

Reflections on the Role of the Educational Psychologist Within a Multi-Academy Trust

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List of Abbreviations

- BFET — Bright Futures Educational Trust
- CAMHS — Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- CYP — Children and young people
- DfE — Department for Education
- DoH — Department of Health
- EP — Educational Psychologist
- EPS — Educational Psychology Service
- ESG — Education Services Grant
- HCPC — Health and Care Professions Council
- HMG — Her Majesty's Government
- LA — Local Authority
- MAT — Multi-Academy Trust
- NAPEP — National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists
- NCTL — National College for Teaching and Leadership
- NHS — National Health Service
- PEP — Principal Educational Psychologist
- SALT — Speech and Language Therapist
- SEND — Special educational needs and disabilities
- SENDCo — SEND Coordinator
- SENDCoP — SEND Code of Practice
- TaSS — Targeted and Specialist Support
- TEP — Trainee Educational Psychologist

Abstract

This study details the reflections of three EPs working within a MAT (BFET) regarding their role and day-to-day practice. Reflections were ascertained during a focus group which was audio recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. Reflection themes indicated that the EPs' role within BFET closely mirrors the role of the EP outlined in existing literature in terms of functions and levels of working across the school age range. The EPs reflections indicate that there is a range of facilitating factors that enable them to provide a bespoke model of service delivery to schools; the EPs also undertake joint working with a SALT and share knowledge and expertise both across and beyond BFET. Reflections are discussed in relation to existing literature regarding the role of the EP and the current socio-political context in which EPs work.

Introduction

The role and distinctive contribution of the EP

The role and distinctive contribution of the EP has been debated and reviewed for a considerable period of time by both those within and outside the profession (e.g., Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Fallon, Woods, & Rooney, 2010; Farrell et al., 2006; Frederickson & Miller, 2008; Wood, 1998; Woods, 2012). Whilst a consensus may not yet have been reached on EPs' distinctive contribution, Fallon et al. (2010) state that the various reviews of the EP profession taken together provide a clear and well-articulated depiction of what EPs actually do. Fallon et al. (2010) present EPs as scientist-practitioners who use psychological skills, knowledge and understanding for the benefit of CYP.

It is suggested and generally accepted that there are five key functions within an EP's role (consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training) which should be conducted at three levels (organisational, group and individual) across different settings (Fallon et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 2006; Scottish Executive, 2002). The extent to which EPs are able to perform each of the five key functions across all three levels in different settings is thought to vary considerably between and even within EPSs; the reasons for this are myriad and may range from individual differences in EP approaches to the type of EPS and different models of service delivery (Farrell et al., 2006).

Socio-political context and the role of the EP

Both Fallon et al. (2010) and Stobie (2002) indicate that whilst the role of the EP has broadly remained consistent over time, the socio-political context has influenced the ways in which EP skills are employed and utilised. Winward (2015) argues that this perspective is particularly important as the employment context of the EP is known to change regularly at local and national levels, which creates shifting responsibilities and can change the ways that EPs work. Indeed, the recent legislative (e.g., Children and Families Act, HMG, 2014) and socio-political changes following the introduction of a decentralisation agenda in which public service funding was devolved away from local government seem to have correlated with a change in the national picture of EP employment, and it follows that this too is likely to have impacted on the role of the EP (Buser, 2013; Winward, 2015). (See also Lee & Woods, 2017.)

It has also been suggested that some legislation and LA structures can restrict or impact negatively on the development of the EP role (Farrell et al., 2006; Woods, 2012). For example, Farrell et al. (2006) suggest that it is a widely held view that a high level of involvement in statutory assessment has prevented EPs from expanding their work. They found that a reduction in EPs' statutory work correlated with an expansion of a wider range of responsibilities and an increased demand for other EP services.

The role of the EP within traded services

Woods (2014a) indicates that in response to changes in funding structures within local governments the majority of LA EPSs have reconsidered their model of service delivery. Recent annual EP workforce surveys conducted by the NCTL and the NAPEP outlined that the majority of services have moved to operating within a partially or fully traded model of service delivery (NAPEP, 2015; NCTL, 2014), in which the service is required to generate income from customers in order to meet some or all of its costs (Woods, 2014a; 2014b).

Winward (2015) found that the impact of trading on the role and contribution of the EP in two partially traded LA EP services has been largely positive, with trading creating opportunities for an extension in the range and type of work being completed, particularly for therapeutic work and other forms of direct work and intervention. This correlates with anecdotal evidence that both LA and non-LA EPSs using a traded model of service delivery are beginning to flourish when freed up from more traditional statutory assessment roles (Manchester City Council, 2011; Fallon et al., 2010). Winward's (2015) research also found that EPs working within a partially traded service saw their distinctive contribution as being linked specifically to their expert role, highly specialised psychological knowledge and skill set and the process by which the work was undertaken. (See also Lee & Woods, 2017.)

Within a traded context, it is the commissioner's role to determine the best provider of specific services (Fallon et al., 2010). It is, therefore, possible that EPs may be asked by a commissioner to provide a service that they do not feel would be in the best interests of CYP (Winward, 2015). However, Woods (2012) argued that, even in traded services, the boundaries of client and customer should remain clear. Woods (2012) outlined that the EPs' duty of care remains with the CYP above any other responsibilities to an employer. Therefore, an EP's commissioned work and advice should not be influenced by commissioner considerations, financial or otherwise; the CYP is the EP's client, whereas the LA or school, as commissioner of the assessment, is the EP's customer (Woods, 2012). Such ethical boundaries are also delineated within the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016) around maintaining appropriate boundaries with service users (see standard 1.7) and the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists (2016) around practising within the legal and ethical boundaries of the EP profession (see standard 2), working appropriately with others (see standard 9) and understanding the key concepts of the knowledge base relevant to EPs (see standard 13).

Contemporary EP employment

As predicted by Fallon et al. (2010), the trading of EP services appears to have created a range of opportunities for EPs to provide services in novel ways, including independent consultancies, social enterprises or working as sole traders taking commissions directly from schools and other agencies (Woods, 2014a; 2014b). The diversity of employment opportunities for EPs is also reflected by increasingly varied placement opportunities for TEPs. An extensive review into the initial training arrangements for EPs stated that 'EPs are moving to a more varied pattern of employment' (DfE, 2011, p. 6) and that 'all employers will have the potential to offer bursarial placements' (DfE, 2011, p. 12). Evidence of TEP placements with training providers/services other than LA EPSs perhaps reflects a change in the profession, with fewer EPs being directly employed by LAs (Morewood & Rumble, 2014).

EP employment within MATs

Academies are publicly-funded independent schools that receive money directly from the government as opposed to the LA. Academies are not required to follow the national curriculum but

are required to adhere to the same rules on admissions, SEND (DfE & DoH, 2015; HMG, 2014) and exclusions as other maintained schools. In many cases, academies stand alone as individual schools. However, there has been an emergence of MATs that are strategically led by a management executive that adopts 'shared approaches to the provision of schooling' (Hicks, 2014, p. 997). (Armstrong, Bunting & Larson, 2009; HMG, 2010; UK Government, 2016; West & Bailey, 2013.)

Academies receive the same per-pupil funding as maintained schools and also receive a proportionate share of the ESG to provide the support services that are directly available to maintained schools (e.g., educational improvement, SEND, staff training and human resources). Whilst academies have greater autonomy over their budgets (West & Bailey, 2013), they are required to provide or purchase the support services that used to be provided by the LA. Hence, many academies join MATs because it represents value for money to access support services provided by a MAT as opposed to purchasing LA traded services (Hill, Dunford, Parish, Rea, & Sandals, 2013). Perhaps unsurprisingly, MATs have begun to employ EPs as part of their provision of SEND support services. Furthermore, the planned reductions in the level of ESG to both maintained schools and academies are likely to increase the demands for all support services funded in this way to demonstrate the value they add (Hicks, 2014; Salokangas & Chapman, 2014).

The present study

Research into the role and distinctive contribution of the EP has predominantly taken place within the LA context (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Fallon et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 2006; Frederickson & Miller, 2008; Scottish Executive, 2002; Stobie, 2002; Wood, 1998; Woods, 2012) and, more recently, within the traded services context (Winward, 2015). However, there is a knowledge gap as to the role and distinctive contribution of the EP within the MAT context.

Whilst it was not possible for the authors to address this knowledge gap in full, the present study details the reflections of three EPs working within a MAT regarding their role and day-to-day practice. The present study was conducted within BFET, a MAT in North West England which currently comprises eight academies across pre-school to post-16 age ranges. The TaSS Team was established in September 2012 and is a multi-disciplinary support service commissioned by, and accountable to, the BFET management executive. In terms of funding, BFET 'top-slice' academies' budgets at a rate of four per cent to pay for support services, including the TaSS Team. The TaSS Team currently comprises a PEP, two main-grade EPs and a SALT commissioned from the NHS.

Methodology

Convenience sampling was undertaken within the TaSS Team and three participants were recruited: the PEP (female) and the two main-grade EPs (both male) who are the authors of the present study. All three participants were employed full time by BFET. The three participants took part in a single focus group that lasted approximately two hours and was moderated by a retired PEP experienced in facilitating focus groups for research purposes. The moderator was acquainted with the three EPs prior to the focus group taking place. The moderator used a focus group topic guide to encourage discussion and interaction (Barbour, 2007; see Appendix). The focus group was audio recorded, transcribed and subject to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis (McLellan, MacQueen, & Nedig, 2003) in order to establish reflection themes. The authors opted to use theoretical, as opposed to inductive, thematic analysis and identified themes at the semantic, as opposed to the latent, level. Credibility of the thematic analysis process was ensured using inter-coder agreement between the first and second authors, and member checking between the three participants and the moderator.

Reflections

Themes will now be presented to detail the reflections of the three EPs regarding their role and day-to-day practice within BFET. Table 1 shows the themes and sub-themes that pertain to these reflections. Within the text, sub-themes are italicised and exemplary data extracts are provided.

Table 1. *Themes and sub-themes arising from thematic analysis of the focus group data*

Themes	Sub-themes
Full breadth of EP work	Levels (individual; group; systemic)
	Functions (consultation; assessment; intervention; research; training)
Flexibility and accessibility	N/A
Impact	N/A
Bespoke model of service delivery	Value-driven
	Embedded within schools
	Limited to pre-statutory work
	Responsive to schools' needs
Joint working with SALT	N/A
Sharing knowledge and expertise	N/A

Full breadth of EP work

The full breadth of EP work was deemed to be integral to the EPs' role within BFET. The EPs identified that they utilise all five of Fallon et al.'s (2010) *functions*. With reference to *consultation*, the EPs employ a consultation-based model of service delivery, including drop-in consultations (i.e., pure consultation with problem holders regarding individual or groups of children); this was seen as important for building capacity within schools. For example, EP1 said "[B]y having a consultation-based model of service delivery...inherent within that is CPD [continuing professional development] for staff." With reference to *assessment*, the EPs' involvement with CYP is limited to pre-statutory work; this involves supporting schools to implement a graduated approach via the four stages of action (assess, plan, do and review) detailed within the SENDCoP (DfE & DoH, 2015). With reference to *intervention*, there is a focus on early intervention and a strong presence of therapeutic intervention, predominantly within the post-16 settings, where students are able to self-refer to the TaSS Team in line with the Children and Families Act (HMG, 2014), which considers post-16 students to be adults (in educational terms). With reference to *research*, all three EPs are actively involved in research, either in terms of local action research or research published in peer-reviewed journals (see Thomas & Atkinson, 2016; Thomas & Atkinson, 2017). With reference to *training*, in addition to the incidental CPD resulting from the consultation-based model of service delivery and drop-in consultations, the BFET schools are able to access CPD from the TaSS Team; this includes a 'menu' of pre-existing training packages and the commissioning of bespoke CPD according to individual school/BFET needs.

The EPs identified that they operate extensively within Fallon et al.'s (2010) *individual* and *systemic levels*, but less so within the *group level*. For example, EP1 said "[W]e do a lot of systemic [work], whether that's systemic within the school or systemic within BFET...our proportion of time is quite heavy on the systemic." Furthermore, the PEP stated that she has worked with "parent groups and teacher groups, but not pupil groups".

Furthermore, the EPs noted that there is a strong focus on preventative work within schools and working across the age range into post-16 settings, although they tend to work less in pre-school. With reference to working in post-16 settings, EP2 said

[W]ith some of the post-16 settings...we've managed to do quite a lot of systemic work...setting up the policies, setting up the procedures...because [pre-SENDCoP; DfE & DoH, 2015] they never had any kind of SEND department and then we worked really closely with their new SEND teams...to set that up.

Flexibility and accessibility

Flexibility and accessibility were seen as fundamental to the EPs' role within BFET. Regarding flexibility, the above-mentioned consultation-based model of service delivery is adapted according to school needs. For example, the PEP said "It's bottom-up: this is what your school needs; this is what your school wants, okay — we will adapt accordingly." The EPs are also expected to act autonomously within their role; EP1 stated "[W]e've been given the autonomy to find novel and creative solutions to the problems that we have within our context." However, it was noted that there are times when the BFET management executive requires the input of the TaSS Team in trust-wide initiatives and that this can pose challenges to the autonomy of the TaSS Team.

Regarding accessibility, there is a ratio of eight BFET schools to three EPs and two TEPs; this leads to BFET schools being allocated significant proportions of EP time. As a result, the EPs felt that they have the time to develop positive working relationships with school staff and parents/carers. For example, EP2 said "I think they [i.e., school staff] value that opportunity, and I think they value the relationship. There are lots of opportunities for informal chats and little drop-ins, and just to talk things through." The EPs also have protected development time, in addition to direct work with schools, and this helps establish links and collaborative working with other professionals (e.g., CAMHS; other EPs; LA SEND officers).

Impact

In undertaking the full breadth of EP work and as a result of flexibility and accessibility, the EPs' role within BFET was seen to achieve positive outcomes. The EPs are required to evidence the impact of their work both within schools and with CYP to the BFET management executive. The EPs felt that they consistently achieve a wide range of positive outcomes. For example, EP2 said "[T]here's the potential to have impact on a wider range of children because we're working at those broader levels; we're working at...building staff capacity and skilling people up." EP1 added

[B]y doing the systemic, preventative [work], we're impacting upon children who may actually never be classified as having SEND [and]...reducing the numbers that are on the SEND registers. If the systems are better and the preventative [work] is in place, you'll have less students who have SEND...and, therefore, the [students] who do come into that category tend to have a higher level of need.

The EPs also felt that they were able to sustain positive impact by having more long-term involvement with CYP. For example, EP2 said "[F]or individual pieces of casework in particular, there's that scope for ongoing support so for those more complex students...it's not time limited so we can be involved over several reviews [and]...make sure your interventions are working."

Bespoke model of service delivery

The EPs felt that they were able to provide BFET schools with a bespoke model of service delivery and identified a number of key facilitators, including BFET management executive buy-in to the full

breadth of EP work, the TaSS Team being *value-driven*, the lack of time restrictions on casework and EPs being *limited to pre-statutory work*. It was seen as key that the BFET management executive buy-in to the full breadth of EP work; the PEP said “I think we’ve been lucky because [the BFET management executive] believe in Psychology and can see the power of it.” The TaSS Team is *value driven* and underpinned by the following mission statement: ‘We seek to find the difference which makes the difference’. Furthermore, relative to the TaSS Team being paid for by BFET top-slicing academies’ budgets, the EPs were candid in asserting that they view CYP as their customers and schools as their clients. For example, EP2 said “In my mind, I’ve always got the child at the forefront...so when we’re commissioning work and agreeing things, I always think...will this impact positively?” Relative to the lack of time restrictions on casework, the PEP said “I think we’re really fortunate...we just don’t have a time limit imposed on cases.” EP2 added “I think we do get a very rich picture of our students’ needs and the[ir] context...the way our role has developed enables us to be really holistic.” Furthermore, as casework is *limited to pre-statutory work*, the EPs are free to undertake the full breadth of work whilst informing statutory assessments within LAs. EP2 states that “[B]eing pre-statutory massively extends the scope of our role.”

The EPs felt that providing BFET schools with a bespoke model of service delivery enabled them to become *embedded within schools* and, subsequently, *responsive to schools’ needs*. The EPs felt that being *embedded within schools* facilitates their role, particularly with the bottom-up development of strategic work. For example, EP1 said “[I]t’s all positive because [schools have] those relationships with you, they’re more likely to trust you and be a lot more honest about how things are going...you see more and you can have a much greater impact.” However, the EPs did note that being so *embedded within schools* also poses challenges to objectivity. For example, the PEP said “I often get asked the question ‘If you’re so close to schools, can you offer a level of criticism that they need?’...that, sort of, impartial role.” The EPs felt that whilst this is a valid critique, reflective practice enables the effects of this to be mitigated. EP2 stated “I don’t think we feel pressure to do things just because we’re that close to the school, I think we feel comfortable in saying, ‘Well actually, is there a better way around this?’” Relative to being *responsive to schools’ needs*, the bespoke nature of the model of service delivery means that schools’ individual needs can be catered for, a strong determinant of which is their Ofsted category. For example, the PEP said

[I]f our schools are [graded as ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’], I think [BFET] have the expectation of [the TaSS Team] that we will help the SEND systems improve to create a better offer for our pupils. [O]ur role is more systemic and once the schools get [graded as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’]...then the more conventional [EP] role kicks in.

The EPs also noted that they protect time to work with vulnerable CYP who have experienced a significant loss, transition or change.

Joint working with SALT

The EPs reflected that working in a multi-disciplinary support service enables them to undertake a range of joint working with a SALT. Alongside drop-in consultations offered by the EPs, the TaSS Team also provide schools with joint EP and SALT drop-ins. EP2 said “[Schools] are getting two very different perspectives...perspectives that are very complementary, it’s really useful.” For CYP with more complex needs, there is the opportunity for joint EP and SALT casework. Furthermore, there have been opportunities for joint systemic work with the EPs and the SALT, particularly with regards to early years, secondary transition and literacy/language development. As a result, the EPs noted that joint working with the SALT provides high levels of informal CPD. For example, EP1 said “[W]henever I’ve worked with [the SALT], that’s been the single biggest change towards my professional development...it’s improved my casework...it’s improved outcomes for the children I work with; it’s helped me become a better practitioner...I think it’s invaluable.”

Sharing knowledge and expertise

The EPs reflected that they share knowledge and expertise across and beyond BFET. In addition to sharing and developing best practice across BFET, the EPs are also actively involved in supporting the professional development of TEPs. The EPs have strategic responsibility within BFET and actively develop provision to cater for different types of SEND (e.g., autism, behavioural difficulties and literacy difficulties). The EPs are also actively involved in strategic reviews of SEND provision across the BFET schools. Regarding the professional development of TEPs, the EPs have established links with EP training programmes at two universities. This has included the delivery of seminars, supporting academic staff with research and providing placements for TEPs.

Discussion

In light of the impact that the changing socio-political context has on the ways in which EP skills are employed and utilised (Fallon et al., 2010; Stobie, 2002), the authors highlight an emerging category of EP employment in addition to those listed by Woods (2014a; 2014b): EPs working in a MAT (Hicks, 2014; Salokangas & Chapman, 2014). Following on from Winward (2015), who stated that the changing employment context of the EP creates shifting responsibilities and can change the ways that EPs work, the present study details the reflections of three EPs working within a MAT regarding their role and day-to-day practice. (See also Lee & Woods, 2017.)

The EPs' reflections indicate that their role within BFET closely mirrors that of other EPs as identified by Fallon et al. (2010). The EPs within BFET carry out the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training at the individual, group and systemic levels across the three to nineteen age range. However, it was noted by the EPs that they tend to work less extensively at the group level and in pre-school settings. The ways in which the EPs worked throughout BFET was considered to be autonomous and flexible according to individual school needs, although it was acknowledged that the EPs' autonomy can be impacted by trust-wide initiatives. The EPs saw themselves as highly accessible to school staff, largely due to the favourable ratio of three EPs to eight BFET schools. The EPs are required to evidence the impact of their work and consistently achieve positive outcomes.

The EPs reflected that they are able to provide a bespoke model of service delivery to schools within BFET, including the use of drop-in consultations. Key facilitators of this were buy-in from the BFET management executive, the TaSS team being value-driven, the lack of time restrictions on casework and EPs being limited to pre-statutory work. As a result of this, the EPs saw themselves as being embedded within schools and able to be responsive to schools' needs. However, it was noted that being so embedded within schools can pose challenges to EPs' objectivity. The EPs undertake a significant amount of joint work with the SALT and share/develop knowledge and expertise across BFET; an example of this is the fact that the EPs have strategic responsibility for developing provision for distinct categories of SEND. The EPs have also established links with two universities responsible for the training of EPs.

The EPs reflected that their role within BFET is facilitated, in part, by the lack of restriction from LA structures and legislation associated with statutory assessment (DfE & DoH, 2015; Farrell et al., 2006; Woods, 2012). Indeed, the pre-statutory nature of the EPs' role within BFET lends itself to undertaking the full breadth of EP work and provides opportunities to engage in creative and novel practice. However, given the lack of LA structures and the ways in which the TaSS Team is funded, the EPs were candid in asserting that, in-line with Woods (2012), they are able to maintain clear boundaries whereby CYP are their customers and schools are their clients. This also reflects the EPs' navigation of relevant ethical boundaries within the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and

Ethics (2016; see standard 1.7) and Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists (2015; see standards 2, 9 and 13), as discussed in the introduction.

Regarding the methodology of the present study, the dependability of the focus group was high, due to the moderator's use of a focus group topic guide (see Appendix). The credibility of the focus group was also high, due to the moderator taking steps to build rapport with the EPs, both prior to the present study and during the focus group itself. However, it could be argued that the credibility of the data could have been increased by carrying out semi-structured interviews with each of the three EPs on an individual basis; this would also have avoided any potential social influence of the PEP over the two main-grade EPs. The credibility of the data could also have been increased by using an independent moderator who was not acquainted with the EPs prior to the focus group taking place. As for the thematic analysis of the qualitative data generated by the focus group, dependability was high due to the use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis and inter-coder agreement. Credibility was also high, due to the use of member checking following thematic analysis. Furthermore, although the sample consisted of only three participants, this incorporated all EPs within BFET's TaSS Team and was in-line with recommendations made by Barbour (2007) regarding the number of participants required to undertake a focus group.

The authors acknowledge the potential for bias regarding researcher allegiance in that they are both directly employed by BFET. However, steps were taken to mitigate potential bias, including jointly agreeing the content of the focus group topic guide with the moderator (see Appendix), using a third party to moderate the focus group and using the moderator to member check the thematic analysis. A further critique is that there was a lack of data triangulation. For example, the credibility of the thematic analysis could have been enhanced by carrying out a similar focus group with a sample of key stakeholders (e.g., SENDCos) and triangulating themes. As the present study took place in a single context, the transferability of the reflections are also very limited, although the authors feel that the reflections may be of interest to the EP community and MATs that have begun to employ EPs as part of their provision of SEND support services (Hicks, 2014; Salokangas & Chapman, 2014).

Despite the acknowledged limitations of the present study, the authors feel that the findings may have implications for the professional practice of EPs and TEPs. Specifically, it is plausible that increasing numbers of EPs may begin to work within MATs. Were this change in the employment context of EPs to happen, EPs may be relied upon to work with the MAT management executive and school leaders to create a bespoke model of service delivery that embodies the MAT's values and mission statement, and utilises the full breadth of EP work, so as to best promote positive outcomes for CYP with SEND. This change in the employment context of EPs could impact on the ways in which EP skills are employed and utilised, potentially leading to the emergence and development of a skill set which is more 'MAT-specific' (Buser, 2013; Fallon et al., 2010; Stobie, 2002; Winward, 2015). Furthermore, universities responsible for the training of EPs may be keen to establish links with MATs that directly employ EPs so as to provide TEPs with placement opportunities to undertake the full breadth of EP work and thus flexibly apply taught content within their developing professional practice (DfE, 2011; Morewood & Rumble, 2014). In light of this, the authors would like to make the following recommendations:

- that management executives consider the largely positive findings of the present study upon deciding whether it would be purposeful and impactful to employ EPs within their MAT;
- that EPs consider the practical implications of developing and utilising a skill set which is more 'MAT-specific' within their professional practice, specifically around creating a bespoke model of service delivery and utilising the full breadth of EP work; and
- that universities responsible for the training of EPs consider taking proactive steps to establish TEP placement links with MATs that directly employ EPs.

Future directions for research include the possibilities of:

- triangulating the present reflections with the views of key stakeholders (e.g., SENDCos; parents/carers; CYP) as to the role of the EP within a MAT;
- comparing the role and distinctive contribution of the EP within a MAT against that of the EP working in other contexts (e.g., LA EPSs, independent consultancies, social enterprises and sole traders);
- gathering the views of key stakeholders as to the similarities and potential differences between the role and distinctive contribution of the EP within a MAT compared to the EP working in other contexts (e.g., SENDCos who work/have worked with EPs within a MAT and at least one other context);
- comparing the role and distinctive contribution of the EP within BFET against another EP team directly employed by a MAT; and
- research into some of the more distinctive contributions of the EP within a MAT.

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Appendix: Focus Group Topic Guide

- What is the rationale behind the TaSS team's model of service delivery?
(10 minutes)
- How is your work commissioned?
 - How does this impact on your role as a 'critical friend' to schools (*e.g., client vs customer*)?
 - Does being more embedded within schools impact upon your role?
(5 minutes)
- What is your role (*e.g., breadth and depth*) with regards to the following at a systemic, group and individual levels:
 - Consultation
 - Assessment
 - Intervention
 - Research
 - Training
(30 minutes)
- How does your role differ across the age ranges with which you work?
(3 minutes)
- How does your role differ across the types of school in which you work?
(5 minutes)
- How do you perceive key stakeholder groups (staff/parents/students) view your role?
 - Do they view your role as different to other EP services they have accessed?
(10 minutes)
- How does your role and employment within a MAT impact upon outcomes for CYP with SEND?
(5 minutes)
- What is your involvement in statutory assessment work?
 - Does your level of statutory assessment work extend or inhibit your role?
 - What level of interface does this lead to with LAs?
 - How does this affect relationships with the LAs?
(10 minutes)
- What opportunities are there for multi-agency working:
 - Within the TaSS team?
 - Across BFET?
 - Within the wider community?
(10 minutes)
- Does being part of a MAT promote links with academic/training institutions?
(2 minutes)