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Exploring the Physical Education and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People

by

Chloé Woodhouse

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) experiences of young people who are or who have been 'looked-after', i.e. who have been under the care of their local authority at some point. In recent years, there has been unprecedented awareness within policy and research of the disadvantageous trajectories that children and young people in care often face; particularly in relation to their education, health and wellbeing (Sempik *et al.*, 2008). Despite the perceived capacity of sport/physical activity to contribute to young people's positive development (e.g. Holt, 2008; Bailey *et al.*, 2009), few studies have considered the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of looked-after children and young people (LACYP). Indeed, to date, there remains a dearth of research on LACYP's experiences of sport and physical activity in educational contexts. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to an increased understanding of this under-researched area.

In keeping with more recent attempts to place person and circumstance at the heart rather than the periphery of sociological research (Holland *et al.*, 2008) and in the interests of promoting the 'voices' of marginalised and vulnerable young people (e.g. Heath *et al.*, 2009; O'Sullivan and MacPhail, 2010), this thesis provides new insights into the ways in which LACYP experience PESS, and how their broader life circumstances impact and shape those experiences. In so doing, the study adopts a conceptual framework in the form of a social ecological model that possesses five levels of influence at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, community and public policy level (see McLeroy *et al.*, 1988).

Considering both adult and youth voices (generated through semi-structured surveys and interviews with young people, PE teachers and local authority professionals), the empirical data presented makes an original contribution to knowledge by foregrounding the multiple social ecological influences that are at play within LACYP's experiences of PESS. For example, the study highlights how the social ecological context for each LACYP presents notable difficulties in relation to personal and physical environment, pre-care experience, health and wellbeing, and educational engagement. What the resultant findings depict is that LACYP's lives are highly complex and multi-dimensional and should not be viewed in isolation from wider life circumstance. To this end, the study seeks to challenge the way

in which PESS is currently offered to LACYP (and others with complex needs) and therefore has implications for research, policy and practice. This includes issues with regards to the different perspectives of adults and young people; the appropriate training for PE teachers; and the methodological challenges of doing research with LACYP.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DNH	Department of National Heritage
DoH	Department of Health
ESB	Emotional, Social and Behavioural
HoC	House of Commons
IoE	Institute of Education
LACYP	Looked-After Children and Young People
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NCPE	National Curriculum for Physical Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGB	National Governing Body
NICE	National Institute of Care Excellence
OSHL	Out of Schools Hours Learning
PE	Physical Education
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PESS	Physical Education and School Sport
PESSCL	Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links
PESSYP	Physical Education, School Sport and Young People
PRT	Prison Reform Trust
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
VSH	Virtual School Headteacher

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and contribute to an increased understanding of the Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) experiences of young people who are, or have been, 'looked-after' in the care of their local authority (see section 1.1). In recent years, there has been unprecedented awareness within policy and research of the disadvantageous trajectories that children and young people in care often face; particularly in relation to their education, health and wellbeing (Sempik *et al.*, 2008). Given the perceived potential of sport/physical activity to contribute to young people's health, wellbeing and positive development (e.g. contributing to bone strength, enhancing self-confidence and engendering life skills – see Bailey *et al.*, 2009), it is argued that PESS activities may have an important role to play in looked-after children's educational experiences (Armour *et al.*, 2011).

In keeping with more recent attempts to place person and circumstance at the heart, rather than the periphery of sociological research (Holland *et al.*, 2008), and in the interests of promoting the 'voices' of marginalised young people (Heath *et al.*, 2009; O'Sullivan and MacPhail, 2010), this thesis provides new insight into some of the ways in which children and young people in care experience PESS, and how their broader life circumstances impact on these experiences. This chapter begins by discussing who looked-after children and young people (LACYP) are, what this more general demographic comprises, and how their life trajectories typically unfold. Following this, the aims of the study are outlined, as is the structure and content of the thesis itself. To this end, the chapter aims to provide an overview of the landscape across which LACYP's lives and lifestyles play out in 21st century England.

1.1 Who are LACYP?

In the UK, 'looked-after children' is the legislative term for all children and young people looked after by a local authority in accordance with the Children Act 1989. Under this Act, a local authority may remove a child or young person from their natural family setting by reason of a Care Order, Emergency Protection Order, under police protection or may provide them with accommodation (for more than 24 hours) with the agreement of the parents. Accommodation provided by local authorities is usually with foster carers or in residential homes. It is also important to note that where a child or young person is cared for full-time by relatives, they are not regarded as looked-after within the UK context; rather this is known as kinship care (see Hay, 2012; Winokur *et al.*, 2014).

Children and young people are considered looked-after up until the age of 18 years and remain under the care of local authorities until they are 25. Research from the UK and beyond suggests that there have been recent increases in the number of children being taken into care (e.g. Grey, 2017). From a local perspective, in March 2017 there were 72,670 looked-after children in the care of local authorities in England; an increase of 3% from the previous year (Department for Education (DfE), 2017a). This comprised 40,960 males and 31,710 females. Whilst children become looked after for a variety of reasons, the majority are admitted to care due to a complex interplay of vulnerabilities arising from their needs and their parents' ability to meet these needs (Brophy, 2006). Statistically, 61% of those individuals mentioned above were in care due to abuse or neglect, 15% due to family dysfunction, and the remaining 24% due to reasons pertaining to absent parenting, socially unacceptable behaviour, child disability, parent illness or disability, low income, or being a family in acute distress. Estimates suggest that three quarters of these children are looked-after in foster care, 6% reside with their parents and the remaining 20% of children are in various residential settings such as secure units, children's homes, hostels or residential schools. The majority of children in care are between the ages of 10-15 (39%), with those aged between 0-4, 5-9 and 16 years and older each making up approximately 20% of the looked-after population. Similar to the general population of all children in England, three quarters of those who are looked-after are from a White British background, those with a mixed or black ethnicity are slightly over represented and those from an Asian background are slightly underrepresented in the looked-after children population (DfE, 2017a).

It is common amongst the academic and grey literature, for the acronym 'LAC' to be used to refer to looked-after children (up until the age of 18). However, despite its use in policy documents and related publications, it has been noted that pejorative connotations associated with this term may suggest a deficit model (i.e., that these children may be 'lacking' in something) (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016) and using the term 'children' to refer to young people can be considered derogatory for those adolescents within the care system. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the term LACYP (Looked-After Children and Young People) will generally be used as an umbrella term for all those in local authority care. However, there will be times when it is necessary to specify differences between children and young people in the context of the discussion and so reference to either 'looked-after children' or 'looked-after young people' will also be made where relevant. Internationally, this population are also referred to, among other things, as 'children in care', 'care-experienced children', 'children looked-after' or 'youth in residential/foster care'. Despite these linguistic variations, much of this literature holds relevance across international borders, as a consequence of the greater needs and vulnerability of this population (Sempik *et al.*, 2008).

1.2 The contribution of this research

It has long been accepted that LACYP fall within the most disadvantaged groups in society and that they are often vulnerable individuals who are susceptible to poorer life chances, including their educational and life achievements (Stephenson, 2007; Amadeo and Marshall, 2013). Armour *et al.* (2011) remind us that we must not think of LACYP as a 'homogeneous group', as each looked-after child or young person in England will have experienced a different life trajectory. Indeed, the education, careers, health and wellbeing of LACYP is almost solely shaped by what happens to them at home, school and in the community. Yet, unlike the majority of the childhood population, LACYP have often suffered some form of abuse and/or neglect prior to their entry into care, making them among the most vulnerable children in Britain (Hayden, 2007; Sempik *et al.*, 2008). Alongside relative poverty, poor parenting, disrupted or stressful living conditions and/or family breakdown, this can equate to further disadvantage in due course, particularly in terms of health and education (Stein 2001; Hayden, 2007; Davies and Ward, 2011; Jackson *et al.*, 2011). To this end, research has shown that, as a group, LACYP are at risk of a

number of poor outcomes (e.g. poor health and low academic achievement) and it is agreed that action is needed to address these issues (Broad and Monaghan, 2003).

Although arguments exist for why sport should not be considered a panacea for all deep-rooted social problems (e.g. Coalter, 2008; Meek, 2014) academic literature suggests that sport and physical activity can be a provider of certain protective factors for marginalised and vulnerable young people. For example, an international body of research has focused on the benefits of experiencing positive sport and physical activities to facilitate reductions in youth crime (Collins and Kay, 2003), truancy and substance abuse (Shroeder, 2005), the reengagement of disadvantaged youth (Sandford *et al.*, 2008a) and the promotion of resilience (Holt, 2008). However, few studies have considered the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of LACYP, and, to date, none have explored the role of schools in providing such developments through Physical Education or School Sport. For example, studies have typically been focused on general leisure pursuits (e.g. Safvenbom and Sarndahl, 2000), extra-curricular activities (see Farineau and McWey, 2011) or sport and physical activity more broadly (Quarmby, 2014). Given the aforementioned potential of sport/physical activity to contribute to young people's positive development, and the perceived role that PESS may play here (Armour *et al.*, 2011), it has been suggested that more research is needed to further our understandings in this area (Quarmby, 2014).

1.3 Aim of this research

In light of the above, the aim of this research is to explore the PESS experiences of LACYP in the English context, in order to gain a better understanding of their attitudes towards, engagements with, and experiences of PESS participation. In so doing, the research examines three key questions:

1. What role does PESS play in the lives of LACYP in England?
2. What affects LACYP's motivations towards, participation in, and experiences of PESS?
3. Do LACYP's experiences of care impact upon their experiences of PESS?

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is organised into eight further chapters (outlined below) with accompanying references and appendices. *Chapter 2* locates the thesis in the context of existing literature pertaining to LACYP's broader life experiences, including their potential trajectories once they have left care. Several salient issues are recognised consistently within this field of literature (concerning, for instance, LACYP's placements, education, relationships and health) which for the purposes of this study provide important context when examining their PESS experiences. The chapter then explores the perceived value of PESS with regard to the existing literature on marginalised young people, before focusing explicitly on the international and UK studies that have considered sport, extra-curricular and leisure provision in the context of LACYP's lives.

Chapter 3 then provides an overview of the conceptual framework adopted for this study, focussing on a social ecological model pioneered by McLeroy *et al.* (1988) (see Figure 1, section 3.3). In order to provide relevant context, the discussion firstly explores previous theoretical underpinnings of research with LACYP, before focusing on the criticisms and potential benefits of ecological models more broadly. It then considers McLeroy and colleagues' (1988) approach to understanding an individual's behaviour and how this will be used in the context of the present study to understand LACYP's individual experiences. The five levels of individual and environmental determinants within the model, which have strongly informed thinking in this study, are then addressed. Given that the broadest of these determinants is the influence of public policy, and to fully integrate the social ecological model within this study, *Chapter 3* also includes a review of key UK public policies, papers and legislation from 1989 to 2017[1] that relate to LACYP. This includes policies that relate to LACYP's lives more broadly (i.e. from a social care perspective), those that relate specifically to LACYP's education and those that are centred more broadly around education and PESS for the wider childhood population (e.g. The National Curriculum for Physical Education). Set out in chronological order, this information is intended to facilitate an understanding of how policy has changed over time and how such changes may have been influential in shaping the PESS experiences of LACYP.

[1] The policy begins at 1989 since this was when LACYP were first acknowledged within public policy. It is set out in a chronological order and ends with the most recent policy update at the time of writing.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework of the research and the epistemological and ontological assumptions and beliefs which underpin it. The process of undertaking research with LACYP becomes a focal point of this chapter, with the discussion including debate on the importance of seeking 'youth voice', as well as the ethical considerations and challenges (specifically looking at issues of access) associated with researching this population. The participants of the study are introduced and the different phases of the research outlined, as are the perceived benefits and constraints of utilising the selected methods for collecting and analysing data. This chapter also includes a personal reflexive account of undertaking the study, highlighting my own vantage point (as researcher) and detailing the research journey I underwent. Leading on from the methodology chapter, *chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8* then report, analyse and discuss the findings relating to four major themes emerging from the data: (i) Environment and context; (ii) Wellbeing and behaviour; (iii) The perceived value of PESS and (iv) The influence of others. Each chapter draws on data from all phases of the research, to illustrate both the similarities and contrasts between the views of the LACYP and the professionals within their lives.

Looking more closely at the core 'data chapters', *Chapter 5* looks specifically at how the complex environment of the care context within which LACYP find themselves, can often indirectly impact upon the nature and quality of their PESS experiences. *Chapter 6* subsequently takes a more individualised outlook, recognising the role that the health, wellbeing and behaviour of LACYP can play in affecting their motivation and participation towards PESS. *Chapter 7* moves on to focus on the value afforded to PESS by the LACYP themselves as well as their wider network (i.e. schools), and how the perceived value associated with PESS can be influential in what they experience. Lastly, *Chapter 8* foregrounds the supportive network and relationships of LACYP and the, often unconscious, bearing they can have on LACYP's PESS experiences.

In bringing the thesis to a close, *Chapter 9* seeks to pull together the key findings of the preceding analysis chapters and offers a direct response to the study's initial aim of gaining a better understanding of the experiences of LACYP in relation to Physical Education and School Sport. In doing so, it considers what contribution this research makes to the broader field of study and how the findings presented here may help to shed light on the experiences of those who represent a 'hidden group' in sport and physical activity research

(Quarmby, 2014). In closing, the chapter outlines both the limitations and possibilities of the research and provides recommendations for future research in this field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter locates the thesis within the context of existing literature concerning looked-after children and young people (LACYP). In doing so, it explores significant research pertaining to both the experiences and outcomes of LACYP and the international perspective regarding the role of Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) within their lives. The chapter begins with a brief overview of key themes concerning LACYP's lived experiences and this is followed by a detailed account of the interrelated issues concerning their placements, wellbeing and education. To this end, the chapter goes beyond pure description by providing analytical insights into where PESS fits across the broader landscape of these young people's lives. This discussion provides the contextual backdrop against which the final part of the chapter is presented, which focuses on the role of sport, and PESS more specifically, for marginalised groups at the national and international level.

2.1 Key issues within LACYP's experiences

In recent years, LACYP have received substantial attention within UK government policy and legislation (Hayden, 2007) which has often been initiated by widely publicised accounts of child abuse (Stephenson, 2007; Shaw and Frost, 2013). The broadening of literature concerning LACYP has allowed us to better understand the lives, needs and experiences of this marginalised group; with consistent findings indicating that "looked-after children constitute one of the most severely troubled and disturbed groups in the general child and youth population" (Iwaniec, 2006a, p. 6). Indeed, in Selwyn's (2015a) review of the perspectives of LACYP on being in care, several studies highlighted that young people felt there was a lack of awareness amongst both professionals and peers of the issues they face.

The most abundant theme within the literature refers to the concept of stability; largely being focused around the permanence of LACYP placements but also on the stability of family, school and peer relationships. Gaining increasing momentum, but still limited, is the literature surrounding the health and wellbeing of LACYP, attributable perhaps to the well-documented evidence that they are susceptible to poorer health and more likely to

have special educational needs (Simkiss, 2012; Cameron *et al.*, 2015; Mannay *et al.*, 2015). Another fundamental issue that has gained significant interest in recent years is that of the educational trajectories of LACYP. Statistics continue to highlight the educational underachievement of this group (see section 2.4), yet schooling has been recognised as playing an important role in the stability of LACYP lives (Daniel and Wassell, 2002a). What is also apparent is that the education, health and wellbeing profiles of LACYP are significantly shaped by their home, school and community backgrounds which frequently demonstrate key markers of social deprivation, abuse and/or neglect (Stein, 2012). Evidence suggests that such issues may hinder cognitive and emotional development which, in turn, may have implications for educational outcomes (Berridge *et al.*, 2008; Jackson *et al.*, 2011; Stein, 2012). Of course, it would be naïve to assume that the adversity faced by LACYP is counteracted once they are in local authority care. That said, Berridge (2012) and Sebba *et al.* (2015) have argued that the care system is generally beneficial and not inherently damaging to educational outcomes.

An existing and growing body of research concerning LACYP has thus played an important part in raising the profile of this previously under-researched group and in contributing to a range of significant developments at the levels of policy procedures and practice (Winter, 2006; Hayden, 2007). Perhaps not surprisingly, the three main themes highlighted here, stability, health and education, have all featured heavily within recent policy developments - as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3 (section 3.4). These themes are multifaceted and interrelated and it is to a closer inspection of each one that we now turn.

2.2 Placement stability for LACYP

Often during their time in care, children and young people experience considerable disruption in their lives due to placement instability and placement movement (Clay and Dowling, 2004; Stein, 2005). Where this is not the case, the prospects of achieving academic success rise noticeably alongside emotional and financial stability, which are fundamental in creating and sustaining an environment where learning can thrive (APPG, 2012). This could perhaps be attributed to causations found between placement stability, placement choice, educational achievement and resilience (e.g. Atwool, 2006; Daniel, 2008;

Shaw and Frost, 2013). The stability of placements can also be linked to the stability of education and the chance of improved educational outcomes (Skuse *et al.*, 2001; Stein, 2001; APPG, 2012). This correlation between LACYP placements and education will be discussed in due course (section 2.4.1).

Research suggests that placements can break down for a variety of reasons, yet regardless of the cause, this can have a devastating impact on the self-esteem of LACYP (APPG, 2012). In the Children's Care Monitor survey 2011, it was noted that almost a quarter of LACYP were not given notice of change in their placement until the day of their move and 55% were given notice of a week or less (APPG, 2012). Shaw and Frost (2013) explain that placements that are intended to last but eventually break down, mainly occurs amongst older children and young people, those who have challenging behaviour and those who do not want to be in care. This often coincides with carers feeling unable to cope and the overall pressures of fostering, which can lead to a shortage of carers (Hayden, 2007). Furthermore, given that the breakdown of placements can worsen children and young people's mental health problems and increase the lilkihood of further placements breaking down, Hannon *et al.* (2010, p.14) suggest that "children need to receive high quality emotional and professional support and stable placements from the start of their care journeys to address these problems and build their resilience". For instance, Atwool (2006) discussed implications in relation to attachment and resilience for children in care in New Zealand, and noted that as the number of care placements increases, so too does the child's vulnerability. This is supported by Daniel (2008) who concluded that the need to have a secure attachment to a specific person is a protective factor that can increase a child's or young person's resilience. Moreover, Hannon and colleagues (2010, p.12) add:

> A care system that promotes stability, resilience and healthy psychological development for looked-after children, should be based around ... stable and high-quality placements that provide good parenting and are responsive to the child's needs, and a supported transition to independent adulthood.

Stein (2008) explains that such a context can be achieved through having a secure attachment by means of a positive, warm relationship, which lessens the chance of a placement breaking down. Secure attachment to one or two significant adults (not necessarily parents) can facilitate better outcomes later, it is suggested, by promoting resilience for looked-after children (Hannon *et al.*, 2010; Shaw and Frost, 2013). It is argued that this is best achieved by long-term foster placements or adoption, as these can offer stability and better meet emotional and educational needs (Stein, 2008; Shaw and Frost, 2013). Having the ability to forge relationships with other children and adults can also affect a child at school, helping to support their attendance and attainment (Hayden, 2007). Certainly, Selwyn (2015a) infers that LACYP value having the opportunities and support to make and keep friends, although the instability of placements often makes this difficult. This issue will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter, in relation to LACYP's educational experiences. For now, our attention turns to their health and wellbeing.

2.3 The health and wellbeing of LACYP

It is well-documented that children and young people within the care system have poorer levels of mental and physical health than their peers (e.g. Ford *et al.*, 2007; Hadfield and Preece, 2008; Skouteris *et al.*, 2011). Research shows that this is likely to be associated with the reasons behind young people initially being taken into care, with at least two thirds having one physical health concern and almost half suffering from mental health difficulties (Centre for Social Justice, 2014a; DfE, 2014a; Luke *et al.*, 2014; Selwyn, 2015b). Hayden (2007) reminds us that mental health problems are known to disproportionately affect groups of children who are already disadvantaged, with children's early experiences having long-term impacts on their emotional and physical health, as well as social development. Previous literature also asserts the link between experiences of abuse and neglect and ensuing mental health problems (e.g. McAuley and Davis, 2009), making LACYP particularly vulnerable. The Department of Health (DoH) (2015) explain that many mental health conditions in adulthood emerge in childhood and, if left untreated, may develop into conditions which need regular care. This is supported by Stein (2012, p.87) who explains that the complexity of LACYP's needs are often formed "within children's earlier damaging intra-family relations and the failure of the care system to compensate young people". Early problems in childhood cause greater need for concern,

since it is more likely that it will affect them longer term than those who display such problems in adolescence (Rutter *et al.*, 1998).

Research has shown that a third of LACYP have emotional and behavioural health that is considered to be a cause for concern, with LACYP in England six times more likely than children in the general population to be convicted of a crime or receive an out-of-court disposal (PRT, 2016)[2]. Challenging behaviour that can cause disruption at home and school can often be due to some form of mental health need, which may be labelled as Emotional, Social and Behavioural (ESB) difficulties, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) or Autism. A high proportion (57%) of LACYP are labelled as having special educational needs (SEN), most commonly of a social, emotional or behavioural nature (DfE, 2017b). These can inhibit an individual's social development, education and peer group relationships, as well as cause distress to other children (Hayden, 2007). Selwyn (2015a) reported that maintaining and developing positive and trusting relationships is at the heart of children and young people's concerns regarding their own wellbeing. An additional finding from that study was that LACYP also recognised the impact of frequent placement moves on their mental health, especially the loss of emotional stability and contact with trusted adult figures. Nonetheless, emotional and behavioural problems have also been associated with placement breakdown in the first instance (Hannon *et al.*, 2010). This highlights the complexity of LACYP's lives and the intersections between their health and placement stability.

It has recently been acknowledged that LACYP have difficulties accessing appropriate mental health services, reflecting the inadequacy of such services more generally for children and young people in England (PRT, 2016). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, a National Audit in 2014 revealed that there has been very little change in the emotional and behavioural health of children in care over the last three years when based on SDQ scores (The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)[3] (National Audit Office, 2014). To date, most measures of LACYP wellbeing have been objective, and often collected from carers or social workers rather than from the children and young people concerned

[2] Out-of-court disposals aim to ensure outcomes are both proportionate to the crime committed and effective in reducing the risk of further offending (Youth Justice Board, 2013).
[3] The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a child mental health questionnaire for children aged 2 to 17 years old (National Audit Office, 2014).

(Selwyn, 2015b). For example, Children's Services within the UK annually supply the government with data on their LACYP population, which is then published[4] to outline issues such as educational achievement, teen pregnancies, offending, and levels of employment or education after leaving care. The reason for this is so that local authority performance can be compared against national standards to assess the impact of policy changes (Selwyn, 2015b). This implies that the wellbeing of LACYP has often been represented by the absence of problems, rather than factors associated with resilience and wider contextual determinants. In this respect, Fattore *et al.* (2007) argue that children should be given more opportunities to gain experience that can enhance their wellbeing. For example, the school presents a context which can affect and be affected by a child's wellbeing, and so this chapter moves on to focus on the education of LACYP.

2.4 The educational trajectories of LACYP

In Western industrialised societies at least, education is a fundamental part of every child's life; a mechanism that is often responsible for determining an individual's future (Stein, 2012). Significant research over the past three decades, alongside the introduction of national statistics from 1999, has raised unprecedented awareness that LACYP are educationally disadvantaged compared to the general population of children and young people (e.g. Goddard, 2000; SEU, 2003; DCSF, 2009a; Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011; Stein, 2012; DfE, 2013a; Berger *et al.*, 2015; Sebba *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, it is clear that this represents a significant concern for LACYP themselves. Many have emphasised through research, for example, their disappointing educational experiences whilst they lived within the care system, suggesting that this left them vulnerable in terms of unemployment and social exclusion (Kahan 1979; Simon and Owen, 2006). This has contributed to the attention afforded to LACYP within policy, legislation and practice over the years (Hayden, 2007), whereby education has been cited as "a vital component of care planning for looked-after children" (DfE, 2012b, p.1). The disruption caused by a lack of familial stability often makes it difficult for young people to focus on their education. Consequently, they are less likely to complete primary or secondary education (Berlin *et al.*,

[4] The Office for National Statistics annually provide information on looked-after children at both local and national levels. The figures are based on data collected from all local authorities in England. This publication is known as a Statistical First Release (SFR) and is made available on the Gov.uk website (DfE, 2017a).

2011; Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011; Sebba *et al.*, 2015). In 2015, 14% of LACYP achieved five or more A*-C GCSEs or equivalent, including English and mathematics; an increase on the 12% who achieved this in the previous year. However, this compares to 53% of children who are not looked-after (PRT, 2016). Stein (2012) argues that these measures of how well the care system is performing are both simplistic and limited, since they do not take into account the poor starting points these young people have upon entry to care.

Theoretical and empirical explanations have been posited in recent years for the reason behind LACYP's poorer educational trajectories. For example, the Social Exclusion Unit report *A Better Education for Children in Care* (SEU, 2003) identified five key factors as to why LACYP were achieving significantly below average: (i) placement instability; (ii) too much time out of school; (iii) insufficient help with education; (iv) primary carers not being expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development; and (v) many children having unmet, emotional, mental and physical health needs. In addition, Shaw and Frost (2013) concluded that there are three main causes of educational disadvantage for LACYP: pre-care disadvantage, placement instability and system abuse[5]. Similarly, other research has attributed poor educational experiences to the limited and variable access to the educational system (Zetlin *et al.*, 2006); home and school placement instability (Pecora, 2012; Sebba *et al.*, 2015); and fragmented relationships (Franzen and Vinnerljung, 2006; Berlin *et al.*, 2011). More recently, a large-scale project by Sebba and colleagues (2015) identified the key factors contributing to the low educational outcomes of LACYP as being the length of time in care, placement changes, school changes, school absence, school exclusions, placement type, school type, and level of educational support. According to Hayden (2007), educational underachievement may be attributed to wider factors comprising of inadequate corporate parenting[6], care environment, failure to prioritise education, inappropriate expectations, placement instability, disrupted schooling and pre-care experiences. Research in the field has therefore primarily attributed such shortfall in academic achievement to LACYP experiencing disadvantaged backgrounds before entering care, placement instability whilst

[5] System abuse is otherwise referred to as the experiencing of stigma associated with being looked-after, such as being taken out of class to attend a review or having to request permission to stay at a friend's house (Shaw and Frost, 2013).

[6] The corporate parents of LACYP is formed by the entire local authority, employees and partner agencies who are responsible for providing the best possible care, aspirations and safeguarding of LACYP (Dixon *et al.*, 2015).

in care, time out of education, and insufficient support for education. This complex picture is supported by Stein (2012, p.94) who infers that "the reasons for looked-after children and young people's underachievement are multifaceted and require an understanding of their life course".

That said, it is important to recognise, that some children may (and do) achieve higher levels in their education when in care (Wade *et al.*, 2011). This is possibly due to the more positive experiences they are receiving since the introduction of recent educational initiatives such as Personal Education Plans (PEP) and Designated Teachers[7] (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). More recently, it has been suggested that the introduction of Virtual School Headteachers (VSH) and Pupil Premium funding have led to important improvements, with better educational outcomes for LACYP. In the UK, the VSH has a statutory role in the education of LACYP (DfE, 2014a) and aims to encourage more stringent monitoring and interventions regarding LACYP education trajectories. This is partly achieved through use of a PEP. Nonetheless there remains consensus amongst practitioners and academics alike that more could be done to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of a minority of LACYP who may present challenges (PRT, 2016). In particular, there are concerns regarding the assumptions that are made about what it means to be "looked-after" (Manney *et al.*, 2017). For example, Selwyn's (2015a) review of the literature surrounding the views of LAYCP in relation to their care journey, recognised the issue of stigma and negative labelling within schools; with some LACYP thinking that teachers and peers mistakenly assume that children are placed in care due to their own poor behaviour or fail to understand the difficulties they faced before entering care and how this could affect their behaviour. Within the review, school generated mixed feelings for LACYP, with some emphasizing that it was a place to establish and maintain friendships while others associated it with social exclusion and bullying (Selwyn, 2015a).

With these things in mind, the aim of the following section is to focus on the possible educational trajectories of LACYP, to provide context to this study as it seeks to understand the role PESS might play in an individual's journey through the care system. Drawing on the SEU report (2003), and the aforementioned academic literature, it focuses

[7] The role of the VSH, PEPs, Designated Teacher and Pupil Premium is discussed further in relation to policy in Chapter 3.

on perhaps the most pivotal influencing factors within LACYP educational experience: educational stability; disengagement/disaffection from school; and a lack of support for education. In doing so, the chapter continues by addressing the possible outcomes of such trajectories.

2.4.1 Educational stability

As noted, placement stability has received significant attention in attempting to understand the poorer educational experiences of LACYP (Skuse *et al.*, 2001; SEU, 2003; Clay and Dowling, 2004; Stein, 2005; Hayden, 2007; Hannon *et al.*, 2010; APPG, 2012; Shaw and Frost, 2013). For many LACYP, school life is frequently disrupted, making their education a challenging process. Having so many distractions in their home life, such as placement moves and complicated relationships, has been associated with difficulties in concentrating at school (Selwyn, 2015a). Clay and Dowling (2004) contend that education is not given sufficient priority when planning for placements and future options. For instance, those with the most placement moves tend to experience the worst outcomes, particularly in relation to education, training and employment (Jones *et al*, 2011; Prison Reform Trust, 2016). Ensuring high quality placements, therefore, can significantly benefit LACYP's experiences of education and future aspirations to continue to further and higher education, training and employment (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Stein, 2009; DfE, 2012a).

Shaw and Frost (2013) argue that changes in a child or young person's placement can cause discontinuity in education (having to change school), loss of information, decrease in self-esteem and a loss of social networks, all of which can negatively affect their health and reduce their resilience. This is supported by the PRT (2016) who note that disruption associated with placement moves can exacerbate existing problems of social exclusion and vulnerability to bullying. Such complexity and disruption within LACYP's lives has been cited as causing periods of low attendance for some individuals (Selwyn, 2015a). Jackson and colleagues (2011) imply that it should be assumed that children in long-term care will remain in placement and education until the age of 18, which should also be evidenced in

their Pathway Plans[8]. Indeed, Hannon *et al.* (2010) stress that avoiding disruption to education by keeping LACYP in the same school, with the same friends, has a strong association with their resilience. Local authorities in the UK are required to consider any implications of placement moves in the disruption of education. This is because they can act as a source of security and stability, providing opportunities for constructive contact with peers and supportive adults (Gilligan, 1998), as well as facilitating the development of self-esteem and confidence; particularly through non-academic qualifications such as sport or music (Dixon *et al.*, 2004). Jackson and colleagues (2011) argue that more should be done to help and encourage young people to participate in social, leisure and volunteering based activities and projects that are to remain stable despite any placement changes; providing LACYP with qualifications, experience and income. In turn, having positive school and community experiences can act as a protective factor against risk and help to develop resilience (Daniel, 2008). For young people who have become disengaged with their education, positive school experiences are notably important and it is to this discussion we move to next.

2.4.2 Disengagement/disaffection from school

The notion of 'disaffection' is a complex and multi-dimensional concept and one that is difficult to define (Sandford and Duncombe, 2011). Particularly among youth, disaffection is commonly associated with disengagement from education and puts individuals at-risk of negative outcomes that can lead to social exclusion. Having SEN, or other needs that have not been met, is just one of the issues associated with disaffection-related behaviour at school (Hayden, 2007). Other issues include: child abuse/poor parenting, disrupted or stressful living conditions, disruptions associated with being in care and relative poverty, all of which are common for LACYP (Hayden, 2007). For example, the PRT (2016) argue that early life trauma can manifest itself in challenging behaviour which, in turn, can put LACYP at greater risk of exclusion from mainstream education.

[8] The 1989 Children Act requires that a Pathway Plan must be prepared for all young people leaving care. The plan includes actions that must be taken by the responsible local authority, the young person, their parents, their cares and other agencies, so that each young person is provided with the services they need to enable them to achieve their aspirations and make a successful transition to adulthood (DfE, 2015).

Stephenson (2007) argues that the process of detachment from a mainstream setting can lead to social exclusion. Therefore, for vulnerable young people such as LACYP, becoming detached from education may inhibit them in their adult lives. When referring to detachment from education, we are referring to the inability of the child to cope and remain within mainstream educational settings (Stephenson, 2007). As the relationship between a young person and a school breaks down, a gradual detachment can occur. For LACYP, school may serve as one of the only stable entities in their lives and so maintaining this relationship becomes essential (Hannon *et al.*, 2010). Stephenson (2007) notes that detachment accelerates when young people reach 14; an age when engagement with the care and criminal justice system is at its highest. The process of detachment from schooling manifests itself in a variety of ways including through school exclusion (fixed-term or permanent), absenteeism (authorised or unauthorised (truanting) and/or being statemented (with SEN) (Stephenson, 2007).

Exclusion through behaviour or being statemented as having SEN suggests that the problem is located within the child and therefore the child will be removed. By grouping young people who significantly underachieve or behave disruptively, alongside a range of other adversities, can be a significant risk factor for adverse outcomes such as social exclusion or not being in education, employment or training (NEET) (Stephenson, 2007). To avoid this, it has been suggested that schools should find ways of enabling LACYP to experience success and build on their self-esteem and self-competence (Cameron *et al.*, 2015). However, Sebba and colleagues (2015) profess that LACYP are at an increased risk regarding school absence and exclusion, with looked-after girls being more than three times as likely to be permanently excluded (Viner and Taylor, 2005). Moreover, Pearce and Hillman (1998) argue that once a child has been excluded, their vulnerability increases, particularly from the prospect of placement breakdown.

As noted above, the government's other key performance indicator for LACYP is absence from school. Truanting involves wilfully missing school without 'parental' consent or knowledge, often displaying traits of anti-social behaviour (Stephenson, 2007). Reid (1999) argued that reducing truancy can help to reduce offending and social exclusion. If LACYP enter the custodial system whilst at school, it increases their chances of instability at school, consequently resulting in detachment to mainstream education (Stephenson, 2007). In this

instance, it is likely that LACYP are known across a range of different agencies such as youth justice, social services and mental health, i.e. CAMHS (Hayden, 2007). For example, breaches of authority that lead to school exclusion commonly manifest as criminal offences such as theft, criminal damage or assault (Stephenson, 2007). Hayden (2007) notes that a LACYP behaving in such a way should be a warning that something is wrong, and therefore there is a need to pay particular attention to the possible underlying causes located within the family, school and community; targeting only one area of the young person's life is unlikely to be sustainable. It is therefore possible to understand the correlation between school exclusion and offending behaviour, especially since problem behaviour in school is one of the associated risk factors for criminal involvement and poor prospects when older (Farrington and Welsh, 2007; Hayden, 2007; Stephenson, 2007). Jackson and colleagues (2011) explain that irregular school attendance should be noted as a possible indication that the child could be suffering from serious family problems and information on unexplained absences should be closely linked to safeguarding policies in schools. The APPG (2012) make reference to Baldwin (1998) to suggest that a positive relationship between a LACYP and their carer is important in helping young people who truant and who are excluded from school in returning to education. Given that the behaviour of these children can often be attributed to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)[9] and not simply the characteristics of the child, Jackson *et al.* (2011) recommend that local authorities and children's services should, where possible, keep LACYP in mainstream education but with additional support.

We have already established that the challenging behaviour of LACYP can be linked to disruption and upheaval associated with placement moves. Additional factors include a lack of a consistent social worker and the reasons for entering care in the first place (SEU, 2003; Stephenson, 2007). Inconsistent and inadequate parenting during the early years and the failure to nurture and provide boundaries (Shaw and Frost, 2013) is something which stems from Bowlby's (1953) theory of attachment. This means LACYP may experience difficulties controlling their behaviour and understanding the consequences of their actions. Sinclair (2005) suggests the need to provide protective factors, in order to increase

[9] "Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are situations which lead to an elevated risk of children and young people experiencing damaging impacts on health, or other social outcomes, across the life course" (Allen and Donkin, 2015, p.40.)

the chances of improved outcomes for those children otherwise at risk of poor ones. Protective factors within the lives of LACYP identified by research include: a secure base (Gilligan, 1997; Daniel and Wassell, 2002a; Armour *et al.*, 2011); enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy (Rutter, 1985, 1999; Gilligan, 1997; Armour *et al.*, 2011); and positive, supportive relationships (Daniel and Wassell, 2002a; Atwool, 2006; Armour *et al.*, 2011). Interestingly, these are factors that have also been identified as being perceived benefits of participation in physical education and school sport (e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 2009) and this highlights the potential of PESS to contribute to the positive development of LACYP, a subject to which we will return (see section 2.7). For now, however, the discussion moves on to discuss the suggested lack of support given to LACYP's education.

2.4.3 Lack of support for education

It has been suggested that schools failing to help young people in care to reach their full potential may significantly impact the educational attainment of those concerned (Stein, 2012). The APPG (2012) contend that this can often be due to schools having low aspirations for the educational attainment of looked-after children. Selwyn (2015a) found the educational prospects of LACYP to be a concern, with many teachers having preconceived ideas about what they could achieve because of their care history, undermining their potential and self-confidence. LACYP themselves felt that there was little recognition within schools of the complexities they faced in their lives, suggesting that teachers needed additional training to know how to support looked-after children (*ibid*). Interestingly, it has been noted that additional training may also be required for other professionals within the lives of LACYP. Jackson and Hojer (2013), for example, indicate that social workers do not engage fully with the educational attainment of LACYP, and tend to associate poor achievements to factors within the child, rather than questioning the systems and processes around the young person's education. It is suggested that social workers therefore need a better understanding of the education system (Sebba *et al.*, 2015) and teachers an understanding of the care system (Jackson *et al.*, 2011). Since many LACYP have a history of disadvantage prior to entering care, planned and well organised multi-professional work is clearly necessary to address these disadvantages and ensure educational difficulties do not accumulate once they are in care (Shaw and Frost, 2013).

According to the Scottish Office Education Department, parental attitudes to school or their levels of education can affect children's attendance and efforts at school (Stephenson, 2007). In a report by Barnardo's (2013) the organisation explains that parents and carers of children not in the care system have much higher aspirations for what their child will achieve at school, giving them the support and encouragement needed. Carers who come from sound educational backgrounds and who recognise the need to prioritise the educational progress of children in their care, can therefore play a central role in raising both the educational aspirations and achievements of looked-after children (APPG, 2012). Foster carers and residential support workers should understand that promoting educational achievement is a key part of their role; if they are not able to provide educational support due to their own low level of education then they should receive additional help and guidance from teachers (Jackson *et al.*, 2011). Certainly, according to the APPG (2012), schools that work closely with foster carers and involve them in all aspects of school life are far more likely to see a continuance of progress outside of the classroom.

As we have seen, some children may achieve more highly in their education by being in care (Wade *et al.*, 2011). Evidence shows that VSH, PEPs and Designated Teachers can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of looked-after children, especially since some LACYP saw their entry to care as beneficial to their education (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). However, despite the VSH post becoming statutory in all local authorities (DfE, 2013a), there is evidence to suggest that young people are often not aware of their PEPs, let alone involved in their implementation and progress (APPG, 2012). This is supported by Brodie and colleagues (2011) who conclude that there is no clear evidence between recent initiatives such as PEPs, and improved educational outcomes; suggesting a need for better understanding of young people's experiences at school and as learners, alongside recognition of other emotional health and wellbeing needs.

2.5 Outcomes of young people leaving care

LACYP are not simply affected by their time in care, but their experiences can continue to have an impact on the rest of their lives. For example, a range of negative life course events likely influenced by educational disadvantage are more prevalent in individuals who have been in care (Viner and Taylor, 2005; Berlin *et al.*, 2011). Indeed Stein (2006a, 2009, 2012) explains that, as a group, young people leaving care may have a more problematic journey to adulthood, as it often occurs at a much earlier stage than it does for their peers. They are among the most vulnerable individuals within our society, at risk of experiencing poorer outcomes than other young people of a similar age (Clay and Dowling, 2004). This can include homelessness, being NEET, substance use and criminal behaviour (Broad and Monaghan, 2003; Stein, 2006a, 2008, 2012; Barnardos, 2013). According to the Parliament Justice Committee (2012), 23% of the adult prison population has previously been in care, even though LACYP and care leavers account for less than 1% of the general population. Moreover, of the young people in the youth justice system, more than 40% have been in local authority care at some point (Barnados, 2013). Pinkerton (2006) implies that young people who have low expectations for the future may regard themselves as having little chance in mainstream society and, by way of an alternative, turn to risk-taking behaviours instead. It is argued that those at risk of participating in criminal activities, because they face multiple adversities, are less likely to have accumulated the necessary skills at school or through family to steer them away from negative pressures, such as effective decision making and planning skills (Stephenson, 2007). For young people leaving care, the increased risk of teenage pregnancy and subsequent child removal can mean that intergenerational care experiences occur (see Roberts, 2017). Combined with a lack of emotional and material support and dependence on benefits (Stein, 2006a), it is perhaps not surprising that care leavers are over-represented in the homeless, prison, mental health and learning-disabled populations (DCSF, 2009a), leaving them more susceptible to social exclusion later in life (Wade and Munro, 2008; DCSF, 2009a). For instance, Stephenson (2007) notes that serious or persistent offenders, those with ESB difficulties, those permanently excluded from school, those who have been looked-after and those who have at some time been homeless, have overlapping characteristics that are rooted in poverty and social exclusion. With regard to LACYP, Blome (1997) suggests that this is because some young people leaving care do not receive the support that a 'good parent' would be expected to provide, with Aldgate (1994) similarly implying that the continued availability

of most family homes as a 'safety net' to which young people can return is not available for many care leavers.

Improving outcomes for care leavers has remained a prominent government priority after it was suggested that being in care can transform their lives and provide them with good life chance opportunities (DfE, 2012a). In their research, Cashmore and Paxman (2006) pointed out that a combination of stable relationships, jobs and social networks are key to ensuring a successful transition to independance. Despite recent policy developments aimed at assisting the journey from care to adulthood, it seems that care leavers continue to experience compressed and accelerated transitions (Ward, 2008; Stein, 2012); in particular, facing difficulties and changes to personal, social, financial, domestic and educational circumstances (Montgomery *et al.*, 2006; Leonard, 2011). How well young people can cope with this transition to adulthood can be largely influenced by what happens to them in their families, schools and communities before and during their time in care (Stein, 2012). Therefore, by improving and enhancing LACYP's developmental opportunities while they are in school, there is the potential to improve their life chances once they leave care and school.

Historically, the relationship between UK care leavers and post-compulsory education has also proved problematic. For example, those in foster care are half as likely as their peers to have a university degree or equivalent by age 26 (Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011). As Stein (2012, p.96) notes: "Care leavers are more likely not to be in post-16 education, employment and training than young people in the general population". This probability is increased by exclusion and truanting at school which can prevent qualifications being achieved (DfES, 2003b). Hayden (2007) argues that young people who entered care due to socially unacceptable behaviour are the most likely to be NEET at age 19. This is further supported by Stephenson (2007) who argues that becoming detached from education can result in a greater chance of delinquency and non-participation in post-16 schooling (Stephenson, 2007). Despite significant changes in recent years to related legislation and statutory guidance, practice across the care system does not consistently support high levels of achievement in education for young people in and from care (The Who Cares Trust, 2012). Taylor's (2006) study, recommends that both practical and emotional support are necessary for those in care and after they have left. With this in mind, it has been

suggested that engagement in physical activity for LACYP could contribute to building resilience and self-esteem, in addition to developing the skills necessary to cope with life experiences once they have left care (Gilligan, 2000). Such ideas are expanded on in the subsequent section.

2.6 Sport, physical activity and PE for marginalised groups

There is a significant amount of literature which suggests that sport and physical activity can be a provider of developmental qualities, not just for LACYP but for the wider society (e.g. Bailey, 2005). However, it is important to note that the term 'sport' carries numerous connotations and that it is often used interchangeably or as an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of physical activities and exercise. Therefore, for the purposes of this review, 'sport' will be used in its broadest sense, with varying terms used only in reference to specific literature.

The notion of sport as an educative tool has been viewed by policy-makers, practitioners, and academics alike (e.g. Green, 2008; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Bird *et al.*, 2013) as an agent for stimulating personal and social change, particularly within the lives of young people (Nichols, 2007; Coalter, 2008; Jarvie, 2008). PAT 10[10], or more accurately the research that underpinned PAT 10 by Collins *et al.* (1999), identified sport's potential in relation to health, regeneration, crime reduction and social exclusion. More recently, research has pointed to the offering of sport for marginalised populations as a useful mechanism within the provision of social welfare services (Coakley, 2002; Green, 2008; Vinson and Parker, 2013). Others render sport as a diversionary tool or deterrent to anti-social behaviour (Coakley, 2002; Nichols, 2007; Green, 2008) with the view that participation in sport provides a legitimised alternative to violence (Hylton and Totten, 2013) or a lawful form of excitement (see Nichols, 2007; Parker, *et al.*, 2014; Morgan and Parker, 2017; Parker *et al.*, 2017). For example, for young people within the youth justice system, the provision of sport has been recognised as imperative for the positive effects in

[10] Policy Action Team (PAT) 10 was part of 17 other Policy Action Teams that were set up at the end of 1998 to assist with the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2001). PAT 10's specific focus was on the potential that sport and arts can make towards neighbourhood renewal.

increasing children and young people's self-esteem, reducing anxiety, as well as improving their health (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

An international body of research has focused on the many benefits for young people of sport participation. For example, it has been noted that experiencing positive sport and physical activities can improve health (Long and Carless, 2010), reduce youth crime (Collins and Kay, 2003), help address truancy and substance abuse (Schroeder, 2005); re-engage disadvantaged youth (Sandford *et al.*, 2008a); promote resilience and positive development (Holt, 2008), and generate social capital (Bailey, 2005). Furthermore, it has been suggested that participation in sport can help to facilitate young people's positive, social and moral development through 'character building' and the acquisition of life skills (Sandford *et al.*, 2006; Sandford and Duncombe, 2011). Schroeder (2005) adds that sport can mimic many of the challenges found in everyday life, thereby enabling young people to learn the life skills they need to deal effectively with such challenges. This is something which proves to be particularly important for young people with fewer opportunities who may require extra support to develop their identity, social skills and ability to cope with life's challenges, in addition to facilitating the process of social inclusion (Schroeder, 2005) – something which is equally applicable to LACYP. However, the empirical and theoretical basis for the potential of sport to act as a panacea for deep-rooted social problems, is somewhat contested as being based on presumption and implication, rather than evidence (see Bloyce and Smith, 2010; Coalter, 2008, 2010, 2013; Dacombe, 2013).

Sport and physical activity within an educational context has also received significant attention for the potential palliative qualities of sport discussed above. In the last decade or so, the provision of Physical Education (as a compulsory National Curriculum subject) and School Sport (as voluntary extra-curricular activity) has been high on the educational and political agenda; part of policy discussions that sees sport not only as a mechanism for encouraging healthy active lifestyles (e.g. Every Child Matters, 2005 as outlined in Chapter 3) but also as "a tool for social good" in its capability to display "character building, discipline, morality, ethical behaviour and the reduction in social exclusion" (Girginov, 2008, p.50). Such arguments are based upon the grounds that PESS has the potential to provide valuable contributions to children, school and the wider community (Bailey *et al.*, 2009). Fejgin (1994) adds that PESS provides experiences that are not met elsewhere by

the curriculum. For example, research has implied that students value PE for providing a break from the rest of the school day because of the frequent opportunities to talk and engage with others (e.g. Morey and Goc Karp, 1998; Cothran and Ennis, 2001). In 2004, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament declared it the 'European Year of Education through Sport', with the main campaign to expose to the public the importance of sport within an educational context. Given the capability of physical activity and sport in promoting pro-social skills and behaviour, PE is considered (by some) a valuable tool to effectively re-engage disaffected pupils (e.g. Sandford and Duncombe, 2011). Likewise, extra-curricular activities such as school sport have also been recognised as significant for contributing to a child's development. For example, participating in extra-curricular physical activities away from an educational context plays an integral part for enhancing learning experiences within PE (Ntoumanis, 2001; 2005), positively affecting cognitive, affective and social developments (Bailey *et al.*, 2009). Further evidence also implies that physical activity can provide children and young people with substantive health benefits and improved psychological and behavioural outcomes, as well as build resilience, develop a spirit of inclusion and contribute to team-building skills (e.g. Fredricks and Eccles, 2005; Maynard *et al.*, 2009; Janssen and LeBlanc, 2010). In addition, it has been noted that a positive relationship exists between physical activity levels and academic attainment (Public Health England, 2014). Cameron and colleagues (2015) highlight the importance of informal learning outside the curriculum, and suggest that it can be provided through spare time activities or school's extra-curriculum programme. In a longitudinal study of almost 4000 students, taking part in extra-curricular activities was associated with low substance use and depression, higher academic aspiration and attainment and positive attitudes to school (Darling, 2005). Although there was no conclusive evidence as to the length of participation and which extra-curricular activities yielded certain outcomes, the findings suggest that participation in extra-curricular activities supports a general sense of psychological wellbeing.

2.7 Sport, physical activity and PE in the lives of LACYP

So far within this chapter, we have established that as one of the most disadvantaged groups in society, LACYP are at risk of a range of adverse social, educational and health outcomes (Sempik *et al.*, 2008). Within the UK and beyond, concerns regarding the systematic underachievement of this group have been directed at narrowing the 'outcomes gap' by promoting involvement in activities that support physical, social and psychological development. Schools are increasingly recognising that they cannot consider a child's educational requirements without considering the impact of broader issues around physical, social and emotional wellbeing (DfES, 2005). Despite the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009b) somewhat optimistically rendering sport an opportunity to alleviate previous levels of disadvantage, some young people are faced with obstacles and barriers that hinder their involvement in sport. Examples include a lack of motivation, difficulties in accessibility and/or a shortage of professionals in recognising the needs of marginalised young people (Schroeder, 2005). It has also been noted that LACYP are at an increased risk of developing serious health conditions, since being overweight or obese is more prevalent in LACYP than children within the general population (Skouteris *et al.*, 2011). Quarmby (2016) states that due to their disadvantaged background, it is likely that LACYP would already have been excluded from some physical activities prior to entering care. As such, LACYP have been identified as "one of the groups most in need of regular engagement in physical activity for health", yet they remain least likely able to access PESS provision (Armour *et al.*, 2011, p. 221).

It is argued that regular engagement in physical activity may help LACYP raise self-esteem, foster resilience and develop friendships (Gilligan, 1999; 2000). Murray (2013) states that with an increased policy interest in the wellbeing of children in the UK, priority should be afforded to ensuring LACYP are provided with every opportunity to ameliorate their disadvantaged status. In several of the studies reviewed by Selwyn (2015a), LACYP reported that having encouragement, opportunities and resources to have hobbies and do fun and exciting things was important in giving them a sense of normality. In this respect, it has been argued that LACYP should have access to enrichment activities "equal to their peers" (DfES, 2007, p.10). However, little is known about LACYP's engagement, facilitators or barriers associated with physical activity (Quarmby and Pickering, 2016). Further, research by Murray (2013) has highlighted that most local authorities in the UK

do not gather data on LACYP's involvement in physical activity, thereby eliminating any possibility to make comparisons with the rest of the youth population. Historically, local authorities in England have tended to rely on the provision of physical activity and sport within the school context which carries the assumption that everyone accesses school. As we have seen, this is not always the case.

Quarmby (2016) asserts that time out of school means LACYP often miss out on school-based sport activities. Yet it is argued that schools, in addition to children's services and youth services, can play an important part in supporting children in care to develop aspirations and their own interests (PRT, 2016). There is also scope for GPs and other professionals to consider referring LACYP for a wider range of interventions and services to support their mental health and wellbeing, such as sport (DoH, 2015). Facilitating LACYP's participation equal to their peers and offering them the chance to enjoy the benefits of sport, may enhance not only their physical wellbeing, but their psychological wellbeing also (Murray, 2013). For example, Hollingworth's (2012) study noted that sport/physical activity can be integral to the development of social capital, resilience and identity for LACYP, as well as contributing to emotional, mental and physical health. Likewise, being given opportunities to participate in community activities was recognised by LACYP as an important way of developing social skills, confidence and self-esteem (Selwyn, 2015a). In turn, research by Quarmby (2014) found that LACYP residing in residential homes considered sport as a means to a particular end; a context where they could spend time with friends and develop social capital. A Norwegian study also noted the positive influence of friends for LACYP's engagements in activities such as sport (Safvenbom and Samdahl, 2000).

Within the context of the disproportionate criminalisation and stigmatisation of LACYP, the PRT (2016) imply that statutory guidance must recognise the important role local authorities can make in tackling negative serotypes, by raising awareness about the needs, circumstances and characteristics of LACYP. They argue this is central to enabling LACYP to succeed in the "wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills in order to have an enjoyable childhood and successful adult life", as referred to in the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations (DCSF, 2010, p.1). In a study of the risk and protective factors associated with offending, Schofield *et al.*, (2014) collated qualitative and

quantitative data from 100 young people (aged 14-19 years) from four local authorities in the UK, to identify risk and resilience factors associated with an increase or decrease in the likeliness of offending by LACYP. Based on known research for factors associated with offending, risk and resilience, factors were considered across four psychosocial areas: individual, family, education and community. The sample included a core group of LACYP involved with the youth justice system, LACYP not involved with the youth justice system and non-LACYP offenders. Within their findings on the impact of positive activities (defined as leisure activities, sports, crafts, membership of groups), it was revealed that 52% of the non-offending group were engaged in some form of positive activity, compared with the two offending groups at 20% and 28%. Additional studies have also argued that extra-curricular activities can invoke protective factors such as a diversion from offending, minimising availability to induce health-harming behaviours and widening support through a network of adults and peers (see Mahoney, 2000; Cameron *et al.*, 2015).

The value of participation in extra-curricular and leisure time activities concerning LACYP has been highlighted in research findings from the YiPPEE (Young People in Public Care – Pathways to Education in Europe) study, which identified trends in post-compulsory education for LACYP in five countries. Sport was seen to be valuable for developing skills, gaining friendships and acquiring social competence for care-experienced young people, providing a much-needed source of stability and consistency within their lives (Hollingworth, 2012). However, the number of those participating in sport within the study was less than 40%, which is a stark contrast to the estimated 75% of 16-24 year olds in the general population (Seddon, 2011). For children not in the care system, family structures have also been noted as having an effect on physical activity levels. In a qualitative study of 24 children from low income and lone parent families in the UK, it was found that structural constraints in relation to parent's time and work commitments impacted upon their involvement in physical activity (Quarmby and Dagkas, 2012). Comparing LACYP's involvement in physical activity to those young people in various alternative family structures (e.g. two parent, step-parent, lone parent), evidence from the USA suggests that LACYP were less likely to participate in the recommended levels of physical activity (Ornealas *et al.*, 2007). This may be because vulnerable young people can often suffer from feelings of helplessness and low self-esteem (Haudenhuyse *et al.*, 2012).

In relation to the discussion above, findings from a quantitative study in Norway exploring how LACYP make use of their free time, found that those in residential homes reported lower levels of engagement in physical activities. The study used a self-report questionnaire with 20 adolescents living in residential institutions and compared findings to 27 adolescents who were not in care (Safvenbom and Samdahl, 1998). Within residential homes in the UK, Quarmby (2014) identified difficulties in accessing sport and physical activity due to the homes' constraints and disrupted patterns of participation from placement changes. This was similar to the institutional factors reported by a US study into the activity of children in residential homes which identified access to facilities and constraints imposed by the care system as a barrier to their engagement (see Dowda *et al.*, 2009). In addition, Sport England (2012) highlighted that the more 'transitions' children and young people face, for example moving schools, moving area, time out of education, employment or training, the less likely they are to participate in sport. This has further been recognised by Hollingworth (2012) who indicated that maintaining leisure interests for LACYP was problematic due to frequent placement moves that resulted in being further away from activities and friends, reducing their social capital. The stability of the care and school context was previously alluded to in section 2.4.1 as impacting upon their education also. Cameron and colleagues (2015) add that when a change of school is necessary, it is important when planning for this change, to try to maintain a child's involvement in clubs and sports activities. Regular engagement in physical activity for example, has been found to provide a sense of structure to LACYP's lives that they may not have elsewhere due to the change in placements (Farineau and McWey, 2011; Hollingworth, 2012). However, a further US study found almost half of foster carers surveyed were unaware of the activities LACYP were involved in prior to the placement in their home (Fong *et al.*, 2006). Within the UK, a LACYP's PEP, for example, is intended to address this by providing information regarding their education, in addition to documenting wider extra-curricular activities (DCSF, 2009) (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.17).

Despite sport and physical activity being used as a vehicle (rightly or wrongly) for combating social problems and targeting marginalised young people, to date there have been few studies that have considered the role of sport, physical activity or PE in the lives of LACYP - who by their very nature are considered marginalised. Rather, the focus has been a more generalised account of their leisure provision (see Safvenbom and Sarndahl, 2000); extra-curricular activities (see Farineau and McWey, 2011) or sport and physical

activity pursuits (see Quarmby, 2014), with the majority utilising quantitative measures and rarely including LACYP as participants. This is supported by a recent literature review on sport and physical activity in the lives of LACYP, which noted the domination of adult voices in the few studies identified (Quarmby and Pickering, 2016). As such, Quarmby (2014) asserts that LACYP represent a 'hidden group' in relation to sport and physical activity research, policy and practice and that more research is needed to further our understanding in this area.

Whilst there is definitive scope to extend the literature regarding LACYP and sport/physical activity, at present there remains a significant gap that focuses on sport and physical activity within an educational context. This seems somewhat surprising given that sport has featured largely within research policy and practice in recent decades, as has the continued educational underachievement of LACYP. It has been argued that professional teachers and coaches need sufficient knowledge about LACYP to ensure they do not miss important opportunities for them to access and reap the potential benefits of PESS (Armour *et al.*, 2011). It is not clear, however, if or how such knowledge is being generated or what impact this has on the experiences of LACYP in PESS; something that gives additional impetus to the current study. Moreover, bearing in mind that Sport England (2003) recognised that more children participated in sport at school than outside of a school setting and that LACYP are known to have more issues regarding school attendance, there would appear to be a need for more thought to be given to how developmental opportunities through PESS can be made more equitable. Altogether, this paves the way for the current study, facilitating an examination of what is currently an under-researched area.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of some of the most prominent research concerning LACYP that links to issues at the heart of this research. Overall six key issues have been discussed: research concerning placement stability; LACYP health and wellbeing prior to and during their time within the care system; the educational trajectories of LACYP; outcomes for care leavers; the role of sport/PESS for marginalised populations; and research pertaining to PESS within the lives of LACYP. Much of the

current research on LACYP highlights the disadvantage that they face, the complexity of their lives and how they attempt to navigate through and within their environment. The picture is not completely negative, however, with the discussion also pointing to positive factors. For example, this chapter has drawn out research evidencing the potential benefits of positive activities (such as sport) within the lives of LACYP; in particular their capacity to function as a protective factor against some of the adverse experiences young people may face. The next chapter outlines the conceptual framework adopted for the study, part of which is formed by a synopsis of the contemporary politics and policies salient to this study.

CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISHING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

Having provided an overview of some of the key research pertaining to the PE and School Sport (PESS) and broader educational experiences of looked-after children and young people (LACYP), this chapter outlines the theoretical and conceptual components that have informed this research and data analysis. There is much consensus among scholars that some form of theoretical framework is necessary within research, to assist in the selection and prioritising of certain factors over others and, moreover, in revealing relationships between certain concepts at an abstract level (Grix, 2010). Without the use of theories, and indeed the abstract ideas and propositions contained in theory, it is argued that "the observer would be buried under a pile of detail and be unable to weigh the influence of different factors explaining an event" (Stoker, 1995, p.16). When combined with empirical research, theoretical concepts make it easier to achieve abstraction; to simplify and not further complicate the understanding of social phenomena (Grix, 2010).

The aim of this chapter is to convey the conceptual framework for this study, which was identified as a pertinent way of interpreting emergent themes from the data. In doing so, the chapter reviews the use of theory within previous research with LACYP, before critically discussing the use of one specific theoretical model that was ultimately selected to make sense of the empirical findings of this study; the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). In essence, this chapter is a means of further contextualising the study. It provides a more specific extension of the literature review, and therefore can be considered as a bridge between the literature and the methodology chapters.

3.1 Theoretical concepts within LACYP research

Despite the growth in child welfare and LACYP research over the past decade, it has been reported that much of the work undertaken tends to lack a theoretical underpinning (Berridge, 2007). Holland (2009, p.228), for example, implies that "fleeting references or total absence of theory is how research with looked-after children has often been typified". This is perceived to be problematic and has been identified as a key issue to address. Both Rutter (2000) and Stein (2006b), for example, emphasise the need to move away from those purely descriptive studies which seem to be prevalent within this area of research. Within his work on care leavers and their transition into adulthood, Stein (2006b) recognises a distinct lack of theoretical perspectives within empirically driven studies and suggests that attachment theory (see Dozier and Rutter, 2008), focal theory (e.g. Coleman, 1989) or the concept of resilience (Goldstein and Brooks, 2013) could be used to underpin research within this field. More recently, however, a scoping review by Holland (2009) found there were only 6 out of 44 studies that had not established a theoretical base, suggesting that theoretical considerations within this field are becoming more apparent; particularly with regard to utilizing a child's participation/rights-based approach or a symbolic interactionism/social constructionist underpinning.

Historically speaking, evidence of a theoretical base (particularly from a UK and USA perspective) has often been rooted in psychology and developmental psychology (Stein, 2006b) with particular attention afforded to concepts surrounding attachment (e.g. Howe *et al.*, 1999; Leathers 2002; Atwool, 2006; Dozier and Rutter, 2008; Hannon *et al.*, 2010) and resilience (e.g. Jackson and Martin, 1998; Gilligan 1997; Lambert 2001; Gardner, 2004; Stein, 2005; Drapeau *et al.*, 2007; Daniel, 2008; McMurray *et al.*, 2008; Woodhouse, 2013). Whilst these theories have dominated much theoretical perspective over recent years in understanding the needs of LACYP, using these concepts in isolation suggest that the issues and outcomes of LACYP are located solely within the child. For instance, the use of attachment theory in interventions for addressing behaviour has been challenged, calling for an awareness of other approaches for explaining and predicting behaviour (Barth *et al.*, 2005). In addition, despite recognising the importance of attachment theory within LACYP literature, due to its focus on the quality of relationships and the importance of a secure base, Berridge (2007) also implies that there is an absence of broader sociological perspectives. Thus, in his later work he draws upon work within the fields of sociology

and social policy, taking fuller accounts of the contexts within which children and families live to strengthen research within this field (Berridge, 2012). In a similar vein, Farineau (2016) also notes the benefits of attachment theory in understanding relationships, but implies that we cannot ignore the complexities of the child welfare system in which LACYP are embedded. There is a need, according to Leathers (2002), to consider the various factors and multiple contexts that may be influential to children within a foster care context. This mirrors some contemporary work undertaken within the broader field of physical education that considers the notions of space, place and identity within young people's lives (e.g. O'Donovan *et al.*, 2014; Sandford, in press).

Whilst these individualistic concepts of attachment and resilience still prove useful to draw upon in relation to research concerning LACYP, it can be argued that they are in themselves limiting by not considering other factors that could contribute to, for example, a young person's resilience. This is demonstrated in one particular study which examined the causes of attachment disorders for youths who have been maltreated and have been removed from their homes (Follan and Minnis, 2010). The researchers in this study confirmed that there was a need to look beyond attachments and consider environmental factors when understanding relationships for this population. In addition, Winter (2006) notes that it is difficult to find accounts in the education and health literature of LACYP which highlight the multiplicity of their experiences and their lives. One conceptual framework that takes account of both individual and environmental determinants is a social ecological framework. Such a framework considers determining factors that may occur externally to the individual, alongside those internal factors such as attachment and resilience. It recognises that individual characteristics and external environmental contexts cannot be viewed in isolation from one another since the individual is always located within an environment (e.g. the school, workplace, home and community). In support of this, Farineau (2016) emphasises that researchers and professionals need to understand how there is not simply one factor that has the biggest influence on young people in care, rather we must consider the wider contextual factors and how these systems (and networks of systems) work together to influence their outcomes. It can therefore be argued that a social ecological model may prove useful when researching with LACYP, since it contains various levels of determinants that do not operate in isolation and assumes that, for example, appropriate changes in the social environment can produce changes in individuals (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). The chapter now moves on to provide a rationale for the use of a

social ecological model and its concepts in relation to LACYP and the ensuing study.

3.2 An introduction to ecological theories

The ecological theory of development was initially proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) with ecological and social ecological models evolving over decades across the fields of sociology, psychology, education and public health (Green *et al.*, 1996; Richard *et al.*, 2011). Most commonly used to understand the multiple levels of influence on behaviour, this theoretical model identifies a multiplicity of perspectives, specifically noting the interactions between different contexts and relationships that surround an individual. From an ecological perspective, "the child is in the inner circle and the environment is a series of nested structures surrounding the child, each imparting unique influences on development" (Stormshak and Dishion, 2002, p.197). Bronfenbrenner (1979) notes that most of the building blocks in the environmental aspect of the theory are recognisable concepts in the behavioural and social sciences, but the model's originality lies in the way they relate to each other. Implicit within this model, then, is the concept of a dynamic interaction between the individual and broader environmental contexts; proposing that behaviour can only be understood in context. Thus, the ecological environment extends beyond an individual's immediate interactions and includes events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner divides these environmental influences on behaviour into four analytical levels centering around the individual: the microsystem (e.g. family, schools, work interactions); the mesosystem (the interaction between two microsystems); the ecosystem (the larger social system within with an individual is embedded); and the macrosystem (an individual's sociocultural context and society's cultural beliefs).

The popularity of this ecological model within social science is perhaps due to it being considered an encompassing holistic theory, considering multiple contexts of a young person's life and looking beyond their individual characteristics and relationships (Farineau, 2016). For instance, previous studies have shown that taking an ecological approach to various areas of the child welfare system have proven beneficial (see Howe, 1983; Hong *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, Farineau (2016) suggests that when researching delinquency of youths in foster care, adopting an ecological perspective such as

Bronfenbrenner's can help fill the gap in various areas of research. She adds that in addition to informing practice and policy development, this approach "appreciates the complexity of youths' experiences as they navigate the various systems with which they interact on a daily basis" (Farineau, 2016, p. 148). As such, it is argued that employing an ecological framework for this study has the potential to appreciate the complexity within what is at present, a relatively unexplored topic (Quarmby, 2014). Nonetheless, it would be naïve to assume that utilising the ecological framework by Bronfenbrennar (1979) is directly relevant to studying the PESS experiences of young people in care, since its original proposal is centred broadly around human *development* rather than simply focusing on *experiences*. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original model places considerable emphasis on the environmental context that surrounds an individual, although it is worth noting that he later criticized his own work for failing to emphasise the role a person plays in his or her own development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Taking this into consideration, Belksy (1980) combined Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model with a theory of individual development in an effort to account for individual, family, social and cultural influence in child abuse. Therefore, in terms of more recent adaptations, social ecology serves as a useful theoretical vehicle that considers multiple factors of influence to understand how each layer impacts the individual, and thus their experiences. For example, in an attempt to understand children's experiences of life in foster care, Whiting and Lee (2003) conducted interviews with children and described the value in adopting an ecological framework for conceptualising their experiences. Mburu (2014) also adopted a social ecological framework that had previously been employed by fellow researchers within the field of health (see Stokols, 1996; Mugavero *et al.*, 2011), since the model recognises that health experiences and outcomes are often influenced by factors situated within and beyond the individual (Feldacker *et al.*, 2011). Efforts to understand academic-related differences between disadvantaged children and their more affluent counterparts have also benefited from an ecological systems approach to development (Mahoney *et al.*, 2005), while within child welfare literature, Haskett and colleagues (2006) emphasise the need to consider various contextual factors that relate to outcomes for those involved in foster care; something a social ecological model achieves. Farineau (2016) also suggests the use of an ecological approach to understanding delinquency of youths in care. In particular, Farineau's study makes reference to the model's usefulness in understanding the contextual factors related to involvement in the

child welfare system, where she argues that "to ignore the context of foster care and the various levels of their environment would be to ignore an important aspect of these youths' identity and reality" (Farineau, 2016, p.148). Likewise, Quarmby and Pickering (2016), drawing on the work of McLeroy *et al.* (1988), used a social ecological model as the framework for their discussion on the multi-dimensional aspects that influence the engagement of LACYP in physical activity.

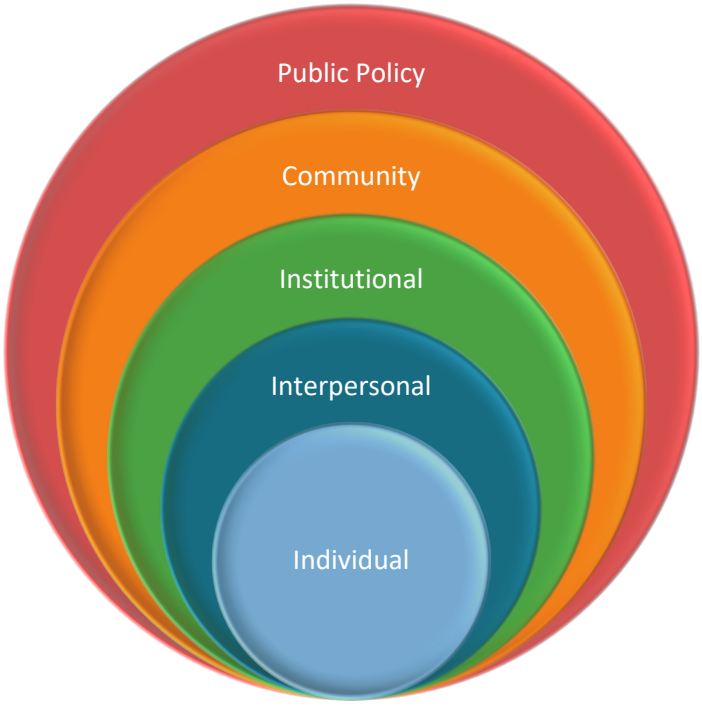
One critique of an ecological approach to research is that it is so broad that it cannot easily be applied to real world settings (Farineau, 2016). Therefore, Tudge *et al.* (2009) emphasise the need for researchers to specify which version of the theory they are using to guide their work. Quarmby and Pickering (2016) employed McLeroy and colleagues' (1988) framework as part of their scoping review and their use of its concepts seem to pave the way for its use within an empirical study such as this one, particularly since it draws upon the individual level as well as the wider policy level. The impact of policy is something which Howe (1983) previously highlighted as needing to be understood within permanency planning and the foster care system. In this regard, it is argued that McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) model can also be considered a useful tool in understanding various levels of influence on LACYP's experiences of PESS. This specific model borrows from the work of previous studies to create an ecological framework that can be considered analogous to that of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work, which views behaviour, or in the case of this study 'experience', as being determined by different levels. Identifying and understanding the applicability of these levels in relation to the present study is where we now turn.

3.3 Adopting a social ecological framework

Social ecological models have been described as "visual depictions of dynamic relationships among individuals, groups, and their environments" (Golden *et al.*, 2015, p.10). These are embedded within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model (see figure 1) through five levels of influence which are assumed to impact on an individual's behaviour: (i) individual factors, (ii) interpersonal processes, (iii) institutional factors, (iv) community factors and (v) public policy. Given the complexity associated with the lived experiences of LACYP (outlined in the previous chapter), this guiding framework is intended to contribute to understanding how these five levels of influence may shape the

PESS experiences of this population of young people. This discussion now moves on to give an overview of each level of influence from McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) model, in addition to providing context in relation to LACYP.

Figure 1: A diagram illustrating McLeroy et al's. (1988) social ecological model



3.3.1 Individual factors

This level of influence includes the characteristics and choices of the individual (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Factors here include their age, wellbeing, attitude, behaviour (i.e. with regard to behavioural norms) and skills. It also includes the developmental history of the individual, past experiences and their socio-economic circumstance. Chapter 2 identified that LACYP cannot be considered as a homogenous group (Armour *et al.*, 2011) and therefore individual factors will vary; however, certain overarching factors within this level may be more prevalent and influential on their PESS experiences than others. For example,

Quarmby and Pickering (2016) noted the self-efficacy of LACYP as being an influencing individual factor on their participation in physical activity.

3.3.2 Interpersonal processes

Interpersonal processes are regarded as the relationships within an individual's social support systems and formal or informal social networks (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Examples include family, work colleagues and friendship network. In the context of LACYP, these relationships may include their biological family, foster carers, residential workers, peers, social workers and teachers. In relation to physical activity participation for LACYP, it has been posited that little is known about whom the influential key social agents are (Quarmby and Pickering, 2016).

3.3.3 Institutional factors

Institutional factors are considered to be the key social institutions within which the young person operates and with which they engage. It includes the physical and social environment, including the rules, regulations, expectations, practices, policies and structures of institutions (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). For the purposes of this study, institutional factors for LACYP (as identified in Chapter 2) are likely to include: school, home, foster home, residential home, neighbourhood, virtual school and the wider social care system. In relation to this, individual residential home policies and care system constraints - including placement movements - have been noted has particularly influential on LACYP's participation in physical activity outside of the school (see Quarmby, 2014).

3.3.4 Community factors

These factors are essentially the relationships among the institutions as described above (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). For LACYP, this may include the connections between their school and the Virtual School, or their foster carer and social services, for example. Farineau (2016) argues that within an ecological model, this level is especially relevant for young

people in care since they may have various institutions that either work collaboratively together for their benefit or, conversely, conflict and cause confusion for the adolescent.

3.3.5 Public policy

The final factor to highlight is that of public policy. McLeroy *et al.* (1988) define public policy as the local and national legislation and policies that support or hinder health behaviours. Of relevance within the study presented here is the policy that surrounds a young person when they enter the care system and how these policies may impact positively or negatively on their PESS experiences. In order to provide further context for this level of influence and to locate the relevant policies within the study, the chapter now moves on to provide an overview of the key public policies perceived to be of relevance to the PESS experiences of LACYP.

3. 4 The policy context

Following on from the above discussion of the conceptual framework, this part of the chapter now attempts to contextualise the environmental determinants of LACYP's experiences of PESS in terms of public policy. In so doing, it provides a chronological overview of the way in which government policy and legislation within England has taken shape in recent years regarding LACYP and PESS. By outlining the key policies, it offers an understanding of how young people's experiences may have been shaped over time at the widest level of influence, as affirmed within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological framework. It is important to note here that, to date, there are no published policy documents concerning (specifically) both LACYP and PESS. Rather, the policy context is formed of a combination of Acts of law, Green papers, White papers, statutory guidance and other related published policy documents concerning the education of LACYP and the PESS experience of all children. In terms of chronology, it begins with the *Children Act 1989,* since this act was key in reforming policy with regard to children, especially those looked-after. It ends with the most recent policy documentation at the time of writing, the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*.

3.4.1 The Children Act 1989

The *Children Act 1989* altered the law with regard to child protection. Implemented in 1991, its aim was to ensure the welfare of all children in England and Wales and protect them from harm, allocating duties in this regard to local authorities, courts, parents and other agencies. The Act focuses on the idea that children are best cared for within their own families (Berridge and Brodie, 1998); however, it also made provisions that allow for local authorities to intervene in cases of a child being mistreated. Combined with sets of Regulations and Guidance, the *Children Act 1989* was significant in establishing the legal framework for the present-day care system in England and Wales (Shaw and Frost, 2013). Under section 22 of the *Children Act 1989*, a key responsibility of local authorities is to safeguard and promote the welfare of the looked-after child (Children Act, 1989). This includes written care plans that set out a child's educational needs and how they are going to be met. The introduction of this Act highlighted a lack of in-care and after-care services, which saw some local authorities set up educational support teams and leaving care teams in the 1990s (Jackson and Cameron, 2011).

3.4.2 National Curriculum for PE 1992

The National Curriculum for PE (NCPE) was established in 1992, as part of the broader educational reforms occurring in England and Wales after the implementation of the *Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988* (Wilkinson, 2017). However, it is argued that the ERA effectively reinforced the low status of PE as a subject, with research on the policy-making process indicating that very little changed for PE after its passing (Penney and Evans, 1999). Within the National Curriculum, PE became a foundation subject in both primary and secondary schools, alongside technology, history, geography, modern foreign languages, art and music. It was argued that children were not receiving sufficient access to competitive team games in the PE curriculum and action was needed to revive England's place on the international sporting stage (Evans and Penney, 1995). This led to a compulsory part of the NCPE focusing on the teaching of traditional and competitive team games, alongside a selection of athletic activities, swimming, dance, gymnastics and outdoor adventurous activities (OAA)[11]. This also met the broader National Curriculum

[11] Based upon activity areas for Key Stage 3 since it is of most relevance to the present study.

aim of learners developing knowledge, skills and understanding (Capel and Whitehead, 2013). Further emphasis on competitive team games was reiterated in *Sport: Raising the Game* (1995) which arguably reduced PE as a subject to 'sport' (Evans and Penney, 1995). Nonetheless, subsequent revisions of the NCPE have been implemented since the latter part of the decade (see section 3.4.4).

3.4.3 Quality Protects 1998

Following the revelations of widespread abuse in children's homes during the 1990's, the New Labour Government came into power in 1997 with a drive to implement new and stronger duties for those working with LACYP and care leavers (Stein, 2012). A subsequent critical review by Utting (1997) on the safeguarding of children living away from home was where the term *Quality Protects* was coined (Shaw and Frost, 2013). In response to this review, the *Quality Protects* programme was launched in 1998 (implemented in 1999) by the Secretary of State for Health. It was a three-year programme designed to transform the management and delivery of children's social services, with local authorities working in partnership with the Department of Health (DoH). The main element of the programme was to introduce mandatory national objectives for children's services, which set clear outcomes for children that local authorities were expected to achieve (DoH, 1998). Since New Labour had a central remit to enhance social inclusion, a Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was established to consider how collaborative working could help in achieving their objectives (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). The first SEU report was published in 1998 and referred to the need to improve the educational achievement of looked-after children and reduce school exclusion (SEU, 1998). As such, one of the *Quality Protects* objectives (Objective 4) was to: "ensure that children looked after gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care" (DoH, 1998, p.14). This provided a backdrop for the implementation of the *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000*, which was introduced to extend local authority responsibilities towards young people previously looked-after. Under the Act, which came into force in October 2001, local authorities have a duty to assess the needs and provide adequate financial and personal support for young people who are 16 and 17 in care or previously in care, including those in full time education until they are 21 (DCSF, 2009b; DfE, 2013d).

3.4.4 National Curriculum for PE 1999

Throughout the 1990's, schools were central to various PE and sport initiatives, largely as a consequence of the perceived potential of sport and PE to contribute to wider societal issues being further realised by policymakers and stakeholders (Houlihan and Green, 2006). Following the initial iteration of the NCPE in 1992, the revised NCPE, introduced in 1999, had a clear focus on equality and opportunity (Capel and Whitehead, 2013). It began to look at holistically developing children through spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through physical activity, and after previous NCPE criticisms, the health-related focus of PE was strengthened (Cale and Harris, 2005). Nonetheless it still retained its focus on pupil performance, with schools expected to teach dance, games, gymnastics, swimming, athletics and outdoor adventurous activities. It was around this time that New Labour saw the potential for sport and school sport to tackle a wide range of issues including social exclusion, community cohesion, health and obesity and crime and anti-social behaviour (Coalter, 2008; Collins, 2010). As was noted in Chapter 2 (section 2.6), research also pointed to the potential of sports participation to elicit benefits for the youth population and the sport initiative outlined below, *Sporting Future for All 2000*, continued to reflect New Labour's policy strategy.

3.4.5 Sporting Future for All 2000

The development of the NCPE in 1992 (revised again in 1999) with its focus on elite sport and competitive team games, supported the Conservative Government sport policy document *Sport: Raising the Game* (Department of National Heritage (DNH), 1995) and gave license to the 1997 New Labour Government to become increasingly interventionist in setting the PE and School Sport policy agenda during the late 1990s. Many initiatives and policy developments at this time aimed to improve provision across all levels of sport development, from grassroots to elite level, with specific support for school sport (Evans and Penney, 1995; Houlihan and Green, 2006). The trend toward the development of schools with 'specialisms' was initiated by the Conservatives and continued under the newly elected Labour Government in the form of 'Specialist Sports Colleges' (SSCs). With the SSC's at the core, connections emerged between clusters of primary schools and secondary schools via specialist school sport coordinators, to establish 'School Sport Partnerships' (SSP's). 'The SSC and SSP initiatives were originally conceived as developing

wider opportunities in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK (see Bringing Britain Together 1998[12], PAT 10, Game Plan[13]) as part of New Labour's social inclusion agenda. However, their remit was to raise the standards in PESS, through strengthening links between schools and communities (DNH, 1995). This commitment to sport within education was demonstrated further with the publication of *Learning through PE and Sport: PE, School Sport and Club Links* strategy.

3.4.6 Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) (2002)

To improve the provision of PESS through the use of SSCs and SSPs, the Youth Sport Trust[14] had a prominent role in devising specific outcomes and advised ministers that a coordinated scheme was needed to promote youth sport. As a result, the *PE, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL)* strategy was developed and introduced in 2002, with an aim to ensure pupils were receiving two hours of high-quality curriculum PE a week and increase participation in wider physical activities and sport. The SSP and SSC initiatives identified in 3.4.5, formed two of a series of strands that were introduced to achieve such aims. Other strands included, for example: gifted and talented, school club links and swimming. The PESSCL strategy documented a shift towards collaborative working and was jointly supported by the Department of Education (DfE) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Data collected within the national PESSCL survey indicated that PESS participation increased following the introduction of the policy (Quick *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, the number of students participating in two hours of PESS per week increased from 25% in 2002 to 86% in 2007; surpassing the government's ambition of 75% (Phillpots 2013).

[12] A national strategy for neighbourhood renewal.
[13] A strategy for delivering the government's sport and physical activity objectives.
[14] Youth Sport Trust is a national charity and was established in 1994, with an aim to create a brighter future for all children and people through sport.

3.4.7 Every Child Matters (2003)

The *Every Child Matters* (ECM) Green Paper emerged following the death of 8 year-old Victoria Climbié, who was murdered by her guardians in 2000 (Hayden, 2007). A public enquiry into her death, headed by Lord Laming, noted the failure of organisations to protect her and gave recommendations on child protection in England. The ECM Green Paper identified four key themes: increasing the focus on supporting parents and carers; early intervention and effective protection; strengthening accountability and the integration of services at all levels; and workforce reform (SEU, 2003). The aim of the New Labour Government was to do more in the way of protection and in ensuring that every child reaches their full potential, regardless of circumstances, by giving children support to achieve five outcomes: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic wellbeing (DfES, 2003a). Alongside a focus on education for all children, the New Labour Government prioritised the education of looked-after children. In 2003, the Social Exclusion Unit published the report *A Better Education for Children in Care,* which identified five key factors as to why looked-after children were significantly underachieving in their education (see also Chapter 2, section 2.4). It highlighted specific areas of action to improve life chances for children in care, including greater stability of placements and help with school (DfES, 2004). The release of this Green Paper, combined with the publishing of the Government's response to the Laming enquiry, saw a major consultation and review of children's services (Stein, 2012). This led to the *Children Act 2004*, discussed below.

3.4.8 Children Act (2004)

The *Children Act 2004* built upon the *Children Act 1989* and was the legislative platform to reform children's services to further improve the lives of children, young people and their families; including the protection and safeguarding of children. The Act included establishing a national Children's Commissioner and national Director of Children's Services (Children Act, 2004). It also gave a considerable amount of flexibility to local authorities in the way they could implement its provisions (Hayden, 2007). Section 52 of this Act reiterates Section 22 of the *Children Act 1989* and places a statutory duty for local authorities to promote the educational achievement of the children they look after (Children Act, 2004; DCSF, 2010a). This policy requested that Children's Services

Departments were to be set up in every local authority to bring care and education under one administrative body (Hart, 2006; Jackson and Cameron, 2011). This multi-agency delivery meant the *Children Act 2004* gave the legal underpinning to *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (2004) (see below), with the intention to achieve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes (see 3.4.7) (DfES, 2003a, 2004). Linked with this, the *Education Act 2005* meant the admissions system into school also changed to give priority to looked-after children. This was to ensure that LACYP were guaranteed admission to the preferred and most appropriate schools for their education (DCSF, 2010b).

3.4.9 Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2004)

Although the *Children Act 2004* provided the legislative framework to support the long-term programme of *Every Child Matters*, the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* Green Paper stated that legislation by itself is not enough and needs to be a part of a wider process if change is to happen (DfES, 2004). The 2004 Green Paper set out a framework that identified ways in which all services involved in the lives of children and young people could work better together to deal with the consequences of difficulties in children's lives and be proactive in preventing things from going wrong (DfES, 2004). Following the SEU report in 2003 and the *Children Act 2004*, part of the aim of *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* was to build on the achievements of the *Quality Protects* programme to improve the life chances of looked-after children (DfES, 2004). A particular focus was on enhancing the number of foster carers; providing stable placements to ensure minimal disruption in children's home and school lives; and introducing a national award scheme to highlight the work of anyone who made a positive impact on a looked-after child's life (DfES, 2004). In spite of this, it has been implied that policies such as *Every Child Matters* do not challenge the social and economic circumstances of children and families, but rather focuses on individuals overcoming adversity against the odds (Shaw and Frost, 2013). This is linked to the concept of resilience, which has been noted as being significant for LACYP as well as something that can be promoted through sports participation (see Chapter 2). However, Shaw and Frost's (2013) argument coincides with the previous justification in this chapter for using a social ecological framework for this study, since it considers the wider context of LACYP's lived experiences.

3.4.10 Extended Schools (2005)

In June 2005, as part of the *Every Child Matters* remit, the DfES published *Extended Schools: Access to Opportunities and Services for All,* which set out a core offer of extended services which the Government expected to be available in or through all schools by 2010. The expectation was that all schools were to offer access to extended services beyond the school day, providing all children with a range of safe, organised activities from 8am – 6pm. Such experiences were to include: breakfast clubs, parenting classes, cookery classes, sports clubs and use of leisure facilities. The Government was hopeful that such change could make a real difference to children's chances at school by "providing them with opportunities to stay fit, healthy, acquire new skills, build upon what they learn during the school day or to simply have fun" (DfES, 2005, p.4). However, in an evaluation of the extended services, a key problem was identified as being the cost to the Government, to schools, and to families. Carpenter *et al.* (2012, p. 158) concluded that "the costs of activities are still a barrier to pupils taking part, particularly pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds", such as LACYP.

3.4.11 Care Matters (2006, 2007)

In 2005, only 11% of children in care achieved five good GCSEs (A*-C) compared with 56% of all children (DfES, 2006). These statistics confirmed to the government that looked-after children's life chances had not improved at the same rate as their peers and it became apparent that children in care remained at a greater risk of being "left behind" in terms of their education (DfES, 2006, p.3). This led to growing evidence that LACYP in and leaving care were also susceptible to poor career outcomes (Wade and Dixon, 2006). This stimulated the publishing of the New Labour Government's Green Paper *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* (2006), aimed at improving state care for children and young people. Specific proposals included ensuring the right placement, so that children can have a happy, stable home life, in order to flourish with a significant focus on improving their education (DfES, 2006). Educational proposals included the offer of free school transport to allow children to remain at the same school despite any placement changes; perhaps as a way of combating the well-documented evidence which suggests that stability of home and school placements can affect the educational experience of LACYP (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.1). In addition, the Virtual

School Headteacher (VSH) initiative was piloted in 11 local authorities; with the VSH being specifically responsible for overseeing the education of those children looked-after by the local authority (DfES, 2006). LACYP can attend a range of local schools and so "the role of the VSH is to improve educational standards and access to educational provision for this group, as if they were attending a single school" (Berridge *et al.*, 2009, p.6). The VSH operates as part of a 'Virtual School' team within a local authority; the Virtual School is therefore not a teaching institution but a coordinated system of support for improving the educational achievements of LACYP (Berridge *et al.*, 2009).

Importantly, the *Care Matters* paper also stressed the need to ensure children's voices are heard when important decisions are being made regarding their future. It was recommended that all local authorities are to establish a Children in Care Council to provide children and young people (both those in and leaving care) with additional opportunities to voice their views and experiences of the care system and increase their ability to influence and improve the services they receive from their local authority corporate parents (DfES, 2006). A further proposal was to encourage local authorities to offer free leisure provision for children in care, since it was declared that (at the time) 50% had difficulties accessing positive activities. However, more recently, Murray (2013) confirmed the disparity in local authorities offering free sport leisure provision, with almost 50% not providing this. The Green Paper also acknowledged that factors such as secure attachment, friendship and engagement in positive leisure activities can promote health and wider wellbeing. This was noted in Chapter 2 as significant for LACYP, who may have difficulties in these domains. As a result, there was an additional responsibility placed on the Director of Children's Services to ensure that LACYP participate equally with their peers in positive activities such as sport and physical recreation. Furthermore, a new pot of funding named the 'personal educational allowance' was also introduced for LACYP who were at risk of not reaching the expected standards of attainment to support their educational and developmental needs. The £500 allocation per child per year was to "give children in care greater access to extended services, personal tuition outside school, positive activities, and trips and visits that will enrich their learning and support their development" (DfES, 2007, p.75). The subsequent White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change*, published in 2007, outlined the specific proposals that led to the *Children and Young Persons Act 2008*.

3.4.12 National Curriculum for PE (2007)

The NCPE 2007 built upon the changes that were previously exercised in the 1999 curriculum (namely the holistic focus). In this revision, children were still to be assessed on performance, but the key concepts of the curriculum shifted to holistically developing children's creativity, improving their competence and promoting healthy and active lifestyles (QCA, 2007). A focus on a broad and balanced curriculum also meant that activities were not prescribed but based upon whether they addressed the NCPE's key processes and key concepts. The new content reflected the philosophical shift in the way youth were encouraged to participate in and maintain healthy, active lifestyles (Vinson and Lloyd, 2013). In this respect, it was argued that PE contributed to the broader education of pupils through the overall aims of the National Curriculum in developing successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens (Capel and Whitehead, 2013).

3.4.13 Children and Young Persons Act (2008)

The Coalition Government, elected in 2010, implemented the *Children and Young Persons Act 2008* in 2011. The purpose of this Act was to legislate the recommendations set out by the DfES (2007) White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* to ensure consistently high-quality care services for looked-after children. The educational provisions for LACYP outlined in the Act placed the Designated Teacher role on a statutory footing. Such person "should have lead responsibility for helping school staff understand the things which affect how looked after children learn and achieve" (DCSF, 2009c, p.4). This includes leading on the development and implementation of a LACYP's Personal Education Plan (PEP)[15] and being the initial point of contact within the school (DCSF, 2009c). The Act also emphasised the need to ensure that placement moves would not disrupt the education of LACYP.

[15] The PEP is discussed further in section 3.4.17.

3.4.14 Physical Education, School Sport and Young People (PESSYP) (2008)

In 2008, the PESSCL strategy was extended and became 'PESSYP' (*Physical Education, School Sport and Young People*) in the hope of it becoming a world-class system for PESS (DCSF/DCMS, 2008). One of the key differences was that provision was extended to 5-19 years olds, whereas previously PESSCL had focused on 5-16 year olds (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). A further development within the PESSYP strategy was the 'five-hour offer'. This still included two hours of curriculum PE (for 5-16 year olds), and the three additional hours (for 5-19 year olds) were to come from extra-curricular or community providers (DCSF/DCMS, 2008). At the same time, a new sport policy *Playing to Win* (DCMS 2008) was released in preparation for the London 2012 Olympic Games. Together with *Playing to Win*, an additional strand of PESSYP reinforced the prominence of competition within sport, through the creation of competition manager posts, coaching and intra-school competition (Sport England and Youth Sport Trust, 2009). Between both PESSCL and PESSYP, these initiatives secured an investment from the government of over £2 billion for PESS (Armour *et al*., 2011).

3.4.15 Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations (2010)

The statutory guidance from *Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations 2010,* implemented in April 2011, set out the functions and responsibilities of local authorities and partner agencies under Part 3 of the *Children Act 1989* (see above), concerning the provision of local authority support for children and families. These responsibilities were in relation to care planning, placement and case reviews for looked-after children, in order to safeguard and promote their welfare and enable each looked-after child to achieve his/her full potential in life - as stated in the Section 22 of the *Children Act 1989* (DCSF, 2010a). This included promoting their educational achievement regardless of where they live and considering any implications that placement decisions may have on their education and welfare (see DCSF, 2010a; DfE, 2012b).

3.4.16 The Importance of Teaching 2010

The schools White Paper 2010, entitled *The Importance of Teaching*, came as a statement of recognition that the UK's overall educational achievement was not improving at the same rate as other countries. The White Paper outlined the steps necessary to implement whole-system reform for education in England, focusing on structural change and rigorous attention to standards (DfE, 2010a). It placed responsibility on local authorities to support vulnerable pupils (including looked-after children), those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and those outside of mainstream education. It stated that local authorities were to continue to act as the corporate parent for looked-after children, with a primary role in improving their educational attainment. This included the continuation of looked-after children being given priority in admissions to schools. A key initiative set out in *The Importance of Teaching* White Paper 2010 was the Coalition Government's priority to address the socioeconomic disparity between pupils. This established the 'Pupil Premium', a form of financial assistance designed for disadvantaged pupils (those entitled to Free School Meals) to provide additional funding outside of schools' budgets, with the primary objective of raising their attainment. The Government believed that headteachers and school leaders would be able to decide best how to use their Pupil Premium in order to respond appropriately to individual circumstances (DfE, 2013e). If used in the right way, it was felt that the Pupil Premium could provide educational interventions that could raise the educational attainment for those pupils at a disadvantage. When the Pupil Premium was introduced to schools in April 2011, it initially included looked-after children who were in care for at least 12 months; more recently, it has been extended to include all children who have been in care for at least 6 months (DfE, 2013c).

3.4.17 Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked-After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2010)

When the Coalition Government were elected in 2010, not only were they committed to raising the academic achievement of children overall, but they placed a particular emphasis on narrowing the educational attainment gap between children in care and their peers (House of Commons (HoC), 2011). A key part of this guidance was that local authorities had to ensure education remained a priority when care planning, taking into account the implications of school moves at crucial times such as Key Stage 4 when pupils would be

taking their GCSE's (DCSF, 2010b). This was to be done through the use of an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP). A PEP is a written document that should detail the necessary teaching and learning provisions required to meet the educational needs of the child in care. As noted in Chapter 2 (section 2.4) the SEU's report (2003) implied that insufficient help with education was a reason for looked-after children's underachievement and it seems the PEP was introduced to address this. The DCSF (2010) stated that a requirement of the PEP was to also document out of school hours learning (OSHL) activities, study support and leisure interests. The development, implementation and reviewing of a LACYP's PEP is the responsibility of the social worker (or other appropriate professional) and the school's Designated Teacher. The child or young person will also have a relevant local authority representative specified in the PEP, such as a foster carer. In accordance with the *Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked-After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010*, this representative must attend parents' evenings and other relevant meetings (DCSF, 2010b).

The guidance also stated that those working with LACYP were required to promote positive behaviour and reduce school exclusions in order to maintain the child in school (DCSF, 2010b). Support for foster carers to help children with their homework and other educational opportunities also formed part of the statutory guidance, which targeted one of the factors the SEU held accountable for the low educational attainment of LACYP: primary carers not being expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development (SEU, 2003). Although not intended to directly address this issue, the following public health guidance (see section 3.4.18) was issued to promote holistic development for LACYP, which of course would include their educational experiences and PESS.

3.4.18 Promoting the Quality of Life of Looked-After Children and Young People (Public Health Guidance) (2010)

This public health guidance was jointly written by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). Its purpose was to improve the quality of life (physical health, and social, educational and emotional wellbeing) of LACYP "by ensuring that organisations, professionals and carers work together to deliver high quality care, stable placements and nurturing relationships for looked-after children and young people" (NICE/SCIE, 2010, p.5). The guidance sets out recommendations intended for the various adults and professionals that play a part within a looked-after child's life. Included within the guidance is a call to support children and young people to participate in the wider network of peer, school and community activities to help build resilience and a sense of belonging. This was also recognised in the literature review (Chapter 2) as pertinent for LACYP. Recommendations highlighted for the purposes of this policy discussion in relation to PESS, include the following:

Table 1: Public health guidance recommendations for promoting the quality of life of LACYP (in relation to PESS)

Recommendation	Suggested action to be taken
Recommendation 24: Meet the individual needs and preferences of LACYP	• Social workers and IROs[16] to ensure access to creative arts, physical activities, and other hobbies and interests to support and encourage overall wellbeing and self-esteem.
Recommendation 36: Training for foster carers and residential workers	• To ensure an understanding and awareness of the role of extra-curricular activities for LACYP. • To ensure it provides a good understanding of how the absence of appropriate physical and emotional affection, or different forms of emotional and physical abuse, affect a child or young person's psychological development and behaviour.

[16] An IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) is appointed to each child who becomes looked-after. They are responsible for chairing the child's care plan review to ensure the child is listened to and can challenge the local authority where necessary based on the child's best interests and needs (Jelicic *et al.,* 2014).

Recommendation 41: Develop teacher training	To ensure all teacher training programmes have a core training module that looks at the needs of LACYP and includes an understanding of: • The impact of stable care and education on children and young people and how to help them have a stable education. • The impact of loss, separation and trauma on child development, attachment and cognitive functioning. • The value of engaging in activities outside the school curriculum and in the community.
Recommendation 50: Develop a national core training module	• To inform professionals and carers about the needs of LACYP and learn how to encourage engagement in activities outside the school curriculum and in the community, including creative and leisure activities.
Recommendation 52: Train social workers	• On an awareness of the importance and impact of extra-curricular and enriching activities for LACYP. • On early interventions that focus on preventing adverse behaviours such as offending behaviour, substance misuse, smoking, obesity, and bullying are key to improving children and young people's health and wellbeing in the future. Evidence suggests that activities and interventions that positively promote health and wellbeing – such as diet, exercise, emotional health and forming friendships, are the most engaging and successful. Such interventions are delivered to varying degrees in schools and universal settings with all children, but often, LACYP miss out on sessions or do not benefit from the consistent approach to these issues from a school, due to their frequent moves during care or the periods of school absence they experienced prior to coming into the care system.

(NICE/SCIE, 2010)

These recommendations suggest that the quality of life for LACYP may be enhanced if all those working alongside them better understood LACYP's needs and associated impact of the care context. In addition, there is an emphasis on those professionals to encourage participation in physical activity and extra-curricular activities and understanding the importance of them in contributing to the wellbeing of LACYP. This reflects the

continued emphasis in appropriate support for the wellbeing of LACYP (see Chapter 2) and, interestingly, also relates to a core finding from this study (see Chapter 6).

3.4.19 Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)

These *National Minimum Standards* apply to fostering services and are issued for use by Ofsted[17], who take them into account in the inspection of fostering services. The DfE (2011) who issued the document, state that they may also be used by providers and staff for a self-assessment of their services, and can provide a basis for the induction and training of staff and carers. In addition, they can be used by parents, children and young people as a guide to what they should expect a fostering service to provide and to do as a minimum. In relation to PESS, fostering services must ensure children have "access to educational resources and opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning, develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life" (DfE, 2011, p.20). Looked-after children are also to be supported to take part in school-based and out-of-school activities, and to be able to pursue interests, hobbies and leisure activities. These regulations respond to past criticisms that rigid rules have prevented LACYP in enjoying ordinary childhood experiences (Cameron *et al.*, 2015).

3.4.20 Creating a Sport Habit for Life (2012)

In a review of expenditure, the Coalition Government announced in 2010 that the School Sport Partnership (SSP) scheme (part of PESSCL and PESSYP strategies) would cease to have funding from 2011. The following year, they released a new policy document *Creating a Sport Habit for Life* (DCMS, 2012). This appeared to reflect the Coalition Government's stance toward PESS; that quality provision of competitive sport will encourage lifelong sporting participation (DfE, 2010b). This policy featured Olympic-style School Games, alongside a push towards school-club links driven by National Governing Bodies (NGBs).

[17] Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. They inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages (Ofsted, 2017).

3.4.21 National Curriculum for PE 2013

The most recent NCPE in 2013, was designed so that schools could develop their own curricula and assessments for PE that would best meet the needs of their pupils. It removed the attainment targets, key concepts and processes which were the core focus of the NCPE 2007 and put traditional team sports back on centre stage (Stidder, 2015). The new curriculum appears to merge several previous NCPE's, with four key aims around competence, sustained participation, competition, and the leading of healthy, active lifestyles. It is argued that this NCPE strengthens the importance of elite sporting performance (Stidder, 2015) and is reflective of Government priority at the time.

3.4.22 Children and Families Act (2014)

In 2013, the Department for Education (DfE) (2013b) were seen to take strategic action to improve the quality of care and the stability of placements for looked-after children so that all children could succeed in life. In terms of education, Ofsted (2012) emphasised the significant impact that strong VSH leadership can have on the attainment of LACYP. Following the publication of annual statistics in December 2012 (which indicated LACYP were still underachieving in their education), *Improving the Adoption System and Services for Looked-After Children 2013* was published. This paper recommended that every local authority should have a VSH to make sure children in care receive the support they need to succeed at school, and pledged to make sure they listened to the views of children in care and ensure they receive better care and protection (DfE, 2013b). This provided the foundations for the provisions later set out in the *Children and Families Act 2014* that put VSH on a statutory basis and allowed for LACYP to remain with foster parents until 21 years old to help with their emotional stability. The *Children and Families Act 2014* amended the *Children Act 1989* (see 3.4.1)) to require local authorities in England to appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of its LACYP, wherever they live or are educated. That person (the VSH) must be an officer employed by the authority or another local authority in England.

3.4.23 Promoting the Education of Looked-After Children (Statutory Guidance) (2014)

This guidance replaces *Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children* published in March 2010 by the DfE (see 3.4.17) and is intended for local authority professionals and Special Educational Needs (SEN) departments in schools. It sets out conditions through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under 22(3A) of the *Children Act 1989* as amended by the *Children and Families Act 2014*: to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. Included is the requirement of all LACYP to have a PEP (which, again, is to also document OSHL activities and leisure interests). It also states that there is a requirement to identify developmental (including any related to attachment) and educational needs (short and longer term) in relation to skills, knowledge, subject areas and experiences (DfE, 2014a). As part of implementing this statutory guidance, the VSH is required to provide training to those working directly with LACYP (such as social workers and Designated Teachers). Part of this training should include information on promoting positive educational and recreational activities for LACYP (DfE, 2014a). Further, the VSH is expected to also offer training and advice to schools to "enable schools to understand that looked after children, including those who remain looked after but have been placed for adoption, are not a homogenous group and that their individual needs will be different" (DfE, 2014a, p.8). It is interesting to note that the concept of looked-after children's wellbeing is not mentioned in relation to promoting their education, rather additional statutory guidance pertaining to this was issued the following year (see below).

3.4.24 Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children (statutory guidance) 2015

This joint statutory guidance issued from the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health (DoH) replaced the *Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children 2009*, which has since been archived. The guidance was issued under sections 10 and 11 of the *Children Act 2004* (see 3.4.22) in order provide more detail about how the legislation is intended to be applied by local authorities, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and NHS England; and applies to England only[18]. An

[18] Welsh and Scottish Governments have their own statutory instruments.

interesting point to note here is that schools are not included as part of the guidance in promoting LACYP health and wellbeing. The only duty towards education is the requirement for social workers to ensure that VSHs and Designated Teachers are aware of information about the child's physical, emotional or mental health that may have an impact on his or her learning and educational progress (DfE and DoH, 2015). This is perhaps due to Public Health England (2014) highlighting that a positive relationship exists between levels of physical activity and academic attainment. There is, however, no mention of physical education or indeed physical activity as a promotion of wellbeing and physical health; other than a fleeting reference to sport whereby social workers are to ensure "that the children their authority looks after, including teenage parents, have access to available positive activities such as arts, sport and culture, in order to promote their sense of wellbeing" (DfE and DoH, 2015, p.20).

3.4.25 Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation 2015

In 2015, following public consultation, the Conservative Government published its sports strategy which arguably reflects "the biggest shift in Government policy on sport for more than a decade" (Crouch, 2017, p.1). *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation* consists of three embedded ideas around: sport for social good; elite sporting success; and integrity within sport (to reduce corruption) (HM Government, 2015). In an attempt to look beyond levels of participation, the strategy consists of five broader outcomes: i) physical wellbeing, ii) mental wellbeing, iii) individual development, iv) social and community development and v) economic development. Central to this study, is the Government's commitment (via Sport England) to get more people from under-represented groups (e.g. LACYP) engaging in sport and physical activity in a regular and meaningful way. In relation to PESS, the strategy also pledges to "better understand the barriers and issues around the drop-off in engagement from primary school to secondary school as well as identify good practice" (HM Government, 2015, p.35). In essence, this strategy attempts to define what success looks like in sport. In doing so, it identifies the broader contributions that sport can make, with an inherent focus on the nation's physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

3.4.26 Children and Social Work Act (2017)

The *Children and Social Work Act 2017* consists of a series of changes to the law within the social work profession in England. Local authorities' corporate parenting principles for LACYP are clarified within this Act, which include the responsibility:

> (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
>
> (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
>
> (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
>
> (d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
>
> (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
>
> (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
>
> (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independence.
>
> (Children and Social Work Act, 2017, p.1)

The Act also includes a provision of information and advice to promote educational achievement in relation to previously looked-after children, who are now the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order (Local Government Association, 2017). The formerly titled 'Designated Teacher' role within schools, is now referred to as the 'Designated Person', who remains responsible for promoting the educational achievement of LACYP and those previously looked-after. In relation to those leaving care, the legislation requires local authorities to publish their local service offers for care leavers, and provide personal advisors to care leavers up to the age of 25, regardless of whether they are in education or training.

3.4.27 Policy Summary

The policy overview presented in this chapter was intended to provide a broader exploration of the policy aspect of McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model and helps to illustrate how these factors shape the lived experiences of LACYP. It is perhaps interesting to note that the policy is largely centred around broader experiences (such as home life and educational achievement) and there is a less direct focus on PESS. There are, however, perceptible links to all other levels of McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) model, with policy highlighting people, places and skills that can be seen to sit across the individual, interpersonal, institutional and community levels. This reinforces the need to see the levels as intersecting, given the complex landscapes of LACYP's lives presented throughout the study.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed the purposes of establishing a conceptual and theoretical framework in relation to research with LACYP and highlighted the use of theories that have been employed in previous research. In doing so, it has proposed that an ecological framework, specifically an adaption of McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model, may serve as a useful tool in this study by facilitating an understanding of LACYP's PESS experiences in accordance with the five levels of influence within the model: (i) individual, (ii) interpersonal, (iii) institutional, (iv) community and (v) public policy. In order to provide context for the ensuing study and embed potential influence at the public policy level, the discussion moved on to discuss the policy context for LACYP and for PESS from the *Children Act 1989* to the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*. The following chapter now moves on to present the methodological framework for the study and explains the methods of data collection and analysis that were employed.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND ACCESS

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the methodological principles, methods and context that guided this study. Since researchers adopt approaches which are specifically relevant to the research aims that they intend to address (Cresswell and Poth, 2017), this study adopted an interpretive approach via a multiple methods methodological framework. For this research, it was felt that qualitative methods could better help to explore and understand complex concepts and relationships that quantitative measures alone might fail to expose (McEvoy and Richards, 2006). To guide the reader through the rationale for adopting such an approach, the chapter is split into several sections. Firstly, the philosophical underpinnings of the research are addressed. Secondly, it explores what it means to 'do' research with looked-after children and young people (LACYP), informed by scoping interviews with academics, professionals and practitioners already in the field. Discussions around ethical considerations and the challenges of gaining access, as well as details on the research setting and participants involved, are subsequently outlined in the fourth and fifth sections. Section six then provides a rationale for the use of multiple methods (via a three-phase approach), in addition to the limitations of such methods. Issues concerning privacy, confidentiality and consent are explored in the subsequent two sections, before moving on to discuss the analysis of the data in section nine. Finally, a reflexive account of my own positionality within the research, the research process and the difficulties arising therein are documented.

4.1 Paradigm justification

The word 'paradigm' is frequently used as the overarching term for a researcher's philosophical stance – embracing their ontology, epistemology and theoretical perspective (Mayan, 2009). Since the researcher plays an integral part in the overall research process, it is important to consider their view of the world as it underpins and informs methodology and methods (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Mason (1998, p. 12) implies that a "reluctance to address these issues often stems from vagueness, imprecision, or a failure to understand that there is more than one ontological perspective". Studies based upon weak and poorly

defined ontological and epistemological positions often provide inaccurate and invalid sets of data (De Vaus, 2001). It is therefore considered imperative that the ontological and epistemological positions of research are well defined and critically considered prior to data collection (Mayan, 2009). A researcher's selection of a paradigm(s), however, is not entirely a matter of choice. Often, we have subconsciously already made assumptions about the world, our topic and how we can understand these, but choosing a paradigm involves assessing which paradigm best fits with our methodological preferences (Maxwell, 2005); ultimately driven by our research aim.

Within academia there are radically different assumptions as to what exists that can be investigated (Gomm, 2008). These are driven by two main questions: what is out there to know? (ontology) and what and how can we know about it? (epistemology) (Geco and Sosa, 1999; Maxwell, 2005). Together, they form the foundations for research (Grix, 2010). Rodwell (1998) implies that a study which aims to analyse social perceptions should adopt a research approach based upon a constructivist ontological ideology. Constructivist approaches to research consider social phenomena and meaning to be socially constructed (Robson, 2002); whereby knowledge is based on social interaction, social experience, human perception and social conventions and is therefore in a constant state of revision by social actors (Bryman, 2016). They understand that people are "intelligent, reflective and wilful, and that these characteristics matter for how we understand the world" (Moses and Knutsen, 2012, p. 10). Since the overarching aim of this research is to explore LACYP's experiences of the social world, a constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology are established as necessary.

Epistemologically, the nature of this research is to understand multiple meanings rather than extract generalised explanations and therefore we could not articulate the best possible conclusions through objective measures; ruling out a positivist or post-positivist epistemological position. Positivism is an epistemological position that implies social reality can be 'captured' through cause and effect (Gomm, 2008) assuming that, through objective and scientific measurements, human behaviours and social reality can be measured - much like in the natural sciences (McNeill and Chapman, 2005; Bryman, 2016). Cohen *et al.* (2007) explain that those who take this position base results on what may be already known - striving for objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability,

patterning and the construction of laws and rules of behaviour. Interpretivists on the other hand think of social reality as a complex configuration of interpretations and meanings (Gomm, 2008) and something that cannot be understood by mere observation (Grix, 2010). Rather than adopting a logical stance like positivism, interpretivism requires the researcher to understand the social world through subjective meaning, interpreting society in terms of its actors (Pole and Lampard, 2002; Cohen *et al.*, 2007), linking it to a constructivist view of the world. The interpretative model has its roots in philosophy and human science; suggesting that researchers should approach participants not as individual entities who exist in a vacuum but rather that they should view their practice as connected with others in the broader context of their lives (Holloway, 1997). This is fundamental for a valid understanding of social reality (Pole and Lampard, 2002). Gomm (2008) explains that an interpretive approach to research would suit those who are primarily interested in investigating how people experience the world and/or how they make sense of it. Given the particular challenges of accessing LACYP (identified later in this chapter) and the desire to privilege youth voice, an interpretivist stance was adopted for this research.

Despite foregrounding the longstanding belief that paradigms (and associated research methodologies) are incapable of integration with one another, it is also important to acknowledge that debates exist that oppose the dogmatic either-or choice of paradigm. For example, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) established connections between the two traditional paradigms, whilst John *et al.* (2007) notes that contrasting philosophical positions do not necessarily exclude the use of data collection and analysis techniques associated with qualitative or quantitative research. It has therefore been suggested that constructivists have much to gain from engaging with alternative approaches (Moses and Knutsen, 2012). Hence, although this study inherently takes the form of an interpretative and constructivist approach to social enquiry, it also recognises that there are "multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued" (Greene, 2007, p.20). In other words, whilst recognising that individuals shape and are shaped by social experiences, there is also an appreciation that social structures can significantly influence this process.

Grix (2010, p.83) suggests that "the reason why so many of us choose to outline positivism and interpretivism – and thereby leave out a whole host of social research between these

binary poles – is because they can be seen as opposites". It is not to discount perspectives that sit in between, rather it is noting that positivism and interpretivism are overarching terms that cover many variations of approach to social science enquiry. A researcher's epistemological perspective, therefore, will determine the way in which they construct their research methods and methodology. Crotty (1998) explains that methodology is the strategy or plan of action that shapes the choice and use of certain methods to achieve desired outcomes. It answers the question 'how can we go about acquiring that knowledge?' (Grix, 2010) and thus means that the research questions (or problems) will always drive the methods we use and subsequently the methodology we employ. Given the questions driving this research (see section 1.3), the research outlined here thus took the form of a (predominantly) qualitative methodological approach. Such an approach means employing methods that aim to gain detailed description of characteristics, qualities or views, as opposed to those that produce large amounts of quantifiable data to uncover general patterns and relationships (quantitative methodologies) (Flick, 2009). Within social care research, in particular, Davies and Wright (2008) suggest that qualitative approaches are more able to ensure that participants' views are represented, whilst Goddard (2000) implies that the complex nature of LACYP's experiences cannot be fully accessed through larger scale, quantitative research alone.

4.2 Challenges of researching with children and those 'looked-after'

It is evident within literature that researching with children can be more difficult than researching with adults, largely due to the ethical considerations and consent that is needed, as well as the perceived (traditional) notion that they are somehow 'incapable' of fully understanding the nature of their involvement (Christensen and James, 2008; Heath *et al.*, 2009). Adult-centric research agendas can tend to dominate due to the ethical difficulties that are involved in shaping research with children and young people, such as safeguarding, confidentiality and competency (Goredema-Braid, 2010). Alderson and Morrow (2011, p. 5) argue that "when children's unique and valuable views are unknown for lack of research, because it is thought to be too risky to involve them, it is harder to ensure that the best opportunities and services are offered to them, or that harmful services are improved". This lack of involvement strays somewhat from the legal and developmental proceedings that have occurred over the past few decades. For example, the *United Nations Convention*

on the Rights of the Child (1991, Article 12) with its inherent focus on children's rights of participation and to have their views taken seriously on matters affecting them, and the 1989 *Children Act* (see section 3.4.1), which refers to listening to children's view within research as being essential (Heptinstall, 2000).

The past couple of decades has seen a significant shift in the involvement of children and young people within research. Albeit a lengthy process, this paradigm shift now recognises the importance of viewing children and young people as subjects in their own right, as opposed to objects to be studied (Christensen and Prout, 2002). Thus, the process of researching with children and young people is now gaining momentum and has received significant support for its capacity to hear their voices (Heath *et al.*, 2009), particularly within physical education research (O'Sullivan and MacPhail, 2010; Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012). As Sandford and colleagues (2010, p. 66) explain, "there is a growing shift towards acceptance of, and support for, viewing young people as competent and skilled social agents who are capable of reflecting upon, understanding and articulating their experiences". This is reflected, for example in the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) ethical guidelines which requires researchers to comply with Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*[19]. This recent strive for 'youth voice' within empirical research, however, is not without its difficulties (Sandford *et al.*, 2010).

Significant emphasis has often been placed on the ethical and methodological considerations involved when researching vulnerable young people and, in particular, LACYP (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006). These ethical considerations will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter (section 4.4), as addressing them is crucial for effective research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Conducting research with children and young people requires particular methodological considerations to ensure that their participation is a positive experience. For example, the use of participatory techniques may help to

[19] Article 12 states that: "Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." (UNICEF, 1991, p.5).

reduce anxiety for children and young people who are not used to being formally questioned (Barker and Wells, 2003), or who have difficulties with communication (Clark and Statham, 2005). Equally, some children and young people may feel patronised by such techniques and therefore a combination of traditional 'adult' methods and child-centered methods has been suggested by some (Punch, 2002; Clark and Statham, 2005). Thus, researchers need to be flexible and not make assumptions about competency and understanding on the basis of age alone (Hill, 2005). Since many LACYP have experienced family breakdown, trauma and loss, Kendrick and colleagues (2008) emphasise the need to be mindful of this when engaging and addressing sensitive issues; additionally because it can emotionally affect the researcher when listening to their participants' stories (Hannan *et al.*, 2002).

Furthermore, the process of accessing and engaging children and young people in research is proving just as significant an issue. For example, it has been noted that there are specific challenges associated with accessing authentic youth voices (e.g. Sandford *et al.*, 2010) and the voices of marginalised or vulnerable groups of young people (e.g. Riley and Docking, 2004). This includes the 'hidden group' of LACYP in research, policy and practice (Quarmby, 2014). It has been suggested that parents, or other 'gatekeepers', can often prevent children participating in research (Tisdall *et al.*, 2010), whilst Skanfors (2009) argues that parents (in particular) should not deny children their right to participate. The ability by gatekeepers to exclude young people, particularly in the case of LACYP, is often because they are perceived as vulnerable individuals and therefore requiring protection (Berrick *et al.*, 2000; Heptinstall, 2000). Alderson and Morrow (2011) highlight the importance of protection, yet also recognise that over-protection can lead to children becoming passive objects of concern in the research process, rather than active agents. This notion of 'over-protection', combined with not letting young people decide for themselves, ultimately suppresses their voice; impacting on the quality of research that is often intended to address issues relating to those concerned. This remains particularly important, especially in the context of this research, since there is a tendency for LACYP to have different perspectives on key issues from carers, practitioners and policy makers (Holland, 2009). Martin and Jackson (2002, p.124) imply that LACYP have a "wealth of practical knowledge and experience" with which to advise professionals, yet Quarmby and Pickering (2016) noted the dominance of adult voices within research concerning LACYP. The complexities of gaining access can have implications for the kinds of research

conducted, the sample of young people included, and the extent to which their experiences are representative of the LACYP population (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006). To try and overcome some of these complexities within this research, scoping interviews were planned and carried out as the next section illustrates.

4.3 Scoping interviews

Wigfall and Cameron (2006) point to the practical difficulties in conducting research with LACYP. Therefore, to assist with the research process and the construction of a sound methodology, it was decided that scoping interviews should be conducted with a number of expert researchers in the field. These interviews were undertaken with relevant contacts, identified through the early part of the study, and were valuable in that they offered points of good practice from experienced individuals who had undertaken similar studies and/or methodologies. These contacts included: research associates from an independent research unit, a freelance researcher and a leading academic in the field of looked-after children; all of whom have carried out research either with looked-after, adopted or vulnerable/marginalised children. Their experiences differ greatly in terms of the project aims, funding allocated, sample size, and time-constraints. Importantly, however, they offered a useful insight for different stages of the research process; particularly with regards to facilitating access to LACYP, possible methods to use and constructive considerations in relation to the data collection. For example, those who had done research with LACYP suggested gaining access through the Virtual School, and participatory activities were suggested as useful for encouraging conservation during interviews. In relation to data collection, the respondents emphasised the need to keep the environment relaxed and consider the wording of questions, whilst also being aware that the amount of data collected on each visit could vary significantly. This is also recognised in the ethical guidelines by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) who state that researchers must take the necessary steps to put children and young people at ease and reduce the distress or discomfort that they may experience during the research process. There were, however, different thoughts on interviewing, with one respondent highlighting difficulties with group transcribing and another suggesting small groups are easier due to them taking up less time. Appendix 1 illustrates these findings in more detail using quotes generated from the interviews. Taking these scoping interviews into

consideration, helped to shape the research process by providing guidance on how to gain access to the field and successfully collect data with LACYP.

4.4 Ethical considerations

As noted above, ethical considerations are considered fundamentally important for any study, particularly those within the social sciences (Webster *et al.*, 2014). The completion of research ethic applications is usually a formality at the early stages of the research; a necessary step in order to be able to begin collecting data. This process has been described as "procedural ethics" (Guilleman and Gillam, 2004, p.262). Therefore, to proceed with the collection of data in this study, approval was needed from Loughborough University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee. Guilleman and Gillam (2004) imply that in one respect research ethics applications are of limited importance, since they cannot help you when you are in the field and experience difficult or unexpected situations that require you to make a decision. However, they also argue that they serve to highlight the ethical principles that are important for social research and are thus a "practical reminder that we need to be both mindful and active in protecting our research participants (and ourselves) from harm and undue risks, as well as affording respect for autonomy" (p.277). As such, ethical considerations encompass all stages of research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 79) add that:

> Given the nature of qualitative research ethical issues are pervasive and ongoing throughout the course of study, from the kind of questions asked, the kinds of techniques used to collect the data, the field roles adopted, and how the research is eventually written up and reported.

They further add that ethics in qualitative research is a not a 'one-off' matter. Simply because ethics committees have granted clearance for a study to go ahead, this does not mean that the concept is dealt with; ethical issues and dilemmas will crop up along the way and will have to be considered, reconsidered and resolved. Guilleman and Gillam (2004, p.262) refer to these difficult and usually unpredictable situations that arise during research as "ethically important moments" and are more recently being reflected upon within

qualitative research (e.g. McEvoy *et al.*, 2017). The authors imply that these issues are not usually addressed in research ethics committee applications, nor are they events that are often anticipated when applying for approval. Therefore, although an ethics application for this study was submitted and approved (with the researcher following the outlined ethical procedures), "ethics in practice" remained a constant requisite (Guilleman and Gillam, 2004, p.263).

During this study, a consideration of ongoing ethical issues was vital, largely due to the vulnerability of some of the participants. Christians (2005) explains that professional and academic associations each adopt their own code of ethics, yet all have an overlapping emphasis on informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. This research, for example, was also guided by the BERA ethical guidelines for education research (see BERA, 2011). Of particular concern in this study were issues relating to informed consent, and privacy and confidentiality, both of which are discussed later in sections 4.7 and 4.8. Although these issues are not unique to researching children, it has been argued that they present important and different challenges when researching *with* children (e.g. Mauthner, 1997; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998a, own emphasis added).

4.5 Gaining access to LACYP

Many of the practical challenges of doing research with LACYP can be initiated from the complexities around gaining access (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006). Access to participants in research can never be guaranteed, yet it is something that all those researching in the social sciences rely upon. As Van Maanen and Kolb (1985, p.11) write: "Gaining access to most organisations is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work and dumb luck". Accessing vulnerable groups such as mental health patients, those with a disability or anyone under the age of 16 brings further difficulties, not least the ethical procedures involved. Such groups, because of their vulnerability, often have numerous 'gatekeepers' who believe they have their best interests at heart and therefore do not always permit a 'stranger' to delve into the lives of people they may be responsible for. In the context of research, gatekeepers can be individuals or groups of individuals who control information and are able to grant access or entry to particular settings or participants (Holloway, 1997). Therefore, it is worth remembering

that gaining access to an *organisation* does not necessarily mean that one will gain access to *individuals* who will participate in the research; rather negotiating access can be an ongoing process (Bryman, 2016).

It is well documented within the literature (see Chapter 2) that children who are in local authority care are more vulnerable than children brought up within their birth families, largely because of the disrupted and detrimental effects of their pre-care experiences, which can impact on subsequent experiences during their time in care (Hayden, 2007; Stein, 2012). With many adults (such as social workers, carers and teachers) coming in and out of their lives, gaining access to this marginalised group is undoubtedly a significant challenge and perhaps helps to explain why research in this area is limited. For example, research published in recent years concerning the health and wellbeing of LACYP, has acknowledged a lack of substantive research to underpin their studies (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006).

Heptinstall (2000) points out that researchers working within this field (i.e looked-after children) are largely dependent upon a variety of gatekeepers, not only for access to children and young people (as participants), but also for the speed at which the research can progress. This means, therefore, that 'official adults' remain a major barrier in the successful participation of vulnerable children with research processes (Hart and Lansdown, 2002; Kendrick *et al.*, 2008). Within this study, numerous avenues were explored in an attempt to gain access. For example, following the scoping interviews, several VSHs from local authorities were contacted in the hope that they might be able to facilitate access; however, none of those approached could offer assistance. An outline of the research, including the aims, background and methods, was also included in a relevant conference[20] programme in the hope of generating some interest from local authorities or individuals who attended, but none were forthcoming. Due to the known difficulties in gaining access, it was decided that there would be no exclusion criteria for LACYP (relating to, for example, gender, type of care placement or length of time in care) for fear of limiting

[20] Safeguarding Children: Everybody's Business Conference, hosted by the Centre for Children and Family Research.

access further. This is since other studies have had difficulties with access and recruitment, and as such had to change their original criteria (see Heptinstall, 2000). A decision was made, however, to focus on those who were currently in or had recently finished secondary school, because (it was hoped) that they would have been in school longer and therefore had more experiences of Physical Education and School Sport (PESS). Access to youth participants was eventually secured through gatekeepers who were also participants in the first phases of data collection (i.e. local authority professionals). Further details relating to gaining access to LACYP are referred to in the following discussion concerning the collection of data and also in the reflexive section (4.10) at the end of this chapter.

4.6 The collection of data

Data collection for this research was split into three phases, to allow for a progressive and informing approach to the generation of data. Together these phases comprised of a multiple-method approach, whereby several methods (surveys and interviews) were embedded within the research strategy and used to give a clear and extended picture of the experiences of LACYP. This was done because it is argued that one method alone cannot portray all the subtle variations in ongoing human experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Thus, researchers may use a variety of interpretive methods to enhance their approach in making sense of the worlds of the participants they are studying. Moreover, Darbyshire and colleagues (2005, p.1) add that "using multiple methods in researching children's experiences is a valuable approach that does not merely duplicate data but also offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access through reliance on a single method of data collection". Although arguably a positivist approach, the utility of a survey was to aid in addressing the research questions more fully by focusing on the wider structural features of social life, alongside the smaller individual aspects that could be obtained from interviewing. This is supported by Robson (2002) who argues that qualitative accounts may be enriched by supportive quantitative evidence, and in this case meant that quantitative data could be used to enhance the primary qualitative method (interviews) (Leavy, 2017). In the context of LACYP, in particular, Cameron and Wigfall (2006) imply that it is important to ensure a variety of methods to understand the scope of their experiences.

In this study, the first phase of data collection was intended to generate insight from a professional perspective (primarily Virtual School Headteachers) in order to decipher what they understand about the PESS experiences of LACYP. This phase was then used to generate key questions to be asked during phases 2 and 3, which included the voices of LACYP and PE teachers (respectively). The findings from phase 1 were then compared to those findings from phase 2 and 3, to identify points of similarity and difference. The three phases of research and methods used in each are outlined in more detail below (see also Appendix 2 for the timeline of the data collection). The use of first person is used for the remainder of this chapter, where relevant, as a way of positioning myself within the research.

4.6.1 Phase 1 of data collection

As noted above, phase 1 of the study was intended to gain a general insight into the key people, processes and practices involved in shaping the PESS experiences of LACYP. It was split into two parts. The first part of the data were collected via online surveys, disseminated to key local authority professionals in England. Virtual Schools, specifically Virtual School Headteachers (VSH) were the target audience for this due to their statutory role in all local authorities in England, whereby they have the responsibility for monitoring and promoting the education of children in care within their authority[21]. The choice to undertake a survey as the initial form of data collection was because it could generate a wide scope of information on a relatively unchartered landscape. It also provided an opportunity to recruit the participants for follow-up interviews, as suggested during the scoping interviews. Bryman (2016) suggests that the extensive growth in using online surveys for social research can be attributed to their low cost, tendency to generate fewer unanswered questions, and capacity to elicit better responses to open questions. It is argued that they are also more cost-effective and less time-consuming to distribute than postal questionnaires (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Toepoel, 2017). Typically, online surveys receive a lower response rate than postal questionnaires (Bryman, 2016), yet for this study there was fear that postal surveys could easily be lost when sending them to generic local authority postal addresses. Having the participants direct email addresses meant there was less chance of this happening, therefore increasing the chances of securing a higher response rate. Finding

[21] See Sections 3.4.11 and 3.4.21

the email addresses of all VSHs was not without its difficulties, since these are not readily available on councils' webpages. Nonetheless, a list of email addresses for VSHs in England was obtained. Although it was somewhat dated and held the risk of including inaccurate information, it was feared that sending it to generic local authority email addresses may not necessarily reach the intended participants.

The survey itself included demographic questions concerning the participant and their role within the local authority, as well as closed and open questions around key areas of policy and practice relating to LACYP's education and responsibility towards sport/physical activity within this (see Appendix 3 for the survey). It was sent electronically to all VSHs in England, totalling 153. Fifty-seven of the emails failed to reach the respondent, perhaps due to the contacts no longer being in post, so we can assume the survey reached 96 VSHs. The survey received a total of 46 responses, just under a 50% response rate from those whom it reached, or 30% from all the VSHs in England. However, six of those were not completed fully and so were not included. This meant 40 surveys could be used for analysis. It is important to note at this point, that despite the survey being sent directly to VSHs, not all of the respondents were in this role. The survey was also completed by those working immediately alongside the VSH within the local authority (Virtual School) context[22]; for example, the assistant VSH or the lead teacher for children in care. The data generated through the survey consisted of open and closed responses to questions, which were collated, sorted and analysed through a series of coding (outlined in section 4.9) to facilitate the identification of key issues and concepts.

The second part of this initial phase of research built upon the first, using semi-structured interviews with the VSHs and other local authority contacts (e.g. lead teachers for children in care, assistant VSH) who completed the online survey. The aim was to build upon the answers given in the survey and gather further information to help understand what LACYP's experiences of PESS may look like from a professional perspective. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed participants some freedom to highlight issues of personal importance (Robson, 2002). All survey respondents who indicated they were willing to be contacted for interview were invited to participate and a total of 10

[22] The 'Virtual School' is part of a local authority, and therefore at times the terms will be used interchangeably.

telephone interviews were conducted, each lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The questions asked during these interviews expanded on those within the online survey. Initial demographic questions (such as their role and the number of LACYP within their local authority) were followed by a range of open ended questions based upon their views and involvement with PESS for LACYP and with the education of care-experienced youth more broadly (see Appendix 4 for the interview schedule).

The participants were given a choice of how they wished to be interviewed, either face-to-face, via Skype or over the telephone. The reason for this was that it was hoped that by giving the respondents some control over the interview it would elicit a higher response rate. All participants chose to be interviewed via telephone. Telephone interviewing has been identified as useful way of collecting data with busy people (Miller, 1995). Whilst this method can present difficulties (e.g. with rapport building and not being able to take into consideration body language and facial expressions), it has the advantage of being able to be conducted at various times and locations convenient for the respondent. The cost of conducting these interviews was also minimal as it eliminated any travel costs which would have been incurred due to the geographical spread of respondents across the country (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The 10 participants interviewed consisted of local authority professionals[23] from six out of the nine regions across England (see Appendix 6 for an illustrated map). The following table (Table 2) provides details of these interview participants[24], including their role and the approximate number of children and young people looked-after by their local authority (at the time of interview).

[23] The term 'local authority professionals' is used during the thesis to indicate those participants who took part in phase 1 of the data collection. Where specific extracts of data are presented during the forthcoming chapters, individual roles will be referred to.

[24] All participants and places in this study have been given pseudonyms which are discussed in section 4.8.

Table 2: Local authority interview participants[25]

Name	Job Title	Local Authority	Region of England	Approximate No. of LACYP in Local Authority
Debbie Howell	VSH	Talborough	North East	313
Gareth Houlston	Education Development Officer	Comptonshire	South West	150 (of school age 4 – 18)
Heather Roberts	VSH	Whippinghamshire	Yorkshire and the Humber	329
John Davis	VSH	Yevendale	South East	103
Laura White	Teacher Advisor for the Corporate Parenting and Education Team	West Calbourne	West Midlands	778
Liam McKay	Education Development Officer	Eastonshire	West Midlands	630
Lisa Phillips	Assistant VSH	Millfolk	Yorkshire and the Humber	241
Robert Knight	VSH	Bucktonshire	Yorkshire and the Humber	450
Sandra Scott	VSH	Wellhampton	East Midlands	850
Sarah Kingston	VSH	Bembridgeshire	South East	600

All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and were transcribed verbatim. I transcribed all interviews myself to allow for a deeper understanding of the data, since it has been argued that the process of transcription can raise certain analytical questions (Roulston, 2014). The process of analysis is outlined in more detailed in section 4.9.

4.6.2 Phase 2 of data collection

While the first phase of data collection focused on the adult perspective, the second phase was concerned with hearing the voices of LACYP. It has been recognised that making space for authentic youth voice can provide different perspectives from those of practitioners and policy makers who have so often been consulted on in research on behalf of children and young people (Holland, 2009; Quarmby and Pickering, 2016). Holland (2009) for example, reported a consistent finding of the differences between children and

[25] For ease of reference, this table can also be found in Appendix 5.

adults in their understanding and prioritising of key issues; emphasizing the need for facilitating youth voice within research. Including interpretations from both practitioners and LACYP within this study, therefore, enables for an enriched understanding of the complexity of these individuals' lives. The following table provides an outline of the interviews that were conducted with the LACYP participants, which precedes a narrative explaining the data collection process.

Table 3: LACYP interview participants

Name	Type of interview	Location of interview	Date of interview	Length of interview (minutes)
Shannon, Jamie, Megan	Group	Pre-organised local authority event	26.10.2015	59
Chantelle, Bradley, Lucy	Group	Pre-organised local authority event	26.10.2015	58
Shannon	Individual	Fast food restaurant	02.12.2015	47
		Fast food restaurant	12.12.2015	97
Jamie	Individual	Coffee shop	03.12.2015	56
		Coffee shop	17.12.2015	87
		Coffee shop	22.02.2015	83
Luke	Individual	Participant's school	11.12.2015	65
Mia	Individual	Participant's school	11.12.2015	41
Kalaya	Individual	Participant's home	11.12.2015	58
		Coffee shop	17.12.2015	61
		Coffee shop	23.02.2015	61
Nathan	Individual	Pub restaurant	11.12.2015	47

Access to LACYP was initially attempted through the local authority contacts established in phase 1 of the research; following advice received in the scoping interviews suggesting that this was the best way to access participants. However, none were particularly forthcoming, with most directing me to go through local authorities' Children in Care Councils[26]. Following additional requests, just one local authority in the south west of England allowed me to conduct research with this particular group. This local authority invited me to carry out data collection at a pre-established event. The event was initially

[26] A group of LACYP who meet to discuss matters concerning all LACYP which all local authorities are required to have in order to listen to the youth voice (see section 3.4).

planned to last two days; however, the first day was cancelled due to a shortfall of attendees. On the second day, six LACYP attended, all of whom were happy to take part in the research. I coordinated with the gatekeeper on how the data collection would take place, and it was decided to split the group into two, according to their ages. This allowed me to conduct two group interviews, both consisting of two females and one male. The first consisted of young people aged between 13-16 years (Bradley, Lucy and Chantelle) and the second comprised of young people aged 17-19 years (Jamie, Shannon and Megan).

The decision to select group interviews as an initial data collection method with young people was based on a number of reasons. Firstly, since access is notably difficult within the LACYP field, I had to be creative and flexible with the access that was granted. As noted, I had been invited to a pre-established event and given the opportunity to speak with young people; in this context, using group interviews was the best way to fit in with their existing itinerary. Secondly, speaking to the young people together, reduced any power relations that may have been more prominent in a 1-1 scenario (Eder and Fingerson, 2003), particularly since this was the first time of the young people meeting me. Having the opportunity to share their experiences with one another may also have helped them to open up or draw upon certain experiences that they may otherwise not have thought of. This is since group contexts have been noted as sparking discussions that enable both shared understandings and differences in opinion and experience (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). As with all methods of data collection, however, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. For any type of interview there is the risk of participants giving socially desirable answers in an effort to please rather than be truthful (Greene and Hill, 2010). This challenge is recognised by Bryman (2016) who highlights that participants are more likely to conform to culturally expected views when in a group context. Additionally, participants may feel a pressure to conform or may even be 'silenced', particularly when there are notable dominant members (Heath *et al.*, 2009). They may also feel hesitant and withhold experiences due to other participants being present (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). For this reason, it was important that I also conducted individual interviews with the young people where possible.

Initially, four of the six young people involved in the group interviews said they were willing to be interviewed again individually, affording me the opportunity to explore

interesting points made within the group discussions. When arranging the follow-up interviews, however, two of the six young people did not respond to me and so that left two young people; one male (Jamie, 19) and one female (Shannon, 17), who subsequently took part in a number of interviews (see Table 3). The age of these two participants meant that they could give consent, eliminating the need for third party involvement such as gatekeepers. This made the follow-up interviews far easier to arrange. Jamie and Shannon were given a choice of when and where these interviews would take place, to allow them some anatomy over the interview proceedings (Greene and Hill, 2010). Other strategies used to minimize the power imbalance during interviews included valuing the participants time by thanking them (O'Kane, 2000), and minimizing the authoritative image of the interviewer by using informal language (Hill, 2010). Interviewing on more than one occasion was helpful since it allowed me to build rapport with the participants and generate lines of questioning based upon the previous answers they had given (Bryman, 2016). Certainly, these young people appeared more comfortable in discussing their experiences within places of their choosing, as evidenced by the data revealing a deeper insight into their lives (see Chapters 5-8). Conducting multiple interviews also meant that Jamie's and Shannon's voices appear louder within the data than the other participants.

In addition to Jamie and Shannon, a further four young people from a different local authority also participated in the research, with access being facilitated by a local authority survey respondent who acted as the gatekeeper. Two of these participants, Luke and Mia, were of school age and so the gatekeeper accompanied me to their school for the interviews to take place. The gatekeeper chose to be present whilst the interviews took place, which could be considered both as a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, it meant that the young person was familiar with the professional as someone who visits the school regularly; allowing them to perhaps feel more comfortable with the situation. On the other hand, this familiarity could also mean that socially desirable answers - or the holding back of information - was more likely to occur. In addition to the school visits, another young man, Nathan, 16, was interviewed at a place chosen by him (a local pub restaurant) one afternoon. Again, I was accompanied by the gatekeeper, making the introductions far less daunting for the individual. Lastly, a young woman, Kalaya, 17, was interviewed at her foster carer's house. The gatekeeper accompanied me to her house, but did not stay in the room as the interview took place. This particular young woman was also happy to take part in follow-up interviews (without the gatekeeper present) and so three

further interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for her. All these interviews with Kalaya were conducted at coffee shops (see Appendix 2 for the timeline of data collection). To provide additional context to the data collected in phase 2, the following table consists of a short vignette for each LACYP participant who took part in the study.

Table 4: Personal profiles of LACYP interview participants[27]

Name	Personal profile
Bradley	Male. 15 years old. In year 11 at secondary school. Happy to chat during the group interview. Chairs his own PEP meetings at school. Appeared focused on his education. Enjoys participating in various sports.
Chantelle	Female. 16 years old. In year 11 at an alternative education provision. Came into care at the age of 15. Currently in foster care. Excluded from secondary school due to disruptive behaviour. Expressed a dislike towards school in general. Vocal during the group interview.
Jamie	Male. 19 years old. Care leaver. Currently in college studying Performing Arts and an ambassador for the local authority. Under a care order from birth. Went into foster care at the age of 16. Attended a Pupil Referral Unit at the age of 11. Most of secondary school education was spent at a residential school. Disclosed that his parents were alcoholics and his mum was violent (domestic violence). Also mentioned self-harming from the age of 13-18 years old.
Kalaya	Female. 17 years old. Currently in college studying Art and Design. Came into care at the age of 15 and is currently in foster care. Moved placement once during this time. Born and lived in Thailand with her aunties until the age of 6. From the age of 6, her mum decided to move to England with her. Disclosed that her mum was violent towards her as the reason for entering care.
Lucy	Female. 13 years old. In year 8 at secondary school. Appeared shy during group interview. Expressed that she wants to do well at school.
Luke	Male. 13 years old. Year 9 at secondary school. Came into care at the age of 4. Has attended 4 schools and has spent time in different residential homes. Moved secondary school due to placement moves. Disclosed having anger issues and received anger management at his last school. Appeared happy to chat and draw a life map, although tended to go off subject easily during the interview.
Megan	Female. 19 years old. Care leaver. Currently works and is an ambassador for the local authority. Quiet during the group interview.
Mia	Female. 12 years old. Year 8 at secondary school. Currently in foster care. Has had 3 placements since she was 8 years old. Appeared quiet and shy to begin with. Creating a life map appeared to help put her at ease.
Nathan	Male. 16 years old. Studying Art and Design at college. Held back a year at school due to placement and school moves. Moved homes (and school) 3 times in 3 years during secondary school.
Shannon	Female. 17 years old. Currently doing an apprenticeship in Business Administration at her local authority council and is also an ambassador for them. Went into care at the age of 14. Disclosed that her parents were illiterate, her mother is dyslexic and disabled, so her father cared for her whilst she helped care for her mother. Both parents had/have drug and alcohol addictions and referred to herself as a "drugs mule" for her parents. Spent much of her education in alternative education provisions, for example Pupil Referral Units. Bullied at school and took illegal drugs from the age of 11. Had two foster placements since coming into care. During the study, she turned 18 and moved from her foster carer's home to independent living. Appeared willing to share her experiences and was particularly dominant during the group interview. Constantly sought reassurance that I understood her during the interviews with her use of "do you see my point? / do you know what I mean?" on many occasions. Her use of the word "mate" directed towards me and use of swearing suggested she perhaps felt like she could speak freely.

[27] For ease of reference, this table can also be found in Appendix 5.

In total, the second phase of data collection consisted of two group interviews and 11 individual interviews with 10 LACYP[28]. I did not access any of the participants' formal data held within the local authority, which limited any assumptions I might make regarding their experiences (Munro, 2001). This also meant that I was reliant on their own narratives during the interviews. The interview agenda (see Appendix 4) was based on a number of broad questions around issues relating to PE, school and extra-curricular activities (with the research questions also serving as a foundation for some of these). Further probing questions, which sought to identify their experience in relation to any benefits, barriers and challenges to participating in PESS and school activities, were also asked during the interviews. In order to engage the young people and stimulate conversation, the use of young person-friendly participatory activities such as the creation of timelines/life maps were used within some of the interviews (see Appendix 7). It is suggested that methods such as these, i.e. that combine art and craft work or photography, can open up young people's responses and their intense participation in research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011).

It has been recognised that young people are less keen on research methods that involve sitting and talking to an adult (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). For example, Mannay *et al.* (2015) noted that during their research, allowing LACYP to lead the interviews through discussions of their visual data changed the dynamics from the traditional interview setting that can be associated with social workers and other agencies. The life-map and timelines (noted above) were chosen following the scoping interviews, after their usefulness in conducting interviews with vulnerable and/or looked-after children had been noted. The timeline for example, is considered a simple way to interpret the influence that different contexts and time have on an individual's current life (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998a; Deacon, 2006) and has been used in previous sport-related research with young people (e.g. Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012; Quarmby, 2014). Engaging a child in a drawing activity (such as the life map) is suggested to be a powerful way of eliciting their views, particularly when children can answer questions whilst participating in another task (Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2009). This can help to create a relaxed environment for children and young people to engage in research (Bagnoli 2009). However, it is argued that one of the drawbacks of employing a drawing activity (such as life maps) is that participants may feel anxious in

[28] See Appendix 2 for a timeline of data collection.

being seen to be doing something too childlike by their peers (Johnson *et al.* 2012). In an attempt to eliminate this, I decided not to do the life map activity or timeline with the older participants who were over the age of 16. Despite timelines having been used successfully with adult participants (see Adriansen, 2012; Mannay and Creaghan, 2016), the decision not to use these with the older young people was because most of the conversations took place in public spaces such as coffee shops. Therefore, since the use of participatory methods were not used during all interviews, their purpose was to encourage LACYP voice during the interviews, as opposed to facilitate the creation of visual data.

All the individual interviews conducted with the young people were (with their consent) recorded with a Dictaphone and lasted between 45 – 90 minutes. Although mostly identified with ethnographic studies (Bryman, 2016), field notes were also made following each interview to document the context and in case there was an issue with the recording device. As in phase 1, all interviews were transcribed by myself since it is felt that this stage of the research forms an important part of the analytical process.

4.6.3 Phase 3 of data collection

Phase 3 of the data collection consisted of a similar format to that of phase 1; comprising both a survey and individual telephone interviews (see Appendix 3 for surveys and Appendix 4 for interview schedules). The target cohort for this phase of the research was PE teachers who taught at schools located within the three local authorities responsible for the LACYP participants in this study[29]. An electronic survey was sent to all secondary, special schools and Pupil Referral Units within these three counties, totalling 139 institutions. The survey consisted of demographic questions to begin with, followed by a mixture of open and closed questions concerning the respondent's awareness of LACYP and their experiences of delivering PESS for LACYP. Sixteen responses were received and four of those participants were willing to take part in a follow-up interview. Despite contacting all four participants, only two were available for telephone interview (see Table 5).

[29] Data collection with LACYP was originally secured through three separate local authorities, however one local authority withdrew at a later stage. This is explained in more detail in section 4.8.

Table 5: PE teacher interview participants[30]

Name	Job Title	School Name	Region of England
David Andrews	Head of Physical Education	Lushington Secondary School	East Midlands
Mark Jones	Head of Physical Education	Sandcove Secondary School	South West

Both interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes[31] and, like phase 1, explored lines of inquiry from the survey in more detail. The number of participants who took part in this final phase of the data collection was disappointing and unduly influenced the breadth of data generated. Nevertheless, it was felt to be important to include the data from this phase in the overall data set, as it offered important insight from an alternative perspective. Kennett (2006) and Fowler (2009) suggest that the response rate to surveys is often dependent on whether the respondents are interested in the subject matter or consider it relevant to them or their experiences. In the context of this study, it is interesting to consider whether the lack of awareness of LACYP within schools, the relevance of LACYP issues for PE teachers, or the broader confusion over 'whose responsibility' it is to support LACYP's access to PESS/sport/physical activity, might also have played a role here (see sections 7.4, 8.1 and 8.2).

In essence, this study remains representative of a small sample of participants; thus, the intention here is not to produce generalisations, but rather to focus on producing rich and in-depth descriptions of social life that can help readers to understand what it would be like to be someone else, and indeed experience the world from their position (Gomm, 2004). Having outlined the methods of data collection, I now move on to discuss how the process of consent, privacy and confidentially were addressed during these aspects of the research process.

[30] For ease of reference, this table can also be found in Appendix 5.
[31] See Appendix 2 for the timeline of data collection.

4.7 Consent

Informed consent insists that research subjects have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of their involvement within the research; participants must agree voluntarily to participate with such agreement based on full and open information regarding the research (Christians, 2005). Within this study, for those taking part in the online surveys (phases 1 and 3), information was provided ahead of completing the survey and participants were made aware that consent would be assumed upon their completion of the survey (see Appendix 3). For the telephone interviews, information regarding the study and the process of participating in it were explained at the outset and verbal consent was received.

For the second phase of the study, an information sheet (Appendix 8) was provided to the gatekeepers involved in the research and a modified more 'young person-friendly' sheet was used for all young people involved. Both sheets contained the necessary information as required by Loughborough University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee. The youth participants' understanding was also checked through verbal communication prior to any data collection taking place. Consent forms were used for participants to sign once they had agreed to take part and once it was clear that participants fully understood the extent of their involvement (see Appendix 9). For the young people involved who were under the age of 16, an adult with parental responsibility was also required to sign to the agreement of the participating child. This was done in line with the university's ethical guidance and BERA's (2011, p.7) guidelines, which states that researchers are required to seek approval from "those who act in guardianship (e.g. parents) or as 'responsible others'" (i.e. those who have responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of the participants e.g. social workers).

In the context of LACYP, it is important to remember that approaching parents for consent may not be appropriate or in the best interests of the child, since "there is a possibility that they [looked-after children] have been placed there because of abuse by parents, or because there has been a breakdown in relationships in the family" (Kendrick *et al.*, 2008, p.88). Gaining consent for such young people is a particularly difficult process, since the parental responsibility varies for each child depending on their care status. The process of gaining consent for the young participants in this study, was therefore

negotiated on a case by case basis. It has been argued that the process of acquiring consent assumes that consent is just a standalone procedure that is done prior to any data collection taking place; often accepting that the one-off piece of information is sufficient for participants to understand all that is involved in the research process (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). However, it has been suggested that seeking informed consent is, or should be, an on-going process (Flewitt, 2005; Hill 2005) and therefore the young people's understanding (in phase 2) was constantly checked throughout the research process with frequent opportunities given to ask questions or seek clarification.

4.8 Privacy and confidentiality

The issue of privacy and confidentiality arises in all research with human participants, but for research involving children and young people, the issue is far more prominent (Kendrick *et al.*, 2008). Christians (2005) explains that the reason for privacy and confidentiality is to protect both people's identities and the location of the research. For example, LACYP may have been moved away from their local authority in order that they are not found by their parents, so confidentiality must be assured to safeguard them from unwanted exposure (Christians, 2005). Issues of confidentiality among child research participants can sometimes be problematic if a child discloses information that may suggest they or another child is at risk (Gallagher, 2009). The British Sociological Association (2002) advise that guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise; for example, in relation to the abuse of children. The adults who took part in the survey and telephone interviews were assured confidentiality and anonymity within the research before deciding whether to take part. For the young people who took part in the study it was explained to them that confidentiality could be assured unless I had reason to believe they or someone else may be at risk; in which case I would be required to pass on those concerns.

In the group interviews, the issue of confidentiality and not repeating things other people have said outside the group was also explained, but of course was not something that could be guaranteed. Alderson and Morrow (2011) note that children and young people sometimes like to be recognised for the part they played in the research data; however,

depending on which information is released, this can make them identifiable. Even if only one child is identified, this can then make it easier to identify other children or adults who took part in the research. Like Emond's (2005) experience when researching young people in residential care, one young person in my study asked for her name to be used in the research and it was explained that for confidentiality reasons this unfortunately was not possible. It has been suggested that allocating children and young people pseudonyms could cause them to feel as if they have lost ownership of the research (Grinyer, 2002; Holroyd, 2003), and so the young people were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms within this study in the hope that it would avoid such feeling. Despite offering, however, the young people were happy for a name to be chosen for them. Therefore, as noted, all personal names and places used to identify participants within this research are pseudonyms allocated by the researcher.

4.9 Analysis of data

The process of data analysis can be described as "the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (Bernard, 2011, p.338). As noted above, data were generated in this research through a number of methods (e.g. surveys, individual interviews and group interviews). Once the raw data from these methods had been collated (in the form of survey responses or interview transcripts), the data were read, re-read and coded to draw out key ideas and issues[32]. A code is often a short phrase or word that symbolises a piece of the data (Saldaña, 2013). Charmaz (2006, p.45) states that coding "generates the bones of your analysis" and therefore forms an essential part of the analysis process. This process of coding was done manually using traditional writing materials[33], since it is argued that it can give you more ownership of the work and control over the analysis (Saldaña, 2013). The following table (Table 6) includes an extract of conversation with a LACYP participant and is intended to provide an illustration of the coding and categorisation that was done as part of the analytic process.

[32] The participatory tasks used e.g. timelines and life-maps were not included in the analysis, since they were not used with all participants and their purpose was to encourage LACYP voice during the interviews, as opposed to facilitating the creation of visual data.
[33] E.g. pens, highlighters, coloured index markers, scissors.

Table 6: An extract of an interview transcript showing the codes employed in the analysis of data

CW:	Are you able to tell me a bit about your school experience?	
Nathan:	Well I had a bit (laughs), it was a rumble and a tumble basically. Because I got held back a year, 'cos I moved around a lot. And then when I, 'cos I was living in Sharpton and then when I moved back to live here in Yarbury, they felt like, if I went back into year 11 then it would disrupt my learning, and my GCSE's, and that. So, they kept me behind a year, so I went back into year 10. I dunno it was alright to start with, and then I dunno, it kind of went (upside down gesture with his thumb).	Placement moves School moves Turbulence/disruption to education.
CW:	What do you mean by that?	
Nathan:	Like, I turned really like defiant and stuff 'cos of like, all the stuff that was happening. I couldn't really be bothered to follow any orders and stuff. I'd get the bus in and go out for a fag, stuff like that.	Behaviour (negative) Disengagement from school/education (Form of control/ communication?)
CW:	Why do you think that you started to become defiant?	
Nathan:	Umm I dunno, it was like, probably because I wasn't getting into trouble that much. So like yeah, I would get into trouble at school, but then I wouldn't have any like, I dunno, I wouldn't have any major consequences for it and stuff like that. And then I just kinda got fed up and bored, so yeah.	Lack of boundaries Attitude towards school/disengagement/ lack of priority?

Analysis was ongoing throughout the research process to help inform later phases of data collection and analytic memos were noted as I went along. Analytic memos are "sites of conversation with ourselves about our data" (Clarke, 2005, p.202). As a result, some codes

were condensed into one and new codes were developed, as commonalities or distinctions among data became more transparent. The codes were then manually grouped into subthemes according to the reoccurrence of particular issues, patterns or concepts (Gomm, 2004; Saldana, 2013). The core themes (centred around context, relationships, value, and wellbeing) in which the subthemes were sorted were not decided on prior to the coding of data and this can therefore be considered a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process of thematic analysis took the form of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach:

1. *Familiarizing yourself with your data:* Transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas.

2. *Generating initial codes:* Coding interesting features across the data.

3. *Searching for themes:* Collating codes into potential themes.

4. *Reviewing themes:* Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts. Produce a thematic 'map' [table] of analysis.

5. *Defining and naming themes:* Refining the specifics of each theme, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

6. *Producing the report:* Selecting extract examples and producing the report.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87)

With this particular type of analysis, themes are not predetermined but rather 'induced' from the data (Ezzy, 2002). Theme names and descriptions were generated with the intent of capturing the essence of the themes in the most concise way possible. Table 7, below, is an example of how the codes transpired into themes.

Table 7: An example of how themes emerged through the analysis of data

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes
Wellbeing and Behaviour	Wellbeing as a barrier	Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties (ESBD)
		Lack of confidence; lack of self-esteem; anxiety; fear
		Pre-care experiences (trauma; abuse; neglect; attachment)
	Improvements associated with wellbeing	Social interaction; team work; relationships
		Health-associated benefits (fitness; active lifestyle)
		Emotional/mental health (resilience; confidence; self-esteem)
	Impact of behaviour/attitude	Positive attitude towards school (aspirations, achievements, engagement; motivation)
		Negative attitude; disengagement from school (truancy, exclusion, isolation)
		Negative coping strategies (drugs; alcohol; self-harm)

It is important to acknowledge here that the social ecological model (see Chapter 3) did not directly inform the analysis, rather it was used as a lens through which to make sense of the themes that were generated. Harry *et al.*, (2005, p.7) argue that it "would be naïve to think that pre-conceived beliefs and perspectives will not be brought to bear on the data", and therefore it is impossible to remove all traces of the researcher (Clarke, 2007). With this consideration, I present a reflexive account in the next section.

4.10 Methodological reflexivity

In recent years, there has been an increasing body of research that has recognised the importance of reflexivity when conducting ethical research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Etherington, 2007; Warin, 2011; Phelan and Kinsella, 2013). Bryman (2016) infers that it is often the case amidst methodological discussion, for the social researcher to include a reflexive account of their positionality and decision-making processes during the study, since social science research can be influenced by a variety of factors. Reflexivity involves researchers placing themselves and their practices under scrutiny, "acknowledging the

ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge" (McGraw *et al.*, 2000, p.68). For example, this includes examining our gender, age, ethnicity, identity, social class, religion, (dis)ability, previous experience, as well as rapport with participants (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). This understanding gives recognition to the implications and significance of the researcher's choices within the research process and the consequences in relation to data collection and dissemination (Bryman, 2016). It goes someway in addressing how the social researcher may affect the way in which research is conducted and the findings interpreted.

With regard to my positioning within this study, I am a 26-year-old white British female. I come from a non-professional background and I am the only person in my family to have gone to university. My Bachelor's degree was in Sports Education and Sports Development and my Master's by Research degree focused on the educational trajectories of looked-after children. My previous Master's degree could almost be considered a 'trial run' in my attempt to gain access to LACYP, but was ultimately unsuccessful in the necessary timeframe. With this in mind, I thought I was entering into this study knowing how difficult access would be and assumed that the additional length of such study, and the higher status qualification it afforded, would put me in a better position to access the field. How wrong I was. I lost count of the amount of rejections or unhelpful correspondence I received, which served to prove one thing; ultimately, no one within the contexts I contacted was prepared to take responsibility for facilitating young people's involvement in the research. Often, I would simply be pointed in another direction or passed on to another person who was 'better equipped to help'. Ultimately my study felt like it was on standby until access was secured. Once a literature review was completed (although in a constant state of revision), I could not establish a fixed methodology since I did not know how many young people I would have access to, in what setting this would be, and for how long. I was aware that it was these things that would ultimately inform the methods I would adopt, and only knowing the methods could I plan subsequent stages. I felt, then, that I could not plan for anything, but was left collecting ideas, concepts and methods that could potentially be used. As such, I was rather 'pushed' towards developing a more 'fluid methodology', one more responsive to the emergent structure of the study. The difficulties I refer to, are not limited to my study (e.g. Murray, 2005). Although studies rarely address the practical issues of undertaking research with LACYP (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006), Heptinstall (2000) noted the difficulties in securing access to looked-after

children, with over 50% of her initial cohort lost due to exclusions by gatekeepers (e.g., social workers and parents). Despite being from a dedicated research unit, the process of recruiting 16 participants took her approximately 10 months.

Aside from the obvious emails, phone calls and meetings, my attempt to gain access to speak with LACYP was nothing like I had predicted. I cooked pizzas, made Christmas decorations, rock climbed and even went to a planned event at Center Parcs with LACYP, all in the hope that it would lead to me being able to speak with them. However, while I was allowed to talk with them in these scenarios, I was unable to *collect data* due to various ethical considerations and required processes (e.g. obtaining necessary consent). I attended the events voluntarily and was more than happy to do so; I wanted to show the gatekeepers that I was committed to getting to know these young people and offer any additional services I could. Nevertheless, getting to know these young people seemed almost impossible when not even the local authority (in which the group interviews took place) could predict their attendance at events or determine if they would turn up again. One particular local authority even had to cancel a particular event the day before it was due to take place due to lack of numbers (an event at which it was agreed I could collect data). Trying to access a group of (vulnerable) children who are not all in one school, but indeed belong to a 'Virtual School' and who may have moved placements six times during the course of this study, was always going to be problematic. The slow and lengthy process required to recruit looked-after children for research purposes has been widely cited in the literature (see Butler and Williamson, 1994; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998b; Heptinstall, 2000; Murray, 2005; Quarmby, 2014); a reason, perhaps, why so little research (particularly qualitative research) has been done in this area.

The whole process of gaining access revolved around relationships, and my experience in this study showed that it is more about who you know, rather than what you know. Many of the professionals I spoke with dismissed it before it had even been put to the young people, perhaps through fear of what the young people might say or a recognition of the level of work involved to set meetings up. This notion that gatekeepers may consciously or unconsciously block children's participation in research has previously been recognised by Heptinstall (2000) who argues that not letting young people decide for themselves prevents their voice being heard. Only one line of access I pursued put it to their young

people to decide their own participation in the research; they did so through their Children in Care council. Interestingly, the young people were particularly interested and wanted to take part, since my study met the aims of a strand of their local authority initiative. I was granted permission from the gatekeeper to hear the young people's voices during their bi-monthly meetings that groups of LACYP and care leavers regularly attend. I was invited to three different meetings, where the young people were split into age ranges and I was told to expect around 25 young people in total. However, despite eight months of negotiating access, and attending events and meetings with various professionals and young people, due to difficulties with securing consent (from adults), none of the group interviews happened. Only one consent form was received, with the gatekeeper noting that:

> The situation with consent is that the carers' need to sign the consent and sometimes they are unaware of what the project is really about and for some young people in care the consent has to signed by their social worker which sometimes can be extremely difficult.

This was discouraging, particularly as I had spent a considerable amount of time preparing relevant materials. To add to the frustration, the young people still attended the scheduled meetings - which had an explicit focus on youth voice - but because I was external to the council and had to gain separate consent, I was unable to collect any data with them; regardless of the fact that they wanted to take part. Negotiating access therefore remains a major challenge in conducting research with LACYP, which can have a significant impact on the timing of the research, as I discovered (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006).

When conducting research with young people, particularly with those who may have difficulties establishing relationships with regard to trust, I knew that it was important to build a rapport quickly so that they would feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences. Without opportunities to get to know people over a period of time, as I would have liked, I felt an extra pressure when meeting youth participants for the first time. It was an incredibly daunting feeling, not knowing how you were going to be perceived and if you were going to be accepted. This meant, for example, the things that some researchers may not acknowledge as relevant became incredibly important (e.g. what to wear, personal

mannerisms and giving active thought to the complex life histories of participants). This was especially challenging since most of the encounters I had with the young people were in the presence of local authority staff, so it was often a challenge to find the right balance between being respected as a professional to gatekeepers and yet not coming across as 'another professional' to the young people.

During the study, it was important for me to remember that my youth participants were used to individuals coming in and out of their lives, being asked questions, sitting in meetings and listening to decisions being made about/for them. To them, I was just another stranger wanting to speak to them. For this reason, I made it clear from the start that I was not a social worker, nor a teacher. I was not there to judge or pass on what they might say; I was purely there to listen and try and understand their experiences. I dressed in a casual but presentable manner (jeans and a jumper were the usual attire), and engaged in general conversation with the young people before any data collection took place. I would talk about everyday things such as current music or TV programmes or their plans for the weekend. I kept the interactions fun, informal and relaxed in order that I might be accepted by the young people (as someone they were willing to talk to) and remove any potential discomfort from their participation. This sense of rapport is something which has been suggested by Punch (2002) as necessary when speaking to children and young people, since they are often not used to sharing experiences with unknown adults (although, as noted, this may not necessarily be the case for LACYP). This is contrasted by Kendrick and colleagues (2008) who suggest that it can sometimes be easier to speak about things with a stranger as opposed to someone who has a positive view of them, particularly if it is to discuss potentially embarrassing, painful or shameful experiences. During this process, I was aware of the possibility of hearing some sensitive issues or distressing experiences. One "ethically important moment" (Guilleman and Gillam, 2004, p.262) was a personal disclosure by a young woman that I was not expecting during one of the three individual interviews I had with her. Although I knew that disclosures could happen with this kind of respondent group, I found this incident somewhat difficult to deal with, despite it having been historic and legally dealt with on behalf of the person concerned. I cannot be sure to what extent my age, gender and ethnicity may have affected the conversations I had with young people, but being female may have been a contributing factor in the disclosure mentioned above.

4.11 Summary

This chapter has provided details concerning the specific methodological principles, methods and context that guided, shaped and underpinned this study. It began by considering epistemological and ontological assumptions to explain why a qualitative methodological framework was predominantly adopted for this study. The potential challenges of doing research with children and young people, particularly those who are looked-after, were then identified, with scoping interviews introduced as a means of gaining knowledge that could help to shape and inform this current research. Further challenges in conducting research were considered in relation to ethical issues and, in particular, the process of negotiating access to LACYP and hearing their voices. The three phases of data collection were then explained, and the research methods employed in each were discussed in relation to their advantages and limitations for this study. Following this, the discussion proceeded to explore how consent, privacy and confidentiality were ensured during the research process and how the data were analysed to identify key themes for discussion. Finally, a reflexive researcher account was presented, documenting a personal view of the research process and the difficulties arising therein.

Having now addressed the methodology employed in this research, the following four chapters present the key research findings alongside relevant discussion. Each chapter includes an amalgamation of data from all three phases of the study, presented across three to four different sub-themes. Due to the different numbers of adult voices and the fact that some LACYP were interviewed on more occasions that others, certain voices may appear to be more apparent within the findings due to the greater insight of experiences that they offered. Broadly speaking, the chapter headings represent the key themes and the sections within each discussion denote the sub-themes. Throughout the chapters, the social ecological model (McLeroy *et* al., 1988) is drawn upon to provide clarity and understanding of the many different influences at play within LACYP's experiences.

CHAPTER 5: ENVIRONMENT AND CONTEXT

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is the first of four that present the findings that emerged from the data analysis across all three phases of the research. This includes the surveys and interviews with local authority professionals and PE teachers, and the individual and group interviews with looked-after children and young people (LACYP). Since Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) finds itself situated within the broader educational environment, many of the themes identified within all four chapters as affecting the PESS experiences of LACYP, are located within their broader life trajectory. This is because PESS is always experienced in context, which means LACYP's experiences of PESS and development through PESS, cannot be studied in isolation. The themes that emerged across the analysis are theoretically relevant to the conceptual model outlined in Chapter 3 and are situated within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model.

This chapter focuses upon the influence of the wider environment and context in which LACYP find themselves. Specifically, it is referring to the surroundings or conditions in which a LACYP operates for example, school, home and community. Interestingly whilst all respondents explicitly noted environmental and contextual factors as impacting LACYP's experiences of PESS, the views of young people compared to the adults (local authority professionals and PE teachers) often differed and this will be highlighted during this chapter. Present within this chapter then, are themes concerning: LACYP's experiences prior to becoming looked-after; the disruption of placement stability; the location of placements; and the complexities of being educated within alternative provision settings. Quotations from respondent transcripts, in addition to statistics and extracts from the surveys, are used to reinforce the link between the data and the emergent themes. For clarity, it is important to note that there was often an overlap within the local authority professional data of terms used in the responses received in both the survey and the interviews, specifically regarding PE, school sport and sport outside of the school setting. These terms appeared to be used interchangeably, highlighting perhaps the lack of understanding between the differences of such terms, despite this distinction being outlined at the start of the survey itself (see Appendix 3).

5.1 Pre-care experiences

Chapter 2 identified how LACYP's pre-care experiences are often associated with poorer outcomes regarding their health and education. As noted by the APPG (2012, p.3): "By the very nature of being in care, young people have experienced a different and often very difficult start in life. Those experiences in themselves create barriers and so need to be understood in the context of learning and education". Since PESS sits within the broader remit of health and education, it is perhaps unsurprising that this study also found PESS to be impacted by a LACYP's pre-care experiences. Within the social ecological framework model, McLeroy and colleagues' (1988) argue that an individual's knowledge, self-concept, attitude and developmental history directly affects their behaviour. To this end, each LACYP who enters the care system will have experienced a different trajectory affected by their knowledge, behaviour, self-concept and developmental history. These individual factors that McLeroy *et al.* (1988) describe are therefore consistent with LACYP's life experiences prior to becoming looked-after. This consensus is also reflected within LACYP literature, with the pre-care experiences of looked-after children noted as directly affecting their behaviour once they come into care (Stephenson, 2007; Shaw and Frost, 2013). For example, Bateman (2017) implies that the factors that lead to children coming into care are associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties and lowered resilience. Findings from this research highlight that these pre-care experiences can negatively influence LACYP's *motivation towards* PESS as well as their *experiences of* PESS. For example, 17-year old Shannon, who at the time was transitioning out of her foster care placement, explained that she hated PESS and never willingly participated, attributing this to her experiences prior to becoming looked-after. When asked the reason for not wanting to participate in PESS, she explained:

> 'Cos I wasn't socialised as a child [by my parents], so I don't get on with other children now, I don't get on with people generally. Not in a nasty way, just the fact that I don't. I don't get the conversation or I don't understand. It's like I [am] socially unacceptable, d'you know what I mean. I don't do social things … I wasn't socialised. I was a drugs mule half my life. It was "Hey, take this bag of coke down to Dosser and don't get nicked on the way there" (laughs). So, yeah.

What Shannon is articulating here suggests that she blames her parents for the lack of social skills that she developed in her earlier years, and her perceived lack of social skills for her dissatisfaction in PESS. Similarly, Jamie, a 19-year old care leaver who was attending a local Further Education college at the time of being interviewed, reflected on his childhood and the possible reasons for his dislike of PESS and physical activity in general. Like Shannon, Jamie believed this to be due to an absence of parental support prior to foster care:

> Growing up wasn't easy 'cos we were on a little estate kinda thing. And I didn't go out until I was like 10/11, 'cos my mum forbid it for some reason. And it was kinda like my mum and dad would stay in the house and we couldn't go out or anything, so I guess that's where the whole active thing gets me a bit blurgh, 'cos I never went out as a kid. So, they just like would keep us in and since like, cos obviously they used to drink, well they still do, they didn't do anything with us. So we'd be inside, and we'd have nothing to do, so we'd just have to go up to our rooms and do something.

Jamie further explained that his interests were computer gaming, writing and music. These activities are indicative of individual pastimes as opposed to group activities, and are likely attributed to Jamie's apparent isolation when residing with his birth parents. This perhaps suggests that Jamie's dislike for PESS was due to other interests he developed as a result of continuous isolation prior to becoming looked-after. Other research has also found LACYP to prefer individual, self-involving activities (e.g. Safvenbom and Samdahl, 1998). This notion is also reflected in work by NICE/SCIE (2010) who imply that early experiences may have long-term consequences for the health and social development of children and young people.

This finding of pre-care experiences influencing the participation of LACYP in PESS was also evident in the data from local authority professionals and PE teachers; with the narratives largely focusing on the abuse and trauma that young people may have experienced. Within the local authority survey data, approximately 80% of the respondents believed that there were barriers and/or challenges that affect LACYP's motivations

towards, participation in and experiences of PESS. Forming part of these barriers were indications of LACYP's past experiences. For example, a Deputy VSH survey respondent indicated that the motivation of LACYP towards PESS can be impacted by their "experience prior to coming into care where there is little emphasis on healthy lifestyle and doing any exercise at all". Similarly, another VSH survey respondent implied that "due to neglect, many do not have the best motor skills and therefore find some PE/sport a challenge". This notion was explored further during the local authority interviews, where there also appeared to be an emphasis on the lack of support LACYP received from their birth families. With regard to participating in extra-curricular activities, interview participant Laura White, in her role as a Teacher Advisor for the Corporate Parenting and Education Team, notes: "Historically that's the one thing that they've lacked, they've lacked support in being able to do things. They start from a very poor base". Stein (2012) asserts that the experiences of LACYP prior to entering care, including their educational experience, family experiences and the reason they entered care in the first place, can all have an impact on the young person's wellbeing and educational outcomes. Findings from this study imply that this can also include their participation in education and PESS. For example, when asked if they feel their LACYP experience any barriers in participating in PESS, Lisa Phillips, the assistant Virtual School Headteacher from Millfolk, explained:

> I'm not sure in regard to PE, but in general I think it's probably the things where there is development trauma and attachment. And obviously children want to be in control because they've not been in control, and so it's very important for them to be in control and then that produces negative behaviours … One of the things we're doing in Millfolk is we're trying to give schools free developmental, trauma and attachment training, so that they're aware of sort of the issues that looked-after children face. And not just only looked-after children but adopted children, children on the peripheries of care and also children who are going through divorce, bereavement or who have got parents with mental health issues or drug or alcohol abuse issues … we're trying to give them that training so they've got a good understanding of what developmental trauma and attachment is, how it presents in schools and what they can do, what strategies they can use to sort of negate some of the more challenging aspects of that.

Coman and Devaney (2011) note that the corporate parent (local authority) has the potential to amplify, dampen or have no effect on the vulnerability of LACYP who are at risk of poorer outcomes by virtue of their pre-care experiences. In total, six of the ten local authority interviewees spoke of providing training to school staff to create an awareness and increased understanding of LACYP; a finding that is explored in more depth in Chapter 8. The data presented thus far suggests that the pre-care experiences of LACYP can have an impact on their wider educational trajectory; something which is again consistent with discussions in Chapter 2. The notion that this subsequently translates into undesirable behaviours is focused upon in Chapter 6. However, more specifically linked to LACYP's experiences of PESS, Mark Jones, Head of PE at Sandcove Secondary School in South West England, suggested that some LACYP's pre-care experiences can have a detrimental effect on their motivation towards this aspect of their education:

> If they've had quite of bit of trauma in their lives, then they probably aren't as confident as perhaps they should be. And that may have an effect on their levels of ability in PE because obviously, that's quite a big thing being a sociable activity and confidence is quite important. And, as I said, we've tried to develop this club straight away in Year 7 so they're given the opportunity to work on that. And we work quite closely with a few of the people in the support group, so I'm quite happy that we're trying our best really.

In a similar vein to the assistant VSH from Millfolk (cited above), Mark and his colleagues recognised that there was a barrier preventing some LACYP from fully being able to invest themselves in PE lessons as a consequence of their adverse experiences, and sought practical ways to address these issues through extra-curricular provision from when LACYP start secondary school. This barrier is further illustrated in an extract taken from an interview with Sandra Scott, the VSH in Wellhampton, who suggested that the PE environment may present issues of anxiety and distress for some LACYP due to historical events:

> Even just getting changed for PE can be quite a challenge. In the fact [that] if they're self-harmers or they have experienced some quite unnerving experiences in their

> lives, and then getting undressed in front of lots of other people and things like that, it's just not something they're capable of doing.

Similar findings within this study were also identified in the context of schools. For example, the Head of PE at Lushington Secondary School, David Andrews, explained that for many LACYP, PE could be a subject that provides a sense of uneasiness:

> I can think of several other students that aren't in PE lessons because of their unease with the changing room environment and for the complete desire not to do practical activities. And yeah, they go elsewhere, they don't even come to PE. Again, there's several students that won't entertain PE.

The challenging culture of the changing room environment is not a new phenomenon with regards to physical education research (see Bramham, 2003; Fisette, 2011; O'Donovan *et al.*, 2014). In the present study, this is reinforced from the narrative of a looked-after female respondent, Kalaya, who reflected on her PE lessons in secondary school prior to becoming looked-after. She disclosed the reason for sometimes not attending PE lessons, which, as she describes, was just prior to her entry into care; when the school became aware of her situation at home:

> The reason the school knew [about my home situation] was 'cos [of] my best friend. 'Cos my mum was violent and she didn't let me go to school for a week and my friend was worried why I wasn't coming to school and why I wasn't answering Facebook or anything. So my friend went and told the school, and the school rung up and my mum and my mum was like "She's not coming to school again" … because like when she hit me, I had PE like during that week, so if I was to get changed in PE, people would probably ask me questions. I don't know what I would have said and I don't know if I would have told them or not … my mum used to like lock me in at home and used to go to work. Like in case I run away or escaped, they used to lock the windows and doors, so I couldn't really go outside, couldn't

> really open a window, so I was stuck with staying inside, didn't really have much physical activity.

The notion that pre-care experiences can impact upon the PESS experiences of some LACYP, as was the case for Kalaya, is a finding that was consistent with data from local authority representatives and indicative of the impact of the family on a young person's physical activity participation (see Kay, 2003). For example, an interview with Heather Roberts, a VSH from Whippinghamshire local authority, revealed that:

> One of the challenges is that lots of looked-after children have missed huge chunks of education before they come into care, because the dysfunctionality of the families' pre-care experiences … you're always on catch up, you know you've got at least a year if not up to two years when you're on catch up trying to get them, their skills up to sort of generic age level development.

These responses indicate that the pre-care experiences of LACYP can be deemed as a significant influencer on LACYP's experiences of PESS, much like their overall educational experience. McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model views past experiences and development as inherent within the individual, and therefore LACYP's pre-care experiences can be considered an individual influence on PESS; that is their experiences of PESS are influenced by the multitude of experiences they had prior to entering care. Having said this, these experiences would of course also have been influenced by external factors at the time such as interpersonal relationships (e.g. with the birth family). In particular, family structure and socio-economic status have been noted as influential on young people's physical activity dispositions (see Kay, 2003; Quarmby and Dagkas, 2010; Holt *et al.*, 2011). For example, in low income and lone parent households, constraints of time, parents' work commitments and a lack of transport can cause young people to engage in sedentary alternatives (Quarmby and Dagkas, 2013). However, since LACYP's experiences prior to care are historical, they remain an individual influence on their PESS experiences. Nonetheless, in terms of the overall environment and context of PESS within the lives of LACYP, it would be naïve to think that institutional factors do not play a part in shaping LACYP's experiences, and so it is to this, we now turn.

5.2 Placement disruption

As we have seen, the instability of placements is consistently referred to within the literature regarding the lived experiences of LACYP and the findings from this research provide no exception in this respect. To reiterate, placement instability (movement of placements) occurs for various reasons and is regarded as a major factor affecting the educational trajectories of LACYP (Stein, 2005; Hannon *et al.*, 2010; APPG, 2012;). The statistics outlined in Chapter 2 showed that the majority (approximately three quarters) of LACYP are placed within foster families during their time in care. For this reason, the interviews with local authority and PE teacher respondents were mostly concerned with the experiences of young people looked-after by foster carers. In addition, nearly all the young people interviewed were or had been in foster care, with the exception of one who had experience of residential care.

It is argued that changes in a child or young person's placement may consequently have a negative impact on academic achievement, since links have been made between placement stability, placement choice, educational achievement and resilience (e.g. Atwool, 2006; Daniel, 2008; Shaw and Frost, 2013). Stephenson (2007) notes that the instability and disruption to LACYP's home or school lives have been associated with problematic behaviour and are often a common denominator for those young people with difficult circumstances. The notion that placements breakdown due to the behaviour of LACYP might suggest that placement disruption is an individual factor within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model. However, positioning placement breakdown in this way implies an associated discourse of blame, failing to acknowledge wider influences such as the relational aspect with the carer at the interpersonal level. For example, Shaw and Frost (2013) explain that placements that are intended to last but eventually break down are mostly seen amongst older children and young people (those aged between 11-15). In this study, results from the local authority professionals survey also identified this age range as the age in which LACYP are likely to face the most barriers with PESS. Further placement breakdowns can also be seen in those who demonstrate challenging behaviours and/or those who do not want to be in care (Shaw and Frost, 2013). This scenario was aptly described by Shannon, whose placement experiences suggests a lack of agency from institutionally led decisions:

> It's a very hard deal … It's hard to get your head around, to explain, because in that position you're not scared, you just dunno where you're going. You're a number being pushed from person to person. Like, I could have ended up in Scotland or somewhere … So I'm quite lucky I was only moved to Crayport. But it's still moving away from your school, your home, your friends, everything…. They [social workers] don't understand what a massive change that is. For some people it's a relief, but for people like me, 'cos I was there into my late stages, it hits you harder because everything you know, it's like trying to teach an old dog new tricks. It doesn't work. D'you see my point? You have to try and adapt. And I was against it, I was against everything.

What Shannon, and two other LACYP participants revealed, is consistent with the existing literature that suggests that placement changes can lead to a young person to loathe and/or become detached from school (see Stephenson, 2007). This consequently impacts upon their experiences of PESS due to its context within the school environment. Paradoxically, it is argued that involvement in extra-curricular activities can facilitate attachment to school (Barber *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, when asked about possible barriers to LACYP's participation in school sport, Lisa Phillips (Assistant VSH, Millfolk), implied that LACYP placements could be problematic:

> I think it is down to perhaps the instability that they've had and the sense of loss that they've already had … And it's, for young people who have maybe been moved from around placements, because of challenging behaviour, then there's sometimes a feeling of I'm not worthy of joining a club or I'm not, y'know, I'm going to get kicked off. And so they don't want to join because they're frightened of another loss. Or if I get involved in this club and then I move placement again then I'm going to lose it. … And yeah, I think it's about loss sometimes.

The loss that Lisa describes is closely linked to a sense of belonging that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. It is argued that without a sense of belonging, which is formed through strong connections, children will become isolated and disconnected

(Ginsburg, 2011). This is evident within Lisa's account when she spoke of a reluctance of LACYP to take part in school sport due to placement breakdown and thus a weakening of connections. Such sentiments also echo those of Quarmby (2014) who found that the disruption caused by placement changes has previously been found to cause difficulties for LACYP in residential homes in accessing sport and physical activity outside of school. Similar issues were identified by a number of respondents in this study in relation to sport within school, where placement disruption was noted as a barrier for LACYP. Heather Roberts (Whippinghamshire local authority) elaborated further:

> CW: What are the biggest challenges looked-after children face in participating in PE and school sport?
>
> Heather: I would suspect it's the fact that they've moved placements a lot, so this is not Whippinghamshire looked-after children, this is generic. They tend to move placements and they tend to move schools and because of that you get a very disjointed friendship group, access to things like that.

These extracts in relation to placement disruption suggest various ways in which placement stability may affect LACYP's participation in PESS. However, the data beyond this quote revealed substantial differences in the associated reasons why it may have an impact. One reason was related to the emotional wellbeing of the individual in terms of the feelings of loss and self-esteem, whilst another was allusive to the practical aspects associated with PESS such as PE kit, transport and foster carer availability. Unlike pre-care experiences, practical support and resources are more easily addressed (see 5.3). Barriers attributed to emotional wellbeing may be eliminated if LACYP were residing in a stable foster home, whereby they had a secure connection to at least one significant caregiver. For the youth respondents, it became evident that PESS, and school more generally, were not always considered a priority due to the emotional turmoil they experienced, rather than the practical implications of placement movements. Reflecting upon his own experiences of school and PESS, Nathan (aged 16) talked of the "rumble and a tumble" of the disruptive home life that he endured:

> Like basically, it's a funny story. So I was in Sharpton [another geographical location] up until Year 8, and then I came here for year 9, and then I went back to Sharpton for year 10 and 11 and then came back to here for year 10 and a bit of year 11, so yeah it's quite confusing.

Nathan's experience is reflective of previous research findings which note that the stability of placements is often closely linked to the stability of education and the chance of improved educational outcomes (e.g. Skuse *et al.*, 2001; Stein, 2001; APPG, 2012), which may include participation in extra-curricular activities. Clay and Dowling (2004) contend that education is not given sufficient priority when planning for such placements and future options. The decision to move a LACYP can often be for administrative reasons and/or the availability of foster carers, thus indicating that placement stability is influenced at an institutional level within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model through local authority policies and procedures, in addition to the overarching national statutory guidance at the policy level.

As Nathan's extract reveals, multiple placement changes can cause discontinuity in education, which has been regarded as severely impacting on social networks, sense of identity and self-esteem (see NICE/SCIE, 2010; Shaw and Frost, 2013). During the interview with Nathan, there was further exploration of if and how these placement changes had an effect on his education:

CW: How about with school, all that moving?

Nathan: Umm I think it disrupt[ed] my learning a lot because, because of like my behaviour and stuff like that, I wasn't learning.

Nathan's account suggests that there was a lack of engagement toward education (including PESS), due to the frequent upheaval within his life that became the sole focus of his attention. It has been argued that avoiding disruption in education by keeping LACYP in the same school with the same friends has a strong association with their educational attainment (Hannon *et al.*, 2010). This is because it can act as a source of

security and stability, providing opportunities for constructive contact with peers and supportive adults (Gilligan, 1998), as well as facilitating the development of self-esteem and confidence, through non-academic qualifications such as sport (Dixon *et al.*, 2004). Likewise, Farineau and McWey (2011) argue that LACYP may endure subsequent changes to friendship groups, case workers and fosters carers and it could be argued that participating in an extracurricular activity can provide a sense of structure and stability within these young people's lives. That said, for the majority of respondents, despite staying at the same school with the same friends, moving to a new home can still have a negative impact on educational experiences, including their engagement in PESS. Such was the experience of Kalaya, who stated that she never moved schools and did not participate in any extra-curricular activities such as school sport. She explained that when she was first placed into care at the age of 13 or 14, her educational experience suffered:

> My grades went down. I don't know, I don't think I was really into lessons and learning, 'cos I'd fallen out with friends and I wasn't living with my mum and then I'm not seeing my sister. I dunno, it was tough.

Kalaya's comments are reflective of previous work that has sought to identify the impact of moving placements and which has noted that, despite staying at the same school, the stability of home placements is the most important thing to young people in care (APPG, 2012). The associated disruption caused by having to move placements has presented itself as a clear finding within this study as impacting upon LACYP's experiences of school and subsequently PESS at the individual, institutional and policy level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). The state of anxiety Kalaya and the other young people within this study expressed when moving homes, depicts a clear understanding as to why certain aspects of education such as PESS may suffer given the context and complexity of their lives. However, this study found that it is not only the instability caused by placements that can impact on LACYP's experiences of PESS. The location of these placements can also be a contributing factor and this is where we turn to next.

5.3 Placement location

Whilst the majority of discussion within Chapter 2 was directed towards the instability of placements for LACYP, there was little reference to the placement distance from schools; other than the requirement at a public policy level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) for local authorities (where possible) to keep children in the same school despite any placement changes (see *Children and Young Persons Act 2008*, section 3.4.13). Gilligan (2013) argues that not all activities for LACYP should be linked to school, in order to prevent a loss in these activities in the event of a change in a young person's placement. Respondent accounts were consistent with Gilligan's argument, with the data revealing that where LACYP were placed had a major influence on whether they participated in school sport. For example, it was noted by Robert Knight, the VSH from Bucktonshire, that "staying after school, depending on travel back, how far they have to travel back is a big issue". The interview extract below with Heather Roberts, a VSH in the north of England, also evidences this:

> When you're moving into new foster placements, you know, to be able to access not the PE lessons, but clubs and things like that. Somebody's got to take on board what needs to happen for that like transport, foster carers being able to pick up, taxis organising who's going to pay for them, who's going to provide the PE kit and things like that.

The location of a LACYP's placement as affecting their engagement in after-school activities such as school sport, was a shared concern among the local authority respondents; as articulated by Sandra Scott, a VSH from a local authority in the Midlands:

> CW: What would you say are the biggest challenges [for looked-after children in accessing PE and school sport]?
>
> Sandra: I think it can be where their placement is. So, if their placement is not in the local area and they've got to be taxied back or picked up at certain times that can sometimes prevent them taking part, particularly in after school activities.

Although it appears that placement moves are not always accommodating in terms of their proximity to schools, transport issues have been acknowledged and addressed in some cases. In the example below, a mainstream school within the north-east region has recognised and attempted to overcome this barrier for LACYP, as the local authority's VSH explained:

> I know one school for example that have a minibus, two or three minibuses, that go after school for those who stay on for extra activities. If you're in a rural community and you haven't got someone who can pick you up or take you home, then you can't continue with that, so if there's specific arrangements put in place that's helpful or any arrangement to get someone back in that sort of way. So that's just one small thing that comes immediately to mind.

Likewise, Heather Roberts identified an issue regarding transport in her role as VSH, and the kinds of provisions Whippinghamshire were putting in place to overcome this:

> As part of our PEPs, we will always talk about access to after-school clubs, and if a foster carer can't pick them up then can we have a taxi funded or is there somebody else. Or you know, we always work through that, because there is a definite barrier because of the distance involved sometimes between schools and placements for just normal sort of access do you know what I mean.

While these comments highlight the impact of logistics on LACYP's access to extra-curricular sport, these examples suggest that PESS may not be the only element in play here with regards to their wider educational experiences. Indeed, the issue of location/transport can affect access to education more broadly and other extra-curricular activities occurring after school. There are also variations in who addresses this barrier; the school or the local authority. The survey data from the PE teachers revealed that 63% believed there were barriers/issues concerning LACYP's experiences of PESS, with travel arrangements for extra-curricular activities being noted as problematic. Similar findings

were also found in the local authority professionals survey. For example, an Educational Development Officer from a local authority in the West Midlands noted: "LAC often rely on transport arrangements to support their travel to and from school, and this can prove to be a barrier." This point was further explored during the interviews with local authority professionals and PE teachers. In the following extract, David Andrews of Lushington Secondary School, explains this further:

CW: Are you aware of any issues or barriers then that looked-after children face?

David Andrews: Extra-curricular is a completely different kettle of fish, there's massive barriers there. Depending if they have much further to travel, sometimes they'll have much further to travel and it's a bus, it's a taxi, it's picked up, so after-school sport doesn't go on as much.

CW: So these issues and barriers you mention, what do you think is needed to address these do you think?

David Andrews: It's about keeping kids close to the school that they're in, keeping them well within catchment so that the travel arrangement can be made easily so they can walk, they can cycle or foster carers can pick them up. As opposed to, I know individuals who live about 40 miles away, 30 to 40 miles it's not possible for students to stay after school. That's the biggest barrier.

This presents tension at the institutional level between maintaining school stability by placing LACYP 40 miles away (impacting on access to extracurricular activities and friendship groups) and the suggestion that these decisions should be considered on a case by case basis, rather than assuming that school stability should always be centralised (see Mannay *et al.*, 2015). What is interesting to note is that, contrary to the views of teachers and local authority professionals, none of the LACYP interviewed specifically mentioned the location of their placements or transport concerns as having an impact on their PESS

experiences. Differences between adults and LACYP in the prioritizing of key issues has also been found in other research exploring LACYP's experiences (see, Holland, 2009). That is not to say that transport or location are not issues for other LACYP, it may simply be that the respondents in this study lived within a close enough proximity to their schools or considered other factors as more influential such as the disruption of moving. Nonetheless, these examples illustrate the key role that the corporate parent (local authority) plays in shaping LACYP's PESS experiences in relation to accessibility issues.

Support from outside the educational setting is something that all children rely upon for engagement within education and extra-curricular activities and is typically provided by parents/family for those who reside with their birth families (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). For LACYP, the responsibility lies with the corporate parent. By law, all LACYP in England have corporate parents (See Chapter 3, section 3.4.25: *Children and Social Work Act, 2017*). Corporate parents are responsible for providing the best possible care, aspirations and safeguarding of LACYP (Dixon *et al.*, 2015). This includes ensuring that these young people are given the same opportunity as their peers to participate in extra-curricular activities such as school sport (DfES, 2007). Foster carers also have an important role to play, being responsible for providing the support they may otherwise lack. As part of the Fostering Services: *National Minimum Standards*, foster carers are required to promote and value education to help their foster child(ren) achieve their full potential and prepare them for adulthood (DfE, 2011) (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.19). The importance of the foster carer in the promotion of education and additional activities for LACYP has been noted in previous studies (Jackson *et al.*, 2011; Gibson and Edwards, 2015). In terms of their PESS experiences, foster carers can be considered to play an important role in supporting travel arrangements. Therefore, although placement location (or rather transportation issues) as an influencer of LACYP's experiences of PESS appears to sit more within the institutional level of their social ecology, it can also be influenced at an interpersonal level by the relationship with the foster carer. The distance of a LACYP placement in relation to their school may prove to be more significant if, in fact, it is their school that changes, rather than their placement. In this respect, research has shown that for some LACYP, their educational trajectory can be problematic and so the next sub-theme reveals the impact of alternative educational provision on LACYP's PESS experiences.

5.4 Alternative educational provision

Alternative provision is defined as "an organisation where pupils engage in timetabled, educational activities away from school and school staff" (Taylor, 2012, p.4). Such activities are for pupils who cannot attend mainstream school for a variety of reasons, such as school exclusion, behaviour issues, short or long-term illness, school refusal or teenage pregnancy. Predominantly, they are young people with behavioural difficulties, who come from deprived backgrounds and are among the most vulnerable within society:

> They often come from chaotic homes in which problems such as drinking, drug-taking, mental health issues, domestic violence and family breakdown are common. These children are often stuck in complex patterns of negative, self-destructive behaviour and helping them is not easy or formulaic. Many also have developed mental health issues.
>
> (Taylor, 2012, p.4)

If we look at the above in accordance with McLeroy *et al.*'s. (1988) social ecological model, it suggests that young people attend alternative provision due to individually related factors. However, the individual category within the model is built upon choice and individual agency, which is often reduced for LACYP. It is therefore crucial to recognise the interplay here between the interpersonal (relationships) and the institutional (e.g. placement moves) factors that would have also impacted upon their educational trajectory. For LACYP, spending time out of mainstream education is not uncommon. Dixon and Stein (2003) found that 95% of their study participants had truanted or been excluded and half had been victims of bullying. This causes a disruption to their learning and, as has subsequently been found within this study, to potentially impact upon their experiences of PESS. Although it is documented that LACYP are more likely to be excluded and experience increased behavioural and emotional difficulties than their peers (a finding identified in the following chapter), over two thirds of the young people involved with the present study were in mainstream education (albeit varying in degrees of stability and consistency). However, the remaining respondents spoke of how their behaviour meant that part of their educational trajectory was spent in an alternative provision setting, such as a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). All PRUs have a teacher in charge, akin to a mainstream school's headteacher, and in 2013 there were 393 PRU's in operation across England and Wales (DfE, 2013f). In order to decipher the PESS experiences of youth participants who

had attended alternative education, it was important to firstly gain a fuller understanding of LACYP's experiences of learning within an alternative provision setting. By so doing, the data revealed that their experiences were significantly different from those of mainstream schooling, particularly in relation to PESS provision. This is illustrated below in the example from 19-year-old Jamie, who reflected on his PESS experience when in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) at the age of 11:

> We didn't have PE in the PRU at all, just an activity day which we had every single Friday every week … We'd go to the park, we'd go to the park and just run around and do whatever so that's pretty much our PE, but we didn't learn anything in the way of PE integration.

Similarly, in the context of a different PRU, the below extract from an interview with Shannon confirms that the provision of PE within PRUs is largely ambiguous, thus indicating that time spent out of mainstream education can result in limited access to PESS for LACYP:

CW: What about your times at the PRU's, did you have PE there?

Shannon: I did but it wasn't actually PE. See what they would call PE was "Awesome" right … you'd have Dan who was classed as the PE teacher, he'd take you out with however many students were in your class, most likely in mine there was about 5 students. So you'd think me, 5 other students in the back of this mini bus and he's go "right we're going to Broadstoke". So you'd turn up in Broadstoke right, we'd go into that like educational park bit, now it's like an exercise park and he'd literally just say "run free". He'd open the doors and say "go play, be back in half hour". I swear to God, if you wanted to you could go lie on the ground, he would not do nothing, you could do whatever you wanted to.

These interview extracts are perhaps not surprising given that the statutory guidance at the policy level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) for alternative provision states that such provisions must offer appropriate and challenging teaching in English, mathematics and science (including IT) on par with mainstream education (DfE, 2013f). There is no mention of other compulsory subjects such as PE, which if delivered would be on par with what these young people would have access to in mainstream education. This may be suggestive of why it has been argued that alternative provision is not of a consistently high quality (PRT, 2016).

PRUs, however, are just one example of how alternative educational provision is delivered; other options include home schooling services, e-learning centres and residential schools. For Jamie, his trajectory was particularly complex. Following his time at a PRU, as identified above, Jamie also attended a special needs residential school for the majority of his secondary school education. In contrast to the PRU, this had a positive impact on his education:

> I think I would've failed in normal school if I didn't [attend residential school]. 'Cos obviously the relationship with the teachers and students and stuff and the friendliness, and it was so small groups as well. I don't think I'd survive in a bigger group than what I had.

Jamie explained that although PE was part of the curriculum at this school, he did not engage with it or see its value, a theme that is explored in more depth in chapter 7. Despite Jamie not engaging with PE, he did value and participate in the extra-curricular programme that the school offered, as the illustrative quote below evidences:

> Jamie: You'd get an activity list that would come round that you could do. Mostly the things I chose was go to the gym or go on a walk 'cos we'd do night walks … anything in the gym, like in the hall because we'd play dodgeball, we'd play killer, hockey and snooker and stuff like that. But I think from year 7 to year 10, I mainly chose walking, night walks and stuff cos it was fun, or cooking. I think those were the two ones I enjoyed the most.

CW: So was there quite a lot of activities to choose from then?

Jamie: Yeah I think it was mostly, you wouldn't do the same thing twice in a month, 'cos it would be like doing loads of stuff, they'd keep you busy.

CW: And did you enjoy doing these activities?

Jamie: Oh yeah I loved it, yeah it was brilliant. 'Cos it gives you a chance to waste time until tea, so you'd go out, do something, come back, have tea, and chill out in the house area and watch tv and go to bed … it was a very nice way to spend your time basically … and cos of the range of activities I didn't look at the list and be like "Oh there's nothing to do". So it kinda, it got me out as well instead of sticking myself in the house area like I was doing at home, it got me out and about so.

Jamie's recollection of his positive experience at the residential school may be due to the opportunity and individual choice given in being able to access extra-curricular activities (such as sport and outdoor pursuits), which he may otherwise not have been able to access within a mainstream school setting or had the opportunity to try, as implied by his pre-care experiences. The examples presented within this section of the chapter highlight how the complexity of some LACYP's educational journey can mean participation in lessons (such as PE) and extra-curricular activities (school sport) is varied or even non-existent; often due to the degree of turbulence and loss of control within their lives. Being educated within alternative provision, such as a PRU, meant these young people were unable to learn within a mainstream environment and, from the examples above, their access to compulsory education such as PE suffered due to their emotional, social and behavioural (ESB) difficulties. For other LACYP like Jamie, however, alternative provision can in fact enhance their engagement and access to PESS, highlighting the disparity between alternative provision services at an institutional level within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988).

5.5 Summary

The aim within this chapter has been to present some of the key findings that emerged from the analysis across the three phases of data collection. From the surveys and interviews with both adult and youth participants, it became clear that LACYP's experiences of PESS can vary significantly due to the environment and context within which they find themselves situated; largely influenced at an individual and institutional level within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). For many of the LACYP interviewed, the influence of their experiences prior to becoming looked-after was noted as having a subsequent impact upon their decision to engage with PESS when looked-after. Although well-documented within the educational literature concerning LACYP (see Chapter 2, section 2.4), placement instability has also presented itself within this study as having a specific effect on LACYP's PESS experiences, alongside the location of such placements in proximity to schools. Being educated in an alternative provision setting has additionally been found to impact LACYP's experiences of PESS, highlighting the disproportionate availability of PESS afforded to LACYP. Within this chapter, there has been ongoing references to the wellbeing and behaviour of LACYP being impacted by their environmental and contextual surroundings, and it is this issue that is the focus of the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 6: WELLBEING AND BEHAVIOUR

6.0 Introduction

Within the previous chapter, the findings suggest that the environment and care context of looked-after children and young people (LACYP) can impact their experiences of Physical Education and School Sport (PESS). This chapter now focuses on how the wellbeing and behaviour of LACYP can shape their experiences of PESS. The specific purpose of the chapter is to illustrate how all three respondent groups (LACYP, local authority professionals and PE teachers) view LACYP's wellbeing and behaviour in association with PESS; highlighting, where necessary, the similarities and differences between participant groups. In doing so, the chapter centres on three distinct themes. The first recognises that LACYP may suffer from social and emotional difficulties that inhibit their participation and engagement in PESS. The second, paradoxically, highlights how the respondents considered PESS to be a provider of positive developments associated with the wellbeing of LACYP. Thirdly, the chapter examines the differences in LACYP's behaviour towards school and how this may subsequently impact their view of PESS. Using key concepts from McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model, the chapter serves to address, in particular, one of the central research questions: namely, what affects LACYP's motivations towards, participation in and experiences of PESS?

Wellbeing is a multifaceted and ill-defined concept. Since the World Health Organization (WHO) first introduced the term in 1948, various definitions have been put forward. According to Dodge *et al.* (2012) there is little, if any, agreement on what 'wellbeing' means save for the fact that it is often used as an overarching concept to describe quality of life. For example, the WHO's working definition refers to the "realisation of one's physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual potential" (Selwyn, 2015b, p. 3). Related terms such as 'happiness', 'quality of life', and 'life satisfaction' are also often used interchangeably (Allin, 2007). Although there is general consensus over what constitutes 'wellbeing', Waldron (2010) argues that different components of the term may be prioritised. For example, one individual may prioritise the quality of his or her relationships, whereas another may place greater emphasis on being financially secure. Despite such variation, the broadly defined wellbeing of LACYP is of concern. Evidence confirms that children and

young people who have suffered abuse and neglect are at increased risk of emotional and behavioural problems (Jonson-Reid, 1998; Ryan *et al.*, 2007; Ryan *et al.*, 2008), with 37% of looked-after children being reported as having emotional and behavioural health needs (PRT, 2016). The wellbeing of LACYP is almost solely shaped by what happens within the context of their home, school and community lives, with many experiencing maltreatment within socially deprived households (Stein, 2012). Dodge *et al.* (2012) associate stable wellbeing with an individual's ability to draw upon the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a specific psychological, social and/or physical challenge; an ability equating to resilience. The need for some LACYP to build their resilience was noted in Chapter 2 and is a concept that is further explored in this chapter.

6.1 Social and emotional difficulties

Historically, physical wellbeing with regard to child protection and safeguarding has been the focus of those responsible for LACYP, arguably due to the widespread public accounts of physical and sexual abuse and the fact that emotional neglect often goes unnoticed because of its occurrence away from the public eye (Iwaniec, 2006a). However, more recently, and in line with the wider recognition and awareness of mental health issues within UK society, the social and emotional wellbeing of LACYP has received significant attention at the public policy level (as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3). Iwaniec (2006b) states that there are a whole host of social and behavioural difficulties associated with experiencing psychological abuse in childhood. As a result, LACYP are more likely to suffer from emotional, social and behaviour difficulties (ESBD) (Ford *et al.*, 2007) which often impacts their educational outcomes (Jackson *et al.*, 2011; Stein, 2011). Statistics demonstrate that looked-after children are four times more likely to suffer from mental health problems than their peers, with 57% of LACYP in England having a special educational need, compared to 14% of others their age (DfE, 2017b). This was also recognised in the SEU report (2003) as one of the key reasons why LACYP underachieve within education; suggesting that they require more help with their social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. Writing within an Australian context, Fattore and colleagues (2007) argue that children should be given the opportunity to gain experiences that enhance their wellbeing. The data generated through this research revealed that 80% of local authority survey respondents believed there to be barriers to LACYP's participation

in, motivations towards and experiences of PESS, with significant consideration given to LACYP's social and emotional difficulties; particularly around low self-esteem and low self-confidence. This is illustrated in the extract below, taken from an account written by a VSH survey respondent:

> Being looked-after implies that the young person will have experienced trauma, neglect or other disruption in their lives. This has a significant impact on social and emotional wellbeing – which can further affect self-esteem and mood. A young person with low self-esteem, low mood, or poor social and emotional wellbeing is likely to lack motivation for a number of activities – and participation in PE and school sport may suffer. This is always different for every child – some children find PE/sport a very positive outlet for their stress and anxiety - and they experience a 'feel good' factor when getting involved in team activities and sport.

This particular VSH, from a local authority within the borough of London, discusses the social and emotional wellbeing of LACYP in the context of earlier disadvantage, which has been noted elsewhere as having long-term consequences for the health and social development of children and young people (see NICE/SCIE, 2010). This was also a finding established in the previous chapter, which suggested the wellbeing of LACYP prior to entering care has the potential to negatively impact on their engagement in PESS once they are in care. Likewise, this was recognised by the youth participants as not only affecting their participation in and experiences of PESS, but also affecting their overall school experiences. The extract below is taken from a conversation with 17-year-old Shannon who described what school and PESS looked like for her:

> CW: You seem to have a low view of yourself and your ability to do things like your education. Where do you think this view of yourself has come from?
>
> Shannon: That's generally come from my low ability, self-esteem and self-confidence, because I don't have a lot of any of them (laughs), because of my past and

> what's happened to me and generally of, yeah, who I am.

Shannon's response is unsurprising given that vulnerable adolescents often possess low self-esteem and a perceived lack of competence (Haudenhuyse *et al.*, 2012). Self-esteem is a resilience characteristic that enables young people to cope with both success and failure. It is closely linked to self-worth and how and whether a young person feels valued (Schofield *et al.*, 2014) and may worsen with changes in relation to placement experiences (APPG, 2012; Shaw and Frost, 2013). Constructive activity (outside of education) is said to be an important part of improving self-esteem, confidence and self-efficacy for LACYP, in addition to developing peer relationships (Schofield and Beek, 2009). Like Shannon's experience, LACYP's confidence (or lack of) was a recurrent finding within the data.

Having low self-esteem and low self-worth can be seen as an individual influence within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) which suggests that the PESS experiences of LACYP may be affected by the amount of confidence, self-esteem and/or self-worth they possess. In the context of this study, a lack of these were seen to inhibit engagement in PESS. This trend was also evident in a Norwegian study of adolescents within residential homes, with findings demonstrating that a lack of belief in their own abilities hindered respondents' participation in physical activity (Safvenbom and Samdahl, 1998). Furthermore, in a qualitative longitudinal study in Canada, researchers found a direct relationship between young people's participation in extracurricular activities, their school performance, their ability to socialise, and their self-esteem (see Steckley, 2005). For example, those who rarely or never participated in extracurricular activities were more likely to report having lower self-esteem and difficulty with friends.

The influence of friendships on LACYP's experiences of PESS is a theme that is explored in more depth in Chapter 7, however the ability of LACYP to socialise with others forms part of the present theme and consistently emerged during discussions with LACYP. Socialising is considered to be an essential component of peer-to-peer interaction and it is noted that children who have experienced emotional abuse are at risk in terms of their ability to develop positive relationships with others (Iwaniec, 2006b). For example, in an interview with Jamie, he articulated that a lack of ability to socialise with others was a key

issue preventing LACYP engaging in PESS. In this sense, the collaborative, interactive nature of PESS means it can be considered distinct from other domains of the educational curriculum. As Jamie puts it:

> Socialising is a hard thing for children in care, and even for children not in care. It doesn't matter how old you are, it's still a hard thing. I know I still have a hard time socialising with new people sometimes, so I think that's one of the barriers that stop children in care from doing it [school sport]. 'Cos obviously kids can be mean and the moment people in school find out you're in care they see it as a bad thing. So if you're gonna do an activity and you're afraid of that happening, that's a barrier for a young person. 'Cos if you don't get along with many people in school and you see a bunch of people on the list [a sign-up list to express an interest] that you don't really wanna mix with but you know are doing that activity, then it's going to stop you from doing the activity. I'm not saying you should take those people off. That's not what should happen. But it should just be about promoting self-confidence and things like that in children in care, to just step forward and be like "I wanna do this".

Issues regarding the social wellbeing and capabilities of LACYP (that Jamie refers to) indicate a possible lack of developmental opportunities during the younger years, much like with emotional wellbeing. Wilkinson and Bowyer (2017) argue that abuse and neglect have adverse impacts for most children, affecting their emotional, behavioural and mental wellbeing. They go on to suggest that positive changes to the caregiving environment can help children to recover from their experiences of maltreatment. For example, Berridge *et al.*, (2008) found that most LACYP made social and behavioural progress from having educational support, yet it is still implied that social, emotional and behavioural difficulties can persist even after children move to a nurturing and stable environment (Wilkinson and Bowyer, 2017). This was illustrated in the present study by Luke, who was in Year 9 at the time of interview. At the end of the interview, Luke asked if he could show me his recent school report. On producing the report, he cited several teachers' comments for the lessons he was happy to discuss with me. He did not mention PE and so once he had finished reading from his report, I asked him what it said about PE lessons:

CW: Have you got PE on the list?

Luke: Yeah. "Generally Luke is doing OK. He usually brings kit, although not to every lesson" [as I] stated to you, "And participates with some enthusiasm. He is a helpful student, always keen to lend a hand. Luke does find it difficult to deal with some of the emotional issues that sometimes arise. Being able to show empathy and work with others without issue is something he can continue to work on. Luke is a real asset to the class".

Luke's reference to "stated to you", was to acknowledge that he had already spoken of his lack of kit and so this was not a new issue being brought to attention. However, during the interview he had not mentioned anything that was indicative of emotional issues, which the PE teacher suggests could be hindering his PE experience. With the majority of children entering care having suffered abuse and neglect, the APPG (2012, p.9) argue that "engaging in education can often be almost impossible whilst they (LACYP) continue to have underlying and all too often untreated trauma that can directly affect their mental health."

The social and emotional characteristics that have been at the forefront of this chapter have been described as potential barriers to LACYP's PESS engagement at the individual level of the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), both by LACYP themselves and by local authority respondents. This finding presents an interesting paradox with regard to some of the key literature presented in Chapter 2, which claims that PE and sport can enhance the wellbeing of LACYP (e.g. Gilligan, 1999; 2000; Hollingworth, 2012; Murray, 2013). This is interesting and raises some important questions for discussion, particularly in light of the fact that there were also numerous references from participants in this study to the potential of PESS to deliver improved wellbeing for LACYP, as the next sub-theme demonstrates.

6.2 Improved wellbeing through PESS

As noted in Chapter 2, the claimed benefits of taking part in sport and physical activity are well-documented within the related literature (see Collins and Kay, 2003; Bailey, 2005; Schroeder, 2005; Holt, 2008; Sandford *et al.*, 2008a, b; Bailey *et al.*, 2009). For young people within the youth justice system, many of whom have also spent time in care, the provision of sport has long been recognised as having positive effects in increasing children and young people's self-esteem, reducing anxiety and improving their health (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 2016). Despite there being counter arguments to suggest that sport should not be considered a panacea for complex social problems (Meek, 2014), the survey responses from this study from the local authority professionals suggested that PESS may indeed be seen in this way by some. More than 90% of the respondents stated that PESS was beneficial for LACYP, with many referring to physical, social and emotional wellbeing, such as encouraging a healthy lifestyle, developing social skills, building confidence and improving self-esteem. This has been previously documented by the SEU (2003) who asserted that educational outcomes are strongly influenced by a child's emotional, mental and physical health and suggested that schooling can increase a child's health by raising self-confidence and self-esteem, and enabling participation in sports and access to health education. However, an interesting concept within the survey and interview responses from local authority professionals was that often the individual factors that were described as possible *barriers* to LACYP participation and experiences of PESS, were also the same factors that they believed could be *gained* from PESS, as Heather Roberts, a VSH from Whippinghamshire local authority, explains:

> The biggest [development for LACYP] for me is self-esteem and confidence. Whether you're doing a solo or a team sport, if you feel you're able to do something and you get enjoyment and pleasure; and it's also got the heath side kick as well, then you know it's doing you well. It's doing a lot of good isn't it really.

In addition, given the well-documented literature on the perceived benefits of PESS, the local authority professionals were asked if they thought it was important for LACYP to participate in extra-curricular activities, including school sport. All respondents (n=10) agreed that this was important, as exemplified in the interview extract below from a VSH:

John Davis: Yeah absolutely. Our view has always been that a happy child is a progressive child, and in terms of participating in other activities, we also feel that we have seen a direct relation between increase levels of motivation, confidence, self-esteem leading to greater participation in school-based activities … whether it's schools or other activities. For example, from youth services as well, where they've been involved in extra-curricular activities, we have seen a remarked improvement in the level of contribution, participation for those young people as well.

The issues described here (i.e., confidence, self-esteem, participation) are inherent within the individual level of McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model and are strongly linked to the concept of resilience, as noted previously both within this chapter and in Chapter 2. Attempting to define resilience proves difficult since it is not a straightforward concept (Lambert, 2001; Daniel and Wassell, 2002a) but rather an outcome phenomenon (Goldstein and Brooks, 2013). People may be highly resilient in one aspect of their lives but require much more support in others (Brom *et al.*, 2009; Ginsburg, 2011). The ability to rise above difficulties however, is frequently referred to within literature (Masten *et al.*, 1990; Gilligan, 1997; Masten, 2007; Davies 2011; Ginsburg, 2011). The concept of resilience in relation to disadvantaged children was pioneered by Rutter (1985) and is used to highlight how some young people can succeed in areas such as education despite being initially faced with disadvantage. Daniel (2008) emphasises that a good education and experiences in school, combined with support for friendships and development of skills and interests, is one of the requirements necessary for resilience. It is also well established within the positive youth development literature as one of a number of outcomes that can be achieved through participation in sport (Holt, 2008) and related activities (e.g. Daniel and Wassell, 2002a). The notion of resilience and the importance of extra-curricular involvement was further implicit within the views of other local authority professionals, as a VSH from North East England articulated:

CW: Do you think it's important then for looked-after children to participate in these activities?

Debbie Howell: Oh definitely. This is why we did the audit[34] all those years ago and then really pushed it, because we felt that they were missing out on opportunities that could really make a difference to their resilience and sense of self, and friendships and, so, yeah, it's something we're always promoting.

This stance has also been reflected in previous policy documentation (see section 3.4.11) whereby factors such as friendships and engagement in positive leisure activities are seen as having the potential to promote health and wider wellbeing (DfES, 2006). However, with regard to PESS, the most recent statutory guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of LACYP does not mention physical education or indeed physical activity as promoters of wellbeing and physical health (see DfE and DoH, 2015). The importance of LACYP being able to access PESS on account of the perceived associated benefits is reiterated further in the extract below, taken from an interview with Liam McKay, an Education Development Officer for LACYP in the English Midlands:

> I think it's very important because the social interaction is one, but also it's about development, personal development for children. Because it's good and well the government rhetoric highlighting that they're not up to speed with their peers or like on par with their peers [in terms of academic attainment], but these children I think sometimes people do kind of need to minimize the impact of trauma, bereavement, loss. And how they get around this, it's not always engagement in education, it's about getting the holistic bond of activities, but to teach those skills and also areas of weakness.

Liam noted that it is not necessarily about pursuing academic engagement per se, when looking to support LACYP to achieve personal developments. Rather Liam suggested that engagement in wider activities should be considered central in addressing the social and emotional difficulties associated with being looked-after. This has previously been

[34] Debbie spoke of gathering information on LACYP's participation in activities, in the form of questionnaires sent to LACYP and their carers. She explained this audit was done 9 years ago.

recognised in a report by APPG (2012, p.10) where it was suggested that "to improve educational outcomes you have to also tackle the principle causes holding each child back, including instability, poor mental health and a lack of wider support". In addition, The National Institute for Health Care Excellence (NICE) and Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) (2010) recommend that social workers and independent reviewing officers ensure access to creative arts, physical activities, and other hobbies and interests to support and encourage the overall wellbeing and self-esteem of LACYP (see section 3.4.18). This relates to research that has recognised participation in extra-curricular activities supports a general sense of psychological wellbeing (Darling, 2005) and connections between ongoing involvement in extracurricular activities and pro-social behaviours (Zaff *et al.*, 2003). There was further evidence in this study of developing pro-social behaviours within the data from PE teachers, as the extract from Mark Jones' interview demonstrates:

CW: What do you think looked-after children and young people can gain from taking part in PESS?

Mark: Well just looking at this group we have, it's increasing confidence, social skills and made to feel part of a group and a team. And success, they've been successful and overcome some challenges and things, just the whole kind of spiel that you get from being involved in sport really … If we can try and make them understand that taking part actively, being successful, trying their hardest are all good qualities to have in life really.

Due to their role in teaching the subject of PE, evidence of such benefits were in abundance within the PE teacher data, with all survey respondents (n=16) stating the advantages of LACYP's participation in PESS. Examples included: health benefits; social and emotional benefits; confidence; communication skills; social skills; team work experience; a way to express themselves; develop confidence; increase self-esteem; escape from issues they may have within their home life; and a sense of belonging. However, the consensus was that these benefits were the same for all children and not any more beneficial for LACYP, with PE teachers using phrases in their responses, such as "just like

any other child, "as with all children", and "all children receive the same benefits from taking part in sport". An interview with Head of PE, David Andrews, illustrated this point in more detail:

> CW: So what do feel that LACYP can gain from taking part in PE?
>
> David: Confidence, self-efficacy massively. Leadership qualities. The ability to challenge themselves, massive amount of challenge, the need to achieve is there. It can remove the fear of failure, a release, a stress release. It's endless, and again I know we're talking specifically about looked-after children, but it's not specific to them, it's to all children and this is why I feel PE must become higher on the Ofsted agenda … I can think of looked-after children that excel in extra-curricular and physical activity, in motivation, in confidence, much better in PE than other students. But then I can think of, well as I said some don't even come to PE, so it really depends on the individual.

The notion that the associated benefits of participating in PESS are not limited to LACYP is an interesting finding from the PE teacher respondents, since it implies that whilst PESS may improve social and emotional aspects of LACYP's wellbeing, such improvements are not perceived to be any more beneficial than for children or young people who are not looked-after. This is despite findings noted above (section 6.1) highlighting a significant lack of social and emotional development for many LACYP. Within the previous extract from David's interview, he noted the variations of LACYP's engagement with PE. Absconding and disengaging from PE is a finding that is explored later. Within his comments, however, David also argues that although PESS is important for those disengaged from education, physical activity and sport outside of the school environment can be just as beneficial for improving LACYP wellbeing:

> [PE is] as important as any maths or English exam, a priority … [because] it's the only subject in school that

> keeps kids living longer. It keeps kids living into adult life, it's the only subject in school that provides lifelong learners that encourages healthy, happy lifestyles, a good wellbeing … The more [extra-curricular] activities these students can do, the greater their wellbeing. I'm not saying that it has to be in school, but school's one of the easiest areas for them to access extra-curricular. They say, "Oh I hate my school, I hate my teachers, I hate everything about it", that's fair enough, as long as they're going down to their local football club, if they're happy there that's not a problem. It's about levels of activity, and the more we can get children doing the healthier, the better the level of their wellbeing.

During this interview, David highlighted that alongside disengagement from PE, LACYP may fail to engage with schooling more generally which has the potential to impact their engagement with PESS, a finding that will be explored in the subsequent chapter. David also raises further questions concerning participation in physical activities away from school, deeming them harder to access but just as important for wellbeing. He argues that LACYP may gain a greater measure of improved wellbeing in sport and physical activity outside of the school context, since they do not associate it with negative experiences at school. Similar findings were demonstrated by Hollingworth (2012) who noted that sport/physical activity can be integral to enhancing emotional, mental and physical health for LACYP. In addition, Bailey *et al.*, (2009) argue that participating in extra-curricular physical activities within and beyond the educational context can positively affect cognitive, affective and social developments. Being given opportunities to participate in community activities has also previously been recognised by LACYP themselves as an important way of developing social skills, confidence and self-esteem (Selwyn, 2015a).

To summarise, the adult respondents within this study considered PESS to be a platform via which LACYP may positively develop self-esteem, confidence and other wellbeing traits. The data highlighted, however, that this is unlikely without an engagement with PESS in the first place. Significantly, this finding was inconsistent with almost all the LACYP respondents, who did not indicate any improvements regarding their wellbeing from PESS, due perhaps to the evident lack of participation and negligible value given to the role of PESS within their lives (explored further in the next chapter). A significant

finding in this respect, was the behaviour, attitude and mind set of LACYP respondents toward PESS and their education more generally, a topic to which we now turn.

6.3 Negative behaviour vs. Positive mind set

The extent of behavioural problems among LACYP has been well documented (Heflinger *et al.*, 2000; Zima *et al.*, 2000). From the data collated with youth respondents in this study, a clear finding was that their behaviour and attitude towards school were closely related to how much they valued and engaged with PESS. In accordance with McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model, such findings imply that this is an individual determinant that can affect a LACYP's PESS experience. These influences on their PESS experiences are unsurprising given that Chapter 2 noted that LACYP may display more challenging behaviour, closely linked to statistics which show they can often suffer from ESB difficulties and SEN. Literature discussed in Chapter 2 also emphasised the barrier that this can create for LACYP with regard to their learning and, in the case of this study, was found to affect their participation in PE as well as the wider curriculum. This is demonstrated in the extract below, taken from an interview with the VSH from Bucktonshire, who was asked about potential barriers to LACYP's engagement with PE:

> Robert Knight: Oh it's tough to generalize because it's on an individual basis. But what you would say is as a generalization, there are some whose behaviour can be volatile because of the emotional need that they have in attachments … the main problem isn't just specific to PE, it's specific to school.

Linking directly to the social and emotional difficulties previously documented within this chapter, Robert noted the behaviour of LACYP as being a result of the emotional difficulties that are often associated with being looked-after. What is also interesting to note from Robert's sentiment is the ideology that these behavioural difficulties may not only impact PE, but that they can impact upon an individual's entire school experience (see also Chapter 2). For example, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) (2012, p.42) argue that: "What is the point of going to school if children are totally distracted and unable

to concentrate or learn anything because of their emotional turmoil?". Evidence of this was also forthcoming from the LACYP themselves. Here, for example, Shannon explains the reasons for having to attend a PRU (also see Chapter 5, section 5.4):

CW: And what reason was it that you had to attend the PRU?

Shannon: 'Cos I smashed a chair round the back of my teacher's head.

CW: And why did you smash…

Shannon: Because I was reporting bullying to the Deputy Headteacher and she refused to believe me and I got extremely nasty, angry and yeah.

CW: Is there any reason do you think as to why you behaved in that way as opposed to a different way?

Shannon: Because I reported it for two years prior. My attendance was lower than 28%. I used to just ditch school behind the sports hall, they knew exactly where I was and didn't care. The fact is I was unkempt, because I had the parents that I had. They didn't give a toss really to be honest … Because obviously my home life wasn't that good, I had so much going on. I had my brother and sister taken away when I was at [PRU], then I was taken into care. I was moved from my first care home to Judy [current foster carer]. My first carer was terrible. I was there 6 months and they just cared about the money …

The turmoil Shannon experienced during her time at school, started prior to entering care, an issue previously raised in Chapter 5, with a Lead Teacher for Children in Care commenting that "often behaviour is poor due to sort of trauma and stress which has happened in their lives" (Gareth Houlston, Comptonshire). Within literature and policy,

this is not a new phenomenon. For example, Lord Laming's (2016, p.ii) report highlights how LACYP and care leavers' earlier life experiences often manifest themselves in challenging behaviours: "For some, their anger, frustrations, inability to express themselves except through challenging behaviour and possibly violence all point to failure, for whatever reason, in their earlier years." For Shannon, her behaviour appeared to be a response to being denied agency and not being listened to, representative of a relational (interpersonal) issue within the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Problem behaviour in school was also noted in Chapter 2 as one of the associated risk factors for criminal involvement and poor prospects when older (Farrington and Welsh, 2007; Hayden, 2007; Stephenson, 2007). This was certainly the case for Shannon, who disclosed during the interview that she had also been involved with the police due to theft at the age of 13. This is similar to findings by Schofield *et al.*'s (2014) whose study of looked-after children and offending highlighted how young people's alcohol and substance use may be associated with coping behaviours. The PRT (2016) estimate that up to half of all children and young people involved in the criminal justice system are or have been in care. The disproportionate criminalisation of LACYP is suggested to be consistent with accounts that predict a relationship between socio-economic status and contact with the youth justice system, since LACYP's life experiences "are typically characterised by high levels of abuse, victimisation, deprivation and other forms of adversity" (Bateman, 2017, p.22). However, others suggest that the majority of LACYP engaging with criminal justice start to offend prior to becoming looked-after (Darker *et al.*, 2008). In terms of the respondents in this study, 16-year-old Chantelle was currently in Year 11 at the time of interview and had only been in care for five months. Reflecting on her PESS experiences, she described her exclusion from her mainstream school:

CW: Do you mind me asking why it was you got kicked out?

Chantelle: Just like loads of things really, 'cos obviously I was there for two years, I used to get excluded at least once a week, like so obviously it all adds up and it just gets to the point where the school won't take it anymore.

CW: What reasons were the school excluding you for?

Chantelle: Throwing tables, throwing coffee around, just point blank refusing … walking out, shouting at people, loads of things.

Later in the interview, Chantelle argued that the cause of her behaviours was also because "I was on drugs at the time", further indicating that her involvement in recreational drug use was due to being "involved with the wrong people". Chantelle was in Year 8 when these behaviours came to the fore, three years prior to her entering the care system. Such findings echo those of Staines (2016) who identified that early life trauma can manifest itself in challenging behaviour which, in turn, can put LACYP at greater risk of exclusion from mainstream education and at greater risk of criminalization. In England, the statutory guidance for local authorities states that those working with looked-after children are required to promote positive behaviour and reduce school exclusions in order to maintain the child in school (DCSF, 2010b). Previous research relating to the broader context of PESS indicates that girls who participate in sports are less likely to experience teen pregnancy, smoke cigarettes, use recreational drugs or engage in other high-risk behaviours (see Steckley, 2005).

Amidst the data collected from the PE teachers, similar issues regarding LACYP's behaviour were conveyed by the survey respondents as factors affecting their engagement with PESS. For example, the Head of a PE department at a secondary school explained that "often these [LACYP] students come with underlying issues that affect their behaviour within the classroom … this shouldn't provide these students with an excuse to behave this way, but staff can have a little sympathy." These findings were consistent with the data from the youth respondents, as Nathan's account of his time at secondary school reveals:

> I turned really like defiant and stuff 'cos of like, all the stuff that was happening. I couldn't really be bothered to follow any orders and stuff. I'd get the bus in and go out for a fag, stuff like that … If I had no trouble at home or anything, I would go in fine and I'd probably be fine for the day. But if I had like an argument the night before or in the morning

> or something, then I'd definitely be off at school and then like if anyone, like I dunno, said anything, then I would just go mad.

Similarly, 19-year-old Jamie explained that he would often get angry at school and display negative behaviours as a consequence:

> CW: Where do you think the anger comes from?
>
> Jamie: It was all my built-up anger towards my mum I think. It was mainly 'cos so many times I wanted to just punch something or throw something in the house or just destroy the house completely, but I never did 'cos I never had the courage. But in school I took from [an] example from everyone else kicking off that I could do it, that it was acceptable in my head.

Within the above extracts, Nathan and Jamie both imply that their behaviour and emotions were directly affected by what they experienced outside of school, which supports the notion that LACYP's lives are complex and multi-dimensional and therefore cannot be fragmented and viewed in isolation. Mahoney (2000) argues that participating in extracurricular activities has long been associated with decreased antisocial behaviour in young people, specifically aggression. A report published by the DCSF entitled *Learning behaviour* also highlighted that engagement in sport could positively impact behaviour and pupil achievement (see Steer, 2005). Although little is known about the effect of involvement with extracurricular activities and delinquency specifically for LACYP, past literature indicates that involvement in activities may afford opportunities to build positive relationships, which in turn, may result in better outcomes (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000; Fredricks and Eccles, 2006; Sandford *et al.*, 2008b). This notion is discussed further in Chapter 8 (section 8.4).

Contrary to this, however, results from a US study of 117 young people in foster care, indicated that greater involvement in extracurricular activities was associated with higher levels of delinquency (Farineau and McWey, 2011). Further analyses revealed that the type

of placement and closeness with caregiver predicted delinquency above and beyond the frequency of participation in extracurricular activities. However, the LACYP within the present study, who were reflecting back on their educational experience and associated undesirable behaviours, were also the ones less likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities. This raises further questions as to whether their behaviour might prevent their involvement or if indeed their lack of involvement exacerbates such behaviour.

As noted, NICE/SCIE (2010) points to the duty of schools to provide full-time education for LACYP, which includes students with complex needs, those who exhibit challenging behaviours and those who are also the most vulnerable. They argue that an awareness and understanding of the complex issues these children face in an educational setting is vital. Similar issues were recognised by the local authority professionals within this study, who are also responsible for the education of LACYP in England. Debbie Howell, a VSH from Talborough in the north of England, explains:

> Schools' understanding of behaviour of looked-after children is a challenge. Umm and if they haven't had the training you really see, you know some of the sanctuaries [sanctions] they use make the behaviour worse. So that's a challenge in trying to get an understanding around the attachment, the importance of positive relationships and understanding the mental health needs of the young people.

The APPG (2012) note that there are a disproportionately large number of LACYP with deep-rooted and complicated learning and behavioural difficulties who require specific personalised interventions and additional support beyond that which would be standard. This was certainly a shared consensus among local authority respondents in this study. When asked what schools were doing to support LACYP's participation in PESS, Debbie Howell explained:

> I think it's just the schools that go the extra mile who have flexible support, who have identified a key adult that keeps an eye out for that child to go to when they need it, who use behaviour management system that has flexibility…

> Just to understand what's behind the behaviour and why it's occurring and show a bit more understanding, empathy. Understanding that these kids' lives are really tough and if you were an adult going through half of the stuff they are going through you would be struggling.

This perspective was also recognised in the findings from the survey that was disseminated to PE teachers. For example, in response to the question that asked how they address any barriers/issues that LACYP may face in relation to PESS (see Appendix 3 for full survey), a head of PE at a secondary school inferred that teachers could be "more accepting/understanding of their [LACYP] behaviour/emotional issues and why there may be non-participation in clubs."

Conversely, however, it is worth noting that a number of LACYP have positive experiences in the care system (achieving good emotional and physical health), do well in their education, and have good jobs and careers (NICE/SCIE, 2010). This was reflected in the data from this study, which revealed that the few LACYP who were engaging in PESS also had a positive mindset towards their education. For example, Lucy, 13, was in Year 8 at the time she participated in the group interview. She explained the influence of her friends on her engagement with school and extra-curricular activities and asserted that "I know that I can't get distracted because if I want the best grades in Year 11 then I have to work hard". The influence of peers on LACYP's experiences of PESS is a theme that is referred to in more detail in Chapter 8. The importance of achieving in education was also expressed by Bradley, aged 15, who was in the same group interview as Lucy and in Year 11 at the time. Bradley explained that "when I'm older I want to be a forensic science investigator or physicist". However, the importance of education for Bradley was not limited to aspiring to achieve, since he also revealed that it was largely associated with the feeling of belonging that being at school provided:

> 'Cos like it's like another family isn't it. You go to school, like everyone's the same, you're all unique in your own way, but you're all part of one big family and feel wanted. And it's where I can shine, because at home no one really cares what I do, and when I start telling them about science they're like "Oh Bradley shut up". But in school they all

> listen and they're like "Oh thanks Bradley that's really useful". So yeah, I like to help people.

The feeling of belonging has already been established in the previous sub-theme as a potential benefit of taking part in PESS. Within this same interview, Bradley had already expressed his appreciation of PE for that very reason. The extract below from the group interview demonstrates this more clearly, highlighting the associated feelings of belonging that both Lucy and Bradley experienced from taking part in extra-curricular activities:

> CW: So how does it make you feel to take part in these activities outside of school?
>
> Lucy: Umm, good.
>
> CW: Why does it make you feel good?
>
> Lucy: Because then I know I'm actually part of something
>
> CW: And is it nice to feel part of something?
>
> Lucy: (nods)
>
> Bradley: (nods). Well it might come as a shock to you, but I don't have many friends right. So, if I feel part of something, part of a team, then I feel like I'm wanted.

In this interview, Lucy was referring to participating in the school's cheerleading team and Bradley to his participation in the school's football team and a local football team. These experiences that Lucy and Bradley shared, emphasise how they can be a source of stability within their lives, which Hollingworth (2012) also identified as important for those in or leaving care. These young people's views were however, in the minority in this research. The reason for highlighting them within this theme is because of the association that was found; those LACYP who engaged in PESS also had a positive attitude towards their

overall education, and those who expressed a dislike for PESS also exhibited behavioural issues during their time at school. This confirms findings that suggest taking part in extra-curricular activities is associated with higher academic aspiration and attainment and positive attitudes to school (see Darling, 2005). The behaviour and attitude described here are both intrinsic at the individual level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Whilst it may constitute as an individual influence on the PESS experiences of LACYP, their behaviour and attitude can also be affected by those factors at an interpersonal and institutional level, such as their birth family, their school environment and their foster home.

6.4 Summary

The aim within this chapter has been to present key findings associated with LACYP's wellbeing and behaviour within school and their surrounding environment. Data suggest that LACYP's motivation towards, experiences of, and participation in PESS is largely shaped by their own wellbeing and behaviour; an inherently individual influence within the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) adopted within this study. Nonetheless, the findings reveal that these individual factors can be manipulated and influenced by wider processes and practices, as this study continues to demonstrate. Specifically, this chapter noted that all respondent groups identified the social and emotional difficulties faced by a large proportion of LACYP as having a consequent impact on their motivation and participation within PESS. Paradoxically, the chapter also proceeded to acknowledge the claimed improvements in wellbeing that LACYP could potentially gain from participation in PESS. This was a shared view among the local authority professionals and PE teachers; however, LACYP respondents did not share experiences associated with such improvements.

The last theme within this chapter identified the behaviour and mind set of LACYP as playing a pivotal role within their experiences of PESS. Expressing undesirable behaviours as a form of communication was found to be a barrier for LACYP engaging with PESS and schooling more generally. Furthermore, an interesting finding was that the two LACYP who shared positive PESS experiences, did not refer to any undesirable behaviours and appeared to have a more positive mind set toward their education in

general. These findings could be attributed to the fact that nearly all the youth respondents within the study professed not to be interested in PESS and did not identify it as playing an important role within their lives. The value and priority afforded to PESS by respondents emerged throughout the data analysis, indicating the potential influence it can have on the PESS experiences of LACYP and it is to this we turn our attention to next.

CHAPTER 7: THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF PESS

7.0 Introduction

One of the things that arose during discussions in Chapters 5 and 6, was the extent to which Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) is valued by the three respondent groups (local authority professionals, looked-after children and young people (LACYP) and PE teachers). Following on from this, the present chapter focuses on the overarching theme of the value that is afforded to PESS within the lives of LACYP, in order to help further address the primary research questions outlined in Chapter 1; specifically, in terms of the role PESS plays within LACYP lives. Each of the three groups of participants offered significant amounts of information in relation to this theme. However, these were expressed in different ways and key concepts from McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model (see Chapter 3) are drawn on to allow these variations to be clearly identified through a number of sub-themes. The chapter begins by focusing on the personal perspectives of the LACYP participants to illustrate how their disengagement from PESS, and education more generally, had a profound impact upon their experiences. Discussion continues by acknowledging that the PESS experiences of LACYP are largely dependent on their personal interest in PESS, with many LACYP simply having alternative interests. The second part of the chapter explores the priority that is afforded to PESS from an institutional perspective, i.e. Virtual Schools and schools and how this is impacted upon by public policy. In so doing, it identifies the disparity and variation that exists for PESS to create differing experiences for LACYP.

7.1 Disengagement from school

From discussions in Chapter 6 in relation to the wellbeing of LACYP, it was noted that their behaviour can be connected to whether they are engaged with their overall education. In this respect, PESS was not isolated. Yet, data from this study suggest that the LACYP participants who were disengaged from school in general, also appeared to be disengaged from PESS. This is evident in the extract below from Shannon who spoke about the bullying she had experienced at school and how this had made her schooling particularly difficult:

Shannon: It got to the point where I refused to even bother going to class. It got to the point where I used to pull the fire alarm every day … every single day. They knew it was me, they wouldn't even evacuate the school … It got to the point where they'd just tell everyone to stay where they were and they'd just come and get me, 'cos they'd seen me on camera pull it, d'ya know what I mean. Then they'd put me in Isolation and I used to love Isolation. I used to be in Isolation every single day. Y'know most kids go "Oh I don't want to be in Isolation", I was in Isolation every day. I knew all the teachers in Isolation, I used to love being in Isolation.

CW: Why did you love Isolation so much?

Shannon: No one's allowed to talk to you, you're not allowed to talk to anyone else. You get your lunch brought to you, you get to sit there and do fuck all, all day. Best days of my lives. I never got any GCSEs, any qualifications, nothing. 'Cos I refused to go to class, refused to interact.

Placing pupils in some form of 'isolation' has traditionally been used in state schools as a reprimand for displaying undesirable behaviours that are not severe enough to warrant a fixed period or permanent exclusion. The DfE (2016, p.12) guidance on *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools* states that: "Schools can adopt a policy which allows disruptive pupils to be placed in an area away from other pupils for a limited period, in what are often referred to as seclusion or isolation rooms". It is for individual schools to decide how long a pupil should be kept in isolation and to determine what pupils may and may not do during the time they are there (DfE, 2016). The guidance states that their time spent there needs to be used as constructively as possible and they should not be kept in isolation longer than is necessary. However, similarly to exclusion, the reason for the adverse behaviour displayed may be complex and deep-rooted (as was noted in section 6.3). From Shannon's perspective, her experience of schooling was particularly negative, stemming from personal reasons that perhaps were not apparent to the staff at her school. For example, Shannon disclosed some rather traumatic experiences about her life prior to

entering care including neglect and sexual abuse, and that when she became looked-after during her teenage years she implied that she was already disengaged from school and out of mainstream education. Daniel (2008) argues that having positive school and community experiences can act as a protective factor against risk and help to develop resilience. These advantages have also been associated with sports participants within positive youth development literature (e.g. Holt, 2008). For Shannon, her negative experiences of neglect and abuse and a lack of positive community support meant that she did not appear to value any aspect of education. This was reflected in her negative outlook on school, which unsurprisingly also included PESS, as the extract below demonstrates:

> Shannon: The fact is, during that time, the social services were involved. The kids [brother and sister] were being taken away, proceeds and everything like that. So I wasn't focused on school, I didn't care about that. I didn't care what the fuck was happening, I cared what was happening with my brother and sister, what was going on at home, d'you know what I mean.

Occurrences outside of school transitioned into school, affecting Shannon's academic achievement and her participation in PESS. For Shannon, school was a place of perceived hatred that represented an arena for bullying; it involved a lack of understanding from those around her and denoted a difficult social context in which to engage. Staying after school to participate in extra-curricular activities was therefore not a priority for Shannon, who stated that her attendance at secondary school was lower than 28%. Shannon did not specify which year this attendance rate was, yet it is far lower than the national average rate of 95% (DfE, 2017c). It is reported that when children and young people remain out of education or training for a significant amount of time, it can result in lower academic achievement (Stephenson, 2007). Jackson and colleagues (2011) explain that irregular school attendance should be noted as a possible indication that the child could be suffering from serious family problems, which was certainly the case for Shannon. However, Shannon expressed that she did not feel that the school helped her situation having reported the bullying two years prior to her exclusion from school at the age of 14. Stephenson (2007) argues that truanting involves wilfully missing school without 'parental' consent or knowledge, often displaying traits of anti-social behaviour. This was the case

for this young woman, who in a separate interview, spoke of her involvement in anti-social behaviour and experience in custody, as detailed in Chapter 6 (section 6.3). If LACYP enter the custodial system whilst at school, it increases their chances of instability at school, consequently resulting in detachment to mainstream education (Stephenson, 2007). As previously noted in relation to a LACYP behaviour, these disengagement characteristics are considered to be an individual influence within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), yet can be affected by those factors at an interpersonal and institutional level, such as their birth family or their school environment.

This notion of disengagement from education also became apparent for other young people during the group and individual interviews. However, unlike the discussion above that confirms Shannon attributing her disengagement to the institutional and interpersonal situations taking place outside the school environment, Jamie implied that his disengagement was because of individual factors (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), such as lethargy and a difficulty to see a positive future:

> Jamie: I think it was mainly just me not wanting to learn that affected my education.
>
> CW: And where did that come from?
>
> Jamie: It might be because of my laziness when I was at home. 'Cos like, well I wouldn't say laziness, reluctant as to do anything. And loads of people, well most people, would blame what went on at home as its impact on education. I'm not really one to do that. That is a factor of it but I, it's mainly me thinking about. I didn't really think about the future and I didn't have an image of a future. So school to me was just a waste of time because I didn't see myself as ever having a future. I didn't even contemplate a future, so I couldn't really be bothered to learn because of that.

Staines (2016) asserts that a crucial way for any child or young person to develop aspirations and prepare for the future is to find out their own interests and aptitudes and

to be supported in developing them. Foster carers and residential workers have been recognised as playing a central role in promoting educational achievement and aspirations for LACYP (see Jackson *et al.*, APPG, 2012). Yet Jamie's difficulty in being able to imagine a future for himself, could be attributed to an interpersonal influence (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) of a lack of support and encouragement to help him understand the importance of education for his future. Pinkerton (2006) implies that young people who have low expectations for the future may, by way of an alternative, turn to risk-taking behaviours instead. Jamie's lack of value towards his education meant that he did not invest fully in school, which was also recognised in the previous chapter regarding his behaviour (see section 6.3). Raising LACYP's aspirations and building life chances is associated with the development of a Personal Education Plan (PEP) (see Section 3.4). As noted earlier, all LACYP in England must have a PEP which is usually reviewed bi-annually and forms part of their care plan. It helps track each LACYP's educational progress, as well as ensuring the right type and level of support is continually provided. From speaking with the LACYP participants within this study about whether PESS is considered within the PEP, it became evident that on the whole they did not want to engage with PEP meetings and appeared not to see the importance of them; as an extract from 16-year-old Nathan demonstrates:

CW: In those PEP meetings, what do you chat about?

Nathan: I dunno I wasn't really listening. I wouldn't listen unless someone said my name.

CW: Why didn't you want to listen?

Nathan: Boring, someone is talking and talking and talking.

During the interviews with LACYP, I tried to uncover whether PESS forms part of their PEP meetings. However, most of the LACYP interviewed found it difficult to explain the content of those meetings due to their lack of engagement in them. For example, during an individual interview with 12-year-old Mia, she spoke with frustration at how the meetings would take place over her break times:

CW: So what sort of things do you chat about in those [PEP] meetings?

Mia: I don't really pay attention.

CW: How come you don't pay attention?

Mia: They're boring.

CW: Why's that?

Mia: 'Cos they're in school, during your own time. Most of the time they're during lunch time or break time when I'm meant to be with my mates eating or chasing them round playing tag or summit. Not sat there in a meeting room that's about the same size as this (interview sized room) with about four or five of us in.

For Mia, her break times were valued more highly than her PEP, since it was the part of the school day where she could play with her friends. During the interview, it became clear that Mia's friends were considered to be an important role within her overall school experience and therefore she did not want to be in a meeting that she deemed to be unimportant. Interestingly, a qualitative study by Holland (2010) also found that LACYP showed disinterest in the formal care context with regard to reviews and care plans. This highlights the complex nature of this study by presenting an interesting conflict between the 'official' priorities at the public policy level and Mia's personal priorities within the individual level of her social ecology (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Being treated differently from other young people not in care is what Shaw and Frost (2013) refer to as 'system abuse' and what they refer to as one of the main causes of educational disadvantage. The APPG (2012, p.29) remind us that "children and young people must have a say in the planning for their education, but it needn't be obligatory for them to attend the formal PEP meeting". Within this study, those LACYP who said they attended their PEP meetings implied that they rarely engaged; as Shannon explains:

> I told them [professionals] "I don't like education, I still don't want education, can we not have this meeting" and then I would kick off, kick a chair across the room and go out for a fag.

Chapter 4 (section 4.2) identified that there are challenges around hearing youth voice and Shannon's sentiment is one example of how this challenge manifests itself. With responses such as this, it could be argued that giving LACYP a choice of whether they would like to attend may be more beneficial for their engagement with school than being singled out. Formal meetings with professionals rarely happen with children in their birth families, so it questions whether LACYP would feel happier having these conversations regarding their education with just their foster carers or Designated Teacher. Recent research also attempts to address the challenges of youth voice and poses alternative forms of engaging children and young people, which could prove useful for some LACYP (see Hill, 2006).

It has been suggested that engagement with education is dependent on factors which are both internal and external to the child or young person (Cameron *et al.*, 2015). Internal factors include the child's cognitive and emotional dimensions, and external factors include participation in academic work outside of the school and behavioural aspects of school, such as attendance and adherence to the school rules. These were largely identified in Chapter 6, within the context of debate regarding LACYP's behaviour and wellbeing. However, Cameron and colleagues (2015) add that, alongside providing academic and behaviour aspects, school can also provide opportunities for developing more emotional and social aspects such as participation in extra-curricular activities. For the LACYP participants in this study who did not engage with education, and consequently did not benefit from the academic or behavioural aspects associated with school, these extra-curricular activities can perhaps be considered of greater importance. These experiences were noted within Chapter 2 as providing opportunities for enjoyment, building relationships and developing a sense of self-efficacy which in turn can impact positively on LACYP's engagement within school (Cameron *et al.*, 2015). For some of the youth participants in this study, however, these opportunities were not considered valuable, which questions whether such benefits are indeed achievable, as the next theme demonstrates.

7.2 Disengagement from PESS

As a relationship between a young person and a school breaks down, a gradual detachment to schooling can occur (Stephenson, 2007). For five of the LACYP participants in this study, becoming disengaged from school meant they were more likely to have also disengaged with PESS due to its association with the school context. The extract below from an individual interview with Chantelle (aged 16) demonstrates this notion further:

> CW: What was the reason do you think, for not wanting to take part in clubs after school?
>
> Chantelle: Because I can't be bothered, I don't want to stay in school for a minute longer than I have to.

The picture that Chantelle painted of her experience of school was predominantly negative. Education was not a priority within the context of her overall life circumstances; she was permanently excluded after two years of secondary school due to her behaviour and began taking recreational drugs during school hours from the age of 12. Evidently her disengagement with after-school activities, such as school sport, is largely linked to the previous discussion on disengagement from school and also the previous chapter on behaviour. For example, Chantelle utilised negative coping mechanisms and displayed irrational behaviour as a result of possible traumatic experiences. This behaviour is recognised by Hayden (2007) who asserts that having needs that have not been met is just one of the many issues associated with disaffection-related behaviour at school. Other issues include child abuse/poor parenting, disrupted or stressful living conditions, disruptions associated with being in care and relative poverty, all of which are common for LACYP and were indeed for Chantelle.

For the youth respondents, much of the disengagement with regard to PESS was associated with a lack of interest or ability. This certainly appeared to be the case for Luke, 13, who explained:

> I think doing sports is a waste of time unless you enjoy it, which I don't really enjoy it … it doesn't interest me at all,

> 'cos I just think it's a waste of time. It's not like I'm gonna forget how to walk in a year's time if I don't do PE is it.

Luke's disposition on not valuing PE is certainly not something new within research concerning young people and PE (e.g. Cothran and Ennis, 2001; MacPhail *et al.*, 2004). In view of this, Luke, who was in year 9 at a secondary school in the south of England, further described an often-used excuse that allowed him not to have to participate in PE lessons:

> I'm glad I didn't get the correct kit, 'cos otherwise I would have had to do rugby, and I would have ended up getting a kit mark. 'Cos I would've forgot my shoes on purpose, and then they wouldn't have been able to give me one 'cos I would just say "I'm a size 12". They always believe it. 'Cos I always buy shoes that are too big, which makes it look Iike I'm a big foot, but actually I'm a size 8. So, I gets shoes that are a size way bigger and then when they go "what size are you?", I go "12" and then they're like "well we aint got boots that big", but they have got my size.

During the individual interview with Luke, it became clear that he was not athletically inclined and did not appear to value PESS for this reason. Creating an excuse to not have to participate in PE was recurrent in the data collected from the LACYP participants, where half of the young people preferred detention/isolation than having to participate in PESS. For instance, Megan, 19, described her PE participation as being activity dependent: "I only liked swimming, trampolining and rounders, any other thing I was like "I'm not doing it" … if I knew it was something I didn't like, I would purposely forget my PE kit." Preference of activities within PE has also been identified by Gorely *et al.* (2011) who found that girls' participation in PE and sport declines over time. Likewise, Chantelle, also spoke of how her interest in the activity affected her participation and motivation towards PE:

> Umm I don't like PE 'cos it's pointless. It's boring, and you have to do set activities. Like they've got it all set out for like the whole year. And like I dunno, it's boring 'cos you've

> got to do hockey and stuff. I don't like hockey, like I'd rather play football, 'cos I am actually pretty good at football to be fair.

For some of the LACYP participants in this study, their desire not to participate was evidently due to a lack of interest or ability as previously mentioned. This can also often be the reason for disengagement for many young people not looked-after and so LACYP are not isolated in this respect. For example, it has been argued that for an increasing number of young people, PE appears to be disconnected from their lives, identities and lifestyle interests beyond school and therefore it is irrelevant to them (e.g. Sandford *et al.*, 2008a; Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010). However, more specific to LACYP is the chaos they have experienced within their lives as a result of coming into care, suggesting that perhaps participation in PESS may be deemed insignificant for this reason. As Nathan explains:

> I just, I just chose not to go to it [PE]. Probably would've, with everything that was happening, going on, like moving around and going to all these different places, having arguments with teachers and stuff like that, it just didn't put me in the mindset to go play football.

Nathan's recollection highlights the complexity of LACYP's lives and how many of the themes identified in the data chapters thus far, overlap and intersect to play a part in shaping their experiences of PESS. For Nathan, it was the moving of placements and his volatile behaviour in school that caused his disengagement from a subject that he had previously enjoyed. Although Nathan's disengagement would appear to be of an individual nature with regards to the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), it is important to recognise the reciprocity between the layers of the framework that have influenced his decision to disengage. For example, the impact of placement stability and prevalence of negative behaviour were identified in previous chapters as institutional and individual influences that may contribute to the shaping of LACYP's PESS experiences (see 5.2 and 6.3). For Shannon, it emerged that PE had never been a subject she enjoyed. Whilst reflecting on her secondary school PE lessons during the interview, her participation in PE was associated with rather unnerving feelings:

CW: How did that make you feel when you knew you had a PE lesson?

Shannon: It physically made me wrench inside. Because of the fact of why should I have to sit and get undressed when all these other girls that are going to take the piss outta me … It got to the point where I'd walk on the field, put my fingers down my throat and throw up over the pitch, and she'd send me off on purpose. I had no choice. If I wasn't ill, or even if you didn't have a PE kit right, she'd make you roll your trousers up right yeah, and run round the field still.

For Shannon, it seemed that PE engendered a degree of personal or emotional vulnerability/exposure that other subjects did not and therefore she would resort to behaving in such manner to protect herself from, and gain some control over, these experiences. School more generally has previously been identified as a place associated with social exclusion and bullying for some LACYP (Selwyn, 2015a). These examples from the data that detail how and why some LACYP actively disengage from PESS, correlate with findings identified in Chapter 5 in relation to the impact of pre-care experiences for LACYP; specifically, those that identified how the traumatic experiences in childhood can manifest themselves in ways that may affect all areas of LACYP's lives, including PESS. Such a finding confirms why PESS should not be viewed in isolation and how the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) can be considered useful in understanding the complexities at play within the lives of LACYP.

Furthermore, the notion of LACYP disengaging from PESS proves to be an interesting finding since previous research points to sport as a valuable tool for re-engaging disaffected young people (see Holt, 2008; Sandford and Duncombe, 2011; Armour *et al.*, 2013). It may well be the case that for LACYP, sport outside of the school setting has more potential to achieve this; since being disengaged from school means that the young person is also likely to be disengaged from PESS (as has been shown). Activities outside of the school context have previously been proven to be valuable in several other studies, with LACYP reporting that having encouragement, opportunities and resources to have hobbies and do fun and exciting things was important in giving them a sense of normality (see Selwyn, 2015a). This

was also recognised in an interview with Jamie (19-year-old care leaver). Reflecting on his personal experience, he believed that being given the opportunity and encouragement to find an enjoyable pastime is crucial for LACYP:

> Jamie: I think if for kids in care, if you promote all these activities and do more than one thing, it gives them an opportunity to discover things they like as well … If you give them that option it gives them a chance to discover what they enjoy. 'Cos I know when I went into care I had no idea what I enjoyed until I went into care and I started writing, I started doing performing arts at college…

Jamie's sentiment supports Fattore and colleagues' (2007) argument that children should be given the opportunities to gain experiences that enhance their wellbeing, which, as in this instance, may not necessarily be sport. Jamie's new-found interest in performing arts once he entered care, led him to continue his education post-16. This was also the case for Kalaya, 17, who found enjoyment through art because she found it to be relaxing:

> Drawing is like really chilled, gets your mind of things. And you can like draw and express anything in art, that was quite a good way of relaxing and spend my time…

During the individual interview, Kalaya continued to explain that she enjoyed receiving positive feedback and felt proud of her art work, and so took the subject as a GCSE before continuing to study it at college. Similar findings have been recognised by the APPG (2012) who noted that high achieving young people in the care system have been characterized by having developed a range of out-of-school interests and hobbies that widen their educational base. For the LACYP participants within this study, having alternative interests other than sport was one of the reasons for not valuing PESS and therefore not participating in after-school sport. However, it may well be that their alternative interests provided that sense of normality, improved wellbeing and enjoyment that they simply felt they did not reap from PESS or sport. This highlights potential disparity between the claimed benefits of sport that were discussed within the literature in Chapter 2 and data in Chapter 6, and the relevance of such concepts within the lives of the LACYP within this

study. It therefore raises the question of how those who support the education of LACYP and wish to promote their health and wellbeing through PESS do so, whilst battling potential disengagement. The influential role of the Virtual School in this respect, is explored in the following section.

7.3 The Virtual School's valuing of PESS

Unlike children who grow up solely within their birth families, LACYP have an additional advocate of the Virtual School also being responsible for their education, forming part of the corporate parent responsibility for LACYP. In the UK, the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) has a statutory role in the education of LACYP (DfE, 2014a) (see also Chapter 3, section 3.4.21) and aims to encourage more stringent monitoring and interventions regarding LACYP's education. The data gathered from the local authority interviews and survey respondents, suggest that the support from Virtual Schools varied. In particular, in terms of how much support was provided for PESS, the type of support that was provided, and whether they deem it necessary to be the ones providing the support in the first place. This finding has been reflected elsewhere regarding variations among local authorities in the level of commitment and resource dedicated to improving educational outcomes for LACYP (see APPG, 2012). Research from Brodie and colleagues (2011) also previously concluded that there is no clear evidence between initiatives such as the VSH and improved educational outcomes.

This finding which concerns the variable value allotted to PESS by Virtual Schools, further became notable within the data since the VSH's main duty, in accordance with the *Children and Families Act 2014*, is to promote the educational achievement of LACYP (see section 3.4.21). This duty was described by one VSH as "a challenge and support role for schools on behalf of looked-after children" (Heather Roberts, VSH from Whippinghamshire). Interestingly, the survey data from the local authority professionals revealed that 93% of respondents felt that they <u>do not</u> have a specific duty towards LACYP involvement in PESS. A possible reason for this was explained in one of the follow-up interviews with Gareth Houlston, a Lead Teacher for Children in Care, who stated: "It's not a duty other than it's a subject in school and we have a responsibility for all subjects I suppose". In contrast, Debbie Howell, a VSH from Talborough local authority, explained how "we have

a duty to promote the health and wellbeing of looked-after children, that is a statutory duty, like we have to promote their education, so yes there is [a duty] I guess". However, this was the only local authority professional representative to mention that health and wellbeing was a statutory duty of Virtual Schools. This suggests that there is perhaps ambiguity regarding the responsibility of PESS provision for LACYP. A more detailed account below is taken from an interview with Robert Knight (VSH in Bucktonshire) who indicated why his role does not have a duty toward PESS:

> I would say there's nothing in my role about any subjects, it's just to promote the educational achievement. I think you've got to be aware of how local authorities and Virtual School Heads performance is judged and it keeps coming back to the attainment gap, not the progress gap … there isn't a mention, no Virtual School Head that I'm aware of will have anything around particular subjects other than tracking the levels in English and maths and their sub levels of reading, writing and spelling, punctuation and grammar for the younger ones, they're the ones. The targets that are put out from the DfE (Department for Education) are linked to that…

This extract demonstrates how statutory requirements and government targets can potentially inhibit the priority given to PESS; something which young people or indeed those working directly with them have little control over. Recognising that these wider policies can have implications on the young person highlights why the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) proves useful in the application to this context; since without acknowledging the influence of public policy and wider social factors, we might not fully understand what can affect LACYP's experiences of PESS. For example, an interview with Sarah Kingston, a VSH from the south east of England, also highlighted how government policy was having a significant impact at the institutional level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) of LACYP's social ecology:

> CW: Do you and your team have any duty towards looked-after children's involvement in PE?

Sarah: No, no we don't. In fact, … all we end up doing is, we go to a number of PEPs and sort of mop up when things aren't working well. And we do a lot of training with designated teachers and foster carers and social workers and independent reviewing officers, but no we don't have anything to do with PE.

CW: Why do you think that is?

Sarah: Well we don't really have anything to do with any of the curriculum much at all, apart from what comes up in the PEP or when we go to meetings. Because we're such a small team, there's 300 schools in Bembridgeshire and with me and two and a half people to do a job, you can imagine a lot of it is around data collection. And PE doesn't focus in our, you know it's all about 5 A*-C's in English and Maths.

Performance driven targets set by the government regarding the academic attainment of LACYP, have an inherent focus on maths and English, due to statistical releases published publicly each year. Within the interviews with local authority professionals, evidence of a VSH's duty towards PESS appeared absent "because we're measured on English and maths, we're not measured on PE" (Debbie Howell, VSH, Talborough). These examples help to illustrate where Virtual Schools' priorities lay and that a possible reason for the lack of accountability for PESS may be due to public policy influence (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). The lack of accountably for PE was also identified in questions around the Personal Education Plans (PEP) of LACYP. The data revealed that no statutory requirement appears to exist specifically for PE, or rather any subjects. This finding was also apparent in the results from the local authority respondent survey. Despite 40% of the respondents answering "yes" to PE being included in the PEPs of their LACYP, many of the remaining respondents gave explanations as to why it is not. For example, a VSH from the north west of England stated: "Not specifically but extra-curricular activities are explored", whilst another from a London borough added that "a question about extra-curricular activities is included which can include sports activities". This therefore evidences a level of disparity between local authorities in England in relation to PE within PEPs, with many

not referring to PE per se. This was also the case during the follow up interviews, as Liam McKay, an Education Development officer from Eastonshire local authority, explained:

> CW: Is that [PE] identified in every child's PEP?
>
> Liam: They'll be an area yes. Because one of two things it comes up with is, you can fill in a strength and difficulties questionnaire, but also the pupil sheet that will ask if you're involved in any extra-curricular subjects, non-curricular, any clubs that you join. And also, if you can swim, because some local authorities, they kind of make some of the underprivileged children … eligible for free passes for swimming and leisure centres.

These examples, indicate that it may be common practice for local authorities to not specifically document LACYP's participation in PE. This represents an interesting find since within schools in England, PE is a compulsory subject within the broader National Curriculum (DfE, 2014b). However, at present there is no specific obligation as to how much time is spent on teaching PE, with the DfE allowing schools to determine what they think counts towards their PE provision. The lack of status for compulsory PE within the PEP was contrasted by an emphasis on encouraging participation in extra-curricular activities such as school sport. Within the local authority survey, after-school and out of school activities were mentioned by all local authority respondents in terms of having a specific section within the PEP. A further 38% stated that school sport is included on the PEP yet, as noted, much reference was made to sporting activities outside the school setting. This is an interesting find since Murray's (2013) study concluded that councils tended to rely on the provision of physical activity within schools, assuming that access and opportunities within school would be taken up by LACYP; something this study suggests may not necessarily be the case. Documenting out of school activities in the PEP is likely to reflect the DfE's (2014a) statutory guidance which states that the education and development needs are to be covered (in the PEP), including leisure interests. Nonetheless, it was identified at the beginning of this chapter that not all LACYP may be interested or engaged with the content of the PEP and therefore this raises questions around whether documenting PESS directly impacts upon LACYP's experiences. It does, however,

highlight that the value afforded to PESS for LACYP can be seen at an institutional and public policy level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988).

At the interpersonal level within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model, the individual support that the Virtual School staff provided their LACYP in relation to PESS varied, with some having little contact with their LACYP. The amount of contact appeared to be linked to the number of children they were responsible for within their local authority. It emerged that staff from smaller local authorities were perhaps able to have more contact than those with a high population of LACYP, where the VSH role was concentrated on strategic issues. Conceptually, this is another example of how an institutional factor within McLeroy's *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model, for example the size of the local authority, may have an impact on the services received by LACYP. One specific example came from an interview with a Lead Teacher for Children in Care in Comptonshire local authority, who explained that he had individual contact with the LACYP in his local authority and utilised PE within that contact:

Gareth Houlston: We know all our children in care like personally, 'cos we do lots of different things with them. So, we, I run a centre on a Monday and a Friday morning where we take some children out of school. And we do nurturing type stuff, cooking, PE, play games and we take, there's no set criteria to who comes out, but we, if kids are struggling or have just come into care … It's enabled us to really support the children in school. 'Cos if you get to know them properly you can then inform the school in a much better way, and yeah it works well, they all enjoy it because it is very nurturing.

Comptonshire local authority, in terms of the number of LACYP within their care, was much smaller than many of the interviewees' local authorities, indicating why they may have had the capacity to support their LACYP in this way. Nonetheless, they recognised that in order to help LACYP succeed within education, providing additional support to help them cope with the turbulence and upheaval they have experienced is necessary. This is something which has been given considerable attention within the literature (e.g. APPG, 2012; Cameron *et al.*, 2015) and is closely linked to the previous chapter on wellbeing and

behaviour. The way that many of the VSH interview respondents explained that they provided support for LACYP was indirectly through the training of staff within schools (explored further in Chapter 8, section 8.3). The training typically focussed on the notion of attachment, with some offering it solely to Designated Teachers and others offering it to the whole school staff where possible. These differences in where training is provided is an interesting concept since their statutory duty as a VSH is to provide the support and training necessary for schools to understand LACYP. Following him completing the local authority professional survey, Gareth Houlston also highlighted the perceived need to do training with PE teachers - specifically in order to improve LACYP's experiences of PE:

> I'm going to pursue this really, the PE bit. And so, I would have contact with maths and English teachers, not all of them, but where there were sort of areas for concern. And I think it might be worth doing some training with PE staff around inclusion of children who are anxious about PE and what they can do to support it.

Within the statutory guidance for local authorities, it is the responsibility of the VSH to ensure "schools understand the powerful role they can play in significantly improving the quality of life and the educational experiences of looked after children" (DfE, 2014a, p.30). Since PESS forms part of LACYP's compulsory educational experiences, the duty extends - or should extend - to include it. The extract above is illustrative of how a Virtual School attempts to meet this requirement, yet prior to the interview it would appear this was perhaps not the case. Thus, the type of relationship that exists between the local authority and school staff presents a community factor which can indirectly affect LACYP's experiences of PESS i.e. whether staff have received training or not. Further, this is closely linked to a more direct interpersonal influence within McLeroy and colleagues' (1988) model, whereby teachers implement the training into their practice of teaching LACYP.

The need for schools to be understanding may have presented as a consistent finding amongst the local authority professionals, due to local authorities largely holding schools accountable for supporting LACYP's engagement with PESS. This is conveyed in the following comments from two VSHs:

Debbie Howell:	In schools it's really for the schools to be promoting it [PESS] and making sure looked-after children are getting the opportunities.
	~
Sandra Scott:	The accountability is with schools to educate our children, so yes that accountability does end up in schools.

Whilst schools are responsible for the education of all children, the reason for the introduction of the VSH is so that LACYP have additional support and advocacy; they should be "the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked after children" (DfE, 2014a, p.5). In accordance with the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), the impact of accountability on LACYP's PESS experiences sits across both the public policy and institutional levels (see Figure 1, section 3.3 for a diagram of the model). At a public policy level, this is whereby legislation and statutory guidance is published for the purposes of specific institutions (in this case the schools and the Virtual School). At the institutional level, this is whereby those specific institutions are required to accept accountability and act accordingly to implement those policies. Evidently, the data from this study has revealed disparity with where the responsibility is ultimately perceived to lie. The pressures at a public policy level appear to present barriers for Virtual Schools to be able to give value to PESS, with Virtual Schools relying on the schools to value and provide the necessary support. Whether the schools do this, is where we now turn.

7.4 School's valuing PESS for LACYP

From the evidence presented in the previous section we can see that, on the whole, local authorities deem schools to be responsible for supporting LACYP to engage in PESS. The school is recognised as an institutional factor within the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), whereby organisations surrounding the young person are said to affect and have an influence on their behaviour or rather, in this case, their experiences (see section 3.3). During several of the interviews with local authority professionals, the priority given to PESS by schools was expressed as a challenge affecting LACYP's

participation, with some respondents implying that "it's not taken seriously enough" (Sarah Kingston, VSH, Bembridgeshire). Sarah explained during the interview that the schools within her local authority had some excellent initiatives relating to sports participation prior to the recent withdrawal of the *Extended Schools* funding (see Chapter 3), but that these were now dependent on the individual headteacher's perceived value of sports participation. In addition, Gareth Houlston (Comptonshire local authority), further articulated how PESS is not always considered important within schools:

> I kind of think … for lots of our schools, there's sort of a lethargy around it you know… that it's just not as important and actually English and Maths is more important … since you've made contact with me I've sort of started doing a bit of informal research myself. For our own kids and secondary school pupils, there's an incredibly high percentage of children that don't do PE, and that's kind of accepted and that's something I'm going to challenge.

The lethargy around PE that Gareth refers to within Comptonshire local authority, was also recognised by the LACYP participants. For example, Jamie described PE as a subject that gets overlooked; when asked the reasons why he thought that this was the case, he explained:

> It's less academic, whereas every other lesson is academic. So, it's kinda like, it's not really a lesson. It's a break away from lesson, learning something else other than, I dunno. I wouldn't see PE as education really in my view, because it's more about training and building your fitness up more, than building your mind and educating you.

In a similar vein, Jamie refers to the association of academic subjects as being viewed superior to vocational subjects such as PE. The perceived negligible value given to PESS by schools was also evidenced during the interviews with other LACYP where it became apparent that some LACYP were able to forgo PE lesson in favour of revision classes or alternative activities such as music lessons. For example, during an individual interview with Mia, I asked her about her attendance in PE lessons and she explained to me that she

does not always participate in them. The example below, is an extract from this interview, where Mia informs me of the reason why she does not always attend her PE lessons:

CW: Why don't you go [to PE]?

Mia: Umm music and extra support in my learning.

CW: So is that something you choose to do instead of PE, or is it something you're told to do?

Mia: Choose.

CW: So you're allowed to miss PE to go and do those things?

Mia: Yeah.

Mia, who was 12 years old at the time of the interview, was given the choice from the school of whether she wanted to take part in an alternative activity as opposed to attending her PE lessons. Mia exerting her agency and choosing not to engage with PE, is evident of an individual influence within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988); something that was also outlined previously in this chapter with regard to LACYP's disengagement from PESS. Similar issues were identified by Kalaya, who stated that she used to be able to "get out of PE" and do revision instead:

CW: So was it always PE that the revision classes replaced?

Kalaya: It was PE. And then once some people had already done GCSE's and got like, say history was already done, then that would be a spare lesson to do revision.

CW: But if it wasn't done they'd use PE?

Kalaya: Yeah.

CW: And what would you have rather done?

Kalaya: The revision lesson … if I had to choose anything from like PE or something else, I'd choose something else. 'Cos I dunno, my school, their PE was kinda boring.

As with Mia, Kalaya was willing not to engage in PE. With reference to the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), the individual agency expressed by these LACYP can be considered an individual influence affecting their PESS experiences. However, the school should also take responsibility at the institutional level by the minimal value given to PE as a subject, demonstrated through the offering of alternative activities. During an interview with the Head of PE at Lushington Secondary School, David Andrews explained that he was having a "battle" with the senior leadership team at his school because of the pressures placed upon them for their next Ofsted inspection; therefore, he felt torn between his principles of getting young people participating in PESS and the 'official' demands. This suggests that the relationship between institutions (school) and people (teachers) may indirectly affect LACYP's experiences of PESS, highlighting a community factor within the social ecology of LACYP (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). As David explains:

> I'm having kids withdrawn, even Key Stage 3, through to extra maths, extra English, extra science in their core PE lessons. And it's a battle I'm having with senior leadership … I've done my research on the kids pulled out of core PE, the numbers etc. This current time we're getting closer to 50% of Year 11. Now I couldn't tell you how many of those are looked-after 'cos I haven't looked at it… but I can name two to three [LACYP] students who have been removed from core PE.

David's account suggests that these findings are not necessarily unique to LACYP, with many young people being withdrawn from PE in order to attend revision classes. From both Mia's and David's account, it seems that the revision sessions were not just targeted

to those young people taking their GCSE exams. Similar findings were also apparent in relation to school sport, with the Head of PE at Sandcove Secondary School in the south of England explaining:

> Mark Jones: In a perfect world we would offer things, but I think the general nature, it's probably a national thing, is we don't tend to do kind of practices as such after school anymore. They're all taken up with fixtures and kind of revision lessons and so on. So, it's been quite difficult to actually target any specific students this year with, well for a few years now, in terms of extra-curricular after school … I think there is probably too much emphasis on these students getting these sort of ten qualifications. I think sometimes, I don't know if we necessarily get it right educationally, in this country.

In relation to LACYP specifically, a possible reason for the prioritisation of extra revision classes for academic subjects in place of vocational subjects such as PESS, could be because national statistics continually document the educational underachievement of this population, with research attributing this to the insufficient support they can receive for their education (see section 2.4.3). The pressure for LACYP to achieve academically was previously noted in section 7.3 as a public policy influence within the social ecological framework (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), with reference to the government's measurements for LACYP's educational attainment. So, although the discussion in this section implies that school's value of PESS may be representative of an institutional influence on LACYP's PESS experiences, these experiences may actually also be influenced by the wider public policy level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988).

The data so far in this section suggest that the value given to PESS by schools may impact upon LACYP's participation. For instance, schools offering alternative activities could encourage LACYP to disengage from PESS, potentially inhibiting some LACYP from being able to develop the possible benefits that are associated with participation. During the interviews with local authority professionals, I asked for their thoughts on how practice could be improved in terms of PESS provision for LACYP. One example, from the Lead

Teacher for Children in Care at Comptonshire local authority, suggests:

> Gareth Houlston: Well I think certainly raising the profile of certain things like PE, if we're talking about that y'know. I think that is really important, an understanding of the benefits for children in care. I mean training for staff is one of the biggest areas for improvement I think. So that everyone who's working with a child or comes across a child in a day is aware of how to support appropriately.

This recognised need for schools to understand the complexities of LACYP's social experiences links back to the previous section that noted some local authorities were attempting to meet this need through the training of staff in schools to be able to better support LACYP. It is suggested that having support is directly relevant to the maintenance of positive relationships, which have been found to be a central part of how LACYP view their own wellbeing (Selwyn, 2015a) and the biggest asset for initiatives based around developing positive behavioural change amongst youth (see Armour *et al.*, 2013; Hermen *et al.*, 2017). For all children, support has been recognised as being crucial for them to be able to succeed in life and for LACYP this notion of support, or indeed a lack of support, has been noted on many occasions within policy, legislation and literature (SEU, 2003; Clay and Dowling, 2004; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Stein 2012; The Who Cares Trust, 2012). A clear finding from the data collected was the variation of support that may directly or indirectly affect LACYP's experiences of PESS. This support is impacted upon by the influence of interpersonal relationships, which forms the focus of debate in the subsequent, and final, data chapter.

7.5 Summary

The central aim of this chapter has been to present four key findings from the data analysis which help to facilitate an understanding of the PESS experiences of LACYP. The findings suggest that LACYP who are disengaged from their education more generally, may also be more likely to be disengaged from PESS. However, an inherent lack of interest and enjoyment for PESS, coincided with the chaos and turmoil experienced, suggests, at an

individual level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), the insignificant role PESS may play in the lives of many LACYP. The findings imply that out of school experiences may prove more beneficial, with LACYP attributing enjoyment and benefits to alternative interests such as art and drama. This was also reflected at an institutional level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) with the local authority professionals' emphasis on general extra-curricular and out-of-school provision documented within LACYP's Personal Education Plans. In relation to this, there was evidence of a perceived lack of duty towards LACYP's PESS provision by the local authority professionals, which they attributed to the public policy influence of pressures associated with government target measurements in academic subjects (such as maths and English). The Virtual Schools in this study, therefore, seemed to hold the schools accountable for the PESS provision for LACYP. Despite this, the value that schools gave to PESS for LACYP also appeared to vary, with the findings implying that PE may be overlooked due to its inferiority to academic subjects, further evidencing the potential wider influence of the government's academically-focussed targets. Overall, this chapter implies that the negligible value and priority that may be afforded to PESS can impact LACYP's PESS experiences and the role it plays within their lives; influenced across four levels within the social ecological model (public policy, community, institutional and individual) (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). It therefore poses the questions as to what extent interpersonal relationships may also have an influence, which now forms the basis of discussion in the final data chapter.

CHAPTER 8: THE INFLUENCE OF OTHERS

8.0 Introduction

The findings presented in the previous chapter focused on the value afforded to Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) for looked-after children and young people (LACYP), largely from an individual, institutional and policy perspective. In keeping with the interrelated nature of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), this final data chapter builds upon the previous discussion by identifying how interpersonal processes intersect to shape and influence PESS participation and experiences for LACYP. Essentially, the focus is on the nature of the relationship between LACYP and their primary social groups, with the aim being to draw out specific connections through the narratives of respondents. Broadly speaking, the notion of relationship in this context is referring to close connections with family, friends, school and community. Discussion in Chapter 2 noted that some LACYP may be connected to problematic relationships (Hayden, 2007), yet the importance of maintaining these relationships has been considered essential if they are to achieve and succeed within education and take part in extra-curricular activities (Daniel and Wassell, 2002b). For LACYP, this has been noted as something that may prove difficult to achieve if they have experienced a turbulent trajectory (Hayden, 2007; Daniel and Wassell, 2002a). Data presented thus far has identified this to be the case for many of the LACYP participants within this study. It became clear during the data collection and analysis that specific people could be, or had been, influential with regard to shaping (for good or ill) the PESS experiences of LACYP. In particular, two key social groups were identified: teachers and peers. The discussion in this chapter is separated into sub-sections within each of these core areas. The findings with regards to teachers looks at the role of the PE teacher, teachers' understanding of LACYP and, lastly, teacher training. The theme of peers explores the influence of friends on PESS participation and building friendships.

8.1 The role of the (PE) teacher

It has previously been argued that there are 'too many' professionals involved in the lives of young people facing multiple challenges, such as care-experienced youth (Stephenson, 2007). However, it is perhaps inevitable within educational establishments that LACYP will come into contact with numerous adults, a large majority of whom are teachers. For example, Holland (2010) noted that the LACYP within her study were often involved in large, complex networks and that these relationships (positive or negative) were central to their everyday emotional and physical wellbeing. This section, therefore, focuses on the role of the PE teacher in shaping LACYP's PESS experiences, in addition to further exploring the role of the Designated Teacher who is responsible for the education of LACYP within their school (see Chapter 3, section, 3.4.13). The data collated from the LACYP participants implied that although some of them had a positive relationship with their PE teachers at school, this did not necessarily lead to a greater desire to participate in PESS due to their own personal preferences, as the previous chapters have highlighted. This is illustrated in the following extract taken from an interview with Nathan, who as we saw in Chapter 5, had an extremely turbulent school experience and often chose not to attend PE:

CW: So how about your PE teachers, what were they like?

Nathan: They were good. I liked the PE teachers, 'cos obviously they were quite motivating and stuff like that, cos they have to be. But, like, yeah, most of them were really good. I don't think I had anyfink [sic] against any of them.

Nathan's account demonstrates that the relationship he had with his PE teachers was positive (or certainly not negative) implying that this may not necessarily be the case for some of his other teachers at school. Further conversations with Nathan revealed that what he valued most from his PE teachers was their support with motivation, encouraging participation at times when he perhaps did not want to engage. We know from the previous chapters that motivation was a struggle for Nathan, who disengaged from school and at times presented undesirable behaviours at school such as absconding. In a similar vein,

Jamie spoke of three particular teachers who were supportive in nature and contributed to his overall school experience, one of whom was a PE teacher:

> CW: Why do you think it was those three in particular [that you felt supported you]?
>
> Jamie: 'Cos they were the ones that actually, like, cared. Like, if I had a problem, they were the ones who would come to me and knew what was going on. Like, if I was upset in the classroom and I was trying to cover it up, they were the ones that saw through it and could tell something was up. Whereas no one else did. If I was in a bad mood, that's all they saw.

Like Nathan (and as outlined in Chapters 6 and 7) we know that Jamie did not value PESS or identify potential benefits associated with participation in PESS. Therefore, the positive relationship Jamie refers to with his PE teacher was not based on the teacher's ability to provide Jamie with those benefits; it was based solely on the support and nurturing investment the teacher made towards him with regard to what was going on outside of school. This somewhat contradicts previous research that suggests positive relationships between teachers and young people have been noted as potentially facilitating engagement and personal development within physical activity and sport (see Sandford *et al.*, 2008a; Armour *et al.*, 2013[35]). However, the importance of positive relationships is considered a central concept amongst research on resilience (Hayden, 2007) and, in the context of this study, the role of the PE teacher becomes an identifiable interpersonal factor within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). The potentially positive impact of PE teachers on LACYP can also be seen from the interview data from the local authority professionals, as the VSH assistant, Lisa Phillips, from Millfolk local authority implied:

> I think for some of our looked-after children, the PE teachers are really positive role models. Y'know because PE is a thing they do enjoy, because it does help them release a lot of pent up stress. Y'know the fight, flight sort

[35] The authors suggest that personal interest and motivation can also play a role here.

> of aspect of themselves. They often do associate with PE teachers quite a lot.

It is important to acknowledge here, however, that Lisa's sentiment is likely to be more applicable to those who already engage with PE. In a similar vein, Liam McKay, an Education Development Officer at Eastonshire local authority, made the following observation:

> I notice that [PE] staff are younger people now and they relate to the children well, and kind of accommodate the needs of looked-after children well … myself, I have a very close relationship with some of the staff and they keep an on-going dialogue. For example, I use this child Joe Bloggs, they'll say "well he didn't participate today" or "he was tearful today" or "do you know he didn't have his kit". So, it helps you to understand where things are for looked-after children.

With youth and local authority participants both referring to the positive relationship that can potentially ensue between PE teachers and care-experienced youth, it would seem that interpersonal factors such as this can be incredibly influential with regard to shaping LACYP's school and PESS experiences. Previous research findings have highlighted the important role that positive relationships can play in acting as a protective factor against negative life outcomes for LACYP, as well as other individuals living in difficult or challenging circumstances (Cottam, 2015; PRT, 2016). However, like their peers, not all LACYP will experience this positive relationship and therefore a critical perspective is needed here. The notion of being able to associate with PE teachers has also previously been reported within broader sporting literature, which identifies that project leaders who are charismatic and willing to tackle issues associated with disengagement are more likely to affect a positive change in the lives young people with whom they work (see Sandford *et al.*, 2008a, b). Despite some of the local authority respondents suggesting that PE teachers can play a (positive) pivotal role in LACYP's PE experiences, the majority confirmed that they did not have direct contact with the PE teachers. This raises questions regarding to what extent they can be certain of such a pivotal role. The consensus was that contact between a local authority professional and a PE teacher would only occur if there

was a particular issue or problem to be resolved, as evidenced by the VSH at Whippinghamshire local authority:

> CW: Do you have contact with the PE teachers?
>
> Heather Roberts: Not in their role as a PE teacher. Some of them may be a PE teacher that is [also] the Designated Teacher for looked-after children. Or some of them may be a PE teacher, but they're acting as head of year role and they will have contact with my team. I don't specifically have involvement with PE teachers.

This extract helps to demonstrate that the relationship between respondents situated within a Virtual School and the PE teachers in a mainstream school was somewhat tenuous. Conceptually, this notion that there may be a disconnect between two institutions is considered a community factor within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) and highlights, again, the potential piecemeal provision of PESS for LACYP. Further evidence to this effect was provided by Robert Knight, the VSH from Bucktonshire local authority:

> We don't tend to [have contact with PE teachers], it tends to be through the Designated Teachers. I mean because I'm dealing with such a large number of children and a large number of schools, we don't tend to get involved with individual teachers unless there's an issue.

Having previously discussed the support that the Virtual School respondents provided individual LACYP (identified in Chapter 7), it became apparent through the analysis that contact with PE teachers is often related to the size of the local authority. For example, Liam from Eastonshire (featured above) who stated that they had direct contact with PE teachers, was based in a far smaller local authority than Bucktonshire. From a social ecological perspective (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) this can be considered a community factor since it is the relationship between two

institutions (Virtual School and mainstream schools). Nonetheless, Chapter 3 identified that all Virtual Schools must have contact with a Designated Teacher within each school. To this end, the data implied that the relationship between Virtual schools and the Designated Teachers may be influential in shaping the school experiences, and specifically PESS experiences, of LACYP. Such relationships can be considered specific to the care context within with LACYP are embedded, in that those who are not looked-after would not be influenced by this community factor. This is clarified in the following extract from the VSH at Talborough local authority:

> Mainly it's the Designated Teacher and the head of year that we would meet in school. So really, it's for the Designated Teacher really to have that overview of what that [looked-after] child is involved with, and promote activities for them.

The Designated Teacher was not only seen to be influential at the community level through the relationship they had with the Virtual school, but also at an interpersonal level, through the relationship that they had with the LACYP within their school. This is evident in the following comments from Robert Knight when asked his thoughts on how practice in schools could be improved in order to better support LACYP with PESS. He suggested:

> The Designated Teacher's got to be aware of the child's views. And be aware of, through building relationships with them, what it's like in school, what's difficult in school, and trying to make adjustments accordingly. Umm I think that, that would be the key thing.

Having an awareness of LACYP's needs in order to sufficiently support them during school is not a new finding with regard to the wider LACYP literature (see Chapter 2). Broader literature also highlights the need to understand young people's experiences with regard to issues around space, place and identity (Sandford, in press). For example, in Selwyn's (2015a) review on LACYP's views of being in care, several studies highlighted

that LACYP felt that there was a lack of awareness amongst professionals and peers of the issues they face. This presented as a clear finding in this study, which is where we turn to next.

8.2 Teachers' understanding

In the context of sport, a lack of recognition of the needs of marginalised young people has been noted as a barrier to young people's involvement (Shroeder, 2005). Likewise, within an educational setting Selwyn (2015a) found that LACYP thought that teachers had little understanding of their trajectories and felt that teachers would often undermine their potential and self-confidence, with them having low expectations and preconceived ideas about what they could achieve, stemming from their care history. In the context of PESS, teachers' understanding of LACYP's lives was identified as a significant finding within this study. In line with the conceptual framework adopted for the study, such a finding builds upon the interpersonal influence of relationships between LACYP and teachers (specifically PE teachers) identified in the previous section.

As has already been noted (see section 6.3), schools have a duty to provide full-time education for LACYP, which includes students with complex needs who may exhibit challenging behaviours and who are also the most vulnerable (NICE/SCIE, 2010). According to NICE/SCIE (2010), in order to do this, an awareness and understanding of the complex issues these children face in an educational setting is essential. This was also found to be the case from the LACYP participants in this study, with evidence suggesting that teachers' understandings of their situation made a real difference to LACYP's educational experiences:

CW: And what made you enjoy school?

Megan: I dunno. I think it was just like where the teachers knew my background and stuff. I knew that I could go and talk to them about my home life and anything I needed to talk to them about.

Megan, aged 19, explained how she enjoyed school and attributed her enjoyment to knowing that her teachers, including her PE teacher, were aware of her previous experiences and were approachable. We know from the literature review (Chapter 2) that many LACYP lack positive relationships and necessary levels of educational support outside of school, so teachers showing this level of understanding within the school context is significant, facilitating the creation of positive educational experiences. Such experiences were also articulated by two other youth participants, Chantelle and Bradley, during a group interview in which they were asked about their teachers at school:

Chantelle: Yeah, they knew my background and why I wouldn't sit in a lesson. So, yeah, they were all really understanding actually.

Bradley: I have a rough background and they all know about my rough background. So, it helps in lessons if I need a time out they know why, that sort of thing. You know they'll come and talk to me, it happens a lot.

CW: So do you think it would make a difference if they didn't know that?

Bradley: Yeah, 'cos like if I don't get a time out because I've got anger issues, I'll probably end up smashing up the computers or something like that. And I don't want to do that, I just want to do well in school. So, having that like someone to talk to calms me down.

Both Chantelle and Bradley make reference to behavioural difficulties as affecting their ability to maintain their participation within lessons. As we have seen in Chapter 5, such behavioural and emotional needs often impact LACYP's experiences of school and, within this context, PESS. The extract above demonstrates how such behavioural needs might be mitigated if teachers are able to empathise and show understanding with regard to a young person's broader personal circumstances. An interesting finding was that not all LACYP

participants within this study noted the same level of understanding from their subject teachers - even when asked directly. PE teachers thus appeared to be something of an exception here, typically displaying a deeper level of understanding than other teachers[36]. The extract below from Lucy, who was in her second year of secondary school at the time, demonstrates this:

> I don't really like any of my teachers. Like, I like my PE teacher because I can talk to her and she'll understand where I'm coming from … I just don't think they [other teachers] know my background that well, so they like might not know how much like people hurt my feelings when they talk about my real parents, my real family and stuff.

Knowing that her PE teacher understood her background seemed to have made a difference to Lucy's relationship with her PE teacher. This also appeared to be a key factor in how she made a distinction between teachers she 'liked' and 'disliked'. This notion that PE teachers are perhaps more approachable than other teachers may be due to the differentiated environment that can be associated with PE departments. For example, often PE teachers have a separate staff room which may present as a safer or more comfortable environment for LACYP to talk to teachers. In addition, the interactive and collaborative nature of PE lessons can provide space for interaction and communication between teachers and students (Bosco, 2013). Further evidence of this was provided by Kalaya during an interview, where she spoke of how she felt her PE teacher, Miss Peterson, understood her more than other teachers, because she was aware of what was going on at home prior to Kalaya becoming looked-after:

> Kalaya: I like Miss Peterson, I had a really good relationship with Miss Peterson, like she was nice, she understood me. You know how some teachers would just shout at you and kinda like hate you after a while cos you didn't turn up and stuff. But Miss Peterson

[36] It is worth noting here the ambiguity surrounding the PE teachers' background knowledge of the LACYP participants and to what extent it was obtained through the relationship they had established with each young person, or whether they were provided with certain information by the school.

she was like "why aren't you turning up, I can make it [lessons] better".

CW: So why do you think she [Miss Peterson] understood you more?

Kalaya: She was nicer. And she like knew about from when I was at home and like the other teachers', they didn't really know.

Kalaya's sentiment suggests that Miss Peterson's time and investment in understanding that she had some difficulties with PE participation, contributed to the creation of a positive relationship between them. Cothran (2010) indicates that teachers are becoming increasingly interested in gaining the insights and experiences of young people in school, including what they value about PE. Although these participant voices (noted above) show that some individuals valued having the support and understanding of their PE teachers, we know from previous discussion that this does not necessarily mean that LACYP are more likely to engage with PESS, due to other individual and environmental determinants recognised within the social ecological model such as pre-care experiences and placement (in)stability (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). However, it does appear to be the case that when multiple teachers have an awareness of LACYP's needs and an understanding of how to support them, it contributes to the creation of positive relationships and an improved overall school experience for care-experienced youth. This is illustrated in the extract below, which is taken from an interview with Jamie who was reflecting on his own school experience:

> It would help a lot if teachers were more aware of what was going on in children in care's life. 'Cos if they're in a bad mood, all they're [teachers] gonna see is that they're in a bad mood. And if they're, sometimes children in care can be overly happy because of something that's happened, but that still gets classed as a bad thing if they're overly happy. So I think if they were more aware of what was going on outside of school, it would affect their teaching and the lessons and how they interact with their students, a lot.

Similar findings have previously been identified by Selwyn (2015a) who noted that the LACYP in her review felt that there was little recognition within schools of the complexities that they faced in their lives, suggesting that teachers need additional training to know how to support them. Nonetheless, findings within this chapter have identified the positive role that some PE teachers may play in LACYP's educational experience. Indeed, results from the PE teacher survey revealed that 94% of respondents were made aware of the LACYP who are in their school and, moreover, that 88% felt that this information was important for informing their practice. The reasons why practitioners felt it was important to be made aware of LACYP in their school were largely concerned with understanding the difficulties that these young people may face. The examples in Table 8 below from the PE teacher survey respondents help to illustrate this point:

Table 8: Question responses taken from the PE teacher survey

Role	**Why do you feel it might be important for teachers to be made aware of LACYP in their school population?**
Teacher of PE and Head of House	They have alternative needs to be addressed
Head of PE	To have an understanding about the pupils you are teaching and what is going on in their lives to help build your relationship with them
Head of PE	To ensure appropriate support is offered and can tailor sessions to enable student to feel comfortable and supported in their learning
Head of PE	A looked-after child can go through emotional difficulties. I would hate for any member of my team to add to those pressures
Head of (PE) Department	Can accommodate them in lessons and be ready to offer time and support. Understand that they may not be as prepared for lessons as others or in the right mood. Ensure comments are not made between other students which may cause discomfort to the LAC
PE teacher	Knowing individual circumstances is important in understanding how students may be feeling emotionally
Head of Boys PE	Some pupils who are LAC have very difficult upbringings and it is important to understand these issues to aid planning and to see behaviour patterns

This issue of awareness was explored further during the individual interviews with PE teachers. For example, David Andrews, Head of PE at Lushington Secondary School, explained how the teachers at his school are made aware of those pupils who are looked-after:

> We look at the registers and there's a mark there that says this is a looked-after child or a pupil premium child etc. There's no details ever given regarding that. And I appreciate there's got to be a level of privacy.

During the interview, David acknowledged the importance of confidentiality with regards to each LACYP's status. However, he also raises the issue that a 'mark' next to a student's name does not allow him to fully understand the context or offer appropriate, tailored support for that individual, noting that "the more information you have on a child, the easier it is to teach or the easier it is to facilitate progress". This lack of awareness, then, could present barriers in creating positive PESS experiences for LACYP, since it has been recognised that for care-experienced youth to thrive in education and other constructive activities they must be effectively supported (PRT, 2016). Evidence from the APPG (2012) confirms that support for LACYP across the education system in England appears to be patchy and inconsistent, which is partly attributed to a poorly-informed workforce, confirming David Andrews' stance during the interview cited above. Further, it has been noted that there is a lack of understanding of the impact that early traumatic experiences can have on children's social and emotional wellbeing and how, in turn, this can impact upon their behaviour and learning (AGGP, 2012). Data from this study, however, highlights that some PE teachers may be aware of the difficulties LACYP might face; albeit that there is a lack of training and information provided on how to offer support with those difficulties. For instance, the PE teacher survey revealed that three-quarters of respondents did not receive specific formal input/tuition concerning LACYP during their teacher training and 88% had not received any training since they started teaching. There was a consensus that training would be beneficial for their role, with one Head of PE respondent stating that "I do not feel enough is done to help teachers deal with some aspects of [LACYP's] lives." Within the survey, respondents also provided examples of the type of training they felt would be useful, which often revolved around being able to support LACYP's needs. Examples included having strategies on: how to help LACYP

succeed; how to cater for their needs; and how to provide additional and suitable support. In addition, respondents suggested having anonymous case studies, with examples of how to support LACYP and Continued Professional Development (CPD) on how to adapt teaching and the planning of lessons. There are some interesting parallels here, perhaps, to Armour's (2014) recent work on pedagogical cases, which implies that composite narrative case studies (drawn from research) could enhance teaching practice within PE by bridging the gap between research, theory and practice. The requirement for training in this area certainly presented itself as a notable finding within this study and is discussed in more detail in the following section.

8.3 Teacher training

Whilst interpersonal relationships have received significant attention within the previous sections of this chapter, relationships between establishments (community factors) have also been found in this study to indirectly affect the PESS experiences of LACYP. This section builds upon the previous discussion to identify the significance of providing training for teachers around the contexts, experiences and needs of LACYP to contribute to enhanced practice in this area. This could ultimately lead to improved educational experiences for LACYP within their general schooling and, within this context, their experiences of PESS.

A body of literature implies that more could be done to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of a minority of LACYP who may present challenges, such as those identified within Chapter 6 (see PRT, 2016). For example, Selwyn's (2015a) work documented existing research on young people's views of their care experiences and found that several studies reported on the issue of stigma and negative labelling within schools. In particular, it was noted that LACYP thought that teachers and peers mistakenly assumed that children were placed in care due to their own poor behaviour, or that some teachers failed to understand the difficulties LACYP faced before entering care and how this could affect their conduct. This finding was also echoed by some of the local authority participants in this study. For example, Debbie Howell, a VSH from a local authority in North East England, explained that schools' understandings of LACYP was a real challenge facing Virtual Schools and attributed this, in part, to a lack of training:

> Schools' understanding of behaviour of looked-after children is a challenge … if they haven't had the training you really see, you know some of the sanctuaries [sanctions] they use make the behaviour worse. So that's a challenge in trying to get an understanding around the attachment, the importance of positive relationships and understanding the mental health needs of the young people.

The Prison Reform Trust (2016) argue that statutory guidance ought to assert the important role of the local authority in tackling the stigma which children in care can encounter. Staff training on issues of attachment and the effects of trauma, along with a general overview of the how local authority care teams and/or Virtual Schools work, have previously been suggested to combat the problem of stigma by forming part of core teacher training and CPD programmes (APPG, 2012; PRT, 2016). Within this study, issues surrounding LACYP and attachment were mentioned on numerous occasions during the interviews with local authority professionals, as the following VSH respondent demonstrates:

> Sarah Kingston: We try and teach schools about disruptive, emotional attachment, so they understand the children aren't just being naughty, they're damaged. So we do a lot of training on that. So yes, it's tightening their awareness as to what the key issues are for looked-after children, and to tighten some things that will make them fall off the education scene.

Discussions around attachment are not new when researching LACYP, having informed an array of international literature and research over the course of the last few decades (e.g. Atwool, 2006; Dozier and Rutter 2008; Rutter, 2008; Hannon *et al.*, 2010; Woodhouse, 2013). The theory of attachment essentially looks at the psychosocial development of a child's relationship with significant others (in most cases the birth parents) and helps facilitate an understanding of how we connect with others and how such connections can

lead to adaptive or maladaptive outcomes (Lambert, 2001). The initial attachment a child has with a parent can cognitively affect subsequent attachments (e.g. with friends and family) whereby children analyse the social relationships that they have previously formed in terms of the availability, care and support offered by the other person. However, attachment is not something that is only prevalent in childhood, rather it manifests itself as a psychological need that continues throughout an individual's entire life, where maintaining attachments (relationships) remains a primary goal (Rutter, 2008). It seems that whilst attachment issues for LACYP have previously been evidenced within wider research, the local authority professionals interviewed within this study also recognised and witnessed this within their roles. All respondents who spoke of attachment suggested that there was either a lack of understanding or a need for understanding to enhance LACYP's wider school experiences. Several local authority professionals, for example, spoke of the need to provide specific training for staff within schools as a way to address this issue, as evidenced by the following quote from Heather Roberts, a VSH in the north of England:

> We have really good working relationships [with schools]. We've done a lot of training with them to get them on board about all the issues. You know, the trauma, the loss, the separation, the trust issues. The fact that having contact with the birth family can affect … a child so badly, that the next day at school they're not in a position to learn sometimes, do you know what I mean. And we've worked through a lot of these issues with schools.

Such sentiments add to existing literature that has identified training for staff within schools as a gap in provision that can act as a barrier to the educational achievement of young people (APPG, 2012). It is argued that more work needs to be done with teachers to help them understand what underpins the disruptive and difficult to manage behaviour that can be exhibited by LACYP, equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to have the confidence to know what intervention is likely to be the most effective. Understanding LACYP within the broader context of their lives has been a recurrent theme throughout this study. This issue has attempted to be addressed by a Virtual School from the Midlands, with Sandra Scott (VSH) stating:

> We've spent a lot of time trying to train people in understanding it [attachment]. So, we can make changes in how children and young people are taught in our schools, so that they can actually be maintained in our schools … I have a statutory duty to offer training for Designated Teachers for looked-after children … We will train anybody who needs to be trained, but if you like our statutory focus should be on the statutory duty, the statutory post of Designated Teachers.

Most of the training mentioned by the local authority professionals was specifically for the Designated Teacher within each school, reflecting local authorities' statutory duty under Section 20 of the *Children and Young Person's Act 2008* to ensure that the Designated Teacher undertakes appropriate training (see section 3.4). Whilst Designated Teachers hold a key role within the educational life of LACYP, that teacher does not always accompany the young person and therefore the support given by other teachers (including PE teachers) within the school setting is equally important (APPG, 2012). Some Virtual School respondents had attempted to address this gap in provision by proactively offering training to colleagues. For example, Debbie Howell explained:

> We do a lot of whole school training as well. So, they get an actual, our children in care council do some training for schools … which is about what it feels like to be a looked-after child. So, a lot of, so that would include PE staff in that if it's delivered whole school.

There was a shared consensus among respondents that more staff within schools would benefit from such whole-school training; however, resource capacity, funding and time constraints meant that this was not always possible. In Chapter 7 (section 7.3) it was noted by one local authority professional (Gareth Houlston) that completing the survey as part of this study had raised an awareness that perhaps there was a gap in provision for the training of PE teachers: "It might be worth doing some training with PE staff around inclusion of children who are anxious about PE and what they can do to support it." A similar perspective was also evident within the PE teacher data, where (as identified in the previous section) being offered training to support LACYP within PESS was felt to be useful, as David Andrews' narrative demonstrates:

> Areas like this [supporting LACYP] you can, you can never have too much training. Of course, it can take priority over other bits that need just as much priority, but in this area I would say there is definitely a need for more training … How to deal with the emotional needs of students, how to spot emotional difficulties that these children can go through, and how to encourage and motivate them.

The data presented thus far indicates that there is a clear argument to be made for training PE teachers (indeed, all teachers) in understanding the trajectories of LACYP, in order that they might be able to better support and accommodate these young people within PESS activities. At present, there is no reference to LACYP within the national *Teachers' Standards*[37] for trainee teachers[38] (DFE, 2011). Albeit generic, there is an expectation that teachers "have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these" (DfE, 2011, p.11).

Specifically, and in close connection to the findings in Chapter 6, there have been references to LACYP's emotional and social deficits resulting from attachment issues, suggesting a need for LACYP to also be supported in developing positive relationships. Having the ability to forge relationships with other children and adults has been noted as positively affecting marginalised children and young people at school, such as improvements in their attendance and attainment (Hayden, 2007). Additional research has also shown that involvement in activities may afford opportunities to build positive relationships, which in turn may result in better outcomes for youths participating in these activities (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000; Sandford *et al.*, 2008a,b). The findings from this study, therefore, indicate that the PESS experiences of LACYP both affect, and are affected by, peer relationships, as the final section now demonstrates.

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[37] The *Teachers' Standards* are used across England to assess the practice of all trainees working towards QTS (Qualified Teacher Status), and all those completing their statutory induction period. They are also used to assess the performance of all teachers with QTS (DfE, 2011).

[38] Specific reference is made to those "with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities" (DfE, 2011, p.12).

8.4 The influence of friends and the building of friendships

Friendships are said to play a fundamental role within the concept of resilience (Daniel, 2008) which has been noted as significant for LACYP to succeed within their education (Woodhouse, 2013). Coman and Devaney (2011) argue that LACYP can have deficits in their capacity to form and sustain relationships due to their pre-care experiences (which may have included abuse or maltreatment), and has previously been noted as potentially affecting their experiences of PESS (Chapter 5, section 5.1). Ginsburg (2011) writes that children's connections with others can be weak or limited if families move frequently and children have to leave friends behind. The discussion presented in Chapter 2 and the findings identified in Chapter 5 both provide evidence to suggest that LACYP are indeed susceptible to disruption in terms of moving home and/or school (Skuse *et al.*, 2001; SEU, 2003; Clay and Dowling, 2004; Stein, 2005; Hayden, 2007; Hannon *et al.*, 2010; APPG, 2012; Cameron *et al.*, 2015). It is also well-documented that these movements can result in specific challenges for the individual, including the difficulties in building friendships and maintaining them (Shaw and Frost, 2013). This sits across several of the levels of McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological framework, as not only can this difficulty with friendships be considered an interpersonal factor, it is also an institutional factor i.e. social services deciding whether to move the young person, thus changing their geographical and social environment. The data from the local authority respondents revealed that they felt establishing friendships was an important outcome for LACYP in taking part in school sport. The following extract from an interview with Robert Knight, VSH at Bucktonshire local authority, suggests that the importance of sport in providing friendships is due to LACYP displaying individual developmental issues:

> Well most of the young people themselves would say you know "we want to be treated normally, we would like to be seen as no different to anyone else". And actually, the social interaction and the working with a peer group and playing with a peer group is important. It may well be, although it's not always the case, but in their early years there hasn't been the same stimulus. And that neglect, and that kind of delay, means something is missing. So the opportunity to go and socialise, I think it's really important for looked-after children. They'll form those attachment friendships with others at the same time.

Additional research points to regular engagement in physical activity as a way for LACYP to raise their self-esteem, foster resilience and develop friendships (Gilligan, 1999; 2000; Hollingworth, 2012). The results from the local authority survey showed 92% of respondents believed that participating in PESS provided benefits for LACYP, with multiple references to creating 'a sense of belonging' and building 'positive peer relationships'. Schofield *et al.* (2014, p.177) have argued that for LACYP "a sense of belonging is always complex and may include a range of families, friends and even professionals, all of whom may contribute and shape their identity and values". When exploring this idea within the individual interviews, there was further support for the concept of being a 'part of something', as illustrated in the narrative below from an assistant VSH:

> Lisa Phillips: I think with all those sort of extra-curricular activities, it gives them a sense of being in a group. It's often with positive role models, y'know older coaches who are training them and they're positive role models … I think, I think it's about being with peers who are doing something positive rather than y'know, unfortunately for some of our looked-after children, they do sort of associate with negative peer groups. And it's positive peer groups if you join a club and are part of a team.

The above extract conveys, perhaps, the significance of PESS for LACYP in establishing relationships at the interpersonal level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). However, much discussion from the respondents was directed at sport more generally and included sports clubs away from the school setting. Nonetheless, constructive activity outside of education is said to be an important part of improving self-esteem, confidence and self-efficacy for LACYP, in addition to fostering peer relationships (Schofield and Beek, 2009). This therefore reiterates the finding from Chapter 7, that participation in activities away from school and associated pressures may help young people foster positive friendships. The value of participation in sport for LACYP in terms of gaining friendships has also been highlighted in research findings from Europe (see Jackson *et al.*, 2011). This has recently been recognised by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) (2010) in which recommendations

were made to support children and young people in care to participate with peers in school and community activities to help build resilience and a sense of belonging. Indeed, a sense of belonging has long been established within literature surrounding sports participation (Ennis, 1999; Holt, 2008) and is directly linked to the ideology that interpersonal processes (i.e. establishing friendships and connections) can be achieved through participation in PESS (see Holt and Sehn, 2008). Debbie Howell, a VSH respondent from the north east of England, echoed this sentiment when she explained why she felt participating in PESS was important for LACYP:

> A lot of it I think is to belong to something. I think it's really important for a lot of our kids. To feel good about themselves and their abilities, to be part of a team. It helps with their relationships with other young people.

Likewise, similar findings were found amongst the data from the PE teacher survey. The results revealed that all respondents believed there were benefits for LACYP resulting from PESS participation, possibly a predictable finding given that they are the teachers of the subject. Nonetheless, for those who expanded on their answers, a clear focus was around developing friendships and feeling a sense of belonging. One PE teacher shared a specific example where a LACYP was "struggling with school life so came along to football after school and instantly made new friends". Donnelly and Coakley (2002) have stressed the importance of sport/physical activity programmes for fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance, which was also touched upon in Chapter 6 (section 6.3) in relation to Bradley's and Lucy's sentiments. Such data offer some substantiation to the literature that points to the value of sport in establishing friendships, or at least providing a sense of belonging. However, in the present study this appeared to remain the view of professionals working with LACYP; indeed, the building of friendships through PESS was not mentioned by any of the LACYP interviewed. Having said this, some LACYP respondents spoke of already having well-established peer groups, whereby the influence of those peers on participation in PESS was found to be significant. For example, Nathan explained that he participated in school sport prior to his upheaval in moving schools. The extract below from the interview with Nathan, focuses on understanding what made him decide to take part in extra-curricular sports activities:

CW: Did anyone encourage you to take part in those after school activities?

Nathan: Err the rugby team was probably cos most of my mates did it. Golf, same again, my mate was doing it.

Comparable findings have been documented in Norway, with the presence of friends being noted as having a positive influence on the desire of LACYP to engage in activities such as sport more often (Safvenbom and Samdahl, 2000). This was also certainly the case for some LACYP participants in this study. For Mia, friendships appeared to play a particularly important and supportive role within her life, as evidenced by her continual reference to them during the interview. It soon became clear that her friends were notably influential in her desire to participate in PESS:

CW: So what made you start taking part in those [extra-curricular activities] do you think?

Mia: My friends really, they're like "Oh yeah let's go up PE and do basketball or hockey". I don't think my friends have ever said hockey but yeah.

CW: Is that the same now when you take part in things?

Mia: Yeah, that's the only reason I'll do something other than music.

This is similar to the findings of Tannehill *et al.* (2015) who found that girls desire to participate in physical activity is linked to socialising with friends, in whatever activity they choose to do. The notable influence friends can have on LACYP participation in PESS was also recognised by those teaching LACYP, as David Andrews, Head of PE at Lushington Secondary School, explained:

> If there's a good friendship group that are staying behind, then I'm pretty sure they'll be more comfortable, or they'd be more willing to step out of their comfort zone and stay behind, as opposed to not having that friendship circle … We're all dependent on people aren't we, we all need that dependency. And if we've had that root of support removed then we look to seek it elsewhere and often that's friendship circles. I do think for evidence that I've seen, that friendship circles can be incredibly influential for looked-after children, more than other children.

David's sentiment has also been reflected in previous research which points to the influence of friends on PE participation (e.g. Gorely *et al.*, 2011; Maturo and Cunningham; 2013). For example, O'Donovan and Kirk (2008) note how young people build friendships with others similar to themselves or align themselves with particular groups who they share ideals with. In a similar vein, Kalaya expressed that although her school would offer school sport, her reason for not participating was due to her friends not choosing to do it:

> CW: How about after-school activities, were they ever mentioned [in your PEP]?
>
> Kalaya: Yeah, they said there's a few activities like going on after school, if you're interested in taking part then you can sign up at a certain place. But I never really did 'cos my friend didn't go.

As identified in Chapter 7, Kalaya was also not necessarily athletically inclined and it could be that her friends were similar in this respect. For Kalaya, her friends played an important role within her life, acting as her supportive network inside and outside of school when things became difficult at home. Nonetheless, the influence of peers at the interpersonal level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) transcends more widely than just impacting on their PESS experiences, and has been noted as impacting upon LACYP's overall wellbeing. For instance, Selwyn (2015a) reports that maintaining and developing positive and trusting relationships were at the heart of children and young people's concerns regarding their own wellbeing.

The evidence presented here from the youth respondents demonstrates the strong influence that friendships can have on the choices LACYP make with regards to PESS. Yet the data further revealed that for the other LACYP respondents, a lack of friendships meant this interpersonal influence did not exist as part of their PESS experiences. For those who expressed difficulties in developing positive relationships with peers, it highlights the potential of PESS in this respect (as a context that promotes interaction and collaboration); although previous findings within Chapter 7 suggest that the complex nature of their lives means that PESS may not necessarily be the platform in which to develop friendships if their interests lay elsewhere. Similar findings with regards to alternative interests were found by Safvenbom and Samdahl (1998) who discovered that LACYP spent most of their free time in solitude and were more likely to say that they wanted more self-involving activities, perhaps indicating an absence of friendships. However, it has been suggested that this could also be as a result of a lack of participation in these activities in the first place. For instance, Steckley (2005) noted that young people who rarely or had never participated in extracurricular activities were more likely to report having lower self-esteem and difficulty with friends. Enhanced self-esteem, self-efficacy and positive relationships have been noted as protective factors for those young people at risk of poor outcomes (e.g. Rutter, 1985, 1999; Gilligan, 1997; Daniel and Wassell, 2002b; Atwool, 2006; Armour *et al.*, 2011). These are developments that have also been associated with PESS (see Bailey *et al.*, 2009) and so highlights its potential in the positive development of LACYP. Paradoxically, however, Chapter 6 found that having low self-esteem could be a barrier to LACYP's participation in PESS and, interestingly, the building of friendships through PESS was not perceived as an outcome by the LACYP who took part in this study. These raise some important questions for further discussion.

8.5 Summary

The empirical data presented in this chapter goes some way to highlighting the multiple social ecological influences (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) that are at play within LACYP's experiences of PESS. The focus within this chapter predominantly identified the interpersonal relationships between LACYP and their teachers and peers. In so doing, the discussion has also drawn together some of the other themes (and sub-themes) that have crisscrossed this thesis, and, again, reinforces the complexity of LACYP's lives and PESS

experiences. With regard to significant adults, this chapter has explored the important role of teachers within LACYP's experiences of PESS. Where positive relationships were highlighted, it was found that teachers' understanding of LACYP's contexts and the potential impact of negative experiences were perceived to make a difference – particularly to the young people themselves - and provide valuable support within the school context. However, the data also revealed that the level of understanding shown by some teachers may not necessarily be standard practice across all schools. The discussion therefore suggested that best practice could perhaps be achieved through training for teachers, to help them identify ways to support and contribute to positive school and PESS experiences for LACYP.

Further interpersonal processes at play included LACYP's friends as having a significant influence on their decisions (or not) to participate in school sport. Conversely, the data found that some LACYP had difficulties with making or maintaining friendships and so for those young people, this did not present as an influencing factor in terms of their PESS experiences. Much literature has pointed to the importance of developing positive peer relationships for LACYP's resilience and the findings from this chapter contributes to the existing literature to suggest that PESS could potentially play a role here. Data from those adults within LACYP's lives (namely local authority staff and PE teachers), rather than the LACYP themselves, emphasised a sense of belonging and establishing friendships as a significant outcome that LACYP could gain from participation in PESS. Yet, the social ecological context for each LACYP presents notable difficulties, as identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in relation to their environment, wellbeing, educational engagement and support provided. The following final chapter now seeks to draw together the four data chapters that have been presented, to provide a concluding discussion of the dominant themes from the research and consider the implications of these findings. It closes with identification of the limitations of this study and an articulation of the need for further investigation in particular areas.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.0 Introduction

This study set out to explore the Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) experiences of children and young people who are, or have been at some point, looked-after, in order to provide a better understanding of the role such activities play within their lives and what factors might influence, shape and support their experiences. Over the course of the study, the research has taken many turns; evolving as a result of discussions, opportunities and challenges that have occurred, as well as through the exploration of additional research being conducted within this embryonic field. As noted, an established international body of research has focused on the potential benefits for young people experiencing positive sport and physical activities to, for example: reduce youth crime (Collins and Kay, 2003); tackle truancy and substance abuse (Shroeder, 2005); facilitate the reengagement of disadvantaged youth (Sandford *et al.*, 2008a,b); and promote resilience (Holt, 2008). However, few studies have considered the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of looked-after children and young people (LACYP) and, to date, none have explored the role of schools in providing such opportunities/experiences through PESS. In this respect, the study builds on the work that has been done with regard to LACYP's educational experiences and the limited body of research focusing on LACYP's physical activity/sport experiences (e.g. Quarmby, 2014). It extends understanding by focusing specifically on physical activity/sport within an educational context (i.e. PESS), which has been suggested as potentially significant for LACYP (e.g. Armour *et al.*, 2011; Quarmby, 2014). The research therefore addressed three key questions:

1. What role does PESS play in the lives of LACYP in England?
2. What affects LACYP's motivations towards, participation in, and experiences of PESS?
3. Do LACYP's experiences of care impact upon their experiences of PESS?

In addition to the usual sources of academic literature, the methodological framework for this research was also informed by initial scoping interviews undertaken with professionals and researchers working within the field. Acknowledging the importance of youth voice in research with, for, and on young people (Heath *et al.*, 2009), the study has drawn upon

10 LACYP's voices, in conjunction with local authority professionals and PE teachers, to provide insight and understanding regarding LACYP's experiences of PESS. Generated through semi-structured surveys and interviews, the data were thematically analysed, in that the themes were 'induced' from the data as opposed to being predetermined (Ezzy, 2002). To provide clarity to the empirical data, a conceptual framework was adopted that would help assemble a picture of LACYP's experiences through a multiplicity of perspectives. It was felt that the social ecological model[39] (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) would be useful in its application to the individual and environmental determinants that emerged through the analysis of data, since social ecological models have recently been used in additional studies relating to LACYP (e.g. Farineau, 2016; Quarmby and Pickering, 2016); thus highlighting their potential capacity in understanding the multifaceted contexts of LACYP's lives.

The previous four chapters have identified and outlined key issues highlighted within the analysis of data generated in the study. Moreover, they have aimed to explore the PESS experiences of LACYP as they navigate their way through such complex environments, as well as examine how broader structures (policies and processes) and the enactment of these by key individuals (principally local authority staff and PE teachers) can/do shape LACYP's practices. This process has identified some areas of convergence and coherence between the different groups of respondents (i.e. LACYP and local authority staff), as well as highlighted characteristics that are apparently unique to each individual LACYP. In so doing, the study has raised several key questions and issues pertaining to LACYP's PESS experiences which are worthy of further consideration. A central finding of the research is that LACYP's experiences of PESS are closely related to their experiences of school more generally, which is subsequently impacted upon by a variety of factors at all levels of their social ecology (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Whilst also recognising the limitations of the research in terms of its representative value, this final chapter now looks to summarise the key issues identified through the analysis and start to outline questions they raise with regard to LACYP's experiences of PESS (and also their experiences of education more broadly). In doing so, it highlights where this study makes a valuable contribution to literature within this emerging field and discusses potential implications for future research and LACYP educational policy and practice.

[39] For a diagram of the model, see Figure 1.0 in Chapter 3 (section 3.4).

9.1 Key lessons learnt

To be able to build upon and extend existing literature within this area, the literature review provided a comprehensive overview of some of the most prominent research conducted to date that related to issues at the heart of this research. Overall six key issues were discussed in Chapter 2, which included: LACYP's placement stability; their health and wellbeing prior to and during their time within the care system; the educational trajectories of LACYP; and possible outcomes for care leavers. In addition, the role of sport/PESS for marginalised populations was discussed alongside (limited) research pertaining to the place of PESS within the lives of LACYP. Much of the current research on LACYP that was reviewed, highlighted the disadvantages that this group face, the complexity of their lives and how they attempt to navigate through and within their environment (e.g. Sempik *et al.*, 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2011; Simkiss, 2012; Sebba *et al.*, 2015). The discussion also noted, however, that the picture is not completely negative and pointed to positive factors. For example, the research that points to the potential of positive developmental activities (such as sport) within the lives of LACYP as a protective factor against some of the adverse experiences they may face (Gilligan, 1999; 2000; Daniel, 2008; Hollingworth, 2012; Schofield *et al.*, 2014).

Considering this in light of the data generated and with particular consideration of research question 3 (see above), the study indicates that LACYP's experiences of PESS can vary significantly due to the environment and context within which they find themselves situated, largely influenced at an individual and institutional level within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) (see Chapter 5). The individual influence of their experiences prior to becoming looked-after was noted as having a subsequent impact upon their decision to engage with PESS when looked-after. Although well-documented within the educational literature regarding LACYP (see Chapter 2), placement instability has also presented itself within this study as affecting LACYP's PESS experiences, alongside the location of such placements with regard to their proximity to schools. Being educated in an alternative provision establishment (e.g. a Pupil Referral Unit) has additionally been found to impact LACYP's experiences of PESS. The PESS provision in this context, however, can be seen to reflect the statutory guidance at the policy level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) that states that alternative educational provisions must offer appropriate and challenging teaching in English, mathematics and science (including IT) on par with

mainstream education (DfE, 2013f). There is no mention of other compulsory subjects such as PE within this guidance. This may indicate why it has been argued that alternative provision is not of a consistently high quality (PRT, 2016) and highlights the disproportionate availability of PESS afforded to LACYP in these contexts. However, this was based on retrospective accounts from LACYP rather than teachers, and therefore it is important to consider the temporal distance in these instances and highlight it as a limitation of the study.

Further to the above, this study also identified in Chapter 6 that LACYP's motivations towards, experiences of, and participation in PESS are strongly shaped by their own wellbeing and behaviour; an inherently individual influence within the social ecological framework adopted for this study (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Nonetheless the findings revealed that these individual factors can be manipulated and influenced by wider processes and practices that have been highlighted throughout the core data chapters (5, 6, 7 and 8). Specifically, all respondent groups (local authority staff, PE teachers and LACYP) identified the social and emotional difficulties faced by a large proportion of LACYP as having a consequent impact on their motivation towards and participation in PESS. Somewhat paradoxically, the study also found a shared view among the local authority professionals and PE teachers that participation in PESS could lead to improvements in wellbeing for LACYP. Interestingly, however, LACYP respondents did not share experiences associated with such perceived improvements, highlighting a disparity between the views of the young people and professionals in this respect; something which has previously been noted in research concerning LACYP (Holland, 2009). In addition to LACYP wellbeing, data analysis identified the behaviour and mindset of LACYP as playing a pivotal role in shaping their experiences of PESS. For example, expressing undesirable behaviours (e.g. disruptive/abusive) as a form of communication was found to be a barrier for LACYP engaging with PESS and schooling more generally.

The findings suggest, then, that LACYP who are disengaged from education more generally may also be more likely to be disengaged from PESS – as an integral part of the school context. Certainly, the vast majority of LACYP respondents within the study were not interested in PESS – or at least they did not identify it as playing an important role within their lives. This helps to address, in part, one of the key questions this study set out

to examine (question 1 – the role of PESS in LACYP's lives), although it should be remembered that the study involved only a small sample of participants and the results are not broadly generalisable. An inherent lack of interest in and enjoyment of PESS for LACYP coincided with the chaos and turmoil experienced in their broader experiences, which perhaps helps to explain the insignificant role of such activities. In this respect, the findings imply that out-of-school experiences may prove more beneficial for LACYP, with the youth participants in this study attributing enjoyment and benefits to a number of alternative interests such as art and drama. This was also reflected at an institutional level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) with the local authority professionals' emphasis on general extra-curricular and out-of-school provision, something documented within LACYP's Personal Education Plans (PEPs). In relation to this, there was evidence of a perceived lack of duty (or responsibility) towards LACYP's PESS provision by the local authority professionals, which they attributed to the public policy influence of pressures associated with government target measurements in more 'academic' subjects (such as maths and English). Rather, the Virtual School staff involved in this study seemed to hold schools wholly accountable for the PESS provision for LACYP. Despite this, the value that schools gave to PESS for LACYP also appeared to vary, with the data indicating that PE may, in some cases, be overlooked as a central element of LACYP's education due to its inferiority to academic subjects; further evidencing the potential wider influence of the government's academic focussed targets.

In association with a perceived lack of value of PE, there also seemed to be a lack of knowledge by some PE teachers on the possible needs associated with LACYP, and how being care experienced may affect an individual's experiences of, and engagement with, PESS. Overall, there appears to be, in some instances, negligible value and priority afforded to PESS within the educational landscape, which consequently impacts LACYP's PESS experiences and the role it can/does play within their lives. This reinforces the notion that a piecemeal nature of PESS provision exists for many LACYP, through disjointed services and a devolved sense of responsibility (see Chapter 7).

With a lack of coherence regarding the responsibilities of the corporate parent and the school towards LACYP's PESS experiences, it is perhaps not unsurprising that the analysis foregrounded the more informal supportive networks and relationships of LACYP. The

data indicated the often-unconscious bearing these relationships can have on LACYP's PESS experiences; notably the interpersonal relationships between LACYP and their teachers or their peers (Chapter 8). In so doing, the data emphasised the significance of key teachers within LACYP's experiences of PESS. In the cases where teachers had knowledge of an individual's background, it was found that PE teachers' understanding of LACYP had not gone unnoticed and evidently made a difference in the maintenance of positive relationships and support for LACYP in school more generally. However, the data also revealed that this understanding shown by these teachers may not necessarily be standard practice within schools. The discussion suggested best practice could be achieved through additional, tailored training for teachers, to help them identify ways to support and contribute to positive school and PESS experiences for LACYP. Further interpersonal processes at play included LACYP's friends as having a significant influence on their decisions to participate in school sport; something which is also highlighted within the broader literature (e.g. Gorely *et al.*, 2011; Maturo and Cunningham; 2013). Conversely, however, the data found that some LACYP had difficulties with making or maintaining friendships and so the influence of friends did not always present as a key factor impacting their PESS experiences.

Much literature has pointed to the importance of developing positive peer relationships for LACYP's resilience (Daniel, 2008; Hannon *et al.*, 2010; NICE/SCIE, 2010) and the findings from this study contribute to the existing literature to suggest that PESS could potentially play a role here. Certainly, data from those adults within LACYP's lives (local authority staff and teachers), emphasised a sense of belonging and establishing friendships as a significant outcome that LACYP could gain from participation in PESS; although it should be noted that this was not necessarily a view echoed by the young people themselves. This difference of issues across all three respondent groups again signifies the complexity of the context and the importance of speaking with multiple respondent groups who play a different role in shaping the PESS experiences for LACYP. If only adult voices were heard, for example, the picture would likely be distorted; since LACYP tend to have different perspectives on key issues from carers, practitioners and policy makers (Holland, 2009). In essence, the empirical data presented in this thesis go some way to highlighting the multiple social ecological influences (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) that are at play within LACYP's experiences of PESS and reinforces the value of this theoretical framework for exploring the experiences of LACYP. The next section of this concluding discussion now

moves on to discuss three significant issues that have emerged from this research study. Although they largely represent a different level of influence within McLeroy *et al.*'s (1988) social ecological model, they each have overlapping influences that have been presented consistently throughout the previous four data chapters.

9.2 At the individual level: The negligible role of PESS within LACYP's lives

The notion of sport as an educative tool has long been viewed by policy-makers, practitioners and academics alike (e.g. Green, 2008; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Bird *et al.*, 2013) as an agent for stimulating personal and social change; particularly within the lives of children and young people (Jarvie, 2008; Coalter, 2007; Nichols, 2007). For example, as noted in Chapter 2, for young people within the youth justice system, the provision of sport has been recognised as imperative for the positive effects in increasing children and young people's self-esteem, reducing anxiety as well as improving their health (MoJ, 2016). Furthermore, it has been suggested that participation in sport can help to facilitate young people's positive, social and moral development through 'character building' and the acquisition of life skills (Sandford *et al.*, 2006; Sandford and Duncombe, 2011). Within an educational context, research has implied that students value PE for providing a break within the school day, often because of the frequent opportunities to talk and engage with others (e.g. Morey and Goc Karp, 1998; Cothran and Ennis, 2001). For LACYP, in particular, it has been argued that facilitating participation equal to their peers and offering them the chance to enjoy the benefits of sport, may enhance not only their physical wellbeing but their psychological wellbeing also (Murray, 2013). For example, Hollingworth's (2012) study noted that sport/physical activity can be integral to the development of social capital, resilience and identity for LACYP, as well as contributing to emotional, mental and physical health.

One of the most significant findings of this study, is the unequivocal need to consider the multi-dimensional lives of LACYP and how experiences in different contexts intersect with, and subsequently impact, others. This study found that the individual experiences of LACYP in relation to their pre-care, school and care experiences are key to determining their engagement and interest in PESS. This has previously been recognised, in part, by Sport England (2012) who imply that the more 'transitions' children and young people

face (e.g. moving schools, moving area, time out of education, employment or training) the less likely they are to participate in sport. Likewise, Quarmby (2016) asserts that time out of school means LACYP often miss out on school-based sport activities. This is similar to those discussions in this study regarding Pupil Referral Units and their PESS provision. However, for most of the LACYP respondents, it was their lack of interest in the subject (PE) that affected their motivation towards and experiences of PESS. In particular, an individual's behaviour and attitude towards school was closely related to how much they valued and engaged with PESS, with their behaviour and emotions directly affected by what they were experiencing outside of school. This goes some way towards understanding what factors can affect LACYP's experiences of PESS (research question 2). Again, it emphasises the significance of those intersections between social fields (Sandford, in press), supporting the notion that LACYP's lives are complex and thus elements of their experience cannot be fragmented or viewed in isolation.

Given the disinterest that was expressed by most of the LACYP involved in the study, the role of PESS within their lives could be deemed as largely insignificant. This suggests that the issue here then, is not simply the disparity associated with LACYP accessing the claimed benefits of PESS that were identified (Chapter 6), but rather the relevance of the practice in their lives. From the analysis of data, it can perhaps be suggested that PESS does not always resonate with LACYP, appearing irrelevant or insignificant given the chaotic nature of their lives beyond school. It poses the question whether, given their turbulent lives, PE/sport practitioners can expect LACYP to engage in PESS at all when coping and surviving dominates their existence. This has similarly been identified, albeit not in an educational context, by Quarmby (2016) who suggested that physical activity may not form a central role in the lives of LACYP. Previous research identified above that suggests otherwise, has perhaps not unpacked the reality of these young people's lives. On this basis this study differs by offering an alternative perspective that illustrates, in part, some of the complexity of LACYP's lives. In particular, it recognises that this is not a straightforward issue and that a greater knowledge of the fundamental life experiences of LACYP is needed to ensure that PESS and sport practices are shaped in a way that is more engaging and meaningful for LACYP.

9.3 At the interpersonal level: The accessibility of PE teachers to LACYP

For all children, having the right support has been recognised as being crucial for them to be able to succeed in life and for LACYP this notion of support, or indeed a lack of support, has been noted on many occasions within policy, legislation and literature (SEU, 2003; Clay and Dowling, 2004; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; The Who Cares Trust, 2012; Stein 2012). Having the ability to forge positive relationships with other children and adults has been noted as affecting children and young people at school, such as facilitating improvements in their attendance and attainment (Hayden, 2007). For example, Holland (2010) noted that the LACYP within her study were often involved in large, complex networks and that these relationships (positive or negative) were central to their everyday emotional and physical wellbeing. It is perhaps inevitable that, within educational establishments, there are numerous adults that young people in care will come into contact with, the majority of whom are teachers who represent an interpersonal influence within a young person's social ecology (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988).

The notion of pupils often being able to associate with PE teachers/coaches has been reported regularly within the physical education and sport literature, with research suggesting that educators who are charismatic and willing to tackle issues associated with disengagement are more likely to affect a positive change in the lives young people with whom they work (see Sandford *et al.*, 2008a). The positive relationship that was identified between some LACYP and PE teachers in this study, however, was not necessarily based on the educator's ability to provide the claimed benefits of PESS (e.g. confidence, self-esteem, sense of belonging), rather it was perceived to be the support and nurturing investment the teacher made towards the individual themselves with regard to what was happening outside of school. Such relationship did not necessarily increase the level of engagement with PESS by LACYP, due to other individual and environmental determinants recognised within the social ecological model such as pre-care experiences and placement stability (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Nonetheless, they were considered supportive relationships within the broader context of an individual's educational experience. This perhaps contests previous research that suggests positive relationships between teachers and young people can potentially facilitate engagement and personal development within physical activity and sport (see Sandford *et al.*, 2008a; Armour *et al.*, 2013), although the significance of context and individually-mediated experiences has also

been highlighted as a key issue within much of this work. The present study has shown, then, that although they may not facilitate an enhanced PESS engagement, a LACYP's PE teacher may indeed play an important role in a care-experienced young person's overall educational experience. Moreover, when multiple teachers have an awareness of LACYP's needs and how to support them, this appears to contribute to an improved overall school experience, thus creating the positive relationships that have been associated with the concept of resilience (Hayden, 2007; Woodhouse, 2013).

It could be argued that a positive PE teacher-student relationship exists for some LACYP because PE teachers are perhaps more 'accessible' than other teachers. This notion may be due to the differentiated environment that can be associated with PE departments and practices, with the interactive and collaborative nature of PE lessons providing space for interaction and communication between teachers and students (Bosco, 2013). For example, as noted, often PE teachers have a separate staff room which may present as a safer or more comfortable environment for LACYP to talk to staff. Additionally, unlike other subjects, when a young person is unable to participate in the lesson it can present as an opportunity for the PE teacher to offer their time in understanding why this is the case. The additional time that some PE teachers may invest in students could be an indicator of why some LACYP feel a positive relationship exists here. Previous research findings have highlighted the important role that positive relationships with key adults can play in acting as a protective factor against negative life outcomes for LACYP (Cottam, 2015; PRT, 2016). Given the discussion here around PE teacher practice, it poses the question as to whether PE teachers could contribute to positive school experiences for LACYP by being a mentor. Of course, it would be naïve to assume that all LACYP will experience such a relationship with a PE teacher and therefore it could be argued that an appropriate mentor would depend on who a LACYP positively identifies with. For example, in Selwyn's (2015a) review of the perspectives of LACYP on being in care, several studies highlighted that LACYP felt that there was a lack of awareness amongst professionals and peers of the issues they face. To overcome this barrier, an awareness and understanding of the complex issues these children face in an educational setting is essential (NICE, 2010). This was also found to be the case from the youth participants in this study, with evidence suggesting that teachers (broadly) understanding their situation made a difference to a LACYP's educational experience and the creation of positive relationships.

Data from this study highlight that while some PE teachers may be aware of the difficulties LACYP might face, many do not feel they know enough about how to help address these. There would certainly appear to be a lack of training and information provided on how to offer support with such difficulties, with 88% of teacher survey respondents having not received any training in this area since they started teaching. There is thus a clear argument to be made for specific training for PE teachers (indeed, all teachers) targeted at understanding the trajectories, experiences and potential outcomes of LACYP in order to be able to better support and accommodate them within PESS and the wider school context. This finding is not limited to this study, however, with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) (2012) having also presented the argument that more work needs to be done with teachers to help them understand what underpins the disruptive and difficult to manage behaviour that can be exhibited by LACYP, equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to have the confidence to know what intervention is likely to be most effective. For example, Armour's (2014) work on pedagogical cases, implies that composite narrative case studies (drawn from research) could enhance teaching practice within PE, by bridging the gap between research, theory and practice and offer specifically tailored content that could be shared across the school context. Given that this study has identified the intersecting levels of influence at play within LACYP's PESS experiences, the VSH and associated local authority staff may also benefit from such training, which may help to depict the reality rather than the perceived provision of PESS.

9.4 At the public policy level: Government structural constraints

In recent years, LACYP have received substantial attention within UK government policy and legislation (Hayden, 2007). The broadening of literature concerning LACYP has allowed for a better understanding of the lives, needs and experiences of this marginalised group; with consistent findings indicating that "looked after children constitute one of the most severely troubled and disturbed groups in the general child and youth population" (Iwaniec, 2006a, p. 6). An interesting concept that this study has raised, is that schools are not included as part of the statutory guidance in promoting LACYP's health and wellbeing (Chapter 3, section 3.4). The only duty towards education is the requirement for social workers to ensure that VSHs and Designated Teachers are aware of information about the child's physical, emotional or mental health that may have an impact on his or her learning

and educational progress (DfE and DoH, 2015). There is also no mention of PE or indeed physical activity as a means of promoting wellbeing and physical health, other than a fleeting reference to sport whereby social workers are to ensure "that the children their authority looks after, including teenage parents, have access to available positive activities such as arts, sport and culture, in order to promote their sense of wellbeing" (DfE and DoH, 2015, p.20). This raises important questions about local authorities, and indeed schools, needing to push the health wellbeing agenda but battling against a lack of guidance and the disengagement of some LACYP. However, there is also an argument as to whether encouraging LACYP to do something that they do not personally associate with (as noted above – section 9.2) could have adverse effects for their wellbeing. Nonetheless, since PE is a compulsory subject within schools, all pupils are expected to participate and therefore ensuring their experience is positive, or at least not negative, remains crucial if the NCPE is to achieve its aim of ensuring that all pupils engage and develop competence in sport and physical activity and lead a healthy and active lifestyle (DfE, 2014b). Given the discussion above with regard to the important role that PE teachers (can and do) play in the lives of LACYP, this further supports the notion of tailored training for schools and teachers around LACYP and the promotion of their wellbeing, whether that is through PESS or alternative activities.

In order do this, however, a commitment is required by schools (and those who work within them) to seek to understand the complexity of LACYP's lives and why, as a result of chaotic experiences, care-experienced pupils may not engage despite being offered opportunities. As noted in earlier discussions, as part of implementing current statutory guidance, the VSH is required to provide training to those working directly with looked-after children (such as social workers and Designated Teachers). Part of this training should include information on promoting positive educational and recreational activities for LACYP (DfE, 2014a). Further, the VSH is expected to also offer training and advice to "enable schools to understand that looked after children, including those who remain looked after but have been placed for adoption, are not a homogenous group and that their individual needs will be different" (DfE, 2014a, p.8). However, a body of literature implies that more could be done to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of a minority of LACYP, who may present challenges such as those identified within Chapter 6 (see PRT, 2016). This study recognises that training for schools in understanding LACYP may be inconsistent, identifying structural constraints and policy

implications associated with capacity amongst Virtual Schools, and tight budgets for CPD training within schools. Evidence from the APPG (2012) also confirms that support for LACYP across English education appears to be patchy and inconsistent, which is partly attributed to poorly-informed teachers – something also identified within this study.

Furthermore, within the statutory guidance for local authorities it is the responsibility of the VSH to ensure "schools understand the powerful role they can play in significantly improving the quality of life and the educational experiences of looked after children" (DfE, 2014a, p.30). Since PESS forms part of LACYP's broader educational experiences, the duty extends - or should extend - to include it, yet this study suggests that there may be some disparity in practice here. The pressures at a public policy level (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) appeared to present barriers for Virtual Schools to be able to give value to PESS, based on statutory requirements and government targets. For example, the analysis of data highlighted that performance driven targets set by the government regarding the academic attainment of LACYP, which have an inherent focus on maths and English due to statistical releases published each year, may be affecting the attention that can be afforded to other aspects of the curriculum such as PESS. This finding has also been reflected elsewhere regarding local authority variation in the level of commitment and resources dedicated to improving educational outcomes for LACYP (see APPG, 2012). In this respect, the data generated from the local authority professionals in this study implied that it was schools' responsibility to ensure LACYP were engaging in PESS. However, the discussion further suggested that some schools may also be giving minimal value to PE due to the same government constraints, whereby schools had allowed/expected some LACYP to attend revision sessions in place of their PE lessons. Murray (2013) states that with an increased policy interest in the wellbeing of children in the UK, priority should be afforded to ensuring LACYP are provided with every opportunity to ameliorate their disadvantaged status. Although this may not necessarily be through PESS for all LACYP, as previously identified, it may be through the understanding that LACYP may be interested in alternative constructive activities/subjects that could increase their wellbeing, such as art or drama, as identified by LACYP respondents in this study. Investing in LACYP holistically, rather than confining support to academic achievements only, may prove beneficial to their broader wellbeing - a current topic of interest and priority for policymakers.

9.5 Limitations, impact and future research

While this study has important implications for understanding the PESS experiences of LACYP and provides useful suggestions for policy makers and practitioners, there are a number of methodological limitations that are worthy of note, many of which were identified in the reflexive account presented in Chapter 4 (section 4.10). The total number of respondents was a key limitation, constrained and governed by the access that was granted and by those willing to take part in the research. A particular limitation was the PE teacher data collected, and the subsequent lack of these participants' voices in this study. This therefore remains an avenue for further research in this area, particularly with regard to the potentially significant relationship that PE teachers can have with LACYP in their classes. In an ideal scenario, LACYP respondents would have been visited on multiple occasions prior to collecting any data so that a rapport could have been established (Punch, 2002). It also would have been useful to have been able to interview more of them on more than one occasion. Where participants were interviewed more than once, they shared a far deeper insight into their experiences, facilitating a clearer picture of their life trajectory and where PESS fitted in to that. The disparate access to youth participants (in particular) also meant that some LACYP voices were more dominant than others in the analysis, reflective of the amount of opportunities there had been to collect data. Having more opportunities to speak with LACYP, local authority professionals and, in particular, PE teachers, would have certainly proved beneficial, allowing for the generation of a more detailed picture of this relatively uncharted landscape. It may have also helped in being able to identify underlying themes that were perhaps not clearly visible in the narratives of the respondents.

If access had not been such a barrier within this research, undertaking case studies with all who play a part in shaping LACYP's experiences of PESS (e.g. LACYP, their foster carer/s, social workers, PE teachers and designated teachers), could have been an alternative and useful approach to further understand the complex nature of LACYP's lives and demonstrating more clearly how they cannot be considered a homogenous group – a consideration for future research perhaps. Gaining access to this field, however, has been noted as being notoriously difficult (Butler and Williamson, 1994; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998b; Heptinstall, 2000; Murray, 2005; Quarmby, 2014). Given the difficulties that have been outlined in previous research and that LACYP have been deemed a 'hidden

group' within in sport and physical activity research (Quarmby, 2014), this study can be considered successful in its capacity to incorporate a range of participants and has given voice to those whose stories are often untold. There remains, however, significant scope for more LACYP's voices to be heard; something which can only contribute to understanding their lives further.

In this respect, it is important to reflect on how this research can contribute to such an agenda and seek to make an impact. Moving forward there is a need to consider how disseminating the original contribution of the study (including the privileging of youth voices) to a wider audience, may encourage an associated discourse and improved practice in this area. It is anticipated that strategies for dissemination will include providing a short summary of the findings to the participants of the study; contributing to CPD training within education/children's social care settings; and raising awareness through providing a summary of the key findings to online communities of practice, such as *ExChange: Care and Education*[40]. It is also hoped that the dissemination of findings from this study through academic publications might facilitate a contribution to future research agendas (both personally and for other academics in related fields).

Future research, for example, could usefully explore how LACYP manage the turbulence they endure and consider how their wellbeing might be supported through PESS or other developmental activities. For instance, by firstly considering their fundamental life experiences, how might PE/school sport best be used and adapted for them to build self-esteem and self-confidence? Another avenue for future research would be to examine how the education of teachers around support for LACYP may be incorporated into initial teacher training, with consideration given as to whether CPD in this area could form a statutory offer within schools. Furthermore, additional research is needed to understand *how* to engage LACYP in PESS (and related activities) that could contribute to their wellbeing and learning about the role that peers may play here. Finally, there is also a pressing need to understand the role of the activities that do interest/resonate with

[40] ExChange: Care and Education is an online resource hub that aims to provide resources that can help to improve educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people in Wales who are in or are leaving care (CASCADE, 2016).

LACYP, whether they are accessible, and how or if these activities contribute to their wellbeing.

9.6 Summary

This final chapter has drawn together the main themes of the thesis, in addition to addressing the study's methodological limitations. What this thesis clearly shows is that LACYP's lives are complex and multi-dimensional and cannot be fragmented and viewed in isolation. The use of a social ecological model in this respect (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988), was identified as a valuable conceptual tool for understanding LACYP's complex social experiences. For example, the discussion has highlighted that the social ecological context for each individual LACYP presents notable difficulties in relation to their environment, wellbeing, educational engagement and support provided. The study has also found that LACYP's experiences of PESS can vary significantly due to the environment and context within which they find themselves situated, largely influenced at an individual and institutional level within the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). The individual influence of their experiences prior to becoming looked-after was noted, in particular, as having a subsequent impact upon their decision to engage with PESS when looked-after.

Further, this research has identified that a LACYP's motivation towards, experiences of, and participation in PESS is largely shaped by their own wellbeing and behaviour; an inherently individual influence within the social ecological framework adopted for this study (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). Nonetheless the findings revealed that these individual factors can be manipulated and influenced by wider processes and practices that have been acknowledged throughout the thesis. For example, the study indicated how the supportive networks and relationships of LACYP can often have an unconscious bearing on their PESS experiences, predominantly the interpersonal relationships between LACYP and their teachers and peers. Overall, there appears to be negligible value and priority afforded to PESS within the broader context of education (by both LACYP and adults) which consequently impacts LACYP's PESS experiences and the role they play within their lives. This is despite broader literature, and indeed the adult participants in this study, affirming the value of PESS for young people.

This study represents the start of a journey to understand more about the PESS experiences of LACYP and perhaps goes some way to challenging the established state of affairs with regard to policy, practice and research attention. The data and discussion presented here contribute to the growing literature on LACYP and offer a new insight into their lives that considers how PESS experiences are shaped by a variety of influences at each level of the social ecological model (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988). In so doing, this research has addressed a gap in the literature in that it considers both adult and youth voices, discovering not only individual differences with regards to LACYP's experiences but also that the same issue can be represented differently within an adult and youth perspective. The different identification and perception of issues across all three respondent groups again signifies the importance of speaking with the multiple stakeholders who play a role in shaping the experiences of LACYP – including young people themselves.

In addition to the above, the chapter has highlighted some of the key themes that were identified as significant through the analysis of data. It was argued that PESS may not resonate with some LACYP given the chaotic and turbulent lives in which they find themselves situated. However, the role of the PE teacher in positively contributing to their educational experiences could prove a favourable resource to draw upon, particularly if training in this area were to be implemented on a statutory basis. In this respect, one of the key values of the study is that it has highlighted, and reinforced, the fact that there are policy implications with regards to supporting LACYP, not only in PESS, but in relation to their wider wellbeing and education. Accordingly, it has foregrounded a possible disparity of PESS provision for LACYP as a result of government structural constraints. There are clear implications here for future research directions and, it is argued, this study represents a step into further valuable work in this area.

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APPENDIX 1: SCOPING INTERVIEWS

Scoping Interviews: Participant information

Job title	Type of interview	Date of interview	Length of interview
Senior University Lecturer	Individual	21.05.2014	21
Senior Research Associate	Individual	06.08.2014	44
Freelance Researcher, 2 x Research Associates	Group	14.08.2014	47

Scoping Interviews: Themes and data examples:

Theme	Data extract examples
Access	"Umm the main difficulties with regards to access is that massive hierarchy of gate keeping and the delays that are in place". (Senior University Lecturer) "I spoke to the Virtual Head for young people first, then he put me in touch with the children's home services manager". (Senior University Lecturer) "In the first instance, I would get in touch with the head of the virtual school". (Senior Research Associate) "Because those young people have quite complicated lives already, when you go to individual social workers they tend to do a little bit of gate keeping. So often they might say 'Oh you know what I'm not going to give it to that family 'cos I know they're just changing schools and they've had this thing with the mum and it's all kind of kicked off'... we ask the admin team to send it out 'cos the admin team don't do that gatekeeping" (Senior Research Associate)

Theme	Data extract examples
Methods	"The timeline thing worked well because you could revisit it at different points". (Senior Research Associate) "The drawing activities did not work well if I'm honest. I thought they would work really well ... as soon as someone drew something they were looking at what they were drawing and not on their own, then slagging off that drawing and then drawing something else or drawing on their drawing". (Senior University Lecturer) "I've used life-mapping for 6-16 year olds". (Freelance Researcher) "I think things that haven't worked with children have been things that have been too structured, too kind of formulised ... but for teenagers it would be fine, most of them would probably be able to cope with it". (Senior Research Associate)
Data Collection	"Not the, not the first three [weeks] because I spent that time just getting to know them … I tried to collect data on every single visit [after that], but on some visits I got like 3 lines of what happened and other visits like 3 pages". (Senior University Lecturer) "Know the [interview] schedule well before the interview". (Research Associate) "The moment you drag paperwork out it changes whole atmosphere". (Freeland Researcher) "Transcribing is a nightmare with siblings [when doing life-maps together]". (Research Associate)
General advice for researching with LACYP	"They [the Virtual School] might also have suggestions for you and say 'Actually the term you use is this'. Do you see what I mean? So that's always really helpful" (Senior Research Associate). "The key thing is remembering that, I think I've said it already, these are not just children but their looked-after children and so you know thinking very carefully about, I mean most of them will be totally fine but some of them will have come from very disruptive, very chaotic, sometimes damaging backgrounds. And so just in the way you present yourself and your research, just have that in the back of your mind you know, these guys have not necessarily had the best experience of people in the past". (Senior Research Associate)

APPENDIX 2: TIMELINE OF DATA COLLECTION

Phase 1: January - July 2015

- Local authority professional survey
- Local authority interviews

Phase 2: October 2015 – February 2016

- LACYP group interviews
- LACYP individual interviews

Phase 3: January 2016 - March 2016

- PE teacher survey
- PE teacher interviews

Interview Details: Phase 1

Phase of data collection	Name	Type of interview	Location of interview	Date of interview	Length of interview (minutes)
1	John Davis	Telephone	-	19.05.2015	23
1	Sarah Kingston	Telephone	-	19.05.2015	30
1	Sandra Scott	Telephone	-	20.05.2015	32
1	Gareth Houlston	Telephone	-	20.05.2015	42
1	Robert Knight	Telephone	-	20.05.2015	41
1	Lisa Phillips	Telephone	-	21.05.2015	44
1	Liam McKay	Telephone	-	21.05.2015	30
1	Laura White	Telephone	-	22.05.2015	35
1	Debbie Howell	Telephone	-	01.06.2015	40
1	Heather Roberts	Telephone	-	02.07.2015	51

Interview Details: Phases 2 & 3

Phase of data collection	Name	Type of interview	Location of interview	Date of interview	Length of interview (minutes)
2	Shannon, Jamie, Megan	Group, face-to-face	Pre-organised local authority event	26.10.2015	59
2	Chantelle, Bradley, Lucy	Group, face-to-face	Pre-organised local authority event	26.10.2015	58
2	Shannon	Face-to-face	Fast food restaurant	02.12.2015	47
			Fast food restaurant	12.12.2015	97
2	Jamie	Face-to-face	Coffee shop	03.12.2015	56
			Coffee shop	17.12.2015	87
			Coffee shop	22.02.2015	83
2	Luke	Face-to-face	Participant's school	11.12.2015	65
2	Mia	Face-to-face	Participant's school	11.12.2015	41
2	Kalaya	Face-to-face	Participant's home	11.12.2015	58
			Coffee shop	17.12.2015	61
			Coffee shop	23.02.2015	61
2	Nathan	Face-to-face	Pub restaurant	11.12.2015	47
3	David Andrews	Telephone	-	23.02.2016	56
3	Mark Jones	Telephone	-	08.03.2016	26

APPENDIX 3: SURVEYS

Survey 1: VSH (Local Authority) Survey

For the purposes of this survey:

- The term ‘looked-after children’ refers to all children and young people up until the age of 18 who the local authority are currently responsible for. (It does not include those in kinship care).

- 'PE' includes all Physical Education lessons that take place in school time as part of the National Curriculum.

- 'School Sport' includes any organised physical or sporting activity that is extra-curricular. That is, it takes place before school, during lunchtime or after school and is not part of the curriculum. It also includes fixtures and events held at other schools or venues whereby the individual is representing the school (including weekend or school holiday events).

The research project has been fully approved by Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee and I will be working strictly within the guidelines and protocols supplied by the university for this type of research. All data generated through this questionnaire will be kept confidential and your comments will be anonymised. By taking part in the survey you are agreeing your consent. When the study ends, you will be able to request a copy of my final research report. Many thanks for your time.

1. Within which region is your local authority based in England?
   - *North East*
   - *North West*
   - *Yorkshire and The Humber*
   - *East Midlands*
   - *West Midlands*
   - *East of England*
   - *London (Inner)*
   - *London (Outer)*
   - *South East*
   - *South West*

2. Approximately how many children are currently being looked-after within your local authority?
(This includes all looked-after children and young people up until the age of 18).

- *Less than 100*
- *100 - 500*
- *500 -1000*
- *1000 -1500*
- *1500 - 2000*
- *2000+*
- *I don't know*

3. What is your job title?

4. How long have you been in this role for?

- *Less than 1 year*
- *Between 1 - 3 years*
- *Between 3 - 5 years*
- *Between 5 -10 years*
- *Over 10 years*

5. What does your role involve? (Please give a brief outline of your main responsibilities)

6. If your role is not having lead responsibility for the education of looked-after children, who takes this role within your local authority? If it is your role, please select your preferred title.

- *Virtual School Headteacher*
- *Looked-After Children's Education Manager*
- *Head of Educational Services for Looked-After Children*
- *Education Advisor for Looked-After Children*
- *Other (please specify)*

7. Is this person's role part-time or full-time? (if you are the lead role, this will be about your working hours)

- *Full-time (35 hours or more per week)*
- *Part-time (less than 35 hours or more per week)*
- *Other (please specify)*

8. Does this role include any specific duties towards looked-after children's involvement in PE and School Sport?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If 'Yes', please provide details:

9. Are you aware of other people/groups within your local authority that support looked-after children's participation in PE and School Sport?

- *Yes*
- *No*
- *If 'Yes', please give brief details of job titles/main responsibilities:*

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"The school experiences of looked-after children are affected by the type of care placement they are in (e.g. foster care, residential care etc.)"				
"The school experiences of looked-after children are affected by the supportiveness of their care placement."				
"The school experiences of looked-after children are affected by the school they go to."				

11. Do you think participating in PE and/or School Sport provides benefits to looked-after children's overall development?

- *Yes, PE does*
- *Yes, School Sport does*
- *Yes, they both provide benefits*
- *Neither of them provide benefits*

Please list any benefits below:

12. Do you think participating in PE and/or School Sport can be detrimental to looked-after children's overall development?

- *Yes, PE is*
- *Yes, school sport is*
- *Yes, they can both be detrimental*
- *Neither of them are detrimental*

Please list detriments below:

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"Being in care positively affects looked-after children's ability to participate in PE."				
"Being in care positively affects looked-after children's ability to participate in School Sport."				

14. Do you thinking there are any barriers and/or challenges that affect looked-after children's participation in PE and School Sport?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If 'Yes', please give details of any barriers/challenges:

15. Do you thinking there are any barriers and/or challenges that affect looked-after children's motivation towards PE and School Sport?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If 'Yes', please give details of any barriers/challenges:

16. Do you thinking there are any barriers and/or challenges that affect looked-after children's experience of PE and School Sport?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If 'Yes', please give details of any barriers/challenges:

17. At what age do you think looked-after children face the most barriers affecting their PE and School Sport experience?

- *Key stage 1 (Years 1, 2 : Ages 5-7)*

- *Key stage 2 (Years 3,4,5,6 : Ages 7-11)*
- *Key stage 3 (Years 7,8,9 : Ages 11-14)*
- *Key stage 4 (Years 10,11 : Ages 14-16)*
- *Don't know*

18. Are you aware of any provision in place to ensure looked-after children participate in PE lessons?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If 'Yes', please provide details of provision:

19. Within your local authority, is PE included as part of a looked-after child's Personal Education Plan (PEP)?

- *Yes (please give details below)*
- *No (please give details below)*
- *I don't know*

Please give details:

20. Within your local authority, is School Sport provision included as part of a looked-after child's PEP?

- *Yes (please give details below)*
- *No (please give details below)*
- *I don't know*

Please give details:

21. Are looked-after children offered or entitled to any support, funding or services in being able to access School Sport?

- *Yes*
- *No*
- *I don't know*

If Yes, please give details:

22. Is there anything that your local authority has done or currently does in relation to PE and/or School Sport that has worked well and can be shared for good practice? (If not, please just write 'No' in the box below)

23. What are the main policies or documentation that informs your local authority practice in relation to looked-after children's PE and School Sport experience? (If you are not sure, please write 'Not sure' in the box below)

24. Is there anything else you would like to add?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If 'Yes', please give details:

25. Many thanks for your time and willingness to help me with this research. If you would be willing to help further and participate in a follow-up interview (either in person, via Skype or telephone at a time that suits you) please provide your contact details below and I will be in touch. Alternatively, you can email me at: C.Woodhouse@lboro.ac.uk Thank you.

Survey 2: PE Teacher Survey

Welcome to my survey.

The survey is split into two sections. The first consists of general questions surrounding looked-after children within the school setting, the second focuses more specifically on PE and School Sport.

For the purposes of this survey:

- PE includes all Physical Education lessons that take place in school time as part of the National Curriculum.

- School Sport includes any organised physical or sporting activity that takes place at school (before, during or after) but is not part of the curriculum, i.e. extra-curricular.

The research project has been fully approved by Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee and I will be working strictly within the guidelines and protocols supplied by the university for this type of research. All research, including this questionnaire is confidential and anonymised. By taking part in the survey you are agreeing your consent. When the study ends, you will be able to request a copy of my final research report. Many thanks for your time.

1. Please select the type of school you currently work at?
   - *Secondary*
   - *Special*
   - *Alternative provision (inc. PRU)*
   - *Private*
   - *Other*

2. Within which local authority is your school based?

3. What is your current job title?

4. When you were training to be a teacher, did you receive any training around looked-after children?
   - *Yes (please explain):*
   - *No*

5. Are you and your PE colleagues made aware of the children and young people in your school who are in care?
   - *Yes*
   - *No*
   - *Other (please explain):*

6. Do you feel it's important for all staff to know about looked-after children (in general)?
   - *Yes*
   - *No*

   a. Why do you feel it is/isn't important?

7. Do you know who the person responsible for the education for looked-after children (sometimes referred to as the designated teacher) is in your school?
   - *Yes*
   - *No*

8. Since teaching, have you received any training around working with looked-after children?
   - *Yes*
   - *No*
     a. If so, what was this training and who provided it?

     b. What additional training or support do you think would be useful?

9. Are you aware of any school-specific policies related to looked-after children?
   - *Yes*
   - *No*
     a. If yes, please explain if these policies have any specific relation to PE, School sport? i.e. additional support in being able to stay after-school.

     b. If no, do you feel this is needed?

Please answer these questions based on your own context and teaching experience. You may wish to base your answers around individual examples as I am aware that it is difficult to generalise. If you have never come across a looked-after child or cannot answer a question, please tick N/A.

10. Are you aware of any issues or barriers that looked-after children face in relation to their PE or School Sport experience?
    - *Yes (please explain):*
    - *No*
    - *N/A*

    a. What do you think is needed to address these?

11. What do you think looked-after children can gain from taking part in PE and/or School Sport?

    a. Does this differ from their peers? If so, how?

12. Are you able to offer any examples of good practice (past or present) involving a looked-after child/children and PE/school sport that can be shared?

13. If you would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview either in person, via telephone or skype, please leave your details below and I will be in touch. Alternatively please contact me at c.woodhouse@lboro.ac.uk. Many thanks for your time.

    Name:
    Email:

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

VSH Interview Schedule

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak to me.

Brief reminder of research:
Explore the PE and School Sport experiences of looked-after children to better understand the opportunities available to or challenges faced by these young people.

- Phase 1: online surveys and interviews with local authority
- Phase 2: interviews with schools and young people.

Consent:

- Confirm happy to record conversation
- Anything I use from conversation in my research will be anonymised
- Can stop interview at any time
- Don't have to answer questions

Opening Questions:

1. How many children are currently looked-after in your local authority?

2. What is your role within your local authority?

- *Job title*
- *Hours*
- *What the role involves?*
- *Who works with/alongside you?*
- *How long been in post? What was your previous role?*
- *Own motivations going into this role? Might be nice to get a sense of their investment/engagement with this context.*

PESS Questions:

3. Does your role have any specific duties towards looked-after children's involvement in PE at school? E.g. PEP

(if YES – what are these duties, who carries them out? Do schools also take responsibility?)

(If NO – why do you think this is the case when it is also a statutory subject? Whose responsibility is it?)

4. Do you have specific engagement with any subject teachers?

5. Are you aware of any challenges that schools face with regard to working with/accommodating LAC?
   - *Examples of where things are working well…*
   - *Examples of where there have been problems…*
   - *Thoughts for how practice could improve here?*

6. What do you think children can gain from taking part in PE/ after school activities?
   - *Does this vary from other out-of-school activities?*

7. What do you think are the biggest challenges for looked-after children with regard to their participation in PE/sport/after school activities?

- *Previous experience (prior care)*
- *Placements e.g. out of area*
- *Relationships*
- *Foster carers attitudes*
- *Schools*
- *Friends*
- *Social worker*
- *Transport*
- *Wellbeing and health*

Extra-Curricular Questions:

8. With regard to the pupil premium:

   - *What sort of things do you spend it on?*

   - *Who makes that decision – school/you?)*

   - *(How) are individual needs taken into account here? Do LAC have a voice?*

   - *Are there any out of school activities it is used for? Collectively outside of school.*

9. Do you think it's important for looked-after children to participate in extra-curricular activities?
   - *Why?*
   - *Which activities are most popular?*

10. Do you/your office have any specific duties towards ensuring looked-after children engage in after-school activities such as sport, music, art, drama etc?
    - *Is this included in their PEP?*

11. Aside from schools, do you know of any other teams or organisations that help looked-after children's involvements in out–of-school activities? (e.g. sport, music, art, drama, cooking)
    - *Within the LA*
    - *Beyond the LA*

Generic Questions: Virtual School

12. What do you think the particular challenges are as a virtual school?
    - *Compared to formal education – direct daily contact with pupils.*

13. What do you think are the three biggest impacts of a virtual school?
    - *Benefits to young people?*

14. (How) do current educational policies (e.g. academies) impact your effectiveness?
    - *E.g relationship with non-council run schools (academies)?*

Access questions:

15. Explain difficulties in gaining access. What are your opinions on this? Do you have any advice or recommendations on how I can meet LACYP?

LACYP Group Interview Schedule

Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Young People

Welcome:

- Introduce myself
- Purpose of today's conversation – what you say could help others
- Not teacher/social worker
- Not to judge but to listen and understand feelings
- There is no correct answer, honesty.

Consent:

- Go through information sheet – check understanding?
- Record conversations
- Confidential unless harm or harm to others
- Sign agreements

Ground rules:

- Check everyone understands and agrees

Introductions:

- Everyone take turns to introduce themselves
- Name, age, favourite subject at school
- Make name badges

Ice breakers:

- Back 2 Back stand up
- Heads/Tails with coin
- Word association – using ball

School & PE Questions:

- Use names!
- What do you mean by…? Example?
- Could you tell the group why you think that?
- Does anyone have any similar experiences?
- Does anyone have any different ideas?

1. Can you tell me a bit about your experience of school?
    - **Current year group**
    - **Distance live from school**
    - **Relationship with friends/teachers**
    - **how long they've been there, previous schools**
    - **What do you like/not like about school?**

2. Can you tell me about your experience of PE at the schools you've been to?
    - **Attendance**
    - **PE teacher's relationship – get on well?**
    - **PEP meetings – do you attend? How many?**
    - **Designated teacher**
    - **Distance away from school**
    - **Peers**
    - **Enjoy/hate – what in particular? Always felt this?**

3. How does taking part in PE make you feel?

4. Is there any thing that has affected your enjoyment or participation in PE at school?

5. What would you like to change that would help you enjoy PE (or school) more?
    - **Activities as part of curriculum.**
    - **Anything teachers/school could do?**
    - **Anything your carers, parents or social workers could do?**

- Use names!
- What do you mean by…? Example?
- Could you tell the group why you think that?
- Does anyone have any similar experiences?
- Does anyone have any different ideas?

Extra- curricular Questions:

6. Can you tell me about any after school activities or clubs you take part in?
   (And whether they are done at your school or outside of school?)
   - **Why decide to do it? Friends/family influence?**
   - **How does it make you feel?**
   - **Who picks you up/drops off?**
   - **How long taken part? Why stopped?**
   - **Any help in attending or funding activities?**
   - **Anyone encourages you to attend – FC?**
   - **Anything you'd like to do but can't for any reason?**
   - **SCHOOL SPORT**

7. Who supports you in school and any activities you take part in outside of school?
   - **Transport**
   - **Funding**
   - **Encouragement**
   - **Watching**

Closing Questions:

8. What key messages about PE or school sport would you like to pass on to teachers, social workers and policy makers?

9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences of PE or sport?

Summarise what we've spoken about: PE experience, hobbies experience, key messages

LACYP Individual Interview Schedule

Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Young People

Welcome:

- Introduce myself
- Purpose of today's conversation – what you say could help others
- Not teacher/social worker
- Not to judge but to listen and understand feelings
- There is no correct answer, honesty.

Consent:

- Go through information sheet – check understanding?
- Record conversations
- Confidential unless harm or harm to others
- Sign agreements

Key discussions:

- School experience
- PE
- School Sport
- Extra-curricular activities

School Questions:

1. Can you tell me a bit about what school's like for you/ your experience of school?
    - **Current year group**
    - **Distance live from school**
    - **Relationship with friends/teachers**
    - **How long they've been there, previous schools**
    - **What do you like/not like about school?**
    - **PEP meetings – do you attend? How many?**

PE Questions:

2. Can you tell me about your experience of PE at the schools you've been to?
    - **Attendance**
    - **PE teacher's relationship – get on well?**
    - **Designated teacher**
    - **Distance away from school**
    - **Peers**
    - **Enjoy/hate – what in particular? Always felt this?**

3. How does taking part in PE make you feel?

4. Is there any thing that has affected your enjoyment or participation in PE at school?

5. What would you like to change that would help you enjoy PE (or school) more?
    - **Activities as part of curriculum.**
    - **Anything teachers/school could do?**
    - **Anything your carers, parents or social workers could do?**

Extra- curricular Questions:

6. Can you tell me about any after school activities or clubs you take part in? (And whether they are done at your school or outside of school?)
    - **Why decide to do it? Friends/family influence?**
    - **How does it make you feel?**
    - **Who picks you up/drops off?**
    - **How long taken part? Why stopped?**
    - **Any help in attending or funding activities?**
    - **Anyone encourages you to attend – FC?**
    - **Anything you'd like to do but can't for any reason?**
    - **SCHOOL SPORT**

7. Who supports you in school and any activities you take part in outside of school?
    - **Transport**
    - **Funding**
    - **Encouragement**
    - **Watching**

Closing Questions:

8. **What key messages about PE or school sport would you like to pass on to teachers, social workers and policy makers?**

9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences of PE or sport?

Summarise what we've spoken about: PE experience, hobbies experience, key messages

PE Teacher Interview Schedule

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak to me

Brief reminder of research:
Explore the PE and School Sport experiences of looked-after children to better understand the opportunities available to or challenges faced by these young people.

- Phase 1: online surveys and interviews with VSH
- Phase 2: interviews with young people.
- Phase 3: online survey and interviews with head of PE/PE teachers

Consent:

- Confirm happy to record conversation
- Anything I use from conversation in my research will be anonymised
- Can stop interview at any time
- Don't have to answer questions

Opening Questions:

1. What type of school do you currently work at? (see survey)
   - *Secondary*
   - *Special*

2. Within which local authority is your school based? (see survey)

3. What is your current job title?

4. How long been a PE teacher for?

General LACYP Questions:

5. When you were training to be a teacher, did you receive any training around looked-after children?
   - *If so, what training? Who took it? Compulsory?*

6. Are you and your PE colleagues made aware of the children and young people in your school who are in care?
   - *How are you made aware? What are you told?*
   - *Do you feel it's important you know?*

7. Do you feel it's important for all staff in schools to know about looked-after children (in general)?
   - *Why do you feel it is/isn't important?*

8. Do you know who the person responsible for the education for looked-after children (sometimes referred to as the designated teacher) is in your school?
   - *Do you have much contact with this teacher regarding looked-after children?*

9. Since teaching, have you received any training around working with looked-after children?
   - ***If yes**: what was this training and who provided it?*

   - *What additional training or support do you think would be useful?*

10. Are you aware of any school-specific policies related to looked-after children

    - ***If yes****: do these policies have any specific relation to PE, School sport? i.e. additional support in being able to stay after-school, use of PP money.*

    - ***If no****: do you feel this is needed?*

11. Are you aware of any challenges your school faces (in general) with looked-after children?

    - *Examples? What's needed to overcome these?*
    - *Share for good practice?*

PE and School Sport Questions:

12. Do you feel a looked-after child's experience of care impacts their view or motivation towards PE and school sport?

        - *How? Why?*

13. Are you aware of any issues or barriers that looked-after children face in relation to their PE or School Sport experience?

    - *Access*
    - *FC*
    - *Previous experience*
    - *Relationships*
    - *Friends*
    - *Kit*
    - *Transport*
    - *Placement*
    - *Wellbeing*

    - What are the biggest challenges they face?
    - What do you think is needed to address these? (ask about each one they mention)

14. Are you aware that a looked-after child has a personal education plan (PEP)?

- *Do you know if PE or extra-curricular activities is recorded on it?*
- *Are you involved in the PEP at all?*

15. What do you think looked-after children can gain from taking part in PE and/or School Sport?

- *How? Examples?*
- *Do you feel this differs from their peers? How?*

16. How important do you feel it is for looked-after children to participate in PE?

- *Why?*
- *How about after school activities? Just sport, or others?*

17. Are you able to offer any examples of good practice (past or present) involving a looked-after child/children and PE/school sport that can be shared?

APPENDIX 5: PERSONAL PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS

Phase 1: Local authority interview participants

Name	Job Title	Local Authority	Region of England	Approximate No. of LACYP in Local Authority
Debbie Howell	VSH	Talborough	North East	313
Gareth Houlston	Education Development Officer	Comptonshire	South West	150 (of school age 4 – 18)
Heather Roberts	VSH	Whippinghamshire	Yorkshire and the Humber	329
John Davis	VSH	Yevendale	South East	103
Laura White	Teacher Advisor for the Corporate Parenting and Education Team	West Calbourne	West Midlands	778
Liam McKay	Education Development Officer	Eastonshire	West Midlands	630
Lisa Phillips	Assistant VSH	Millfolk	Yorkshire and the Humber	241
Robert Knight	VSH	Bucktonshire	Yorkshire and the Humber	450
Sandra Scott	VSH	Wellhampton	East Midlands	850
Sarah Kingston	VSH	Bembridgeshire	South East	600

Phase 2: Personal profiles of LACYP interview participants

Name	Personal profile
Bradley	Male. 15 years old. In year 11 at secondary school. Happy to chat during the group interview. Chairs his own PEP meetings at school. Appeared focused on his education. Enjoys participating in various sports.
Chantelle	Female. 16 years old. In year 11 at an alternative education provision. Came into care at the age of 15. Currently in foster care. Excluded from secondary school due to disruptive behaviour. Expressed a dislike towards school in general. Vocal during the group interview.

Jamie	Male. 19 years old. Care leaver. Currently in college studying Performing Arts and an ambassador for the local authority. Under a care order from birth. Went into foster care at the age of 16. Attended a Pupil Referral Unit at the age of 11. Most of secondary school education was spent at a residential school. Disclosed that his parents were alcoholics and his mum was violent (domestic violence). Admitted to self-harming from the age of 13-18 years old.
Kalaya	Female. 17 years old. Currently in college studying Art and Design. Came into care at the age of 15 and is currently in foster care. Moved placement once during this time. Born and lived in Thailand with her aunties until the age of 6. From the age of 6, her mum decided to move to England with her. Disclosed that her mum was violent towards her as the reason for entering care.
Lucy	Female. 13 years old. In year 8 at secondary school. Appeared shy during the group interview. Expressed that she wants to do well at school.
Luke	Male. 13 years old. Year 9 at secondary school. Came into care at the age of 4. Has attended 4 schools and has spent time in different residential homes. Moved secondary school due to placement moves. Admitted to having anger issues and received anger management at his last school. Appeared happy to chat and draw life map, although tended to go off subject easily during the interview.
Megan	Female. 19 years old. Care leaver. Currently works and is an ambassador for the local authority. Quiet during group interview.
Mia	Female. 12 years old. Year 8 at secondary school. Currently in foster care. Has had 3 placements since she was 8 years old. Appeared quiet and shy to begin with. Creating a life map appeared to help put her at ease.
Nathan	Male. 16 years old. Studying Art and Design at college. Held back a year at school due to placement and school moves. Moved homes (and school) 3 times in 3 years during secondary school.
Shannon	Female. 17 years old. Currently doing an apprenticeship in Business Administration at her local authority council and is also an ambassador for them. Went into care at the age of 14. Disclosed that her parents were illiterate, her mother is dyslexic and disabled, so her father cared for her whilst she helped care for her mother. Both parents had/have drug and alcohol addictions and referred to herself as a "drugs mule" for her parents. Spent much of her education in alternative education provisions, for example Pupil Referral Units. Bullied at school and took illegal drugs from the age of 11. Had two foster placements since coming into care. During the study, she turned 18 and moved from her foster carer's home to independent living. Appeared willing to share her experiences and was particularly dominant during the group interview. Constantly sought reassurance that I understood her during the interviews with her use of "do you see my point? / do you know what I mean?" on many occasions. Her use of the word "mate" directed towards me and use of swearing suggested she perhaps felt like she could speak freely.

Phase 3: PE teacher interview participants

NAME	JOB TITLE	SCHOOL NAME	REGION OF ENGLAND
David Andrews	Head of Physical Education	Lushington Secondary School	East Midlands
Mark Jones	Head of Physical Education	Sandcove Secondary School	South West

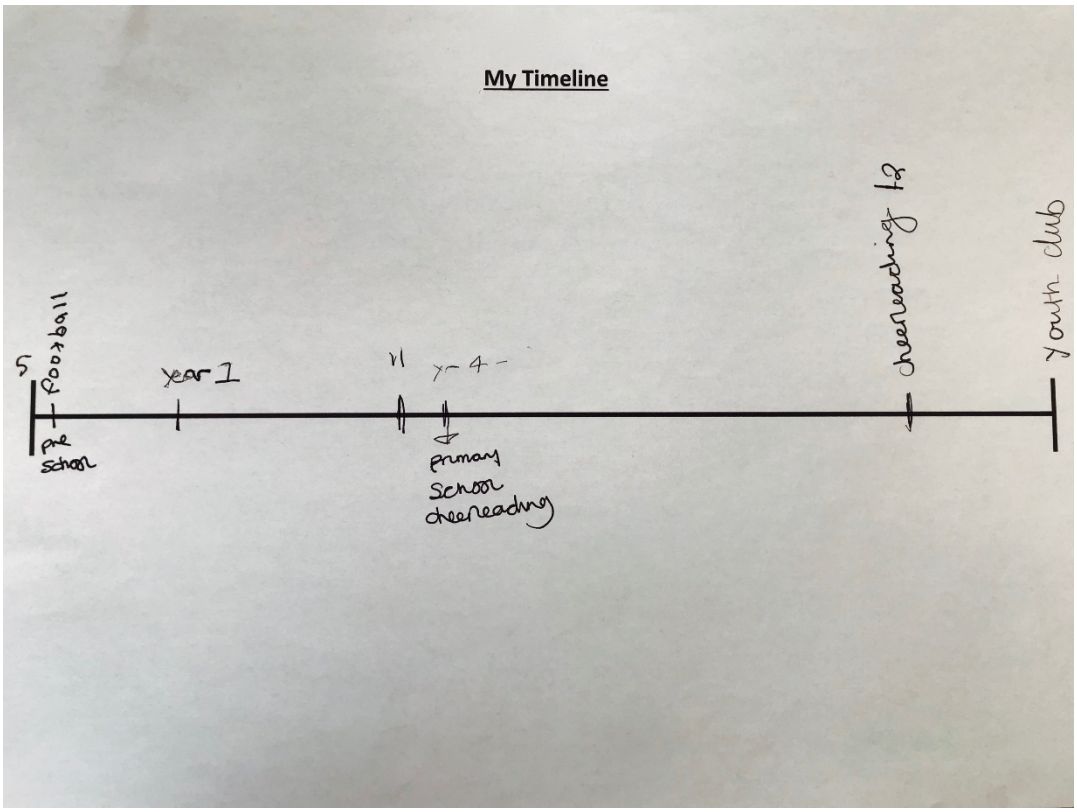
APPENDIX 6: MAP OF REGIONS IN ENGLAND

Phase 1 local authority interview respondents represented from 6 out of 9 regions:

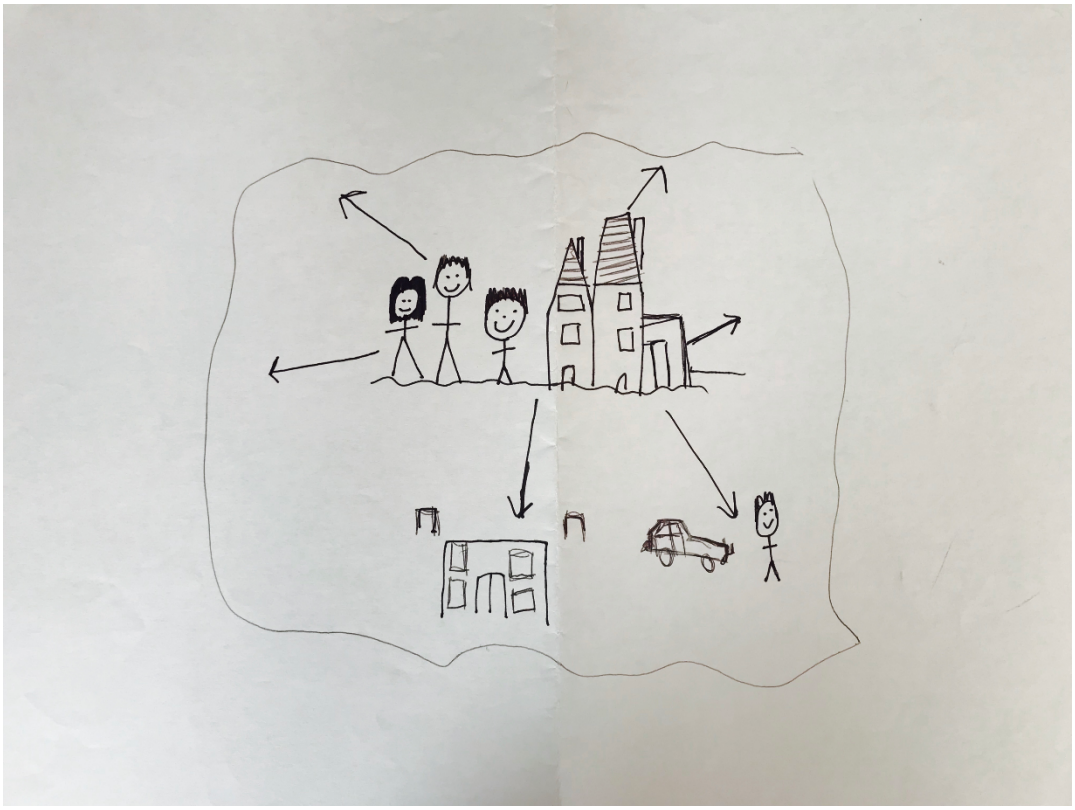
- North East
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- South West
- South East

APPENDIX 7: TIMELINE AND LIFE MAP EXAMPLE

Timeline example



Life Map example



APPENDIX 8: INFORMATION SHEETS

Information Sheet 1: Parent/Guardian

Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People

My name is Chloé Woodhouse and I am a postgraduate student at Loughborough University. I have just started a research project to talk to young people in care about their experiences of Physical Education (PE) and School Sport and seek your permission for your child to be involved via [name of school/organization]. This information sheet provides further information about why the study is being carried out and what is involved if your child took part. This study has received full ethical clearance from Loughborough University and I hold an enhanced DBS (CRB) certificate. Below are some questions you may have.

Why am I doing this study?
The study is about exploring the PE and School Sport experiences of young people who are currently or have been in care. I am especially interested in the role PE and School Sport plays in the lives of young people in care and whether they face any barriers in accessing PE and School Sport.

Why has my child been invited to take part?
They have been invited to take part in the study because they have spent some time in care.

Do they have to take part?
It is entirely up to them whether they want to take part or not. I will explain the details of the study to them and if they decide they want to take part, then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to let them do so. I will ask them to sign one too. They can withdraw from the study at any time up until the point I write up my study in February 2016 and do not have to give a reason why. All they need to do is to let me know that they no longer want to take part. The services and help they receive will not be affected in any way if they choose to take part or not.

What will it be like to take part?
I will have a group discussion with the young people at [name of school/organisation]. All they have to do is tell me about their experience of PE and School Sport. I will have a few questions to ask and activities to do that will help them to tell me about their experience. Each group conversation will last no more than 45 minutes and if it's ok with them I will tape record it to

make it easier for me to process the information afterwards. I may also ask them for a follow-up conversation to take place at a later date at a time and place convenient for them.

Will their taking part in the study be kept confidential?
Yes, all information will be handled in confidence (unless they tell me something that makes me worried about theirs or other safety). Confidentiality is guaranteed both during and after this study. No one, other than me, will be able to listen to the tape recordings or see any notes I have written. All the information which is collected about them during the study will be kept strictly confidential. When I write about the findings of the study, participants will be given different names so that they cannot be identified.

What are the risks or disadvantages of taking part?
There are no risks or disadvantages to taking part other than the time taken up by our conversation.

What are the advantages of taking part?
This is an area that not many people know much about, so by sharing their experiences they are contributing to a study that could potentially help the experiences of other young people in care.

What happens when the research study stops?
When the study ends they will be able to ask me for a copy of my final report.

What do I do if I am uncomfortable with something or a problem arises?
If you have any worries about any part of the study, then you can speak to me in confidence and I will do my best to answer your questions. Alternatively, you can speak to someone in the [organisation] or contact my supervisor: Rachel Sandford, Lecturer in Young People and Sport, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, Tel: 01509 226392. Email: R.A.Sandford@lboro.ac.uk.

If you have any more questions or queries regarding the research, please feel free to contact me and I will be happy to provide further information. If you are happy for your child to take part, please could you read and sign the attached consent form. If you would also like to take part in the study and share you experience via an informal interview at a time and place convenient for you, then please let me know. Many thanks.

Chloé Woodhouse
Postgraduate Student
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU
E-mail: C.Woodhouse@lboro.ac.uk

Information Sheet 2: Young Person

Young Person Information Sheet

Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People

My name is Chloé Woodhouse and I am a student at Loughborough University. I have just started a research project to talk to young people in care about their experiences of Physical Education (PE) and School Sport and would like you to have a think about whether you might like to take part. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part, I want to say a few words about why the study is being carried out and what it would be like if you decided to be involved. Please take some time to read the following information carefully and to talk to others about it if you want to.

Why am I doing this study?
The study is about exploring the PE and School Sport experiences of young people who are currently or have been in care. I am especially interested in the role PE and School Sport plays in the lives of young people in care, whether they face any barriers in accessing PE and School Sport and whether the type of care placement can affect this.

Why have I been invited to take part?
You have been invited to take part in the study because you have spent some time in care.

Do I have to take part?
It is entirely up to you to decide whether you want to take part or not. I will explain the details of the study to you. If you decide that you do want to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form to show that you have agreed to do this and your parent/carer will need to sign one too. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. The services and help you receive will not be affected in any way if you choose to take part or not.

What happens if I say I'll take part but then don't want to carry on with the study?
You can withdraw from the study at any time up until the point I write up my study in February 2016. All you need to do is to let me know you no longer want to take part.

What will it be like to take part?
You will be involved in an individual or group discussion with other young people in care. All you have to do is tell me about your experience of PE and School Sport. I will have a few questions to ask that will help you to share your experience. It will last no more than 45

minutes and if it's ok with you I will tape record it to make it easier for me to process the information afterwards as I won't be able to write down everything quick enough. I may also ask you to take part in another conversation at a later date, but this is something you can decide on later.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
Yes all information will be handled in confidence (unless you tell me something that makes me worried about yours or other safety). Confidentiality is all about protecting the identity of people who take part in studies like this so that no one knows who the participants are. Confidentiality is guaranteed both during and after this study. No one, other than me, will be able to listen to the tape recordings or see any notes I have written. All the information you share during the discussions will be kept strictly confidential. When I write about the findings of the study, participants will be given different names so that they cannot be identified.

What are the risks or disadvantages of taking part?
There are no risks or disadvantages to taking part other than the time taken up by our conversations.

What are the advantages of taking part?
This is an area that not many people know much about, so by sharing your experiences you are contributing to a study that could potentially help other young people in care.

What happens when the research study stops?
When the study ends you will be able to ask me for a copy of my final report.

What do I do if I feel uncomfortable with something or a problem arises?
If you have any worries about any part of the study, then you can speak to me in confidence and I will do my best to answer your questions. Alternatively, you can speak to someone at [local authority contact]. If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Mrs Zoe Stockdale, the Secretary for the University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee: Mrs Z Stockdale, Research Office, Rutland Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 222423. Email: Z.C.Stockdale@lboro.ac.uk.

Chloé Woodhouse
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Alternatively please contact:
Rachel Sandford, Lecturer in Young People and Sport, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, Tel: 01509 226392. Email: R.A.Sandford@lboro.ac.uk.

Information Sheet 3: Child

(**Please see overleaf for children's information sheet)**

Loughborough University

PE and School Sport

COULD YOU HELP SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE?!

Who am I?

My name is Chloé Woodhouse and I am a student at Loughborough University.

I have just started a research project to talk to young people in care about their experiences of Physical Education (PE) and school sport. This is an area that not many people know much about and so is important because it gives you a chance to share your experience and views—positive or negative!

What will I have to do?

- Firstly as you're under 18, I'll need to spea
  the adult who is responsible for you so that
  may give permission for you to take part.
- I would then like to have a chat with you a
  your experiences of PE and school sport—d
  worry if you're thinking "I haven't got muc
  say" that's normal! I'll have some questions
  activities that will help make things easier.
  can chat for as little or as long as you'd like, o
  it's about 30-60 minutes. It may be the case
  we meet up several times in order to get to k
  each other, but that is something that you
  decide.
- I am happy to meet at a time and place of
  choice. This could be at your school, home,
  public place such as a youth club or out of sc
  activity you take part in etc.

What happens with what I say?

- Everything you say will be kept private, unless you say something that makes me worried about yours or others safety.
- You can stop the chat at any time without giving me a reason.
- As I won't be able to write down everything you say quick enough, I will bring a tape recorder with me to record what we chat about. This is something that only I will listen to afterwards to help me remember.
- I'd like to use some of the things you say in your own words when I write up my study, but I will use a different name for you so that no one will know it's you—you can even choose a different name for yourself if you want!

Do I have to do it?

Not at all. It's up to you whether you'd like to take part—the balls in your court! If you choose to take part and then change your mind that's fine too and you don't have to tell me why, I can take out your data up until the point I start writing up my study. I'll show you the data I have collected with you and then that will be the last point for you to tell m you don't want me to use what you've said. The services and help you receive will not be affected in any way if choose take part, not to take part or drop-out at any point.

THINK YOU MIGHT LIKE TO DO IT?

Great! Just turn over the page!

Loughborough University

GET IN TOUCH!

Just give me a call or text me on (00000000000) and I will phone you back. Or you can email me at c.woodhouse@lboro.ac.uk and will get back to you as soon as I can. If you want we can arrange to meet beforehand so that you can meet me and we can talk more about it in person or on the phone before you make up your mind

Alternatively you can contact:

Rachel Sandford, Lecturer in Young People and Sport, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, Tel: 01509 226392. Email: R.A.Sandford@lboro.ac.uk. Or *John Evans*, Professor of Sociology of Education and Physical Education, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 222971. Email: J.Evans@lboro.ac.uk

APPENDIX 9: CONSENT FORMS

Consent Form 1: Parent/Guardian

Loughborough University

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People

Title of Project: Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People

Name of Researcher: Chloé Woodhouse

- I have read and understood the information sheet given to me and had any questions I may have answered.
- I understand that this research is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of young people's experiences of PE and School Sport and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.
- I understand that the young people are under no obligation to take part in this study.
- I understand that the young people have the right to withdraw from this project for any reason up until the point the study is written up, and that the young person will not be required to explain the reasons for withdrawing.

I agree for _____ to participate in this study.

Name: ……

Signature: ……

Relationship to young person: ……

Date: .....

Consent Form 2: Child/Young Person

PE and School Sport Experiences

Loughborough University

Young Person's Consent Form

Title of Project: Exploring the PE and School Sport Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People

Name of Researcher: Chloé Woodhouse

Young person's name:_____

Please tick the box after reading the statements if you agree with them. All statements must be ticked to proceed with the interview.

- ☐ I have read the information leaflet and understand what the above study is about.
- ☐ I understand what taking part in the interview involves.
- ☐ I understand that everything I tell you is private.
- ☐ I understand that if you think I, or any individual might not be safe, you will have to tell others.
- ☐ I am happy for you to write down or record what is said to you.
- ☐ I understand that you will write a report that will include the things discussed in the interview.
- ☐ I know that you will not use my name, or any other name I mention, in the report and my identity will be kept anonymous throughout the research project.
- ☐ I understand that I do not have to answer all of the questions.
- ☐ I understand that I have the right to drop out of the study at any stage for any reason, and that I do not have to explain the reason why.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in the research, or withdrawing from the research, will not affect the services I receive in any way.

Researcher's signature:

I [researcher name] _____confirm that I have told [young person's name]_____ about the research project and given them the information leaflet. To the best of my knowledge they have understood what I have told them and they are giving free consent.

Signed _____ date_____