THE TRANSITION OF EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVERS FROM MAINSTREAM POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL INTO A YOUTHREACH EDUCATION CENTRE: 

An Exploration of Staff Perspectives and the Implications for the Centre’s Guidance Service

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MA in Guidance Counselling

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Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is entirely his/her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature__________________
Personal Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

Declaration ................................................................................................................................. ii

Personal Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. iii

Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................... iv

List of Figures and Tables ........................................................................................................ vii

Abbreviations ............................................................................................................................ vii

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ix

Chapter 1 – Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Overview .......................................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Present Study ................................................................. 2
   1.3 Structure of the Present Study ..................................................................................... 2

Chapter 2 – Literature Review ............................................................................................... 5
   2.1 Introduction – What is Early School Leaving? ......................................................... 5
   2.2 Why is Early School Leaving an Issue? ................................................................. 6
   2.3 What Contributes to Early School leaving ............................................................ 7
   2.4 Early school Leaving – Cause and Consequence ............................................... 8
      2.41 School Culture and Relationships ..................................................................... 9
      2.42 Social Class and Early School Leaving ......................................................... 10
      2.43 Academic Underachievement ........................................................................ 12
   2.5 Policy Response to Early School Leaving ............................................................ 12
      2.6 Youthreach ............................................................................................................ 14
         2.61 Education and Training ............................................................................... 16
         2.62 ‘Youth work’ in Youthreach ........................................................................ 17
         2.63 Application of Attachment Theory in Youthreach .................................... 17
         2.64 Guidance & Mentoring in Youthreach ......................................................... 18
   2.7 The Guidance Counsellor in Post-Primary Education ............................................. 20
      2.71 Whole Guidance Service ................................................................................. 21
5.3 The Learner/Staff Relationship ................................................................. 48
  5.3.1 Empathy and Acceptance in the Relationship .................................. 51
  5.3.2 Role Modelling in the Relationship ................................................. 53
5.4 Person-centred Education ................................................................. 56
  5.4.1 Individual Educational Approach ................................................ 57
5.5 Chapter Summary ............................................................................... 57

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Implications .............................................. 58
  6.1 Introduction .................................................................................... 58
  6.2 Conclusion .................................................................................... 58
  6.3 Implications for Youthreach Practices ........................................... 59
  6.3.1 Staff Training and Development ................................................ 59
    6.3.2 Staff Support in Induction Process ........................................ 60
    6.3.3 Psychometric Testing ............................................................... 60
    6.3.4 Staff Key Working/Mentoring Programme ............................. 60
    6.3.5 Staff Supervision and Training .............................................. 61
  6.4 Implications for the Guidance Service and Guidance Counsellor ...... 61
  6.5 Implications for Future Research ..................................................... 62
  6.6 Strengths and Limitations of Study ................................................. 63
    6.6.1 Strengths of Study ................................................................. 63
    6.6.2 Weaknesses of Study ............................................................. 63
  6.7 Personal Reflection ......................................................................... 64
  6.8 Chapter Summary .......................................................................... 65

References ............................................................................................. 66

Appendix A – Interview Questions – Semi-Structured Interview .......... 77
Appendix B – Subject Information Letter (Manager) .............................. 78
Appendix C – Consent Form (Manager) ................................................ 79
Appendix D – Subject Information Sheet (Participant) ......................... 80
Appendix F – Acceptance of Child Protection Guidelines ....................... 82
Appendix G – Informed Consent Form .................................................. 83
Appendix H – Extract of Interview ....................................................... 84
List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1 - Qualifications of Early School Leavers ............................................................ 5
Figure 2 - Early School Leaving Prevention and Reintegration in Ireland ...................... 13
Figure 3 - Educational Provision Hierarchy ................................................................. 15
Figure 4 - Guidance Supports at Youthreach Education Centres ................................. 20
Figure 5 - Three Integrated Areas of Guidance Service ............................................. 21
Figure 6 - Five-Stage IPA Analysis Table ................................................................... 31
Figure 7 - Summary of Theme Hierarchy ................................................................. 35
Figure 8 - Major Themes ......................................................................................... 36
Figure 9 - Major Themes and Subordinate Themes .................................................... 36
Figure 10 – Whole-school Guidance Relationships System ...................................... 62
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
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<td>CTC</td>
<td>Community Training Centre</td>
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<td>CTW</td>
<td>Community Training Workshop</td>
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<td>DEIS</td>
<td>Delivering Equality in Schools</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>EBD</td>
<td>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESRI</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Institute</td>
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<td>ETB</td>
<td>Education and Training Board</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EWO</td>
<td>Educational Welfare Officer</td>
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<td>FETAC</td>
<td>Further Education Training and Awards Council</td>
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<td>HSL</td>
<td>Home School Liaison</td>
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<td>IGC</td>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</td>
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<td>ILP</td>
<td>Individual Learning Plan</td>
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<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Leaving Cert Applied</td>
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<td>LCVP</td>
<td>Leaving Cert Vocational Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCE</td>
<td>National Centre for Guidance in Education</td>
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<td>NESF</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Forum</td>
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<td>NEWB</td>
<td>National Educational Welfare Board</td>
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<td>NRP</td>
<td>National Reform Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>QQI</td>
<td>Quality and Qualifications Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSE</td>
<td>Relationships and Sexuality Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCP</td>
<td>School Completion Programme</td>
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<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Education Needs</td>
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<td>SENI</td>
<td>Special Education Needs Initiative</td>
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<td>SPHE</td>
<td>Social, Personal and Health Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEC</td>
<td>Vocational Educational Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Vocational and Training Opportunities Scheme</td>
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<td>YEC</td>
<td>Youthreach Education Centre</td>
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Abstract

Although research on Early School Leaving is comprehensive, the focus of research has overlooked both the personal experience of the early school leavers who succeed in returning to education programmes and the staff who support them in this journey. In Ireland such programmes include Youthreach.

The current study aims to explore the experiences of Youthreach professional staff in supporting early school leavers’ transition from mainstream school to Youthreach. It is an extension of a previous study, which examined the personal experiences of early school leavers returning to education in the Youthreach programme.

The research methodology study employed a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six staff members employed in a Youthreach Education Centre in the Mid-West of Ireland were recruited and interviewed using a semi-structured interview format.

The findings highlight a particular culture employed in the centre which is based on the needs of the individual learner. The research findings show how a positive learner-centred environment and curriculum based on humanistic principles of empathy, congruence and positive regard can bring about positive effects for learners in alternative education settings.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Overview

Research has shown that transitions in education can cause difficulties for a sizeable minority of young people (Schiller 1999; Brown and Cowen 1988). In Ireland it is estimated that 1000 young people fail to successfully make the transition from primary to post-primary education (Murray 2013). While on average 9% of students drop out of university in the first year after they transfer from post-primary education (HEA 2013). At post-primary level, over 7,000 young people leave every year before taking the Leaving Certificate (Murray 2013). Many never return to formal education, however some early school leavers return to education within programmes such as Youthreach Education Centres, Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and Community Training Workshops (Youthreach 2004).

Research has shown that adolescents who leave school early at any stage of their education suffer from cumulative disadvantages in respect to their career, social, and learning needs, in addition to their own personal well-being (Stokes 2003). The current study represents an attempt to explore the experiences of Youthreach professional staff in supporting early school leavers’ transition from mainstream school to the Youthreach programme. This study is an expansion on a previous research study which explored the experiences of young people who have left school early, and have re-entered education within Youthreach. Findings from the previous study revealed how role modeling and a positive and supportive learner-centred approach can bring about positive effects for learners in alternative education settings such as Youthreach.

Youthreach is an education and training programme within the further education sector and is funded by the Department of Education and Skills, and managed by the national network of Education and Training Boards (ETB) (Youthreach 2004; DES 2010). The Youthreach programme is the Irish State’s main response to early school leaving; offering a second chance opportunity for young people to re-engage in education, enabling them to participate in vocational training and acquire key life skills (Gordon...
Youthreach provides a range of educational programmes up to, and including Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 (Gordon 2009; DES 2008; DES 2010).

In this study the researcher was employed as a teacher in the Youthreach Education Centre where the research project was based. The participants in the study comprised of Youthreach professional staff employed in the Youthreach Education Centre. The participant group consisted of six participants; three male and three female. The participants’ individual responsibilities and roles in the centre ranged from subject teachers, management (centre coordinator) and counsellor.

A review of the literature highlighted the dearth of research investigating the personal experiences of both the professionals and learners within Youthreach. It is proposed that the current research project may give a voice to the professional staff in Youthreach and shine greater light upon the practices of this sector. Ultimately the research may contribute to educational policy and professional practice.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Present Study

The present research aims to use a qualitative approach to explore the practices of Youthreach professional staff in supporting the transition of early school leavers into a Youthreach Education Centre.

The research objectives include the following:
- To explore the experiences of Youthreach professional staff in supporting early school leavers transferring from mainstream school to the Youthreach programme.
- To explore the processes and supports Youthreach professional staff employ in engaging with early school leavers.
- To determine the implications of the learners’ transition into the centre for the Guidance Service within the Youthreach Education Centre.

1.3 Structure of the Present Study

A brief overview of the structure of the thesis and the chapters to follow is outlined below:

*Chapter 2 – Literature Review*
The literature review outlines the context for the research project. It highlights the dearth of research – both regarding early school-leavers returning to education and in respect to the experiences of educators in supporting this group in returning to education. Chapter 2 also runs through the current literature on early school-leaving and the various policy initiatives concerning the matter. The development and methodological approach of Youthreach is addressed in this section.

This chapter also discusses the role of the Guidance Counsellor within post-primary education. The Literature Review concludes by outlining the effects transitions in education have on young people and the range of supports provided to these individuals. Chapter 2 leads to the research rationale and the research questions for this current study.

**Chapter 3 – Research Methodology**

This chapter provides an outline of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the methodological approach used in the project. IPA is a specifically developed qualitative inquiry approach which enables the exploration of participants’ subjective experiences and social perceptions. Chapter 3 also outlines the processes and procedures involved in establishing the investigation, including data collection and analysis; and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical issues raised and addressed during the research process. The strengths and limitations of the research methodology are also laid out in this chapter.

**Chapter 4 – Results**

This chapter outlines the results of the qualitative research analysis. The findings are classified into the themes that have emerged from the transcripts of the Youthreach professionals.

**Chapter 5 – Discussion**

Chapter 5 discusses the main findings of the study with regard to the experiences and opinions of the participating Youthreach professionals. Deductions are formed within the context of existing literature.

**Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Implications**

This closing chapter presents conclusions derived from the study. It outlines the study’s implications for educational and guidance practice within the Youthreach education
sector. Suggestions for educational policy and future research are also addressed, as are the strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter finishes with a personal reflection on what has been learnt over the duration of the project.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction – What is Early School Leaving?

Although the issue of early school leaving is not new, attempting to define it proves challenging since early school leaving occurs throughout post-primary education; some students leave early with qualifications, while others leave without any formal qualifications (Byrne and Smyth 2010). The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) define early school leaving as non-participation in school before a young person reaches the age of 16 or before completing three years post-primary education, or whichever is later (NEWB 2004). Byrne et al (2009) describe it as when one leaves school without a recognised qualification. In this study, early school leaving is defined as leaving education prior to completing the Leaving Certificate.

In Ireland in 2012, the rate of early leavers from education stood at 9.7% (CSO 2013). The EU average rate in 2012 was 12.8% and varied from 4.4% in Slovenia to 24.9% in Spain (CSO 2013). Measures tackling early school leaving have helped the rate in Ireland to decrease steadily over the past decade, as Figure 1 below illustrates.

![Figure 1 - Qualifications of Early School Leavers](chart)

*Figure 1 - Qualifications of Early School Leavers
Sources: CSO (2011); CSO (2012)*
While this is a very positive trend, early school leaving remains a serious issue. At a policy level the Irish Government National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy has committed to reducing this further to 8% (Government of Ireland 2012).

2.2 Why is Early School Leaving an Issue?

Now more than ever, underachievement at school tends to result in social difficulties that can lead to a life of uncertainty, marginalisation and dependence on the structure of social assistance. Equally, a lack of formal qualifications can prevent an individual progressing into further education, training or stable employment (DES 2004, p.10)

Much research exists on the negative impacts which leaving school early has on the personal, emotional and academic lives of young people (Byrne and Smyth 2010; Prause and Dooley 1997; Smyth et al 2004; Eivers et al 2000; Mc Ardle 2006; Gordon 2009; Stokes 2003). Though it must be observed that early school leaving is not always a negative outcome. Some students who leave school prior to completing the Leaving Certificate continue in some form of further education, apprenticeships, and training in programmes such as Youthreach and CTC programmes (Byrne and Smyth 2010). However, Forkan et al (2009) note that overall, early school leavers possess relatively poor literacy and numeracy skills, have lower self esteem and are at a greater risk of a life of poverty and social exclusion.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) state that “early school leaving is among the most serious economic and social problems which this state must address” (NESF 1997, p.3). Stokes (2003) posits that young people who leave school early are among the most vulnerable in society suffering multiple and cumulative disadvantages in respect of their life chances, educational circumstance and personal welfare. The resulting consequences have impacts on the individual’s mental health, physical health, personal development, and in their social and cultural life (Stokes 2003; Forkan et al 2009). Education is a “powerful predictor of adult life chances” and is the most efficient means by which to safeguard against unemployment (Barnardos 2009, p.5). Research
has highlighted that early school leavers are four times more likely to be unemployed than those who have completed their post-primary education (Barnardos 2009). They have inferior employment prospects, and are more likely to live a life in poverty than those who complete school (Prause and Dooley 1997). Across the EU in 2010, the average rate of unemployment for those who achieved at most a lower secondary education was 14.2%, which is far greater than the unemployment rate of 4.9% who held a third-level qualification (Eurostat 2012). While youth unemployment among early school leavers in 2014 across the EU fluctuates at around 20% (Tovey 2014).

There are damaging emotional and psychological consequences to leaving school early. Eivers et al (2000) note that early school leavers often suffer with lower self-esteem and poor mental health. While Mayock (2000) states that many early school leavers develop alcohol and drug dependencies. And early school leaving is also a significant factor in offending behaviour by young people (O’Mahony 1997; Eivers et al 2000).

Early school leavers are more likely to engage in criminal activities and to be imprisoned than are school leavers with qualifications

(Eivers et al 2000, p.6)

There are, in addition to the social implications, economic costs of early school leaving to Ireland. Research has shown that 40% of prison inmates have left school before the age of 14 (NEWB 2004). The National Education Welfare Board posit that savings of €14 million each year could be saved on services like social welfare and probation supports if young people were prevented from leaving school prior to the Junior Certificate (NEWB 2004). Furthermore, reducing the number of early school leavers would reduce unemployment rate, help lower marginal tax rates, decrease crime, and improve overall citizenship (Jerald 2007). However, Lally (2012) states that programmes such as Youthreach, have been proven to be effective in reducing the numbers entering the youth justice system.

2.3 What Contributes to Early School leaving

When addressing the primary origins of school disaffection and early school leaving there are various theoretical perspectives. According to Cultural Transmission Theory,
disaffection from school results from faulty socialisation into local (subcultures) and family cultures. Shepard (2010) states that this view places the causes of school disaffection in the young person on parental supervision and local culture/peers. While from the Process Theory perspective, disaffection is viewed as a consequence of the young person’s school experience (Cooper 1993). However, other research has revealed that appropriate schooling incorporating appropriate role modelling and a tailored curriculum, such as in Youthreach for example, can offset negative peer and family socialisation and in turn can reinforce or improve culturally transmitted student attitudes (Bandura 1977; Bates et al 2009; Gordon 2009; Klein 2000).

2.4 Early school Leaving – Cause and Consequence

Whether one examines poverty or social exclusion, early school leaving is seen as both a cause and a consequence

(Stokes 2003, p.7)

The causes of early school leaving are multifaceted and not attributed to one particular reason, and can be viewed as a “process rather than a one off event” (European Commission 2011, p.5). Research studies highlight the reciprocal ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors which cause a young person to leave school. These factors include the school culture and organisation, relationships, academic underachievement and family circumstances, which encompass disaffection from the school and education (Byrne and Smyth 2010). In examining learners who transferred to Youthreach, Stokes (2003) found that learner disaffection from school wrought from boredom, teacher/learner relationships, a perceived lack of curricular relevance, and a lack of practical subjects encouraged students to leave school early.

Disaffection while complex is identifiable through aggressive behaviour, disrupted attendance, poor relationships with teachers, lack of interest in and non-engagement in academic progress

(Morrissey 2012, p.576)
2.41 School Culture and Relationships
Research has shown that young people who have left school early identified that their relationships with teachers as one of the principal factors which influenced their disaffection and decision to leave school early (McCoy et al. 2006; Fingleton 2004; Cooper, 1993).

All learning takes place within the context of an interpersonal relationship with teachers. Behaviour is the verbal and nonverbal expression of the total person, and thus the person, not the expression, is the most important

(Brendtro and Ness 1983, p.18)

Smyth and Hattam (2002) state that it is the teacher/learner relationships and “cultural geography” within the school environment are key determinates as to whether some young people complete their post-primary education (Smyth and Hattam 2002, p.375). The classroom relationships and the attachments teachers have with young people, most particularly with young people at risk, are crucial in teaching because teaching as a process is humanistic (Brendtro and Ness 1983). The depth and significance of the relationships which young people have with their teachers can play a crucial role in the prevention of early school leaving and can often be more significant than the formal school structures such pastoral care teams and guidance in the school (McCoy et al 2006; Byrne and Smyth 2010).

Lee and Breen (2007) posit that a learner’s sense of belonging and attachment to their school is directly linked to positive academic and behavioural outcomes. Relational approaches such as a person-centred approach to education and a caring school community can create a sense of belonging and ultimately lead to less early school leaving (Lee and Breen 2007). Further to that, Malone (2006) found that students described a ‘good teacher’ as someone who talks to and listens to students. This underlines the importance of the student’s place upon the teacher/student relationship because research has shown that school dropout is “preceded by more negative relations with teachers” (Byrne and Smyth 2010, p.52). Furthermore, Klein (2000) outlines the importance teacher’s awareness of the particular lives in which young people come from since “their home environment, popular culture and their community have more
influence on their lives than schools could ever aspire to. They come to school with experiences that are diverse and often unfathomable” (p.87).

However in a study on early school leavers, Pomeroy (1999) highlighted the negative influence of the hierarchical teacher/learner relationship in mainstream post-primary schools. The significance of this is related to distinctions of power between teachers and learners. It is directly related to the school culture, on the school relationships, the polarised positions of the teacher and learner, and on how or what gets rewarded and punished (Smyth and Byrne 2010).

Research has shown that empathetic and democratic student/teacher relations, where the learners’ own personal experiences are understood is the preferred teaching approach by young people disaffected by mainstream education (DES 2010). Downes and Maunsell (2007) identified strict authoritarian disciplinary procedures, devoid of empathy and understanding of the learner’s background, as reasons for young people leaving school early. Brendtro and Ness (1983) suggest that a learner’s behaviour is best “understood as part of a child’s life-space, which includes the transaction between the child and adults, peers, task, and educational system” (p.18). While regular suspensions from school created negative attitudes amongst students and can lead to disaffection and accelerate the process of early school leaving (McCoy et al 2006).

Another culture or practice that influences early school leaving is streaming. The practice of student stratification by ability in schools causes and reinforces social class divisions (Smyth 1999). Research has shown that students in lower streams underperform and are more likely to leave school early than learners in higher streams (Smyth 1999; OECD 2012). Streaming has a “negative impact on students assigned to lower tracks and exacerbates inequities, without raising average performance” (OECD 2012, p.3).

### 2.42 Social Class and Early School Leaving

Family background, personal characteristics of the child, the school context and the social behaviour of children interact to create conditions that place children at risk of failing to achieve their academic potential, dropping out of school, and/or having limits placed on their ability to function as productive adults in society.
The social class of a learner’s family of origin is a significant predictor of educational
disadvantage with most early school leavers being from a lower socioeconomic
background (Boyd 1992; Stokes 2003; Byrne and Smyth 2010). Early school leaving is
tied to the family circumstances and is often intergenerational, resulting in the children
of early school leavers also experiencing underperformance in education (Barnardos
2009; Byrne and Smyth 2010; OECD 2012).

Early school leaving encompasses a matrix of complex problems rooted in parents’
attitudes to education, experiences of the education system, family role models, and the
financial resources available in the home (Stokes 2003). Byrne and Smyth (2010) state
that students of parents from working class/manual occupations are more likely to leave
school early than students of middle class/professional parents. In addition, children of
parents with low levels of education from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more
likely to leave education and training before completing upper secondary education
levels than other young people (Smyth 1999; OECD 2012). Furthermore, middle class
parents are more likely to hold a more positive view on education and thus place a
greater value on education, and in turn play a greater role in their children’s education
(Hango 2007). This is significant because it accelerates the process of social
reproduction where poor educational outcomes in parents are transmitted to their next
generation, which further reinforces class divisions (Smyth 1999). Likewise, Stokes
(2003) identifies a strong correlation between the level of parental education and early
school leaving. Hango (2007) states that parental involvement is a positive influence on
a child’s education.

While parents can play a vital role in their children’s learning and development,
disadvantaged parents are less likely to be actively engaged in their child’s
schooling. Improving and diversifying communication strategies is key to align
school and parental efforts and reach out the most disadvantaged parents.

(OECD 2012, p.9)
Unfortunately, working class parents with limited formal education are less likely to engage with their children on their education (Barnardos 2009). Byrne and Smyth (2011) highlight the “mismatch between the cultures of home and school” where the (working class) values of the home meet the (middle class) values and traditions of the school (p.27). This further exasperates the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exclusion where parents and their children remain outside of the school environment and culture (Barnardos 2009).

2.43 Academic Underachievement

Learners attending Youthreach have been found to have significantly lower levels on literacy and numeracy than the national average (Stokes 2003). Research has shown there is a strong association between early school leaving and poor levels of literacy, numeracy and self-efficacy (Morgan et al 1997; Byrne and Smyth 2010). Early school leaving has its origins in literacy and numeracy difficulties, and the resulting experiences of educational failure, academic struggle, and low self-esteem (Byrne and Smyth 2010)

Even in first year onwards, early school leavers have a more negative academic self-image, that is, they are more inclined to feel unable to cope with their school work

(Byrne and Smyth 2010, p.57)

2.5 Policy Response to Early School Leaving

Considering the social and fiscal implications, educational disadvantage has undertaken a central place in policy discourse in Ireland and throughout the EU, with the prevention of early school leaving forming a central goal of many policy initiatives and interventions (Byrne and Smyth 2010). In 2010, the Europe 2020 Strategy Reform Agenda was adopted by the EU (European Commission 2011). The Irish National Reform Programme set out the following targets:

To reduce the percentage of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training to 8%; to increase the share
of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 60%.

(Mallon and Healy 2012, p.9)

At both primary and post-primary levels, the Irish state has employed numerous programmes and measures to address educational disadvantage and early school leaving. The two broad approaches in reducing the incidences of early school leaving include prevention measures and reintegration measures (European Commission 2011). Figure 2 below displays some of the national programmes in Ireland. OECD (2012) highlight the significant role which guidance serves in early school programmes since “guidance is a major element of both types of programme” (p.49).

In the 1990’s the Department of Education established programmes specifically tailored for young people at risk of dropping out of education. The Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) is a vocational programme run over two years and its aim to equip learners with life skills and prepare them for adult and working life (DES 2004). The Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) is a Junior Cycle course targeted at young people who are identified as being at risk of leaving school early (JCSP 2007). Like the LCA, the JSCP curriculum includes life skills, including literacy, numeracy and academic skills, in addition to personal and social development (Byrne and Smyth 2010). The Vocational
Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is an educational scheme for individuals who are unemployed and is funded by the Department of Education and Skills with assistance from the European Social Fund (Kellaghan et al 1995). Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) is a programme for post primary schools and is designed to provide an integrated and strategic approach to tackling educational inequality through a new School Support Programme (SSP). Launched in May 2005, the aim of DEIS is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed (DES 2004). The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 and its legal remit is to ensure that every child either attends a school or receives an education elsewhere. The NEWB works closely with parents, schools and agencies to support school attendance (Stokes 2003). The NEWB has a particular role in following up on children with attendance issues, and where there is a concern about the child’s educational welfare (NEWB 2004). Other targeted programmes in operation to address early school leaving include School Completion Programme, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), and Youthreach.

2.6 Youthreach

Youthreach is a second-chance alternative educational and training programme designed for young people who are considered to be at a particular disadvantage by being unemployed, aged between 15 and 20 years of age and have no or incomplete qualifications from Junior Cycle (Youthreach 2004; DES 2010; Gordon 2009). The second-chance school movement began in the USA in response to the failure of traditional schools to address the needs of groups of students who were disaffected by the traditional school system (Dupper 2008). Such schools provide young people who are “unsuccessful or disaffected with schooling and provide them with an opportunity to learn in a different academic setting” (Dupper 2008, p. 23). Since its inception in 1989, Youthreach caters for almost 3,000 learners annually in places funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES 2010). Youthreach is part of the educational system which supports school completion and aims to eliminate early school leaving (DES 2006). The hierarchy of educational provision and is part of the official provision offered by the DES to meet the needs of children in education who are unsuited or having difficulty in the mainstream setting. This hierarchy is displayed.
on page 15 as Figure 3. Youthreach is set at Level 7 in the support hierarchy, which is proceeded by six level of support at post-primary level.

![Educational Provision Hierarchy Diagram]

**Figure 3 - Educational Provision Hierarchy**

On level 7 of the educational provision, the Youthreach objectives for its participants (learners) are as follows:

- Personal and social development and increased self-esteem.
- Second-chance education and introductory-level training.
- The promotion of independence, personal autonomy, active citizenship, and lifelong learning.
- Integration in further education, training opportunities or the labour market.
- The promotion of social inclusion.

(Byrne 2007)
Research has shown a preference exists among early school leavers for teaching styles and the culture associated with non-mainstream settings such as Youthreach (Smyth and Byrne 2006; DES 2010). Such approaches are characterised by democratic relationships with staff, active learning, and a learner-centred curriculum (Smyth and Byrne 2006; Gordon 2009; DES 2007). Research into Youthreach by McGrath (2006) identified that young people experience a sense of trust, personal responsibility, and independence in the cultural context of Youthreach environment. Such findings by McGrath (2006) are reflected in a previous study by this researcher on the transition process of early school leavers from mainstream school to Youthreach. The design and practices of Youthreach as a model of education has been influenced by three methodical approaches: Education and Training, Guidance & Mentoring, and Youth Work (DES 2008; Gordon 2009). In addition, Gordon (2009) suggests that intertwined into Youthreach practices is Attachment Theory of Bowlby (1982).

2.6.1 Education and Training

Since Youthreach is the state’s primary response to early school leaving, offering a second chance for young people to re-engage in education, the central part of the Youthreach programme is the delivery of education programmes (Gordon 2007). In 2004, Youthreach centres were placed under the remit of Education Act (1998), which designates them as centres of education and places them subject to inspection by the DES Inspectorate (DES 2010).

The major curricular focus is on literacy and numeracy, in addition to ICT, personal development and vocational subjects (DES 2007). Many centres run programmes up to QQI Level 4, in addition to the Leaving Cert or Leaving Cert Applied programme (Youthreach 2004). The curriculum delivered throughout the network of Youthreach Education Centres is tailored to individual and local needs of the learners. This may involve the inclusion of local cultural amenities into the curriculum and material of interest to the particular learner cohort (Gordon 2009). Therefore programmes are person-centred and based on a needs basis rather than on a traditional age basis most common in mainstream post primary schools (Gordon 2009).
2.62 ‘Youth work’ in Youthreach

A Characteristic of youth work interventions is their flexibility and informality (Spain 2009). Unlike formal education, youth work relies on the voluntary engagement of young people and takes into account their social context and the difficulties that result from disadvantage and marginalisation (Harland et al 2008). Youth workers engage with young people in their own environment and community settings, which make those professionals more aware of the challenges the young people face in their daily lives (Gordon 2009).

The key dimensions of Youthwork practice in education include the emphasis on positive relationships, voluntary participation, and an emphatic focus on the welfare of the young person (Harland et al 2005). Brendtro et al 1983 state that “The quality of human relationships is the most powerful determination of successful programmes for the education and treatment of troubled children” (p.17). Morgan et al (2007) argue that youthwork as a process has something to offer the education system. In this regard the beneficial characteristics of youthwork have been recognised by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate as a significant element in Youthreach practice such as the particular curriculum, culture and relationships employed in Youthreach (DES 2010; DES 2008).

2.63 Application of Attachment Theory in Youthreach

The development of social and emotional competence for children and adolescents occurs in the context of relationships that have with adults and peeress. For students with disabilities and those who experience behavioural risk, building and sustaining positive relationships with teachers is vital to the development of social competence

(Talbott and Cushing 2011, p.321)

The development of interpersonal and intrapersonal capability is derived from, and embedded in the relationships in which young people have with significant adults in their lives and the study of these relationships is grounded in Attachment Theory (Bowlby 1982; Talbott and Cushing 2011). The use of Attachment Theory in education
has been investigated at both primary level (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000; Geddes 2005) and at post-primary level (Gordon 2009; Murray and Pianta 2007).

Gordon (2009) states that programmes like Youthreach, which are influenced by Attachment Theory, use the concept of “secondary attachment figures” as a means of changing young people’s negative perceptions, and help improve self-esteem and self-efficacy (p.8). Through the use of the empathy and role modelling, and within an environment of support and low anxiety, self-efficacy is fostered among the participants (Kidd 2006; Bandura 1977; Gordon 2009; Bowlby 1982). Gordon (2009) states that this creates “an environment where the young people can feel secure and where they experience sensitively responsive interactions to them” (Gordon 2009, p.9). The learners begin to trust in the availability and predictability of the support, which helps to develop their self-efficacy (Bandura 1977; Gordon 2009). It is this experience of self-efficacy which allows young people to develop greater personal awareness for the needs and feelings of others, leading to a greater capacity for self-regulation, and for learning and for cooperation with others (Gordon 2006; Bandura 1977; Bowlby 1982; Talbott and Cushing 2011). This approach creates the appropriate foundation for learning and the development of the young person (Gordon 2009).

\subsection*{2.64 Guidance & Mentoring in Youthreach}

It is recognised under national and EU policy that guidance is associated with tackling educational disadvantage; including early school leaving, social exclusion, as well the promotion of lifelong learning (OECD 2004). The Institute of Guidance Counsellors state that guidance counselling in post-primary education “provides for the personal and social, educational and vocational development needs” of learners (1984, p.7). The role of Guidance in second-chance education is promoted in discourse at European level. The OECD and European Commission (2004) recommended policy makers to:

\begin{quote}
make sure that career guidance is part of community-based services that are targeted at early school leavers. These services need to be designed so that users can identify with the staff that work in them and feel at home in them
\end{quote}

(OECD 2004, pp.17-18)
Gordon (2013) states that as part of their general programme, many Youthreach centres provide a broad spectrum of supports within their Guidance Programme. Some of these services are provided by the teaching staff as part of the normal culture of support in a centre and others are delivered by a guidance counsellor. In addition, many centres employ a counsellor, psychotherapist or counselling psychologist for a number of hours each week to provide one-to-one services to the learners (Gordon 2013).

The incidence of disability in Youthreach is estimated to be significantly higher than in mainstream schools, particularly in the areas learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) (Gordon 2009; Smith 2002). As a reaction to such learner needs, a mentoring programme was established in twenty Youthreach centres across Ireland. Learner mentoring is central to the Special Education Needs Initiative (SENI), and plays a central role in the Guidance Service of these Youthreach centres (Gordon 2013). The SENI programme involves staff adopting a role as key worker to individual learners in the centre. The role of keyworker involves a method of mentoring the learner in their academic, social and interpersonal needs (Gordon 2009). Clarke et al (2007) state that the informal process of mentoring is an effective tool in programmes with disaffected young people. Research has shown that positive relationships with significant adults at this age can serve as a protective function and support their development (Talbott and Cushing 2011). The range of Guidance supports and associated level of expertise across the guidance spectrum in Youthreach centres is displayed in Figure 4 below:
2.7 The Guidance Counsellor in Post-Primary Education

The work of a guidance counsellor is a complex task embracing a person’s emotional, social, learning, vocational and career needs (Hayes and Morgan 2011; NGF 2007). The National Guidance Forum (NGF) adopts the following definition of guidance:

Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they can reach their potential and contribute to the development of a better society

(NGF 2007, p.6)

The specific roles which a guidance counsellor undertakes are outlined by the National Professional Bodies for guidance counselling in Ireland, which include The Institute for Guidance Counsellors (IGC) and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) (Geary and Liston 2009a). The Department of Education and Science (DES) refers to guidance counselling in post-primary education as the “range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives” (2005, p.4). The DES (2009) also highlights the ‘central role’ on an individual capacity
which guidance counsellors play in the guidance service within post-primary schools. The role comprises of three integrated areas of activity which illustrated below in Figure 5.

![Figure 5 - Three Integrated Areas of Guidance Service](image)

The various responsibilities across the three areas of guidance include counselling, psychometric assessment, information service, classroom guidance activities, teaching and learning, referrals and professional development (NGF 2007). This holistic integrated approach enables the counsellor to “focus on the social and psychological needs and deal with them in the manner appropriate to the skills, experience and the needs and wishes of the individual” (GACIFE 2007, p.7).

### 2.71 Whole Guidance Service

Collaboration between the guidance counsellor and other members of the teaching staff and co-ordinators is an essential feature of a streamlined and efficient guidance programme.

(DES 2009, p.11)

In citing guidance counselling provision in the Education Act 1998, the DES (2005) state that guidance is “a whole school responsibility” (p.8). This places an emphasis on whole school guidance service rather a guidance service delivered by a single guidance counsellor (NCCA 2007). Furthermore, the Education Act 1998 also places a
requirement on the guidance counsellor, in collaboration with school management and staff, to prepare a Whole School Guidance Plan (DES 2009). As a consequence the DES (2009) advise that guidance programme planning process involves all stakeholders in the post-primary school or Youthreach Education Centre.

2.8 Educational Transitions

Transitions in education normally include the transition between primary and post-primary school, Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle, and the transition between post-primary school and third level education. Research by Brown and Cowen (1988) reported that the actual transition from one level of schooling to another has been shown to have an influence on how learners get on in their education later on. Schiller (1999) defines educational transition as:

- a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students’ educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations

(Schiller 1999, pp. 216-217)

O’Brien (2004) reports that transition difficulties are not prevalent, however when difficulties arise, there exists evidence to suggest that the consequences tend to be quite serious. For young people who struggle it has been shown that the experience of transferring to a new educational environment presents major educational, social and personal development challenges for the adolescent (Gordon 2009). Eccles (1993) states that school transitions threaten an adolescent’s independence and control over their environment and may result in school dropout. European Commission (2011) state that some “transitions between schools and between different educational levels are particularly difficult for pupils at risk of dropping out” (p.5). It also highlights, for many adolescents, concerns about their peer relationships and their own identity (Eccles 1993).

Smyth et al (2004) note that teachers estimated around 10% of students experience transition difficulties when transferring from primary school to post primary school. Transitions may lead to fall in academic performance, bullying, drop in school attendance, and low self-esteem (Eccles 1993; Alspaugh 1998a, 1998b; Isakson and Jarvis 1999; Smyth et al 2004). During this phase, struggling students often relied
particularly on key staff within the school during the settling-in phase, which underlines the significant role of relationships within the school environment (Smyth et al 2004).

2.81 Transitions for Early School Leavers

Little research exists which explores how the transition from post-primary to alternative education programmes, such as Youthreach, has on early school leavers. Research on educational transition for young people with special education needs highlighted the role of teacher relationships and parental support in enabling a smooth transition (Maras and Aveling 2006). It has been stated that early school leavers tend to be from lower socioeconomic groups (Hannan and O’Riain 1993). Significantly, research has shown that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are more reluctant about transitions and adjustments to their education than learners from middle-class backgrounds (Zeedyk et al 2003). Schilling et al (1988) defines transitions in education as the movement from “one state of certainty to another with a period of uncertainty in between” (p.24). When that “uncertainty in between”, which may last for many months, is due to school expulsion, it may be reasonable to suggest that transitions in education for the early school leaver provide great challenges for themselves. Research by Gorby et al (2006) shows that early school leavers find it difficult to re-enter the educational system at a later stage. However, programmes such as Youthreach are designed for early school leavers and it has been recognised that in Youthreach the “young people benefited considerably from smaller class sizes, one-to-one tuition, and intensive literacy and numeracy teaching” (McPhillips 2005, p.58).

2.82 Supporting the Transition

The significance of supporting young people in educational transitions is evident in the development of a number of school transition programmes in Ireland in recent years (Blackrock Education Centre 2007; City of Galway VEC 2000). Many programmes outline practices for parents and schools in supporting young people in the transition. Evaluating a transition support programme for young people in mainstream school, Mc Ardle (2006) found that students across socioeconomic backgrounds felt more confident and about beginning post-primary school after they had completed a transition support programme in primary school. Blackrock Education Centre (2007) reported that student shadowing and mentor programmes are particularly useful in facilitating a more
positive adjustment to post-primary school. Additionally, over one third of children who participated in a teacher mentor programme in their new school showed more positive adjustment to their new environment (Maras and Aveling 2006). Research by Rous et al (2007) identified that the sharing of relevant information with families, such as the timing of the process as beneficial. Maras and Aveling (2006) found that there are benefits for parents who received a parents’ information booklet on preparing their child for the new educational environment.

O’Connor (2006) identified the large number and intricacy of involvement of professionals such as teachers and social workers, psychologists along with parents/guardians in the provision of services for children with particular educational or socioeconomic needs. Rous et al (2007) emphasised the importance of interagency relationships in creating a seamless system of transition for the young person entering the new educational environment. Maras and Aveling (2006) highlight the importance of such consistent support and interpersonal relationships throughout the transition process. Therefore, transition supports which are timely, involve parents, the Guidance Service, teachers, and use of a collaborative approach between all partners have been shown to be more successful for children and young people in educational transitions.

2.9 Chapter Summary and rationale for the current study

The literature review confirmed that a learner’s individual characteristics and socioeconomic factors have the potential to engage or disengage some learners from their education. The nature of school relationships emerged as important contributory factor in early school leaving and the processes around teacher/learner relations are complex. The literature review also highlighted that there are few reintegration programmes for early school leavers in Ireland, and as a consequence there is a dearth of research on the second-chance education sector in Ireland. Although there exists much research into the reasons why young people leave school early, there has been little research carried out on the topic of transitions and reintegration into the second-chance education sector. Given the range of challenges faced by young people who face transitions in education and especially for those who leave school early, the importance of expanding our understanding of developmental processes for this group is paramount. A greater
understanding of challenges for this group, and for the professionals who work with this group, may serve to ensure better practices in supporting the Youthreach programme.

2.91 Research Questions

The study aims to explore the following questions:

- What are the experiences of Youthreach professional staff in supporting early school leavers transferring from mainstream school to the Youthreach programme?
- What are the processes and supports Youthreach professional staff employ in engaging with early school leavers?
- What are the implications of the learners’ transition into the centre for the Guidance Service within the Youthreach education Centre?
Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach to the study, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of that methodical approach. The particular design methodology used in the research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is also investigated and considered in light of the research topic. The chapter concludes by outlining the procedures in the data collection and analysis, and addressing the ethical issues encountered in this study.

3.2 What is Qualitative Research?

A review of the literature on early school leaving has highlighted a bias towards a quantitative approach. However this study employed a qualitative approach, and this was reflected by the research aim and objectives in the study. Hitchcock and Huggers (1995) describe qualitative research as:

Approaches that enable the researchers to learn at first hand, about the social world they are investigating by means of involvement and participation in that world through a focus on what individuals actors say and do

(Hitchcock and Huggers 1995, p.12)

The qualitative approach gives attention to interpretation, descriptions, characteristics and meaning (Kvale 1996). Smith (2003) adds that the qualitative approach seeks to understand a small number of participants’ frames of reference, instead of trying to test a preconceived hypothesis on a larger sample. While Bryman (2001) states that the “qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection of data and analysis of data” (p.266).

3.21 Strengths of Qualitative Approach

The general strengths of the qualitative approach are that it stresses the participants’ own interpretations and meanings. This allows for the researcher a deeper understanding of
the topic from the participants’ perspective which creates a “genuine space within which people are able to reveal what is real for them” (Smyth and Hattam 2001, p.407). The qualitative approach gives the participants a voice and allows them to be considered. This participant-focus approach is “inclusive of the lives, experiences, aspirations and complexities of what was occurring” for the participants (Byrne and Smyth 2010, p.37). Qualitative approaches are perceptive and sensitive to the real environment in which people live (Kvale 1996). They are usually more exploratory and descriptive in nature, and interpretation is based on the participants’ lived experiences, rather than measured facts or numerical data (Cresswell and Miller 2000). Willig (2001) adds that qualitative research is concerned with meaning and the core lived experience that is rooted in the individuals’ socio-cultural context. Qualitative research encompasses a natural, holistic and inductive process (Durrheim 2006). It is also generally engaged with exploring, describing and interpreting the personal and social experiences of participants (Smith 2003). Qualitative research has therefore the potential to provide access to a deep level of participants’ subjective meaning of their experiences. The qualitative research methodology was thus consistent with the objective of this research project, which aims to explore the experiences of Youthreach staff in supporting early school leavers transferring to a Youthreach centre.

For the purposes of this research project, data was collected in the form of one-to-one interviews. Analysis of the data entailed interpreting the narrative scripts in order to understand the phenomenon. Therefore in the context of this research project, the qualitative approach allows for deep insights into subjective experiences of Youthreach staff supporting early school leavers. However appropriate the qualitative approach may be for this study, it does present some limitations.

### 3.22 Limitations of the Qualitative Approach

Peck and Secklet (1999) note that the use of interviews in qualitative research places a significant demand on participants’ time, a factor that may make it difficult to recruit participants. It generally takes longer to collect the data when compared to quantitative research, and the process of data analysis is often time consuming. King (2004) comments that the results from qualitative research can be influenced by the researcher’s
personal prejudices. The researcher in a study using qualitative research is heavily involved in the process; this can lead to the researcher having a subjective view of the study and its participants. King (2004) states that the researcher interprets the research data according to his or her own biased view, which may skew the data output. While Kim (2007) remarks that since qualitative research samples are typically small, the results are likely to be only valid for a particular group. All in all, these relative shortcomings may moderate the usefulness of data results. However, IPA as an approach to research was found to be a particularly suitable method in this research project.

3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Willig (2001) explains that phenomenology “focuses on the content of consciousness and the individuals’ experience of the world” (p.52). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) state that phenomenological research aims to explore and describe situations as experienced by people in their daily lives. Karlsson (1995) adds that phenomenology provides a personal view of the individuals’ experiences and allows the individual the opportunity to talk about events in their lived-in world. Lindegger (2006) states that phenomenology is especially interested in the relationship of the individual to the world in which they inhabit.

IPA is a specifically developed qualitative inquiry approach which enables rigorous exploration of idiographic subjective experiences and social perceptions (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008). It is a user-led approach and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event and is a primarily an “approach to the study of experience” (Smith at al 2009, p.11). IPA has a number of important facets which are in keeping with the aims of the present study. The Phenomenological approach is based on the belief that knowledge and understanding are embedded in our everyday world and that the aim of the researcher is to outline social and psychological phenomena (Groenewald 2004).

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), IPA is specifically aimed at exploring how participants make sense of their personal and social world. IPA also adheres to phenomenological thought in that it explores in detail intimate experiences and takes into account the person’s personal perceptions of the situation, as opposed to attempting
an objective view of the situation (Smith and Osborn 2003). In summary, IPA pays attention to cognitions in an attempt to understand how the individual thinks about the event under discussion (Smith et al 1999). Smith et al (2009) state that IPA is a particularly pertinent approach when researching identity and individuals’ experiences of transitions, which makes it an appropriate method in the current research.

3.4 Participant Recruitment Procedure

At the preliminary of the study, the researcher contacted Youthreach management and the local Education and Training Board (ETB) management and introduced the research proposal to them. A meeting was held on the matter and management was satisfied with the nature of the research project. All participants in the study were recruited directly through the Youthreach Education Centre manager. This was due to ensure appropriate ethical practice since the researcher was employed as a teacher in that centre at the time of interviews. Every staff member in the centre was asked to participate in the study. The final participant group consisted of six participants; three male and three female. IPA studies generally involve small groups of participants (Smith and Osborn, 2003).

3.5 Interview Schedule

The researcher designed a research schedule interview based on the conventions of IPA. Semi-structured interviews are the most effective method of conducting IPA research (Reid et al 2005; Wimpenny and Gass 2000). Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible way of collecting data about how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them (Smith and Osborn 2003). Smith and Osborn (2008) state that the use of semi-structured interviews in a phenomenological approach enables:

> the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participant’s responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise

(Smith and Osborn 2008, p.57)

Individual interviews, ranging in duration from approximately forty minutes to one hour were conducted in a quiet and private room in the Youthreach centre. Times of the
interviews were negotiated with the participants to cause minimum disruption to their school timetable. All interviews were audio-taped with each participant’s permission, and then transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted with the six staff members in a relaxed purposeful manner. Burgess (1988) advises that such an approach enables participants to provide a detailed understanding of their experiences. Thompson (1988) posits that this approach allows the researcher to explore the motives behind the “decisions which individuals make” (p.298).

As the interviews were on a semi-structured basis, this allowed for certain topics to be discussed yet it was flexible enough to explore the individual circumstances of each participant and the issues of concern to them. The topics covered in the interviews included:

- Staff perspectives on the Youthreach centre.
- Staff approaches to their work.
- Staff role in the induction and transfer of learners into the centre.
- Staff perspectives on mainstream and second chance education.
- Staff perspectives on the transition process of learners into the centre.

The interviews were designed to capture the participants’ experiences in supporting early school leavers’ transition from mainstream school to the Youthreach centre. The research broadly addressed the following areas in the interview (See Appendix A for interview schedule):

- The staff perspectives and role in the transfer and induction of learner in to the centre.
- The particular approach employed by the staff in working with the young people.

### 3.6 Data Analysis and Validity

The analysis of the data followed a 5-step IPA analysis approach advocated by Smith et al (2009). The 5-step process is summarised in the Figure 6 below.

| i. Reading and Re-Reading Transcripts | Line by line investigation of transcripts to become familiar with interview content. |
| ii. Initial Noting | Noting of language and connections |
iii. Developing Emergent Themes
Transcripts and notes were re-examined to identify themes. Initial comments were rephrased into concise, interpretative phrases.

iv. Connections across emergent Themes
Emergent themes were mapped out to identify connections. Themes were arranged into clusters as subordinate themes.

v. Validity and Reliability
Participants were invited to comment on the interpretations.

Figure 6 - Five-Stage IPA Analysis Table

Stage 1 - Reading and Re-Reading Transcripts
Stage 1 of IPA analysis involves close reading and re-reading of the text (Smith et al 1999). The procedures in this stage of the analysis enabled the researcher to become much more familiar with the content and tone of the data.

Stage 2 – Initial Noting
Notes of any thoughts, observations and reflections that occurred while reading the transcript were made in this stage. Such notes included recurring phrases, language, particular emotions, and descriptions (Smith et al 2009).

Stage 3 – Developing Emergent Themes
The third stage involved developing an overall structure to the analysis by relating the identified themes into ‘clusters’ or concepts. The interviews were coded according to the main themes and patterns emerging from participants’ accounts. It involved highlighting the significant words, phrases or explanations which the participants used. The predominant “themes are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece” (Smith et al 2009, p.92). The aim, at this stage, is to arrive at a group of themes and to identify categories that suggest a hierarchical relationship between them.
**Stage 4 - Connections across Emergent Themes**

When each transcript was analysed individually, the process was repeated for the transcripts as a cluster. The resulting themes were compared across all transcripts and organised as Major Themes. This process of data analysis in Stage 4 enabled the development of two theoretical and metaphorical themes. These were:

- The Learner/Staff Relationship
- Person-Centred Education

**Stage 5 – Validity and Reliability**

To ensure validity and to further crosscheck the researcher’s understanding, the participants were shown a copy of their transcript and the resulting themes from the data. This was in line with ethical practice, but was also to ensure that the themes and recordings were accurate and represented the recorded interviews. In addition, the transcripts were provided uncoded to the research supervisor as a validity measure for further discussion and examination. The process supported the validation of emergent themes.

### 3.61 Reflexivity and Self-Awareness in Research

In IPA, qualitative research data gathering involves engaging with other people’s language and their particular stories and experiences (Smith et al 2009). Within this process “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith and Osborn 2008, p.53). Such a scenario places a demand upon the researcher for self-awareness and reflexivity. Reflexivity is an explicit evaluation of the self throughout the research and is an important validity measure in the research (Shaw 2010).

It is argued that taking a reflexive attitude enables a holistic approach to psychological research which is imperative for it to address the implications of the researcher and researched being of the same order. Thus, reflexivity must be embedded within experiential qualitative psychology.

(Shaw 2010, p.4)
Reflexivity acknowledges that meanings acquired from the analysis of transcripts are influenced by interpretation. Although IPA strives to gain a better understanding of the participants’ world, this can only be done through the researcher’s intimate engagement with the participants’ transcripts (Smith et al 2009). In this sense IPA is both “phenomenological (that is, it aims to represent the participants’ view of the world) and interpretative (that is, it is dependent upon the researcher’s own conception and standpoint)” (Willig 2001, p.67). In addition, the process of reflexivity in this research project was facilitated through the use of regular supervision with the research supervisor, and personal counselling with a registered psychotherapist, which was a requirement on the course of study undertaken by the researcher.

3.7 Ethical Issues

The project required a number of ethical considerations which are outlined below.

- According to Wassenaar (2006), research ethics should serve to protect the rights and welfare of the participants at all times. Specific principals must be adhered to in order to ensure that the research is carried out according to ethical guidelines.
  The research data obtained for this research project is deemed private; consequently consent was obtained from the participants as well as from the ETB. The researcher undertook to ensure confidentiality at all times.

- The researcher followed the guidelines of the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) Code of Ethics when conducting the research.

- All participants were made aware of the purpose of the research project. Participants received a letter outlining the type of research being undertaken, an information sheet (see Appendix B)

- The use of pseudonyms was incorporated to ensure confidentiality. In addition, some data like third party names were omitted or changed in the work to ensure confidentiality.
• The researcher held a pre-interview meeting with the participants outlining the risks and benefits of the study. Their right to withdraw at any stage of the process was also outlined at this stage.

• The research project did not begin until ethical approval was granted from the University of Limerick Faculty of Education & Health Sciences Ethical Approval Committee.

• As the researcher I ensured that the participants did not experience any emotional harm during the interview process. Interviews were conducted in a safe space where participants could feel secure and comfortable.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the study’s research methodology. The qualitative and quantitative approaches to research provided a context for the discussion of IPA as a research methodology. The motivation for using IPA was provided with reference to its emphasis on its suitability with the research topic. This chapter outlined the processes and procedures followed in the research study from the initial stages through to the presentation of results. It set out the research design, data collection methods, ethical considerations and data analytical methods. The next chapter will outline the results which emerged from the analysis of the data.
Chapter 4 – Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the IPA analysis of the staff perspectives in working with early school leavers transferring from mainstream school to a Youthreach Education Centre. The analysis of the six interviews led to the emergence of a number of themes. This study will outline two theme categories: Major Themes and Subordinate Themes. These are described in Table 7 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Theme</td>
<td>This is a principal theme which is representative of significant thematic matters in the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate Theme</td>
<td>This is a subordinate theme to the Major Theme, by virtue of being influenced or by influencing it and is directly related to the Major Theme. This theme has significant narrative data to support it being a theme independently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 - Summary of Theme Hierarchy
4.2 Overview of Major Themes

It was found that the interpersonal relationship between the professional staff and the Youthreach learners pervades the narrative of every participant and is a dominant influence in the themes. From the analysis two major themes emerged from the transcripts, which included Person-Centred Education and The Learner/Staff Relationship. These major themes are represented graphically in Figure 8 below.

![Figure 8 - Major Themes](image)

An overview of the major themes and the associated subordinate themes is graphically outlined in Figure 9 below.

![Figure 9 - Major Themes and Subordinate Themes](image)
4.3 Major Theme – Introduction – The Learner/Staff Relationship

This Major Theme – that is, the relationship between the staff and learners – emerged as the most significant and dominant theme coming out of the narratives. The particular therapeutic relationship incorporating empathy and non-judgment was a dominant aspect of the style of interaction and teaching employed by the staff in the centre. The professional staff employ a humanistic approach as a means to develop an effective educational environment and to facilitate learning across the centre. This approach is reinforced by role modelling on the part of the staff and by the development of learner attachment to the centre/staff. It was acknowledged by the participants that this interpersonal process of attachment encouraged the development of the learners’ self-esteem and self-efficacy. It was also seen as a support for the staff in managing learners with behavioural issues.

4.3.1 Learner/Staff Relationship

The relationship between the staff and the learners is viewed from the outset as a central part of the work in the centre. It is this relationship that defines the whole approach of the centre, and it emerges as a significant platform for supporting the personal and academic development of all learners. This relationship is viewed by one participant as a process which is both necessary and valuable.

Ah ... I suppose maybe it’s our duty to build a relationship with them first of all. When we do take an effort to build a relationship with one of the kids, I think we have the opportunity to do the best for them. So we understand what works for them.

(Participant 2)

The relationship between the staff and learners is fostered in a deliberate fashion. The staff fully appreciate the worth of these interpersonal associations – supporting as they do the development of the learners on both academic and personal levels. The transcript below illustrates the manner in which the staff try to engage with young people.

I think a lot of the time it’s just about a little comment when you’re passing ... You know, your hair is nice today, those runners are lovely, or something like that.

(Participant 4)
This relationship-building approach enables the staff to form a greater understanding of the young people’s needs and interests. Such attitudes facilitate the development of a person-centred curricular approach. In turn, the teaching provided is more astute and relevant to the young people. This is articulated by one of the participants:

> Getting to know them, getting to know their needs, what makes them tick. Because you need to when you are working with such small groups.

(Participant 1)

This educational technique supports every learner in the centre. The participants recognise that making close personal contact with the learners allows them to identify the individual needs of each young person.

> You know what they need as regards their learning and personal needs.

(Participant 1)

The professional approach outlined by the participants is holistic, focusing on the emotional, social and learning needs of the young people. This involves using empathy and a person-centred style in order to meet the educational and behavioural requirements of each individual. The emphasis on the learner is always central to the process. The transcripts below reflect this.

> It’s less formal. There’s a closer relationship between the staff and the learners. They call us by our first name. It’s a smaller class setting. The learners get more support.

(Participant 1)

> It’s open and friendly, and it’s about putting the learners first.

(Participant 1)

> We approach the young person, from my perspective, in a holistic manner, and put a huge emphasis on relationship building, self-esteem building, as well as inculcating very important values about living ... and of course the 3 R’s as well. The curriculum is broad and is needs specific.

(Participant 3)

> The ethos is warm, home-like and focused on the person. We cater for the individual needs of each learner here.

(Participant 6)
It was significant that every participant interviewed dwelt upon the person-centred atmosphere in the Youthreach centre. This atmosphere reinforces the learner-focused nature of the place, helping to make the ‘mood’ warm and welcoming. The participants cite ‘home’, ‘kitchen’ and ‘family’ in their descriptions of the centre.

*They are in a kind of a kitchen situation, where, if they are having a rough day, they can come out and sit and have a time-out, a cup of tea and cool down ... Maybe talk to one of the passing teachers.*  

(Participant 4)

*It’s a very domestic-centred, homely atmosphere. Empathy is the big thing, making sure that the children feel comfortable, that they feel safe, emotionally, physically, in the environment.*  

(Participant 4)

One participant reflects on the contrasts between the learner’s experiences in the Youthreach environment and the learner’s experiences in the mainstream school environment. The transcript below shows the essential role that personal relationships play in supporting learners in Youthreach.

*They go into mainstream, and it is large and impersonal. And they like our setting because it is small and more family-orientated. They know everyone, and I think they like that kind of coziness in a sense.*  

(Participant 5)

It is also recognised by the participants that a smaller, interpersonal environment is the more appropriate educational setting for the young people who have left school early.

*So I think the close contact with staff here is beneficial to them.*  

(Participant 6)

### 4.3.2 Empathy

The Subordinate Theme of empathy features across the transcripts of all participants. The staff empathise with the young people on a daily basis, and they view the nurturing of these bonds as a very necessary part of their work.

*I think we need to show empathy ... lots of it. Understanding where the kids are at.*  

(Participant 6)
You have a closer working relationship with the learners than you would have in a mainstream school. And you would have a more empathic approach to your teaching.

(Participant 1)

Empathy is the big thing ... I am empathetic. I use empathy. I am maternal. I think it works to my benefit.

(Participant 4)

The participants highlight the use of the empathic approach of ‘understanding’. This approach involves the creation of a ‘holding environment’ for the young people in the centre. The holding environment is a space provided for a learner who may be experiencing emotional difficulty. This specially assigned area gives learners more freedom to work through their feelings.

Some mornings you look at a kid and say leave this child alone. The weekend has been too bad. Back off. Give that child an activity and leave them alone. And I think it is important to remember that, without being too easy on them, it is really important to notice that this child might have had a horrific Sunday. We don't know.

(Participant 4)

Like if I see a kid coming late on a Monday morning, I will approach him with a soft, empathetic approach and not demand straight away from him why he was late. I guess I try to understand, rather than react with the kids.

(Participant 6)

I think you have to judge the response to a particular child quickly, and I think that every one of them needs to be given enormous amounts of empathy, kindness, support — physically, mentally, emotionally — because they are fragile.

(Participant 4)

However necessary and beneficial the role of empathy is, it can take its toll emotionally on the staff. The personal demands and pressures associated with the daily conveyance of empathy are touched upon by this participant:

I think that it is very hard to keep coming every morning with the same level of empathy, no matter how necessary that it is ... Well, I reinvent myself every morning ... Build up my empathy.

(Participant 4)

4.3.3 Environmental & Social Cognisance
Related to the empathic approach is the participants’ awareness of the learners’ individual perspectives. The value of having an appreciation of the social and emotional challenges faced by the learners was mentioned throughout the narratives.

*The core for me, a good teacher, co-conscious, is somebody who sees the whole person, who also understands the environment where they come from. So they have an interest and sensitivity around the particular context for that young person.*

(Participant 3)

*Every morning I come in here and make a distinct effort to be kind to the young people, to try and relate to them academically and socially. I try to understand where they are at.*

(Participant 6)

Having knowledge of the learners’ lives further strengthens the learner/staff relationship. As a consequence, better teaching strategies and behavioural management initiatives have been developed within the Youthreach centre.

*There is a huge effort put on the best way of communicating with the student that will meet them in their world and where they are at. And that is done in a spirit and process of building a relationship.*

(Participant 3)

Furthermore, recognition by the participants that many young people entering the Youthreach centre may have had negative experiences in mainstream education emerged from the transcripts. This is reflected in the descriptions of the conflicts many learners have had with staff when they begin their Youthreach programme. Still, the narratives illustrate staff awareness of the difficulties that learners face when starting their new educational programme. This cognisance arms the staff with a means to appropriately manage the learners’ transition into the centre.

*A big challenge ... They are probably wary from their past experiences.*

(Participant 1)

*They come in with certain expectations to an educational environment ... One could assume quite confidently that their experience up to that has not been good.*

(Participant 3)

*It’s kind of them and us at the beginning. Because they are so used to the mainstream kind of thing. You have to get over the them and us ... and build a relationship with them as well.*
I think that when they start here the young person is probably expecting the same old thing from mainstream school and can often take a while to get used to the person-centred nature of this place. They can start off being defensive with the teacher.

(Participant 6)

The advantages in recognising the learner’s position is stressed by all participants. With such awareness, coupled with a learner-centred approach, a relationship is established that is seen as a “win-win” for both teacher and learner. This reciprocal association assists the staff in managing the learners.

Can take some time to understand that this is how I am meant to behave. It’s striving for a win-win situation, likes of Youthreach. It gives it a great strength, the strive for a win-win. That there is something to be gained if you play ball here.

(Participant 3)

4.3.4 Non-judgmental

The use of a non-judgmental approach to the work in the Youthreach centre, and most especially in managing the learners’ transition into the centre, is evident across the narratives. The absence of judgment further supports the person-centred approach to the learner/staff relationship, as well as promoting the development of a safe, non-threatening environment.

While knowing about their past experiences ... to be aware of it ... but at the same time start from a clean slate.

(Participant 2)

If there are any difficulties between staff and learners, normally it can be sorted relatively easy by having a chat with the learners. The following day they can come back in normally. It is not held against them. Staff do not hold grudges. It is forgotten about, and they have the opportunity to build a new relationship.

(Participant 2)

This non-judgmental approach is considered by the participants to be central in forming positive relationships, in helping learners to overcome behavioural issues, and in supporting learners in their wider learning.
It breaks down barriers after a while. And they do become a lot more co-operative once they get an idea of what we are about.

(Participant 2)

I think it is so important not to judge them. If you judge them, you get the posh or snob reaction, which is often said when the young people are talking about people they dislike. I think if you look at them, say or approach it like this, I accept you as you are, that often can result in an immediate softening.

(Participant 6)

I feel that we cannot judge here, otherwise conflict will occur. We come from different value systems, and classes, so we should not judge ... Rather understand.

(Participant 6)

One participant identified the non-judgmental/accepting approach as a feature of the vicarious learning in the classroom. This participant viewed the staff philosophy of learner acceptance as a model of behaviour that can be passed on to the learners in the centre.

I think I try not to be judgmental. I think it is modelling the whole time.

(Participant 6)

4.3.5 Role Modelling

The narratives suggest that the staff view their relationships with the learners as a means to effect behavioral change in the learners – that is, through the role modelling of appropriate behaviour. The staff recognise that their own behaviour is a source of vicarious learning, and that their actions and attitudes can support the personal development of the learners.

So we are constantly having to model appropriate behaviour the whole time to show them how to behave, rather than give them the same behavior back. So there is a lot of modelling on our part. This is how you behave, and they are watching us.

(Participant 5)

I think that we can offer them confidence, hope and an idea of what could happen in their lives. We are like role models for the young people.

(Participant 6)
The participants stated that the personal demands of continuously role modelling is emotionally draining. For instance, one participant found that the constant modelling of appropriate behaviour in the face of inappropriate behaviour from learners was particularly challenging.

*Like if you are met with constant aggression, it is very difficult sometimes not to give the same back in a sense. But I try to behave appropriately the whole time and try to be calm, sympathetic and empathetic. All those kind of things. It can be very hard.*

(Participant 5)

Nevertheless, the importance of role modelling is highlighted by one participant in the context of the struggles and problems many learners are forced to face on a daily basis.

*I also have come to understand the impact of role modelling for people who very often have few role models in their life.*

(Participant 6)

### 4.3.6 Attachment

Related to role modelling and the maintaining of a positive atmosphere in the centre is the promotion of learner attachment. The healthy relationships between the learners and staff can facilitate the creation of a strong connection between the learners and the Youthreach setting.

*We are like role models for the young people. Like, I think, I think some of them look up to us. We may have battles with them, but they are looking at us.*

(Participant 6)

*A lot of them would not have a father figure when you think of it. A lot of fathers might be in prison and things like that, or they may not have access. There’d be a lot of single mothers.*

(Participant 5)

The participants spoke about the role learner attachment plays in supporting the development of learners’ self-esteem and self-efficacy.

*A lot of them have low self-esteem and attachment issues. Issues like that need to be worked upon.*

(Participant 1)
Valued. Because I don't think that they get that at home. I don't think that you know you're important, and your opinion is important.  

(Participant 4)

The narratives underline the importance the participants’ place upon the relationships in the centre.

4.4 Major Theme – Introduction – Person-Centred Education

The theme of Person-centred Education has an overarching presence within these narratives. The theme depicts the individual processes that are in operation in respect to the management of the learners’ education. It encompasses the person-focused approach that is employed in the centre. This approach incorporates one-to-one learning and the fostering of behavioural objectives for each young person.

4.4.1 Individual Educational Approach

This person-centred means of operating, through which the professional staff support and engage the learners in their education, is a dominant theme in the narratives. To a degree it determines the plans for all pedagogical practices. The fact that the Youthreach centre is committed to addressing the individual needs of each learner is prevalent throughout the transcripts.

I think in Youthreach the curriculum is taught to the individual needs of each person, rather than to a class as a whole.  

(Participant 6)

We also have ILPs and set them targets, individualistic targets. It helps us monitor how each learner is doing.  

(Participant 1)

Every learner needs to be approached in a different way that suits them in the way they work.  

(Participant 3)

This individual approach is complemented by the humanistic practices of empathy and acceptance promoted within the centre. Central to this methodology is personalisation.
It is more personal here. You kind of, you know, know all the learners individually. You are catering for each of them all individually. In secondary school you are catering to a group.

(Participant 5)

I also approach each class with activities designed for each learner – down to their interests and learning level. We spend a lot of time matching stuff to the learners’ interest and abilities.

(Participant 6)

The participants view the individual approach to the learners’ education as being an invaluable aspect of the Youthreach experience. However, adopting such an approach places demands upon the staff: in terms of having to design tailored programmes for each learner, etc.

You have to come up with dozens of strategies for teaching, so you are going in delivering a syllabus. You have got to work on things at an interpersonal level also.

(Participant 4)

It changes your whole teaching style, because you are teaching to the individual learner, or you have to adapt constantly.

(Participant 5)

If I see the slightest nugget of interest in anything, I will run with that and fit it to them.

(Participant 4)

4.5 Summary of Results

This chapter outlined the various themes that emerged from interviewing the six participants in the study. The findings of the study show how a positive learner-centred environment, a curriculum based on humanistic principles and an awareness of learners’ perspectives can create encouraging results for learners in alternative education settings. The next chapter will discuss the implications of the findings with regard to existing literature.
Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to examine the experiences of Youthreach professional staff as they support early school-leavers’ transitions into a Youthreach Education Centre. A qualitative approach utilising IPA was employed. The study sought to explore the professional practices and approaches of Youthreach staff in their management of learners during and beyond their arrival at the centre. In this chapter the findings of the study are considered with regard to what has already been put forward by other researchers.

5.2 Summary of Findings
The research findings stress the importance of the learner/staff relationship within the Youthreach centre. The findings also show how a positive learner-centred environment based on the humanistic principles of empathy and acceptance (non-judgment) can greatly emancipate staff when working with young people. In addition, the findings highlight the important role a learner-centred curriculum and educational approach plays in getting Youthreach learners fully involved in their second-chance education. Role modelling and attachment also surfaced as predominant subjects within the narratives.

The conclusions in this current study correlate with a previous study based on the subjective experiences of early school-leavers in their transition from mainstream school into the Youthreach centre. The previous research found how constructive learner/staff relationships and a supportive learner-centred approach can bring about positive changes for learners in alternative educational settings such as Youthreach. These earlier views are comparable to those reached in the existing study. The findings here are also positively related to research and policy literature at both a national and international level.

*The relationships between teachers and their students play a vital role in the creation of positive learning outcomes and environments for all learners, but particularly for those individuals with diverse needs.*

(Capern and Hammond 2014, p.1)

### 5.3 The Learner/Staff Relationship

The narratives throughout the current research project highlight how essential the staff perceive the learner/staff relationship for the personal and academic development of the early school-leavers. Greenhalgh (1994) suggests that “in order to enable such children to improve access to learning, one has to pay particular attention to processes of relationship” (1994, p.14). Similarly, in a British policy document, Elton (1989) outlined the importance of the interpersonal interaction in the teacher/learner relationship:

*Teaching has never just been about the transmission of knowledge and never will be. Establishing good relationships with pupils, encouraging them to learn and*
to behave well have always been essential parts of a teacher’s work. This cannot be achieved by talking at children, but by working with them.

(Elton 1989, p.41)

Greenhalgh (1994) states that such “an appreciation of the processes in social interactions and relationships which influence emotional growth and learning is important for work with all children, especially those who are troubled” (1994, p.14). The participants in the current study recognised that the learners in the Youthreach centre were disaffected in many ways, and that the relationships fostered were a method to support learners in their learning and overall development. Research has shown that the process of relationship building with young people is a crucial aspect of successful alternative educational provision (de Jong and Griffiths 2006; Brooking et al 2008).

*Relationship building is an essential aspect to alternative education programmes. It is fundamental to improving behaviour and learning outcomes for students with challenging behaviours and should incorporate taking a personal interest in the student, an under-emphasis on the teacher-student power relationship, modelling of trust and respect, an emphasis on the positive (even under adversity) and de-escalation of conflict through talking and humour.*

(de Jong and Griffiths 2006, p.37)

The narratives from the participants in the current study identify the “win-win” nature of the give-and-take relationships that are formed in the Youthreach centre. This relationship style, where staff and learners enjoy a healthy interpersonal connection, is expanded upon in other research. DES (2006) posits that this relationship building is a “reciprocal process that requires cooperation from both student and teacher to help it develop into a positive and sustaining aspect of classroom life” (DES 2006, p.55). Such an outlook is reflected in the Youthreach model, where learner engagement is a humanistic and active process; while it is in contrast to the more traditional teacher-led approach in mainstream schools.

The narratives in the study also highlight how the relationships between staff and learners can assist in the development of the learners’ self-esteem. The research has pinpointed the interpersonal challenges that early school-leavers face. These young
people regularly succumb to poor mental and/or physical health; there is often disaffection with education (Byrne and Smyth 2010; Stokes 2003). However, the presence of empathic and reliable relationships in the lives of these individuals has been proven to support the development of their self-worth, self-efficacy and confidence (Bandura 1986, Newman and Blackburn 2002; Marrone 1989). Moreover, Lawrence (1988) states:

*The teacher is in a powerful position to be able to influence students’ self-esteem not only through the use of systematic activities but also through the establishment of particular caring relationships with students.*

(Lawrence 1988, p.27)

Raider Roth (2005) further suggested that the learning process is “inherently relational”, and that “resilient and trustworthy relationships in school are the bedrock of learning” (p.19). Byrne and Smyth (2010) found that positive relationships lead to more effective learning processes, and “those positive student-teacher relationships emerge as central to learner engagement and learning” (p.180). Research by Bibby and Posterski (1992) highlighted how good relationships in school were valued by the learners more than any other aspect of their schooling. Similarly, it has been noted that the main benefactors of positive learner-teacher relationships are the learners themselves (Hattie 2009; Blum 2005; Pianta 1999). Not only do strong learner-teacher relationships help increase learner academic achievement, but they are also crucial to the social-emotional development of learners (Capern and Hammond 2014). Indeed, research has shown that positive learner-teacher relationships have far-reaching implications in the school milieu (DES 2006; Lawrence 1988; Byrne and Smyth 2010).

*Building healthy, respectful relationships which inspire confidence and develop self-esteem, especially for those students who may not have these dimensions of their adolescent development nurtured in their home environments ... Teachers who show empathy for the lot of these vulnerable students, and who give them the confidence and the belief that they can achieve their dreams, contribute in ways that have far-reaching implications. By contrast, those who interact with them in ways that reinforce their sense of inadequacy do them a great disservice and confirm their sense of can’t do.*
Raider-Roth (2005), while considering relationships in school, states that “in addition to readying students to become active participants in society, interpersonal relationships also serve a second purpose; they are the essential foundation of learning” (2005, p.25). It is evident from the transcripts that the Youthreach staff use the process of developing relationships with the young people as a means to support the learners’ holistic development: “The staff are not just teachers, educators, but are also ... approach the young person from my perspective, in a holistic manner, and put a huge emphasis on relationship building, self-esteem building as well as inculcating very important values about living and of course the 3 R’s as well” (Participant 3). Therefore, it could be said that the staff in the centre use their relationships with the learners as a scaffold, something to support the learners in their personal and academic development. These relationships are in fact the basis for all future learning.

In summary, empathy, social cognisance, acceptance, attachment and role modelling serve as a foundation for the academic and emotional development of learners. This has been underscored in the narratives and reiterated throughout much of the research done within this area.

Positive relationships, non-directivity, empathy, warmth, and encouraging thinking and learning are the specific teacher variables that are above average compared with other educational innovations.

(Cornelius-White 2007, p.134)

5.3.1 Empathy and Acceptance in the Relationship

The participants in the study repeatedly referred to the empathic and accepting relationships that the staff have cultivated with the young people in the Youthreach centre: “I think it is so important not to judge them. If you judge them, you get the posh or snob reaction, which is often said when the young people are talking about people they dislike” (Participant 6). The participants in the study view this approach as necessary, since it was reported that many learners, when starting in the centre, projected
defiant attitudes – more than likely, originating from negative experiences from their post-primary education.

The use of empathy and acceptance in teaching has been shown to cultivate openness, attentiveness and positive relationships in the classroom (McAllister 2000). Marrone (1998) states that empathy and acceptance in the relationships with young people “plays an important role in evoking a sense of self-integration and self-worth as well as in eliciting loving, co-operative and reciprocal responses” (p.42). The use of empathy has also been found to contribute towards instilling resilience in young people (Fonagy et al 1994; Rutter 1999). Resilience in adolescence is greatly influenced by positive relationships and by “processes and interactions arising from significant others and the wider social context” (Schoon 2012, p.143). The relationships between the staff and learners in the Youthreach centre represent positive attachments in the lives of the young people. Woolfolk (2004) states that such constructive involvement is a foundation for “the development of an identity that will provide a firm basis for adulthood” (p.68). This is a crucial developmental progression, since an individual who develops resilience and a healthy identity will be more adaptive and open to challenges in their relationships, education and career (Schoon 2012; Gordon 2009; Kidd 2006).

Schmid (2001) states that the non-judgmental approach is based on acceptance, unconditional positive regard, and a caring attitude for the individual. Rogers (1969) suggests that the enabling “of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between facilitator and learner” (p.105). Learners must believe that the teacher feels positively towards them, and “this should be unconditional and not depend on the pupil fitting the teacher’s conception of an ideal pupil” (Fox 1992, p.147). This is the non-judgmental approach employed in the Youthreach centre. According to Jackson (2010), it is imperative that teachers accept students where they are, and that teachers do not impose their value system on learners. This allows the learners to develop a greater understanding of themselves and their educational needs (Rogers 1969; Jackson 2010).

*When you start where your students are, when you find that common currency you both carry, you communicate to students that it is ok to be exactly who they*
are. You create spaces for students to leverage who they are and what they know to access the curriculum.

(Jackson 2010, p.10)

5.3.2 Role Modelling in the Relationship

The research project spotlighted the fact that the staff perceived themselves as role models for the learners in the centre. Specifically, the use of role modelling to promote appropriate behaviour and improve learner self-esteem frequently surfaced in the narratives: “So we are constantly having to model appropriate behaviour the whole time to show them how to behave” (Participant 5). This vicarious style of learning is comprehensively dealt with in literature. At school the relationships and the forms of interaction with teachers are the key mechanisms through which a culture of learning, social inclusion and other behaviours can be indoctrinated (McGrath 2006). Hargreaves (1972) asserts that for some of the learners at school “the teacher may be one of the most significant of his significant others” (p.28).

Sound relationships are central to the role-modelling process; and in the context of the learner/staff associations highlighted in the narratives, forging such relationships with those young people at risk is particularly important. Bandura (1977) suggests that vicarious learning will most likely occur if there is a close bond between the observer and the model, and if the observer also has a good level of self-efficacy. Similarly, Gordon (2009) states that it is essential that young people have adults with whom they can and want to identify with. Muuss (2006) comments that professional staff working with young people “have an indirect but potent influence in shaping values and attitudes of children and adolescents” (p.310). Muuss (2006) also remarks that vicarious learning is promoted if the model is warm, friendly and supportive, rather than cold and rejecting. In the research study the pleasant, supportive relationships fostered by the staff with the young people provided the ideal parameters for role modelling: “It has a very warm supportive atmosphere.” (Participant 1). Meanwhile, Schunk (2000) states that one of the major factors that affects role modelling, and the driver for behavioural change, is the individual’s self-regulatory capacity and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be defined as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour to produce the
outcomes” (Bandura 1977, p.97). Developing self-efficacy among learners, and most specifically among marginalised young people such as early school-leavers, is of huge importance because if learners believe they have what it takes to succeed, they are more likely to persist when problems occur (Bandura 1977). Furthermore, Kidd (2006) has highlighted the determinative nature self-efficacy has in education. Self-efficacy can lead to the avoidance of certain subjects and future career paths. The implication of all this is that the development of learners’ self-efficacy must be a key practice for the guidance service in a Youthreach centre.

5.3.3 Environmental and Social Cognisance in the Relationship

Staff awareness of the learners’ personal and social lives is prevalent in the narratives. Freire et al (2005) state that a teacher’s relationship with learners demands that the teacher has cognisance of where the learners are presently at in their subjective world. Research has shown that learners respond well when teachers understand the contextual environment of their learners and take a personal interest in them (Canter and Canter 2001; Raider-Roth 2005). Canter and Canter (2001) suggest that the teacher’s personal interest in the learners may be the most important ingredient in the teacher’s behaviour management plan.

The manner in which children develop through their interaction with a variety of social systems is examined in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (1979; 1995; 2004). Bronfenbrenner’s theory gives us a scheme for describing the interrelated structures and processes that operate in an individual’s personal and wider social environments (Gordon 2009). Bronfenbrenner outlines a 4-level ecological environment, with the microsystem being the closest set of relations between the individual and their immediate settings, e.g. home, school, community (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Bronfenbrenner explores how permanent forms of interaction need to be undertaken in the microsystem for optimal development in infancy and throughout the formative years of the individual (Martin and Fabes 2009). In a school context this emphasises the particular importance of having strong, mutual emotional attachments with one or more people who are committed to an individual’s well-being (Gordon 2009).
Bronfenbrenner’s work reinforces the significance of teacher attachment and role modelling in the Youthreach centre.

5.3.4 Attachment in the Relationship

Attachment Theory is closely linked to the social relationships and interactions outlined in Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem: in particular, the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver (Gordon 2009). Attachment Theory was first proposed by Bowlby (1969) and has since been applied to the fields of education and health science. The participants in this research study saw the learner/staff relationship as a secure attachment base for the learners and thus a foundation for learner development: “It provides an attachment, and that is shown in the relationship building” (Participant 4). Attachment Theory suggests that these relationships – which ensure that the learner continuously receives the support of reliable, caring and compassionate adults – can provide the basis for developing a young person’s internal working models and aid them in current and future relationships (Bowlby 1980). Bowlby states that an individual’s development can proceed along one of a number of possible courses, with the one taken being determined by the interaction between them and their environment (Bowlby 1980; Gordon 2009). Similarly, within the Youthreach setting, a learner who develops in an environment of emotional security and stability is more likely to follow an optimal pathway (Gordon 2009). The learner management style employed in the Youthreach centre provides an unhostile, familiar surround where the young people feel at ease: “The great strength the likes of Youthreach has is it provides a safe holding for the young person” (Participant 3). The merits of creating such a holding environment are well documented in academic research.

In childhood and adolescence, a major characteristic of sensitive responsiveness is the parent’s capacity to see the child as a separate human being and to allow them freedom. The child develops a healthy sense of independence and this encourages mental activity, learning and active engagement in the world. The gradual nature of the transition between close and more distant levels of care allows the child to retain their sense of self-efficacy, while also forcing them to be less narcissistic and self-centred.

(Gordon 2009, p.36)
Furthermore, Gordon (2009) comments that it is imperative in Youthreach that teachers, including guidance counsellors, provide a safe and supportive environment for the young person as a “secondary attachment figure” (p.35). The relationships with the staff in the centre could be envisaged as secondary attachment relationships. The narratives outline how the staff in Youthreach go about their work, incorporating as it does modelling and attachment: “Many have poor role models, and I think that we could be great role models for them” (Participant 6). Role modelling is achieved causally through the relationships and “homely” atmosphere in the centre. It is also achieved formally through curricular programmes across a whole-school approach, and particularly in areas such as SPHE, career guidance, personal counselling and group counselling. Consequently, this places the guidance counsellor in a central position in the Youthreach centre, as he or she is a key player in facilitating the social development of learners.

In the UK state-supported educational projects called Nurture Groups were developed in the 1970s to support primary schoolchildren whose emotional and academic needs were not being met in the mainstream setting (Boxall 2002). The Nurture Groups are based on an empathic, supportive and learner-centred approach (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007). Nurture Groups also use Attachment Theory in the design of the programmes implemented in their schools (Boxall 2002). Although Nurture Groups were initially developed in the UK as “provision for younger children, they are now being adopted as a promising intervention at second level” (DES 2006, p.105). There are parallels between the narrative descriptions of the Youthreach centre in the current research study and the methods employed by Nurture Groups. Mirroring what exists in the Youthreach centre, Colley (2009) recommended that the Nurture Group classroom should set out to “provide a safe, welcoming and caring environment for learning, and will replicate the home environment” (p.291). In order to achieve this, further studies have posited that it is important that centres of education adopt a personalised teaching approach that firmly places the learner at the heart of affairs (Brooking et al 2008; de Jong and Griffiths, 2006 Boxall 2002).

5.4 Person-centred Education
The use of a person-centred approach to education is enshrined in the quality-assurance processes in Youthreach (Stokes et al 2000). Existing research points to the advantages to be gained from delivering an individual educational approach in which young people returning to education complete their learning in a non-threatening, person-centred environment (DES 2008). This modus operandi generates learner-teacher relationships based on empathy, warmth and self-awareness; and it is supported by non-directive and active learning techniques (Rogers 1969).

5.4.1 Individual Educational Approach

Carl Rogers was the founder of non-directive and client-centered therapy, and influenced its spread as the person-centered approach to interpersonal relations, nursing, organisational management, and education (Cornelius-White 2004; Rogers 1969). This learner-centered model refers to a “perspective that couples a focus on individual learners ... with a focus on learning” (McCombs and Whisler 1997, p.9). Such an ethos is reflected throughout the narratives of those participating in the current study. DES (2006) suggests that ‘it is important to adapt teaching methodologies and a curriculum to suit the students’ preferred learning modes and interests, while simultaneously building healthy relationships with them’ (DES 2006, p.80). Research has revealed that “learner-centred teacher variables have above-average associations with positive student outcomes” (Cornelius-White 2007, p.134). The participant narratives show how the staff at the Youthreach centre have tailored the programme to focus on the individual needs of each learner, developing a supportive relationship in the process: “We cater for the learner’s individualistic needs. The programme is devised according to their needs” (Participant.1). The provision of a nurturing and personalised educational setting has been recognised in research as a vital element in the reintegration of early school-leavers into education (DES 2006; Byrne and Smith 2010; Wehlage and Rutter 1986; UN 1989).

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the research findings in light of existing research. It was found that the educational environment created in the Youthreach centre, which is based on
constructive humanistic engagement and a learner-centred curriculum, can bring about positive effects for second-chance learners. Existing research on early school-leaving, guidance and alternative education programmes argues for the provision of such a person-centred approach in developing the emotional, social, learning and career needs of early school-leavers. In the final chapter the implications of these findings for teaching and guidance practice within the Youthreach education sector are addressed. Suggestions for educational policy and future research are also put forward. In addition, the strengths and limitations of this current study will be discussed; there will also be a personal reflection.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Introduction

This closing chapter examines the research study’s implications for practices within the second-chance education sector, and attempts to identify what areas should be investigated in future research.

6.2 Conclusion

It has been acknowledged that there is a commitment at national and EU level to prevent early school-leaving, and this is most clearly manifested in the provision of programmes
and ancillary supports dedicated to reducing the amount of young people leaving school prematurely. Much research exists on the topic of early school-leaving, with the majority of it being quantitative in nature. Significantly, there has been little research carried out on the transition process of early school-leavers returning to education, both from the perspective of the early school-leaver and from the perspective of the staff working with these learners.

This study concerns itself with the approach, procedures and perspectives of Youthreach professionals. Its findings show how a positive learner-centred environment coupled with a curriculum based on humanistic principles can bring about beneficial effects for learners in alternative education settings. The conclusions arrived at give rise to a number of implications for Youthreach. Initiatives that could be implemented to better serve the needs of Youthreach learners and staff have also been pinpointed. What has been learnt should be of significance to the guidance counsellor and the Guidance Service as a whole.

6.3 Implications for Youthreach Practices

This section contains recommendations regarding the continuing evolvement of Youthreach practices.

6.3.1 Staff Training and Development

The results show how positive an impact the humanistic approach has on the development and maintaining of effective relationships in the Youthreach setting. The holistic, person-centred approach employed in the Youthreach centre is recognised as an invaluable method of working with young people at risk, such as early school-leavers (Gordon 2009). It is strongly recommended that staff working with young people at risk receive training in these humanistic approaches. The integration of a formalised Personal Development module into teacher training might be an appropriate development in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching courses in Ireland.
6.3.2 Staff Support in Induction Process

The research study points to the major role the Guidance Service, supported by the staff team, should play in the management of the transition process for those early school-leavers entering a Youthreach centre. This suggestion is reinforced by findings from past research and from the deliberations fuelling existing national and EU policy.

*Education and training systems often do not provide sufficient targeted support for pupils to cope with emotional, social or educational difficulties and to remain in education and training.*

(European Commission 2011, p.4)

In addition, the NGF (2007) identified that there is a need for “better support for individuals, especially vulnerable individuals, moving from one environment to another” (p.41). Considering the emotional demands put on young people during educational transitions, it is suggested that the guidance counsellor, within the context of the whole Guidance Service, serves as a key facilitator in educational transitions into and out of the Youthreach centre. This may necessitate establishing a more comprehensive induction process within the Youthreach centre.

6.3.3 Psychometric Testing

It is recommended that the guidance counsellor in the centre appraises learners at the induction phase of the learners’ transition into the Youthreach centre. This be carried out using a standardised psychometric instrument in collaboration with the learner so as to identify their learning needs, strengths, weakness and goals. This data will support relevant staff in developing an appropriate Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each learner.

6.3.4 Staff Key Working/Mentoring Programme

Conflict between staff and learners at the induction phase of the transition into the Youthreach centre was mentioned by the participants. It is therefore suggested that each existing learner in the Youthreach centre, and each new learner, be allocated a staff
member as a key worker/mentor to further support them in their development. This recommendation is similar to the approach undertaken under the SENI programme in many Youthreach centres. In the SENI programme each learner receives a staff key worker during induction. The focus of this intervention is to support the learner in a non-formal manner – when dealing with any issues that may be affecting the learner and so on. Research has shown that this initiative assists the individual learner in many areas: including academic performance, learner behaviour and attendance (Gordon 2013). Although a formal framework exists for the induction of new learners into the Youthreach centre, the inclusion of staff and peer mentoring into this process should provide added benefits.

6.3.5 Staff Supervision and Training

The occurrence of stress and emotional burnout amongst staff in the centre came to light in this project. Previous research has shown that the persistent conveyance of empathy is a mentally draining task (O’Farrell 2006). As a consequence, it is suggested that all staff working with early school-leavers be given appropriate access to support. Reimer and Cash (2003) posit that in order for alternative education programmes to be successful, staff need to undergo regular professional development and must be fully in touch with classroom management techniques. As of now, many teachers who end up working with early school-leavers do not obtain such training in their postgraduate programme (Reimer and Cash 2003).

6.4 Implications for the Guidance Service and Guidance Counsellor

This study calls attention to the stand-alone nature of guidance in the centre. The Guidance Service in the centre can currently be viewed as a service isolated from the other practices at Youthreach. Previous research has shown that the most productive approach to guidance in post-primary education involves teaching staff, management, parents and other external partners such as employers (DES 2008). As a result, it is recommended that several partners within the Youthreach setting be given an active contributing role in guidance provision. The partners in question include teachers, the centre coordinator, ETB management, parents, the student council, employers, and external agencies such as the National Educational Welfare Board. This is graphically
displayed below. The guidance counsellor is at the core of the service, while the supporting partners are on the outer rings. McCoy et al (2006) emphasise that the guidance counsellor “should be seen as part of a wider staff team addressing the needs of all students” (p.197). All of the above strengthens the argument for a whole-centre Guidance Service within the Youthreach centre.

Figure 10 – Whole-school Guidance Relationships System

6.5 Implications for Future Research

It is hoped that the current research makes a contribution to our understanding of how best to deal with the transitions of early school-leavers returning to education. In particular, it is hoped that through the gathering and interpretation of the perspectives of staff working with these young people, keener insights have been gained. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that far more all-inclusive research should be done in this area. The collection of data over a longitudinal period across multiple Youthreach centres and educational reintegration programmes, and the subsequent analysis, would definitely pay dividends.
The use of a qualitative IPA methodology in the research study has enabled the researcher to focus upon the successes, frustrations and opinions within the Youthreach environment. This current research has highlighted the value of listening closely to the Youthreach staff. An even greater appreciation of these matters will be gained when further research of both a qualitative and quantitative nature is undertaken.

6.6 Strengths and Limitations of Study

While this research project had obvious strengths in terms of structure and means of execution, it also unfortunately suffered from several limitations. These are briefly discussed.

6.6.1 Strengths of Study

- This study has provided a valuable insight into the experiences of professional staff members in a Youthreach centre working with young people who have left mainstream school. The research findings may provide a basis for future research, policy and professional initiatives.

- The use of a qualitative approach allowed the participants the latitude and time to reflect on their practices. It brought to the fore the various elements in the values and approaches of the Youthreach centre. A quantitative approach would not have yielded this richness of data – especially apropos the centre’s culture and learner/staff relationships.

- The findings of the research study are predicated on the very own words of the Youthreach professional staff. This participant group is considered reliable and thus contributes to the robustness of the research.

6.6.2 Weaknesses of Study
Although this researcher acknowledges his own potential bias, and was totally aware of this complication throughout the process, it cannot be denied that a teacher interviewing colleagues regarding their work practices inevitably places interpersonal and ethical demands on both parties. The close connection between researcher and participant must be deemed a limitation in this study.

The participant sample was selected through consultation with management in the Youthreach centre. This course of action may have led to some participants feeling they were obliged to participate, while conversely, others might have been ‘frightened off’. In this respect the participant sample cannot be considered appropriately representative of Youthreach professional staff working in the sector.

6.7 Personal Reflection

I have enjoyed both applying and consolidating my learning through working on this research study. The entire experience has been enlightening ... even, dare I say it, character building. Examining the primary and secondary data has furnished me with a greater understanding of the approaches and culture of the Youthreach educational model. This in turn has made it possible for me to think beyond formal educational aims and processes, and to concentrate on the more holistic, innovative methods of effecting development in the young person. I now have a deeper respect for the Youthreach model of education. It is person-centred, based on the premise that educating within a safe and non-judgmental environment is the best way to empower young learners who have left mainstream school prematurely.

Conducting this research has made me a better teacher. Words like empathy and congruence are now more firmly implanted in my mind, not as mere concepts, but as concrete steps towards creating the most constructive, mutually beneficial relationships with early-school-leavers. The course in University of Limerick has injected added relevance into my role as educator / guidance counsellor at the Youthreach centre, and accordingly what has been learnt should enable me to fulfill my duties even more effectively.
6.8 Chapter Summary

Exploring the experiences of staff working with young people who have returned to education has expanded our comprehension of the issues surrounding early school leaving. The qualitative nature of this research allowed for flexibility in questioning and data acquisition, which meant that many relevant topics, instead of simply being listed, were more closely scrutinised.

This research study has given us an intimate insight into the methods employed within the Youthreach educational model. The study has identified the strengths of the programme in addressing the needs of new learners entering Youthreach. The study has also identified whatever shortcomings exist in the provision of supports to the early school-leavers, and indeed to the Youthreach professional staff. Ultimately, what has been presented here should, in its own small way, prove to be of significance to the second-chance education sector – helping to fashion future practices and informing guidance policy.
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**Appendix A – Interview Questions – Semi-Structured Interview**

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. Why you decided to work in a Youthreach Education Centre?
2. Could you describe the Youthreach centre?
3. What are the significant characteristics of the centre?
4. What do you feel is the raison d'etre or purpose of the centre?
5. What makes Youthreach different from school? What makes it similar to mainstream school?
6. What are the differences, if any, between your role as a teacher in Youthreach than your experience in a role as a teacher in a mainstream setting?
7. What are the major characteristics of a Youthreach learner?
8. What challenges do learners face when starting the new programme?
9. What challenges do staff face with learners when they start the programme
10. How does the programme address these challenges
11. How do you personally address these challenges?
12. How do you feel cold the transition process be made better for the learners and staff in the centre?
13. What defines your approach when working with the Young people?
14. What are the central and important skills which you employ in your role in the Youthreach centre?
15. How has working in Youthreach affected your role as teacher/counsellor etc.?
Appendix B – Subject Information Letter (Manager)

Date:

Title of research study:
The transition of early school leavers from mainstream post-primary school to a Youthreach Education Centre: an exploration of staff perspectives and the implications for the centre’s Guidance Service.

Dear Manager,

I am currently a student on the Masters in Guidance Counselling with the Department of Education and Professional Studies, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne and Dr Neil Kenny. As part of my studies I will complete a research dissertation on a topic of interest to me and related to guidance counselling.

In my research, I aim to investigate the transition process of early school leavers from mainstream school to the Youthreach programme. In order to gather this information and provide insights on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to me carrying out this research in the centre. This will involve carrying out one 40-minute interview with each of the 6 participants in the research project on site at the centre at the Youthreach Education Centre. The participants will comprise of professional staff working in the Youthreach centre.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be recorded and the data will be securely held under UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through professional publication.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the centre’s name and individual participants names and details will not be used in the research and the centre will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved in the research.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me, my Supervisor, or Course Director:

Student Name: Noel Kearney
Tel. No.: 061322449
Email: 0202681@studentmail.ie
Supervisor: Dr Neil Kenny
Tel. No.
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Course Director: Dr Lucy Hearne
Tel. No. 061 20 2931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie
This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (13-2-28). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel (061) 234101
Email: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix C – Consent Form (Manager)

Date:

Title of research study:

The transition of early school leavers from mainstream post-primary school to a Youthreach Education Centre; an exploration of staff perspectives and the implications for the centre’s Guidance Service.

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the centre will not be revealed at any stage in the reporting of the research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contributions are:

i. Participation is entirely voluntary
ii. Participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process and any contributions made will be subsequently destroyed.
iii. The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research dissertation, but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included.

I hereby give my consent for Noel Kearney to carry out this research in the centre.

Signature: __________________________  Researcher Signature: ________
Printed Name: _______________________
Date: ______________________________
Date:

Title of research study:
The transition of early school leavers from mainstream post-primary school to a Youthreach Education Centre: an exploration of staff perspectives and the implications for the centre’s Guidance Service.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently a student on the Masters in Guidance Counselling with the Department of Education and Professional Studies, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne and Dr Neil Kenny. As part of my studies I will complete a research dissertation on a topic of interest to me and related to guidance counselling.

In my research I will examine your experience in supporting learners in their transition from post-primary school to Youthreach. In order to gather this information and provide insights on the topic, I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in an interview with me on the topic. The interview should last approximately 40-60 minutes.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be recorded and the data will be securely held according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through professional publication.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the centre’s name and individual participants will not be used in the research and the centre will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved. Please note that the University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and research procedures will adhere to the provision of the Data Protection Legislation.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me, the Course Director, or my Supervisor:

Student Name: Noel Kearney
Tel. No.: 061322469
Email: 0202681@studentmail.ie

Supervisor: Dr Neil Kenny
Tel. No. Email: neil.kenny@ul.ie

Course Director: Dr Lucy Hearne
Tel. No. 061 20 2931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (13-2-28). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office
Date:

Title of research study
The transition of early school leavers from mainstream post-primary school to a Youthreach Education Centre; an exploration of staff perspectives and the implications for the centre’s Guidance Service.

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the centre will not be revealed at any stage in the reporting to the research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contributions are:

i. Participation is entirely voluntary
ii. Participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process and any contributions made will be subsequently destroyed.
iii. The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research dissertation, but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included.

I hereby agree to take part in Noel Kearney’s research study.

Signature: __________________________   Researcher Signature: _________
Printed Name: _______________________
Date: ______________________________
Appendix F – Acceptance of Child Protection Guidelines

Acceptance of the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines

I have read the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines and agree to abide by its contents.

There is no reason why I would be considered unsuitable to work with children or young people.

Primary Investigator Signature: _____________________________   Date:  ___
Department: __________________________________
Print Name: __________________________________

Researcher Signature:  Date: 16th January 2014
Print Name: __________________________________
Department: __________________________________

This form must be retained by the signatory’s University Department
Appendix G – Informed Consent Form

Title of research study
The transition of early school leavers from mainstream post-primary school to a Youthreach Education Centre: an exploration of staff perspectives and the implications for the centre’s Guidance Service.

Should you agree to participate in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please sign the consent form.

☐ I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
☐ I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
☐ I understand that what the researchers find out in this study may be shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written material developed.
☐ I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
☐ I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I agree to my involvement in this research project after agreeing to all the above statements.

Name: (please print): __________________________

Signature: ___________________________________ Date: ____________

Witness Signature _____________________________ Date: ____________

Investigator’s Signature _________________________ Date: ____________

Researcher Signature: ______________________________ Date: 16th January 2014
Appendix H – Extract of Interview

Researcher Thank you so much for this. First off, could you describe the centre from your own lived experience, staff, ethos, etc

P4 It’s if you like a bridge for early school leavers and getting them to the situation where they can continue in mainstream school in *****. It’s a very domestic-centred, homely atmosphere, empathy is the big thing, making sure that, the children feel comfortable, that they feel safe, emotionally, physically in the environment, and I think the ethos probably is to get them to the stage when they can interact with other kids in mainstream education

Researcher And could you describe the curriculum?

P4 Well it’s a mixture of different FETAC courses and the Junior Cert curriculum

Researcher What do you think is the purpose of the centre

P4 I think it is to make sure that these children won’t fall into this abyss, once they are early school leavers, between two and three and four years out of education, and therefore out of interacting with their peers, and therefore given the opportunity to get into all sorts of trouble

Researcher What makes it different from school?

P4 I think the discipline is different, I think the one-to-one is different. I think the empathy is definitely, but on the downside I think that can be a negative thing

Researcher What do you mean by that, negative?

P4 I think the discipline is practically nonexistent here, we give them second chances, third chances, a chance to redo the work that they have missed, I would tighten that up a bit

Researcher You mentioned discipline, and..

P4 Giving them a second chance! But giving them a safe homely environment and one-to-one contact is extremely important

Researcher What do you mean by one to one contact?

P4 One to one I mean is when I started here a particular child here particular literacy problems and challenges, and I was given the option in my own downtime to take that child here on a one to one basis to improve his literacy so he could pop back into the class, that’s what I mean. I think it will be made available if it’s considered necessary.

Researcher What are the similarities between here and school?

P4 Well the curriculum particularly when you are heading for the junior cert is very similar and I think that the similarities would be smaller groups, which I approve of, because they are not functioning well in bigger groups, but I do think the whole classroom situation having to keep their folders in order, in my own particular idea, rightly or wrongly, when I came here, I insisted on the exam papers very early, I insisted on a textbook, not handouts, because I like the continuity and I like them to have something like a textbook and all the time each group has been under direct instructions from me, I have told them the cost of the books, they have not vandalized them, they are still in perfect condition, we work on the exam papers from very early on, I work exactly the same way in mainstream school

Researcher But are there any differences between how you approach the role between here and the other role education?

P4 The main difference is that there is a lot less pressure regarding exams on you in here, another difference here, is that you can
have a classroom full of kids here and you can have four or five different learning levels and so it means that you don't want any child to feel isolated or to feel less efficient that the other children, so sometimes you may have to make sure that the particular child is working away and catching up while the other children are moving ahead, and they are not held back, and ay the same time you have got to make sure that you empathic with all the children at the same level and that no particular feel like that they are in any different or less efficient in their particular work, also remembering that the outcome is supposed to be the same for each child in each group, that is to get the junior cert or FETAC completed, for group 3 the outcome is the Junior cert in two years time, you have got to remember that