# The voices of young people with a history of specific language impairment (SLI) in the first year of post-16 education

**Olympia Palikara**[1]

**Geoff Lindsay**[2]

**Julie E Dockrell**[1]

**[1]Psychology and Human development, Institute of Education, University of London**
**[2]Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), University of Warwick**

**Address for correspondence:**

**Professor Geoff Lindsay**
**CEDAR**
**University of Warwick**
**Coventry**
**CV4 7AL**

**geoff.lindsay@warwick.ac.uk**
**tel: 024 7652 3638**
**fax: 024 76524472**

## What this paper adds

Previous evidence has suggested a poor prognosis for children with language difficulties. Limited educational attainment, higher levels of socio-behavioural difficulties and a greater risk of psychiatric problems have been indicated. Little attempt has been made to incorporate the pupil’s perspective in these contexts and the ways in which changes following compulsory education affect the young people’s lives. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative date to examine outcomes for young people with a history of language difficulties.

This study suggests a more positive status at 17 years and in the first year following compulsory education in England for young people with specific language impairment (SLI), most of whom had been in mainstream education, than previous research had indicated. They recognized their history of special educational needs and continuing educational difficulties, especially with literacy, but further education was providing a more positive experience than school had done and most had social networks. The study suggests that despite the likelihood of continuing educational difficulties there is now a better prognosis for children with SLI.

## Abstract

*Background:* Giving young people more and better opportunities to have their voices heard is a key feature of current educational policy and research internationally and in the UK.

*Aims:* The aim of the present study was to examine the views of young people with a history of specific language impairment (SLI) as they entered post-16 education.

*Methods and procedures:* 54 students identified as having SLI at 8 years of age were followed up through primary and secondary school to post-16 destinations. Most had been educated in mainstream schools. The young people were interviewed individually in relation to their perceptions of their special educational needs, their views on service provision, the role of family and friends as support systems and their aspirations and barriers to future education at the early stages of post-16 education, training and work.

*Outcomes and results:* The young people were able to offer accurate accounts of their history of special educational needs and to explore issues related to their development. Most young people were aware of the specific difficulties they experienced and had positive views about the support offered to them during their schooling. All the young people had at least one person in their family or friendship circle to whom they could talk about joys and concerns and friendships were an important and positive element in their lives. Additionally, most had a positive view of their post-16 courses, with comparable numbers hoping to undertake further study or training, or to go into work. They also had optimistic hopes for their futures five years ahead.

*Conclusions and Implications:* The current study has demonstrated that young people with a history of SLI have awareness of their difficulties and of the impact that these needs have on different aspects of their lives. They were also able to provide valuable views of service provision, both in terms of evaluating the support they received and suggesting ways of improving it.  Ascertaining the views of younger children with SLI and including them in decision making about their education and lives should be an important aspect of the role of those professionals working with this group of children. The study supports the importance of gaining the views of young people with SLI not only as a matter of rights but for the practical benefits that can ensue.

*Key words*: Specific language impairment, children’s voice, perceptions of special educational needs, post-16 education

## Introduction

The need for the voices of young people to be heard in relation to their experiences of education, health and social care have been in highlighted in policy documents both in the UK (Children Act, 1989) and internationally (United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989), and by research studies (Gray *et al.* 2002). These initiatives have been driven by both a concern to respect children's rights and a view that there are practical benefits, as policy and practice can then be developed drawing upon young people's evidence as recipients of services. Studies examining such factors in young people with a history of special educational needs (SEN) are limited. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the views and the reflections of young people with a history of specific language impairment as they enter adulthood about their specific difficulties, educational experiences and personal lives.

Specific language impairment (SLI) is a primary language difficulty, which cannot be explained in terms of other cognitive, perceptual and neurological deficits (Leonard, 1998). Prevalence studies suggest that SLI affects about 5-7% of children at school entry (Tomblin *et al.* 1997). Although it is often considered an early years disorder, these difficulties appear to be longstanding for many young people, continuing into adolescence (Stothard *et al*. 1998) and adulthood (Clegg *et al*. 2005). There are broad ranging effects of SLI including difficulties with the development of literacy skills (Botting, *et al,* 1998; Dockrell *et al.* 2004) limited academic attainments (Dockrell *et al.* 2007; Snowling *et al.* 2001) and behaviour problems (Beitchman *et al.1996*; Lindsay *et al.* in press).

Several studies present evidence of poor prognosis with respect to both academic difficulties and psychiatric problems. A longitudinal study of children identified at five years of age as having speech and/or language impairment found continued academic difficulties in adulthood (Young *et al.* 2002). These findings have been supported by evidence of low academic achievements found in UK school leavers with a history of SLI (Conti-Ramsden in press). None of a group of 20 young male adults with a history of language difficulties followed up when they were of mean age about 25 years had any formal educational achievements (Howlin *et al.* 2000). In addition, two of these studies reported high likelihood of psychiatric and/or socio-behavioural difficulties in late teens and early adulthood (Beitchman *et al.* 2001*;* Howlin *et* al. 2000). Further follow up of 17 of the sample in the Howlin *et al* study revealed psychiatric problems, unemployment and lack of independence when they were in their mid-thirties (Clegg *et al.* 2005). The extent of participants' level of problems has been related to both the severity of the language difficulties and levels of nonverbal cognitive ability.

Other studies have highlighted the needs of children with SLI by exploring the views of their teachers, parents and other professionals (Lindsay and Dockrell, 2004; Marshall *et al.* 2002; Pratt *et al.* 2006; Sadler, 2005). Dockrell and Lindsay (2001) interviewed the teachers of children with SLI and reported the challenges they faced as a result of the children's difficulties and the teachers' limited knowledge of speech and language problems. Investigation of the parental perspectives of children with SLI has also shed light on our understanding of SLI and has offered potentially valuable guides to service provision (Lindsay and Dockrell 2004; Pratt *et al.* 2006). Studies of parents' and teachers' views are important, however adult perceptions of what children and young people think may differ from what children themselves say (Greene and Hill 2005; Sweeting 2001). Without specifically gathering the opinions of children and young people as part of the research process, their basic beliefs, feelings, and views about their difficulties may not be revealed.

Researching the perspectives of children and young people, therefore, has practical benefits with the possibility of providing more comprehensive research evidence. Furthermore, this may, in turn, lead to greater benefits when research is used to drive policy and practice (Gersch 1987). Giving children a voice is not unproblematic but respects their right to participate in research about themselves.

Drawing upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), policy in the UK and internationally has included an emphasis on the active role that children should play in the development of their culture and their right to participate in decisions regarding their own future, for example the Children Act 1989, and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills 2001). Adults are expected to enable children and young people through the development of appropriate processes to express views, to be consulted and to take an active part in decision-making that affects the development of their social world and culture.

A recent review of the literature on disability discrimination across the 0-19 age range found limited examples of studies examining the views of children and young people with SEN in relation to their educational experiences (Gray *et al.* 2002). Recently, however, a large scale UK national study examined the views of the educational experiences of children and young people of 9-19 years with a range of SEN attending different types of provision, namely mainstream primary or secondary schools, special units within mainstream school, special schools or colleges of further education (Lewis *et al.* 2007). The young people were aware of their special needs, valued both formal and informal support that they received in school, and on many occasions expressed views that were different from those of their parents, with the young people adopting a more flexible attitude Additionally, most of the children and young people expressed positive views about their voices being heard in relation to different aspects of their education. A small scale study with 12 primary school children with communication difficulties, aged six to eleven found that most of the children seemed to be aware of their speech and language difficulties and the relation between the speech and language therapy they were receiving with these difficulties (Owen *et al.* 2004). They were also able to express their concerns about aspects of their social interaction with their peers and about the impact of their difficulties on their educational progress, thus providing insight into both the nature of their difficulties and the wider impacts of experiencing a specific language problem. However, the views of young people with a history of SLI are under-investigated.

Given the language and communication needs of children and young people with SLI, investigating their views can be a challenging task, even for professionals trained to work with this group of young people. Eliciting valid responses requires appropriate methodology, a level of familiarity and rapport to be established. However, this is worthwhile as the exploration of views concerning educational experiences, sources of support and future aspirations can form an important basis for better understanding the young people's developmental needs, devising appropriate provision and identifying factors that may contribute to their better adjustment in adult life.

The present study aimed to access the views of young people with a history of SLI who had been part of a longitudinal study from 8 years of age (Dockrell, *et al*, 2007) at the time of transition from school to post-16 education, training and work. At this point the young people were in a position to reflect on their perceptions of their own special educational needs and their school careers, and to look forward to a new stage in their lives. Furthermore, the study was designed to use qualitative methods to supplement the quantitative data available from other parts of the research, including the young people's attainment at 16 years (Dockrell *et al*, 2007).

## Methods

### *Sample*

A group of 69 students (17 girls, 52 boys) who had been identified as having SLI at Year 3 (mean age 8;3, range 7;6 - 8;10) were followed up over their school careers. The present study focuses on the first year of post-16 education.

At age 8 (initial selection) all children were on their school's special educational needs register thereby documented as requiring additional learning support to access the curriculum, and 54% had a statement under the Education Act 1996. The statement of special educational needs specifies the provision that must by law be made to meet the child's special educational needs. This status is applied to about 3% of school pupils, over half of whom attend mainstream schools.

Initial identification of participants was completed following a survey of educational provision in two local authorities (LAs) in England. Professionals (speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and special educational needs coordinators) were asked to identify children who had a discrepancy between their level of functioning in the area of speech and language and that which would be expected given the child's functioning in other areas, and who were experiencing significant language based learning needs. A total of 133 were identified from which a subsample from each LA was derived. Children with any additional complicating factors which would preclude the diagnosis of SLI were excluded. In addition, children of the same age attending regional special schools for children with SLI in England were included in the study (N = 10). Only the children who at age 8 were experiencing specific language impairment were included in the longitudinal study. To validate the clinical diagnoses of SLI a series of repeated measures ANOVAs confirmed that vocabulary scores, grammar scores and expressive narrative scores were all significantly below a measure of nonverbal ability (British Ability Scales: Matrices); for example Test of Reception of Grammar (TROG), $F(1, 63) = 35.68$, $p < .0005$, $\eta^2 = .35$. Initial selection of the SLI sample at 8 years is described in detail elsewhere (Dockrell and Lindsay 2000).

In the first year of post-16 education, data were collected from 64 participants of the initial SLI sample. These young people continued to have substantial difficulties as evidenced by their results on measures of language, literacy and numeracy in Year 11 (Dockrell, *et al* 2007). In all cases except the Test of Reception Grammar (TROG: Bishop, 1989) the mean Z scores of the sample were more than one standard deviation (*SD*) below the mean: British Picture Vocabulary Scale (Dunn *et al.* 1997) mean $Z = -1.28$ ($SD = 1.11$); Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF: Peers *et al*. 1999) Listening to paragraphs mean $Z = -1.16$ ($SD = 0.66$); British Ability Scales II

(Elliott *et al.* 1997) Word Reading *Z* = -1.82, (*SD* = 0.95). Furthermore, in terms of passes in the national examinations at 16 years (General Certificate of Secondary Education - GCSE), whereas nationally 63.4% of young people without SEN achieved the target five GCSE passes at grades A*-C, only 12.5% of the SLI sample achieved this level. With respect to those with English and Mathematics among their five or more passes at this level, the relative percentages are 49.9% and 2.8% respectively (Dockrell *et al.* 2007).

In the first year of post-16 education, 37 were attending colleges of further education with a further seven young people attending residential colleges for students with speech and language difficulties. Four young people were attending school sixth forms and three were still in Year 11. Overall, 80% of the SLI participants were still in full-time education; five young people were employed, five were on training programmes, one was unemployed and for two there was no available information in relation to their post-16 destinations. This paper reports on the findings from 54 complete interviews conducted with the young people in their first year post-16.

A comparison was made of the interviewees and those participants who withdrew or were lost from the study to examine whether the two groups differed. The 15 missing young people who had completed standardized assessments were compared with the cohort who were interviewed on both a language and a literacy measure, namely the Recalling Sentences subtest from the CELF and the BAS II Word Reading Scale administered in Year 9. There were no statistically significant differences on either measure: Recalling sentences, Interview Sample: *M* = -1.74, *SD* = .75; Missing participants: *M* = -1.82, *SD* = .62, *t*(67) = 0.34, ns; Word Reading Scale, Interview Sample: *M* = -.1.43, *SD* = .83; Missing participants: *M* = -1.17, *SD* = 1.03, t(69) = -0.91, *ns.*

### *Measures*

The interview schedule used with the young people included both a structured and semi-structured format to ensure an appropriate balance between consistency of data collection and to provide the opportunity for the young people to explore issues (Appendix 1). The content of the interview was designed to explore issues relevant at this stage of transition both to those young people with special educational needs and also typically developing young people in general: special educational needs and reflections on previous educational experiences; post-16 destinations and life at college; family relationships/family support; friendships/friends' support; and future aspirations. The interview schedule was amended appropriately for those young people at work or for those who at the time of the interview were unemployed or seeking a job. A series of standard prompts were used, where necessary, to support the young people in providing responses.

### *Procedure*

The interview schedule was piloted with young people with language and/or learning difficulties not in the study to ensure that the wording and the length of interview were appropriate for the participants. All the interviews with the young people in the main study were conducted face-to-face by a qualified educational psychologist, who had previously worked with each young person in this cohort on at least two other occasions. The young people were interviewed individually, in a quiet room in college or school, or by a home visit. Informed consent has been gained at each stage of the longitudinal study, initially from parents alone and then from the young people also, as was the case in this study. Confidentiality was assured and the young people were informed that they could terminate the session or not answer specific questions if they wished but none chose to do so. All the interviews were tape-recorded with the young people's permission and field notes were also taken.

### Data analysis

The interviews were analysed by thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). All the interviews were transcribed and coded individually against themes that were pre-determined by the researchers and those emergent themes that were revealed by analysis of the transcripts. The development of the coding system was a recursive (iterative) process where interviews were read and a coding system constructed, and then the transcripts were re-read to identify which elements fitted the identified themes. A total of 32 separate codes were developed, based primarily on the main themes and questions of the semi-structured interview. Inter-rater agreements were examined for a 10 per cent sample rated independently by the author who carried out the interviews (OP) and a second member of the research team not involved in this part of the project, and established at 83%, indicating a reliable coding system. Quotations included in the Results section were selected as representative of the theme under discussion, illuminating meaning. They are presented with a coded identifier to preserve anonymity.  All proportions are based on the 54 who were interviewed unless otherwise stated.

## Results

*The young people's views and understanding of their Special Educational Needs*

In the interviews the young people were asked whether they thought they had, or had ever had, special educational needs (SEN) at school. All but one stated this to be the case. Three quarters of those who reported that they had had SEN at school were accepting of their identified SEN:

> 'When people are asking me about my special needs I am always saying it is nothing, it is like having another teacher helping me. I am ok with that. Even when people are picking up on me saying you get extra help, you have special needs. I am fine with that; I have come in terms with my special needs' (P22)

Some young people went further.  For example one young person stated:

> 'I tried not to focus so much on my special needs but to do my best in order to overcome these difficulties. I tried to improve my skills as much as I could' (P16)

Not all, however, showed such equanimity: A quarter reported feeling worried or upset, frustrated or ashamed. This young person exemplifies the debilitating effect of having to reveal his literacy difficulties and seek the help of others:

> 'I felt like ashamed, I felt ashamed, especially when people were asking about my handwriting and when I had to ask people all the time about spelling or can you read this for me. I think now I am getting on with it, I am not bothered any more.' (P25)

It is interesting, however, that despite this history he claimed to have come to terms with his problems.

Most of the young people (43/54) described the difficulties they had experienced over their lives as associated with speech and language (table 1). None used any of the common labels for such difficulties such as 'specific language impairment' (SLI) or 'specific speech and language difficulties' (SSLD) although four referred to their having autism or Asperger's Syndrome. A small number of other diagnostic categories including dyspraxia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder were also used, by individual interviewees. Recall that the sample was initially selected by exclusion of diagnoses of conditions such as autism but data from pupil level annual school census data (PLASC) also indicated that by 16 years a minority were within the diagnostic category of Autistic Spectrum Disorders (Dockrell *et al.* 2007).

[Table 1 here]

About three quarters (39/54) of young people reported a history of literacy difficulties. Once more, very few – only four – used a diagnostic category ('I am dyslexic'). Most described their literacy difficulties relative to specific skills: 'I had trouble with reading' (P19), 'or it was just really my spelling'. (P85). Others referred to curriculum domains:

> 'English was definitely my weakest subject. I always needed lots of help with English, although I have now much improved.' (P123)

These were accurate concerns. At the age of 8 years their literacy levels were very low (Individual Reading Analysis Accuracy mean *Z* = -1.1, BAS Spelling mean Z -1.34). By the age of 16 years their relative performance had worsened: BAS Word Reading mean *Z* = -1.82, BAS Spelling mean *Z* = -1.68.

Relatively few of the young people referred to behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. Only one identified concentration as a problem. This reflects their current and recent status whereas at earlier stages in the study almost half had exhibited substantial problems with concentration and hyperactivity however, by 16 years the percentage had reduced to just 3% (Dockrell *et al*, 2007).

### *Reflections on their educational experiences*

Only two young people reported not having received any additional support in secondary school (table 2). The two most frequently reported types of additional support were from a teaching assistant (TA) in class (25 at primary, 31 at secondary) or a speech and language therapist (25, 9 respectively). This difference by phase reflects the substantial reduction in SLT support available at secondary school age (Key Stage 3 and 4) (Lindsay *et al.* 2002). In addition, nine reported group work out of class at both primary and secondary; 1:1 teaching assistant (TA) support was reported by just 3 for primary and 4 for secondary education. Differences in access to support for homework and special arrangements for examinations reflect the different demands of the two school phases.

[Table 2 here]

Most of the young people (46/54) had positive or very positive views about the support they received at school, linking this to their levels of achievement, as indicated by these two interviewees:

> 'I am grateful about all the support I received, especially in primary school. I wouldn't have been at college, if it wasn't for this support.'(P15)
>
> 'The support was good. I thank them for that. I have done well. It helped me a lot.' (P13)

Teaching assistants provided additional support to that given by the individual teachers. When the young people were asked to reflect on what it was that had been so helpful about the support they had experienced they typically reported accommodations such as ‘they were reading or writing things for me’ (P101) or ‘explaining things to me’ (P104). This is captured in comments from one of the female interviewees:

> ‘What helped me most in primary was my one-to-one teacher for special needs. I always went to see her and she wrote my timetable. In secondary school [it was] the different one-to-one teachers I had.’

Additionally, some of the young people described the teachers and the teaching assistants as ‘good personalities that cared a lot for me and helped me build up my confidence’ (P104). There were concerns, however, about the ‘stop/go’ nature of much additional support. Those who considered they had had SEN throughout their schooling thought that the benefits of the help they had received would have been improved if this had been consistent. The quantity of support was also a concern. This young woman reported:

> ‘[Without the support] I think I wouldn’t have achieved so much. It helped me through, to get my grades at college….. I would have liked to have had more support with GCSE. I was only allowed a reader for some of the subjects. If I had a reader for all subjects I might have been able to get on to Level 2[1] at college.’ (P82).

Nevertheless, others considered that they had received the support they needed at the time but, having improved, there was no need for it to continue.

Only five of the young people reported speech and language therapy as having been the most helpful form of additional support, perhaps reflecting the long

---

[1] In the UK post 16 courses are formalised at 4 levels – entry level, level 1, level 2 and level 3. Level 3 courses require successful completion of a specified number of GCSEs at grades A*-C, level 2 courses require successful completion of a specified number of GCSEs at levels D-G.

time since they had typically received such support, although those who did report SLT support acknowledged its beneficial impact:

> ‘When I was younger, the speech therapy helped a lot! Before I started it, I couldn’t really speak very good.’ (P28)

Although school was identified clearly as the main source of support, some of the young people referred to other systems, particularly informal support from family and friends, as having been important:

> ‘My mum helped me a lot. She wanted me to succeed. I had a lot of support at home; some at school but not much. [Mum] helped me to understand things. She also helped with my handwriting. She would sit me down and tell me that she would help me if I needed help.’ (P71)

A student who had been in specialist language provision indicated how her more complex family situation could be beneficial.

> ‘My four parents have always been there for me. The days that I am staying at my dad’s place, he helps me with numeracy and IT, he is very good with computers. My father’s girlfriend will sit next to me and help me with writing and spelling. She is very nice, she is lovely. When I am in my mum’s house, she will go through my homework with me and my step father is always there for me, when I feel disappointed. School helps me a lot, but my parents help me with all the things that I find difficult at school.’ (P31)

The importance of the young person’s own attitudes was also identified. One who had attended mainstream schools had limited results in comparison with national norms (he gained three GCSEs, graded E, F and G) but his own determination was a factor in this success.

> ‘I never gave up. I knew that I had problems, but I tried hard. I always thought English was the most difficult subject, but I worked very hard in secondary school. I made very good progress. I never thought that I was different from

> the other the young people. I didn’t want to disappoint my mum. I think she is very proud of me that I did so well in the GCSEs.’ (P22)

A small minority of the young people, about one in ten, expressed dissatisfaction with their schooling and the seeming inability of staff to offer the support they needed:

> ‘Nothing really helped me to do better in school. Because I was shy and quiet, sometimes teachers didn’t even notice that I was in the classroom. When my mother complained to the [secondary] school about the other students’ behaviour towards me, the teachers did nothing to help me. In Year 10 and Year 11, when my attendance was very poor, they were just calling my mum to put the responsibility on her. I preferred to do anything else than going to school.’ (P4)

Another young person raised the issue of teachers’ understanding of her problems and ways to deal with them:

> ‘There were many times when I didn’t know what to do in the class and when I asked some of the teachers to help me out, they just didn’t know what to do.’ (P37)

These experiences may be compared with those of a young person who had attended a residential language school and who achieved 8 GCSE passes (1 at A* - C).

> ‘I used to have a teacher by my side all the time. It was helpful because I understood more. [In the residential school] there would be my teacher, my speech therapist and a support assistant and if I needed help, one of them would come to help me.’ (P138).

### *Reflections on Post-16 destinations*

The majority of the total sample (51/64) continued in some form of education post-16, with 37 attending a college of further education (FE). Most of those in education were studying at Level 1. However, a minority were working towards Level 2 and four of those who had remained at school were working towards Level 3 (AS level). When asked about their choice of post-16 destination, the young people most frequently gave responses concerned with interest and enjoyment (41/54) followed by reasons related to hopes for subsequent employment (25). Other reasons given by smaller numbers of young people included the influence of school (12), or parents (11). Only one young person cited the influence of friends, in this case on their decision to go to college. A substantial minority (10) highlighted the importance of practical learning. Finally two felt they had had no other option but to take the college course they were on.

Achieving success was given by four out of five of the young people as the main reason they enjoyed their post-16 course, training or job. Making new friends and the practical side of learning were each mentioned by a third of the young people. Often, these different aspects were related:

> '[I enjoy] doing the practical side of this course. I come and do all my work and go. I just enjoy it generally. It's a nice college; good classmates.' (P13)

The support of tutors/supervisors, the greater sense of freedom compared with secondary school and the sense of recognition of being an adult were all valued:

> 'You get more freedom, not so much in what we do but you are treated better, I mean, like an adult. For example, my Key Skills teacher, she tells us what to do and we go off and do it.' (P38)

However, despite these positive perceptions, life was not without difficulty. Nearly half of the participants reported having experienced problems since moving to their post-16 destination. Mainly these had occurred in education, but some of the minority had of those in work and training had also experienced problems. The main difficulties for the former related to their course. The increased academic demands faced by some students posed a challenge:

> ‘I had some problems with coursework. It’s harder than GCSE. [For GCSE], the work that you had to produce was much shorter. It’s longer here. The questions are harder and a lot more research has to be done.’ (P71)

About one in six had encountered difficult peers and had been victimized:

> ‘In the classroom, we had a lot of fights. There are two girls who don’t like everyone in the class and these two girls ganged up against me and my friend. Then they left –they only came to the course for the money [Education Maintenance Allowance]. Now they’ve gone, we’re all friends in the class. It’s been fine since then.’ (P82)

The young people reported that support for their learning mainly comprised having tasks and concepts explained to them, having their questions answered and having tasks demonstrated. Help with reading and writing was less frequently mentioned than when recalling the kinds of support given in school**,** even though as a group these young people had levels of literacy significantly below the norm. In some cases both literacy and conceptual demands were reported:

> ‘[College staff] go through with you. They read, they sit beside you and go through [the work]. If you don’t get it, they will say over and over again until you eventually get it.’ (P16)

Most of the young people interviewed considered that the support they received was sufficient and helpful. However, eight of those at college, and one in employment suggested how support could be improved. These tended to be specific to the young person’s course and circumstances but included more support assistants in course classes, in Key Skills classes, more information about coursework requirements, and breaking questions down into small steps. However, accessing support assistants who were knowledgeable about the curriculum area was not always easy: ‘It is hard to find someone with the qualifications to [support] in Art’ (P138).

### *Support from family post-16*

In addition to the help provided to support the young people's education at school, as noted above, family support continued to be important to these young people post-16. Overall, when either happy or upset, the young people in the study were most likely to talk things over with their mothers (table 3), but, fathers, siblings, and the extended family of grandparents, aunts and cousins were also mentioned. All the young people mentioned at least one friend or family (including extended family) member to whom they could talk about joys and/or worries although, for some, this was a much less common occurrence than for others. Only two said they told nobody in the family when they were happy and only one told nobody when upset.

[Table 3 here]

The extended family seemed to be used more frequently at this stage in adolescence when the young people wanted to discuss concerns and worries or as a second tier of familial support – the family closeness of grandparents and aunts/uncles, for example, enabled trust, whilst the greater relational distance compared to mothers and fathers enabled a greater sense of freedom of expression. For example, one female interviewee spoke about talking to her aunt about concerns so as not to worry her parents.

> 'I always talk to my aunt about things that worry me. She is like an older sister to me. She doesn't get upset like my mum does and she can always advise me for boyfriends and things that I cannot discuss with my parents.' (P82).

Over four out of five of the young people received help with post-16 work from their families. Most frequently, this was just from their mothers:

> 'My mum will go through college work with me. For example, if I need to write an essay we will have a short discussion first and then sometimes she helps me to search for information on the web. When I finish, she will have a read, and she will suggest ways to improve my work. She is very supportive. When I am stressed, she is always the first person to notice; the discussion with her is helpful most of the times' (P20)

Fathers, siblings, members of the extended family and friends were also mentioned:

> ‘My older brother always helps me with numeracy; he is very bright. When I don’t understand something, he will try to explain it to me, until I get it. Sometimes, he will come to me the next day to check if I still remember it.’ (P20)

Often the young people mentioned more than one person: eight young people reported that everyone in the family, including siblings, helped them a lot with their homework.

Family members provided quite specific support, similar to that reported for education staff, most frequently explaining work and concepts to the young person and/or checking over the young person’s work (table 4). Help with literacy was also mentioned. A minority did not receive help from a family member; sometimes this was because sufficient help was available at school or college: ‘No, if I need any help with my coursework the teachers are good enough to help me with that.’ (P29)

[Table 4 here]

### *Support from friends and social networks*

All but one of the young people from the SLI group, reported that friendship was ‘very important’ or ‘quite important’ to them either for informal reasons (‘it’s nice to go out with your friends’ (P24)); to provide support (‘it’s good to have friends to discuss your problems with’, P18); or to avoid loneliness (‘It is nice to have friends because otherwise you could be lonely, P10). Most reported that they got on ‘very well’ or ‘quite well’ with their peers at college or other post-16 destination. Popular activities with these new friends included, going for lunch together and meeting up in the evening or at the weekend.  Only one person reported that he had not made new friends post-16. Furthermore, most of the young people reported that they still had some long-term friendships from their earlier schooling. Most of these school friendships had started in secondary school but about a quarter traced back to primary school. The reasons why they had remained friends for such a long time included simply getting on well together (31), having similar characters or personalities (26) or because they were trusting of each other (12). Living close to each other was also mentioned (9) and, particularly for young people who had attended special schools, meetings organised by their previous schools had helped them remain friends for such a long time.

Only eight reported no longer having friends from school. Reasons included practical limitations such as moving away from the area where they had gone to school or leaving residential school to return to the home area. In other cases the young person identified social interaction difficulties or the negative impact of family problems interfering with the development of school friendships.

### *Predictions for the future*

The young people differed in their expectations for the future reflecting a split between those who wanted to continue further study/training (28) and those wanting a job (25). However, when asked to imagine their lives in five years in response to this open question almost all (52) expected to have a job (Table 5). Twelve of the young people hoped to be running their own businesses by their early 20s. Over three quarters also expected to be living independently of parents. The young people who thought this unlikely explained their view in relation to four factors: their own sense that they were unlikely to be ready to do so by age 22 years (5); their parents not being ready to let them move out by then (3); their lack of a social network of friends making it unlikely that they would be able to share a flat (4); and the high cost of renting or buying accommodation (4). Only about a quarter expected to be in a serious relationship with a partner at that time, while one young person raised this but said he didn’t know if he would be in this position, and about three quarters did not mention this issue at all.

[Table 5 here]

## Discussion

The results of this study revealed several important findings concerning the views of young people with a history of SLI in relation to different aspects of their post-16 education and quality of life and also in relation to their previous school experiences. The vast majority of the young people were aware of their history of having SEN and were able to provide a realistic picture of their needs. This is in line with the results of a large scale study examining the perceptions of children with different kinds of SEN in the UK (Lewis *et al.* 2007). The young people in the present study primarily described their SEN in relation to their speech and language difficulties, but importantly they also identified their difficulties with reading, spelling, and writing. This self appraisal by the young people themselves was validated by their scores on standardized scores which confirmed a profile of continuing language and educational needs in adolescence. These findings provide support for young people with a history of SLI being at risk of language and literacy difficulties in adolescence and early adulthood (Young *et al.* 2002).

The majority of the young people had attended mainstream schools which partially accounts for the varied patterns of support described by the young people. This reflects the national picture where specialist provision for children with speech, language and communication needs is much less prevalent during Key Stages 3 and 4 (Lindsay *et al*, 2002). Consequently, most young people with SLI were in mainstream but with limited additional support, mainly teaching assistants (TAs). Teaching assistants were fundamental to the support process in this study.

The use of TAs expanded considerably during the 1990s (Farrell *et al.* 1999) particularly to support pupils with SEN. There is some evidence that TAs have beneficial effects on children's learning and social development (Blatchford *et al* 2004), however the evidence base for the effectiveness of TAs, and especially compared with other provision, is limited (Lindsay 2007).

This study raises questions regarding the adequacy of overall provision for these young people. However, most of the young people reported positive views regarding the support made by schools in relation to their SEN, especially that provided by TAs, and acknowledged the positive role that this support had played in relation to their educational progress. These findings are similar to those reported by Lewis *et al.* (2007), who also found that the young people in their study appreciated the formal support offered by schools in relation to meeting their SEN. However, both the quantity and consistency of support provided in the present study were regarded as problematic. This was particularly true in secondary school. Consequently, the positive views regarding support must be interpreted in the context of the relatively limited amount and the fact that the young people typically were not in a position to make comparisons of the benefits that could accrue with more extensive provision. It is therefore important to establish in what ways effective support can be provided and monitored to address the young people's needs in the latter phases of compulsory education.

Despite their substantial difficulties, especially with literacy, the move to post-16 from school was regarded as positive by the majority of the young people. This contrasts with the earlier lack of success at school, as indicated by their modest success in their GCSE examinations, and raises the possibility that provision post-16, in particular that made by FE colleges, was more appropriate to meeting their needs, with different curricula and greater flexibility. Post 16 is often viewed in a positive light by young people, an educational context where the young person is making a choice about what they want to do. However, the views of these young people with a history of SLI were significantly more positive than a matched group of children with other special educational needs (Dockrell *et al.* 2007) suggesting that these positive views do not imply a general improvement in perceptions for all young people with SEN after moving from compulsory education to FE college or work. Furthermore, although most of the young people seemed to be pleased with the support they received in post-16 placements, the problems experienced with regards to their course work reflects their persistent difficulties, mainly with literacy. This highlights the need for systematic support in relation to their basic skills even after the end of compulsory education (see also Farrell *et al*. 2007)**.**

A large number of the young people participating in this study acknowledged the supportive role that members of their family and their social networks were playing in different aspects of their lives, supporting studies examining patterns of resilience in other young people. For example, within the Rochester Child Resilience Project, resilient status was significantly more likely among those whose parents were emotionally responsive, and had high psychosocial resources (Wyman *et al*. 1999). It remains to be seen whether the supportive role of the close and extended family and friends reported by the young people in this study will be confirmed as a protective factor contributing to resilience of young people with a history of SLI. Most of the young people seemed to be optimistic about their next step, with about equal numbers expressing their wish for further education and training or to get a job, and about their medium term future projecting five years ahead. Their opinions were supported by the views expressed during interviews conducted with their personal tutors in colleges and by their parents, providing triangulated evidence (Dockrell *et al*. 2007).

These findings provide a more positive picture compared with that described by Howlin *et al*. (2000) and then by Clegg *et al.* (2005), who reported lack of employment, poor social adaptation and enhanced risk of increased psychiatric difficulties in their follow-up study during their sample's mid-20s and mid-30s respectively. However, that study comprised a small sample and the severity of the individuals' language difficulties may explain the difference in findings.

It is also important to note that the children in that study were born around the late 1960s and those in the study by Beitchman *et al.* ((2001) were born in the mid-1970s while those in the present study were born around the late 1980s. There have been major changes in the education system over this period including the development of post-16 education, offering young people much greater choice than in the past (see Lindsay and Dockrell, in press, for a discussion). There has been a greater focus on improving standards across the education system including the SEN system; Ofsted was set up and charged with inspecting schools, including special schools, and reporting on the education of children with SEN in mainstream. Schools themselves have changed with a political philosophy promoting choice and diversity (Department for Education and Employment, 2001). New types of schools have been introduced: for example, federations of schools allow the possibility for a radical improvement to optimize provision for pupils with SEN by sharing resources and playing to individual schools' strengths (Lindsay *et al*. 2007). Consequently, comparisons with studies that were undertaken on young people born 15 or 20 years earlier are problematic. Nevertheless, it remains the case that these young people were expressing a more positive perspectives than earlier research has suggested. This is an important, encouraging finding in its own right.

### *Methodological considerations*

In terms of the methodology adopted for the purposes of this study, an interesting question raised by these results is whether interviews produce valid results with this population. The large majority of the young people in this study were able to provide meaningful accounts of their personal and educational histories. This was facilitated by both the experience of the researcher, a qualified educational psychologist with experience of working with children with a history of SLI, and the use of the method of '*narrative coherence* - the capacity to develop a 'good story' in which circumstance and personal experience are meaningfully integrated' (Hauser *et al.* 2006, p.15). The qualitative data from this study allow a richer examination of the young people's reflections of their present and also of their past experiences, so allowing stronger conclusions through the use of triangulation of data. Although there were no statistically significant differences between the sample interviewed and those missing participants on the language and reading measures, it is possible that the groups differed on another important variable. In particular, the missing participants might have had less positive views than those interviewed.

## *Conclusions*

This study has demonstrated that young people with a history of SLI can reflect meaningfully on their past and current experiences. Furthermore, it reveals that despite limited academic success and both persistent and substantial literacy difficulties, these young people had more positive experiences once they had moved from school to post-16 destinations, particularly Further Education Colleges. This finding may be seen as either, or both, an indictment of the limited success in meeting their needs during compulsory schooling and a positive reflection on the ability of post-16 destinations to do so. Furthermore, the study also provides a more positive picture of the post-16 social development of young people with a history of SLI than has been portrayed in earlier studies.

## *Further research and future directions*

Several of the findings from this study are worthy of further exploration. The young people with a history of SLI were able to provide valuable accounts of their histories of SEN and education provision at the age of 17. Future research should examine whether younger children with SLI have similar understanding of their SEN and of the impact that these difficulties have on different aspects of their lives. Additionally, professionals involved with children and young people with SLI should seek to explore and develop meaningful and sensitive ways of including the views of this group in decision making about the different aspects of their education and lives. Furthermore, the young people provided a positive picture with regards to the different aspects of their post-16 education. However, additional research is needed in order to establish whether the positive post-16 experiences of these young people lead to wider achievements and opportunities once they move into adulthood.

## References

### Articles

BEITCHMAN, J.H., WILSON, B., JOHNSON, C.J., ATKINSON, L, YOUNG, A, ADLAF, E., ESCOBAR, M., DOUGLAS, L., 2001, Fourteen-year follow-up of speech/language-impaired and control children: Psychiatric outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.* **40**, 75-82.

BEITCHMAN, J.H., WILSON, B., BROWNLIE, E.B., INGLIS, A., and LANCEE, W., 1996, Long-term consistency in speech/language profiles II: Behavioural, emotional and social outcomes. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,* **35**, 815-825.

BISHOP, D.V.M 1989, *Test of Reception of grammar (2nd Edition).* (University of Manchester, The Author, Age and Cognitive Performance Research Centre).

BLATCHFORD, P., RUSSELL, A., BASSETT, P., BROWN, P., and MARTIN, C., 2004, *The Role and Effects of Teaching Assistants in English Primary Schools (Years 4 to 6) 2000–2003: Results from the Class Size and Pupil Adult Ratios (CSPAR) KS2 Project. Research Report RR605*. (Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills).

BOTTING, N., CRUTCHLEY, A., and CONTI-RAMSDEN G., 1998, Educational transitions of 7-year-old children with SLI in language units: a longitudinal study. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders,* **33**, 177-197.

CLEGG, J.  HOLLIS, C., MAWHOOD, L. and RUTTER, M. 2005, Developmental language disorders- a follow-up in later adult life. Cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **46***,* 128-149.

CONTI-RAMSDEN, G., Heterogeneity of specific language impairment (SLI): Outcomes in adolescence. In C. Norbury, B. Tomblin and D. Bishop (eds), *Understanding Developmental Disorders in Children* (in press),

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT, 2001, *Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs.* (London: The Stationery Office).

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT, 2001. *Schools building on success.* London: DfEE.

DOCKRELL, J.E. and LINDSAY, G.A., 2000, Meeting the needs of children with specific speech and language difficulties. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, **15***,* 24-41.

DOCKRELL, J.E. and LINDSAY, G.A., 2001, Children with specific speech and language difficulties – the teachers' perspective. *Oxford Review of Education,* **27***,* 369-394.

DOCKRELL, J.E., LINDSAY, G., MACKIE, C., and CONNOLLY, V. (2007), Constraints in the production of written text in children with specific language impairments. *Exceptional Children, 73,* 147-164.

DOCKRELL, J., LINDSAY, G., PALIKARA, O., and CULLEN, M-A., 2007, *Raising the Achievements of Children and Young People with Specific Speech and Language and Communication Needs and other Special Educational Needs through School to Work and College.* Research Report 837 (Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills).

ELLIOTT, C.D., SMITH, P. and MCCULLOCH, K. (1997), *The British Ability Scales II.* (Windsor: NFER-Nelson).

FARRELL, P., BALSHAW, M., and POLAT, F. (1999), *The Management, Role and Training of Learning Support Assistants. Research Report RR161* (Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills).

FARRELL, P., DYSON, A., FILIZ, P., GRAEME, H., and FRANCES, G., 2007, Inclusion and achievement in mainstream schools. *European Journal of*

*Special Educational Needs,* **22***,* 131.

GERSCH, I., 1987, Involving pupils in their own assessment. In T. Bowers (ed) *Special Educational Needs and Human Resource Management* (pp 149-173) (London: Croom Helm).

GRAY, P., BULLEN, P., DUCKETT, L., LEYDEN, S., POLLARD, I. and SKELTON, R., 2006, *National Audit of Support, Services and Provision for Children with Low Incidence Needs.* Research Report RR729 (Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills).

GREENE, S., and HILL, M., 2005 Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues. In S. Greene and D. Hogan (eds.) *Researching children's experience: Approaches and Methods* (London: Sage Publications).

HAUSER, S.T. ALLEN, J.P and GOLDEN, E., 2006, *Out of the Woods: Tales of Resilient Teens* (London, England: Harvard University Press).

LEONARD, L., 1998, *Children with Specific Language Impairment* (Cambridge, M.A.: The MIT Press).

LEWIS, A., PARSONS, S. and RORERTSON, C., 2007, *My School, My Family, My Life: Telling It Like It Is. A Study Detailing the Experiences of Disabled Children, Young People and Their Families in Great Britain in 2006.* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, School of Education and the Disability Rights Commission).

LINDSAY, G. (2007), Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming. *British Journal of Educational Psychology,* **77**, 1-24.

LINDSAY, G. and DOCKRELL, J.E. 2004, Whose job is it? Parents' concerns about the needs of their children with language problems. *Journal of Special Education,* 37(4), 225-236.

LINDSAY, G. and DOCKRELL, in press. Outcomes for young people with a history of specific language impairment at 16-17 years: A more positive picture? In S. Chiat, M. Cruice, and V.Joffe (eds). Chichester: J. Wiley.

LINDSAY, G., DOCKRELL, J. and STRAND, S., 2007. The behaviour of children with specific speech and language difficulties: follow up age 8-12 years. *British Journal of Educational Psychology. 77,* 811-828

LINDSAY, G., MUIJS, D., HARRIS, A., CHAPMAN, C., ARWECK, E., and GOODALL, J., 2007. *School Federations Pilot: Study 2003-2007.* Nottingham: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

LINDSAY, G., SOLOFF, N., LAW, J., BAND, S, PEACEY, N., GASCOIGNE, M., and RADFORD, J., 2002, Speech and language therapy services to education in England and Wales. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders,* **37**, 273-288.

MARSHALL, J., RALPH, S., AND PALMER, S., 2002, 'I wasn't trained to work with them': mainstream teachers' attitudes to children with speech and language difficulties. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* **6**, *3,* 199-215.

MILES, M.B. and HUBERMAN, A.M., 1994, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (London*:* Sage).

OWEN, R., HAYETT, L., and ROULSTONE, S., 2004, Children's views of speech and language therapy in schools: consulting children with communication difficulties. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy,* **20**, *1, 55-73.*

PEERS, I. S., LLOYD, P., and FOSTER, C., 1999, *British Standardisation of the CELF.* The Psychological Corporation's Speech and Language Assessment. http://www.tpcweb.com.

PRATT, C., BOTTING, N., AND CONTI-RAMSDEN, G., 2006, The characteristics and concerns of mothers of adolescents with a history of SLI. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy,* **22**, 177.

SADLER, J., 2005, Knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the mainstream teachers of children with a preschool diagnosis of speech/language impairment. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy,* **21***, 2,* 147-163.

SNOWLING, M. J., ADAMS, J. W., BISHOP, D. V. M., and STOTHARD, S. E., 2001, Educational attainments of school-leavers with a pre-school history of speech-language impairments. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders***, 36,** 173-183.

STOTHARD, S. E. SNOWLING, M. BISHOP, D. V. M. CHIPCHACE, B. B. and KAPLAN, C. A., 1998, Language-impaired preschoolers: a follow-up into adolescence. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing*, **41***,* 407-418.

SWEETING, H., 2001, Our family, whose perspective? An investigation of children's family life and health. *Journal of Adolescence,* **24***, 2,* 229-250.

TOMBLIN J.B. RECORDS, N. BUCKWALTER, P. ZHANG, X. SMITH, E. and O'BRIEN, M., 1997, Prevalence of Specific Language Impairment in Kindergarten children. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research,* **40**, 6, 1245-1260.

WYNMAN, P.A, COWEN, E.L., WORK, D.C., HOYT-MEYERS, L., MAGNUS, K.B., and FAGEN, D.B., 1999, Caregiving and developmental factors differentiating young at risk urban children showing resilient versus stress-affected outcomes: A replication and extension. *Child Development*, **70**, 645-659.

YOUNG, A., BEITCHMAN, Y., JOHNSON, C., DOUGLAS, L., ATKINSON, L., ESCOBAR, M., AND WILSON, B, 2002, Young adult academic outcomes in a longitudinal sample of early identified language impaired and control children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* **43***, 5*, 635–645.

Table 1: Young people's reports of their special educational needs

| | Number |
|---|---|
| *Diagnostic Label* | |
| Dyslexia | 4 |
| Autism/ Asperger's syndrome | 4 |
| Epilepsy | 1 |
| Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder | 1 |
| Dypraxia | 1 |
| | |
| *Description of difficulties* | |
| Speech and/ or language | 43 |
| Reading | 39 |
| Writing | 35 |
| Spelling | 26 |
| Maths | 9 |
| Memory | 3 |
| 'I am not very bright' | 2 |
| Concentration | 1 |
| Behaviour | 1 |
| Sight | 1 |

Note: N = 54
More than one response could be given so columns do not sum to N.

Table 2 Young people's reports of additional support received in primary and secondary schools

| *Type of support* | Primary | Secondary |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching assistant in class | 25 | 31 |
| Work with speech and language therapist | 25 | 9 |
| Small group work out of class | 9 | 9 |
| 1:1 with TA out of class | 3 | 4 |
| Homework/coursework club | 0 | 12 |
| Excused homework | 0 | 5 |
| Special arrangements for examinations | 0 | 3 |
| No additional support | 0 | 2 |

Note: N = 54
More than one response could be given so columns do not sum to N.

Table 3 Family members talked to when happy or upset

| | When happy | When upset |
|---|---|---|
| *Main person* | | |
| Mother | 23 | 21 |
| Both parents | 12 | 12 |
| Father | 8 | 5 |
| Siblings | 5 | 1 |
| Grandparents | 1 | 0 |
| Aunt/Uncle | 0 | 4 |
| Whole family | 2 | 3 |
| No-one in family | 2 | 1 |
| Friends | 0 | 2 |
| | | |
| *Anyone else?* | | |
| No-one else | 30 | |
| Grandparents | 14 | |
| Siblings | 4 | |
| Cousins | 3 | |
| Aunt/Uncle | 1 | |
| Other parent | 1 | |

Note N = 54
More than one response could be given so columns do not sum to N.

Table 4  Help provided by family members for those who had coursework (N = 54)

| Helpful action by family | Number |
|---|---|
| Explain work to me | 43 |
| Check my work | 36 |
| Read it for me | 15 |
| They spell words for me | 10 |
| They write for me | 7 |
| Help me with computer | 5 |
| No help from family | 7 |

Note: N = 54
More than one response could be given so column does not sum to N.

**Table 5** Young people’s predictions of their lives in their early 20s

| Predictions for five years time | View of likelihood | SLI (*n* = 54) |
|---|---|---|
| Employed | Yes | 52 |
| | Maybe/hope so | 0 |
| | No | 1 |
| | Don’t know | 0 |
| | Not mentioned | 1 |
| Living independently of parents | Yes | 41 |
| | Maybe/hope so | 1 |
| | No | 5 |
| | Don’t know | 5 |
| | Not mentioned | 2 |
| In a serious relationship | Yes | 15 |
| | Maybe/hope so | 0 |
| | No | 0 |
| | Don’t know | 1 |
| | Not mentioned | 38 |

N = 54

Acknowledgements

This study was funded by the Department of Education and Skills. We are grateful to all the young people and families, who participated in this study and to the staff in the post-16 destinations. We also acknowledge the contribution of Mairi Ann Cullen who assisted with the developing of the coding frame and reliability of the questionnaires.

## Appendix 1 Interview schedule (SSLD and SEN groups)

**Introduction/ Confidentiality**

**Student's name………………………………..Date:……………….Code:…………..**

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. This interview is part of a research study that you have been participating in since you were Yr 3. Before we start, I want you to know that no-one is going to tell your school/college/employer or your parents about what you say.

2) Having finished Yr11, what are you doing now?

| | |
|---|---|
| A Studying (eg at college, private training provider) | |
| B On an apprenticeship or other government supported training | |
| C In a full-time job (over 30 hours per week) | |
| D In a part time job (30 hours per week or less) | |
| E Working but not getting paid for it (eg voluntary work) | |
| F Out of work or unemployed | |
| H Taking a break from study or work | |
| Other activity (please specify) | |

2) Where are you studying?

| | |
|---|---|
| College of FE or tertiary college | |
| Sixth form at school | |
| Other college (please specify) | |
| Other place to study | |
| Don't know | |

2) Are you studying….?

| | |
|---|---|
| Full-time | |
| Part-time | |
| Don’t know | |

3) Please tell me which subjects you are studying.

4) Why did you choose to do this course?

5) What are the good things or the things you enjoy most about doing this course? What makes you say that?

6) Have you had any problems since you started college?
If yes, tell me some more things about these problems.
Who did you ask for help(in college, at home, others)? Why?

8a) How do College staff help you in your course work? (e.g support from LS dept, access to ICT)

8b) Is there anything that the college could do to make your studies easier? What makes you say that?

**FAMILY**

**Every family is different and sometimes the members of our families are helpful but sometimes it’s more difficult to discuss our needs with them. In this section I am going to ask you some questions about your family.**

9) Who do you live with?

10) Do you have any brothers and sisters? If yes, how many?(Ages?)

11) When you are very pleased or happy about something, who in your family do you talk to about this? What makes you say that?

12) Do you also talk to any of your family members when you also have some kind of concern? How does your mother/father (or other member of your family) help you to deal with this concern?

13) Is there any other member of your family that you really trust and discuss things that are of your interest with? Why did you choose this member of your family to talk to?

15) When you go out, do you tell your parent or guardian when you will be back? Why/ Why not?

16) Is there anybody in your family that helps you with your coursework? Can you please describe to me how this person supports you with your coursework?

### FRIENDS

**In this section I am going to ask you some questions about friendship in general and about your friends. Some people have a best friend that they can really trust and share their secrets with and others have friends but not one in particular that they feel really close to.**

17) Generally, how important is friendship to you? What makes you say that?

18) Since you have been at college, how do you get on with the other students on your course?

19) Have you made any friends at college? If yes, what kind of activities do you do together with your new friends?

20) Do you still have any close friends from your previous school? If yes, for how long have you been friends? If yes, why have you remained friends for a long time?

## Special needs and reflections on previous school experiences

**In this section I am going to ask you to think back to your time at school.**

21) There are some students that sometimes find it difficult to do some of the school activities and they need additional help. These students are often named by the schools as having ‘special educational needs’. Do you think that you ever had a special educational need? What makes you say that? How did you feel about it?
**If no:** Do you remember when you were very young and you had some difficulties with your speech and language (SSLD group)/ or some difficulties with learning (SEN group)? And then go back to Q21

22) What kind of special educational needs do you think that you had? Why do you say that? [ Prompt: mention speech and language, but then ask about reading, writing etc if they don’t refer to these]

23) What kind of help and support did you receive at school? What about your homework? Did you receive any support for your homework at school?

24) Looking back now, what do you think about the help and support you received? What makes you say that?

25) If you could have had any kind of help you wanted at school so that you could have achieved your very best, what kind of help would you have chosen? Why?

26) Thinking back to your time at school, who or what helped you the most to do better in school? What makes you say that?

27) Thinking back, was there any help you would like to have had in relation to your education (e.g support from school, teacher’s attitudes)? **Why do you say that?**

## FUTURE PLANS-EXPECTATIONS

**In this section, I would like to ask you about your hope for the future.**

28) What do you plan to do when you finish your course here?

29) How do you see yourself in five years? What do you hope you will be doing? Where will you be living? What will your life be like?