Teacher Perspectives on the Transition Planning Process into Post-Secondary Education (PSE) for students with a Diagnosis of Autism in Post-Primary schools in Ireland.

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Doctoral thesis submitted to Mary Immaculate College toward the degree of Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECpsy).

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Abstract

Aims: This study explored teachers' perspectives on transition planning (TP) into post-secondary education (PSE) for students with autism attending mainstream classes or an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit attached to mainstream secondary schools in the Munster region of Ireland. This study also explored the role of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in the transition planning process.

Method: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was employed as a framework for this research to explore teacher perspectives on current school strengths around transition planning and to explore how these strengths might be built upon as well as the role of the IEP in transition planning. Teaching staff (n=10) completed semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed thematically.

Results: Results indicated that the use of formal transition plans as part of the IEP planning process was not common practice in secondary schools. Results also indicated that staffing and time as well as IEPs which were student centred, tailored to individual needs, collaborative and regularly reviewed, were noted as resources required to reach the ideal TP scenario. The importance of formal planning and a collaborative approach inclusive of all stakeholders for TP (including the PSE institutions) was expressed. TP can also be supported by strengthening communication and links between PSE institutions and post-primary schools.

Conclusions: Findings indicated that a range of informal and formal work is being carried out by teachers as a means of supporting transition planning in post-primary schools. TP into PSE for students with an ASD appears to be in its infancy. The employment of AI as a strengths-based model of inquiry which focused on positive individual and organisational attributes was an appropriate methodology for the current study. Further research in this area is warranted.

Keywords: Transition Planning, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Individual Education Plans, Post-Secondary Education, Appreciative Inquiry

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This thesis represents the end of the doctoral programme but more importantly, it represents the culmination of many years of study and work. I would not be in this position were it not for all of the supportive, kind and gorgeous people that I have known over the years who encouraged me to 'stay at it'. Thank you.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification. This work was submitted in fulfilment as part of the requirement for the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in Mary Immaculate College.

Signed: _____

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i) **Table of Abbreviations**

Definition	*Acronym*
Appreciative Inquiry	**AI**
Autism Spectrum Difference	**ASD**
Autism Spectrum Disorder	**ASD**
Career Guidance	**CG**
Central Applications Office	**CAO**
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service	**CAMHS**
Continuum of Support	**CoS**
Doctorate in Education and Child Psychology	**DECpsy**
Department of Education and Skills/Science	**DES**
Developmental Disorder	**DD**
Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act	**EPSEN**
Educational Psychologists	**EPs**
Foras Áiseanna Saothair	**FÁS**
Health Service Executive	**HSE**
Individual Education Plan	**IEP**
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	**IDEA**
Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act	**IDEIA**
Individual Transition Plans	**ITPs**
Intellectual Disability	**ID**
Leaving Certificate	**LC**
Leaving Certificate Applied	**LCA**
Literature Review	**LR**
Multi-Disciplinary Team	**MDT**
National Council for Special Education	**NCSE**
National Behaviour Support Service	**NBSS**
National Educational Psychological Service	**NEPS**

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	**OECD**
Physical Education	**PE**
Post-Secondary Education	**PSE**
Psychological Society of Ireland	**PSI**
School Age Disability Team	**SADT**
Semi-Structured Interviews	**SSIs**
Summary of Performance	**SOP**
Special Educational Needs	**SEN**
Special Educational Needs Coordinator	**SENCO**
Special Educational Needs Organiser	**SENO**
Special Education Support Service	**SESS**
Special Education Teacher	**SET**
Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Time bound	**SMART**
Special Needs Assistant	**SNA**
Social Personal and Health Education	**SPHE**
Systematic Review	**SR**
Thematic Analysis	**TA**
Transition Year	**TY**
Transition Plan/Planning	**TP**
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	**UNCRC**
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation	**UNESCO**
Weight of Evidence	**WoE**

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1.0 Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter explores the salient components of transition planning for students with a diagnosis of autism and the role of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) within this process in the context of transition from second to third level education. This chapter will also highlight the author's own interest in this area which inspired the research process in the initial stages. Socio-cultural developments that have influenced the perceptions of autism in the current educational climate are also described.

1.1 Research Area

The practice of working to understand the lived and individual experiences of people is an important facet of applied psychology (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). This research explored teacher perspectives on transition planning and the use of IEPs in this process for individuals with a diagnosis of autism in mainstream post primary schools in the Munster region of Ireland.

The author's interest in this area was borne of both professional and personal experiences. During various work placements and through interpersonal relationships, the author had been in contact with students with autism who were very capable of progressing academically but who experienced difficulties with transitioning to and remaining in post-secondary education (PSE) once they had left post-primary school. It was noted anecdotally through informal discussions with the students and their families that this PSE experience may have appeared to have a negative impact on the student's well-being over time.

1.2 The 'D' in ASD

The term 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD) refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders which are hallmarked by challenges in the areas of social interaction, communication, and behaviour (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Carr, 2015; Geschwind & Levitt, 2007; Happé, Ronald, & Plomin, 2006; Siew, Mazzucchelli, Rooney & Girdler 2017). Individuals with a diagnosis of autism are currently recognised as being placed on a spectrum and the condition is listed within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5th edition (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The DSM-V provides clinical criteria and is used as a diagnostic tool for the diagnosis of an ASD by clinicians and practitioners (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

Currently, no biological indicators of an ASD have been identified within the process of the diagnostic assessment of ASD (Norbury & Sparks, 2013). Diagnostic criteria are based upon reports and behavioural observations, such markers which have been argued to be culturally influenced (Norbury & Sparks, 2013). Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman and Hutman (2013) suggested that the neuro-diversity in the descriptions of ASD be acknowledged as opposed to a deficits based medical model description of ASD. Previous literature has cited concerns about an over reliance on the neurobiological components of ASD which are accompanied by a spectrum of defined neurological deficits (O'Dell, Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, Ortega, Brownlow & Orsini, 2016). O'Dell et al. (2016) have proposed that explorations of ASD focus on the identity of individuals with a diagnosis of ASD within a socio-cultural framework instead of examining ASD as firmly rooted within neuro-biological and deficits based models.

Ring, Daly & Wall (2018) proposed a paradigmatic shift towards an appreciation of ASD from the perspective of neurodiversity rather than from a deficits oriented focus, and employed the word 'difference' as opposed to 'disorder' in reference to ASD. Therefore, as a means of staying faithful to the strengths-based approach in the current study, the word 'difference' will be employed when referring to ASD. The word

'disorder' was employed as a search term to ensure that all relevant literature in the area was included.

1.3 Transitioning into Post-Secondary Education (PSE)

Adolescence and young adulthood often involves significant periods of change for young people and their families (Geller & Greenberg, 2009). The young person aims to become more independent by beginning to create the initial phases of a life outside of the family home (Geller & Greenberg, 2009). This can also be a time of both excitement and anxiety for young people and their families (Cheak-Zamora, Teti & First, 2015; Geller & Greenberg, 2009; Schall, Wehman & McDonough, 2012).

Within the context of transitioning into PSE, the process of transition planning has been described as a "process or coordinated set of activities" (Roberts, 2010, p. 158). This coordinated set of activities is created especially for an individual requiring support as a means of facilitating their move from second level education into third level (Roberts, 2010). The process of transitioning from the often highly structured environment of post-primary school to the less structured facets of early adulthood for individuals with a disability has been described as a "developmental process" in and of itself (Michaels & Orentlicher, 2004, p. 209). The challenges associated with this transition require an adjustment period as well as steps taken to support the management of specific issues which might arise (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

1.4 The Current Study

There is a lack of evidence of formal transition planning in post primary education in the Irish context (Bell, Devecchi, McGuckin & Shevlin, 2017; Doyle, Mc Guckin & Shevlin, 2017). Research into the transitioning experiences of students with an ASD, their parents and teachers has also been recommended for further exploration in previous literature (Bell et al., 2017, Rose et al., 2012). Furthermore, previous studies exploring

transition plans have focused on the perspectives of young people and their parents/caregivers as opposed to teacher perspectives on transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Browning, Osborne & Reed, 2009; Cheak-Zamora, Teti & First, 2015; Doyle et al., 2017; Thompson, Bölte, Falkmer & Girdler, 2018; Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers 2015).

Of note, this study initially sought to triangulate data by eliciting the voice of the student and their parents/caregivers as well as the voice of their teachers, however, recruitment difficulties resulted in a redirected focus on exploring teacher views on transition planning (see sections 6.3.1 & 6.3.4). Notwithstanding, aside from their parents/caregivers, students with an ASD tend to spend the most time with their teachers (Hallisy, 2019). The current study explored teacher perspectives on transition planning into PSE and the role of IEPs in this process for students with an ASD. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was employed as a framework for this research to explore teacher perspectives on what is working well in schools in relation to transition planning, and also to facilitate the exploration of how existing strengths might be built upon when planning for the transition into PSE. AI espouses a strengths-based approach to exploration within an organisation, with a focus on the process of becoming ready to elicit change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teacher perspectives on transition planning and the role of IEPs in transitioning. A two-phase literature review was conducted to explore ASD and transition planning and the role of IEPs. This process led to the identification of research questions for the present study, outlined in Figure 1 overleaf which provides a visual map to the structure of the thesis.

Figure 1. Visual map of thesis layout

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│ Transitioning to PSE for young people with ASD   │
│ and the role of IEPs in this process             │
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│ Review Question 1:   │    │ Review Question 2:   │
│ What do we know      │    │ What do we know      │
│ about transition     │    │ about IEP usage for  │
│ planning into PSE    │    │ students with a      │
│ for students with a  │    │ diagnosis of autism? │
│ diagnosis of autism? │    │                      │
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│ 2 Phase Literature Review                        │
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│ Research Question 1: │    │ Research Question 2: │
│ What are post-primary│    │ What are post-       │
│ school teacher's     │    │ primary school       │
│ experiences and      │    │ teacher's            │
│ perspectives on      │    │ perspectives on      │
│ transition planning  │    │ the use of IEPs      │
│ from post primary    │    │ within the transition│
│ education to post-   │    │ planning process for │
│ secondary education  │    │ students with an     │
│ in Ireland for       │    │ ASD?                 │
│ students with an ASD?│    │                      │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Methodology                                      │
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│ Appreciative Inquiry (AI)                        │
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│Participants:│→ │Data        │→ │Analysis:   │
│Teachers of  │  │Collection: │  │Thematic    │
│students with│  │Semi-       │  │Analysis of │
│a diagnosis  │  │Structured  │  │transcribed │
│of autism    │  │Interviews  │  │interviews  │
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│ Results: Research Question 1 and Research        │
│ Question 2                                       │
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2.0 Chapter Two: Literature Review

The current chapter will explore the literature in the area of transition planning for students with an ASD as well as the usage of IEPs. This chapter will also systematically and critically engage with the literature linked to the research area. A two phase approach was applied to the process of reviewing the literature as a means of ensuring that all of the relevant literature in both areas was explored effectively.

- **Literature review phase one:** ASD and Transition Planning into Post-Secondary Education (PSE)
- **Literature review phase two:** The use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with an ASD

2.1 Transitioning into PSE.

Research on PSE transition in the Irish context indicates that the transition planning process is not formally structured and may be less emphasised as a component of the preparation to transition from post-primary school (Bell et al., 2017; Doyle et al., 2017). Irish policy, in line with international policy has begun to examine how best to include and integrate specific marginalised groups into society (Bell et al., 2017; DES 2001; Doyle et al., 2017; OECD, 2011).

Although more than a decade has passed since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) was enacted in the United States of America (USA), teachers continue to experience difficulty in relation to creating and implementing effective IEPs for their students (Caruana, 2015; IDEIA, 2004). Teachers reported challenges in prioritising and setting goals and objectives within the IEP process for individuals with an ASD (İlik & Sarı, 2017; Wilczynski, Menousek, Hunter & Mudgal, 2007).

The IDEIA Act provided a framework to support the transition experience of students into PSE and adult life in the United States (IDEIA, 2004). Within this framework, legislation was enacted on the mandatory usage of an assessment called

Summary of Performance (SOP) before the student left high school (Leconte, 2006; Morningstar & Liss, 2008). Sitlington, Neubert, Lombard and Begun, (2007) have posited that the use of assessment materials such as SOP could be complimentary to IEP usage in transition planning, specifically the process of exploring areas of need in the transition process while building upon transition strengths as required.

2.2 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

IEPs have been described as an "educational map" for students with a disability (Ruble, McGrew, Dalrymple & Jung, 2010, p. 1). IEPs have also been described as "living documents" which allow for a continuous review of the student's levels of academic attainment and functional ability (Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017; McCausland, 2005, p. 24). IEP usage is currently mandatory in schools for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Australia, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and the UK (NCSE, 2006). The use of targets within IEPs that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound (SMART) facilitates an effective means of monitoring and tailoring the created goals to the student (Brown, Leonard & Arthur-Kelly, 2016). Research linked to the general usage of IEPs for pupils and students both with and without an ASD has indicated a range of educational benefits to correctly employing IEPs in the classroom (Rose et al., 2012; Slade et al., 2018). Some difficulties in the creation and implementation of IEPs have been identified and an increase in teacher training has been suggested to support IEP usage (Andreasson et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2012; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017).

IEPs are tailored to intervening in relation to the individual needs of the young person and function to assist in the assessment, monitoring and planning of the education process (Tremblay et al., 2017). IEPs also serve to create and monitor tailored goals in these areas while listing the supports and nature of the services being employed to support the student (Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017).

The importance of IEP usage has been acknowledged internationally, and supported through documentation on effective pedagogical practices for the development

of IEPs (NCSE, 2006; Prunty, 2011; Rose et al., 2012; Tremblay et al., 2017). In England, the Special Needs Code of Practice describes best practice in developing and implementing IEPs for students (Dfes, 2001; UNESCO, 2011). IEPs were introduced in the mid-1970s in the USA (Tremblay & Belley, 2017). Under the 'Individuals with Disabilities Education Act' (IDEA) (United States Department of Education, 1997; United States Department of Education 2004), the employment and use of IEPs for every child with a diagnosed disability or SEN was mandated (Alkahtani, & Kheirallah, 2016; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017; United States Department of Education 2004).

Similarly, in Canada, IEPs are mandatory in all jurisdictions as specified in the Canadian Schools Act 1996 (Alkahtani, & Kheirallah, 2016; McCausland, 2005; NCSE, 2006). IEPs have been employed as an educational tool for students with a disability in Australia (Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018).

2.2.1 The use of IEPs in Ireland.

Within the Irish context, IEPs are described as "a written document prepared for a named student which specifies the learning goals that are to be achieved by the student over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve those goals", (NCSE, 2006, p. xii). IEPs are viewed as paramount in the process of supporting the inclusion of all school aged children with SEN (Ring et al., 2018). Historically, the employment of IEPs was primarily linked to special schools, (NCSE, 2006; Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O' Raw & Zhao, 2012). In post-primary schools in Ireland, IEPs can be employed within the continuum of support (CoS) which is comprised of three school based support processes; support for all, school support (for some) and school support plus (support for few). According to the DES (2010) 'the continuum of support encompasses a graduated solution orientated framework of assessment and intervention in schools' (DES, 2010, p.4). The use of IEPs is normally situated on the upper end of the CoS (school support plus) with individual plans created for students requiring individual support (DES, 2007b). The use of IEPs in post-primary schools has been acknowledged

to differ from the usage of IEPs within primary schools in Ireland, this has been reported to occur due to the difference in educational structure at second level (e.g. up to 11 teachers per child, different classes etc.) (DES, 2010).

In order to facilitate the inclusion of young people with SEN into mainstream schools, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) act (Oireachtas, 2004) outlined guidelines to assist with the creation and employment of IEPs (Rose et al., 2012). A primary purpose of the EPSEN act was to introduce a legislative basis for the use of IEPs for individuals with a SEN (McCausland, 2005; Oireachtas, 2004). Despite recommendations within literature, the EPSEN act is yet to be ratified in Ireland (Rose et al., 2012). Therefore individualised education planning for young people with SEN is not yet mandatory in Irish schools (Bell et al., 2017; Ring et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2012).

2.2.2 IEPs and Transition Planning

Transition planning guidelines suggest that transition planning occur for a range of school leaving pathways including: entering PSE, entering the workforce, vocational or rehabilitative training as well as sheltered and/or supported employment (NCSE, 2006). Within the Irish context, NCSE guidelines pertaining specifically to IEP creation and review for transition planning state that "that the principal or special educational needs organiser (SENO) "take the necessary steps to enable the student to progress as a young adult to the level of education or training that meets the wishes of the student and his/her parents and that are appropriate to the student's ability", (NCSE, 2006, p. 48). NCSE transition planning recommendations also suggest planning which occurs up to a year before school leaving, the involvement of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) clinicians if required as well as the inclusion of relevant external services such as PSE access officers and/or disability and/or Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) officers (NCSE, 2006). While the attendance of the aforementioned external services is not required at transition planning meetings, it is recommended that such parties are connected with the SENO and the school (NCSE, 2006). Furthermore, this document states in adherence with

good practice, that the transition planning process for school leavers is person-centred and tailored to the needs of the individual (NCSE, 2006).

Within an international context, Shattuck et al. (2012) found that the prospects of entering and staying in PSE for students with an ASD are poor, especially when compared to the prospects of students with other disabilities (e.g. students with a developmental language or learning disability). This sentiment has been echoed in relation to prospective occupational opportunities for individuals with a diagnosis of an ASD (Roux et al., 2013). National and international literature has suggested that further research into the role of the secondary school regarding transition planning for students with a diagnosis of an ASD into PSE is warranted (Bell et al., 2017; Shattuck et al., 2012). The transition of senior cycle students with a diagnosis of an ASD into PSE is an understudied area when compared to existing research exploring the transition of students with a diagnosis of an ASD from primary into post-primary education (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Hanewald, 2013; Kluth et al., 2009; Schall et al., 2012).

2.2.3 Gough's Weight of Evidence (WoE).

The systematic literature review phases were both conducted using Gough's Weight of Evidence (WoE) technique (Gough, 2007). Gough's WoE is a systematic technique for structuring a weighting system for literature (Gough, 2007). Gough's WoE explored and weighted a range of specific areas pertaining to each research paper (Brantlinger et al., 2005);

- **Methodological quality** (which explored measures used, educational significance, identifiable components, replication and external validity)
- **Methodological relevance to research question** (which explored methodologically suitable means of data management, appropriate population sample, pre and post transition data and relevance to research area)

- **Study topic relevance** (which explores production of scientific evidence, appropriate methodological design, systematic use of qualitative methods, and inclusion of coherent articulation of results).

The three aforementioned categories were then calculated to create an overall WoE for each paper.

A comprehensive search for relevant literature and research was completed for both phases. Database searches took place between June 2017 and April 2019 for both phases. A number of academic psychological and educational databases with literature relevant to the research area within the Mary Immaculate College and University of Limerick online database collections were used (including Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Google scholar and PsycInfo).

A two-phase literature review was conducted to address review questions 1 and 2, which were as follows:

- *(Phase One)* **Review Question 1***:* What do we know about transition planning into PSE for students with autism?
- *(Phase Two)* **Review Question 2:** What do we know about IEP usage for students with a diagnosis of autism?

2.3 Phase one: ASD and Transition Planning into Post-Secondary Education (PSE)

The initial phase of the literature review aimed to explore literature relevant to the process of transition planning into PSE for students with a diagnosis of an ASD. The first phase of the systematic literature review was conducted under Gough's weight of evidence technique (Gough, 2007). A range of inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed as a means of exploring the existing relevant and academic literature which integrated specific components of the research area; transition planning into PSE for students with a diagnosis of an ASD. See appendix A4 for a list of inclusion and exclusion criteria and accompanying rationale. Search terms pertaining to autism and transition

planning were employed e.g. ASD, transition planning and PSE. See appendix A4 for more information on search terms and individual database results and a flow chart highlighting the data collection and screening process see appendix A4. See table 2.0 for a list of all included full text studies.

Table 2.0) Table of included studies

Eligible Studies (n=6)

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1. Browning, J., Osborne, L. A., & Reed, P. (2009). Research section: A qualitative comparison of perceived stress and coping in adolescents with and without autistic spectrum disorders as they approach leaving school. British Journal of Special Education, 36(1), 36-43.

2. Cheak-Zamora, N. C., Teti, M. and First, J. (2015). 'Transitions are Scary for Our Kids, and they're Scary for Us': Family Member and Youth Perspectives on the Challenges of Transitioning to Adulthood with Autism. Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 28, p. 548-560.

3. Van Hees, V., Moyson, T., & Roeyers, H. (2015). Higher education experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder: Challenges, benefits and support needs. Journal of autism and developmental disorders, 45(6), 1673-1688.

4. Bell, S., Devecchi, C., Mc Guckin, C., & Shevlin, M. (2017). Making the transition to post-secondary education: opportunities and challenges experienced by students with ASD in the Republic of Ireland. European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32(1), 54-70.

5. Hatfield, M., Ciccarelli, M., Falkmer, T., & Falkmer, M. (2017). Factors related to successful transition planning for adolescents on the autism spectrum. Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs.

6. Thompson, C., Bölte, S., Falkmer, T., & Girdler, S. (2018). To be understood: Transitioning to adult life for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Plos ONE, 13(3), 1-16.

2.3.1 Systematic review.

Following a systematic review of the literature, six studies met the inclusion criteria for the present study. See appendix A for excluded full text studies. The included studies were evaluated using Gough's Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework (Gough, 2007). The WoE also provides a systematic assessment of the varying facets combined to indicate the contribution of a study in answering the review questions (Gough, 2007). See Appendices A and B for all WoE information for phases one and two. All extracted study information has been compiled into a table, please see appendix B for further information.

2.3.2 Syntheses of studies employed.

An analysis of the studies reviewed resulted in the identification of a number of themes across the studies. Key themes included student levels of stress and anxiety related to transition planning, other factors which have an effect on transition planning and the views of parents/guardians, teachers and students on transition planning.

2.3.2.1 Student levels of stress and anxiety related to transition planning.

Van Hees et al. (2015) explored the challenges, benefits and mental health difficulties of 23 students with an ASD. The study aimed to explore a more holistic account of university life for students with an ASD. Findings indicated that some challenges were experienced by individuals with an ASD in university. These were primarily linked to the social and academic demands placed upon them. The difficulty in meeting these demands were linked to ASD attributes such as weak central coherence (a limited capacity to generalise information and perceive scenarios holistically) and theory of mind (the capacity to attribute internal mental states to oneself and to others) (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985; Frith & Happé, 1994). These difficulties led to communication and social skills challenges as well as some resistance to change and

sensory and repetitive behaviour complications. Other challenges included doubts about disclosure of diagnosis to staff, mental health difficulties as well as attempting to conceal diagnosis and the challenges the participant faced until they were unable to cope anymore. Unlike the current study which is strengths based, this study primarily focused on the challenges and difficulties linked to ASD. However, positive aspects of having an ASD were cited by participants in the study and included: strong memory, precise work completion, attention to detail, analytical skill, observational skill and dedication to task.

The research conducted by Van Hees et al. (2015) was weighted as high quality due to a range of factors. The primary strengths of this study included: the high number of participants, the relevance of the population sample used (eliciting the voice of the individual), the amount of data gathered and the use of independent coding as a means of ensuring inter-rater reliability. The current study also employs inter-rater reliability as a means of ensuring reliability within the data analysis. Limitations of this study included a lack of gender diversity with a high number of male participants in the study, leaving a small sample of female participants. However, this is possibly a result of an overall higher prevalence rate of the disorder amongst the male population (Lai, Tseng, Hou & Guo, 2012; Williams, Thomas, Sidebotham & Emond, 2008). This limitation was also evident in the research by Bell et al. (2017) wherein a lack of gender diversity was observed (all participants were male) and a lack of external generalisability (due to the specific cohort and small sample size) was identified. Further limitations of the Van Hees et al. (2015) study included a failure to engage or consult with teaching staff for their views around transition plans due to the educational focus of this study. Addressing this limitation, the current study will focus on and explore teacher perspectives.

Browning et al. (2009) elicited the voice of the student in their study concerning transition and social exclusion for students with an ASD. The aim of their study was to determine whether individuals with an ASD perceive stress differently to those who do not have an ASD. Browning et al. (2009) included mainstream and special school students with an ASD (n=10) and mainstream students without an ASD (n=7). Results from this study indicated that individuals without a diagnosis of an ASD tended to experience stress in relation to educational contexts, specifically around future planning. The non ASD

group believed that they were able to manage stress and cited that they would look for external support if required. This group also cited a range of techniques to manage stress levels. The ASD group were found to experience stress in relation to things that could cause actual physical harm to them. They perceived themselves to be poor at managing stress and failed to attribute reasons as to why they were poor at dealing with stress. The ASD group were also highly concerned with interpersonal relationships and they failed to examine future prospective problems linked to their education. The ASD group did not mention external consultation as means of stress management. While this study also explored future planning for individuals with an ASD, this study is dissimilar to the current study which explores a strengths oriented perspective on future planning for students with an ASD.

In contrast, Browning et al. (2009) primarily focused on difficulties in relation to emotional regulation and problem solving that can be experienced by school leaving aged students with an ASD. This study, unlike the current study did not gain the perspectives from other stakeholders such as teaching staff. This study also excluded the perspectives of parents/caregivers. Strengths of the Browning et al. (2009) study included the use of a non-ASD cohort of school leaving aged peers as a means of comparison in relation to stress, the relevance of the population sample employed (eliciting the voice of the individual) and the use of independent coding as a means of ensuring inter-rater reliability. Similar to research conducted by Browning et al. (2009) and other studies (Bell et al., 2017; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2018), the current study will also employ a second coder as a means of ensuring inter-rater reliability within the qualitative analysis.

Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) aimed to explore the perspectives of individuals with an ASD and their care-givers around their experiences in relation to transitioning specifically their social, educational, and vocational needs and experiences. This study found that the transitioning experiences of both cohorts were marked by anxiety founded due to a lack of support from external services. Similar to the current study, Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) explored the perspectives of individuals who support the individual with an ASD. The current study differs to the study by Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) as it

focuses solely on teacher perspectives as opposed to student and parent/caregiver perspectives that were focused on in the Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) study.

2.1.4.2 Factors effecting transition planning.

Bell et al. (2017) aimed to examine how six leaving certificate students with an ASD experienced transitioning from post primary to PSE. This study also set out to examine their experiences in assessing and progressing to PSE. This study found limited evidence of any formal process of transition planning for all participants. Access to support also appeared to be a complex process. Bell et al. (2017) also cited self-determination skills as a key predictor of success within the transition process to higher education. In contrast to the current study, this study excluded the perspectives of secondary school teachers of students with an ASD around the process of Transition Planning (TP). Furthermore, this study explored the transition planning experiences of final year leaving certificate students and two of the student's parents pre and post leaving certificate, despite research indicating that transition planning begins from approximately two years before leaving (Daly et al., 2016). The current study aims to explore the perspectives of teachers working with students with an ASD in senior cycle (transition year (TY), 5th year and final year.

An inductive approach was taken by Thompson et al. (2018) in their study which aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of 19 parents of adult children with an ASD around their transition to adulthood using focus groups and participant weighted rankings of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) current guidelines in relation to successful transition. Findings in the Thompson et al. (2018) study indicated that ICF areas of activity and participation as well as environmental factors were found to have the strongest influence on transition outcomes. This study also highlighted that three major themes emerged from the parents of adult children with an ASD: that is for them to be understood, to understand the world that they are in and also to succeed. This study was similar to the current study as it explored future

planning but dissimilar in that it did not include teacher perspectives around this area. Critical analysis of the Thompson et al. (2018) study also reflected a diverse range of strengths: a large sample size of parents, the use of focus groups, each lasting three to four hours, the use of the ICF to guide the coding process, the use of inter-rater reliability through the emphasis of the process of consensus in the coding practice and the practice of piloting the focus groups in the initial stages. The current study will also take an inductive approach to data collection and will also employ piloting in the initial stages of data collection as a means of ensuring validity amongst the interview questions. The piloted interview data will not be employed in the general data collected within the study.

2.3.2.2 Parent/guardian, teacher and student views on transition planning.

Bell et al. (2017) interviewed two parents on their children's experiences in relation to decision making processes, their perception of the available supports and barriers to progress in PSE. This study indicated that dissimilarities were found to exist between the student with a disabilities' expectations of the PSE opportunities that will be afforded to them and the PSE opportunity expectations of associated stakeholders (Bell et al., 2017). This research also indicated that the process of accessing support in PSE or third level was noted to be a complicated process for some students: these students reportedly required consistent support from parents who wanted to make sure that they were in the process of accessing PSE supports that were available to them (Bell et al., 2017). Similarly, the exploratory study conducted by Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) found that caregivers tended to have concerns around the lack of services to support the development of social, educational and career/vocational services as well as some fatigue as a caregiver around having to perform this role and support these unmet needs for their children. While the current study will not explore student or parent perspectives on transition planning (TP), it will include teacher perspectives on TP for school aged leavers and young people with an ASD.

Hatfield et al. (2017) sought to examine the transitioning process for adolescents to PSE by utilising the PRECEDE[1] model in conducting a needs-based assessment to determine the predisposing, reinforcing and enabling factors (in accordance with the PRECEDE model) that impact on successful transition for adolescents with an ASD. The secondary aims of this study were to examine how these factors relate to perceptions of current and ideal transition planning processes. Similar to the Bell et al., (2017) study, this study indicated that the parental and professional perceptions differed from those of the adolescent around the current transitioning process-with the adolescent population citing it as 'ideal'. This divergence in opinion around transitioning planning indicated two key points: that this is a common cognitive trait in adolescent development (having different opinions around one's own future to those of their care givers/parents) and that a strengths-based individualised transition plan which heavily involves the adolescent is a primary aspect of a successful transitioning plan. This study explored the perspectives of professionals who worked with the student with an ASD as well as the student, past-student and parent perspectives around the transition planning process. Similarly, the current study also aims to gain the perspectives of professionals who work with and support individuals with an ASD within an educational setting. The current study is dissimilar to the aforementioned studies as it will not include the voice of the student or their parents/caregivers (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015).

Noted limitations of the Hatfield et al. (2017) study included the use of an online questionnaire to gather data with the use of open-ended questions as opposed to the use of semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups which have proven efficacious in gathering more in depth and richer data in previous research in this area (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Van Hees et al., 2015). In this vein, a data collection limitation was also noted in the Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) research included the use of a focus group for individuals with an ASD. Elevated levels of anxiety are common amongst

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[1] PRECEDE is a framework that has been used to diagnose the intervention needs for a specific population(Hatfield et al., 2017). PRECEDE stands for **P**redisposing, **R**einforcing and **E**nabling **C**onstructs in **E**ducational **D**iagnosis and **E**valuation (Crosby & Noar, 2011). The model incorporates three factors: predisposing, reinforcing and enabling factors (Crosby & Noar, 2011).

individuals with the disorder, as such, a focus group scenario could elicit anxiety and serve to decrease the authenticity and quality of the data collected as opposed to the use of a one-to-one interview (Ozsivadjian, Knott & Magiati, 2012). The current study will employ one-to-one semi-structured interviews with teaching staff, conducted and transcribed by the researcher as a means of exploring the current research area and ensuring that as much rich data as possible is gathered during the data collection process.

2.4 Phase two: The use of IEPs for Students with an ASD

The second phase of the literature review explored the role, use, experiences around IEPs for students with an ASD and/or their teachers and/or parental perspectives around the use, role and experiences of IEPs. The second phase of the systematic literature review was also conducted under Gough's weight of evidence technique (Gough, 2007). A range of inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed as a means of exploring the existing relevant and academic literature which integrated specific components of the research area; IEP usage for students with an ASD. See appendix B3 for a list of criteria and accompanying rationale. Search terms pertaining to IEP usage for students with SEN and with and without an ASD were employed due to a dearth in literature specifically exploring the specific role of IEPs in transition planning for students with an ASD. See appendix B3 for more information. Both manual and database searches took place between June 2017 and April 2019. See appendix B3 for more information on search terms and individual database results and a flow chart highlighting the data collection and screening process see appendix B3. See table 2.1 for a list of all included full text studies

Table 2.1) Table of Included Studies

Included Studies (n=7)

1. Lee-Tarver, A. (2006). Are individualized education plans a good thing? A survey of teachers' perceptions of the utility of IEPs in regular education settings. Journal of Instructional Psychology, 33(4), 263-273.

2. Goepel, J. (2009). Constructing the Individual Education Plan: confusion or collaboration?. Support for learning, 24(3), 126-132.

3. Prunty, A. (2011). Implementation of children's rights: what is in 'the best interests of the child'in relation to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)?. Irish Educational Studies, 30(1), 23-44.

4. Rose, R., Shevlin, M., Winter, E., O'Raw, P., & Zhao, Y. (2012). Individual Education Plans in the Republic of Ireland: an emerging system. British Journal of Special Education, 39(3), 110-116.

5. Andreasson, I., & Wolff, U. (2015). Assessments and Intervention for Pupils with Reading Difficulties in Sweden--A Text Analysis of Individual Education Plans. International Journal of Special Education, 30(1), 15-24.

6. Samalot-Rivera, A., & Lieberman, L. J. (2017). Adapted Physical Educators' current level of involvement in the IEP process. Palaestra, 31(3)

7. Slade, N., Eisenhower, A., Carter, A. S., & Blacher, J. (2018). Satisfaction with Individualized Education Programs Among Parents of Young Children With ASD. Exceptional Children, 84(3), 242-260.

2.4.1 Systematic review.

Following a systematic review of the literature, seven studies met the inclusion criteria for the present research study, see appendix A for excluded full text studies. The included studies were also evaluated using Gough's Weight of Evidence in the exploration of role of IEPs in transition planning for students with an ASD (WoE) framework (Gough, 2007). See Appendices A and B for all WoE information for phases one and two. All extracted study information has been compiled into a table, please see appendix B3 for further information.

2.4.2 Synthesis of studies employed.

An extensive analysis of the studies employed resulted in a number of themes being categorised from the study findings. A synthesis of extracted themes included areas relating to: IEP satisfaction levels, the use of IEPs and the quality of IEPs.

2.4.2.1 IEP satisfaction levels.

Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017) explored the views of physical education teachers in relation to IEP creation and implementation for students with an ASD. Findings in this study suggested that while many teachers took part in the development of an IEP that in general, teachers reported feelings of frustration with the process. Teachers reported feelings of frustration due to the difficulty in joining the IEP creation and implementation process whilst having a physical education teaching background.

Similar to the current study, Lee-Tarver (2006) sought to explore teacher's perceptions. Teacher perceptions were sought regarding the utility of IEPs for students with disabilities and found that teaching staff perceive the use of IEPs as valuable in the education process as a means of supporting curriculum access and preparation. Results of

this study also indicated that teachers were active participants in the IEP creation and implementation process. Lee-Tarver (2006) also found that teachers reported that further training in the creation and implementation of IEPs was warranted. The current study aims to capture teacher's perceptions and views around the role of IEP in a similar context.

Parent satisfaction levels in relation to IEPs was assessed by Slade et al. (2018) and this study found that parental levels of IEP satisfaction were positively correlated with other factors such as the level of parent-school connectedness as well as familial financial resources. These findings are similar to findings by Prunty (2011) whereby an emphasis was placed upon parent-school collaboration in relation to IEP creation and implementation. Slade et al. (2018) also found that the number of years of experience reported by teachers was found to be negatively correlated with IEP satisfaction, indicating that less experienced teachers were associated with higher levels of parental satisfaction with their child's IEP. Slade et al. (2018) posited that this could be due to newly trained teachers having more up-to-date knowledge and training around IEP usage. Slade et al. (2018) also posited that inexperienced teachers could be more approachable than experienced teachers for parents to express their own ideas around IEP usage relating to their child. Lee-Tarver (2006) had previously asserted that additional teacher training was warranted in relation to IEP creation. The current study is dissimilar to the study by Slade et al. (2018) as the current study will not explore parental perspectives on IEP usage and satisfaction. Strengths in the Slade et al. (2018) study include the use of a large sample population and the collection of a range of other data as a means of assessing many associated factors in relation to parents' levels of satisfaction with the use of IEPs. Further strengths of the Slade et al. (2018) study included the use of semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire as a means of exploring parental levels of satisfaction. Similarly, the current study will explore TP and the role of IEPs in TP with the use of semi-structured interviews. Finally, limitations of the Slade et al. (2018) study include the exclusion of teachers as direct participants in this process. In contrast to this study, the current study will focus solely on the perspectives of teaching staff.

2.4.2.2 The use of IEPs.

Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman (2017) in their study reported that a lack of training and education in relation to the development of IEPs was evident among the physical education cohort of teachers. Teachers also suggested a range of means of improving their level of involvement with the IEP process including further input and training. This sentiment was echoed in the study by Lee-Tarver (2006) which found that teachers perceived that more input/training around the use and implementation of IEPs for teachers was warranted going forward. Strengths within the Lee Tarver (2006) study included the high number of participants which were employed. The current study will also employ teachers but will not employ as large a sample size as in Lee Tarver's (2006) study. However, the current study will gather rich data in the form of semi-structured interviews which will explore teacher perspectives on IEP usage as opposed to Lee Tarver's (2006) study which gathered data using a brief questionnaire format.

A large sample size was included in the Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017) study as well as a measure which was collaboratively created and analysed by seven experts in the field of adapted PE which were noted as strengths. The current study will explore teacher perspectives on the role of IEPs within a specific context that is, transition planning for students with an ASD. However, the sample size in the current study will not be as large as the study by Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017). Similar to the study by Lee-Tarver (2006), the study by Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017) employed the use of a questionnaire. In contrast, Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017) used open ended questions as a means of gathering data. The current study differs from both studies in its use of semi-structured interviews to gather data.

Attitudes towards IEP usage as well as the development and implementation of IEPs in primary schools was explored in the study by Rose et al. (2012). This study found that despite the non-mandatory status of IEP usage in Ireland, IEPs were being used in all participating Irish primary schools in the study. Similar to the study by Lee Tarver (2006), the Rose et al. (2012) study also included a large and diverse sample size: educational staff, parents and pupils The use of interviews as a means of collecting data is also viewed

as a strength in relation to exploring the use of IEPs and their implementation. Further strengths include the independent coding in the analysis of data. Limitations to this study included the specific focus on IEPs within a primary school context which did not facilitate insight into the practice around IEP usage in early education or post-primary settings. Thus, results in relation to IEP usage were relevant only within the context of primary schools as opposed to across other levels within the Irish education system. The current study aims to build upon this research by gaining teacher perspectives on IEP usage. However, unlike the study by Rose et al. (2012), the current study will focus on post-primary teaching staff. Similar to this study, the current study will employ an independent coding system to ensure validity.

Prunty (2011) explored the role of the IEP and the voice of the child in this process and elicited the voice of the teacher in relation to IEP usage. The primary themes which emerged included the importance of the involvement of parents, collaboration around IEP and the co-ordination of the IEP amongst stakeholders. Further research within an Irish context has also indicated the existence of some difficulties in the correct creation, implementation and review of IEPs (Prunty, 2011). Similarly, the current study will explore teacher perspectives in this area but will not focus on the voice of the child. In this vein, a limitation in the Prunty (2011) study included the use of a focus group for students with an ASD who may struggle in such settings due to the anxiety associated with ASD (Lai et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2008).

Goepel (2009) explored the level of agreement among pupils, teachers and parents in relation to IEP creation and implementation and the perception around the needs of the child. This study indicated that a discrepancy exists around the perceived needs of the child which could potentially damage the opportunity to create a robust, collaborative and communicative relationship amongst all stakeholders in relation to IEP creation and implementation. Further findings in this study included some confusion and a lack of clarity linked to the roles linked to IEP creation and implementation (Goepel, 2009). Strengths in relation to the Goepel (2009) study included the use of an in-depth exploration in the form of a case study design and the inclusion of the parent/guardian

and teacher's perspective. The current study aims to replicate aspects of this study such as gaining teacher perspectives around IEP creation and implementation.

Noted limitations of the Goepel (2009) study included the use of a questionnaire as a means of assessing parent/guardian and teacher perspectives which might have reduced the amount of insight which could be gained in relation to the use of IEPs by this cohort. Similarly, a noted limitation of the Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017) study was that it included the use of a questionnaire which did not allow for expansion on the views of participants and the use of a very specific cohort of educators (PE teachers). The current study will explore teacher perspectives on the role of IEPs in transition planning but will do so through the use of semi-structured interviews as a means of gathering rich data around teacher perspectives in this area. Unlike the study by Samalot-Rivera and Lieberman (2017), the teachers employed will also vary in their professional roles within their school as a means of gaining further insight into IEP usage amongst post-primary staff with a view to increasing the validity of the findings.

2.4.2.3 The quality of IEPs.

Andreasson et al. (2015) examined 150 IEPs in Sweden from a range of students from years 1 to 9 (aged 7-16 years old) as a means of assessing the quality and use of IEPs for students with difficulties in literacy and found that the investigation and intervention quality varied across the population used. Prior investigation into the appropriate interventions was found to be lacking in IEPs in the study by Andreasson et al. (2015). Similarly, Rose et al. (2012) found that the consistency and quality of IEP usage varied in primary schools in Ireland. Strengths in the Prunty (2011) study include the two-phase approach to the data collection: focus groups and the use of a questionnaire in both mainstream and specialist school settings. Further strengths of this study include the large sample size of both phases and the recruitment of student, teacher and parent/guardian participants in the focus groups to explore the use of IEPs (Prunty, 2011). Strengths associated with the study by Andreasson and Wolff (2015) also included a large

participant population and a large number of reviewed IEPs. The current study will not be reviewing individual IEPs nor will the current study explore student and/or parent/caregiver perspectives, however, the current study will employ semi-structured interviews to gather rich and complex data as a means of exploring teacher perspectives on the use of IEPs.

2.5 Conclusion and Syntheses of findings: Literature Review phase one & phase two

It is important to note that while all of the studies employed were of a high calibre that all studies carried limitations. The current study aims to acknowledge and build upon the strengths and limitations noted within the included literature. The systematic reviews in the areas of transition planning for students with an ASD and IEP usage for student populations with ASD and SEN has indicated a range of areas which would benefit from further exploration.

2.5.1 Literature review phase one.

The study by Van Hees et al. (2015) found that individuals with an ASD faced a range of difficulties as a result of the range of symptoms associated with ASD (namely social, behavioural and communicative difficulties). However, the study also highlighted the positive components of ASD, many of which were framed as being advantageous to possess in a workplace or in academia in general. All studies found that individuals with an ASD can tend to face a range of challenges and difficulties in the transitioning process. This study indicated that there were positive aspects of having an ASD which contributed to the skill of an individual in some instances (Van Hees et al., 2015). Individuals with an ASD were found to see themselves as less able to cope in certain circumstances, but they were also less likely to report seeking external assistance with areas of difficulty. Furthermore, individuals with an ASD were less inclined to ruminate about prospective problems or difficulties. This is echoed in the study by Bell et al. (2017) whereby little or

no evidence of future planning around an upcoming transitioning process was found. Similarly, results from the Hatfield et al. (2017) study served to highlight the need for an ASD specific transition plan which is tailored to support different groups of people. Hatfield et al. (2017) also recommended that such plans should account for the individual's anxiety and should utilise, when possible, their motivation and insight.

The study by Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) highlighted a lack of services and a lack of opportunity for skill development in a range of areas for individuals with an ASD as reported by their caregivers, as well as concerns around the skill development of their children with an ASD. Thompson et al. (2018) found three primary themes in their data: firstly, parental wishes that their child with an ASD would be understood by others (including their family, co-workers, peers and society in general etc.). Secondly, the theme of their children understanding the world in which they live. Thirdly, parents expressed their wishes for their child to reach their potential and succeed in life.

Each study addresses parts of the research questions which underpin the current study, for example, Browning et al. (2009) examined how stress is experienced by individuals with an ASD in relation to transitioning from school. The current research will build upon this area by focusing the existing strengths in transition planning for students with an ASD as well as by exploring how these strengths can be built upon. Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) and Bell et al. (2017) both explored the experiences of both the parent/caregiver and the young person in relation to transitioning. The studies by Van Hees et al. (2015) and Browning et al. (2009) focused solely on student perspectives of transition planning while the study by Thompson et al. (2018) focused on parent/caregiver perspectives of transition planning. The study by Hatfield et al. (2017) included all three cohorts: student, parent/caregiver and associated professional views and experiences of transition planning. The research in the area of transition planning will also be built upon by the current study by exploring a cohort which was not solely addressed within the aforementioned studies, that is, teacher perspectives on transition planning.

The study by Bell et al. (2017) examined the pre and post transition experiences of a small number of case study participants. Similarly, the studies by Van Hees et al.

(2015) and Hatfield et al. (2017) examined the experiences of cohorts who had either transitioned or who had not yet transitioned as well as the experiences of a range of carers and professionals associated with the study child/adolescent/young adult. While the current study will not explore pre and post transition data or focus on student or parent perspectives around TP, the current study does set out to explore post primary school teacher's perspectives around the transition planning process. Such teachers will have a range of experiences in this area and will have supported the transition process for students with an ASD who may have already left or are due to leave their school in the near future and will therefore lend their expertise to the exploration of transition planning in the past and present. These studies have highlighted the individual experiences, difficulties and challenges to transitioning across all cohorts as well as the positives and strengths in the transitioning process which have answered review questions around the area and shaped the research questions going forward in the current study.

2.5.2 Literature review phase two.

The study by Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, (2017) indicated that there were some difficulties experienced by teachers in relation to IEP creation and implementation. The study by Andreasson et al. (2015) found that the investigation and intervention components varied in their quality. Poor investigations were also noted pre-intervention in IEPs. Similarly, inconsistencies were found in relation to IEP usage in primary schools in Ireland (Rose et al., 2012). The study by Prunty (2011) found that previous IEPs were found to guide the IEP review/creation meetings (according to 90% of respondents). Prunty (2011) also found a lacking in best practice methods in relation to IEP usage (lack of use of agenda for IEP meetings reported by 61% of respondents etc.).

Goepel (2009) found that a lack of clarity amongst key stakeholders in relation to perceptions around the child's needs led to difficulties in the IEP creation and implementation process including confusion and frustration amongst key stakeholders. The research undertaken by Lee-Tarver (2006) indicated that teachers understood and reported the importance of the use of IEPs but also found that more training was warranted

going forward in elementary school in relation to IEP usage. Research by Slade et al. (2018) indicated that the amount of teacher experience was negatively correlated with IEP satisfaction. Furthermore, high levels of parent-school connectedness and financial resources within the family were linked to IEP satisfaction. Many of these studies assessed the role and quality of IEPs using a range of varying means and cohorts. Two consistent limitations in the research included a failure to gain insight from the teachers and/or to elicit the voice of the child around the creation, the use and quality of their IEP (Andreasson et al., 2015; Lee-Tarver, 2006; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017; Slade et al., 2018). A further limitation includes a failure to obtain data which allowed for expansion upon points linked to IEP creation and implementation by employing qualitative means of data collection, either as a partial or full measure within studies (Goepel 2009; Lee-Tarver, 2006; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017). The current study aims to build on previous literature by using semi-structured interviews to explore teacher perspectives on the role of IEPs in transition planning. The current study will employ teaching staff with relevant experience in working with students with an ASD and creating IEPs for students with an ASD. The IEP research will be built upon by exploring teacher perspectives on the role of IEPs in the transition planning process. Unlike much previous research, the current study will not explore student and/or parent/caregiver perspectives on this area for reasons which will be addressed in the discussion section.

2.5.3 Implications for future research.

2.5.3.1 Findings from review question one.

All included studies within this systematic literature review scored high on the WOE D-overall section. Some limitations were noted among the studies. Primary limitations included a small sample size (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Van Hees et al., 2017) and an over representation of a single cohort (Thomson et al., 2018). Most studies ensured reliability by using independent researchers to code collected data separately (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Hatfield et al.,

2017; Van Hees et al., 2017). Future research could benefit from examining a cohort within an Irish context to build upon previous exploratory case study research such as research conducted by Bell et al. (2017). A larger population sample where possible could also support external validity. An exploration of the experiences and facets linked to transitioning into post-secondary education which involves consulting with teaching staff as well as the student and their parent/guardian would also benefit this area of research.

2.5.3.2 Findings from review question two.

Four of the included studies scored high on the WOE D-overall section (Andreasson & Wolff, 2015; Prunty 2011; Rose et al., 2012; Slade et al., 2018;). Two of the included studies scored medium on the WOE D-overall section (Goepel, 2009; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017). One study scored low on the WOE D-overall section (Lee-Tarver, 2006). Future research on IEP usage might benefit from a more longitudinal style of IEP assessment, starting at one time point and moving through the school years with the child assessing the quality of the IEP over a set time frame (Rose et al., 2012). Furthermore, when assessing IEPs, a large cohort from a range of schools in varying regions would support the external validity of findings (Rose et al., 2012). Some of the studies employed in the phase two review had a large sample size but did not include a wide range of schools from which the participants were recruited (Lee-Tarver, 2006). The use of case studies as a means of investigation can be a valuable means of gaining deep insight into the experiences of an individual, however, the lack of external generalisability can lessen the contribution to research, especially in relation to the use of a general tool such as an IEP (Goepel, 2009). Equally, Andreasson et al. (2015) assessed many IEPs from a wide range of districts (11 districts in Sweden) but the study failed to gain more individual and personalised insights in the form of interview or survey of the students or their parents or teachers (Andreasson et al., 2015). Finally, many of the studies which scored higher in the review tended to recruit parents and/or teachers as well as students in their study as participants which allowed for the student's voice to be elicited, which can be positive as a means of gaining holistic input (Rose et al., 2012; Prunty,

2011). Other studies supported research questions in relation to exploring parental satisfaction in relation to IEPs by assessing indirect data from children (e.g. cognitive functioning etc.) (Slade et al., 2018).

2.5.4 Summary of literature review findings.

Upon revision of both strands of the literature review, a range of findings have been highlighted:

- The individual experiences of transitioning into PSE of young adults with an ASD was found to vary somewhat (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Bell et al., 2017; Hatfield et al., 2017).

- Some studies indicated that a significant disparity exists between young people with disabilities' expectations and the associated stakeholders' (parents, associated professionals) expectations of post-secondary opportunities and supports required in educational faculties (Bell et al., 2017; Hatfield et al., 2017; Thompson, Fulk, & Piercy, 2000).

- In contrast, other studies found that parents/caregivers and their children with an ASD both reported anxiety in relation to transitioning (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015).

- Research on parent/caregiver experiences has also indicated that a poor level of external service supports exist for individuals with an ASD in relation to developing their social, educational and vocations skills (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015).

- Furthermore, Thompson et al. (2018) also posited that young people with an ASD ought to be supported environmentally through the adaptation or modification of their environment as required, as a means of supporting them to engage more in their participation in aspects of life and ultimately, their transition into adulthood.

- Little evidence of transition planning in post primary education has been found in the Irish context (Bell et al., 2017).

Finally, research has consistently indicated that an early start to the transition support process for individuals with an ASD is crucial to the efficacy of transition into

PSE (Bell et al., 2017; Cimera , Burgess & Wiley, 2013; Vanvergeijk et al., 2008; Wehman et al., 2014; Wei, Wagner, Hudson, Yu & Javitz, 2016). The process of transitioning can be facilitated by a range of factors including careful planning techniques and the facilitation of access to a range of services, accommodations and resources to aid with transitioning into PSE (Van Bergeijket al., 2008). Research has also indicated inconsistencies in relation to IEP usage in Ireland (Rose et al., 2012). Difficulties in the correct creation, implementation and review of IEPs have been reported (Prunty, 2011). More training may be required in this area as a means of ensuring a more standardised approach to IEP creation and implementation which may benefit users of IEPs. Communication difficulties were also cited as primary concerns amongst key stakeholders in the IEP process, with a lack of clarity around priority areas for development within the IEP, causing difficulty in IEP creation and implementation (Goepel, 2009). Further training in relation to stakeholder communication and collaborative work on IEPs might also benefit key stakeholders in the IEP creation and implementation process.

2.6 Current Study Rationale and Research Questions

Data on the exact number of individuals with a diagnosis of an ASD continuing from mainstream post primary school to further education is not currently available within an Irish context. Australian research has indicated that the number of individuals with an ASD entering further education from a mainstream post primary school setting is much lower than that of their peers (Karola, Julie-Ann & Lyn, 2016). Research on educational transitioning for students with an ASD has been primarily linked to the transition process from primary to post primary school, leaving a gap in the literature exploring the transition for students with an ASD into PSE (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). Previous literature also highlighted a gap in research exploring teacher perspectives on transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; NCSE, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015).

Consequently, this study aims to explore teacher perspectives on the transitioning process into PSE for post-primary school students with an ASD.

Much of the research on the use of IEPs has been linked to their utility and/or the experiences of individuals linked to their general usage or more specific usage in relation to an area of education (e.g. literacy or physical education etc.), (Andreasson et al., 2015; Goepel, 2009; Prunty, 2011; Rose et al., 2012; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017; Slade et al., 2018). However, research assessing the experiences of teaching staff in the use of IEPs in relation to transition planning is scarce in previous literature. Moreover, much of the research on IEP usage is concentrated solely in primary or elementary school contexts thus neglecting to explore post-primary school IEP usage (Goepel, 2009; Prunty, 2011; Rose et al., 2012; Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, 2017; Slade et al., 2018). As such, the current study also aims to explore perceptions of IEPs in post-primary schools. The research questions for the current study are as follows;

1. What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post-primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

2. What are post-primary school teacher's perspectives on the use of IEPs within the transition planning process for students with an ASD?

3.0 Chapter Three: Methodology

This research aimed to explore the perspectives of post-primary school teachers in relation to their transition planning experiences for students with an ASD. The current study also sought to explore the perspectives of post-primary school teachers on the role and use of IEPs in transition planning for students with an ASD.

3.1 Study Design

The employment of a qualitative methodology in this research facilitated the process of gaining insight into the perceptions of individuals, specifically in relation to their experiences as members of a wider system through the collection of rich and complex data (Green & Thorogood, 2018).

3.1.1 Research paradigm.

The paradigm employed in this study followed a social constructivist perspective, whereby meanings are subjectively constructed and based upon lived experiences which are shaped by the individual's own experiences of their reality (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Lewis, 2015; Kim, 2001). Furthermore, the aim of this research was to obtain the perspectives of the participants, which are quite frequently "negotiated socially and historically" (Lewis, 2015, p. 21). This research employed an inductive or bottom-up approach without any of the restrictions associated with a definitive and foundational theoretical perspective (e.g. being bound by a specific theoretical framework) (Henderson, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Ponterotto, 2005; Reid et al., 2005).

3.1.2 Appreciative inquiry as a methodological tool.

AI involves the use of solution-oriented discussion to elicit change, rather than viewing internal difficulties or issues through a more problem oriented or deficits focused lens (Van Der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011). AI is built upon five core principles; the constructivist principle, the simultaneity principle; the poetic principle; the anticipatory principle and the positive principle (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011). See table 3.0 for definition of AI principles.

The five stages of the AI process are collectively referred to as named the '5D cycle' (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). The 5D cycle was originally known as the 4D cycle but the first 'D'-'Define' was later added (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). See table 3.1 for definition of the 5D stages.

Table 3.0) AI Principles Table

AI Principle	Meaning
The Constructivist Principle	Posits that knowledge and future development are married as concepts (Bushe et al., 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Whitney et al., 2011). Also posits that individuals are continuously involved in the process of making sense of our reality/world and that the meaning that we make of our world is conceived with the use of language and inquiry as a means of development (Whitney et al., 2011).
The Simultaneity Principle	Posits that the process of exploring an area with the use of inquiry or questions is simultaneous with the process of change within an organisation (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Whitney et al., 2011). Views the process of this exploration as an intervention in relation to change (Whitney et al., 2011).
The Poetic Principle	Posits that each organisation provides constant opportunities for learning as well as interpretation through the acknowledgement of each organisations history, present and future prospects which are co-authored by its members (Whitney et al., 2011). Posits that an organisation's members' stories can inform, express and inspire within an organisation (Bushe et al., 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2001).
The Anticipatory Principle	Posits that the level of positive thought in hopes and projections for the future can have an impact on the positivity level of future behaviours and actions (Whitney et al., 2011). This positive energy is a foundational tenet of AI (Whitney et al., 2011).
The Positive Principle	Posits that the means of creating and sustaining change within an organisation are dependent on the level of created and maintained positivity in relation to the task of the group and/or individual who is tasked with creating change within said organisation (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Whitney et al., 2011).

Table 3.1) The 5D stages of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011)

Stage Define	*1:*	Includes exploring what the topic is and whether it merits further exploration (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001, Mohr et al., 2011)
Stage Discovery	*2:*	Includes the process of exploring and appreciating the strengths/best of what is currently working, process is linked to positive change and core positivity (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001)
Stage Dream	*3:*	The process of exploring the potential for change and what could be based on positive inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Fitzgerald et al., 2001).
Stage Design	*4:*	The process of realising and recognising the potential and form of change within an organisation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001)
Stage Destiny	*5:*	Includes the process of empowering, affirming and planning in relation to change based on strengths based and positive inquiry within an organisation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001, Mohr et al., 2011)

3.2 Appreciative Inquiry: Critique of AI

The role of the researcher has evolved in that 'research subjects' are no longer employed in research, instead, participants are invited to participate or enrol in a piece of research (Aldred, 2009). Increased emphasis has been placed on positive inquiry, positive change, the process of empowerment as well as the utility of group and individual processes which are linked to creating and sustaining wider change within an organisation (Aldred, 2009). AI is a mode of research in which the researcher avoids engaging with a critique or a focus based on deficits or perceived weaknesses within an organisation when tasked with exploring or bringing about change (Ludema, Wilmot & Srivastva, 1997).

AI had previously been reported as being under-evaluated as a research methodology. It has been used in much action research despite the lack of literature to support its prevalence (Grant & Humphries, 2006). Previous research has cited concerns in the use of a solely strengths focused mode of inquiry such as AI suggesting that less strengths oriented and less positive areas were at risk of being overlooked within an organisation (Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Rogers & Fraser, 2003). The current study will explore strengths but will also explore how existing strengths can be built upon.

Grant and Humphries (2006) posited that more evaluative research is warranted in the use of AI, however, they also stated that the use of AI should be conducted parallel to the research process. Similarly, Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, (2006) argued that inquiry is synonymous or equal to the intervention process, and that the very act of posing the positive question allows for reflection around organisational strengths and the planting of seeds of change. Fitzgerald, Murrell & Newman, (2001) stated that AI appears to have a diverse range of applications in research and is in a continuous state of evolution. They contend that it will never be seen to be "finished" as a mode of action research (Fitzgerald et al., 2001, p. 21). Fitzgerald et al. (2001) have described AI as a more contemporary form of action research in that previously, action research had focused on a more linear path of problem solving as a means of supporting the organisation or owner of the problem. The function of AI usage was historically linked to fostering corporate change as AI was initially employed within organisations as a means of promoting

positive change within the organisation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). In recent years, the utility of AI has been demonstrated within the fields of social, health and education research (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Dematteo & Reeves, 2011; Hammond 2013; Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel & Black, 2009).

In this vein, Fitzgerald et al. (2001) reported that the use of AI in research had been negatively viewed as a one size fits all or a more universal method to promoting organisational change. Fitzgerald et al. (2001) challenged this view by asserting that the problem oriented view of supporting change had not been critiqued due to its deeply rooted place in research. Similarly, Ludema et al. (2006) purported that the use of AI as a positive mode of inquiry can serve to unlock "existing deficit constructions, creating spaces for new voices and languages to emerge, and expanding circles of dialogue to build a supportive relational context, appreciative inquiry allows for the positive construction of social reality" (Ludema et al., 2006, p. 12).

Hammond (2013) posited that in the act of finding problems within the process of problem solving, we tend to magnify them. This approach would serve to hinder the data collection process and disregard the more positive aspects of a participating school's approach to the role of IEPs in transition planning which if explored, could be built upon going forward. Furthermore, a variance in the use of transition plans for PSE has been highlighted in previous literature within an Irish context (Daly et al., 2016). As such, the researcher did not employ a direct assessment of the usage of IEPs within the process of TP due to the variance in IEP usage within post-primary schools as well as the infancy of the TP process in said schools (Daly et al., 2016; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). Furthermore, an IEP protocol examining said usage would directly contrast with the solution focused and strengths based methodological usage of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). The use of AI was an appropriate means of conducting such sensitive research due to the more positive, strengths-based approach to the intricacies of the data collection process which involved building upon pre-existing strengths rather than highlighting deficits, which would be an inappropriate and insensitive means of conducting this research (Bell et al., 2017; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; DES, 2007a; NCSE, 2016; Rose et al., 2012). The use of AI strategically avoids the potential for

negativity, blame, anger, frustration and dissatisfaction by employing positive and strengths-based questions as a means of exploring the research area. The use of AI as a methodology to support inquiry of areas of a complex or sensitive nature has been demonstrated in previous literature (Giles & Alderson, 2008; Liebling, Price & Elliott, 1999). Furthermore, the utility of AI as an effective means of exploring strengths based experiences in educational settings has also been demonstrated in previous literature (Dematteo & Reeves, 2011; Giles & Alderson, 2008; Kozik et al., 2009).

Finally, transition planning for students with a disability which incorporates an IEP is a relatively unexplored concept in secondary schools (Bell et al., 2017). In addition, the process of discussing transition planning into PSE could elicit anxiety in each cohort of participants for a range of reasons including; anxiety about future educational placement and anxiety linked to leaving home. (Daly et al., 2016; Grigal, Hart & Migliore, 2011; Shattuck et al., 2012; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). In light of the sensitivity related to the areas covered in this exploration, a strengths-oriented, positive method of inquiry was certainly warranted. As such, the use of AI in the current study is suited to the sensitive nature of the data being collected which will be linked to current transition planning processes as well as teacher perspectives around the current role of IEPs within this process in post-primary schools.

3.2.1 Appreciative inquiry and the current study.

AI is built upon the concept that the seeds of change can be present and potentially apparent from the first line of inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). While AI has not been found to improve the quality of transition plans, it has supported more positive interactions during IEP meetings (Kovik, 2008). AI differs from traditional means of interview as it allows the researcher to obtain information in the form of stories, situational recall and metaphors with a view to discovering positive moments (Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins & Hetherington, 2009). AI is especially suited to qualitative data collection although research has indicated that quantitative data can also be analysed under an AI lens (Fitzgerald et al., 2001).

The current study has addressed all five stages of the 5D cycle. The initial stage '***Define'*** involved exploring the existing knowledge base which was facilitated by the process of systematically reviewing the literature within the area. This process facilitated the identification of research questions which had not previously been addressed within the literature. This process then led to the rationale for the study design.

The second, third and fourth stages: '***Discovery, Dream*** and ***Design'*** influenced the question formulation in the semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C for AI stages and the corresponding questions).

The final stage, '***Destiny*'** will be addressed by outlining the implications of the research and by feeding back the recommendations which were informed by the analysis of the collected data. This information will be sent to participating schools once the thesis has been reviewed academically. This process will afford participating schools the autonomy to implement such findings in transition planning support and serve to potentially assist further planning in participating schools. See figure 3.0 for a visual representation of the application of the 5D's within the current study.

Figure 3.0: the 5D model within the current study

Define: *Literature review and filtering of information to gain insight into the research area*.

Creation of review questions and eventually research questions from gaps within existing literature.

Semi Structured Interviews created in line with AI 5D model-employing 3 of 5 D's: **Discovery**, **Dream** and **Design**.

Discovery: What are the currently existing strengths?

Dream: What does the ideal scenario look like?

Design: What resources are required to establish and maintain the ideal scenario?

Destiny: *Final stage*

Feedback which will be given to participating schools based on study findings.

3.3 Participants

This study initially sought to explore the perspectives of students, their parents/caregivers and their teachers around transition planning and the role of IEPs within this process. Recruitment difficulties meant that teacher perspectives were obtained. Parents and students were invited to participate in this study but uptake rates were low within the aforementioned cohorts. This resulted in the voice of the student and/or their parent/caregiver not being elicited in the current study. Schools were also likely to commit to participating due to anxiety around transition planning, their usage of IEPs and concerns around the efficacy of their own transition planning protocol. Collected data from the one parent and three students who participated in the study was not employed. This was due to generalisability limitations associated with the small quantity of data collected and the number of participants. Notwithstanding, the schools associated with the participating parent and students will receive feedback on transition planning in

the coming months as a means of ensuring ethical research and guaranteeing that their time was not poorly utilised when participating in this study.

Previous research in the area of transition planning within an Irish context has noted that transition planning in Ireland tends to begin approximately two years before the move to PSE (Daly et al., 2016). Consequently, teachers of students with an ASD in the senior cycle with experience of writing IEPs were invited to participate in the current study.

The advantages and disadvantages of determining participant numbers a-priori in qualitative research have been debated in recent times (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Sim, Saunders, Waterfield & Kingstone, 2018). Previous literature has suggested that the number of participants required to reach thematic and data saturation can vary and depend on the study design and methodology (Francis et al., 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010; Sandelowski, 1995). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that when conducting qualitative research, thematic data saturation can occur from between 6 and 12 participant interviews.

Consequently, the researcher aimed to include 6 to 12 participants as a means of reaching data saturation and therefore, faithfully representing themes relevant to the research questions. Ten post-primary school teachers took part in this study. Of these ten participants, one teacher was a special needs coordinator (SENCO), six teachers were special education teachers (SET) and three teachers were mainstream teachers. Three mainstream post-primary schools located in the Munster region of Ireland participated in the study.

3.3.1 Sampling process.

Due to recruitment difficulties and the limited timeframe available to conduct the study, the sampling approach employed was non-probabilistic convenience sampling (see section 5.10 in discussion chapter). The limitations to the use of convenience sampling are noted and discussed in section 6.3 in the conclusion chapter.

3.3.2 Recruitment process.

Mainstream post-primary schools with an ASD unit that were known to the researcher and/or their colleagues were identified as prospective participating schools and the researcher then contacted the identified schools. Principals of mainstream post primary schools with an ASD unit/class in the Munster region were initially contacted via phone call. The researcher used a specially created script to explain the research to each school (See appendix D). If the principal or Deputy Principal (DP) was unavailable to speak to the researcher at the time of the call, a message was left with the school secretary for the principal or DP and an email which briefly explained the project, was sent to the school email address for the attention of the principal after the initial phone call.

If the school wanted to participate and contacted the researcher via phone or email, a meeting or phone call was set up to discuss the research further (if required) and information sheets were sent via email (or delivered) to the school to distribute to prospective participants.

A key link-in person in the form of a designated staff member (SET or career guidance counsellor, SENCO etc.) was appointed during this time and any further correspondence was directed towards the key link-in person. The key link-in person passed on the relevant documentation to individuals who were eligible to take part in the study.

Participants who were eligible met two main criteria;

- Teaching staff with current or previous experience working with students with an ASD in mainstream or within a unit

and

- Teaching staff with experience in the creation and implementation of IEPs for students with a diagnosis of an ASD.

If school staff satisfied each of the eligibility criterion and were interested in participating, they were given consent sheets to review and a date and time was organised for data

collection, usually through the key link-in person. Participating teachers then filled in the consent form in person at the time of the interview. See table 3.2 for a visual representation and for more information regarding the recruitment steps taken.

Table 3.2) Recruitment Steps

Step	Action
1.	The Principal or DP of the school was contacted via phone call and the research was explained using a script (see Appendix D).
2.	An email was then sent containing information sheets for the school Principal or DP.
3.	a) If the Principal consented to the school's participation in the research in their school within three to five working days, participant information sheets and consent sheets were sent via post or email. A key link-in person was designated for all further correspondence (a member of the SEN team, a career guidance counsellor, mainstream or ASD unit teacher). b) If the school had not contacted the researcher via email or phone within three to five working days, the researcher contacted the school via phone to ascertain whether they might require further clarification and/or whether they wished to participate.
4.	If the school then clarified that they wished to participate in the study, information sheets and consent sheets were sent via email and/or post. A key link-in person was designated for all further correspondence (similar to step 3a).
5.	The researcher then contacted the key link-in person via phone or email to discuss upcoming data collection dates, procedure and recruitment numbers within the school.
6.	Within one to three months of the school expressing an interest in participating the study, the researcher began collecting data.

3.4 Procedure

The process of data collection was undertaken over a period of three months using semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers in post-primary schools in the Munster region in Ireland. Similar to previous research on transition planning, the use of one-to-one interviews facilitated an in-depth understanding and exploration of the research questions (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Doyle et al., 2017; Van Hees et al., 2015).

3.5 Measures Employed

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews (SSIs).

Data were collected from teachers using face to face semi-structured interviews (SSIs) as a means of facilitating the teachers to expand upon the prompts/questions, leading to a collection of broader, more descriptive and rich data. Advantages linked to employing SSIs include; flexibility, the opportunity to broadly explore the research area using prompts which allow participants to expand on prompts as well as the provision of a space for elaboration and/or probing if either party is unclear about any materials used (Breen, 2006; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Disadvantages linked to the SSIs approach include; the time-consuming practice of SSIs as well as some unwanted effects on the participant by the presence of the researcher, such as the induction of a more inhibited approach to answering questions or the presence of a social desirability bias which can skew data (Adams, 2015; Holbrook, Green & Krosnick, 2003; McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

SSIs were selected for the data collection task within the current study due to the sensitive nature of the data collected. The use of one-to-one SSI allowed for further exploration of areas which may not have necessarily been expanded upon within a focus group scenario due to the presence of other group members (e.g. IEP usage, professional views on transition planning etc.), (Leung & Savithiri, 2009). Furthermore, the use of focus groups may not allow for the expansion and in-depth exploration of the research

area afforded by interviews (Breen, 2006). Finally, the use of SSIs supported a one to one more in depth discussion on TP and the use of IEPs in this process without the fear of professional judgement or negative evaluation from colleagues which may have transpired within discussions in a focus group setting (Leung & Savithiri, 2009).

3.5.1.1 SSIs: Reliability and validity.

Qualitative research has been criticised in literature for a perceived lacking in scientific rigor, especially when compared to the statistical rigor which is adhered to in research of a quantitative nature (Leung, 2015; Noble & Smith 2015; Sandelowski, 1993). It has been argued that the philosophical basis of qualitative and quantitative research directly contrasts and as such different parameters ought to be employed when ensuring the validity and reliability in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Noble & Smith, 2015; Rolfe, 2006). Golafshani (2003) argued that "reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in [the] qualitative paradigm" (Golfshani, 2003, p. 604). Noble and Smith (2015) suggested that alternative terminology be used when addressing quantitative research terminology in qualitative research. Noble and Smith (2015) suggested that validity be referred to in terms of 'truth value', i.e. an accurate portrayal of the participants' own realities. Furthermore, they suggested that reliability be phrased as 'consistency', referring to the trustworthiness of the methodology and the transparency of the decisions made by the researcher (Noble & Smith, 2015). Finally, when conducting qualitative research, Noble and Smith (2015) also posited that generalisability be referred to as 'applicability' within a qualitative context (e.g. the consideration of application of findings to the relevant contexts).

In accordance with previous literature on methods of establishing validity (or 'truth value') and reliability (or 'consistency') pertaining to the development of the SSIs, the SSIs were based on previous methodologies on this research area (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016; Pathak & Intratat, 2016). The SSIs were internally reviewed by the researcher and their supervisors and were also externally piloted using a sample cohort from the population employed in the study (Kaillio et al., 2016). In line with previous

literature, the SSIs were piloted pre-data collection with two mainstream post-primary teachers (Adams & Cox, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This afforded the researcher the opportunity to anticipate any pertinent issues in relation to the SSIs usage as well as the opportunity to review and resolve any difficulties in participant understanding of the questions posed. As part of the researcher's own endeavour to ascertain a high level of reflexivity within this research and as a means of ensuring objectivity in the data collection and analysis phases, the researcher also asked the pilot cohort for feedback regarding their perceptions of her demeanour during the pilot interview (e.g. facial expressions, intonation, body language etc.). See section 3.8 for more information on the obtention of researcher reflexivity. Data collected from the pilot phase was not included in the study.

As a means of ensuring the truth value or validity of the research, all SSIs contained a scripted introduction and question cues to ensure similarity across the broad areas which were covered. Open-ended questions on the SSI were designed to align with the AI model of inquiry and were also created in adherence with previous literature on creating SSI interview guides (Adams, 2015). Moreover, all relevant NCSE documentation on transition planning and the use of IEPs for students with SEN was also reviewed to support the valid construction of the SSIs (NCSE, 2006; NCSE, 2014, NCSE, 2016a, NCSE, 2016b). See table 3.3 for sample items. See appendix G for teacher semi-structured interview format and appendix C for SSI questions and corresponding AI 5D model components.

Ten participating teachers were briefed before the study using an interview script about the aims of the study. Informed consent was obtained in written form from participants regarding the use of data and their participation in the study (see Appendix F). The 10 semi-structured interviews lasted between 17 minutes and 33 minutes and were conducted on a one to one basis with the researcher. During the interviews, participating teachers were asked a range of questions which were open ended in nature allowing the participants to expand upon their answers. All data collected were qualitative in nature (Mertens, 2014). All data were transcribed verbatim and interviews were later played and

compared with transcripts by the researcher to ensure the highest level of accuracy was achieved during the transcription process. See appendix G for the teacher interview script.

Table 3.3) Sample questions and corresponding AI stages:

AI Stage	Corresponding question from the teacher semi-structured interview form
Discovery	What is working well in relation to transition planning into PSE for individuals with an ASD?
Dream	What might the ideal use of IEPs look like within the transition planning process?
Design	What does the school need to do overall as an organisation to support the ideal transitioning scenario?

3.6 Data Collection

Data were collected using recorded semi-structured interviews. See Appendix G for the teacher interview scripts employed.

3.6.1 Ethical considerations.

This research was assessed for ethical considerations by the DECpsy research ethics committee and ethics was granted to conduct this research in May 2018. Conducting research brings with it a range of ethical considerations (Haverkamp, 2005). The researcher was cognisant of conducting research in an ethically sound manner in relation to all facets of the research process from recruitment and data collection to analysis, storage and dissemination. The researcher conducted the interviews and transcribed the collected data. The data was kept on an encrypted memory device which

was used only for research purposes. All data was analysed on a password protected computer which was kept in a secure and locked area. All data collected was kept confidential and no identifying information was employed when referencing participating schools and staff.

Participants were informed about the nature and focus of the study before taking part. Participants were also made aware that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The procedures for this were listed in all information sheets (see appendix E).

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was employed for analysis, which allowed for the identification of thematic patterns in the data which was related to the areas being explored (that is, the role of IEPs in PSE Transition planning for individuals with an ASD) (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012; Kung, Giles & Hagan, 2013).

The transcripts were then reviewed and coded. In line with previous literature, an independent coder was employed as a means of insuring internal reliability within the analysis process (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Hatfield et al., 2017; Van Hees et al., 2017).

3.7.1 Thematic analysis (TA).

All data were qualitative in nature and thematic analysis was employed as a means of finding and analysing patterns and salient experiential perspectives from within the collected data (Braun et al., 2006; Clarke et al., 2013; Clarke et al., 2014; Tierney & Fox, 2010). The use of TA when compared to other means of qualitative data analysis facilitated a theoretically flexible and independent exploration of the collected data whilst allowing for the identification of constellations of meaningful narratives and key patterns

and themes as well as the intrinsic organisation of rich data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Clarke and Braun, 2014; Joffe, 2012). TA is a systematic and analytical means of facilitating the researcher to extract and code collective implicit and explicit phrases and meanings into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2014; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

In contrast to other qualitative approaches, Clarke and Braun (2013) have suggested that TA is a means of analysis more so than a methodology in itself (Clarke et al., 2013). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is recommended for research on the life-histories and specific experiences of the individual. TA was selected over IPA as it facilitates the flexibility to identify, observe and analyse patterns within the discourse (Clarke et al., 2013; Reid et al., 2005; Knight, Wykes & Hayward, 2003). Content Analysis (CA) was also considered as an approach to the data analysis. CA has been identified as more suited to deductive analyses with the aim of formulating a phenomenological concept (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The use of TA is more suited to inductive approaches to research in which no pre-existing theories frame the research area (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). An inductive or bottom-up approach is driven by the collected data as opposed to by pre-existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2014). TA has been employed as a means of analysis in previous research to explore themes in relation to school staff perceptions of IEPs (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018).

Data were analysed in coherence with the six -step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) for TA including: data immersion, code generation, the identification of themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and reporting. This approach was similar to other recommended TA analysis step processes, and some overlap did occur between the advised steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Green et al., 2007). See table 3.4 for more information.

Table 3.4) Thematic Analysis: Six Step Approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Thematic Analysis: *Six Step Approach*	Research Action
Phase 1: *Familiarising yourself with your data*	The researcher gathered the data, transcribed the data and listened to the recordings repeatedly as a means of ensuring quality control and familiarising herself with the data. Data was then read and re-read.
Phase 2: *Generating initial codes*	An initial list of noted quotes was created and from this list, codes which identified features of the data were generated.
Phase 3: *Searching for themes*	Codes were then sorted and aligned with broader overarching themes that had been identified within the data.
Phase 4: *Reviewing themes*	Themes were reviewed and refined by looking at the coded extracts as well as the patterns within the themes. Codes or themes which were unmatched or unsuited were re-categorised or excluded. The thematic maps or overall patterns were then explored against the set of data and refined as a means of accurately exploring the data.
Phase 5: *Defining and naming themes*	Themes were refined and reviewed once more and collated with other themes of required. The meanings of themes were explored.
Phase 6: *Producing the report*	Fully explored, reviewed, refined and defined themes were then reported in a clear and concise manner with specific data highlighting and accompanying each theme.

3.7.2 Coding.

All transcripts were read a number of times by the researcher as a means of immersing herself in the data after which, coding then took place. Codes were created manually by colour-coding specific phrases, sentences and/or words which were relevant in their relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris,White & Moules, 2017). Data were refined and collated into codes which were marked and linked to the raw data for further reference (Guest et al., 2012). Identified codes were then collated and placed into subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Guest et al., 2012). During this process, less relevant or minor codes were amalgamated with other minor but similar themes and listed under larger umbrella sub-themes which were also categorised accordingly (Green et al., 2007; Joffe, 2012). Each sub theme and theme had a designated colour which corresponded to a number of codes.

Singular units of data (which were isolated categorically or were found to be dissimilar to other themes) were categorised under a miscellaneous code and were then refined and reviewed further. If the miscellaneous codes were noted as relevant they were added to the study and if they were noted as irrelevant, they were excluded from the study (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Subthemes within the data which were identified and were observable within the transcript in the form of a statement were categorised under larger, overarching themes which were identified within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Braun, Clarke, Terry, Rohleder & Lyons, 2014; Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Relevant themes were identified, not through quantifiable means but rather through the bearing they held to the research questions, (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

In line with previous qualitative AI research data were explored thematically under the 5D AI domains (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012; Kaye-Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008; Kung et al., 2013). All data were categorised in line with three of the employed 5D concepts of AI for the data collection and analysis processes; Discovery, Dream and Design. The 'discovery' component of AI focused on current strengths and what is currently working well. The 'dream' component explored what the ideal transition planning scenario looks like to the participant and the 'design' component explored the

participants views on the resources or changes required to reach their 'dream' or ideal view of transition planning. The initial D-'define' was employed when initially exploring the research area and the final D-'destiny' will be employed in the future in the form of relevant recommendations to participating schools around transition planning and the use of IEPs in this process once the current study has been examined.

3.7.2.1 Independent coding.

It is imperative that qualitative research pertains to a strategic layout as a means of conducting credible research (Noble & Smith, 2015, Sandelowski, 1993). Conducting an analysis as a sole researcher can bring with it a myriad of errors in relation to the analysis of data (Hruschka et al., 2004). It would be remiss to consider a sole researcher's observation and interpretation of data to be an appropriate definitive mode of analysis. This is due to the prospective subjective biases present which could result in erroneous inferences and systematic errors based on the lens through which the sole researcher views the data (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Kruglanski & Ajzen, 1983; Noble & Smith 2015). These research biases can be borne of the researcher's own experiences, views and aims and can skew the data and decrease the reliability and in turn, the validity of the results (Noble & Smith, 2015).

In order to adhere ensure that the data analysis process was reliable or consistent and that the participants' own truth was reflected accurately, specific measures were taken. A second coder was recruited by the researcher with a view of pertaining to a scientifically rigorous framework for this qualitative piece of research. While previous literature has indicated that caution should be employed when using another coder as a means of obtaining inter-rater reliability, research has also indicated that employing an independent coder is an important aspect of the analysis process (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe et al., 2004; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In this vein, a researcher with previous experience of conducting qualitative research, who held a level nine Master of Science qualification in Psychological Science was asked to independently code the data (Joffe et al., 2004). As cited in previous literature, the current researcher did not guide the coder or brief them around the analysis before the coder began coding the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

However, the primary researcher did brief the coder on the established practice of coding data which was related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Consequently, the coder was given the research questions to accompany the transcript as a means of ensuring that this established practice was upheld through the independent coding process. The coder was given a transcript with a range of colour coded units of code and was then asked to compare the codes with the coding patterns previously obtained. The independent coder reviewed the codes as a means of assessing code meanings and relevance, level of quality and inconsistencies within the data (Joffe et al., 2004). As per previous research, inconsistencies in code meanings, categorisations and/or definitions were resolved through continued discussion and review amongst the coders (Bell et al., 2017). Coding inconsistencies were resolved through discussion and eventually a mutual agreement was met (for instance, the coder and researcher initially disagreed on whether data pertaining to the 'information sharing' themes ought to be categorised under 'collaboration' or categorised as a separate standalone subtheme. This issue was resolved through discussion and it was decided that there was enough relevant data to merit a separate sub category of 'information sharing and IEP access'). The final phase of the TA analysis involved a write up or reporting of salient themes within the data and further discussion around the sub-themes placed under each theme (Joffe, 2012).

3.8 Researcher Reflexivity during Data Collection and Analysis

The importance of critical or inward reflection has been cited as a key component of qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017; Berger, 2015). The capacity to view the data process as separate to the researchers own viewpoints, subjective views and emotions linked to the process of gathering said data is an efficacious means of conducting qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). The researcher acknowledged her own role within the data collection procedure and as such, the researcher was careful to attempt to avoid contaminating the data collected by over or under representing certain teachers in the analysis process (Berger, 2015). The researcher took much care to acknowledge her own affect and associated life events which coincided

with the data collection and analyses processes. The researcher took note of her own affect pre-interview as a means of ensuring a neutral, open and friendly demeanour before the interview. The researcher rehearsed the interviews with colleagues and recorded them while both her and her colleague watched the recordings and took note of her, intonation, facial expression, body language etc. so as to ensure a friendly and open overall demeanour. The researcher was also careful to maintain a neutral facial expression during the interview, specifically if sensitive information was shared.

A further means of ascertaining that the data collected was objectively collected and analysed involved the researcher keeping a research journal detailing events in her life which coincided with data collection and analyses (e.g. PSI presentation which took place during the data collection phase). The researcher also recorded her own attitudes, reactions and affect within the research journal of relevance immediately post interview, for example 'I was surprised when teacher X reported Y' or 'of note: Teacher X was a very inspirational and energetic teacher'. Making field notes in the research journal post interview facilitated a more objective means of employing data without under or over relying on specific participants based on the researcher's own feelings or attitudes towards them borne during the interactions during the data collection phase.

4.0 Chapter Four: Results

Ten teachers were interviewed in total using a SSI format which prescribed to the 5D elements of AI including; Discovery, Dream and Design. One SENCO, six SETs and three mainstream post-primary school teachers took part in the study. Data were analysed using TA and conceptually founded patterns were observed and recorded in the form of themes and sub-themes (Boyatzis, 1998). See appendix I for a record of extracted codes and sub-themes for each participant. Data were explored using themes and sub themes under the AI 5D methodology. The process of theme and sub-theme collation is illustrated, see figure 4.0.

Figure 4.0. Thematic layout in Results section

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      The AI 5D components of the data: Discovery, Dream and Design.        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
            ↓                                          ↓
┌───────────────────────────────┐    ┌───────────────────────────────┐
│ Research Question 1: What are  │    │ Research Question 2: What are  │
│ post-primary school teacher's  │    │ post-primary school teacher's  │
│ experiences and perspectives on│    │ perspectives on the use of IEPs│
│ transition planning from post  │    │ within the transition planning │
│ primary education to post-     │    │ process for students with an   │
│ secondary education in Ireland │    │ ASD?                           │
│ for students with an ASD?      │    │                                │
└───────────────────────────────┘    └───────────────────────────────┘
            ↓                                          ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Thematic Analysis: relevant sub-themes labelled and collated into larger  │
│ overarching themes and labelled. Sub- themes and themes then reported in   │
│ Results section.                                                          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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The research questions will be addressed within the data by exploring the areas highlighted in figures 4.1 and 4.2. Each research question will be addressed within the AI 5D framework.

4.1 Research Question 1: *What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?*

Figure 4.1. Research question one and associated themes

RQ1: What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

Discovery:
- General School Strengths
- School Transition planning Strengths

Dream:
- School relationship with PSE
- Staff and time

Design:
- School Resources required to reach ideal TP scenario
- TP time line
- PSE role in TP
- Parental Roles in TP

4.2 Discovery: Current Strengths

A range of strengths were listed throughout the interviews. Strengths were linked to IEP usage, personal and professional strengths and school strengths in relation to TP.

4.2.1 General school strengths.

More general school strengths were discussed with teachers reporting a range of school strengths including their school ethos, general programmes which benefit student development as well as the process of supporting students in a range of areas.

4.2.1.1 General school programmes.

Teachers discussed the importance and value in many of the school programmes that they offer. Teachers spoke highly of a range of programmes such as leaving certificate applied (LCA) and extra-curricular activities designed to support student development in a variety of areas and support them to access the curriculum if needed.

> *Well we do LCA we do the new junior cert level 1 and level 2. So that's really important.* (Teacher 1, Line 69)

Parent-school relationships were also noted as a general strength within the school as well as liking in with PSE institutions.

> *Definitely interaction with parents is I think is a very-we're quite good at doing that, parents are always at the centre of our planning and like I said with the National Learning Network or you know, any colleges.* (Teacher 5, Line 27)

Diversity in the type of events and opportunities that students could avail of was noted as a general strength within a school.

> *[There's] a lot of opportunities cause, you know, throughout the whole school experience for kids to participate in and attend all kinds of events I mean it's just way more interesting than it was.* (Teacher 10, Line 48)

4.2.1.2 School ethos.

Teachers spoke highly of the ethos within the school which was portrayed and modelled by staff and valued and at times, continued by students. An open door policy, tailoring to the needs of the student and building upon current strengths to support areas of need were noted as current and general school strengths. An incident whereby the strengths of a student were used as a means of supporting his area of need was reported to portray the positive and facilitative ethos that is currently being fostered within the school.

> *Really good pastoral care system. Open door policy of . . . the Principal, like you know, he really does have an open door, which is really important I think. And just kind of finding out what they're good at like, like we had a kid who started last year*

for instance and he couldn't learn anything you know, he had no retention, he could bring his books to class, he couldn't read a timetable, like we were really worried about him, he had no working memory and then we discovered he could like, play any song by ear. So, we found one strength and that's what we're building on. You know what I mean? And he's using songs and changing the words to help him learn his subjects. (Teacher 1, Line 82)

The availability of resources was also discussed in terms of supporting students with their overall development. This included the use of technology and assistive technology where required.

We have good resources, for students, especially those in SEN like they all have access to their own personal computers. (Teacher 7, Line 52)

A warm and inclusive ethos was noted as a strength within schools. This involved inclusivity in relation to SEN as well as inclusivity to all students by fostering an ethos of respect, courtesy and welcoming atmosphere within the school.

Well I think that the most important thing from our school is the ethos and for that is being inclusive so students with SEN and particularly autism, we try to engage them mainstream as much as we can, they mightn't achieve in that particular subject but it's just their social interactions and their skills within their class plus they're making friends with their peers so I think that's really important for them going out into society or third level is being able to learn social skills and cues that they understand what they are. (Teacher 3, Line 52)

A sense of belonging was also noted as an important element for students with SEN within the school. The sense of acceptance and belonging felt by students with an ASD was highlighted as a result of this ethos.

The sense of community in the school, the sense of belonging, pupils in this school, the pupils from the unit here, the ASD pupils feel very much accepted within the whole school environment. (Teacher 9, Line 100)

This sentiment was also echoed by other teachers from different schools;

The school is very family oriented and friendly so even in the corridor, you say hello, you make eye contact and we kind of definitely reinforce that as students coming into our classroom and we stand at the door and we welcome them. (Teacher 3, Line 110)

An appreciation of their students as individuals was noted in schools whereby teachers reported that they taught students which they and the school valued as individuals. The merits of being an inclusive school were also described (e.g. low incidence of bullying)

> *Our values here are very much based on respect, openness, care. [The principal] would always say you know, he would always say you know we have fantastic students and we can see it as well, our kids are great, they're so respectful of one another and bullying wouldn't be a very high in our school.* (Teacher 5, Line 100)

4.2.1.3 Supporting and motivating students.

The process of supporting students was of paramount importance in many of the schools. The use of staff, time, resources and student interests were cited as means of supporting the student, whilst keeping them engaged and motivated. The process of giving the student time to express themselves and/or their interests was reported as a mean of supporting students. This flexibility was noted by many teachers who acknowledged how components of an ASD might have an effect on the student's learning in different ways.

> *Usually we find out what one of their main interests are that it would be a real way of moving forward, finding out what their strengths are . . . one of my students is obsessed with space, now he'll try and control every class around space so we might give him a small snippet around space or he'll tell me, then I can get on with my class. But until I let him get his little speak in about space, give him the space to do it, we're stuck there* (Teacher 3, Line 61)

Another teacher noted that the pace in which personal interests and strengths were recognised, fostered and utilised was important in the supportive process.

> *It [the school] provides them with opportunities to explore their strengths. They take a great interest in their strengths. Strengths are very quickly recognised here. They would encourage them.* (Teacher 9, Line 49)

The importance of supporting students' development by targeting more specific areas of need for support was also discussed with a teacher noting the variations in their students' ability and capacity for development and tailoring to their needs accordingly. These needs

were not always noted as academic with some areas for development being within a social domain.

> *We do a lot of work around their social skills and study skills so, now, it depends on your student but some of them mightn't achieve academically and we'd or they might be very good academically and then we'd have to focus on their social skills so that they could interact more with their peers and that they can have a better fit in society, so we do a lot of work on that as well.* (Teacher 3, Line 10)

This school tended to work with families where appropriate as a means of tailoring their support to the needs of the student and generalising the learning to their home environment.

> *We're a very positive school, we're very positive with the kids. We're always very eager and keen to facilitate as much as we can in whatever they want to do outside and after school. We meet with the families an awful lot, we're all in touch with the families on a very regular basis.* (Teacher 6, Line 28)

The importance of maintaining a strengths focused ethos and a strengths based approach was also reported as more general strengths within schools.

> *We're really looking at highlighting their strengths as opposed to their weaknesses. And giving them opportunities, you know realistic opportunities for success within the classroom and around the school.* (Teacher 5, Line 56)

Tailoring lessons where required to support the student to access the curriculum was also reported as a strength.

> *Individually planning each lesson ah towards, you know each student's needs and their strengths, and you know, honing in on their actual, I suppose their . . . talents and their strengths and trying to improve them as best we can.* (Teacher 7, Line 28)

The process of tailoring to the needs of the individual was reported in terms of the individuals own interests and strengths.

> *I believe that the greatest work being done really is recognising the individual and their individual strengths.* (Teacher 9, Line 8)

While the range of means in which students with an ASD are facilitated both inside and outside of the classroom in school was highlighted by all participants. An appreciation and understanding of the diversity amongst students with an ASD was also noted across the participating schools.

And again, its every much . . . tailored to the individual . . . no two ASD children are the same so you have to tailor it. You know, you work with them. (Teacher 1, Line 94)

4.2.2 School transition planning strengths.

A range of strengths were discussed by teachers in relation to transition plans and the associated school strengths in this area.

4.2.2.1 Tailored to student needs.

Teachers discussed the importance of supporting the student in the process of transition planning in a way that is meaningful to them, whether this was based on the student's interests or on their abilities or areas that they find challenging. The need to ensure that the student is comfortable with the process was also addressed. Parental support was highlighted as a salient aspect of the transition planning process, but the input and collaboration with the student was noted as paramount to the process.

> *I suppose it's knowing them, knowing what their strengths are, knowing what their ambitions are you know? Sometimes it's knowing what they're good at so you can give direction. . . . they may be fixated on something, but you know that really, it mightn't suit, so it's gently trying to direct them you know. . . And I think it's important to work with the child as opposed to the parent . . . it's what the child wants that's ultimately important and not so much about what a parent might want for their child and I think it's recognising the child is centre and you can only give direction but not dictate I suppose, and options, give them opportunity to open their mind to alternatives, always have a plan B. (Teacher 2, Line 74)*

The importance of exploring the less traditional routes within PSE (e.g. PLC courses etc.) was also expressed with the process of tailoring to the needs of the student.

> *I suppose it's just an awareness of the needs of the students who would, are not able to attend university. You know, that intermediate step. (Teacher 10, Line 72)*

Recent educational, societal and governmental changes linked to attitudes around school programmes in Ireland and the transition planning process were also noted by this teacher when discussing the transition into PSE.

I think on the whole, as a country you know there are more options opening up for people who are not doing the traditional leaving cert. It seems to be somewhat less stigmatised and, I mean this is very recent (Teacher 10, Line 12)

4.2.2.2 School Programmes which support TP.

School programmes which support the process of transition planning were reported by teachers. A range of programmes were available to support their transition such as career guidance, work experience and other such programmes. Career guidance (CG) was emphasised as a key component of this process due to their capacity to link-in with colleges, arrange trips and visits and support students to investigate their own training and career paths during their time in the senior cycle.

5th and 6th year have career guidance each week and we would always have ear-marked a group of kids at the start of the year with career guidance teachers that definitely need one to one info with the career guidance teacher. . . There would be a lot of days out and open day trips which works really well. (Teacher 1, Line 13)

Supporting the student's own development around their own expectations and awareness within work experience situations was discussed as part of the preparatory work to be tended to before and during the student's engagement with the work experience process.

You've to build up their expectations and let them know what the expectations of their work experience is. That they have to prove themselves in different areas before they're given extra responsibilities. (Line 104, Teacher 3)

The importance of familiarising students with transition planning research processes and PSE institutions was also reported.

We've excellent guidance counsellors here. They . . . ensure that the students get the opportunity to visit the open colleges, open days, the career exhibitions, they invite colleges in, and students are very ofay with . . . learning to investigate do career investigations for themselves from an early stage, I mean they do that in third year, in transition year and then obviously they're well able to do it at senior cycle. (Teacher 2, Line 42)

School programmes such as LCA were noted as key facilitators of career investigations alongside CG input. The LCA programme was also highlighted as a means of developing

a range of academic, life and organisational skills while equipping students with the skills required to progress to PSE training courses.

> *The leaving cert applied programme is brilliant in that it gives them huge opportunities to find different careers that they might like, giving presentations, gaining in confidence, performing in concerts, doing bake-sales-enterprise, communicating with you know a lot of staff members.* (Teacher 6, Line 48)

This sentiment was echoed by other teachers who also acknowledged the utility of the LCA programme. The skills learnt within a programme such as LCA were also noted as being useful in PSE institutions for future academic work or assignments.

> *The majority of them would do that programme [LCA] which I think is very suitable for them . . . It's very . . . project work based, like third level would be and I suppose it prepares them for that. It prepares them to be more independent and to take ownership over their work and the present their work. They're taught . . . skills that would be needed . . . when they go to third level.* (Teacher 7, Line 4)

4.2.2.3 Collaboration with stakeholders.

Teachers discussed the importance of collaborating with all stakeholders as well as the student when supporting the student to transition into PSE. The process of collaboration and the associated expectations of school staff were emphasised as a part of the support process within schools.

> *So definitely collaboration between the parents, guardians teachers and myself, there's really good collaborations. Definitely . . . the inclusion aspect of the school, that these kids are at the fore minds all the time of teachers . . . and that it's automatic nearly that of course these kids are going to be ear-marked.* (Teacher 1, Line 50)

The role of supportive staff in this process was also reported as a strength within the collaboration process. This was specifically related to teachers who dedicated their own time outside of the classroom during this process.

> *That's one of the main strengths in the school is that the teachers are so willing to give up their time to facilitate transitioning. It's . . . really hard on teachers because everything is a requirement of their own time outside of class time.* (Teacher 4, Line 48)

The inquiry process which is linked to the support process was reported as an important aspect of collaboration amongst staff.

All options are looked at, so you'd have a big you know involvement through career guidance. (Teacher 2, Line 14)

The role of collaboration with parents as well as the chosen PSE institution was reported as a collaborative strength. The importance of equipping students to engage in self-directed research was noted as part of the LCA programme which supported the overall collaboration.

We meet with the place [PSE institution] . . . visit them a number of times in advance, we meet with the parents, there's a lot of careers research done in the leaving cert applied programme. (Teacher 6, Line 3)

The role of families in this collaboration process was noted as a strength.

In the LCA programme we need a lot of cooperation with the families for work experiences, placements, practical achievement tasks, lots of different aspects of the course like that, need a lot of communication all the time. (Teacher 6, Line 31)

4.2.2.4 Transition planning processes.

The planning processes that teachers account for when creating transition plans or supporting the student to engage in transition plans were discussed. Some teachers cited links to PSE as a current strength in this area.

Well I suppose one thing that we do well is that we've a really good connection with the National Learning Network so any students I suppose that are at that level have access to that, so we usually bring someone in to speak to them. (Teacher 5, Line 3)

The process of engaging with a PSE by visiting the campus or venue was reported as a strength in TP. This was reported as a positive means of reducing anxiety in prospective students of PSE institutions.

Bringing the student to the venue . . . for a day trip prior to finishing secondary school. Arranging, if it's appropriate for them to go again, maybe during the summer, with a parent. Just to keep it fresh in their head reduce their anxiety about where the rooms are (Teacher 4, Line 10)

The importance of an early transition planning process and the associated benefits to the students and staff was also discussed. An awareness of their role as a teacher in PSE transition planning whether formal or informal was noted as a strength.

By putting in an early intervention, it's working for both student and the teacher so it makes that transition easier for them . . . once they leave us. I think like that's part of being a good teacher, is preparing them for their life after post-primary. (Teacher 3, Line 19)

The utility of holding meetings in collaboration with stakeholders was reported as a current transition planning strength in one school as well as connecting with the PSE institutions where appropriate.

What's working well? I suppose making contact with where they're going [PSE institution] and having several meetings including the student. (Teacher 4, Line 4)

Tailoring to the needs of the student whilst monitoring these needs were also cited as transition planning strengths.

Both in mainstream and in learning support, teachers would be aware of their needs, so at the beginning of every academic year, we would have staff meetings and the needs of the students would be discussed. (Teacher 4, Line 62)

The process of tailoring transition plans to the needs of the students were noted as a formal procedure in schools whereby the individual needs of the student to support their transition was monitored and supported by a designated staff member.

What we do is we have team teachers. They're a specific teacher that looks after all of first years, a specific teacher that looks after all of second years, a specific teacher that looks after third years and a specific teacher that looks after senior cycle. So whatever teacher they have would throw up the IEP . . . So they would be involved in drawing that up and sharing the appropriate information with the staff. They tend to coordinate what teachers would best suit their needs for the one on one class so if in particular they needed cooking skills, you might if possible, draft the home-ec teacher in for that class. (Teacher 4, Line 73)

The utility of CG counsellors as facilitators within each school was noted as an area of strength within the transition planning process.

> *I think what is improving is the amount of contact and time students have with guidance and that's really significant all the way through and that's kind of recent.* (Teacher 10, Line 3)

A variety of sub-themes and themes linked to school strengths were highlighted by teachers in relation to general schools strengths, transition planning strengths as well as IEP usage strengths. See figure 4.3 for a visual thematic map of the themes and sub-themes extracted.

4.3. Dream: The Ideal Transition Planning Scenario

The ideal scenario was discussed with teachers around transition planning and their views on the ideal usage of IEPs in the transition planning process.

4.3.1 School relationship with PSE.

4.3.1.1 Communication.

Teachers discussed the role of PSE in transition planning and how they could ideally link-in with the school and vice versa as a means of creating the ideal transition planning process.

> *I definitely think that we need to build on our communication with college that they actually come out and visit us or we go and visit them to really have a proper place . . . where they know that child that's coming into them* (Teacher 1, Line 121)

Teachers portrayed an understanding of the difficulties they faced as educators in relation to time and resources but also in relation to linking in with PSE institutions and the education system in Ireland (e.g. the CAO points system)

> *It's the time as well for us to do all that, like I can't go and visit CIT and Maynooth . . . it's easier said than done at the same time so I can see their point as well and*

there's so many thousands of kids applying to them, there's no guarantee cause of the CAO that they'll get a place in the college so the college could do rakes of work around a child and the child could take somewhere else. (Teacher 1, Line 153)

The process of expanding the contacts outside of the school in PSE was also noted within the ideal transition planning scenario.

Just making more connections with courses outside of the ones that we're normally used to dealing with (Teacher 6, Line 81)

4.3.1.2 Building rapport.

Attending open days and career days within the PSE institutions was noted within the ideal scenario as a means of improving and increasing knowledge around PSE institutions.

Ideally, we'd be more involved in attending these things [PSE open days] that we'd be better informed. We'd have as teachers . . . more connection to the institutions but that might be really, unrealistic. (Teacher 10, Line 127)

Building rapport with the PSE was noted as an ideal scenario for TP. The transfer of information between second and third level education was also addressed.

So it would be collaborative. It would involve visits out to universities and visits in from them. It would involve you know, the moving of your school passport or your student support file from the school to university which doesn't happen because they won't take it or they don't want it (Teacher 1, Line 212)

This sentiment was echoed by another teacher who felt that students could be supported by having the capacity to transfer information to PSE to support the student's learning going forward.

And to . . . formally have information that we pass on to . . . the school. Mostly about the student's learning style, their communication . . . possible challenges. (Teacher 10, Line 195)

This relationship with a PSE institution was noted to be a guiding tool in the transition planning process in terms of addressing prospective challenges which might lay ahead.

I suppose to liaise with potential employers or third level institutions, recognise the potential challenges in those places, and come back to the findings in order to prepare, recognise at an early a stage as possible. (Teacher 9, Line 118)

4.3.2 Staff and time.

4.3.2.1 Resources.

The ideal transition planning scenario was discussed and the role of staff within the process as well as the time and resources. Repeated exposure to their PSE institution was noted as a potential benefit in transition planning if possible. Furthermore, a designated staff member who was responsible for supporting the transition planning process was also noted within the ideal transition planning scenario.

> *I know budgeting wouldn't allow but if there could be someone with time in their timetable given to helping students in the transition process. . . Students with autism . . . would benefit from going to wherever they will transition to . . . once a week. You know, so that the repetition is there, and they've built up a relationship before they ever start. So yeah, in an ideal world, someone with the designated job of facilitating that transition would be lovely. But just to give more time to it.* (Teacher 4, Line 159)

Having more time during the week to support transition planning was noted as a primary facet within the ideal transition planning scenario. The utility of professional training in this area was also emphasised within the ideal transition planning scenario.

> *In an ideal world, look it always comes back to more resources really doesn't it? You know if we had more time if we had, I suppose, training or CPD you know just looking at all the avenues that are out there.* (Teacher 5, Line 173)

4.3.2.2 Planning.

Having an allocation of time to bring students into PSE to explore their options was noted, having a full day within a PSE institution to experience the place was also recommended.

I suppose even days where you could just bring them out and see what it's like, what a day in college would be like and see what's needed. Because it's such . . . a big move . . . especially into a third level institute. (Teacher 8, Line 216)

A consultative and individualised process whereby the parent and students meet with a CG counsellor to support the transition planning process was noted as part of the ideal scenario.

Having regular meetings and consultations with students, maybe their parents and a guidance counsellor and doing up an individual plan for each student and during the year, we monitor it to see progress. (Teacher 7, Line 114)

This sentiment was echoed by other teachers who reported that a specific strategy that was collaborative and informative would be beneficial in the transition planning process.

We'd need some sort of a strategy that . . . the teachers would meet with the guidance counsellor and the teachers meet with the parents and . . . we share the information (Teacher 10, Line 166)

I suppose everyone needs to be on board with the same ideas and being there for the students. Giving them all as much information as they can and encouraging them as well I suppose to go on and to try it (Teacher 8, Line 257).

The ideal scenario explored the use of resources, time, collaboration amongst stakeholders as well as communication and information sharing with the appropriate parties.

See figure 4.4 for a visual thematic map of the themes and sub-themes extracted.

4.4 Design: Resources Required to Support the Ideal Transition Planning Scenario

The next prospective steps that the school might take to reach the aforementioned ideal scenario were discussed. Required resources and actions were noted.

4.4.1 School resources required to support the ideal transition planning scenario.

The resources required from the school to support the student in experiencing a more ideal transition planning process were explored.

4.4.1.1 Formal planning.

A more formalised means of transition planning was discussed by teachers. This included a collaborative process that was more structured and concrete.

> *I think we need some more formal plans . . . like we meet with the career guidance teacher to come up with a list of students.* (Teacher 1, Line 116)

Having a more tangible transition plan within an IEP was also noted as a resource required to support the overall transitioning planning process as well as a collaborative effort in creating the transition plan.

> *I think we need to continue as we're going . . . maybe it needs to be written down a bit more. . . and I think more, joint meetings with parents, teachers and guidance counsellors, I think that would be really important. And parents and teachers and colleges.* (Teacher 1, Line 296)

An appreciation of the already established transition planning from primary to secondary was noted as a prospective resources for supporting TP.

> *I suppose it's to mirror maybe what we do when we transition from primary to secondary, so you know, make them aware of the changes, you know encourage maybe visit to college or a work place that they intend going.* (Teacher 2, Line 116)

Having another separate plan for PSE was also noted as beneficial to the transition planning process.

> *And that there's a backup option. You know the National Learning Network is often a back-up but I've said to parents if X doesn't work out next year, you always have this.* (Teacher 1, Line 219)

Delegating the transition planning roles to ensure that preparations for transitioning have been carried out was also noted amongst teachers.

> *Just to have somebody responsible for it, to have it as maybe a post or a role or somebody's job that they would oversee the transitioning. And that it's less ad hoc* (Teacher 4, Line 195)

4.4.1.2 Collaboration amongst stakeholders.

The importance of employing stakeholders within the process of transition planning was described. The importance of taking the views of the student into account during this process was noted.

> *It should involve the teachers, the parents but most importantly the students themselves because there's no point in me putting a plan in place for a certain student to want third level when they don't want to do that. So you get buy-in from the student, find out what do they want and what do they want to achieve and like, also take feedback from the parents and other teachers within the school so it's like a team approach to their plan.* (Teacher 3, Line 134)

This sentiment was echoed by another teacher who suggested the use of a planning team in this collaborative process.

> *I suppose in secondary school, the problem can always be that you always have a team of teachers working with a child so it's to have I suppose a planning team? So, when we talk about maybe the transition process . . . you're talking about the guidance counsellor the SEN coordinator, maybe a year head so time for team meeting.* (Teacher 2, Line 168)

The importance of fostering a strong communication ethos within the post-primary school system both in general and to support the transition planning process was also emphasised.

> *Just to make sure that there's good communication between pupils and teachers and amongst teachers as well as to any potential problems a young person might face.* (Teacher 9, Line 152)

4.4.1.3 Tailored approach.

Utilising a more tailored approach to the transition planning process was emphasised by teachers.

> *I think listen to your students. They will . . . guide you to what they want out of life I think . . . they mightn't be able to say it in that exact way but you need to listen to them and take note of what do they want and then by that you can tighten your interactions with your students . . . how you prepare them for transition.* (Teacher 3, Line 184)

The school staff having an awareness of ASD while meeting the individual needs of the student were also noted as important resources. The diversity observed amongst students with an ASD was noted as a primary facet of the tailored approach to transition planning for students with an ASD. This was also noted as a difficulty for teaching staff at times.

Every child with autism is completely different so I think you need to bear that in mind and what's suitable for one isn't going to be suitable for another or what interactions, interventions you put in place isn't going to be suitable so like that's a difficulty then for teachers (Teacher 3, Line 204)

The importance of being ASD aware as a means of supporting students with an ASD was also echoed by other teachers.

I think in general the more autism aware the school becomes, that that, then the teachers, in general are more tuned into potential problems. (Teacher 10, Line 238)

The importance of being ASD aware but also viewing the student themselves as an individual was also emphasised.

As I say, there's no recipe. Its recognising every child is an individual. And it's working with each individual, ASD or otherwise. (Teacher 2, Line 279)

4.4.1.4 Staff and time.

The staff, time and resources that the school might realistically provide was explored as a means of reaching the ideal transition planning scenario.

We'd need an hour's admin a week. Between the career guidance and SENCOs or the unit teachers, or even their class teachers meet. (Teacher 1, Line 200)

The importance of being aware of the relevant information and communicating said information was also noted as a required resource to support the transition planning process.

Information dissemination. And communication. I think we have one-hour classes. And the week is very hectic and it's very hard to meet your colleagues and discuss the students, how they're doing to liaise with them, it's not always appropriate to send an email. (Teacher 4, Line 123)

Time and staffing were noted as resources required within the transition planning process. The process of being given the time and space within the workplace to engage more with the transition planning process was highlighted as a prospective resource going forward.

> *Maybe freeing us, freeing the special needs teachers up even to make phone calls and even visit them, in advance, and even maybe during that June provision programme or whenever, to visit the third level institution, having meetings and passing over that information.* (Teacher 6, Line 204)

Student-teacher relationships were also noted as important in the transition planning process. Having a more strategic view around staffing and students could also support the transitioning. Recognising students as individuals with their own experiences and personalities was also noted within this process.

> *I'm going to put it out there that you need a teacher that works well with that particular student. Because you know, in something like this, you can't have personality clashes, it'll only make everything ten times worse. So strategic planning of staff I would say is important as well.* (Teacher 5, Line 252)

A key person whose role was linked to transition planning was also reported as a prospective resource in transition planning.

> *Just dedicate a specific teacher to each student so that they have somebody to go to even if they're not a guidance teacher, I suppose that person then might be the go to person for that student in terms of their planning and maintaining their goals..(*Teacher 7, Line 140)

Recognising student strengths was also noted as an important resource as well as supporting students to reach their full potential in a range of areas.

> *Just recognising all of their strengths and working with them and getting them to achieve the best they can do you know, the best that they possibly can, be that academically or socially or emotionally.* (Teacher 6, Line 112)

4.4.2 Transition planning timeline.

The timeline required to support transitioning was explored. Teachers expressed an awareness of the practicalities of beginning the transition planning process too early.

> *So I suppose it really is only fifth year that you make a decision on the academic course you're taking and . . . sixth class is transitioning into school, third years*

transition to a senior cycle. So it's kind of fifth year before you really, TY maybe at times but usually . . . they're in TY (Teacher 1, Line 261)

Answers varied but most teachers reported that transition planning should begin within the senior cycle. Teachers reported concerns that students might become overloaded with the decision making process, especially if they had not considered their own PSE options. Teachers felt that once the planning process begun that a series of minor but crucial steps could be taken chronologically as a means of eventually creating a more concrete plan.

> *Like you don't want to start too early because they'll say 'sure I don't know what I want to do in first year', plus you might just bombard them with information so definitely from junior cert on, you'd want to be putting in place for them and just getting them to think about what do they want to do next so if they want to do an apprenticeship where can they go? What steps do they need, what support do they need to get onto that course or if it's away from home, is there appropriate accommodation for them or have they transport-all those little things.* (Teacher 3, Line 42)

> *I would say for the last two years, so once they start their leaving cert applied programme.* (Teacher 7, Line 123)

The following teacher did report that they felt that the transition planning process was a more longitudinal and as such could begin quite early with the use of more longitudinal goals.

> *I would say, as soon as they, as early as, as soon as they come in to the school I would imagine.* (Teacher 9, Line 124)

4.4.3 PSE Role in transition planning.

4.4.3.1 PSE Institution awareness of student needs.

The role of PSE institutions in transition planning was explored in relation to post primary school relationship with PSE. It was reported that at times, PSE institutions are not aware enough of the student's needs in their approach to education. One teacher explored a scenario that had previously occurred within her school whereby she felt a student who had left the school to pursue a career within PSE had not been adequately supported by her PSE institution and as such, did not progress or continue with their

chosen course. Frustration on the part of the teacher was evident in relation to the deficits oriented lens which the teacher felt the PSE institution viewed the student's abilities.

> *I suppose, ideally that colleges change their approach. Do you know, that college start talking to schools. Rather than us having to talk to them . . . we'd a kid a couple of years ago that didn't have a diagnosis of ASD but like got a merit here in LCA, got a place in a childcare course. . . but they did nothing to help the child and the child flunked out of it and they had never talked to us. Actually, they only talked to us when they [were] going to ask the child to leave the course because the child wasn't able. But they'd never talked to us prior to that about of what we did with them, how we get them to learn, nothing. The phone call we got was 'they can't cope here, how did they get a merit in LCA? Because they can't do a child care course' well, we helped them that's how they got their merit in LCA, we didn't do the work for them but we helped them. But you're quite happy to get that phone call and good bye and good luck. It's a very deficit approach* (Teacher 1, Line 267)

This teacher also explored the focus on supporting more obvious disabilities as well as the lack of differentiation she felt was evident in PSE institutions and how this is not a supportive means of educating certain students.

> *[The PSE focus is on] physical difficulties that if you're in a wheel chair or if you need touch typing or technology, you're laughing but if its sensory or if its emotional or behavioural or differentiation, like no college course differentiates whereas in secondary school we're differentiating all the time . . . [the students] might not achieve an academic qualification but why can't they go do a PLC course that is differentiated down from a FETAC level 5 to a FETAC level 2 but it's not. Then they've got to go to the NLN and it's very segregated, you can either achieve at this level or you can't.* (Teacher 1, Line 235)

4.4.3.2 PSE Collaboration with post-primary school.

The importance of a taking a more collaborative approach to transition planning including the information dissemination process with PSE institutions was also noted as an important feature of transition planning. One teacher suggested that parents could be more involved playing a more salient role in communicating directly with the PSE institutions.

That we'd talk to parents and pupils more explicitly about what their plans are when they leave here. That we need to follow through that we see that they've applied for what they need to apply for and that we get maybe the parents to do the handling with the colleges so the colleges need to come talk to us or that we I suppose if we got the parents and the pupils permission could we just forward to the students passport and IEP to the college? (Teacher 1, Line 286)

This was also noted by other teachers who reported that that the school/PSE links could be built upon in numerous ways. The links between primary and post-primary school were noted as well-established and contrasted with the less established links between post-primary and PSE in transitioning.

We probably could be meeting more with the staff in the third level institutions and doing a much more detailed handover. (Teacher 6, Line 141)

It's kind of hard, like there are lots of links between primary and secondary schools but there are very little links between secondary and third level, so I suppose that is something that could be built upon. (Teacher 7, Line 68)

One teacher explored the difficulties in meeting with PSE institutions in relation to the delegation of roles and key link-in personnel. This teacher also explored the use of language within a PSE institution and how this might have an adverse effect on the capacity or willingness of student to seek support within a PSE institution.

And part of that is probably our fault that we're not demanding a meeting with those colleges but often they just won't meet us or there's nothing in place there so who do you meet? . . . And even names like the disability office . . . how backwards is that like? Like if we had a disability coordinator here . . . even now like additional needs coordinator. Like any high functioning child wouldn't want to go into the disability office in X [local university]. (Teacher 1, Line 135)

The utility of linking in with the PSE collaboratively whilst involving all stakeholders as a means of exploring all of the prospective SEN resources and facilities in PSE institutions that will be available to the student and their families was noted. An understanding of some of the needs of students with an ASD was highlighted within this context.

[Teachers, parents and students should] link in with the college . . . [to] identify the disability services . . . in the college, understanding the facilities that are available to them so whether that's assistive technology or a quiet room or you know, there's like all these different avenues that they can take so the students need to know that and . . . I'm sure you know as with autism, they need to . . . know what's going to

come and what's available if this situation happens and if that situation happens so we can access all that information and prepare them beforehand they feel I suppose more at ease. (Teacher 5, Line 223)

4.4.4 Parental roles in transition planning.

Parental support was emphasised as a salient aspect of successful transitioning. The varying means in which students could be practically supported by their parents were explored by teachers. Parental roles were reported and opportunities for parents to support their child to plan to transition into PSE were also explored. One noted area of parental input that was required was linked to fostering a more engaged approach to personal responsibility at home. This was highlighted by discussing the stark differences between the tailored and informal supports that students receive in post-primary schools by comparison to the less individualised and more formal support systems that they might encounter in PSE, some of which have the potential to leave students feeling less supported within PSE. The role of the parents/guardians was discussed in light of this contrast, with teachers suggesting that fostering their child's sense of independence and personal responsibility at home was key in supporting transition planning.

They need to start transitioning before we do, the parents, not even the pupil . . . really making sure this child [is] as independent as possible so that they can succeed in university where there's going to be no teacher checking their home school diaries every morning or texting Mom and saying they forgot their PE gear or had a meltdown today . . . like no lecturer in a college is going to text a parent and say you know 'will you talk to him this evening about his manners?' (Teacher 1, Line 352)

4.4.4.1 Communication and acceptance.

The importance of communication was noted within this process. The process of accepting their child and their child's diagnosis was noted. Having realistic expectations around their child's PSE options as well as using the school as a support system within

this process as a means of providing feedback and exploring PSE options through the use of collaborative meetings with relevant staff.

> *Being supportive, listening to their child, hearing their child. Communicating with all supports be it at school or your third level or work placement. Do you know, acceptance, it's amazing still the number of parents that we could have that mightn't fully accept that their child is ASD.* (Teacher 2, Line 253)

> *Parents need . . . to recognise their student's abilities and likewise, their disabilities. I think often here, they're very supported and maybe they have, obviously they accept their child for who they are but when they go into third level you know there's a lot more difficulty that might be apparent.* (Teacher 6, Line 219)

> *If they communicate well with the school, listen to what is being said about their child. Because they will play a very important role in fostering a lot of what has been recognised within the school.* (Teacher 9, Line 173)

4.4.4.2 Transition planning logistics.

The importance of being aware of the logistics of PSE choices and supporting these choices where possible from the home environment was also noted as an important parental role within the transition planning process.

> *They need to get support from home because in the school environment you can only plan and . . . you can't really implement what the student needs to go on to third level so you have to find out what supports are available . . . that the family can put in place in order for the student to achieve. I mean there's no point in putting in a plan that a student's going to go to CIT when they've no way of getting to CIT or staying there.* (Teacher 3, Line 170)

The long term transitioning goals linked to organisational skills were also noted as important aspects of transition planning for parents/caregivers. Practical measures such as trips to the PSE institution of choice as well familiarising themselves with resources (such as the disability office etc.) were also noted as important parental roles.

> *Definitely to facilitate visits to their third level institute of choice. To help with whatever preparation would be needed for that so whether it's cooking, whether it's washing themselves, whether it's making a bed, whether it's working the washing machine . . . all of those things that they'll want, to live out of home, if they're not living out of home. Transport, how are they getting there . . . do they know where to get the bus, helping with all of those things, identifying what issues they might have . . . parents know the child best.* (Teacher 4, Line 201)

Even discussing first of all, their different options, and . . . the routes that are available to them like for third level. I suppose liaising with the school as much as possible so that they're both on the same wavelength. Maybe taking them to visit different third level institutions. (Teacher 7, Line 165)

I suppose visiting the third level institutions, like that visiting the disability department . . . most of the families here would be very supportive . . . maybe not trying to hold the students back . . . we've had other families . . . where they don't want to let the children into X [PSE institution], you know even though they would manage. (Teacher 6, Line 237)

The importance of obtaining resources for PSE was also noted as important parental roles. This was also noted as important in relation to technology in PSE so that students can become more computer-literate to support their progression in PSE.

Get the resources in for them, maybe get a laptop and get them used to using it. (Teacher 7, Line 193)

Yeah and to find out what supports are in place because they could be away from home, they could be isolated and even just in terms of assignments, if they have a difficulty how are they going to find support? (Teacher 3, Line 179).

Supporting the student in the PSE research process in transition planning was noted as a salient parental role. Parental acknowledgement of this role was explored from the perspectives of the teachers as well as the intricacies of what this role might entail.

Acknowledge the role that they have [in transition planning] and take responsibility for their role. (Teacher 5, Line 319)

I suppose they could just look up information, look at the different booklets for them and show them what is out there and go through it. They'd probably know themselves what would suit them, especially . . . what jobs or colleges or courses would suit [them] (Teacher 8, Line 269)

The parental experience of supporting a child with more complex disabilities to transition into life after post-primary school was also acknowledged.

I think it's very, very hard for parents . . . there are very few options for kids who have . . . [a] moderate learning disability [or] mild or moderate learning disability and autism . . . it's complicated for the higher functioning kids but for the other kids . . . it's terrifying for parents. (Teacher 10, Line 271)

A range of prospective resources which would support the ideal transition planning process as well as the ideal usage of IEPs within this process were discussed. Sub themes

and themes in the resources required pertaining to areas such as PSE links, parental roles, school resources and IEP resources were extracted. See figure 4.5 for a visual thematic map.

4.5 Research Question 2: *What are post-primary school teacher's perspectives on the use of IEPs within the transition planning process for students with an ASD?*

Figure 4.2. Research question two and associated themes

RQ2: *What are post-primary school teacher's perspectives on the use of IEPs within the transition planning process for students with an ASD?*

Discovery:
- Current IEP Strengths

Dream:
- IEP creation and implementation
- Transition planning components of IEP

Design:
- IEP Resources required to support the ideal TP scenario
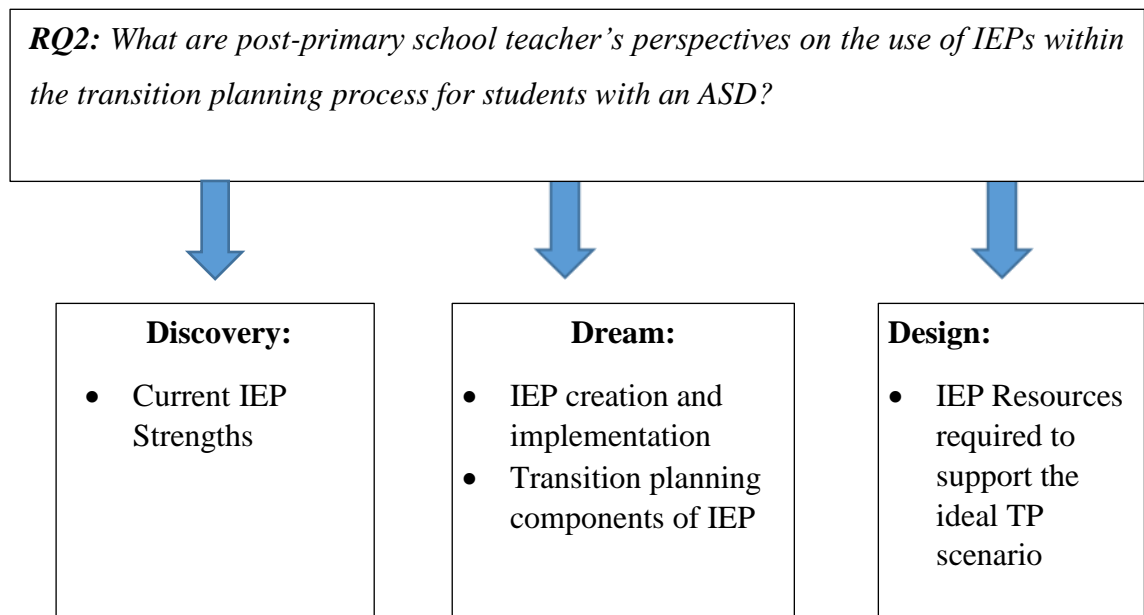
4.6 Discovery: IEP usage strengths

4.6.1 Current IEP usage strengths

4.6.1.1 IEP strengths.

A range of IEP strengths were explored by Teachers. Strengths in relation to current IEP usage were explored with all teachers citing one or more IEP strengths in terms of: target usage (short and long term targets, small number of targets, use of SMART targets), the ethos behind IEP usage (collaborative, strengths based, actively seeking current strengths and potential to support areas of need when creating an IEP) as well as the use of individualised IEPs that were tailored to the needs of the student. However, the novel nature of IEP usage in post-primary schools was noted by

participants. When asked about IEP strengths in relation to the current use of IEPs in their school, one teacher stated that the school uses them which alone they viewed as a strength.

> *We have them. Some schools don't. That's a very obvious one.* (Teacher 5, Line 134)

Similar sentiment was expressed by a teacher in another school when asked about current IEP strengths in their school with this participant reporting that this was an eventual process.

> *I would say, just that finally, we've decided to take them on you know what I mean it's like, yeah, this was a long time coming.* (Teacher 10, Line 98)

4.6.1.2 Collaboration with stakeholders.

Teachers reported that the collaboration around IEPs was a strength in their usage. Such collaboration often involved other staff members, the parents and sometimes the students themselves. One teacher reported that staff support and shared resources can be beneficial in relation to the creation of IEPs.

> *I think definitely, the team environment really in the school . . . that teachers will help each other out with students like I had one student who I found it very difficult to motivate and then another teacher gave me an idea well this works for me, try this and when I tried that, that also worked for me. So I never would have thought of that unless another teacher had given me the advice about that particular student so I think in my school, definitely teachers are willing to share resources but also their experiences.* (Teacher 3, Line 117).

The importance of a 'whole school approach' to the formulation of IEPs was reported with one teacher reporting that the school may also engage with external services during this process if required. The collaboration behind IEP creation amongst staff members was highlighted as good practice within the school. The use of a whole school approach to IEP targets whereby collaborative targets from the IEP could be supported within the classroom environment was also evident, as one SET noted;

> *We'd be regularly in contact with any outside professionals as well, if we needed to like, OTs educational psychologists . . . so there's definitely a collaborative*

approach to that. Yeah. And of course with the teachers, the classroom teachers as well because they see the students, you know 90% of the time, we [SETs] might only see them once or twice or a couple a few times a week, so it's important that they're up to speed as well. And we also ensure that the classroom teachers just complete kind of like a one pager, where they set out their own targets for the student. Looking at our IEP and in consultation with us where they set out their own targets for their own lesson and some strategies that they're going to use so we try to really focus on the differentiation there and combining the classroom with the IEP, you know, whole school approach. (Teacher 5, Line 154)

The positive impact of collaboratively creating and implementing IEP targets with the input of the student was emphasised.

And if all teachers are working collaboratively on those targets and that the student . . . is involved in the IEP targets. (Teacher 2, 134)

The importance of a collaborative approach in looking at strengths and areas of needs were discussed without failing to involve the primary stakeholders-the students themselves.

We'll say with parents where we discuss the students' strengths, weaknesses and moving forward, what areas we as teachers feel the student needs to work on, what the parents feel the student needs to work on and we talk to the students as well like we never leave those out of the planning process. It's something that can be overlooked, where the adults are dealing with the situation and they're planning someone else's life without including the person. Whereas we would ask the students as well. Just simple things like 'what are you finding hard?', 'what can we do to make your days better?' you know, things like that. (Teacher 5, Line 139)

The utility of gaining access to IEPs was also expressed by one teacher who suggested that the ease of access was a strength within their school.

I suppose everyone that teaches them has access to all of their IEPs on the VS-ware now so I suppose it's very easy to look them up and especially if you teach that child. (Teacher 8, Line 199)

4.6.1.3 Strengths based and tailored to student needs.

Teachers reported that the primary strengths of their IEP usage also included their strengths based and holistic approach to creating IEPs. Teachers in all participating

schools reported that IEP usage within their schools was strengths based, individualised and holistic (especially when considering the student's areas of need).

> *We'll always start with strengths . . . And then even though we have weaknesses . . . the weaknesses are always followed by 'what's the reason for the weakness?' so it's not that it's a weakness, there's a reason why the weakness exists so it's not a deficits approach about the child but it's a deficits approach potentially about the diagnosis of the child* (Teacher 1, Line 174)

> *Tailoring to the individual is definitely a huge strength, when it comes to IEPs. Facilitating what their needs are.* (Teacher 4, Line 150)

The awareness of each student's capacity to succeed and learn was also emphasised as a strength in the process of formulating IEPs. This was discussed as a strength and an area to build upon by teachers.

> *An ability to recognise potential in each individual pupil. And work on that.* (Teacher 9, Line 116)

4.6.1.4 Usage of IEP targets.

A number of teachers highlighted target usage in IEPs as a strength, reporting that the type and length of the target can serve to instil a sense of achievement in the student. The importance of encouraging the student's continued progression and for the student to feel that sense of progression was emphasised in the creation of targets within IEPs.

> *Long and short term targets so long term targets achievable over the year and short term for . . . 6 weeks . . . so at least if they can't achieve a long term target, they can always achieve the short term targets, you know so something that's very achievable.* (Teacher 1, Line 184)

Another teacher highlighted the importance of using SMART targets as a means of creating a sense of achievement whilst not overloading the student. This was also aimed at instilling a sense of achievement and progression so as not to overwhelm the student.

> *I mean the IEPs the SMART targets, keep them simple doable, review as necessary . . . you know not too many, three at a time.* (Teacher 2, Line 133)

This teacher also emphasised the importance of the student being part of the target formulation process with emphasis being placed on the collaborative agreement within the school in relation to IEP strengths.

> *That they know them, that they know that they exist and yes, that they are happy that this is what's going to be the target I think.* (Teacher 2, Line 140)

See figure 4.3 for a visual of the discovery thematic layout.

4.7 Dream: The Ideal use of IEPs in transition planning.

4.7.1 IEP creation and implementation for transition planning.

4.7.1.1 Collaboration amongst all stakeholders.

The ideal usage of IEPs in the transition planning process was also discussed. A collaborative effort whilst starting with the primary stakeholder, the student, was noted within the ideal IEP usage scenario.

> *You'd really be speaking with the parents . . . looking at what their plans for their child is and obviously what that child's plan is and then you put this, your IEP based on that . . . starting with the child, speaking to parents, understanding what their life will look like in the following year and then trying to develop strategies to make their life the following year as easy as possible..* (Teacher 5, Line 217)

4.7.1.2 Information sharing and IEP access.

Sharing information on IEPs with the relevant staff members was also noted within the ideal transition planning scenario whereby a more collaborative approach could be more easily facilitated.

> *If every teacher had access and could see what's going on . . . you see them [and] you can work exactly on the same page and work together and if everyone's building on that then hopefully it will build up.* (Teacher 8, Line 233)

Well I think definitely they need to be open for teachers to see what the IEP is because some schools it's usually just down to the SET teachers . . . but I think that all teachers, if they have that student, should have access to the IEP and have input into the planning. (Teacher 3, Line 144)

It's important to share information about individual pupils. (Teacher 9, Line 134)

4.7.1.3 Regular review.

The importance of continuously reviewing IEPs was also referenced as a means of highlighting the ideal usage of IEPs, in general and in relation to transition planning across all schools.

We'd use them a lot in first year and second year but you kind of forget them then as you'd get to know the students I suppose . . . to make teachers, to make a conscious effort to go back to the IEPs because you do forget.. (Teacher 7, Line 147)

I think they're probably used quite effectively, I suppose they just need to be updated regularly (Teacher 9, Line 157)

4.7.1.4 Tailored to individual student needs.

The importance of tailoring the IEPs to the needs of the student was also expressed. The lack of utility in a 'one size fits all' approach to transition planning was emphasised.

If you've a lot of students on IEPS there's a real risk of kind of doing a copy and paste when it's not individualised where it should be individualised, so you just need to bear that in mind (Teacher 3, Line 156)

4.7.2 Transition planning components of IEPs.

4.7.2.1 IEP goals and targets.

Self-directed research and supervised research into PSE options were noted as ideal usage of IEPs within the transition planning process.

IEPs could contain goals about visiting and researching. (Teacher 10, Line 161)

The targets within IEPs to support transition planning going forward were also explored. The utility of creating a backup plan or plan B was highlighted as a prospective support for students who may not gain entry to their initial preferred course or PSE institution. The use of smaller and more manageable targets were emphasised as important aspects of IEP creation.

> *[the use of] a target directed towards part of the process you know so that might be 'I'm going to research whatever' or 'I'm going to have a plan b' or . . . maybe where you've a broad target . . . you're going to break it down into steps* (Teacher 2, Line 163)

This sentiment was echoed by another teacher who also emphasised the necessity of breaking down targets.

> *The targets and your strategies need to be SMART . . . and they need to be broken down as well.* (Teacher 5, Line 236)

The ideal usage of IEPs within the transition planning scenario included collaboration and information sharing amongst stakeholders, regular review of tailored IEPs and the use of SMART targets which were broken down accordingly.

See figure 4.4 for a visual thematic map of the dream component.

4.8 Design: Resources required to reach the Ideal Transition Planning scenario.

4.8.1 IEP resources required to reach the ideal transition planning scenario.

4.8.1.1 IEP structure.

The structural changes to the IEP as a means of supporting transition planning was discussed. This included a specific area dedicated to individualised information related to transition planning.

> *We'd probably need another part included in our IEP that's directly for transitioning, separate from their education in fifth and sixth year, we probably need to add something physically to the document not necessarily set targets but you know a part where you discuss with the parent and discuss with the career*

guidance teacher and this is the possible plan . . . with the child's . . . input but . . . we don't necessarily have that written anywhere. (Teacher 1, Line 246)

This sentiment was echoed by other teachers.

Absolutely, yeah it [the transition plan] should definitely be built into the IEP if they are in senior cycle. (Teacher 4, Line 180)

We need to add a paragraph specifically around transition planning. (Teacher 1, Line 286)

The use of formal meetings dedicated to the development of IEPs was proposed as a valuable asset in transition planning going forward.

It would just be possibly that there's . . . a mandatory meeting and that, and we could see it as an IEP meeting so that we could . . . get at least a goal from guidance around transition. (Teacher 10, Line 206)

A more collaborative approach to IEP planning for students was reported as a prospective resource going forward within the transition planning framework.

Definitely a team approach for planning for IEPs for particular students and again like that you get the parents and the student involved. (Teacher 3, Line 148)

4.8.1.2 IEP targets.

One teacher questioned the relevance and value in focusing on non-academic IEP goals during a time of acute academic pressure.

Yeah, I suppose an IEP ideally would only have maybe three targets, main targets at any one time but you're talking about a child in leaving cert, so it can be academic and if its ASD it can be still around the social and communication you know? . . . so as you prioritise . . . where does the transition come? I'm not trying to say it's less important but in a moment in time in the school year, the priority is supporting the child to maybe deal with their academic subjects or to deal with the anxiety of stresses around leaving cert you know so you've so many elements. (Teacher 2, Line 183)

4.8.1.3 Tailored IEPs.

The use of Tailored IEPs in transition planning was explored. The process of utilising student strengths and working on their areas of needs were noted within this process. The utility of the active use of an IEP for transition planning was also highlighted as a means of tracking individualised goals. This included building upon the successes and areas of need as guided from previous IEPs.

You're going to have to look at the individual person, look at their strength and weaknesses and then plan from that. Now that takes a lot of time and effort but I think from using an IEP on the students from day one you can see how if you give them a goal or they set a goal for themselves how they achieve and in what time frame. And then you can build on those working towards a transition. (Teacher 3, Line 126)

Just having the information and like having their needs whatever their needs are. Having them on the IEP and having whatever you need to do to meet those needs . . . have it in the IEP and to actually be actively working from it. (Teacher 4, Line 169)

4.8.1.4 Collaborative IEPs.

Emphasis was placed on a more collaborative approach to IEP usage in transition planning. The formal collaboration process was also discussed.

I think definitely they need to be open for teachers to see what the IEP is because some schools it's usually just down to the SET teachers . . . to use but I think that all teachers, if they have that student, should have access to the IEP and have input into the planning. (Teacher 3, Line 144)

Yeah it doesn't have to be a lot of meetings, but just maybe one formal meeting you know, to get . . . a picture of their options. (Teacher 10, Line 189)

Figure 4.3. Discovery visual thematic map for research question 1 and 2

Discovery: Current School Strengths

IEP Strengths:

- Collaboration
- Strengths based/tailored to student needs
- Use of IEP targets

School Transition Planning Strengths:

- Tailored to student needs
- School Programme which supports Transition Planning
- Collaboration with Stakeholders
- Transition Planning processes

General School Strengths:

- School Programmes
- School Ethos
- Supporting and Motivating Students

Figure 4.4. Dream visual thematic map for research question 1 and 2

Dream: The Ideal Transition Planning Scenario

School Relationship with Post-Secondary Education (PSE):

- Communication
- Building Rapport

IEP Usage:

- Collaboration
- Information sharing & IEP access
- Tailored
- Regular review

TP components of IEPs:

- IEP targets

Staff and Time:

- Resources
- Planning
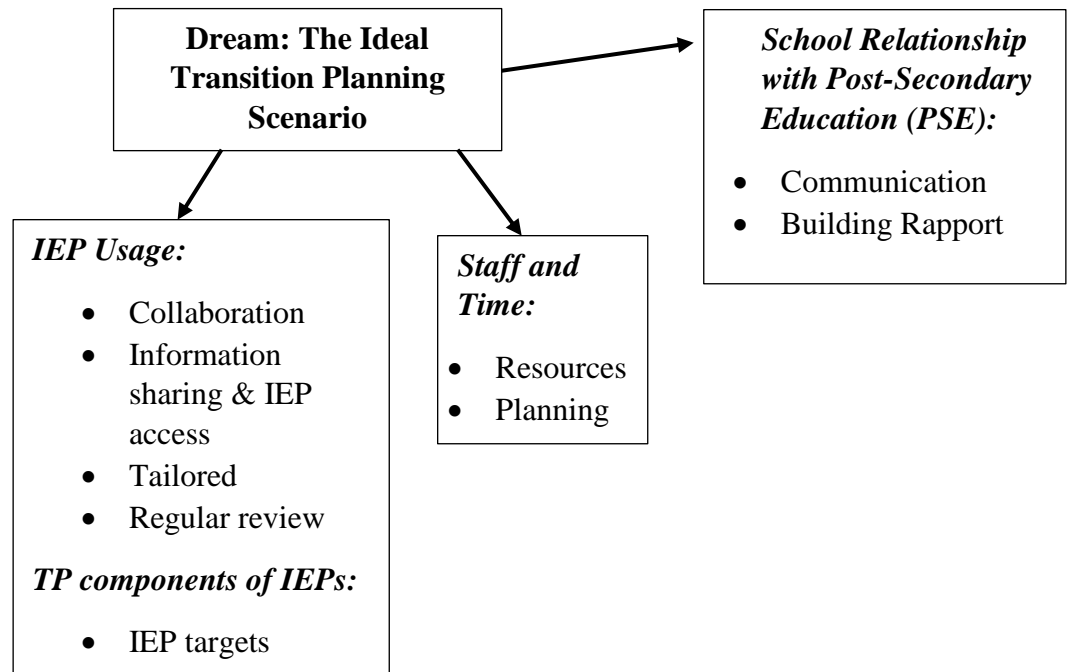
Figure 4.5. Design visual thematic map for research question 1 and 2
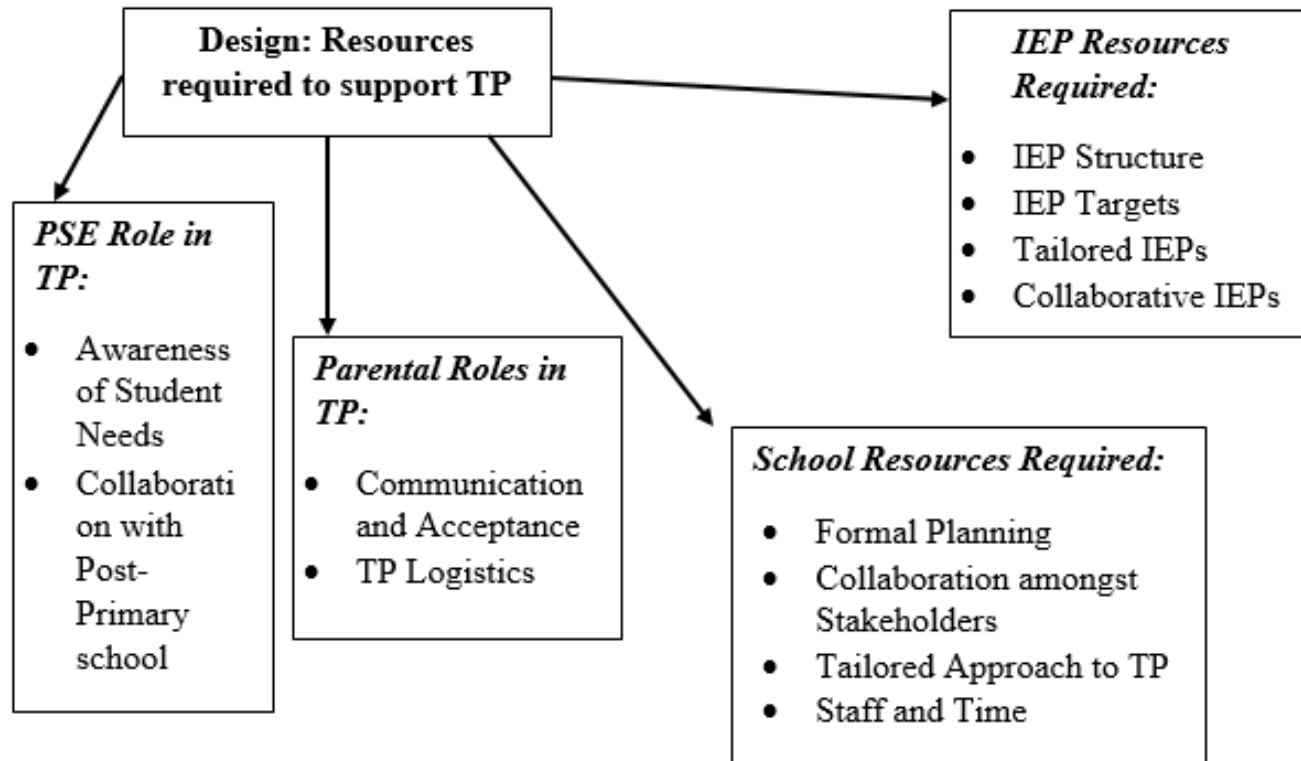
5.0 Chapter Five: Discussion

This study sought to explore post-primary school teacher perspectives around transition planning (TP) into Post-Secondary Education (PSE) and the role of IEPs in the transitioning process as such, the research questions were as follows;

1. What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

2. What are post-primary school teacher's perspectives on the use of IEPs within the transition planning process for students with an ASD?

This study produced a range of qualitative data which facilitated the exploration of teacher perspectives on transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD as well as teacher perspectives on the role of the IEP within the transition planning process. See figure 5.0 for a summary research themes for both research questions. See figure 5.1 for research question discussion format for both research questions.

Figure 5.0. Amalgamation of all observed themes for both research questions

Discovery: Current School Strengths

IEP Strengths: Collaboration, Strengths based, Tailored, Use of IEP Targets

Transition Planning Strengths: Tailored to student needs, school programmes, collaboration with stakeholders, transition planning processes

General School Strengths: School ethos, School programmes, supporting and motivating students

RQ1 & RQ2: Themes within data-Discovery, Dream & Design

Dream: The Ideal Scenario

School Relationship with PSE: Communication, Building Rapport

Staff and Time: Resources, Planning

IEP Usage: Collaboration, Information, IEP access, Tailored, Regular review

Design: Resources required to reach the Ideal Scenario

IEP Resources required: IEP Structure, IEP Targets, Tailored IEPs, and Collaborative IEPS.

School resources required: Formal Planning, Collaboration amongst stakeholders including PSE, tailored approach to TP, Staff and Time

Parental Roles in TP: Communication and Acceptance, TP Logistics

PSE Role in TP: Awareness of Student needs, Collaboration with Post-Primary School.

Figure 5.1. Research questions one and two: discussion format

Research Question 1.

What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

Current TP strengths

The Ideal TP scenario

Resources required to reach the idea scenario

Research Question 2.

What are post-primary school teacher's perspectives on the use of IEPs within the transition planning process?

Current IEP strengths

IEP usage within the ideal TP scenario

Resources required to support the ideal usage of IEPs in the TP process

5.1 Research Question One: *What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post-primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?*

The use of AI facilitated the strengths based focus on all elements of the research question. All data were gathered under a strengths-based lens as a means of ensuring that the sensitivity of the situation was comprehended throughout. As a means of answering the first research question, the current study explored teacher perspectives on existing school strengths relating to transition planning, perspectives on what the ideal transition planning scenario might look like and the resources that may be required to achieve the ideal scenario. A variety of themes and sub-themes were identified within the data with the use of Thematic Analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006). The use of TA in the current study supported the identification of conceptual and relevant themes and patterns which captured the participating post-primary school teacher's perspectives. Such themes and sub-themes will be discussed in the current chapter.

5.2 Discovery

5.2.1 Current transition plan strengths.

Existing strengths were expressed by teachers in relation to transition planning and the existing school strengths pertaining to the transition planning process. Highlighted transition planning strengths that were in existence within schools included; TPs that were tailored to the student's needs and collaborative and inclusive of all stakeholders. School programmes which supported transition planning were also discussed and strengths relating to the transition planning process itself within schools were examined.

5.2.1.1 Student input and collaboration.

It was evident that transition planning was student centred and collaborative in that all teachers demonstrated an awareness and knowledge on the importance of supporting the student as well as their parents and families. Research has consistently demonstrated that student input and involvement in the transition planning process is crucial to the progress of the transition into PSE (Hatfield et al., 2017; Hetherington et al., 2010; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995). A study by Hetherington et al. (2010) exploring perspectives of parents and students around transition planning found that students are less likely to engage in the transition planning process and that often it is too late when students do engage. Research exploring parental perspectives around transitioning for children with an ASD found that parents viewed a student centred approach as being a vital component in the success of the transitioning process (Stoner, Angell, House & Bock, 2007). Transition planning which is primarily student-focused has been found to be practiced less within schools despite being a vital component of the transition planning process (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Philbin, 2009). Under the IDEA act (IDEA, 1997) students were required to attend their IEP transition planning meetings where possible. Teachers, parents/caregivers and other relevant professionals were also required to attend such meetings (IDEA, 1997). If the student did not attend the meeting, the school was required to ensure that the students own interests were salient in the transition planning process (DeFur, 2000)

Results of the current study indicate that teachers informally tend to involve the student in transition planning. Results also indicated that teachers motivate the student by utilising the student's own interests and strengths as a means of prompting 'buy-in' from students as well as giving them a sense of progression and achievement in their transition from post-primary. An emphasis was placed upon putting a plan in place for PSE for students with their input by teachers and the practice of fostering the teachers' awareness around this process was demonstrated. This has been noted in previous literature with Carter et al. (2013) suggesting that motivating factors in helping individuals with an ASD

to engage more in self-directed activity including allowing the individuals to make decisions around the activities while incorporating their own interests in the pursuit.

5.2.1.2 Tailored transition plans.

In line with previous research recommendations and guidelines on transition planning, teachers also emphasised current transition planning strengths as taking a tailored approach to transition planning as well as a collaborative effort in the creation and implementation of transition plans (Doyle, 2016; NCSE, 2006; Philbin, 2009). Similar to previous literature, all teachers reported transition planning processes, both formal and informal, were noted to begin from approximately TY or 5th year onwards and were linked with school programmes such as LCA or CG input (Doyle, 2016; NCSE, 2006). Teachers also portrayed an awareness of the ideal times to start transition planning with one teacher referencing an awareness of the relevant literature on the recommended transition planning timeline.

5.2.1.3 School programmes.

School programmes which supported transition planning were also demonstrated across all three participating schools. The establishment of programmes such as Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which supported the academic skill set required for PSE (e.g. presentations, deadlines, formal discussion, organisational skills) as well as supporting life-skill development (e.g. social skills, emotional regulation skills, organisational skills) through the employment of modules which required the student to work with the community though a range of extra-curricular and work-experience based placements were cited as paramount to the transition planning process. Within the current study, an emphasis was placed on the importance of communicating with prospective employers for work experience as well as with the families of students in LCA as a means of supporting the overall transition planning process.

The school endorsement of work-placements facilitated the experience of work for students in a safe and secure environment which allowed them to sample work-life in a range of places. Teachers reported that often, students were more focused post work-experience and appeared to be more driven to gain employment through training (if required) as a means of securing employment similar to their preferred work-experience. Work experience also facilitated the practice of managing realistic expectations and responsibilities for students in LCA. Teachers reported that they linked in with the work experience staff in advance of the placement beginning as well as linking in with the student's parents (specifically in relation to work experience logistics). This process supported the practical side of researching careers for students in LCA (e.g. more concrete experiences in work experience to draw upon to support transition planning). The process of engaging in work experience also served to strengthen links with the wider community, develop social and organisation skills as well as give the student a sense of responsibility. This process of fostering engagement with the community has been linked to more successful transitioning experiences for students with an ASD (Carter et al., 2013).

Other programmes which supported transition planning included the use of career guidance (CG). CG was employed as a means of exploring range of a range of career paths in more formal settings for senior cycle students (both with and without SEN) with a trained professional, often during a weekly scheduled meeting. The importance of CG as a means of supporting transition planning has been reflected in similar previous studies (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Doyle et al., 2017; NCSE, 2017; Oireachtas, 2001). Furthermore, recommendations made at a governmental review on transition supports included urgently including special schools within CG reviews going forward as a means of supporting special school students to transition into work or further education (Oireachtas, 2018). Similarly, recommendations on transition planning supported the process of visiting campuses, increasing CG and transition training, attending open days and collaboratively supporting the student to transition into PSE (NSCE, 2017; Oireachtas, 2001; Oireachtas, 2018). Doyle et al. (2017) investigated parental perceptions on TP in Ireland and found that parents perceived the role of CG in supporting TP within schools as a salient component of successful TP. Furthermore, parents

suggested that CG ought to involve the process of parental support within the overall TP process (Doyle et al. 2017).

The attendance of open days in third level institutions was also highlighted as a transition planning strength within all participating schools. The importance of equipping students with the skills to engage in self-directed research in relation to PSE options was also noted as a strength in transition planning. The benefits of bringing the student to a prospective PSE campus or building was emphasised by all participating teachers. The benefits of this process can be linked to the tangible and concrete experience of visiting a campus for a student with an ASD as well as the potential to decrease prospective levels of associated anxiety linked to unfamiliar areas.

5.3 Dream

5.3.1 The ideal transition planning scenario.

Insights into teacher perspectives on what the ideal transition planning scenario might look like were explored with teachers citing that the ideal transition planning scenario would involve much communication with stakeholders as well as communicating and building rapport with the PSE institutions.

School resources included in the ideal transition planning scenario were also discussed. Teachers reflected an understanding around the complexity of the post-primary and post-secondary school relationship. Time lines for the transition planning process were also explored.

5.3.1.1 Connections with PSE.

The importance of increasing connections was PSE institutions was discussed. In line with previous research, the utility of having an awareness of the PSE options and

what each option can offer students was also described with an emphasis being placed on the attendance of PSE open days where possible (Dymond, Meadan & Pickens, 2017).

The process of building rapport with the PSE was highlighted within the ideal scenario by teachers. Within this process the importance of the capacity to transfer of information between second and third level education as a means of supporting students going forward was also addressed. Previous reports addressed the importance of building a relationship between the school and the PSE institution disability office as well as other relevant PSE parties whilst collaboratively supporting the student to transition (NCSE, 2017; NCSE; 2006; Oireachtas, 2001).

5.3.1.2 Staff and time.

The resources required within the ideal transition planning scenario were discussed and the role of staff within this process was also explored. The complexities of school budgets as well as school systems were addressed within this process. Teacher training was also addressed as a salient resource within transition planning.

The merits of having a specified time to bring students into PSE to explore their options was noted within the ideal transition planning scenario. This also included the prospect of visiting campus and having a full day within a PSE institution to experience the PSE institution fully.

Results in the current study indicate that the timeline transition planning was noted as beneficial to begin in the senior cycle, from TY or 5th year on by the majority of teachers. This is in line with previous research on transition planning timelines within an Irish context (Daly et al., 2016; NCSE, 2006). International literature on transition planning timelines suggested that transition planning begin between the ages of 14 and 16 years of age (IDEIA, 2004; Smith, 2000). Some researchers have argued that transition planning should begin by the age of 14 at the latest (Sitlington et al., 2007). DeFur (2000) highlights the role of the IEP in transition planning and the relevance of an early start to transition planning "generally, an IEP addresses services to be provided to the student

during one school year. But when it comes to transition requirements, the IEP team must think and plan several years ahead" (DeFur, 2000, p. 2). Similar research exploring the transitioning experiences of students with an ASD and their parent/caregivers and universities has also emphasised the benefits of early TP (Dymond et al., 2017). Furthermore, this research reported that students with an ASD fared better in PSE when they had been previously well prepared to attend PSE (Dymond et al., 2017).

5.4 Design

5.4.1 Resources required to reach the ideal scenario.

Resources that were required to reach the ideal transition planning scenario were explored and highlighted by each participating teacher. Within this process the resources within the school were reported as well as the role of PSE and parental role in transition planning. Resources required were cited as involving more planning, more time and personnel as a means of supporting the ideal transition planning scenario. The process of delegating the role of transition planning as a means of ensuring that the process has been carried out correctly and effectively was also highlighted as a personnel resource required to procure ideal transition planning practice.

5.4.1.1 PSE role in TP.

The salience of the capacity of post-primary school education systems to influence PSE enrolment and attainment has been highlighted in previous literature (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). However, the role of PSE and post-secondary institutions have been viewed as separate entities in previous years and this isolated approach amongst both institutions has invoked a myriad of adverse transitioning repercussions for students both with and without an SEN (Kirst & Venezia, 2001). Similar to previous research, the current study has found that the process of bridging the gap between second and third level education can often be left to post-primary school programmes and teachers to avoid

impeding the transition experiences of their students into PSE (Kirst & Venezia, 2001). Similar studies which focused on PSE student recommendations on transitioning for students with SEN found that a primary recommendation of the students interviewed included a strengthening of the communication amongst the PSE institutions and post-primary schools before and during the transition as well as a more reliable communication system amongst all parties involved in the transition into PSE (Redpath, Kearney, Nicholl, Mulvenna, Wallace & Martin, 2013).

Within the current study, a suggested replication of the long-standing and well-established relationship from primary school to post-primary school transition planning was noted as a prospective resource for supporting transitioning between post-primary and PSE. In a similar vein, research on transition planning has suggested that the process of mapping out the supports available in a student's current school as well as outside of their school, in prospective PSE institutions would support transition planning (NCSE, 2017; Oireachtas, 2001). The use of such a map would also highlight gaps in support for the student going forward (NCSE, 2017).

The current study noted that teachers also reported that PSE links with the post-primary school could be more detailed and that more information could be shared to support transition planning between the two educational institutions. Research has indicated that to fully and adequately prepare students for PSE, preparations should be made within the student's present school as well as amongst the wider education system (NCSE, 2017; Oireachtas, 2001; Rusch, Hughes, Agran, Martin & Johnson, 2009). In line with previous literature, the current study has ascertained that strengthening secondary school links with PSE institutions could be a beneficial action within the transition planning process (NCSE, 2017; Redpath et al., 2013; Kirst & Venezia, 2001).

Teachers in the current study echoed the standpoints of previous literature in the area by suggesting that the process of thoroughly exploring the prospective PSE supports available to the student during the transition planning phase within post-primary school may be linked to more efficacious transition planning outcomes (Redpath et al., 2013; Rusch et al., 2009). In this vein, teachers in the current study also noted the benefits of

taking a more tailored approach to transition planning whilst acknowledging the views of the primary stakeholder in the process, the student. Test and Grossi (2011) reported that planning meetings should incorporate student strengths, aims and areas of need. Research around parental perspectives on transition planning has indicated that understanding the child at the centre of the transition was a salient component to the efficacy of the transitioning process (Stoner et al., 2007). This finding has also been noted in research exploring student views on transition into PSE (Redpath et al., 2013).

5.4.1.2 Parental roles.

Parental input was highlighted by teachers as beneficial to the transition planning process. This is in line with previous research wherein parental input in transition planning was viewed as a critical component of the overall process (Dymond et al., 2017; Doyle et al. 2017; NCSE, 2006). A range of minor and major interventions for parents/caregivers to undertake within the home environment as a means of supporting their children to transition were explored by teachers. The current study found that all teachers reported that there is a definite space for parental/caregiver support and home based intervention within the transition planning process. Teachers in two of the participating schools noted that parents could engage more in the process of supporting their child in transition planning while teachers in the third school felt that parents' levels of engagement in this process was satisfactory and that parents/caregivers were in fact inadequately supported by the wider education/disability support system. Interestingly, Thompson et al. (2000) has suggested that parental expectations around the amount of supports that will be required to support their child in PSE have been indicated to be higher than the amount of supports and opportunities which their child reports they will require in PSE. This parent/child expectation discrepancy has also been noted in previous Irish and international literature around transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Hatfield et al., 2017). Similarly, previous research exploring parental perspectives on transitioning found that parents/caregivers wanted their children to be understood, to understand the world and to succeed (Thompson et al., 2018).

In the current study, teacher perceptions of the support that parents can give their child involved parents supporting the development of their child's social, research and life skills, engaging with their child around PSE options as well as acknowledging the capabilities and disabilities of their child going forward. Similarly, transitioning research has recommended that parents/caregivers can support students with an ASD to transition at home by researching ASD, instructing their child around daily living skills, communication with their child around goals and hopes (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). This holistic support would lend itself to the transition process with previous literature in TP having stated that "family support is pivotal" to the overall process of TP (Doyle et al. 2017, p. 279)

5.4.1.3 Collaboration.

Employing a consultative and collaborative framework whereby the parent and students meet with a CG counsellor to support transition planning was also noted as a resource to be built upon within the ideal transition planning scenario. Continuing to work with the parents/caregivers of students as well as the relevant staff members on the students PSE options and transition planning was noted within the ideal scenario. This is similar to previous research in this area whereby the student, their parent/caregivers, their teacher and the PSE institution were recommended to engage in an overall collaborative practice to support the TP process (Dymond et al., 2017).

The current study also found that teachers were mostly satisfied with parental input in general, but teachers did report that they felt that parents could support transition planning more at home in a range of ways, e.g. taking students to open days, college campuses, researching PSE options with and for their child and considering the logistics of PSE options. The process of parental support around the use of technology and other resources was discussed as a practical means of parental support of transition planning. Parental support was noted as a resource required to reach the ideal TP scenario wherein parents/caregivers facilitated and supported the research component of the transition planning process. Similarly, research around transition planning also recommends that a

collaborative approach be taken amongst the parent/caregivers, school and relevant professionals would also support transition planning (Dymond et al., 2017; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).

The practice of collaboration amongst the student, their families and associated professionals has been posited as a primary feature of a successful and effective transition planning in much previous research (Hetherington et al., 2010; NCSE, 2017; Taylor, Morgan & Callow-Heusser, 2016; Thompson et al., 2000; Povenmire-Kirk, 2015; West, 1992). Under the IDEIA act (2004), an emphasis has been placed on encouraging student and their parents/caregivers to actively participate in the transition planning process (Philbin, 2009; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Research exploring parental perspectives on transitioning has indicated that parents placed much emphasis on the importance of communication between home and school during transition planning (Stoner et al., 2007). Previous research in the area of transition planning found that parents were dissatisfied with the level of communication in second level education around the transition planning process (Hetherington et al., 2010).

Overall, current school strengths of transition planning practices in the participating schools involved transition planning which:

- Were tailored to the needs of the student,
- Were collaborative (involving the student, their parents and the relevant professionals)
- Motivated the student (involved their own interests)

Other school strengths explored included school programmes such as:

- LCA
- Work experience within the community
- Career guidance support
- Attendance at PSE open days/visiting PSE campuses

The ideal transition planning scenario included many of the aforementioned strengths being built upon as well as:

- Building a stronger relationship with PSE institutions
- Collaborating and communicating more with PSE institutions
- Sharing relevant information with PSE institutions
- Resources such as; time, money, staff

The use of more resources in transition planning were also explored. Teachers reported that in order to reach the ideal scenario that a range of resources were required including:

- More planning around transitioning (more meetings and collaboration amongst all stakeholders)
- More time (to attend PSE institutions, to collaborate with other stakeholders, to attend meetings relating to TP, to engage with transition planning)
- More staff (delegation of a key transition planning staff member, more staff to give support and CG if required)
- Transition plans which are tailored to the needs of the individual
- Transition plans which are built upon strong links with PSE institutions and the feeder secondary school (meetings with PSE staff, attending campus and PSE staff attending secondary school site to discuss PSE options)
- Transition plans which share relevant information with PSE institutions (learner profiles, areas of need, areas of strength, previous achievements, interests, support networks etc.)

Parental resources required to support the ideal transition planning scenario were also explored and findings indicated that parents can (and do) support students in a range of ways to transition successfully into PSE including:

- Giving their child enough time to discuss and explore all PSE options
- Supporting the research component of PSE at home (with their child or by themselves or both)
- Providing their child with the assistive technology (AT) required to support learning in PSE.
- Visiting PSE campuses as required with their child

5.5 Research Question Two: *What are post-primary school teacher's perspectives on the use of IEPs within the transition planning process for students with an ASD?*

This study also sought to explore the perspectives of post-primary school on the use of IEPs within transition planning. Current strengths of IEP usage were discussed. The ideal usage of IEPs in the transition planning process was discussed as were the required IEP resources to reach the ideal usage of IEPs.

5.6 Discovery: Current Strengths pertaining to IEP usage

5.6.1 Current IEP strengths.

Findings in relation to current strengths pertaining to IEP usage within schools included a collaborative approach to the use of IEPs and the employment of a 'whole school approach' to the IEP creation and implementation. Findings indicated that other highlighted IEP strengths around IEP usage included the use of strengths based IEPs which were tailored to the needs of the student.

5.6.1.1 Targets.

The usage of IEP targets as SMART targets was also described as a current strength in the IEP usage. The use of SMART targets was identified as under-developed in IEPs in secondary schools (Daly et al., 2016). Teachers in the current study also noted that IEP targets were created in the short term and long term (if required) as a means of fostering a sense of achievement and progress in their students. Targets were also reportedly broken down and instruction was made explicit within IEPs. This is in line with previous recommendations around IEP creation and implementation whereby targets were recommended to be broken down, used in the short term and long term, monitored, reviewed (Smith, 2000; Jung, 2007).

5.6.1.2 Tailored.

The current study found that IEPs were also strengths based and tailored to the needs of the students. Research has indicated that a strengths based approach to IEP creation and implementation can support the IEP usage as well as the IEP planning process (Epstein, 2000; Epstein, Rudolph & Epstein, 2000; Weishaar, 2010). The benefits of a strengths based approach have also been noted in transition planning (Epstein et al., 2003).

Similar to previous research, the current study found that the practices linked to the creation and implementation of IEPs varied amongst the participating schools (Andreasson and Wolff, 2015; Philbin, 2009; Rose et al., 2012). Teachers reported a collaborative approach to IEP creation and implementation in the current study which involved the SET and/or the student and/or their parents/caregivers and/or other teachers. In contrast, previous research has indicated that less emphasis has been placed on staff collaboration in relation to IEP creation and despite invitation, the attendance of external services and supports in this process was minimal (Daly et al., 2016). In addition, students in secondary school were not observed to attend their own IEP meetings nor were they noted as formally playing an active role in their IEP creation (Daly et al., 2016; Ring et al., 2018). The benefits of education systems prompting students to take personal responsibility and fostering self-advocacy for students in relation to transition planning and the success of their transition planning outcome have been highlighted in previous research (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Philbin, 2009; Test & Grossi, 2011; Wei et al., 2016).

While previous literature has indicated that the creation and implementation of IEPs can be less developed at secondary school level than at other levels of education, overall, the current study found that teachers reported a range of general current strengths within the IEP usage within their school (Ring et al., 2018). Such strengths included the following areas:

- Collaboration amongst stakeholders (student and/or SET and/or other teachers and/or parents/caregivers)

- A whole school approach to IEP usage (inclusive system around relevant teacher viewing process, relevant staff awareness of other goals and input for new goals in IEPs)

- Strengths based (lists student strengths and utilises strengths to support areas of need)

- Tailored to the individual needs of the student

- Use of SMART targets

5.7 Dream IEP usage within the Ideal Transition Planning Scenario.

5.7.1 IEP creation and implementation for transition planning.

A range of manners of best utilising IEP usage within the transition planning process were discussed.

5.7.1.1 Collaboration amongst all stakeholders.

Teachers reported that a more collaborative approach would support IEP usage within the transition planning process. This collaboration would ideally involve parents, teachers as well as any associated professions and would ideally begin with the student. Previous research within an Irish context has observed some parental involvement within the IEP process (Daly et al., 2016). Previous literature in this area has highlighted the difficulties linked to parental participation in IEP meetings due to work or other commitments (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). Cavendish and Connor (2018) also found that parents who were in attendance at such IEP meetings found the language used to be inaccessible and as such found the experience to be difficult. Research has also indicated that parents of older students are more likely to participate in IEP meetings to support the process of transition planning and that this participation rate varied depending on the

disability of their child as well as their socio-economic background (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz & Valdes, 2012).

Research has indicated that a lack of trust in the school felt by parents/caregivers can have a negative effect on rates of parental/caregiver input in IEP meetings with lower levels noted when a lack of trust in the school is evident (Stoner & Angell, 2006). Weishaar (2010) suggested a number of ways to support collaborative and strengths based IEP meetings between home and school. These methods included: reframing language to be more strengths based, providing a space for parents/caregivers to voice their concerns, nurturing a relationship built on trust between home and school, reducing teacher and parent/caregiver anxiety where possible by being direct about difficulties, fostering an atmosphere of respect within meetings and providing a draft copy of the IEP for all parties to review after the meeting (Weishaar, 2010). Weishaar (2010) also posited that no new or surprising information should be disclosed during an IEP meeting and that any previously noted difficulties should be discussed before the meeting takes place. Weishaar (2010) also maintained that IEP meetings should employ both collaborative and conflict resolution techniques to be effective.

4.7.1.2 Information sharing and IEP access.

The current study found that the practice of sharing information and access where relevant, in relation to IEP usage was desired by teachers in all participating schools. This sharing of information was linked to internal access amongst staff as well as within meetings. IEP meetings can include a range of professionals from internal and external services, meeting attendees may include the student, their parents/caregivers, administrative staff and other stakeholders, depending on the student's strengths and areas of need (Woods, Sylvester & Martin, 2010). During such meetings should be founded upon the primary stakeholder, the student's own PSE interests and goals (Sitlington, Clark & Neubert, 2006). The use of IEP meetings can be important in the process of supporting transition planning (DeFur, 2000). DeFur (2000) viewed Transition Plans as a continuous process within schools. DeFur (2000) posited that the continued monitoring and review

of transition plan goals was important in the overall transitioning process. DeFur (2000) viewed the process as on-going and collaborative: "the written plan provides the framework, but like any good plan the process remains open to new information. All team members need to be aware of the goals and planned activities so that everyone can reinforce progress toward the student's goals" (p. 7).

5.7.1.3 Student input.

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of student input in their IEP creation and implementation as well as participating in the overall transition planning process (NCSE, 2006; Philbin, 2009). Within the current study, the facilitation of self-directed learning as an approach to research and supervised research into PSE options for students was also noted within the ideal usage of IEPs within transition planning. This process would support student learning and skill development around researching as well as serve to practically facilitate the process of researching PSE options. Research exploring PSE outcomes for students with disabilities has indicated that supporting students to engage in self-directed learning early in post-primary school can support more effective transition outcomes into PSE (Rusch et al., 2009). Moreover, fostering an ethos of self-directed learning in IEP creation and implementation has been shown increase student rates of involvement in IEP meetings (Arndt, Konrad & Test, 2006). Gaining the student's perspective in relation to PSE institutions that they would hope to attend and supporting the research process as part of the transition planning journey have also been implicated in positive PSE transition planning practice and outcomes (DeFur, 2000; Rusch et al., 2009; Sitlington et al., 2007). In general, collaborative input (which includes student input) in IEP creation has been viewed as good practice within the IEP creation and implementation process (Smith, 2000). An inclusive school ethos has also been noted as paramount to the goal creation and implementation process (Doyle et al., 2017).

5.7.1.4 Targets.

The majority of teachers were aware of the prospective place of transition planning within IEPs. However, some teachers reported difficulty with prioritising transition planning or life skills goals due to the demands of more immediately relevant academic targets that were linked to the leaving certificate. All teachers acknowledged the importance of transition plan targets in general but one teacher did struggle to find space within the IEP to be dedicated solely to transition planning goals. This has been reflected in previous research whereby teachers have reported prioritising academic goals rather than transition planning or life skills oriented goals within IEPs (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). Moreover research has indicated that IEPs of students availing of a highly differentiated curriculum often focus less on functional skills and more on academic skill development (Sanches-Ferreira, Lopes-dos-Santos, Alves, Santos & Silveira-Maia, 2013). As a means of resolving this concern if required within a school, research has suggested that the creation of 'individual transition plans' (ITPs) as a separate entity from IEPs could serve to facilitate the same role as an IEP but for transition needs, while being utilised as a constantly reviewed and evolving document which could be transferred to PSE if required (Doyle et al., 2017). However, such ideas ought to be viewed with caution as much more research into this area would be warranted before any resources could be deployed to facilitate ITP usage (Doyle et al., 2017). This is due to an under researched uptake and retention rate of such a document in post-primary schools (Doyle et al., 2017). This is especially relevant due to the lack of formalised TP in schools using IEPs observed in the current study.

Mainstream teachers who participated in the current study were found to have somewhat less experience in creating and implementing IEPs than their SET/SENCO colleagues. Similar to the current study, mainstream teachers were not noted as primary IEP creators with the SET or SENCO taking on this role in many cases (Daly et al., 2016). As such, it can be argued that mainstream teachers that are creating an IEP may not attribute as much weight to transition planning goals or daily living skills as an SET or SENCO.

Test and Grossi (2011) posited that the role of IEPs in transition planning can be blended with practices and goals in other areas such as social sciences or an equivalent (such as, SPHE) if required. It was argued that more research on curriculum blending to support transition plans and the use of IEPs was warranted (Test & Grossi, 2011). Moreover, research has suggested that IEP targets can be used specifically to support personal development and/or transitioning goals (Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder & Algozzine, 2004). Research on supporting students with an ASD in the transition planning process has emphasised the importance of identifying transition planning goals within an IEP as well as linking IEP goals to PSE goals where possible, the process of evaluating and adjusting said goals was also emphasised (Szidon et al., 2015). Previous research has argued that teachers tend not to focus on personal development goals such as self-determination as a component of transition planning which can have a negative effect on transition outcomes (Dymond et al., 2017; Thoma, Baker & Saddler, 2002; Wood et al., 2004). Moreover, teacher training programmes do not extensively explore teaching methods of nurturing and fostering self-determination in students (Thoma et al., 2002). Furthermore, research exploring means of increasing self-determination implicated higher levels of self-determination with more collaborative IEPs and more effective transition planning outcomes (Powers et al., 2005; Van Laarhoven-Myers, Van Laarhoven, Smith, Johnson, & Olson, 2016; Woods et al., 2010). More recent literature has emphasised the key role of self-determination in the transition process (Bell et al., 2017; Clark, 2018; Dymond et al., 2017; Van Laarhoven-Myers et al., 2016).

Within the current study, the use of IEPs within the ideal transition planning scenario included the following areas:

- IEPs which were collaborative and inclusive of all stakeholders

- IEPs which included self-directed learning with targets around PSE research

- IEPs which included an area dedicated to transition planning goals/targets (e.g. broad goals/targets including social skill development and narrower goals such as PSE research) and/or other relevant transition planning information

5.8 Design: Resources required to reach the ideal usage of IEPs within the Transition Planning scenario

5.8.1 Resources required to reach the ideal usage of IEPs in transition planning.

In the current study, the resources required within schools to support the most effective use of IEPs in the transition planning process included a range of areas: IEP structure, IEP targets, IEPs which are tailored to the needs of the student as well as a collaborative approach to IEP creation and implementation. Teachers reported that the IEP structure could be reviewed and a specific area within the IEP that was dedicated to the process of TP. This would support a formalised approach as well as a written document to support transition planning.

The most efficient use of targets within IEPs to support the transition planning process going forward were explored by teachers in the current study. These targets were specifically directed towards transition planning. The importance of having a plan B was also highlighted within the ideal usage of IEPs in transition planning.

Within the current study, IEPs which are also tailored to the needs of the student, whilst incorporating the students own hopes, views and goals in collaboration with the relevant staff and the students' parents/caregivers were also noted as part of the ideal usage of IEP in the transition planning process. Previous research has indicated the benefits of employing individualised or tailored IEPs for students with an ASD which incorporated student strengths as well as their areas of need (Etscheidt, 2003; Jung, Baird, Gomez, & Galyon-Keramidas, 2008).

Overall, teachers viewed IEPs as useful assets within the transition planning process. Teachers also reported resources which were required to support the usage of IEPs within the ideal transition planning scenario, the following areas were suggested as IEP resources required within this process:

- IEP structure (use of a specific transition planning area within general IEP)

- The use of transition planning targets (broad and narrow which are broken down accordingly)
- The employment of a tailored approach to IEP usage within transition planning
- Collaborative efforts in IEP creation and implementation within the transition planning process (including the student, their parents/caregivers, their teacher and any other relevant professional parties).

5.9 The Framework Employed for the Exploration of the Research Area; Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

This research explored the role of the IEP in relation to transition planning employed within schools for students with a diagnosis of an ASD. Data were collected by prompting teachers to think about the role of the IEP in transition planning, their transitioning experiences as well as their own professional hopes or their hopes for their transitioning students. This task which could potentially elicit much anxiety or negative affect, especially if data collected were based upon previous experiences of frustration, disappointment or a poor relationship between the school and/or parent/guardian.

This study employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a means of exploring these areas. AI employs a more positive outlook to problem solving, seeking to appreciate what is working well within an organisation and building on this using a positive, strengths-based approach (Hammond, 2013). In this vein, the AI approach posits that an organisation is viewed more as a mystery to be explored rather than a problem to be solved (Hammond, 2013; Whitney et al., 2011). An AI framework facilitated the inductive exploration of this area while decreasing the risk of causing distress to participants in relation to their perceptions or concerns relating to IEP usage, relevance and/or overall quality of their transition planning experiences to date. AI seeks to explore the positive change that is believed to be inherently present in any individual or organisation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). As such, the use of AI as a means of

exploring the strengths around transition planning and IEP usage within transition planning was appropriate for sensitive nature of the current study.

5.10 Data Collection Challenges

The current study initially sought to explore teacher, student and parent perspectives around transition planning and the role of IEPs within the transition planning process. The recruitment process was challenging due to a low up-take rate within the parent and student cohorts. Post-primary schools were also less inclined to consent to participating in the study for a range of reasons which will be discussed. The sampling process changed as a result from purposive sampling to convenience sampling.

5.10.1 Recruitment challenges.

5.10.1.1 Parent cohort.

Parents were less inclined to engage with the research area. A range of reasons were provided; lack of knowledge around TP, views on transition planning discussions as premature due to their child being two to three years away from leaving their post-primary schools as well as reports of time constraints to engage in the project. Recruiting parents for research or intervention programmes has proven to be a somewhat difficult task in previous research (Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin & Berry, 2012; Heinrichs, Bertram, Kuschel & Hahlweg, 2005). One parent did participate in the current study but their data was not directly employed. Feedback will be provided to the school which their child attends as a means of ensuring that their time given during their participation was best utilised.

5.10.1.2 Student cohort.

Difficulty was also encountered in the recruitment process for the student cohort. The reasons for the low participation rates amongst the student cohort varied. It was reported to the researcher that students did not want to participate for several reasons: they were unsure about the research area, they did not want to meet the researcher, anxiety around participating and/or not feeling able to answer the questions, they did not understand what an IEP was, as well as not wanting to participate because they found the research content uninteresting. Students were also less inclined to want to meet with the researcher in person. The prevalence of mental health difficulties such as anxiety is high within the ASD community and as such students may have felt anxiety around the prospects of participating in this study (Geller & Greenberg, 2009). Students with an ASD may have been less inclined to participate in a situation with a new person due to the challenges they face socially (Shattuck, Orsmond, Wagner & Cooper, 2011).

Students with an ASD have been found to have prospectively overly optimistic views on PSE opportunities when compared to other stakeholders as well as lower rates of concern around future oriented situations linked to PSE, which might have contributed to a potential lack of interest in participating in the current study (Browning et al., 2009; Hatfield et al., 2017). Difficulties in recruiting and retaining adolescent participants without an ASD have been also noted, specifically in relation to more longitudinal research (Seed, Juarez & Alnatour, 2009). Three students did participate in the current study but their data was not employed directly. Feedback will be provided to the school which the students attend as a means of ensuring that their participation time was best utilised.

5.10.1.3 School concerns about research participation.

Schools were also less inclined to consent to their schools engagement with the research project. Schools reported a range of reasons for a lack of participation including:

concerns about parental feedback, concerns about negative feedback from participants, concerns linked to eligibility of participation due to less formal transition plans protocols within the school. Twenty-five schools with an ASD unit that were listed in the NCSE list were contacted in total during the recruitment process. Three schools agreed to participate in the study. Previous research has indicated that a range of factors can affect school participation rates such as a lack of contact, guidance and interest in the research area (Harrington et al., 1997). The recruitment process was in line with guidelines offered by previous research recruitment papers; confidentiality was ensured, good communication and interpersonal skills were used, the perspectives of the prospective participants was acknowledged and catered for if required, incentives were discussed (in the form of the opportunity to contribute to research) and generic feedback was offered to each school pending the thesis examination (Axford et al., 2012; Patel, Doku & Tennakoon, 2003). Despite the researcher's best effort, the contacted schools were still less inclined to engage with the project.

5.11 Researcher Reflections

Similar to previous studies, reflections on the research will be explored (Goldstein, 2005). The use of AI was an advantageous methodology to employ due to the sensitive research area. The use of a strengths based approach allowed teachers to explore their own strengths as well as their school strengths while reducing the possibility that they might feel judged or negatively view in any manner. AI facilitated the exploration of what was working well, what the ideal transition planning scenario looked like and how the ideal scenario might be reached within the school.

The researcher had significant concerns around the progress of the study during the recruitment phase due to low up-take rates amongst the parent and student cohorts. The teacher cohort were easier to recruit for this research. The researcher restructured the scope of the research question as required as a means of capturing the views of the cohort employed.

However, the researcher did recruit and collect data from three students and one parent. The parent participant was not linked to any of the participating students. The three students attended units (either on a full or part-time basis) within a mainstream secondary school. Two of the participating students were in 5ᵗʰ year while one of the students was in TY. The mean age of the students was 15.3. All participating students were male. See appendix J for more information on student and parent data.

5.12 Transition Planning Recommendations for Post-Primary Schools

Transition plans which are child focused should be utilised in schools in relation to transitioning into PSE (Hendricks & Wehman 2009). The use of specifically created transition goals would also support the transition planning process (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).

Transition planning is mandatory in the USA and is therefore integrated into an IEP (Bell, Devecchi, Mc Guckin & Shevlin, 2017). Under the IDEIA act (2004), an emphasis is placed on the importance of student and familial participation in the transition planning process (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). In addition, the planning process is required to have commenced at age 14 and certain components of the plan must also be in place by the time the child is 16 (Geller & Greenberg, 2009).

According to Roberts (2010) under the IDEIA (2004), the transition plan should:

- be reviewed annually at least
- include information regarding current levels of attainment and performance
- should include specific steps and instructions for transition planning goals
- Include information relating to previous experiences within the community (work-experience etc.)
- include information relating to occupational and/or training goals which are created parallel to the student's own aspirations (Roberts, 2010)

Results in the current study indicated that the process of transition planning took form in a range of means: formally, informally, inadvertently through other programmes such

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as LCA or CG counselling. Similar to previous research findings, transition planning was not commonly formally structured through the use of IEPs in the participating post-primary schools (Bell et al., 2017). This is also in line with previous research in an Irish context whereby transition planning was viewed as varied and was not formally utilised in post-primary schools (Bell et al., 2017; Doyle et al., 2017; Daly et al., 2016).

The overall utility on the employment of IEPs in TP was acknowledged by all teachers with an emphasis being placed on parental roles, PSE connections and collaboration amongst all stakeholders in creating IEPs. The importance of the use of tailored IEPs was also expressed by all participating schools. Previous research has indicated diverse findings in relation to the quality of educational provision for students with an ASD in secondary schools in Ireland (Daly et al., 2016; Doyle et al., 2017). Furthermore, international research has indicated that a discrepancy exists between policy recommendations and the practical implementation of IEPs on the ground in schools (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). More teacher training on the creation and implementation of IEPs at a post-primary level may be warranted (Ruble et al., 2010).

Findings from the current study indicate that post-primary school teacher's views on ideal transition plans include transition plans which:

- are inclusive of all stakeholders (especially the student)
- are collaborative in their creation and implementation
- are reviewed at least on yearly basis or more often if required
- involve specific meetings for their creation and review
- are specific and individualised to the student's own needs and hopes
- have specific targets/goals related to TP (broad and narrow)
- have a specific area within an IEP
- involve relevant teaching staff

Furthermore, teachers reported that the ideal transition planning process would involve:

- more structure as a process with more time and resources allocated within the school

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- the inclusion of all stakeholders (especially the student)
- collaboration and individualisation as a process involving all the relevant professionals (both inside and outside of the school)
- a start time from approximately TY or 5th year onwards
- linking in with other staff and/or subjects where relevant and possible (e.g. life-skills, cooking, social skills, career guidance etc.)
- better communication and information sharing with the PSE institutions
- the creation of stronger links with the PSE institutions

6.0 Chapter Six: Conclusion

The current study explored teacher perspectives on transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD in post-primary schools and the role of IEPs within the transition planning process. This chapter will explore methodological strengths and limitations, directions for future research, research finding implications for educational psychologists and the current study's contribution to research in this area.

6.1 ASD and Transition Planning.

The diagnostic features of an ASD can result in the requirement of much higher levels of conscious effort from individuals with an ASD to navigate their way in different areas (Happé et al., 2006). These areas include the interpretation and processing of social mannerisms as well as nonverbal cues, the presentation of patterns of thinking which can be obsessional or pervasive in nature, regulating their emotions as well as sensory and motor skill complications (Geller & Greenberg, 2009; Happé et al., 2006; Stewart, Barnard, Pearson, Hasan, & O'Brien, 2006). Transition planning, while mandatory in some countries such as the USA, is not mandatory in other countries (such as in the Irish context) and as such, a natural variance in their creation and implementation is likely to be observed in research (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Powers et al., 2005).

The current study built upon previous research by exploring teacher perspectives on transition planning and teacher views on the role of IEPs within this process. Findings within the current study indicated that transition planning does occur both informally and formally within post-primary schools and directly and indirectly (through the use of interventions and/or programmes designed to support holistic as well as academic development such as LCA). Despite some concerns around the process of positioning transition plan IEP targets amongst more traditionally academic targets within an IEP, overall, post-primary teachers viewed IEPs as useful assets within the transition planning process.

6.2 Strengths and Value of Methodology

The current study employed AI as a means of exploring the sensitive area of transition planning research and the role of IEPs within transition planning. The current study also collected data in the form of semi-structured interviews which allowed for the collection of rich qualitative data which facilitated the exploration of the realities and experiences of the participants. Data were collected, transcribed and analysed by the researcher. An independent coder was employed as a means of ensuring reliability and validity within the analysis process. Data were collected on site from three different schools using 10 teachers with varying roles within the school (e.g. SET, SENCO, mainstream).

6.3 Study Limitations

Although the current study had some methodological strengths, some limitations relating to the sample strategy, participants and sampling process employed in the current study among other limitations were noted.

6.3.1 Sampling strategy.

This research initially sought to employ non-probabilistic, purposive sampling as a means of recruitment. This process proved unsuccessful over time due to a range of potential reasons, (for more information, see section 5.10). Due to recruitment difficulties linked with the parent and student cohort and the limited timeframe available to conduct the study, the sampling approach was changed from non-probabilistic purposive to non-probabilistic convenience sampling focusing on the voice of the teacher. The researcher used professional and personal contacts to support the recruitment process as a means of feasibly gathering all the data within the research time frame. While convenience sampling can provide accessibility to a population within a limited time frame (as was the case with the current research and the doctoral timeline), convenience sampling is not without limitations (e.g. suitability of participants chose to research questions as well as

the collection of unsuitable or inappropriate data), see section 6.3.5 for more information (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

6.3.2 Social desirability.

Social desirability bias involves under reporting less perceived desirable behaviours and attitudes and highlighting or reporting more perceived desirable behaviours and attitudes instead (Latkin, Edwards, Davey-Rothwell & Tobin, 2017). Social desirability bias has been noted in literature as a confounding variable which has the capacity to skew results, specifically research employing indirect questioning, interviewing and face to face self-reporting as a means of data collection (Fisher, 1993; Leggett, Kleckner, Boyle, Dufield & Mitchell, 2003; Van Laarhoven-Myers et al., 2016; Van de Mortel, 2008). The current study may have incurred some social desirability bias in the data collection process due to use of face-to-face SSIs. This method of data collection did not account for the potential for teachers' overall perceptions of the research and their cognisance of their professional representation of their school to effect the data they provided.

6.3.3 Data triangulation.

The use of SSIs was the only source of data collected, as such data triangulation was not employed in the current study. Data triangulation involves obtaining data using multiple methods or sources as a means of gaining further understanding the research area, (Patton, 1999). In the context of qualitative data, triangulation can refer to the testing of validity within data through the amalgamation of data obtained from multiple sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014). The use of triangulation as a means of testing the validity and reliability of qualitative research has been advocated for in previous research, but the use of triangulation can also vary depending on the specific research parameters employed (Golafshani, 2003).The implication of not

triangulating data involves a lack of internal validity of the data collected which is noted as a limitation within the current study.

6.3.4 The voice of the child and parent.

Much previous research has included the voice of the student and/or their parent/caregiver in relation to transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Hatfield et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015). However, much research in this area has previously excluded the voice of the teacher in transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015). Therefore, the voice of the teacher was elicited in the current study due to research having indicated a prominent gap in obtaining the voice of the teacher. Furthermore, three students and one parent did participate in the current study and as a means of ensuring that participant time was adequately used, the participating schools from which the parent and students were associated will receive feedback on the research despite the data from said participants not being utilised in the study.

6.3.5 Convenience sampling.

While non-probabilistic sampling is appropriate to employ in research exploring a specific area with limited time, staff and resources, the process of convenience sampling could be viewed as a limitation within the current study (Etikan et al., 2016). The data collected could be skewed by the participating schools and their awareness of the research area. Most schools were reluctant to participate in the current study due to the nature of the research area and their own feelings of readiness to discuss this area in detail.

Schools were primarily reluctant to engage with this study due to perceptions of ambiguity around the adequacy of their own usage of IEPs and approaches to transition planning. Schools which agreed to participate may have had a more concrete and practiced approach to transition planning, and as such may have been more confident in

their own approaches thus affecting the reliability of the data in relation to teacher perspectives in this area. Finally, all three participating schools were confined to the Munster region of Ireland and as such, further research on a more national scale is warranted.

6.3.6 Generalisability of research findings.

This study employed a sample of post-primary school teachers (n=10) with varying roles within the schools employed. All teachers taught in one of three participating post-primary schools. A relatively small number of post-primary schools participated in this study (n=3). The lower number of participating schools resulted in transition planning practices being explored across three schools in the Munster region of Ireland. Similar to the Bell et al. (2017) study where a small number of participants were recruited, a lower sample size may have an effect on the external generalisability of the research. As such, the generalisability, or as Noble & Smith (2015) posited, the 'applicability' of the current research findings has been affected. While the targeted area for exploration held specific parameters (post-primary school teachers views on transition planning for students with an ASD and the role of IEPs within this process), the use of three post-primary schools and 10 participants from the Munster region of Ireland may implicate the application of the findings from the current study to other relevant contexts.

6.4 Future Research

Teacher perspectives that were observed in the current study highlighted the importance of student participation in the transition planning process. This perception has been alluded to in international research (Thompson et al., 2000; Stoner et al., 2007). As such, avenues for future research could focus on methods to encourage higher levels of student involvement in the transition planning process (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).

Much of the existing research in the area of transition planning has focused on the transitioning experiences of school leaving aged participants (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009). Transition planning research has also focused on the transitioning experiences of students already in higher education (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Hatfield et al., 2017; Van Hees et al., 2015). While studies such as the Bell et al. (2017) examined the pre and post transition perceptions of secondary school students in their final year and the study by Hatfield et al. (2017) explored the transitioning experiences of both second and third level students, more research is warranted in this area. The transition planning experiences of students currently in school as well as the transition planning experiences of school leavers is lacking in current literature. Furthermore, a more longitudinal approach to TP research which explores the transition planning process for the student from its inception in post-primary school until the end of their first semester or academic year in PSE education would also be beneficial as a means of gaining insight into TP within the evolving educational contexts (Doyle, 2016). Finally, due to the variance of IEP usage and transition planning in post-primary schools in Ireland found in the current study and in previous literature, further research is warranted to explore the role of IEPs in transition planning on a national scale (Daly et al., 2016).

Much previous research on transition planning has elicited the voice of the student and/or their parent/caregiver (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Hatfield et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015). It is important to note, that research in transition planning has also excluded the voice of the teacher in this process (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015). It is therefore imperative that future research explores all stakeholder perspectives (student, teacher and parent/caregiver) on transition planning. Such research would serve to build upon and explore the existing bank of knowledge of parental/student expectation discrepancy as well as exploring teacher expectations around transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Hatfield et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2000). Research which aims to elicit the voices of all the associated stakeholders would be paramount in gaining validity in this research area going forward.

Another area of research might include an exploration of the role of the SNA in the transition planning process. Previous research has indicated that young people with disabilities and their parents expressed the advantages in having an SNA for their time in education (NCSE, 2017). However, difficulties were noted within the study around PSE institutions understanding of the role of the SNA in supporting students to access the curriculum through a range of means (NCSE, 2017). Furthermore, PSE institutions expressed some concern around the prospects of students becoming over-dependent on their SNA and as such, arresting their development in a range of daily-living and functioning areas (NCSE, 2017). PSE institutions reported that an unhealthy SNA dependence could also further hinder student's capacity for independence as well as their transition into PSE (NCSE, 2017).

Finally, the current study employed AI as a means of exploring a sensitive area within schools. This has proven to be an efficacious method of exploration as it facilitated teachers to give a strengths based account of transition planning and the use of IEPs in this process whilst exploring how the 'ideal' and 'dream' scenarios might look. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to delve into this area with minimal concerns around the prospects of offending participants or participating schools or invoking negative emotions in the participants. As such, the use of AI may be beneficial to similar research of a sensitive area going forward.

6.5 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

- Wider research has consistently demonstrated that early transition support for individuals with an ASD is crucial (Bell et al., 2017; Cimera , Burgess & Wiley, 2013; Vanvergeijk et al., 2008; Wehman et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2016). Therefore, it can be argued that integrating a transition plan into an IEP at an early stage in secondary education to prepare for PSE could be beneficial to the school leaver (Bell et al., 2017). The role of the educational psychologist in this instance could revolve around linking stakeholders and maintaining their connections to ensure that the primary stakeholder, their parents or carers and the appropriate professionals are aware of a transitioning plan. Such a plan would be tailored to meet the needs and interests of the primary

stakeholder and as such would assist in affording them opportunities to strengthen existing skills and establish new skills in required areas (Carter et al., 2013).

- The process of transitioning could also be facilitated by a range of factors including careful planning techniques and the facilitation of access to a range of services, accommodations and resources to aid with transitioning into PSE within the community (Van Bergeijket al., 2008). EPs could be involved by supporting their schools with the process establishing and maintaining community services and connections between the primary stakeholders within a community. The establishment and maintenance of such relationships within the community may have the potential to assist the individual and/or their parents/carers to access a range of opportunities, resources and services which are tailored to support the individual's strengths and areas of need (Carter et al., 2013).

- According to the NCSE document on IEP usage, the role of psychologists can involve "the assessment of the child and included in the preparation of Individual Education Plans. Apart from providing general advice and support to school staff he/she is often consulted about individual children. He/she may gather information about children, their skills and abilities and may plan a programme of support" (NCSE, 2006, p. 59). Therefore, EPs in this instance could attend transition planning meetings where possible and support the school to support the student using an IEP from the initial stages of the transition planning process until the student leaves the school.

- The overall role of EPs could also be utilised to inform and encourage schools to engage more with the transition planning process. This input could be in the form of professional training/input around transition planning and assessment within the transition planning process. Leconte, (2006) suggested that transition assessment is efficacious as it acts as a vehicle in the process of gathering information with a view to making an informed decision. Leconte (2006) viewed the process of transition planning as an intervention method in and of itself. Equally, Sitlington et al. (2007) emphasised the importance of continued and coordinated assessment and monitoring of the transition planning process through the use of IEPs.

- In the USA, the use of Summary of Performance (SOP), a form of assessment under the IDEIA act has also been cited as beneficial in the transition planning process (IDEIA,

2004; Sitlington et al., 2007). Within an Irish context, Doyle (2016) similarly argued for the usage of an assessment for learning protocol whereby the strengths, areas of need and interests of a student with SEN were continuously recorded and monitored as a means of tailoring and supporting the overall TP process. In the absence of tangible guidelines on assessment for TP within an Irish context when compared to the IDEIA act stipulations on TP, it could be argued that EPs could assist post-primary schools in the transition planning process by monitoring the assessment processes for TP.

- In order to be most effective, transition planning has been advised as being an intrinsic component of the student's IEP (West, 1992). Furthermore, schools should holistically support students with the use of a range of programmes which cater to the development of skills in a range of areas to support the transition out of post-primary school (DES, 2007b; West, 1992). EPs could also support this process within post-primary schools by attending IEP meetings as well as by giving input to schools around how they can best support the TP process.

- Finally, although previous literature exploring the prospective role of EPs in third level education is sparse, EPs who are familiar with a student's transition plan may be in an advantageous position to meet with third level education and disability officers to discuss prospective supports available to the student if appropriate.

6.6 Contribution to Knowledge

6.6.1 Methodology reflections.

The current study employed AI as a means of sensitively exploring the research questions in the field of education. AI challenges the more traditional deficits or problem-focused lens of traditional action research (Grant & Humphries, 2006). The process of avoiding a deficits-based lens in AI research which is purposefully oriented more towards a positive lens, serves to decrease the possibility of exaggerated or inflated deficits and weaknesses being reported which would disturb the capacity and hope to change and distort any already existing and useful strengths within an organisation (Ludema et al.,

1997). This form of positive inquiry is believed to provide a platform for change which can be transformative in nature within an organisation (Whitney et al., 2011; Cooperrider et al., 2001). The use of AI in the current study facilitated this exploration and avoided overtly negative evaluations of a school or teacher's role in transition planning by exploring school strengths and how the ideal transition planning scenario might look to the participant. AI then built upon this feedback by exploring the resources required to reach the aforementioned ideal scenario. Therefore, the use of AI supported the process of positively exploring the research area but also facilitated the obtention of practical teacher recommendations on how the reported positive change could be employed in relation to transition planning within their school. As such, AI was an efficacious research vehicle within the current study. The use of AI also facilitated the reflective practice of the researcher by employing a strengths based approach to accompany her friendly and open demeanour whilst collecting the data. The employment of a reflective approach under the AI lens (as discussed in section 3.8) facilitated the adoption of a more open and objective approach to data collection and analysis which in turn aided in the avoidance of subjective bias, thus strengthening the trustworthiness and scientific rigor of the qualitative research conducted (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017; Noble & Smith 2015).

The recruitment process proved to be difficult at times due to the lack of participant uptake for the student and parent cohorts. Although it was not feasible due to the time constraints of the doctoral programme, a longer period of time for the recruitment process may have allowed the researcher to build a more solid relationship with prospective participants (e.g. building a relationship with the school over more time, presenting the research area in more detail at a parent/student careers night, thus meeting prospective participants whilst allowing more time for the participants to consider their role in the research). If it had been possible, increased levels of contact with the researcher may have served to increase participation uptake rates and lessen participation anxiety on the part of the school, parents or students. On the other hand, it is worth noting that increasing exposure to the researcher before data collection is not without implications as this could also result in a blurring of the boundaries of the relationship with the

participants which could result in a skewing of the data due to reasons similar to those discussed in section 6.3.2.

6.6.2 Research findings.

The current study explored transition planning into PSE for students with a diagnosis of an ASD and the use of IEPs within this process in post-primary schools in Ireland. Findings indicated that transition planning does occur on both formal and informal levels within post-primary schools in Ireland. Similar to previous literature, findings also indicated that post-primary schools were currently less likely to use IEPs to support the transition planning process (Bell et al., 2017). However, students were prepared for PSE in a range of ways: directly with the use of tailored interventions around areas of need to support life in PSE (e.g. daily living skills, organisational and social skills etc.) and indirectly developing a range of skills required for PSE with the use of modules within more general education programmes (e.g. work experience in LCA etc.).

While the current study is not without limitations, there are noteworthy findings to be considered that were borne of this study. While the findings have some shortcomings in relation to their generalisability or applicability, it is worth noting that across all participating schools, similar points were consistently made by teachers in reference to how students with an ASD can be supported to transition into PSE and the role of the IEP within the process.

Such findings emphasised the importance of building relationships and linking in with the PSE institution, collaborative and tailored transition plans as well as designated staff and IEP space for this process within the school. Across all schools, the findings also highlighted the invaluable contribution of school programmes such as LCA as well as the salience of the role of CG counsellors in the transition planning process. The employment of school activities such as day trips to PSE institutions as well as career planning modules were also positively viewed within the transition planning process by post-primary school teachers in the Munster region of Ireland.

The findings of the current study will be disseminated through publication within a peer-reviewed journal. An element from the current study will be submitted to the European Journal of Special Education Needs as a research paper for peer review (research question one). This choice of journal is due to the research topic relevance to the journal as well as the worldwide academic audience which is reached by said journal. Research submission to the European Journal of Special Education Needs will be with a view to contribute to and build upon existing research in the area. See appendix K for journal article.

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Appendices

Appendix A) Systematic Literature Reviews: Phase 1

Appendix A 1) Excluded Studies (Phases 1 and 2)

Excluded Study (excluding duplicates)	Rationale for exclusion
1. Alpern, C. S., & Zager, D. (2007). Addressing communication needs of young adults with autism in a college-based inclusion program. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 428-436.	Topic not relevant to area of research.
2. Boehm, T. L., Carter, E. W., & Taylor, J. L. (2015). Family quality of life during the transition to adulthood for individuals with intellectual disability and/or autism spectrum disorders. *American journal on intellectual and developmental disabilities*, *120*(5), 395-411.	Examined family quality of life and associated predictors
3. Burgess, S., & Cimera, R. E. (2014). Employment outcomes of transition-aged adults with autism spectrum disorders: A state of the states report. *American journal on intellectual and developmental disabilities*, *119*(1), 64-83.	Focus on employment and not PSE
4. Borthwick, L. (2012). Life lessons. *Nature*, *491*(7422), S10-S11. doi:10.1038/491S10a	Topic not relevant to research area
5. Carter, E. W., Harvey, M. N., Taylor, J. L., & Gotham, K. (2013). Connecting youth and young adults with autism spectrum disorders to community life. *Psychology in the Schools*, *50*(9), 888-898.	Focus on community involvement, not relevant to topic area.
6. Chen, J. L., Sung, C., & Pi, S. (2015). Vocational rehabilitation service patterns and outcomes for individuals with autism of different ages. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *45*(9), 3015-3029.	Not relevant to research area.
7. Geenen, S. J., & Powers, L. E. (2006). Transition Planning for Foster Youth. *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, *28*(2), 4-15.	
8. Ham, Whitney, Jennifer McDonough, Alissa Molinelli, Carol Schall, and Paul Wehman. "Employment supports for young adults with autism spectrum disorder: Two case studies." *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 40, no. 2 (2014): 117-124.	Examination of employment case studies. Not relevant to PSE.

Reference	Reason
9. Hill, D. A., Belcher, L., Brigman, H. E., Renner, S., & Stephens, B. (2013). The apple iPad (TM) as an innovative employment support for young adults with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, *44*(1), 28.	Focus on employment and assistive technology, not relevant to topic area.
10. Kandalaft, M. R., Didehbani, N., Krawczyk, D. C., Allen, T. T., & Chapman, S. B. (2013). Virtual reality social cognition training for young adults with high-functioning autism. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *43*(1), 34-44.	Not relevant to research area
11. Kirby, A. V. (2016). Parent expectations mediate outcomes for young adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *46*(5), 1643-1655.	Examined parental expectations and outcomes.
12. Liu, E. X., Carter, E. W., Boehm, T. L., Annandale, N. H., & Taylor, C. E. (2014). In their own words: The place of faith in the lives of young people with autism and intellectual disability. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities*, *52*(5), 388-404.	Includes individuals with an ASD and ID. Topic not relevant to research area.
13. Loukas, K. M., Raymond, L., Perron, A. R., McHarg, L. A., & LaCroix Doe, T. C. (2015). Occupational transformation: Parental influence and social cognition of young adults with autism. *Work*, *50*(3), 457-463.	Not relevant to topic area.
14. Matthews, N. L., Smith, C. J., Pollard, E., Ober-Reynolds, S., Kirwan, J., & Malligo, A. (2015). Adaptive functioning in autism spectrum disorder during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *45*(8), 2349-2360.	Focus on adaptive focusing.
15. McCollum, M., LaVesser, P., & Berg, C. (2016). Participation in Daily Activities of Young Adults with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *46*(3), 987-997.	Examined the efficacy of using an 'Adolescent and **Young Adult** Activity Card Sort (AYA-ACS)' in assisting young people with an ASD. Not relevant to topic area.
16. McDonough, J. T., & Revell, G. (2010). Accessing employment supports in the adult system for transitioning youth with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *32*(2), 89-100.	Not relevant to research area.
17. Morgan, R. L., & Schultz, J. C. (2012). Towards an ecological, multi-modal approach to increase employment for young adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, *43*(1), 27.	Focus on employment, not relevant to research area.
18. Myers, E., Davis, B. E., Stobbe, G., & Bjornson, K. (2015). Community and social participation among individuals with autism spectrum disorder transitioning to adulthood. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *45*(8), 2373-2381.	Focus on community and social participation, not relevant to topic area.
19. Neely, J., Amatea, E. S., Echevarria-Doan, S., & Tannen, T. (2012). Working with families living with autism: Potential contributions of marriage and family therapists. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *38*(s1), 211-226.	Not relevant to research area.

20. Nevill, R. E., & White, S. W. (2011). College students' openness toward autism spectrum disorders: Improving peer acceptance. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *41*(12), 1619-1628.	Focus on university level, non-ASD peers' perceptions of ASD rather than individuals with an ASD. Not relevant to research area.
21. Orsmond, G. I., Shattuck, P. T., Cooper, B. P., Sterzing, P. R., & Anderson, K. A. (2013). Social participation among young adults with an autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *43*(11), 2710-2719.	Examined social participation, not relevant to topic area
22. Palmen, A., Didden, R., & Verhoeven, L. (2012). A personal digital assistant for improving independent transitioning in adolescents with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, *15*(6), 401-413.	Focus on ABA techniques and assistance, not relevant to area of research.
23. Rogers, K., & Zeni, M. B. (2015). Systematic literature review of medical home models to promote transitions to primary adult health care for adolescents living with autism spectrum disorder. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, *12*(2), 98-107.	Systematic literature review-not relevant.
24. Rydzewska, E. (2012). Destination unknown? Transition to adulthood for people with autism spectrum disorders. *British Journal of Special Education*, *39*(2), 87-93.	Article examining a range of different studies in the area, an overview rather than a study.
25. Schall, C. M., & McDonough, J. T. (2010). Autism spectrum disorders in adolescence and early adulthood: Characteristics and issues. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *32*(2), 81-88.	Focus on issues and barriers to success for individuals with an ASD and their family. Does not examine other areas relevant to research area(such as facilitators of success etc.). Participants employed were too young(13-17).
26. Strickland, D. C., Coles, C. D., & Southern, L. B. (2013). JobTIPS: A transition to employment program for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *43*(10), 2472-2483.	Focus entirely on employment rather than PSE
27. Taylor, J. L., & Seltzer, M. M. (2011). Employment and post-secondary educational activities for young adults with autism spectrum disorders during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *41*(5), 566-574.	Majority of participants had an ID, some also had a psychiatric disorder.
28. Taylor, J. L., & Henninger, N. A. (2015). Frequency and correlates of service access among youth with autism transitioning to adulthood. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *45*(1), 179-191.	Not relevant to topic area.

Reference	Reason for exclusion
29. Thomas, K. C., Parish, S. L., & Williams, C. S. (2014). Healthcare expenditures for autism during times of school transition: some vulnerable families fall behind. *Maternal and child health journal*, *18*(8), 1936-1944.	Not relevant to topic area
30. Thomas, M., Hunt, A., Hurley, M., Robertson, S., & Carter, B. (2011). Time-use diaries are acceptable to parents with a disabled preschool child and are helpful in understanding families' daily lives. *Child: care, health and development*, *37*(2), 168-174.	Not relevant to research area, examined pre-school children, unclear if population employed is with or without an ASD and/or ID.
31. Tipton, L. A., & Blacher, J. (2014). Brief report: Autism awareness: Views from a campus community. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *44*(2), 477-483.	Focus on views within a university campus. Not relevant to topic area.
32. VanBergeijk, E. (2015). Review of Hamburger syndrome: A story of adult autism. *Journal Of Autism And Developmental Disorders*, *45*(8), 2649-2650. doi:10.1007/s10803-015-2421-x	Not relevant to research area.
33. Van Bergeijk, E., Klin, A., & Volkmar, F. (2008). Supporting more able students on the autism spectrum: College and beyond. *Journal Of Autism And Developmental Disorders*, *38*(7), 1359-1370. doi:10.1007/s10803-007-0524-8	Article reviewing nosology of ASD and accommodations in place in American context. Not suitable to review.
34. Wei, X., Jennifer, W. Y., Shattuck, P., McCracken, M., & Blackorby, J. (2013). Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) participation among college students with an autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *43*(7), 1539-1546**.**	Not relevant to topic area
35. Wei, X., Christiano, E. R., Jennifer, W. Y., Blackorby, J., Shattuck, P., & Newman, L. A. (2014). Postsecondary pathways and persistence for STEM versus non-STEM majors: Among college students with an autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *44*(5), 1159-1167.	Not relevant to topic area
36. Zalla, T., Labruyère, N., & Georgieff, N. (2013). Perceiving goals and actions in individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *43*(10), 2353-2365.	Not relevant to research area
37. Lee, G. K., & Carter, E. W. (2012). Preparing transition-age students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders for meaningful work. *Psychology in the Schools*, *49*(10), 988-1000.	Not relevant to research area
38. Hatfield, M., Falkmer, M., Falkmer, T., & Ciccarelli, M. (2016). Evaluation of the effectiveness of an online transition planning program for adolescents on the autism spectrum: trial protocol. *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health*, *10*(1), 48.	Focus more on career preparedness more than post-secondary educational outcomes

39. Hendrickson, J. M., Woods-Groves, S., Rodgers, D. B., & Datchuk, S. (2017). Perceptions of students with autism and their parents: The college experience. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *40*(4), 571-596.	Focus on post-transition experiences recalling experiences in post-secondary education
40. VanBergeijk, E. O., & Cavanagh, P. K. (2012). Brief report: New legislation supports students with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary funding. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *42*(11), 2471-2475.	Research not relevant to research area
41. Tassé, M. J. (2012). Presidential address, 2013: A charge for the future. *Intellectual And Developmental Disabilities*, *50*(6), 519-523. doi:10.1352/1934-9556-50.06.519	Literature not relevant to research area
42. Senland, A. K., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2016). Sociomoral Reasoning, Empathy, and Meeting Developmental Tasks during the Transition to Adulthood in Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal Of Autism And Developmental Disorders*, *46*(9), 3090-3105.	Literature not relevant to research area
43. Rogers, K., & Zeni, M. B. (2015). Systematic literature review of medical home models to promote transitions to primary adult health care for adolescents living with autism spectrum disorder. *Worldviews On Evidence-Based Nursing*, *12*(2), 98-107.	Systematic literature review not relevant to research area
44. Wei, X., Wagner, M., Hudson, L., Yu, J. W., & Javitz, H. (2016). The Effect of Transition Planning Participation and Goal-Setting on College Enrollment Among Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Remedial and Special Education*, *37*(1), 3-14.	Focus on college enrolment as opposed to PSE or a variation in PSE options.
45. Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Javitz, H., & Valdes, K. (2012). A national picture of parent and youth participation in IEP and transition planning meetings. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *23*(3), 140-155.	Analysis completed on data collected between 1999 and 2004. Student participants had an LD as well as other disabilities.

Appendix A 2) WoE Descriptions (Gough, 2007)

Weight of Evidence	*Description of WoE*
WoE A	Methodological Quality

WoE B	Methodological Relevance to Review Question
WoE C	Study Topic Relevance
WoE D	Overall Weight of Evidence

The WoE is divided into four separate domains (Gough, 2007). The domains include appraisals of the methodological quality (WoE A), methodological relevance (WoE B) and topic relevance (WoE C). The assigned weightings for each domain are then calculated and averaged in order to provide an overall appraisal for the study (WoE D). The weightings which have been attributed to each study can be seen in table 1.4 below. All domain weightings were calculated by assessment in accordance with coding protocol frameworks relating to the methodological quality of the papers. This was based on the suggested framework for qualitative research (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Appendix A 3) Systematic Literature review phase 1: WoE A, B, C & D Frameworks
WoE A: Methodological Quality

Weighting of Evidence WOE A: Methodological Quality
Scoring protocol: The score for methodological quality (WoE A) is based on the rating given to each of the studies according to the coding protocol for qualitative research (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

The key features of an intervention study will be rated on a 4-point scale to specify level of evidence (i.e., 3 = strong evidence/support, 2 = promising evidence/support, 1 = marginal or weak evidence/support, 0 = no evidence/support).

These coding protocols enable the coder to rate the methodological quality of a study according to features such as reliability and validity of measurement and baseline quality.

The weightings from each section were then averaged to give an overall measure of methodological quality. In order to receive a 'High' weighting for 'methodological quality' a study must receive an average rating of 2.5 or above. To receive a 'Medium'

weighting for 'methodological quality' a study must receive an average rating between 1.5 and 2.4. To receive a 'Low' weighting for methodological quality a study must receive an average rating of 1.4 or below.

WoE A)

Research Paper	*Measures*	*educational significance*	*Identifiable components*	*Replication*	*External validity*	*WoE A*
Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers(2015).	**1.5**	**3.0**	**2.0**	**2.5**	**2.5**	**2.3**
Browning, Osborne & Reed, P. (2009).	**1.5**	**3.0**	**1.5**	**1.0**	**1.0**	**2.0**
Bell, S., Devecchi, C., Mc Guckin, C., & Shevlin, M. (2017).	**1.5**	**3.0**	**2.5**	**2.0**	**1.0**	**2.0**
Hatfield, M., Ciccarelli, M., Falkmer, T., & Falkmer, M. (2017).	**1.5**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**1.0**	**2.3**
Cheak-Zamora et al., (2015)	**1.5**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**1.5**	**2.0**	**2.2**

Thompson, Bölte, Falkmer & Girdler (2018)	1.5	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.2

WoE B: Methodological Relevance to Review Question

Weight of Evidence B: Methodological Relevance to Review Question

WoE B Scoring protocol:

In order to receive a 'High' weighting for methodological features, the study must have a sound group design. The study must employ the appropriate means of measuring data and analysing data in relation to the aims of the research. Study must score 3 or over.

In order to receive a 'Medium' weighting for methodological relevance the single case deign studies must use a sound methodological means of analysing data with some measures taken to ensure internal validity. Study must score 2.

In order to receive a 'Low' weighting, some data may not be included, or may recorded with no examination of confounding variables, challenges in internal validity. Analysis may not include a theoretically sound or appropriate examination of data. Study must score 1.

Research Paper	*Methodologically suitable means of Data analysis (collection methods, recording and reviewing data etc.)*	*Data comparison group (employment of an ASD and non-ASD comparison group)*	*Pre and Post transition data collected*	*Relevant to research area*	*Weighting*	*WoE B*
1. Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers(2015).	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**Yes**	**2**	**Medium**

2.	Browning, Osborne & Reed, P. (2009).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High
3.	Bell, S., Devecchi, C., Mc Guckin, C., & Shevlin, M. (2017).	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3	High
4.	Hatfield, M., Ciccarelli, M., Falkmer, T., & Falkmer, M. (2017).	Yes	No	No	Yes	2	Medium
5.	Cheak-Zamora et al., (2015)	Yes	No	No	Yes	2	Medium
6.	Thompson, Bölte, Falkmer & Girdler (2018)	Yes	No	No	Yes	2	Medium

WoE C: Study Topic Relevance

Weight of Evidence C: Study Topic Relevance

WoE C: Scoring protocol:

In order to receive a 'High' weighting for relevance the study must have met all of the following criteria; the research rationale was clear and evident from early in the study suggesting a definite research question and clear means of analysis. The relevant population sample(s) were employed. The appropriate methodological design and means of analysis were used. The setting which the research was conducted was appropriate to the research area.

In order to receive a 'Medium' weighting for relevance the study must have met at least 3 of the following criteria; the research rationale was clear and evident from early in the study suggesting a definite research question and clear means of analysis. The relevant population sample(s) were employed. The appropriate methodological design and means

of analysis were used. The setting which the research was conducted was appropriate to the research area.

In order to receive a 'Low' weighting for relevance, the study must have met 2 or less of the following criteria; the research rationale was clear and evident from early in the study suggesting a definite research question and clear means of analysis. The relevant population sample(s) were employed. The appropriate methodological design and means of analysis were used. The setting which the research was conducted was appropriate to the research area.

Research Paper	*Production of scientific evidence (valid information around research area)*	*Appropriate methodological design (including use of a relevant population sample and/or employment of data collection triangulation methods and/or investigator triangulation methods)*	*Systematic use of qualitative methods in data analysis stage (e.g. data coding, content analysis, thematic analysis, etc.)*	*Inclusion of a coherent articulation of results (including research purpose, usefulness of findings and associated implications for field)*	*Weighting*	*WoE C*
Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers(2015).	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**4**	**High**
Browning, Osborne & Reed(2009).	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**4**	**High**
Bell, Devecchi, Mc Guckin & Shevlin (2017).	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**4**	**High**
Hatfield, Ciccarelli,	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**4**	**High**

Falkmer, & Falkmer(2017).						
Cheak-Zamora et al., (2015)	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**4**	**High**
Thompson, Bölte, Falkmer & Girdler (2018)	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**4**	**High**

WoE D: Overall Weight of Evidence

Weight of Evidence D: Overall Weight of Evidence

Studies were given a weighting of 3 'High', 2 'Medium', or 1 'Low'. These scores were then averaged to provide each study with an overall weight of evidence score (WoE D).

Scoring protocol:

To receive a 'High' overall weighting a study must receive an average score of at least 2.5. To receive a 'Medium' overall weighting a study must receive an average score of between 1.5 and 2.4. To receive a 'Low' overall weighting a study must receive an average score of less than 1.4.

Appendix A 4) Phase 1: Inclusion/exclusion Criteria, Search Terms, Flow Chart and Extracted Information.

i)   *Inclusion and exclusion criteria and rationale;*

Area	*Inclusion Criteria*	*Exclusion Criteria*	*Rationale*
Publication Category	Literature used must be in peer reviewed journal	Literature that has been retrieved in a non-peer reviewed journal and/or academic dissertations	To ensure overall quality and methodological rigour

Language	English only	Any other language	Author not bilingual
Time	January 2003-April 2019	Any study outside of named time range	The author wanted to ensure that no pieces of research were excluded as research in this area begun in the past decade and a half
Journal access	Full Text only	Research containing abstract only and/or references only	To allow for a full and comprehensive examination of the study
Participants	School leaving aged adolescents and/or young adults (aged 14+) and/or their families and/or care takers and/or teachers	Young children and/or non-school leaving aged children	To examine the efficacy of the study on the aforementioned specific population cohorts (school leaving aged young adults/adolescents and/or their care takers and/or their teachers)
Participant diagnoses	Individuals with a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Comorbid psychiatric diagnoses and/or psychotic disorders and/or mood disorders or other neurological disorders, and/or participants with an intellectual or learning disability.	To avoid confounding variables in the studies examined
Area	*Inclusion Criteria*	*Exclusion Criteria*	*Rationale*
Intervention	Any intervention and/or exploratory process examining transitions into post-secondary education for young people with an ASD who are due to leave or who had recently left	Any interventions relating to transition programmes which were not associated with post-secondary education/secondary school leaving.	To explore the efficacy and availability of the range of specific intervention programmes available to young adults with ASD

	secondary school at the time of data collection.		
Methodology	Reports and research examining a range of governmental literature/case studies/focus groups around ASD and PSE.	Research examining irrelevant content/literature.	To ensure internal validity

ii)   *Literature 1 Search terms.*

Database results (including duplicates)

Search Term(s)	*ERIC*	*PsyInfo*	*ASC**	*Total (including duplicates)*
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **Transition** *AND* **post-secondary education**	0	2	7	9
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **young adults** *AND* **transition**	22	35	34	91
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **young adults** *AND* **transition** *AND* **Adolescents**	16	26	2	44
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder AND young adults AND education AND transition**	18	17	43	78
	Total			**222**

Manual Search Database Results

Search Term(s)	Google scholar
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **Transition** *AND* **post-secondary education**	6,810
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **young adults** *AND* **transition** *AND* **Adolescent**	14,000
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **young adults** *AND* **transition** **ASD** *OR* **Autism Spectrum**	18,000
	17,500
Disorder *AND* **young adults AND education AND transition**	
Total	**56,310**

Figure 2.0. Flow chart of data collection and screening process;

Identification

Number of identified articles throughout selected database searches: (n=222)	Number of identified articles throughout manual searches: (Google Scholar, n=56,310)

Screening

Number of studies when duplicate and/or irrelevant studies were removed: n=56,532

Number of records examined: (n=49)

Number of records excluded at this stage: (n=43)

Eligibility

Number of full text articles assessed for eligibility: (n=6)

Number of excluded articles: (n=43).

n=12 (examination of associated challenges rather than relevant supports)

n=1 (preschool population cohort)

n=3 (college peer views and knowledge around ASD)

n=21 (study content unrelated or irrelevant)

n=2 (study focused on social skill/cognition development)

n=4 (duplicates)

Included:

Number of studies included in Systematic literature review: n=6

iv) *Extracted Information Table*

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Browning et al. (2009) Study aimed to elicit the voice of the student concerning transition and social exclusion. Study also aimed to determine stress perceptions in individuals with an ASD	n= 17 school leaving aged adolescents. 10 participants had an ASD (8 male and 2 female, mean age: 15:0). 7 participants did not have an ASD (4 male and 3 female, mean age: 15:1)	Collective case study design, comparison group employed of individuals without a diagnosis of an ASD examined with individuals who did have a diagnosis of an ASD.	Mixed methods approach. Data were transcribed verbatim and coded by two independent researchers. Employment of content analysis (CA) to examine themes. Information was coded into units and categorised for further quantitative analysis.	Results indicated that individuals without a diagnosis of an ASD tended to experience stress in relation to educational contexts, specifically around the future. Non ASD group believed that they were able to manage stress and cited that they would look for external support if required. Non ASD group cited a range of techniques to manage stress levels. ASD group experienced stress in relation to things that could cause actual physical harm to them.

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) This study sought to explore the experiences of an individual and their parents/caregivers in relation to transitioning into adulthood.	n= 32 individuals across two cohorts; one cohort was with young people who had an ASD (n=13). The other cohort consisted of their parents/caregivers (n=19)	This study held four focus groups across two locations. Each location held one young adult focus group and one parent/caregiver focus group. Focus groups held 4-9 participants each and were conducted by two of the study authors.	Data were qualitative. Data were transcribed verbatim and coded by researchers who employed a Grounded Theory (GT) approach to analysis.	Results indicate that parents/caregivers felt that there was a lacking in the support services available to their child. Both cohorts reported concerns and anxiety around the transitioning process.

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Van Hees et al. (2015) This study sought to examine the challenges, benefits and mental health issues of students with an ASD.	n=23 students in higher education with an ASD 17 men and 6 women, aged between 18 and 25 years took part in the study	This study examined 3 areas; education, student life and daily living. Transitioning into employment was also examined as a secondary area Interviews were conducted by one researcher using a semi structured interview template. Interview schedule focused on education/student life and daily living. (mean length: 78 minutes)	Analysis was qualitative. Data were transcribed verbatim and coded by two independent researchers. Grounded Theory (GT) approach was employed. NVIVO 10 was also employed.	Results indicated a social and academic difficulties in University. Positives in this vein included; strong memory, precise work completion, attention to detail, analytical skill, observational skill and dedication to task.
Bell et al. (2017) The aim of this study was to examine how six people with an ASD experienced transitioning from secondary to PSE.	n= 6 individuals in final year of secondary school (leaving certificate). All participants had a diagnosis of an ASD and were male and were aged between 17 and 19. Two parents were also interviewed around their views on their children's experiences (decision making processes, their perception of the available supports and barriers to progress in PSE).	Study examined experiences in assessing and progressing to PSE. Study also examined the resources available to students with an ASD as well as the issues and barriers in relation to access to and progression in education and transitioning. This was an exploratory and case study design which focused on the experiences of six school leavers both before and after they left school (4 months before leaving secondary school, and autumn semester (after 3 months in their new educational setting: higher education or university).	Semi structured interviews were used (20-30 mins) and were transcribed verbatim and Data were analysed using coding schemes (borne of literature and peer consultation among researchers). Lean coding then took place. Pre and post themes were examined.	Results indicated limited evidence of any formal process of transition planning for all participants. Access to support appeared to be a complex process. Results also indicated that self-determination skills were a key predictor of success in higher education

Extracted Information Table (continued)

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used and Analysis	Outcome
Hatfield et al. (2017) This study sought to examine the transitioning process for adolescents to PSE by utilising the PRECEDE [2] model in conducting a needs based assessment to determine the predisposing, reinforcing and enabling factors (in accordance with the PRECEDE model) that impact on successful transition for adolescents with an ASD.	n= 126, including adolescents with an ASD, their parents or guardians and associated professionals. Some adolescents were in years 9 to 12 of Australian secondary schools, 50% were currently in and 50% had left school in the past 5 years. The professional cohort included individuals who had worked with the adolescent participant.	Secondary aims of this study were to examine how these factors relate to perceptions of current and ideal transition planning processes. This exploratory study which included three cohorts; adolescents, their carers/parents and professionals who worked with them.	Data were gathered using an online questionnaire which used closed and open questions. Data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative means of analyses. Qualitative data were independently coded by two researchers, emergent themes were compared and contrasted and categorised into enabling, reinforcing and predisposing factors as described in the PRECEDE model.	Results indicated that the parental and professional perceptions differed from those of the adolescent around the current transitioning process with the adolescent population citing it as 'ideal'-indicating that a strengths based individualised transition plan involving the adolescent is a primary aspect of a successful transitioning plan. Results highlight the needs for an ASD specific transition plan which is tailored to support different groups of people. Such plans should account for and utilise when possible, the individuals anxiety, motivation and insight.

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Thompson et al. (2018) This study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of parents of	n=19 participants in total including parents of young adults (aged 18 to 30) with an ASD. Parents included 14 mothers, four fathers and one step-father	Data were collected using four focus groups in a private clinic in Australia. Lasting three to four hours. Structured focus groups	Meaning units were created recorded and condensed. The condensed copy was then given to members who ranked the 3 most important aspects for	Findings indicated that ICF areas of activity and participation as well as environmental factors were found to have the strongest influence on transition outcomes. The study also

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[2] PRECEDE is a framework that has been used to diagnose the intervention needs for a specific population (Hatfield et al., 2017). PRECEDE stands for **P**redisposing, **R**einforcing and **E**nabling **C**onstructs in **E**ducational **D**iagnosis and **E**valuation (Crosby & Noar, 2011). The model incorporates three factors; predisposing, reinforcing and enabling factors (Crosby & Noar, 2011).

adult children with an ASD around their transition to adulthood.	who reported on their perceptions of their children's transition experience, their children included 15 male and seven female young people with an ASD.	included open-ended questions.	individuals with an ASD as well as the overall units in relation to International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) current guidelines for successful transition.	highlighted that three major themes emerged from the parents of adult children with an ASD; that is for them to be understood, to understand the world that they're in and also to succeed.

Appendix B) Systematic Literature review Phase two

Appendix B 1) Weight of Evidence Descriptions

Weight of Evidence	*Description of WoE*
WoE A	Methodological Quality
WoE B	Methodological Relevance to Review Question
WoE C	Study Topic Relevance
WoE D	Overall Weight of Evidence

Appendix B 2) Weighting of Evidence:A, B, C & D Frameworks

WoE A: Methodological Quality

Scoring protocol: The score for methodological quality (WoE A) is based on the rating given to each of the studies according to the coding protocol for qualitative research (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005; Gough, 2007).

The key features of an intervention study will be rated on a 4-point scale to specify level of evidence (i.e., 3 = strong evidence/support, 2 = promising evidence/support, 1 = marginal or weak evidence/support, 0 = no evidence/support).

These coding protocols enable the coder to rate the methodological quality of a study according to features such as reliability and validity of measurement and baseline quality.

The weightings from each section were then averaged to give an overall measure of methodological quality. In order to receive a 'High' weighting for 'methodological quality' a study must receive an average rating of 2.5 or above. To receive a 'Medium' weighting for 'methodological quality' a study must receive an average rating between 1.5 and 2.4. To receive a 'Low' weighting for methodological quality a study must receive an average rating of 1.4 or below.

WoE A)

Research Paper	*Measures*	*educational significance*	*Identifiable components*	*Replication*	*External validity*	*WoE A*	*Weighting*
Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman(2017).	**2.0**	**3.0**	**1.5**	**1.5**	**1.5**	**2.3**	**Medium**
Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw & Zhao(2012).	**2.5**	**3.0**	**2.0**	**2.5**	**2.5**	**2.5**	**High**
Andreasson & Wolff(2015).	**2.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**2.5**	**2.7**	**High**
Prunty(2011).	**3.0**	**3.0**	**2.5**	**2.0**	**2.5**	**2.6**	**High**
Goepel(2009)	**2.5**	**3.0**	**2.5**	**2.5**	**1.5**	**2.4**	**Medium**
Lee-Tarver(2006).	**2.0**	**2.5**	**2.0**	**3.0**	**1.5**	**2.2**	**Low**
Slade, Eisenhower, Carter, Blacher(2018).	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**High**

WoE B Scoring protocol:

Weight of Evidence B: Methodological Relevance to Review Question

In order to receive a 'High' weighting for methodological features, the study must have a sound group design. The study must employ the appropriate means of measuring data and analysing data in relation to the aims of the research. Study must score 3 or over.

In order to receive a 'Medium' weighting for methodological relevance the single case deign studies must use a sound methodological means of analysing data with some measures taken to ensure internal validity. Study must score 2.

In order to receive a 'Low' weighting, some data may not be included, or may recorded with no examination of confounding variables, challenges in internal validity. Analysis may not include a theoretically sound or appropriate examination of data. Study must score 1.

Research Paper	Methodologically appropriate means of Data management (collection methods, recording and reviewing data, data analysis etc.)	Use of appropriate and relevant population sample	Longitudinal data and/or pre and post data collected	Relevant to research area	Weighting	WoE B
1. Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman(2017).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High
2. Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw & Zhao(2012).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High
3. Andreasson & Wolff(2015).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High
4. Prunty(2011).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High
5. Goepel(2009).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High
6. Lee-Tarver(2006).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High
7. Slade, Eisenhower, Carter, Blacher(2018).	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	High

WoE C: Scoring protocol:

Weight of Evidence C: Study Topic Relevance

In order to receive a 'High' weighting for relevance the study must have met all of the following criteria; the research rationale was clear and evident from early in the study suggesting a definite research question and clear means of analysis. The relevant population sample(s) were employed. The appropriate methodological design and means of analysis were used. The setting which the research was conducted was appropriate to the research area.

In order to receive a 'Medium' weighting for relevance the study must have met at least 3 of the following criteria; the research rationale was clear and evident from early in the study suggesting a definite research question and clear means of analysis. The relevant population sample(s) were employed. The appropriate methodological design and means of analysis were used. The setting which the research was conducted was appropriate to the research area.

In order to receive a 'Low' weighting for relevance, the study must have met 2 or less of the following criteria; the research rationale was clear and evident from early in the study suggesting a definite research question and clear means of analysis. The relevant population sample(s) were employed. The appropriate methodological design and means of analysis were used. The setting which the research was conducted was appropriate to the research area.

Research Paper	*Production of scientific evidence (valid information around research area)*	*Appropriate methodological design (employment of data collection triangulation methods and/or investigatorand/or external reviewer validity review methods)*	*Systematic use the appropriate method of data analysis if applicable. For example, qualitative methods in data analysis stage (e.g. data coding, content analysis, thematic analysis, etc.)*	*Inclusion of a coherent articulation of results (including research purpose, usefulness of findings and associated implications for field)*	*Weighting*	*WoE C*
1. Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman(2017).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High
2. Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw & Zhao(2012).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High
3. Andreasson & Wolff(2015).	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3	Medium
4. Prunty(2011).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High
5. Goepel(2009).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High
6. Lee-Tarver(2006).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High
7. Slade, Eisenhower, Carter, Blacher(2018).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	High

WoE D: Overall Weight of Evidence

Weight of Evidence D: Overall Weight of Evidence

Studies were given a weighting of 3 'High', 2 'Medium', or 1 'Low'. These scores were then averaged to provide each study with an overall weight of evidence score (WoE D).

Scoring protocol:

To receive a 'High' overall weighting a study must receive an average score of at least 2.5. To receive a 'Medium' overall weighting a study must receive an average score of between 1.5 and 2.4. To receive a 'Low' overall weighting a study must receive an average score of less than 1.4.

Appendix D) Excluded Articles

Research Article	Reason for exclusion
1. Sacks, L. H., & Halder, S. (2017). Challenges in implementation of individualized educational plan (IEPs): Perspectives from India and the United States of America. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 8(9), 958-965.	Content not relevant
2. Timothy, S., & Agbenyega, J. S. (2018). Inclusive school leaders' perceptions on the implementation of individual education plans. International Journal of Whole Schooling, 14(1), 1-30	Content not relevant
3. Cavendish, W., & Connor, D. (2018). Toward Authentic IEPs and Transition Plans: Student, Parent, and Teacher Perspectives. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 41(1), 32-43.	Content linked to IEP planning and the facilitation of student participation in IEP planning. Employment of student participants with a learning disability.
4. Rossetti, Z., Story Sauer, J., Bui, O., & Ou, S. (2018). Developing collaborative partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families during the IEP process. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 50(4), 172-182.	Content not relevant- linked to the facilitation and experiences of linguistically diverse families in school IEP planning meetings.
5. İlik, Ş. Ş., & Sarı, H. (2017). The training program for individualized education programs (IEPs): Its effect on how inclusive education teachers perceive their competencies in devising IEPs. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 17, 1547-1572.	Content not relevant, content linked to Teachers capacity to implement IEPs.

6.	Buxton, P. S. (2018). Viewing the Behavioral Responses of ED Children from a Trauma-Informed Perspective. *Educational Research Quarterly*, *41*(4), 30-49.	Content not relevant
7.	Lieberman, L. J., Kirk, T. N., & Justin, A. H. (2018). Physical Education and Transition Planning Experiences Relating to Recreation among Adults Who Are Deafblind: A Recall Analysis. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, *112*(1), 73-86.	Content not relevant- study focused on adults
8.	Wong, V. W., Ruble, L. A., Yu, Y., & McGrew, J. H. (2017). Too Stressed to Teach? Teaching Quality, Student Engagement, and IEP Outcomes. *Exceptional Children*, *83*(4), 412-427	Content not relevant- study focused on teacher burnout and teaching.
9.	Hauser, M. D. (2017). The Essential and Interrelated Components of Evidenced-Based IEPs: A User's Guide. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *49*(6), 420-428.	Content focused solely on creating and writing IEPS.
10.	Oluwatayo, I. B., & Ojo, A. O. (2018). Walking Through a Tightrope: The Challenge of Economic Growth and Poverty in Africa. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, *52*(1), 59-69	Content not relevant
11.	Caruana, V. (2015). Accessing the common core standards for students with learning disabilities: Strategies for writing standards-based IEP goals. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *59*(4), 237-243.	Content not relevant
12.	Alkahtani, M. A., & Kheirallah, S. A. (2016). Background of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) Policy in Some Countries: A Review. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *7*(24), 15-26.	Content not relevant
13.	Hammel, A. M. (2018). Amy and Drew: Two Children Who Helped Determine What Free Appropriate Public Education Means. *General Music Today*, *31*(2), 29-32.	Content not relevant
14.	Simpson, R. L., de Boer-Ott, S. R., & Smith-Myles, B. (2003). Inclusion of learners with autism spectrum disorders in general education settings. *Topics in language disorders*, *23*(2), 116-133.	Content not relevant
15.	Kurth, J., & Mastergeorge, A. M. (2010). Individual education plan goals and services for adolescents with autism: Impact of age and educational setting. *The Journal of Special Education*, *44*(3), 146-160.	Content not relevant
16.	Fish, W. W. (2008). The IEP meeting: Perceptions of parents of students who receive special education services. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *53*(1), 8-14.	Content linked solely to parental perspectives of the IEP and SEN services.

17.	Etscheidt, S. (2003). An analysis of legal hearings and cases related to individualized education programs for children with autism. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, *28*(2), 51-69.	Content not relevant
18.	Ruble, L. A., McGrew, J., Dalrymple, N., & Jung, L. A. (2010). Examining the quality of IEPs for young children with autism. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *40*(12), 1459-1470.	Content not relevant
19.	Panerai, S., Zingale, M., Trubia, G., Finocchiaro, M., Zuccarello, R., Ferri, R., & Elia, M. (2009). Special education versus inclusive education: the role of the TEACCH program. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *39*(6), 874-882.	Content not relevant
20.	Rao, S. M., & Gagie, B. (2006). Learning through seeing and doing: Visual supports for children with autism. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *38*(6), 26-33.	Content not relevant
21.	Test, D. W., Mason, C., Hughes, C., Konrad, M., Neale, M., & Wood, W. M. (2004). Student involvement in individualized education program meetings. *Exceptional Children*, *70*(4), 391-412.	Content not relevant
22.	Dybvik, A. C. (2004). Autism and the inclusion mandate. Education Next, 4(1).	Content not relevant
23.	Wilczynski, S. M., Menousek, K., Hunter, M., & Mudgal, D. (2007). Individualized education programs for youth with autism spectrum disorders. *Psychology in the Schools*, *44*(7), 653-666.	Content not relevant
24.	Vakil, S., Welton, E., O'Connor, B., & Kline, L. S. (2009). Inclusion means everyone! The role of the early childhood educator when including young children with autism in the classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *36*(4), 321.	Content not relevant

Appendix B 3) Phase 2: Inclusion/exclusion Criteria, Search Terms, Flow Chart and Extracted Information.

i) Inclusion and exclusion criteria and rationale;

Area	*Inclusion Criteria*	*Exclusion Criteria*	*Rationale*
Publication Category	Literature used must be in peer reviewed journal	Literature that has been retrieved in a non-peer reviewed journal and/or academic dissertations	To ensure overall quality and methodological rigour
Language	English only	Any other language	Author not bilingual
Time	January 2003-April 2019	Any study outside of named time range	The author wanted to ensure that no pieces of research were excluded as research in this area begun in the past decade and a half
Journal access	Full Text only	Research containing abstract only and/or references only	To allow for a full and comprehensive examination of the study

Area	*Inclusion Criteria*	*Exclusion Criteria*	*Rationale*
Participants	Pre-school and/or School aged children and/or adolescents and/or their families and/or parents/caregivers and/or teachers	Infants and/or non-pre-school and/or non-school aged children	To examine the efficacy of the study on the aforementioned specific population cohorts
Participant diagnoses	Children/students with and without SEN and/or with and without a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or their parents and/or their teachers.	Comorbid psychiatric diagnoses and/or psychotic disorders	To stay as relevant as possible to the review question around the use of IEPs for students with and without SEN or an ASD, their teachers and parents/caregivers.

Intervention	Any intervention and/or exploratory process examining experiences in relation to the role of IEP in schools involving children with SEN and/or an ASD and/or their parents/caregivers and/or their teachers. IEP usage in Transition Planning for school leavers.	Any interventions and/or exploratory process relating to programmes which were not associated with IEPs or IEP usage.	To explore the efficacy and availability of the range of specific exploratory and/or intervention research in relation to IEPs
Area	*Inclusion Criteria*	*Exclusion Criteria*	*Rationale*
Methodology	Reports and research examining a range of governmental literature/case studies/focus groups around IEPs	Research examining irrelevant content/literature.	To ensure internal validity

ii) *Phase two search terms*

Both manual and database searches took place: search terms and results are in tables 1.6 and 1.7. See figure 2 .0; flow chart highlighting the data collection and screening process. See table 1.9 for all included full text studies and appendix A for a table of excluded articles.

Database results (including duplicates)

Search Term(s)	ERIC	PsyInfo	ASC*	Total *(including duplicates)*
ASD *OR* Autism Spectrum Disorder *AND* Transition Planning *AND* Individual Education Plan *OR* IEP *OR* Individualized Education Plan *OR* Individual Education System *OR* Individualized Education Program *OR* Special Education Plan	417	225	754	1,396
Individual Education Plan *OR* IEP *OR* individualized education program *AND* Transition Planning *AND* Post-Secondary Education *AND* Autism Spectrum Disorder *OR* ASD *AND* OR SEN	0			0
Individual Education Plan *OR* IEP *AND* Transition Planning *AND* Autism *OR* ASD *AND OR* SEN	2	2	2	6
	Total			**1,402**

Manual Search Database Results

Manual Search Term(s)	Google Scholar	Total (including duplicates)
ASD *OR* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *AND* **Transition Planning** *AND* **Individual Education Plan** *OR* **IEP** *OR* **Individualized Education Plan** *OR* **Individual Education System** *OR* **Individualized Education Program** *OR* **Special Education Plan**	21,200	21,200
Individual Education Plan *OR* **IEP** *OR* **individualized education program** *AND* **Transition Planning** *AND* **Post-Secondary Education** *AND* **Autism Spectrum Disorder** *OR* **ASD** *AND* *OR* **SEN**	5,140	5,140
Individual Education Plan *OR* **IEP** *AND* **Transition Planning** *AND* **Autism** *OR* **ASD** *AND* *OR* **SEN**	5,080	5,080
	Total	**31,420**

Figure 2.1. Flow chart of data collection and screening process;

Identification

| Number of identified articles throughout selected database searches: (n=1,402) | Number of identified articles throughout manual searches: (Google Scholar, n=31,420) |

Screening

Number of studies when duplicate and/or irrelevant studies were removed: n=29,458

| Number of records examined: (n=31) | Number of records excluded at this stage: (n=24) |

Eligibility

| Number of full text articles assessed for eligibility: (n=7) | Number of excluded articles: (n=24).

n=22 (content not relevant to study)

n=1 (adult cohort)

n=1 (content linked solely to Teachers capacity to implement IEPs) |

Included:

Number of studies included in Systematic literature review: n=7

vi) *Phase two: Extracted Information Table*

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Lee-Tarver (2006) Study aimed to investigate the perceptions of regular education teachers on the utility of IEPs for children with disabilities within an inclusive classroom.	n=123 teachers across two elementary schools in North America. A brief questionnaire was used to obtain data.	Exploratory study using a questionnaire to assess the views of teachers around IEP usage for children with disabilities in north America.	The questionnaire used consisted of demographic information and sixteen questions concerning the importance of Individualized Education Plans for current students in their classrooms.	Results indicated that the majority of regular education teachers perceived IEPs as useful tools in curriculum preparation and teachers were active participants in the IEP process. However, responses also suggest that additional training is warranted. Results also indicated that teachers were active participants in the IEP creation and implementation process.
Goepel (2009) Study explored the level of agreement among pupils, teachers and parents in relation to IEP creation and implementation and the perception around the needs of the child.	This exploratory study included a case study design whereby four children in primary school were interviewed. The children's parents and teachers were also asked to fill in a written questionnaire which was created as a means of gaining insight into the perceived needs of the child. Additionally, it examined to what extent partnership is expressed through the targets shown on the IEP and in particular whether the voice of the child is heeded.	Case study design. 4 case studies of children in primary school. Parental and teacher data were also collected.	Data were collected in written and interview format and were also collected across three cohorts; child, teacher and parent. Data were recorded verbatim in three out of the four case studies employed and thematically analysed and written data was also analysed thematically	Unclear roles and lack of clarity within IEP design and practice. Furthermore, gaining common perception of child's needs was problematic among stakeholders

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Prunty (2011) This study explored the role of the IEP and the voice of the child in this process	Stage 1: n=27, five focus groups including three groups of teachers, one group of parents and one group of children with ASD. Stage 2: a survey questionnaire was designed, based on the children's rights indicators, to evaluate current IEP practice in Ireland for pupils with ASD. The questionnaire was completed by 213 teachers of ASD students in both mainstream and specialist settings	Purposive sampling employed in the study to select five focus groups. Study employed a data collection whereby adult focus groups were given six articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a point of discussion and were asked questions in relation to IEP usage.	All five focus group interviews were audio-taped and four were transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed thematically which allowed for the exploration of submerging themes in the data. Descriptive statistics were employed as a means of analysing phase two of the data.	Emerging themes within the focus groups included the participation of parents, collaboration of all those involved in the education of the pupil with ASD and the co-ordination of the IEP.
Rose et al. (2012). Study examined the extent to which IEPs have been developed and implemented in schools, and attitudes towards their use in Primary schools.	N=409 across 10 Primary schools were visited over 2 years.	Interviews were conducted with teachers, parents, pupils and other professionals to gain data related to IEP development and implementation.	All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were then subjected to a categorical coding process that enabled the researchers to identify recurring themes and to describe common and exceptional features of phenomena identified by respondents.	The findings of the research suggest that schools are taking the initiative in developing IEPs, though there is inconsistency in their use and in perceptions of their usefulness This study also found that IEPs were being used in all participating Irish primary schools in the study. However, the study also indicated that the consistency and quality of IEP usage varied.

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Andreasson and Wolff (2015) The use of assessment and investigation in IEPs for pupils with Reading difficulties. One important part of the analysis of the IEPs included quality aspects of investigations and interventions.	Data from IEPs of 150 pupils from years 1 to 9 (aged 7-16 years old) in Sweden. Sample was gathered from 61 teachers from 11 districts Approximately 2-3 IEPs were collected from each teacher.	Code schemes were elaborated in order to enable analyses in regards to the documents quality. The aspects of the code schemes reflected adequate assessments and interventions concerning reading difficulties. Each IEP was ascribed a mark from a five grade scale: 1= lowest value; 5= highest value.	The coding scheme employed as a means of analysis was established and was created using policy guidelines. Each IEP was graded using 1 (lowest quality) to 5 (highest quality).	The results show a large variation of the quality for both. In many cases there is a lack of prior investigation in the IEPs and in other cases a limited connection between the assessments of the investigations and the interventions.

Study	Participants	Design	Measures used & Analysis	Outcome
Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman, (2017). The study sought to explore the views of physical education teachers were sought in relation to IEP creation and implementations for students with an ASD.	n=137 physical educators	A content-validated open-ended questionnaire with 17 questions was used to gather the qualitative data. The questionnaires were reviewed by a panel of seven experts in the area of adapted physical education (PE) until a final draft of the questionnaire was agreed upon	Themes and sub-themes were extracted from questionnaire answers and an external reviewer was employed to ensure that thematic extractions and/or used quotes were valid	Three themes emerged from the data collected: 1) lack of respect, 2) better communication, and 3) training/education. Lastly, suggestions were given by participating teachers to improve their involvement in the IEP process.

Slade et al. (2018)	n=142, parents of children with an ASD were administered questionnaires in relation to their satisfaction levels of their child's IEP, a range of factors were also examined in relation to language ability, cognitive ability among socio economic factors.	This exploratory study assessed parental levels of satisfaction in relation to their child's IEP using both semi-structured interviews and through the use of an IEP satisfaction survey in which parents filled in Likert scale of satisfaction in relation to a range of questions around their child's IEP. The child of the participating parent was also indirectly assessed using parental reports around developmental functioning.	Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language, 2nd edition (CASL-2) (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999), Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) (Lord et al., 2000). Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence 3rd Edition (WPPSI-III) Teacher Report Form (TRF) (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Parent and Teacher Involvement Scale (PTIS-P/PTIS-T) Financial family factors were reported at three time points by the child's parents. Teacher and classroom characteristics were also assessed using a questionnaire assessing a range of areas including preparedness and professional training in relation to ASD. Data in the study was assessed using both qualitative and quantitative means.	Results indicated that IEP satisfaction was in general, positively linked with factors such as parent–school connectedness and family financial resources. The levels of IEP satisfaction was found to be unrelated to the assessed child characteristics. Furthermore, IEP satisfaction was negatively linked with the number of years of experience had by teachers.
Study explored satisfaction levels of parents of children with ASD aged 4-8 in relation to multiple aspects of their IEPs.				

Summary of Weight of Evidence of included research papers (Gough, 2007).

Research Paper	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
	Methodological Quality	*Methodological Relevance to Review Question*	*Study Topic Relevance*	*Overall Weight of Evidence*
1. Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers, (2015).	*2.3*	*2.0*	*4.0*	*2.7*
	(medium)	*(medium)*	*(high)*	*(high)*
2. Browning, Osborne & Reed(2009).	*2.0*	*3.0*	*4.0*	*3.0*
	(medium)	*(high)*	*(high)*	*(high)*
3. Bell, Devecchi, Mc Guckin & Shevlin(2017).	*2.0*	*3.0*	*4.0*	*3.0*
	(medium)	*(high)*	*(high)*	*(high)*
4. Hatfield, Ciccarelli, Falkmer & Falkmer(2017).	*2.3*	*2.0*	*4.0*	*2.7*
	(medium)	*(medium)*	*(high)*	*(high)*

	Research Paper	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
			Methodological Relevance to Review Question		*Overall Weight of Evidence*
		Methodological Quality		*Study Topic Relevance*	
5.	**Cheak-Zamora, Teti and First(2015).**	*2.2*	*2.0*	*4.0*	*2.7*
		(medium)	*(medium)*	*(high)*	*(high)*
6.	**Thompson, Bölte, Falkmer & Girdler (2018).**	*2.2*	*2.0*	*4.0*	*2.7*
		(medium)	*(medium)*	*(high)*	*(high)*

Weight of Evidence (WoE) table for included studies

Research Paper	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
	Methodological Quality	*Methodological Relevance to Review Question*	*Study Topic Relevance*	*Overall Weight of Evidence*
1. **Samalot-Rivera & Lieberman(2017)**.	*2.3* *(medium)*	*3.0* *(high)*	*4.0* *(high)*	*3.1* *(high)*
2. **Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw & Zhao(2012).**	*2.5* *(high)*	*4.0* *(high)*	*4.0* *(high)*	*3.5* *(high)*
3. **Andreasson & Wolff(2015).**	*2.7* *(high)*	*3.0* *(high)*	*3.0* *(high)*	*2.9* *(high)*
4. **Prunty(2011).**	*2.6* *(high)*	*3.0* *(high)*	*4.0* *(high)*	*3.2* *(high)*

	Research Paper	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
		Methodological Quality	Methodological Relevance to Review Question	Study Topic Relevance	Overall Weight of Evidence
5.	Goepel(2009).	2.4 (medium)	3.0 (high)	4.0 (high)	3.1 (high)
6.	Lee-Tarver(2006).	2.2 (medium)	3.0 (high)	4.0 (high)	3.0 (high)
7.	Slade, Eisenhower, Carter, Blacher(2018).	3.0 (high)	3.0 (high)	4.0 (high)	3.3 (high)

Appendix C) 5D Stages and Corresponding Questions

Stage	Question
Discovery	1. What is working well in relation to transition planning into PSE for individuals with an ASD? 2. What have the positive experiences of the school been in relation to PSE transition planning? 3. Which school strengths come to mind when thinking about the transition planning process? 4. Which personal strengths as a teacher are you most proud of? 5. What strengths within the school can be built upon to assist with transition planning? 6. How can school values lend themselves to transition planning? 7. Which school strengths are do you feel apparent when you think about the use of IEPs?
Dream	8. How do you feel the school could ideally plan for transitioning? 9. What might the ideal PSE transition planning process look like? 10. What might the ideal use of IEPs look like within the transition planning process?
Design	11. What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal transition planning process? 12. What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal use of IEPs within the transition planning process? 13. What does the school need to do overall as an organisation to support the ideal transitioning scenario? 14. What needs to be done differently, if anything to reach an ideal transitioning scenario? 15. Which resources (already existing or required) will assist with bringing about this change?

Appendix D) Script used for recruitment when initially contacting schools

Phone call script for initial recruitment stages

'Hello Mr/Ms. X,

Thanks very much for taking this phone call, I realise that this is a very busy time of year for schools. My name is Maura Moriarty and I am currently carrying out research for my doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in Mary Immaculate College.

This research is going to explore the use of IEPs in the process of transition planning into college or third level education as a means of support for students with an ASD/Autism in attendance at secondary schools. I'm going to employ Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a means to do this. AI is a strengths based approach to research and does not focus on deficits but instead it focuses solely on school strengths and what is 'going well'.

This research would involve senior cycle teachers (who have experience with creating and implementing IEPs and planning for the transition of senior cycle students).

The data collected in the semi-structured interviews with teachers should take no longer than 30-40 minutes. I wonder whether you might know of any teaching staff who would be eligible to participate and interested in taking part in this research?'

Appendix E) Information Sheets

Appendix E 1) Board of Management (BOM) Information Sheet

Board of Management Information Sheet

An Exploration into the Role of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in the transitioning process into Post-Secondary Education (PSE) for individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Dear Member of the Board of Management,

As part of my doctoral thesis, I am carrying out research on the role of IEPs in supporting and preparing students with a diagnosis of an ASD in the transitioning process. This research will employ Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to explore student, parent and teacher perspectives on what is working well in schools in relation to the use of IEPs in transition planning. More traditional means of inquiry can involve a 'deficits' oriented and problem based approach research. AI differs from more traditional approaches as it explores the already existing strengths within an organisation and looks at how they can be built upon in collaboration with the school, student and parent. The use of AI will also facilitate the exploration of how personal and school strengths might be built upon within schools and to inform future change in the use of IEPs in transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD.

What is the study about?

This study aims to examine the use of IEPs in the process of transition planning into post-secondary/third level education as a means of support for students with an ASD currently attending secondary schools.

The researcher will hold semi-structured interviews with parent/guardians and staff (separately) on a one- to-one basis. The researcher will also assist students in filling in a questionnaire during school hours asking them about their experiences in school, some experiences will be linked to transitioning into PSE. The researcher will also view the existing IEPs of students with an ASD. This is not an inspection of any kind. The researcher is interested in their potential role in transition planning. There are no wrong answers in relation to this research. The goal is to explore the experiences and supports in place for students with an ASD and staff in relation to transition planning.

What will school staff have to do?

Staff involvement in the study will be timetabled for during your school day- e.g. lunch time or at another time outside of school hours if convenient for them. Teachers or school staff who have experience in creating and/or implementing IEPs for individuals with an ASD will be invited to take part in a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Staff might include, special education teachers/resource teachers, career guidance counsellors, year heads or other staff members with experience in relation to creating and implementing IEPs for students with an ASD in the school.

What will the students with an ASD who are participating have to do?

Students in transition year (TY) and 5th year will be asked to fill in a questionnaire around their experiences in school at a convenient time with the researcher and a familiar adult. They can choose to complete the questionnaire with the researcher in the absence of a familiar adult in the school. This process should take no longer than 20-25 minutes.

What will the parents/guardians of the study children have to do?

Parent/guardian involvement in the study will involve parent/guardian of children with an ASD engaging in a semi structured interview with the researcher at a time which is convenient for them. Parents/guardians will be invited to take part in a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Do students have to participate if their parents decide to participate?

No, students will not have to participate if their parents decide to participate. This study will not be exploring relationships among participants so if a parent would like to participate and their child would not, or vice versa, this would not be a problem as all data will be analysed separately.

What are the benefits?

The findings of this study are intended to support teachers and educational staff in the transition planning process. The findings will also highlight the role of IEPs in the transitioning process in Ireland and could assist with the implementation of prospective policies in relation to transition planning for PSE.

What are the risks?

Participants might decide that they don't want to answer a question. If this happens, they do not have to answer any question that they do not wish to. All participation is entirely voluntary.

What if prospective participants do not want to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and participants can choose not to take part or to stop their involvement in this study at any time. Students who would like to cease their participation can do so by contacting the researcher directly via email (on the email address supplied in the student information sheet), or by telling their parent/guardian and/or teacher who will then contact the researchers. Participants who chose to withdraw will be immediately removed from the study along with any data they might have submitted.

What happens to the information?

At the end of the study the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous. The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researcher's password protected computer. The computer will be stored in a locked room. No participant or school information/identifying information will appear on any findings linked to this research.

All participants will be assigned a fictitious name and no regional data will be given. Information gathered will be written in a thesis/report by the researcher. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept until September 2024. After this time, it will be destroyed. Unfortunately, individual feedback will not be available but all data collected will be anonymous and will be used to examine results in the overall research. Recommendations made post Thesis review will be sent to participating schools as a support around how they might support individuals' with an ASD in the PSE transitioning process.

What if prospective participants have more questions or do not understand something?

If anyone has any questions about the study they may contact the principal investigator- Maura Moriarty. It is important that prospective participants feel that all of their questions have been answered prior to committing to engage in this study.

What happens if anyone should change their mind in relation to participating in the study?

At any stage should any participants feel that they want to stop taking part in the study, they are free to cease participation and take no further part. There are no consequences for changing your mind about being in the study.

Contact name and number of Project Investigators.

Principal Investigator

Maura Moriarty

Trainee Educational Psychologist, (TEP)

Mary Immaculate College

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Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be extremely grateful if you would consider participating in this study. If anyone in your school would like to participate in this study or you have any further queries, please feel free to email the principal investigator on the above address.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Maura Moriarty (TEP)

_____

Dr Orla Slattery

This research study has received Ethics approval from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (DECPsyREC). However, if you have concerns about this study you may contact:

Dr Therese Brophy (DECPsy Programme Leader)

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South Circular Road

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Appendix E 2) Teacher Information Sheet

Teacher Information Sheet

An Exploration into the Role of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in the transitioning process into Post-Secondary Education (PSE) for individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Dear Teacher,

As part of my doctoral thesis, I am carrying out research on the role of IEPs in supporting and preparing students with a diagnosis of an ASD in the transitioning process. This research will employ Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to explore student, parent and teacher perspectives on what is working well in schools in relation to the use of IEPs in transition planning. More traditional means of inquiry can involve a 'deficits' oriented and problem based approach research. AI differs from more traditional approaches as it explores the already existing strengths within an organisation and looks at how they can be built upon in collaboration with the school, student and parent. The use of AI will also facilitate the exploration of how personal and school strengths might be built upon within schools and to inform future change in the use of IEPs in transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD.

What is the study about?

This study aims to examine the use of IEPs in the process of transition planning into post-secondary/third level education as a means of support for students with an ASD currently attending secondary schools.

The researcher will hold semi-structured interviews with parent/guardians and staff (separately) on a one-to-one basis. The researcher will also assist students in filling in a questionnaire during school hours asking them about their experiences in school, some experiences will be linked to transitioning into PSE. The researcher will also view the existing IEPs of students with an ASD. This is not an inspection of any kind. The researcher is interested in their potential role in transition planning. There are no wrong answers in relation to this research. The goal is to explore the experiences and supports in place for students with an ASD and staff in relation to transition planning.

What will school staff have to do?

Staff involvement in the study will be timetabled for during your school day- e.g. lunch time or at another time outside of school hours if convenient for them. Teachers or school staff who have experience in creating and/or implementing IEPs for individuals with an ASD will be invited to take part in a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Staff might include, special education teachers/resource teachers, career guidance counsellors, year heads or other staff members with experience in relation to creating and implementing IEPs for students with an ASD in the school.

What will the students with an ASD who are participating have to do?

Students in transition year (TY) and 5th year will be asked to fill in a questionnaire around their experiences in school at a convenient time with the researcher and a familiar adult. They can choose to complete the questionnaire with the researcher in the absence of a familiar adult in the school. This process should take no longer than 20-25 minutes.

What will the parents/guardians of the study children have to do?

Parent/guardian involvement in the study will involve parent/guardian of children with an ASD engaging in a semi structured interview with the researcher at a time which is

convenient for them. Parents/guardians will be invited to take part in a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Do students have to participate if their parents decide to participate?

No, students will not have to participate if their parents decide to participate. This study will not be exploring relationships among participants so if a parent would like to participate and their child would not, or vice versa, this would not be a problem as all data will be analysed separately.

What are the benefits?

The findings of this study are intended to support teachers and educational staff in the transition planning process. The findings will also highlight the role of IEPs in the transitioning process in Ireland and could assist with the implementation of prospective policies in relation to transition planning for PSE.

What are the risks?

Participants might decide that they don't want to answer a question. If this happens, they do not have to answer any question that they do not wish to. All participation is entirely voluntary.

What if prospective participants do not want to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and participants can choose not to take part or to stop their involvement in this study at any time. Students who would like to cease their participation can do so by contacting the researcher directly via email (on the email address supplied in the student information sheet), or by telling their parent/guardian and/or teacher who will then contact the researchers. Participants who chose to withdraw will be immediately removed from the study along with any data they might have submitted.

What happens to the information?

At the end of the study the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous. The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researcher's password protected computer. The computer will be stored in a locked room. No participant or school information/identifying information will appear on any findings linked to this research. All participants will be assigned a fictitious name and no regional data will be given. Information gathered will be written in a thesis/report by the researcher. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept until September 2024. After this time, it will be destroyed. Unfortunately, individual feedback will not be available but all data collected will be anonymous and will be used to examine results in the overall research. Recommendations made post Thesis review will be sent to participating schools as a support around how they might support individuals' with an ASD in the PSE transitioning process.

What if prospective participants have more questions or do not understand something?

If anyone has any questions about the study they may contact the principal investigator-Maura Moriarty. It is important that prospective participants feel that all of their questions have been answered prior to committing to engage in this study.

What happens if anyone should change their mind in relation to participating in the study?

At any stage should any participants feel that they want to stop taking part in the study, they are free to cease participation and take no further part. There are no consequences for changing your mind about being in the study.

<u>**Contact name and number of Project Investigators.**</u>

Principal Investigator

Maura Moriarty
Trainee Educational Psychologist, (TEP)
Mary Immaculate College

Email: mmthesis@outlook.com

Research Supervisor(s)

Dr Orla Slattery
Inclusion Co-ordinator
Department of Educational Psychology,
Inclusive and Special Education
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Yours sincerely,

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Maura Moriarty (TEP)

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Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
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Phone: 061774767

Appendix F) Consent Document

Teacher Participation Consent Sheet

Title of Project: *An exploration into the role of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in post-secondary education transitioning planning for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).*

Please tick the boxes and sign below to indicate your consent:

Should you consent to participating in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please tick the boxes and/or sign the consent form.

1. I have read and understood the teacher information sheet(s).

2. I understand what the project is about, how data will be collected and what the results will be used for.

3. I am aware that all information relating to my participation will be kept confidential.

4. I am aware of what I will be asked to do, and of any risks and benefits of the study.

5. I am choosing to take part in the study and I know that I can stop taking part in the study at any stage without giving any reason to the researchers.

6. I am aware that the interview sessions will be audio recorded and I agree to this. I understand what will happen to the data collected and/or recordings once the study is finished.

I agree to the statements above and I consent to taking part in this research study.

Name: (please print): _____

Signature:

_____

Date: _____

Investigator's   signature

_____

Date: _____

Appendix G) Semi Structured Interview Template (Teacher)

SCRIPT: *'Thanks very much for meeting with me today. I am just going to ask you a few questions today about your experiences as a teacher in relation to transition planning for students with an ASD/Autism. I am also interested in the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in this process. In order to research this area, I'm going to employ Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a means of exploring data which is strengths focused and not deficits focused which is beneficial for researching data of a sensitive nature, such as the data being collected for this study. In the spirit of the use of AI, we will be looking at the strengths within the school as well as focusing on what is going well in the transition planning process throughout this interview. Do you have any questions?'*

Teacher Semi-Structured Interview

1. What is working well in relation to transition planning into PSE for individuals with an ASD?

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2. What have the positive experiences for the school been in relation to PSE transition planning?

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3. Which school strengths come to mind when thinking about the transition planning process?

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4. How does your school build upon the strengths of its students?

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5. Which personal strengths as a teacher are you most proud of?

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6. What already existing strengths within the school can be built upon to assist with transition planning?

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7. How can school values lend themselves to transition planning?

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8. Which school strengths do you feel are apparent when you think about the use of IEPs?

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9. How do you feel the school could ideally plan for transitioning?

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10. What might the ideal PSE transition planning process look like?

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11. What might the ideal use of IEPs look like within the transition planning process?

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12. What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal transition planning
process?

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13. What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal use of IEPs within
the transition planning process?

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14. What does the school need to do overall as an organisation to support the ideal transitioning

Scenario?

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15. What needs to be done differently, if anything to reach an ideal transitioning scenario?

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16. Which resources (already existing or required) will assist with bringing about this change?

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17. In what ways do you feel parents/guardians can positively support students to reach these goals?

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Any other comments:

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Appendix H) Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step approach to thematic analysis:

Thematic Analysis: Six Step Approach	Research Action
Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data	The researcher gathered the data, transcribed the data and listened to the recordings repeatedly as a means of ensuring quality control and familiarising herself with the data. Data was then read and re-read.
Phase 2: generating initial codes	An initial list of noted quotes was created and from this list, codes which identified features of the data were generated.
Phase 3: searching for themes	Codes were then sorted and aligned with broader overarching themes that had been identified within the data.
Phase 4: reviewing themes	Themes were reviewed and refined by looking at the coded extracts as well as the patterns within the themes. Codes or themes which were unmatched or unsuited were re-categorised or excluded. The thematic maps or overall patterns were then explored against the set of data and refined as a means of accurately exploring the data.
Phase 5: defining and naming themes	Themes were refined and reviewed once more and collated with other themes of required. The meanings of themes were explored.
Phase 6: producing the report	Fully explored, reviewed, refined and defined themes were then reported in a clear and concise manner with specific data highlighting and accompanying each theme.

Appendix I) Teacher Thematic Analysis Table including codes and sub themes
Note: t=teacher, p=parent

	AI Theme Discovery	*AI Theme* Dream	*AI Theme* Design	*Theme* MISC
Teacher				
1. SEN CO	• Parental/School relationship • Meetings with stakeholders • Relationship with PSE institutions • Pastoral care • Open door policy • Career Guidance • LCA and other school • NLN • programmes • Strengths based approach • Student advocacy • IEPs • Good school reputation • Tailored to student needs • Planning • Good communication (t) • Accommodating (t) • Student advocate (t) **IEP STRENGTHS** • Strengths based • Explorative IEPs (why is PLN present?) • Holistic IEPs (effect of diagnosis) • Long and short term targets • Build sense of achievement and continued progression • Linked to CG for 5th and 6th years	• More formal planning • Collaboration of all stake holders (student, class and/or unit teacher, parents and SENCO) • More communication with PSE institution • Appropriate naming of 'Disability Office' • More training for disability office workers around info giving • Transferral of information from 2nd to 3rd level (student passport/student support file)	• Continued entitlements in 3rd level (same system ideally as 2nd and primary level) • Inclusion • Strengths based • Advocate for needs of students • One hour per week admin time • Child decides ultimately on PSE option • PSE Plan B • Collaboration of stake holders • Visits to and from PSE institution • Transferral of information from 2nd to 3rd level (student passport/student support file) • Transitioning section in IEP (separate from academic section) • Collaborative • Start in TY or 5th year • Communication between staff in secondary and third level • More support for students in PSE by PSE staff • Explicit plans • More writing up and formalising of plans • Families to accept more help • Study skills, realistic expectations, life skills and independence skills on part of parents (P)	• Data protection • Systemic difference between input in secondary and third level inputs, e.g. CAO and offers could change options suddenly

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
2. SET	• Good communication • Education tailored to needs of child • All options explored for PSE • Research into PSE by staff • NLN • Educate students on how to research their PSE options • College open days • Career nights • LCVP • LCA • Pastoral care • Year head system • Knowing the student (personality and ability) • Child centred approach • Direction not dictation • Plan B in place • Monitoring strengths and AON • Good listener (t) • Awareness of childs ability (t) • Supports holistic development of child (t) **IEP STRENGTHS** • SMART targets • Not too many targets at a time (3 or so) • Collaborative effort • Student involvement	• Mirror primary school to secondary school transition-liaison and visits • Liaise with college staff • Visit college supports • Have a plan B • Well researched	• Up to date on college changes • Previous students discussions or videos of previous students discussions for career nights • Build self confidence • Foster independence • Communication with parents • Consider and research students options • Plan B • Liaise with college staff • Transition planning targets • Holistic targets on IEP • Planning team collaboration (CG, SENCO, year head) • Consulting with external services (e.g. ASIAM) • Recognising every child as an individual and working with each individual	• SEN background-supports teaching and planning • Transition planning Vs Academic planning within IEP and in timeline • No 'Recipe' for transition planning

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
3 Mainstream	• Study and social skills • Preparation for life after school • Inclusive ethos • Strengths based approach • Student interests are involved in education as much as possible • Patience (t) • Relationship build on respect with students (t) • Break down of curriculum for students to access it (t) • Extra-curricular activities • Holistic education **IEP STRENGTHS** • Team collaboration • Supportive staff members (share resources and experiences to support students)	• Early diagnosis of an ASD • Early intervention • Transition planning to start no later than 16-after JC • TPs not too early (not in 1st or 2nd year) • Holistic planning around course choice, transport, accommodation etc. • LCA programme • Tailored approach • Student participation in planning • Use of IEP to monitor goals and time frames • Collaboration of all stakeholder incl student • Find out student PSE interests • IEP access to all teachers (not just SET or SENCO)	• LCA programme (work experience) • Family oriented and friendly school • Individualised IEPs • Maintain structure outside of school (p) • Planning at home around PSE logistics (p) • Research into PSE (p) • Listen to students • Teach resilience	• Tailored to needs of student • Collaborate with other staff members e.g. (CG)

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
4 SET	• Inclusive of student • Contact with PSE institutions • NLN • Visit PSE as much as is viable • Meetings with PSE • Life skills training • Enthusiastic staff • Active engagement of T with PSE • 1:1 time • Teach teacher to coordinate needs of students and support training or upskilling in AON • Rotating teachers (11 week block training in range of areas) • Needs facilitation • Dedication (t) • Empathic towards student and parents (t) • Identifying needs and working towards specific goals (t) • Lots of experience w SEN (t) • Resources within school for life skills training (e.g. kitchen etc.) • Value individual • Accommodating to needs of individual and catering to meet their needs **IEP STRENGTHS** • Tailored to individual needs of student	• Information dissemination amongst staff • Communication amongst staff • Time • TPs as a job post, teacher with designated role of TPs	• Information dissemination and communication amongst staff • Value individual • Accommodating to needs of individual and catering to meet their needs • More time • Designated TPs officer (to bring students to PSE once per week) • IEP-have information on needs and to actively work on needs in IEP • TPs built into IEP in senior cycle • Preparation of life skills (p) • Facilitate visits to PSE (P) • Logistics of PSE choice (transport etc) (p) • Collaboration with school on TPs (p)	• No IEP for TPs per se but consistent monitoring of life skills and PSE goals all year long • Accessing resources in IEPs can be difficult • Student time-e.g. students on LCA have to attend to very little time to support specific goals • Teacher/student time tabling

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
5 SET	• Good relationship with PSE-lots of contact • NLN • Life skills preparation for PSE • Communication with parents • Collaboration with parents and other services for TP • AT module for students for PSE • Encourage and praise students • Recognise achievements • Provide opportunity for success in classroom • Approachable (t) • Good rapport (t) • Understanding (t) • Supporting student with sig needs • Respect, openness • Care, inclusive ethos • Peer support **IEP STRENGTHS** • Collaboration with parents, student, teachers and external services • Whole school approach • Combining classroom and IEP • Communication with other teachers	• Teacher suited to student (personality wise) • Plenty of time and resources • Cluster groups • CPD • Understanding student and their needs • Contact with PSE • Communication with parents around TP logistics • Collaboration with all stakeholders (IEP based on this) • Link in with chosen PSE institutions and disability services/AT office if needed • SMART targets for IEP • Targets broken down	• Supporting HF students more • Timetabling for student with complete timetable to access SEN for TP • Inclusive ethos • Resources • Time • CPD • Cluster group for teachers • Openness to change and understanding • Student comfort • Acknowledge and take responsibility for TP role (p) • Generalise learning at home (p)	

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
6 SET	• Visit PSE institution • Meet with parents • Communication with parents • LCA • Career research • NLN • PLC courses • Work experience • CG • Positive school • Eager to facilitate • PSE open days attendance • Strengths based • July provision activities • Extra-curricular activities • Building confidence and sense of self (t) • Provision of opportunities for success (t) • Acceptance of students **IEP STRENGTHS** • Encouragement of students around targets	• More detailed 'handover' to PSE • Link in more and give more info to PSE • Pre-empting challenges and preparing students • Share knowledge of student with PSE • More resources • Allocation of more time for SET to support TPs • Visits to PSE as late as possible due to students being undecided around their PSE choices and CAO	• Make more connections with PSE institutions • Facilitate subjects of interest outside of LCA in mainstream classes (not limiting students) • Recognising unique ability and strengths of students • Meet more with PSE staff • More detailed 'handover' • Pre-empting challenges and preparing students (IEP) • Share knowledge of student with PSE (IEP) • Resources • Allocation of time for SET to support TP • Recognise students abilities and disabilities-more realistic expectations (p) • Honesty with PSE around student's capabilities and needs (p) • Visit PSE and disability offices (p)	• More contact desired with new PSE institutions • How far to push students academically? • Transport for PSE for students with an ASD to allow them to broaden educational opportunities?

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
7 SET	• LCA • Previous students attending school for PSE talks • Student friendly • Student oriented • Tailored lessons based on student strengths and AON • Organised (t) • Plan to suit student needs (t) • Caring nature (t) • Takes student interests into account (t) • Good resources • CG • Open days • Career fairs • Bring out the best in students **IEP STRENGTHS** • Organisational skills • Making out the IEPS • Collaboration of IEPs Formulation of IEPs	• Middle person between 2nd and 3rd level • CG • Regular TPs meetings involving student parents and CG • Monitor TPs progress • Create tailored IEP • Specific TP section in IEP • Time • Resources	• CG-more needed • Middle person between 2nd and 3rd level • Link between school and 3rd level built upon • Continue caring ethos within school • Regular meetings/consultations with students, parents and CG • Creating tailored IEP with TP section • Use IEP for TPs • 2/3 year start before leaving school • Time • Key link in person in school for TP • Allocation of time and resources for TP each week (to link in with TP staff member) • Discuss TP with student (p) • Explore routes to PSE (p) • Visit PSE with student regularly (p) • Develop project work skills (p) • Provision of resources (laptop) (p)	

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
8 Mainstream	• Technology • Social skill development • LCA • Life skill development • CG • Open days • Work experience • 3rd level visits to school-guest speakers • Tailored to needs • Builds on students strengths • Extra-curricular activities • Inclusive ethos • Communication skills (t) • Leadership skills (t) • Positive attitude (t) • Organisation skills (t) • Awareness of students capabilities (staff) **IEP STRENGTHS** • Access to IEPs on software	• 'A day in college' to see what's needed • Access to IEPs for teachers who teach student • Collaboration around IEP for TP • Guest speakers • Visits from PSE institutions	• Opportunities to explore career paths • Keep students focused • Get to know students capabilities • Tailored to needs • Guest speakers • Visits from PSE institutions • Variety in career exploration routes • Openness to exploration of routes • Everyone on board (collaboration) • Plan B • Be Supportive (p) • Encourage student (p) • Research PSE and career options (p)	• FETAC/PLC courses beneficial as they are more closely monitored than colleges/universities • Less difficult to get lost in PLC/FETAC course • GDPR (accessing IEP on school software-only if you teach student)

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
9 mainstream	- Work experience - Fostering independence - Highlighting and exploring student strengths - Students as individuals - Fostering confidence - Fostering student interests - School atmosphere - Inclusive ethos - Secure and safe environment of school - Openness - Quick recognition of strengths - Opportunities to explore strengths - Enthusiasm (t) - Interest in ASD students (t) - Good liaison amongst staff - Encourage students - Collaboration **IEP STRENGTHS** - Ability to recognise potential in each student and work on that	- More liaison with prospective employers/PSE institutions - Establish more links - Long term TPs - Strengths based - PSE exploration - Encouragement - Good liaison amongst staff members - Information sharing - Tailored - Strengths focused - Identify direction of interest and challenges ahead - Regular update	- More work experience opportunities - More involvement w community - Quickly identify strengths and support exploration of strengths - Inclusive ethos - Sense of community in school - Peer support - More liaison w prospective employers/PSE institutions - Establish links - Begin TP on arrival to school - Long term TP - Strengths based TP - PSE exploration - Encouragement - Good communication - Information sharing - Tailored - Identify interests and challenges ahead - Regular update of TP - Inclusive ethos - School community - Regular contact w school (p) - Supportive of school (p) - Get involved (p) - Generalise learning at home (p) - Communicate w school (p)	

Teacher	Discovery	Dream	Design	MISC
10 SET	• CG • Inclusion • More options than traditional LC • LCA • Less stigma • Support • Student advocacy • Pastoral care • Diverse options for experience • Extra-curricular activities • Hands on experience • Holistic view of education (t) • Diverse experience (t) • Open days **IEP STRENGTHS** • School uses IEPs • Collaboration	• Info sharing • Communication amongst staff • Replicate aspects of primary to secondary transition (visit PSE regularly) • TP protocol • TP report for PSE institution • TP meetings (yearly and twice in senior year) • Collaboration • Communication w stakeholders • Mandatory IEP meetings	• Awareness of needs of student • Open days • CG • Openness to all PSE options (PLC/FETAC) • Wellbeing input • Effective IEPs • More involved in PSE exploration • More connection w PSE institutions • More information sharing w PSE • 'Transition report' • Transition IEP • TP protocol • Collaboration w stakeholders (parent, CG, teacher and student) • TP meetings • Visits to PSE • Communication w staff members • Aim really high • Acknowledge potential 'pitfalls' • Advocate for student • Become Autism aware • Tailored to needs • School to build links with work experience and PSE • Increase confidence • Community and PSE supports for student	• Irish exemption • Student mental health • Recession (IEPs) • EPSEN act • Parental difficulties in supporting student to transition into PSE (work, single parent, capacity) • Few options for parents and families in relation to PSE/work at times • Role delegation (IEP)

Appendix J) Student and Parent Data

Appendix J 1) Student Cohort

Student	Destiny	Dream	Design	Misc.
Student 1.	- Social skill development (in School) - Career Guidance (in School) - Personal interests (personal) - Memory (personal) - Academia (personal)	Awareness of capacity of staff to support transition plan	- Freedom awareness in transition plan - Becoming independent - Parent support-fostering independence - self-directed support in the form of financial PSE costs/research - Career guidance - LCVP	- Lack of awareness around IEP - Not thinking about specifics of future at present time - Has an outline of a plan
Student	**Destiny**	**Dream**	**Design**	**Misc.**
Student 2	- Social skill development (school) - Extra-curricular activities (school) - IT, science, sports, computers (personal) - Excited about future - Positive about future and increasing skillset/knowledge - Academic and social support (school)	- IT, gaming, computer training course/ career - Personal freedom (from attending PSE)	- Encouragement, visit college campus, research (parents) - Research and don't do drugs (personal) - Support interests, CG leaflets, teaching (School)	Awareness of utility of IEP
Student	**Destiny**	**Dream**	**Design**	**Misc.**
Student 3	Staff in general discussions with staff, guest speakers, academic and social support (school)	Personal interests playing a large part in PSE institution choice/career choice.	- Communicate and support PSE research (parents) - Research PSE options (personal) - Preparation for PSE-visiting PSE	- Awareness of strengths and areas of need in IEP - Some awareness of individual

	• Academia, debating, public speaking, storytelling, (personal) • Personal interest in subjects • Excited and positive about future		campuses, discussion with student about PSE options (school)	transition planning within school

Participating students filled in questionnaires with an SET or mainstream teacher on school grounds. An interview was carried out with the participating parent. The student cohort were primarily positive about the future and their path to their chosen career prospects. Two of the three students were aware of the utility behind IEP usage. Students were aware of how the school staff and their parents could support their transition planning process. Students also portrayed an awareness of how they could support themselves in this process.

Appendix J 2) Parent Cohort

Parent	Destiny	Dream	Design	Misc.
Parent	• Organisation, planning and coordination of SETs, eagerness to help, work experience placements, collaborative IEP usage with external services (SADT, NEPS) (School) • Well informed (parents)	• Early start of transition planning (upon entry to second level) • Interagency liaising around IEP creation and TP process • Information days/evenings around prospective training options • Maximising strengths of student • More in-depth appraisal of PSE options in IEPs • Long term IEP targets • Regular IEP meetings as standard with review 1 to 2 times a year • Strengths focused IEP meetings • One SENCO minimum in each school-as key coordinator for TP/IEP creation • LCA available in all schools • Parents role in informing policy • Parents association-with subset for parents of students with SEN • Information sharing opportunities amongst parents • Joint collaboration amongst parents/school/PSE and external services	• SENCO link in with PSE • Early start of transition planning (upon entry to second level) • Work experience placements • Development of existing educational programmes such as LCA • More collaboration amongst all external services, school, parents, etc. • Short, medium and long term targets • Usage of IEPs in TP • Individually tailored transition planning • CG assessment to support TP • SEN career guidance in general	• Social and learning aspects of meeting with other parents of students with SEN.

The participating parent was also aware of the utility of IEPs and the potential they held as a means of supporting transition planning. The participating parent was satisfied with how the school had supported her son but did not that there was no transition plan in place for her son. She noted that her son's IEP was a collaborative process between the school and external services which was very beneficial. She also noted that IEPs were currently not focused on transition planning but rather academic goals. She noted that IEP targets were also created only in the short term and that there was a place within IEPs for medium and long term targets. The participating parent also felt that transition planning for PSE should begin upon entry to second level education. Similar to teaching staff, the participating parent emphasised the importance of programmes such as LCA and work experience opportunities in the transition planning process. Similarly, the parent also highlighted the key role that career guidance plays in transition planning. In line with teacher's data, the participating parent highlighted the importance of collaboration amongst the parents, school and relevant services in the creation of IEP as well as the creation of transition plans which are tailored to the needs of the student. It is worth noting that the participating parent occupied a somewhat similar professional space as the teachers but was not employed in education.

Appendix K) Empirical Paper

Empirical Paper

Teacher Perspectives on the Transition Planning Process into Post-Secondary Education (PSE) for students with a Diagnosis of Autism in Post-Primary schools in Ireland.

Abstract

Aims: This study explored teachers' perspectives on transition planning (TP) into post-secondary education (PSE) for students with autism attending mainstream classes or an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit attached to mainstream secondary schools in the Munster region of Ireland.

Method: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was employed as a framework for this research to explore teacher perspectives on current school strengths around transition planning and to explore how these strengths might be built upon in transition planning. Teaching staff (n=10) completed semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed thematically.

Results: Results indicated that the use of formal transition plans as part of the planning process was not common practice in secondary schools. Results also indicated that staffing and time as well as plans which were student centred, tailored to individual needs, collaborative and regularly reviewed, were noted as resources required to reach the ideal TP scenario. The importance of formal planning and a collaborative approach inclusive of all stakeholders for TP (including the PSE institutions) was expressed. TP can also be supported by strengthening communication and links between PSE institutions and post-primary schools.

Conclusions: Findings indicated that a range of informal and formal work is being carried out by teachers as a means of supporting transition planning in post-primary schools. TP into PSE for students with an ASD appears to be in its infancy. The employment of AI as a strengths-based model of inquiry which focused on positive individual and organisational attributes was an appropriate methodology for the current study. Further research in this area is warranted.

Keywords: Transition Planning, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Individual Education Plans, Post-Secondary Education, Appreciative Inquiry

Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

The term 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD) or Autism refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders which are hallmarked by challenges in the areas of social interaction, communication, and behaviour (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Carr, 2015; Geschwind & Levitt, 2007; Happé, Ronald, & Plomin, 2006; Siew, Mazzucchelli, Rooney & Girdler 2017). Individuals with Autism are currently recognised as being placed on a spectrum and the condition is listed within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5th edition (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The DSM-V provides clinical criteria and is used as a diagnostic tool for the diagnosis of an ASD by clinicians and practitioners (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

Autism spectrum difference.

Currently, no biological indicators of an ASD have been identified and within the process of the diagnostic assessment of ASD (Norbury & Sparks, 2013). Diagnostic criteria are based upon reports and behavioural observations-markers which have been argued to be culturally influenced (Norbury & Sparks, 2013). Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman and Hutman (2013) suggested acknowledgement of the neuro-diversity in the descriptions of ASD as opposed to a deficits based medical model description of ASD. Ring, Daly & Wall (2018) have proposed a method of investigation which fosters an appreciation of the neurodiversity component of ASD rather than a deficits oriented focus of the condition and to this end, have employed the word 'difference' as opposed to 'disorder' in reference to ASD. The word 'disorder' was employed in this study when exploring the literature in the area, to ensure that all relevant literature in the area was included. However, as a means of staying faithful to the strengths based approach which has been employed to explore this area, the word 'disorder' will be omitted and the word 'difference' will be employed instead when discussing the condition to ensure that a deficits based approach to the condition is not portrayed and that instead, an appreciation of the differences and neurodiversity of autism is fostered.

Transitioning into Post-Secondary Education (PSE)

Adolescence and young adulthood are significant periods of change for young people and their families (Geller & Greenberg, 2009). This time is also recognised as a time for familial change, whereby the young person aims to become more independent by beginning to create the initial phases of a life outside of the family home (Geller & Greenberg, 2009). It is understandable, therefore, that this can also be a time of both excitement and anxiety for young people and their families (Cheak-Zamora, Teti & First, 2015; Geller & Greenberg, 2009; Schall, Wehman & McDonough, 2012).

Within the context of transitioning into post-secondary education, the process of transition planning has been described as a 'process or coordinated set of activities' (Roberts, 2010, p. 158). This coordinated set of activities have been created especially for an individual requiring support as a means of supporting their move into third level education, from second level education (Roberts, 2010). The process of transitioning from the highly structured environment of school to the less structured facets of early adulthood for individuals with a disability has been described as a 'developmental process' in and of itself (Michaels & Orentlicher, 2004, p. 209). The challenges associated with this transition, can be far greater for individuals with an ASD and requires an adjustment period as well as steps taken in time to support the management of taxing situations which might arise (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

Transitioning into PSE for students with an ASD.

The process of facilitating and supporting the needs of students with an ASD in both secondary and post-secondary educational institutions has been challenging (Hedges et al., 2014; Roberts, 2010). Many individuals with an ASD who do not require large amounts of support and who do not have additional cognitive impairments, still tend to struggle with some of the demands in adult life (Roberts, 2010; Rydzewska, 2012).

Current issues in transitioning into PSE.

Research on PSE transition in the Irish context has suggested that the transition planning process is not formally structured and therefore is a less planned procedure (Bell, Devecchi, Mc Guckin & Shevlin, 2017). Irish policy, in line with international policy has begun to examine how best to include and integrate specific marginalised groups into society (Bell et al., 2017; DES 2001; OECD, 2011).

Current Study Rationale and Research Questions

Data on the exact number of individuals with an ASD continuing from mainstream post primary school to further education is difficult to locate within an Irish context. However, Australian research has indicated that the number of individuals with an ASD entering further education from a mainstream post primary school setting is much lower than that of their peers (Karola, Julie-Ann & Lyn, 2016). Research on educational transitioning for students with an ASD has been primarily linked to the transition process from primary to post primary school leaving a gap in the literature exploring the transition for students with an ASD into PSE (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). Previous literature has also highlighted a gap in research exploring teacher perspectives on transition planning (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009; Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015). Consequently, this study aimed to explore teacher perspectives on the transitioning process for secondary school students with an ASD. Teacher perspectives on the use of IEPs in the TP process were also explored but this paper will focus solely on teacher experiences and perspectives around TP. The research question for the current study was as follows:

What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

Methodology

This research aimed to explore the perspectives of post-primary school teachers in relation to their transition planning experiences for students with an ASD.

Study Design

This study explored the strengths of the school and school staff in relation to the TP process. The employment of a qualitative methodology in this research facilitates the process of gaining insight into the perceptions of individuals, specifically in relation to their experiences as members of a wider system through the collection of rich and complex data (Green & Thorogood, 2018).

Research paradigm.

The paradigm employed in this study follows a social constructivist perspective whereby meanings are subjectively constructed and based upon lived experiences which are shaped by the individual's own experiences of their reality (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Lewis, 2015; Kim, 2001). Furthermore, the aim of this research was to obtain the perspectives of the participants which are quite frequently 'negotiated socially and historically' (Lewis, 2015, p.21). Unlike other paradigms such as post-positivism, which places more emphasis on logic and takes a more ordered approach to data, this research employed an inductive or bottom-up approach without any of the restrictions associated with a definitive and foundational theoretical perspective (Henderson, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Ponterotto, 2005; Reid et al., 2005).

Model of Exploration: Appreciative Inquiry

The role of the researcher has evolved in that 'research subjects' are no longer employed in research, instead participants are 'invited to participate or enrol' in a piece of research (Aldred, 2009). Increased emphasis has been placed on positive inquiry, positive change, the process of empowerment as well as the utility of group and individual processes which are linked to creating and sustaining wider change within an organisation (Aldred, 2009).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a mode of research in which the researcher avoids engaging with a critique or a focus based on deficits or perceived weaknesses within an organisation when tasked with

exploring or bringing about change (Ludema, Wilmot & Srivastva, 1997). AI facilitates the exploration of strengths within an organisation and supports the inquiry around how such strengths can be built upon to bring about change within an organisation (Grant & Humphries, 2006). As such, the use of AI was an appropriate means of conducting such sensitive research. The use of AI fostered a more positive, strengths-based approach to the intricacies of the data collection process which involved building upon pre-existing strengths rather than highlighting deficits, which would be an inappropriate and insensitive means of conducting this research (Bell et al., 2017; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; DES, 2007; NCSE, 2016; Rose et al., 2012). See figure 1.0 for AI 5D model.

Figure 1.0) AI 5D Model
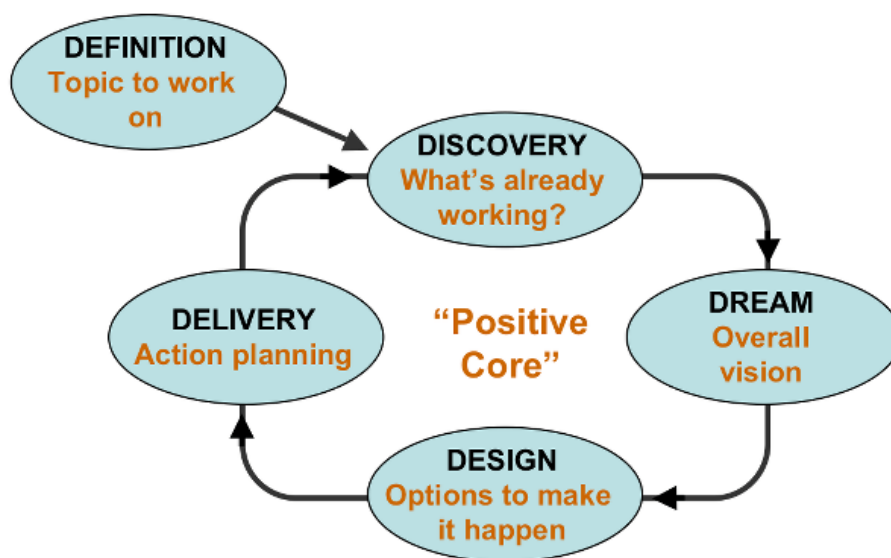
Participants

Previous research in the area has noted that transition planning in Ireland tended to begin up to 18 months before the move to PSE (Daly et al., 2016). Consequently, post-primary school teachers of students with an ASD in the senior cycle were invited to participate in the current study. Although the advantages and disadvantages of determining participant numbers a-priori in qualitative research have been debated in recent times (Sim, Saunders, Waterfield & Kingstone, 2018). Previous literature has suggested that the number of participants required to reach thematic and data saturation can vary and depend on the study design and methodology (Francis et al., 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that when conducting qualitative research, thematic data saturation can occur from between 6 and 12 participant interviews. Ten post-primary school teachers took part in this study, of these ten teachers, one was a special needs coordinator (SENCO), six were special education teachers (SET) and three were mainstream teachers. Three mainstream post-primary schools in total participated in the Munster region of Ireland.

Procedure

The process of data collection was undertaken over a period of three months using semi-structured interviews with educational staff in post-primary schools in the Munster region of Ireland.

Measures Employed

Data were collected from teachers by employing semi-structured interviews. All questionnaires were piloted on small samples similar to the cohorts being used in the data collection process as a means of

anticipating any issues in relation to the instruments and as a means of reviewing participant understanding of the questionnaires being employed (Adams & Cox, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). All measures in all questionnaires were designed to align with the AI model of inquiry using the 'Discovery', 'Dream' and 'Design' stages (see table 1.1 for sample items).

Table 1.1) Sample questions and corresponding AI stages:

AI Stage	Corresponding question from the teacher semi-structured interview form
Discovery	*What is working well in relation to transition planning into PSE for individuals with an ASD?*
Dream	*What might the ideal use of IEPs look like within the transition planning process?*
Design	*What does the school need to do overall as an organisation to support the ideal transitioning scenario?*

Semi-structured interviews.

Participating teachers were briefed before the study about the aims of the study and their role as participants in the study. Information sheets were given and informed consent was obtained in written form from participants regarding the use of data and their participation in the study (see appendices A and B). Data were collected during 30 minutes to 1 hour long one to one semi-structured interviews with the researcher. During the interviews, participants were asked a range of questions which were open ended in nature allowing the participants to expand upon their answers. All data collected were qualitative in nature (Mertens, 2014). All data were transcribed verbatim and interviews were later played and compared with transcripts by the researcher to ensure the highest level of accuracy was achieved during the transcription process.

Data Collection

Data were collected using recorded semi-structured interviews. See appendix A for Teacher questions and appendix B for the teacher interview script.

Ethical considerations.

Ethical approval was sought and granted for this research project from the university research board. The implications of conducting research brings with it a range of ethical considerations (Haverkamp, 2005). The researcher was cognisant of conducting research in an ethically sound manner in relation to all facets of the research process; recruitment, data collection as well as ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participating schools. The researcher conducted the interviews and transcribed the collected data. The data was kept on an encrypted memory device which was used only for research purposes. All data was analysed on a password protected computer which was kept in a secured and locked office. All data collected was kept confidential and no identifying information was employed in reference to all participating schools and participants.

Participants were informed about the nature and focus of the study before taking part. Participants were also made aware that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time and the procedures for this were listed in all information sheets.

Piloting.

The semi-structured interview template which was employed as a means of collecting data for the current study was piloted with two post-primary school teachers before data collection begun. Data collected from the pilot phase was not included in the study. The teacher's feedback from the pilot phase was taken into account and the semi-structured interviews were reviewed before data collection begun with the ten teachers who participated in the study.

Data Analysis

All data collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and were qualitative in nature and were analysed qualitatively. The data collected was the analysed thematically. The transcripts were then reviewed and coded. An independent coder was also employed as a means of insuring internal reliability within the analysis process. Themes and patterns within the data emerged and as such, employing thematic analysis was a preferred means of analysing said data as it allowed for the identification of patterns among data which was related to the areas being explored (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012; Kung, Giles & Hagan, 2013).

Thematic analysis.

All data were qualitative in nature and Thematic Analysis (TA) was employed as a means of finding and analysing patterns and salient experiential perspectives from within the collected data (Braun et al., 2006; Clarke et al., 2013; Clarke et al., 2014; Tierney & Fox, 2010). The use of TA when compared to other means of qualitative data analysis facilitated a more theoretically flexible and independent exploration of the collected data whilst allowing for the identification of constellations of meaningful narratives and key patterns and themes as well as the intrinsic organisation of rich data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Clarke and Braun, 2014; Joffe, 2012). TA was carried out in line with the six step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) see appendix C. Data were refined and collated into codes which were marked and linked to the raw data for further reference (Guest et al., 2012). Identified codes were then collated and placed into subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Guest et al., 2012). During this process, less relevant or minor codes were amalgamated with other minor but similar themes and listed under larger umbrella sub-themes which were also categorised accordingly (Green et al., 2007; Joffe, 2012).

Results

Ten Teachers were interviewed in total using a semi-structured format which prescribed to the 5D elements of AI including; Discovery, Dream and Design. One SENCO, six SETs and three mainstream teachers took part in the study. Data were analysed using TA and conceptually founded patterns were observed and recorded in the form of themes and sub-themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Data will be discussed using themes and sub themes under the AI 5D methodology.

Discovery: Current Strengths

A range of strengths were listed throughout the interviews.

General school strengths.

More general school strengths were discussed with teachers reporting a range of school strengths including their school ethos, general programmes which benefit student development as well as the process of supporting students in a range of areas.

General school programmes.

Teachers discussed the importance and value in many of the school programmes that they offer. Teachers spoke highly of a range of programmes such as leaving certificate applied (LCA) and extra-curricular activities designed to support student development in a variety of areas and support them to access the curriculum if needed.

> Well we do LCA we do the new junior cert level 1 and level 2. So that's really important. (Teacher 1, Line 69)

Parent-school relationships were also noted as a general strength within the school as well as liking in with PSE institutions. Diversity in the type of events and opportunities that students could avail of was noted as a general strength within a school.

> (There's) a lot of opportunities cause, you know, throughout the whole school experience for kids to participate in and attend all kinds of events I mean it's just way more interesting than it was. (Teacher 10, Line 48)

Supporting and motivating students.

The process of supporting students was of paramount importance in many of the schools. The use of staff, time, resources and student interests were cited as means of supporting the student, whilst keeping them engaged and motivated. The process of giving the student time to express themselves and/or their interest was reported as a mean of supporting students. This flexibility was noted by many teachers who acknowledged how components of an ASD might have an effect on the student's learning in different ways. Tailoring lessons where required to support the student to access the curriculum was also reported as a strength.

> I believe that the greatest ahm, work being done really is recognising the individual and their individual strengths. (Teacher 9, Line 8)

School transition planning strengths.

A range of strengths were discussed by teachers in relation to transition plans and the associated school strengths in this area.

Tailored to student needs.

Teachers discussed the importance of supporting the student in the process of transition planning in a way that is meaningful to them, whether this was based on the student's interests or on their abilities or areas that they find challenging. The need to ensure that the student is comfortable with the process was also addressed. Parental support was highlighted as a salient aspect of the transition planning process but the input and collaboration with the student was noted as paramount to the transition planning process.

The importance of exploring the less traditional routes within PSE (such as Post Leaving Cert-PLC courses etc.) was also expressed with the process of tailoring to the needs of the student.

> I suppose it's just an awareness of the needs of the students who would, are not able to attend university. You know, that intermediate step. (Teacher 10, Line 72)

School Programmes which Support TP.

School programmes which support the process of transition planning were reported by teachers. A range of programmes were available to support their transition such as career guidance, work experience and other such programmes. Supporting the student's own development around their own expectations and awareness within work experience situations was discussed as part of the preparatory work to be tended to before and during the student's engagement with the work experience process.

> You've to build up their expectations and let them know what the expectations of their work experience is. That they have to prove themselves in different areas before they're given extra responsibilities. (Line 104, Teacher 3)

The importance of familiarising students with transition planning research processes and PSE institutions was also reported. Career guidance (CG) was emphasised as a key component of this process due to their capacity to link in with colleges, arrange trips and visits and support students to investigate their own training and career paths during their time in the senior cycle. School programmes such as LCA were noted as key facilitators of career investigations alongside CG input.

> We've excellent guidance counsellors here. They are you know very much they like ensure that the students get the opportunity to visit the open colleges, open days, the career exhibitions, they invite colleges in, and students are very ofay with, you know learning to investigate do career

investigations for themselves from an early stage, I mean they do that in third year, in transition year and then obviously they're well able to do it at senior cycle. (Teacher 2, Line 42)

Collaboration with stakeholders.

Teachers discussed the importance of collaborating with all stakeholders as well as the student when supporting the student to transition into PSE. This processes and the associated expectations of and from school staff was emphasised as a part of the support process within schools. The role of supportive staff in this process was reported as a strength within the collaboration process. This was specifically related in teachers who dedicated their own time outside of the classroom during this process. See figure 1.1 for thematic map.

That's one of the main strengths in the school is that the teachers are so willing to give up their time to facilitate transitioning. It's like it's really hard on teachers because everything is a requirement of their own time outside of class time and all of that (Teacher 4, Line 48)

Figure 1.1) Discovery: visual representation: Discovery: What is current working well?
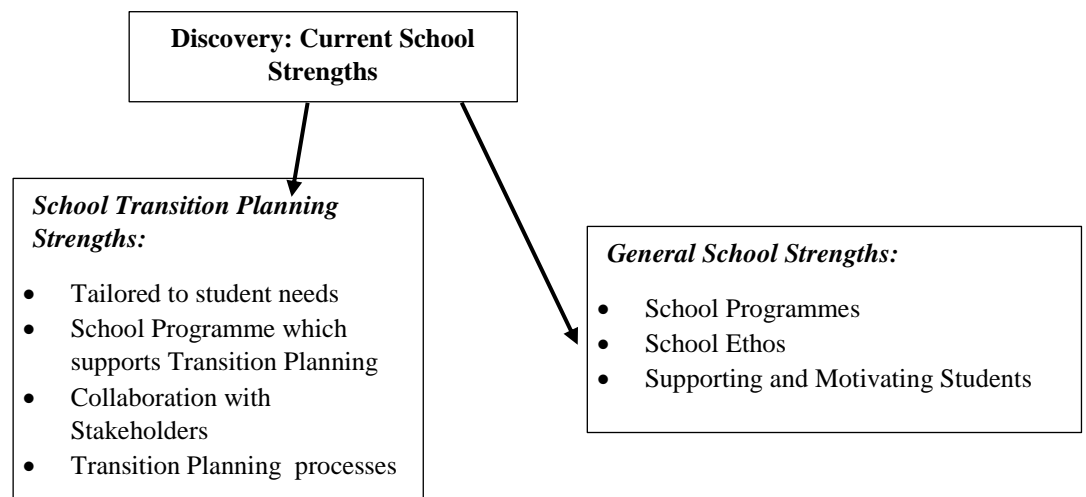
Dream: The Ideal Scenario

The ideal scenario was discussed with teachers around the transition planning process.

School relationship with PSE.

Communication.

Teachers discussed the role of PSE in transition planning and how they could ideally link in with the school and vice versa as a means of creating the ideal transition planning process.

Teachers understood the difficulties they faced as educators in relation to time and resources but also in relation to in linking in with PSE institutions and the education system in Ireland (e.g. the CAO points system). The process of expanding the contacts outside of the school in PSE was also noted within the ideal transition planning scenario.

Just making more connections with courses outside of the ones that we're normally used to dealing with, outside of the normal. (Teacher 6, Line 81)

Building rapport.

Attending open days and career days within the PSE institutions was noted within the ideal scenario as a means of improving and increasing knowledge around PSE institutions.

> Ideally, we'd be more involved in attending these things that they'd go to, that we'd be better informed. We'd have as teachers, you know, more connection to the institutions but that might be really, unrealistic. (Teacher 10, Line 127)

Building rapport with the PSE was noted as an ideal scenario for TP. The transfer of information between second and third level education was also addressed.

> So it would be collaborative. It would involve visits out to universities and visits in from them. It would involve you know, the moving of your school passport or your student support file from the school to university which doesn't happen because they won't take it or they don't want it (Teacher 1, Line 212)

This sentiment was echoed by other teachers who felt that students could be supported by having the capacity to transfer information to PSE to support the students learning going forward.

> And to-you know, formally have information that we pass on to you know the school. Mostly about the students learning style, their communication-you know possible challenges. (Teacher 10, Line 195)

### Staff and time.

Resources.

The ideal transition planning scenario was discussed and the role of staff within the process as well as the time and resources which would exist in the ideal transition planning process were also discussed. Repeated exposure to their PSE institution was noted as a potential benefit in transition planning if possible. Furthermore, a designated staff member who was responsible for supporting the transition planning process was also noted within the idea transition planning scenario. Having more time during the week to support transition planning was noted as a primary facet within the ideal transition planning scenario. The utility of professional training in this area was also emphasised within the ideal transition planning scenario.

Planning.

Having an allocation of time to bring students into PSE to explore their options was noted, having a full day within a PSE institution to experience the place was also recommended.

> I suppose even days where you could just bring them out and see what it's like, what a day in college would be like and see what's needed. Because it's such a, it's a big move and going into-especially into a third level institute. (Teacher 8, Line 216)

Figure 1.2) Dream: visual representation: Dream: What is the ideal scenario?
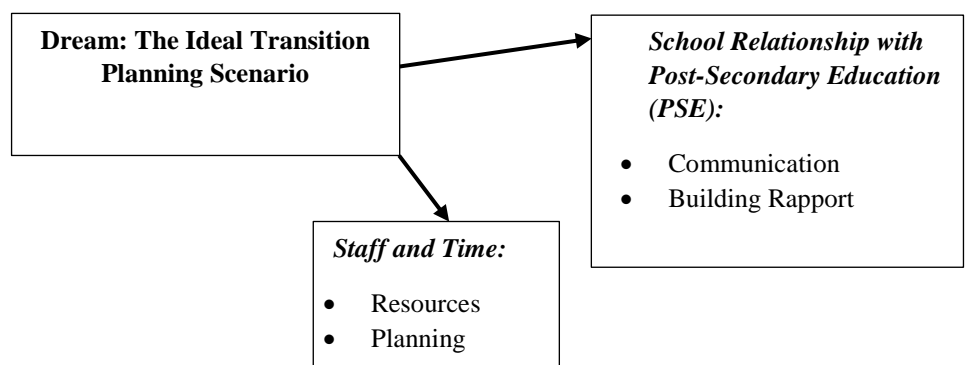
Design: Resources Required to Support the Ideal Transition Planning Scenario

The next prospective steps that the school might take to reach the aforementioned ideal scenario were discussed. Required resources and actions were noted.

School resources required.

The resources required from the school to support the student in experiencing a more ideal transition planning process were explored.

Formal Planning.

A more formalised means of transition planning was discussed by teachers as a means of supporting TP.

I think we need some more formal plans around like you know, like we meet with the career guidance teacher to come up with a list of students. (Teacher 1, Line 116)

Having a more tangible transition plan within an IEP was also noted as resources required to support the overall transitioning process as well as a collaborative effort in relation to the transition plan creation. An appreciation of the already established transition planning from primary to secondary was noted as a prospective resources for supporting TP.

I suppose it's to mirror maybe what we do when we transition from primary to secondary, so you know, make them aware of the changes, you know encourage maybe visit to college or a work place that they intend going. (Teacher 2, Line 116)

Collaboration amongst stakeholders.

The importance of employing stakeholders within the process of transition planning was described. The importance of taking the views of the student into account during this process was noted. The importance of having a strong communication system was also noted.

Tailored approach.

Utilising a more tailored approach to the transition planning process was emphasised by teachers. An awareness of ASD and the act of meeting the individual needs of the student were also noted as an important resources. The diversity observed amongst students with an ASD was noted as a primary facet of the tailored approach to transition planning for students with an ASD. The importance of being ASD aware as a means of supporting students with an ASD was also echoed by other teachers.

I think in general the more autism aware the school becomes, that that, then the teachers, in general are more tuned into potential problems. (Teacher 10, Line 238)

The importance of being ASD aware but also viewing the student themselves as an individual was also emphasised.

As I say, there's no recipe. Its recognising every child is an individual. And it's working with each individual-ASD or otherwise. (Teacher 2, Line 279)

Staff and time.

The staff, time and resources that the school might realistically provide was explored as a means of reaching the ideal transition planning scenario. The importance of being aware of the relevant information and communicating said information was also noted as a required resource to support the transition planning process. Time and staffing were noted as resources required within the transition planning process. The

process of being given the time and space within the workplace to engage more with the transition planning process was highlighted as a prospective resource going forward.

> We'd need an hour's admin a week. Between the career guidance and SENCOs or the unit teachers, or even their class teachers meet. (Teacher 1, Line 200)

Transition planning timeline.

The timeline required to support transitioning was explored. Teachers expressed an awareness of the practicalities of beginning the transition planning process too early. Answers varied but most teachers reported that transition planning should begin within the senior cycle.

> I would say for the last two years, so once they start their leaving cert applied programme (Teacher 7, Line 123)

One teacher did report that they felt that the transition planning process was a more longitudinal and holistic process and as such could begin quite early with the use of more holistic and longitudinal goals outside of academia which would lend themselves to transitioning in a variety of ways.

> I would say, as soon as they, as early as, as soon as they come in to the school I would imagine. (Teacher 9, Line 124)

PSE Role in transition planning.

PSE institution's awareness of student needs.

The role of PSE institutions in transition planning was explored in relation to post primary school relationship with PSE. It was reported that at times, PSE institutions are not aware enough of the student's needs in their approach to education.

PSE Collaboration with post-primary school.

The importance of a taking a more collaborative approach to transition planning including the information dissemination process with PSE institutions was also noted as important features of in transition planning. Teachers reported that that the links could be built upon in numerous ways. The links between primary and post-primary school were noted as well-established and contrasted with the less established links between post-primary and PSE in transitioning.

> It's kind of hard, like there are lots of links between primary and secondary schools but there are very little links between secondary and third level, so I suppose that is something that could be built upon. (Teacher 7, Line 68)

The dissemination of information was noted as a prospective facilitator of the TP process.

We probably could be meeting more with the staff in the third level institutions and doing a much more detailed handover. (Teacher 6, Line 141)

Parental roles in transition planning.

Parental support was emphasised as a salient aspect of a successful of transitioning. The varying means in which students could be practically supported by their parents were explored by teachers. Parental roles were reported and opportunities for parents to support their child to plan to transition into PSE were also explored. One specific area of parental input that was noted was linked to parent's fostering personal responsibility at home. This was highlighted by discussing the stark differences between the tailored and informal supports that students receive in post-primary schools by comparison to the less tailored and more formal support systems that they might encounter in PSE which could leave students feeling less supported

and somewhat lost within PSE. The role of the parents/guardians was discussed in light of this contrast, with teachers suggesting that fostering their child's sense of independence and personal responsibility at home was key in supporting transition planning.

> They need to start transitioning before we do-the parents, not even the pupil, do you know the parents need to become TY/5th year, really making sure this child as independent as possible so that they can succeed in university where there's going to be no teacher checking their home school diaries every morning or texting Mom and saying they forgot their PE gear or had a meltdown today and couldn't do PE, like no lecturer in a college is going to text a parent and say you know 'will you talk to him this evening about his manners?' (Teacher 1, Line 352)

Communication and acceptance.

The importance of communication was noted within this process. The process of accepting their child and their child's diagnosis was noted. Having realistic expectations around their child's PSE options as well as using the school as a support system within this process as a means of providing feedback and exploring PSE options through the use of collaborative meetings with relevant staff.

> Parents need probably to be, to recognise their student's abilities and likewise, their disabilities. I think often here they're very supported and maybe they have, obviously they accept their child for who they are but when they go into third level you know there's a lot more difficulty that might be apparent. (Teacher 6, Line 219)

Transition planning logistics.

The importance of being aware of the logistics of PSE choices and supporting these choices where possible from the home environment was also noted as an important parental role within the transition planning process. The long term transitioning goals linked to organisational skills were also noted as important aspects of transition planning for parents/caregivers. Parental consideration of the more practical measures was emphasised such as trips to the PSE institution of choice as well as noting places of importance (such as the disability office etc.).

> Visiting the third level institutions, like that visiting the disability department.. (Teacher 6, Line 237)

The importance of obtaining resources for PSE was also noted as important parental roles. This was also noted as important in relation to technology in PSE so that students can become more computer-literate to support their progression in PSE.

> Get the resources in for them, maybe get a laptop and get them used to using it. (Teacher 7, Line 193)

Supporting the PSE research process in transition planning was noted as a salient parental role. See figure 1.3 for a visual thematic map.

Figure 1.3) Design: visual representation: What resources are required to support transition planning (TP)?

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        ┌──────────────────────────┐
        │ Design: Resources required to │
        │      support TP          │
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PSE Role in TP:

- Awareness of Student Needs
- Collaboration with Post-Primary school

Parent/caregiver Roles in TP:

- Communication and Acceptance
- TP Logistics

School Resources Required:

- Formal Planning
- Collaboration amongst Stakeholders
- Tailored Approach to TP
- Staff and Time
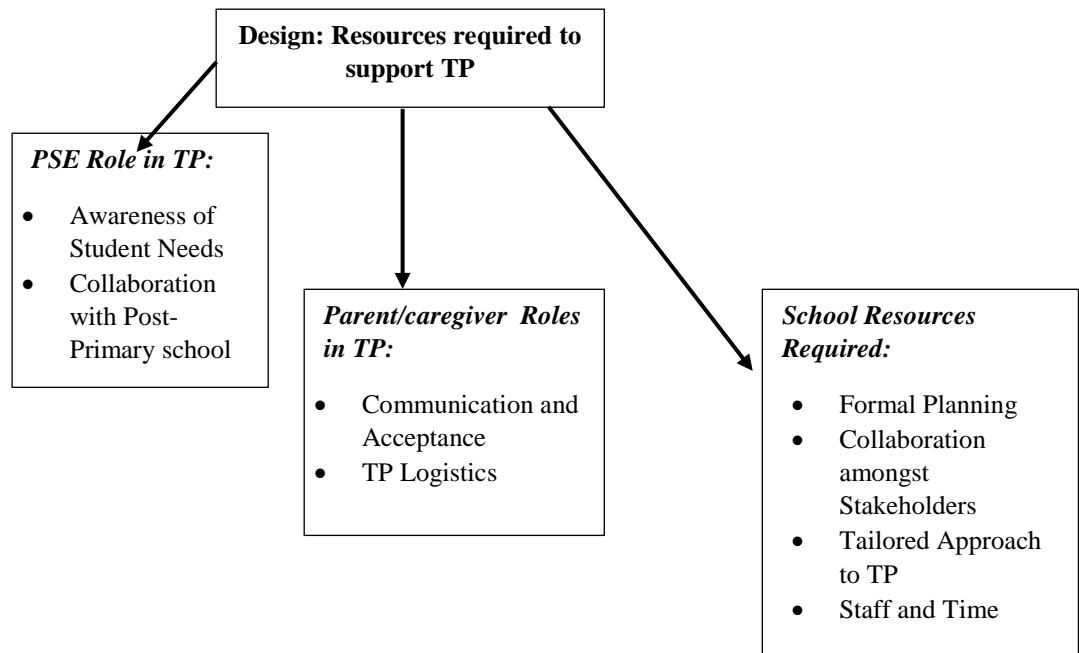
Discussion and Conclusion

The current study explored teacher perspectives on transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD in post-primary schools. This chapter will explore methodological strengths and limitations, directions for future research, research finding implications for educational psychologists and the current study's contribution to research in this area.

This study sought to explore post-primary school teacher perspectives around transition planning (TP) into Post-Secondary Education (PSE), the research question was as follows;

What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

This study produced a range of qualitative data which facilitated the exploration of teacher perspectives around transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD in the Munster region of Ireland.

Research Question: What are post-primary school teacher's experiences and perspectives on transition planning from post primary education to post-secondary education in Ireland for students with an ASD?

The use of AI facilitated the strengths based focus on all elements of the research question. All data were gathered under a strengths-based lens as a means of ensuring that the sensitivity of the situation was comprehended throughout. As a means of answering the research question, the current study explored teacher perspectives on existing school strengths relating to TP, perspectives on what the idea transition planning scenario might look like and the resources that might be required to achieve the ideal scenario. A variety of themes and sub-themes were identified within the data with the use of Thematic Analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006). The use of TA in the qualitative analysis of the current study supported the identification of conceptual patterns which highlighted teacher perspectives in the aforementioned areas. Such themes and sub-themes will be discussed.

A range of transition planning strengths were discussed. Overall, current school strengths of transition planning practices in the participating schools involved transition planning which:

- Were tailored to the needs of the student,
- Were collaborative (involving the student, their parents and the relevant professionals)
- Motivated the student (using their own interests)

Other school strengths explored which supported the transition planning process included a range of school facilities and programmes such as:

- LCA
- Work experience within the community
- Career guidance support
- Attendance at PSE open days/visiting PSE campuses

The ideal transition planning scenario included many of the aforementioned strengths being built upon as well as:

- Building a strong relationship with PSE institutions
- Collaborating more with PSE institutions
- Sharing relevant information with PSE institutions
- Resources such as; time, money, staff

The use of more resources in transition planning were also explored. Teachers reported that in order to reach the ideal scenario that a range of resources were required including:

- More planning around transitioning (more meetings and collaboration amongst all stakeholders)
- More time (to attend PSE institutions, to collaborate with other stakeholders, to attend meetings relating to TP, to engage with transition planning)
- More staff (delegation of a key transition planning staff member, more staff to give support and CG if required)
- Transition plans which are tailored to the needs of the individual
- Transition plans which are built upon strong links with PSE institutions and the feeder secondary school (meetings with PSE staff, attending campus and PSE staff attending secondary school site to discuss PSE options)
- Transition plans which share relevant information with PSE institutions (learner profiles, areas of need, areas of strength, previous achievements, interests, support networks etc.)

Parental resources required to support the ideal transition planning scenario were also explored and findings indicated that parents can (and do) support students in a range of ways to transition successfully into PSE including:

- Giving their child enough time to discuss and explore all PSE options
- Supporting the research component of PSE at home (with their child or by themselves or both)
- Providing their child with the assistive technology (AT) required to support learning in PSE.
- Visiting PSE campuses as required with their child

Implications for Future Research

Teacher perspectives observed in the current study highlighted the importance of student participation and collaboration amongst key stakeholders in the transition planning process. This perception has been alluded to in international research (Thompson et al., 2000; Stoner et al., 2007). As such, more research could focus on methods to encourage higher levels of student involvement in the transition planning process (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).

Much of the existing research in the area of transition planning has focused on the transitioning experiences of school leaving aged participants (Bell et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2009). Transition planning research has also focused on the transitioning experiences of students already in higher education (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Hatfield et al., 2017; Van Hees et al., 2015). While studies such as the Bell et al. (2017) examined the pre and post transition perceptions of secondary school students in their final year and the study by Hatfield et al. (2017) explored the transitioning experiences of both second and third level

students, more research is warranted in this area. The transition planning experiences of students currently in school as well as the transition planning experiences of school leavers is lacking in current literature. Furthermore, longitudinal research which explores the transition planning process from its inception approximately two years before the student leaves school would also be beneficial.

The participating schools in this study were located in the Munster region of Ireland and as such, further research on a national scale is warranted.

Finally, another area of research might include an exploration of the role of the SNA in the transition planning process. Previous research has partially addressed this area and has indicated that young people with disabilities and their parents expressed the advantages in having an SNA for their time in education (NCSE, 2017). However, difficulties were noted within the study around PSE institutions understanding of the role of the SNA in supporting students to access the curriculum through a range of means (NCSE, 2017). Furthermore, PSE institutions expressed some concern around the prospects of students becoming over-dependent on their SNA and as such, arresting their development in a range of daily-living and functioning areas (NCSE, 2017). PSE institutions reported that an unhealthy SNA dependence could also further hinder student's capacity for independence as well as their transition into PSE (NCSE, 2017).

Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

Wider research has consistently demonstrated that early transition support for individuals with an ASD is crucial (Bell et al., 2017; Cimera , Burgess & Wiley, 2013; Vanvergeijk et al., 2008; Wehman et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2016). In this vein, it can be argued that integrating a formal transition plan into a document such as an IEP at an early stage in secondary education to prepare for PSE could be beneficial to the school leaver (Bell et al., 2017). The role of the educational psychologist in this instance could revolve around linking stakeholders as maintaining their connection to ensure that the primary stakeholder, their parents or carers and the appropriate professionals are aware of their transitioning plan. Such a plan would be tailored to meet the needs and interests of the primary stakeholder and as such would assist in affording them opportunities to strengthen existing skills and establish new skills in required areas (Carter et al., 2013). The process of transitioning therefore can be facilitated by a range of factors including careful planning techniques and the facilitation of access to a range of services, accommodations and resources to aid with transitioning into PSE (Van Bergeijk et al., 2008).

Furthermore, research has suggested that the role of the educational psychologist could be to assist with establishing and maintaining community connections between the primary stakeholder in a community to assist the individual and their carers to access a range of opportunities, resources and services which are tailored to support the individual's strengths and areas of need (Carter et al., 2013).

The role of EPs could also be utilised to inform and encourage schools to engage more with the transition planning process. This input could be in the form of transition planning training around transition planning and assessment within the transition planning process. Leconte, (2006) suggested that transition assessment is efficacious as it acts as a vehicle in the process of gathering information with a view to making an informed decision. Leconte (2006) viewed the process of transition planning as an intervention method in and of itself. Equally, Sitlington et al., (2007) emphasised the importance of continued and coordinated assessment and monitoring of the transition planning process through the use of IEPs. In the USA, the use of SOPs, a form of assessment under the IDEIA act has also been cited as beneficial in the transition planning process (IDEIA, 2004; Sitlington et al., 2007). In the absence of such tangible guidelines within an Irish context, it could be argued that EPs could serve to support post-primary schools in the transition planning process.

In order to be most effective, transition planning has been advised as being an intrinsic component of a student's IEP (West, 1992). Furthermore, schools should holistically support the transition with the use of a range of programmes which cater to the development of skills in a range of areas to support the transition out of post-primary school (West, 1992).

Limitations of the current study

Limitations were noted within the current study. This study employed a medium sized sample of teachers (n=10). All teachers taught in one of three participating post-primary schools. A relatively small number of post-primary schools participated in this study (n=3), which decreased the external generalisability of the current study.

Although parents and students were invited to participate in this study, uptake rates were low. Therefore, it is a limitation of the current study that the voice of the student and/or their parent/caregiver was not elicited.

While non-probabilistic sampling is appropriate to employ in research exploring a specific area with limited time, staff and resources, the process of convenience sampling could be viewed as a limitation within the current study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Data collected within the current study could be skewed by the participating schools and their awareness of the research area. Most schools were reluctant to participate in the current study due to the nature of the research area and their own feelings of readiness to discuss this area in detail. Schools were primarily reluctant to engage with this study due perceptions of ambiguity around the adequacy of their approaches to transition planning. Schools which agreed to participate may have had a more concrete and practiced approach to transition planning, and as such may have been more confident in their own approaches thus affecting the reliability of the data in relation to teacher perspectives in this area.

Finally, social desirability bias involves under reporting less perceived desirable behaviours and attitudes and highlighting or reporting more perceived desirable behaviours and attitudes instead (Latkin, Edwards, Davey-Rothwell & Tobin, 2017). Social desirability bias has been noted in literature as a confounding variable which has the capacity to skew results, specifically research employing indirect questioning, interviewing and self-reporting as a means of data collection (Fisher, 1993; Leggett, Kleckner, Boyle, Dufield & Mitchell, 2003; Van de Mortel, 2008). The current study may have incurred some social desirability bias in the data collection process due to the potential for teachers' overall perceptions of the research and their cognisance of representing their school to effect the data they provided.

Conclusion

The current study explored transition planning into PSE for students with an ASD in post-primary schools in Ireland. Findings indicated that transition planning does occur on both formal and informal levels within post-primary schools in Ireland. Similar to previous literature, findings also indicated that post-primary schools were currently less likely to use formal documents such as IEPs to support the transition planning process (Bell et al., 2017). However, students were prepared for PSE in a range of manners; directly with the use of tailored interventions around areas of need to support life in PSE (e.g. daily living skills, organisational and social skills etc.) and indirectly developing a range of skills required for PSE with the use of modules within more general education programmes (e.g. work experience in LCA etc.).

Teacher perspectives on the role of parents/caregivers in the TP process for students with an ASD were noted with parents/caregivers being in a position to facilitate and support the TP process in a range of ways. The range of ways that they could support the TP process included; fostering independence from an early stage and supporting the development of a variety of skills at home (e.g. social, organisational and daily living skills), conduct more research into PSE options, linking in with and/or visiting PSE institutions where possible, considering the more practical perspectives of attending a PSE institution as well as considering their child's capabilities when reviewing PSE options.

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Appendices

Appendix A) Teacher Questions and corresponding AI 5D model

Stage	Question
Discovery	1. **What is working well in relation to transition planning into PSE for individuals with an ASD?** 2. **What have the positive experiences of the school been in relation to PSE transition planning?** 3. **Which school strengths come to mind when thinking about the transition planning process?** 4. **Which personal strengths as a teacher are you most proud of?** 5. **What strengths within the school can be built upon to assist with transition planning?** 6. **How can school values lend themselves to transition planning?** 7. **Which school strengths are do you feel apparent when you think about the use of IEPs?**
Dream	8. **How do you feel the school could ideally plan for transitioning?** 9. **What might the ideal PSE transition planning process look like?** 10. **What might the ideal use of IEPs look like within the transition planning process?**
Design	11. **What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal transition planning process?** 12. **What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal use of IEPs within the transition planning process?** 13. **What does the school need to do overall as an organisation to support the ideal transitioning scenario?** 14. **What needs to be done differently, if anything to reach an ideal transitioning scenario?** 15. **Which resources (already existing or required) will assist with bringing about this change?**

Semi Structured Interview (Teacher)

SCRIPT: 'Thanks very much for meeting with me today. I am just going to ask you a few questions today about your experiences as a teacher in relation to transition planning for students with an ASD/Autism. I am also interested in the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in this process. In order to research this area, I'm going to employ Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a means of exploring data which is strengths focused and not deficits focused which is beneficial for researching data of a sensitive nature, such as the data being collected for this study. In the spirit of the use of AI, we will be looking at the strengths within the school as well as focusing on what is going well in the transition planning process throughout this interview. Do you have any questions?'

Teacher Semi-Structured Interview

18. What is working well in relation to transition planning into PSE for individuals with an ASD?

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19. What have the positive experiences for the school been in relation to PSE transition planning?

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20. Which school strengths come to mind when thinking about the transition planning process?

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21. How does your school build upon the strengths of its students?

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22. Which personal strengths as a teacher are you most proud of?

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23. What already existing strengths within the school can be built upon to assist with transition planning?

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24.   How   can   school   values   lend   themselves   to   transition   planning?
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25.   Which school strengths do you feel are apparent when you think about the use of IEPs?

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26. How do you feel the school could ideally plan for transitioning?

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27. What might the ideal PSE transition planning process look like?

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28. What might the ideal use of IEPs look like within the transition planning process?

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29. What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal transition planning process?

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30. What needs to be done differently in order to achieve the ideal use of IEPs within the transition planning process?

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31. What does the school need to do overall as an organisation to support the ideal transitioning Scenario?

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32. What needs to be done differently, if anything to reach an ideal transitioning scenario?

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33. Which resources (already existing or required) will assist with bringing about this change?

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34. In what ways do you feel parents/guardians can positively support students to reach these goals?

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Any other comments:

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Appendix C) TA six step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Thematic Analysis: *Research Action Six Step Approach*

1.	**Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data**	The researcher gathered the data, transcribed the data and listened to the recordings repeatedly as a means of ensuring quality control and familiarising herself with the data. Data was then read and re-read.
2.	**Phase 2: generating initial codes**	An initial list of noted quotes was created and from this list, codes which identified features of the data were generated.
3.	**Phase 3: searching for themes**	Codes were then sorted and aligned with broader overarching themes that had been identified within the data.
4.	**Phase 4: reviewing themes**	Themes were reviewed and refined by looking at the coded extracts as well as the patterns within the themes. Codes or themes which were unmatched or unsuited were re-categorised or excluded. The thematic maps or overall patterns were then explored against the set of data and refined as a means of accurately exploring the data.
5.	**Phase 5: defining and naming themes**	Themes were refined and reviewed once more and collated with other themes of required. The meanings of themes were explored.
6.	**Phase 6: producing the report**	Fully explored, reviewed, refined and defined themes were then reported in a clear and concise manner with specific data highlighting and accompanying each theme.