

Non-Statutory Educational Psychology Reports: Views of Key Stakeholders

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Report writing is a central part of the educational psychologist's (EP) role, however little research has explored what key stakeholders think about these reports. This small-scale research project investigated the views of three parents/carers and two special educational needs coordinators about non-statutory reports within a local authority Educational Psychology Service in the South East of England. These views were explored qualitatively using focus groups, analysed using thematic analysis, and three main themes were identified: the tension between accessibility and detail, emotional conflict, and potential for change. Parents and SENCos both reported the need for EP reports to be easy to read but also desired detail and greater information. Participants acknowledged the challenges of finding a balance between the level of detail and the ease of reading in reports, and suggested discussions with the EP and hierarchical recommendations as potential ways to resolve this tension. The findings also highlighted the emotional conflict experienced by parents when reading the report; parents wanted the extent of their child's needs to be acknowledged but found this emotionally challenging to read within a report. Finally, the research highlighted the potential for EP reports as a tool for change.

Keywords: EP reports; parents; SENCos; children's needs; participatory research

Introduction

Educational Psychologists (EPs) spend a considerable amount of time writing statutory and non-statutory reports (Hull, 2010). In statutory reports, EPs "provide advice or information to local authorities for children and young people who have Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and are undergoing a statutory Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment" (British Psychological Society, 2015, p. 3). Non-statutory EP reports typically provide accountability for EP work, make suggestions for action, explain outcomes of assessments, and make transparent the evidence-based practice at the heart the work (Hull, 2010). Although a range of advice exists to aid statutory report writing, including guidance on structure, content, and format (British Psychological Society, 2015; Cornwall Educational Psychology Service, 2018; Crane, 2016), there is little research and formal guidance on the writing of non-statutory EP reports.

High-quality EP reports are more likely to be used and can lead to more cohesive working practices and relationships within multidisciplinary teams (Hull, 2010). Research has stated that EP reports should follow a logical structure and prioritise areas for action (Hull, 2010). Reports should also be comprehensible for their readers and EPs should clearly synthesise and summarise a complex

problem; EP reports should be easy to understand and use (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Frederickson & Cameron, 1999).

To investigate whether high-quality reports are written in practice, Cameron and Monsen (2005) analysed quality assurance exercises conducted within their local authorities (LAs). In the first LA, surveys using Likert scales were sent to special needs department caseworkers asking for their feedback on reports they had received. In the second LA, feedback on the reports was given by a group of EPs. From these quality assurance exercises, the researchers concluded that the way the reports were structured did not allow stakeholders to develop a comprehensive understanding of the child's difficulties and an understanding of why interventions had been recommended. In addition, the authors reported that some EPs regarded report writing as an administrative chore rather than a valued aspect of their involvement. Whilst this research provides some insight into how EP reports should be written, the study does have its limitations. The Likert scales used in one LA limited the detail of these individuals' views. In the second LA, EPs' views were sought, and it is likely that they find the reports easier to understand and may view them more favourably; indeed, EPs are not the intended audience of the reports. Thus, research should now seek the views of stakeholders, with a

view to those perspectives informing guidance for writing non-statutory EP reports.

EP reports are read by many individuals including parents, teachers, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), and multi-agency teams (Hull, 2010; Squires et al., 2007). SENCOs are an important stakeholder group as they coordinate the suggestions into a plan for the child (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). In general, it has been found that advice and recommendations from EPs are highly valued by SENCOs (Ashton & Roberts, 2006), although this finding was not specifically focused on the information contained in reports. SENCOs' views of EPs reports were investigated in a study by Freeman and Miller (2001). Questionnaires were sent to 59 SENCOs about how assessment results are communicated through EP reports and it was found that SENCOs did not find reports useful when assessment information was written as a statistical analysis of test scores, when subtest scores were listed and when patterns of subtest scores were described. SENCOs found it more useful when EPs described the child's skills in an area and provided rationale for areas of need based upon the child's performance. This suggests that SENCOs prefer assessment information to be embedded in context. Whilst this provides useful information, it should be noted that Freeman and Miller's study also used a Likert scale questionnaire. This, in conjunction with the lack of research in this area and the importance of SENCOs as a stakeholder group, suggests that there is a need to comprehensively capture SENCOs' views of EP reports.

Another key stakeholder group are parents and carers and their involvement in education has been found to improve outcomes for children (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009; Squires et al., 2007). However, parents and carers often feel disempowered by professionals; the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2006) stated that, due to the actions of various professionals, "parents feel ignored or that their views and preferences are not being given proper consideration" (p. 37). An earlier study by Cranwell and Miller (1987) investigated the views of parents and found that the terminology used in professional reports was difficult for parents to understand. Though it could be argued that this study is a little older and was focused on statements of special educational needs, the findings are supported by Squires et al.'s (2007) research using questionnaires that were sent to parents whose children had EP involvement to gather their views of EP services. The study showed that parents did not value reports where the EP had not explained unfamiliar terms and where tables and numerical information were not clearly explained; they wanted reports which were clear, suggesting that readability is an important factor for

parents. Furthermore, parents in this study also stated that they wanted the feedback they received to be detailed and comprehensive, to include strategies for parents and teachers, to provide signposting to other sources of support and to be emotionally supportive. Lastly, parents had mixed views about whether reports should provide a new understanding of the child. Some parents wanted their views about their child reinforced, whilst others wanted a new understanding of their child. It is clear from this research that gathering parental views can provide numerous suggestions on how EP reports could be improved.

In a further research study, Hull (2010) explored the views of multiple stakeholder groups by consulting parents/carers, SENCOs and SEND panel members about their experiences of EP reports. In their questionnaire responses, all groups of stakeholders expressed that they valued reports that provided new information and helped inform plans for action. SENCOs also valued the application of psychology and reports that were easily accessible. All stakeholders agreed that EP reports provided a good understanding of the child's strengths/difficulties, were concise, relevant, and linked difficulties to actions for supporting these difficulties. However, they felt that reports were not always easy to read and did not use appropriate language for parents/carers. It is important to note that parents/carers and SEN panel members' views were relatively under-represented, with SENCOs dominant in the sample, and that the depth and range of stakeholder views could not be fully captured through use of questionnaires.

SENCOs and parents'/carers' views of EP reports have not been comprehensively gathered. The existing research has tended to use questionnaires, which limits the detail that can be gathered from stakeholders. In contrast, qualitative methods would provide the detail and depth that are lacking from stakeholder views as reported in the literature. For example, a focus group methodology would provide the opportunity to gain more detailed views of each group of stakeholders. It may also facilitate the emergence of more sensitive and personal themes than individual interviews (Guest et al., 2017), as participants may relate to each other due to some shared experiences. Dynamics and processes between individuals influence what is revealed and how this is interpreted; this differs within focus group settings with a range of participants, compared to individual interviews there is just one participant and one interviewer (Coenen et al., 2012). Furthermore, the published research is outdated and has focused primarily on gaining views of general psychological advice or statutory EP reports. Recurring themes have arisen from the existing literature

including the importance of a high degree of readability of reports and the importance of actionable and clear recommendations; these issues could be explored more effectively by asking parents/carers and SENCOs more openly about their views.

This small-scale research project was conducted in partnership with a LA EPS within South-East England, to fill a gap in the prior literature and to support EPs to develop an evidence-based approach to report-writing. The objectives of this research are to explore what stakeholders value about non-statutory EP reports as well as to understand what improvements they believe need to be made.

Method

Design

Given the limited amount of qualitative research available on stakeholder views of EP reports, we took an exploratory, inductive approach to this research, using thematic analysis to draw themes from the focus group discussions. We adopted an interpretivist approach when conducting the analysis. This allowed us to draw upon our own report writing experiences as trainee EPs, and to develop a rich understanding of the participants' views as they were constructed through our collaborative focus group discussions (Brown, 2018; Edley & Litosseliti, 2018).

Participants

Two focus groups were held; one to gather SENCO views of EP reports, and one to gather the views of parents and carers. Two SENCOs (Chloe and Ebony) took part in the SENCO group. One worked in a primary school, and one in a secondary school. Both had worked as a SENCO for at least 10 years and had received at least one non-statutory EP report from the participating LA within the last year. Two parents and one carer (Audrey, Brooke, and Francie) took part in the focus group for parents and carers. Each looked after a child aged six to eight years. They had all received between two and four non-statutory EP reports regarding this child, with at least one of these being written in the last year.

Measures

A semi-structured topic guide consisting of seven open-ended questions was used to facilitate the focus group discussions (Appendix A). This was written by four of the

researchers, who were all trainee EPs. It incorporated topics suggested by two EPs from the participating LA, in addition to those identified in the existing literature on EP reports.

Procedure

The research was approved by The University of Southampton Faculty Ethics Committee (ERGO number: 47703). SENCOs from all schools in the participating LA area were contacted by telephone or email. Two SENCOs were able to attend the SENCO focus group, which was held at a local primary school. Two-hundred parents and carers who had received an EP report from the partner EPS in the last year were contacted by post. Four parents and carers returned their consent forms and indicated they could attend the parents and carers focus group. One parent dropped out on the morning of the focus group due to unforeseen circumstances, meaning three attended the parents and carers focus group; this was held at a local community centre.

Both focus groups were led by two of the researchers (who were trainee EPs). Each focus group was recorded with an audio recorder. Participants were informed that they could withdraw until transcription (beginning two weeks after the focus group), that no identifying information would be shared, and that their contributions would be anonymised. After the focus group, participants were debriefed, and researchers were available in case participants wanted to speak privately or ask questions.

Data Analysis

The two transcripts, one from each focus group, were analysed using thematic analysis. Four researchers jointly coded the transcripts using NVivo 12. The parent/carer transcript was coded first. Initial themes were identified from these codes, and an initial coding manual was constructed. This manual was then used to code the SENCO transcript. Following this, the manual was refined and new themes were added. Throughout this process, coding disagreements were resolved through discussion to reach mutual agreement between all researchers.

Results

Three themes best illustrated participants' views regarding non-statutory EP reports: accessibility vs. detail, emotional conflict and potential for change (Figure 1). Each encapsulated a tension described by the participants and comprised several sub-themes.

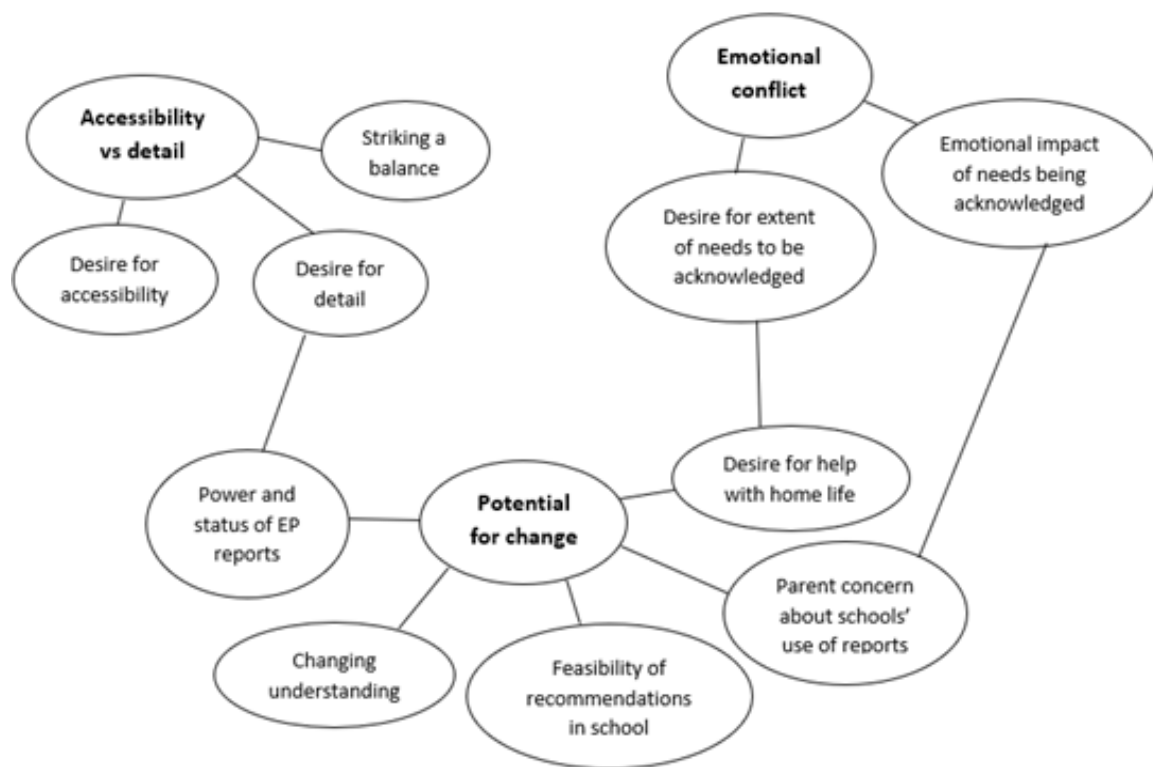


Figure 1

The Final Thematic Map Indicating the Themes, Subthemes, and Their Relationships

Accessibility vs. Detail

Both the parents/carers and SENCoS cited detail as a strength of the EP reports they had received. They appeared to find the reports useful for providing a narrative about the child, drawing on developmental history and different stakeholder views, to help them understand the child more holistically. For example, Chloe and Ebony agreed that having the views of the parent: “adds to that history and that background doesn’t it as well” (Chloe); “You want to understand exactly where that child’s coming from” (Ebony).

Both the parent and SENCo groups also discussed instances when they would like more detail in reports, particularly in relation to the assessments the EP had carried out. Francie felt that EPs should “[give] the proper name of the test and what the test is and what it, what it measures... because that threw me as a parent”. The SENCo group also acknowledged that, without adequate description, assessment results could be difficult for parents and teachers to access; SENCoS sometimes struggled with this themselves, and thought further description of assessments would be beneficial. However, both groups recognised a potential challenge for EPs, because although they wanted reports to be detailed, they also wanted them

to be accessible for a range of audiences. Brooke’s comments described this conflict:

Layman’s terms, exactly. But also at the same time not dumb it down. Because you want the message to come across, we don’t want to patronise people. It’s very difficult. Don’t patronise people, get the message across but make it understandable but don’t lose any of the detail (Brooke).

As well as accessibility in terms of language, participants wanted to be able to extract information from reports quickly. Though they did not want to lose the rich detail in EP reports, participants recognised that including it all could make them very long: “there is so much in there [that it’s] difficult to pick out the most valuable aspects” (Brooke).

There was some consideration in both groups about how this conflict could be resolved. Discussion with the EP, both before and after the report was written, was thought to be one solution. Before the report, some participants described talking to their EP to either express a preference for how the report would be written, define terminology, or agree on wording:

Well before she, when she was talking to me she went through it with me and exactly said what she was going to do. So I already knew, because she already explained it to me before I had my report, so I've had quite a good experience (Audrey).

Chloe recognised that revisiting reports through discussing and re-reading had helped to clarify her understanding of the child's needs. This suggests that engaging with the report could make it more useful: "and sometimes it's nice, you talk about it in the meetings and things. And sometimes it's nice to have it to re-read it... 'cause you sort of clarify it again when you read it, don't you?" (Chloe). After receiving the report, some participants mentioned that they *had* contacted, or felt they *could* contact their EP with further questions or clarifications. All participants agreed this was valuable, though some acknowledged systemic constraints meaning this might not always be possible. Ebony stated that having a range of strategies to try or adapt also reduced the need to contact the EP again further down the line: "You've got to have somewhere you can go if it doesn't go right straight away... then you can develop it a bit without actually having needed to be time dependent on the EP, before you can take any next step".

Another idea raised by the parents/carers and SENCOs was to have recommendations presented hierarchically in terms of importance. They felt this could make the report less overwhelming for them to read, without losing the depth and detail they valued: "I wonder if there could be like a tiered approach. This is essential, this is a nice to have and this is if you've got time" (Brooke); "don't leave it out, you know, just give us some that are achievable, then perhaps some to aim for" (Ebony).

Emotional Conflict

Parents/carers also sought outcomes such as diagnosis, more support for their child, or increased chances of gaining an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with the challenge of trying to get one being itself a draining and emotional experience.

I'm able to tick the box for my EHCP because without that I'm not going to get an EHCP and that's all I was after. That's what I wanted and that's what I was told I would never get and you know (Brooke).

Parents in the focus group often described a sense of feeling emotionally overwhelmed, both by the process of obtaining an EHCP for their child, and by reading the descriptions of their children in the EP reports they

received. Parents/carers felt they had fought to receive formal acknowledgment of their child's needs and wanted their struggles to be validated. Francie experienced a sense of validation after reading that her child was recommended to have one-to-one support the majority of the time in school: "now imagine me doing that on my own, with two other children, go on. And then tell me why I'm struggling as a parent". Having the amount of support their child needed expressed reduced their fears of inadequacy as parents, however this highlighted a tension as parents also reflected that seeing their child's needs identified so starkly in a report could, itself, evoke negative emotions:

To see it written down in black and white makes it real. Then again, it's like all of these things you fight really hard to get there and then you get it, it - you're delighted that you've got it but you're also devastated with the information that's in there and the- the significance of that (Brooke).

Brooke described reading about her child's needs as a "knife to the heart" and, in relation to receiving a further report, as: "different because we'd already had that first smash over the head with an EP report"; such violent imagery was common in the parents' and carers' descriptions of reading the reports about their children.

Potential for Change

Parents/carers and SENCOs discussed the potential that EP reports had to lead to positive change for the child and family. In comparison to reports from some other professionals, EP reports were more highly regarded and seen as having greater power. Parents/carers felt that having an EP report was a stepping stone to more support for their child or a step towards obtaining an EHCP: "I think, for me, the best thing is just the, the 'I've finally got this and this means that I can get what I'm after which is help for my son'" (Brooke).

The aim of requesting EP involvement was often to support the child across their learning environments. However, there were some mixed views about how effectively this was achieved and whether more could be done. Parents/carers and SENCOs felt that EP reports often led to a changed understanding of a child's needs. This "upskilling" or increasing knowledge often enabled them to view the child's needs differently and to adapt what they were doing.

... my boy's just into KS2 but he's working at KS1 level and to know where he is in that KS1 level, at what sort of like age, you put a mental age to your child almost, so like I

understand you're eight but mentally you're like five or six. Do you know what I mean, and then as a parent you know then how to, 'cause it's not just educationally it's their level of understanding isn't it and you know then you can change your parenting to suit (Francie).

Furthermore, the individual work with a child could lead to support for other pupils in schools. Chloe shared a scenario where, based on this new understanding and use of tools and resources shared by EPs, they were able to apply this for a number of children in their school.

I do find that sometimes as well, they recommend... like a resource or a book or something, and then um, you find actually that's workable for so many more children than just that one, where you can just sort of think actually, oh actually that's a really good idea for that child, I know that child's quite similar, I'll try it for them (Chloe).

There were however tensions between parents'/carers' and SENCOs' views of how suggestions in reports were implemented by school staff. SENCOs described a difficulty in managing parent/carer expectations when teachers felt recommendations were not feasible:

...that can be quite difficult to manage in a school actually... especially as a SENCO because you're right in the middle of the parent that's saying that's what it says and then the EP's recommendations, class teacher going I can't do it (Chloe).

Although the SENCOs discussed that strategies often needed to be adapted, they felt this could be aided by an EP's understanding of the school context and what would be realistic and achievable: "I think if they know the school and if they've been working with you and if they've had a bit of experience themselves as an EP... and they know... what kinds of things schools deliver" (Ebony); "the EP reports, they do consider, actually the system of the school and what you've got and what's in place, and what's, what is actually possible" (Chloe).

On the other hand, parents/carers discussed the time investment it took for them to obtain an EP report, and they expressed disappointment in how these were used by some school staff. Their responses suggested an inconsistency between how teachers implemented suggestions each year. Furthermore, their responses indicated that some school staff felt they knew better than the EP. Parents/carers however felt that EPs were experts in their role and these differing views appeared to cause further conflict between parents and school staff: "the headteacher, me, actually

came to blows and he was on about calling the educational psychologist in to question everything that she had written in her report because he didn't believe any of it" (Francie); "that is not his forte, that is not his speciality and it is not in his job role to say what my child's needs are or what they're not. That was the educational psychologist's role. She did that and no-one still listens" (Audrey).

Parents/carers also expressed a desire for more support at home. In addition to their views that EP reports often did not consider the child in their home environment, they also felt the EP reports lacked suggestions for how to help their child at home. They discussed the difficulties this presented for them as a result:

I find that quite difficult too because the challenges he presents at home are very different to the challenges he presents at school and it doesn't cover that ...and I think in terms of actually getting support coz ... he's at home more than he's at school. And it's like well he's alright at school so good luck at home, have a lovely time, good luck, good luck (Brooke).

This was an area where they felt school staff should provide more support and resources for them to use with their child. They also felt there was a lack of clarity about where to obtain funding for additional resources.

The lack of reviewing within the process also raised some concerns for parents/carers; they expressed confusion regarding what had been achieved and whether the report had fulfilled what they hoped it would:

...there's no clarification as to what actually has been done and what hasn't been done either um which I think is, is quite like difficult as a parent 'cause you're still even after the report and you think yeah now he's got all these needs what is actually being put into place and how is it being put into place (Francie).

As a result, parents/carers remained unsure whether their child was receiving the support they needed in order to progress. This appeared to leave parents/carers feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, particularly as obtaining an EP report had been a process which they described as challenging.

Discussion

Through two focus groups held separately, this research aimed to capture and understand the views of primary school parents/carers and SENCOs with regards to non-statutory EP reports. Three main themes were generated:

accessibility vs. detail, emotional conflict, and the report's potential for change. In addition to the value that participants held regarding EP reports, we identified a number of tensions. Parents and SENCos both reported the need for EP reports to be easy to read but also desired detail and greater information. The participants themselves acknowledged the difficulties of finding a balance, and suggested discussions with the EP and hierarchical recommendations as potential ways to resolve this tension. The findings also highlighted the emotional conflict experienced by parents when reading the report; parents wanted the extent of their child's needs to be acknowledged but found this emotionally challenging to read within a report. Finally, the research highlighted the potential for EP reports as a tool for change. Participants believed that EP reports could lead to a change in understanding and knowledge; they also appeared to have a high level of regard for EP reports. However, parents wanted the reports to include more strategies for parents to use at home and they raised concerns about the extent to which schools used EP reports. On the other hand, SENCos noted that they found it difficult to manage parents' expectations at times when the recommendations were not feasible. Although the SENCos did state that feasibility of the strategies was less of an issue when the EP in question knew the school well.

These findings add support to the existing literature. The need for accessibility across terminology used, communication of assessment materials, and explanations of complex problems has been reported in various research studies in this area (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Cranwell & Miller, 1987; Frederickson & Cameron, 1999; Freeman & Miller, 2001; Hull, 2010). Stakeholders' desire for detail has also been implied, and both parents and SENCos have stated their need for assessment information to be clearly and comprehensively explained (Freeman & Miller, 2001; Squires et al. 2007). In contrast with the questionnaire methodology often used in prior literature, the use of focus groups in the present research allowed a more in-depth examination of these stakeholders' views, albeit with a limited sample. In doing so, more sensitive and personal themes may have arisen through the focus group discussions as the group had shared experiences. Furthermore, participants have been provided with an opportunity to consider suggestions on how to resolve the tensions they described. As a result, EPs can not only understand some of the issues which may be present in their reports, but also implement some strategies which may support their work with parents, carers or SENCo.

The emotional conflict caused by EP reports has not been commonly reported within the literature; for example,

Cameron and Monsen (2005) reported that EPs did not reflect upon the power or impact of the reports they were writing. However, Squires et al. (2007) acknowledged the role of emotions; they reported that parents wanted their views heard and the reports to be emotionally supportive, a finding replicated through this research. This supports the notion that EPs should be acknowledging the emotional impact of their reports as indicated by Squires et al.'s findings (2007), and actively seeking to minimise the impact of negative emotions incurred by parents as a result of reading the reports. Furthermore, this study also found that participants wanted a new understanding of their child, and valued the improved understanding and knowledge gained from EP reports (Squires et al., 2007).

While prior research has indicated that teachers and SENCos valued the psychological advice and recommendations (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Hull, 2010), additional understanding into how these recommendations are used in practice was gained. For example, parents reported concerns about how schools use reports and SENCos shared concerns about the feasibility of implementing suggestions. As the SENCo has a role to coordinate support for children, their concerns noted here are important to consider; if they do not feel the recommendations are feasible, reports may not lead to change. Additionally, the findings from this study add support for Squires et al.'s (2007) suggestion that parents wanted strategies for both parents and teachers.

Reflections and Directions for Future Research

This study captured the views of five stakeholders; this sample is unlikely to be demographically or psychologically representative of parents/carers or SENCos nationally (Buckley, 2022) and additionally LA EPS across the country may have differing templates for non-statutory EP reports. Given the small sample from a single LA, views from even more stakeholders could add to the understanding of what people value about EP reports. Therefore, future research could explore ways of reaching participants from other LA EPS and from a diverse range of backgrounds to gain a more detailed insight into their views and enable triangulation of conclusions drawn (Parker, 2004).

Relatedly, this study may have lacked saturation and information power, that is, the amount of information relevant to the research question that the sample holds (Malterud et al., 2016). Malterud et al. (2016) suggested that studies required fewer participants when the research question was narrower and when the analysis was theory-informed and within cases. Conversely, an inductive, cross-case study like this one, with a broad, exploratory

question, may require at least six participants (Malterud et al., 2016); the size of our focus groups may therefore have limited our ability to gather a wider range of insights, resulting in reduced rigour and saturation (Buckley, 2022; Yardley, 2000). Recruitment of parents may be more successful if conducted through a parent support group. In terms of SENCos, recruitment conducted through SENCo events may be more successful. This may lead to a larger group and enable greater rigour in findings.

Future research should also consider gathering the views of a wider range of stakeholders. Although this research focused on two key stakeholder groups, many other individuals read such reports such as multi-agency teams and sometimes young people themselves (Hull, 2010). Furthermore, the SENCos' descriptions of the barrier's teachers had shared has highlighted a need to explore teacher views. It would also be valuable to explore teachers' views of the lack of consistency parents felt their children had as they progressed through the school years. Considering the different contexts of primary and secondary school, it would also be interesting to observe how teacher views may differ across both settings.

Another missing viewpoint is that of CYP themselves (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). This is of particular importance as EPs support young people up to the age of 25. EPs are required to ensure the views of CYP are recorded in reviews and reports (Harding & Atkinson, 2009), however their views of reports themselves and their usability or relevance has not often been explored. Although it can be difficult to obtain their views (Keeffe & Andrews, 2015; Nico, de Almeida Alves, Ferrer-Fons, Serracant & Soler-i-Martí, 2018), it is important that these are obtained and decisions about assessment, planning and review are based on the voice of CYP (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Lundy, 2007). This currently remains a significant gap in published literature and future work should address this gap so that EP reports can be made more appropriate for all those who read and use them.

Implications for Practice

Despite its limitations, it is important to note that this study is exploratory and sought to address a gap in the literature by gathering detailed views of parents/carers and SENCos in relation to non-statutory EP reports. Building on the existing literature, these findings can provide guidance to EPs when writing non-statutory reports, something which was previously lacking. For example, it may be beneficial for EPs to consider meeting with parents, carers, SENCos, and young people, to collaboratively write key sections of the report or to communicate in person some of the more complex or emotional information. Once

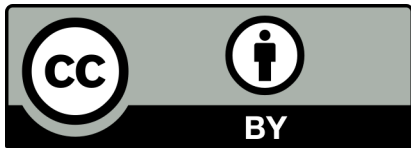
the views of these key stakeholders are taken into account, the SENCos and parents/carers who receive non-statutory EP reports will be more likely to value, use and understand them which in turn leads to greater benefits for the young people involved.

Additional guidance for EPs from this study includes using a tiered approach to recommendations, acknowledging struggles in an emotionally sensitive way, clearly explaining assessment information, and clarifying expectations around recommendations. From a strengths-based perspective (Lopez & Snyder, 2009), it is useful for EP services to be aware of what participants valued, so these qualities can continue to be present in reports. This included the detailed, holistic picture of the child, inclusion of stakeholder perspectives, and facilitating a greater understanding of the child's needs. It is also helpful to recognise preferences shared by both stakeholder groups, as this gives EPs a way of meeting the needs of both groups, an issue raised as difficult in previous work (e.g. Harvey, 2006).

Conclusion

This research highlighted that parents/carers and SENCos value detail and suggested strategies in EP reports, however these need to be balanced to maintain accessibility and recommendations need to be feasible to be effective and lead to change. Additionally, parents/carers shared that reports are a means of validating their concerns to other professionals, however this can also be difficult for them as it can evoke a range of negative emotions. EPs and other professionals working with parents/carers should be sensitive to the emotional responses' EP reports may evoke.

Whilst these focus groups have explored the views of parents/carers and SENCos, key stakeholder voices which continue to be missing in research are CYP and teachers. Researching the views of these two groups would support EPs to maintain person-centred approaches when writing reports, and to consider how EP reports facilitate teachers' understanding of CYPs needs and what barriers they may experience in implementing strategies EPs suggest.



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Appendix A

Topic guides

Parent/carers topic guide

1. What kind of things do you expect to see in EP reports?
2. Tell us what you thought about the EP reports you received.

Prompt: strengths, weaknesses

3. What do you think about the length of EP reports?

Prompt: structure

4. Tell us your thoughts about the language used in EP reports.

Prompt: jargon/technical terms and clarity.

5. Have EP reports influenced your understanding of your child's strengths and needs?

Prompt: if so, how?

Different/similar to other professionals' reports?

Balance of new and confirming information

Answer the original question?

6. What do you think about any advice, strategies or recommendations given in EP reports?

Prompts: implementation, relevance and achievability.

7. Could EP reports be improved?

Prompt: If so, how? What elements are most useful?

SENCo topic guide

1. What kind of things do you expect to see in EP reports?
2. Tell us what you think about the EP reports you receive.

Prompt: strengths, weaknesses.

3. What do you think about the length of EP reports?

Prompt: structure.

4. Tell us your thoughts about the language used in EP reports.

Prompt: jargon/technical terms and clarity.

5. Have EP reports influenced your understanding of children's strengths and needs?

Prompt: if so, how?

Different to other professionals' reports?

Balance of new and confirming information.

Answer the original question?

6. What do you think about any advice, strategies or recommendations given in EP reports?

Prompts: implementation, relevance and achievability.

7. Could EP reports be improved?

Prompt: If so, how? What elements are most useful?