarding Transitions to Elective Home Education**

The research base regarding parents' transitions to EHE is large and complex, with over 2000 journal articles, books and dissertations published on the topic to date (International Center for Home Education Research, 2022). To accurately position the present study, it is first important to understand the current state of the relevant literature. I initially conducted a rapid mapping review to establish the scope of the literature and guide my approach to the review (Booth et al., 2022).

### **2.3.1 *Rapid Mapping Review***

With regards to transitioning to EHE, researchers have predominantly explored parents' reasons for deciding to home educate, which they term 'parental motivations' (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Researchers have employed quantitative and qualitative paradigms to identify a range of motivations. Quantitative research in this area (e.g., Morse & Bell, 2018) typically seeks to identify trends in parental motivations in the home educating population. Qualitative research (e.g., Neuman & Guterman, 2019) typically seeks to interrogate parental motivations in more detail, such as by exploring change in reasoning over time.

Many researchers (e.g., Baidi, 2019) have investigated motivations of home educating parents in general. However, others have explored the motivations of families with specific demographics and have considered the implications of aspects such as religion (e.g., Thomas, 2019), ethnicity (e.g., Ray, 2015) and SEND on their decision to home educate (e.g., Kendall & Taylor, 2014).

A final notable feature of the EHE motivations research base is the distribution of locations that the research has been conducted in. The majority of research has been conducted in the United States (US; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). This is congruent with historic and current trends in the wider field of research into EHE and has been attributed to the greater numbers of CYP and families who participate in EHE in the US in comparison to other countries, as a result of its large population (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, 2020). Research from other countries, such as the UK

(e.g., Maxwell et al., 2018), Australia (e.g., Slater et al., 2020) and Israel (e.g., Neuman & Guterman, 2021), forms a far smaller proportion of the research base.

### ***2.3.2 Applicability of Findings From Research Conducted in Other Countries***

When interpreting the findings of a study, it is important to consider the context that it is conducted in, particularly for a social phenomenon such as EHE. EHE exists alongside schooling and other options for education, the nature of which is dependent on the education context of the society that the family lives in (Spiegler, 2010). A parent's decision to home educate is likely to be influenced by both macro level (e.g., a country's EHE policy) and micro level (e.g., the schools in their local area) influences of their environment. The decision is thus grounded within the parent's context, which has implications for the transferability of a study's conclusions; if the context of EHE in a study is different to the research and practice of EHE in a location of interest, the findings regarding parents' decisions to home educate may not be transferable (Smith, 2017). While the micro level influences on a participant are difficult for a reader to assess, potential macro level influences on a sample can be appraised in terms of their transferability to the population in the country of interest.

As noted above, a large proportion of the research into EHE, including that which investigates parents' motivations to home educate, is conducted in the US. Given the differences between education contexts within the UK and US, readers should be cautious when transferring the findings of EHE research conducted in the US to the EHE research and practice of the UK.

For example, the US practises 'the separation of church and state' in schools, which, amongst other impacts, prohibits school-sponsored religious expression in state-funded schools (Green, 2014). In comparison, over a third of state-funded primary schools in England have a designated religious character, typically Christian, in which religious expression may be interweaved into the school's practices, such as praying in assembly (Andrews & Johnes, 2016). Comparatively, home educating parents in the US frequently cite reasons relating to faith, such as wishing to provide religious teaching, as key motivators in their decision to enter into EHE (e.g., Dahlquist et al., 2006); however, this reason is rarely cited in the UK EHE research literature. It should be noted that the relationship between the existence of state schools with a religious character and the proportion of parents that decide to home

educate for religious reasons is unknown and a direct correlation cannot be drawn. However, these comparisons nevertheless highlight the importance of recognising the education context within which EHE, and the parents who make decisions around their child's education, exist.

Thus, when considering conclusions from research studies, it is important to consider macro level influences of the local education context in parents' motivations for EHE (Spiegler, 2010). Findings from research conducted in other countries that have differing education systems to that of the UK may not be transferable to the research and practice of EHE in the UK. As such, literature from the UK will be prioritised in the following literature review. Searches will be limited to research conducted in the UK where there is sufficient relevant literature; if there is a lack of relevant literature conducted in the UK, the locations of the research studies will be noted.

## **2.4 Literature Review Strategy**

The size and heterogeneity of the EHE motivations literature identified through the rapid mapping review described above (section 2.3.1) informed my decision to review relevant literature using a narrative approach that incorporates systematic practices to answer three targeted review questions.

### **2.4.1 Narrative Review**

A systematic literature review, which attempts to critically examine and synthesise empirical evidence within a given topic area, is traditionally considered to be the most comprehensive approach to reviewing a body of literature (Booth et al., 2022). However, depending on the purpose of the review, aspects of the literature itself and constraints of the research study, it may not always be the most suitable approach (Booth et al., 2022). In contrast, a narrative literature review, which broadly attempts to describe the current evidence within a given topic area, is a more adaptable approach (Booth et al., 2022).

A systematic review is conducted in accordance with stringent guidelines so as to generate accurate conclusions regarding a specific question; in health research, they are frequently utilised to synthesise and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of interventions (Booth et al., 2022). The accuracy of conclusions may not be as imperative for a review that seeks to explore rather than conclude; a

narrative review may be as appropriate for my aim described above (section 2.2) of situating my present study within the research context (Booth et al., 2022).

The guidelines that a researcher may follow when conducting a systematic review are typically limited to a single or a small number of similar study designs; a lack of such standards renders the narrative review a more flexible approach to account for diversity in methodologies (Booth et al., 2022). My initial mapping review highlighted the complexity of the EHE motivations literature in terms of its heterogeneity in methodological approaches.

Finally, given the constraints of the current research study, such as the review only being conducted by myself and my lack of resources to adequately translate records that are not written in English, I recognised that it would not be possible to accurately conduct a systematic review that exhaustively reviews all relevant research studies (Booth et al., 2022).

#### **2.4.2 *Systematic Approaches to Complement the Narrative Review***

Given the flexibility of narrative approaches to reviewing literature in comparison to a systematic literature review, the procedure that a researcher follows may be less clear, which impacts on a reader's ability to judge the quality of a review and reproduce it (Booth et al., 2022). A lack of transparency increases the potential for the reviewer to bias the conclusions through not reporting or not critically evaluating research studies (Booth et al., 2022). To support researchers to share the methods that they utilise to review literature, Grant and Booth (2009) described the SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, Analysis) framework. Below, I use this framework to articulate my approach to reviewing the literature around parents' transitions into EHE and their relationships with LA education professionals.

*Search* considers how the reviewer identifies their records. I selected eight databases to perform my searches within, based on their relevance to the discipline of education: British Education Index, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Scopus, PsycInfo, Journals@Ovid, Web of Science Core Collection, and the British Library E-Theses Online Service. I excluded records that were not empirical research (e.g., opinion pieces, reviews). The search process for each question, including search terms, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a diagram of the process, is described in more detail in the corresponding section (sections 2.5–2.7).

*Appraisal* considers how the reviewer assesses the quality of the identified records. Based on the variety of methodologies noted in the initial mapping review, I sought out a single tool that was suitable for assessing quality across multiple research designs. I opted for Sirriyeh et al.'s (2012) Quality Assessment Tool for Studies with Diverse Designs (QATSDD) for the critical evaluation of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies. This tool, including the reasons for its selection, is described in more detail below (section 2.8).

*Synthesis* considers how the reviewer amalgamates and reports information from the records. My searches highlighted commonalities between studies in terms of their properties (e.g., methodologies and methods, populations and participants) and findings. Thus, I synthesised the information for each review question by first overviewsing properties of the reviewed studies, before reporting findings thematically to summarise what is currently known.

*Analysis* considers how the reviewer narrates the information from the reviewed records to make conclusions about the literature. As my appraisal highlighted common limitations in the studies related to data collection tools and sampling, I explained these key limitations in more detail (sections 2.9–2.11), including their effects on the findings of the studies, and used them to inform my approaches to the present study.

### **2.4.3 Three Literature Review Questions**

My initial mapping review revealed that, despite the size of the research base regarding parents' motivations for entering into EHE, there is limited research that specifically considers how parents in the UK come to decide to enter into EHE. Based on this, I decided to consider three specific questions within my literature review: one to explore what is currently known about UK parents' motivations for home educating (section 2.5), a second to explore what is known regarding parents' decision-making processes in the transition to EHE (section 2.6), and a final to explore what current research indicates about the engagement between home educating parents and LA education professionals (section 2.7).

Thus, in the following sections, I aim to answer the following questions:

1. What does existing research literature tell us about why parents in the UK enter into EHE?

2. What does existing research literature tell us about how parents come to decide to enter into EHE?
3. What does existing research literature tell us about engagement between parents who are currently, or are considering, participating in EHE and professionals who work for the LA that they live in?

## 2.5 Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom

Given the contextually situated nature of EHE, as described above (section 2.3.2), it is first important to identify the motivations of parents who live in an education context that is relevant to the present study. I based this aspect of the review on the question 'what does existing research literature tell us about why parents in the UK enter into EHE?'.

### 2.5.1 Literature Search Process

To identify relevant literature regarding parents' motivations for entering into EHE in the UK, I combined two search terms to identify relevant records: 'elective home education' (home educat\* OR homeschool\* OR home school\* OR home-school\*) AND 'motivation' (motiv\* OR deci\* OR cho\* OR reason\*). Figure 1, below, identifies the full inclusion and exclusion criteria. Given the lack of research in the area, I did not include a parameter regarding the year in which studies were conducted.

Parameter	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic	EHE	Relationship between school staff and parents, home learning during COVID-19 lockdown
Resource type	Empirical research	Opinion piece, literature review
Publication type	Journal article, thesis	Book chapter, newspaper article
Location of study	UK	Outside of the UK
Access to publication	Full access	No access

*Figure 1: Table of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for 'Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom'*

These criteria resulted in the identification of 105 records across seven databases (the British Library E-Theses Online Service did not identify any records). I screened these results based on the relevance of their title or abstract (e.g., excluding research that is concerned with the 'home-school' relationship between parents of children who attend school-based education and school professionals). I

downloaded the resulting 31 records and then excluded a further nineteen due to their status as a duplication or irrelevance of the full publication. I thus included a final twelve studies in this review (Appendix A). Figure 2, below, illustrates this search process.

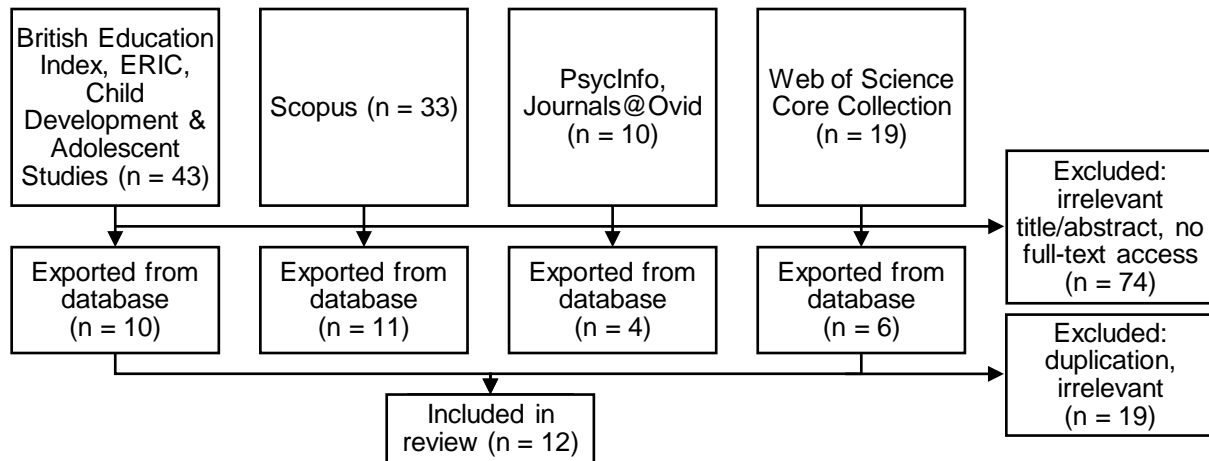


Figure 2: Diagram of Search Process for 'Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom'

### 2.5.2 Methodologies and Data Collection Methods

The majority of the reviewed studies employed a qualitative paradigm to explore UK parents' motivations for EHE. Some, such as Mitchell (2020a), further clarified this by describing the use of an interpretivist paradigm to highlight the importance of considering participants' subjective experiences. Interviews and questionnaires were the two most popular methods for collecting data. Questionnaires were used to capture data from large samples, such as Rothermel (2003) who considered the motivations of over 400 families and the ADCS (2021) who collected information from 126 LA professionals. The limitations of using data collection tools that have predetermined response options are described in the latter part of the chapter (section 2.9.1). As well as questionnaires, Ofsted (2019) utilised other methods such as focus groups and letters, which was likely to maximise the size of their sample. Interviews were often either used in tandem with questionnaires for smaller samples, such as in Maxwell et al. (2018), or as part of a case study approach to explore families' motivations in more depth, such as in Myers and Bhopal (2018).



### **2.5.3 Populations and Participants**

The majority of the reviewed studies considered the motivations of the general population of parents who engage in EHE in the UK, such as Rothermel (2003). However, others conducted research with specific subgroups of home educating parents to identify motivations that may be specific to these populations. In terms of religious and ethnic minority groups, D'Arcy (2014) interviewed Traveller families to consider issues of race and ethnicity within school settings while Myers and Bhopal (2018) interviewed Muslim families to explore how 'risk'—including radicalisation—is conceptualised in relation to Muslim EHE. Motivations of parents of CYP who have SEND were also specifically investigated, with Kendall and Taylor (2014) and Parsons and Lewis (2010) exploring issues of inclusion in the school environment. Ofsted (2019) focused on motivations of parents who deregistered their children from secondary schools due to a significant increase of young people from Key Stage 4 entering EHE and Key Stage 3 aged young people representing the largest age group in EHE overall.

Although all studies considered the motivations of parents, some explored this through the perspectives of other sources. Alongside parents, Bower (2021) explored a young person's perspective of his parents' reasons for deregistering him from school. The ADCS (2021) only surveyed LA representatives to gain a nationwide overview from the perspective of services. Maxwell et al. (2018) and Morton (2010) interviewed LA representatives to supplement the views of parents. To triangulate views, Ofsted (2019) collected data from parents, secondary school children, LA representatives for EHE, senior leaders of secondary schools.

### **2.5.4 Research Findings for 'Parents' Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom'**

Almost all of the reviewed studies included participants who had deregistered their children from school. Thus, many described parental motivations that reflected dissatisfaction with aspects of their child's experience of school; disappointment with education or schools was the most popular reason noted in Rothermel (2003).

The ability of school professionals to support individual needs, such as SEND, was frequently identified as a motivation for entering into EHE. It was identified as a primary driver in Mitchell (2020b) as well as in Ofsted (2019), which considered deregistration for secondary school aged CYP. For example, parents of CYP who

have SEND in Kendall and Taylor (2014) noted that school professionals lacked understanding and knowledge around specific SEND, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Social issues with peers, such as incidents of discrimination and bullying, were another reason that parents deregistered their children to home educate. The family in Bower (2021) reported that their child was bullied and socially excluded as a result of discrimination based on his religious belief and parents' sexuality as well as due to a lack of support from school professionals; similarly, Traveller families in D'Arcy (2014) reported instances of racism. Deregistering for such social issues was conceptualised in Myers and Bhopal (2018) as mitigating against risk for children.

Other factors that motivated parents towards EHE related to the priorities and values of the state school system. Parents in Mitchell (2020b) identified factors that they felt indicated that the school system is unfit for purpose, including the young age that children enter school and the volume of homework that pupils are set. Parents of CYP who have SEND in Maxwell et al. (2018) commented on the unsuitability of the focus in schools on assessment and attainment for their children.

Considering parents' concerns above, such as a lack of support for their children's needs and social issues with peers, some studies explored their interactions regarding this with school professionals. In Kendall and Taylor (2014), parents of CYP who have SEND noted a lack of engagement from school professionals in general, while the family in Bower (2021) felt that professionals at their child's school did not address their concerns. Ofsted (2019) recognised that there was a breakdown in the relationship between school professionals and parents for all participants. Ofsted (2019) also highlighted how actions by school-based professionals and specialist education professionals, such as threatening prosecution for non-attendance, could further motivate parents towards EHE.

Interestingly, the only reviewed study that focused on parents who had deregistered their children from school but did not identify aspects of schools as a key motivator was the survey of LA professionals by the ADCS (2021). LA representatives reported the top three parental motivations as: health concerns related to COVID-19, philosophical or lifestyle choices and health (including mental health) reasons. School-specific reasons (e.g., bullying, SEND) were cited at a far lower rate and the reasons noted above were not explained in detail. The discrepancy of these findings with studies described thus far could indicate the

limitations of using other sources to identify parental motivations, particularly where the source may be implicated in parents' decision-making.

In comparison, CYP's mental health was identified in many studies as declining as a result of the impact of negative experiences of school, such as in Bower (2021); this left parents feeling forced to deregister their children. The construction of the decision as a necessity was particularly notable for parents of CYP who have SEND, with parents in both Parsons and Lewis (2010) and Kendall and Taylor (2014) reporting feeling that they had no other choice or alternative. Similarly, Traveller families in D'Arcy (2014) described feeling compelled to enter into EHE due to a lack of support from school professionals. However, Morton (2010) identified that parents who constructed their decision as a 'last resort' tended to reframe this over time to deregistering for 'natural' (e.g., lifestyle) or 'social' (e.g., adult-child interactions) reasons once engaging in EHE. This indicates how time spent in EHE encourages parents to reflect on their construction of education itself and reframe their original reason for home education.

Parents in Morton (2010) who constructed their decision in one of the two other ways were more likely to have started EHE upon their children reaching compulsory school age; home educating for such ideological reasons is echoed in other research studies that are conducted with parents whose children have never attended school. In the only reviewed study that conducted research with just these families, parents in Mitchell (2020a) perceived the state school system to be flawed and irrelevant as well as under pressure to conform to government policy at the expense of acting in the best interests of CYP; they felt that it failed to support curiosity and engagement. Such ideological reasons were identified more frequently by these parents than by parents whose children had previously attended school in its parallel study, Mitchell (2020b). Given that parents completed the same survey, comparing the findings suggests that parents whose children attended school are more likely to perceive the state school system as not meeting their child's individual needs while parents who opted for EHE at the outset of their child's education are more likely to perceive the state school system as not meeting the needs of CYP in general.

## 2.6 Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education

The studies described above (section 2.5) typically explore parents' reasons for entering into EHE through exploring motivations at a surface level, such as through closed choice questions on questionnaires administered at a single timepoint (e.g., Rothermel, 2003). Limitations with this approach to data collection are discussed below (section 2.9). To appreciate the complex and dynamic nature of self-reported parental motivations, some researchers have explored the decision-making processes that lead parents to enter into EHE. I based this aspect of the review on the question 'what does existing research literature tell us about how parents come to decide to enter into EHE?'.

### 2.6.1 Literature Search Process

To identify relevant literature regarding parents' decision-making processes around entering into EHE, I combined two search terms to identify relevant records: 'elective home education' (home educat\* OR homeschool\* OR home school\* OR home-school\*) AND 'decision-making' (decision making OR decision-making). In comparison to the previous review, I expanded the search to include research conducted in any country due to a paucity of relevant studies. Figure 3, below, identifies the full inclusion and exclusion criteria. Given the lack of research in the area, I did not include a parameter regarding the year in which studies were conducted.

Parameter	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic	Decision-making in transition to EHE	Aspect of current EHE, relationship between school staff and parents, home learning during COVID-19 lockdown
Resource type	Empirical research	Opinion piece, literature review
Publication type	Journal article, thesis	Book chapter, newspaper article
Access to publication	Full access	No access
Language	English	Other language

*Figure 3: Table of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for 'Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education'*

These criteria resulted in the identification of 73 records across seven databases (the British Library E-Theses Online Service did not identify any records). I screened these results based on the relevance of their title or abstract (e.g.,

excluding research that is concerned with decision-making around an EHE curriculum). I downloaded the resulting nine records and then excluded a further four due to their status as a duplication or irrelevance of the full publication. I thus included a final five studies in this review (Appendix A). Figure 4, below, illustrates this search process.

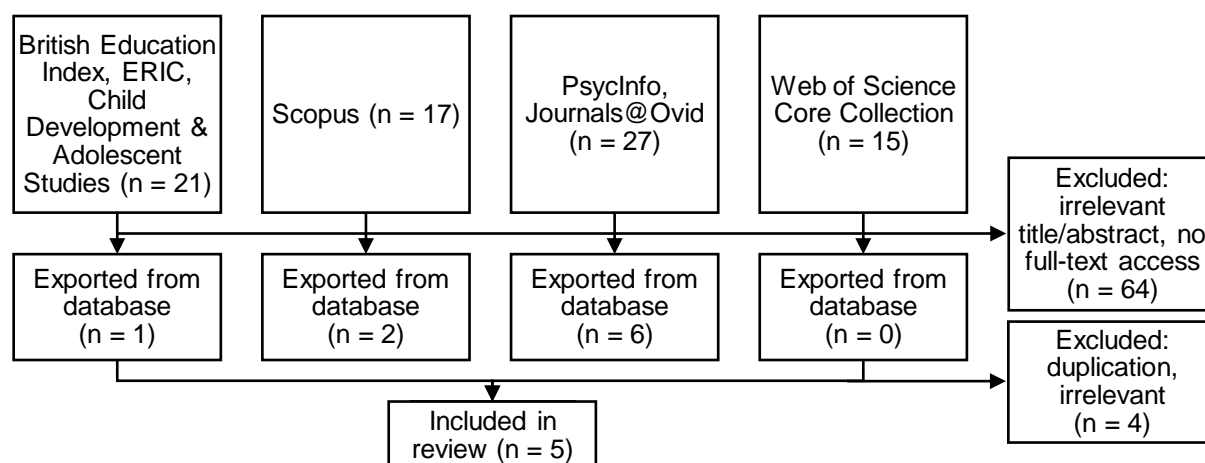


Figure 4: Diagram of Search Process for 'Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education'

## 2.6.2 Methodologies and Data Collection Methods

To explore parents' decision-making processes in depth, all of the reviewed studies employed qualitative methodologies. Some articulated coherent methodologies, including theoretical underpinnings, such as Adamson (2021) who based her interviews on constructivist grounded theory. The value of adopting a social constructivist paradigm to explore parents' decision-making journeys is described below (section 2.9.2). All of the studies utilised interviews to collect data; Anthony and Burroughs (2010) also included observations as part of a longitudinal case study approach to consider the experiences of families over a year.

## 2.6.3 Populations and Participants

All of the reviewed studies only conducted research with parents. All but one of the studies was conducted in the US; Adamson (2021) was conducted in the UK. In terms of subgroups of parents in the EHE population, although the majority did not specifically consider demographics, such as Anthony and Burroughs (2010) and Campbell (2012), Simmons and Campbell (2019) explored the decision-making processes of parents whose children have ASD.

However, not all of the participants had ultimately made the decision to home educate; some parents in Adamson (2021) opted for other alternative education practices (e.g., flexi-schooling, forest school settings) or decided to keep their children in state schools, while Lovett (2014) included parents who moved their children to independent schools.

#### ***2.6.4 Research Findings for ‘Parents’ Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education’***

Parents’ decision-making processes around EHE were typically instigated by concerns about school-based education. For parents of CYP who have ASD, Simmons and Campbell (2019) identified that events relating to their children’s negative experiences of school (e.g., those that compromised their wellbeing or safety) could trigger consideration of EHE. For parents who made non-state school choices, Lovett (2014) applied sensemaking theory to recognise these concerns as the catalyst for recognising that a change in their child’s education was necessary.

Interestingly, in their longitudinal study, Anthony and Burroughs (2010) concluded that although parents were initially concerned about their children’s experiences of school, latent motivations, such as wishing to instil religious beliefs through education, ultimately encouraged parents to deregister their children from school. Such latent motivations typically reflected values that parents sought from education, which indicates the importance of investigating the relationship between initial motivations and the sense that parents make from these experiences.

A key aspect of parents’ decision-making process identified in the majority of the reviewed studies was how parents actively gathered information to inform their decision. Through sensemaking theory, Lovett (2014) reported that parents assimilated information (e.g., from reflection on their family circumstances, discussion with friends and family), based upon which they selected their action that was consistent with the data that they had collected. Simmons and Campbell (2019) identified a range of resources that parents of CYP who have ASD drew on, including the internet, books and other parents (e.g., from ASD parent support groups). Adamson (2021) reported that parents explored their options through conducting research, hearing the views of others and considering their own feelings; within this, they negotiated potential barriers (e.g., accommodating their employment) by identifying solutions. Given parents’ engagement in such research

and reflection as well as consideration of factors relating to their own family dynamic, Campbell (2012) articulated the choice to home educate as critical and complex.

Having gathered information and identified their way forward based on this, parents finally entered into EHE (e.g., by deregistering their child from school). Adamson (2021) conceptualised this as 'stepping out of the system'. Simmons and Campbell (2019) identified that the decision-making process can take months or years for some parents. Lovett (2014) noted that the decision to home educate was retained by parents through feedback from positive outcomes of EHE for their children and retrospection on previous events.

Adamson (2021) was the only study that conducted research with parents who considered home educating but ultimately did not enter into EHE. This decision was influenced by individual and social factors, such as disagreement from spouses, financial constraints, a lack of a like-minded EHE community in the local area, and finding a state school that aligned with their values regarding education. This indicates that parents may also gather information to inform their decision that counters entering into EHE. Parents thus engage in an active decision-making process in which they weigh up various information relating to their individual and social context before deciding to home educate their children.

## **2.7 Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals**

Despite identifying that parents may draw on a range of sources of information, including other people, when deciding to enter into EHE, the research studies above (section 2.6) suggest that they have limited engagement with LA education professionals on their decision-making journey. Given my interest in exploring opportunities for specialist education professionals to interact with these parents, I constructed an additional search to identify research studies that describe the interactions between parents who are considering entering into EHE and LA education professionals. An initial search identified a lack of research that explores interactions between parents who are considering entering into EHE and LA education professionals. I thus expanded the search to consider interactions between parents who are currently home educating and LA professionals to inform my understanding of parents' experiences after making the decision and glean examples from practice that could be extrapolated to be applied to parents who are

considering entering into EHE. I based this aspect of the review on the question ‘what does existing research literature tell us about engagement between parents who are currently, or are considering, participating in EHE and professionals who work for the LA that they live in?’.

### 2.7.1 Literature Search Process

To identify relevant literature regarding home educating parents’ engagement with LA education professionals, I combined three search terms to identify relevant records: ‘elective home education’ (home educat\* OR homeschool\* OR home school\* OR home-school\*) AND ‘local government professionals’ (local authorit\* OR school district\*) AND ‘engagement’ (engag\* OR relation\* OR interact\*). As with the previous review, I expanded the search to include research conducted in any country due to a paucity of relevant studies. Figure 5, below, identifies the full inclusion and exclusion criteria. Given the lack of research in the area, I did not include a parameter regarding the year in which studies were conducted.

Parameter	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic	Home educating parents’ relationships with professionals	No consideration of relationships with professionals, home learning during COVID-19 lockdown
Resource type	Empirical research	Opinion piece, literature review
Publication type	Journal article, thesis	Book chapter
Access to publication	Full access	No access

*Figure 5: Table of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for ‘Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals’*

These criteria resulted in the identification of 32 records across seven databases (the British Library E-Theses Online Service did not identify any records). I screened these results based on the relevance of their title or abstract (e.g., excluding research that is concerned only with parents). I downloaded the resulting fourteen records and then excluded a further nine due to their status as a duplication or irrelevance of the full publication. I thus included a final five studies in this review (Appendix A). Figure 6, below, illustrates this search process.



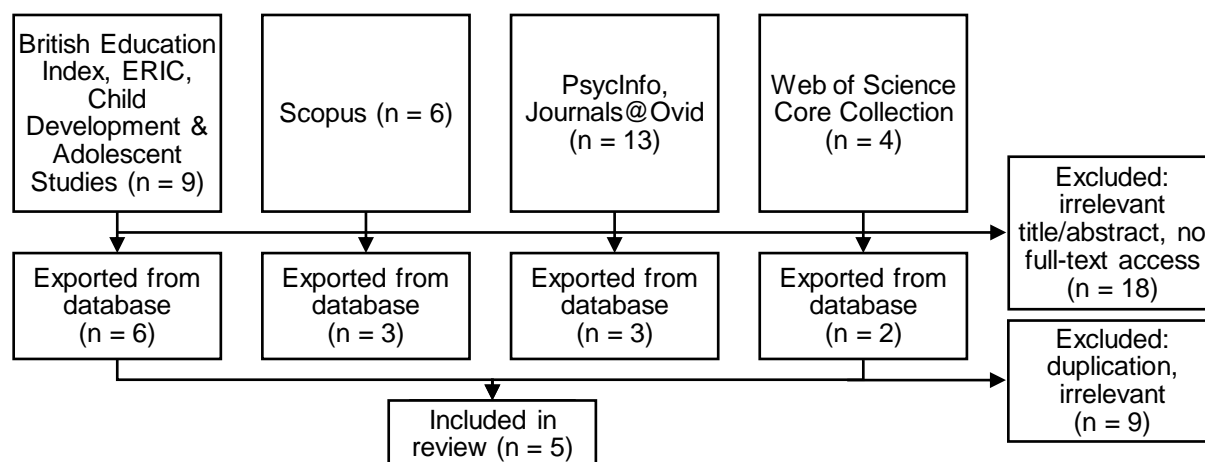


Figure 6: Diagram of Search Process for 'Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals'

### 2.7.2 Methodologies and Data Collection Methods

Reviewed studies employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The ADCS (2021) and Dahlquist et al. (2006) both utilised questionnaires within a quantitative paradigm to collect data from large samples. The others used qualitative designs to collect data through interviews, such as through a case study approach in Bhopal and Myers (2016). Stoudt (2012) further explicated her approach by articulating a phenomenological underpinning for interviews. Ofsted (2019) was the only study to triangulate information from multiple sources, which included questionnaires, focus groups and letters.

### 2.7.3 Populations and Participants

Reviewed studies considered parent and/or LA education professional perspectives of the relationship between the home educating community and the LA. Dahlquist et al. (2006) and Stoudt (2012) explored the views of parents in the US, with Stoudt (2012) focusing on parents of CYP who have SEND. The ADCS (2021) explored the views of LA representatives for EHE in England. Ofsted (2019) and Bhopal and Myers (2016) explored the views of both parents and LA education professionals in England. Ofsted (2019) focused on parents who deregistered their children from secondary school and included LA professionals, such as LA representatives for EHE and senior leaders of secondary schools. Bhopal and Myers (2016) focused on Traveller families and LA professionals, such as LA representatives for EHE and Traveller education.

All but one of the studies considered the experience of currently home educating parents; Ofsted (2019) considered the relationship between LA education professionals and parents who were on their journey towards deregistering to enter into EHE.

#### ***2.7.4 Research Findings for ‘Engagement Between Electively Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Education Professionals’***

Reviewed studies indicated differences in offered support between the UK and US for currently home educating families. In the UK, LA representatives for EHE surveyed by the ADCS (2021) reported typically offering telephone calls, video calls and face-to-face meetings to support families; however, the purpose of this communication was not explained further. A small number of these professionals also used social media and email to inform families about national EHE guidance and educational support available during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering LA professionals who work in other centralised education services, Bhopal and Myers (2016) noted that home educating Traveller families benefitted from interaction with LA professionals who supported Traveller education; some distributed books and course materials. However, professionals reported feeling financial pressure not to continue supporting these families as there was no official funding within the LA for families who participated in EHE, regardless of background.

While the main offer of support from LA education professionals in the UK was communication with families, school districts in Minnesota in the US offered public (i.e., state) school resources to home educating families, which helped the majority of parents to feel a degree of support, according to Dahlquist et al. (2006). Parents reported making use of sports and art facilities, consultation with school professionals, curriculum support and after-school classes. In Pennsylvania, laws also allowed school districts to provide services for home educated CYP who have SEND, such as speech and language therapy. However, Stoudt (2012) reported that parents typically opted to utilise private services instead to diagnose and support SEND to avoid having to seek approval of their home educating provision from their local school district, which is required for CYP who have SEND. Considered together, these two studies from the US indicate home educating parents’ interest in accessing public resources while maintaining autonomy in their EHE provision.

With regards to transitioning from mainstream state schools to EHE, Ofsted (2019) concluded that no clear steps existed for parents, centralised LA education professionals and schools-based professionals to work together, and involvement largely depended on local approaches and the relationships between the three parties. Some centralised LA education professionals used existing mechanisms, such as fair access panels and inclusion strategy groups, to identify and respond to families who were moving to EHE, while others facilitated specific meetings with parents and school-based professionals. Where specialist education professionals and school-based professionals were consulted by parents early in their decision-making process, they were more likely to be able to ensure that parents understood their responsibilities, identify support that could be put in place in schools, and explore alternatives to EHE. Ofsted's (2019) study indicates that LA education professionals are beginning to develop their own practices to support families who are considering transitioning to EHE, but there is no national guidance.

## **2.8 Assessing Quality in the Reviewed Research Studies**

Given the range of methodologies that researchers have used in the reviewed studies, including both quantitative and qualitative designs, I opted to use Sirriyeh et al.'s (2012) QATSDD to assess the quality of the studies that were included in the literature review. The QATSDD is a checklist that is suitable for evaluating studies that have quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods designs (Sirriyeh et al., 2012). It assesses sixteen aspects of a study on a scale of zero to three and outlines qualitative descriptors for each score to facilitate scoring (Sirriyeh et al., 2012). Such aspects include 'justification for choice of data collection tool(s)', 'representative sample of target group of reasonable size' and 'fit between research question and method of analysis' (Sirriyeh et al., 2012). The QATSDD scores and additional evaluative comments for each reviewed study can be found in Appendix A.

## **2.9 Data Collection Method Limitations in Elective Home Education Research**

Based on the QATSDD scores and evaluative comments, the first methodological limitation that was common to a number of the reviewed studies, most notably with regards to exploring parental motivations (section 2.5), was the suitability of the data collection method. Authors of the reviewed studies utilised a

range of methodologies; however, some methods of data collection may more easily facilitate parents to express their personal views.

### **2.9.1 Use of Predetermined Data Collection Tools**

Many of the reviewed studies in the first aspect of the literature review (section 2.5) utilised questionnaires to investigate parents' motivations for entering into EHE. Such instruments typically have motivations that are predetermined by researchers, and participants are asked to select either one or multiple motivations. Motivations typically reflect factors that relate to the individual child or young person, their family, schooling and the practice of EHE.

Collecting data using a questionnaire with predetermined motivations has been criticised for imposing a researcher's taxonomy and requiring participants to adapt their responses to fit within this worldview (Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Ultimately, respondents can only report their motivations within the confines of the options available on the questionnaire. For example, Parsons and Lewis (2010) presented seven specific motivations that were related to parent factors (e.g., 'we wanted to be with our children') as well as 'other' and 'not applicable' options. It is notable that the 'other' option was selected second most often (by 22% of participants) as the most applicable motivation within the parent factor section of the questionnaire and never as the least applicable motivation. This suggests that the seven specified reasons did not sufficiently encapsulate participants' motivations for EHE and demonstrates how forced-choice options on questionnaires predetermined by researchers may lack congruence with the experiences of their participants.

An additional difficulty with interpreting motivations derived from such instruments is the varying levels of generality of the predetermined reasons; researchers often include general motivations that almost all home educating parents would likely agree with, regardless of their individual experiences (Spiegler, 2010). For example, 'disappointment with education/schools' (e.g., Rothermel, 2003) is a broad reason that could be selected by a variety of parents who may have been motivated by a particular aspect of schooling, such as the content of the curriculum, negative peer interactions, or the support that their child received for their needs. General reasons such as this may not be specific enough to capture the essence of individual parental motivations for EHE.

Thus, data collection methods that include predetermined reasons, such as questionnaires, can constrain parents to reconstruct their motivations for EHE in a way that may not allow them to express their personal views.

### **2.9.2 *The Socially Constructed Nature of Self-Reported Motivations***

A further challenge to eliciting parental motivations for EHE relates to the socially constructed nature of self-reporting. As well as influencing their initial decision to home educate, a participant's context also affects their reconstruction of their initial motivations when taking part in research.

For example, the literature demonstrates that self-reported motivations for entering into EHE are not stable and can change over time (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Soon after their transition into EHE, parents may be more likely to identify reactive factors that pushed them away from schooling, but after practising EHE for a length of time, they may be more likely to identify proactive factors that pulled them towards EHE if their experience is positive (Morton, 2010). Thus, a participant's current context can influence their reported motivations for EHE, especially if it differs from their circumstances at the time of deciding to enter into EHE. A questionnaire that considers parental motivations at a single timepoint may not be sensitive enough to capture this complexity.

Even the act of participating in research can influence how motivations for entering into EHE are constructed. As described in the first chapter (section 1.3), EHE is an alternative education practice with a largely negative public perception; this can prompt parents to self-censor their views and practices, particularly towards those who do not participate in EHE (Pattison, 2018). Parents may report motivations that serve to defend themselves against perceived expected criticism and construct their decision to home educate as a justification in the context of being a 'good' parent (Lois, 2009).

Thus, self-reported motivations for entering into EHE are socially constructed, both by a participant's context and in the act of communicating their motivations (Spiegler, 2010). To conduct research that aligns with this notion, researchers can adopt a qualitative research paradigm that assumes the involvement of people in constructing social reality. However, in published studies that investigate motivations for EHE, very few researchers appear to critically consider findings through the lens of how parents construct their self-reports, or indeed, describe the theoretical

underpinnings of the study. This is likely due to the word count limitations of journal articles but could be seen as an important omission given that these assumptions ultimately influence the interpretation of findings (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

## **2.10 Sampling Strategy Limitations in Elective Home Education Research**

A further methodological limitation that is relevant to many of the reviewed studies (sections 2.5–2.7) is sampling bias, which results from using samples of self-selected participants (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Researchers tend to use such convenience sampling strategies due to the challenges of recruiting home educating parents (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020).

### ***2.10.1 Challenges Conducting Research With Electively Home Educating Families***

In many countries, including the UK, there is no official record maintained of home educating families, and thus it can be difficult to contact parents to share information about research studies. In addition, due to the marginalisation of EHE in public discourse, parents may be reluctant to participate in research if they are suspicious of a researcher's motives (Myers, 2020).

Ellard-Gray et al. (2015) identified four challenges that qualitative researchers may experience in recruiting certain populations, which can be applied to home educating parents: labelling the population, mistrust of the research process, participation risks and participant resource constraints. Potential participants may not respond to advertisements if they do not identify their experience with the language used by the researcher; some home educating parents may not identify with the term 'elective' if they feel that their decision was a forced choice (e.g., Parsons & Lewis, 2010) (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). They may not trust the research process due to historical poor experiences of research by others in the population; home educating parents have previously felt misrepresented by research conducted by the government (see Stafford, 2012) (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). They face increased risks (e.g., social, psychological) when participating in research, which can increase their hesitancy to participate; it can be upsetting for home educating parents to reflect on negative aspects of their child's school experience (e.g., Kraftl, 2013) (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Finally, their resources may constrain their ability to participate in research; depending on their typical involvement with delivering their child's

education, home educating parents may not have the time to engage in lengthy interviews (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015).

### **2.10.2 Use of Convenience Sampling Strategies**

Thus, to maximise their sample size, many researchers opt for convenience samples of parents who are more easily accessible (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). However, this non-probabilistic method of sampling tends to result in a sample comprised of participants who may not be representative of the wider population under study (Etikan et al., 2016).

Researchers tend to advertise in local forums for families who undertake EHE (e.g., Simmons & Campbell, 2019) and may recruit every parent who volunteers to participate in the research. However, it is possible that the families who engage with such networks, and those who volunteer to participate in research, are not wholly representative of the wider home educating population. Mitchell (2020b), for example, recruited participants via EHE networks and found that 60% of her sample of home educating parents reported holding degree level qualifications. This is 20% higher than the proportion of currently or previously home educating parents who reported holding degree level qualifications in a nationally representative sample (Smith & Nelson, 2015). Such discrepancies highlight potential limitations of the convenience samples of self-selected participants that are typically utilised in EHE research. It is important to consider the implications of this for generalising the findings from a study to the wider home educating population.

## **2.11 Researcher Positionality Considerations in Elective Home Education Research**

A final consideration that is pertinent to many of the reviewed studies is the self-evaluation of a researcher's position in relation to their study. This concept of researcher positionality is explored in more depth in chapter three (section 3.3) but is also relevant here given that many of the studies described above are conducted by researchers who have ongoing relations to the EHE community; for example, a number of the researchers are also home educating parents (e.g., Stoudt, 2012). In short, a researcher's position is their pre-existing stance in relation to their study, which is influenced by aspects of their context, including their personal characteristics, experiences and biases (Berger, 2015). In comparison to the data

collection and sampling strategies described above, I do not define this as a limitation because a researcher's position itself is not inherently problematic; however, it is important for a qualitative researcher to attempt to document it and the steps that they have taken to mitigate against it to assist a reader in interpreting the findings and conclusions of a study (Darawsheh, 2014).

### **2.11.1 The Effects of 'Insider' Researcher Status**

Researchers who already have experience in the field under investigation in some way can be described as 'insider' researchers (Berger, 2015). This is recognised as beneficial in many respects. Initially, having insider status may facilitate access to the topic literature, including understanding of jargon, cultural practices, and historical and political contexts; this can support a researcher in making methodological decisions for their own study (Berger, 2015; Olukotun et al., 2021). When recruiting participants, an insider researcher is more likely to have existing relationships with potential participants, which can expedite recruitment; they may be more easily trusted by the population of interest who may expect the researcher to be better able to understand and represent their experiences (Berger, 2015). During data collection, insider status can facilitate quick development of rapport with participants, which can support the gathering of rich data (Berger, 2015).

However, having insider researcher status can also complicate the research process. For recruitment, existing relationships may incline a researcher to select a sample based on familiarity rather than a purposive sampling technique; potential participants could also experience feelings of pressure to participate based on the relationship (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2021; Moore, 2012). A number of researchers identified above conducted their studies with participants who were already known to them (e.g., Campbell, 2012). While collecting data from participants, insider researchers may be more likely to direct the interview according to their own experiences, especially if they identify their experiences with that of the participant, and the participant may be more likely to withhold aspects of their account if they assume that the researcher shares certain knowledge or experiences with them (Berger, 2015). During analysis, insider researchers can risk blurring participants' accounts with their own prior knowledge or experiences, and may thus be more likely to impose their own assumptions, values and biases on to the findings (Greene, 2014; Olukotun et al., 2021).



### **2.11.2 Use of Reflexivity**

To account for the potential limitations of being an insider researcher, researchers can create awareness of their position through engaging in reflexivity; a process in which a researcher self-evaluates their position in relation to their research (Darawsheh, 2014). Exploring pertinent aspects of their position supports a researcher to assess their impact on the research process and outcomes, and ultimately identify their role in creating the knowledge that results from their research (Berger, 2015).

It is notable that I was able to relate the reviewed studies to just one of the potential limitations of being an insider researcher. This is largely because authors of the reviewed studies neglected to report the effect of their positionality on their study and resulting findings; only Lovett (2014) described attempting to 'bracket' (i.e., record and set aside) her prior experience before data analysis in order to maximise the voice of participants. Perhaps this is partly because reflexivity relies on researchers having a high degree of self-awareness of themselves within their study (Pillow, 2003). While it is easy for a researcher to articulate their sampling strategy, it is somewhat more difficult for them to recognise how their own prior experiences and knowledge might shape their data collection and analysis. However, doing so can support a reader to determine the influence of the researcher within their findings. This is particularly important for researchers who conduct research within a phenomenological philosophical paradigm to appreciate the perspectives of participants (e.g., Stoudt, 2012).

Given the limited reflexivity in the reviewed studies, it is difficult to identify the role of the researcher in their conclusions, which they may inadvertently attribute to participants. This is a particular consideration for researchers who have an aspect of their position that is especially relevant to EHE, including insider researchers, such as home educating parents (e.g., Campbell, 2012), and those working within the education system, including school inspectors (e.g., Ofsted, 2019) and centralised LA education professionals (e.g., D'Arcy, 2014).

## **2.12 Key Findings and Implications for the Present Study**

In summary, the literature that surrounds parents' decisions to enter into EHE is diverse in terms of its populations, methodologies and findings. Prevalent themes

indicate that: in the UK, parents' motivations for entering into EHE are often driven by concerns around schools' ability to meet individual needs (e.g., Mitchell, 2020b); parents undertake an active decision-making process when considering entering into EHE (e.g., Lovett, 2014); there is limited evidence-based guidance regarding how LA education professionals support parents during this decision-making process (e.g., Ofsted, 2019). These key findings generate questions that pertain to the aims of the present study.

### **2.12.1 Research Questions**

Firstly, the present study aims to better understand the decision-making journeys of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE. Motivations for EHE for parents in the UK have been widely researched. However, the majority of the research that considers the decision-making processes that leads up to the decision to deregister is conducted in the US. Adamson (2021) is the only reviewed study that explores the journey for parents in the UK, but this is alongside parents who opted for other alternative education practices and parents who ultimately decided not to leave the state school system. Thus, the present study seeks to answer the following research question: *how do parents come to decide to deregister their children from school to enter into elective home education?*

Secondly, the present study aims to identify opportunities for specialist education professionals to engage with these parents, and explore the information, advice and support that parents would value at different stages of their journeys. Adamson (2021) identified that in their active decision-making process, parents assimilate information from multiple sources, including the perspectives of others. However, there has been limited exploration of a potential role for specialist education professionals to engage with parents who are considering entering into EHE. Only Ofsted (2019) recognised that centralised LA education professionals are beginning to develop practices that are based on existing processes their LA, which can have positive impacts on parents' decision-making journeys. Thus, the present study seeks to answer the following research question: *how would parents like to engage with specialist education professionals along their decision-making journeys?*

## **2.13 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have synthesised literature from the most relevant aspects of the EHE research base to the present study: motivations for EHE in the UK, decision-making processes towards EHE, and engagement between parents and LA education professionals. From this, I have identified prevalent themes within the findings, including concern around schools' ability to meet individual needs, active decision-making processes, and limited relationships between home educating parents and LA education professionals. However, I have also recognised common methodological limitations that are relevant to many of the reviewed studies and highlighted issues around data collection methods, sampling strategies and researcher reflexivity. These key findings and issues supported my development of the research questions and research design of this present study. While the research design will be explored in chapter three with reference to methodological issues identified in this chapter, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do parents come to decide to deregister their children from school to enter into elective home education?
2. How would parents like to engage with specialist education professionals along their decision-making journeys?

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter will explore the methodology of the present research study. I will first outline its methodological foundations and the importance of identifying a researcher's position within their research. I will then describe considered methodologies before elaborating on my chosen approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Based on this, I will discuss the study design, including its participants, data collection and data analysis. Finally, I will highlight additional considerations that supported my study design, including those relating to ethics and research quality.

### **3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings**

The methodology for a research study must be derived from its overarching aims. The first aim of my research is to better understand the experiences of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE, particularly with regards to their decision-making journeys. The second aim is to identify opportunities along these journeys for specialist education professionals to engage with these parents, including exploring the information, advice and support that parents may value at different stages along their decision-making journeys.

#### **3.2.1 *Qualitative Research Paradigm***

To investigate the lived experiences of human participants, adopting a qualitative research paradigm, which assumes that humans are involved in the construction of their social reality, is most appropriate (Willig, 2013). This allows a researcher to explore a person's subjective perspective of their reality, which they may do so by collecting rich and detailed data through in-depth techniques, such as interviews and focus groups (Willig, 2013).

#### **3.2.2 *Bounded Relativist Ontological Position***

The qualitative research paradigm includes a range of perspectives regarding the nature of this social reality and the role of humans in its construction, that is, ontological positions. For example, naïve realism assumes that one reality exists independently of humans while relativism assumes that multiple realities exist as

mental constructions (Moon & Blackman, 2014). As this study is concerned with participants' perspectives of their experiences as well as their application to other parents who may be considering entering into EHE, it adopts a bounded relativist ontological position (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Bounded relativism assumes that a shared reality exists within a group of people that share a certain orientation (e.g., cultural, political) but that different realities exist across groups (Mandelbaum, 1979). This enables the research to appreciate the individual perspectives of participants as well as their relevance to a wider population of parents who share experiences of deciding to deregister their children from mainstream state schools to enter into EHE.

### **3.2.3 *Social Constructionist Epistemological Framework***

Within the assumption about the construction of reality is the assumption about the construction of knowledge, that is, epistemological frameworks. For example, objectivism assumes that meaning exists within objects and is discovered by humans, while subjectivism assumes that humans create meaning and impose it on to objects (Moon & Blackman, 2014). As this study explores participants' interactions with their context and imagines opportunities for support through researcher–participant discussion, it adopts a social constructionist epistemological framework (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Social constructionism assumes that humans generate knowledge through interpretation and engagement with their reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This enables the researcher to produce understandings of a situation that are grounded in their context, which allows them to account for the socially constructed nature of self-reported motivations for EHE (Spiegler, 2010).

### **3.2.4 *Interpretivist Philosophical Orientation***

Underpinned by ontological and epistemological commitments, the final consideration that ultimately structures a researcher's approach to research is their set of beliefs that guide their actions. A bounded relativist ontological position and social constructionist epistemological framework align with an interpretivist philosophical orientation, which seeks to understand the development of phenomena through exploring individual cases (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Interpretivism focuses on how humans make meaning from their worlds, and these interpretations are

considered to be contextually dependent on the culture and history of the phenomenon (Weber, 1922, as cited in Gerth & Wright Mills, 2009).

An important aspect of interpretivism is its axiological perspective, that is, its consideration of the role of values within research, including the weight given to the researcher's values. In interpretivist research, there is an explicit recognition of the researcher as part of what is being researched; they cannot be separated from the research (Weber, 1922, as cited in Gerth & Wright Mills, 2009). As such, the researcher's subjective values, biases and perspective are assumed to greatly influence data collection and analysis (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Interpretivist researchers identify and communicate relevant aspects of themselves to highlight their role within the research process.

### **3.3 Researcher Positionality**

Based on my adoption of an interpretivist philosophical orientation, it is important to create awareness of myself within the research process. The qualitative research paradigm assumes that humans play a role in reality construction, which implicates researchers (as humans) in the production of their data (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Qualitative researchers are often described as data collection instruments due to their role in eliciting data from participants, for example, as an interviewer (Pezalla et al., 2012).

Each researcher, and indeed person, has an individual perspective, which is derived from their context, such as their personal characteristics, experiences and biases; this is described as their position (Berger, 2015). This position is considered in relation to the contexts of a researcher's study, including the positions of participants (Rowe, 2014). Aspects of a researcher's position can influence their research to varying extents, which is often dependent on the topic itself. A highly relevant positional consideration for this research study is that I do not share the experience of EHE with my participants, neither as an educator nor learner. This renders me an 'outsider' researcher, which increases the likelihood of associated implications throughout the research process, including difficulties with recruiting participants, slower development of rapport with participants, and increased diversity of perspective during data collection and analysis (Berger, 2015).

### **3.3.1 Use of Reflexivity**

As noted in chapter two (section 2.11.2), researchers can create awareness of their position through engaging in reflexivity. Given my part-time role as a trainee EP who is on placement in an LA EPS as well as a researcher, identifying my influence within the findings of the study is important. Reflexivity can be practised through techniques such as writing a critical autobiographical analysis, recording reflections and field notes in a journal, and discussing the research process with supervisors or colleagues (Dean, 2017). In an attempt to identify my influence in the findings, I engaged in a number of reflexive exercises throughout the research process to self-evaluate my position in relation to my research, which included writing a critical autobiographical analysis and recording reflections in a journal. In Appendix B, I include extracts from my research journal including a critical autobiographical analysis of my position that explores the origins of my initial interest in the topic and several sample reflections that I recorded throughout the research process. After engaging with these techniques, I ultimately reflect on my influence on the findings in a reflexive note in chapter five (section 5.7).

## **3.4 Consideration of Methodological Approaches**

Before opting for IPA, I considered other methodological approaches while I was developing my thinking around how I might explore the experiences of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE.

### **3.4.1 Appreciative Inquiry**

Originally, I was interested in exploring transitions between school and EHE, including factors that facilitate a positive experience of transition into EHE and factors that facilitate a positive experience of re-enrolment into school. I thus considered conducting an appreciative inquiry (e.g., Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), which is an approach that seeks to identify strengths and positive aspects within a situation. However, I felt that adopting a strengths-based approach would not adequately enable participants to talk freely regarding their full range of emotions and experiences on what may be an emotive subject.

### **3.4.2 Narrative Inquiry**

As an approach that focuses more closely on parents' interpretations of their experiences of deregistering their child from school, I then considered conducting a narrative inquiry (e.g., Clandinin, 2006), which elicits participants' stories. However, despite this approach being able to honour participants' lived experiences, including their journey and range of emotions, its analysis encourages the researcher to present and analyse each story in its entirety. Instead, I wanted to dissect participants' accounts and explore certain aspects of their stories in more detail, such as eliciting their ideas about how other families who are deregistering CYP from school could be supported.

### **3.4.3 Action Research Approaches**

Given my interest in exploring participants' ideas for LA policy for working with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE, I also considered approaches related to action research that are based on life experiences, such as participatory narrative inquiry (e.g., Kurtz, 2014) and reflective inquiry (e.g., Lyons, 2010). However, I deemed these approaches to be inappropriate because the population of interest, home educating parents, do not have power to implement changes in LA policy. This is the responsibility of LA education professionals, whom I did not wish to involve in the current research study given that it is in the early stages of exploration on the topic.

## **3.5 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

I decided to design my research as an IPA study. In comparison to the approaches described above, IPA is useful for exploring participants' accounts of their experiences as well as their reflections on it; it also recognises different roles of researcher and participants, and places the responsibility of analysis with the researcher.

### **3.5.1 Theoretical Principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The approach of IPA is concerned with exploring human lived experience, including how people make sense of significant life events. It is informed by three key areas of philosophy: *phenomenology*, *hermeneutics* and *idiography* (Smith et al., 2009).



At the heart of IPA is a person's experience. *Phenomenology* is the study of human experience, particularly with regards to what matters to us in our lives (Smith et al., 2009). It focuses on the meaning that a person makes from an experience, and thus derives the key process of reflection in IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Attempting to understand a person's experience involves exploring their perspectives and meanings, which are unique to their relationship with the world; in this way, such an investigation is a lived process (Smith et al., 2009).

Given the focus on meaning-making in IPA, it is thus concerned with interpretation. *Hermeneutics* is the theory of interpretation of oral, written and other communications (Smith et al., 2009). When exploring a person's reflections, IPA researchers engage in a 'double hermeneutic' because they are interpreting a person's interpretations of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Attempting to make sense of a person's account is an iterative process that moves back and forth between examining specific aspects (e.g., words, extracts) and wider contexts (e.g., the interview, a person's life) (Smith et al., 2009).

Understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of a person exemplifies the idiographic nature of IPA. *Idiography* is the study of the individual (Smith et al., 2009). For IPA, analysis of a person's reflections is systematic and detailed; it remains grounded in the individual's account and only tentatively generalises conclusions from the study with significant attention to context (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.5.2 Rationale for Choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Firstly, IPA is a suitable approach for my research study because of its interest in exploring lived experience, including what matters to participants. Given the depth required for a participant's account in IPA studies, the approach particularly lends itself to exploring major life experiences that involve aspects of emotion and have previously invoked reflection for the person (Smith, 2019). Making the decision to deregister a child from school can be considered as such an experience; Kraftl (2013) described the physical and emotional impact of deregistering for mothers who entered into EHE and cited feelings such as relief and fear.

Reflecting on such experiences can allow the researcher and participant to explore deeper levels of meaning. As described above, the core concern of IPA is understanding the experiential significance of events; that is, the meaning that a

participant makes from the experience (Smith, 2019). Exploring a parent's meaning-making of the events that influenced their decision-making journey towards deregistering their child from school can illuminate their final decision as well as indicate potential principles that should underlie any engagement from specialist education professionals.

Finally, the interpretative nature of IPA also acknowledges my role within the analysis. This is important to recognise as I inevitably bring a different perspective in my analysis of the participants' data due to aspects of my position, such as being a trainee EP and not being part of the EHE community.

### ***3.5.3 Addressing Limitations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis***

A key concern around IPA is its ability to adequately capture experience, and the meaning of this experience, rather than just reported perspectives (Tuffour, 2017). Firstly, IPA relies on the communication skills of both the researcher and participants to construct the person's experiences, which can be challenging (Willig, 2013). Additionally, only investigating an individual's perspective has been criticised for not exploring wider contextual aspects that may have triggered the experiences, such as past events and sociocultural domains (Willig, 2013). However, Smith et al. (2009) assert that the cultural positions of participants can be explored through the hermeneutic, idiographic and contextual features of IPA, largely in the stages of coding the data. These concerns highlight the importance of being skilled in interviewing to improve the likelihood of collecting rich and exhaustive data from participants (Smith et al., 2009). My experience as a trainee EP has supported me to develop my communication (e.g., questioning and active listening) skills, including with parents.

Despite the reliance of IPA on communication for data collection, some researchers have critiqued the approach for not adequately analysing the language that a participant uses to construct experiences in the interview (Willig, 2013). However, similarly to analysing contextual aspects of data described above, Smith et al. (2009) acknowledge the important role of language, and include analysis of this in the stages of coding. Although a participant's language is not the primary focus of an IPA study, this concern draws attention to the need for thorough coding of aspects of the interview alongside analysing the participant's account, such as language and context.

A further criticism related to the method of IPA is its lack of standardisation, the openness of which increases its complexity for researchers (Pringle et al., 2011). Giorgi (2010) described the absence of a prescribed method and the subjective nature of the initial stages of coding as unscientific due to the difficulty with replicating such an analysis. Smith et al. (2009) do, however, report general steps for performing IPA to support novice researchers, which are described below (section 3.8.1). Nevertheless, Giorgi's (2010) concerns demonstrate the importance of transparency in reporting the process of data analysis, including indicating the steps taken to derive interpretations from the original data.

A final key critique is the generalisability of the conclusions of IPA studies. Based on its idiographic nature and reliance on a researcher's individual interpretations, questions have been raised about the ability of IPA studies to contribute knowledge to a wider context, including generating new theories based on the findings (Pringle et al., 2011). However, while it is important not to overstate conclusions in this way, the coupling of identified patterns with analytic commentary enables findings to illuminate existing theories (Reid et al., 2005). Thus, generalisability in IPA research may be considered in terms of 'analytical generalisation', in which findings are applied to an established concept or theory that may or may not have been constructed for the research population; they may thus produce new understandings of a topic (Smith, 2017). To support a reader to evaluate the generalisability of the findings of an IPA study, Smith et al. (2009) encourage researchers to produce a research account that is rich, transparent and related to current literature.

### **3.6 Participants**

IPA studies are conducted with a relatively small (e.g., between four and ten interviews for professional doctorate research projects) and homogenous sample of participants who have experiences of a shared phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). This facilitates the necessary detail of analysis, including similarities and differences, and application to psychological theories (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.6.1 Participation Criteria**

To obtain a homogenous sample where participants had recently experienced the shared phenomenon of deregistering their child from school to enter into EHE, I established the following participation criteria for the present study:

- Parents must have entered into EHE in the past 24 months. I implemented a timeframe in the hope that having made the decision relatively recently, participants would be able to recollect their journey in a high level of detail and would not yet have reframed their original decision based on their experiences EHE (as in Morton, 2010). This also excludes parents who are currently in the process of deregistering and have not yet completed their decision-making journey as I did not want my research to influence a parent's decision to deregister a child from school.
- Parents must have previously enrolled their child at a state school within a target LA. EHE is a phenomenon that is grounded within participants' local context of schooling and education, so it is preferable that the context is uniform across participants (e.g., they have access to similar schools and services) to increase homogeneity of the sample. This criterion initially only included one target LA but was then widened to include potential participants from eleven LAs in the South West of England due to limited recruitment in the initial target LA. As well as being geographical neighbours, these LAs also have similar statistics regarding EHE, such as the proportion of CYP who have EHC plans and are home educated (School Census Statistics Team, 2022).
- Parents must not be appealing against an LA decision regarding their child's education, for example, related to an EHC needs assessment or plan; they must withdraw if this changes during participation. These parents were excluded so as not to interfere with any ongoing legal processes.
- Parents are eligible if they have since re-enrolled their child at a school. The focus of this research is only on the journey of deciding to deregister, so participants do not have to be currently home educating.

These criteria were advertised in the recruitment invitation (Appendix C).

### **3.6.2 Participant Recruitment**

Given the popularity of social media groups for connecting home educating families (e.g., Fensham-Smith, 2019), I hoped that the recruitment invitation could be advertised on such groups within the target LA. However, these groups are not public and only those who participate in EHE can join. Thus, I initially sent emails (Appendix D) to twelve EHE network co-ordinators, as named on the target LA's website, in which I requested them to share the invitation with families through their platform. One co-ordinator agreed to share the invitation within their network.

This method only resulted in contact from one parent who later became a participant, so I secured ethical approval to send the content of the email via instant message to administrators of Facebook groups for local EHE networks in the target LA. Out of nine groups, three administrators agreed to share the invitation within their groups. This did not result in contact from further parents. I then secured ethical approval to contact administrators of Facebook groups for local EHE networks in the wider South West region. Out of 38 groups, eleven administrators agreed to share the invitation within their groups.

In total, I contacted approximately fifty local EHE networks through approximately one hundred Facebook group administrators as well as the original twelve network co-ordinators.

### **3.6.3 Sampling Technique**

I used opportunity sampling to build a sample of home educating parents in which everyone who was willing to participate in the study was included in the final sample (Etikan et al., 2016). Relinquishing control over participant selection in this way increases the likelihood of creating a biased sample that is not representative of the wider population of interest, which can have implications for the conclusions of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). However, as an incidental sampling technique, this strategy is convenient and reduces the demands of selecting a sample, which is particularly useful for recruiting participants from populations who may be less likely to participate in research (Etikan et al., 2016).

I anticipated that—based on the research literature (e.g., Adamson, 2021) and previous experience—it would be difficult to recruit home educating parents. They can be reluctant to participate in research and discuss their experiences with those who do not home educate themselves due to the previously discussed negative

public discourses around EHE, such as risk and abuse (Myers, 2020). Therefore, although IPA studies typically employ more purposive sampling techniques, I deemed opportunity sampling, based on its convenience, to be appropriate. Such incidental sampling techniques are a popular choice for EHE researchers (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020).

I sent a participant information sheet (Appendix E) and consent form (Appendix F) to fourteen home educating parents who replied to my invitation, with one from the target LA responding as a result of emails to EHE network co-ordinators and the other thirteen responding as a result of instant messages to Facebook group administrators in the wider South West region. Seven parents completed the consent form to participate in the research.

#### **3.6.4 Final Sample**

The final sample was comprised of seven home educating mothers who live in five LAs in the South West of England (numbered based on their proximity to the original target LA, which is numbered as 1). Figure 7, below, describes relevant information that was discussed in the interviews regarding the participants and the children whom they deregistered from school to home educate. In addition, all mothers were white and lived as part of a two-parent household (either with their home educated child(ren)'s biological father or otherwise). Further demographic data (e.g., household income) was not collected.

<b>Participant's pseudonym</b>	<b>Local authority key</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Details of deregistered home educated child(ren)</b>	<b>Details of school child(ren) attended prior to deregistration</b>	<b>Term of deregistration</b>	<b>Consideration given to moving school</b>
Harriet	1	Currently working	Daughter, youngest of two (other child attended school); identified as having SEND	Mainstream secondary school; key stage 3	Autumn term 2021	Not considered suitable due to provision of other local schools
Emma	2	Currently working	Son, eldest of two (other child attends school)	Mainstream secondary school; key stage 3	Autumn term 2021	Not considered suitable due to child's emotional needs
Anne	3	Currently working	Son, youngest of three (other children attended school); identified as having SEND	Mainstream secondary school; key stage 4	Autumn term 2020	Not considered suitable due to provision of other local schools
Charlotte	3	Currently working	Daughter, eldest of two (other child not yet of compulsory school age, but intending to home educate)	Mainstream primary school; key stage 1	Autumn term 2020	Not considered suitable due to proximity to other schools
Isabel	3	Worked prior to home educating	Son, eldest of two (other child attends school); identified as having SEND	Mainstream secondary school; key stage 3	Autumn term 2021	Not discussed
Nancy	4	Worked prior to home educating	Two sons, youngest of three (other child attended school); youngest son has since returned to school	Mainstream primary school; key stage 1, key stage 2	Summer term 2020	Not considered suitable due to children's social and emotional needs
Maria	5	Currently working	Son, eldest of two (other child attends school); identified as having SEND	Mainstream primary school; key stage 1	Summer term 2020	Not discussed

*Figure 7: Table of Characteristics of Participants*

### **3.7 Data Collection**

The aim of IPA studies is to elicit participants' stories and explore their thoughts and feelings regarding a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). One-to-one interviews are well-suited to these in-depth discussions because they allow the participant space to reflect on their experiences and support rapport-building between the researcher and participant (Smith et al., 2009). For home educating parents, interviews can facilitate reflection on their journey towards EHE, including what it means to them (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010). In comparison, data collection tools that have predetermined options for responses, such as questionnaires, can force participants to reconstruct their response to fit to the researcher's worldview (Neuman & Guterman, 2019).

To elicit experiences, interviews for IPA facilitate discussion on a number of lines of inquiry that are relevant to the area of interest while maintaining flexibility to follow participants' preferred discussion topics (Smith et al., 2009). As such, interviews for IPA tend to be semi-structured in nature and may broadly follow an interview schedule.

#### **3.7.1 Interview Schedule**

Interview schedules support a researcher to phrase questions in an appropriate way (e.g., open, sensitive, clear) and identify additional, more specific prompts to develop exploration of a participant's response; they can act as a 'virtual map' of the interview that support a smooth experience for both researcher and participant (Smith et al., 2009).

I developed an interview schedule (Appendix G) based on recommendations in Smith et al. (2009). It includes prompts for starting and ending the interview, general topic questions and prompts to elicit participant's broad stories and reflections on deregistering their child from school, and more specific follow-up questions and prompts to draw out detail on key events, including imagining support that they would have appreciated. These are sequenced by topic area (e.g., overall narrative, key events) with more general questions towards the beginning of the schedule and more specific reflection towards the end. However, in the interest of following the participant's lead to support the flow of the interview, I designed this order to be flexible so that participants can alternate between general discussion and specific reflection if preferred.



The process of producing an interview schedule should be seen as iterative and open to adjustment based on experience (Smith et al., 2009). I thus adapted the interview schedule after a pilot interview (section 3.7.4) with an experienced home educator (as described in a reflection in Appendix B) and increased the flexibility of my delivery of the schedule to allow the interviews to become more participant-led as my confidence with the interview process developed.

### **3.7.2 Stages of Data Collection**

I designed the interview process to unfold over three stages: an introductory video call followed by two video call interviews. All interactions took place online via Zoom videoconferencing software. When the study initially received ethical approval, in-person interviews were not permitted due to research activity restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions aside however, I felt that video calls were particularly appropriate for interviewing home educating parents due to their convenience in terms of being able to explore participants' stories without intruding into their home environment or meeting in a potentially inappropriate public place (Myers, 2020).

Logistically, the initial fifteen-minute video call acted as an opportunity to arrange the two interviews and test the video call technology. It also allowed me to begin to develop a relationship with participants prior to the interviews through introducing myself and my position as a researcher, learning some basic details about the parents, and opening a channel to discuss my research before they were expected to provide any data. Smith et al. (2009) highlight the importance of developing rapport and trust with participants in order to allow them to feel comfortable to open up and provide rich and detailed data for IPA. As conducting interviews via video call can compromise rapport, I felt that it was important to take extra steps to develop the relationship beforehand (Lo Iacono et al., 2016).

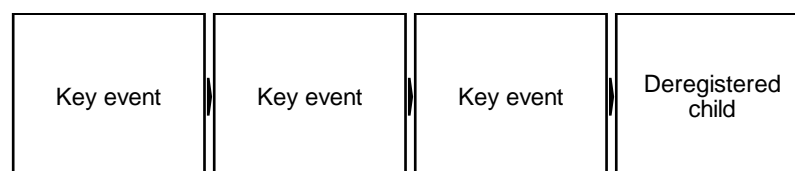
Data was then collected through audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. The interviews were split into two one-hour sessions to allow participants enough time to explore their stories while minimising the fatigue that can develop from intense one-to-one interaction. I used the interview schedule described above to elicit the participants' narratives and explore key events, which I visually documented through an onscreen timeline, as described below. Typically, in the first interview, participants recounted their journey, while in the second, they considered support

that they felt that they would have appreciated along their journey. In both interviews, I explored the personal significance of key events and suggestions for engagement with specialist education professionals in terms of their decision-making around deregistering to enter into EHE. See Appendix B for an example of a reflection on an interview.

### **3.7.3 Timeline Representation**

To support a participant's exploration of their story, I visually represented it onscreen through a linear timeline with key events on their journey towards ultimately deciding to deregister their child from school to enter into EHE. Patterson et al. (2012) discuss the value of the visual depiction of timelines in generating more detailed and reflective data, for example, by highlighting patterns as well as anomalies in the narrative. As they require a high level of participant input, co-constructed timelines can also support rapport and active engagement in the interview (Marshall, 2019). They can help the participant to feel more in control of how their story is documented and redress the power balance between the researcher and participant (Marshall, 2019).

I created the timelines during the first interview with each participant based on notes that I had made while the participant initially recounted their experiences. I used the 'Basic Process' SmartArt template on Microsoft Word while displaying it via Zoom's screensharing function so that the participant could contribute to the timeline as it was being created (see Figure 8, below, for an illustration of the structure). We revisited the timeline during the second interview as a reflective prompt to consider key events in more detail and identify at which key events the participant would have valued engagement with specialist education professionals. Anonymised versions of participants' timelines are documented in chapter four (section 4.2).



*Figure 8: Example of Timeline Structure for Participants' Experiences*

### **3.7.4 Pilot Interview**

Before undertaking the interviews, I conducted a pilot interview to pre-test the format of my interviews and practise my interview technique (Malmqvist et al., 2019). I advertised for a volunteer on a social media group that connects researchers with home educating parents who are interested in participating in research. An experienced home educator, who had also recently completed a master's degree that involved qualitative research into EHE, volunteered to participate in the pilot interview.

In an hour, we elicited her initial narrative and depicted this on a timeline; we also explored one key event in detail and discussed support that she received as well as support that she would have appreciated at that timepoint. We then spent a further thirty minutes reflecting on her experience of the interview and discussing my interview schedule.

Based on our reflective discussion and watching a recording of the pilot interview, I adapted the interview schedule for data collection. In the introductory video call, I included a discussion about my interest in EHE and role as a trainee EP to facilitate openness and trust with participants. At the start of the first interview, I included a statement to highlight the general structure of the interviews and cue participants into providing an initial descriptive narrative of their experiences. I also developed a structure to guide my notetaking to record only necessary prompts for the current conversation and keep my focus on the participant. Appendix B includes a reflection on the pilot interview and Appendix G highlights the changes that I made to the interview schedule as a result of the pilot interview.

## **3.8 Data Analysis**

I transcribed interviews verbatim and imported them into NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The utility of computer software for analysing data using IPA has been questioned due to constraints of the software, such as performing multiple levels of coding (Wagstaff et al., 2014). However, researchers can overcome these challenges through adapting functions of the software (Wagstaff et al., 2014). Benefits of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to support data analysis include improved management of large datasets, increased efficiency in coding, and perhaps most importantly, enhanced transparency and trustworthiness of data analysis (O'Kane et al., 2021).

### **3.8.1 Six Steps of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

As described above (section 3.5.3), IPA is a flexible approach with no prescribed stages. However, to provide guidance for novice researchers, Smith et al. (2009) propose six steps for IPA to support reflective engagement with data to explore meaning-making. These are *reading and re-reading; initial noting; developing emergent themes; searching for connections across emergent themes; moving to the next case; looking for patterns across cases*. Although described as 'steps', the process is iterative and inductive rather than linear with the researcher shifting between different analytic skills; each step represents a different perspective to take on the data (Smith et al., 2009). As a novice researcher, I followed these six steps to support fidelity to the IPA approach. Appendix H exemplifies the data analysis process by following the analysis of one participant's account through the six stages.

*Reading and re-reading* involves the researcher immersing themselves in the original data to enter into the participant's world and make them the focus of the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). To do so, the authors recommend actively engaging with the data through repeated reading of the transcript (Smith et al., 2009). This also allows the researcher to identify the broad structure of the interview, which is useful for gaining insight into how a narrative might link sections of an interview, and recognise the development of rapport throughout the interview, which can be useful for locating richer and more detailed sections (Smith et al., 2009).

*Initial noting* explores a participant's language and meaning at increasingly interpretative levels (Smith et al., 2009). These notes typically examine phenomena of concern to the participant and the nature of these concerns (Smith et al., 2009). At the most basic level, descriptive comments identify aspects of the participant's account, such as relationships, events and values, that matter to the participant and structure their thoughts and experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Next, linguistic comments examine how the content and meaning is presented, such as by analysing repetition, fluency and tone (Smith et al., 2009). Then, conceptual comments begin to interrogate underlying ideas that may highlight patterns within the account to support a researcher's sense making; these comments may also include personal reflections (Smith et al., 2009). This step continues to increase a researcher's familiarity with the text.

*Developing emergent themes* shifts the primary focus of the analysis from the participant's transcript to the researcher's notes derived from the second step (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher must attempt to reduce the detail in the analysis while maintaining the complexity of the connections and patterns in the notes (Smith et al., 2009). They can do so by producing a statement about important features of their notes that capture the psychological essence of the account (Smith et al., 2009). The phrases within this should reflect the participant's original words as well as the researcher's interpretation; these will likely represent emergent themes that have developed from the account (Smith et al., 2009).

*Searching for connections across emergent themes* entails mapping the themes to identify how they interrelate; this supports the researcher to draw themes together and produce a structure that highlights the most important aspects of the participant's account (Smith et al., 2009). This can be explored through a number of strategies, such as grouping emergent themes to create superordinate themes (i.e., abstraction), identifying oppositional relationships (i.e., polarisation), and considering temporal, cultural and narrative aspects to frame understandings of more discrete themes (i.e., contextualisation) (Smith et al., 2009). This stage and the preceding stage of the analysis forms the basis for the interpretative accounts for individual participants (section 4.2).

*Moving to the next case* occurs once the researcher has finished their primary analysis of one participant's account and begins to analyse another participant's account (Smith et al., 2009). In this, it is important for the researcher to set aside their interpretations from the first account and analyse the new account on its own terms; this can be facilitated by re-engaging in the first four steps (Smith et al., 2009).

*Looking for patterns across cases* allows the researcher to consider the themes across the participants' accounts, and identify connections between them (Smith et al., 2009). This typically progresses the analysis to a more theoretical level and may involve reconfiguring or relabelling of themes (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) suggest that researchers could present the results of this analysis as a master table of superordinate themes for the sample and their relation to each participant (Appendix I). This stage of the analysis forms the basis for the interpretative account for the sample (section 4.3).

### **3.8.2 Reflexivity in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

In addition to the six steps, I included an extra stage to account for my position within the analysis. Goldspink and Engward (2019) recommend for a researcher to take time after the third step of *developing emergent themes* to reflect on the participant's account and their commentary of the account. This reflexivity can support a researcher to document their position by drawing awareness to themselves within their interpretation and the development of themes (Goldspink & Engward, 2019). Appendix B includes an example of such a reflection that I recorded during data analysis.

### **3.8.3 Analysis of Timelines**

As well as acting as a prompt for reflection during the interview, I also used participants' timelines to support my analysis of participants' accounts. For individual participants, examining the structure of timelines helped me to identify temporal and serial aspects of themes when *searching for connections across emergent themes*. Across the sample, comparing participants' timelines supported me with the final step of *looking for patterns across cases*. To remain faithful to the IPA methodology in terms of focusing on the meaning that participants made from their experiences, I did not conduct additional analysis of the timelines, such as of the lengths of participants' decision-making journeys.

## **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Alongside methodological guidelines, I also drew on more general sources to design my study; the first is ethical guidance. The BPS (2021) propose four general principles for psychologists to abide by when conducting research with human participants: *respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals, groups and communities; scientific integrity; social responsibility; maximising benefit and minimising harm*. I used these principles to guide the design of my research, including to address the following challenges.

Psychologists must protect and promote the rights of participants in their research activities to maintain *respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals, groups and communities* (BPS, 2021). This includes developing procedures that ensure valid consent, confidentiality, anonymity and fair treatment (BPS, 2021). For example, I endeavoured to design a recruitment process that did

not provoke feelings of coercion or pressure for potential participants. I also omitted details from the published accounts and timelines to promote participants' anonymity and reduce the risk of identification by readers.

Ensuring that the research is of sufficient quality and contributes to the development of knowledge upholds *scientific integrity* (BPS, 2021). Inadequately designed or conducted research wastes resources, including the contributions of participants, and findings that result from poor research may be misleading (BPS, 2021). For this reason, I drew on Yardley's (2000) and Nizza et al.'s (2021) quality criteria to inform my research process throughout design, data collection and analysis, which are described below (section 3.10).

As psychological research exists within the context of human society, psychologists have a *social responsibility* for the welfare of others, including those within and outside of their societies (BPS, 2021). Generating psychological knowledge aims to support beneficial outcomes, in terms of promoting respect for persons (as described above) as well as making a positive contribution to society (BPS, 2021). This includes working in accordance with personal and professional responsibilities. For example, I designed a procedure that would support my response if a participant disclosed information that made me concerned for a person's (e.g., their child's) welfare, which would require reporting in a safeguarding capacity.

This responsibility to human society and psychological research includes *maximising benefit and minimising harm* to participants and other persons, groups or communities who could be affected by the research (BPS, 2021). The risk of harm (to, e.g., psychological wellbeing, personal values) from participating in the research should not be greater than the risk that is experienced in ordinary life (BPS, 2021). For example, as I was concerned that reflecting on the potentially emotive experience of deregistering their child from school could provoke distress for participants, I included procedures to support their wellbeing should they become upset.

Ethical approval for the research study was granted in May 2021 by the University of Bristol's School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee. Appendix J comprises the approved ethics application form, which includes descriptions of procedures that were implemented to account for the challenges noted above, as well as agreed amendments to the recruitment procedure.

### 3.10 Promoting Quality Within the Research

The final sources of information that I considered when designing this research study were related to ensuring its quality. I used Yardley's (2000) general principles for qualitative research to guide my decision-making throughout the research process, as well as Nizza et al.'s (2021) indicators for studies that utilise IPA to enhance the quality of my analysis. I evaluate methodological aspects of my study—including its research design, sample, data collection, data analysis and overall coherence—against these eight criteria in chapter five (section 5.8).

#### 3.10.1 Assessing Quality in Qualitative Research

A number of tools, which articulate various criteria, have been developed to assess the quality of qualitative research studies. Many of these, such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme's (2018) Qualitative Checklist, are structured approaches that are designed to highlight evidence of specific markers of quality. Evaluating studies through identifying included information is useful for reviewing literature at a surface level. However, such checklists are often not detailed enough to consider the impact of the underpinning theoretical (e.g., ontological, epistemological) assumptions on the study (Long et al., 2020). In qualitative research, these assumptions are key to guiding decision-making within the research process, so I endeavoured to adopt an approach to quality assessment that prompted me to reflect on relating theory to practice.

Having determined my methodological foundations, I thus opted to draw on more general quality criteria considerations, which allowed for alignment with theoretical assumptions, to guide decision-making within my research. Yardley (2000) suggested four broad principles: *sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; coherence and transparency; impact and importance* (Yardley, 2015).

Considering existing theoretical and empirical literature as well as the perspectives and sociocultural contexts of participants demonstrates *sensitivity to context*, which can be attended to throughout design, data collection and analysis (Yardley, 2015). This allows the researcher to discover new phenomena and develop innovative understandings with participants, which can then be situated within the wider research context (Yardley, 2015).



In-depth engagement with the research supports a researcher's *commitment and rigour*, including performing a thorough data collection and conducting an analysis of sufficient breadth and/or depth (Yardley, 2015). Competency with their chosen methodology supports the researcher to create novel insight within the topic area (Yardley, 2015).

*Coherence and transparency* considers how the study makes sense as a whole as a result of the researcher's decisions in its design, and the justification of these decisions in the final report (Yardley, 2015). Coherence relates to the fit between a study's theoretical approach, research questions, and methods of data collection and analysis. This contributes to the transparency of the study, along with communicating sufficient details of the methods used and presenting enough data to demonstrate the origins of analytic interpretations (Yardley, 2015). A coherent and transparent study promotes the clarity and power of a researcher's argument (Yardley, 2015).

The *impact and importance* of a study is its potential influence within its wider context, which may be theoretical, such as increased understanding of a topic, or practical with applicable implications (Yardley, 2015). Addressing the points above to promote, and communicate, the quality of the study can thus increase its potential impact (Yardley, 2015).

### **3.10.2 Quality Indicators for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Studies**

In addition, Nizza et al. (2021) identified four indicators of quality that are specific to analysis within IPA studies: *constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative; developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account; close analytic reading of participants' words; attending to convergence and divergence*.

Conveying a story that progresses through the analysis both within and across identified themes is *constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative* (Nizza et al., 2021). It aligns with Yardley's (2015) 'coherence and transparency'. Within a theme, a narrative can be developed through illustrating a specific point with a selected extract and accompanying analytic interpretation, and then furthering the point with another extract and interpretation that advances the analysis, for example, by offering a new perspective (Nizza et al., 2021). An overall narrative is then demonstrated through themes that interconnect findings to produce a rich and cohesive story (Nizza et al., 2021).

*Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account* involves deriving themes that explores a participant's meaning-making from an experience (i.e., experiential) and/or further to this, the effect of the experience on their identity (i.e., existential) (Nizza et al., 2021). Given that meaning-making is a key focus of IPA, this indicator relates to Yardley's (2015) 'commitment and rigour'. Exploring such concerns within meaning-making in participants' data capitalises on the depth and insight that IPA can offer (Nizza et al., 2021).

The idiographic and interpretative focus of IPA can be exercised through *close analytic reading of participants' words*; that is, revealing the fuller meaning of a participant's account and exploring their relationship with the experience (Nizza et al., 2021). This also aligns with Yardley's (2015) 'commitment and rigour' in terms of performing a sufficiently in-depth analysis. This can be accomplished by examining the meaning of the extract itself as well as considering it within the wider context; such a close reading supports the researcher to construct their interpretations (Nizza et al., 2021).

Identifying a balance of similarities and differences between participants' accounts to represent patterns and commonalities while retaining a focus on each participant's unique experience supports *attending to convergence and divergence* (Nizza et al., 2021). It relates to Yardley's (2015) 'sensitivity to context' in terms of considering participants' individual perspectives as well as their wider sociocultural context, of which participants may share aspects. This involves examining a particular extract within the context of the whole sample's experience; it can demonstrate how participants interpret the same experience in similar or different ways (Nizza et al., 2021). Commenting on the prevalence of, and variability within, a theme also enhances the transparency of findings (Nizza et al., 2021).

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have described the methodology of the present research study. In terms of its theoretical underpinnings, I have articulated my reasoning for adopting a bounded relativist ontology, social constructionist epistemology and interpretivist philosophical orientation with regards to the aims of the study. Given its interpretivist framework, I explained the importance of evaluating my positionality through reflexivity to account for my individual perspective. I then described considered methodologies before outlining IPA as my preferred approach, including

its theoretical principles, my rationale for choosing it, and its limitations. For the practical elements of the study design, I discussed the procedures for recruiting and sampling participants, interviewing (including timelining) to collect data, and analysing the data using IPA. Finally, I identified additional sources of information that supported my research design alongside methodological guidelines, which included ethical guidance and quality indicators.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Chapter Overview

IPA studies typically initially consider findings from the data in isolation before relating them to the wider literature (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, this chapter focuses on my interpretative accounts of participants' data. To retain a focus on their unique experiences (as recommended in Nizza et al., 2021), I will first describe the journey of each participant through brief interpretative accounts that summarise superordinate themes from their individual accounts. I will then outline the interpretative account for the whole sample that captures the shared thinking and experiences of participants and introduces the superordinate themes that I derived from across participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, I will explore these themes in detail to analyse the meaning that participants made from their experiences as well as identify suggestions for the practice of specialist education professionals that can be interpreted from these experiences.

### 4.2 Interpretative Accounts for Individual Participants

Participants' accounts documented their experiences of their decision-making journeys around their children's educational provision and their suggestions for engagement with specialist education professionals. To appreciate the individuality of these experiences before considering them as part of the wider sample, I have presented the timeline and a narrative of the superordinate themes that I derived for each participant below.

#### 4.2.1 Anne

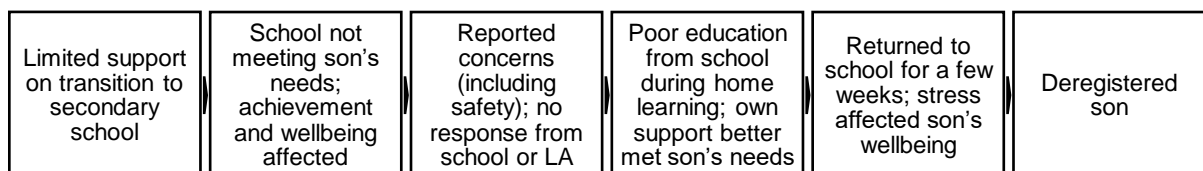


Figure 9: Timeline of Anne's Experiences

Anne (whose timeline is documented in Figure 9, above) deregistered her son when she decided that school professionals did not place the same value on helping her son to succeed in his education as she did and felt that she could provide a

better education for him, which she viewed as a great responsibility. It is important for Anne that her son enjoys learning; she perceives education as vital to living a productive life as an adult in the Western world. Her son has an EHC plan for needs related to ASD. Based on the popular reputation of the secondary school, and her son's positive experience of primary school, Anne expected her son to be well-supported, and was keen to offer her involvement to the school to aid this (e.g., supervising lunchtime clubs). However, she felt that the support from school professionals for her son was limited (e.g., provision described in his EHC plan was not implemented) and not personalised (e.g., he was not removed from class for targeted interventions); she did not feel that the provision nurtured his strengths nor supported his needs. She found this lack of support to be detrimental to her son's academic development and wellbeing, including his physical safety. In response to her advocacy for her son (e.g., challenging the lack of support from school with the council, requesting EOTAS), Anne noted an apathy from professionals in both school and centralised LA SEND services in increasing their provision for her son, which she described as related to their perception of a lack of resources. Home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic gave Anne an opportunity to explore teaching her son at home with the implied support of school professionals in the background; when her son made significant progress under her guidance, she decided that EHE could result in better outcomes for him.

Anne believes that in the first instance, specialist education professionals should support parents in ensuring that their child is receiving a suitable education, such as through advocacy at annual review meetings for EHC plans and being more open to alternative approaches to education (e.g., EOTAS, flexi-schooling). If parents feel that school-based education is not succeeding in supporting a child, Anne believes that an education professional from the LA could provide consultancy to help parents to design a tailored programme of EHE, which could reduce parents' anxieties and support the development of a provision that promotes positive outcomes for the child.

### 4.2.2 Charlotte

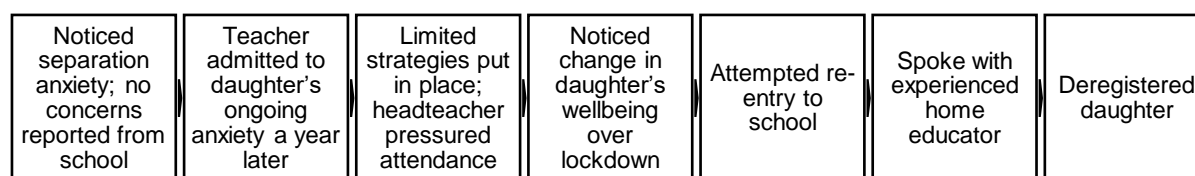


Figure 10: Timeline of Charlotte's Experiences

Charlotte (whose timeline is documented in Figure 10, above) deregistered her daughter when she felt that she could no longer trust school professionals with her daughter's wellbeing. For Charlotte, communication is an important part of developing a trusting relationship. Her distrust of school professionals began when she first discovered that staff had not been communicating about her daughter's anxiety, which had been ongoing for over a year. Charlotte was keen for help but a structured plan was not implemented and communication from school professionals remained limited with Charlotte feeling unsure about what support was in place. Her daughter's wellbeing and academic development continued to decline and Charlotte felt that support strategies were insufficient for her daughter's level of anxiety and implemented too late to be effective in improving the situation. Charlotte visited her daughter's general practitioner (GP) as her anxiety was affecting her physical health but the doctor reiterated the responsibility of the school. Charlotte felt alone in determining how to resolve the situation, which she felt was amplified by the headteacher's overriding concern with her daughter's attendance rather than her wellbeing. Time off school due to the COVID-19 pandemic improved her daughter's wellbeing, and Charlotte enjoyed the freedom from school and work schedule restrictions. Upon attempting to return to school, Charlotte's trust in her daughter's school professionals became irreparably damaged when staff physically managed her daughter into school. Charlotte had expected deregistration to be a difficult process due to the weight that she perceives society to place on school-based education, but speaking with an experienced home educator empowered her to send the letter to the headteacher as well as to seek out connection with other parents, which she perceives as particularly important for providing EHE. Charlotte had always been interested in the idea of EHE due to its flexible and laidback nature but had worried that she would not have the social support to do so; however, the social approval became less important as her daughter's wellbeing deteriorated.

Charlotte believes that LA education professionals should allow flexi-schooling, which she feels would have reduced the pressure on her daughter and supported her daughter's wellbeing while granting Charlotte time to develop her daughter's confidence. She recognised that this would require a wider overhaul of the education system, including reconsidering current approaches to pupil assessment. Due to a general distrust of LA professionals within the EHE community and their lack of understanding about alternative education practices, Charlotte suggested that it would be more appropriate for LA education professionals to work with (e.g., train) volunteer home educating parents who could provide peer support.

### 4.2.3 Emma

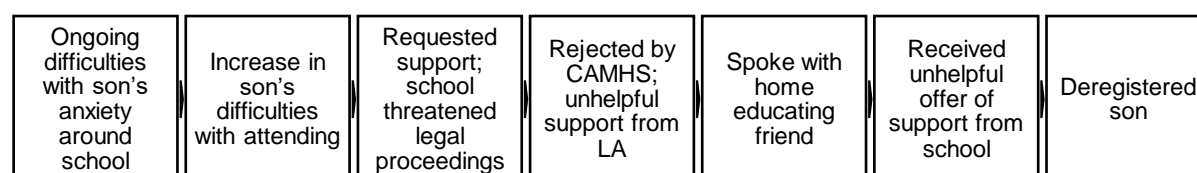


Figure 11: Timeline of Emma's Experiences

Emma (whose timeline is documented in Figure 11, above) deregistered her son from school after losing faith that the LA's services were able to support her family. Much of Emma's journey towards EHE was spent advocating for her son, particularly in terms of actively seeking support for his needs from both formal (e.g., her son's school, the council's family support services, the National Health Service [NHS]) and informal (e.g., a friend who has expertise in children's mental health) sources. Emma felt that the support that she received from services did not reflect the individual needs of their family; she described the provision that was put in place by school professionals as disorganised and untimely, and felt that centralised LA education professionals' pressure on attendance detracted the focus from her son's education and wellbeing. Although her son's needs placed an initial strain on the family, Emma identified that this was compounded by the lack of support from services, and the combination of these stressors was exhausting to the point where she felt unable to challenge professionals about the provision that her son was receiving. Emma found the support from her friends to be more helpful to guide her in supporting her son's needs and identify ways forward with his education provision;

a friend who currently home educates increased Emma’s understanding of EHE and her confidence that she would be able to undertake it.

Based on her reliance on informal sources of support and the impact that the lack of support had on their wellbeing, Emma repeatedly identified her concern for families who are considering (or currently engaging in) EHE but may not have the resources to effectively support their children. Emma feels that specialist education professionals should be more involved in supporting parents, both in ensuring that school professionals are using their resources effectively to support pupils and in providing unbiased information to parents whose children are not in school-based education (e.g., explaining how to register for secondary examinations), which she feels could be considered as a parent’s right.

#### 4.2.4 Harriet

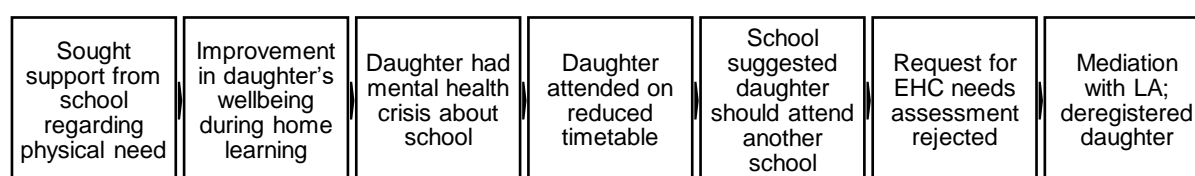


Figure 12: Timeline of Harriet’s Experiences

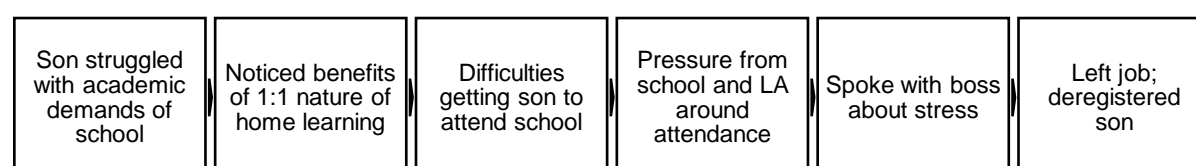
Harriet (whose timeline is documented in Figure 12, above) deregistered her daughter from school when she lost trust in the ability of school professionals to provide suitable support for her daughter’s SEND, which she ultimately felt could be related to a lack of concern; Harriet wondered if her daughter’s previously high academic capability had reduced the urgency with which professionals offered support. Despite consistently requesting support for her daughter’s physical need and wellbeing, communication from school professionals was limited; Harriet felt that they did not activate a graduated response, which then affected her ability to secure an EHC needs assessment. Harriet continued to advocate for her daughter’s voice and needs by seeking support from professionals who work in services such as the LA and NHS, and finally by deregistering her from school when these avenues for support were closed to her. Although she feels that entering into EHE has been the right decision for her daughter’s wellbeing, she did not describe it as an active choice but as a necessity given a lack of other options and the deterioration of her daughter’s mental health. She is concerned about how the EHE provision available



to her may impact on her daughter's educational achievement, and by extension, her future. Harriet perceives that many parents of CYP who have SEND are reluctantly engaging in EHE due to a lack of support in school, which she feels is resulting in additional disadvantage for these CYP. She has also been surprised by the lack of communication from professionals that she has received since her daughter stopped attending school, even before they had deregistered; she feels that the school-based and centralised LA professionals who oversee EHE were presuming that her daughter was okay. She considered this a safeguarding concern, particularly as she expects that there may be families who have complicating circumstances on top of challenges with their child's education.

Harriet thus feels that specialist education professionals need to become involved with school-based professionals and families when the placement begins to breakdown, such as when a school professional suggests that their school may not be able to meet a child's needs or when a parent suggests that they are considering deregistration. Harriet perceives that their initial role would be to review the support that has been put in place by school professionals, and then to support parents in considering alternative ways forward with their children's education, including EHE, if this is unsuccessful.

#### **4.2.5 Isabel**



*Figure 13: Timeline of Isabel's Experiences*

Isabel (whose timeline is documented in Figure 13, above) deregistered her son from school when she recognised that EHE was a viable way forward for his education. Her son had always found the academic demands of school difficult to manage, but Isabel felt that he was well-supported by the school. However, she noted that his needs escalated to high levels of anxiety upon returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, which also affected his physical health. Isabel felt that the procedures that were implemented by school-based and centralised LA education professionals left her son feeling pressured to attend school, and generated feelings

of embarrassment and guilt for Isabel. She perceived that neither school nor healthcare professionals (e.g., his GP) took responsibility for increasing their support for her son's wellbeing. At the point of making the decision to home educate, Isabel had multiple stressors in her life (e.g., unwell father) but her son's school attendance was causing her the most stress because of the suffering she perceived it to be causing her son and its effects on the whole family (e.g., daily arguments, being able to give less time and attention to her other son). Although Isabel had known about it since she was young, having grown up alongside home educated children, she felt that EHE did not occur to her as an option that was available to her due to its marginalisation as an alternative education practice and incompatibility with her career. After her boss suggested its viability, leaving her job and entering into EHE became an unexpectedly positive major life change that has benefitted Isabel and the rest of the family; she feels that it has enhanced her role as a parent and improved her son's wellbeing. Although she was concerned about other people's perceptions of her decision, she has had a positive reception from her friends and colleagues.

Isabel believes that specialist education professionals need to normalise EHE by presenting it as a valid option for education from the beginning of a child's school career (e.g., on school admissions application forms). She feels that this would reduce pressure for parents whose children experience emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) as well as reduce concern about anticipated negative reactions from others. Isabel believes that the anticipated negative societal perception of EHE further encourages the EHE community to withdraw from engagement with LA professionals (e.g., responding to communication from the LA EHE service).

#### 4.2.6 Maria

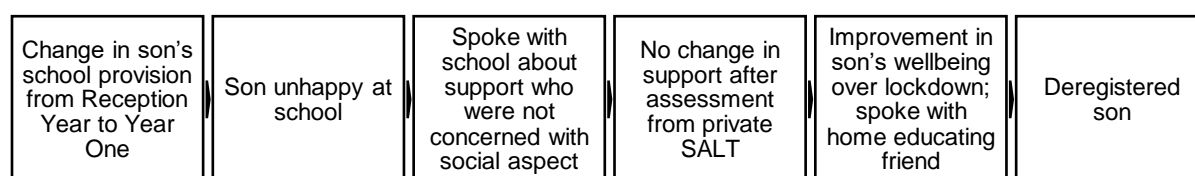


Figure 14: Timeline of Maria's Experiences

Maria (whose timeline is documented in Figure 14, above) deregistered her son from school after feeling dissatisfied with how they prioritised her son's needs

and their lack of holistic educational provision for Year One pupils. Compared to the nurturing approach to education that Maria noted in her son's Reception Year class, which she felt supported her son's social and emotional development, she felt that the curriculum in Year One was too focused on academic skills and was delivered in an authoritarian manner by the teacher. Maria did not perceive this style of learning to be age-appropriate and felt that they should be participating in more creative and practical activities. Maria recognised that her son struggled with social aspects of school, so when his experience of school began affected her son's wellbeing, Maria sought support from school professionals. However, she felt that the school professionals demonstrated little interest in adapting their provision to support his social development, even after an independent speech and language therapist (SALT) whom was commissioned by Maria made recommendations to them. Maria felt that this demonstrated a lack of priority that was placed on her son's needs by school professionals as well as their expectation of pupils conforming to their provision rather than vice versa. After seeing improvements in her son's wellbeing over lockdown, Maria decided that alternative approaches to education may better suit her son and felt inspired by her home educating friend's approach to EHE.

When her son was at school, Maria believed that specialist education professionals should have been more involved in offering additional support for her son, such as by providing support from additional members of staff who have experience with CYP who have SEND. Given her perceived inflexibility of provision in school-based education, she also feels that centralised LA education services should invest more resources into alternative approaches to education, including supporting some aspects of EHE (e.g., providing a co-ordinator and/or learning hub that the community can access if they wish to). Maria expressed that this would be invaluable for the welfare of both CYP and their parents, as she finds that EHE can be isolating.

#### 4.2.7 Nancy

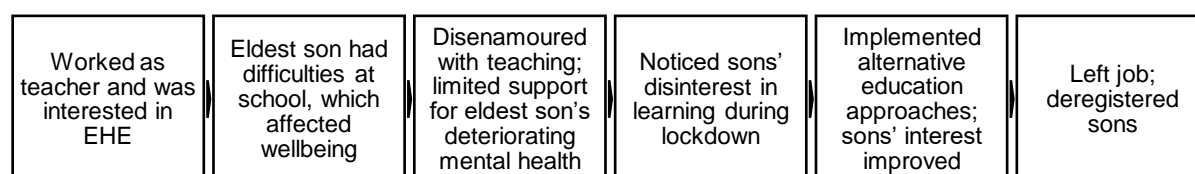


Figure 15: Timeline of Nancy's Experiences

Nancy (whose timeline is documented in Figure 15, above) deregistered her sons from school when she felt that the experience that school professionals were offering them was not conducive to learning, particularly for her eldest son, whose difficulties in school were affecting his wellbeing. As a teacher, Nancy had always been interested in alternative approaches to education; she was feeling increasingly disillusioned with working in a system within which she felt that she could not influence change. She highlighted that there was a lack of time and resources available to meet pupils' needs and felt that pupils were being channelled towards conforming to the school's and society's expectations, at the expense of individuality. This dissatisfaction was compounded by her eldest son's declining mental health, which she identified as being influenced by his experience at school. Nancy felt that the support provided by school professionals lacked a graduated response that attempted to intervene at the level of her son's underlying needs rather than managing the presenting behaviour; she was suspicious that this was because the school-based and specialist education professionals lacked the resources to do so, except for CYP who have the highest levels of need (e.g., by accessing therapy through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services [CAMHS]). Throughout their school careers, Nancy has advocated for her sons (e.g., by challenging practices at school), and after noticing the disengagement of both sons during home learning in the COVID-19 pandemic, she researched and implemented alternative approaches to learning at home to reinspire their interest in education. Seeing the positive results from this led her to deregister both sons.

To ensure that school-based and centralised LA education professionals are accountable for their support, Nancy believes that they need to empower parents with information, such as by sharing a flowchart of their graduated response to the needs of CYP. In terms of parents who are considering EHE, Nancy recognises that not all parents may have the resources to research a range of approaches to learning that differ to school-based education, particularly child-led approaches (e.g., unschooling). Thus, to increase their understanding and reduce their anxieties, Nancy also believes that specialist education professionals should provide information on a range of approaches to education, which she also reports would support the wider EHE community to feel more accepted and welcomed by LA education professionals. Nancy described a negative perception and expectation of

engagement with the LA within the EHE community, which she believes is underpinned a lack of consistency and transparency in LA education professionals' expectations of parents' responsibilities and their involvement with families.

### **4.3 Interpretative Account for the Sample**

As observed in the individual timelines and narratives above (section 4.2), participants described a number of common experiences within their accounts. Regarding the meanings that the participants made from their experiences, I examined individual participants' superordinate themes across the sample to identify superordinate themes for the sample, which I present below as narratives of recurrent themes. I deemed a superordinate theme to be recurrent when it was represented in the account of every participant.

#### **4.3.1 *Timeline of Shared Experiences***

Figure 16, below, illustrates the experiences that were shared by all participants. Participants reported that their children had additional needs within the school environment (e.g., cognitive, social, physical) that impacted on their wellbeing; this was followed by a lack of communication and/or graduated response from the school regarding these needs. Participants also sought help from other services (e.g., centralised LA education services, NHS) but, again, encountered limited support. Informal sources of support (e.g., current home educators) were helpful in assisting their decision-making. With regards to the recent context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the timing of lockdowns occurred at varying stages along each participant's decision-making journey towards deregistering their child(ren) from school. Participants reported noticing positives from their children while they were away from the school environment during the lockdowns (e.g., increased engagement in learning and/or improvement in wellbeing), with families who attempted to return to school when attendance was expected once again also experiencing increases in (particularly emotional) needs that their children demonstrated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

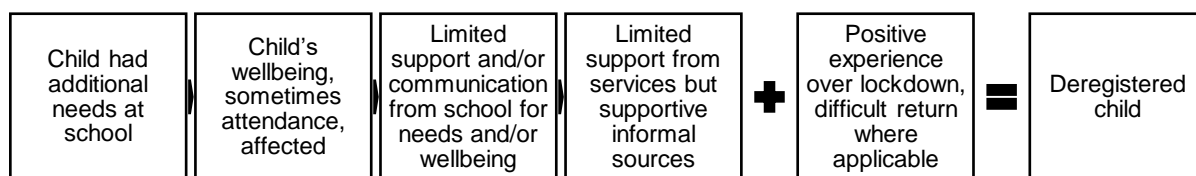


Figure 16: Timeline of Experiences Shared by Participants

#### 4.3.2 Narrative of Shared Experiences

Based on their children's experiences of school, participants were initially dissatisfied with the inflexibility and impersonality of mainstream state school provision, such as towards meeting individual needs. When an aspect of school contributed to a deterioration in their children's wellbeing, a lack of response to their children's needs left participants feeling unheard and distrusting that mainstream state schools were able to support their children. As a result, participants felt unsupported by school-based and specialist education professionals in identifying a way forward for their children's education, particularly when they were considering an alternative education practice, and ultimately deregistered their children from mainstream state schools as a result of this.

#### 4.3.3 Narrative of Suggestions for Engagement With Local Authority Professionals

The themes of their experiences directly reflected their suggestions for support that participants felt would benefit families who are experiencing a similar journey. In terms of the sensitivity of the mainstream state school provision, participants believed that school-based and specialist education professionals should adapt their practices to value children's learning and wellbeing needs rather than focusing on outcomes, such as attainment and attendance. When a child is experiencing difficulties at school, participants felt that specialist education professionals should advocate on behalf of parents and audit the support being provided by school professionals so that parents can trust that their child is receiving the support that they are entitled to in accordance with LA policies and processes, such as a graduated response to SEND. And if, despite appropriate support, school-based education continues to impact on a child's wellbeing, participants thought that specialist education professionals should empower parents with knowledge about alternative approaches to education, such as EHE, to normalise the practice and

support the relationship between LA education services and the home educating community.

#### 4.4 Overview of Superordinate Themes for the Sample

Three superordinate themes for the sample can be identified in the above narratives of shared experiences and suggestions for engagement for specialist education professionals, which I interpreted from participants' accounts. These are: *sensitivity to needs*, *trust in support* and *problem-solving*. Figure 17, below, illustrates how the three superordinate themes (in bold) interact, with themes of participants' shared experiences linking consecutively while generating themes of participants' shared suggestions for engagement for education professionals (in italics).

The first superordinate theme, *sensitivity to needs*, encompasses the experience of mainstream state school provision not being sensitive enough to accommodate the individual needs of CYP (e.g., by measuring pupil attendance at the expense of their wellbeing) as well as the suggestion of school-based and specialist education professionals responding to the individual needs of families (e.g., by working co-operatively with parents and CYP to support attendance).

The second superordinate theme, *trust in support*, encompasses the experience of feeling distrustful that professionals who work in state schools are able to support their children (e.g., due to a lack of graduated response to needs) as well as the suggestion of specialist education professionals responding to parental concerns and supporting their relationships with school professionals (e.g., by bringing expertise to review the provision).

The third superordinate theme, *problem-solving*, encompasses the experience of feeling unsupported by school-based and specialist education professionals to identify ways forward for their child's education in their unsustainable situations (e.g., by feeling responsible for getting their child's needs met in, or out of, school) as well as the suggestion of specialist education professionals supporting parents to consider ways forward for their child's education, which may include alternative education practices (e.g., by empowering them with information to make an informed choice).

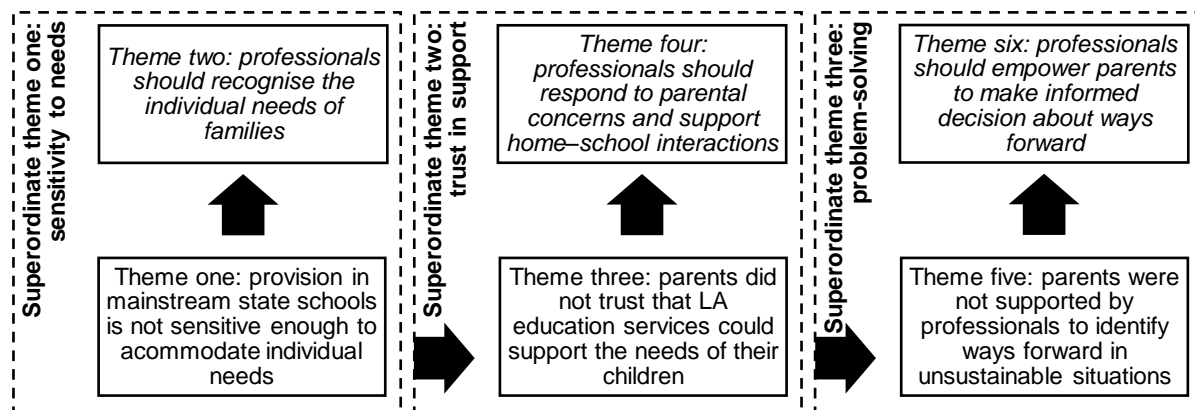


Figure 17: Map of Superordinate Themes and Themes

I explore these three superordinate themes below by splitting each into two themes to consider both the participants' experiences and suggestions for engagement for school-based and specialist education professionals for each superordinate theme (sections 4.5–4.10). Each of the six themes comprises of subthemes that portray participants' accounts of the theme in more detail. Each subtheme is explained through an illustrative quote from a participant to spotlight their voice followed by my interpretation and additional supporting quotes. Appendix I comprises a table that identifies how the sample is represented across the superordinate themes, themes and subthemes as well as tables for three of the themes that detail contributing quotes to subthemes.

#### 4.5 Theme One: Experiences of Dissatisfaction With Insensitive Mainstream State School Provision

Participants initially experienced dissatisfaction with their children's experiences of education, particularly in terms of the sensitivity of school-based and centralised LA education professionals in responding to their family's needs, which they described as contributing to a decline in their children's wellbeing. Participants who deregistered their children while they were in primary school (Charlotte, Maria and Nancy) tended to attribute this to aspects of the mainstream state school system, such as pedagogical practices. Participants who deregistered their children while they were in secondary school (Anne, Emma and Harriet) tended to attribute this to aspects of the individual schools that their children attended. Figure 18, below, illustrates the superordinate theme (sensitivity to needs) that this theme (experiences of dissatisfaction with insensitive mainstream state school provision)



stems from as well as the four subthemes (recognising constraints on school professionals, preferring different teaching and learning practices, feeling pressured by the LA focus on attendance, worrying about child's wellbeing) that it is comprised of.

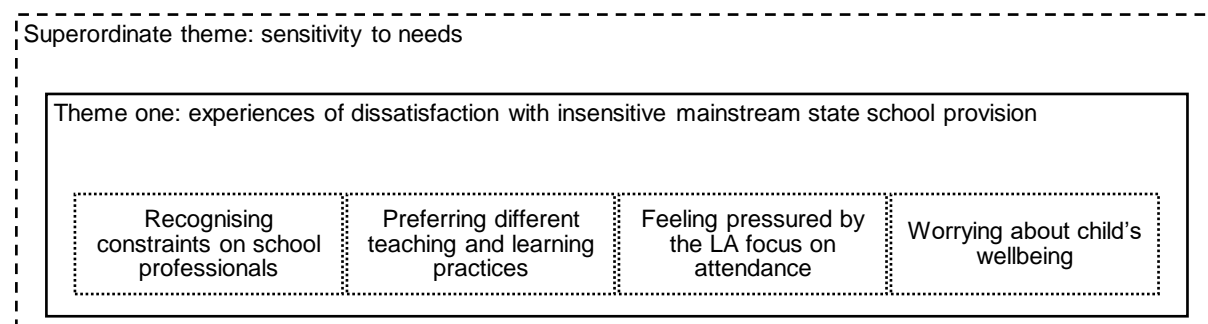


Figure 18: Map of Themes for 'Experiences of Dissatisfaction With Mainstream State School Provision'

#### 4.5.1 Recognising Constraints on School Professionals

Although often dissatisfied with the support that their children received from school professionals, participants recognised the constraints of the wider system on the professionals' ability to support children. As a former teacher, Nancy drew on this in the most depth:

*I was becoming increasingly disenamoured with the school environment: the amount of space and time children are given to really grow, the amount of provision that it's possible to make in a class of thirty for individual characteristics [...] And sometimes kids get swept under the carpet, you see it [...] So I was becoming more and more like, 'This system is working for some, but it's really not working for all, and I don't think I want to be a part of it anymore'. (Nancy)*

In this, Nancy highlighted how the limited capacity of school professionals who work within mainstream state schools can impinge on their ability to recognise and meet the individual needs of all CYP. The dissatisfaction not only led her to leave teaching but also to deregister her children. Maria also suggested that a challenging workload affected her son's teacher's ability to implement provision that supported his needs: *"It had basically been going round that she was very stressed [...] I think what was happening is she was getting bogged down with that"*. Anne felt that this pressure

had created a sense of apathy for professionals who worked in the SEND department around trying to increase their provision for her son: *“They’ve been under-resourced for so long, it was almost like they’d just got used to it and became complacent”*.

#### **4.5.2 Preferring Different Teaching and Learning Practices**

Participants who attributed school professionals’ difficulties in meeting their children’s needs to working within the mainstream state school system rather than to working within the individual schools also valued differing pedagogical practices to those that they perceived state schools to embody. Maria disagreed with the behaviour management style of her son’s teacher:

*I thought, ‘I don’t want my son being shouted at at school’, he doesn’t need to learn in that way. I remember my time at school, and if a teacher shouted, you just switched off to learning. So I wanted learning to take place in a nurturing environment, not in an authoritarian way [...] It’s Victoriana, kind of. Haven’t we evolved from when I was at school? (Maria)*

Here, Maria reflects on her own school experiences as well as those of her son to position an authoritarian style of teaching as not conducive to learning. She felt uncomfortable with the reduction in play-based learning and increase in table-based learning as her son transitioned from Reception Year to Year One, which she did not believe that her son, along with other children his age, was emotionally ready for. Similarly, Charlotte expressed dissatisfaction with homework resources in inspiring interest in learning: *“The schoolbooks are worse than the Biff and Chip books that we had when we were kids, they’re just so boring”*. Nancy suggested that she tried to complement school-based education to enhance learning for her sons: *“As well as it being an artificial environment, frankly; so we spent a lot of time outside”*.

#### **4.5.3 Feeling Pressured by the Local Authority Focus on Attendance**

The majority of participants whose children’s school attendance was affected by anxiety around school experienced pressure from school-based and centralised LA education professionals to increase their attendance. Emma noted the impact of this approach on her son’s wellbeing:

*None of us want to go to court, none of us want to be labelled as bad parents [...] So we rushed it [...] The more we're pressuring him, he would kick back and feel really uncomfortable, be really exhausted [...] There just felt this pressure for numerical improvement, there was no assessment of... how comfortable he felt. It was just obsessive around percentage of time spent in that building. It's just such a crude measure of success. (Emma)*

Above, Emma highlighted the value that school-based and centralised LA education professionals placed on her son's presence at school, which she felt was at the expense of his wellbeing. She reflected on how the threat of prosecution from centralised LA education professionals contributed to feelings of inadequacy as a parent and prompted her to collude with authority figures to pressure her son. Charlotte also noted a focus on attendance statistics and felt that school-based professionals perceived her daughter's difficulties as a threat to their statistics: *"It was all about the headteacher wanting numbers, the minute that [my daughter] wasn't there, she became an absence, this woman does not want an absence"*. Isabel expressed her frustration in receiving threatening communication from centralised LA education professionals, despite being ignored by school professionals after repeatedly seeking support for the issue: *"I had approached school saying, 'His attendance is really poor, can you help me help him?'; and then to get this angry letter was really horrible"*.

#### **4.5.4 Worrying About Child's Wellbeing**

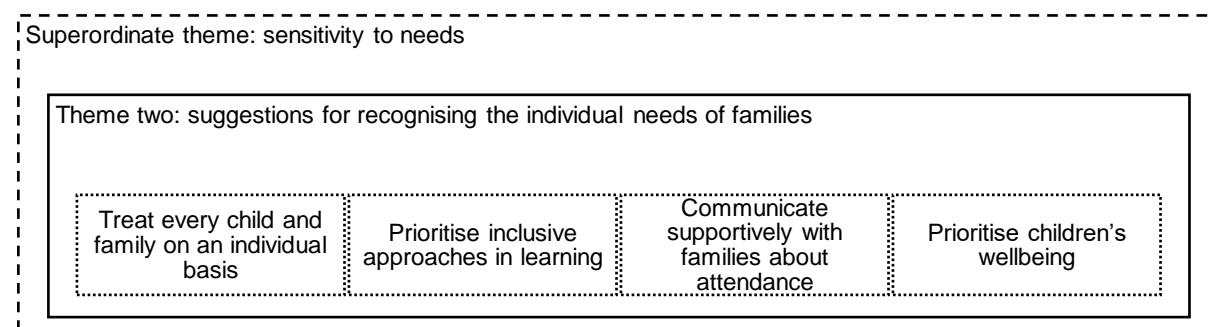
All participants reflected on how their children's wellbeing deteriorated as a result of not getting their needs met at school. This became the key influence in prompting all participants to identify ways forward for their children. Although Isabel had multiple stressors in her life, her son's difficulties worried her the most:

*I didn't feel like I had any control about what was going on with [my son], but I also didn't feel like I could do anything about it, but I also couldn't accept it [...] You can put up with any amount of pain and heartache yourself but seeing your child's suffering is so awful [...] I just didn't know where to turn. (Isabel)*

This quote illustrates that Isabel felt helpless in supporting her son to attend school before she had considered EHE as a valid option. The experience of witnessing her child's declining mental health prompted her, and other participants, to intervene. Harriet highlighted the impact of the return to school after learning from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic on her daughter who threatened to take her own life: *"She went back to school [...] and literally had a mental health crisis [...] She was so, so devastated about school that day, it was just too much for her"*. Ultimately, Charlotte reflected on the importance of children's happiness to parents, and the necessity of sacrifice to ensure this: *"When it comes to my kids' mental health, I would chop off both my arms to see them happy"*.

#### 4.6 Theme Two: Suggestions for Recognising the Individual Needs of Families

To be more sensitive to children's needs, participants suggested that school-based and specialist education professionals should work alongside families to value their individual needs and ultimately support their children's wellbeing. For participants whose children experienced additional needs in the classroom (Anne, Harriet, Isabel, Maria and Nancy), this was discussed in relation to promoting inclusive practices to support learning. For participants whose children found attending school difficult due to anxiety (Charlotte, Emma, Harriet and Isabel), this was centred around supporting families to address underlying needs rather than focusing on raising attendance. Figure 19, below, illustrates the superordinate theme (sensitivity to needs) that this theme (suggestions for recognising the individual needs of families) stems from as well as the four subthemes (treat every child and family on an individual basis, prioritise inclusive approaches in learning, communicate supportively with families about attendance, prioritise children's wellbeing) that it is comprised of.



#### **4.6.1 Treat Every Child and Family on an Individual Basis**

Given that the perceived insensitivity of professionals to the needs of their children represented the start of participants feeling unsupported by LA education professionals, they suggested that both school-based and specialist education professionals should utilise policies to endeavour to respond to families on an individual basis. As the only participant whose child had an EHC plan, Anne reflected on the importance of the allocation of resources to support SEND:

*If the council had enforced this flexible approach to education, using all the resources available to each and every child individually, that would have meant he would stay in school, that would have meant that I would have been more comfortable with his education, I wouldn't have had to rethink it. (Anne)*

In this, perceiving her son to not be receiving the support that he was entitled to reduced Anne's confidence in school professionals. The quote represents how policy relating to individual needs should be carefully applied to create change in practice. Emma noted that a blanket application of school-wide policies did not allow for consideration of individual needs, she felt that some flexibility would have supported her son's learning: *"There was no differentiation in the policy, it was 'no work must be sent home'; yet for me that didn't make sense if you look at us as an individual family"*. Many participants, such as Maria, also hypothesised about benefits of flexi-schooling; they believed that school-based and centralised LA education professionals should consider allowing it to facilitate closer attention to their children's individual needs and wellbeing, which they may not be receiving in the school environment: *"That would be really helpful because that means he'd be getting a bit of time at home one-to-one and then also then going into school"*.

#### **4.6.2 Prioritise Inclusive Approaches in Learning**

The perceived insensitivity to needs represented a wider issue of school professionals requiring pupils to fit within their provision while participants advocated for an inclusive approach in which school professionals adapt their support for

children. Maria attributed the expectation of conformity to the values of mainstream state schools:

*I just like to think he's got the support he needs to be himself, because I don't want him to feel like he has to change. And that's the thing with the school system, if you fit in, then it's alright, but if you're not mouldable, you don't fit in.*  
(Maria)

Here, Maria contrasted EHE and school-based education to highlight the value that she places on individuality and celebrating this at a social level. Her articulation of this suggests benefits in promoting inclusive policies and practices to reassure parents about how school professionals value diversity of CYP. Participants noted the effect of perceived discriminatory practices on their children's wellbeing; Nancy, whose son had difficulties with motor skills, noted the use of punitive practices, which highlights the importance of considering underlying needs in managing presenting behaviour: *"[The teacher] started to keep [my son] behind for his volume of writing; and [my son] lost a few break times and that really upset him"*. Anne, whose son has a diagnosis of ASD, also reflected on teaching practices that could suggest the utility of staff training in promoting approaches to support CYP with SEND: *"'Square peg, round hole' type sketch [...] He would walk out of classrooms because they'd try and make him do something [...] Autistic kids will just... shut down or they act out"*.

#### **4.6.3 Communicate Supportively With Families About Attendance**

The participants who felt pressured by LA policies regarding school attendance reiterated the importance of school-based and specialist education professionals working alongside parents to support their individual situation and address underlying needs rather than prosecuting the presenting behaviour. Isabel had to continue to ring the school's reception daily to report her son's absence as part of the attendance policy, which was an experience that she found to be embarrassing:

*I'd ring every single day and I just felt like a real idiot, and I was like, "you know what's wrong with him"; and I just had to go through the whole story*

*every time [...] So yeah I hated all of that... I just wanted, not special treatment, but just a little bit of understanding. (Isabel)*

Above, Isabel's experience suggests that school-based professionals should consider how members of staff who work on reception can embody understanding and respect of the family's situation as it may negate some of the uncomfortable feelings that parents may experience when their child finds attending school difficult. Harriet alluded to the importance of school professionals regarding absence for mental health reasons in a similar way to physical illness: *"I said, 'Well, I don't think it will be unauthorised, this is a mental health crisis [...]' and I would expect you to be tolerant about that"*. Emma also reflected on the impact of a communicative approach that addresses the child's underlying needs rather than resulting behaviour: *"From the school, from the local authority... some sort of child-centred, family-centred patience to help us get it right, rather than this monitoring"*.

#### **4.6.4 Prioritise Children's Wellbeing**

Given the priority that participants placed on their children's wellbeing, they would likely have appreciated the same value being embodied through the actions of school professionals. Harriet was struck by the lack of communication from school professionals when her daughter was not attending due to heightened levels of anxiety:

*I think that had there been regular family meetings or family support [...] We managed it but they didn't know that [...] I know my child's safe and loved, but they don't know that. And that breakdown, for me, was quite significant.*  
(Harriet)

This quote illustrates the value that Harriet may have placed on regular contact from school professionals to demonstrate their concern about her daughter; she felt the lack of interaction amounted to a safeguarding oversight. The importance of participants feeling that schools were supporting their children's wellbeing was also relevant when the CYP were in the school environment. Charlotte expressed the emotional toll of not knowing how her child's anxiety was, or was not, being supported, thus echoing the value of close home-school communication: *"It felt*

*upsetting to think that I was taking her there every day when I wasn't sure she was being... not cared for I suppose isn't the right word, but... she was a bit invisible".*

This suggests that school-based and specialist education professionals should carefully consider how their approaches to supporting children's wellbeing are implemented and communicated to parents as it can be interpreted as an overriding priority from participants' accounts. Even now, participants found reflecting on their children's experiences of school emotionally challenging; Maria commented: *"I'm talking about it now, I'm like, 'Oh my gosh it is really sad'; bless him"*.

#### 4.7 Theme Three: Experiences of Losing Trust in Local Authority Education Services

Upon feeling dissatisfied with their children's experiences of school, participants sought support from school-based and centralised LA education professionals. However, based on the communication and/or support that they received, participants began to distrust that mainstream state schools were able to meet their children's needs. Almost all participants described this as a lack of response from school-based and centralised LA education professionals, except for Isabel who reflected more on the challenge of meeting the needs of her son. It is likely that this is associated with her close relationship with her son's primary school professionals and her alignment to similar values and pedagogical practices that are embodied by mainstream state schools. Figure 20, below, illustrates the superordinate theme (trust in support) that this theme (experiences of losing trust in the LA) stems from as well as the four subthemes (seeking communication with school professionals about concerns, seeking response to child's needs, feeling overlooked due to child's level of need, losing trust in receiving support from the LA) that it is comprised of.

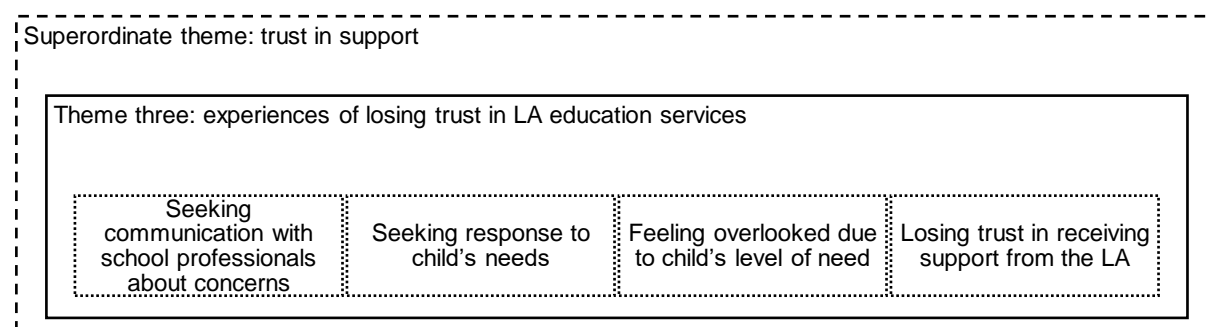


Figure 20: Map of Themes for 'Experiences of Losing Trust in Local Authority Education Services'



#### **4.7.1 Seeking Communication With School Professionals About Concerns**

Although participants were active in seeking support for their children, they found it difficult to give and receive information regarding their concerns, and reported feeling uninformed and unheard as a result. Charlotte felt that school professionals missed multiple opportunities to communicate how her daughter was experiencing school:

*She told me then that [my daughter] has always been anxious and has always been seeking reassurance all day long [...] And I was very cross to find that out there and then because nobody had told me [...] I felt completely let down that this teacher hadn't bothered to mention this to me before. (Charlotte)*

As Charlotte briefly checked-in with her daughter's teacher every day and attended parents' evenings, she interpreted the lack of communication about her daughter's ongoing anxiety as a lack of effort on the teacher's part. Due to the value that she places on her daughter's wellbeing, this generated feelings of frustration and disappointment for Charlotte. Participants felt that school professionals were not interested supporting their children; when trying to be put in touch with the SENCo, Maria noted: *"You don't feel listened to [...] I just didn't feel like there was a priority"*. Isabel identified the importance of communication to parents, regardless of any further action: *"I just needed... not necessarily for them to do anything but just to feel a bit heard, I suppose, just to be invited into a meeting to talk about it"*.

#### **4.7.2 Seeking Response to Child's Needs**

When they were able to get in contact with school professionals, participants looked to them for resources to support their children. However, their children's provision was not always changed as a result of the parent reaching out. Emma expressed her expectation of expertise:

*I spoke to the head of year and I said to him, "[I'm] really having trouble getting [my son] into school" [...] I thought he'd have a plan... he was just really quiet on the end of the phone [...] He was like, "Is there anything I can do to help?". I was like, 'Oh God, you don't have a plan, I thought you'd have had kids like this'. (Emma)*

Emma was surprised and worried as she interpreted the teacher's silence and response to indicate a lack of knowledge in the area, which she expected given his senior role. Along with Emma, many of the participants sought help from school professionals because they perceived them to have expertise in supporting their children's additional needs. However, it was not only knowledge that participants found school professionals to be lacking in; Nancy interpreted that she was offered limited information about the support that was available to her son because the LA do not have the financial resources to increase their provision for his needs: *"I feel suspicious that the reason why that information is not there is because nothing is there, because they have no money, they have no provision"*. To Anne, the lack of support felt so minimal that it equated abandonment: *"I just don't understand how they can abandon someone [...] and think, 'Oh no we're just not going to provide for you whatsoever, never mind'"*.

#### **4.7.3 Feeling Overlooked Due to Child's Level of Need**

Participants hypothesised that their children's needs were overlooked because they did not reach the threshold to warrant a higher level of targeted support. This was especially notable for participants of children whose anxiety was preventing them from attending school but was not deemed to be significant enough to meet the threshold for intervention from CAMHS. Nancy illustrated a perceived lack of middle ground for these needs:

*It's like this game of tennis in that a child would reach a point where they're talking about doing something to themselves or something that's really concerning. And that would trigger the response of, 'Tell the parents to take them to the GP, let's do a CAMHS referral'. Call CAMHS, talk to CAMHS, and then it gets hit back across the court to the school; 'but at least you've got the name in a database somewhere for the next time it happens'. (Nancy)*

Here, Nancy appears to suggest education and health professionals passing responsibility for supporting her son's mental health needs to the other party. Related to the suspected lack of LA provision described above, Nancy felt that support for children's anxiety is 'all or nothing' with a paucity of lower-level targeted

interventions. A comment from her son's GP led Isabel to believe that an increase in prevalence in children's mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic meant that her son's needs were downplayed, despite them affecting his school attendance: *"I think she was trying to be reassuring saying, 'Yeah we're seeing so much of this, it's really sad', but I took it like 'it's just standard'"*. Similarly, Harriet alluded to her daughter's anxiety being overlooked due to her academic attainment: *"And that's the problem with [my daughter], she's an achiever, isn't she, so those sorts of children are the ones that really do slip through"*.

#### **4.7.4 Losing Trust in Receiving Support From the Local Authority**

When families received limited communication from school professionals, they began to lose faith in the ability of mainstream state schools to support their children's needs. This appeared to be the key decision point when participants started seriously considering deregistering their children. Charlotte reflected on how distrust of school professionals at her daughter's school developed for her:

*It just started a snowball of distrust with the school. I felt like you put your child's wellbeing in these people's hands and they didn't do what I felt they're supposed to do [...] That was the start of me being like, 'I'm not sure I trust these people to do the right thing'. (Charlotte)*

In this, Charlotte explained that a lack of response to her daughter's needs catalysed a growing belief that the school professionals could not be presumed to take action in supporting her daughter's wellbeing, which she perceived as their key role. For many participants, the culmination of a loss of trust in school professionals to actively support their children resulted in an interest in alternative approaches to education, such as EHE. Anne persevered in sending her son to school until she began to believe that the lack of support was due to a lack of interest in her son: *"I trusted that they had my kid's best interests at heart [...] It literally took me three years of being fobbed off before I was like, 'Oh, maybe they don't care'"*. Emma highlighted her final thoughts around the key influence of trust on deregistration: *"How can I make a child go into a place that I've lost faith in?"*.

## 4.8 Theme Four: Suggestions for Responding to Parental Concerns

To engender trust in responding to parental concerns, participants suggested that specialist education professionals should support the home–school relationship when it appears as though school-based professionals are not providing the support that parents feel that their children are entitled to. For the majority of participants, who felt that the school professionals were not using their resources effectively, this was described in terms of auditing their children’s provision. For Isabel, who felt satisfied with the support that school professionals were able to provide her son, this was noted in relation to facilitating communication. Figure 21, below, illustrates the superordinate theme (trust in support) that this theme (suggestions for responding to parental concerns) stems from as well as the three subthemes (be transparent about the graduated response to additional needs, review support provided by school professionals, mediate the home–school relationship) that it is comprised of.

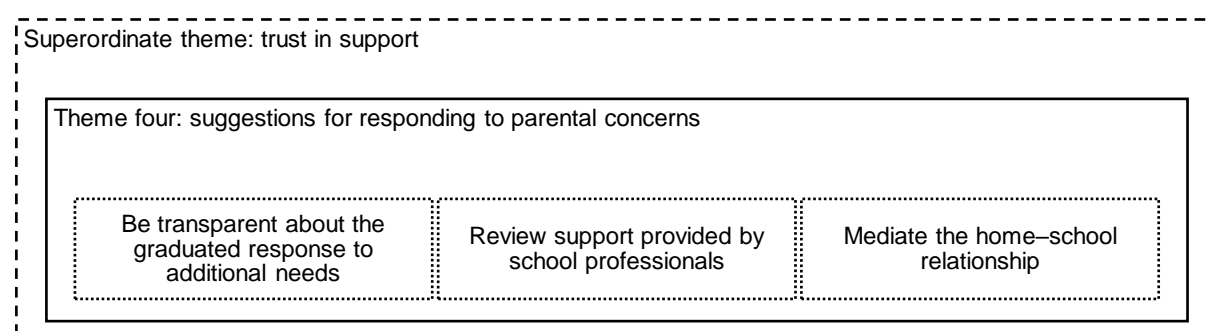


Figure 21: Map of Themes for ‘Suggestions for Responding to Parental Concerns’

### 4.8.1 Be Transparent About the Graduated Response to Additional Needs

Participants’ distrust in mainstream state schools began as a result of a lack of clarity in the process for responding to children’s additional needs. Participants felt that professionals should be clearer about the support that parents should expect their child to receive, to increase parental awareness and confidence in the LA provision, and so that they are able to identify when a school is falling short of the expected standard. Nancy suggested that schools should articulate information about their graduated response to additional needs in a way that is accessible for parents:

*There needs to be [...] like a systems diagram in every school, so there’s no... Because it’s so easy to have grey areas and ambiguity and everyone’s*

*had a busy day, isn't it. But it's almost like, 'If this happens, this happens next, this happens next, this happens next'. (Nancy)*

Here, Nancy reflected on the utility of clarifying the process of addressing concerns so that support can be accurately reviewed against the theory of a policy rather than practice, which is typically complicated by competing priorities. She suggested that a flowchart, for example, could illustrate different stages of a graduated response. A diagram of staff and resources could also support school professionals in their understanding and communication with parents; Emma's repetitive questioning suggests that professionals in positions of responsibility at her son's school were unclear about their provision: *"I kept asking the head of year, 'So what's the framework for supporting childhood mental health issues? Who's in charge? Who's in charge of this?'"*. Harriet alluded to the importance of this information as evidence that may be necessary if parents decide to pursue a complaint about their child's school: *"I just don't know where you go with this sort of thing... the policy and knowing what you're entitled to [...] Where are the policies?"*.

#### **4.8.2 Review Support Provided by School Professionals**

Participants looked to the expertise of school professionals to support their children; when this did not create change, they would have liked school-based professionals to initiate involvement from outside expertise, such as specialist education professionals. Anne felt that an advocate would have been helpful to review the provision implemented by school professionals in comparison with the provision that was documented in her son's EHC plan:

*It would be great if there was a parent—actually it's advocacy for the kid... a third party that's there that cannot pull the wool over the eyes of the parent [...] If I had had an advocate from the very beginning, as a parent of an SEN child, on my side... they could have actually held them to task. (Anne)*

Above, Anne suggested that a professional who has knowledge of school provision could challenge school professionals to ensure that their resources are being allocated effectively; this could support parents to feel informed about the quality of their children's support. Aside from challenging schools, participants believed that

outside expertise would contribute specialist knowledge; Emma accepted limitations of school professionals' ideas for provision: *"I would have welcomed anyone saying, 'You need to do this more', or 'Try this', or 'You haven't done this'; I didn't expect the school to do everything"*. Harriet reflected on school professionals suggesting that they cannot meet a child's needs as a suitable catalyst for specialist education professionals to become involved with support: *"I think at the point of where you're being almost advised to go to a different school [...] it would have been quite helpful to have had that"*.

#### **4.8.3 Mediate the Home–School Relationship**

Although participants wanted to challenge the support that their children were receiving, they also wanted to maintain a positive relationship with school professionals for the benefit of their children. When in this position, Emma identified the potential value of a mediator:

*It puts you in a really difficult position to fight for what you feel you should get. So I think a neutral broker there, who knows the school's resources, who's got some expertise in the area, but can do something about those power dynamics that are inevitable, would have been really useful. (Emma)*

In this, Emma reflected on the disadvantaged position of parents who lack knowledge of supporting children's additional needs in school yet are trying to maximise their child's provision, all while trying to maintain a positive working relationship with school professionals. This indicates that a mediator who brings parents and school professionals together to explore the situation could redress this power balance and ensure that knowledge is distributed across both parties. Isabel suggested that facilitating conversation could be an aim for a mediator in instances of a communication breakdown: *"They just had stopped replying to my emails [...] 'I just want him to be at school, we want the same thing, can we just talk about it?'"*. In terms of the benefits of maintaining a positive home–school relationship in challenging circumstances, Charlotte described her reasoning and consideration of the future: *"If she does ever want to go back, if I start making complaints and make a big noise about it, she's not going to be welcomed back to that school easily"*.

## 4.9 Theme Five: Experiences of Problem-Solving Unsustainable Situations

The lack of response from school-based and centralised LA education professionals led to participants feeling anxious and unsupported by formal sources of support in identifying ways forward for their children in a situation that they felt was unsustainable due to its effect on their children's wellbeing. For the majority of participants who deregistered their children from secondary school (Anne, Emma, Harriet), problem-solving was discussed more in relation to striving to get their children's needs met in the school environment; these participants appeared to be more reluctant to home educate. For the participants who deregistered their children from primary school (Charlotte, Maria, Nancy) and Isabel, problem-solving was discussed more in relation to getting their children's needs met regardless of the education setting. Figure 22, below, illustrates the superordinate theme (problem-solving) that this theme (experiences of problem-solving unsustainable situations) stems from as well as the five subthemes (fighting to get support for child from system, feeling alone in identifying ways forward, worrying about deregistering child, relying on informal sources of support, reflecting on 'electing' to home educate) that it is comprised of.

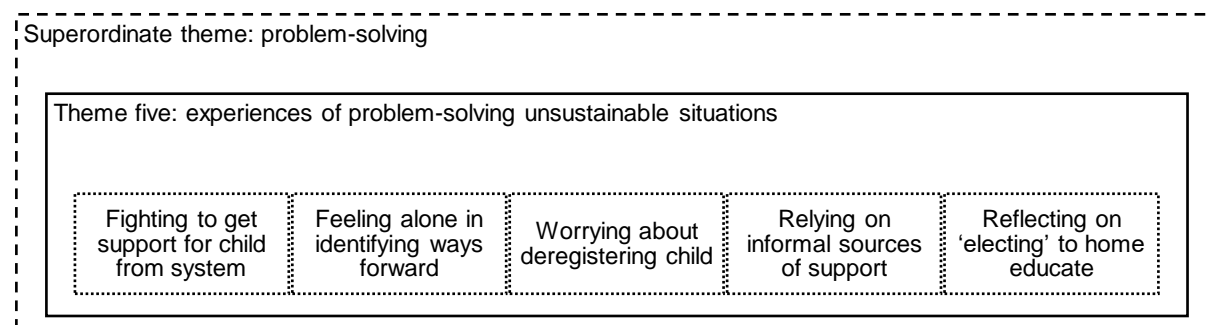


Figure 22: Map of Themes for 'Experiences of Problem-Solving Unsustainable Situations'

### 4.9.1 Fighting to get Support for Child From System

Participants perceived that they were advocating for support for their children against, instead of alongside, professionals who were working within their children's schools. This compounded stress for parents who were in an already challenging situation. Emma highlighted the vulnerability of this added complication:

*You're in a very vulnerable position as a parent [...] At a point where it's impacting on your mental health, you've got to say, "Right, what is the priority*

*here? The priority is making sure I'm okay so I can support him, and he's okay. I can't take on the local authority, the DfE and the school". (Emma)*

Above, Emma identified the need for parents to prioritise their resources to protect their own wellbeing to enable them to continue to support their children. Due to its effect on her mental health, she felt unable to continue to challenge the support that her son had received from school-based and centralised LA education professionals. Participants also had difficulty in securing support that their children were legally entitled to; Anne identified persistence as a key feature of requesting provision that was documented in her son's EHC plan: *"I asked for it over and over and over, we got nothing"*. Harriet also described the impact of persevering in her role as the active advocate for her daughter while feeling unsupported by school professionals: *"That frustration at getting her voice heard, that's exhausting [...] You do all the talking and the chasing, the school don't do anything"*.

#### **4.9.2 Feeling Alone in Identifying Ways Forward**

As such, participants felt alone in seeking a way forward for their children to create change; they identified themselves as their children's primary advocate. Although, as she perceived, her daughter's difficulties were catalysed and maintained by the school environment, Harriet indicated that she was the sole person trying to problem-solve the situation:

*We then had a meeting after a couple of months because I asked for it and said, "Look, how are we going to move forward?". And at that point the school said, Well, maybe this isn't the right school", and I said, "Well hang on here, we've not even tried to increase from the three hours a week". (Harriet)*

In this, Harriet described how she endeavoured to initiate action and progression while school professionals suggested that they could not support her daughter's needs further despite having only offered minimal provision prior to this point. Participants identified many instances of trying to engage school professionals but being met with a limited response. Charlotte emphasised the burden of feeling responsible for ensuring her daughter's wellbeing: *"I spent very sleepless nights thinking, 'Oh God, what am I going to do if this next tactic doesn't work?'"*. Due to a



lack of support in school, participants sought ways forward within the home environment; after feeling that school professionals were not interested in supporting her son's social development within their provision, Maria commissioned an independent SALT: *"I thought, 'Well, maybe that's something that we could help him with', and we went to see a speech and language therapist about it"*.

#### **4.9.3 Worrying About Deregistering Child**

Despite the unsustainability of their children's situation, participants were nevertheless worried about taking the step to deregister them from school. They perceived the decision as a big responsibility and contemplated the impacts that it could have on their children. Charlotte described a prolonged period of anxiety around considering entering into EHE:

*I had many moments of wobbling, 'Am I doing the right thing? Will she hate me when she's older?'. All of that. I had every emotion I could possibly have, I think. Quite a few months of those emotions as well; it wasn't just one day, it was months and months of wobbles. (Charlotte)*

Here, Charlotte reflected on the weight of making such a decision on behalf of her daughter and the future-focused concerns that her questioning was centred around. Fear of the unknown was a concern for many participants. Prior to the home learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, participants had had little experience of educating their children at home; Anne considered how this lack of familiarity with EHE practices likely prevented many parents from deregistering: *"It was basically like trying to step off a ledge and think to yourself, 'Well I've heard that if I flap my arms hard enough, I might be able to fly'"*. Isabel also illustrated how the anticipated negative perspectives of others factored into her decision: *"[They] wouldn't in a million years consider home ed [...] The thought of telling some of those people that I'd made this choice was quite scary"*.

#### **4.9.4 Relying on Informal Sources of Support**

Given the lack of support from school-based and centralised LA education professionals with their children's challenges, participants felt reliant on informal sources, such as friends and the home educating community. From such sources,

they sought out information about EHE, advice for meeting their children's needs and support for their own wellbeing. Isabel recalled a conversation with her boss:

*She was home educating her grandson [...] so she knew a bit about it [...]  
She was like, "Yeah you could totally do it, and I wouldn't suggest it if I didn't  
think that you could", and obviously she knows me really well. (Isabel)*

In this, Isabel was introduced to the idea of EHE by a trusted person and alluded to the conversation reassuring her confidence in her ability to home educate her son. Maria noted that having a home educating friend prevented her from feeling isolated in her journey into EHE: *"Fortunately, my best friend was homeschooling as well, so I didn't feel too out on a limb"*. Considering parents on the whole, Emma recognised that informal sources of support were not available to everyone and considered the value of them: *"I feel like if I'd been without that I would have felt even more lonely... That was just serendipity that I had that connection"*.

#### **4.9.5 Reflecting on 'Electing' to Home Educate**

The actual decision to deregister and enter into EHE was described differently by participants. The participants who reflected more on their experience of the decision itself were those who were more reluctant to home educate their children (Anne, Emma, Harriet). Harriet expressed her ongoing feelings around her decision:

*They say there's a choice; there is no choice. I sent an email yesterday to the head of the safeguarding education [service] [...] and said, "It's not elective, 'elective' is choice but not necessary, this was necessary but not a choice"; to me, using the word 'elective' is wrong, and I feel quite strongly about that.*  
(Harriet)

Above, Harriet highlighted the incongruence of her decision to home educate with the language of 'elective' used by LA and government professionals. This wording likely generated such uncomfortable emotions for Harriet due to the difficult experiences that she and her daughter encountered on their journey towards EHE. Anne echoed Harriet's resentment at having to deregister her son from school: *"Like I said, I'm a reluctant home educator; this is definitely not the deal I wanted"*.

However, other participants did not ruminate on the decision itself and instead framed it as an active choice; Charlotte viewed her entry into EHE as a move towards an aspirational lifestyle: *“I hate this nine-to-three thing that we’re attached to but I always thought that [an alternative lifestyle] was completely unobtainable”*.

#### 4.10 Theme Six: Suggestions for Empowering Parents to Make an Informed Decision

For parents who have decided that school professionals who work within mainstream state schools cannot meet their children’s needs, participants suggested that specialist education professionals should support and empower parents on the next stage of their journey by providing information on alternative education practices, such as EHE. They felt that this could increase parental confidence in their decision to deregister their child and improve outcomes for CYP. The majority of participants (Anne, Emma, Harriet, Maria and Nancy) felt that a role could exist for specialist education professionals to offer information and/or advice about practice for parents who are new to EHE. Charlotte and Isabel, however, felt that it would be more appropriate for professionals to just identify options for alternative education to parents who are experiencing challenges with their children’s experiences of mainstream state schools; they believed that support surrounding the practice of EHE would be better delivered by peers, such as other home educating parents. Figure 23, below, illustrates the superordinate theme (problem-solving) that this theme (suggestions for empowering parents to make an informed decision) stems from as well as the three subthemes (empower parents with information, support parents who have fewer resources, recognise the potential for positive outcomes from deregistration) that it is comprised of.

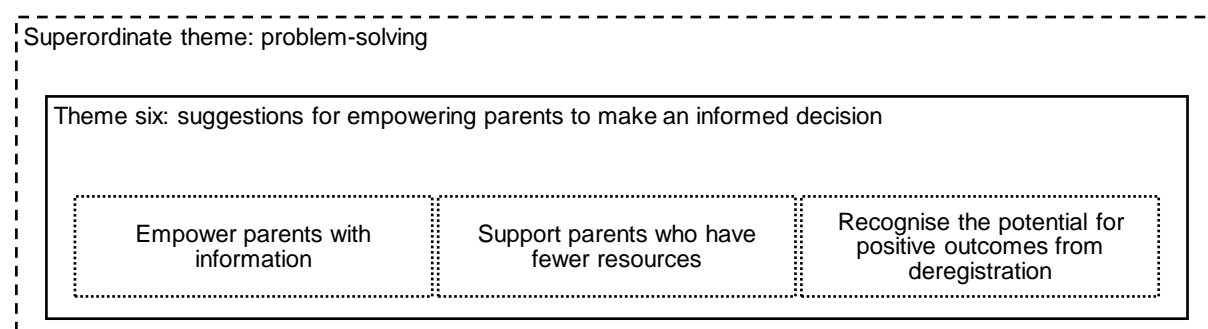


Figure 23: Map of Themes for ‘Suggestions for Empowering Parents to Make an Informed Decision’

#### **4.10.1 Empower Parents With Information**

Participants felt that it was important for parents to feel that they are making an informed choice when they enter into EHE, which they believed that specialist education professionals could support by empowering parents with information about alternative approaches to education. Harriet highlighted the potential value of accessing useful information from a single source:

*The next stage would be being empowered with the right information... to be able to make an informed choice and not muddling through. Like we were saying, going on Google, going on Facebook, looking at the home ed pages, it's crazy; you can be mis-sold so many things. (Harriet)*

Here, Harriet identified the volume of information that is already available about EHE but questioned the bias of sources and the potential for parents to be misled. She, and other participants, felt that it would have been helpful for specialist education professionals to share impartial information about aspects of EHE practice. Isabel suggested that presenting EHE as a valid option throughout a child's education could help parents to recognise it as a potential way forward that can be considered if it becomes appropriate for the family: *"I don't think I would have chosen it back then [...] but when he started finding it difficult, I might have seriously been able to give it some thought"*. Charlotte also reflected on the benefits of an official source validating EHE for parents who are considering deregistering: *"Working up to that was really daunting because [...] you're brought up to think that school is this really big, absolutely necessary deal that it's horrific to go without"*.

#### **4.10.2 Support Parents who Have Fewer Resources**

While reflecting on their own journeys, participants reported their concern for parents who were on a similar journey in terms of sustaining a challenging situation or transitioning to EHE but may have fewer resources, including financial, intellectual and social capital. They felt that support from specialist education professionals would be particularly helpful for these parents. Nancy reflected on the privilege afforded to her by her teaching experience:

*I did it all by myself. And I know that that's not an option that's open to every parent because they might not know where to go for the information [...]*  
*Whereas a lot of people, they just keep on filling in the cracks and trying to get through the next day, and the next day. (Nancy)*

In this, Nancy highlighted the necessity of having knowledge of the education system in being able to identify alternative ways forward for education other than attending school, thus indicating the benefits of sharing information about sources of advice and support more widely. Participants suggested an active role for specialist education professionals; Maria identified the value of supporting parents to consider alternative education practices when problem-solving: *“As a creative person myself, I can look for solutions myself, but I feel grateful that I am able to do that [...] That's where I feel people need a bit of advocacy”*. Emma alluded to the financial implications that face families who are considering EHE to remedy a challenging situation that may be instigated by schools: *“If I was a full-time cleaner and I had a child that went through what [my son] has been through, what would I do? Your options are so limited”*.

#### **4.10.3 Recognise the Potential for Positive Outcomes From Deregistration**

Finally, participants felt that it was important for education professionals to recognise the potential for positive outcomes for CYP that can arise from deregistering from school and becoming home educated. Although participants described their journey towards deregistration as predominantly negative, they all highlighted their current experience of EHE as positive and the right decision for their family, which they described in terms of its effect on the wellbeing of their children. Isabel commented on the difference that she has noticed in her son:

*It was honestly like a magic wand. So we took him out of school, said, “You don't have to go back”, and I haven't spoken to the doctor since. And I needed to, he was really struggling with all these different things. (Isabel)*

Above, Isabel reflected on the improvements in her son's physical and mental health that had occurred as a result of removing the stressor of school. Despite her perspective that her decision to home educate was not 'elective', Harriet felt that it

has been worth it as her daughter has developed in happiness and confidence: *“Do you know what, I wouldn’t make a different decision by seeing how she is now”*.

Nancy encompassed participants’ overall feelings about their experiences of EHE once they had deregistered their children from school: *“You might be starting because of mental health issues or whatever, but actually, it’s a really positive journey”*.

#### **4.11 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have reported findings from my IPA of participants’ decision-making processes that led them to deregister their children from school to enter into EHE. I first outlined an account of each participant’s journey and interpreted the meaning that they made from their experiences. Based on participants’ individual accounts, I created a narrative that highlighted the experiences and suggestions for engagement with education professionals that were shared by the sample. Within this interpretative account for the sample, I derived three superordinate themes that each encompassed two themes, one that reflected an aspect of participants’ shared experiences and another that proposed a related suggestion for engagement from education professionals. Based on the three superordinate themes, findings can be summarised through the following:

1. Parents were initially dissatisfied with the insensitivity of mainstream state schools towards their children; they felt that education professionals should prioritise the individual needs of families.
2. Parents lost trust in education professionals when they demonstrated a limited response to their children’s needs; they felt that specialist education professionals should support the response of school-based professionals to parental concerns.
3. Parents deregistered their children after feeling alone in problem-solving the unsustainable situation they felt that their family was in; they felt that specialist education professionals should empower parents to make an informed decision, such as by providing information on alternative education practices.

In the following chapter, I will consider the findings in relation to existing research literature to answer the research questions proposed in chapter one.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Chapter Overview

Having analysed participants' data from the present study in isolation in the previous chapter (as suggested in Smith et al., 2009), this chapter will discuss findings in relation to existing research to ground the present study within the context of current literature. First, I will answer the proposed research questions through integrating my interpreted superordinate themes into the existing EHE research literature. I will then contemplate the implications of these superordinate themes for engagement with specialist education professionals in the context of the theory of relational approaches and propose a reflective tool that professionals could use to support their engagement with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. As the implications mark the final discussion of my interpreted findings, I will then reflect on my role and influence in the research process in a reflexive note. Finally, I will evaluate methodological aspects of the present study with reference to existing EHE research literature as well as evaluative sources to consider the quality of my conclusions in the context of the research process.

### 5.2 Parents' Decision-Making Processes Towards Deregistration and Elective Home Education

Findings from the present study can be considered alongside existing literature to answer the first research question: *how do parents come to decide to deregister their children from school to enter into elective home education?*

#### 5.2.1 Dissatisfaction With Insensitive Mainstream State School Provision

Congruent with many of the studies included in the literature review that explored parents' motivations for EHE in the UK, such as Mitchell (2020b), participants in the present study were initially motivated by concerns regarding the ability of school professionals to support the individual needs of their children. More specifically, similar to findings reported in Simmons and Campbell (2019), participants began to contemplate EHE when unmet needs impacted on their children's experiences of school. Participants perceived a lack of sensitivity in mainstream state schools to children's learning, social and emotional needs, which

was illustrated by, for example, placing an overriding focus on school attendance for CYP who were experiencing EBSA. Indeed, in exploring transitions to EHE for secondary school aged CYP, Ofsted (2019) noted that threatening prosecution for non-attendance could further motivate parents towards EHE. Participants in the current study described the impact of these negative experiences of school on their children's wellbeing, which was identified in Bower's (2021) case study amongst other studies. Participants' highlighting of the impact of school provision as a motivator for EHE contradicts findings from the ADCS's (2021) survey of LA representatives, which identified key motivations as health concerns related to COVID-19 and for philosophical or lifestyle reasons. The only reference that participants in this study made regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their decision to home educate was recognising the positive effects of their children being away from the school environment when they had to engage in home learning as part of the national lockdowns and the increase in mental health needs when attendance at school was expected once again. As with the differences between the findings of the ADCS's (2021) study and those of other studies that explore parental motivations for EHE identified in the literature review (section 2.5.4), this discrepancy regarding the influencing factor of COVID-19 may be as a result of LA representatives' reporting of parents' motivations as a secondary source that may not capture parents' original views.

### ***5.2.2 Losing Trust in the Local Authority***

When participants in the present study sought support for their children's needs, including their deteriorating wellbeing, they perceived a lack of response (including communication) from school-based and centralised LA education professionals. This reflects comments of the parents in Bower's (2021) case study who noted a lack of response from school professionals with regard to their reported concerns about their child. It also supports those of parents of CYP who have SEND in Kendall and Taylor (2014) who identified a lack of engagement in general from school professionals. The lack of response to their concerns led to participants in this study feeling unheard and distrustful that professionals who work within LA education services, including state schools, could support their children. This echoes Ofsted's (2019) findings of a breakdown in the relationship between parents and



school-based professionals as a prevalent precursor to a parent deregistering their child from school.

### **5.2.3 Problem-Solving in Unsustainable Situations**

Due to feeling unsupported by LA education professionals, participants in the present study felt alone in identifying ways forward for their children's education in their unsustainable situations. Instead, similar to parents in Lovett (2014), participants assimilated information from research, self-reflection and informal sources of support, such as friends and those within the EHE community, to guide their consideration of alternative approaches to education. Comparably, Ofsted (2019) identified a lack of national guidance for LA education professionals to support their practice when engaging with parents who are considering entering into EHE. Because of the limited support that they received from school-based and centralised LA education professionals throughout their journeys, some participants did not view their deregistration as 'elective' and instead constructed their decision to home educate as a last resort. This is similar to findings from Morton (2010), in which some parents deregistered due to perceiving their children's experiences of state schools as unsustainable, and Kendall and Taylor (2014), in which parents of CYP who have SEND deregistered their children due to the declining mental health of their children.

## **5.3 Parents' Preferred Engagement With Specialist Education Professionals**

Findings from the present study can be considered alongside existing literature to answer the second research question: *how would parents like to engage with specialist education professionals along their decision-making journeys?*

### **5.3.1 Recognise the Individual Needs of Families**

In general, participants in the present study believed that school-based and specialist education professionals could place a greater emphasis on valuing the individual needs of CYP and their families by prioritising inclusive approaches and wellbeing in schools. Participants' recognition of inclusion as an influence on their decision, and the perceived importance of their children's wellbeing, reflects themes highlighted by parents of CYP who have SEND in Kendall and Taylor (2014); they noted a lack of understanding of professionals who work in mainstream schools

around supporting SEND as contributing to their children's deteriorating wellbeing. In terms of direct engagement with parents, participants suggested that this could include adopting a co-operative approach in communication with families around supporting school attendance that appreciates their individual circumstances, including through written communications to parents.

### **5.3.2 *Respond to Parental Concerns***

When parents have concerns about their children's experiences of school, participants in the present study felt that specialist education professionals could mediate the home-school relationship and advocate on behalf of parents to audit the support that is being provided by school professionals. They suggested that this would increase parents' trust that mainstream state schools are able to support their family in accordance with their policies, particularly with regards to identifying and supporting additional needs in line with the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & Department of Health [DoH], 2015). One of the benefits that Ofsted (2019) recognised in terms of LA education professionals engaging with parents who are early on in their decision-making journey of deregistering their children from secondary school was identifying further support that could be put in place in schools. The opening of such a channel could present an opportunity for specialist education professionals to become part of a parent's active decision-making process around suitable education for their child; as Adamson (2021) identified, parents draw on multiple sources, including the perspectives of others, to inform their thinking around the benefits and drawbacks of engaging in alternative education practices.

### **5.3.3 *Empower Parents to Make an Informed Decision***

When, despite robust provision from school professionals, parents continue to feel that school-based education is unsuitable for their children's needs, participants in the present study believed that specialist education professionals could empower parents with information to support them to make an informed decision about their children's education. They suggested that this could include increasing parents' understanding about alternative approaches in education to the state school system and supporting them to consider their options. Further benefits that Ofsted (2019) recognised in terms of LA education professionals engaging with parents who are early on in their decision-making journey of deregistering their children from

secondary school was ensuring that parents understood their responsibilities in relation to EHE as well as supporting them to explore alternative ways forward to EHE. Participants felt that engagement with specialist education professionals along the decision-making journey to discuss alternative education practices could normalise the practice of EHE and support the relationship between centralised LA education professionals and the home educating community. However, given the findings from Stoudt (2012), which highlighted parents' withdrawal from support from LA education professionals in circumstances where they would have to seek approval of their EHE provision, it is important that LA education professionals embody a respectful rather than paternalistic (i.e., restricting their freedoms in their supposed interest) attitude towards parents' autonomy in EHE.

#### **5.4 Underpinning a Model of Engagement for Specialist Education Professionals**

Considering findings from this study alongside existing literature, I propose that opportunities exist for specialist education professionals to engage with parents along their decision-making journey towards deregistering their child from school to enter into EHE. Given that EHE exists as a social phenomenon, it is appropriate to underpin a model that is related to it with social constructionist principles, which assume the importance of negotiating shared meanings of experience (Kelly, 2017). I thus contend that a model of service delivery for supporting parents who are considering EHE could be developed by professionals who work in the services, in consultation with parents with whom they work. As such, it is outside of the scope of the present study to derive a model that could be implemented by specialist education professionals.

However, my findings represent a starting point for considering potential service user perspective and can be interpreted to indicate values that could be embodied by specialist education professionals who are working with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. Values are an important consideration for designing models that are developed using social constructionist principles (Kelly, 2017). The three themes that I interpreted from participants' preferred engagement with education professionals (recognise the individual needs of families, respond to parental concerns and empower parents to make an informed decision) allude to the importance of specialist education

professionals attending to their interpersonal processes of their engagement with parents. This suggests the value of specialist education professionals adopting relational approaches in their engagement with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE.

Next (sections 5.5–5.6), I explore the theory and practice of relational approaches and identify some approaches that may be particularly relevant for specialist education professionals to embody when engaging with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. While part of the literature review (section 2.7) considered practical aspects of engagement between LA education professionals and parents who were currently home educating or considering entering into EHE, these sections will introduce new literature that explores the application of relational approaches in a broad range of professionals' interactions with service users to consider this aspect of participants' accounts through a theoretical lens. The literature in the following sections is derived from a cursory search of the literature regarding relational approaches for professionals.

## **5.5 Embodying Relational Approaches When Engaging With Parents**

Originally developed in the context of the therapeutic relationship between a therapist and their service user (e.g., Rogers, 1949), relational approaches emphasise the impact of relationships on an individual's experience of the world as well as the importance of a quality (e.g., authentic, mutual) practitioner–client relationship for supporting change for a person (DeYoung, 2015). Research has demonstrated that this relationship, along with interpersonal skills such as warmth and empathy, correlates more highly with positive outcomes in psychotherapy than the specialised treatment intervention itself (Lambert & Barley, 2001).

Relational approaches are already implemented by many professionals who work in LA services. School professionals may embody relational approaches in their policies and practices for behaviour management (e.g., Dunnett & Jones, 2020); for example, they may use emotion coaching techniques, such as validating feelings and facilitating problem-solving, to support pupils when their emotions are heightened (see Gilbert et al., 2021). At a strategic level, a policy institute recently recommended that centralised LA professionals could consider implementing relational approaches through increasing citizens' power in decision-making, creating

physical spaces for people to connect and maintaining consistent and open channels of communication (Cummins, 2022). These varied applications indicate the flexibility of relational approaches and their utility in supporting a range of professionals to improve their engagement with service users.

Perhaps most similarly to the specialist education professionals that this present study is interested in, social work professionals use relational approaches (often described as 'relationship-based practice') to reflect on psychological and social factors that can support positive working relationships with their service users (e.g., Ruch, 2018a). Additionally, relevant to the experiences of the participants in this study, the interactions within which social work professionals embody relational approaches to support service users are often emotionally charged (Ruch, 2018a). Thus, the practices that are described below are based on research that considers the application of relational approaches for professionals from the fields of social work, education and healthcare who work with adult service users.

In terms of their mechanism, relational approaches encourage professionals to reflect on the process and dynamics of their interactions with service users, rather than just the content (Ruch, 2018b). A key aspect of this is understanding, and responding to, the role that anxiety plays in shaping a person's behaviours in distressing and uncertain situations (Ruch, 2018b). For example, professionals who practise relational approaches may respond to a service user's visible and underlying communication of anxiety by adopting a curious stance and providing emotional containment (Ruch, 2018b). These approaches can support service users to better understand and tolerate their experiences and identify meaningful and effective ways to move forward (Ruch, 2018b). Such an outcome may be supportive for parents who are on a decision-making journey regarding the educational provision that they deem to be most suitable for their children.

'Relational approaches' is an umbrella term that can encompass a range of values; however, there are a number of practices that may be particularly relevant to supporting parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. Based on participants' unfolding experiences, although many aspects of adopting a relational approach are likely to be relevant for working with all parents, certain values may come to the fore depending on the stage that a parent is at on their decision-making journey. These are as follows and are explored in more detail below:

1. When a parent is dissatisfied with their child's experience of school, specialist education professionals could draw attention to a family's individual needs.
  2. When the relationship between a parent and school professionals is breaking down, specialist education professionals could advocate for the family's concerns.
  3. When a parent is considering ways forward with alternative education practices, specialist education professionals could empower parents to make an informed decision.
- At any point along a parent's decision-making journey, specialist education professionals could create a holding environment to help a parent to feel supported by LA education services.

### **5.5.1 *Recognise the Family's Individual Needs***

When engaging with parents who are dissatisfied with their child's experience of school, specialist education professionals could consider the child and their family holistically to identify the child's underlying needs that are contributing to their presenting behaviour. This may include adopting a stance of curiosity to explore, and generate multiple narratives around, the role that anxiety is playing in the lived experience of service users, given its perceived influence in the theory of relational approaches (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016). Seeking to understand the perspectives of service users through engaging with them with an open mind could support service users to feel listened to and deem their individual needs as being respected; this could engender feelings of trust in the professional (Ferguson et al., 2022).

### **5.5.2 *Advocate for the Family's Concerns***

When engaging with parents whose relationship with school professionals is breaking down, it may be helpful for specialist education professionals to consider a position of advocacy to ensure that the provision that is being implemented in school is supporting the child. Fox (2015) asserts that in the SEND Code of Practice, the DfE and DoH (2015) affirm the priority for EPs to advocate for the voice of the child, and their family by extension, to get them the support that they need. EPs may do so by empowering the child to advocate for themselves, advocating on their behalf to services (e.g., school professionals) or supporting others (e.g., parents) to advocate for the child (Fox, 2015). For professionals who mediate between families and

services within a context of limited resources, advocating for these families is key to ensuring that they gain access to provision (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016). Specialist education professionals could advocate for parents to redress the power balance between parents and school professionals, particularly for parents who feel excluded from discussions and decisions regarding their children's experiences at school (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Supporting parents and professionals to work in partnership could help parents to gain a sense of control in managing their child's situation (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007).

### **5.5.3 Empower Parents to Make an Informed Decision**

When engaging with parents who are considering ways forward with alternative education practices, it may be useful for specialist education professionals to draw on the concept of relational autonomy, which is based in literature from the healthcare professions. Relational autonomy recognises the social environment of a service user and the value of support from others, including family/friends and professionals, in developing the decision-making capacity of a service user (Gomez-Virseda et al., 2019). Practices that relate to promoting relational autonomy include presenting new possibilities, providing emotional support and connecting the service users with others who could support them (Gomez-Virseda et al., 2019). This could include specialist education professionals providing neutral information about available alternative education practices, such as EHE, and sharing contact details for visible home educating parents in their local EHE community. This could support a service user to develop trust in the professional as well as self-trust in their own ability to make decisions (Goering, 2009).

### **5.5.4 Create a Holding Environment**

For parents who are at any stage of their decision-making journey, specialist education professionals could create a holding environment. Developed from Donald Winnicott's (1960) notion for parent–infant relationships, for service users, a holding environment represents acts of care from individual professionals towards service users, who, in turn, are part of the network of care and control that encompasses a service user (Ferguson et al., 2022). Practices that can create a holding environment include being reliable in communication, taking account of power dynamics and structural inequalities that may be impacting on the lives of service users, and

connecting with service users in meaningful ways, including with their internal experiences (Ferguson et al., 2022). This could support service users who are in challenging situations to feel 'held in mind' (i.e., thought of by another) by professionals and thus experience a sense of security and being cared for (Ferguson et al., 2022). While the other values are tied more specifically to the experiences of parents at particular points on their decision-making journeys, given the general nature of a holding environment, this concept could be applied by specialist education professionals who are working with parents who are at any stage on their journey towards EHE.

## **5.6 A Reflective Tool for Specialist Education Professionals**

The values identified above (recognise the family's individual needs, advocate for the family's concerns, empower parents to make an informed decision, create a holding environment) indicate aspects for specialist education professionals to consider embodying within their practice. To facilitate this, I propose a set of reflective questions that may support specialist education professionals to reflect on their practice with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. I would anticipate that this tool could be used by specialist education professionals who are engaging with parents and carers who are actively considering home educating (akin to the participants of this study when they were later on in their decision-making journey and exploring alternatives to school-based education) as well as parents and carers who may later consider home educating based on the trajectory of their current experiences (akin to the participants of this study when they were earlier on in their decision-making journey and wanted to improve their children's experiences of school-based education). Based on participants' unfolding experiences along their decision-making journeys, different reflective questions may be helpful for engaging with parents and carers who are at different stages on their decision-making journey towards EHE. This is not designed to be an exhaustive list of questions but a tool to help professionals to reflect on their application of relational approaches in their practice.

Before documenting the reflective questions, it is first important to consider the rationale for professionals to use reflective practice to support the implementation of relational approaches as well as the resources that professionals need to engage in reflective practice.



### **5.6.1 *The Link Between Relational Approaches and Reflective Practice***

The suitability of applying reflective practice to supporting relational approaches has been articulated by Ruch (2005) who identified four ways in which reflective practice complements relationship-based practice. Firstly, both relational approaches and reflective practice appreciate the complex and unique nature of human behaviour (Ruch, 2005). Secondly, both encourage professionals to recognise their role in interactions with service users and consider how they can utilise their interpersonal skills to improve their practice (Ruch, 2005). Thirdly, both value the social contexts that the professional and service user exist within and consider the impact of these on interventions (Ruch, 2005). Ultimately, reflective practice allows professionals to draw on diverse sources of knowledge to inform their relational approaches (Ruch, 2005).

### **5.6.2 *Resources Required for Reflective Practice to Support Relational Approaches***

A suggested attraction of adopting relational approaches is the relatively limited material resources that are required for professionals to implement them (Ruch, 2018a). However, Ruch (2005) asserts that, for professionals to understand the complex interpersonal dynamics of the situations that they are involved in and effectively implement the practices that are embodied within relational approaches, they must be afforded the time and space to engage in holistic reflective practice. Holistic reflective practice encourages professionals to reflect on the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of behaviour, including their own as well as that of service users (Ruch, 2007). Services can support professionals with developing their holistic reflective practice by facilitating secure relationships between team members within which professionals can explore and process their experiences with service users; this may occur through practices such as supervision (Ruch, 2007).

### **5.6.3 *Reflective Questions for Engaging With a Parent/Carer who is Dissatisfied With Their Child's Experience of School***

With the value of *recognise the family's individual needs* in mind, the following reflective questions may be helpful:

- How are the child's needs impacting on the parent/carers and wider family?

- How are education provider professionals supporting the parent/carer with their child's needs?
- How are education provider professionals understanding the child's needs that underlie their presenting behaviour?
- How are education provider professionals embodying inclusion in their policies and practices?

#### **5.6.4 Reflective Questions for Engaging With a Parent/Carer Whose Relationship With School Professionals is Breaking Down**

With the value of *advocate for the family's concerns* in mind, the following reflective questions may be helpful:

- How is the parent/carer perceiving the support from education provider professionals?
- How can I help the parent/carer to feel heard by education provider professionals?
- How can I create a shared understanding of the child's needs between the parent/carer and education provider professionals?
- How can I support education provider professionals to empathise with the parent/carer's perspective?

#### **5.6.5 Reflective Questions for Engaging With a Parent/Carer who is Exploring Alternative Education Practices**

With the value of *empower parents to make an informed decision* in mind, the following reflective questions may be helpful:

- How can I work with the parent/carer to increase their understanding of, and confidence in, supporting their child's access to education?
- How can I maintain an open channel of communication to support the parent/carer in their ongoing decision-making?
- Who in the local alternative education (e.g., home educating) community might I be able to signpost the parent/carer to?
- How do I perceive alternative education approaches and how does this influence my practice?

### **5.6.6 Reflective Questions for Engaging With any Parent/Carer who is on a Journey Towards Elective Home Education**

With the value of *create a holding environment* in mind, the following reflective questions may be helpful:

- Where is the parent/carers currently receiving support from, considering both formal and informal sources of support?
- How can I convey my availability for, and responsiveness to, this parent/carers?
- What am I doing to convey my understanding of the challenges of this parent/carers' lived experience? What else could I do to convey my understanding?
- Where else might I be able to signpost the parent/carers to for support, including other services?

## **5.7 Reflexive Note**

Having completed my report of the findings from the present study, I now reflect on my influence on the findings, which I have developed through engaging in reflections throughout the research process to self-evaluate my position in relation to my research. This is derived from Appendix B, which is comprised of sample reflections from my research journal, including my critical autobiography. The most impactful aspect of my position on the findings of the present study has likely been my part-time role as a trainee EP in an LA EPS, in which I typically seek to support the inclusion of pupils who are educated within the state school system.

With regards to recruiting home educating parents to participate in my study, my lack of access to EHE platforms due to not being part of the EHE community meant that my access to potential participants was mediated through gatekeepers. Given that the majority of local EHE network coordinators and social media group administrators I contacted did not reply to my emails or instant messages and likely did not share my recruitment poster within their network, I likely was not able to advertise my research study to as many home educating parents as I would have been able to if I was part of these groups. I wonder if part of the reason that the gatekeepers did not share my advertisement was because, in the interest of transparency, I informed them of my dual role as a trainee EP in an LA EPS as well

as a university researcher in my initial communication. This may have increased their suspicion of my intentions and motivations to conduct the research.

In terms of my influence on the resulting dataset, from reflecting on the conclusions in relation to the original aims of the study, I recognise that the majority of findings are related to parents' experiences of reactive factors that 'pushed' them away from school as opposed to proactive factors that 'pulled' them towards EHE. Although participants will also have shaped the findings in this way—for example, home educating parents who were particularly dissatisfied with support that their children received at school might have been more likely to respond to the invitation to participate in the present study—it is important to acknowledge my role in this.

During data collection, it is notable that I tended to explore school-related aspects of participants' journeys in more depth, such as by asking more follow-up questions about the significance of events related to their children's experiences at school and less about the significance of events related to their discovery of EHE. If a researcher who had previous experience of being a home educating parent themselves conducted the same interviews, it is highly likely that they would highlight different aspects of participants' journeys to explore in more depth, which would likely create different findings and conclusions.

During data analysis, many of my codes reflected this focus on reactive factors of school, including the lack of support from school professionals as opposed to the support that they received from other sources. For example, where Maria commissioned an independent SALT, my coding focused more on how the school professionals did not implement the SALT's recommended provision rather than how the SALT's involvement increased Maria's understanding of her son's needs; however, she alluded to both of these factors as contributing to her decision to home educate.

My inclination that my data collection and analysis focused more on experiences that pushed participants away from mainstream state schools rather than those that pulled them towards EHE has been supported by my reflections on my experiences of working in an LA EPS. I have noticed similarities between the journeys of participants in this study and the journeys of parents I have worked with who moved their children from state schools to independent schools. The focus on these reactive factors may also suggest that findings from this study may be somewhat applicable to this population of parents.

Given the assumed socially constructed nature of IPA findings and individual (and thus unreproducible) nature of IPA studies (e.g., Giorgi, 2010), this reflection on my position is not necessarily a criticism of the present study but seeks to increase the transparency of the origin of its findings. However, it does illustrate the importance of recognising the context in which the findings were generated.

## **5.8 Evaluation of the Present Study**

As alluded to in the reflexive note, it is important to consider the quality of the research study process that generated the findings when deriving conclusions from the findings presented in the dissertation. Thus, I evaluate aspects of the research design, sample, data collection, data analysis and overall coherence of the present study to identify strengths and weaknesses in accordance with quality markers of qualitative research (as in Yardley, 2015) and IPA studies (as in Nizza et al., 2021). To inform future studies, I consider how the limitations of the study could have been addressed.

### **5.8.1 Research Design**

Adopting the qualitative approach of IPA to design the research study allowed me to explore the lived experiences of parents who deregister their children from school to home educate while appreciating the socially constructed nature of the reporting of their perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). Previous quantitative studies that have adopted positivist paradigms to capture parents' motivations have not been able to account for this social construction (Spiegler, 2010). Honouring the perspectives of participants and considering existing research literature in the design of the study both suggest an initial sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2015).

The 'phenomenological' aspect of IPA allowed me to explore the personal meaning of certain events towards their decision to home educate (Smith et al., 2009). Considering the deeper levels of meaning of a participant's experiences supports the researcher and participant to recognise values that may underlie the motivations that are initially identified by participants (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010). In the present study, exploring the meaning that participants made from their experiences supported me to identify potential values that could underpin the approach of specialist education professionals, which is key to developing a theoretically-grounded model (Kelly, 2017). Using the findings to design a model for

LA engagement represents the practical implications of the study, which suggests its potential for impact in practice (Yardley, 2015).

The 'interpretative' aspect of IPA allowed me to account for my influence within the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Through engaging in reflexive practices, such as writing a critical autobiography and recording reflections in a research journal, I have attempted to identify my position and my role in the creation of the findings in the above reflexive note (section 5.7) (Dean, 2017; Goldspink & Engward, 2019). Appreciating my perspective as distinct from that of the participants is particularly important given my part-time role as a trainee EP who is on placement in an LA EPS and thus my position as an 'outsider' researcher (Berger, 2015).

However, the associated limitation with the weight given to the researcher's interpretation in IPA is the individual, and thus potentially unreproducible, nature of the resulting findings (Giorgi, 2010). This has implications for the generalisability of conclusions in terms of generating new theories for wider populations (Pringle et al., 2011). Thus, I have been careful to confine the generalisation of the findings from the present study to theoretical generalisability by considering them in light of the established theory of relational approaches; this has enabled me to illuminate the utility of developing relationships in supporting parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE (Smith, 2017).

To my knowledge, the present study is the first to utilise IPA to explore parents' transitions into EHE and thus identify the personal meanings of events along their decision-making journey. This indicates the discovery of new phenomena and understandings within the EHE research context (Yardley, 2015).

### **5.8.2 Sample**

The most impactful limitations of the present study that constrain its conclusions are related to the strategies used to recruit and sample the participants. To attend to converge and divergence of participants' experiences in detail, researchers conducting IPA studies attempt to secure homogenous samples (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2009). However, due to challenges with recruiting participants, the final sample in the present study was not as homogenous as originally envisioned. Given that EHE is a practice that is rooted in its local education context, I intended to recruit participants from the same LA in an attempt to standardise the services that families had access to while their children were

attending mainstream state schools. However, I had to broaden my focus from one LA to multiple in the South West due to limited interest from EHE network co-ordinators and home educating parents during recruitment. The increase in heterogeneity of the sample resulted in a diminished ability to reflect at length on contextual factors, such as participants' experiences of centralised LA education services, which likely reduces its sensitivity to participants' sociocultural contexts (Yardley, 2015). To maintain a focus within the target LA, an alternative recruitment advertisement strategy that did not rely on approval from EHE network co-ordinators, may have increased interest from potential participants. Such strategies, for example, advertising through posters in public areas (e.g., Adamson, 2021), would likely have required additional resources that were outside the scope of this project.

Based on the challenges with recruitment, which I had anticipated in chapter three (section 3.6.3), opportunity sampling appears to have been a suitable strategy for the present study. The difficulty of the process led to me to appreciate the reason for the prevalence of convenience sampling strategies in EHE research (as reported in Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Although I anticipated the challenges prior to recruitment and tried to mitigate against them by being transparent about my position to gatekeepers (i.e., local EHE network co-ordinators) and offering participants an introductory video call prior to data collection, the pervading difficulty suggests a lack of sensitivity to the perspectives of home educating parents as potential participants (Yardley, 2015).

Furthermore, the self-selecting nature of this sample increases the likelihood of sampling bias in which participants who volunteered for the research were not representative of the population of parents who had recently deregistered their children from school to enter into EHE. It is likely that the seven participants who agreed to participate—out of the fourteen parents who responded to the advertisement and the likely many more eligible parents who saw the advertisement—felt that they had the resources, such as time and confidence, to report on their experiences (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). It is notable, for example, that almost all of the participants had degree level qualifications (as either identified by participants or assumed from their current or previous employment), which is far higher than 24% of currently home educating parents reported in Smith and Nelson (2015). Additionally, all of the participants described their children as having needs that required targeted provision within school, which is not likely to be representative

of all parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE. Although the strong convergence of the experiences and suggestions for engagement that were reported by participants in this study could indicate that findings may be shared by other parents, the extent of this is unknown. Thus, findings, and by extension, the reflective tool described above (section 5.6), are likely only applicable to parents who share similar characteristics or experiences to the current participants, rather than to the entire population of parents who deregister their children to enter into EHE. Careful consideration should be given when generalising to, for example, parents whose children do not demonstrate additional needs in school, parents who live in a single-parent household, parents from ethnic minority groups, parents whose children attended a specialist state school setting. To increase the likelihood of obtaining a sample that better represents its population, it would be necessary to employ a probabilistic sampling strategy in which participants are selected from a sampling frame of eligible persons to balance certain attributes (e.g., parent education, parent occupation, SEN status of child, age of child). Again, this would likely have required additional resources that were outside the scope of this project, such as access to LA records of parents who had recently deregistered their children from mainstream state schools.

Ultimately, adopting alternative recruitment and sampling strategies that allowed me to utilise additional resources could have improved the inclusivity of the research study and potentially increased the diversity of the sample. Fensham-Smith (2019) noted that while many home educating parents are able to access online EHE network groups, this is dependent on their cultural competence as well as social and economic capital, which suggests that some home educating families may be excluded from these online communities. Many participants reflected on how online EHE network groups acted as a source of information and/or support in their decision-making journey and/or current experience of EHE while also expressing concern about parents who lacked resources, including these informal sources of support. Adopting alternative recruitment and sampling strategies could have resulted in these parents being included in the sample, which would have allowed me to explore their experiences and may have generated more divergent findings that may have represented the experiences of a wider range of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE.



### **5.8.3 Data Collection**

In terms of data collection, conducting the interviews over videoconferencing software rather than in-person could have compromised my rapport with participants (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). However, based on the rich and detailed data that participants provided, I believe that our rapport allowed participants to feel comfortable enough to report on their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Steps that I built into the data collection process supported rapport. Conducting a pilot interview allowed to reflect on my role in the data collection and identify how to improve rapport with participants (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Introducing myself through an initial introductory video call with participants provided an opportunity to begin to build trust prior to data collection. Constructing participants' experiences as a timeline during the interviews helped to redress the researcher–participant power balance (Marshall, 2019).

I felt that it was particularly important to attempt to develop a relationship with participants given my position as an 'outsider' researcher (e.g., Berger, 2015) coupled with the marginalisation of EHE in public discourse and historical poor experiences of participating in research for home educating parents (see Stafford, 2012). Including additional steps in the data collection process illustrates my sensitivity to the sociocultural context of participants as well as commitment and rigour in terms of collecting sufficiently in-depth data for analysis (Yardley, 2015).

The quality of this data, including how adequately it captures participants' experiences and the meaning they made from them, is largely dependent on my, and the participants', communication skills (Tuffour, 2017; Willig, 2013). While the rich and detailed data that I collected during the interviews suggests good quality, it is likely that a more experienced researcher might have been able to gather more comprehensive data.

### **5.8.4 Data Analysis**

With regards to data analysis, I followed Smith et al.'s (2009) proposed six steps to IPA closely to reflectively engage with interview transcripts. Following the steps supported me to undertake a close analytic reading of participants' words by exploring the meaning of their account and their relationships with their experiences, and conduct a sufficiently in-depth analysis (Nizza et al., 2021; Yardley, 2015). During the coding stages, this included considerations of participants' local education

contexts as well as use of language in the interview to mitigate against Willig's (2013) critiques that IPA does not adequately address contextual factors nor analyse the language used to construct experiences. However, despite following Smith et al.'s (2009) general steps, congruent with Giorgi's (2010) concerns noted above, I recognise that a second researcher may not be able to replicate my coding and interpretations; I have included an audit trail of an example analysis of a participant's account (Appendix H) to increase the transparency of my analysis (Yardley, 2015).

When reporting, initially presenting individual interpretative accounts supported me to retain a focus on participants' unique experiences and thus attend to divergence within the sample (Nizza et al., 2021). Following this, presenting an interpretative account for the sample supported me to identify patterns and commonalities and thus attend to convergence (Nizza et al., 2021). I presented both individual and sample interpretative accounts as narratives and illustrated them through timelines to construct a cohesive story that demonstrates how the themes interconnect (Nizza et al., 2021).

The themes themselves reflect interpretation of participants' accounts at an experiential level as they analyse the meaning that participants made from their experiences; this should have capitalised on the insight that IPA can offer (Nizza et al., 2021). When exploring the themes, I further considered convergence and divergence by describing how each theme was represented across the sample and including quotes from multiple participants (Nizza et al., 2021). The table of participant representation across findings (Appendix I) indicates the prevalence of themes, which enhances the transparency of findings (Nizza et al., 2021). To sustain a compelling narrative, I illustrated each theme with a block quote, which I then interpreted, and furthered this through additional shorter quotes that are also interpreted to further develop the argument (Nizza et al., 2021).

In the discussion, I then considered the findings of the study alongside existing literature to answer the research questions, thus reaffirming the sensitivity of the study to its research context (Yardley, 2015).

### **5.8.5 Coherence**

In an attempt to justify the coherence of the present study, I articulated the methodology from its theoretical underpinnings, which relate to aspects of my overarching aims (Yardley, 2015). I then selected IPA as a research design that was

underpinned by these theoretical approaches, and proposed research questions and opted for methods of data collection and analysis that suited this research design (Yardley, 2015). The coherence between these aspects of the present study contributes to its transparency and the clarity and power of my argument (Yardley, 2015).

## **5.9 Chapter Summary**

Given that many aspects of the research process reflect indicators of quality in research, this suggests that the findings and conclusions of the present research study can be considered as trustworthy for increasing understanding of parents' decision-making processes for deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE and proposing a theoretical basis for a model of engagement for specialist education professionals who work with these parents. Firstly, findings indicate that some parents may decide to deregister their children from school to enter into EHE in response to an unsustainable situation, after losing trust in the ability of LA education services to support their family given dissatisfaction with their children's experiences of school, including a lack of support for their additional needs. Secondly, findings indicate that some parents may value individualised and co-operative engagement with specialist education professionals along their journey; while they are interested in keeping their children in school, this may involve reviewing and improving school provision and when they feel that state school is no longer an option, this may involve identifying and exploring alternative education practices, such as EHE. Given the limitations related to the choice of IPA as the research design and the self-selected sample from online EHE network groups, it is important not to overgeneralise the findings to assume that they are representative of all parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE. Nevertheless, interpreting the meaning that participants made from their experiences and suggestions for engagement with specialist education professionals enabled me to identify the potential value of professionals embodying relational approaches when they are working with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. From this, I proposed a reflective toolkit of questions that specialist education professionals can use to structure their thinking around embodying relational approaches when engaging with parents who are on this decision-making journey.

## **6 Conclusions**

### **6.1 Chapter Overview**

In this concluding chapter, I will summarise the findings of the present study and consider its implications for practice and further research. Firstly, I will address the original aims of the study and describe findings that have contributed to deepening our understanding of the experiences of parents who decide to deregister their children from school to enter into EHE. I will then identify the unique contributions of this study to existing knowledge and discuss implications for practice (including considerations for a range of professionals and policymakers) as well as suggestions for further research. I will also explore how I intend to disseminate the findings to relevant parties. Finally, I will present my concluding thoughts regarding how findings from the present study fit within the current wider issue of inclusion in education.

### **6.2 Revisiting the Aims of the Present Study**

Having described the findings of the study in isolation and in the context of the existing research literature, I can now present them to address the aims of the present study that I identified in chapter one (section 1.7).

#### ***6.2.1 Understanding the Decision-Making Journeys of Parents who Deregister Their Children From School to Enter Into Elective Home Education***

The first overarching aim of the study was to better understand the decision-making journeys of parents who deregister their children from school to enter into EHE.

The findings from the present study have suggested that parents decide to deregister their children from school to home educate as a solution to their family's unsustainable situation, in which the mental health of their children may have been significantly affected. Their journey may begin with a dissatisfaction with aspects of mainstream state schools that they perceive as insensitive to their children's individual needs. This, coupled with a lack of response to their children's needs, may lead to a loss of trust in the LA's ability to support their family. Parents may feel unsupported by LA education professionals along their decision-making journey.

### **6.2.2 *Identifying Opportunities for Specialist Education Professionals to Engage With Parents Along Their Decision-Making Journeys***

The second overarching aim of the study was to identify opportunities along these journeys for specialist education professionals to engage with these parents, and explore the information, advice and support parents would value at different stages.

The findings from the present study have suggested that parents may value engagement with specialist education professionals at three key stages along their decision-making journeys. At an earlier stage in their journey, when parents are becoming dissatisfied with their children's experiences of school, they may value specialist education professionals working alongside them to recognise the needs of their child and family. Having their individual needs explored to increase the understanding of school professionals could support parents to feel that the school professionals can accommodate their child's needs and support their child's wellbeing. Then, when parents still feel that school-based education is the most suitable option for their children, they may value engagement with specialist education professionals to audit the support that is being provided school professionals. Specialist education professionals could mediate the relationship between parents and school professionals and bring expertise to facilitate improvements to a child's provision, which could support parents to feel more trustful that LA education services can support their family. At a later stage in their journey, when parents no longer feel that state school education is the most suitable option for their children, they may value engagement with specialist education professionals to consider ways forward with alternative education practices. Depending on their individual situation, parents may appreciate different kinds of information and advice at this stage. At a basic level, parents may value support with identifying options for alternative education; some may also appreciate information and advice about alternative education practices, such as the diversity of approaches that can be practised under the umbrella of EHE. Empowering parents with such information could support them to feel more confident in making an informed decision about their child's education. When supporting parents who are on a decision-making journey towards EHE, findings from the present study suggest that specialist education professionals should consider embodying relational approaches, such as creating a

holding environment, recognising the family's individual needs, advocating for the family's concerns, and empowering parents to make an informed decision.

### **6.3 Contributions to Knowledge**

The present study has added to the limited research literature base that explores the decision-making processes of parents who enter into EHE in the UK. More specifically, it has illustrated the decision-making processes of parents of CYP who demonstrate additional needs in mainstream state schools. To my knowledge, it is the first to apply IPA to investigate parents' decisions to enter into EHE or to deregister their children from state schools. It deepens understanding of parents' perspectives through creating detailed accounts of their experiences, including identifying key events that influence decision-making and the meaning that parents may make from these events. Similarly, it highlights the significance of a perceived lack of support for SEND from school-based and centralised LA education professionals on the experiences of parents and families.

The present study is also the first, to my knowledge, to explore a potential role for specialist education professionals to engage with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. Interpreting the meanings that participants made from their experiences suggested a novel application of using relational approaches in their practice to support these parents. In this way, it is also the first study to propose a theoretical basis that could underpin a model for specialist education professionals to engage with parents who are on this decision-making journey, as described in chapter five (section 5.4). This goes some way to address the gap in the literature, identified by Ofsted (2019), which suggested a lack of guidance for LA education professionals around engaging with parents who are considering entering into EHE.

As well as its intended contributions to knowledge in terms of understanding parental decision-making and identifying theoretical underpinnings for supporting these parents, given the context that the research was conducted in, the present study has also illuminated parental decisions to home educate after home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through describing the discrepancy in their children's wellbeing when expected to attend school and when expected to learn from home, participants' accounts have highlighted the impact of inclusion and SEND support on children's mental health and related behaviours, such as EBSA.

While the link between children's SEND and mental health and the decision to home educate has previously been identified in research—as demonstrated in the reviewed research studies in chapter two (section 2.5)—the present study is likely to be one of the first to explore these factors in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent significant increase in the home educating population (see ADCS, 2021). The DfE (2019b) recognises the importance of centralised LA education professionals considering trends in EHE in a wider strategic context to identify shortcomings in local state education provision.

In addition to the suggestions for a model of engagement for specialist education professionals described in chapter five (sections 5.4–5.6), the above contributions to knowledge can be applied to considerations for practice for a range of professionals and policymakers.

## **6.4 Considerations for Practice**

While the theoretical underpinnings for a model suggested in chapter five (sections 5.4–5.6) were proposed for specialist education professionals, additional practical considerations can be identified for a range of professionals and policymakers from the present study. I derived the following considerations for practice from: studies included in the literature review, participants' suggestions for support from professionals, notable features of children's experiences as reported in participants' accounts, and the themes that I interpreted from the accounts of participants in the present study.

### **6.4.1 Considerations for School-Based Professionals**

Within schools, the present study indicates a number of focus areas that school professionals can address to improve their support of families who may be experiencing dissatisfaction with mainstream state schools and may be considering deregistering their children as a result.

In terms of supporting pupils in school, participants highlighted aspects of their children's school-based education that they felt lacked in provision, including utilising inclusive approaches to learning and supporting emotional wellbeing. As this appeared to be part of a limited graduated response to need, findings suggest that school-based professionals may need to refamiliarise themselves with their responsibilities in the SEND Code of Practice, including the 'assess, plan, do, review'

approach to identifying and supporting SEND (DfE & DoH, 2015). This should include, for example, implementing provision that is suited to support the individual needs of CYP and seeking advice from external professionals (e.g., EPs). Additionally, it is notable that many of the participants' journeys referenced a transition in their children's education, such as from primary to secondary school; this complements literature that highlights the importance of ensuring that sufficient provision is in place to support pupils during this time (e.g., Evans et al., 2018).

When engaging with parents, participants reiterated the importance of school professionals working in partnership with parents when identifying and supporting additional needs, as in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). A key example from many participants' experiences was responding to EBSA, with this study indicating that school professionals should consider how to support parents with their child's wellbeing and attendance. In addition to responsibilities for collaborating with parents, participants were not aware of other support that they, and their children, should expect from schools. The SEND Code of Practice outlines the expectations of school professionals to provide school-specific information about their graduated response to identifying and supporting SEND (DfE & DoH, 2015). This highlights the need for school professionals to ensure that relevant information is accessible, such as on their website, and increase parents' awareness of the existence of this information.

#### **6.4.2 Considerations for Specialist Education Professionals**

The main consideration for practice for specialist education professionals derived from the present study is the application of relational approaches when engaging with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE. However, as this has been articulated in chapter five (sections 5.4–5.6), it will not be reiterated here. Instead, this section will suggest aspects of service delivery in which the proposed reflective tool may support professional practice through either self-reflection or aiding school professionals to reflect on their practice.

Given their role in promoting the education of CYP, EPs are well-placed to support families who may be on a journey towards EHE, both directly and indirectly, and as suggested in chapter one (section 1.6.1), they may already be doing so unknowingly. The exact nature of EP involvement in this area would need to be



carefully considered within the current context of LA EPSs, which typically includes many competing considerations, such as limited capacity and a high statutory assessment workload (Lyonette et al., 2019). However, as suggested by the present study, parents may be deregistering their children from state schools to enter into EHE partly as a result of a lack of provision that supports the inclusion of CYP who demonstrate additional needs, which then impacts on their children's wellbeing. This highlights an opportunity for strategic managers to consider how EPs in their service can be commissioned to be involved in the support of these CYP.

EPs can create and communicate evidence-based guidance (e.g., via training and/or publishing) regarding the needs of CYP, which could increase school professionals' understanding of supporting pupils with additional needs, such as EBSA. Further, given the key role of teachers in determining provision in the absence of SENCo input, as described in many participants' accounts, EPs can also work closely in direct work with teachers, such as through facilitating consultation and supervision. In all, the present study complements the literature that highlights the utility of EPs working systemically with supporting adults to effect change for CYP (Boyle & MacKay, 2007).

When school professionals are finding it particularly difficult to support a child or young person within their environment, participants suggested the value of involving specialist education professionals to review provision and mediate the relationship between parents and school professionals. With their knowledge of additional needs, provision in schools, mechanisms of change and managing challenging interactions, EPs may be well-placed to facilitate such a process. According to the SEND Code of Practice, support from external professionals should be requested by school professionals as part of the graduated response to need (DfE & DoH, 2015). However, for the children of the participants in this study, support was not routinely commissioned by school professionals. As such, participants suggested that the LA could initiate support from specialist education professionals through additional mechanisms, such as via parent request (as in the EHC needs assessment process) or via an automatic trigger based on recorded pupil data (e.g., a significant drop in school attendance).

The other specialist education professionals for whom this study may have direct implications for work in education safeguarding/welfare services and have responsibility for supporting attendance in schools as well as oversight of home

educating families. With regards to school attendance, participants highlighted the importance of professionals ensuring individuality in their approach when working with families by considering their underlying needs. For example, participants suggested that a less prosecutive and more supportive approach would be helpful for families whose children are experiencing EBSA. Incorporating such an approach may be challenging for these professionals who may typically work within a legal context of ensuring school attendance, but perhaps the two are able to exist in conjunction, in a similar way to social workers' conceptualisations of relationship-based practice.

Given that professionals who work in education safeguarding/welfare services have an understanding of a range of education settings, including EHE, and are interested in ensuring that every child is able to access full-time education, they could be well-placed to support parents to consider alternative approaches to school-based education, such as EHE and EOTAS, when appropriate. As suggested by participants, even identifying options for families could support parents to feel less alone when problem-solving a way forward for their family in their unsustainable situation. This could include signposting to visible home educators in the EHE community or LA services, such as the parent carer forum.

An additional consideration for centralised LA education professionals in terms of engaging with the EHE community in general can be derived from the engagement of some participants with current home educators in their decision-making journeys. For many, peer support is an important aspect of EHE and it is notable that there are often experienced home educators who contribute to this community more often than others (e.g., Fensham-Smith, 2019). Given the interest of these parents in facilitating a positive experience of EHE for others, it may be helpful for LA education professionals to consider how to develop relationships with these visible home educators. These parents may be well-placed to act as a point of liaison with the EHE community. For example, they could share information that the LA may wish to communicate to the wider community or support with evaluating the LA's model of service delivery for working with parents who are (currently or considering) engaging in EHE.

### **6.4.3 Considerations for Government Policymakers**

Finally, as the roles of school-based and centralised LA education professionals are directed by policy, the present study also indicates considerations for local and central government policymakers.

Participants' common experiences of school professionals' limited implementation of a graduated response to their children's additional needs has implications for local government policymakers. The SEND Code of Practice outlines the expectations of LAs to provide information in their Local Offer about arrangements for identifying and supporting SEND in their LA (DfE & DoH, 2015). A cursory review of the Local Offers of the LAs that the participants live in indicated that it is typically difficult to locate and interpret this information. According to participants, understanding provision that LAs expected from schools could help parents to feel that the LA were able to support their children and potentially maintain a level of trust. Again, this suggests the importance of ensuring quality and accessibility of information about the graduated response through consulting with parents.

For both local and central government policymakers, participants expressed the importance of using language in policies and other communications that accurately describes the experiences of those it is referring to. For example, some participants identified misalignment with the term 'elective' for some home educating parents. This complements Pattison's (2018) research that demonstrates how home educators can be marginalised through language in LA publications.

While considerations for local government policymakers are related to the accessibility of information contained in policies, for central government policymakers, who dictate the national educational provision, the present study suggests the value of reviewing the content of policies. Through their children's experiences of school, participants have interpreted that the provision in mainstream state schools is not flexible nor holistic enough to meet the individual needs of CYP.

These perspectives echo reports in the DfE and DoH's (2022) SEND Review green paper, which identified a lack of early identification and intervention to support CYP to be educated within their local mainstream school setting. This has resulted in parents lacking knowledge about provision they should expect to be available in state schools and lacking confidence that their children's needs are able to be met in mainstream settings (DfE & DoH, 2022). In turn, this has led to an increased reliance

on more specialist sources of support, which is recognised through increased applications for EHC plans, for example (DfE & DoH, 2022). To address this, amongst other proposals, policymakers are proposing the introduction of national standards for co-producing and communicating with families regarding decision-making in the process of assessing and supporting SEND (DfE & DoH, 2022). The findings from this study suggest that parents would welcome this change to policy and highlight a potential role for specialist education professionals to be included within such a standard.

Similarly, proposals from the DfE's (2022c) Opportunity for All white paper, which is underpinned by the Schools Bill legislation identified in chapter one, could also be enhanced by the findings from the present study. For example, policymakers are highlighting a focus on increasing school attendance rates as they have declined from levels noted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (DfE, 2022c). Findings from this study suggest the importance of considering the wellbeing of CYP within attendance interventions and working with families whose children are experiencing EBSA.

## **6.5 Dissemination of Findings**

Communicating the findings of this study to relevant professionals and policymakers requires me to explore a number of avenues for dissemination, including presentations and publications.

### **6.5.1 Dissemination to Education Professionals**

To disseminate findings to education professionals, with a focus on communicating the information to specialist education professionals but with an additional audience of school-based professionals in mind, I intend to share the information via both verbal and written communications.

Most directly, I will produce a research report that summarises the findings of the study and my suggestions for considerations for practice for school-based and specialist education professionals, which I will send to managers of education safeguarding/welfare services who work in the LAs that the participants of this study live in. Based on their interest in the study, I will also send this report to participants who suggested that they may wish to share the findings within their local EHE community and the LA education professionals with whom they engage.

I also intend to make findings more widely available through publication. Primarily, I expect this to take the form of a journal article that summarises the findings and my suggestions for considerations for practice, which I aim to publish in a journal for education practitioners, preferably on an open access basis to make it accessible to a range of specialise education professionals.

In terms of verbal communication, for professionals who work in the LA that provided my part-time placement during my doctoral training, particularly those who work within the EPS and the education safeguarding/welfare service, I will offer to deliver a presentation that explains the findings and my suggestions for considerations for practice. I would present this live and in-person to encourage discussion regarding potential implementation within the LA. I will also create a recorded version of the presentation slides to share with education professionals from other LAs who indicate interest in receiving further information upon receiving my report.

### **6.5.2 *Dissemination to Government Policymakers***

To disseminate findings to central government policymakers, I will select and report findings that can be submitted as evidence as part of consultations and debates. For example, the Schools Bill is expected to be received by the House of Commons in Autumn 2022 (I. Hook, personal communication, August 19, 2022). I hope that, depending on the timeline for examination and approval of this dissertation, I will be able to submit evidence to provide information regarding aspects of the Schools Bill that are relevant to the present study, including their measures to increase school attendance and their intention to introduce a register for CYP who are not in school.

### **6.5.3 *Considerations for Dissemination***

Given the status of EHE as an education practice that is alternative to the state school system, I recognise that some policymakers may be reluctant to reflect on a role for centralised LA education professionals that might support a parental decision to deregister children from state schools. This highlights the importance of explaining the rationale and context of the research (section 1.5) regarding parents who deregister their children from school as a reactive decision due to a perception of their children's needs not being met at school as well as the potential benefits of

maintaining a positive working relationship between LA education professionals and home educating parents.

## **6.6 Suggestions for Further Research**

Finally, I propose that a number of avenues for further research can be identified from the present study to build on its findings. These include: drawing on the perspectives of parents and specialist education professionals to design a model of service delivery for LA education professionals to support parents who are considering entering into EHE; exploring the perspectives of parents who considered deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE but ultimately decided against it; and exploring young people's perspectives of school-based education and EHE following experiencing home learning during the lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***6.6.1 Designing a Model of Service Delivery for Local Authority Education Professionals for Supporting Parents who are Considering Elective Home Education***

Perhaps the most directly related next step to build on the findings of the present study through further research would be to explore developing a model of service delivery that details how LA education professionals can support parents who are considering entering into EHE. As described in chapter five (section 5.4), given that EHE is a social phenomenon, this could be achieved through designing a model that is based on social constructionist principles, which can account for the negotiation of shared meanings of experience (Kelly, 2017). A research study could adopt an appreciative inquiry approach (e.g., Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) with LA education professionals and home educating parents who live in the LA to jointly develop a strengths-based model that aligns with the vision and resources of their community. The themes that I interpreted in the present study, and my association of these to relational approaches, could underpin the delivery of services and practices within the model. As Ofsted (2019) noted, professionals in some LAs are beginning to implement their own processes to identify and support parents who are considering entering into EHE; research could evaluate this existing practice, which could also inform practice for other LAs.

### **6.6.2 *Exploring the Experiences of Parents who Considered Elective Home Education but did not Deregister Their Children***

A research study that could further develop our understanding of parents' decision-making processes around EHE could explore the experiences of parents who considered deregistering their children from school to home educate but decided against it. Adamson (2021) was the only reviewed study that included participants who considered alternative education practices but kept their children in the state school system, which was useful for identifying factors that were barriers to alternative education or incentives for school-based education. Similarly to the present study, adopting an IPA approach with these parents could support researchers to understand their experiences, including the significance of events that influenced their decision to keep their children at school. The themes that are interpreted from such a study could be used to deepen understanding of parental decision-making and the role of school support in this.

### **6.6.3 *Exploring Young People's Perspectives of Education After Participating in Home Learning***

I identified a final suggestion for further research from a comment made by Harriet during her interview; she noted that, as a result of home learning during the lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, young people were beginning to recognise that attending school was not the only option for their education. Assuming that older children have some input in their parents' decision to enter into EHE, and given the increasing numbers of young people who are being deregistered from secondary school (e.g., Ofsted, 2019), it would be valuable to consider the perspectives of young people. Researchers could employ a qualitative approach with young people who attend schools and those who are home educated to increase our understanding of pupils' experiences of school-based education and EHE, and support us to identify preferred and disliked aspects of education. Such a research study would also increase the representation of the views of home educated children in the research literature, which is currently limited (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020).

## **6.7 Concluding Thoughts**

In the present study, I sought to understand parents' decision-making processes towards deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE and

identify potential opportunities for specialist education professionals to engage with these parents. I interpreted that some parents in the UK may decide to home educate their children as an alternative approach to education after losing trust in the ability of mainstream state schools to support their children's individual needs and mental health. I also interpreted that some parents may value engagement with specialist education professionals along their decision-making journey through auditing their children's support at school and supporting them to identify ways forward with alternative education practices.

Based on this, I derived that specialist education professionals who engage with parents who are considering deregistering their children from school to enter into EHE may wish to reflect on the implementation of relational approaches in their practice to support these parents to understand their experiences and identify ways forward for their children. Such engagement may be particularly valuable for parents who lack access to the informal sources of support that were so important to the parents who participated in this study.

Finally, exploring parents' individual decision-making journeys towards EHE has also illuminated systemic issues within mainstream state school education, particularly with regards to delivering an inclusive education that supports the participation of children who demonstrate additional needs in the school environment. Returning to the legislation identified in chapter one that permits EHE in the UK, Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 (p. 7) states that "the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive *efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs he may have*, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise" [emphasis added]. The findings and implications of the present study suggest that it may be pertinent for state school policymakers to reflect on the 'efficiency' and 'suitability' of their educational provision for meeting the individual needs of every child and young person who is eligible for such provision. This may support more parents to trust that their children are able to be supported by, and included within, mainstream state schools.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Studies Included in the Literature Review

#### Reviewed Studies for 'Motivations for Elective Home Education in the United Kingdom'

Study	Publication type	Country of investigation	Methodology	Participants	Findings	Evaluative comments (see QATSDD table below for quality assessment scores)
Association of Directors of Children's Services (2021)	Report	England	Questionnaires	126 LA representatives	Most frequently identified in top 3 reasons provided by parents: health concerns relating specifically to Covid-19, philosophical or lifestyle choice, health/emotional health, parents did not provide a reason, general dissatisfaction with the school	Second hand reporting from LA representatives, possibility that responses do not accurately represent parents' original motivations/experiences, potential bias from LA perspective or what parents have communicated to LA; reasons tend to be broad; indicates role of pandemic in current context
Bower (2021)	Journal article	Northern Ireland	Case study (from larger mixed methods study); interviews	1 family with a child who has SEN	Child's negative school experiences centred around bullying from peers regarding religious belief and parents' sexuality → parents felt school were not meeting child's individual needs nor addressing their concerns → child socially excluded, facilitated by school's minimal support → parents decided school was incapable of providing efficient and suitable	Detailed account of family's motivations for entering into EHE that indicates complexity, i.e., change in motivation over time; no discussion about where families were recruited from for questionnaires and interviews, nor how the sample was selected 'purposively'; no discussion about relationship between researcher and participants; despite detailed

					education and had poorly impacted on child's mental health; felt EHE could be tailored to child's individual needs	discussion of child's difficulties with school, little discussion of decision-making process that led to identifying EHE as way forward; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population
D'Arcy (2014)	Journal article	England	2 sets of semi-structured interviews over 6 months with interpretivist underpinning	11 Traveller families	Parents felt compelled to enter into EHE due to school's inability to meet children's SEN and instances of racism, bullying and discrimination	Highlights particular subgroup of UK EHE population, themes identify reasons previously noted in other subgroups; relates EHE to issue of education inclusion; directly links findings with previous research; limited researcher reflexivity in terms of effect of author's role (e.g., works in LA Traveller Education Service) on collecting and analysing data; used member-checking to ensure credibility of findings
Kendall and Taylor (2014)	Journal article	England	Semi-structured interviews	7 mothers of children who have SEN	Parents felt that they had no other choice, decline in health/wellbeing of children the deciding factor; failure of schools to engage with parents, lack of knowledge and understanding around specific SEN (e.g., ASD)	Diversity in sample in terms of age of home educated child(ren), previous school settings attended and length of time spent in EHE; telephone interviews often in view of children, no consideration of effect of this on data; no described process of analysis; supported quotes and themes with previous research; no consideration of researcher



						reflexivity; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population
Maxwell et al. (2018)	Journal article	Wales	Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews	45 representatives from 22 LAs interviewed (1 replied in email form); 134 parents completed questionnaires; 6 parents interviewed	Approx. 1/3 of parents had children with SEN who were deregistered due to negative experiences of school, e.g., system based on assessment and attainment, lack of support; parents persevered in attempting to keep children in school; did not reject school-based education but extent to which schools could meet needs	Unclear sources of reported data (i.e., interviews, questionnaires), so unclear how different modes of communication could have influenced data (e.g., presence of researcher in interview); self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population
Mitchell (2020a)	Journal article	UK	Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with interpretivist underpinning	54 parents of 92 children who have not previously attended school; 54 completed questionnaires, 8 interviewed	Perception of education system as flawed and irrelevant, disagreement with purposes and drives of state education; schools seen as under pressure to conform to government policy rather than acting in the best interests of children, fails to support curiosity and engagement; unhappy with school starting age, class sizes, inability to work with different ages and bullying	Reasons identified through researcher's categorising of participants' language, so not forcing to conform to researcher's worldview but some themes (e.g., "recipients' dislike of the school system", selected by 43% of participants) too broad to pinpoint more specific motivations and understand experience; transcripts (not analysis) member-checked to enhance trustworthiness; no consideration of researcher reflexivity in terms of influence on interviews and data analysis; self-selected sample's views

						may not be representative of larger population
Mitchell (2020b)	Journal article	UK	Questionnaires and interviews with interpretivist underpinning	132 parents of 223 children who had previously attended school; 132 completed questionnaires, 8 interviewed	Primary driver was LA's failure to meet SEN (e.g., physical, social, cognitive) as well as inadequate responses to bullying and concern for children's emotional wellbeing; felt the education system was unfit for purpose (e.g., early school entry, inappropriate pedagogical practices, volume of homework, academic pressure)	Sometimes, prevalence of reasons across participants is unclear; no quotes used so participants' original language unknown and analytical process unclear; transcripts (not analysis) member-checked to enhance trustworthiness; no consideration of researcher reflexivity in terms of influence on interviews and data analysis; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population
Morton (2010)	Journal article	England	Interviews with interpretivist underpinning	19 families, 1 LA official	Parents constructed decision in three ways: 'natural' (childhood, education and lifestyle) 'social' (social interactions associated with schools), 'last resort' (untenable situations, e.g., child's mental health); overlap and movement, members of third group tended to reconstruct ideas over time, towards another group	Focuses on under-studied 'crunch point' of decision and identifies complexity of constructing decision (e.g., change over time); no consideration of researcher reflexivity and impact on data collection and analysis (attendance at EHE meetings and festival suggests author may be, or have connections, in the EHE community); self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population

Myers and Bhopal (2018)	Journal article	England (West Midlands)	Case studies (from larger study); interviews	2 Muslim families	Decision often driven by circumstances related to putting strategies in place to mitigate perceived risk in relation to their children and their education (e.g., racism, dangerous neighbourhoods, marginalisation); contrasts the lens of 'risk' to that described by EHE policy makers	Focuses on under-studied subgroup in EHE population; no consideration of researcher reflexivity and impact on data collection and analysis; related to research with other marginalised group (Travellers); findings from 2 families selected from wider sample, may not be representative of experiences of other Muslim families in EHE
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2019)	Report	England (East Midlands)	Questionnaires, focus groups and letters	16 LA representatives for EHE, 36 senior leaders of secondary schools, 23 parents, 4 secondary school aged children participated in interviews or focus groups; 8 parents, 3 secondary school aged children completed questionnaires and provided letters	SEN and/or medical, behaviour or other wellbeing needs were main reasons for moves to EHE; length of time spent considering EHE sometimes short (e.g., one day); breakdown in relationship between schools and parents in all cases; parents can move to EHE to avoid pressures at school (e.g., avoiding prosecution for non-attendance, permanent exclusions); some parents and children left feeling unprepared for EHE	Data collected and analysed by Ofsted inspectors but no consideration of researcher reflexivity in terms of the effect of this on data collection and analysis (e.g., parents and children may be more inclined to participate to complain about school, may be likely to report negative experiences of schools rather than positive aspects of EHE); diverse sample of parents and professionals considers multiple perspectives

Parsons and Lewis (2010)	Journal article	UK	Questionnaires	27 parents of children with SEN	2/3 of parents identified 'push' factors away from school as main reasons (e.g., bad experiences with provision, perceived failure of schools to meet child's needs); some parents feared for child's mental health, felt they had no alternative but to deregister child	Considers previously understudied subgroup of EHE populations; identifies that some parents were already known to researchers but effect of this on the data collection and analysis is not considered; questionnaires include categories pre-selected by researcher, which could conform parents' responses to researcher's worldview; difficult to explore views in more detail using questionnaire; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population
Rothermel (2003)	Journal article	UK	Questionnaires	419 families	Most commonly selected reasons: disappointment with education/schools, ideology or always intended to, school bullying, child's emotional wellbeing; motivations could be divided into two groups: experiences with school, family ideology	Euestions previous taxonomies, including applicability to UK context; difficult to explore views in more detail using questionnaire; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population; no statistical assessment of reliability or validity of questionnaire; motivations pre-selected by researcher which could conform participants' responses to researcher's worldview; some categories (e.g., "disappointment with 'education',

						schools”) too broad to interpret specific motivations
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# **Reviewed Studies for ‘Parents’ Decision-Making Processes Towards Elective Home Education’**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Publication type</b>	<b>Country of investigation</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Evaluative comments (see QATSDD table below for quality assessment scores)</b>
Adamson (2021)	Journal article	UK	Interviews with constructivist grounded theory approach	21 parents (some who decided against EHE)	Core process of ‘stepping out of the system’: parents have attitudes of school that developed before they began to consider how to educate child → explore their options through research, hearing views and considering their own feelings → negotiate barriers through identifying practical solutions	Considers processes that underlie decision before parents’ conscious consideration; self-selected convenience sample, participants’ views and experiences may not be representative of the wider population (e.g., researcher noted that many have worked in education); diversity of sample in terms of age of home educated child and delivery of education (i.e., attending ‘alternative’ settings, flexi-schooling) indicates generalisability of findings
Anthony and Burroughs (2010)	Journal article	US (South East)	Case studies; interviews and observations over a year	4 families	Ideological and pedagogical concerns with school initial catalyst but latent motivations (e.g., instilling religious beliefs through education) pushed families to deregister despite attempted reconciliation with schools	Uses stories to explore detail and nuance of motivations; homogenous sample to explore subgroup in depth but limits generalisation to other families; multiple data sources collected over a year, used peer review and participant checks; no consideration of researcher reflexivity; self-selected

						convenience sample, participants' views and experiences may not be representative of the wider population; conducted in different education context to UK, may not be generalisable to UK EHE families
Campbell (2012)	Thesis	US (Michigan)	Interviews	14 families	Choice was critical and complex process with research, conversations with home educating friends, contemplation regarding faith implications; process often precipitated by combination of circumstances relating to a specific event, characteristics of parent and child, school/family condition; majority of decisions aligned with convergence or insightful decision-making process	Explicitly considers the journey of decision-making; many families already known to researcher (dual role and insider researcher considerations not discussed); homogenous (Christian) sample so findings potentially not generalisable; self-selected convenience sample, participants' views and experiences may not be representative of the wider population; identifies applicable implications for practice; conducted in different education context to UK, may not be generalisable to UK EHE families; no identification of methodology aside from 'qualitative'
Lovett (2014)	Thesis	US (Louisiana)	Interviews with phenomenological underpinning	10 parents (5 in EHE, 5 opted for private school)	Sensemaking theory: ecological change (realise decision needs to be made) → enactment (assimilating information to guide action) → selection (act	Application of popular theory to EHE decision-making; considers researcher reflexivity effect on participants; use of member checking and peer review to

					consistent with data collected) → retention of selection (through feedback, retrospect, etc.); influences included social network, environment, religion/worldview/values, time, convenience, flexibility, academics	support credibility; self-selected convenience sample, participants' views and experiences may not be representative of the wider population; also considers other choice than EHE, may not be generalisable; conducted in different education context to UK, may not be generalisable to UK EHE families
Simmons and Campbell (2019)	Journal article	US	Interviews	9 parents of children with ASD	Decisions were either part of a long-term process (months to years) or caused by a catalyst event (typically relating to compromise in child's safety/wellbeing and negative interaction with staff); sources of information around decision: internet resources, other parents, books, ASD groups, media	Considers decision-making process; no consideration of researcher reflexivity; self-selected convenience sample, participants' views and experiences may not be representative of the wider population; identifies applicable implications for practice; conducted in different education context to UK, may not be generalisable to UK EHE families

#### Reviewed Studies for 'Relations Between Home Educating Parents and Local Authority Officials'

Study	Publication type	Country of investigation	Methodology	Participants	Findings	Evaluative comments (see QATSDD table below for quality assessment scores)
Association of Directors of Children's	Report	England	Questionnaires	126 LA representatives	117 respondents offered (in order of commonality): telephone call, video call, face-to-face meeting; other support	Large, so likely representative, sample of LAs; limited data around information, advice or support offered other than

Services (2021)					offers included the use of social media and email to keep EHE families updated on national guidance or educational support available during the pandemic, and utilising EHE parent network groups or hubs to maintain engagement	medium of communication; questionnaire as data collection method likely not in-depth enough to capture detail; only considers LA's perspective of practice, no exploration of parents' perspectives of support received
Bhopal and Myers (2016)	Journal article	England (South Coast)	Case studies; interviews	10 Gypsy and Traveller families; 5 educational practitioners	Some families benefitted from wide-ranging support of Traveller Education Service members who, for example, distributed books and course materials to families (common but not universal among TES members); some TES members reported feeling financially pressured not to continue working with families who chose to EHE as officially no funding was available to provide support for home educated children	Considers perspectives of both parents and professionals, so able to consider practical aspects of support offered as well as effect of support received; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population; limited researcher reflexivity in terms of effect of author's role (e.g., works in LA Traveller Education Service) on collecting and analysing data
Dahlquist et al. (2006)	Journal article	US (Minnesota)	Questionnaires	193 parents	Majority of respondents (71%) felt at least somewhat supported by local school districts and personnel; utilised public school resources (in order of popularity) were athletics, consultation with school staff, use of media, involvement in art and physical education, curriculum support, and participation in after-school classes; improvements to	Considers policy-relevant information for schools; low response rate (potential bias of respondents who have positive relationships with LA more likely to respond), suggests reasons for recruitment and participation challenges; sought feedback on survey; closed-choice questions may force participants to adapt to researcher's worldview



					relationship included for the school district to communicate offerings, not require interaction, be polite, and allow participation	
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2019)	Report	England (East Midlands)	Questionnaires, focus groups and letters	16 LA representatives for EHE, 36 senior leaders of secondary schools, 23 parents, 4 secondary school aged children participated in interviews or focus groups; 8 parents, 3 secondary school aged children completed questionnaires and provided letters	No clear steps for parents, LAs and schools to work together; LAs that were able to support ensured that parents understood their responsibilities, schools that were able to support advised parents of support mechanisms put in place or of alternatives to EHE; LAs and schools only able to support when informed early; some LAs used fair access panels and inclusion strategy groups to identify and respond to families moving to EHE; some LAs facilitated three-way meetings; involvement dependent on individual relationships and local approaches	Data collected and analysed by Ofsted inspectors but no consideration of researcher reflexivity in terms of the effect of this on data collection and analysis (e.g., parents and children may be more inclined to participate to complain about school, may be likely to report negative experiences of schools rather than positive aspects of EHE); diverse sample of parents and professionals considers multiple perspectives; self-selected sample's views may not be representative of larger population
Stoudt (2012)	Thesis	US (Pennsylvania)	Interviews with phenomenological underpinning	30 parents of children who have SEND	Although Pennsylvania's law allows families and school districts to work together to provide services for SEN, this does not happen often; most families utilised independent services (e.g., speech and language therapy, EHE	Purposive sampling technique created diverse sample in terms of age of previous school settings attended and length of time spent in EHE; emailed questions to participants before to allow preparation and support triangulation; used peer review

					consultancy, tutoring) and did not want state support; families may not document diagnoses of SEN by private practitioners in school district documentation, potentially to avoid interaction with state (would need approval of EHE practice)	and member-checking of transcripts to enhance trustworthiness; researcher known to majority of participants but limited researcher reflexivity in terms of negative implications for data collection and analysis
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**Quality Assessment Tool for Studies With Diverse Designs (QATSDD) Table for Reviewed Studies**

Criteria	Study																		
	ADCS (2021)	Adamson (2021)	Anthony & Burrows (2010)	Bhopal & Myers (2016)	Bower (2021)	Campbell (2012)	Dahlquist et al. (2006)	D'Arcy (2014)	Kendall & Taylor (2014)	Lovett (2014)	Maxwell et al. (2018)	Mitchell (2020a)	Mitchell (2020b)	Morton (2010)	Myers & Bhopal (2018)	Ofsted (2019)	Parsons & Lewis (2010)	Rothermel (2003)	Simmons & Campbell (2019)
Explicit theoretical framework	0	3	2	2	1	1	0	3	1	3	0	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	1
Statement of aims/objectives in main body of report	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	3
Clear description of research setting	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	1	1	3	3	3	2	2	2
Evidence of sample size considered in terms of analysis	2	3	2	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Representative sample of target group of a reasonable size	2	3	1	2	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	1	2	3	1	2	1	3	1

Description of procedure for data collection	1	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	2	3
Rationale for choice of data collection tool(s)	0	3	2	0	3	1	1	1	3	3	3	2	2	0	3	1	1	1	1	2
Detailed recruitment data	1	3	3	0	2	3	2	1	3	3	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2
Statistical assessment of reliability and validity of measurement tool(s) (quantitative research only)	0						0										0	0		
Fit between stated research question and method of data collection (quantitative research only)	2						1										3	3		
Fit between stated research question and format and content of data collection tool (qualitative research only)		3	3	3	3	3		3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3			3	3
Fit between research question and method of analysis	1	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
Good justification for analytic method selected	0	3	2	3	2	0	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	3	2
Assessment of reliability of analytic process (qualitative research only)		0	3	0	0	1		3	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0			2	2
Evidence of user involvement in design	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Strengths and limitations critically discussed	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	3	3

Note: 0 = not at all; 1 = very slightly; 2 = moderately; 3 = complete

## **Appendix B: Extracts From Research Journal**

### **Critical Autobiography (23.03.2021)**

I probably first became aware of the concept of EHE as a child but did not actively reflect on its implications as an alternative to schooling until I worked as a swimming teacher in a gap year before university and taught private swimming lessons to a home educated child during school hours. My colleagues and I wondered about what it would be like to be home educated and if we would have preferred it to attending school, given the option. This led me to later reflect on similarities of EHE with aspects of my childhood. My parents valued my interest and success in learning and success in education; they arranged learning opportunities at home, such as setting aside time at weekends for literacy and numeracy activities and taking me to the library frequently. I think that it is probably my parents' value of my education that first inspired my interest in the concepts of learning and education. As such, I was brought up to perceive 'education' as not synonymous with 'school' and recognised that opportunities for learning could occur outside of the school environment.

I interacted with home educated CYP again when working as a tutor during my undergraduate degree. The combination of these experiences and reflections sparked my interest in conducting research with home educating parents and adolescents about their social lives for my final year project. Although it was not the focus of my data, parents who entered into EHE through deregistering their children from school described both negative experiences of school for their children and positive effects that they had noted upon transitioning to EHE. From their reporting of these experiences, I perceived that the parents placed great weight in this decision and that the events leading up to it generated strong emotions.

After university, I worked as an assistant EP in an independent EPS, delivering input that was commissioned by schools who did not receive non-statutory support from their LA EPSs. In this role, I frequently encountered parents and (often school) professionals who expressed negative perceptions and experiences of centralised LA services, including those who felt that the centralised services were limited in their support of the inclusion of CYP in schools. My experiences in this role led me to reflect on the possible discrepancies between the intentions of LA professionals to support CYP and how this may be realised in practice (e.g., due to models of service delivery and/or constraints on resources), particularly considering the impacts on the perspectives and experiences of service users. Now that I am working within an LA as a trainee EP, I feel motivated to explore the working relationships of centralised LA and school-based professionals with parents who are considering deregistering their children from state schools through entering into EHE.

### **Reflection: Pilot Interview (21.07.2021)**

Recruited via a social media group that links home educating parents with researchers, an experienced elective home educator (S) volunteered to pilot my interview schedule with me. For participants, I have allocated a fifteen-minute introductory video call followed by two one-hour video calls to collect data. However, as the purpose of this interview was to practise my data collection, I did not wish to unnecessarily encroach on S's time so spent an hour and a half in total on the pilot interview.

We used just over an hour to explore her journey. I first asked a general question about her story to elicit her narrative and key events, we then constructed a visual timeline onscreen to sequence the events, and finally identified a key event (chosen by S) in more depth to discuss support. S told me beforehand that she had recently completed a Master's degree and undertaken qualitative research on the topic of EHE, so I used the last half an hour to share my interview schedule with her and seek her feedback on the layout and specific questions. She was particularly

helpful in that she was able to appreciate both the role of the interviewer and interviewee related to elective home education.

From S's feedback and my observations from the video recording of the interview, I learned the following:

- An honest and genuine explanation of my interest in EHE coupled with a personable interview style allowed S to feel able to trust me and open up to discuss her experiences. It will be important for me to communicate this to participants during the introductory video call as home educating parents can be suspicious of researchers.
- When introducing the general structure of the interview, I can mention that we will be identifying and exploring key events to cue participants into spontaneously highlighting these when they initially recount their story. Participants may also talk in terms of general themes during this, I can make a note of these and later use questions such as "can you give me an example of a time when..." to draw out key events from these themes.
- Having a structure that was flexible in terms of the order of focus areas (e.g., alternating between eliciting the overall narrative, creating a timeline, discussing key events) gave the interview a flow that was largely directed by S, which further supported her to feel at ease during the interview.
- To increase my attention to the participant and increase my use of immediate follow-up questions, I should take fewer notes, recording only necessary prompts for the current conversation. A structure with headings such as 'key event' 'idea to explore', 'question', 'other' would help with limiting my note taking.
- S identified a point (a couple of key events before deregistering) on her timeline where her preferred outcome changed from wanting her child to attend school to wanting to deregister her child; pinpointing this with participants may be helpful in terms of exploring the push-pull factors of school-EHE.
- I should ensure to leave a suitable amount of time at the end of the interview to ask if the participant has anything else that they would like to share as their response to this could be lengthy and require a substantial period of time to explore.

### **Reflection: Roundtable With Home Education Researchers (02.12.2021)**

I had a virtual meeting with nine other doctoral researchers who are also currently researching EHE. It was so interesting to hear about the diverse range of research into EHE that is currently being undertaken in UK universities.

The majority of the other researchers could be seen to occupy 'insider' researcher positions due to home educating their own children or being a previously home educated young person themselves. I noted that, despite their position, many described experienced similar recruitment barriers to the ones that I am experiencing in terms of gaining the trust of gatekeepers and the self-selected nature of their samples. These issues appear to be pervasive for EHE researchers and it led to an interesting reflection about the reasons for this.

We reflected on that, as researchers, we appear to occupy a middle ground of wanting to produce knowledge that bridges the gap between education policymakers and EHE practitioners to create better outcomes for both parties. However, it was felt that the education policymakers perhaps do not always take EHE research seriously given that it may be advocacy-based and is often based on self-selected samples of vocal EHE practitioners. Conversely, the gatekeepers of the EHE networks are often wary of researchers' agendas and intentions that underpin their interests in studying EHE, so may not allow researchers to advertise within their networks. And where research is advertised within EHE networks, typical EHE practitioners may not volunteer to participate if they feel that they do not have the same knowledge and experiences of the vocal EHE practitioners who are active in their network in advocating for EHE in public spheres by citing positive outcomes for CYP.

The 'us vs. them' dichotomy from both sides thus results in a self-perpetuating stalemate cycle for researchers in their recruitment, which ultimately affects the quality of their research.

We also hypothesised about potential ways forward to bring the two parties together and empower less knowledgeable, confident or experienced EHE practitioners, and considered the impact and importance of accessible knowledge exchange activities, such as podcasts.

### **Reflection: Harriet's Interviews (11.02.2022)**

Today, I conducted my second interview with Harriet, the only participant from my original target LA. Harriet had contacted me indicating interest in participating some months ago but had not yet deregistered her daughter from school. In her original contact, she described practices from the LA that she felt were letting down CYP with SEN and forcing families to home educate. Given that she ended up participating months later once she had deregistered her daughter, this gave me an insight into potential motivations that home educating parents might have for participating in the research study.

Harriet is the fourth participant that I have interviewed. It was interesting to reflect on how much harder I found it to listen to her story, which I believe is because I am on placement in the EPS of the same LA and it made Harriet's experience feel 'closer to home'. Although I was able to empathise with other participants regarding the emotional labour of their experiences, I found myself feeling uncomfortable emotions, including disbelief, anger and responsibility, as I heard how Harriet's account of how her daughter was let down by school professionals. I think that factors that played into this included having a greater understanding of the processes that should have been implemented, knowing the services that the family should have had access to, and recognising familiar names of centralised professionals.

This additional knowledge led me to ask Harriet more follow-up questions about the support that her daughter received at school and from centralised LA professionals. As my focus was on the personal significance of events, the additional questions themselves did not generate richer data but did help to build rapport with Harriet and develop a sense of attunement, which I recognised through an increased use of vocalisations that indicated agreement and the phrase "you know". As Harriet described herself as a reluctant home educator who would still prefer for her daughter to be in school, I believe that she may have considered me as an 'ingroup' researcher in that we were both interested in the inclusion of children with additional needs in schools in the LA. Research suggests that this perception could have supported Harriet to provide a richer account of her experiences data collection (based on the rapport) but also withhold aspects of her account if she assumes that I share certain knowledge with her (Berger, 2015). On a personal, and more selfish, note, I found it uncomfortable to discuss the shortcomings in a system that I am part of and ultimately felt relieved that I had been forced to recruit outside of the original target LA so that I was better able to emotionally distance myself from participants' accounts.

### **Reflection: Harriet's Analysis (12.02.2022)**

Harriet structured her account about the experiences of her daughter with regard to systems and systemic issues, such as, in terms of 'disadvantage' and 'safeguarding'. I expect that this perspective was informed by her job within the NHS where she works with families who may be experiencing similar issues. Harriet described the lack of support that her daughter received at school for her physical disability and resulting anxiety in a context of disadvantage, which I felt alluded to discriminatory practice under the Equality Act 2010. With regards to her daughter's mental health, Harriet further described the lack of support in school (including lack of contact when her daughter was unable to attend school but still on roll) as well as the lack of communication from the LA EHE team as amounting to a safeguarding issue. Her ability to reflect on the emotional challenge of her

family's experiences in conjunction with families that she had met in her job (including the support that they receive in response to their difficulties) really contextualised for me the role that Harriet perceives for LA professionals to support families who are considering entering into EHE. I feel that her perspective aligns closely with my position in this research.

On a personal level, the uncomfortable feelings that I noted yesterday after completing my interviews with Harriet persevered today, if not intensified, while I transcribed and coded the data. In the audio recordings, I could hear my growing disbelief and disappointment in responses to Harriet's account as she continued to document increasing challenges, first with her daughter's school and then centralised LA services. As I was coding, I had to keep reminding myself that Harriet's account was indeed just that, her experience of the system rather than the experience of every parent who has been a service user of the LA services that I work within. However, it is worth noting that I recognise similarities between Harriet's experiences and those of some parents whom I have interacted with in my role as a trainee EP, including those who have deregistered their children to attend independent school.

Having reflected on my experience of analysing Harriet's account and our close alignment in terms of regarding the transition to EHE as being shrouded in issues of a systemic nature, I now need to review my codes to ensure that I am not muddying my interpretations of Harriet's account with those of my own experiences, including accounts of other parents who live in the same LA.

## Appendix C: Recruitment Invitation

# I WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY!

Have you started home educating  
in the past two years?

Did you withdraw  
your child from school  
to home educate?



Do you have ideas about  
how families who are  
considering home education  
could be supported?

### Research Project

Exploring parents/carers' experiences of deciding to withdraw their child from school to home educate, and considering ideas for support for future families.

### Participant Involvement

- » Two one-hour video call interviews that explore your story through constructing and reflecting on a timeline of your journey towards deciding to home educate
- » Either one or two parents/carers from a family can participate
- » Participation is voluntary

### Eligibility Criteria

- » Entered into home education in the past 24 months
- » Child was previously enrolled at a Local Authority maintained (i.e. not independent) school
- » Not appealing against a Local Authority decision relating to your child's education
- » You are eligible if you have since re-enrolled your child at a school

If you are interested in participating or  
would like further information, please contact  
Eloise at [eloise.decarvalho@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:eloise.decarvalho@bristol.ac.uk).



This project has received ethical approval from the University of Bristol's School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee. If you have any queries or complaints about this research invitation, please contact Dr Jak Lee at [jak.lee@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jak.lee@bristol.ac.uk).



## **Appendix D: Recruitment Emails to Network Co-ordinators**

### **Email to network co-ordinators**

Dear [co-ordinator]

I hope you don't mind me emailing you; I found your email address on the [Local Authority] website as a contact for an elective home education network.

I am a doctoral Educational Psychology student at the University of Bristol currently on placement in [Local Authority]. I have previously conducted research with home educating families exploring the social experiences of adolescents (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10212-018-0398-5>).

I am currently researching parents/carers' experiences of deregistering their child from school to enter into elective home education. I wish to interview parents/carers to understand their journeys towards elective home education and explore their ideas about support/information/advice they would have appreciated from the Local Authority on this journey.

I would be grateful if you could let me know if you would agree to share my research within your network? I will provide a digital advert for you to share. If so, how many parents/carers would this be likely to reach?

Thank you for taking the time to read this email; I would be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Best wishes

Eloise de Carvalho

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
University of Bristol

### **Email to network co-ordinators to share recruitment invitation**

Dear [co-ordinator]

Thank you for agreeing to share a digital advert for my research; please find .png and .pdf versions attached. I would really appreciate it if you could please share this with the parents/carers in your network. I am hoping for around ten parents/carers to participate.

I am also happy for it to be shared more widely if you know of other parents/carers who may be eligible and interested in participating.

Many thanks

Eloise de Carvalho

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
University of Bristol

**Email to parents/carers to decline their participation**

Dear [parent/carers]

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study, I really appreciate it. Unfortunately, I currently have enough participants and cannot accommodate anymore. If this changes and a space becomes available, would you be happy for me to contact you to invite you to participate?

Best wishes

Eloise de Carvalho

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
University of Bristol

## Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet



8 Priory Road  
Bristol BS8 1TZ  
Tel: +44 (0)117 954 6755  
[bristol.ac.uk/sps](http://bristol.ac.uk/sps)

### Study Information

I am a trainee educational psychologist at the University of Bristol. For my doctoral dissertation, I am interested in exploring how parents/carers experience the journey of deciding to deregister their child from school to enter into elective home education. Within this, I also wish to explore ideas around how families on this journey could be supported (e.g., suggestions for Local Authority engagement). You are being invited to take part in my research study because you responded to my recruitment invitation.

This project has received ethical approval from the School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee, and will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

### Participation Requirements

If you choose to participate, I will first arrange a short video call to introduce myself and discuss your participation. You will take part in two (maximum one-hour each) interviews over Zoom. In these interviews, I will ask you about your experiences with your child's schooling as well as how you discovered elective home education and your journey into it; we will jointly construct a timeline of these experiences. We will reflect on the timeline to consider what information/advice/support you think would have been helpful for you at different points along your journey and thus could support future families.

Because the interviews are about *your* journey, we may speak briefly about your child's experiences of schooling, but we will not explore these in detail and will focus on your perspective. If you feel that recollecting your story may cause you to become upset, you may wish to ensure beforehand that someone you trust will be available to speak to after your interview. Additionally, if you disclose information that makes me concerned for the safety of you or another person, I have a duty of care to report serious harm to the appropriate safeguarding authority.

Participation in this study is voluntary. This research is being conducted independently of Local Authorities, and as such, Local Authority professionals (e.g., members of the Education Safeguarding team) will *not* be informed about who chooses to participate. However, you cannot participate in this research if you are (currently or considering or start) disputing a Local Authority decision relating to your child's education (e.g., relating to an Education, Health and Care Plan). If you become involved in a dispute with the Local Authority, please let me know so that I can delete the material you have shared with me.

You can ask to withdraw from the study at any time without reason. If you ask before the point of write-up (1<sup>st</sup> March 2022), your data and information will be deleted. It may not be possible to withdraw your data after this point.

### **Use of Participants' Data**

The interviews will be recorded to aid transcription of your data; only the audio recordings will be downloaded, other recorded files will be deleted directly after the interview. Each audio recording will be deleted once the interview has been transcribed. The data from the interviews (i.e., transcripts and timelines) will be primarily used in a research report (my dissertation), as well as a potential research report for the Local Authority, presentations to interested parties and/or journal article publications. In any use of the data, measures will be taken to protect anonymity. For example, you will be assigned a pseudonym and identifying details (e.g., names, locations, specific details of experiences) will be changed or omitted in the transcripts and timelines. However, it should be noted that anonymity cannot be guaranteed and there is a chance that somebody who is familiar with your experiences may be able to recognise you from your data.

For future research and learning, anonymised interview transcripts will be deposited on the University of Bristol's Data Research Repository under a restricted access arrangement, in which researchers must sign a data sharing agreement before they can access the transcripts.

### **Researcher Contact Details**

If you are interested in participating, or require further information, please reply to this email ([eloise.decarvalho@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:eloise.decarvalho@bristol.ac.uk)), with the completed consent form attached if appropriate. The project is supervised by Dr Jak Lee, Assistant Programme Director for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of Bristol. If you have any queries or complaints, please contact Dr Lee at [jak.lee@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jak.lee@bristol.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely,



Eloise de Carvalho

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Date: 29.04.2021

## Appendix F: Consent Form



8 Priory Road  
Bristol BS8 1TZ  
Tel: +44 (0)117 954 6755  
[bristol.ac.uk/sps](http://bristol.ac.uk/sps)

**Informed consent for 'Exploring the decision-making journeys of parents/carers who withdraw their child from school to enter into elective home education, and potential opportunities for Local Authority engagement'**

	Please click the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
<b>Taking part in the study</b>			
I have read and understood the study information dated 29.04.2021. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer any questions.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can withdraw from the study before 01.03.2022 without having to give a reason and I have the right to request that all information held about me is deleted before this point.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in the study involves one fifteen-minute introductory video call as well as two one-hour video call interviews.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the video calls being recorded and downloaded as audio files for the purposes of transcription with personal details omitted, and understand that the audio recordings will be deleted once the interview has been transcribed.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that if I disclose information that makes the researcher concerned for the safety of myself or another person, they have a duty of care to report this to the appropriate safeguarding authority.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not (currently or considering) appealing a Local Authority decision relating to my child's education.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Use of the information in the study</b>			
I understand that my data (e.g., audio recordings, anonymised transcripts) will be stored as password protected files on the university server.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that information I provide will be used for a doctoral dissertation and may also be used in research reports, presentations and journal article publications.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the researcher.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I consent to my anonymised (i.e., personal information and identifying details removed) interview transcripts (including timelines) being quoted in research outputs.

☐☐

**Future use and reuse of the information by others**

I give permission for the anonymised transcripts that I provide to be deposited in the University of Bristol's Research Data Repository under a restricted access arrangement.

☐☐

**Signature**

*Name*

*Signature*

*Date*

**Study contact details for further information**

Eloise de Carvalho: [eloise.decarvalho@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:eloise.decarvalho@bristol.ac.uk)

## Appendix G: Interview Schedule

*Red font denotes changes made after pilot interview on 21.07.2021.*

### Introductory Video Call

#### *Guide*

- Thank for agreeing to participate, explain purpose of this call (introductions, recap study information, opportunity to ask questions).
- If consent form not returned, read out consent form and confirm consent (record and transcribe). If consent form returned, recap information sheet and consent form to confirm ongoing consent.
- Ask about participant: LA, age of home educated child, when they deregistered, any other children (education status), occupation (or previous), who else is in the family household, what motivated them to respond to the advert?
- Introduce self, **role as TEP**, past EHE research **(including current motivation and interest)**, purpose of study.
- Recap information sheet: focus of experiences (theirs not child's, before deregistering, not current EHE), limits of confidentiality.
- Check familiarity with Zoom.
- Arrange dates and times of interviews.
- Check for questions, suggest email if any in meantime.

### Interviews

#### *Starting the Interview*

- Recap information sheet and consent form to confirm ongoing consent.
- **"I'm going to start by asking you about your general journey of deciding to deregister your child from school to enter into home education. We'll identify key events within this to create a timeline and then reflect on these in more detail."**

#### *Core Question*

"Tell me about your journey that led you to **deregister** your child from school to enter into home education. Start from wherever in your child's education you feel is appropriate."

#### *Topic Prompts*

- Parents' experience of aspects of child's schooling that led to consideration of deregistration.
- Discovery of, and learning about, elective home education.
- Consideration of feasibility of undertaking elective home education.
- Process of deregistering child from school.

#### *Follow-Up Questions*

Explore additional examples, explanations, extensions, clarifications, descriptions (using participant's own language).

- "Could you tell me more about...?"
- "Could you describe...?"
- "Could you tell me your experiences of...?"
- "How did it feel...?"
- "Is there a particular memory...?"
- "What was the importance of ...?"

- “What did ... mean to you?”
- “What impact did ... have for you?”
- “What were you thinking...?”
- “Can you give me an example of a time when...?”

#### *Timeline Reflection*

“I would now like for us to take it a step further and reflect on the timeline to imagine what information/advice/support you would have appreciated at key timepoints from the local authority, and think may be helpful for future families who are in a similar situation.”

#### *Prompts for Reflecting on Timeline Points*

- Main concern at this time
- Push–pull factors of school–EHE
- Preferred outcome at that time
- Information/advice/support they had with main concern (formal and informal)
- Ideal involvement for preferred outcome (what/where/whom)
- Potential role for LA involvement

#### *Follow-Up Questions*

- “What would ... mean to you?”
- “What would be the importance of...?”
- “What impact do you think ... could have had?”

#### *Ending the Interview*

- “Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?”
- “How was it for you to tell me your story?”
- “I appreciate your openness; thank you for sharing your experiences and ideas with me. I’m now going to transcribe our interviews and consider them alongside interviews from other participants to explore patterns and identify common themes and possible roles for the local authority.”
- “How have you found this process?”
- “What questions do you have for me as we end our time together?”

#### **Note-Taking Structure for Interviews**

Key event	Idea to explore	Question	Other

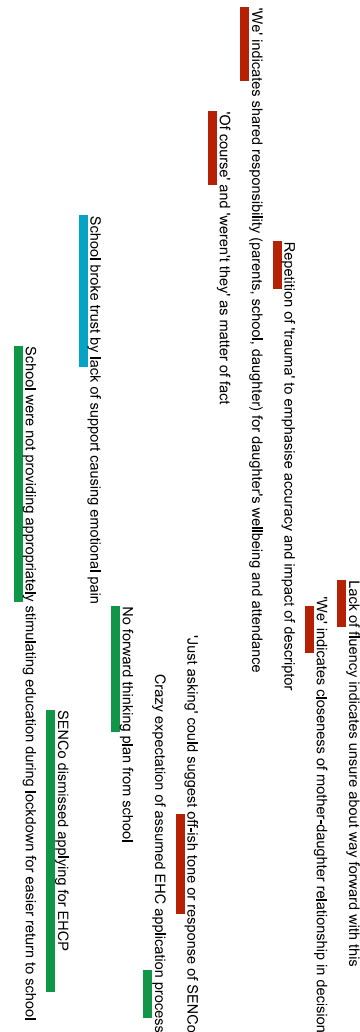


## Appendix H: Example Analysis of a Participant's Account

00:08:03 Researcher: It sounds like you were the one suggesting the things as well, as in suggesting trying to 'up' the time, and that kind of thing. It sounds like there wasn't...

00:08:15 Harriet: Yeah because, it was when we got to June, and then it was like, 'can we have a meeting because what are we going to do in September?', because I could see she wouldn't want to go back in September, because she kept saying, "can I just stay at home and home school?". And of course, they were starting to be a bit more savvy about it, the teenagers, they're starting to know, 'oh there's an alternative', weren't they, and I think... she was so very, very unhappy at the school, that I think it was... she would have found any excuse now, then at that point, not to go because actually she... she couldn't see why she had to subject herself to all of that trauma, and it really was trauma. I mean, she had ten weeks of psychotherapy, and I mean, this was *such* inbuilt trauma from school, nothing ever from outside of school, it's all school related, and so... I feel sad because you trust them with your child and you assume they're going to give them the right education and the right support. And it was in June when they sort of said, 'oh well year eight's been a write off', and it's like, 'well there's no excuse for that', because... through the whole of lockdown they were just sending home quizzes, there was never anything substantial, so I think the children got quite lazy anyway, with learning, because it was like, well, you can just sit in bed, iPad, quizzes. So I think then they got into that and then to know they were then going back to school full time was probably a bit of a shock for all children, let alone somebody who's absolutely dreading it. So I think at that point, yeah, there could have just been more... return to school in a better way, I think, it was just... Like I say, we quickly agreed to the three... [my daughter] quickly agree to three hours a week, but... there was never any change from that. She couldn't manage more than that, so I think that that's part of it, I can't say that that wasn't... right, her doing the three hours a week. But there just was never a plan, I never had a meeting with the SEN. I mean, we had a few emails where she was... I was saying, "oh apparently [my daughter] can have an EHCP", and then she was like, "oh you won't get one because there's a child in this school with a pacemaker and they haven't got an EHCP", and it was like, 'oh I didn't know, I was just asking the question'. I mean, I never had an EHCP for [my eldest son], so I was just asking the question because that's what the psychotherapist that, she should have an EHCP. So I just asked a question like, "oh, shouldn't [my daughter] have an EHCP?", and then she's... "well you won't get..." and kind of a bit... And that was my only real conversation with her. It was like, 'oh okay', and then I said, "well, apparently you can do a parental one, a parental request", so I said, "I'll do that but I understand it's going to be

Coding Density



rejected because apparently you get rejected the first time and then you appeal and then you might get one". And I thought, 'oh this is all crazy...'. And I was thinking... for SEN needs, and then somebody said, "well they should be doing an SEN assessment anyway". But when I picked them up on that in July... when I emailed in September and said, "oh she never had an SEN assessment", they said, "no we went to do it but [your daughter] was off", and I said, "but she'd been going from April to July... why has that not happened?", and then I said, "and can you tell me if she's on the SEN register?", which is at that point they said, "no". And then I said, "oh"... And by then we're now going into October with those couple of emails, but all of those were all driven by my concerns as a... like, maternal concerns, without a doubt, they were... I don't think the school were worried... See it's funny, because they send you these reports, '95% attendance equals success' sort of thing. And you're like... I got really peeved off because I said, "she has done more than 95% attendance because you've agreed three hours, she's been there every week, three hours, so she's actually exceeded the 95% attendance". But it said that she'd only had 60% or something, which can't be mathematically correct because she wouldn't have been there 60%, she was only there three hours a week. So I said to them, "well that is a success if we've agreed three hours a week, she's 100% attendance" sort of thing, and it really annoyed me because I was just like, 'hang on here, she's doing all of what she's agreed and actually you're not giving her that time'. So I think part of me thinks that they weren't bothered about attendance in one way, but actually... I think it was either, they want you there or they don't want you there, I don't think they could manage any flexi schooling or any change in what was expected. And I think that that was never really talked about until June, when they said, "well, oh yeah maybe we could try and increase it by 10 minutes a day", and, "oh yeah, you're right maybe we should do a bit more". So it was a bit strange, the attendance in the early days, I would say, it wasn't very clear.

00:13:29 Researcher: You mentioned before that you were so shocked at how little communication the school had with you, and that kind of thing. What did that mean to you? What was the significance of that lack of communication?

00:13:50 Harriet: It just meant you couldn't progress, there was no plan, there was no... I mean, they didn't know... like I've said to you all along... they didn't know what we're like, really. I know they do kind of know because they met me a lot for [my eldest son], and they know I'm a nurse... But they don't really know, and that has surprised me, that they haven't got to know us as a family unit, or... there's been that kind of...



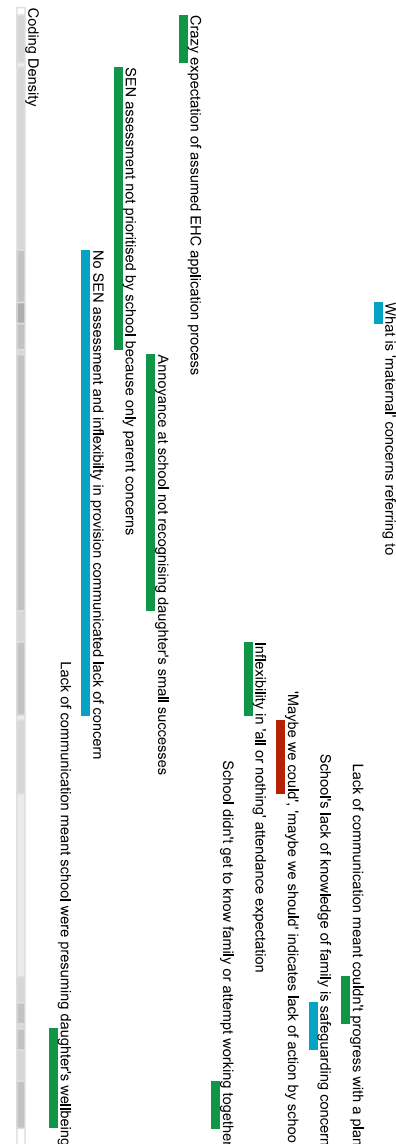
Descriptive comments



Linguistic comments



Conceptual comments



## Appendix I: Participant Representation Across Themes

Master Table of Participant Representation Across Themes

Theme			Participant						
Superordinate theme	Theme	Subtheme	Anne	Charlotte	Emma	Harriet	Isabel	Maria	Nancy
Sensitivity to needs	Experiences of dissatisfaction with insensitive mainstream state school provision	Recognising constraints on school professionals	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Preferring different teaching and learning practices		X		X	X	X	X
		Feeling pressured by the local authority focus on attendance		X	X		X		
		Worrying about child's wellbeing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Suggestions for recognising the individual needs of families	Treat every child and family on an individual basis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Prioritise inclusive approaches in learning	X			X	X	X	X
		Communicate supportively with families about attendance		X	X	X	X		
		Prioritise children's wellbeing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trust in support	Experiences of losing trust in local authority education services	Seeking communication with school about concerns	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Seeking response to child's needs	X	X	X	X		X	X
		Feeling overlooked due to child's level of need		X		X	X	X	X
		Losing trust in receiving support from the local authority	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Suggestions for responding to	Be transparent about the graduated response to needs	X		X	X			X

	parental concerns	Review support provided by school professionals	X	X	X	X			X
		Mediate the home-school relationship		X	X		X		
Problem-solving	Experiences of problem-solving unsustainable situations	Fighting to get support for child from system	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Feeling alone in identifying ways forward	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Worrying about deregistering child	X	X	X	X	X		
		Relying on informal sources of support		X	X	X	X	X	
		Reflecting on 'electing' to home educate	X	X		X			X
	Suggestions for empowering parents to make an informed decision	Empower parents with information		X		X	X		X
		Support parents who have fewer resources	X		X	X		X	X
		Recognise the potential for positive outcomes from EHE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

#### Example Quotes From Codebook for Theme of 'Experiences of Dissatisfaction With Insensitive Mainstream State School Provision'

Subtheme	Quote	Participant
Recognising constraints on school professionals	It signified they were terribly under-resourced. But they've been under-resourced for so long, it was it's almost like they'd just got used to it and became complacent. And I understand that when you have... And as a matter of fact, literally, what did the SEN coordinator say to me? So I tried to call her, and I was like, "hey can we talk about this?", and she said, and by the way, I literally tried to call her maybe four or five times over nearly three years, so I'm not badgering her or anything, and I tried to call her after I got one of these silly reports and she's like, "I have 300 other kids to deal with".	Anne
	It was too much for one teacher with 30 children to take on by themselves, with no support from anyone else as well. I feel bad for the teacher, as well, she was she was not a bad teacher, she was a good teacher that my daughter liked, it's just that she couldn't do what needed to be done, it was too much.	Charlotte

	But nothing ever seemed to have happened and when I spoke to her on one occasion I remember her saying, “yeah we’ve been in contact with the head of year nine but we haven’t heard back from him yet”, and I remember, I was thinking, it’s not just me then that he doesn’t get back to. And I know he has 300 kids that he has to look after and it’s just him and an assistant... So yeah they seem to have... both them and the new school, the information hasn’t been very timely.	Emma
	And I know that the school’s busy, I don’t judge them, but I just feel like... In fact, just knowing that the teacher that he was with, because she was... well I’d heard that she basically thought that was the worst class she’d had in many years of her teaching, because it had basically been going round that she was very stressed and shouting at the children and... there were a lot of behaviour issues. I think what was happening is she was getting bogged down with that, so obviously just [my son]’s needs weren’t getting met, because it was low down in the priority?	Maria
	I was becoming increasingly disenamoured with the school environment, the amount of space and time children are given to really grow, the amount of provision that it’s possible to make in a class of 30 for individual characteristics, the... As a teacher that’s very well-intentioned myself, good at differentiation, but there’s differentiation in terms of activities or levels of something you ask a child to do, and there’s differentiation in terms of how much nurturing you can give them and it’s just... it’s hard, at secondary especially. And sometimes kids get swept under the carpet, you see it.	Nancy
Preferring different teaching and learning practices	I felt so much freer to just come and do and go as we please. Suddenly we don’t have to worry if we have done 6000 phonics in one day, that’s all dreadfully boring, or that I’ve read like eight books that, like the school books are worse than the Biff and Chip books that we had when we were kids, they’re just so boring. Suddenly, I didn’t have to sit and read those anymore, we can do something that she’s passionate about, she likes, I like, we can all join in, her younger sister can join in, her dad can join in, we all do stuff together, we all learn together.	Charlotte
	She said, “oh, we can’t go in there, there’s a small group working”, and I said, “oh that’s interesting, it’s that for SEN?” and she said, “yeah we have it in all year groups for SEN”, and I was like, ‘oh, why are they not doing that at [my daughter’s school]?’ I was shocked really. So I think I was like, ‘oh maybe there is an alternative for [my daughter] not to go to this school’, and that’s when you start looking around and seeing what is there and what other things can she do that will mean that she gets a good education, and that’s when you end up... home educating really.	Harriet
	So he was getting all this extra support, but there was no effort made to bring him back into the bigger classroom. It just felt like a lot of school was just a waste of time for [my son]. And I think, even if he’s just at home playing games, he’s learning more than he was at school, where he was just... switched off, bored, confused, lost, anxious. And when you’re feeling anxious, you’re not in a state for learning, are you? So he wasn’t... even if he was capable of understanding what the information he was being given, he wasn’t capable of taking it in that mental state, so it just was not working for him.	Isabel
	Haven’t we evolved from when I was at school? You’d hope that there’d be a new way of learning, you’d think... I’m definitely a big fan of Sir Ken Robinson and the creative learning instead... because I’m a creative person, [my husband] is also a creative person, and creativity is probably one of our most important ways of thinking. So yeah just, I felt like there wasn’t a creative way of teaching my son.	Maria

	Because, being in the classroom, you realise how many distractions there are from other children, behaviour-wise, despite the fact that I was a really good teacher, you know the impact that that has on learning over time... as well as it being an artificial environment, frankly. So we spent a lot of time outside and I always used to wish to myself that there would be a way of setting up some kind of cooperatives, I used to have a bit of a fantasy about working together with friends that had different strengths that we could use to home educate our children.	Nancy
Feeling pressured by the local authority focus on attendance	I felt like it was all about the headteacher wanting numbers, the minute that [my daughter] wasn't there she became an absence, this woman does not want an absence. And days later that was absolutely confirmed by me not sending [my daughter] back again. And the headteacher getting hold of me and saying, "what are you doing? What are you doing with [your daughter]?"	Charlotte
	That didn't feel like a space that we were entitled to... we were constantly being pushed. And we did a bit of that ourselves, but definitely... And I think we did it because we felt pressured from the school and the local authority, as we were perceiving ourselves... that we were not being seen as bad parents, so we would go along with that, sometimes, and then I think as we became wise and we were watching the patterns, we tried to resist that, but there was just... When you're just being told about legal processes, it's very hard for you to feel like you can do anything but be pushed along by that.	Emma
	I just don't really know but there just felt this pressure for numerical improvement, not... there was no assessment of [my son]'s... how he felt, how comfortable he felt. It was just obsessive around percentage of time spent in that building... It's just such a crude measure of success... probably kids going to that school all day and they're not listening to what the teacher says, but no one's worried about that just well, I mean I'm sure they are worried about that, but it just felt weird. So yeah there just felt that that constant pressure to go too fast.	Emma
	And the letter that we got from the local authority, it was really scary and harsh, just the wording of it and... And especially the fact that I had been... I had been the one to raise it, saying... I had approached school saying, "his attendance is really poor, can you help me help him?". And then to get this angry letter was really horrible... and school were apologetic about that but basically said there's nothing they can do. Yeah it was the school and the local authority, because the school, I was think I was saying last week, I'd ring up and it was a scary phone call every single day.	Isabel
	And it felt like ringing in sick to work when you know you're just a bit hungover or something and you're basically just taking the piss a bit, you... you feel guilty about it and you put on that sickly voice. It felt that, and it was horrible... and they do that, don't they, because they know that if parents feel bad about it, they're more likely to force their kid to go.	Isabel
Worrying about child's wellbeing	But I could see from her work, I went to parents evening, I can just see from her work that it was just... she started off at the beginning of the year writing and by the end of the year, she was so distracted by her fear that her words were... it was just scribbling on the page, which is obviously really worrying to see.	Charlotte
	So I think the feelings and the impact it had on me, was I was already, having been quite a robust person and never had any sort of mental health issues, waking up in the morning feeling pretty anxious myself, sweaty... nowhere near a panic attack, but feeling really quite high levels of anxiety as soon as I woke up which I was not familiar with at all.	Emma

	I think it was just the fact that... I just couldn't accept... I didn't feel like I had any control about what was going on with [my son], but I also didn't feel like I could do anything about it, but I also couldn't accept it. And it was... just seeing your child... you can put up with any amount of pain and heartache yourself but seeing your child's suffering is so awful.	Isabel
	And then you'd take him to school and there was that crying, and you think, 'oh is this normal?' and then just... the look of worry on his face. I thought, 'is this... maybe normal?'; you don't know. 'Okay, why does my son not say hello to anyone on the way to school? Why is he so anxious? Why is he wanting to just stay so close to me and not socialise?'	Maria
	There were a couple of instances of bullying... low level... I'm not sure there is such a thing, personally, because we don't know how it affects the recipient... But from one or two of the more boisterous boys to [my eldest son] and then a couple of times I walked past the playground and he'd be wandering around on his own and it just did not feel good in my heart, and this is reception.	Nancy

#### Example Quotes From Codebook for Theme of 'Suggestions for Responding to Parental Concerns'

Subtheme	Quote	Participant
Be transparent about the graduated response to needs	It was just an absolute shambles, everything was a shambles, there was... he was supposed to have a computer that's just for him, that would provide continuity to his education, so he could store files on it, so he could work on it, and it's a coping mechanism for someone who can't write very quickly. So he could use speech to text. We had asked for... we knew he was entitled to one, they said he was entitled to one, I asked every couple of months, we never got one. We never got any of the resources that he was supposed to have.	Anne
	I kept asking the head of year, "so what's the framework for supporting childhood mental health issues? Who's in charge, who's in charge of this?" Because the SENCo, technically, my understanding would be that they never got involved and yet... everything I heard that person's role, it was very much about, learning difficulties... it was a SENCo... but it didn't seem to cover all the areas that some SENCos cover. I often didn't get a reply on emails about questions like that.	Emma
	I didn't think they gave us enough... maybe, gave us enough information, perhaps as well, I think with regards to what we should expect going forward, there wasn't really a discussion around policy or SEN or support or, as well, so that's possibly something.	Harriet
	That's a really important uncovering, isn't it. It's like, there needs to be a process in every... like a systems diagram in every school. So there's no... Because it's so easy to have grey areas and ambiguity and everyone's had a busy day, isn't it, but it's almost like, 'if this happens, this happens next, this happens next, this happens next'. Yeah I completely agree, of course that should have happened, now I look back.	Nancy
	Yeah and it should be transparent, again, as well shouldn't it. There should be a flow diagram of what you can expect, so that you can actually hold your local authority or whatever, or your school even, accountable. My child is here, what's going on? There's no power in that way because it's all hidden.	Nancy

Review support provided by school professionals	And I actually didn't even believe it, people were telling me, 'I think they're fobbing him off', I'm like 'no, no, they're just busy, it's fine, they're just...'. It literally took me three years of being fobbed off before I was like, 'oh, maybe they don't care, maybe this is it'. So if I had had an advocate from the very beginning, as a parent of a SEN child, on my side, I could have said... they could have actually held them to task.	Anne
	It wasn't like a big, planned event, it was just the teacher trying to do little things and then she had this support worker at lunch times, but apart from that it never really went any... they didn't really plan for it to go any further than that. So that's where I felt a bit stuck because I felt like it needed something, she needed something more than just what the teacher could give her. She's spread over 30 kids, so yeah she needed something more than that, I think, and that was... is where another party could have come in, that would have been helpful I think, definitely for support.	Charlotte
	But basically, I thought they would then be a broker between me and the school, that's how it seemed it was going to work to begin with. And I was like, great they can hold the school to account and say... because she said to me, they must be doing everything to get him into school... before we go... before you go anywhere else, they must be proving that they're doing everything they can, I was like, great, there's perhaps six things on our list that we still want action on.	Emma
	I think at the point of... where you're being almost advised to go to a different school. At that point, I think it would have been quite helpful to have had that. And thank goodness I stood up for ourselves and said, "well hang on here, you've not even tried to get her back even longer, can we not at least try?".	Harriet
	But in terms of... looking into it in a more deep way and looking into... I suppose just beginning... I suppose, unpicking what was going on in the classroom perhaps or something like that, nobody was really doing that. It was all very, 'let's put a plaster on it, let's put a plaster on it'. Yeah? So there was no middle ground, no, 'let's actually look at what's going on and give this young person some strategies or try and put some strategies in place'. There was no... It didn't get to that.	Nancy
Mediate the home-school relationship	So obviously I was very cross. I just sent a deregistration letter and I did toy with, 'shall I get... shall I complain, shall I... make this known?', I did toy with it. And then I thought, 'no because if [my daughter] ever wants to go back, this is probably the best school in the area, unfortunately... well, that I can get to... so if she does ever want to go back, if I start making complaints and make a big noise about it, she's not going to be welcomed back to that school easily'. So I didn't say anything.	Charlotte
	You feel really caught between... you want to get the best for your child, and you don't want to be an unreasonable parent and it kind of puts you in a really difficult position to fight for what you feel you should get. So I think a neutral broker there, who knows the school's resources, who's got some expertise in the area, but can do something about those power dynamics that are inevitable, would have been really useful.	Emma
	But it still amazes me that I was never invited in for a meeting face-to-face with all that we had gone through for such a long period of time. And yet, I was going to be invited in for the beginning of the legal proceedings. So I feel like somebody, a neutral broker, could have literally pulled us together and made us sit in a room together, that would have been a start. The longest face-to-face chat was outside the school, the day before we left, which just feels crazy.	Emma



	They just had stopped replying to my emails, like I'm not a really pushy and annoying mum, I just want him to be at school, we want the same thing, can we just talk about it? They didn't reply to my emails until I said, 'I've had this letter'. But I think also I screwed up because I put... I was never sure who to send them to, so I'd put his form tutor and the attendance officer and someone else and the head of year, and I guess they all thought someone else was going to reply and I'm like, 'well, they didn't'.	Isabel
	We had a meeting, but it just took so long. So I was contacting his tutor, his head of year, the head, the attendance lady, and just not getting anywhere, just nobody... And again because it was Covid, probably if it wasn't Covid, they'd have got me straight in there for a meeting. But because it was Covid... but I didn't even get a phone call, I didn't even get a response to an email. So yeah, I just needed... not necessarily for them to do anything but just to feel a bit heard, I suppose, just to be invited into a meeting to talk about it and see if there was just anything that could be done.	Isabel

#### Example Quotes From Codebook for Theme of 'Experiences of Problem-Solving Unsustainable Situations'

Subtheme	Quote	Participant
Fighting to get support for child from system	And essentially it's a massive battle to get EOTAS, it's not forthcoming, they're not like, 'oh let's see if we can manage this', it wasn't even offered, they basically said, "we don't really have resources for this, and good luck to you if you...", that came from the council, they're like, "it's not going to happen, technically we're supposed to provide it, but we don't actually have the resources to provide it".	Anne
	I often didn't get a reply on emails about questions like that, and I could have pushed... but... when your energy is so needed for other things... I couldn't be fighting them, I needed to be supporting my son. So you're in a very vulnerable position as a parent in that you... at a point where it's impacting on your mental health, you've got to say, "right, what is the priority here? The priority is making sure I'm okay so I can support him, and he's okay. I can't take on the local authority, the DfE and the school. I don't do that right now".	Emma
	It was just exhausting, you're just fighting... I mean we've paid taxes since we were 16, me and my husband, we've always worked, we're so compliant it's ridiculous. And then to not have an education for your child is just like, 'oh my God, what is this country coming to?'.	Harriet
	When I spoke to the teacher about my concerns, there was just no... there was no... interest, if you like, in the social aspect of it because, 'as long as they're doing well academically'. But for me, that's not important, for me at the moment, still, it's for him developing his emotions and interacting with his peers so that's... I felt like I wanted him to have help with that, that's what I felt like he needed.	Maria
	It's like this game of tennis in that a child would reach a point where they're talking about doing something to themselves or something that's really concerning. And that would trigger the response of, 'tell the parents to take them to the GP, let's do a CAMHS referral'. Call CAMHS, talk to CAMHS, and then it gets hit back across the court to the school, and... 'but at least	Nancy

	you've got the name in a database somewhere for the next time it happens', and at least their name is in a database somewhere for the next time it happens, and then they might actually get in there, so... I just don't trust them.	
Feeling alone in identifying ways forward	I felt really unsure in this phase, because nothing seemed to be working. So I spent very sleepless nights thinking, 'oh God, what am I going to do if this next tactic doesn't work?'. And trying all these different things with her, and just each thing didn't work or just went even worse than we imagined. So I was very unsure of what was going to happen at all.	Charlotte
	I think, basically, at that point we were probably doing a lot of the support with [my son] and talking less to the school, it definitely became much more... we tried to work on his resilience and I'm trying to think when I did that mindfulness course... We contacted the school a little bit, but not a lot at that point. So [my son] had some kind of friendship issue group changes with friendships and things like that and we just tried to do a lot of that sort of support ourselves.	Emma
	We were doing our bit, there was nothing happening their end, and so it just... I don't know, it just felt like they gave up or... not gave up that sounds rude, but I just don't think they tried very hard. I don't think they even addressed her SEN needs to be honest. But they cannot... she needed a small classroom, and they said, "her options are, she sits in learning support and copies out her homework book or she goes into a classroom". I said, "well she can't manage in a classroom currently and she's still having lots of treatment, she's waiting for CBT", and all this.	Harriet
	What I was looking for, and [my husband] and I felt, was that he needs more help socialising. Because he likes being by himself and I thought, 'well, maybe that's something that we could help him with', and we went to see a speech and language therapist about it because we thought, 'well, is there anything... are there any issues with...'. We thought maybe there might be some special needs, additional needs. Because he just did like to always play by himself.	Maria
	So hope for the future, I suppose, instead of... feeling like you have to do it all yourself, which is basically what I feel like I did. I did it all by myself. And I know that that's not an option that's open to every parent because they might not know where to go for the information. And my previous career had given me insight into what I would want to see, and what I think should happen next. Whereas a lot of people, they just keep on filling in the cracks and trying to get through the next day, and the next day, and the next day.	Nancy
Worrying about deregistering child	So that's why before the pandemic, I was like... it was basically like trying to... step off a ledge and think to yourself, 'well I've heard that if I flap my arms hard enough, I might be able to fly'. And you're like, 'but I don't think that's really true, I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that, I don't want to risk... I don't want that; I don't like it'.	Anne
	The wobbles started in the pandemic, when I started thinking about it, and I was wobbling about it, like, 'oooooh I'm going to... is it going to hurt her...?'. I did a lot of research into the psychological effects that it could have, I looked at whether there's homeschooling children out there now that were homeschooled years ago, are they happy? I did all the research, which is... I don't know whether it's helpful to do that really because each child is different, so you never know how it's going to turn out, but I did know that I couldn't keep sending her to that situation, so yeah.	Charlotte

	I think I thought about it a very personal level for quite like a low-level amount of time just thinking, 'could I do it? How would that impact on my work? Would we be able to keep bringing in income because I'm the main income person in the house?' And I was kind of like, 'okay, how is that going to work?'	Emma
	But I think my concern was that it was never going to be enough, it was just never going to be quite enough and you need structure and you need learning. I've been to university a couple of times so I'm used to being taught in that way, that, 'this is what you need to learn' and they teach you and you learn it, it was quite a lot of thinking differently, for me, so to really change those thoughts.	Harriet
	I definitely was... apprehensive about telling people that I've done it. I've got a lot of friends that are doctors and things, so they obviously value education and wouldn't in a million years consider home ed... ever. And even if they were able to, but obviously their jobs wouldn't allow that, but they... Education has been a huge part of their lives, they want their children to do well academically and lots of money and all the rest of it so the thought of telling some of those people that I'd made this choice was quite scary.	Isabel
Relying on informal sources of support	I joined all of them and then one of my friends put me in touch with a woman who is a home edder, a long time... like a vet, a veteran home edder, because they're friends. And I just messaged her and was like, 'I know of you through a mutual friend, thought I'd say hi, we're going to home ed', and she became my link into the home ed world.	Charlotte
	All of the support I had around that was informal. So I mentioned talking to a friend who had homeschooled... done home education. I talked to a good friend who had been very aware of the process. I talked to the CBT therapist person who'd been supporting me with my parenting of the situation and so all of the sources of support there were informal and they were great sources of support.	Emma
	So then I started to read up, I read the local council's websites on home education. The [local authority] one's not very good actually, the [neighbouring local authority] one's much better, you could get much more information off that. And then I looked at... I mean I've still not heard anything from the home education team at [local authority] and I rang them in December so. Apparently you get sent a pack of information. So I haven't really had that information, so just been what I've been able to find out myself by reading the Facebook pages.	Harriet
	So she kind of knew a bit about it, she was like, "it's really easy, you just get in touch with the local authority and..." so was saying she'd done all this planning and stuff and they said, "no you don't need to do all of that or show us all of it", she was like, "yeah you could totally do it, and I wouldn't suggest it if I didn't think that you could", obviously she knows me really well.	Isabel
	So it was mainly through my friend who was already home educating. Yeah for a while our lives were very parallel because my child was at mainstream and her schedule was very different, so I was aware of that. But it was really good to have her support, because it was, like I say, in Covid, then I was like, 'oh, actually, this is not working out, us doing homeschooling', as in having to log on and he wasn't enjoying that at all.	Maria
	It would have meant my kid stayed in school, it would have meant that my kid had a... better education. I'm not so foolhardy to think that I can provide the same diverse education that 20 different teachers can. I'm a substitution, I'm just doing the	Anne

Reflecting on 'electing' to home educate	best I can. But if the council had enforced this flexible approach to education, using all the resources available to each and every child individually, that would have meant he would stay in school, that would have meant that I would have been more comfortable with his education, I wouldn't have had to rethink it, that would have been great.	
	So I think I knew about it, but I just didn't know much about it in my area, as such. I don't know, I guess it's always been there and it's always been in the back of my mind, because... We just like to be chill about life and sometimes we just want to go off on holiday, not come back when we have to and... I hate this nine to three thing that we're attached to but I always thought that it was completely unobtainable.	Charlotte
	I don't feel there's anything elective about this home education, it is... there is no choice. They say there's a choice, there is no choice. I sent an email yesterday to the head of the safeguarding education, because they sent the letter saying, 'we see you're now electively home educating...', and I've sent a letter and said, "it's not elective, 'elective' is choice but not necessary, this was necessary but not a choice; to me, using the word 'elective' is wrong, and I feel quite strongly about that", so I sent that yesterday.	Harriet
	I think it's a massive responsibility that I didn't really want to be quite honest. I didn't want to be sorting out her education, I've got enough to do. I'm flabbergasted that you're just left to get on with it to be really honest, because I think of some of the families I work with and they can't even fill forms out, and how are you then supposed to educate your child? So I feel a bit flabbergasted that that's just expected, 'oh you've just got to find it now, and you've got to pay for it and get on with it'. And you're like, 'well actually, I never even wanted to be in this position'.	Harriet
	It would have meant... trust... in that system, and it would have meant that... they've got your back, they've got my child, they've got us, they are able to provide each level for different children. That's what it would have meant, that there is a system here that works, I suppose, is what it would have meant. Instead of there's not a system, or the system doesn't work; it's not fit for purpose.	Nancy

## Appendix J: Approved Ethics Application Form and Amendments

Ethics Application Form (Approved 07.05.2021)



### SPS RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM: STAFF and DOCTORAL STUDENTS

- This proforma must be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School for Policy Studies, both staff and doctoral postgraduate students.
- See the Ethics Procedures document for clarification of the process.
- All research **must** be ethically reviewed before any fieldwork is conducted, regardless of source of funding.
- See the School's policy and guidelines relating to research ethics and data protection, to which the project is required to conform.
- Please stick to the word limit provided. **Do not attach** your funding application or research proposal.

#### Key project details:

1. **Proposer's Name:**
2. **Proposer's Email Address:**
3. **Project Title:**
4. **Project Start Date:**  **End Date:**

#### Who needs to provide Research Ethics Committee approval for your project?

The SPS REC will only consider those research ethics applications which do not require submission elsewhere. As such, you should make sure that your proposed research does not require a NHS National Research Ethics Service (NRES) review e.g. does it involve NHS patients, staff or facilities – see <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/>

If you are not sure where you should apply please discuss it with either the chair of the Committee or the Faculty Ethics Officer who is based in RED.

Social care research projects which involve NHS patients, people who use services or people who lack capacity as research participants need to be reviewed by a Social Care Research Ethics Committee (see <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/social-care-research/>). Similarly research which accesses unanonymised patient records (without informed consent) must be reviewed by a REC and the National Information Governance Board for Health and Social Care (NIGB).

#### Who needs to provide governance approval for this project?

If this project involves access to patients, clients, staff or carers of an NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation, it falls within the scope of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social.

You will also need to get written approval from the Research Management Office or equivalent of each NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation.

**When you have ethical approval, you will need to complete the research registration form:**  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/study-notification.html>

Guidance on completing this form can be found at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/guidance.pdf>. Contact the Research Governance team ([research-governance@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:research-governance@bristol.ac.uk)) for guidance on completing this form and if you have any questions about obtaining local approval.

#### **Do you need additional insurance to carry out your research?**

Whilst staff and doctoral students will normally be covered by the University's indemnity insurance there are some situations where it will need to be checked with the insurer. If you are conducting research with: Pregnant research subjects or children under 5 you should email: [insurance-enquiries@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:insurance-enquiries@bristol.ac.uk). In addition, if you are working or travelling overseas you should take advantage of the university travel insurance (see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/insurance/travel-insurance/>).

#### **Do you need a Disclosure and Barring Service check?**

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Criteria for deciding whether you require a DBS check are available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

You should specifically look at the frequency, nature, and duration of your contact with potentially vulnerable adults and or children. If your contact is a one-off research interaction, or infrequent contact (for example: 3 contacts over a period of time) you are unlikely to require a check.

If you think you need a DBS check then you should consult the University of Bristol web-page: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/legal/dbs/>

5. If your research project requires REC approval elsewhere please tell us which committee, this includes where co-researchers are applying for approval at another institution. Please provide us with a copy of your approval letter for our records when it is available.

N/A

6. Have all subcontractors you are using for this project (including transcribers, interpreters, and co-researchers not formally employed at Bristol University) agreed to be bound by the School's requirements for ethical research practice?

Yes

No/Not yet

Not applicable

X

Note: You must ensure that written agreement is secured before they start to work. They will be provided with training and sign a detailed consent form.

7. If you are a PhD/doctoral student please tell us the name of your research supervisor(s).

Dr Jak Lee & Dr Rob Green

Please confirm that your supervisor(s) has seen this final version of your ethics application?

Yes

No

X

8. Who is funding this study?

N/A

If this study is funded by the ESRC or another funder requiring lay representation on the ethics committee and is being undertaken by a member staff, this form should be submitted to the Faculty REC.

Post-graduate students undertaking ESRC funded projects should submit their form to the SPS Research Ethics Committee (SPS REC).

<b>9. Is this application part of a larger proposal?</b>		
No	X	
Yes		
If yes, please provide a summary of the larger study and indicate how this application relates to the overall study.		

<b>10. Is this proposal a replication of a similar proposal already approved by the SPS REC? Please provide the SPS REC reference number.</b>		
No	X	
Yes		
If Yes, please tell us the name of the project, the date approval was given and code (if you have one).		
Please describe any differences (such as context) in the current study. If the study is a replication of a previously approved study. Submit these first two pages of the form.		

### ETHICAL RESEARCH PROFORMA

The following set of questions is intended to provide the School Research Ethics Committee with enough information to determine the risks and benefits associated with your research. You should use these questions to assist in identifying the ethical considerations which are important to your research. You should identify any relevant ethical issues and how you intend to deal with them. Whilst the REC does not comment on the methodological design of your study, it will consider whether the design of your study is likely to produce the benefits you anticipate. **Please avoid copying and pasting large parts of research bids or proposals which do not directly answer the questions.** Please also avoid using *unexplained* acronyms, abbreviations or jargon.

<b>1. IDENTITY &amp; EXPERIENCE OF (CO) RESEARCHERS:</b> Please give a list of names, positions, qualifications, previous research experience, and functions in the proposed research of all those who will be in contact with participants
<p>Eloise de Carvalho MSc BSc (Hons), current Year 2 DEdPsy student.</p> <p>For my BSc Psychology dissertation, I explored the social experiences of electively home educated adolescents through interviews with the young people and their parents (doi: 10.1007/s10212-018-0398-5).</p> <p>For my MSc Child Development dissertation, I created and evaluated the implementation of a growth mindset intervention for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12472). This is my most recent piece of research.</p> <p>I will be undertaking all stages of the research, including data collection, data analysis and write-up.</p>
<b>2. STUDY AIMS/OBJECTIVES [maximum of 200 words]:</b> Please provide the aims and objectives of your research.
<p>The aim of this research is to explore the experiences that lead parents/carers to decide to withdraw their child from school to enter into elective home education (EHE) and imagine potential opportunities for local authority (LA) professionals to engage with parents/carers who are considering entering into EHE.</p> <p>Research puzzles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the lived experiences of parents/carers who decide to withdraw their child from school to enter into elective home education?</li> <li>2. What do these stories reveal in terms of opportunities for the local authority to offer information, advice or support to families who are considering elective home education?</li> </ol>

## RESEARCH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

(If you are undertaking secondary data analysis, please proceed to section 11)

- 3. RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY [maximum of 300 words]:** Please tell us what you propose to do in your research and how individual participants, or groups of participants, will be identified and sampled. Please also tell us what is expected of research participants who consent to take part (Please note that recruitment procedures are covered in question 8)

Participants will be self-selected through responding to my recruitment invitation (Appendix B). Target participants are parents/carers from a south west England LA who have withdrawn their child from an LA maintained school to enter into EHE. They will have entered into EHE in the past two years so that they are able to recollect their story. They will not be (currently or considering) appealing against an LA decision relating to their child's education; this will be assessed through the consent form (Appendix D).

It is hoped that up to ten (individual or sets of) parents/carers will participate. Participants will take part in a research introduction followed by two video-recorded interviews, all conducted over Microsoft Teams; see interview guides for further details (Appendix E). In the first interview, participants will describe their experience of their child's schooling as well as their discovery of EHE, and their journey up to removing their child from the school roll; we will construct a timeline with key points that contributed to their decision-making. In the second interview, participants will reflect on their journey, including imagining information/advice/support that they would have appreciated at key points. Meetings will be conducted remotely for participants' convenience and avoid potential feelings of intrusion from entering into their home environment.

Based on the historic difficulty of recruiting parents who are involved in EHE for research, I do not expect more than ten (individual or sets of) parents/carers to volunteer to participate; participants will therefore be selected on a first come, first served basis. If ten parents/carers consent to take part, I will ask the EHE network co-ordinators to remove my research invitation (if possible), or delete my Facebook post if undertaking my second recruitment strategy, and reject further respondents with the caveat that I may contact them should other participants withdraw.

- 4. EXPECTED DURATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** Please tell us how long each researcher will be working on fieldwork/research activity. For example, conducting interviews between March to July 2019. Also tell us how long participant involvement will be. For example: Interviewing 25 professional participants for a maximum of 1 hour per interview.

Interviews will be conducted between May and August 2021. Five to ten (individual or sets of) parents/carers will participate in a fifteen-minute introductory video call as well as two video call interviews for a maximum of one hour per interview.

- 5. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND TO WHOM: [maximum 100 words]** Tell us briefly what the main benefits of the research are and to whom.

Participants may wish to share their story, particularly if they perceive that it might help future parents/carers on a similar journey. For the LA, it is hoped that professionals who work with parents/carers considering EHE (such as those within the Education Safeguarding team) can reflect on their practices based on parents/carers' suggestions to identify how they could improve their support. Additionally, schools may be able to reflect on their practice based on parents/carers' experiences to identify practices that may contribute to parents/carers removing their children from the school roll, and improve their support for these children and families.

- 6. POTENTIAL RISKS/HARM TO PARTICIPANTS [maximum of 100 words]:** What potential risks are there to the participants and how will you address them? List any potential physical or psychological dangers that can be anticipated? You may find it useful to conduct a more formal risk assessment prior to conducting your fieldwork. The University has an example risk assessment form and guidance : <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/media/gn/RA-gn.pdf> and <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policies/>

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED
Participants may become upset during the interview when reflecting on emotional aspects of their experiences.	In the participant information sheet (Appendix C), I will encourage participants to ensure that somebody will be available to speak to after participating in the interviews. If they begin to sound uncomfortable during the interview,



	I will support them using active listening, empathy and other communication skills. If they become upset, I will stop the interview immediately and ask how they wish to proceed: have a break and continue the interview, postpone to a later date or terminate their participation. If they terminate their participation, I will ask whether they wish to submit their data thus far.
Participants may disclose information that constitutes a safeguarding concern relating to the safety of a member of the family, e.g., the participant or their child.	The participant information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D) will warn of the limits of confidentiality. I will discuss any concerns with my supervisors, and if considered to be appropriate, report the concern to the LA's safeguarding partnership board.
The connection drops during the interview and the meeting is terminated abruptly.	I will try to re-establish a connection. If this is not successful, I will email the participant to arrange another meeting to continue the interview.
Participants' management of their identity and anonymity is compromised by identifying features in shot during their video-recorded interviews.	During the introductory video call (Appendix E), which is not recorded, I will suggest that for the video-recorded interviews, they do not have identifying features in shot, e.g., they are sat in front of a plain wall, or suggest that they blur their background using the Microsoft Teams software, which I will explain how to do if necessary.
Parents/carers may feel a sense of obligation to participate if they wish to maintain a good relationship with the LA.	It will be highlighted in the participant information sheet (Appendix C) that I am a university researcher and will not be informing the LA about who contacts me or agrees to participate.

- 7. RESEARCHER SAFETY [maximum of 200 words]:** What risks could the researchers be exposed to during this research project? If you are conducting research in individual's homes or potentially dangerous places then a researcher safety protocol is mandatory. Examples of safety protocols are available in the guidance.

<b>RISK</b>	<b>HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED</b>
Holding the participant's emotions while retelling a difficult story.	Beforehand, I will ensure that one of my trainee educational psychologist peers is available after each of my interviews to reflect on any difficult stories. During the interview, if I sense that a topic is sensitive for the participant, I will ensure that I allow us breaks and will follow the steps I highlighted above if a participant becomes upset.
Aspects of my identity that I may not wish to share are compromised by identifying features in shot during the video-recorded interviews.	I will ensure that my background is either plain and does not include any identifying features or is blurred using the Microsoft Teams software.

- 8. RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES [maximum of 400 words]:** How are you going to access participants? Are there any gatekeepers involved? Is there any sense in which respondents might be "obliged" to participate (for example because their manager will know, or because they are a service user and their service will know), if so how will this be dealt with.

The first option for recruitment is through liaison with co-ordinators of eleven EHE networks within the LA who have made their contact details publicly available. One network, for example, includes approximately 200 parents/carers. I will email them (Appendix A) to ask if they would be willing to share my recruitment invitation (Appendix B) via their online platforms and enquire about their platform. Of the co-ordinators that agree to share it within two weeks of me contacting them, I will ask those with the largest networks to advertise my research; this will be done one-by-one on a fortnightly basis to manage the number of parents/carers that the research is being shared with. Snowball sampling may also be successful within the EHE community if participants have a positive experience of participating in the research, so I will encourage participants to share my research invitation further.

Alternatively, if this recruitment strategy does not attract enough participants from within the LA and I have to widen my potential participant pool, I belong to a 'Home Education / Home

Schooling UK Student Research' Facebook group for parents/carers who are involved in EHE and interested in participating in research. If I do not have five (individual or sets of) parents/carers four weeks after interviewing my last participant, I can post my recruitment invitation (Appendix B) on here.

Parents/carers may feel a sense of obligation to participate if they wish to maintain a good relationship with the LA, e.g., because they wish for their child to return to school in the future. For this and other reasons, it is highlighted in the participant information sheet (Appendix C) that I am a university researcher and will not be informing the LA about who contacts me or agrees to participate.

- 9. INFORMED CONSENT [maximum of 200 words]:** How will this be obtained? Whilst in many cases written consent is preferable, where this is not possible or appropriate this should be clearly justified. An age and ability appropriate participant information sheet (PIS) setting out factors relevant to the interests of participants in the study must be handed to them in advance of seeking consent (see materials table for list of what should be included). If you are proposing to adopt an approach in which informed consent is not sought you must explain in detail why this is not considered to be appropriate. If you are planning to use photographic or video images in your method then additional specific consent should be sought from participants.

Informed consent will be sought via an emailed consent form (Appendix D), which can be completed electronically and returned via email. The consent form will be sent to participants who request it following reading the participant information sheet (Appendix C), which will be emailed to parents/carers who respond to my recruitment invitation (Appendix B).

Please tick the box to confirm that you will keep evidence of the consent forms (either actual forms or digitally scanned forms), securely for twenty years.

X

- 10.** If you intend to use an on-line survey (for example Survey Monkey) you need to ensure that the data will not leave the European Economic Area i.e. be transferred or held on computers in the USA. Online Surveys (formally called Bristol Online Surveys) is fully compliant with UK Data Protection requirements – see <https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/>

Please tick the box to confirm that you will not use any on-line survey service based in the USA, China or outside the European Economic Area (EEA).

X

- 11. DATA PROTECTION:** All applicants should regularly take the data protection on-line tutorial provided by the University in order to ensure they are aware of the requirements of current data protection legislation.
- University policy is that “personal data can be sent abroad if the data subject gives unambiguous written consent. Staff should seek permission from the University Secretary prior to sending personal data outside of the EEA”.
- Any breach of the University data protection responsibilities could lead to disciplinary action.

**Have you taken the mandatory University data protection on-line tutorial in the last 12 months?** [https://www.bris.ac.uk/is/media/training/uobonly/datasecurity/page\\_01.htm](https://www.bris.ac.uk/is/media/training/uobonly/datasecurity/page_01.htm)

Yes

X

No

Do you plan to send any information/data, which could be used to identify a living person, to anybody who works in a country that is not part of the European Union?

See <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-and-brexit/data-protection-if-there-s-no-brexit-deal/the-gdpr/international-data-transfers/>

No

X

Yes

If **YES** please list the country or countries:

Please outline your procedure for data protection. It is University of Bristol policy that interviews must be recorded on an encrypted device. Ideally this should be a University owned encrypted digital recorder (see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/transcription/>). If you lose research data which include personal information or a data breach occurs, you **MUST** notify the University immediately. This means sending an e-mail to [data-](#)

[protection@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:protection@bristol.ac.uk) and telling your Head of School. See additional details at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/data-breaches-and-incidents/>

The UK Data Protection Act (2018) include potential fines of up to €20,000,000 for not protecting personal data – so please provide details about how you plan to ensure the protection of ALL research data which could be used to identify a living person.

Interviews will be recorded as video files using the Microsoft Teams software. Upon transcription, personal details (e.g., names, schools, locations) will be removed and resulting documents (timelines and interview transcripts) will be stored as password protected files. All electronic files will be stored on the University server. Raw video files will be deleted upon completion of the project.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY	Yes	No
All my data will be stored on a password protected server	X	
I will only transfer unanonymised data if it is encrypted. (For advice on encryption see: <a href="http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/device/">http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/device/</a> )	X	
If there is a potential for participants to disclose illegal activity or harm to others you will need to provide a confidentiality protocol.	X	
Please tick the box to <b>CONFIRM</b> that you warned participants on the information and consent forms that there are limits to confidentiality and that at the end of the project data will be stored in a secure storage facility. <a href="https://www.acrc.bris.ac.uk/acrc/storage.htm">https://www.acrc.bris.ac.uk/acrc/storage.htm</a>	X	

Please outline your procedure for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

In the participant information sheet (Appendix C) and during the interviews (Appendix E), participants are informed of the limits of confidentiality (e.g., the chance of somebody familiar with their story recognising them from their data). To limit discussion about another person's details/story (such as their child's experience of school), participants are also reminded at these times about the focus of the interview being on their experiences.

Upon transcription, identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts and timelines. Matching codes based on their chosen pseudonyms will be assigned as file names for video recordings, timelines and interview transcripts to allow for tracking.

For the thesis and other research outputs, participants will be represented through their chosen pseudonyms and further identifying details will be omitted or changed. For example, only basic details (a few words) will be used to convey timepoints in published timelines. Only a couple of timepoints from each participant's timeline will be explored in further detail using interview transcripts.

## DATA MANAGEMENT

### 13 Data Management

It is RCUK and University of Bristol policy that all research data (including qualitative data e.g. interview transcripts, videos, etc.) should be stored in an anonymised format and made freely and openly available for other researchers to use via the data.bris Research Data Repository and/or the UK Data Archive. What level of future access to your anonymised data will there be:

- Open access?
- Restricted access - what restrictions?
- Closed access - on what grounds?

This raises a number of ethical issues, for example you MUST ensure that consent is requested to allow data to be shared and reused.

Please briefly explain;

- 1) How you will obtain specific consent for data preservation and sharing with other researchers?
- 2) How will you protect the identity of participants? e.g. how will you anonymise your data for reuse.
- 3) How will the data be licensed for reuse? e.g. Do you plan to place any restrictions on the reuse of your data such as Creative Commons Share Alike 2.0 licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/uk/>)
- 4) Where will you archive your data and metadata for re-use by other researchers?

Consent for preservation and sharing will be obtained via the consent form (Appendix D). The identity of participants will be protected by removing identifying information (e.g., names, locations). Anonymised transcripts will be made available on the data.bris Research Data Repository under restricted access due to the individuality of the participants' experiences and thus possibility of re-identification. Researchers who wish to gain access to the transcripts must agree not to publish individual transcripts in their entirety.

### SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

#### 14. Secondary Data Analysis

Please briefly explain (if relevant to your research);

- (1) What secondary datasets you will use?
- (2) Where did you get these data from (e.g. ESRC Data Archive)?
- (3) How did you obtain permission to use these data? (e.g. by signing an end user licence)
- (4) Do you plan to make derived variables and/or analytical syntax available to other researchers? (e.g. by archiving them on data.bris or at the UK Data Archive)
- (5) Where will you store the secondary datasets?

N/A

### PLEASE COMPLETE FOR ALL PROJECTS

- 1) **DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS [maximum 200 words]:** Are you planning to send copies of data to participants for them to check/comment on? If so, in what format and under what conditions? What is the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication and dissemination of findings etc.?

I do not intend to send copies of the data to participants; however, participants' timelines will be jointly constructed during the first interview.  
The data will form part of my DEdPsy thesis, which I will make publicly available on EThOS upon completion. I also hope to submit this research for publication as a journal article as well as present my research to interested parties (e.g., LA professionals) through a research report and possible presentations if requested. This is stated in the participant information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D).

- 2) **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Please identify which of the following documents, and how many, you will be submitting within your application: Guidance is given at the end of this document (appendix 1) on what each of these additional materials might contain.

**Additional Material:**

**NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS**

Recruitment letters/posters/leaflets	2 (Appendices A & B)
Participant information sheet	1 (Appendix C)
Consent form	1 (Appendix D)
Interview guides	1 (Appendix E)

**Please DO NOT send your research proposal or research bid as the Committee will not look at this**

#### **SUBMITTING AND REVIEWING YOUR PROPOSAL:**

- To submit your application you should create a **single Word document** which contains your application form and all additional material and submit this information to the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email to [sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk)
- If you are having problems with this then please contact the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email ([sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk)) to discuss.
- Your form will then be circulated to the SPS Research Ethics Committee who will review your proposal on the basis of the information provided in this single PDF document. The likely response time is outlined in the 'Ethics Procedures' document. For staff applications we try to turn these around in 2-3 weeks. Doctoral student applications should be submitted by the relevant meeting deadline and will be turned around in 4 weeks.
- Should the Committee have any questions or queries after reviewing your application, the chair will contact you directly. If the Committee makes any recommendations you should confirm, in writing, that you will adhere to these recommendations before receiving approval for your project.
- Should your research change following approval it is your responsibility to inform the Committee in writing and seek clarification about whether the changes in circumstance require further ethical consideration.

**Failure to obtain Ethical Approval for research is considered research misconduct by the University and is dealt with under their current misconduct rules.**

**Chair:** Beth Tarleton ([beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk))  
**Administrator:** Hannah Blackman ([sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk))  
**Date form updated by SPS REC:** January 2019

#### **Amendments to Recruitment Procedure (Approved 06.10.2021)**

Good morning

I am seeking amendments for the project 'Exploring the decision-making journeys of parents/carers who withdraw their child from school to enter into elective home education, and potential opportunities for local authority engagement (SPSREC2021165)' with regards to my recruitment process.

I currently have approval for emailing co-ordinators of EHE networks within the LA who have made their contact details publicly available to ask if they would be willing to share my recruitment invitation via their online platforms (a local strategy) followed by sharing my research invitation on the 'Home Education / Home Schooling UK Student Research' Facebook group for parents/carers who are involved in EHE and interested in participating in research (a national strategy if I am unsuccessful in recruiting locally).

However, having emailed the co-ordinators of EHE networks advertised on the LA website, I have realised that this list is out of date. My emails have bounced back as undelivered, or I have been informed that they are no longer involved in EHE, or I have not received a response. Only one person out of the eleven that I contacted replied agreeing to share my invitation, and from this, I received interest from one participant.

I wish to continue to try to recruit locally so am requesting to broaden my approach by adding the following stages to my recruitment process:

1. Have LA colleagues who have previously liaised with co-ordinators of EHE networks share my recruitment invitation with their contacts. I will use my current recruitment email for them to forward along with the invitation to assert my identity as a researcher from the University as opposed to an employee of the Council.
2. Contact co-ordinators of EHE networks through publicly available contact details on their websites using my existing recruitment email. This may include contacting co-ordinators of Facebook platforms. These groups are only for EHE families so I will not join the groups but I will ask the administrator to share my invitation within their platform.

To avoid contacting too many people at once, I will leave at least two weeks between trying steps 1 and 2. With regards to Facebook groups, I will contact the largest first, followed by increasingly smaller groups.

I hope that this is okay, I am very open to questions, comments and ideas.

Many thanks

Eloise

#### **Amendments to Recruitment Procedure (Approved 10.01.2022)**

Good morning

I am still finding it difficult to recruit participants within the LA. May I please have approval to use the following recruitment strategy (approval received below for within the LA) for networks within the wider area of the South West? *Contact co-ordinators of EHE networks through publicly available contact details on their websites using my existing recruitment email. This may include contacting co-ordinators of Facebook platforms. These groups are only for EHE families so I will not join the groups but I will ask the administrator to share my invitation within their platform.*

Many thanks

Eloise