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Transition to secondary education: children's aspirations, assessment practices and admissions processes

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**Transition to secondary education:
children's aspirations, assessment practices
and admissions processes**

By

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A dissertation submitted as part of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Abstract

This thesis presents research into the processes, practices and experiences of transition to secondary education in Northern Ireland from a children's rights perspective. Three aspects of the contemporary landscape of transition are considered: availability of school places and children's school choice aspirations; privately operated unregulated tests used for selection; and school level admissions arrangements which mediate transfer. The overarching aim of the thesis was to understand how inequities in each of these areas are potential barriers to children's enjoyment of their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989).

The mixed-methods study was conducted in three strands: a documentary analysis of school admissions policies for 205 academically selective and non-selective secondary schools offering admission in September 2014; a collaboration with children as research advisors to inform the purposes, processes and outcomes of the research which reflects a rights based approach; and a questionnaire of a broad sample of transition age children (10-12 years, n=1327) which extensively investigated their views and experiences of the policy and practice of transfer. The rights based, mixed methods approach was intentional, so as to place the voices of those directly affected by the transfer arrangements at the heart of the research.

The findings illustrate serious inequities which represent a system-level failure to safeguard the child's right to education (article 28) under the CRC and according to Tomaševski's 4-As conceptual framework; that education should be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable (2001). Aspects of transition procedures, such as the differential availability of school places and inconsistencies in school admissions requirements, limit school choice and contribute to inequitable access to secondary education. The assessment arrangements are shown to create additional complexities in admissions practices, resulting in differential experiences of access to academically selective schools. This thesis, by offering insight into children's experiences of admissions decisions across the full range of school types, demonstrates that the power of choice lies with schools. An analytical tool, developed as an outcome of this research, is proposed as a means to assess the extent to which transition arrangements are underpinned by respect for children's rights.

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'It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters, in the end'

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

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Abbreviations

AQE	Association for Quality Education
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland)
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DENI	Department of Education (Northern Ireland)
EANI	Education Authority (Northern Ireland)
ELB	Education and Library Board (Presently Education Authority Regions)
BELB	Belfast Education and Library Board
NEELB	North Eastern Education and Library Board
SEELB	South Eastern Education and Library Board
SELB	Southern Education and Library Board
WELB	Western Education and Library Board
GL	Granada Learning
NIA	Northern Ireland Assembly
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPTC	Post Primary Transfer Consortium
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

Transition to secondary education is a significant landmark in a child's school career. The processes of transfer have been associated with significant social, emotional and academic consequences. This thesis considers transition from a children's rights perspective (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a), to establish the extent to which the processes of transfer are in compliance with international children's rights standards, set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, United Nations (UN), 1989), and how these processes are experienced by children. This is pertinent since two distinctive aspects of secondary education provision in Northern Ireland have a particular influence on the landscape of school choice and present a challenge to equitable, fair and complete provision of the right to education (CRC, article 29). First, the segregation of education along religious and community lines and second, the continuing use of academic selection at transition (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008; 2016) based on assessment arrangements which are unregulated and have been identified as ethically problematic (Elwood, 2013a).

Education in Northern Ireland is a devolved policy area, with the NI Assembly, when it is functioning, holding responsibility for policy development and the Department of Education (NI) charged with its implementation (Perry, 2016b). Over the last century, both under devolved governance and direct rule, Northern Ireland's education system has been developed in line with many of the same ideological and cultural beliefs as other jurisdictions in the UK (Donnelly & Osborne, 2005). Therefore, whilst at first glance it would appear very familiar to an English audience, it is distinctive in terms of the provision of religiously segregated and academically selective schools (ibid.; Gardner, 2016). Katarina Tomaševski, the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, in a mission to Northern Ireland, identified education policy decisions to be governed by vested political interests rather than the state's obligation to safeguard the right to education (Tomaševski, 2003b).

'The extent to which education is designed to reflect or obliterate societal fault-lines is a political choice made by adults and imposed upon children. The rights of the child represent an indispensable corrective for such adult choices.' (ibid., p. 14)

The decision to adopt a rights based approach in this research places appropriate emphasis on children's views and represents a challenge to the imposition of adult views.

1.1 General context

In the context of Northern Ireland's academically selective system the consequences of transition are well documented, for example, disruption of friendship groups, negative effects on children's self-esteem and a narrowing of the Key Stage 2 (KS2) curriculum (Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Gardner & Cowan, 2005; NICCY, 2010; Shewbridge, et al., 2014). A key justification for continued selection is the perceived quality of provision in the selective sector, in terms of grammar pupils' higher overall attainment (Gardner, 2016). However, inequities in access to grammar schools for children of different socio-economic background and a long tail of underachievement (Perry, 2016a) point to a system characterised by a lack of fairness and inclusion (OECD, 2012). This is illustrated by considering that the likelihood of completing compulsory education 'successfully', by achieving 5 GCSE passes (Grades A*-C, including English and maths), is 19 times greater for grammar pupils than for their non-grammar peers (Calculated by the author from headline attainment data (Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), 2017b).

'In countries with large differences in student performance between programmes and schools, admissions and grouping policies have high stakes for parents and students' (OECD, 2016b, p. 170).

Whilst secondary level education is freely available to all children in Northern Ireland the future character of their schooling depends on whether they are offered a place at a grammar or non-grammar school. Therefore, the processes of transition, including assessment practices and admissions arrangements, have high stakes.

A child's future life chances depend on attaining the credentials necessary to access further study or employment. The type and quality of the school they attend is known to impact on this and it is therefore important to understand how admissions policies operate and whether the mechanisms for placing students in different schools or educational tracks are fair and robust (Burgess, et al., 2017b). In the NI context transfer arrangements, which combine statutory and non-statutory procedures, mediate school choice in a complex landscape of different school types. Differences in admissions procedures, used to admit Year 8 (Year 7 in England) pupils to those schools, mean that transition can be difficult to navigate and is perceived as lengthy and uncertain. It is also likely that the admissions procedures, similar to those in England, due to needless complexity and poor transparency, have the potential to be

more difficult to navigate, particularly for less well educated parents and carers (West, et al., 2011).

The reliance on privately operated unregulated (Gardner, 2016), assessments for selection in grammar school admissions have the potential to create additional complications. The use of two tests, which replaced the previous single test, presents potential inequities because, although the assessments for selection are used for the single purpose of grammar admissions, they differ significantly in content and format (Elwood, 2013a). The current assessment practices, despite becoming embedded as an integral part of transition, are thought to have the potential to magnify the impact of social differences in selection (Shewbridge, et al., 2014). Further concern emerges in relation to the pattern of their use, which broadly reflects existing community divisions between schools (ibid.). The absence of government oversight (Gardner, op. cit.) means that test operators are not required to make available information about the tests or the ways that outcomes are used to inform admissions decisions (Elwood, op. cit.).

In addition to a lack of transparency around academic admissions, there is a further gap in knowledge about the admissions procedures for all secondary level schools. In NI there has been little focus, in policy or research, on school choice or admissions arrangements beyond their relevance to academic selection. The wider implications of transition arrangements, which may not be equally accessible to all children, are the key focus of this research. Therefore, whilst the landscape of secondary education is dominated by academic selection, and this is the basis of a significant proportion of the research outlined in this thesis, the research also considers the availability and accessibility of non-selective schools. An emphasis is placed on how children experience navigating a transition context which presents multiple potential breaches of their rights. The rights concerned relate both to the availability and accessibility of education provision and the need for policy makers to take children's views into consideration in decision making.

1.2 Policy context

Similarly to Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland has a devolved Administration, known as the NI Assembly. Unlike many other European Democracies the political

spectrum in Northern Ireland does not reflect a right to left format and instead runs from unionist to nationalist. The two main political perspectives are linked to the two main religious identities or community affiliations. Firstly, Unionist or Loyalist voters who are mostly Protestant and would generally describe their national identity as British and wish for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The majority of this group are likely to vote for the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). Secondly, Nationalist or Republican voters, mostly from a Catholic background with an Irish national identity and who express a desire for the North of Ireland to be reunited with the Republic of Ireland. Sinn Fein and the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) would attract the majority of votes from this group. The final main party are Alliance, a moderate middle ground party who identify themselves as being a cross-community option. The leaders of the DUP and Sinn Fein, as the two parties with the largest vote share, take up the leadership roles of the executive branch, as First Minister and Deputy First Minister respectively. A significant feature of NI devolved governance is that the successful passage of legislation relies on cross-party and cross-community consensus (Birrell & Heenan, 2013), as opposed to a majority vote model. In theory, 'a policy style based on bargaining, compromise, inclusiveness and co-operation' (Ibid., p. 766, referencing Lijphart, 1969) underpins the legislative process in a consociational democracy. In reality, the extent to which consensus has been achieved in many areas of social policy is relatively limited (Gray & Birrell, 2011). At the time of writing (June 2018) the Assembly is not functioning and there is no devolved governance, nor has direct-rule from Westminster been implemented.

Academic selection at transition has been an area of political contention in NI for decades, with the two main political parties holding well established diametrically opposed views (Birrell & Heenan, op. cit.). Party political positions are well established across the political spectrum, with the DUP and UUP strongly supportive of selection whilst Sinn Fein, the SDLP and Alliance remain equally strongly opposed to it (Gallagher, 2015). This opposition has been manifested in the policy environment as 'the future life-chances of thousands of children played second fiddle to party politics and middle-class pressure' (Gardner, 2016, p. 357). Indeed, the reluctance of the political parties to attempt any meaningful compromise has been identified as a notable feature of the political debate (Gallagher, 2006), particularly since the power-sharing format of the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) is built on the principle of political

consensus. Several comprehensive accounts of the political machinations which resulted in the current policy impasse are provided in the literature (For example, Gardner, op. cit.). A summary is provided here as useful contextual information.

The potential and reality of reform

Calls for reform of the academically selective system of secondary schooling, and the mechanisms for selecting students within it, are a long-standing feature of education policy debate (Gallagher, op. cit.). At various junctures the abolition of selection was anticipated but not realised (Birrell & Heenan, 2013). At the turn of the century several significant reports were published which demonstrated the negative consequences of selection, although explicitly identifying the arrangements as having implications for children's rights (Lundy, 2001) was relatively uncommon. Test preparation narrowed the primary curriculum and negatively impacted children's experiences of upper primary school, whilst test performance and subsequent entry to grammar schools was confirmed to be mediated by social background (Gallagher & Smith, 2000). A bipolar pattern of attainment at GCSE for grammar and non-grammar pupils was identified and termed the grammar school effect, where the single most significant factor affecting achievement at GCSE was attendance at a grammar School (ibid.). Investigations of specific aspects of the transition arrangements, questioned the capacity of the tests (Gardner & Cowan, 2000) and school admissions policies (Lundy, op. cit.) to effectively and fairly differentiate between candidates. The volume of research evidence relating to the negative impact of selection on children and primary schools, not least the deeply concerning socially segregating effect (Gardner, 2016), seemed irrefutable.

The subsequent decade saw a series of political manoeuvres which resulted in a chaotic policy landscape (Birrell & Heenan, op. cit.) in relation to transfer. The eleven-plus was abolished twice by two successive Sinn Féin Education Ministers, and the separate status of grammar schools was removed by the Labour Secretary of State under direct rule. The reinstatement of grammar school status was negotiated by the DUP in talks to re-establish devolution and embedded in law under the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act, 2006 (Section 21). Therefore, any future attempt to change the status of grammar schools or abolish selection would have required a legislative remedy dependant on cross-community political consensus. The case is an

example of policy impasse (Gray & Birrell, 2011), where ‘no policy change can be introduced and matters are left as they are’ (Birrell & Heenan, 2013, p. 775).

1.3 Transfer arrangements

The political stalemate (Elwood, 2013a) means that the current transfer arrangements are underpinned by three aspects of policy provision: statutory guidance (DENI, 2010-2015a); the recognition of grammar schools in law (Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act, 2006); and school level admissions policies, with each school’s Board of Governors acting as the Statutory Admissions Authority under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997.

Following the end of regulated transfer testing (2009) statutory guidance stated that “Decisions on admission to post-primary [secondary] schools should not be based on the perceived academic ability of an applicant however defined or assessed” (DENI, 2015a, p. 3). These guidelines were in operation between 2010 and 2016, consequently for the duration of the period of this research. However, DENI’s position on the use of academic admissions changed with the appointment of a DUP Education Minister in May 2016, who expressed support for ‘the continued right of schools to use academic selection in entry criteria’ (NIA Committee for Education, 2016, p. 2) and amended the statutory guidance accordingly (DENI, 2016). During the period of this research, although there was no statutory arrangement for academic selection at eleven, the St Andrews Agreement (2006) represented a statutory provision by recognising, in law, the status of academically selective schools as a separate school type. This tension between the statutory guidance (2010-2016) and legal provision goes beyond the type of policy impasse (Gray & Birrell, *op. cit.*) described in the literature. The complexity of policy provision is compounded by the existence of different layers of legislative and administrative arrangements which although seemingly incompatible are in concurrent operation. In practice, the processes and practice of transition are governed by school level policies, and the power of schools’ Boards of Governors acting as their own statutory admissions authority. Indeed, despite the change of Minister and the subsequent amendments to the statutory guidance (*ibid.*) school level policies continue to dominate the landscape of transition. The prominence of school level admissions policies is a significant focus of this research.

School admissions arrangements

The Board of Governors of each school in NI sets criteria to be used for admitting pupils where applications exceed the enrolment number (The Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, article 16). This differs significantly from the situation in other jurisdictions, for example, in England where authority for school admissions can be held by: the Local Authority in the case of community and voluntary-controlled schools; the school governing body for voluntary-aided and foundation schools; or the academy trust for the three types of academies (West & Hind, 2016, p. 10). In NI, under the 1997 order (articles 10, 13, 15 and 16), Boards of Governors are responsible for setting and applying admissions criteria where the school is oversubscribed which results in the potential for each secondary school to have different admissions criteria.

The distinguishing feature between grammar and non-grammar admissions is the use of criteria pertaining to academic ability and the use of exclusively non-academic criteria, respectively. The dominant focus of research into transition arrangements in Northern Ireland has been the academically selective system (Gallagher & Smith, 2000) and the assessment arrangements which inform selection decisions (Elwood, 2013a; Gardner & Cowan, 2000; 2005; NICCY, 2010). Rather less attention has been paid to the processes of selection more generally. Indeed, the literature relating to school admissions criteria in the context of Northern Ireland is limited to a single report (Lundy, 2001). This gap has been identified by previous research, particularly in relation to how the outcomes of tests are used as part of admissions decisions, both under the previous (Gardner & Cowan, 2005) and current (Elwood, *op. cit.*) assessment arrangements. This research addresses the gap in existing research evidence but also seeks to contribute to the literature more broadly in light of what is known about admissions criteria from other contexts, particularly recent work undertaken in England (for example, Allen et al., 2012; West & Hind, 2016).

Boards of Governors are legally 'required to have regard to' (DENI, 2013b, p. 2) the content of the statutory guidance document. However, whilst this duty represents a legal obligation it does not mandate compliance with recommendations, rather it requires schools to demonstrate that they have considered the content of the document in developing their own admissions policies. This has been described as quasi-regulation, in the English context (West, et al., 2006). In effect, whilst schools

must ensure that their admissions criteria are able to distinguish between applicants 'down to the last available place' (Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, art. 16,5) the degree to which schools comply, in terms of content and the criteria used, is at their own discretion. Therefore, in addition to the potential for significant variations between admissions criteria used by individual schools, as discussed above, there is further potential for significant variation in the extent to which schools' admissions criteria reflect the recommendations of statutory guidance (DENI, 2013b).

System-level divisions

The landscape of secondary education is characterised by three main types of system level division: Gender, Religion, and 'Ability' (Elwood, 2013a; Hughes, 2011). First, school gender profile with both co-educational and single-sex, all-girls and all-boys, schools; second, school religious character with Catholic, Protestant, and Integrated schools; and third, academic ability with academically selective 'grammar' and non-selective, all-ability, 'non-grammar' schools. This research examines the interaction of these system level divisions which have a direct impact on children's rights and lives in terms of school choice and their engagement with school level admissions policies.

Non-academic criteria

Statutory guidance documents detail 'Recommended Admissions Criteria' and 'Admissions Criteria that are Not Recommended' (DENI, 2013b, pp. 4-5). Several categories of non-academic criteria are covered and the rationale for the Department's position on each of these is outlined.

The criterion proposed to be given first priority in the admissions policies of every school in Northern Ireland is the consideration of the Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) status of applicants. It is suggested that this criterion is applied in order that the proportion of FSME pupils admitted to the school equates to the proportion of FSME applicants. Whilst no rationale is provided for this recommendation it is likely to represent an attempt to address the significant social stratification evident at secondary level. The pupil populations of different schools show variation in the proportion of FSME children, however, the most significant differences are between the grammar and non-grammar sectors (Perry, 2016a). Were schools to apply this criterion in

making admissions decisions it would have significant potential to ensure a more balanced representation of FSME children in different schools and school types.

Prioritising existing family connections to the school, beyond having a current sibling in attendance are not recommended. Giving priority to a current sibling is of practical benefit to families, both for the children who wish to attend school with a sibling and for parents arranging travel, however, no other family connection has this benefit. Indeed, where priority is given to, for example, applicants with a parent alumni there is increased potential for social selection. Lundy (2001) raised concern about 'the link between prior attendance of family at grammar schools and social disadvantage' (p. 21). Therefore, aside from those with a sibling currently attending the school, the consideration of family connections has the potential to disadvantage the least privileged children.

In terms of geographical criteria, the use of both defined catchment areas and named feeder primary schools in giving priority to applicants for whom the school is the nearest suitable school are recommended. However, these criteria have been identified as having potential to directly or indirectly discriminate against some children according to their race or religious belief (Ibid.). Indeed, where schools are responsible for setting their own catchment areas in England, the potential for geographical criteria to 'be used to influence the composition of the intake' (Morris, 2014, p. 399) of individual schools has been identified. The use of distance from school tie-breaker criteria are not recommended on the basis that they have the potential to disadvantage applicants residing in rural locations but for whom the school is in fact the nearest suitable school (DENI, 2013b).

Preference criteria, where priority is given to those applicants who name the school as their first choice on the transfer form, are discouraged on the basis that they will restrict genuine parental choice by encouraging tactical expression of choice on the transfer form (DENI, 2010). It is of concern that a school's admissions criteria could have the potential to limit the free expression of parental preferences in a system underpinned by the principle of parental choice (Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, art. 9).

Academic criteria and assessment practices

Until 2009 one *eleven-plus* transfer test, produced by *nfer* on behalf of CCEA, was used to inform admissions to grammar schools. The process suffered criticism for negatively impacting pupil experiences of schooling, magnifying inequalities in educational outcomes (Gallagher & Smith, 2000) and being of questionable reliability (Gardner & Cowan, 2000). Nonetheless, the process, was a statutory element of the education system which was managed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), a public body accountable to the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). DENI took responsibility for providing parents of all P7 children full details of the transfer test and admissions criteria for secondary schools in a single document (DENI, 2010, p. 30).

The current assessment arrangements emerged, in 2010, following the end of statutory transfer testing resulting from the Minister of Education's abolition decision. Grammar schools sought a means to continue to select applicants to Year 8 using academic criteria. However, being unable to agree on a common approach eventually two different groupings of schools chose two different tests (Gardner, 2016). Firstly, the Common Entrance Assessment (CEA) produced by The Association for Quality Education (AQE) in Northern Ireland which is generally used by Protestant schools; and secondly, the Granada Learning Assessment (GL) bought in by the Post-Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) and used by Catholic schools. The two tests are colloquially known as the AQE and GL tests, and these terms are used throughout this thesis.

Through the use of two different tests 'possible issues of variability in validity, reliability, comparability and difficulty arise which have major implications for the consequential use of these tests' (Elwood, 2013a, p. 211). In addition to the potential for the dual testing arrangements to be problematic in terms of the administration of admissions decisions, the pattern of test use has the potential to perpetuate existing divisions by school religious character within the system with what amounts to a Catholic test (GL) and a Protestant test (AQE) (Elwood, 2013a; Gardner, 2016). Therefore, the current assessment arrangements have multiple potential consequences in terms of children's rights: for example, non-discrimination (art. 2), because all children cannot necessarily access the assessments 'irrespective of context, locations and/or status' (Elwood &

Lundy, 2010, p. 347). Due to a lack of transparency it is not possible to assess how far the private consortia, or the schools using the tests, have addressed their obligation (Moss, 1998) to consider how the tests might be used in context (Elwood & Murphy, 2015).

The then DENI policy opposed the use of academic criteria, citing equality concerns and aiming to raise standards in all schools (DENI, 2010-2015a). The decisions of secondary schools' Boards of Governors' to continue to use academic criteria in pupil admissions created a situation whereby admissions practices did not reflect statutory guidance (ibid.). Furthermore, since the tests are privately operated their producers are not accountable to government (Elwood, op. cit.; Gardner, op. cit.). Effectively, the non-statutory nature of the tests means that there is no onus on test providers or the schools which use the tests to make any assessment data publicly available (Elwood, op. cit.). This has significant consequences for children who aspire to attend a grammar school since they must engage with an unregulated assessment system which lacks transparency. Furthermore, the information required by children and their parents to make informed decisions about secondary transfer is provided by multiple sources such as the ELBs and the private consortia operating the transfer tests.

The GL test is free to any child wishing to take it whilst the AQE incurs a cost of £45, with a fee exemption for FSME children. These arrangements raise questions around equal access, particularly with tests being broadly divided along community lines (Ibid.). In addition to the financial obstacle to admission (Tomaševski, 2001) such practices are not in compliance with domestic law under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (art. 128,1). Indeed, DENI (under the oversight of a Sinn Fein Minister) highlighted the practice to be open to legal challenge (DENI, 2010). Of course, charging represents a financial burden on families: a further barrier to equitable access.

Schools admissions requirements specify whether outcomes in one, or both, tests are accepted, and children's decisions about which test(s) to sit are made on this basis. Many children will sit both tests (KLT, 2010-2013; NICCY, 2010), with 2, 3 or 5 test papers which take place on 5 consecutive Saturdays in November/December of Year 7 (final year of primary school). In 2014, pupil outcomes in two commercial, unregulated,

transfer tests informed admissions to 31% (Shewbridge, et al., 2014) of secondary schools. There were 212 mainstream secondary schools in Northern Ireland. Of these, 70 were described as grammar schools or operated academically selective admissions. Year 8 admissions based on pupil outcomes in one, or both, of the transfer tests were made by 66 schools (31%). The remaining 4 grammar schools comprise 1 school which no longer uses academic selection but retains the status and title of a grammar school and 3 'Dickson Plan' grammar schools which are senior high schools for pupils aged 14-18 in one area which operates delayed selection. A number of other grammar schools had pledged a commitment to moving away from academically selective admissions but since 2014 only one more grammar school has become non-selective (Belfast Telegraph, 2017).

Prevalence of the current tests

According to media reports, in excess of 7000 Year 7 students applied to sit each of the tests in Autumn 2017 (BBC News, 2017). Using this information it is possible to estimate the proportions of the Year 7 cohort who sat the transfer tests. The most recent pupil population data relates to the 2016/17 academic year, which gives the total number of Year 6 students as 23810 (DENI, 2017a). It is this cohort of students who were the potential test takers for November 2017, the period to which the BBC figures relate. It is therefore estimated that, of the 23810 potential candidates, 25.6% (6100 pupils) were entered for the AQE test (only), a further 22.1% (5255 pupils) were entered for the GL test, and that 8.4% (2000 pupils) were entered for both types of test. This means that an estimated total of 56.1% (13355) of Year 7 pupils sat an unregulated test in 2017.

1.4 The research aims and questions

This research aims to contribute knowledge in relation to the processes, practices and experiences of transition to secondary education in Northern Ireland. The statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer, and the self-reported views and experiences of children as they make the transition, are key considerations. The intention is to identify the ways in which the current procedures, including school admissions policies and assessment arrangements, impact on the rights and lives of children.

The research questions are organised within three main themes: the policy and practice of the current arrangements for transfer; children's views and experiences of transfer; and a children's rights based approach to transfer. The research questions are outlined below and how these are operationalised is discussed in Chapter 3 (p.99).

The statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer

1. What are the existing statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer to secondary schools in Northern Ireland and how do these operate?
2. What do publicly available data about secondary transfer, including the available school places, admissions arrangements and pupil outcomes in transfer tests, contribute to our knowledge of transfer arrangements?

The views and experiences of children

3. What are children's experiences of the transfer procedure?
4. What can such experiences tell us about the impact of the existing arrangements on children and their education?
5. What are children's views of the policy and practice of secondary transfer?

A rights based approach to secondary transfer

6. In what ways do the current arrangements have the potential to negatively impact the rights of children?
7. How will a children's rights analysis of these arrangements and their implementation improve our understanding of the impact of school admissions policies and high-stakes selection tests on children and their experience of the transfer process?
8. What would a children's rights based transfer procedure, inclusive of testing arrangements, look like?
9. How would this contribute to improvements in terms of equality of opportunity and access for all children transferring to secondary schools?

The study, whilst adult-led, used a collaborative approach with child research advisors who contributed to the child-focused data strand which accessed, analysed and interpreted the experiences of a broad sample of children. It builds on the findings of existing research which suggests that the current arrangements may not have been developed in the best interests, or with due consideration of the views or rights, of children (Elwood, 2013a). The result of the study is a data enriched picture of the landscape of secondary transfer and additional insight into children's experiences of navigating that landscape.

1.5 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

It is customary for researchers to practise reflexivity in order to account for their own position in the research. This is particularly common within the qualitative tradition where such accounts are made explicit in the research (Altheide & Johnson, 2011) and less so in the quantitative tradition where reflection is undoubtedly undertaken as a matter of course but rarely explicated (Ryan & Golden, 2006). Hall (2013) emphasises the applicability of critical reflection within a pragmatic approach, particularly the value of continuous inquiry. The practice of reflexivity enables the researcher to uncover how their own assumptions influence what and how they research (Nagy Hess-Biber, 2010).

With regard to the research presented in this thesis, I do not claim to hold a neutral position within the research. This is particularly so given my own personal experiences, both of being educated and having worked as a teacher, within the NI education system. During the course of this research I have reflected critically on my own, sometimes conflicting, views and experiences of earlier transition arrangements. From the outset I had concerns relating to inequities within the system and the potential for admissions decisions to characterise children's future schooling (Gallagher & Smith, 2000). My interest in local politics meant that I had long been aware of the lack of political agreement on the issue of academic selection. The absence of meaningful political dialogue in relation to the issue was perceived by me as an example of the extent to which the interests of children were consistently overlooked in the political arena (Gardner, 2016). The proposed topic of this research appealed to me because a children's rights based approach offered a pragmatic framework to (re)consider the issue, not only of assessment, but other policy directives at the local

level in relation to transition (Elwood, 2013a). From the outset the research was intended to address a lack of evidence, identified by Elwood (2013a), in relation to how selection decisions were being made on the basis of test outcomes in the two unregulated tests. However, as I began to engage with the literature it became apparent that problematic admissions practices at transition were unlikely to be limited to the processes of selection for grammar school places and the use of tests for selection. It became clear that to focus exclusively on academically selective admissions would be to ignore the possibility that the admissions arrangements experienced by children in their applications to the full range of school places had the potential to act as a barrier to children's enjoyment of their rights.

1.6 Terminology

This section defines several terms which are used throughout this thesis. The purpose is to provide clarification for the reader where the intended meaning of a term may not be immediately apparent.

Transfer and transition

This research considers the transition from primary to secondary level education. The terms 'transfer' and 'transition' can be used to describe a broad range of pupil movements within and between education systems. This research uses the terms transfer and transition interchangeably, to refer to the transition from primary to secondary education following the usual procedures (Evangelou, et al., 2008).

Secondary education

In NI Secondary level schools are collectively described as *post-primary* to take account of two main school types: grammar schools which are almost exclusively academically selective; and secondary, or non-grammar schools, which operate all-ability admission. A small number of schools are partially selective, where a percentage of the Year 8 intake are selected using academic criteria and the remaining intake is all-ability. Within this thesis the use of the terms **grammar** and **non-grammar** describe the two types of post-primary school. It is necessary to acknowledge that whilst some secondary schools are defined by their own particular character, as Grammar, the other schools are described in a deficit term, characterised by their

difference from Grammar schools, i.e. as Non-Grammar. The use of these terms reflects their common use in policy documentation rather than the author's own preference which would be the terms 'academically selective' and 'all-ability' schools. The term **secondary** is used here to describe secondary level education and is used in place of the term *post-primary* which is ordinarily used within Northern Ireland.

Key stages and year groups

Primary provision in Northern Ireland is organised in three Stages: Foundation (Years 1 and 2); KS1 (Years 3 and 4); and KS2 (Years 5, 6 and 7). Compulsory secondary education is organised in two Key Stages: KS3 (Years 8, 9 and 10); and KS4 (Years 11 and 12). The final two years of secondary education, KS5, are not compulsory (Shewbridge, et al., 2014). The year groups differ from those used elsewhere, for example, in England. Since this thesis makes repeated references to transition age children it is important to note that the final two years of Primary school are Year 6 and Year 7, known as Year 5 and Year 6 in England. The first year of Secondary school is Year 8, known as Year 7 in England.

The religious character of schools

As discussed above, schools in Northern Ireland can be understood as fitting into one of three distinct religious character categories. These categories are not immediately obvious from the school 'type' descriptors used in policy documents, which can obscure the differences in religious character between schools.

As can be seen from Table 1.1 (p. 31) there are 7 types of mainstream secondary level school in Northern Ireland. The decision has been taken to group these categories into the three distinct religious character descriptors used elsewhere in research: Catholic, (*de facto*) Protestant, hereafter referred to as Protestant, and Integrated (Elwood, 2013a; Hughes, 2011; Lundy, et al., 2012). Integrated schools attempt to achieve a pupil intake from a range of community backgrounds (usually 40% Catholic, 40% Protestant and 20% other faiths and none). Whilst the use of the terms Catholic and Integrated are not in question the description of self-identified 'non-denominational' schools as Protestant and of 'Irish Medium' schools as Catholic can be contested. Nonetheless, non-denominational (controlled and voluntary grammar under 'other' management) schools are generally accepted to be Protestant in character and Irish

Medium schools are primarily attended by children from a Catholic tradition. Therefore, these two school types are described in these terms in this research. The 14 independent schools, are not considered in any of the analyses provided in this research and are therefore excluded from any explanations of school type.

Table 1.1: Types of Secondary Level School

School Type/ Management Type Descriptors (DENI, 2014b)	Management structure	Grammar	Non- Grammar	Religious Character descriptor
Controlled	BoG / Education Authority (EA)			Protestant
Catholic Maintained	BoG / Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)			Catholic
Other Maintained (Irish Medium)	BoG/EA			Catholic
Controlled Integrated	BoG/EA			Integrated
Grant Maintained Integrated	BoG			Integrated
Voluntary Grammar (Catholic Managed)	BoG			Catholic
Voluntary Grammar (‘Other’ Managed)	BoG			Protestant

Regional organisation of education

The Education Authority (EA) for Northern Ireland is a non-departmental ‘arm’s length body’ (Perry, 2016b) established under the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Established as a single authority to absorb the functions of the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs: equivalent to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England) (Institute of Education, 2015, p. 53), established under the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. At present the functions of the EA are discharged by regional offices, which are the former ELB offices. The period of the current research began prior to the implementation of the 2014 Act and the data used in the documentary and secondary data analysis makes specific reference to ELB regions. Therefore, whilst the terms ‘ELB region’ and ‘EA region’ may be used synonymously an effort has been made to use geographical terms to aid clarity, for example, the ‘Belfast

region' can be taken to specifically refer to the administrative jurisdiction of the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) or EA Belfast Region. The EA operates under the authority of the Department of Education (DE) which, again for the purposes of clarity, is referred to in this research as Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI).

Free School Meal Entitlement

Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) is used throughout this thesis as a proxy measure of socio-economic deprivation. Where FSME Status is referenced the distinction is between two groups: FSME indicates those entitled to Free School Meals and Non-FSME refers to those who are not entitled to Free School Meals. The precedent for using this proxy measure, often described as crude but convenient, is well established within the literature and deemed to be an adequate indicator of deprivation at a pupil level (Shuttleworth, 1995) and only marginally less accurate than more complex measures of deprivation (Ilie, et al., 2017).

Special Educational Needs

Children with additional educational needs are described as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) which reflects the statutory descriptor (DENI, 1998). It should be noted that a policy distinction, using a five stage approach, is made between different gradations of learning difficulties, particularly in relation to assessment and additional support offered in school (stages 1-2), in school with external specialist support (stage 3) and with joint responsibility shared between the school and the Education and Library Board (ELB) (Stages 4-5). Since this research makes very limited reference to these different groupings of students, they are categorised as a single group. The intention here is to use the overall proportion of SEN pupils as an indicator of differences in the demographic make-up of schools.

5+ GCSE benchmark

Pupil attainment is often measured using a 5+ GCSE benchmark. Two main variations are used in DENI reports on pupil attainment, both refer to the achievement of 5 or more GCSEs, grades A*-C, with one adding the additional requirement that the 5 GCSEs must include both English and Maths. This descriptor is usually written as '5+

GCSEs Grades A*-C (incl. Eng & Maths)' and will be referred to as the '5+ GCSE benchmark' in this research.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is presented in 8 chapters. Firstly, this introduction which reviewed the research context and provided relevant background information. A review of the literature is provided in **Chapter 2**. This is in three main sections: first, an overview of transition literature and a discussion of children's school choice aspirations; second, a consideration of assessment literature with a particular focus on selection at transition using high-stakes tests and related issues of fairness and equity; and third, an overview of school choice literature with an emphasis on decision making power and school level admissions policies. **Chapter 3** discusses the conceptual underpinnings of the research. The focus is the applicability of Tomaševski's (2001) 4-As scheme in undertaking a rights based analysis of the current transfer arrangements in Northern Ireland. This analysis is further contextualised within the children's rights literature more generally and identifies multiple potential infringements on the extent to which children's rights are safeguarded at transition.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the methodological approach and research methods used in carrying out the study, including the rationale for adopting a children's rights based approach and a mixed methods design. A full overview of the research questions and processes, along with an outline of the three research strands, is presented. The data analysis strategy, including the collaborative analysis undertaken with the CRAG, is outlined in this chapter. The ethical considerations which underpinned the study are also discussed.

The results of the study are presented thematically, in three chapters. **Chapter 5** offers insight into the landscape of school choice using detailed analysis of the availability of school places, children's preferences for different types of school place and the admissions procedures which mediate access to school places. **Chapter 6** explores the current assessment arrangements, by documenting children's experiences of preparing for and sitting the tests and by using publicly available data about the uses of these assessments as part of the selection process. **Chapter 7** examines school admissions processes from the perspectives of children,

concentrating on their views of the academically selective system, their experiences of applying to a secondary school and their accounts of admissions decisions.

An integrated discussion of the main findings is undertaken in **Chapter 8** in four main themes. Firstly, the extent to which access to secondary education is provided on an equitable basis. Secondly, equity issues emerging from the data relating to assessments used for selection. Thirdly, the extent to which school choice is an agentive experience for children and the dominance of schools' decision-making power. Finally, an exploration of quality and equity in Northern Ireland's education quasi-market with reference to the conceptualisation of secondary education provision as a two-tier system and the perceived acceptability of the current arrangements. The chapter concludes by proposing an analytical tool as a proposed approach to understanding the extent to which transfer procedures are in compliance with fundamental children's rights principles.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Academic selection is only one aspect of the transition landscape which affects children's experiences of transfer. Moving to secondary education is a major educational milestone in multiple international contexts and has been the focus of many major national and international studies. Transition is strongly impacted by a variety of factors which have implications for children's rights and children's educational opportunities. This review examines the substantive issues of the research in three key areas: transition to secondary education and children's aspirations; assessment at transition and academic selection; and school choice and school admissions arrangements.

2.1 Transition to secondary education and children's aspirations

Transition from primary to secondary education is 'a major event in the school lives of children' (Topping, 2011). Although transfer procedures and number of transitions differ by context, the issues contributing to successful transition are markedly similar and can be broadly categorised as social, emotional, and academic (Coffey, 2013; Evangelou, et al., 2008; Sutherland, et al., 2010). Where students' perceptions are documented these tend to concentrate on social and emotional aspects whilst teacher perspectives focus on academic attainment (Topping, op. cit.). However, it seems impossible to treat these categories discreetly since they are intrinsically linked (Rice, et al., 2011). From a system and school perspective transition is routine, nonetheless, for quite some time it has been known to be complex and stressful for children and their parents (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). This section reviews literature relating to conditions for successful transition, and children's transition experiences.

Conditions for successful transition

Research focused on successful transition tends towards two main conceptualisations: firstly, approaches from the psychological tradition which focus on student adjustment at transition by considering areas such as motivation, resilience and self-esteem; and secondly, a school organisational perspective with a focus on the processes of transfer and how hospitable conditions for transition can be created at a school and system level. This section draws from studies in both areas, using a pragmatic approach to consider the implications of different aspects of transition from the perspective of the

challenges faced by children and the social, emotional, and academic impacts of secondary transition.

A majority of children adjust well to their secondary school (Evangelou, et al., 2008), however, the consequences of unsuccessful transition mean that a significant minority experience 'concerns about work, peer friendships and relationships with teachers' which persist throughout their secondary school career (Galton, 2009, p. 5). Galton et al. (2003) argue that between the 1990s and 2000s transition programmes were focused away from social and emotional issues, which were thought to have been resolved, and towards addressing academic progression and curriculum continuity. However, several years later it became evident that a more holistic analysis was integral to understanding what made for successful transition (Sutherland, et al., 2010). Several important transition studies, undertaken by psychologists, have shown the interrelatedness of social, emotional and academic functioning and outcomes (Jidnal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Lester & Cross, 2015; Paulick, et al., 2013; Rice, et al., 2011). Studies in the fields of education and sociology of education have tended towards understanding how schools can facilitate effective transitions by considering the multiple challenges which children face at transition (Coffey, 2013; Evangelou, et al., op. cit.; Hanewald, 2013; West, et al., 2010).

Transition is widely documented to be a stressful experience (Evangelou, et al., op. cit.; McGee, et al., 2003) which presents multiple challenges because children experience a period of flux in peer relationships, must build new relationships with a greater number of teachers and adjust to the secondary school environment's routines, rules and subjects (Galton, 2009). In addition to pastoral challenges, or perhaps because of them (Rice, et al., op. cit.), the move to secondary education is often associated with an 'attainment dip' (Sutherland, et al., op. cit.). In several studies from England a majority of children were found to experience successful transitions with potential negative impacts being short lived; however, a significant minority of children experienced poor transitions which are associated with poorer long term academic outcomes and social and emotional adjustment (Evangelou, et al., op. cit.; Galton, op. cit.). This pattern persists across contexts, although the evidence is clear: 'smooth transitions prevent school failure and dropout' (OECD, 2007, p. 17).

Relationships and school climate

Despite considerable social and emotional effects, transition is accepted by children as 'a regular part of the educational landscape' (Coffey, 2013, p. 269). Relationships with peers and teachers (Ibid.) and ensuring that children have an opportunity to build a relationship with the school prior to transition have been identified as ways to reduce anxiety (Lucey & Reay, 2000). Furthermore, facilitating children in building peer friendships has been identified by schools as a means to improve transition experiences (Coffey, op. cit.) both easing feelings of anxiety and isolation, and positively impacting pupil attainment, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Wetz, 2006).

Lester and Cross (2015) consider mental and emotional wellbeing at transition to rely on school climate factors: which include teacher and peer relationships, as well as a sense of safety and school belonging. Their longitudinal study shows a decline in these areas following transition, however, in addition to being protective of mental and emotional well-being, a key finding shows peer relationships to be the most significant predictor of positive transition expectations and contributor to ultimate transition experiences. This is notable because peer friendships are at risk at transition, particularly when children with long standing relationships find themselves at different secondary schools (Topping, 2011). Making new friends was found to be a 'major objective to be achieved when starting secondary school' (Rice, et al., 2011, p. 257). Where this does not happen quickly, children may be unable to attend to other aspects of settling in to their new school. The potential for changes in friendship groupings to lead to anxiety and stress, which affect children's broader transition outcomes, should not be underestimated. A doctoral study undertaken in Western Australia showed that following transition lower academic competence was more likely amongst children who perceived themselves to be poor at forming friendships (Agnella Vaz, 2010, p. 305), although no causality is attributed to the finding. Whilst forming new friendships is important in coping with transition, it should be noted that, children who moved to secondary school with most of their existing friends settled in better than children who had not (Evangelou, et al., 2008).

Poorer transitions

Research evidence shows that transition is experienced differently depending on children's background characteristics, such as gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity (Driessen, et al., 2008), across varied contexts, for example, England (Evangelou, et al., 2008), Germany (Pietsch & Stubbe, 2007), and New Zealand (McGee, et al., 2003). Variations can be found regardless of whether transition decisions are made on an academic, using teacher recommendations (as used in Belgium (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013)) or standardised tests (Marsh & Hau, 2003), or on a non-academic basis (Hanewald, 2013), although in this latter case the influence of social background characteristics appear to be much lower (West, et al., 2010). Since transition is a time of uncertainty the potential for children to experience anxiety and related emotional impacts is heightened (Jidnal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Emotional problems are further shown to differentially impact sub-groups of children, for example, Riglin et al. (2013) found that school anxiety at the beginning of Year 7 (age 11/12) in England correlated with lower attainment for boys and higher attainment for girls.

A review of the literature from the 1960s and 1970s shows children at risk during transfer are 'younger, less mature, less confident pupils; ones of non-academic disposition, often from a poor social and economic background' (Galton, et al., 2000). Despite this knowledge having existed for considerable time, and the efforts on the part of schools to address concerns raised in research and practice, many children continue to experience poor transitions. For example, a study conducted in Scotland, found that lower ability children, due to higher levels of transition-related stress and anxiety, were found to experience poorer transitions than more able children (West, et al., 2010, p. 23). Nonetheless, evidence shows that well planned and implemented transition programmes can mitigate against negative social, emotional and academic consequences by supporting students at this critical transition (Hanewald, op. cit.; Riglin, et al., op. cit.).

Children's transition experiences: aspiration and choice

Children's perspectives leading up to and following transition are relatively well documented in the existing literature (West, et al., op. cit.). However, research evidence related to children's school choice aspirations is quite limited. This section

concentrates on children's transition experiences, by outlining existing evidence about their aspirations and the implications of school choice on these experiences.

Children's transition aspirations

The role of aspirations and expectations, in general, have significant effects on children's educational experiences (Gorard, et al., 2012). For example, it is well known that educational outcomes are strongly associated with educational aspirations (Baker, et al., 2014; Vaisey, 2010). Public and political rhetoric embraces an idea that 'low aspirations' account for persistent attainment gaps and poor social mobility (Baker, et al., op. cit.). However, overt focus in policy discourse on the effects of aspirations obscure structural barriers, such as limited school choice (Musset, 2012; OECD, 2012), to improved attainment for less advantaged students (Baker, et al., op. cit.). Furthermore, to frame school choice decisions as aspirational, or indeed lacking in aspiration, absolves the state of responsibility for addressing structural inequalities which could improve equity within the education system. Instead the policy objective becomes the raising of young people's aspirations so that they pursue the possibility of 'social mobility'.

Research relating to educational aspirations tends not to specifically address children's aspirations at transition or their school choice preferences. Nonetheless, variations in the proportions of children from different socio-economic backgrounds applying to, and being successfully admitted to, grammar schools in particular could be taken to suggest different aspirations for a grammar school place. Cribb et al.'s (2013) study, which examined grammar school entry patterns in England, found that school principals were likely to attribute lower proportions of FSME children attending grammar schools to lower educational aspirations amongst disadvantaged families. However, their recommendations for improving representation of FSME children at grammar schools consider only school level approaches: broadening access to the tests for a wider range of (high achieving) children; revising school admissions policies, particularly to reinstitute geographical criteria which would reduce school catchment areas, making grammar schools less accessible to those who do not live locally; and introducing positive discrimination in favour of FSME children in admissions policies. Considering these recommendations the implication is that access to grammar places is limited by structural disadvantages, defined by Baker et al, (op. cit.) as 'the absence

of opportunities and conditions for them to be realised' (p. 539), rather than school choice aspirations of individual children or their families. Other research confirms that teachers perceive low aspirations to account for poorer progression amongst disadvantaged students (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). The authors conclude that such perceptions tend to at worst ignore, or at best underplay, structural barriers which limit school choice amongst those children which are emphasised in policy rhetoric as most likely to benefit from its potential for educational mobility.

Baker et al. (2014) showed that, despite some differences in the educational aspirations of different groups of children, overall aspirations are high, even for less advantaged students. Where aspirations are low children are less likely to make 'ambitious' choices in relation to their education (Ibid.). However, the authors suggest that children's choices actually reflect realistic expectations, for example, lower aspirations for a university place amongst disadvantaged students reflects the reality that fewer students within this group will have an opportunity to progress to higher education. Access to school can also be conceptualised as an educational aspiration (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, op. cit.) whereby school choice aspirations are abstract preferences whilst school choice expectations are more realistic expressions of choice which take account of the likelihood of successful admission to a school. The idea that children's aspirations are realistic emerges elsewhere in the literature (Gorard, et al., 2012) and is confirmed in the school choice literature which shows differences in the school choice preferences expressed by different sub-groups of families (see section 2.3).

Expectations and positive transitions

Children's transition expectations play a role in how they experience the move to secondary school. Those children who anticipate a positive transition are more likely to report experiencing it as such (Waters, et al., 2014). However, even largely positive transitions are associated with increased stress (Topping, 2011). Some studies suggest that the significance of transition had been overstated because the impact of transition declines quickly following transfer (Galton, et al., 2000). However, methodological choices (or practical limitations) in much of the research, where studies are conducted shortly after transition, may not take account of the 'more profound

impact of the transition experience on identity' (West, et al., 2010, p. 44) which can only be measured several years post-transfer.

A study conducted by Evangelou et al. (2008) showed differences between children's and adults' perceptions of what would make a transition successful. For example, children's accounts tended to emphasise actions on the part of individual children whilst adults described potential positive effects of school and system level interventions (ibid.). This suggests that child survey respondents felt responsibility for managing their own transition effectively. However, additional case-study interviews showed children's descriptions of positive transition experiences were characterised by good communication from the secondary school prior to transition, effective support in making new peer friendships, positive relationships with teachers and a supportive home environment (ibid.). These issues, identified earlier in this chapter as hospitable conditions for successful transition, are supported and controlled by adults. Therefore, although children experienced feelings of responsibility, it must be emphasised that their potential to experience a positive transition was limited by school and system level constraints, over which they had little control.

Galton et al. (2009), reviewing UK research literature, identified peer friendship as the most commonly cited concern amongst children both pre- and post-transition. Similarly, in New Zealand, friendship was identified as a source of both anxiety at the possibility of losing friends, and excitement at the idea of making new friends (McGee et al., 2003). Interestingly, English pupils' transition concerns showed that aspirations about making friends, whilst differently constructed by primary and secondary students, endured across transition (Rice, et al., 2011). For many children transition represents inevitable disruption to peer friendship groupings (Coffey, 2013; Lester & Cross, 2015), although related concerns dissipate after several months in the new school (West, et al., 2010). Nonetheless, children's perspectives suggest that these disruptions are a source of great anxiety (Topping, 2011) and that for many, school choice decisions are influenced by a desire to maintain friendship groupings (Lucey & Reay, 2000; Reay & Lucey, 2003; West, et al., 1991).

The impact of school choice policies on children's transitions

This section briefly considers school choice policies in relation to successful transition and children's experiences (Section 2.3 gives a full discussion of school choice). Children who transfer with existing friends settle better at secondary school (Evangelou et al., 2008; Lester & Cross, 2015) but the impact of school choice on pupil enrolment results in diverse transitions for children (Galton, op. cit.) whereby classmates transfer to a range of different schools and have differing potential for transferring with other members of their friendship groupings. For example, Evangelou et al. (op. cit.) found that white children were more likely to transfer to the same school as their friends than non-white children (p. 26).

Curriculum continuity, one measure of successful transition (Evangelou, et al., 2008), can be improved through cooperation between primary and secondary schools (McGee, et al., 2003). Such cooperation can take the form of a transition programme which supports students prior to transition and on arrival in their new school (ibid.). Furthermore, strengthening collaboration between primary and secondary schools is recommended as a means of supporting student learning at transition (Sutherland, et al., 2010). However, strong links between secondary schools and feeder primary schools are made more difficult in a climate of increased school choice, where primary school students may be transferring to a range of secondary schools (Galton, 2009; McGee, et al., op. cit.; Sutherland, et al., op. cit.).

Relatively little work has been done to extend knowledge of children's school choice aspirations or their perceptions of the processes and outcomes of admissions decisions compared with research into educational aspirations more generally. Furthermore, two key issues obscure understanding of the full impact of choice on children's experiences, as the following examples show. First, the impact of increased competition for school places in London has reduced the proportion of children being placed in a preferred school, this has increased disappointment amongst families because within choice-based systems it is the responsibility of the individual rather than the state to ensure that children are offered a school place (Butler & Hamnett, 2011). This means that children's, and parents', choices become influenced by school requirements whereby expressed preferences differ from actual preferences. Secondly, where children are placed in a school not of their choosing they are found to

deploy survival tactics which allow them to retain a sense of agency in the decision making process (Reay & Lucey, 2003). In these cases children minimise disappointment and express acceptance of a place which they may previously have described as unacceptable. For many children choice is 'in effect, closed down; a process which involves being chosen rather than choosing' (ibid. p.131).

The impact of social, emotional and academic challenges on the successfulness of transition can be limited by protective factors such as peer friendships and effective primary-secondary collaboration in transition programmes. However, increased school choice and resulting diverse transitions have consequences in both of these areas with the potential to directly impact children's transition experiences. The literature on transition, particularly in relation to children's perspectives, tends to focus on social adjustment and the processes of adjusting to the new school environment and rather less on the processes of choice which lead up to the transition phase. This research intends to contribute to knowledge around children's aspirations for a school place at transition, and the processes of applying to and being admitted to a school.

2.2 Assessment at transition and academic selection

The term educational assessment refers to 'a wide range of methods for evaluating pupil performance and attainment' (Gipps, 1994, p. vii), and can be understood as a central curriculum component (Barnes, et al., 2000). Assessment is often characterised as a formative-summative dichotomy (Elwood & Murphy, 2015; Harlen, 2012; Man Sze Lau, 2016), *formative* describing assessment 'to aid learning' and *summative*, to summarise learning either 'for review, transfer and certification' or for 'accountability to the public' (Black, 1998, p. 35). Therefore, assessment is often defined by its purposes (Gardner, et al., 2009). However, it must also be considered in terms of forms and uses: 'how we find out and make judgements about what students have learned' (James & Gipps, 1998, p. 286). Assessment can take many forms, indeed, definitions of assessment often provide examples (Black, op. cit.; Gipps, op. cit.) which illustrate a variety of methods and instruments, both formal and informal: 'testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom based assessment carried out by teachers and portfolios' (ibid., p. vii). These different assessment methods share a common purpose of gathering information about pupil learning (Harlen, 2016). However, the interpretation and uses of assessment

information have potentially powerful consequences for individuals and systems (Gipps & Murphy, 1994).

The arguments made in this thesis are informed by a socio-cultural conception of assessment as a social practice and social product (Filer, 2000). Therefore, rather than seeing assessments as neutral processes they are considered to be value-laden (Elwood, 2005; Gipps & Murphy, op. cit.), with significant social, cultural and ideological 'baggage' attached to them (Messick, 1981, p. 4). Indeed, assessments do not exist in a vacuum but are created for particular purposes (Newton & Shaw, 2016), with these purposes and uses underpinned by cultural and ideological beliefs and constrained by economic and political realities (Gipps, 1995). As Moss et al. (2008a) argue, assessments 'do far more than provide information; they shape people's understanding about what is important to learn, what learning is, and who learners are' (p. 296). Such understandings are developed through discourses, where priority is given to the values of the dominant group, for example, a reliance on performativity in the UK context (Dann, 2016). Nonetheless, assessments continue to be publicly perceived as objective and fair, although the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that because these develop from within particular social and political standpoints (Ibid.), assessment mechanisms serve as 'subtle and complex agencies of social reproduction and control' (Broadfoot, 1979, p. 85).

Assessment purposes, uses and consequences

Where an assessment is carefully and thoughtfully designed for a particular purpose it is likely to be a reasonable indicator of a learner's learning in a given domain. That is, it 'measures what it claims to measure', thus meeting the requirements of a traditional definition of assessment validity (Gipps & Murphy, 1994, p. 23). However, assessment validity, regardless of the perspective adopted in conceiving of it, can reach beyond this traditional definition to consider test uses, interpretations and consequences (Newton & Shaw, op. cit.).

Assessment validity is a contested term, with even widely used definitions lacking widespread consensus (Newton & Baird, 2016). The main source of contention is whether validity is limited to a broadly positivist conceptualisation focusing on

measurement and technical qualities of an assessment and the uses to which these are put, or whether it should encompass ethical and social consequences under a more liberal banner (Newton & Shaw, 2016). As outlined above, the approach adopted in this thesis conceives of assessment as a social practice, and therefore, ascribes to the liberal tradition (ibid.) (albeit whilst recognising the possibility of this binary as an oversimplification (Shepard, 2016)), and considers validity to apply to the acceptability of inferences, and the consequences of decisions, made about individuals on the basis of assessment outcomes (Cole & Moss, 1989). Two important concepts within this perspective, and which are important for this thesis, are consequential validity (Messick, 1989; Messick, 1995) and differential validity (Gipps & Murphy, 1994), which are discussed in the following paragraphs. The section concludes with a consideration of fairness and equity in relation to high-stakes testing. This is of importance because this thesis considers how academically selective school admissions decisions rely on information provided by high-stakes tests.

Consequential validity

Consequential validity emphasises the role of social consequences in evaluating the uses, interpretations and implications of assessments.

‘To appraise how well a test does its job, we must inquire whether the potential and actual social consequences of test interpretation and use are not only supportive of the intended testing purposes, but at the same time are consistent with other social values’ (Messick, 1989, p. 8)

This statement illustrates Messick’s rationale for emphasising the importance of consequences and values in considering test validity. He did not consider *consequential validity* as a separate ‘type’ of validity, but as a facet of *Unified Validity* (Messick, 1995) which addresses technical aspects and social and ethical implications. Therefore, a judgement of a test’s validity relies on multiple, and overlapping, sources of information, including test score interpretations and their proposed uses, as well as the resulting intended and unintended consequences (Messick, 1989). Gipps (1994) describes the shift to conceptualising validity as a ‘unitary structure’ as a shift towards a test-use perspective which is underpinned by ethical considerations. Whilst the assessment literature has long been concerned with the social impact of assessment uses, Elwood describes ‘a degree of ethical blindness when considering the powerful social consequences of assessment policy and use’ (Elwood, 2013a, p. 206).

Newton (2007) describes the distinction between ‘translating an observation of performance into a particular kind of assessment judgement – and the use to which that judgement is put’ (p. 157). He identifies 18 different assessment purposes in an attempt to achieve clarity around the intended and actual uses of assessment types (ibid.), and emphasises that a test developed for a specific purpose is unlikely to be repurposed in an unproblematic way. In addition once assessment data is created it is interpreted as meaning something concrete about individuals and can be used for multiple purposes without regard to the original context (Baird & Hopfenbeck, 2016, p. 822), or the inherent value-implications related to the context-bound nature of assessment. Indeed, the further the degree of abstraction the greater likelihood that data is used in potentially problematic and unsuitable ways (ibid.). Such unintended consequences may be argued to be beyond the remit of a test developer, nonetheless, Newton (op. cit.) argues that, in addition to clarifying the purposes for which an assessment is suitable, potentially unsuitable uses must be identified. This aligns with Messick’s view that a test’s suitability for a proposed purpose is a fundamental aspect of validity (Messick, 1980), whereby the extent to which a purpose is considered appropriate, or valid, is a value-judgement (Messick, 1989). For example, relying on a single source of assessment information to make placement decisions, whilst commonplace, is highly problematic, particularly where some students are placed in lower status provision (Gipps & Murphy, 1994). Therefore, form and interpretation are not as important as ‘the political and social uses’ (Gipps, 1994, p. 51) to which information is put.

Differential validity

An assessment is considered to be biased where it is differentially valid for sub-groups of the population (Cole & Moss, 1989). This is important because the social construction of assessment systems emphasises their apparent fairness (Gipps & Murphy, op. cit.; Stobart, 2008). However, ‘so-called standardised tests, continually produce results that show up gaps in achievement between groups in society’ (Gardner, et al., 2009, p. 15). Differential performance, where some groups perform less well on a test than others, is widely documented in relation to social characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Francis & Wong, 2013). This limits the degree to which appropriate inferences can be drawn from assessment data, in other words establishing what a test score means about an

individual's knowledge or understanding of a topic. Furthermore, the evidence shows that political and ideological choices made about assessment continue to reproduce social inequalities (Broadfoot, 1979; Gipps & Murphy, 1994; Stobart, 2008).

The original promise of formal exams was to improve equality of opportunity and the possibility of advancement through merit rather than connections (Broadfoot, op. cit.). However, seeming equality of opportunity is insufficient to ensure fairness, in the view of Gipps and Murphy (op. cit.), rather they prefer the *spirit of justice* emphasised in the pursuit of equity. According to their definition, equity 'implies that assessment practice and interpretation of results are fair and just for all groups' (ibid, p. 18). Bias can be taken to mean that a test is unfair to a particular group, however, Gipps and Murphy (ibid.) suggest this to be a narrow conceptualisation and extend bias to comprise both technical and experiential inequities. They acknowledge that differences in performance may be accounted for by real differences between groups, caused by differences in their experiences of the curriculum or schooling, for example, lack of opportunity to learn the material to be tested, or insufficient language skills to access the test itself. Therefore, these differences, whilst they may be 'real' in the sense that they are not caused by (technical) test bias, do not negate the invalidity of an assessment.

High-stakes tests: equity and fairness

Assessments, at any stage of education, become high-stakes because of their consequences for individuals, or groups (Stobart, op. cit.). The use of assessment data which is perceived as robust is important in ensuring that resulting high-stakes decisions are perceived as fair (ibid.). External tests are publicly perceived as 'objective' and 'impartial' (Gipps & Murphy, op. cit., p. 15), and are accepted as facilitating progression by merit, although there is much to suggest that seemingly meritocratic progression continues to advance the interests of those 'most privileged in terms of opportunity and preparation' (Stobart, op. cit., p. 21). High-stakes tests are so-called because of their social use, whereby test outcomes 'are directly linked to important rewards or sanctions for students, teachers, or institutions' (Madaus, 1988, p. 29). Consequences for individuals can be significant, such as access to further study or work. Furthermore, the use of test data for accountability purposes has led to an increasing focus on performativity in education (Baird & Hopfenbeck, 2016) and in

education policy (Supovitz, 2009). Issues related to the consequences of academic selection are discussed in a separate section. This section is concerned with the relationship between high-stakes tests, learning and the curriculum. This is of importance because preparation for high-stakes selection tests can negatively impact the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Assessment is known to exert powerful influence over the curriculum (Harlen, 2016) and this influence is considered an unintended consequence of high-stakes test use (Shepard, 2016). One aspect of this relationship is the curriculum 'washback' effect. This term describes the potential for tests to influence what is taught, and learned, in schools, particularly where testing programs are perceived to be high-stakes (Madaus, 1988). Alderson and Wall (1993) describe washback in positive and negative terms, and this is reflected across the literature. Tests have the potential to shape the curriculum, in a positive way, by providing learning opportunities (Dann, 2002), however, the potential for teaching and learning to focus on the material to be tested can result in a narrowing of the curriculum (Madaus, op. cit.). For example, in Trinidad and Tobago a high incidence of 'teaching to the test' is documented (De Lisle, 2008). Similarly, in NI, transfer test preparation is believed to 'distort the curriculum' due to an absence of curriculum-alignment (Shewbridge, et al., 2014, p. 69). This is particularly problematic because the testing regime does not align well with the curriculum or the statutory assessment arrangements (CCEA, 2007a). Improving alignment between classroom instruction and test content, Koretz (2008) argues, is 'a zero-sum game' (p. 253) whereby in order to re-allocate teaching time to one aspect of the curriculum another area must be neglected. The intention of tailoring instruction in this way, or teaching to the test, is to improve student performance. However, this approach can have consequences for the validity of an assessment, since performance gains are likely to be 'score inflation', where the improvement is 'limited to a specific test – or to others that are very similar' (ibid., p. 255). Therefore, rather than achieving a positive effect on student learning only a positive effect on student performance in a limited domain is achieved.

Au (2007), using a qualitative meta-synthesis, identifies three different ways in which this distortion is manifested as curriculum control: *Content control* (content of instruction is changed to better align with the material to be tested); *Formal control* (the

fragmentation of knowledge and teaching in the context of the tests); and *Pedagogic control* (material is delivered by teacher-centred instruction). In his discussion, Au is careful to present a balanced view, since some of the studies reviewed suggest that the curriculum control exerted has positive impacts on learning, for example, where the *content control* has the effect of expanding the material to be covered. Whilst the use of tests at transition, and the associated test preparation, can create learning opportunities in the upper primary school (Dann, 2002), where selection assessments are not universal children who opted-out experienced being left out of class activities or unnecessarily participating in test preparation (Gallagher, 2000). Such differential effects on children's lived experiences of schooling demonstrate positive and negative washback effects (Gipps & Murphy, 1994). Although, the evidence suggests that the outcome is often a narrowing of classroom teaching and learning experiences (Madaus 1988) with an overt focus placed on the material to be tested, and value associated, not with learning but rather test performance (Gardner, et al., 2009). This raises significant equity and fairness issues, not least in terms of equality of opportunity to learn the material to be tested (Gipps & Murphy, op. cit.) which is discussed in the next section. Indeed Madaus (Op. cit.) argues that washback effects corrupt a 'test's ability to serve as a valid indicator of the knowledge or skill it was originally intended to measure' (p. 30).

Assessment for selection

Assessments for selection can take a variety of forms, for example, externally or internally set tests, student attainment profiles based on teacher assessment, or teacher recommendations which may rely on multiple sources. Within an academically selective system, regardless of the mode chosen, assessments used for the purposes of selection are high-stakes (Stobart, 2008) because they are the 'key artefacts' (Elwood & Lundy, 2010, p. 339) used to make critical decisions about individuals' progression to different school-types. This thesis concentrated on the use of tests to inform decisions which have high-stakes for individual children in the context of secondary transfer, rather than other high-stakes uses, for example, school accountability. Inherent in the process of academic selection is a belief that test scores can be used, both to predict individual future potential, and to identify those children most likely to benefit from a more 'academic' curriculum. This approach has been described as an attempt to assess pupil 'suitability' for grammar schools (Gardner &

Cowan, 2000) but is widely acknowledged to be imperfect (Allen, et al., 2017) whereby 'the decision to offer a grammar school place or not will be something of a lottery' (Coe, et al., 2008, p. 20).

The perceived legitimacy of selection

Waldow (2013) emphasises that for selection to be accepted as legitimate it must be perceived as fair (referencing Struck, 2001) but that perceptions of fairness are context bound. Tests used for selection at transition in England, in areas such as Bristol or Kent (Allen, et al., op. cit.), and further afield in post-colonial contexts, for example, Trinidad and Tobago (De Lisle, et al., 2012) are commonly called the 'eleven-plus'. Different tests are commercially available or developed in different contexts, and whilst they share a name, they may or may not be equivalent in terms of what they are measuring and reporting (Elwood, 2013a). Nonetheless, the 'eleven-plus' is publicly perceived as 'the fairest mechanism for allocating secondary school places' (De Lisle, et al., op. cit., p. 45). Although, selection decisions rely on artificially scarce 'good' grades (Waldow, op. cit.). Indeed, evidence shows test-based selection decisions are likely to exclude a significant number of students who have performed comparatively well or whose outcomes have been misclassified (Allen, et al., op. cit.; Coe, et al., op. cit.; Gardner & Cowan, op. cit.). Whilst this is almost undoubtedly the case with other examinations there seems to be a particular ethical issue because 'in terms of life chances, the selection examination for secondary schooling could historically claim to carry the highest stakes for individuals' (Stobart & Eggen, 2012, p. 2)

The use of 11-plus transfer tests legitimises perceptions that selection, for grammar places, is by academic ability, and a scientific endeavour. However, differences in pupil achievement in these tests, is known to be strongly associated with social class and socio-economic status and these differences could be argued to account for differential access to grammar places (Allen, et al., op. cit.; De Lisle, et al., op. cit.; Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Gardner & Cowan, 2005; Institute of Education, 2015). In reality two further factors have an impact. Firstly, in a system where pupils are required to 'opt-in' to transfer tests, FSME children with the same attainment as Non-FSME children are less likely to sit a transfer test (Wareham, et al., 2015). Secondly, where children from more deprived backgrounds have similar attainment (or even identical attainment in KS2 tests) to their more affluent peers they are still less likely to

access a grammar school place (Burgess, et al., 2017a). Children from affluent families with moderate attainment are more likely to transfer to grammar school than children from poorer families with very high attainment (ibid.). Recently, grammar schools have attempted to draw more applications from high attaining children from deprived backgrounds but who have not chosen to sit the 11+ tests, or apply to a grammar school (Wareham, et al., 2015). Despite some success such initiatives have some way to go to equalise the differential patterns of grammar school access (Ibid.).

Equity and fairness: opportunity to learn

The field of educational assessment has long been concerned with equity, fairness and social justice (Elwood, 2013a). Indeed, neglecting equity and fairness has been presented as undermining the validity of assessments used for the purposes of selection (Stobart & Eggen, 2012). As demonstrated above, transfer tests continue to enjoy perceived legitimacy and impartiality, in a range of contexts, despite alarming disparities in access to grammar places for children of different social status.

'The notion of the standardised test as a way of offering impartial assessment is of course a powerful one, though if equality of educational opportunity does not precede the test, then the 'fairness' of this approach is called into question' (Gipps, 1995, p. 148)

However, the equity and fairness implications of the processes of selection go beyond technical issues (Gipps, 1994). This section focuses particularly on children's experiences of learning and the curriculum. For exams to be fair children should have equivalent opportunities to learn the curriculum on which they are based (Pullin, 2008). In selective systems children experience differential access to the learning required for tests both in school and outside of school (Allen, et al., 2017; Caul, et al., 2000; De Lisle, et al., 2012; Gardner & Cowan, 2005). For example, in Trinidad and Tobago an evaluation of selective arrangements showed 'gender discrimination' with 'unequal learning opportunities' identified as a barrier to equity (De Lisle, et al., op. cit., p. 49). Test-coaching has been described as 'almost a pre-requisite' for accessing a grammar place (Jerrim & Sims, 2018, p. 20). The opportunity to learn relies on multiple layers of provision related to: the content of the curriculum and guidance to schools about test preparation; classroom level decisions made by teachers; and preparation made available to children outside of school in the form of private tuition.

Decisions relating to alignment between what is taught in primary schools and what is assessed on transfer tests, and whether specific test-related preparation is permitted in primary schools can result in differential learning opportunities. Taking the example of Kent, where 11-plus test preparation is not permitted in state schools but is provided in private primary schools, FSME children who perform equally well on the curriculum based test elements (English and maths) perform less well on the reasoning questions which make up a third of the test (Allen, et al., 2017). This disparity is thought to result from varied in-school preparation. In addition to differential performance of children attending private and state schools, a difference is shown for performance within the state sector according to the proportion of FSME children in the school population. This suggests that either some state schools are undertaking test-specific preparation in school or that additional out of school learning is differentially available to children according to socio-economic status. A similar situation has been documented in NI, with adequacy of alignment between the statutory curriculum and non-statutory transfer tests being questioned by the OECD (Shewbridge, et al., 2014). A further issue is that schools reported parental pressure to contravene official guidance by providing in-school test preparation (Elwood, 2013a; NICCY, 2010), despite potential limitations on 'statutory obligations to deliver the primary curriculum' (DENI, 2010, p. 22).

A key issue in terms of fair assessment is related to choice, or absence thereof, in relation to subjects studied or mode of assessment (Barrance & Elwood, 2018). However, choice should be available for test preparation, and the tests themselves. As discussed above, decisions made at policy and school levels have a direct impact on children's test-preparedness. However, teachers' decisions in relation to assessment have been raised as a children's rights concern, particularly in relation to non-discrimination, article 2 of the CRC (Elwood & Lundy, 2010). Stobart emphasises that 'being excluded from examinations is not neutral' (Stobart, 2008, p. 27) because inherent in such exclusions are value-laden messages about individuals' potential. However, equally concerning is exclusion from learning undertaken prior to the test. Differential access to learning opportunities, for sub-groups of children, has been documented in existing research, both in contexts where the tests are provided on a universal (De Lisle, et al., 2012) and opt-in basis (Gallagher & Smith, 2000). However, variations in learning provision between different schools has also been documented (Allen, et al., op. cit.; NICCY, op. cit.). Furthermore, access to learning opportunities, and ultimately the tests themselves, are likely to be mediated by teacher perceptions

and judgements of children's capacity to perform well and these perceptions show variation across sub-groups of children by, for example, gender and ethnicity (Elwood & Lundy, 2010).

Francis and Wong (2013) point to the positive effects of additional test preparation on test outcomes as evidence that such tests are not '*a simple reflection of 'natural ability' or talent*' (p. 13), a view which emerges elsewhere in the literature (Gardner & Cowan, 2005). Recent data illustrates significant differences between grammar entry for pupils who were tutored and those who were not: the figures for Northern Ireland show a striking difference (80%:40%); in England the situation is even more extreme (73%:14%) (Jerrim & Sims, 2018). Indeed, a test produced by the Centre for Educational Measurement (CEM) intended to be 'resistant to coaching' and instead assess 'natural ability' was reported in the media, to disadvantage children from the most deprived postcodes and black minority ethnic groups (Millar, 2016). Where differential access to opportunities to learn are experienced by children questions must be asked about the extent to which tests are fit for purpose and whether resulting test-based decisions are fair and robust (Elwood & Lundy, op. cit.). In addition, such practices should be assessed in terms of the extent to which children enjoy their rights, as provided for in international law (ibid.).

Academically selective education

Selective education is a form of 'horizontal' stratification or tracking, where 'students of similar abilities, interests and motivation' are grouped into separate programmes, classes or schools (OECD, 2016b, p. 166) and is a common approach to addressing diversity within school systems. Decisions about the organisation of school programmes can be made at different levels: at system level 'offering the choice of general/academic and vocational programmes'; at school level 'admitting students based on their academic records, interests or social background, or grouping students by ability between classes'; or at parental level 'choosing a place to live and a school for their children' (ibid., p. 166). The approach, or combination of approaches, used vary by context (Dupriez, et al., 2008), however, models of horizontal stratification risk exacerbating inequities within education systems (OECD, 2012, p. 10).

A key argument for ‘ability’ tracking, and one which persists in public and policy rhetoric (Francis, et al., 2017a), is that grouping similarly able students will allow for more effective instruction and ultimately lead to improved outcomes for students (OECD, 2012). Across OECD countries the general trend is for tracking from age 15 or 16 but some countries operate tracking for students as young as age 10 (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). Early tracking is strongly associated with attainment differences at the end of compulsory schooling for children of differing socio-economic status (SES) (ibid.). Children of low SES perform better in systems which do not operate early tracking whilst the performance of high SES children remains at the same level. ‘In countries with early tracking, inequality increases systematically, whereas it decreases in countries without tracking’ (ibid., p. 155).

Merit and attainment in selective systems

A key policy justification for selective education is the promise of social mobility. In a speech entitled ‘Britain, the great meritocracy’ the Prime Minister outlined her vision for the expansion of grammar schools and asked ‘Where is the meritocracy in a system that advantages the privileged few over the many?’ (May, 2016). Academically selective systems are perceived and portrayed as *engines* of social mobility, however, ‘meritocracy is unachievable when the starting blocks are too differently positioned’ (Francis & Wong, 2013, p. 28). This section considers learner progression and attainment in academically selective systems.

‘Education systems are fairer if students’ achievements are more likely to result from their abilities and factors that students themselves can influence, such as their will or effort, and less fair the more they are conditioned by contextual characteristics or “circumstances” that students cannot influence, including their gender, race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, immigrant background, family structure or place of residence’ (OECD, 2016a, p. 203)

The principle of ‘social mobility’ assumes social inequality and the possibility that individual achievement can allow movement up, or indeed down, social strata (Francis & Wong, op. cit., p. 28). Such meritocratic ideals underpin most liberal democratic societies’ education systems (Hemseloet, 2012): individual advancement is secured by individual achievement and perceived to be merit-based. Progression in NI follows the

same principles as England where merit is measured by 'credentials', in the form of external examination results, which allow individuals to be admitted to a subsequent stage of education. Merit-based allocation of limited resources is broadly perceived to be a fair and equitable approach which lends legitimacy to the practice of selection (Waldow, 2013). However, the mediating effects of 'race', gender and social class on educational attainment belie a 'facade of meritocracy' (Francis & Mills, 2012, p. 577). Therefore, an assessment system based on meritocratic principles is at risk of perpetuating social injustice where examination outcomes, and related selection decisions, are mediated by ascriptive criteria, such as gender or race (Waldow, op. cit.). The potential for school admissions and selection decisions to be mediated in these ways are of particular importance in this thesis which considers the extent to which sub-groups of children differentially experience transition according to their gender, community/religious background, and FSME.

As discussed above, inequity is magnified in selective systems (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011; OECD, 2012), with academic selectivity producing wider achievement gaps (Connolly, et al., 2013). However, it is unclear whether an attainment advantage exists for grammar pupils because a focus on headline attainment data may disguise any effects on attainment for individual, or groups of, children (Coe, et al., 2008).

A number of studies have attempted to gain insight into a potential attainment advantage. Comparing grammar and non-grammar pupils with similar prior attainment, Jesson (2007) has argued that grammar school attendance has no measurable impact on attainment but that attainment differences are linked to differences in the social composition of schools. His research shows pupil progress at the majority of grammar schools to be 'average' whilst schools where pupil progress is deemed 'above average' account for twice as many non-grammars as grammars. In terms of academic achievement, lower ability children appeared to benefit more from placement in comprehensive schools (in non-selective areas) than in secondary moderns (in selective areas) (ibid.). These findings are not to be overstated, due to a lack of transparency around sampling and methods employed (Coe, et al., op. cit.), and the author's acknowledgement that conclusions are tentative due to the relatively small sample size (Jesson, op. cit.).

Differences are shown for sub-groups of children according to the school type they attend and their prior attainment. FSME children who attend grammar schools attain at a marginally higher level than their non-grammar counterparts (Jesson, 2007). Similarly, borderline pupils who attend grammar schools showed significantly better attainment than their non-grammar peers (Schagen & Schagen, 2002). This has been described as a grammar school effect (Connolly, et al., 2013; Gallagher & Smith, 2000), whereby children who attend a grammar school tend to achieve higher educational outcomes than their non-grammar peers. In their synthesis of studies investigating attainment in academically selective systems, Coe et al. (2008) conclude that educational gains resulting from grammar school attendance range from 'between zero and three-quarters of a GCSE grade per subject' (p. 238). They argue that an 'apparent' grammar school effect is related to pre-existing differences between grammar and non-grammar pupils (p. v). Similarly to Shuttleworth and Daly (2000), they explain the difficulty of isolating causal factors in attainment as being school based from, for example, home circumstances.

An academic curriculum: the UK context

The rationale for grammar schools is to provide an 'academic' curriculum suited to high attaining children. Curriculum tracking and selectivity of admittance are distinct models of an academic curriculum (Robert, 2010), although they have become somewhat indistinct in the UK. At present there is no systematic curriculum tracking during compulsory schooling in the UK. In policy and practice the curriculum offering for all types of secondary level schools is the same at KS3: under the National Curriculum in England (DfE, 2014); and the Statutory Curriculum for NI (CCEA, 2007b). At KS4, subject options give a more diverse offering: in England these are set out in the same National Curriculum document as the KS3 curriculum (DfE, op. cit.); whilst in NI the curriculum is underpinned by an *Entitlement Framework* which attempts to ensure a balanced offering of *general* and *applied* subjects (CCEA, 2007c). Accountability measures for secondary schools use pupil outcomes in GCSE, or equivalent, qualifications and these are offered in all mainstream secondary schools. Contemporary discussion of an 'academic' curriculum, therefore, refers to selectivity of admittance (Robert, op. cit.), as set out by school admissions codes or policies, which outline mechanisms for selection by 'ability'.

Despite the evidence which shows that the academic curriculum in the UK relates to selectivity of admittance rather than curriculum tracking (Robert, 2010) the public rhetoric continues to perpetuate two perceptions which are informed by historical arrangements: first, that grammar schools do operate curriculum tracking and offer a 'different' or 'more academic' education (Gallagher & Smith, 2000); and second, that non-grammar schools are a 'second best' alternative to grammar schools (Broadfoot, 1979). However, the more compelling issue that these perceptions raise relates to the lack of provision of different types of education in the context of children's right to education and the obligation on the state to 'encourage the development of different forms of secondary education' (article 28.1.b). These issues will be revisited in Chapter 3.

2.3 School choice and school admissions arrangements

School choice and diversity of provision have become deeply embedded in many national education systems (Musset, 2012; UNESCO, 2017), in what can be described as a global trend (Francis, et al., 2017b). These principles underpin the progression from primary to secondary education, a key transition which relies on the exercise of choice. School choice relies on market principles and was expected to improve efficiency and equity (Hoxby, 2003). The dominant justification of school choice, a term often used interchangeably with parental preference, is the entitlement to express a school preference (Walford, 2006). This can be framed as a parental right (Musset, op. cit., p. 6), which enables parents to make a decision about the most suitable school for their child (West & Currie, 2008). However, in many cases decision making power does not lie with parents because it is restricted by school level and system level constraints (West & Hind, 2016) and parental preferences are unrealised (West & Currie, op. cit.). Ball et al. argue that the policy and practice of choice are portrayed as neutral but are 'systematically related to social class differences and the reproduction of class inequalities' (1996, p. 89). Enrolment patterns confirm that school choice policies have not improved equity (Musset, op. cit.) and that within education quasi-markets, schools retain the power of choice which they exercise through admissions arrangements (Robert, op. cit.; West & Hind, op. cit.).

School choice at transition

Parental choice is available for an average of 60% of students across OECD countries with significant country to country variation (Musset, 2012, p. 8). National policies vary (Gewirtz, et al., 1995), and can be categorised as universal or targeted choice (Musset, op. cit.). Initiatives such as open enrolment, where all families have the possibility of exercising choice, are universal, whilst initiatives, such as voucher schemes, which offer choice to certain groups of (disadvantaged) families based on need are targeted.

Whilst diversity of provision (ibid.) and market principles (Gorard, et al., 2000) have long governed education, social policy reforms since the early 1990s have formalised these principles (Glennerster, 1991), with emerging quasi-markets governing provision of education, health, social-care and housing in the UK and USA (LeGrand & Bartlett, 1993). The principles of choice in public policy, and public services more generally, have become increasingly prevalent over time (Dowding & John, 2009; Musset, op. cit.) and have been adopted in more varied contexts, for example, in Chile and Sweden (Bunar, 2010). Since service providers (schools) compete for clients (students supported by their parents) in the marketplace, the basic principle is of market competition. 'Welfare quasi-markets' differ from conventional markets because they are subject to a higher degree of regulation and control: providers are not necessarily profit-making; and consumer choice can be expressed in non-financial ways or exercised by a third party, such as a local authority (LeGrand & Bartlett, 1993). A key aspect of quasi-marketisation is reliance on the principle of choice, a mechanism anticipated to empower consumers to influence the market through performance of choice between providers (Hoxby, 2003). Proponents of increased choice in social policy report twofold benefits: increased efficiency, or productivity; and improved equity in service provision (ibid.).

Friedman's discussion of 'the role of government in education' (Friedman, 1955) underpins current policy direction. He advocated improving or widening parental choice for its potential to improve efficiency and equity: the two principles presented by Hoxby (Op. cit.) as benefits of education quasi-markets. Firstly, increased efficiency in meeting 'consumer' demands would result from increased market competition, as a remedy to rigidly controlled government allocation of school places, thereby improving school standards (Friedman, op. cit.). Secondly, proposed formalisation of market

principles, and subsequent widening of choices, was thought to have the potential to mitigate against social stratification, for example, by class or place of residence (Friedman, 1955). Parental financial capacity was considered responsible for social stratification because of ability to pay for private school places or moving into the catchment area of a preferred state school. Stratified residential areas, combined with the operation of catchment areas, further homogenised school intakes. The two objectives, of improved school efficiency and reduced social stratification (ibid.), were central to school choice reforms internationally.

Quality and Equity in education quasi-markets

Quasi-marketisation of public services is characteristic of a broader neoliberal policy context, which has both economic and social consequences. Lingard (2014) describes 'an ideology which promotes markets over the state and regulation and individual advancement/self-interest over the collective good and common well being' (p. 80). Between school competition is fundamental in school choice systems: school viability and levels of funding rely on being successful in competing for students. Encouraging competition effectively absolves the state of responsibility for assuring quality education provision for all children (See p. 38). Instead this responsibility is partially placed on schools, which are expected to improve the quality of provision in order to attract students. Responsibility is also placed on individual consumers, in this case students supported by their parents, who are expected to effectively navigate the system to access a good quality school (Butler & Hamnett, 2011). From this perspective, the key argument against increased choice is the resulting emphasis on individual, rather than collective, gain which justifies the existence of winners and losers in the education system (Apple, 2006). Quasi-marketisation has not improved educational quality or equity, as originally intended, and has instead created the potential for exacerbating social stratification (Musset, 2012).

'Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion)' (OECD, 2012, p. 9)

International trends show school systems with higher socio-economic inclusion tend to also have higher academic inclusion (OECD, 2016b, p. 173). Socio-economically and

academically inclusive systems are those where variations in socio-economic status and student performance are greater within than between schools (OECD, 2016). School choice policies present a challenge to equity by increasing pupil segregation by ability, socio-economic status and ethnic background (Musset, 2012; OECD, 2012). Homogenisation of individual schools' pupil populations increases between school differences in performance and social status (ibid.). In addition to the role of selective school admissions, exacerbation of social stratification can result from parental self-selection, whereby better-off and better informed parents are more likely to exercise choice and to do so effectively which increases between school differences 'in terms of performance and socio-economic background' (ibid., p. 65). Indeed, increasing choice in Finland, a system internationally lauded as providing equal access to quality education, led to the most advantaged parents making the 'best' choices on behalf of their children and ultimately increased social stratification (Kosunen, 2016). Early tracking and ability grouping present a risk to equity since the most disadvantaged students are 'disproportionally placed in the least academically oriented tracks or groups' (OECD, 2012, p. 59). Furthermore, whilst selection does not affect overall levels of performance within a system it does lead to greater inequalities in performance between students (ibid.), with these particularly pronounced for children placed in lower ability tracks (Hattie, 2009). School admissions, which can restrict parental choice, are more likely to favour advantaged children 'who are easier to teach and more able to learn' (OECD, 2012, p. 65). This is particularly so where schools enjoy autonomy over admissions policies (ibid.). In summary, social stratification can be exacerbated by policies such as increasing parental choice, tracking by academic ability and giving schools control over admissions policies.

Northern Ireland's horizontal and vertical markets

The manifestation of separate secondary provision in NI (See Chapter 1) in the education quasi-market merits explanation. McKeown (2006) conceptualises school competition as taking place in both horizontal and vertical markets (p. 101): competition between schools of differing religious character within a horizontal market; and grammar and non-grammar schools competing within a vertical market. The findings of this empirical study showed that although competition between schools of Catholic and Protestant religious character was very weak, both of these types of school were in effective competition with Integrated schools. Competition within the vertical market

was particularly impacted by open enrolment which had a differential impact on grammar and non-grammar schools. An overall pupil population decline increased the dominance of grammar schools in the vertical market, with the proportion of pupils transferring to grammar places increasing over time from 29% in 1984 (Gallagher & Smith, 2000) to 41% in 2004 (McKeown, 2006), with the current figure remaining at 41% (DENI, 2015b). In simple terms the proportion of places available at grammar schools appears to be very generous. This is particularly so when compared to other contexts, for example, in England where fewer than half of selective learning authorities have more than 10% of places available at academically selective schools (Allen, 2008).

Demographic changes have had direct consequences for schools. Grammar schools' ability profiles now include a more diverse range of pupils whilst the ability profiles of non-grammar schools have become skewed towards pupils with high levels of additional educational needs (McKeown, op. cit.). The result is a magnification of social difference between the school types. In addition, a hierarchy of non-grammar schools has emerged with undersubscribed and low status schools having a concentration of socially disadvantaged students. Within school choice systems, such as open enrolment, the future viability of schools is secured by their capacity to perform competitively within the market (Musset, 2012). The positioning of one school type as elite ensures that market-competition is unfairly weighted towards the elite school type (Lubienski, 2006) which has negative consequences in terms of children's education rights. Principals, teachers and pupils who participated in McKeown's (op. cit.) area study reported that parental preference prioritised grammar schools followed by integrated schools. This PhD research considers children's preferences for different school types within the horizontal and vertical markets.

School choice and family level decisions

The processes which safeguard school choice often rely on decisions made at different levels, within 'a system of decision location' (Coons & Sugarman, 1978). Therefore, in practice school choice is not wholly dependent on parental choice but rather is a process performed by multiple decision makers. Decisions are taken at the family level: parents who exercise choice by expressing school preferences in applications for admission on behalf of their child; and children who may be gifted a level of

involvement by parents in parental preference decisions. The positioning of parental choice as an extension of personal freedom within a liberal political system (Gewirtz, et al., 1995) has brought about a perception of parental preference as a right which is often used as a policy justification (Musset, 2012). However, it may be argued that decision making power lies at the school and system levels (UNESCO, 2017). The dominance of middle class interests in education marketplaces are expected to be limited by school choice, thereby improving access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds because their parents have the same freedom of choice as more affluent parents (Robert, 2010). However, as choice initiatives have gained increasing control of education systems, the evidence shows that increased choice, at best perpetuates (Francis, et al., 2017b) and at worst exacerbates social segregation across schools (Reay, 2012).

School choice, from the perspectives of children and parents, operates within multiple constraints (Reay & Lucey, 2003) which limit choice in practice. In part the complexities of admissions arrangements create the need for parents to exercise cultural and social capital to 'decode the local market' (ibid., p. 126). Therefore, in order to identify a 'good' school choice parents would require, for example, knowledge of school performance and an understanding of the school's admissions policy. Making informed decisions requires parental judgement in balancing the desire for a place at a particular school against the likelihood of their child meeting admissions requirements. Reay (2004) argues that reliance on the exercise of cultural and social capital in performing school choice makes it 'real' for the middle-class whilst remaining 'illusory' for the working class. Parents with pre-existing capacity to navigate the system maximise their advantage over those who lack such capacities, and the result is an exaggeration of social segregation (Ball, et al., 1996). Geographical implications, namely where families live, continue to have significant consequences for the performance of school choice (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Reay & Lucey, op. cit.) despite the original intention of choice policies to limit this aspect of economic advantage (Friedman, 1955).

Burgess et al (2014) suggest that social segregation is not linked to differences in preferences amongst different groups but differences in the school places which are available and accessible to them, and their capacity to make 'strategic' choices

(Burgess, et al., 2017b). The wider choice of schools available to more affluent parents, and the implicit privilege accorded, is accessed 'as a result of synergies between their advantages and those of their children' (West & Currie, 2008, p. 243). The converse is those families for whom school choice might be better described as an 'inevitability' (Reay & Lucey, 2003, p. 125), where no true choice exists and decisions are made within multiple constraints. Evidence shows that only the most privileged parents continue to be able to navigate the system to the advantage of their own children (Butler & Hamnett, 2011). In the case of London, allocation of places in 'good' schools is becoming increasingly competitive and parents are making 'safe' choices, prioritising what they perceive to be accessible schools, rather than 'optimal' choices, which would prioritise the most suitable school for their child (ibid.). This study draws attention to the tendency for parents to focus on measures of absolute performance in making judgements about the quality of schools, similarly to parents in Chicago (Berry Cullen, et al., 2005), which leads to perceptions that there are relatively few good schools.

Children's agency in school choice

A great deal of research has attempted to gain a better understanding of school choice from the perspective of parents, however, less common is to prioritise the views and agency of children in the processes of school choice (Reay & Lucey, op. cit.). Indeed, a neglect towards children's education rights in national policy with respect to school choice have been identified in the literature (Harris, 2009) and the priority given to parental choice has been raised as a children's rights concern (Tomaševski, 2000). Parents report considering children's preferences (West, et al., 1995) and children do report participating in the decision-making process (Walford, 2006). However, whilst children tend to report high levels of involvement in decision-making, these decisions often rely on information and school options presented by parents. An example is the extensive research undertaken by the 'privileged/skilled chooser' category of parents (Gewirtz, et al., 1995, p. 25) before the final 'suitable' options are presented to the child and at this point the final decision becomes 'child-led'. Walford (2006) therefore suggests that the process, where children are involved, relies on their interaction with parents as part of a decision-making team.

In other research children's preferences were found to have a greater influence than parents' preferences on final decisions (Thomas & Dennison, 1991). Although many parents expressed a reluctance to overrule their child the decision did ultimately lie with parents. Thomas and Dennison's (1991) findings led them to directly question the overt policy focus, stemming from the Education Act (1980), on parental preference and the absence of pupil preference. Where research documents children as having 'extended agency' in school choice (Urquhart, 2001, p. 85) this was reported predominantly amongst working class children. In these cases the additional decision-making power afforded to children may have resulted from a lack of parental capacity to effectively navigate the system on behalf of their child. In addition to variability in children's agency in decision-making at a family-level, many children's experiences, especially those from working class backgrounds, were not characterised by genuine choice (Reay & Lucey, 2003). Children's choices were limited by systemic factors within the educational field whereby "choice' is a marker of economic privilege' (Ibid., p. 121)

'Good' schools: the perspectives of parents and children

Arguments in favour of school choice are often associated with presupposed parental desire for academic quality (Burgess, et al., 2014). Quasi-marketisation, rather than encouraging parents to choose the most effective schools for their children can encourage choices which 'provide "good" peer groups' (Hseih and Urquiola, 2006., p. 1479). In Chile implementation of a universal voucher scheme resulted in an 'exodus' of middle-class students from the public to the private sector (Ibid.). Similar findings emerge in other contexts where increased diversity and parental choice works to advantage middle-class families and magnifies social segregation (Gewirtz, et al., 1995; West & Currie, 2008). School choice reforms in Sweden exacerbated existing social and ethnic segregation and widened the between school attainment gap (Bunar, 2010). The result was the emergence of a two-tier system with 'elite' schools populated by middle class ethnic Swedes and 'mediocre' schools admitting working class and minority children (ibid., p. 8). Students of the lower status schools reported that negative perceptions of their school, part of a wider public prejudice against immigrants, could not be addressed without improving cooperation and links between high and low status schools. These voices are a direct challenge to school choice

reforms which have led to increased competition and reduced cooperation between schools.

Where school preferences reflect a desire for schools perceived as 'high performing' (Burgess, et al., 2014) reliance on raw attainment data, such as school league tables, in making choices about schools emerge as a key issue (Ainscow, et al., 2012; Bagley, 2006). This can be situated within a broader neoliberal educational culture of performativity and accountability (Baird & Hopfenbeck, 2016; Francis & Wong, 2013). Schools perceived as 'high-performing' are more likely to be oversubscribed, indicating that they are favoured in parental preferences (Burgess, et al., 2017b). The extent to which a school's academic profile informs parental preferences is also associated with existing social status. This is evidenced by variability in the proportions of FSME pupils eventually admitted to, for example, grammar and non-grammar schools (West & Currie, 2008). At the school choice level, where parents choose a school other than their local school there is evidence that whilst the choices amongst FSME households do prioritise school attainment profiles, this is not done to the same degree as by Non-FSME households (Burgess, et al., op. cit.).

A field experiment conducted in North Carolina investigated how school choice arrangements may have contributed to the lower representation of children from less affluent backgrounds in higher performing schools (Hastings & Weinstein, 2008). Their review of the literature suggested that lower socio-economic status families focused less on a school's academic profile in expressing a school choice. However, the experiment itself analysed differences in school choice preferences depending on the format of the school information provided to parents. The use of a school summary sheet, listing schools by performance data with a chance of admission calculation, significantly increased the proportion of parents opting for a higher performing school when compared with parental preferences made using the less accessible information (a 100 page information booklet and alphabetical spreadsheet of school performance data). Expressed school preferences continued to be associated with a school's distance from students' homes which suggests that geographical accessibility was considered alongside a school's academic profile.

Research conducted in the UK during the 1990s showed parents with limited capacity or confidence in exercising school choice to be less likely to rely on publicly available information about schools in making informed judgements. Instead, this group sought out 'authoritative accounts ... from within local social networks or from direct experience' (Gewirtz, et al., 1995, p. 48). Conversely, privileged parents, it has been argued, are those who both value choice and who have the capacity to navigate the system to the advantage of their child (ibid.). This group of parents are equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge to engage in a strategic navigation of the system and are identified as the only group to be 'engaged in a process of child-matching' (ibid., p. 28), where a school is not chosen exclusively on the basis of academic attainment profile but rather with a more holistic view of its suitability to foster the development of individual children. This extremely sophisticated approach is characteristic of the most advantaged group of parents.

School level admissions policies and decisions

An overt focus on 'accountability', is an increasingly pervasive feature of education systems and between school competition is a key aspect of neoliberal reform which results in a prioritisation of school self-interest (Allen & Burgess, 2010; Gewirtz, et al., 1995; Hughes, et al., 2016). Lubienski (2006) shows that, rather than encouraging innovation and school improvement, choice policies encourage schools to adopt an 'easier route' to improve their market position, namely exerting more control over student admissions. In general terms, high-stakes school accountability describes the ways in which 'school performance is linked to explicit sanctions and rewards' (UNESCO, 2017, p. 52). However, a school's performance in the processes of school choice is arguably the highest-stakes sanction or reward. As Freidman (1955) originally intended, a school which is unable to improve efficiency and thereby effectively compete within the market-place will eventually close. However, rather than raising productivity or efficiency (Hoxby, 2003), schools respond to increased competition in the marketplace by competing to attract 'better students' (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006, p. 1479).

Selective admissions, favouring those students perceived as most likely to perform well in external examinations, subsequently reflect positively on a school and ensure its survival within the market. Walford (2006), citing contemporary media coverage,

describes parental choice as a deception for school selection. Similarly, children's choices are constrained by decisions made by schools and learning authorities (Reay & Lucey, 2003). Whilst choice is upheld as a system priority, it is school level admissions policies and processes which control admissions decisions. In effect, 'schools are choosing pupils rather than parents choosing schools for their children' (West & Hind, 2016, p. 4).

Selective admissions

Selective education, whether using overtly 'ability' based admissions or other forms of selection, for example, by place of residence or religious adherence (Allen, et al., 2014), perpetuates social stratification (Sutton Trust, 2013; West & Hind, 2006). It is the use of academic admissions which has the greatest potential to exacerbate existing social divisions, and where high-quality vocational education has not been developed particularly negative consequences are shown for disadvantaged and low-performing students (OECD, 2016b). Furthermore, socio-economic status has been confirmed as a predictor of selective school admission (Epple, et al., 2002) and the strong correlation between grammar school attendance and family income persists when prior pupil attainment is controlled for (Jerrim & Sims, 2018).

The degree to which schools may be 'selective' depends on the level of autonomy they hold in relation to their admissions policies. West et al (2006) describe two main categories of school: autonomous, those which have autonomy over school level admissions policies; and non-autonomous, where school level admissions policies are imposed on the school by an external body such as a local authority. Since school level policies have the potential to exacerbate or mitigate social segregation in education (Allen, et al., op. cit.), levels of social stratification are higher where individual schools have autonomous admissions (Allen, et al., 2012) and this raises social justice concerns (West & Currie, 2008). Furthermore, autonomous schools' admissions tend to be complex and difficult to navigate (West & Hind, 2016) which increases the possibility of operating selective admissions, rather than 'objective and procedurally fair' oversubscription criteria (Office of the Schools Adjudicator, 2014; West & Hind, op. cit.).

Where admissions decisions are thought to be inaccurate parents have a right to appeal: an element of procedural justice deeply embedded in the UK educational context (Waldow, 2013). However, middle class parents are more likely to exercise this right and to advocate, on behalf of their children, to have administrative decisions overturned. Of course, where such advocacy results in a positive outcome for the individual children concerned the administrative processes must facilitate parental intervention (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Evidence of this process can be found in multiple contexts, for example, in the tracking system operated in Germany children rarely move between educational tracks but where 'upward' movement occurs parental occupation and level of education are mediating factors (Glaesser & Cooper 2011). Similarly, in the English system middle-class children placed in less desirable schools are likely to move to a 'good' school when a place becomes available (Reay & Lucey, 2003, p. 130).

Mitigating the negative aspects of selection

Regulation of school admissions policies can mitigate the potential for social segregation, for example, by imposing catchment area preferences (Robert, 2010). On this basis higher levels of regulation have been introduced in England to address the possible negative outcomes, particularly in terms of higher social segregation, of school autonomy in this area (Allen, et al., 2012). The School Admissions Code (DfES, 2007) provides guidance to schools in England in devising and setting admissions criteria. Prior to 2007 the admissions code required schools to 'have regard' to it (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004), however, the revised code mandated compliance with certain provisions (See Allen, et al., op. cit. and West, et al., 2011 for further discussion). In effect, this obligation to comply rather than justify non-compliance, resulted in some significant changes in school intakes.

One stark example shows how existing inequalities in access were mitigated by this policy change. In 2001, looked after children, a group who experience significant educational disadvantage (Pennell, et al., 2006; West, et al., 2009), were given priority in admissions by 2% of schools (West, et al., 2011, p. 10). A significant shift in admissions practices emerged whereby the admissions policies of 99% of schools accorded priority to this group by 2008 (DfES, 2007). Despite significant success in relation to some admissions practices, a significant number of schools, accounting for

26.6% of the sample of 3000 schools, were found, at least initially, to be in '*major contravention*' of the code (West, et al., 2011). Additional adjustments to admissions policies, to better reflect the code (DfES, 2007), have not had the desired impact of reducing social segregation in school intakes (Allen, et al., 2012). Further regulation is considered as a possibility (ibid.), however, it seems that regulation, in itself, cannot address inequities. Two possible alternatives are identified in the literature. Firstly, modification of formula funding could motivate schools to admit more diverse intakes (West & Currie, 2008). Secondly, transferring responsibility for school admissions to an independent body to improve consistency and transparency in admissions procedures (Allen, et al., op. cit.; West, et al., op. cit.).

In the Netherlands, which has an academically stratified system, the processes of transition to secondary education appear to have eliminated social selection effects (Driessen, et al., 2008). Selection is mediated by a combination of test performance and teacher recommendation to place students in different 'tracks' within a hierarchical secondary school system (ibid.). During the 1980s and 1990s the 'Over-recommending' of some categories of student for higher tracks became recognised as a barrier to equity at transition. However, more recent evidence shows that 'over-recommending' has been eliminated within the system and the association between 'capacities' and educational recommendations has increased. Therefore, transfer decisions can be described as 'merit' based because they show no associations with gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Nonetheless, children's performance in the selection tests do continue to be associated with, for example, social background and parental level of education. Therefore, although the system safeguards meritocratic progression, the means by which merit is assessed is still at risk of perpetuating existing social distinctions.

Chapter 3: Conceptual underpinnings

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to understand the transition to secondary education from a children's rights perspective. Multiple inequities are evidenced at transition and much existing research has approached these issues from perspectives of fairness and social justice (Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Gardner & Cowan, 2000; 2005). One possibility in developing this PhD research was to continue in that tradition. However, a second strand of research has, over the last two decades, directly addressed the implications of the transfer arrangements through a children's rights lens. Children's perspectives have informed proposals for reform (Leonard & Davey, 2001) and been presented as a challenge to the emerging unregulated system (NICCY, 2010). Both admissions policies and assessment arrangements have been identified as potential barriers to children's enjoyment of their rights at transition (Lundy, 2001; Elwood, 2013a). It is through the lens of children's rights that this research has been conceived.

This chapter discusses how the research attends to the broader landscape of transition in terms of the right to education at transition and the extent to which transfer arrangements themselves are in compliance with international children's rights law (CRC, UN, 1989). The 4-As scheme (Tomaševski, 2001) and the general principles of the CRC are considered with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and alongside specific aspects of the landscape of transition in NI. The purpose is to outline the conceptual basis which underpins the study.

3.1 Transition arrangements: fairness, equity and children's rights

This thesis initially emerged from equity and fairness concerns about the current assessment arrangements at transition which had been framed as a rights issue (Elwood, *op. cit.*). A key consideration was that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had called for the abolition of academic selection in NI (2008) and for an end to the current unregulated assessments used for selection (2016). However, it became evident that the tests used to make grammar school selection decisions were only one aspect of a broader transition landscape which raised multiple children's rights concerns in relation to the processes of school choice and the admissions arrangements for all secondary school types. A key focus of the work is how the

complexity of the transition landscape represents multiple barriers in assuring children's rights *to, in and through* education (Verhellen, 1993), as provided for under the CRC (UN, 1989).

The literature discussed in Chapter 2, although drawn from distinct research areas identifies multiple common areas for concern. These can broadly be understood as issues of fairness, access and agency. The research literature evidences differential experiences in relation to aspirations, assessments and choice at transition. This research addresses the commonality between these different bodies of literature and argues that many of the issues considered are fundamental aspects of the right of the child to education (Beiter, 2006) and their experiences as rights holders in and through education (Tomaševski, 2001; Verhellen, op. cit.).

Across European countries, despite the provision of compulsory education at secondary level, there remain challenges in improving universality and equality of access and addressing issues of quality in relation to academic attainment (Lundy, 2012). In many of these countries an exacerbation of social stratification is evidenced and demonstrates differential access to, and quality in, education to be associated with school choice policies and how these are manifested in the education quasi-market (OECD, 2012). On a superficial level primary and secondary education are universally available in NI, however, multiple issues have been identified by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2002; 2008; 2016) in terms of gaps in compliance with the provisions of the CRC (op. cit.).

3.2 Children's rights and the CRC

The human rights of children precede the CRC, with those rights enshrined in child-focused international treaties, such as the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1959), and children being equally subject to the provisions made by human rights treaties in general, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). Nonetheless, the CRC marks a significant turning point in the provision of children's rights in several ways: summarised by Verhellen (1993) as 'its binding character, its comprehensiveness and its participation rights' (p. 200).

The legally binding status of the convention is manifested in two ways. First, the potential for the CRC, or certain provisions of it, to be embedded in domestic law (Lundy, et al., 2013). The principle of 'progressive realisation' means that the obligation, rather than being absolute, requires state parties to implement the CRC to the maximum extent within the limitations of their available resources (Lundy, 2012). Therefore, despite being one of the most quickly and widely ratified instruments of human rights law (Lundy, op. cit.; Verhellen, 1993) the CRC has not been universally adopted as domestic law, for example, 3 of the 12 countries examined in a recent study had done so (Lundy, et al., 2013). Second, the requirement for state parties to periodically report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has been identified as a characteristic of legal accountability (Garbarino, 2011). The comprehensiveness of the CRC, and consequent complexity of the document itself, make it difficult to establish the extent to which the entitlements of children as rights holders are safeguarded. This is partly because the Committee's reports largely rely on state parties' own accounts of their provisions for rights (Lundy, 2012).

Although the CRC is the most comprehensive international legal statement of the rights of children it is not the 'perfect vehicle' for the realisation of those rights (Ibid.). In order that international consensus was achieved the provisions of the CRC were heavily negotiated by powerful political interests, rather than with regard for the needs or views of children (Freeman, 2000). Nonetheless, the comprehensiveness of the document which addresses 41 substantive rights is a key strength (Verhellen, 1993), despite imperfections in these articulations (Lundy, op. cit.). The indivisible, interdependent and mutually reinforcing nature of human rights (Freeman, 2010; Verhellen, op. cit.) is commonly accepted and consistently reaffirmed in UN documents (Beiter, 2006). This indivisibility contributes to the complexity of conceptualising and defining what constitutes adequate provision, particularly within the constraints of the principle of progressive realisation. Children's rights, and human rights more generally, have therefore been the object of many attempts to categorise and illuminate their conceptual underpinnings, one example being the three Ps: *protection*, *provision* and *participation* (Verhellen, op. cit.).

In addition to their recognition as a fundamental human right, the explicit attention given to *children's* participation rights (article 12) in the CRC underlines their

significance (Hammarberg, 1997). The inclusion of participation (art. 12) is held as a recognition of a shift towards conceptualising the child as a 'being' rather than exclusively a 'becoming' (Freeman, 2010): that is to say that rather than viewing children as 'future' citizens they are considered to be agentic humans in their own right (Coady, 2008). This recognition conceptualises children's rights entitlements as real in the present. Freeman (Ibid.) argues that children's participation rights extend beyond article 12 and his discussion emphasises the indivisibility of rights discussed above. For example, children's participation extends to article 14: the right to thought, conscience and religion (1) and of course the right to parental direction in that area (2) (p.20). Children's participation (art. 12) has achieved significant implementation in domestic policy, particularly in relation to education, which can be traced back to its origins in the CRC (Lundy, 2012).

The general principles of the CRC

Despite the status of human rights as indivisible and mutually reinforcing (Verhellen, 1993), four rights, identified by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (1991) as cross-cutting principles, form the cornerstone of all rights provided for by the CRC. The 'so-called' general principles (Hanson & Lundy, 2017, p. 297) are: Non-discrimination (art. 2); best interests (art. 3); right to life (art. 6); and participation (art. 12). It is also important to acknowledge the importance of the right to adult direction and guidance (art. 5) in terms of how children access and use the full range of knowledge available to them in the performance of school choice. Therefore, in addition to the four general principles article 5 is considered to have cross-cutting qualities. The intention is not to suggest that respect for children as rights holders at transition does not extend to each of the CRC provisions, rather for the purposes of this thesis, in addition to the education rights (art. 28 & 29) considered under the 4-As (section 3.3), these five specific rights are considered fundamental to meaningful rights-based analysis of the transition landscape. Recognition of children as rights holders, whose rights ought to be safeguarded in each of these areas, is revisited in section 3.4.

Non-discrimination (Article 2)

The principle of non-discrimination (art. 2) is intended to underpin the provision of each of the rights set out in the CRC (UN, 1989). On this basis access to secondary education, and its different forms, must be equally accorded to every child 'irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status' (para. 1). Of course this would include requiring both academic and non-academic admissions to operate in compliance with non-discrimination (art. 2). Furthermore, Beiter (2006) argues that a remedy against discriminatory practices are made explicit within article 29.1.a, which requires that education be directed towards the development of the child to their fullest potential.

Multiple instances of practices which do not align with the principle of non-discrimination (art. 2) have been outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Previous research has shown that the transfer arrangements are sufficiently complex as to be differentially accessible to parents according to their level of education and financial means (Lundy, 2001). Evidently this has consequences for children, and where access to education is differentially experienced by sub-groups of children it is likely to be discriminatory. For example, evidence that socio-economic status mediates performance in the eleven-plus and subsequent access to grammar school (Gallagher & Smith, 2000). Such evidence shows that, under the previous transfer arrangements, the right to education at transition has not been assured 'without discrimination of any kind' (art. 2.1). This thesis will consider admissions arrangements across the full range of schools, including assessments for selection, in order to identify whether similarly discriminatory practices persist.

Best interests (Article 3)

In the spirit of the CRC, consideration of children's best interests (art. 3), as with the other general principles, should be at the heart of all actions and decisions concerning children, 'whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies' (para. 1). Therefore, in policy level and school level decisions, which govern each aspect of transition, it is expected that 'the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration' (Ibid.). However, since

the best interests of children are not required to be 'the' primary consideration (Freeman, 2000) it is likely that powerful adult interests dominate decisions in each of these arenas (Hammarberg, 1997) and, for example, in the assessment arena potentially 'outweigh a child's or children's best interests' (Elwood & Lundy, 2010, p. 338).

Existing research identifies numerous aspects of transfer arrangements which are unlikely to operate in the best interests of children (art. 3). The use of eleven-plus tests leads significant numbers of children to self-identify as educational failures which can have long-term emotional consequences (Gardner, 2016; Tomaševski, 2003b) with school placement decisions also having potential academic consequences. Specific administrative arrangements also do not seem to have been considered in light of the child's best interests. For example, the use of grammar schools as examination centres, a process which has the potential to increase stress and affect performance due to the unfamiliarity of the surroundings (Gipps, 1995). Assessment arrangements have been argued to operate in the best interests of schools rather than children (Elwood, 2013a). This thesis will establish the extent to which the best interests of children are safeguarded under the current transfer arrangements with a significant focus on assessments for selection but also with due consideration of the broader admissions landscape.

Adult direction and guidance (Article 5)

It has been argued that the right to parental direction and guidance (art.5) ought to be given status as a general principle in place of article 6 (Hanson & Lundy, 2017). Whilst it is not the purpose here to engage in a discussion of the merits of this argument it is important to emphasise the significance of article 5 to transition. Research evidence suggests that school choices are made within family decision-making teams whereby parents have a significant role to play in accessing and mediating information about school choice and admissions procedures for their child (p. 63). Concerns arise in light of the evidence outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 which demonstrates a strong likelihood that parents are differentially equipped to understand and navigate the admissions arrangements. Of course where parental capacity is limited in this regard the guidance offered to children will vary in quality and the potential for children to exercise their right to participate (art. 12) in decision making in line with their evolving capacities (art. 5) is

thereby limited. Furthermore, Eekelaar (1992) argues that the right to adult direction and guidance (art. 5) underpins each of the rights in the convention on the basis that children's rights are 'not self-enforcing, or even immediately self-evident to children' (p. 233). Therefore, the state is obliged to respect the key role of adults under the remit of article 5 to ensure that children are recognised as rights holders which again is subject to parental capacity to fulfil this duty, as is their obligation under the CRC.

Right to life (Article 6)

Since the early stages of operationalising the procedures for state parties to report on their compliance with the CRC (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1991), the right to life (art. 6) has been accepted and established as a general principle (Hanson & Lundy, 2017). Housed within this right is an explicit reference to the responsibility of the state party to assure the 'development of the child' (art. 6). Education is considered as a 'multiplier of rights', whereby the extent of its implementation has the potential to improve or undermine children's capacity to exercise their full range of rights (Lundy, 2006). State parties, as signatories to the CRC, 'have obligations to incorporate its provisions into domestic laws and policies and to ensure their implementation so that all children everywhere enjoy their right to education' (Singh, 2013). In the NI context, similarly to other European contexts, there are significant gaps in the extent to which national policies reflect the provisions of the CRC (Lundy, 2012). In addition to the explicit recognition of state responsibility for safeguarding education rights (art. 28 and 29) the obligation to safeguard the development of every child (art. 6) applies to state party decisions in relation to every aspect of children's lives, including their engagements with transition arrangements.

Participation (Article 12)

The final general principle considered within this framework is children's right to participate (art. 12), or more accurately 'the right to express a view, and the right to have the view given due weight' (Lundy, 2007, p. 931). According to Lundy, children's participation rights are one of the most widely known, misunderstood and poorly applied provisions of the CRC (ibid.). In education, despite significant progress in incorporating article 12 at a national policy level in multiple contexts, the Committee on the Rights of the Child continues to identify breaches of this provision of the convention

across European countries, at a classroom, school and policy level (For a summary see (Lundy, 2012).

As already discussed, powerful adult interests define policy agendas (Freeman, 2000; Hammarberg, 1997) with children often remaining voiceless in terms of education policy reform (Elwood, 2013b). This is despite an explicit requirement that 'States parties should consult children at the local and national levels on all aspects of education policy' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 22). The views of children should be actively sought in relation to the legal and administrative arrangements in place to manage transition, and those views ought to be given due weight in decisions. Nonetheless, it is 'parental freedom of choice' (Tomaševski, 2004, p. 18) which is safeguarded in multiple international human rights treaties and is therefore considered as an aspect of the accessibility and acceptability of education rights (Tomaševski, 2001). Due consideration of children's views (art. 12) has not been taken in the development of the admissions arrangements or the introduction of unregulated testing arrangements (Elwood, 2013a).

DENI transfer guidance (DENI, 2013b), similarly to statutory admissions regulations in England (DCSF, 2008), also specify the importance of parental choice at transition. Advice to primary school Principals, who are the most likely source of advice for parents of transition age children, suggests that parents be advised to take into account 'The child's own views on where he/she would be happiest' (DENI, op. cit., p. 27). Lundy (2007) reminds us that 'the practice of actively involving pupils in decision making should not be portrayed as an option which is in the gift of adults but a legal imperative which is the right of the child' (p. 931). Nonetheless, this example shows that the according of decision making power to children has been placed in the gift of adults by domestic policy. As Tomaševski (2004) acknowledges, children are rarely accorded appropriate levels of decision-making in relation to their education, although it is children who are the rights holders, in terms of the right to education (art. 28 and 29), and to participation (art. 12). Furthermore, despite children's entitlement to express their views and for those views to be given due weight in decisions affecting them, no mechanism has been put in place to take account of children's views in the performance of school choice decisions. This thesis prioritises the views and experiences of children and will address their school choice preferences in an effort to

establish the extent to which their own views are accommodated in the processes of selection.

The right to education

Education rights have been consistently provided for by multiple international human rights treaties (Beiter, 2006). However, the CRC marked a significant turning point by providing the most comprehensive statement of children's education rights (Lundy, 2012). Such was the importance accorded to education in the development of the CRC that in addition to specifying a right to education (art. 28) a further article described the goals of education (art. 29) (Lundy, et al., Forthcoming). The education rights set out in the CRC are discussed at length in sections 3.3-3.4 in relation to how these are conceptualised in the literature, however, a brief overview of the substantive articles is provided here for clarity.

Article 28 outlines the basis for the right to education to be provided on a basis of equality. The principles of free and compulsory primary education (art. 28.1.a.) are mandated and have been extended to secondary level in many countries. The requirement for 'different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational' (art. 28.1.b.) to be developed, and the degree to which they are 'available and accessible to every child' (ibid.) varies between contexts. The terms available and accessible are repeatedly used and the emphasis is on the provision of a quality education for all whereby minimum standards are achieved (Tomaševski, 2001). Two pertinent aspects of article 29 are the need for education to safeguard 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (para. 1(a)) and 'the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society' (para. 1 (d)). As mentioned above, these goals are the responsibility of the state under the CRC, although within school choice systems a reliance on market forces to improve equity and quality in education have all but absolved the state of the responsibility to develop education provision which is of good quality and respectful of children's rights (Beiter, 2006; Lingard, 2014). The intention of this thesis is to explicitly address this lapse in the state's fulfilment of its obligations with regard to children's education rights.

3.3 Conceptualising the right to education

Due to the significance of education in children's lives, and its prominence in the CRC, multiple conceptualisations specific to children's education rights have been developed. Nonetheless, a significant gap in theoretical grounding in children's rights research has been identified (Quennerstedt, 2011). The seminal work of Verhellen (1993) proposed that the breadth of provision in the CRC made the 'right to education' insufficient in terms of its capacity to convey the extent of education rights, instead he proposed the three-track approach, conceiving of rights *to*, *in* and *through* education. Therefore, he considered that in addition to a right *to* education that children's rights should be respected *in* all of their educational experiences and *through* education children should gain an understanding of and respect for human rights. This expanded understanding has informed all subsequent conceptualisations of education rights as multi-faceted and inextricably linked. These include the 'rights to - rights in' approach (Quennerstedt, 2015), and the 'access, quality, respect' approach (Lansdown, et al., 2007).

The 4-As Scheme

Arguably the most widely used conceptualisation of children's education rights is Tomaševski's conceptual framework (2001), which considers children's rights *to*, *in* and *through* education (after Verhellen, 1993) in relation to the 4-As: Availability; Accessibility; Acceptability; and Adaptability. This PhD research adopts the 4-As as a conceptual tool in fulfilling the aims of the study which considers the transition to secondary education from a children's rights perspective.

The 4-As scheme was originally intended as a means of making explicit governmental obligations, in relation to the right to education (Tomaševski, 2001). The scheme was developed within the remit of the special rapporteur in order that violations and denials of the right could be exposed and thus opposed (ibid.). Due to its comprehensiveness it provides a means with which to examine the implications, for children's enjoyment of education rights (art. 28 and 29), of the current arrangements for transition, including the assessments used for selection and school admissions arrangements. An overview of the 4-As is provided in Figure 3.1 (p. 81). The figure draws together the two elements of Tomasevski's (2001) original: first, the conceptual framework, which

outlines the abstract concepts underpinning the dimensions of the right; and second, the scheme which was intended as an elaboration of how these dimensions can be adopted and applied in context.

Figure 3.1 (p. 81) and the accompanying explanation are intended to make explicit the dimensions of the 4-As which align to mainstream transition arrangements in NI (as indicated in the figure by a tick).

Tomaševski (2001) proposed that the availability of education for every child and non-discriminatory access to education underpin the right to education. These two principles are significant to this PhD research because there are significant gaps in knowledge in relation to the provision of school places and how the transition arrangements themselves have the potential to be a barrier to access and therefore an obstacle to education. In addition to specifying that an adequate number of places be made available, the 4-As require that the full range of administrative, legal and financial barriers and obstacles to access be identified and eliminated. Within the category of accessibility Tomasevski (ibid.) particularly highlights non-discrimination (art. 2) and parental choice as dimensions of education rights which are not subject to progressive realisation, but rather ought to be immediately and fully realised.

In the 4-As conceptualisation both acceptability and adaptability are required to safeguard children's rights in education. For education to be acceptable minimum standards must be assured and children should be recognised as rights holders in the educational environment. These considerations of quality and respect in the learning environment are similarly prioritised in other conceptualisations, notably by Lansdown et al. (2007), and both are of interest here. Every child should be entitled to a comparable quality of educational experience and no interaction within the education setting ought to jeopardise their rights (Beiter, 2006). The indivisibility of the different dimensions of the 4-As framework is illustrated by the importance placed on the principle of parental choice to the acceptability of education, in addition to accessibility as described above. The potential of the marketisation of education to negate governmental obligations to assure the provision of quality education for every child, as discussed in Chapter 2, is identified in this conceptual framework.

Figure 3.1: The applicability of Tomaševski's 4-As in considering transition

The 4-As	Conceptual framework		4-A Scheme	
RIGHT TO EDUCATION	AVAILABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – fiscal allocations matching human rights obligations – schools matching school-aged children (number, diversity) ✓ – teachers (education & training, recruitment, labour rights, trade union freedoms) 	SCHOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establishment/closure of schools ✓ – Freedom to establish schools – Funding for public schools – Public funding for private schools
			TEACHERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Criteria for recruitment – Fitness for teaching – Labour rights – Trade union freedoms – Professional responsibilities – Academic freedom
	ACCESSIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – elimination of legal and administrative barriers ✓ – elimination of financial obstacles ✓ – identification and elimination of discriminatory denials of access ✓ – elimination of obstacles to compulsory schooling (fees, distance, schedule) ✓ 	COMPULSORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All-encompassing ✓ – Free-of-charge ✓ – Assured attendance ✓ – Parental freedom of choice ✓
			POST-COMPULSORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discriminatory denials of access ✓ – Preferential access ✓ – Criteria for admission ✓ – Recognition of foreign diplomas ✓
RIGHTS IN EDUCATION	ACCEPTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – parental choice of education for their children (with human rights correctives) ✓ – enforcement of minimal standards (quality, safety, environmental health) ✓ – language of instruction – freedom from censorship – recognition of children as subjects of rights ✓ 	REGULATION AND SUPERVISION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Minimum standards ✓ – Respect of diversity ✓ – Language of instruction ✓ – Orientation and contents ✓ – School discipline – Rights of learners ✓
	ADAPTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – minority children ✓ – indigenous children – working children – children with disabilities ✓ – child migrants, travellers ✓ 	SPECIAL NEEDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Children with disabilities ✓ – Working children – Refugee children ✓
RIGHTS THROUGH EDUCATION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – concordance of age-determined rights ✓ – elimination of child marriage – elimination of child labour – prevention of child soldiering 	OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Children deprived of their liberty

The adaptability of education is considered as a right *in* and *through* education whereby the education on offer ought to adapt to the needs of every child, particularly those most at risk of exclusion. Where a child is expected to adapt to the education on offer neither their best interests (art. 3) nor potential to develop to their fullest potential (art. 29) are truly safeguarded. This dimension of the framework attends rather less to the need for human rights education which is addressed in other conceptualisations of rights *through* education (Verhellen, 1999; Lansdown et al., 2007). Rather Tomaševski identifies the need for education to assure to every child respect, at all levels within the education system, for the full range of rights which children are entitled to under the CRC. She further identifies multiple groups of children whose education rights are particularly under threat because of their circumstances, for example, child migrants and children with disabilities. Her argument is underpinned by a belief that the homogeneity of centrally developed curricula cannot sufficiently address the learning needs of every child.

Whilst multiple education rights frameworks exist, this study draws extensively on Tomaševski's 4-As as providing the most appropriate conceptualisation of education rights. Since the 4-As directly reference multiple concerns which are specifically aligned to transition it is intended to have the greatest potential to identify denials and violations of children's rights at transition.

3.4 Applying the 4-As: Secondary transition in Northern Ireland

This research focuses on the ways in which the current transfer arrangements have the potential to limit children's enjoyment of their rights at transition. As discussed in Chapter 1, although transition arrangements present multiple concerns which are rights issues they are commonly not framed as such. Since the first stage in assuring rights is to identify and expose violations of them (Lundy, 2012), this section reconsiders secondary transition in the NI context, drawing on the international research evidence, and with reference to the 4-As (Tomaševski, 2001). The 4-As provide a useful framework with which to conduct a rights-based analysis of education rights provision at transition. This section considers each of the 4-As concepts and their applications in two sections: rights to education; and rights in and through education. The purpose is to establish which aspects of the arrangements may not be in compliance with

international children's rights law under the CRC, in order that these issues can be critically evaluated within this research.

The right to education: availability and accessibility

The right to education can only be upheld where the government ensures that education is made available for all school age children and secures access to education for every child of compulsory school age. In public perception these twin aspects of the right to education are thought to be safeguarded within national education systems, particularly in industrialised societies, through the provision of compulsory education. However, the UN Committee on the rights of the child has criticised eighteen EU countries for failures in assuring these fundamental elements of the right to education (Lundy, 2012). This section addresses the availability and accessibility of education at transition in NI.

Availability

In terms of school choice, education is only meaningfully available where school places match the population of school aged children in number and diversity (Tomaševski, 2001). Tomaševski (2003a) specifically recognised the potential for statistics relating to school places to assist in the monitoring of the delivery of the right to education and this is a key focus of this PhD research. This research will analyse the availability of school places with reference to the system-level divisions, outlined in Chapter 1, in order to establish whether these meet the availability requirements in terms of type and number.

Evidence of a surplus of secondary level school places (EANI, 2016) would seem to suggest that the government has adequately fulfilled its obligation to make education available in NI. Whilst the literature identifies multiple barriers and obstacles to non-discriminatory access to places their availability is less often considered. Indeed, a previous analysis of the availability of schools across different sectors has shown generally good secondary level provision, particularly in relation to the availability of Catholic and Protestant schools (Lundy, et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the potential for market competition to produce inequities in the availability of places which constrain choice are evidenced in the literature (Chapter 2). In addition to limiting the right to

education (Tomaševski, 2001), such issues are evidence that non-discrimination (art. 2) and participation (art. 12) are at threat in marketised systems. The interaction of system-level divisions has the potential to compound the differential availability of school places (section 2.3). Inequities in provision, and associated differential access, resulting from multi-dimensional separateness (described in Chapter 1) have been identified as children's rights concerns, most notably by the UN Special Rapporteur (Tomaševski, 2003b). Furthermore, divisions by religious/community background, and school selectivity, have been repeatedly criticised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2002; 2008; 2016).

Religious/Community segregation

Provision of schools of different religious character can be termed as 'separate' (Hughes, 2011) or 'segregated' (Gallagher & Smith, 2002; Gardner, 2016). Although 'segregated' is the term adopted by the UN (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, p. 16; 2016, p. 19). Due to the enduring nature of segregation in NI society (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2008) separate Catholic and Protestant schools should not be equated to the existence of faith schools in other contexts. Tomaševski (2003b), highlighting the potential for inclusive education to enhance social cohesion in Northern Ireland, reflects on the United States Supreme Court finding that 'separate educational facilities are inherently unequal' (p. 11). Therefore, in addition to separate provision limiting school choice in potentially discriminatory ways, there is an ethical argument related to the perpetuation of existing social divisions.

The CRC does not explicitly reference the right of parents to choose educational provision for their child which conforms to their religious beliefs or cultural traditions, however, 'the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (art 14) could be taken as an implicit guarantee of such conformance. Other international treaties do explicitly address this provision: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) establishes a parental right 'to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children' (art. 26.3); and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) mandates respect for 'the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions' (Protocol, art. 2). A simplistic analysis may suggest these provisions to be supportive of the separate provision of Catholic and Protestant schools, however, the reality of the situation is

more complex, as this research will show. Beiter (2006), whilst acknowledging arguments in support of separate provision, emphasises the difference between a minority group choosing separate institutions and these being imposed on them. Furthermore, he highlights that all schools must meet minimum quality requirements and comply with non-discrimination principles. Any meaningful analysis of school place availability must take account of the implications of separate provision for children's school choice aspirations.

A relatively small number of Integrated schools exist at secondary level despite the duty to promote Integrated education being enshrined in domestic law (Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1989). Following the establishment of the first Integrated school in 1981 the number grew until 2005. However, the number has now remained consistent for more than 10 years (DENI, 2017c). Nonetheless, parental demand persistently exceeds the availability of places (Tomaševski, 2003b) and public support for Integrated education remains consistently high (Lundy, et al., 2012). Whilst this evidence suggests a lack of availability it has been argued that the principle of choice does not extend to choosing an Integrated school place (Lundy, 2001, p. 31) despite the priority given to parental choice in domestic legislation (The Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997). Furthermore, a specific gap in international law has been identified in relation to addressing the importance of integrated education in socially divided societies (Lundy, 2006). Nonetheless, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has advised the government to 'increase the budget for and take appropriate measures and incentives to facilitate the establishment of additional integrated schools in Northern Ireland to meet the demand of a significant number of parents' (2002, p. para. 48(g)). Indeed, since 2002 the Committee has continued to identify the need to 'address segregation of education' (2008, p. 16) and to 'promote a fully integrated education system' (2016, p. 19). The availability of Integrated places will be one aspect of separate provision considered in this research.

Grammar schools

The processes of selection are often identified as an obstacle in terms of access to grammar school places (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008; 2016). However, it is likely that there are also issues of availability in relation to grammar places within the vertical market (McKeown, 2006). The positioning of grammar

schools as higher status schools (as discussed in Section 2.3) whilst problematic in terms of market principles may also limit school place accessibility for some school types which is a clear children's rights concern. No detailed analysis of the availability of grammar places in NI has previously been undertaken and it is not possible to identify from the literature whether these are available on a basis of fairness. This research will address the likelihood that differential availability exists, particularly in relation to the interaction between school selectivity and the other system-level divisions.

Single-sex schools

The multi-dimensional separateness of education provision in NI, and the deeply controversial nature of segregation by both community background and 'ability' within the education system, mean that the third main system-level division receives much less attention in terms of the need for reform. 'Although girls' and boys' schools are widespread, segregation by sex is seldom discussed' (Tomaševski, 2003b, p. 11). In many international contexts the main concern presented by separate schools for boys and girls relates to potential differences in the quality of education provided at the different school types, namely with girls accessing lower quality provision. This is not the general concern in NI, nonetheless, the potential for single-sex schools to create differences in provision for boys and girls presents a potential challenge to achieving non-discrimination (art. 2). As previously mentioned this has been identified as a children's rights concern because separate provision places a limitation on which places are available to an individual child depending on their sex (Tomaševski, op. cit.).

Accessibility

Diversity within an education system can be argued to fulfil the provision of the CRC to 'encourage the development of different forms of secondary education' (art. 28 (1b)). However, increased diversification tends to exacerbate social segregation and replicate social inequalities (section 2.3) which presents potential challenges to children's enjoyment of the right to education (art. 29). This is particularly evident in terms of equal access to a good quality education which ought to be safeguarded by the principle of non-discrimination (art. 2) and the obligation to safeguard the development of the child 'to their fullest potential' (art. 29 (1a)). Hammarberg (1997), in addition to considering the characteristics outlined under art. 2, highlights the importance of

geographical considerations in assessing equal access to a good quality education. The elimination of legal, administrative and financial barriers to education are explicitly outlined as necessary to ensure access to education provision (Figure 3.1). This section considers the implications of admissions arrangements in the context of diverse provision within the vertical education market (McKeown, 2006) as a potential barrier to fair access to a quality education.

Access to grammar places

Multiple social justice arguments, particularly in relation to equity and fairness, are made against academically selective education provision (section 2.2). However, a tendency to avoid 'human rights language when addressing educational topics' (Beiter, 2006, p. 3), and indeed issues of children's rights more generally (Freeman, 2010), means that even in cases where potential breaches of specific rights are explicitly considered they are not necessarily framed as a children's rights issue. For example, Morris and Perry (2017), discussing data relating to differential grammar school access for children from different social backgrounds, concluded that the 'effect of grammar schools is to increase segregation by social background' (p. 17). Such inequalities in access to selective schools, which are widely documented, present a challenge to non-discrimination (art. 2) and equal access to schooling which is a fundamental aspect of the right to education (art. 29).

Despite describing the need for the state to take responsibility for the 'identification and elimination of discriminatory denials of access' (Tomaševski, 2001, p. 12) under the conceptual framework, the scheme seems to suggest that these are limited to post-compulsory admissions (Figure 3.1). However, the international evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that, in general, students from the most disadvantaged families are less likely to access academic pathways in a context of early tracking (OECD, 2012). It is also apparent that the use of some criteria, including those used in both academic and non-academic admissions, have the potential to magnify social sorting (Sutton Trust, 2013). From a children's rights perspective the magnification of social segregation represents a limitation on the *accessibility* of education provision, one of the pillars of the right to education (Tomaševski, op. cit.). Therefore, it is proposed that, due to the importance of selective practices at transition, those aspects

of accessibility confined to post-compulsory education in the 4-As scheme are equally applicable to compulsory education.

The relationship between socio-economic status and access to grammar school places is well established in the research literature relating to NI (Connolly, et al., 2013; Leitch, et al., 2017). The proportion of FSME children who attend grammar and non-grammar schools shows significant variation, accounting for 7.4% and 27.5% of the respective pupil populations of the two school types (DENI, 2013c). The academically selective system has been identified as representing a structural challenge to equity (Shewbridge, et al., 2014, p. 20). Selection procedures are a proxy for social sorting, with disadvantaged children increasingly placed in 'sink' schools which are actively avoided by parents who have the capacity to do so (Wilson, 2016, p. 117). State provided education should be accessible to all children on the basis of equality (Tomaševski, 2001, p. 12). Therefore, evidence of differential access to a form of secondary education, and perceptions that one form of education is less acceptable than the other, makes explicit the state's failure to fulfil its duty to identify and eliminate barriers to access which result in 'inter-generational transmission of privilege' (Tomaševski, 2003b, p. 10).

Arrangements for testing and admissions

The processes of selection and admission have long been considered problematic from a children's rights perspective (Lundy, 2001; Tomaševski, 2003b). Academic selection at transition has been identified as a barrier to inclusive admissions (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008; 2016). Evidence of variation in test preparation in school (NICCY, 2010) and differences in parental capacity to pay for private tuition (Shewbridge, et al., 2014) are equality issues. However, because the tests themselves sit outside the statutory arrangements, children of parents who lack the required skills and knowledge to access information about the tests are effectively excluded from fulfilling the admissions requirements of a selective school. This need for parents to have 'a feel for the game' (Reay, 2004, p. 79) is a clear example of a limitation on parental choice and a potential discriminatory denial of access (Figure 3.1).

Verhellen (1993) identifies the consequences of examinations as potential ‘constraints on the ‘right to education’ (p. 205). This is particularly relevant in the context of transition since assessments for selection mediate access to secondary education. As discussed in Chapter 1 despite the end of statutory transfer testing many schools consider children’s outcomes in two privately operated unregulated tests in admissions decisions. For both children who sit the tests and those who do not the assessment arrangements are experienced as a constraint on choice which fails the test of acceptability outlined in Tomaševski’s conceptualisation (2001). As discussed in Chapter 2, multiple negative consequences are identified in the literature which have the potential to impact the lives and rights of children (Elwood & Lundy, 2010). As this research will show, in addition to the general concerns around selective admissions the peculiarities of test provision and administration in NI have the potential to limit the accessibility of assessments for selection and grammar places in discriminatory ways. Equality of opportunity cannot be safeguarded where different requirements are applied to different groups of children in accessing the secondary school of their choice. Furthermore, the arrangements do seem to operate in the interests of schools rather than children (Elwood, 2013a).

The level of discretion afforded to individual schools in setting their own admissions criteria, acting as their own statutory admissions authority (The Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, art. 16), has led to a ‘system which lacks coherence’ (Lundy, 2001, p. 41) and, due to a lack of meaningful regulation, has the potential to magnify social stratification, as discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, it is likely that the criteria themselves are needlessly complex and difficult to navigate (West & Hind, 2016) as has been found in the English context. The potential for admissions arrangements in NI to act as an administrative barrier to education has been identified as a children’s rights concern (Tomaševski, 2003b). It is the responsibility of the state to address the likelihood of schools operating socially selective admissions criteria by addressing their obligations to assure parental choice and eliminate discriminatory denials of access (Tomaševski, 2001). School admissions arrangements are under-researched in the NI context (See Chapter 1) and this research will address that gap, both through the systematic analysis of school admissions criteria and children’s experiences of navigating them, in order that potentially socially selective and discriminatory practices are identified.

Rights in and through education: acceptability and adaptability

The provisions for education rights set out in the CRC, in addition to safeguarding the child's right to education, identified the need for state parties to assure rights *in* and *through* education (Verhellen, 1993). Tomaševski's (2001) conceptual framework emphasises governmental obligation in this area and addresses this expanded conceptualisation of education rights by identifying the need for minimum quality, the recognition of children as rights holders and the need for education to address the needs of every learner. As is demonstrated by the identification of multiple breaches of children's rights in the learning environment (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2002; 2008; 2016) there is a significant gap in the extent to which the acceptability and adaptability of education are upheld.

Acceptability

The *acceptability* of education comprises the quality of provision as a fundamental aspect of education rights (Tomaševski, 2001). Variations in quality result in differential likelihood of education facilitating a child's development 'to their fullest potential' (art. 29). This is of particular concern because the 'especially wide socio-economic gap for achievement in the UK comprises a serious block to meritocracy and social mobility' (Francis & Wong, 2013, p. 5). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child specifically references the strong link between social background and school achievement in the UK and NI (2002) and highlighted this as a barrier to 'truly inclusive education' (2008, para. 67(b); 2016, para. 73(a)). Although the pattern of differential attainment according to FSME status persists in England and NI it should be noted that it is more pronounced in the latter. For example, the odds of Non-FSME pupils achieving the 5 GCSE benchmark when compared to their FSME counterparts are three times higher in England and four times higher in NI (Connolly, et al., 2013). This difference is ascribed to the higher level of academic selectivity in the NI system (ibid.) and points to a gap in the quality of provision.

Further evidence of differences in educational attainment, measured using the 5+ GCSE benchmark, for subgroups of the school population are clearly set out in the third Peace Monitoring Report (Nolan, 2014, pp. 97-98). For example, comparing the proportion of FSME Protestant boys achieving this benchmark (19.7%) with Non-FSME Catholic Girls (76.7%) shows a stark difference of 57.0%. However, the most pronounced differences are found for FSME children depending on the selectivity of

the school they attend, with only 22% of this category leaving non-grammar schools having achieved the 5+ GCSE benchmark compared with 87% of the same category of student who attend grammar schools (Perry, 2012). A key aspect of educational equity is the comparable quality of different forms of education within a system (OECD, 2012). This research challenges the acceptability of current education provision by highlighting the state's obligation to assure a high quality education for all children (Beiter, 2006). Despite being a signatory to the CRC, this obligation is not fulfilled in NI because, in addition to the inequities identified above, a high proportion (32.1%) of children leave school without having achieved the minimum acceptable level of education (DENI, 2017b; OECD, *op. cit.*) and the onus is on the state to remedy this breach of article 29.

The 'recognition of children as subjects of rights' (Tomaševski, 2001) is a key component of the 4-As conceptual framework with the state obligation in this regard identified as a significant dimension of the CRC (Verhellen, 1993). Multiple examples of inadequacies in terms of the provision of education rights (art. 28 & 29) are outlined above, and due to the indivisibility and mutually reinforcing nature of rights (Tomaševski, *op. cit.*) such inadequacies also have implications for children's enjoyment of other substantive rights provided for by the CRC (most significantly but not exclusively articles 2, 3, 5, 6 and 12 which are outlined in section 3.2). Pertinent issues are those examples of practices which show potential for active and hidden discrimination (art. 2), and how assessment and admissions procedures impact children's lived experiences in ways which do not prioritise their best interests (art. 3). The differential accessibility of the arrangements, discussed above (p. 86) also point to a gap in children's entitlement to adult guidance (art. 5) and to meaningfully participate (art.12) in decision-making relating to policy development and their own personal expressions of school-choice. This research recognises children as rights holders and aims to establish the extent to which the structural arrangements for transition and children's own experiences of these arrangements reflect that conceptualisation.

Adaptability

Tomasevski (2001) considers the adaptability of an education system, the final condition for the fulfilment of the right to education, to relate to its capacity to accommodate children with differing needs. This need for adaptability is most evident

in relation to children from a minority group or with a disability who have been identified as at risk of exclusion, both from school admissions arrangements specifically and from education more generally (Lundy, et al., 2012; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. para. 73(a)). Children's transition experiences in general, including assessment for selection and school admissions arrangements, can be influenced by external factors which suggests that rather than the processes of transition adapting to meet the needs of every child it is children who must be adaptable.

This chapter has explored multiple aspects of the magnification of social segregation evidenced in systems characterised by school choice and academic tracking. Both parental and school level decisions are identified as factors in stratifying school intakes. This divergence between what Ball (1998) describes as 'star and 'sink' schools (p. 120) results from market competition within the system whereby the reputations of schools as 'elite' or 'mediocre' (Bunar, 2010) result from and are perpetuated by enrolment trends. In the children's rights literature polarisations relating to quality of education provision, with 'an elite education for some and low quality education for the rest' (Hammarberg, 1997, p. 6) can be defined as a 'two-tier system' (ibid.). Such two-tier systems can describe the distinction between privately and state provided education, a global children's rights concern (Singh, 2015). Alternatively, the distinction can result from 'symbolic representations designed to shape enrollment' (Lubienski, 2006, p. 339) which leads to 'vertical' diversification and the existence of 'second-best' schools. In the case of NI a vertical market exists (as discussed in Chapter 2), within which grammar schools are positioned as 'better' schools than those in the non-grammar sector (McKeown, 2006). This reinforces historical notions of non-grammar schools as 'second best' (Broadfoot, 1979), and represents a clear lapse in addressing the educational needs of a diverse student population.

Secondary school admissions arrangements have been identified as a key contributing factor in the development of a 'two-tier culture in Northern Ireland' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008, p. 16). It is argued here that within academically selective systems symbolic status is accorded to schools at a system-level with school admissions practices contributing to the accordance and perpetuation of the symbolic representations described by Lubienski (op. cit.). The need for development of quality

vocational pathways has been raised as a rights issue (Harris, 2009). The OECD (2012) has suggested that this would have particular benefits for the most disadvantaged students by increasing student completion of upper secondary education, thus improving educational equity. Furthermore, the adaptability of the education system is reliant on fulfilling the requirement of the CRC to develop different forms of secondary education' (art. 28, para. 1b) which are made 'available and accessible to every child' (ibid.).

This thesis considers the potential for NI's academically selective system to reflect and perpetuate polarised perceptions, and realities, of educational quality, which illustrate a lack of adaptability in terms of addressing the learning needs of every child. The provision of an appropriate education for all children is the only possible means of assuring 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (art. 29, para. 1(a)). The implications of a two-tier system for children's transitions, and ultimate experiences of secondary education, are a significant consideration and, for the first time since 2000 (Gallagher & Smith, 2000), this research will document children's understandings of the academically selective system.

3.5 Children's Rights as a conceptual approach

Policy initiatives purporting to improve equality, freedom and choice within education often do not do so (Reay, 2006). Indeed, Reay (ibid.) draws on research which demonstrates that increased marketisation has negative civil rights consequences, such as magnifying inequalities (Burawoy, 2005). Whilst social justice 'is based on the concepts of human rights and entitlements' (Gardner et al., 2009), it is research which explicitly addresses the children's rights dimensions of social justice issues which has the potential to identify and expose the injustices experienced by children and young people as rights violations (Tomaševski, 2001). Furthermore, despite criticisms that attempts to accommodate rights principles in education policy, practice and research can be problematic (Quennerstedt, 2013), this approach is underpinned by a strong legal imperative which is often not made sufficiently explicit (Lundy, 2007).

The malleability of human rights 'language' makes the concept equally likely to be employed across the political spectrum and for multiple, potentially conflicting,

purposes (Golder, 2014). Therefore, before adopting a rights based conceptual approach, it is necessary to reflect on how this will be done and how appropriate it is to the present purpose. The concept of children's rights, in research and practice, has been critiqued for weaknesses in its substantive content (Guggenheim, 2005) and for an absence of theoretical grounding (Quennerstedt, 2011). Whilst Guggenheim's (op. cit.) thesis is considered to be deeply flawed (Freeman, 2007) it is nonetheless worthwhile to problematise the substantive content and applications of international human rights treaties. Feminist critiques of children's rights have emerged from multiple perspectives, however, within Olsen's (1992) account significant commonalities do emerge: in relation to the potential for children's rights to positively and negatively impact the rights of women; and in terms of how the CRC may be ineffective in safeguarding the rights of all but the most privileged children. One key issue is that despite the apparent gender-neutrality of the CRC, opportunities to safeguard the specific interests of girl children have not been exploited whilst specific protections have been afforded to boy children: giving the examples of the failure to prohibit child marriage compared with the prohibition of child military service. Freeman (op. cit.) acknowledges a multitude of groups whose interests are inadequately safeguarded within the CRC and his work is an example of how rights based analysis which relies on the CRC is not uncritical of both the Convention itself and how its implementation is monitored by the Committee (Hanson & Lundy, 2017).

An important contribution to the critical literature relating to children's rights, provided by Reynaert et al. (2009), explores 'consensus building'. In their review of children's rights literature they identify a failure to problematize the meaning of children's rights and the emergence of a 'technocratic discourse' which focuses, relatively simplistically, on the extent to which CRC provisions have been implemented. They further argue that decontextualized discourse fails to acknowledge the diversity of children and their lived experiences of rights. Children's rights, as and when they are codified in international law, are one possible translation of existing ideas and values (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013). How these are then interpreted, understood and conceptualised by children, parents and communities form the basis of how they are enacted as 'living rights' (Ibid.). Hanson and Lundy (2017) describe conceptualisations of the CRC presented in scholarly work as lying on a continuum from endorsement to critique, with the majority of perspectives situated between these two extremes. Whilst Stammers (2009) conceives of Child Rights scholars as situated on a spectrum from 'uncritical

proponents' to 'uncritical opponents', Reynaert et al. (2012) call for a renewal of criticality which goes beyond measuring implementation. They advocate the need for scholarship from a 'critical proponent' perspective which accepts children's rights as fundamental principles but questions the social constructions and interpretations of these principles. The work of Freeman, discussed above, ascribes to a 'critical proponent' perspective, similarly to Hanson and Lundy (2017) who self-identify in this way.

It could be inferred that the 4-As scheme (Tomaševski, 2001) takes a technicist approach, similar to that adopted in school development accountability which emphasises monitoring and evaluation (Bennett, et al., 2000) and more broadly in a tradition of prioritising measurable outcomes in critiquing education policy and systems (Whitty, 2006). However, multiple dimensions of Tomaševski's (op. cit.) framework, which has been developed from a critical proponent perspective, demonstrate that it goes beyond both the technicist approach and technocratic discourse described above. Rather than an uncritical acceptance of the content of the CRC her work seeks to elucidate the meaning underpinning substantive provisions, relating to the two education rights (articles 28 & 29), and the extent to which these are safeguarded in practice. Stammers (2013) advocates challenging the polarisation between abstract ideas, characteristic of philosophical and legal interpretations, and practices, which are perceived as the everyday or grassroots experiences or meanings of rights. Rather critical research explores the praxis of children's rights to capture the dynamic nature of interaction between ideas and practices (ibid.). The twin aspects of the 4-As (Tomaševski, op. cit.) are the conceptual framing and the scheme (applicable to practice) which address both the ideas and meaning, or praxis, of children's rights. Furthermore, her conceptualisations are underpinned by evidence drawn from a body of international legal thought and practice. Each articulation of these interpretations expands and gives meaning to the various provisions within articles 28 and 29. The concepts are supported by evidence of children's lived experiences of rights, and of claiming those rights in diverse contexts, which are drawn from cases examined by national, supranational and international institutions. In effect, Tomasevski (2001) provides a conceptual tool through which the praxis of children's rights can be evaluated, in a manner which accommodates the complex and dynamic nature of rights. Such an analysis enables the extent to which children's rights are experienced,

or lived, by children to be assessed and understood, whilst ensuring that potential remedies to rights violations can be envisioned.

3.6 Research purposes in the context of the 4-As conceptualisation

A children's rights-based perspective is a fundamental underpinning of this research which reconsiders the transition to secondary education. This chapter has provided an overview of the conceptual underpinnings of the research which primarily draw on the work of Tomaševski (2001, 2004) but are informed by a broader knowledge of children's rights. As this research will show, clear breaches of education rights are evidenced when the landscape of transition is examined through the lens of the 4-As conceptual framework (Tomaševski, 2001, op. cit.). This includes multiple aspects of the CRC which are inherent in achieving adequate provision of education under the framework (ibid.).

On initial examination, the three areas of investigation, namely children's school choice aspirations, the assessment practices and admissions processes, may appear as issues of availability and accessibility within the right to education. However, this chapter has shown that transition arrangements also have implications in terms of acceptability and adaptability, not least because of the need to recognise children as rights holders and the need to assure respect for the full range of rights, with an emphasis on their indivisibility (Verhellen, 1999), for every child within the system. The rights-based analysis of the landscape of transition undertaken in section 3.4 shows that current transfer arrangements have significant potential to impact the rights and lives of transition age children in NI. However, a lack of conclusive data in many areas identified as problematic make it difficult to establish the extent of denials and violations of rights at transition. This research will address these gaps, in response to existing research evidence and in light of the conceptual underpinnings of the thesis outlined in this present chapter, through the collection and analysis of empirical data to provide a more complete assessment of the impact of transition on children's rights and lives.

The research design and how it is operationalised are discussed in Chapter 4, however, it is necessary to outline the key areas which have been identified in this

present chapter as important to critically analysing transition arrangements. The availability of education cannot be safeguarded unless the provision of schools matches the school-aged population in number and diversity (Tomaševski, 2001). Since school choice and placement decisions rely directly on the availability of places, an analysis which takes account of system diversity is necessary in order to assess the extent to which education is available to all children. By gathering and analysing statistical evidence (Tomaševski, 2003a) the extent to which different types of school place are made available will be established. Children's own school choice preferences will be documented in relation to system-level divisions. Transfer arrangements are shown to exert multiple structural, legal, administrative and financial constraints on children's school choice aspirations. This PhD research systematically analyses school admissions policies to address significant gaps in existing knowledge in relation to assessment and admissions practices. The intention is to systematically identify limitations on access to secondary school within the terms outlined by Tomaševski (2001). By accessing and documenting children's views and experiences, further insight into the impact of transition processes on children's lives and rights will be identified. The intention is to establish the extent to which access on a non-discriminatory basis and without constraints is provided for.

The processes of school choice emerge from the rights-based analysis of transition arrangements as particularly problematic in terms of the need to prioritise parental choice and children's participation rights. In addition, a significant gap in knowledge around decision-making are evidenced which make it difficult to establish the extent to which the accessibility and acceptability of the current arrangements are in compliance with international law. This research, by documenting children's experiences of navigating school choice and admissions procedures will for the first time offer insight into limitations on children's agency and recognition of them as rights holders at this crucial educational milestone. A further important area is the adaptability of the choice-based system and the extent to which the rights of every child are accommodated within it. Particular attention will be paid to children's perceptions of the academically selective system, and how these perceptions potentially reinforce and perpetuate a two-tier division.

In essence, the 4-As informed the development of the research strategy. The need to provide evidence relating to the policy and practice of transition is one crucial aspect. Perhaps, more importantly, the need to create an opportunity for children's views and experiences to be documented is addressed, in order that these may identify and challenge breaches of their rights in the process of navigating transition. Due consideration will be taken of the expanded conceptualisation of education rights, including the interrelated provisions of the cross-cutting principles of the CRC.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and research methods employed in conducting this study which investigates the impact of the current transfer arrangements. The chapter is organised in seven sections. Beginning with section 4.1, the purpose of the study and research questions are outlined. An overview of the considerations which informed the selection of a children's rights based approach (CRBA) (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a; 2012b) and a mixed-methods design are discussed in section 4.2. The research design is outlined in section 4.3, and an overview of the ethical considerations is given. Section 4.4 details the procedures employed in carrying out each discrete phase of the research: the documentary and secondary data analysis which consider the policy and practice of secondary transfer; and the child centred aspects of the research which engage with the views and experiences of transition age children. The purpose is to clearly describe how the research was designed and carried out. An evaluation of the research methods are provided in section 4.5 and a reflection on researcher positionality in section 4.6. The chapter concludes with an outline of the data presentation in section 4.7.

4.1 Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of the research is to address a gap in knowledge relating to secondary transition by (re)considering current arrangements through the perspectives of children and the lens of Children's Rights. The study focuses on children's aspirations at transition, the assessment practices used in selection at transition and the admissions processes which mediate admission to all secondary level schools. The overarching focus is on the impact of transfer arrangements on the rights and lives of children.

Research questions

The research questions guide the research in three key areas: to identify the statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer; to document the views and experiences of children at transition; and to discuss how the current arrangements have serious consequences for the extent to which children's rights are safeguarded within the system. The questions to be considered in each of the three sections are outlined below.

The statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer

1. What are the existing statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer to secondary schools in Northern Ireland and how do these operate?
2. What do publicly available data about secondary transfer, including the available school places, admissions arrangements and pupil outcomes in transfer tests, contribute to our knowledge of transfer arrangements?

The views and experiences of children

3. What are children's experiences of the transfer procedure?
4. What can such experiences tell us about the impact of the existing arrangements on children and their education?
5. What are children's views of the policy and practice of secondary transfer?

A rights based approach to secondary transfer

6. In what ways do the current arrangements have the potential to negatively impact the rights of children?
7. How will a children's rights analysis of these arrangements and their implementation improve our understanding of the impact of school admissions policies and high-stakes selection tests on children and their experience of the transfer process?
8. What would a children's rights based transfer procedure, inclusive of testing arrangements, look like?
9. How would this contribute to improvements in terms of equality of opportunity and access for all children transferring to secondary schools?

4.2 Methodological considerations

Philosophical approach

Discussions of methodological considerations often portray research as either quantitative or qualitative. However, as Biesta (2010) argues, since these terms can only accurately describe forms of data, their use as paradigm descriptors can be

unhelpful. The risk is of narrowing methodological debates to a dichotomous choice, and away from the ontological (the nature of reality) and epistemological (the nature of knowledge) assumptions which underpin the paradigms. Traditionally, quantitative and qualitative research are respectively associated with the positivist and constructivist paradigms (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2012). A positivist approach treats reality as fixed and knowable, whilst a constructivist approach sees reality as created by human interaction and understood within that human construction (Bettis & Gregson, 2001). Such traditional conceptualisations of paradigms focus on their ontological, epistemological and methodological differences (Bettis & Gregson, *op. cit.*), and thus their presupposed incompatibility (Biesta, 2010; Howe, 1988), rather than the commonalities between them (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Mixed Methods Research (MMR), as the name suggests, adopts a pragmatic or pluralist approach to research (*ibid.*), where the direction of the research is driven by the 'dictatorship of the research question' (Tashakori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 20) and methodological choices are made accordingly. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that a researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs underpin their choices about an area of enquiry and the subsequent development of research questions (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). Morgan's (2007) framework outlines three key principles which are central to the value of a pragmatic approach, over either a wholly qualitative or quantitative approach: abduction, intersubjectivity and transferability. Firstly, he argues that an abductive approach to the connection between theory and data represents an opportunity by creating a fluidity between theory- (inductive) and data-driven (deductive) goals. Secondly, since the researcher's relationship to the research processes cannot be wholly subjective or objective, there is movement between these two conceptualisations to build a shared understanding, within a reflexive process. Finally, the inferences which can be drawn from research data are traditionally seen as either context-specific or generalisable, within a pragmatic approach the aim is to seek transferability by reflecting on inferences which might be drawn from the data.

This research adopts a pragmatic approach which broadly aligns with Morgan's (*Ibid.*) framework. Methodological decisions were generally taken from a pragmatic standpoint in relation to the imperative of effectively addressing the research questions. For example, to overcome the lack of transparency in how test outcomes were used in

admissions decisions required the deployment of 'everyday pragmatism' in identifying potential sources of evidence (Biesta, 2010). However, according to Biesta (*ibid.*), decisions around what could qualify as 'evidence' are philosophical. In the case of the pragmatic researcher, such decisions are made from a position which rejects hierarchical epistemological dualisms about knowledge (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In other words, decisions about how best to gather evidence to the same end are likely to have been taken differently by researchers who adopt different epistemological stances.

Since a Children's Rights Based Approach underpins the research, both conceptually (Tomasevski, 2001) and methodologically (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a), it can be described as conforming to a transformative worldview (Mertens, et al., 2010). The transformative worldview, which attends to the need for social change in remedying injustices, often underpins research in the area of social justice (Mertens, 2007). One example is the work of Fielding (2004), who adopted a transformative approach in student voice research. Transformative research has the potential to address power imbalances in research and to further human rights agendas (Mertens, 2007). Since this present research is concerned with children's rights it is underpinned by a transformative purpose. Particularly in relation to the decision to engage in participatory research with children with a view to developing a research process which had the potential to engage with children at the heart of transition (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a).

Johnson argues that mixed methods research is improved by adopting multiple 'thoughtful' perspectives (Johnson, 2009). Therefore, the decision to situate this research at an apparent intersection between two paradigms, is not original (Romm, 2014). Rather it is an example of exploiting paradigmatic permeability (Mertens, 2010), and recognising the affinity between the pragmatic and transformative paradigms (Romm, *op. cit.*). The two paradigms share multiple common aspects, for example, in relation to a tendency to choose a diversity of methods and to apply both inductive and deductive lenses in approaching a research problem (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). A particular ontological and epistemological commonality is found in relation to beliefs and values (*ibid.*). Both traditions share a belief that whilst social realities do exist, attempts to understand and explain those realities take place from within socially-

constructed values systems, and cannot produce 'truths' which are independent of beliefs and perspectives. Such values may stem from personal beliefs and interests, as is the case with the pragmatic approach. Alternatively, as is characteristic of the transformative paradigm, the values system applied can be aligned with particular causes, such as promoting social justice or, in the case of this research, children's rights.

Children's rights based approach

Meaningful engagement with children can strengthen research which hopes to adequately investigate their lives (Roberts, 2008). Kellett (2011) reminds us that involving children in research is 'nothing new', rather what has changed in recent years is how they are considered and positioned within the research process: firstly, with researchers emerging from an enduring perspective of children as lacking competence, defined by developmental psychology and socialisation theory (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014), towards viewing them as 'beings' rather than 'becomings'; secondly, this change in perceptions of the competence of children has seen a move away from research *on* and *about* children towards research *with* and *by* children (Kellett, 2010). This shift has led to researchers seeking out new ways of engaging with children's perspectives in research and a growing volume of research is now being undertaken *with* children (Christensen & James, 2008).

A children's rights based approach (CRBA) is useful for researchers who want to access, document and take seriously the views and experiences of children (Lundy, et al., 2011; Lundy & McEvoy, 2009; 2012a; 2012b). The principles of children's rights, set out in the CRC (UN, 1989), underpinned the purposes, processes and outcomes of this research (Lundy & McEvoy, op. cit.) which adopted a CRBA (ibid.) to investigate the impact of the current transfer arrangements. As with other research within the Rights Based paradigm the aim is to contribute to the wider realisation of children's rights (Lundy & McEvoy, op. cit.), a transformative purpose as mentioned above. In the context of transition this would mean that in addition to children's views being sought and considered, they must also be given due weight in decisions which affect them (Lundy, 2007).

Mixed-Methods Design

The 'centrality of the research questions' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 10), and the breadth of the gap in the existing literature has led to a research design which chooses the most suitable tools to answer the questions (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010). The study employs eclectic methods and is driven by the research questions. Whilst the researcher does not claim to bring sufficient experience to the project to be described as a 'connoisseur of methods' (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012) she nonetheless ascribes to the principle of *methodological eclecticism* and rejects the notion that qualitative and quantitative methods are incompatible (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

A concurrent mixed methods design (Collins, 2010, p. 363) has been chosen to allow the research questions to be addressed pragmatically using research methods which elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. Design typologies provide a means of representing how methods are mixed, in relation to factors such as type, manner, timing and priority (Nastasi, et al., 2010). The process of mapping the research to a design typology begins with a consideration of 'the manner in which qualitative and quantitative methods or data are incorporated' (ibid., p. 315). The absence of a distinction between methods and data, in Nastasi's description, means that the three strands of the research are included in the mapping process and the study is considered to have quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Strand 1, which drew on both quantitative (secondary statistical) data and qualitative (documentary and textual analysis) data to provide insight into admissions policies and practices, and school place provision; Strand 2, the research activity which used a qualitative approach and participatory methods to actively engage child research advisors as collaborators in the development of the study. Strand 3 which gathered survey data relating to the views and experiences of transition age child respondents which included closed and open-ended response data, which were analysed using statistical techniques and thematic analysis, respectively. How the methods are mixed in terms of timing is also important in mapping the typology. In this research the three stages were conducted concurrently, rather than sequentially or in an embedded design. That is to say that the three strands were conducted simultaneously, for example, the secondary analysis of pupil population data (strand 1) was ongoing during the same time period as work with the research advisory group in developing the survey (strand 2). The final component is the priority, or dominance, of different methods within the study. The

power and input of quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) methodological approaches are considered to be equal in this research and can be described as fully mixed (ibid.). Therefore, the typology adopted to represent this research is of a *fully mixed concurrent equal status design: QUAN + QUAL* (ibid. p. 316) and reflects the nature of the approach and types of data collected across strands 1, 2 and 3.

An important element of a mixed-methods design is how best to bring together the data emerging from the different strands of the research (Punch, 2014) and this relates to the power and input of the methodological approaches, described above as fully mixed. This project uses triangulation at the results stage, where following the separate analysis of the data resulting from the different strands of the study, using techniques appropriate to each analysis, the results and the interpretation of the results are presented thematically (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

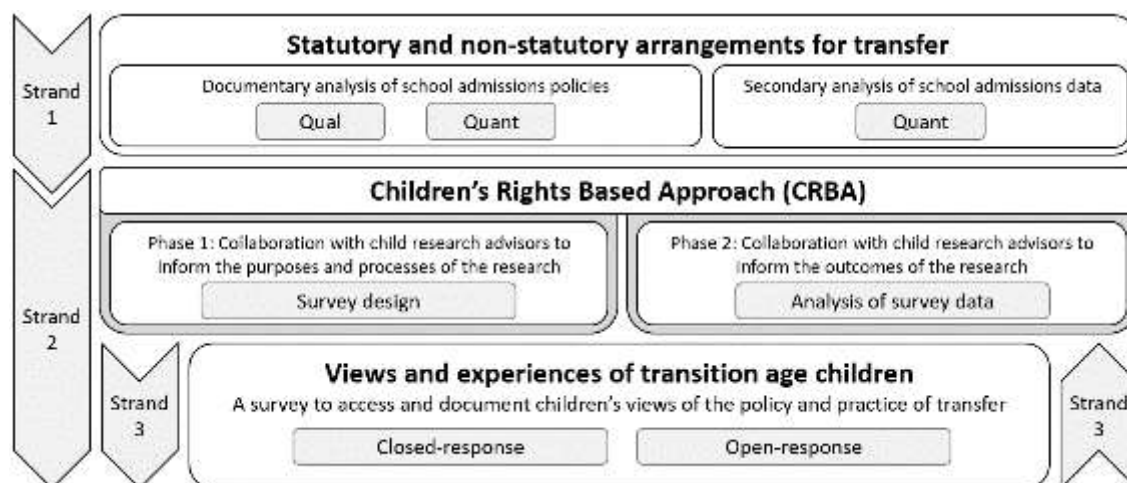
4.3 Research design

This section outlines how the research design was operationalised into three strands and briefly describes the purpose of each of the strands in relation to addressing existing gaps in the research evidence. Further information relating to the research processes used to implement each of the strands are provided in section 4.4.

Operationalising the research design

In order to operationalise the research design the study was organised in three concurrent strands as illustrated in Figure 4.1: Strand 1 considered publicly available information using documentary analysis of school level admissions policies and school admissions data; Strand 2 incorporated collaboration with a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b) in developing, analysing and reporting on Strand 3; and Strand 3 used a survey by online questionnaire, developed in collaboration with children within Strand 2, to access and document the views and experiences of a broad sample of transition age children in relation to secondary transfer.

Figure 4.1: Research design



Strand 1: The statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer: documentary analysis and secondary data analysis.

Transfer arrangements are complex, lack transparency, and are under-researched, as discussed in Chapter 1. This research strand addresses the need for a more complete understanding of the different aspects of the arrangements. Previous transition research in NI has tended to focus on the processes of academic selection whilst this research takes a wider view of the transition landscape and includes the transfer arrangements for all secondary level schools: academically selective (grammar); partially selective; and non-selective (non-grammar).

Strand 1 focuses on the analysis of publicly available data using documentary analysis (Prior, 2003) and secondary data analysis. The purpose of this phase of the research was to address the research questions outlined in the first key area by mapping and critically analysing the statutory and non-statutory transfer arrangements, and by considering these arrangements from a children's rights perspective. The data used in this analysis was compiled from existing publicly available documents and data to form a database of all secondary schools offering entry to Year 8.

Strand 2: Collaboration with child research advisors: Children's rights based approach

A rights based approach, as described in Section 4.2, was selected for its potential to place the concerns of children at the heart of the research by ensuring that the

direction and outcomes of the research flow from the experiences of children (Butler & Williamson, 1994). This was considered important for two main reasons. Firstly, the children's rights implications of transfer arrangements have not been addressed in policy. Secondly, since little was known about the wider transition landscape, beyond academically selective admissions, it was important to engage children who had recent experience of transition as experts in their own lives (Clark, 2004). This enabled the research to identify key issues of importance to children and ensure that the research addressed these issues effectively and in light of children's authentic perspectives.

Strand 2 focuses on collaborative research activities undertaken with Year 8 pupils, who formed a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG). This strand used participatory methods to develop a research instrument intended to access and document the views and experiences of a broad sample of children (Strand 3). As indicated by Figure 4.1, Strand 2 ran concurrently with Strand 3. CRAG activities fed into the design of Strand 3 but the data collected within Strand 3 also fed back into the CRAG activities after the data collection stage. As is increasingly common in research using a CRBA (Barrance, 2016; Templeton, 2016), a selection of the data resulting from Strand 3 was analysed and interpreted by the CRAG and is presented in results chapters 6 and 7.

Strand 3: The views and experiences of children: a survey of transition age children

The views and experiences of children in relation to transfer arrangements in NI are well documented in existing research (Devine & Schubotz, 2004; Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Green & Ward, 2002; KLT, 2010-2013; NICCY, 2010; Sutherland, 2000). However, the tendency to focus on academic selection at transition means that relatively little is known about the perspectives of a broader range of children. Furthermore, following changes to school admissions arrangements, from 2009 onwards, only one primary research report has considered children's transfer experiences under the new arrangements (NICCY, op. cit.) and a large-scale survey has periodically gathered quantitative data relating to children's experiences of transition (KLT, op. cit.).

Strand 3 focuses on the collection of primary data relating to children's own experiences of navigating the current transfer arrangements and their views on the policy and practice of transfer. The survey responses provide quantitative data and open-ended data which allows the perspectives of a broad sample of children to be considered as a central element of the research. This data complements the school admissions data compiled in Strand 1 and allows greater insight into the processes of transition and their impact on the rights and lives of children.

Ethical considerations

This research was carried out following detailed consideration of the ethical impact of each element of the study and in accordance with the appropriate guidelines published by BERA (2011) and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) (Connolly, 2003), concerning responsibilities to participants with regard to voluntary informed consent, privacy, and respect. Ethical approval was sought and granted by the School of Education Ethics Committee (Appendix 11), in accordance with the university's ethical guidelines (Queen's University Belfast, 2014). All aspects of the research have been carried out as described in the procedures outlined in the ethics application and as detailed in the information provided to participants. The following section considers specific ethical issues and outlines how these were addressed in the course of the project.

Voluntary informed consent

Ethical research requires voluntary informed consent (BERA, op. cit.) as a condition of the involvement of human participants. Informed consent, as the term suggests, relies both on participants being adequately informed as to the nature of the research and their proposed involvement and being willing participants who are not under duress to be involved. Where children are asked to participate in the research, both their consent and that of their parents should be sought (Connolly, op. cit.) and refusal to participate should be accepted from either child or parent (Alderson, 2007). All child participants, child research advisors, parents, and school Principals were provided with project information sheets (see Appendix 10) which outlined: the aims of the study; the processes involved in carrying out the research; the limitations of the research; the freedom to withdraw; and the consequences of being a participant.

Active and voluntary informed consent was sought from all children who were involved in the research, both as CRAG members and survey respondents. CRAG members, following a discussion with the adult researcher which emphasised the principles of voluntary consent and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research, were asked to sign a consent form. Due to the ongoing nature of the collaboration with the CRAG and the need for children to be absent from normal classes on several occasions, the parents of CRAG members were asked to sign a consent form, giving active voluntary informed consent. The parents of children who took part in the online survey were given an opt-out consent form, whereby their active informed consent was not required but they retained the right to withdraw their child from the study.

The research activities involving children were carefully considered in terms of the potential harm which might be caused. Transfer arrangements and tests are a sensitive issue for children who are living through, or reflecting on, these experiences. Whilst it was important to gather data which is a fair reflection of children's experiences it remained equally important to safeguard the well-being of children who chose to participate. Great care was taken to minimise risk to children's well-being, particularly in arranging the timing of survey completion which was undertaken with Year 7 students after they had received their admissions decision letters.

Additional ethical concerns: CRBA

The BERA (2011) guidelines mandate compliance with two CRC articles: Best Interests (art. 3); and Participation (art. 12). However, the ethical implications of additional rights, provided for in the CRC, must be considered both in terms of conducting rights-respecting research (Alderson, 2012) and in using a CRBA to research (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a). Beazley et al. (2009) outline four CRC articles which inform a child's 'right to be properly researched', which Alderson (op. cit.), summarises as: "the right to provide opinions' (12); freedom of expression (13); protection from exploitation (36); and 'the highest possible standards being used in work with children' (3)' (2012, p. 236). Although, she argues that this is an incredibly limited view of the provisions of the CRC which apply to the conduct of research with children, and goes on to cite an additional 37 articles which are applicable (ibid. p.236-237). For the purposes of this research the approach taken was to create a respectful

environment which attempted to minimise the potential imbalances of power, both between adult-researcher and CRAG members, and amongst the CRAG.

Prior to the establishment of the CRAG consent was given by all relevant persons: the children; their parents, carers or guardians; and the Principal of the school. The researcher sought to ensure that children's consent to be involved was informed and voluntary. Therefore, at the beginning of the first session with the CRAG the adult researcher discussed the importance of voluntary informed consent with the group members. This helped to assure children that their participation was voluntary and that each CRAG member was aware of their right to withdraw from all or some activities at any time and without giving a reason. The project information leaflet and the child research advisor consent form were reviewed by the group and the opportunity to raise questions was given. The ongoing nature of the collaboration with the CRAG created the need for an approach which acknowledged 'consent as an ongoing process' (David, et al., 2001). It was therefore agreed that withdrawing from the group would be straightforward and that children could express their desire to withdraw to the researcher, their teacher or the school Principal without giving a reason and without coercion to continue to participate. The importance of this issue was reiterated to the Principal and it was agreed that children could exercise their right to withdraw at any stage.

The importance of an inclusive working environment was explicitly discussed at the first CRAG session using the rationale that a CRBA should seek to access the broadest possible range of children's voices. Children were asked to agree to working arrangements which valued and respected individual contributions on the basis that engaging with views which both reflected and challenged our own perspectives would maximise the potential of the research to be effective. As a former teacher, the adult researcher was proficient in developing an inclusive and respectful environment within which every child's voice was valued.

Ensuring privacy and confidentiality

A key aspect of ethical research is an obligation to safeguard participants' 'rights to confidentiality and anonymity' (BERA, 2011, p. 7). The project information leaflets

provided to participants prior to their becoming involved in the study gave assurances that all personal data would be anonymised to protect their identity and stored securely.

The data management plan, for the storage, retention and disposal of the data, was designed to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of all individuals, groups and institutions who were involved in the study. All data was handled in compliance with the data protection act (1998) and the Queen's University Belfast data retention and storage regulations (2015). The privacy of each participant was protected through anonymising the survey data which was stored securely on the Queen's Drive (Q-Drive), with identifying information stored in separate documents. All data files were stored securely. This arrangement ensured that information could not be accessed by individuals other than the researcher and supervisor(s). Upon graduation all data, including passwords for encrypted files, will be transferred to the Supervisor in accordance with the Queen's University Research Data Management Policy.

Where the CRAG was involved in the analysis of data the adult researcher carefully examined the data in advance to ensure that all identifying information was removed. For example, where a survey respondent mentioned the name of a school in an open response the information was removed and replaced with a pseudonym. The reporting of data pertaining to individuals and institutions uses anonymous labelling and pseudonyms (appendices 5-6) in order to protect participants' identities (Creswell, 2014).

4.4 Research Process

This section outlines the procedures used in conducting the three strands of the research. Within each section the sampling strategy, the recruitment of participants and data analysis methods are discussed.

Strand 1: The statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer: documentary analysis and secondary data analysis.

The aim of strand one of the research was to address the research questions within key area one: the statutory and non-statutory arrangements for transfer. This section describes how publicly available data was used to contribute to our knowledge of how the current arrangements operate. The secondary statistical data analysis considers the availability and accessibility of secondary school places, the characteristics of the pupil populations of secondary schools and existing knowledge about pupil outcomes in non-statutory transfer tests used in the academic selection of Year 8 pupils. The documentary analysis explores the admissions criteria used by academically selective, non-selective and partially selective secondary schools. This section outlines the methods of data collection and procedures for analysis.

Multiple sources of secondary data are required to give an overview of the landscape of secondary transfer. All data collected and used within strand 1 is drawn from publicly available information published by DENI, the former ELBs, or from media sources. The relevant data from each source was drawn together into a single Excel spreadsheet. The first worksheet held a master copy of all data collated for the purposes of both the secondary statistical analysis and the documentary analysis. Each analysis then transferred the necessary data to an additional worksheet where a record of the analysis could be saved. The findings resulting from Strand 1 draw on both aspects of the data. Although, the data sources used are detailed in each analysis and the potential limitations of using data from a range of sources is acknowledged.

Secondary data analysis

The purpose of this secondary analysis is to make use of existing publicly available data to understand more about the potential implications of the current transfer arrangements. Each analysis results in descriptive statistics which can be used to make comparisons between schools, and categories of school. The result is a clearer overview of the secondary school system, the characteristics of the pupil populations of schools and the range of test outcomes accepted in school admissions.

The data used in the analysis of the availability of school places was collated from the most recent available pupil population data (DENI, 2015c) relating to the 2013/14 academic year. Descriptive statistics were produced, and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, to allow comparisons as described above. As far as possible the analyses were undertaken for the Year 8 pupil population, for an example see Table 5.1. However, in some cases only whole school data was available, for example, the proportion of Free School Meal Entitled (FSME) children is shown at a school level rather than the individual year group (Table 5.13). Comparisons between different categories of school were made using the resulting data, allowing differences in provision to be identified and discussed.

Two additional sources of data were also accessed. Firstly, the highest and lowest transfer test outcomes self-reportedly accepted in grammar, or partially selective, school admissions which are gathered annually by the local newspaper The Belfast Telegraph, using Freedom of Information requests, and subsequently published on a privately operated website (thetransfertest.com, 2013). This was necessary because, as discussed in Chapter 1, no data relating to children's performance in the two tests is collected by DENI and therefore the publicly available data is extremely limited. Secondly, overall school level GCSE attainment data, collected by digital media organisation The Detail, and published on their website (Torney, 2014). This was necessary because the published school performance data, provides aggregated data for categories of school and pupil rather than school level achievement (DENI, 2014c).

Documentary analysis

The documentary analysis (Prior, 2003) focused on statutory guidance and school level admissions policies relevant to secondary transfer. This method was chosen as having the potential to address a significant gap, both in terms of admissions criteria generally but also specifically in relation to how assessment outcomes were interpreted in making admissions decisions. Documentary analysis relies on both content and textual analysis to derive meaning from a documentary source (Fitzgerald, 2012). In her definition Fitzgerald (ibid.) describes content analysis as a broadly quantitative approach resulting in a count of instances of particular words or phrases and textual analysis as a qualitative approach where a level of interpretation is required to develop an understanding of those instances. The approach adopted in this research draws on

these principles. However, unlike the informal approach adopted in many documentary analyses, a predefined protocol (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011) was developed in this study. The emphasis was on the qualitative interpretation of the content of each school level admissions document, this included ascribing meaning to each criterion statement to establish which criteria were to be applied and in what ways. This was necessary to adequately gain insight into the focus of this strand of the investigation which sought to identify what the existing arrangements were and how they operated. The data collected considers the criteria used to admit young people to grammar and non-grammar places across the range of management types and regions (considered in terms of ELB area). The resulting data shows the extent to which school level policies comply with statutory guidance and differences between the policies of individual schools and across sectors. The analysis provides a clear view of the possible routes a young person might take in transferring to secondary school.

Two primary data sources were used. Firstly, the guidance documents issued annually by ELBs, colloquially known as 'Transfer Booklets' (BELB; NEELB; SEELB; SELB; WELB, 2014: hereafter referred to as 'ELB Transfer booklets, 2014'). These documents detail admissions criteria adopted by the Board of Governors of each secondary school, in their capacity as the 'statutory admissions authority' (The Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, art. 16), and are used, by parents and carers, to understand the entry requirements of the secondary schools their child may apply to. The documents also give details of the numbers of applications and enrolments for each school. Secondly, the 'Post-Primary Transfer Policy' (DENI, 2013b), the statutory guidance document, to which schools have a legal duty to *have regard* in accordance with the Education Order (NI), 1997 – art. 16B and Education Order (NI), 2006 – art. 30 (amendments to previous order).

It should be noted that the guidelines discussed in this research are those published in 2013 (DENI, op. cit.) which set out the same criteria as all guidance documents published between 2010 (DENI, 2010) and 2015 (DENI, 2015a), although minor variations in the text are possible. These guidelines were issued by the Department under the leadership of two Sinn Féin Education Ministers: Catriona Ruane until 2011; and subsequently John O'Dowd from 2011 – 2016. The DUP Minister, Peter Weir, took office in May 2016 and the guidelines for transfer were amended to reflect that

party's different position on academic selection (DENI, 2016). Namely the use of 'academic criteria' in school admissions was changed from 'not recommended' to the new category 'appropriate admissions criteria' (ibid, p. 4).

Admissions criteria published in relation to each school, which admits pupils at age 11, were manually examined, coded as described in Appendix 1 and recorded in a spreadsheet (MSExcel). This process has provided an overview of the way that transfer procedures operated for Year 8 admissions in September 2014, allowing for meaningful comparisons to be made in terms of school type, geographical location and criteria use.

School admissions criteria: the approach to coding

Statutory guidance (DENI, 2013b) describes criteria as 'recommended' and 'not recommended'. The coding takes account of DENI's stance on the inclusion of a range of possible admissions criteria in school level admissions using the descriptors *recommended* (R), and *not recommended* (NR). For example, Criterion R2 Sibling Current prioritises 'Applicants who have a sibling currently attending the school' whilst NR2.04 Other familial criteria refers to 'Familial criteria beyond sibling currently attending the school' (ibid., pp. 14-17). Criteria which were not included in the guidance document are given the descriptor *other* (O).

In addition to whether criteria were recommended by DENI or not, the approach was designed to document and analyse two aspects of secondary school admissions policies: firstly, which factors were considered as part of admissions decisions; and secondly, how each factor was considered in practice, or rather the importance accorded to it. A key priority was to describe, and therefore discuss, the differences between school level policies. Since admissions decisions are often made using a non-linear application of criteria the coding was designed to take account of the order in which criteria were to be applied which allowed the stages of admission to be described.

The following example describes the first stages of an admission decision and demonstrates how the criteria were numbered across the full sample. The numbering

system takes account of how schools apply criteria by operating two-stage numbering, which shows primary (1) and secondary (2) criteria. These codes allow the tables to show when a school groups applicants into categories using some (primary) criteria and then differentiates between candidates within these groups using additional (secondary) criteria. The first criterion applied by the school is numbered 1.01, for example, children who have a brother or sister enrolled in the school. The second criterion is numbered 1.02, for example, children who are the eldest child of the family. Where the applicants within a group are then given preference on the basis of an additional, or secondary, criterion this is numbered 2.01, for example, children who have attended a 'traditional' feeder primary school.

Table 4.1: Admissions criteria coding: a simple example

School	R1 FSME	R2 Sibling current	R3 Eldest Child	R4 Feeder Primary
School A		1.01	1.02	2.01
School B	1.01	2.01	2.02	1.02
School C		2.01	2.01	1.01

Table 4.1 shows how the admissions criteria were coded to allow for comparisons between schools to be made. It shows that whilst schools A, B and C are using the same criteria, they do so in different ways. School A considers family relationships (R2) first, School B gives preference to children entitled to Free School Meals (R1) and School C prioritises children who attended a traditional feeder primary school (R4). The information in Table 4.1 can also be used to understand the importance of particular criteria and to describe the use of criteria more generally. R1 FSME is used by 1 of the three schools in the example. When the analysis is undertaken for a larger number of schools the use of criteria can be categorised in terms of significance by comparing the importance accorded to particular factors, or characteristics, in the admissions process.

Strand 1 sampling

The documentary analysis considers school level admissions policies and available intake data of all secondary schools operating Year 8 admissions (first year of secondary school). Since the analysis relates to Year 8 admissions the analysis excludes those schools which are post-14 senior high, namely 'Dickson plan' schools which are discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore, the data emerging from Strand 1 is for the total number of schools, rather than a sample of schools.

Table 4.2: Number of secondary schools in NI by school selectivity (grammar/non-grammar) and religious character (Catholic, Protestant and Integrated)

		Catholic	Protestant	Integrated	Total (row)
Grammar School	11-18	28 ¹	37		65
	14-18	1	2		3
Non-Grammar School	11-16 (or 18)	69 ²	47 ³	20 ⁴	136
	11-14		4		4
	14-16 (or 18)		1		1
Total (column)		99	89	23	209
Total admitting Year 8 pupils		98	86	23	205

¹ Total includes 1 non-selective grammar school.

² Total includes 1 Irish Medium school which is not a 'Catholic Maintained' but rather an 'Other Maintained' school.

³ Total excludes 2 Protestant Non-Grammars earmarked for closure, and therefore not offering admission to Year 8

⁴ Total includes 2 Integrated schools which have a 'Grammar Stream' within an all-ability school

Table 4.2 gives a breakdown of the numbers of different types of school. A total of 66 schools operate academically selective admissions: 64 grammar and 2 non-grammar (Integrated) schools. A total of 141 schools operate exclusively non-academic admissions: 140 non-grammar schools (including the 2 partially selective (Integrated) schools) and 1 non-selective grammar. The documentary analysis is based on the school level admissions policies of 205 schools (n=205). Where comparisons of the

use of criteria are undertaken, criteria used for admission to the grammar and non-grammar streams in the two Integrated schools are treated separately (n=207). Some secondary analyses rely on school level data for different years where schools earmarked for closure are not excluded, whilst others rely on incomplete data where data pertaining to individual schools has not been provided or has been suppressed. Each analysis provides the sample size in an effort to achieve transparency.

Strand 2: Collaboration with child research advisors: Children's rights based approach

The aim of Strand 2 was to improve the potential of this research to access the 'valuable, legitimate and important' (Murphy, et al., 2013) voices of children who, are generally 'voiceless' in relation to education policy reform (Elwood, 2013b) but, can offer insights beyond their own lived experiences (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b). The involvement of a CRAG provided essential expertise, drawn from children's own experiences, throughout the research process: design, analysis and reporting (Lundy, et al., 2011); and ensured that engagement with child research participants was meaningful and in line with the substantive aims of the research. The co-researchers were engaged in a process which broadly reflects the approach used in a study investigating children's perceptions of science assessment (Murphy, et al., op. cit.) which involved multiple meetings with CRAGs who worked collaboratively to develop, design and refine the research tools and subsequently to collate, analyse and disseminate the research outcomes. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this is an example of research *with*, rather than *by* children (Kellett, 2010). Whilst the research is adult-led it is designed to achieve genuine engagement with children in a climate of shared expertise (Emerson & Lloyd, 2017). The collection of data was carried out by the adult researcher for reasons of practical concern and in order to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Through this process children's perspectives remain central to the research, ensuring that the direction and outcomes of the research flow from the experiences of children (Butler and Williamson, 1994). This research agenda aims to further the realisation of children's rights in a controversial area of educational provision through a pragmatic attempt to develop an intersubjective (Biesta, 2010) understanding of the impact of current transfer arrangements. A participatory research process (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b) has been selected for appropriateness to the

primary research purpose which engages young people at the heart of secondary transfer.

This section outlines the procedures and activities used in collaborating with the children's research advisory group (CRAG) (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a) prior to the fieldwork undertaken in Strand 3. Therefore it considers: the recruitment of CRAG members; the capacity building undertaken with the group; the development and refinement of the research instrument to be used with child participants; and the procedures used in collaboratively analysing the research data.

Selection, recruitment and retention of Child Research Advisors

Children in Year 8 were chosen as the most suitable group to inform and direct the development of the child-centred research activities through participation in the CRAG. These children had recently transferred to secondary school and therefore had an appropriate level of understanding and experience of the substantive issues of the research. Since Research Advisors are not participants the demographic make-up of a CRAG does not need to be representative. Nonetheless, it was important that this research created the greatest possibility of engaging with a broad range of children's perspectives by acknowledging the diversity of childhoods (O'Kane, 2008). For this reason it was decided that the aim would be to recruit a representative range of children which included: boys and girls; Catholic and Protestant; and children who sat a transfer test and those who did not. Since the majority of schools in NI are predominantly attended by children from one of the two dominant community backgrounds it seemed appropriate to approach an Integrated school, with a view to recruiting a suitable range of children.

The CRAG was set up in an Integrated school with eight children recruited from across the year group by the Principal of the school who asked children to volunteer, some children were placed on a reserve list. As discussed in the ethical considerations earlier in this chapter, the active voluntary consent of the Research Advisors was sought and they retained their right to withdraw their involvement at any time throughout the study. The duration of the collaboration with the CRAG was 18 months and spanned two academic years (2015-16 and 2016-17), with a total of 9 sessions.

Several children exercised their right to withdraw, and were replaced with others from the reserve list. A total of eleven children participated in the CRAG activities.

Collaborating to develop a research instrument

From the outset the aim was to create an informal environment which would encourage participation and collaboration. The adult researcher, as an experienced teacher, was confident in managing the group discussions to achieve an accepting and non-threatening atmosphere which encouraged children to be open and willing to talk about their views. In addition to building on the children's prior knowledge of the transfer arrangements it was important to acknowledge their existing level of knowledge. This was achieved by using preliminary tasks with the group which explored the project title and the relevant research questions. This ensured clarity around the vocabulary related to secondary transition, made the issues to be investigated explicit and built confidence within the group that their contributions were valued.

The use of a CRBA (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a) was made explicit to the group and Lundy's model of participation was used to illustrate the different elements (Space, Voice, Audience and Influence) necessary to ensure that children's voices were not only heard but also listened to (Lundy, 2007). It was necessary to acknowledge, at this early stage, that the research agenda was being led by adults, the substantive focus of the research had been identified and that the research would not necessarily lead to any improvement in the realisation of children's rights (Cavet & Sloper, 2004; Lundy & McEvoy, 2009; Lundy, et al., 2011; Sinclair & Franklin, 2000).

Similarly to other research which used a CRBA capacity building activities (Lundy, et al., 2011; Murphy, et al., 2013) were designed to encourage conversation about the purposes and substantive focus of the research. The aim of such activities is primarily to provide *information* (art. 13 and 17) and *adult guidance* (art. 5), in order to assist children to informed views (art. 12) (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b, p. 140). However, capacity building also develops children's confidence in their own capacity to be effective contributors to the research processes (ibid.).

Figure 4.2: Capacity building activity: 'A Transfer Timeline'



The main capacity building exercise was 'A Transfer Timeline' (Figure 4.2). The first part of the activity provided a focus for the CRAG to identify the key events in the process of transition by discussing how they had experienced these and then plotting them on a timeline. The next stage of the capacity building turned to the broader impact of the transfer arrangements using a diagram, with a series of concentric circles representing children, families and schools (see appendix 7). This activity is similar to those developed by other researchers who have used a rights based approach in assessment research (Barrance, 2016; Murphy, et al., 2013) and created an opportunity for the group to reflect, both on children's experiences more generally, but also the wider impact of transition in their home and school lives. The lived experiences of the CRAG identified many issues explored in existing research, for example, that in school coaching and out of school tutoring is prevalent and differentially available to children (NICCY, 2010). The insight demonstrated by the children during these sessions showed a high level of awareness of the substantive issues of the research which both included and went beyond their own lived experiences (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b).

Following a discussion of potential data collection methods, based on options drawn from Bell and Waters (2014), an online survey was identified as the most appropriate means of accessing and documenting the views and experiences of a wide range of children and generating a broad sample of data. It should be acknowledged that this method had already been identified by the adult researcher as having the greatest potential in terms of data collection. Furthermore, this preference was explained to the

research advisors during the discussion with reference to the need to document the experiences of a significant number of children which would not have been accessible using a different method. The development of the survey took account of children's lived experiences, existing research evidence and research advisors' perspectives on research evidence. Sample questions from the 'transfer module' of the Kids' Life and Times (2010-2013) survey were provided to the group. It was felt that many of these questions were appropriate to our purposes and were therefore replicated in the survey. However, in many cases additional responses were added to the questions, as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: 'Why did you do a transfer test?': Response options

Kids' Life and Times Survey, 2010	Moving on from Primary School Survey, 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wanted to do the tests so I could get into a good school • I didn't really want to do them but I thought I should • My parents wanted me to do them • I thought I had to do them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school I wanted to go to asked for a test • I didn't really want to do the tests but I thought I should • I wanted to do the tests • My parents wanted me to do them • My teacher said I should • Other children in my class were doing them • I thought I had to do them

Taking the first response as an example, the original response 'I wanted to do the tests so I could get into a good school' led to an interesting discussion about what a 'good' school was and whether that had to be a 'transfer test' school. It was agreed amongst the group that this response related to a requirement set out by the school, rather than any difference in status, thus the alternative response 'The school I wanted to go to asked for a test' was used in the survey. Following on from this discussion it was decided to include a question asking children to indicate the qualities they associated with a 'good school'.

CRAG contributions were useful in developing and agreeing the questions to be asked, and devising alternative or additional responses. One key area where a significant contribution was made by the Research Advisors related to the aspects of 'moving on', in terms of communication and building relationships with the secondary school. This is evidenced in the inclusion of questions about school open nights and welcome days which had not been part of the adult researcher's agenda. The CRAG also attended a survey pilot conducted with other children in their year group at their school and provided useful feedback on the draft version of the online survey.

Children's Research Advisory Group data analysis

This section presents an analysis of a data topic conducted in collaboration with child research advisors. Two additional data topics were analysed by the adult-researcher only and a discussion of this process is outlined later in this chapter. The decision to involve children in the analysis of this data topic was theoretically motivated, on the basis that children have participation rights (art. 12) and should be offered opportunities to have their views documented and taken into account in decisions which affect them (Lundy, 2007). These rights extend to participation in research pertaining to children's lives (Beazley, et al., 2009). The approach adopted is similar to other research which uses a Children's Rights Based Approach (CRBA) (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a), as described above.

The principles of this research approach, and the practicalities of its initial stages, are well explored in the existing literature, for examples see Lundy and McEvoy (2012b) and Murphy et al. (2013). However, the practicalities of working with children as research advisors, in the later stages of a project, are not so widely documented.

Selection and preparation of data

The decision to select a single data topic for the collaborative analysis related to the need to avoid participation becoming burdensome (BERA, 2011) for child research advisors. The large volume of open-ended response items limited the possibility of conducting meaningful collaborative analysis within the time allocated for work with the CRAG. Therefore, one key data topic was chosen, by the adult researcher, as having the greatest potential contribution to the overall findings of the research. The

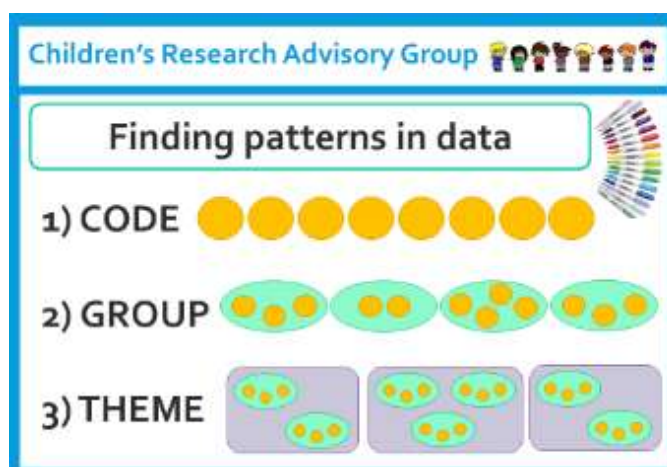
processes of admission to secondary education are under-researched in NI. The survey addressed children's perceptions of school choice, a focus identified in collaboration with the CRAG in the planning phase. Data resulting from several questions which accessed children's perceptions of applying to a secondary school were prepared for analysis with the CRAG. Firstly, the reasons reported by respondents as accounting for whether they had or had not been offered a place in their first choice school. Secondly, explanations of what made the application procedure stressful, where respondents had indicated that they found it to be so. Thirdly, responses from the final survey question which asked respondents if they had anything else to say about moving on from primary school.

Data resulting from these open-response items were prepared by the adult researcher and formed the basis of two data analysis workshops. The preparation stage involved selecting extracts which gave a broad range of responses and avoided excessive duplication of the same idea, for example, where respondents indicated that their 'good result' accounted for their being admitted to their first choice school these responses were eliminated in favour of responses which offered additional information. A total of 135 responses, or data items, were selected for the CRAG analysis. These were numbered and printed out on paper with the relevant survey question to be used in the workshop.

Data Analysis Workshop

Similarly to the analysis of the open-response data carried out by the adult researcher (see p. 133), the data analysis workshop used *Thematic Analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than a *deductive*, or theoretically driven, approach, the analysis was *Inductive*, or data driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The choice of this approach was particularly important in minimising the influence of the adult researcher and increasing the potential for the views of the child participants to emerge in the themes and to be more accurately depicted in the analysis. Following an explanation of the process of thematic analysis, which was explained as 'finding patterns in the data', using the infographic depicted in Figure 4.3 (p. 125). The collaborative thematic analysis workshop was carried out in three phases: initial coding; clustering; and establishing themes.

Figure 4.3: Steps in analysing data



Initial coding

The initial coding was undertaken as a practical group activity, with varying degrees of adult researcher input. Following the explanation of the task several examples were read out and CRAG members suggested possible words to describe the meaning of the excerpt. These words were written in the box provided and taken as initial codes, as can be seen in Figure 4.4. Once the principle had been established the CRAG members worked together in pairs or threes to code the remaining data items while the adult researcher circulated and spent some time with each group. A total of 28 codes were identified.

Figure 4.4: Example of initial coding

86) What made applying to a new school stressful?	17. you might not know anyone and it might be a school with smarter <u>people</u> than you	Friends/People Fitting in
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Clustering

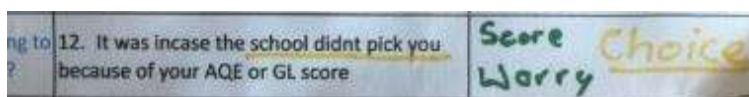
The next stage of the analysis was grouping the data units together into clusters. As anticipated this was not a linear process and a great deal of renegotiation occurred during this activity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One example is the cluster 'tests' which contained many data excerpts, shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Clustering of coded data units



On closer inspection the group decided that respondents' references to the tests were more complex than was denoted by the codes test, score and grade. At this stage the excerpts initially coded using these three terms were reviewed. For example, as shown in Figure 4.6 an excerpt originally clustered in the category test was recoded as *choice* because it was felt that the more important information was about schools choosing pupils based on test outcomes.

Figure 4.6: Example of recoding a data unit



The cluster *Results* was developed to accommodate three different codes related to test outcomes, as can be seen in Figure 4.7. What became immediately apparent was that the same outcome could fit into the 'Good result' and 'Bad result' codes, what mattered in judging whether the outcome fitted into the two codes related to the relevant admissions decision, or how the test outcome was used in the admissions process. Several excerpts related to issues of perceived fairness in the use of test outcomes. It was acknowledged that some excerpts which were placed in the 'Bad' results code, specifically those who claimed to be one mark away from gaining admission, also raised the issue of fairness. The process of attempting to make sense of the data was clearly illustrated as a 'messy' process.

The collage features several sections of handwritten notes on lined paper, all set against a red background.

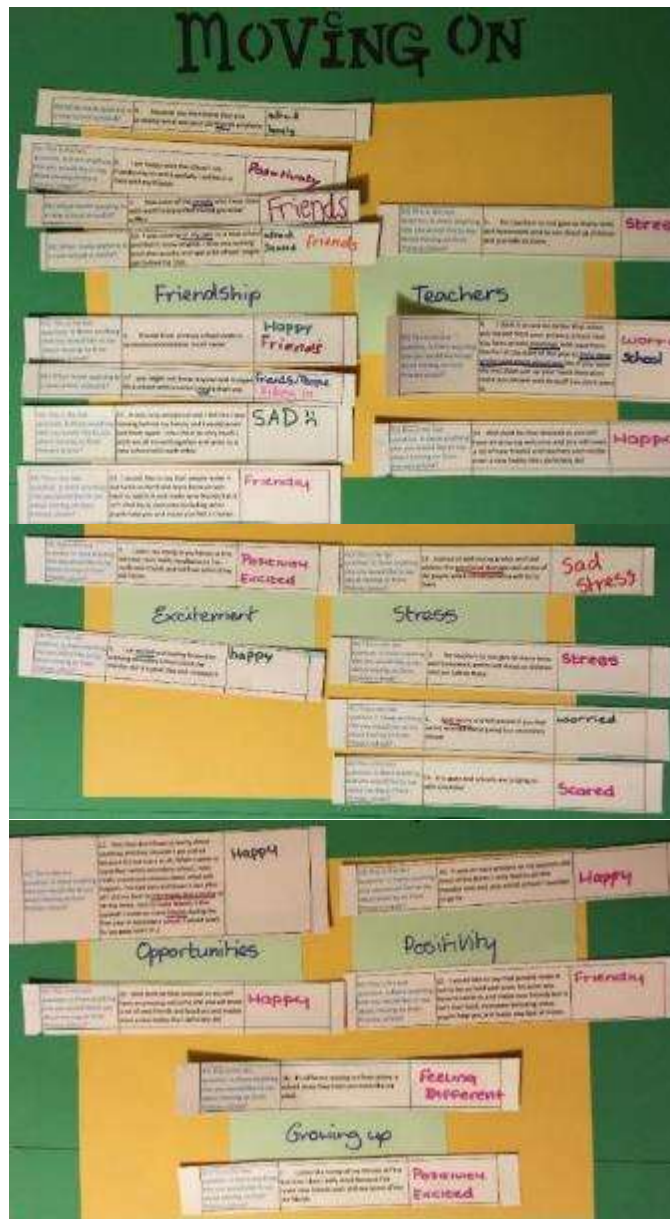
- 'Good' results:** Contains notes about school performance, such as "I was happy to go to school and see my friends" and "I was happy to go to school and see my friends".
- Results:** A central section with a large, bold, red "Results" title. It includes notes about school performance, such as "I was happy to go to school and see my friends" and "I was happy to go to school and see my friends".
- 'Bad' results:** Contains notes about school performance, such as "I was happy to go to school and see my friends" and "I was happy to go to school and see my friends".
- Fairness:** Contains notes about school performance, such as "I was happy to go to school and see my friends" and "I was happy to go to school and see my friends".
- Tests:** Contains notes about school performance, such as "I was happy to go to school and see my friends" and "I was happy to go to school and see my friends".

The notes are written in various colors of ink (black, blue, red) and some include small drawings or symbols. The overall theme is school-related, focusing on results, fairness, and tests.

Using the cluster t

[illegible]

Figure 4.9: Moving on

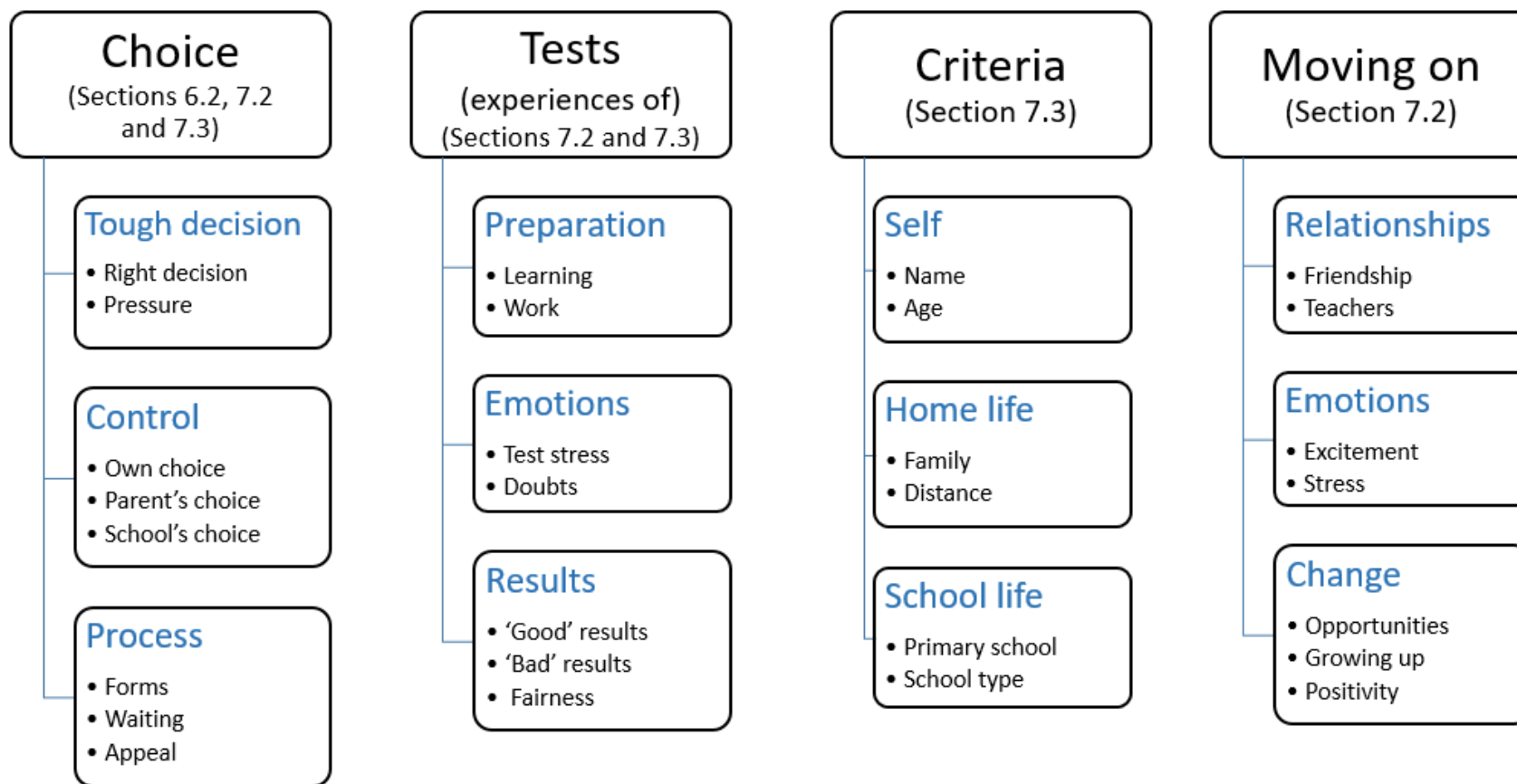


Four key themes emerged from the CRAG data analysis: Choice; Tests; Criteria; and Moving on. Interestingly, the themes which developed had originally appeared as codes in the first stage of analysis.

Thematic Map

The thematic map depicted in Figure 4.10 shows an overview of the codes and clusters covered by each theme and references to the relevant sections in the results chapters.

Figure 4.10: CRAG Thematic Map (Topic 3 - Experiences of applying to a new school)



Strand 3: The views and experiences of children: a survey of transition age children

This strand of the child-centred research activity used a survey to gain insight into the views of a broad sample of children in relation to their own transition experiences and broader issues around transfer. The purpose was to create an opportunity for children to express views, in accordance with article 12 of the CRC, in relation to school level and policy level decisions (Elwood & Lundy, 2010; Lundy, 2007) which have been taken on matters which directly affect them. As described above the survey was developed using a rights based approach, in collaboration with the CRAG. This helped the adult researcher to ensure that questions would be relevant and accessible to the children who participated in the survey.

Online survey

The online survey considered a number of key areas related to transition policy and practice. Some questions produced quantitative data using closed items, either single-response or multiple-response, whilst others asked for an open-response. This approach resulted in a broad data sample which could be explored in the context of the research questions. The survey was administered online using Questback Essentials software (Questback, 2016) which facilitated the migration of the survey data to SPSS Statistics (IBM Corp, 2016), the package used for the analysis of quantitative survey responses, and Microsoft Excel, the software used to manage the open-responses.

Section 1 About you and Background

Respondents were asked to provide demographic information (Sex, Year Group, School, Age, FMSE, SEN, religious and ethnic affiliation) which would allow for sub-group comparative analyses.

Section 2 Experiences of school

This section focused on children's experiences of and anticipation of the final year of primary school. The resulting data was intended to provide insight into children's learning aspirations and experiences in upper primary school. However, the full potential of the data has not been explored in the final thesis and will be reviewed separately.

Section 3 School System

This section focused on children's views of the academically selective school system and types of school. No similar data has been documented in existing research under the current transfer arrangements.

Section 4 Transfer Tests

Two main categories of questions were asked in this section: firstly, children's opinions about the use of transfer tests, the fairness of the tests and the potential for reform; and secondly, children's own experiences of the transfer tests, preparation for the tests and self-reported test outcomes.

Section 5 Choosing a new school

These questions asked children to reflect on the processes of choosing a new school. Children were asked to share their preferences for different school types and their involvement in choosing a school. Their views about attending school open days and welcome events were also included. The final questions in this section related to children's experiences of school admissions decisions.

Survey pilot

A survey pilot had been planned from the early stages of the research, both to ensure that questions were appropriate and that they engaged the children as they completed the survey. An additional concern was the complexity of the selective routing within the survey design where different groups of students were directed to different sets of questions depending on their responses for example, where Year 6 students were asked to talk about anticipating an event whilst Year 7 and 8 students were reflecting on a past event. The survey pilot was planned with a Year 8 group from the school where the CRAG was conducted. However, it was decided that a pilot should also be carried out with Year 6 students, and an Integrated primary school was recruited to this end at a relatively late stage. The pilot identified very few issues with the survey, with some minor errors requiring correction and the removal of one question which proved to be too complex within the constraints of an online survey which would be administered in schools without the supervision of the researcher. One issue failed to

be identified at the pilot stage and only emerged at the live survey stage which meant that responses to one survey question were not used.

Survey: analysis of open-ended responses

Open-response items are often avoided in survey methodology in favour of closed-response items which are perceived as more efficient and reliable (Fink, 2003). Some research has associated open-responses with a potential 'lack of conceptual richness' (O'Cathain & Thomas, op. cit.). However, in this research the benefits are judged to outweigh the limitations because open-ended responses have the potential to provide insight into individual children's experiences. Advantages include improving the extent to which surveys are respondent-focused and creating the potential to access a broad and representative range of respondents for relatively little additional investment of resources (Singer & Couper, 2017). The resulting data, whilst limited in many respects, is nonetheless useful (ibid.). The use of open-ended questions is gaining popularity, however, the use of genuinely open-ended questions, as opposed to extension or expansion questions ('other, please specify' or 'why') is significantly less so (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004). Nonetheless, carefully tailoring questions to elicit rich responses can create opportunities to access valuable evidence which improves our understanding (Romm, 2013). Furthermore, because of the potential to safeguard children's rights to privacy and freedom to express their views, the use of a survey can facilitate children's participation (Lundy & McEvoy, 2008).

One significant challenge in the use of open-response items is how to proceed in analysing and reporting the data (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004). Less complex responses lend themselves to quantitative approaches to analysis whereby instances of, for example, 'agreement' can be coded and counted. However, such an approach would not make the best use of open-response data. This type of data can be conceptualised as qualitative, although this is not without controversy (ibid.). Some research has addressed the potential for questionnaire methods to be re-conceptualised and re-designed from constructivist, and interpretivist, epistemological stances but does not define the resulting data as qualitative (Romm, op. cit.). One particular strength of qualitative research methods, is the potential for human interactions, such as interviews, to seek depth through 'probing' (Tracy, 2013). This is an important dimension of truly qualitative data, since qualitative research sets out to

explore the complex dynamics of social realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, whilst open-response data shares some of the characteristics of qualitative data it is not conceptualised as such in this research because it has to be taken at face-value and follow-up 'critical questions', considered essential to interpreting and making meaning, are not possible (Tracy, op. cit.). However, some responses, particularly those which create opportunities for respondents to write unstructured responses in their own words do share some of the features of qualitative data, and the greatest insight would be gained from using an analysis technique borrowed from qualitative research (O'Cathain & Thomas, op. cit.).

As with the CRAG analysis of open-response data, the adult researcher analysis adopted an inductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is important to acknowledge that to some extent the codes attached to any given data excerpt are influenced by researcher subjectivity. In the case of this research, the coding was carried out following a long period of work with child research advisors and to some extent the adult-researcher's perspective had become informed by children's perspectives. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the potential impact of the adult-researcher's own lived experience. Therefore, whilst the coding was not undertaken from a neutral position (ibid.), every effort was taken to be reflective in the process of analysis in order to give a balanced account of children's views and experiences.

This research addressed several topics which are under-researched in the NI context, therefore the aim of the thematic analysis was to produce a rich description of the data-set as a whole (ibid.). The data set resulted from a survey and therefore was more fragmented than data created through, for example, interview methods. This was advantageous in that the data excerpts were individually more accessible than an interview transcript but of course they were also numerous. The challenge here was to draw these together into a coherent whole. Three main areas, described as data 'topics', were selected for analysis: views of the selective system; views about transfer tests; and experiences of applying to a new school.

Table 4.4: Open-response data items: breakdown by topic area and question content

Data Topic	Summary of question content				Total
	Number of valid response items				
Views of the selective system	Grammar better	Secondary Better	Both the Same		
	449	245	321		1015
Views about transfer tests	Purpose of transfer tests	Additional information about tests			
	1261	493			1754
Experiences of applying to a new school (Data topic used in CRAG analysis)	Application process as stressful	Reason for being placed in first choice school	Reason for not being placed in first choice school	Additional information about moving on	
	377	536	148	720	1781
Overall number of open-response data items selected for first coding					4550

The analysis of the open-response data used thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide: 1) Familiarising yourself with the data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; and 6) Producing the report. Similarly to the approach used with the CRAG, the process of coding, grouping and theming the data items was undertaken. The process resulted in the development of three main themes within each of the two data topics which were exclusively analysed by the adult researcher. The full details of the codes allocated within each theme and sub-theme are provided in the thematic maps shown in Figures 4.11 and 4.12. The treatment of the open-response data relies on these two thematic maps, and the third map developed in collaboration with the CRAG (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.11: Thematic Map: Topic 1 – Academically selective system

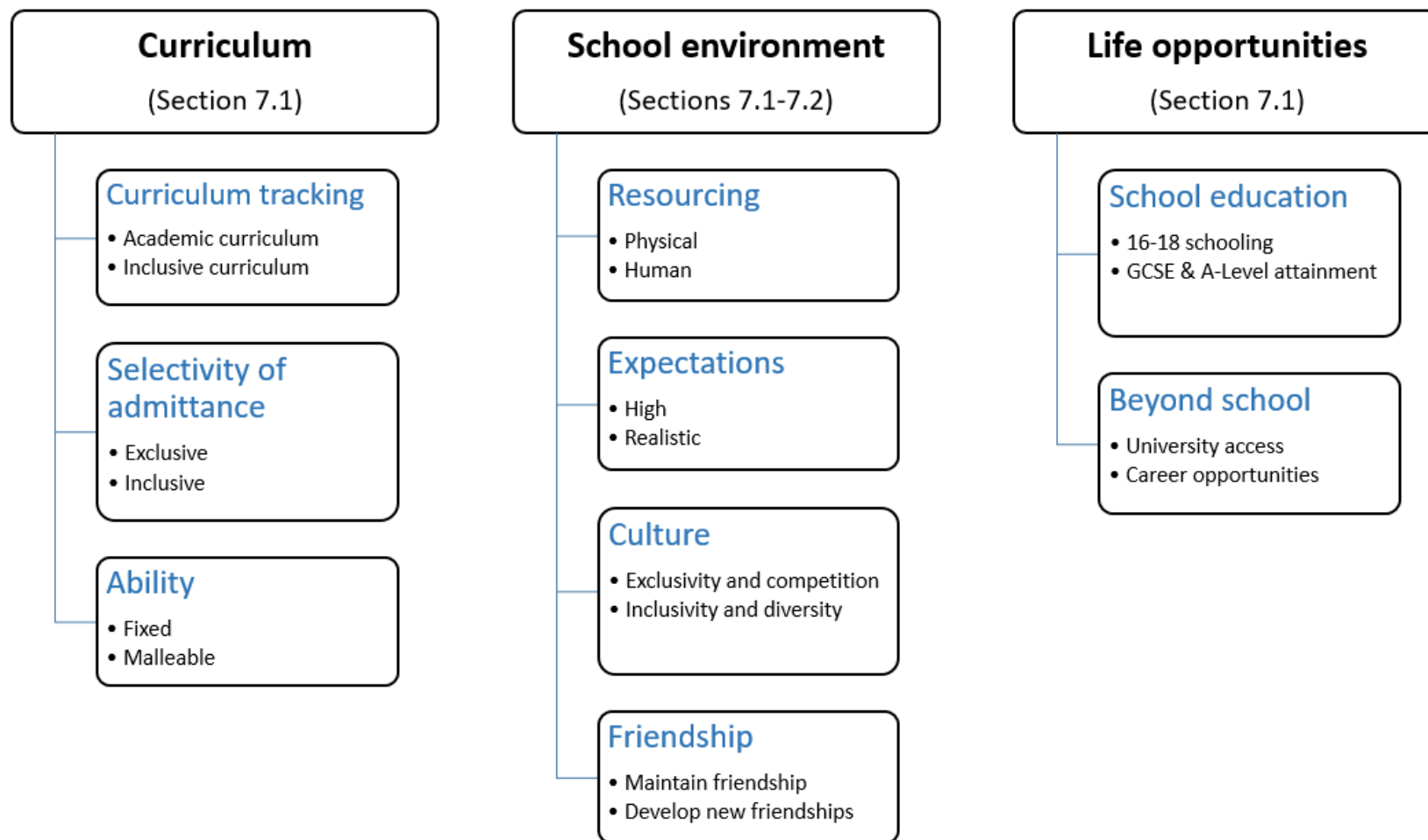
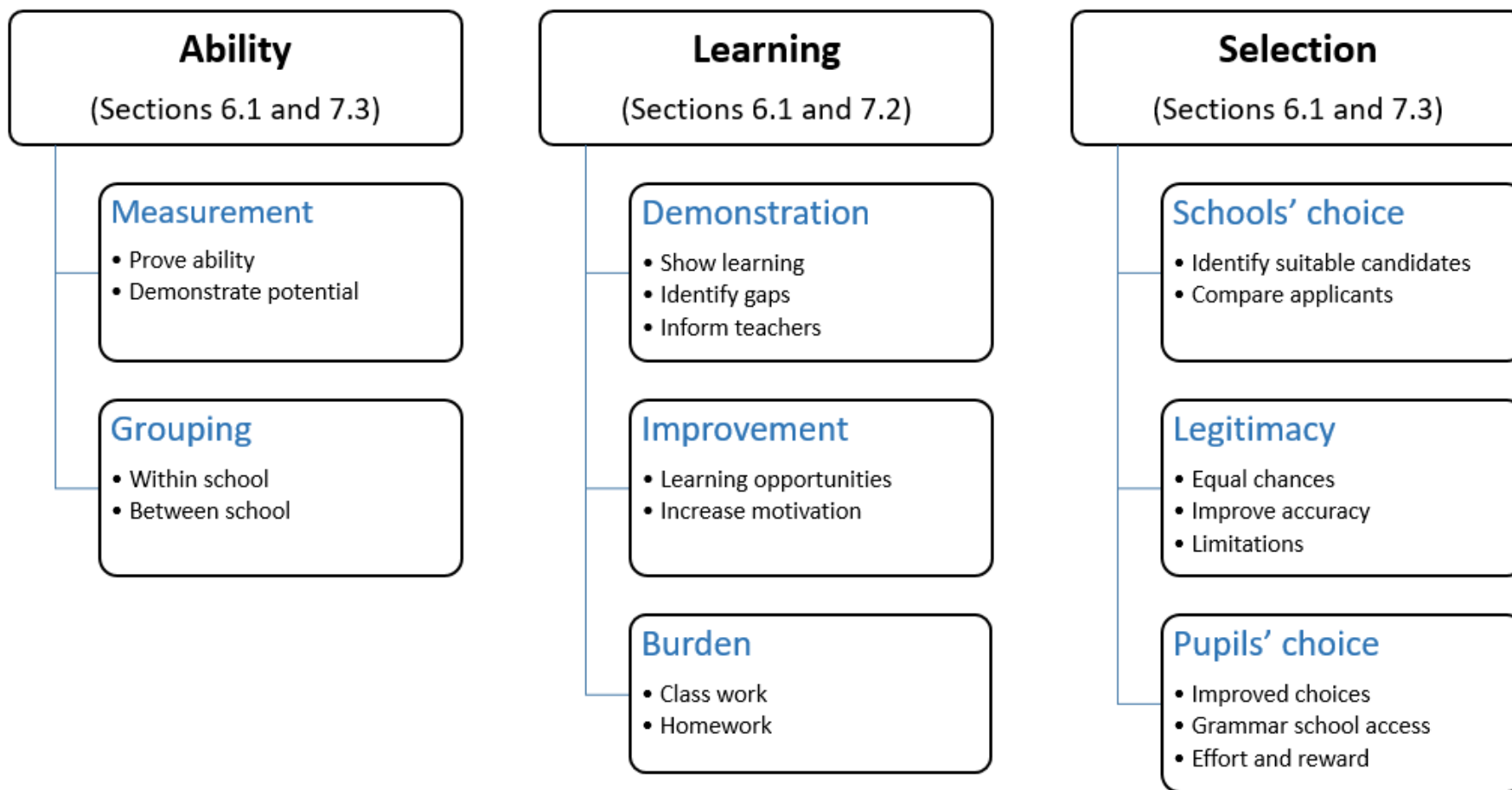


Figure 4.12: Thematic Map: Topic 2 – Purpose of transfer tests



Survey: quantitative data analysis

The analysis of the quantitative survey data closely followed the principles outlined by Pallant (2016) and Connolly (2007). Since the design phase of the survey was carried out using Questback (2016) the manual entry of data was avoided. This meant that the processes of creating a data file was not a separate step and the process of screening and cleaning the data for errors (Pallant, op. cit.) was completed concurrently with the development of the survey code-book, which would ordinarily be completed in advance. The advantage of this technique was that the data relating to each question could be examined closely, the coding checked and a basic level of analysis, as recommended by Connolly (op. cit.), was conducted for each variable. As can be seen in the excerpts of the survey codebook (Appendix 9), for each question the variable abbreviation was recorded, along with the possible responses and their associated numerical values, as well as a frequency table. At the later stages of analysis, where relationships between variables were tested the code book was used to check the accuracy of the resulting data and to assist in developing strategies for recoding variables in more complex analyses.

The reporting of statistical significance in the data chapters follows conventions from two key texts (Connolly, op. cit.; Pallant, op. cit.). In line with recommendations from both of these authors the level of statistical significance (p value) and the effect size (appropriate to the statistical test used) are reported. The statistical significance of a test shows to what degree a finding, of an association between two variables, is likely to have occurred by chance (Connolly, op. cit., p. 162). This association, denoted as the p value, expresses the probability that 'the finding reflects a real underlying trend in the population as a whole' (Ibid., p. 162), for example, where p is calculated to be <0.001 this denotes a greater than 99.9% chance that a finding has not occurred by chance whilst $p=0.05$ denotes a 95% chance. For this reason, where $p<0.05$, a relationship between variables is reported as significant. The effect size is described by Pallant (op. cit.) as the strength of association between two variables, this value quantifies the differences found between groupings and gives a sense of the substantive importance of the finding (Connolly, op. cit.). Effect sizes are calculated using the guidelines presented by Pallant (op. cit.) and are described as small, medium or large. The values associated with these descriptors vary according to the statistical tests used in the analysis and the relevant values are outlined in Table 4.5 (p. 139).

Table 4.5: Conventions for reporting effect size resulting from Chi Square and Mann-Whitney U tests (Pallant, 2016, p. 220 & 230)

Effect size descriptor	coefficient value			
	Phi (2x2 Chi-Square) Or R, effect size (Mann-Whitney U)	Cramer's V (tables larger than 2x2 Chi-Square)		
		Value resulting from subtracting 1 from the number of Chi Square rows or columns is equal to (R-1 or C-1 =)		
		1	2	3
Small effect	0.10	0.01	0.07	0.06
Medium effect	0.30	0.30	0.21	0.17
Large effect	0.50	0.50	0.35	0.29

The statistical tests which compared groupings of respondents excluded responses which did not fit into a clear category, for example, comparisons between FSME and Non-FSME respondents excluded those who selected '*I'm not sure*' and '*Prefer not to say*' responses to the question '*Are you entitled to Free School Meals?*'. In addition, the survey used *selective routing* to navigate respondents through the process of completing the questions relevant to them. Therefore, a question relating to school level admissions decisions would not be asked to Year 6 children since this group would not yet have applied to secondary school. For the purposes of clarity, each analysis of the survey data shows the total number of responses taken into account using the convention $n=x$, n denoting the sample and x the number of respondents.

Strand 3 sampling strategy

Stratified random sampling was selected as the most appropriate method for achieving a sample which represented the different school types at primary and post-primary levels. The intention was to achieve a sample of 600 students, with approximately 24 students completing the survey in each of 25 schools: 12 primary schools (5 Catholic, 5 Protestant, 1 Integrated, and 1 Irish Medium) and 13 secondary schools (3 Catholic non-grammar, 3 Protestant non-grammar, 1 Integrated, 3 Catholic grammar, and 3

Protestant grammar). A random number generator was used to develop a master list which set out the order in which schools within each strata would be contacted (full details of the sampling procedure used are given in Appendix 3). The sample schools were contacted by letter in April giving information about the study and requesting permission to involve transition age children in the online survey during May and June 2016. After a follow up telephone call schools were eliminated from the sample and the next schools on the list were contacted. Where schools agreed to participate the relevant information leaflets and consent forms were sent to the school and a link to the online survey was sent by email. The researcher offered to attend the school to supervise the completion of the online survey. The majority of schools completed the survey online without further contact with the researcher and the researcher visited a small number of schools to assist during survey completion.

Strand 3 sample achieved

This section outlines the survey sample achieved and identifies the limitations of the sampling. A total of 1327 respondents, from 24 schools completed the survey. The sample achieved significantly exceeded the intended 600 respondents, primarily because the number of students who completed the survey in individual schools varied widely from the estimated average of 24 students (the number of respondents from individual schools was between 15 and 154, mean=55). Over the two month period when schools completed the survey it became evident that whilst the total number of respondents had reached the intended quota, the representation across all school types, and indeed the number of schools required, had not been achieved. Therefore, children from additional schools continued to be invited to participate until a relatively balanced sample was achieved with representation of students across each of the intended strata with the exception of an Irish Medium primary school. Nonetheless, a number of limitations are acknowledged.

The original intention had been to over-sample in the grammar school sector due to the need to document children's views and experiences of the transfer tests. However, the final sample (Table 4.6, p. 141) shows a significantly higher number of respondents in grammar (643), compared to non-grammar (297) schools. This is not considered detrimental to between group comparisons since these analyses generally rely on percentages within groupings. A further issue is the over-representation of girls from

highly selective grammar schools, in the Catholic and Protestant sectors. For this reason, it was considered inappropriate to undertake comparisons by gender, particularly in relation to perceptions of transfer tests and self-reported test outcomes. Where such comparisons have been carried out these are not tested for significance. The final issue is that the number of primary respondents better reflects the original intended sample and is therefore incongruous with the secondary sample. Nonetheless, it is deemed robust for the purposes of the analyses undertaken. In the interests of transparency the sample size is clearly indicated for each table and statistical test.

Table 4.6: Number of respondents and schools in sample

Phase	Type	Religious character	# Schools	Respondents		
				# Male	# Female	# Total
Secondary	Grammar	Catholic	4	161	204	365
		Protestant	3	87	191	278
	Grammar total		7	248	395	643
	Non-Grammar	Catholic	5	41	89	130
		Protestant	3	67	26	93
		Integrated	1	36	38	74
	Non-grammar total		9	144	153	297
Secondary total			16	392	548	940
Primary		Catholic	3	67	62	129
		Protestant	4	112	99	211
		Integrated	1	16	29	45
Primary total			8	195	190	385
Overall total			24	587	738	1325 ¹

¹ Two respondents did not indicate their gender as Male or Female, therefore the total number of respondents is 1327

4.5 Evaluation of methods

The evaluation of methods used in research relate to the extent to which approaches adopted are valid and reliable (Cohen, et al., 2011). Validity addresses how accurately the research represents the phenomenon under investigation (ibid.), however, what

constitutes validity is contested and context-bound in both the qualitative (Freeman, et al., 2007) and quantitative (Connolly, 2007) traditions. Reliability relates to how well the methods fulfil requirements of dependability, consistency and replicability or transferability (Cohen et al., 2011). Since methods employed in a study result from multiple decisions and judgements made by individuals the potential for bias is inherent (ibid.). Therefore, the objective must be to address such possibilities to ensure an acceptable level of confidence in the results of the research (Hammersley, 1992). In a mixed methods study, in addition to each of the methods conforming to the validity and reliability requirements of their respective paradigmatic conventions (ibid.), there is a need to assess the research quality in relation to: the data; the analysis of the data; and the conclusions drawn from the analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 27). The following paragraphs examine particular strengths and limitations of the research approach with reference to issues of validity, reliability and quality.

Due to the comparative nature of the documentary analysis, whereby school level policies (ELB transfer booklets, 2014) were coded in relation to how well they reflected the statutory guidance (DENI, 2013b), the potential for researcher subjectivity to influence the analysis was greatly minimised (Cohen, et al., 2011). This was further minimised by development of an analysis protocol (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011) and a coding map. The procedures provide a replicable approach which would enable the analysis to be repeated, this is important since no analysis of school admissions criteria has been undertaken in the NI context since 2001. The extent of the data produced in this strand illustrates the value of the approach in developing insight (Fitzgerald, 2012) into the phenomenon of school admissions policies. The potential limitations relate to reliance on two media data sources, due to the absence of official data (see section 4.4), although there is no reason to believe that self-reported data of this nature is unreliable. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 1, a major gap in both the research literature and publicly available information relates to test performance data for the two tests currently used for selection. Where studies have accessed and analysed this type of data (for examples see (Allen, et al., 2017; Wareham, et al., 2015) there is great potential for inequities in the processes of selection to be better understood, and ultimately to be addressed through policy.

Reliability in survey methodology relates to the extent to which data is dependable, consistent and replicable (Cohen, et al., 2011). The dependability of the instrument was improved through screening questions for clarity and carrying out a survey pilot (ibid.). However, since the questions used in this survey are attitudinal, tests for internal consistency are neither possible nor appropriate (ibid.). The design of the survey was significantly improved through the collaboration with the CRAG, both in terms of the appropriateness of the questions to address matters of concern to transition age children and to ensure that questions were asked in an accessible way. In this regard the influence of the child research advisors is thought to have improved the reliability and validity of the survey (Lundy, et al., 2011). A transparent approach has been adopted in relation to the use of statistical tests in the analysis of data. These have been chosen for their appropriateness to the context of the research, which is a key issue in improving validity. The quantitative data has been appropriately interpreted, with a consistent effort to fully acknowledge the limitations of each test alongside the presentation of the results. Despite the limitations the quantitative data addresses a significant gap in relation to children's experiences of transition in the NI context.

The main limitation of the research is the absence of in-depth qualitative research, such as focus groups with transition age children, which would allow greater understanding of the processes of transition from their perspectives. However, given the extent of the data produced through the other strands of the project there would have been little scope for adequately dealing with additional data within the time limitations and potential resourcing of the project. Nonetheless, the open-response survey items produced a rich data source which has enabled the research to gain insight into children's views and experiences of transition. Furthermore, the data-set has improved the extent to which the research represents the reality of the transition landscape (Creswell, 2014). This is particularly important since no previous research has used a CRBA to document children's experiences of school choice, or school admissions decisions.

4.6 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

Having outlined the methodological approach and research methods adopted in conducting this study it is important to reflect on how decisions related to methodology

were influenced by the researcher's own positionality. As discussed in section 1.5, the decision to expand the focus of the research to accommodate the admissions arrangements for the full range of school types was influenced by my interpretation of both academic and non-academic criteria as having the potential to magnify inequities. However, this decision was certainly influenced by the driving epistemological position articulated within this research, that children are not a single homogenous group and that research which seeks to further a children's rights agenda must be cognisant of representing a diversity of childhoods and voices (O'Kane, 2008). In addition to attempting to accommodate diverse experiences, a particular example of how this epistemological position impacted the research relates to the period of data analysis and interpretation. Multiple aspects of the survey data portrayed the transfer arrangements in a positive light, including responses which reported the additional learning opportunities resulting from test preparation and those which expressed a belief in the fairness of academic selection. On reflection, some of these more positive portrayals were surprising to me. This was particularly so in the latter case, given the extent of the research evidence which demonstrated significant unequal impact on children of both school choice based and academically stratified systems. Nonetheless, I made every effort to attend to faithfully representing the diversity of perspectives shared by the research participants and to give a balanced account of the findings.

Methodological decisions, such as the use of a children's rights based approach, were strongly associated with my own perspective which positioned children as having the capacity to make a valuable contribution to the research (Kellett, 2011). Such positioning, whilst not always made explicit, is nonetheless strongly implicit in the writing of this thesis. For example, in describing the rationale for adopting a rights based methodology the issue of viewing children as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' is important (Coady, 2008). I share this view of children as fully 'human' in the present and thus entitled to the full provision of their rights (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014), under the CRC, and the multiple other instruments of international human rights law. For me the particular attraction of the work of Tomaševski (2001) lay in its capacity to identify and expose violations and denials of children's rights in ways which made explicit that remedying such breaches was both a legal imperative and a governmental obligation. Whilst decision making throughout the writing of this thesis was made in light of this conceptual framework there were also very specific decisions

which were made in direct response to it, for example, it was instrumental in the decision to undertake the significant analysis of the availability of school places.

4.7 Outline of data presentation

The data collected in the course of this research is based on two research strands: the documentary and secondary statistical data analysis from Strand 1; and the survey of transition age children from Strand 3. The documentary analysis considered school level admissions policies, including the use of admissions criteria and a secondary analysis of school intake data. The survey of transition age children gathered quantitative and open-response data relating to children's experiences of transition from primary to secondary school with particular reference to: admissions arrangements, school choice aspirations; assessment for selection, and admissions decisions. The results are presented thematically as three data chapters. Chapter 5 maps the landscape of school choice in relation to the availability of school places, children's school choice preferences, and the admissions criteria which mediate access to secondary education at transfer. Chapter 6 considers the assessment arrangements at transition, with reference to children's experiences of preparing for and sitting the test and by considering the uses of test outcomes in school admissions and children's self-reported test outcomes. Chapter 7 addresses children's perceptions of the academically selective system and their experiences of navigating the process of applying to and being admitted to a secondary school.

Chapter 5: The landscape of school choice

In order to assess the extent to which the right to education (art. 28) is adequately provided for its availability and accessibility must be considered (Tomaševski, 2001). Analysis of school place availability has been proposed as an effective means of monitoring of education provision (ibid.) and the need for children's right to participate (art. 12) in school choice decisions has been identified (See Chapter 3). In addition, any consideration of the accessibility of education should take account of potential administrative barriers to and discriminatory denials of access (Tomaševski, op. cit.). This chapter maps the school choice landscape in relation to the availability of places, children's school preferences and how places are accessed in terms of the criteria used for admissions.

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 consider the availability of school places and children's school choice preferences thematically, with section 5.1 addressing system-level divisions by school gender profile and religious character, and section 5.2 considering how these two types of division interact with academic selectivity within a two-tier system. Multiple inequities in the availability of school places and lack of alignment between children's preferences and school placement are evidenced. No similar data has previously been documented or analysed in the NI context and therefore these sections represent an entirely original contribution.

The processes of accessing a school place are considered in sections 5.3 - 5.5. An overview of issues pertinent to secondary school access, in terms of patterns of oversubscription and admissions, and admissions procedures generally is given in section 5.3. An analysis of non-academic admissions criteria used by grammar and non-grammar schools is provided in section 5.4. The chapter then concludes by comparing the admissions policies of schools using two area profile examples in section 5.5. The significant variations in the admissions criteria used show that, in addition to system-level barriers to school choice existing in relation to the availability of school places, multiple potential inequities emerge from school-level admissions policies. Again these analyses represent an original contribution since no previous research has considered the problematic nature of school admissions from a children's rights perspective, particularly where the analysis considers the full range of schools.

Furthermore, the only data relating to school admissions criteria is almost two decades old (Lundy, 2001).

5.1 School places and children's preferences: gender profile and religious character

This section considers availability of and children's preferences for Year 8 places in relation to school gender profile and religious character. The analyses show differential provision of secondary places and that for a significant number of children school placement does not reflect abstract school choice preferences.

Year 8 places by school gender profile

Table 5.1 shows provision of places (DENI, 2015c) by school gender profile for the five ELB areas, the share of places for each ELB and overall total by gender profile type.

Table 5.1: Year 8 places by Gender profile of school for each ELB area (2013/14)

ELB Region	Gender profile of school							
	All-boys		All-girls		Co-Ed		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	% Gender Profile share within ELB						% share of all places by ELB	
Belfast	1236	29.4	1540	36.6	1435	34.1	4211	19.4
North East	204	4.3	121	2.5	4469	93.2	4794	22.1
South East	296	8.0	341	9.2	3071	82.8	3708	17.1
South	582	11.2	648	12.4	3987	76.4	5217	24.0
West	736	19.3	831	21.8	2242	58.9	3809	17.5
Total	% Gender profile share overall						21739	
	3054	14.0	3481	16.0	15204	69.9		

In four of five areas the majority of places are co-educational whilst the majority in Belfast are single-sex. There are significant variations in provision of co-educational

places, ranging from 34.1% in Belfast to 93.2% in the North East, a 59.1% difference. Where a child's preference is for a co-educational place this choice is much more likely to be realised outside Belfast. Single-sex provision shows similar variation. For example, all-girls places account for 36.6% in Belfast but only 2.5% in the North East. Differences can also be seen within areas, for example, in Belfast 29.4% of places are in all-boys and 36.6% of places in all-girls schools, a difference of 7.2%, accounting for 304 places. This table illustrates significant differences in the provision of places in the different areas when school gender profile is considered. However, this is only one aspect of the three types of system level division.

Year 8 places by school religious character and gender profile

Table 5.2 (p. 149) describes the numbers of places available at different school types according to the religious character (Catholic, Protestant, and Integrated) and gender profile of the schools, and the overall share of places within the ELBs for schools of different religious character. The analysis shows differences in proportions of places available in the Catholic and Protestant sectors in the different ELBs. For example, provision is fairly evenly distributed between the Catholic and Protestant sectors (48.3%:46.5%) in Belfast, whilst the West shows a higher proportion of Catholic than Protestant places (65.1%:26.3%). It is likely that this can be attributed to different proportions of Catholic and Protestant families living in these areas rather than inequities within the system. For example, 2011 census data (Russell, 2014) shows Belfast Local Government District's (LGD) residents are 48.8% Catholic, 42.5% Protestant, and 1.6% Other. This pattern of fairly even distribution between the two main ethno-religious groupings broadly reflects the availability of school places.

Such a direct comparison cannot be made for the Western ELB Area which lies across three LGDs: the population of Catholic compared to Protestant residents is higher in 'Derry and Strabane' (72.2%:25.4%); and 'Fermanagh and Omagh' (64.2%:33.1%); whilst 'Causeway Coast and Glens' (Westerly part within Western ELB) has a lower proportion of Catholic to Protestant residents (40.2%:54.8%). It seems likely that the much higher proportion of Catholic to Protestant school places reflects a similar pattern in the broader population. The overall distribution of places shows balanced provision between Catholic and Protestant schools (46.5%:46.4%) which reflects overall population data (45.1% and 48.4% respectively).

Table 5.2: Year 8 places by Gender profile and Religious Character of school for each ELB area

ELB	Religious character	Gender profile of school							
		All-boys		All-girls		Co-Ed		Total	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
		% share of places by Gender Profile within religious character groupings within ELB						% share of places within ELB	
Belfast	Catholic	685	33.7	854	42.0	496	24.4	2035	48.3
	Protestant	551	28.1	686	35.0	722	36.9	1959	46.5
	Integrated	0	0.0	0	0.0	217	100.0	217	5.2
North East	Catholic	82	5.3	0	0.0	1453	94.7	1535	32.0
	Protestant	122	4.2	121	4.2	2644	91.6	2887	60.2
	Integrated	0	0.0	0	0.0	372	100.0	372	7.8
South East	Catholic	166	16.1	182	17.6	684	66.3	1032	27.8
	Protestant	130	5.8	159	7.1	1957	87.1	2246	60.6
	Integrated	0	0.0	0	0.0	430	100.0	430	11.6
South	Catholic	582	19.3	648	21.4	1792	59.3	3022	57.9
	Protestant	0	0.0	0	0.0	2002	100.0	2002	38.4
	Integrated	0	0.0	0	0.0	193	100.0	193	3.7
West	Catholic	664	26.8	760	30.6	1057	42.6	2481	65.1
	Protestant	72	7.2	71	7.1	859	85.7	1002	26.3
	Integrated	0	0.0	0	0.0	326	100.0	326	8.6
		% share of places by Gender Profile within religious character groupings overall						% share by Rel Char	
Overall	Catholic	2179	21.6	2444	24.2	5482	54.3	10105	46.5
	Protestant	875	8.7	1037	10.3	8184	81.1	10096	46.4
	Integrated	0	0.0	0	0.0	1538	100.0	1538	7.1

This analysis highlights the differential availability of Integrated school places at secondary level across the regions. All Integrated provision is co-educational and it varies from between 3.7% in the Southern region and 11.6% in the South Eastern. This difference, of 7.9%, is a relatively significant variation and demonstrates inequity in access to an already very limited number of Integrated school places.

Table 5.1 showed differences in the provision of places in schools with different gender profiles across the five regions. However, Table 5.2, by presenting additional categories, demonstrates that differential access to places by gender profile is compounded when the dimension of religious character is considered. For example, co-educational places in the West represent 45% of Catholic provision but 86% within the Protestant sector. Therefore a Protestant child, in the West, with a preference for co-educational schooling is more likely to access this school type when compared with their Catholic peer. The analysis also shows that the North East has very few single-sex places in Catholic and Protestant schools and Protestant schools in the Southern area are exclusively co-educational.

Children's preferences by school gender profile

This section considers both secondary and primary respondents' preferences for school gender profile. As discussed, secondary provision is at Co-Educational, single-sex all-boys and all-girls schools in NI whilst at primary level all schools are co-educational apart from a small number of fee-paying preparatory schools.

Table 5.3: Preferences expressed for different types of school by gender profile of school attended (Year 8) (n=930).

Gender profile of current school	Preference expressed for gender profile of school									
	All boys		All girls		Co-Educational		Don't really care		Total (row)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
All Boys	57	24.1	4	1.7	129	54.4	47	19.8	237	100
All Girls	1	0.3	105	29.8	146	41.5	100	28.4	352	100
Co-Ed	1	0.3	11	3.2	287	84.2	42	12.3	341	100
Total (column)	59	6.3	120	12.9	562	60.4	189	20.3	930	100

Table 5.3 shows Year 8 pupils' school gender profile preferences grouped by the gender profile of the school they currently attend. The data shows moderate preferences for single sex schools amongst those who currently attend a single sex school: within all-boys schools 24.1% prefer an all-boys school; and within all-girls schools 29.8% of pupils prefer that school type. An overall majority of Year 8

respondents (60.4%), express a preference for co-educational schooling. This preference is also the most popular choice amongst respondents regardless of the gender profile of their current school, accounting for 84.2% of co-educational, 54.4% of all-boys, and 41.5% of all-girls pupils. Overall, 20% report that they '*don't really care*' about the gender profile of the school with this choice being most popular with respondents attending an all-girls school (28.4%) and least popular with those attending a co-educational school (12.3%).

Table 5.4: Preferences expressed for different types of school by gender of respondent (Years 6 and 7) (n=373).

Gender of respondent	Preference expressed for gender profile of school									
	All boys		All girls		Co-Educational		Don't really care		Total	
	#	#	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
boy	34	18.2	1	0.5	129	69.0	23	12.3	187	100
girl	0	0.0	33	17.7	121	65.1	32	17.2	186	100
Total	34	9.1	34	9.1	250	67.0	55	14.7	373	100

Table 5.4 shows primary respondent's preferences for school gender profile, with a clear majority of girls (65.1%) and boys (69.0%), expressing preference for co-educational schooling. Preferences for single-sex schools account for 17.7% of girls and 18.2% of boys. This data suggests that there is demand for schools with different gender profiles. However, provision of places varies significantly for different groups of children depending on where they live (Table 5.1) and, certainly provision may not reflect what respondents' preferences suggest are desired by children.

Children's preferences by school religious character

This section reviews respondents' preferences for school religious character within categories according to the religious character of the school they currently attend. Religious character is described as Catholic, Protestant, or Integrated, the three categories used throughout the research.

Table 5.5: Preferences expressed for different types of school by religious character of school attended (Year 8) (n=926).

Religious character of current school	Preference expressed for religious character of school									
	Catholic		Protestant		Integrated		Don't really care		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Catholic	330	66.8	1	0.2	38	7.7	125	25.3	494	100
Protestant	12	3.3	110	30.6	99	27.6	138	38.4	359	100
Integrated	6	8.2	3	4.1	54	74.0	10	13.7	73	100
Total	348	37.6	114	12.3	191	20.6	273	29.5	926	100

Table 5.5 compares Year 8 pupils' preferences for different school types. The highest proportion of pupils expressing a preference for their current school type is within the Integrated sector (74.0%). Of those attending a Catholic school, 66.8% indicate this as their preference, compared to 30.6% of those attending a Protestant school. Whilst it is unclear why this is the case it could be argued that it is illustrative of the ambiguous status of 'Protestant' schools (Hughes, 2011) wherein pupils do not necessarily perceive their school's identity as Protestant.

It was anticipated that pupil responses would show a significant degree of status quo bias (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988), whereby individual's decisions are more likely to reflect current situations or previous experiences. However, the data shows relatively large numbers of respondents' preferences diverge from their current experience. This is particularly evident in relation to the numbers of pupils who state that they '*don't really care*' about the religious character of their school. This is more pronounced within the Catholic and Protestant sectors, than the Integrated sector, accounting for 25.3%, 38.4% and 13.7% respectively. Within the category of respondents who attend a Protestant school a higher proportion of children express no clear preference for a particular religious character (38.4%) than have a preference for a Protestant school (30.6%).

Amongst those who attend a Catholic or Protestant school small numbers of respondents express a preference for a school of a different religious character. This data suggests that children may attend a school of a particular religious character for reasons other than affiliation with their own religious identity. This may be, for

example, due to the availability of grammar schools near to where they live, or where respondents from a mixed background follow a family tradition.

Table 5.6: Preferences expressed for different types of school by religious character of school attended (Years 6 and 7) (n=373).

Religious character of current school	Preference expressed for religious character of school									
	Catholic		Protestant		Integrated		Don't really care		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Catholic	86	67.2	2	1.6	6	4.7	34	26.6	128	100
Protestant	4	2.0	100	50.0	31	15.5	65	32.5	200	100
Integrated	0	0.0	1	2.2	39	86.7	5	11.1	45	100
Total	90	24.1	103	27.6	76	20.4	104	27.9	373	100

Table 5.6 compares the views of primary age (Years 6 and 7) children in terms of preference for schools of a particular religious character. Overall, a comparison of the results (across tables 5.5-5.6) for secondary and primary samples are very similar with differences in the percentage values for each category being as small as 1.3%. However, some values show quite large variations and these notable exceptions are outlined here. Children who attend a Protestant school and expressed a preference for that school type accounted for 50.0% of primary respondents and 30.6% of the secondary sample, a difference of 19.4%. No children who attend an Integrated primary school expressed a preference for a Catholic school compared to 8.2% of the same group in the secondary sample. Children who attend a Protestant school and express a preference for an Integrated school accounted for 27.6% of respondents in the secondary sample and 15.5% in the primary sample, a difference of 12.1%. The group who currently attend an Integrated school showed the highest proportional preference for that school type, accounting for 74.0% in the secondary sample and 86.7% in the primary sample, again there is quite a large difference of 12.7% between the two age groups.

These analyses show that many children do not attend a school with a religious character for which they express a preference. This applies to children who have a preference for Integrated schooling and for those who '*don't really care*' about the religious character of their school and yet attend schools where a majority of their

peers are co-religionists (Hughes, 2011) and which can be identified as being of either explicitly Catholic or implicitly Protestant (ibid.) character.

5.2 Perpetuating a two tier system

The third type of system level division is by 'ability', with the existence of grammar and non-grammar schools well established in NI. The allocation of places at secondary level is broadly perceived to be done fairly, however, this separation of children, at age 11, using assessments for selection, has been described as creating two-tier secondary provision (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008). The system has been further identified as a barrier to 'truly inclusive education' in a renewed call for the abolition of school admissions tests (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. 19). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, the OECD has highlighted the emphasis on academic selection at secondary level as representing 'clear structural challenges to equity' (Shewbridge, et al., 2014, p. 21).

Availability of school places: grammar and non-grammar schools

There is clear evidence of differential provision of secondary places by school gender profile and religious character (Section 5.1). However, when sub-groupings take account of academic selectivity even more stark differences become apparent. This section presents a table, in two parts, which shows places across the 5 areas broken down by gender profile, religious character and selectivity. The purpose is to consider the availability of places when the three system level divisions interact.

Table 5.7 (p.155-156) shows overall places available at grammar and non-grammar schools respectively account for 41.0% and 59.0% of the Year 8 entry. However, these proportions differ significantly between areas, with grammar places accounting for 26.7% in the Southern area and 56.4% of places in Belfast. The relatively lower proportion of grammar places in the South can be largely accounted for because of a number of 'Dickson Plan' schools which operate delayed selection (at age 14). The much higher percentage in Belfast may be explained by cross-boundary flow, whereby pupils resident outside the area travel to attend Belfast schools (BELB, 2013). The remaining three areas have grammar provision relatively similar to the 41.0% seen in the overall Year 8 entry: North East, 41.8%; South East, 42.5%; and West, 40.9%.

Table 5.7(a): Year 8 places by Gender profile, Religious Character, and Selectivity of school for each ELB area: Belfast, North East and South East

ELB	Rel Char	Sel	Gender Profile of school								
			All-boys		All-girls		Co-Ed		Total		
			% as gender profile share by sector (ELB, SEL, REL CH)						% share of total Rel Char /ELB		
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Belfast	Cath	GR	334	35.6	301	32.1	302	32.2	937	46.0	
		NG	351	32.0	553	50.4	194	17.7	1098	54.0	
	Prot	GR	269	18.7	448	31.1	722	50.2	1439	73.5	
		NG	282	54.2	238	45.8			520	26.5	
	Int	GR									
		NG					217	100.0	217	100.0	
	Total & % ELB Share		GR	603		749		1024		2376	56.4
			NG	633		791		411		1835	43.6
North East	Cath	GR					500	100.0	500	32.6	
		NG	82	7.9			953	92.1	1035	67.4	
	Prot	GR	122	8.4	121	8.3	1212	83.3	1455	50.4	
		NG					1432	100.0	1432	49.6	
	Int	GR					49	100.0	49	13.2	
		NG					323	100.0	323	86.8	
	Total & % ELB Share		GR	122		121		1761		2004	41.8
			NG	82				2708		2790	58.2
South East	Cath	GR	99	24.5	121	30.0	184	45.5	404	39.1	
		NG	67	10.7	61	9.7	500	79.6	628	60.9	
	Prot	GR	130	11.8	159	14.5	811	73.7	1100	49.0	
		NG					1146	100.0	1146	51.0	
	Int	GR					73	100.0	73	17.0	
		NG					357	100.0	357	83.0	
Total & % ELB Share		GR	229		280		1068		1577	42.5	
		NG	67		61		2003		2131	57.5	

Table 5.7(b): Year 8 places by Gender profile, Religious Character, and Selectivity of school for each ELB area: South, West and Overall

ELB	Rel Char	Sel	Gender Profile of school							
			All-boys		All-girls		Co-Ed		Total	
			% as gender profile share by sector (ELB, SEL, REL CH)						% share of total Rel Char /ELB	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
South	Cath	GR	382	37.9	244	24.2	383	38.0	1009	33.4
		NG	200	9.9	404	20.1	1409	70.0	2013	66.6
	Prot	GR					386	100.0	386	19.3
		NG					1616	100.0	1616	80.7
	Int	GR								
		NG					193	100.0	193	100.0
Total & % ELB Share		GR	382		244		769		1395	26.7
		NG	200		404		3218		3822	73.3
West	Cath	GR	464	45.9	423	41.9	123	12.2	1010	40.7
		NG	200	13.6	337	22.9	934	63.5	1471	59.3
	Prot	GR	72	13.1	71	13.0	405	73.9	548	54.7
		NG					454	100.0	454	45.3
	Int	GR								
		NG					326	100.0	326	100.0
Total & % ELB Share		GR	536		494		528		1558	40.9
		NG	200		337		1714		2251	59.1
Overall	Cath	GR	1279	33.1	1089	28.2	1492	38.7	3860	38.2
		NG	900	14.4	1355	21.7	3990	63.9	6245	61.8
	Prot	GR	593	12.0	799	16.2	3536	71.8	4928	48.8
		NG	282	5.5	238	4.6	4648	89.9	5168	51.2
	Int	GR					122	100.0	122	7.9
		NG					1416	100.0	1416	92.1
Total & % Overall Share		GR	1872	61.3	1888	54.2	5150	33.9	8910	41.0
		NG	1182	38.7	1593	45.8	10054	66.1	12829	59.0
Total									21739	

Availability of school places for sub-groups of children show significant variation by school type, as Table 5.7 illustrates. Evidence of differential school place availability can directly influence options available to individual children. For example, in Belfast, 50.2% of Protestant grammar places are co-educational compared with Protestant non-grammar places which are exclusively single-sex. Therefore, a pupil in this area who has not sat a transfer test and wishes to attend a Protestant school will be unable to attend a co-educational school unless they travel outside the Board area. In the North East, single-sex provision accounts for only small proportions of places, limited to the Catholic non-grammar and Protestant grammar sectors, with between 83.3% and 100.0% of places in each sub-sector (by religious character and selectivity) being offered in co-educational schools. Therefore, children in this area are much more likely to attend a co-educational school. The differential provision of co-educational schools between the Catholic and Protestant sectors, and across the different ELB areas do represent serious inequities in access and have the potential to seriously impact families with more than one child, particularly children of different sex.

The most serious inequity shown in this analysis is differential availability of grammar and non-grammar places in the Catholic and Protestant sectors. Of the overall Year 8 places 41.0% are at grammar and 59.0% are at non-grammar schools. Within the Catholic sector grammar places account for 38.2% of the total whilst in the Protestant sector 48.8% of all places are at grammar schools, representing a difference of 10.6%. This pattern, of higher availability of grammar places in the Protestant sector, is repeated across the four areas which do not operate delayed selection at age 14. The proportion of Protestant places is higher than the proportion of Catholic grammar places, by between 9.9%, in the South East, and 27.5%, in Belfast. Such significant differences result in varied opportunities to access a selective school place for Catholic and Protestant children which represents a serious gap in equal provision of school places.

Whilst the purpose of this analysis is to show differential provision it is not claimed to take full account of the nuanced patterns of provision of school places or pupil attendance at different school types. Due to limitations of the available data the analysis cannot illustrate the extent of cross-boundary flow, whereby residents of one board area attend a school in a different board area which, for example, is thought to

account for between 13% and 67% (depending on the school sector) of pupils attending schools in the Belfast area (BELB, 2013, p. 28). The current analysis, by using school level rather than pupil level data, is limited to provision within school categories, by gender profile, religious character, selectivity, and region. Analysis of pupil level data is likely to show a much more nuanced pattern of school admissions. Nonetheless, this analysis represents an important contribution by providing clear evidence of differential provision of secondary places for different sub-groups of children when the three system level divisions interact.

Children's preferences: grammar and non-grammar schools

In an academically selective system the choice between grammar and non-grammar schools is an important aspect of decision making, particularly given the differences in predicted attainment at the end of compulsory schooling. This section documents pupil preferences for grammar and non-grammar schools.

Table 5.8: Preferences expressed for different types of school by selectivity of school currently attended (Year 8) (n=928)

Selectivity of current school	Preference expressed for selectivity of school							
	Grammar		Non-Grammar		Don't really care		Total (row)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Grammar	402	63.5	30	4.7	201	31.8	633	100
Non-Grammar	23	7.8	160	54.2	112	38.0	295	100
Total (column)	425	45.8	190	20.5	313	33.7	928	100

Table 5.8 shows Year 8 respondents' preferences for grammar and non-grammar schools grouped by selectivity of the school they currently attend. It is important to note, as discussed in Chapter 4, the sample over-represents grammar school pupils. However, percentages are given in rows and therefore describe proportions within the groupings by selectivity of school attended.

Amongst grammar pupils almost two thirds (63.5%) express a preference for that school type whilst more than half (54.2%) of pupils attending All-Ability schools express

a preference for All-Ability schools. This seems to demonstrate that once children have been placed in a particular school type they accept it as the most suited to them. However, it is notable that an average of 35% of Year 8 respondents indicate that they *'Don't really care'* about a school's selectivity. As would be expected a Chi-Square test showed a statistically significant relationship between the type of school currently attended and preference for selectivity of school ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square=379.465, $df=2$) with a large effect size (Cramer's $V=0.639$). This finding further reinforces that students develop an acceptance of the school type in which they are placed.

Table 5.9: Preferences expressed for different types of school by primary school Year Group (Years 6 and 7) (n=375)

Year Group	Preference expressed for selectivity of school							
	Grammar		Non-Grammar		Don't really care		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Year 6	83	43.2	53	27.6	56	29.2	192	100
Year 7	74	40.4	55	30.1	54	29.5	183	100
Total	157	41.9	108	28.8	110	29.3	375	100

Table 5.9 shows primary respondents' preferences for school selectivity. A grammar school is the more popular choice for respondents in both year groups with 43.2% of Year 6 and 40.4% of Year 7 expressing this preference. All-Ability schools are preferred by 27.6% of Year 6 and 30.1% of Year 7 respondents. The remaining 29.2% of Year 6 and 30% of Year 7 responses do not indicate a clear preference for either.

Children's preferences: a complex picture

This section brings together possible combinations of preferences expressed by all respondents to offer a more nuanced picture of school preference by showing overlaps between responses for the three categories of school type. Sub-analyses for primary and secondary respondents are not included because the small numbers of cases did not provide any additional useful information.

Table 5.10: Preferences expressed for different school types by religious character, gender profile and academic selectivity (Years 6, 7 and 8) (n=1265)

Religious Character	Gender Profile	School selectivity						Explanation of % calculations
		Grammar		Non-Grammar		Don't really care		
		#	%	#	%	#	%	
Catholic	Boys	30	13.5	4	4.8	7	5.9	As % 'with preference for Catholic school' within 'school selectivity preference' categories
	Girls	49	22.0	9	10.7	9	7.6	
	Co-Ed	105	47.1	64	76.2	66	55.9	
	Don't really care	39	17.5	7	8.3	36	30.5	
	Total	223	52.5	84	19.8	118	27.8	As % 'with preference for Catholic school'
Protestant	Boys	5	6.0	16	25.4	6	8.8	As % 'with preference for Protestant school' within 'school selectivity preference' categories
	Girls	10	12.0	9	14.3	6	8.8	
	Co-Ed	60	72.3	35	55.6	43	63.2	
	Don't really care	8	9.6	3	4.8	13	19.1	
	Total	83	38.8	63	29.4	68	31.8	As % 'with preference for Protestant school'
Integrated	Boys	3	2.8	2	2.4	1	1.4	As % 'with preference for Integrated school' within 'school selectivity preference categories'
	Girls	8	7.5	3	3.7	3	4.2	
	Co-Ed	82	76.6	73	89.0	53	74.6	
	Don't really care	14	13.1	4	4.9	14	19.7	
	Total	107	41.2	82	31.5	71	27.3	As % 'with preference for Integrated school'
Don't really care	Boys	4	2.6	5	8.2	6	3.9	As % with 'no preference' for Religious Character of school within 'school selectivity preference' categories
	Girls	23	15.2	4	6.6	12	7.8	
	Co-Ed	89	58.9	33	54.1	92	59.7	
	Don't really care	35	23.2	19	31.1	44	28.6	
	Total	151	41.3	61	16.7	154	42.1	As % with 'no preference' for Religious Character of school

Table 5.10 shows how respondents' different school preferences interact. For example, 105 children expressed preference for a Catholic co-educational grammar school. These 105 children represent 47.1% of the children who wish to attend a Catholic grammar school, the remaining 52.9% of children wishing to attend a Catholic grammar school express preferences for single-sex schools, or indicate that they '*don't really care*' about a school's gender profile. It is important to note that this analysis describes the preferences expressed by survey participants and the intention is not to generalise any conclusions to a wider population. The analysis is limited because of

biases within the survey sample and that the method used to compute the combined variables does not result in data which could be reliably tested for statistical significance or effect size.

Within each sector, organised by preference for selectivity and religious character, a majority, between 54.1% and 89.0%, of respondents express a preference for co-educational schooling, apart from those who wish to attend a Catholic grammar where 47.1% indicate preference for co-educational schooling. Those pupils who expressed no clear preference for a particular religious character had the highest proportion of respondents who also '*didn't really care*' about the selectivity of the school (42.1%). Of respondents who expressed a preference for Integrated schooling 41.2% would prefer a grammar place. As Table 5.7 shows: only a small proportion of Integrated grammar places were available for September 2014 entry: 122 places of a total 8960, accounting for 1.36%. It is therefore likely that pupils with this combination of preferences would be unable to realise those preferences and would have to decide which is 'more' important when making a school place choice.

5.3 Accessing a school place: oversubscription and admissions criteria

Secondary schools are legally required to admit applicants to all available places, in compliance with the Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997 - articles 10, 13, 15 and 16 and the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, article 27, and in line with the statutory guidelines (DENI, 2010; 2013a). Where the number of applications for Year 8 exceeds the number of approved places a school is understood to be 'oversubscribed' and must apply criteria published in the school admissions policy 'to select for admission to the school a number of children equal to the school's admissions number' (Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997). This section considers school oversubscription and criteria used to differentiate between applicants to oversubscribed schools.

School oversubscription

This analysis calculates the applications for a Year 8 place received by each school as a percentage of the total number of Year 8 pupils admitted in September 2013 (as detailed in ELB transfer booklets, 2014), allowing subscription levels to be clearly

shown. The analysis cannot be used to understand undersubscription since the approved enrolment number is not considered. Two categories are used: 'not oversubscribed' and 'oversubscribed' schools. Firstly, not oversubscribed schools are those for which applications are less than or equal to the total number of pupils admitted ($<$ or $=$ 100%). These schools may have met their approved admissions number or have been undersubscribed (under roll). Secondly, oversubscribed schools are those for which applications are greater than the total admissions ($>$ 100%), these schools will apply the oversubscription criteria published in their admissions policy to select pupils for admission.

Table 5.11: Levels of (over)subscription for Grammar (GR) and Non-Grammar (NG) Schools (n=204)

	Grammar			Non-Grammar			Total	
Subscription Category	#	% of GR	% within subscription category	#	% of NG	% within subscription category	#	% of Total
Not oversubscribed ($<$ or $=$ 100%)	1	1.5	1.1	90	65.7	98.9	91	44.6
Oversubscribed ($>$ 100%)	66	98.5	58.4	47	34.3	41.6	113	55.4
Total and row %	67		32.8	137		67.2	204	

Table 5.11 shows that of the 204 schools included in the analysis 113 (55.4%) are oversubscribed and 91 (44.6%) are not oversubscribed. Within the grammar sector, 66 (98.5%) of the total 67 schools are oversubscribed. Within the non-grammar sector 47 (34.3%) of the total 137 schools are oversubscribed. This illustrates grammar schools to be disproportionately oversubscribed, representing 32.8% of all secondary schools but 58.4% of oversubscribed schools. Conversely, non-grammar schools account for 67.2% of all secondary schools and only 41.6% of oversubscribed schools. This data confirms the dominant position of grammar schools as the more desirable school type. Interestingly, survey respondents describe grammar schools as offering improved life chances which reinforces the idea that this type of school would be more desirable (See Chapter 7.1).

Table 5.12: Oversubscribed schools in each ELB shown by school religious character and selectivity (GR / NG). (n=113)

ELB	Selectivity	Religious character						Total
		Catholic		Protestant		Integrated		
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Belfast	GR	6	30.0	10	50.0		0.0	16
	NG	1	5.0	3	15.0		0.0	4
North East	GR	4	18.2	11	50.0	1	4.5	16
	NG	1	4.5	3	13.6	2	9.1	6
South East	GR	3	18.8	7	43.8	1	6.3	11
	NG	1	6.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	5
South	GR	8	27.6	3	10.3		0.0	11
	NG	12	41.4	5	17.2	1	3.4	18
West	GR	7	26.9	5	19.2		0.0	12
	NG	10	38.5	2	7.7	2	7.7	14
Overall	GR	28	24.8	36	31.9	2	1.8	66
	NG	25	22.1	15	13.3	7	6.2	47

ELB percentages calculated from oversubscribed schools within ELB.

Overall percentages from total oversubscribed schools overall

Table 5.12 shows significant variations in oversubscription levels for school sub-groups. Protestant grammars account for the largest proportion of oversubscribed schools in three areas: Belfast (50.0%); North-East (50.0%); and South-East (43.8%). Whilst Catholic non-grammar schools represent the most oversubscribed category in the two remaining areas: South (41.4%); and West (38.5%). Levels of demand for Catholic and Protestant schools may vary regionally due to the demographic make-up of the population. However, this pattern shows a variation in the level of demand for grammar and non-grammar schools. Since non-grammar schools are those which should be available to all children, regardless of academic 'ability' it is of concern that provision of Catholic non-grammar places may not meet demand for them. Children with preference for a Catholic school are at risk of experiencing this as a constraint on their expression of school choice. In areas where integrated secondary schools are

available this school type is disproportionately oversubscribed, for example, in the SEELB there are 11 Protestant non-grammar schools of which 2 are oversubscribed, whilst there are 6 Integrated schools of which 3 are oversubscribed. Of course other factors, such as a school's attainment profile, are likely to be taken into account in decision making. Nonetheless, this data points to system level constraints on choice and potential inequities in provision according to the demands of the school population.

Pupil population and Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME)

NI has a high proportion of FSME pupils, with this category representing, on average, 29.4% of the secondary population. Populations of different school groupings show differential representation of FSME pupils. Firstly, the average proportion of FSME pupils differs in schools of different religious character: Catholic (34.9%); Protestant (21.8%); and Integrated (35.0%). This shows that levels of socio-economic deprivation amongst the populations of Catholic and Integrated schools is 1.6 times higher than for Protestant schools. Secondly, when the same analysis is shown by selectivity of school there is a more pronounced difference: the average percentage of FSME pupils in grammar schools is 12.4% and in non-grammar schools the equivalent figure is 3.06 times higher (37.7%). This section contains two tables which show these differences in greater detail using data from the school census carried out in October 2013 (DENI, 2015b).

Table 5.13 (p. 165) shows the average proportion of FSME children in grammar and non-grammar schools organised in bands in increments of 5%. There are clear differences in the representation of FSME children within and between the grammar and non-grammar sectors. Firstly, representation of FSME pupils in the populations of different grammar schools shows significant variation. For example, schools with fewer than 5% FSME pupils account for 13.6% of grammar schools: however, 15.1% of this school type have four times that proportion, with more than 20% of pupils registered as FSME. Secondly, differential representation of FSME children in different non-grammar schools is evidenced to be more extreme with fewer than 20% of pupils being FSME at 7.1% of non-grammar schools and more than 50% of pupils FSME at 19.3% of these schools. Finally, differences between the sectors are striking with no grammar school having a proportion of FSME pupils greater than 40% whilst 39.3% of non-grammar schools have more than 40% FSME pupils. This data shows significant

differences and demonstrates the extent of the impact of social background, measured using FSME, on entry to different schools, particularly within the grammar sector.

Table 5.13: FSME in Grammar and Non-grammar schools (n=206 schools)

FSME pupils % in bands	Grammar			Non-Grammar			Average FSME Population	
	Number of schools, % and cumulative % within sector						Grammar 12.4%	Non-grammar 37.7%
	#	%	Cum%	#	%	Cum%		
0-4.99	9	13.6	13.6				60.6% of Grammar sector below GR average	0.0% of Non-grammar sector below GR average
5-9.99	17	25.8	39.4					
10-14.99	22	33.3	60.6 72.7	1	0.7	0.0 0.7		
15-19.99	8	12.1	84.8	9	6.4	7.1	39.4% of Grammar sector above GR average	55.0% of Non-grammar sector below NG average
20-24.99	6	9.1	93.9	16	11.4	18.6		
25-29.99	2	3.0	97.0	23	16.4	35.0		
30-34.99			97.0	17	12.1	47.1		
35-39.99	2	3.0	98.5 100.0	19	13.6	55.0 60.7		
40-44.99				9	6.4	67.1	1.5% of Grammar sector above NG average	45.0% of Non-grammar sector above NG average
45-49.99				19	13.6	80.7		
50-54.99				11	7.9	88.6		
55-59.99				7	5.0	93.6		
60-64.99				4	2.9	96.4		
65-69.99				2	1.4	97.9		
70-74.99				2	1.4	99.3		
75-79.99				1	0.7	100.0		
Total	66			140				

Table 5.14: Comparison of percentage of FSME children within the population of Grammar and Non-Grammar schools of different religious character (n=209)

ELB area	Grammar		Non-Grammar		
	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant	Integrated
Belfast	18.0	8.6	57.4	44.1	56.0
North East	10.9	8.0	29.5	33.5	30.5
South East	8.4	7.1	37.1	33.6	29.5
Southern	17.9	6.9	41.0	23.8	36.3
Western	18.8	17.8	48.4	35.9	39.4
Overall	16.2	9.4	42.9	32.3	35.0

Table 5.14 shows, on average, that representation of FSME is higher in Catholic schools than Protestant schools for both grammar (16.2%:9.4%) and non-grammar (42.9%:32.3%) sectors. These figures reflect a broader pattern of higher levels of economic poverty (measured using household deprivation indicators) amongst the Catholic community compared to the Protestant community (Nolan, 2014). Nonetheless, this data confirms the lower levels of representation of FSME children within the grammar sector and illustrates the extent to which the most economically deprived are concentrated in non-grammar schools across each ELB area and overall.

Several interesting issues emerge from this analysis. Firstly, Belfast shows the greatest proportions of FSME children in the non-grammar sector compared with other regions. The figures indicate very high levels of socio-economic deprivation within pupil populations of Catholic (57.4%) and Integrated (56.0) schools, whilst Protestant schools accommodate fewer FSME children (44.1%) the figure is still higher than for this sector in other ELBs. Secondly, the grammar sector in the Western area has the largest proportion of FSME pupils across the five areas and the smallest difference between grammar schools in Catholic and Protestant sectors. The largest differences in representation of FSME children in the grammar sector are for Belfast and Southern areas where the FSME average for Catholic grammars are respectively 9.4% and 11.0% higher than for Protestant grammars.

5.4 School Admissions Criteria

In cases where a school is oversubscribed admissions criteria, set down by the Board of Governors of each secondary school and published by the ELB, are used to differentiate between applicants down to the last available place in accordance with the legal requirements (Education Order (NI), 1997; 2006). This section considers school admissions policies of schools (n=204) which provide for students aged 11-16 (or 18). The distinguishing factor between grammar and non-grammar schools' admissions policies is use of criteria pertaining to academic ability and use of exclusively non-academic criteria, respectively. This section begins with a summary of how academic criteria are used, exclusively for admission to grammar places, and continues with an analysis of all other criteria used in admissions, to both grammar and non-grammar schools.

Academic admissions criteria

Academically selective schools use transfer test outcomes to inform admissions decisions. In 2013, the year to which this analysis refers, use of criteria pertaining to academic ability was *not recommended* by the Department (DENI, 2013b) (See Chapter 1. Nonetheless, GL and AQE tests were used by 66 fully or partially selective schools. As previously discussed (pp. 162-163), selective schools are more often oversubscribed than non-selective schools. Therefore, admissions policies of these schools are enacted to differentiate between applicants for places. Chapter 6.3 presents findings pertaining to academic admissions criteria.

Non-academic admissions criteria

Grammar and non-grammar schools use a range of criteria to inform admissions decisions. Non-grammar schools use only non-academic criteria. Admissions to grammar places use non-academic criteria to differentiate between applicants with the same, or similar, test outcomes in one, or both, transfer tests. This section presents findings related to non-academic criteria used for grammar and non-grammar admissions.

Schools are grouped into three categories: grammar schools which use non-academic criteria as the second stage (2.01, 2.02) in admissions decisions (GR 2nd Stage), after

considering academic criteria; non-grammar schools using non-academic criteria in a linear process to differentiate between applicants (1.01, 1.02) (NG 1st Stage); non-grammar schools using non-academic criteria in two stages to differentiate between applicants (2.01, 2.02) (NG 2nd Stage). Amongst non-grammar schools two stage admissions prioritise one non-academic attribute as a primary criterion before applying other criteria as secondary to differentiate within the primary grouping. For example, prioritising applicants for whom the school is the nearest suitable school. Alternatively, two stage admissions are operated by schools aiming to achieve a balanced intake, for example, with regard to proportional representation of FSME pupils, or in the Integrated sector with regard to balanced representation of both main religious identities. Admissions criteria were categorised as *recommended* (R), *not recommended* (NR) or *other* (O) according to the statutory guidance document (DENI, 2013b). Admissions criteria coding is discussed on p. 115.

Family relationships

A total of nine different criteria relating to family relationships are used in the admissions policies of grammar and non-grammar schools. Of these 2 are *recommended*, 5 are *not recommended* and 2 are *other*.

Table 5.15 (p. 169) shows familial criteria *recommended* by DENI are most widely used in admissions with *R2 Sibling-current* included at some stage of the process by every secondary school and *R3 Eldest child* used by 199 schools. Both criteria are used in a significant way, at an early stage of the application of criteria. There is a great deal of overlap, with many schools operating the two criteria concurrently: where having a sibling at the school or being the eldest child of the family are considered as a single category.

A small number of schools treat *R2 Sibling-current* as equivalent to *NR2.01 Sibling-alumni* at an early stage in admissions. Whilst this allows a school to prioritise applicants with an existing link to the school, be it current or previous, DENI (2010) recommends against this. The justification provided by DENI for recommending *R2 Sibling-current* is to improve the possibility that siblings will attend the same school, whilst they recommend against the use of other familial criteria to avoid disadvantaging

other applicants (Ibid.). Two other categories of familial criteria are relatively widely used: with *NR2.03 Parent-alumni* prioritised by 78 schools and *NR4 Children of Staff/Governors* by 92. Although both are given priority in admissions by only a small number of schools, whilst a majority of schools apply them at a later stage, for example, 12 non-grammar schools considered *NR2.03 Parent Alumni* as criterion 1.04. This analysis shows significant variations in the way that school admissions consider family relationships. The complexity of the admissions process is compounded by both the number of criteria used and the lengthy sequence in which they are applied.

Table 5.15: Familial criteria in grammar and non-grammar school admissions

Code	Short description		1.01	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06-1.10	Total (Within Category / Overall)	
			2.01	2.02	2.03	2.04	2.05	2.06-2.10		
R2	Sibling current	GR (2 nd Stage)	42	20	2	2			66	207
		NG (1st Stage)	42	46	24	8			120	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	17	3		1			21	
R3	Eldest child	GR (2 nd Stage)	5	27	14	5	7	2	60	199
		NG (1st Stage)	42	46	24	8			120	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	15	3		1			19	
NR2.01	Sibling alumni	GR (2 nd Stage)	9	12	12	4	2	3	42	119
		NG (1st Stage)	11	18	13	13	5	2	62	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	4	5	4	1	1		15	
NR2.02	Sibling attending/ attended linked school	GR (2 nd Stage)		3	1	1	4	2	11	21
		NG (1st Stage)		6		2	2		10	
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
NR2.03	Parent alumni	GR (2 nd Stage)		2	3	9	6	9	29	78
		NG (1st Stage)	1	1	4	12	10	13	41	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	1	3	1	3			8	
NR2.04	Other familial criteria	GR (2 nd Stage)				3		1	4	18
		NG (1st Stage)			2	3	1	3	9	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	2		2			1	5	
NR4	Children of staff/ governors	GR (2 nd Stage)	5	2	7	4	1	3	22	92
		NG (1st Stage)		6	18	15	6	14	59	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	2	2	3	3		1	11	
O12	First child to transfer to school type	GR (2 nd Stage)		1			1	5	7	17
		NG (1st Stage)		1	8				9	
		NG (2 nd Stage)			1				1	
O13	Sibling unsuccessful applicant	GR (2 nd Stage)			1				1	5
		NG (1st Stage)			2	1			3	
		NG (2 nd Stage)			1				1	

Geographical criteria

Six geographical criteria were identified by this analysis. The 3 *recommended* criteria, *R5 Named Parish*, *R6 Catchment area*, and *R7 Nearest school* are those which would avoid ‘disadvantaging rural / outlying applicants’ (DENI, 2010) by considering whether a school is the ‘nearest suitable school’. These differ from *not recommended* criterion, *NR3 Distance tie-breaker*, and the 2 *other* criteria *O10 Defined catchment area* and *O11 Outside defined catchment area*, which consider geographical location without the nearest school qualifier and are likely to disadvantage applicants who live further away from the school but for whom it is the nearest suitable school.

Table 5.16: Geographical criteria in grammar and non-grammar school admissions

Code	Short description		1.01	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06-1.10	Total (Within Category / Overall)
			2.01	2.02	2.03	2.04	2.05	2.06-2.10	
R5	Named Parish (nearest school qualifier)	GR (2 nd Stage)							0
		NG (1st Stage)							
		NG (2 nd Stage)							
R6	Catchment area (nearest school qualifier)	GR (2 nd Stage)							2
		NG (1st Stage)	1				1		
		NG (2 nd Stage)							
R7	Nearest school	GR (2 nd Stage)				1	2	2	41
		NG (1st Stage)	2	5	6	8	6	4	
		NG (2 nd Stage)			4	1			
NR3	Distance tie-breaker	GR (2 nd Stage)					2	14	87
		NG (1st Stage)		1	3	4	5	12	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	17	12	3	5	3	6	
O10	Defined catchment area	GR (2 nd Stage)		2	1	2		1	78
		NG (1st Stage)	45	11	7	6	3		
		NG (2 nd Stage)							
O11	Outside defined catchment area	GR (2 nd Stage)			2			1	38
		NG (1st Stage)		17	6	2	1	8	
		NG (2 nd Stage)							

As Table 5.16 shows, *R5 Named Parish* is not used by a single school, *R6 Catchment Area* is used by only two schools, and the most popular recommended criterion *R7 Nearest School* is used by a modest 41 schools. However, two criteria which do not contain the nearest school qualifier are widely used, in the case of *NR3 Distance tie-breaker*, by 87 schools, and *O10 Defined catchment area*, by 78 schools. Where these criteria appear in the early stages of admissions policies they are more likely to impact

a greater number of children. For this reason, particular attention is drawn to the use of *O10 Defined Catchment Area* at the first stage (1.01) of the admissions process by 45 non-grammar schools, with a further 18 schools applying it at the second or third stage (1.02 and 1.03).

Primary School attended

Five different criteria are used to consider the primary school a child attended in the application for a secondary place.

Table 5.17: Primary school criteria in grammar and non-grammar school admissions

Code	Short description		1.01	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06-1.08	Total (Within Category / Overall)	
			2.01	2.02	2.03	2.04	2.05	2.06-2.08		
R4.01	Feeder Primary Schools	GR (2 nd Stage)	2		2	6	1	7	18	82
		NG (1st Stage)	27	15	11	4	4	1	62	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	1	1					2	
R4.02	Prep Dept	GR (2 nd Stage)	11	2	2				15	15
		NG (1st Stage)								
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
R4.03	Additional feeder primary schools	GR (2 nd Stage)					1	1	2	12
		NG (1st Stage)		2	1	6		1	10	
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
O8	Preferred P.S. category	GR (2 nd Stage)		1	2				3	26
		NG (1st Stage)	2	6	2	4	6	2	22	
		NG (2 nd Stage)			1				1	
O9	Outside preferred P.S. category	GR (2 nd Stage)			1				1	4
		NG (1st Stage)		1				2	3	
		NG (2 nd Stage)								

Table 5.17 shows the most popular criterion in this category is *R4.10 Feeder Primary School*, which prioritises applicants from schools listed in the school admissions policy as a feeder primary school, with 82 schools using this criterion overall but only 30 of these using it at the first stage. A further 11 grammar schools prioritise applicants from their preparatory departments (*R2*), fee-paying primary level schools affiliated with grammar schools. The use of this criterion, particularly as criterion 2.01, represents a

form of social selection between applicants with the same, or similar, test outcomes who have and have not attended the preparatory department.

Preference criteria

Parents are required to indicate a minimum of three preferred schools, but may indicate as many as they like, on the 'Transfer form' used to apply for a secondary place on behalf of their child, (DENI, 2013a, p. 12). Schools are listed in order of preference and applications are considered by each school in that order (ibid., p. 13). Criterion *NR5 Preference criteria* relates to consideration of the level of preference given to the school on an applicant's transfer application in admissions decisions. DENI recommends against this criterion on the basis that it is 'not in the interests of open enrolment policy' (DENI, 2010, p. 19) and will result in a tactical approach to school choice from parents and children, in effect restricting parental choice.

Table 5.18: Preference criteria in the admissions policies of grammar and non-grammar schools

Code	Short description		1.01	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06-1.07	Total Within Category / Overall	
			2.01	2.02	2.03	2.04	2.05	2.06-2.07		
NR5	Preference criteria	GR (2 nd Stage)								21
		NG (1st Stage)	6	3	2	2	1	2	16	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	4		1				5	

Table 5.18 shows *NR5 Preference criteria* is not considered within the admissions policies of any grammar schools, whilst 21 non-grammar schools consider it at various stages of their admissions policies. Where it is given a high preference in admissions policies it is highly likely to impact admissions decisions for that particular school if it is oversubscribed. Where one, or more, school options under consideration by a family uses this criterion it is likely that it will impact the order of individuals' preferences.

Random tie-breakers

Tie-breaker criteria are those generally applied as the final stage of the admissions process to ensure an admission policy can distinguish between comparable candidates for the last available place (Education Order (NI), 1997; Education Order (NI), 2006).

Table 5.19: Random tie-breaker criteria in grammar and non-grammar admissions

Code	Short description		1.01	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06-1.12	Total (Within Category / Overall)	
			2.01	2.02	2.03	2.04	2.05	2.06-2.12		
R8.01.A	Age tie-breaker (eldest to youngest)	GR (2 nd Stage)			4	6	9	8	27	54
		NG (1st Stage)				3	2	8	13	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	8	4		1	1		14	
R8.01.B	Age tie-breaker (youngest to eldest)	GR (2 nd Stage)				1	2	6	9	13
		NG (1st Stage)					1	1	2	
		NG (2 nd Stage)				1	1		2	
R8.02.A	Alphabet tie-breaker (Random)	GR (2 nd Stage)				3	2	7	12	58
		NG (1st Stage)			1	1	6	7	15	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	24	5		1	1		31	
R8.02.B	Alphabet tie-breaker (Alphabetical order)	GR (2 nd Stage)				1	7	10	18	25
		NG (1st Stage)					1	3	4	
		NG (2 nd Stage)		2			1		3	
R8.03	Random selection tie-breaker	GR (2 nd Stage)		1	2	1		15	19	30
		NG (1st Stage)				1		1	2	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	3		4		1	1	9	
O2	Highest score/grade tie-breaker	GR (2 nd Stage)			1	2	1	4	8	8
		NG (1st Stage)								
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
O15	Shortest name tie-breaker	GR (2 nd Stage)					2	4	6	6
		NG (1st Stage)								
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
O16	Hat tie-breaker	GR (2 nd Stage)						2	2	2
		NG (1st Stage)								
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
O17	By lot tie-breaker	GR (2 nd Stage)						1	1	5
		NG (1st Stage)						1	1	
		NG (2 nd Stage)	1		2				3	

Table 5.19 shows 9 tie-breaker criteria used in school admissions with the majority of schools using recommended criteria or a combination of recommended criteria in sequence. It should be noted that *NR3 Distance tie-breaker*, used by 87 schools, is excluded from this analysis since, as a geographical criterion (Table 5.16), it is not considered 'random'. Applicants are admitted to the 2nd stage of academic admissions

based on transfer test outcomes, it therefore seems unnecessary to reconsider test outcome tie-breakers. Nonetheless, 8 grammar schools operate *O2 Highest score/grade tie-breaker* in second stage admissions (2.03-2.12). A further concern raised by this analysis is that criteria recommended by DENI are suggested because of their capacity to leave an audit trail in the case of an appeal relating to an admissions decision (DENI, 2010). A small minority of schools continue to use criteria *O17 Hat tie-breaker* and *O18 By lot tie-breaker* and it is unclear how the application of these criteria in admissions decisions could be audited or replicated, since no explanation is provided as to how this is done.

FSME

DENI recommends the first criterion to be applied in every school's admissions policy should be *R1 FSME representative* which would ensure that their intake profile reflects the proportion of 1st preference FSME applicants (DENI, 2010). Differential representation of FSME children in grammar and non-grammar school populations are further referenced in the section discussing academic admissions which infers that academic selection results in social selection (ibid.).

Table 5.20: Consideration of FSME in grammar and non-grammar school admissions

			1.01	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06-1.08	Total Within / Overall Category	
			2.01	2.02	2.03	2.04	2.05	2.06-2.08		
R1	FSME representative	GR (2 nd Stage)								10
		NG (1st Stage)	9	1					10	
		NG (2 nd Stage)								
O1	FSME not representative	GR (2 nd Stage)	4	1	7	11	6	12	41	52
		NG (1st Stage)			3	3	1	3	10	
		NG (2 nd Stage)					1		1	

Table 5.20 shows the treatment of FSME within school admissions policies. This analysis shows *R1 FSME representative* is used by only 10 non-grammar schools and no grammar schools. A higher number of schools use *O1 FSME not representative* with a total of 52 schools, of which 41 are grammar schools. However, it is important to consider that only 4 schools apply this as the first secondary criterion (2.01) which effectively means that while many schools have included it in their admissions policies

many fewer will ever apply it in making an admissions decision. Therefore, admissions practices, as they currently stand, are highly unlikely to address the issue of differential representation of FSME children in NI's schools.

This section has presented an analysis of admissions criteria which provides an overview of criteria in use, how they are used, and their relationship to the statutory guidelines (DENI, 2013b). It is evident that a wide range of criteria are used, within a complex system, and that these arrangements have the potential to be difficult for parents to navigate and result in different admissions decisions for 'similar' children. This analysis does show how school admissions policies affect school choice at a local level and these issues are considered in the section below.

5.5 School choice in practice: Area profiles of school admissions policies

The following are samples of school level admissions policies for schools in two areas of NI. They have been chosen as illustrative examples to demonstrate differences in school admissions in a given area. The examples used are admissions policies of six secondary schools published for September 2014 entry. Whilst the information is available in the public domain a pseudonym is used for each school in order to make the data anonymous and avoid singling out individual schools. The tables show school demographic information and criteria to be used to differentiate between applicants in cases where a school is oversubscribed.

Area Profile 1

This section considers three viable school options available to a Protestant boy, two co-educational grammar and one all-boys non-grammar.

Table 5.21 (p. 177) shows the attainment profiles of the two grammar schools are broadly comparable, with 94.0% of Bush Grammar and 95.7% of Kells Grammar pupils achieving the 5+ GCSE benchmark. The attainment profile of the non-grammar, Tall High, shows a marked difference, with 43.1% of pupils achieving the same benchmark. There is significant variation between the three schools in terms of the proportion of FSME and SEN pupils with the non-grammar school having in excess of 20% more pupils in each category than either grammar school. Whilst all three schools are

oversubscribed the two grammar schools are 30% more oversubscribed than the non-grammar school. From this initial data it is clear that an element of social stratification exists within this selection of school choices. The chooser is faced with two options which demonstrate a high possibility of GCSE attainment and low social diversity and a third option with much lower possibility of GCSE attainment and higher social diversity. The admissions criteria of each school prioritises a criterion 'not recommended' by DENI (2010) with the two grammar schools relying on academic admissions and the non-grammar applying a preference criterion.

Academic admissions

Bush Grammar considers outcomes from both AQE and GL tests, applying the *NR1.03 Rank order in bands* criterion. The range of reported outcomes accepted were for the AQE test, with the lowest outcome in the 94-98 range and the highest in the 113-145 range. Kells Grammar considers AQE outcomes using *NR1.01 Rank order of score*. Accepted outcomes were reported with 103 as the lowest and 124 as the highest. As will be discussed in section 6.3, differences in how transfer test outcomes are considered have the potential to lead to differences in final admissions decisions. In the context of area profile 1 this means Bush Grammar applicants with test scores between 113-145 or in the 80-100th GL Cohort Percentile are considered as having the 'same' test outcome for the purposes of admission. These applicants are then differentiated using the non-academic criteria listed as secondary criteria in Table 5.21. Applicants to Kells Grammar are admitted in rank order of score which means that the likelihood of admissions decisions being made based on non-academic criteria are much lower. It is difficult to conclude which approach is more appropriate or fair, although they are clearly different.

Non-academic admissions

Tall High uses NR5 preference criteria as the first stage of admissions. This means students who indicate the school as their first preference will maximise their potential of accessing a place. Those applicants are then differentiated using O10 Defined catchment area, however, unlike *R6 Catchment Area*, O10 does not apply a 'nearest suitable school' (DENI, 2013b) qualifier which has the potential to disadvantage applicants from rural areas.

Table 5.21: Area profile 1 – A Protestant boy’s school options

School name	Bush Grammar	Kells Grammar	Tall High
School type	Protestant Co-ed Grammar	Protestant Co-ed Grammar	Protestant All-boys Non-Grammar
Level of over-subscription	149	146	116
% of FSME pupils	14.97	6.42	36.64
% of SEN pupils (Code 1-5)	10.06	6.42	30.80
Test & outcome range accepted	AQE (94-98) – (113-145) & GL	AQE 103 - 124	(Non-grammar)
% of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C	94.0	95.7	43.1
Admissions criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NR1.03 Rank order in bands • R2 Sibling – current • R3 Eldest child • NR2.04 Other familial criteria – Sibling selected for admission • NR2.01 Sibling alumni • NR2.03 Parent Alumni • O1 FSME (Not representative) <i>NR3 Distance tie-breaker</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NR1.01 Rank order of score • R2 Sibling – current OR R3 Eldest child <i>R8.03 Random selection tie-breaker</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NR5 Preference criteria • O10 Defined catchment area / parish • R2 Sibling – current OR NR2.01 Sibling alumni • NR2.02 Sibling attending/attended linked school • NR2.03 Parent Alumni <i>NR3 Distance tie-breaker</i>

Technical note: Criteria shown in bold are primary criteria, applicants within that category are differentiated by secondary criteria, in the order in which they appear. Criteria in italics are tie-breakers used to differentiate between applicants deemed to equally meet criteria within a particular category.

The three schools apply *R2 Sibling* as a secondary criterion, however, the ways in which it is applied differs for each school. Bush grammar prioritises this over *R3 Eldest Child* whilst Kells Grammar accords *R2* and *R3* the same priority, applying the two criteria simultaneously. Tall High applies *R2* concurrently with *NR2.01 Sibling Alumni*. Overall, the admissions policy of Kells Grammar is the easiest to understand with only three stages, using a total of four criteria. The other two schools Bush Grammar and Tall High, also operate three stage admissions, however, these schools use more criteria, 8 and 6 respectively, and both apply many of the same criteria in a different order. Both also apply *NR3 Distance tie-breaker* as the final deciding criterion between applicants in every other grouping formed through the application of the preceding criteria. The use of this criterion, similarly to the use of *O10 Defined Catchment Area*, has the potential to disadvantage applicants from rural areas.

Area Profile 2

This section presents three school options available to a Catholic girl, one Catholic all-girls Grammar and two Catholic Non-Grammars, one all-girls and one co-educational.

Similarly to schools in Area Profile 2, Table 5.22 (p. 180) shows significant variations in headline attainment. At Six Mile Grammar 100% of the cohort achieved the 5+ GCSE benchmark. The two non-grammar schools show a significant difference in the proportion of pupils achieving the Benchmark: 15.2% at Mourne High and 41.7% at Swanlinbar High. The proportions of FSME pupils at the three schools also shows large variation, similarly to the differences shown between grammar and non-grammar schools in Area profile 1. FSME pupils account for 15.27% of pupils at Six Mile Grammar, higher than for 72.7% of grammar schools (Table 5.13), although still much lower than proportions at Mourne High (29.98%) and Swanlinbar High (36.56%). Differences in proportions of SEN pupils show less diversity in Six Mile Grammar (1.54%) when compared to both Mourne High (19.86%) and Swanlinbar High (17.20%). Differences in levels of oversubscription reflect the dominant position of Six Mile Grammar as the more desirable school option with applications equating to 125% of available places. Mourne High is marginally oversubscribed (103%) and Swanlinbar High is not oversubscribed (100%). This is perhaps surprising since the attainment

profile of Swanlinbar (41.7%) is much higher than that for Mourne (15.2%). This suggests that at a local level other factors are considered in performing school choice.

Academic admissions

Six Mile Grammar's first stage admissions uses *NR1.05 Grade Order* for the GL test before using non-academic criteria to differentiate between applicants with the same grade. It is important to note that grade A was the self-reported GL test outcome for 52.7% of survey respondents (Figure 6.7). Therefore, the use of this criterion means that more than half of those who sat the GL test would be considered as having the 'same' test outcome where this criterion is applied in admissions decisions.

Non-academic admissions

The two non-grammar schools use *O10 Defined Catchment Area* as the first stage in their admissions policies before considering those with *R2 Sibling*, Swanlinbar High considers this in isolation whilst Mourne High considers *R2* as comparable to *O11 Outside defined Catchment Area*. Six Mile Grammar uses *NR4 Children of Staff/ Governors* as the first secondary criterion before considering *R2 Sibling* at the third stage. The fifth secondary criterion applied by Six Mile Grammar is to give priority to *O12 First child to transfer to school / school type* which represents an attempt to prioritise children of families who have no tradition of attending grammar schools, however, this is unlikely to accord any meaningful priority to those applicants since it is applied after three other familial criteria (*NR4*, *R2* and *NR2.01*). Similarly, *O1 FSME (Not representative)* which is used as the seventh secondary criterion is unlikely to significantly prioritise this group of pupils or to increase the proportion of FSME children who are admitted. Both non-grammar schools accord some priority to *O6 Special Educational Need*, however, it is accorded a higher priority at Swanlinbar High (1.03) than Mourne high (1.05). The use of *NR3 Distance tie-breaker*, by the two non-grammar schools, is again likely to disadvantage applicants from rural areas.

Table 5.22: Area Profile 2 – A Catholic girl’s school options

School name	Six Mile Grammar	Mourne High	Swanlinbar High
School type	Catholic All-girls Grammar	Catholic All-girls Non-Grammar	Catholic Co-ed Non-Grammar
Level of over-subscription	125	103	100
% of FSME pupils	15.27	29.98	36.56
% of SEN pupils (Code 1-5)	1.54	19.86	17.20
Test & outcome range accepted	GL B2 - A	(Non-grammar)	(Non-grammar)
% 5+ GCSEs A*-C	100	15.2	41.7
Admissions criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NR1.05 Grade Order • NR4 Children of Staff/ Governors • R2 Sibling - current • NR2.01 Sibling alumni • R3 Eldest child • O12 First child to transfer to school / school type • NR2.03 Parent Alumni • O1 FSME (Not representative) • R8.01.B Age tie-breaker (Youngest-Oldest) • R8.02.B Alphabet tie-breaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O10 Defined catchment area / parish • R2 Sibling – current AND O11 Outside defined catchment area • NR4 Children of Staff/ Governors • O10 Defined catchment area / parish (for 3 additional parishes) • O6 Special Educational Need • R2 Sibling – current OR NR2.02 Sibling attending/ attended linked school • R3 Eldest child • R7 Nearest school • NR3 Distance tie-breaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O10 Defined catchment area / parish • R2 Sibling - current • O6 Special Educational Need • NR4 Children of Staff/ Governors • R4.01 Feeder primary school • O18 All other applicants • NR3 Distance tie-breaker

Data from the two area profiles shows significant variations, both in the criteria used by schools and the ways that those criteria are applied and interpreted. The two examples suggest that, due to the complexity of the landscape of transfer, parents would require a certain degree of understanding of admissions criteria in order to effectively navigate the system on behalf of their child and to secure a place at their preferred school. This is particularly so when different schools use the same and different criteria in different combinations which have the potential to result in different admissions decisions.

5.6 Chapter summary

The data presented in this chapter allows a greater understanding of the provision of secondary school places in NI in three areas: availability of school places within a system characterised by system-level divisions; preferences of transition age children for places at different types of school; and accessibility of places when school oversubscription and school admissions practices are considered. It is important to note that provision within the different categories has evolved over time. Therefore any differences in provision have also evolved and could be argued to reflect patterns of school choice and market competition at a local level, as discussed in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, the analysis offers clear evidence of serious inequities in provision, for example, in relation to variations in the availability of Integrated places in the different ELB regions and the disparity in provision of grammar school places in the Catholic and Protestant sectors. This is problematic because grammar schools are disproportionately oversubscribed which demonstrates that, in practice, the performance of school choice prioritises this school type.

The complexity of the admissions procedures and potential, and documented, inequities in access point to a system which does not prioritise the best interests (art. 3) of children or assure their rights to non-discrimination (art. 2) and participation (art. 12) in relation to access to secondary education or the expression of school choice. The operation of school admissions criteria has seen significant improvement in terms of equitable practices since Lundy's (2001) report: for example, no schools prioritise applicants on the basis of their attendance record or undertake interviews as part of the admissions procedures. Nonetheless, there are multiple instances of criteria being used which have been identified as problematic, as has long been the case in terms of

schools using 'criteria which fly in the face of the guidance' (Ibid., p. 38). Specific instances include the priority given to children according to whether members of their family have previously attended the school (e.g. N.R2.01: Sibling Alumni) which has the potential to be socially selective (Ibid.). This evidence further questions the extent to which the state has fulfilled its obligation to safeguard children's Right to Education (art. 28) by ensuring that education is made available and accessible to every child.

Chapter 6: Navigating the assessment system

Assessments for selection mediate access to secondary education provision at transition. Children's views are rarely sought or taken seriously in assessment reform (Elwood & Lundy, 2010) despite the state obligation to assure children's right to express their views and to have those views given due weight in decisions affecting them (art. 12). The current assessment arrangements at transition in NI emerged within a chaotic policy environment (Birrell & Heenan, 2013) and without due consideration of the views of children (Elwood, 2013a). The use of two privately operated unregulated tests has become well established; nonetheless, there is a lack of transparency around the processes of selection at transition. Although school admissions policies are published annually little is known about how the outcomes of the tests are used in making selection decisions (Elwood, *op. cit.*) because each school can set different academic admissions criteria and no complete data is available about which test outcomes result in successful admission.

Children's views of the current testing arrangements are outlined in section 6.1, whilst section 6.2 offers insight into their experiences of navigating the assessment system in order to access the tests. Section 6.3 gives an overview of how the test outcomes are considered in school admissions policies and a comparison of the lowest scores accepted for admissions to different categories of school. In the absence of publicly available data relating to test performance, section 6.4 uses children's self-reported test outcomes to consider the pattern of distribution of scores for the AQE and grades for the GL tests. This chapter addresses a gap in existing knowledge in relation to the transfer tests with a view to establishing the extent to which the assessment system is accessible and acceptable.

6.1 Children's views of the testing arrangements

This section comprises data expressing children's views on the policy and practice of the current testing arrangements. (See Chapter 1 for discussion of current test provision). There is no existing quantitative data relating to children's perceptions of the fairness of these arrangements. Qualitative data exists which shows children would prefer to have only one type of test and sitting two different transfer tests causes additional stress (NICCY, 2010, p. 44). Unlike children who participated in previous

studies investigating the revised testing arrangements (for example: *ibid*; KLT, 2010) the current cohort of pupils in Years 6-8 have come through a system where using two tests has become embedded as the means of accessing a grammar place and therefore have no direct experience of a single transfer test system. Two aspects of children's views are considered in this section: whether it is fair to have two transfer tests; and what should happen to the transfer tests.

Figure 6.1: Respondents views of whether it is fair to have two transfer tests (Years 6, 7 and 8) (n=850)

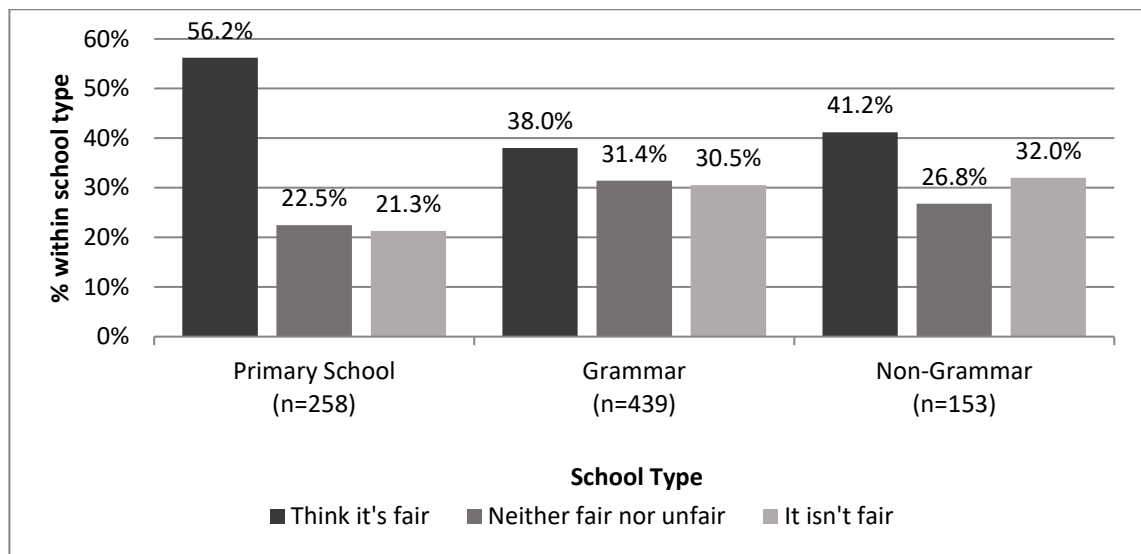


Figure 6.1 shows that the use of two tests for secondary admissions is broadly acceptable to children, with the most popular response from each group of respondents being '*Think it's fair*'. However, the popularity of the response is higher amongst Primary respondents (56.2%) than for both groups of secondary pupils: grammar (38.0%); and non-grammar (41.2%). Conversely a considerably higher proportion of secondary respondents believe that using two tests '*isn't fair*'. It is interesting that a majority of secondary respondents do not '*Think it's fair*': 61.9% of grammar and 58.8% of non-grammar respondents chose an alternative response.

A Mann Whitney test was used to identify any differences between Primary (n=260) and Secondary (n=605, includes grammar and non-grammar) respondents' views of the fairness of having two tests. The test shows the difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, Mann Whitney $U = 64772.5$, $Z = 3.682$). The formula $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{n}}$

(Connolly, 2007) was used to calculate the effect size ($r=0.150$) which was found to be small. This analysis establishes a statistically significant association between views of whether it is fair to have two transfer tests and the phase of school attended by respondents within the sample. It is therefore possible that children's perceptions of the current arrangements' fairness change as they engage with the processes of transition: however, the relatively small effect size means that the finding should not be overstated.

Figure 6.2: Views about what should happen to the transfer tests (Years 6, 7 and 8) (n=1099)

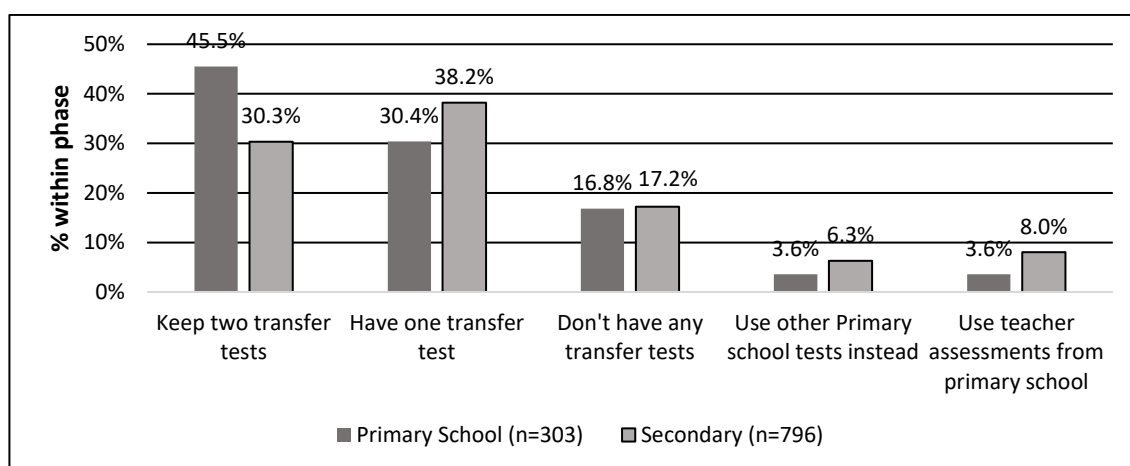


Figure 6.2 shows respondents' views about what should happen to the transfer tests. It builds on existing evidence from KLT (2010) that 40% of Year 7 respondents would 'keep' the tests, 26% would '*get rid of them*' and the remaining 34% were '*not sure*'. The purpose of this question was to see if there was an appetite amongst pupils for alternatives to the current use of two transfer tests.

The Responses show a clear difference in dominant preferences across educational phases: with the most popular option amongst Primary respondents being to retain two transfer tests (45.5%) and Secondary respondents preferring a single test (38.2%). However, 30.3% of secondary pupils did prefer the option of keeping two tests which is 8.6% fewer than the overall proportion of secondary pupils (38.9%) who indicated they believed having the two tests was fair (see Figure 6.1). The difference between the primary and secondary phases was found to be statistically significant using a Mann-Whitney U Test ($p<0.001$, Mann-Whitney U = 100254.5, $Z=4.543$). A small effect size

of $r=0.134$ was calculated. The outcome suggests that children's views of the suitability of having two transfer tests may change over time, although further evidence would be necessary to establish this with certainty. This data further reinforces the idea that, amongst pupils, the use of two tests has become an accepted aspect of transfer arrangements but that when alternative arrangements are considered children do express preferences which diverge from the status quo.

The purpose of transfer tests: children's views

An open response item asking '*Why do you think we have transfer tests?*' was the first question that respondents were asked about assessments for selection. This was done in attempt to document children's existing views about transfer tests. Other questions which sought to draw out views and experiences of specific issues relating to the current assessments were placed later to avoid unintentionally informing children's responses to the question. The presentation of results in this section emerges from the thematic map for topic 2 (Figure 4.12).

A large number of responses referred to transfer tests as measuring academic ability. Some respondents talked about ability in isolation: '*I think we have transfer tests so we can prove our ability*' (Patrick, Owenbream Grammar); '*to classify peoples intelligence*' (Gavin, Roe Primary); and '*To find your IQ level*' (Lewis, Roogagh Primary). Where ability was referenced responses often categorised students into those with 'ability' and those without: '*to determine if you are dumb or smart*' (Adam, Arney Grammar). Respondents then used these categorisations to describe how students could be grouped into these perceived identities: '*to group and separate smart from stupid*' (Dylan, Roe Primary); and '*to separate smart people from less smart people*' (Oisin, Owenbream Grammar). One outlined the perceived benefit to 'smarter' children of grouping by 'ability': '*to sort smarter people into a group so they can focus on their work and not be distracted by stupid people*' (Abigail, Callan High).

Within the responses which identified measuring ability as a purpose of transfer testing a large number of responses portrayed understandings of intelligence as a fixed quality or innate capacity: '*to check the intelligence of an applicant*' (Ben, Sillees Integrated); '*so as to have an insight of the pupils natural skill, what they can do, what they struggle with and to see how prepared they are for the jump from primary to post-primary*'

(Mairead, Cladagh Grammar). However, some respondents did question the reliability of the tests as a measure of ability: *'I think that we have transfer tests to show that particular persons capability, however it might just be the luck of the draw on the day.'* (Julia, Cladagh Grammar).

The use of transfer test outcomes to inform secondary admissions, or ability groupings, was identified by a large number of respondents. For some pupils these decisions represented an effort to provide opportunities which would help students to progress in their learning: *'So the teachers can see what level you are at and which school can help you improve.'* (Alana, Faughan Grammar). Other respondents described the use of transfer tests to group pupils as a way to ensure *'the right people go to grammar schools.'* (Sarah-Jane, Cladagh Grammar) or *'to make it easier to put people in schools and to make sure they get in the right class in all ability schools'* (Charlotte, Faughan Grammar). The idea that within school ability grouping is carried out on the basis of transfer test performance is likely to be a misconception because this data would not be available for the whole cohort and a different form of baseline testing would be required. Respondents from grammar and non-grammar schools both expressed an idea that some children are suited to a grammar school education whilst others are not. One respondent suggested that transfer tests are used *'to see if some children are capable of the work that goes on in grammar schools'* (Ava, Drumragh High) whilst another perceives that *'grammar schools are on a higher level of education'* (Harriet, Quoile High). This respondent went on to suggest that the education offered by grammar schools would be inaccessible to some children: *'someone who would've got like an E on their GL would probably have problems in a grammar school'* (ibid.). The data illustrates a perception of transfer tests as an integral part of transition in a two-tier education system, a view shared by respondents regardless of the school type they attend.

A theme around choice also emerged from the data where transfer tests were identified as offering additional possibilities in terms of choosing a secondary school *'It helps us focus on work, we also get more choices when putting down Secondary School options.'* (Alisha, Cladagh Grammar). For some pupils improved choices were directly linked to effort *'so that people who try harder get rewarded with a wider selection of schools'* (Oran, Owenbream Grammar). For other respondents poor test performance

demonstrated a lack of commitment to school work and selection could be used to group pupils who needed to work harder: *'To sort out pupils to the most appropriate schools. If they are put into a secondary, it is because they need to work harder, like the other pupils sorted there.'* (Kerry, Faughan Grammar). For these respondents focused effort is key to transfer test success and failing to make the required effort is a likely explanation for failing to access a grammar place.

Some respondents expressed a belief that transfer tests contributed to fairness in grammar admissions. One P7 pupil suggested that *'the transfer test is a good system to have a fair judgement of what school you get accepted into'* (Ethan, Roogagh Primary). Many children described using test outcomes in admissions as benefitting schools which would otherwise become oversubscribed. *'I think there are tests because it helps the grammar school decide who to accept'* (Caoimhe, Cusher Primary). Tests are therefore used *'to narrow down the numbers of children who would like to go to grammar schools'* (Oliver, Arney Grammar). Many respondents clearly identified transfer tests as a grammar school requirement, although there were indications of perceived unfairness: *'grammar schools want the children with higher qualities and I don't really think it's fair because you have to stress about a big test at the age of 11'* (Emily, Callan High). Sophie reported that *'if we didn't [have transfer tests] there would be no clear way to distinguish who can or cannot handle the life in a grammar school'* (Sophie, Cladagh Grammar) however, she goes on to highlight unfairness within the system: *'I find them unfair, for you are depending your school for the next seven years on your ten year old self. I think there should be an option to retake it when you are older (if there isn't already)'* (Ibid.).

The potential for transfer tests, and preparation for them, to have a positive role in creating opportunities for, or improving, learning were identified by many respondents. For example, the transfer tests were *'to help people get better at grammar math etc'* (Gary, Camowen Primary) or *'to improve your IQ'* (Liam, Roogagh Primary). Some respondents referred to how learning opportunities produced by transfer tests specifically helped in preparation for moving on to secondary school. Some related these opportunities to specific subject areas *'To improve your maths for secondary school'* (Hayley, Castletown Integrated Primary) whilst others mentioned more general preparation *'I think they have transfer tests because it will help the children prepare*

more for secondary school' (Mia, Roe Primary). Responses which suggested that transfer tests contributed to learning were almost exclusively given by primary age children. This suggests that as children experience transition they move from the immediacy of the test preparation as classroom learning to understanding the transfer tests themselves as a passport or 'qualification' for transfer which then ceases to have value.

6.2 Accessing the transfer tests

AQE and GL tests are sat by Year 7 (primary) school pupils in secondary schools which act as assessment centres for these purposes (see Chapter 1). Parents are responsible for registering their child to sit a test and prior to September 2017, the period during which this research was conducted, primary schools had been directed not to support unregulated arrangements, by providing information to parents or test preparation to pupils, on the basis that 'ability-based admissions maintain and support inequality' (DENI, 2010, p. 20). As previously considered, research has shown access to transfer tests to be mediated by socio-economic status under the previous (Gallagher & Smith, 2000) and current arrangements (NICCY, 2010, p. 20). This section considers children's decisions to sit a transfer test to establish if FSME continues to be associated with those decisions in the manner reported by existing research.

Figure 6.3: Respondents' decision to sit a transfer test or not by FSME (Year 6) (n=165) (Year 7 and 8) (n=1045)

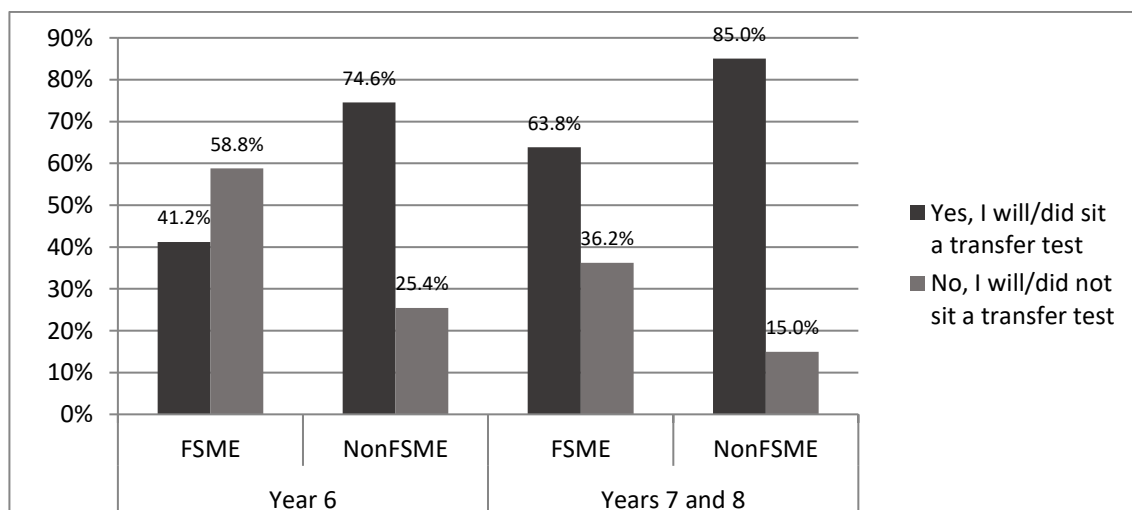


Figure 6.3 shows a higher proportion of Non-FSME than FSME pupils deciding to sit a transfer test. For Year 6 pupils who had not yet reached the transfer test window a Chi-Square test explored the relationship between the intention to sit or not sit a transfer test and FSME status which was found to be significant ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square = 17.600, $df=1$) with a moderate effect size ($\Phi = 0.326$). Whilst for Year 7 and 8 pupils a Chi-Square test considered the relationship between whether they had or had not sat a transfer test and FSME Status. Again this relationship was found to be significant ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square = 58.122, $df=1$) with a lower moderate effect size found ($\Phi = 0.236$). Similarly to findings from existing research (Gallagher & Smith, 2000; NICCY, 2010), these findings show that under the current arrangements decisions to sit a transfer test are associated with FSME (a proxy for socio-economic deprivation).

Figure 6.4: Respondents' decision to sit a transfer test or not by FSME and Religious affiliation (Year 7 and 8) (n=818)

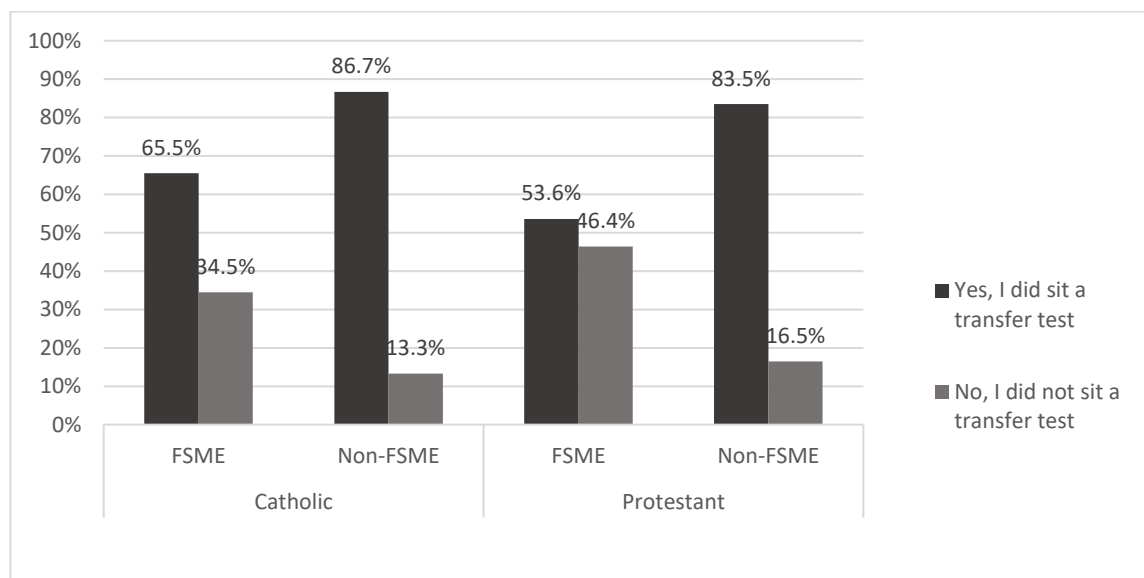


Figure 6.4 shows variations in the proportions of Catholic and Protestant respondents who sat a transfer test by FSME Status. A high proportion of Non-FSME respondents in both the Catholic (86.7%) and Protestant (83.5%) religious affiliation groupings sat a test, a difference of 3.2%. These proportions in each case were higher than for FSME children. However, the difference in the proportions of FSME Catholic (65.5%) and

Protestant (53.6%) respondents who sat a test shows a quite large difference of 12.1%. A Chi-Square test investigated the possibility that a difference existed between Catholic and Protestant respondents but the two variables showed no statistically significant association ($P=0.471$, Chi-Square= 0.521, $df=1$ and $\Phi=0.025$). A further three way cross-tab considered the three variables: whether respondents sat a test, FSME status and religious affiliation. Within the Catholic grouping the likelihood of sitting a test was associated with FSME status ($P<0.001$, Chi-square= 34.853, $df=1$) with a low-moderate effect size ($\Phi=0.250$). Within the Protestant grouping the likelihood of sitting a test was also associated with FSME status ($P<0.001$, Chi-square= 22.330, $df=1$) with a moderate effect size ($\Phi=0.292$).

Figure 6.3-Figure 6.4 show that a difference exists in the likelihood of sitting a transfer test for FSME and Non-FSME children. Whilst the overall pattern is for higher proportions of Non-FSME children to sit a test than FSME children the size of the difference is greater amongst Protestant respondents than their Catholic peers.

Reasons for sitting transfer tests

This section explores reasons chosen by respondents for decisions about sitting transfer tests in three sections: sitting a transfer test; not sitting a transfer test; and sitting two transfer tests. This data builds on findings from existing research in relation to children's decisions about whether or not to participate in assessments for selection (KLT, 2010). The responses used in these multiple response questions reflect the content of the KLT but additional responses were developed in collaboration with the child research advisors. The purpose was to document a more detailed account of respondents' decision-making. An additional question was developed to document children's reasons for sitting both transfer tests, and the resulting data addresses a gap in existing evidence. Each section shows two tables: the first details all available responses for the question with the total number of times each option was selected and the percentage of respondents who selected it; the second shows the most popular combinations of responses with the total number of times and percentage of respondents who gave each combination of responses.

Table 6.1: Reasons for sitting a transfer test (Years 7 and 8) (n=851)

Reason chosen (multiple responses possible)	Number of responses	% of respondents
The school I wanted to go to asked for a test	637	74.9
I didn't really want to do the tests but I thought I should	121	14.2
I wanted to do the tests	262	30.8
My parents wanted me to do them	303	35.6
My teacher said I should	159	18.7
Other children in my class were doing them	99	11.6
I thought I had to do them	61	7.2

Table 6.1 shows the most popular option selected as a reason for sitting a transfer test was *'The school I wanted to go to asked for a test'* with 74.9% of respondents choosing it. This demonstrates a large majority of children are aware that the use of transfer tests is underpinned by grammar school entry requirements. Similarly, in 2010, 83% of children reported doing transfer tests so as to *'get into a good school'* (KLT, 2010) which can be understood to be a grammar school (Elwood, 2013a). Those who report not really wanting to do the tests but feeling obligated to account for 14.2% of respondents whilst a further 7.2% thought that they were obliged to sit the tests.

Table 6.2: Most popular combinations of reasons for sitting a transfer test (Year 7 and 8) (n=851)

Responses in order of popularity	Number of responses	% of respondents
The school I wanted to go to asked for a test	318	37.4
I wanted to do the tests	63	7.4
The school I wanted to go to asked for a test AND I wanted to do the tests AND My parents wanted me to do the tests	39	4.6
The school I wanted to go to asked for a test AND I wanted to do the tests	38	4.5
My parents wanted me to do them	38	4.5
The school I wanted to go to asked for a test AND My parents wanted me to do them	37	4.3

Table 6.2 shows that, overall, the most popular combination of responses was the single choice *'The school I wanted to go to asked for a test'*. This means that for 37.4% of respondents there was no other motivation to sit a transfer test.

Table 6.3: Reasons for not sitting a transfer test (Years 7 and 8) (n=232)

Reason chosen (multiple responses possible)	Number of responses	% of respondents
The school I wanted to go to didn't ask for a test	130	56.0
I didn't want to do the tests	107	46.1
I thought the tests were too hard	64	27.6
My parents didn't want me to do them	22	9.5
My teacher said I shouldn't	10	4.3
Other children in my class weren't doing them	8	3.4
I didn't know I could do them	28	12.1

Table 6.3 shows the most popular option selected as a reason for not sitting a test was *'The school I wanted to go to didn't ask for a test'* with 56.0% of respondents choosing it. This is a higher proportion than previously reported, whereby 41% of children chose *'I could get into the school I wanted anyway'* (KLT, 2010). Children who *'didn't want to do the tests'* accounted for 46.1% of respondents compared to the 41% previously reported (Ibid.). There is evidence of a small yet significant number of children (12.1%) who did not know they could do a transfer test. This raises a question around equality of access to transfer tests, particularly since they operate outside primary schooling and require parents to have a degree of knowledge about the system in order to enter their children for the tests.

Table 6.4: Most popular combinations of reasons for not sitting a transfer test (Year 7 and 8) (n=232)

Responses in order of popularity	Number of responses	% of respondents
The school I wanted to go to didn't ask for a test	71	30.6
I didn't want to do the tests	35	15.1
The school I wanted to go to didn't ask for a test AND I didn't want to do the tests	19	8.2
The school I wanted to go to didn't ask for a test AND I didn't want to do the tests AND I thought the tests were too hard	18	7.8

Table 6.4 shows the most popular combinations of responses for not sitting a transfer test, and once again the most popular outcome related to school admissions

requirements with 30.6% of respondents reporting that the school they *'wanted to go to didn't ask for a test'*.

Interestingly, significant proportions of children report their reason for doing a test or not to be at least partially influenced by their own desire, with those who *'wanted to do the tests'* accounting for 30.8% of those who sat a test and those who *'didn't want to do the tests'* accounting for 46.1% of respondents who did not sit a test. Furthermore, these two response categories emerge, in the respective questions, as the second most popular *'combination'* of responses and in each case are one reason given in three of the four most popular combinations. This suggests that children exercise a degree of agency in decision-making and that children's expressions of wanting, or not wanting to participate, are to some extent respected by adults. However, this experience varies with 7.2% of test-takers believing they were obliged to sit the test and 12.1% of non-test-takers reporting being unaware that they could do a test.

Table 6.5: Reasons for sitting both transfer test (Years 7 and 8) (n=132)

Reason chosen (multiple responses possible)	# of responses	% of respondents
The schools I liked asked for different tests	52	39.4
The schools I liked accepted both tests	47	35.6
It gave me a better chance of getting a grammar school place	106	80.3
Adults at home said it was a good idea	48	36.4
My teacher said it was a good idea	20	15.2

Table 6.5 shows that 80.3% of those who sat both transfer tests did so to improve their *'chance of getting a grammar school place'* whilst other respondents chose this because of schools' requirements for different tests (39.4%), or willingness to accept both tests (35.6%).

Table 6.6: Most popular combinations of reasons for sitting both transfer tests (Year 7 and 8) (n=132)

Responses in order of popularity	# of responses	% of respondents
It gave me a better chance of getting a grammar school place	37	28.0
The schools I liked asked for different tests AND The school I liked accepted both tests AND It gave me a better chance of getting a grammar school place	11	8.3
The schools I liked asked for different tests AND It gave me a better chance of getting a grammar school place	10	7.6
The school I liked accepted both tests AND It gave me a better chance of getting a grammar school place	10	7.6

Table 6.6 shows the most popular combinations of responses for sitting two transfer tests. Each of the four most popular combinations, accounting for an overall total of 51.5% of respondents, refer only to schools' admissions requirements.

The results from the analyses outlined in this section show that children's decisions about whether to take a transfer test are primarily informed by schools' requirements. Since these requirements and the availability of places vary depending on where children live this is likely to influence decisions related to which test or tests to sit. This data confirms the findings of existing research demonstrating that the current arrangements for transfer operate in the interests of schools rather than the children who sit the tests (Elwood, 2013a, p. 210). However, the data, by showing that children's decisions are also informed by their own desires, highlights the potential for children to be agentic in the decision making process.

Preparing for the transfer tests

A criticism of transfer testing under the previous arrangements related to the prevalence of preparation for the transfer tests in primary schools and the negative effect of this on the KS2 curriculum and children's experiences of upper primary school. Since the end of statutory transfer testing primary schools were specifically prohibited from preparing pupils for the privately operated transfer tests (DENI Statutory Guidance 2010-16). This decision was criticised by teachers who felt a moral obligation to prepare pupils for a test they are known to be sitting, particularly one with

high-stakes consequences for a child's future schooling (NICCY, 2010). Nonetheless, this guidance was current during the 2015-16 academic year, the period during which this research was conducted, and the survey attempted to gather information about whether test preparation was occurring, the prevalence of this and variations in access to test preparation for individual children.

Transfer test practice papers

Since the two transfer tests differ in content and format from each other, and other tests children may have taken in primary school, it is important that candidates have an opportunity to practise completing test papers to develop familiarity with the question types and the format of the papers. This is particularly true for the GL test which is multiple choice and uses an OMR answer sheet with which Year 7 children are unlikely to be familiar. This section considers which transfer test practice papers were used by children in their preparation and where this preparation took place.

Figure 6.5 : Practice papers used by pupils who sat a transfer test (Year 7 and 8) (n=694)

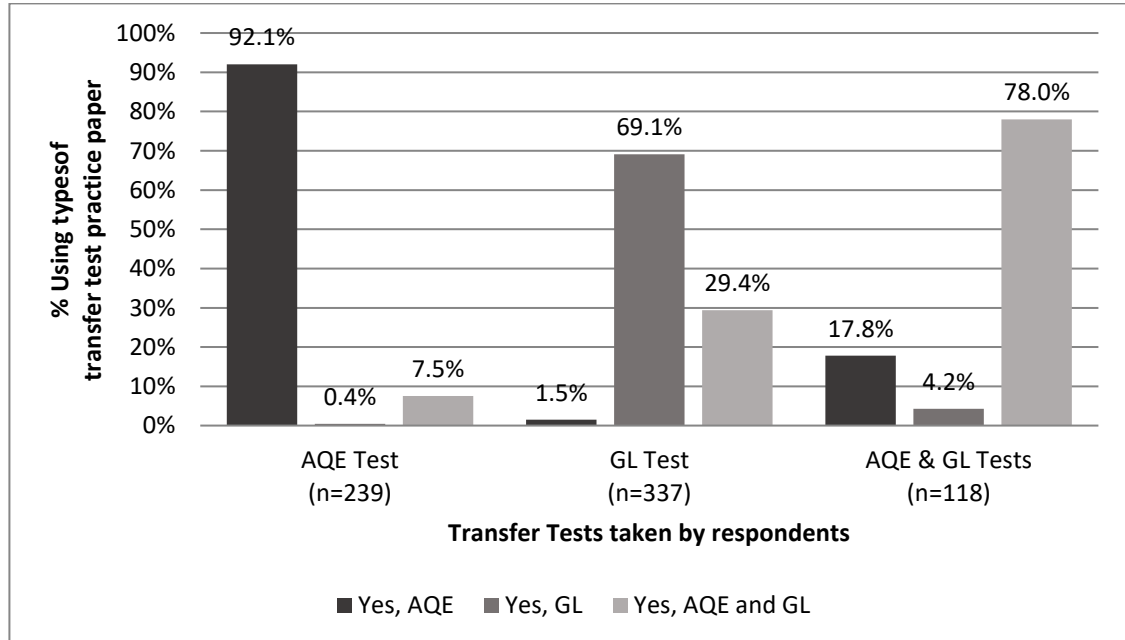


Figure 6.5 shows a breakdown of the types of test practice papers which respondents reported using grouped by the transfer test they sat (where respondents gave a valid response for both questions). In each grouping of test takers a majority reported practising using practice papers for the test, or tests, which they eventually sat. Amongst those respondents who sat the AQE test 92.1% report exclusive use of AQE practice papers and a further 7.5% practised using both types of paper. Of those pupils who sat the GL test 69.1% made exclusive use of GL practice papers, with a further 29.4% reporting using both types. It is unclear whether those who practised using both types had at any stage intended to sit both transfer tests. Since the two tests differ in content and format it would seem unnecessary to prepare for the test which was not to be sat. Furthermore a small number of pupils in each of these categories report using practice papers for the other test type. However, it is unclear why this was the case. A majority (78.0%) of those children who sat both AQE and GL tests had an opportunity to complete practice papers for both tests. However, the remaining 22.0% of children had an opportunity to practice using only one type of practice paper. The differences in patterns of test practice suggest that children's test preparation experiences vary and may not be suited to their needs.

Table 6.7: Breakdown of where respondents completed practice papers (Years 7 and 8) (n=815)

Where did you complete practice papers?	# of responses	% of respondents
At home	569	69.8
With a tutor	275	33.7
In class at school	621	76.2
At an after school club	175	21.5

Table 6.7 shows where respondents who had completed practice papers reported doing so, and gives the number of responses for each option and that number as a percentage of the total number of respondents who answered the question. The most popular options are '*In class at school*' (76.2%) and '*At home*' (69.8%).

Table 6.8 (p. 198) shows an overview of the combinations of places where practice papers were completed by respondents. Using the data in this table it is possible to identify that 137, or 16.7%, of the 815 respondents did not have access to preparation

using practice papers in school. Therefore a large majority, 83.3%, equating to 678 respondents did this type of preparation in school. This data confirms preparation for transfer tests, using practice papers, is widely offered in school despite the guidelines for transfer specifically advising against such provision (DENI, 2010). Nonetheless, a small but significant proportion of respondents did not receive such preparation and this difference represents a serious inequity in terms of access to test preparation.

Table 6.8: Overlaps in responses of where respondents completed practice papers (Years 7 and 8) (n=815)

Where respondents report completing practice papers				# of responses	% of respondents
At home	With a tutor	In class at school	At an after school club		
✓		✓		181	22.2
		✓		161	19.8
✓	✓	✓		139	17.1
✓				77	9.4
		✓	✓	65	8.0
✓	✓			37	4.5
✓	✓	✓	✓	36	4.4
✓			✓	23	2.8
	✓			23	2.8
	✓	✓		22	2.7
			✓	18	2.2
		✓	✓	15	1.8
✓	✓		✓	11	1.3
	✓		✓	5	0.6
	✓	✓	✓	2	0.2

Table 6.9: Breakdown of where respondents completed practice papers by FSME Status (Years 7 and 8) (n=782)

Where did you complete practice papers?	Responses by FSME Status				Total	
	FSME (n=182)		Non-FSME (n=600)			
	% within FSME status grouping				% of total responses	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
At home	108	59.3	435	72.5	543	69.4
With a tutor	43	23.6	217	36.2	260	33.2
In class at school	138	75.8	460	76.7	598	76.5
At an after school club	38	20.9	131	21.8	169	21.6

Table 6.9 shows reported completion of practice papers in the four settings by FSME status. Preparation undertaken in school shows little variation with *in class* and *after school* practice showing a difference of 0.9% between the two FSME groupings. Chi-Square tests showed no significant relationship for *in class* ($P=0.814$, Chi-Square=0.055, $df=1$, effect size $\Phi=0.008$) or *after school* ($P=0.784$, Chi-Square=0.75, $df=1$, effect size $\Phi=0.010$) practice. Preparation undertaken outside school shows much larger variations with 59.3% of FSME and 72.5% of Non-FSME children completing papers *at home* and 23.6% of FSME and 36.2% of Non-FSME children completing papers *with a tutor*. Chi-Square tests investigated the possibility that access to out of school preparation was associated with FSME status. Firstly, *at home* preparation showed a significant association ($P=0.001$, Chi-Square=11.395, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi=0.121$). Secondly, *with a tutor* showed a significant association ($P=0.002$, Chi-Square=9.895, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi=0.112$). This data suggests that access to out of school preparation is likely to be differentially accessible to FSME and Non-FSME children.

Access to preparation in school

In addition to completing transfer test practice papers respondents were asked to indicate if they had received help to prepare for the tests in school.

Table 6.10: Breakdown of type of help received in school to prepare for the transfer tests (Years 7 and 8) ($n=847$)

Did you get help to prepare for the transfer tests in school?	# of responses	% of respondents
Yes, we did work in class	687	81.1
Yes, we did work after school	287	33.9
Yes, we got homework	476	56.2
No, we didn't get any help in school	55	6.5

Table 6.10 shows a large proportion of respondents (81.1%) had access to test preparation in class and that preparation offered by the school after classes was taken up by 33.9%. More than half of respondents (56.2%) got test preparation homework.

A small number, 6.5%, report not getting any help in school to prepare. Since work undertaken in class was the least likely category to be limited by out of school factors, such as inability to stay late after school or inappropriate conditions to complete homework, chi-square tests were used to investigate possible differences in access to work undertaken in class. Firstly, the variable was tested by FSME status, with 79.0% of FSME and 79.8% of Non-FSME children being provided with this opportunity. The Chi-Square test did not show a significant relationship between the two variables ($P=0.817$, Chi-Square=0.053, $df=1$) which reflects the findings of the statistical tests which explored access to practice paper preparation *in school* and *after school* (Table 6.9). Secondly, access to in class preparation by religious identity was considered, with 76.6% of Catholic and 86.1% of Protestant respondents being given access to this preparation. The Chi-Square test showed an association between the two variables ($P=0.006$, Chi-Square=7.699, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi=0.109$). These analyses show that access to in class test preparation is likely to be available on an equitable basis to children of differing socio-economic status but children may experience differential access to such preparation according to religious identity, which indicates possible variations in the preparation offered by different primary schools.

Table 6.11: Most popular combinations of type of help received in school to prepare for the transfer tests (Years 7 and 8) (n=847)

Responses in order of popularity	# of responses	% of respondents
work in class AND got homework	240	28.3
work in class	231	27.3
work in class AND work after school AND got homework	181	21.4
work after school	58	6.8

Table 6.11 shows the most popular combinations of responses for the type of help received in school. The three most popular combinations include preparation '*in class*' and account for 83.8% of the total responses.

Access to a tutor

Access to private tuition, as preparation for transfer tests, places an additional financial burden on families and yet its use has been shown to be extensive. In 2010, 45% of

children reported having a tutor (KLT, 2010). The cost of private tutoring and the implications of costs on availability to less wealthy families raise issues of equity. This survey showed that 49.0% of respondents had a tutor and 51.0% did not (n=845). The following two tables consider children's self-reported access to private tuition according to their FSME status, with the second table showing differences between the two FSME groupings within school religious character groupings.

Figure 6.6: Comparison of access to a Tutor for FSME and Non-FSME pupils
(Years 7 and 8) (n=812)

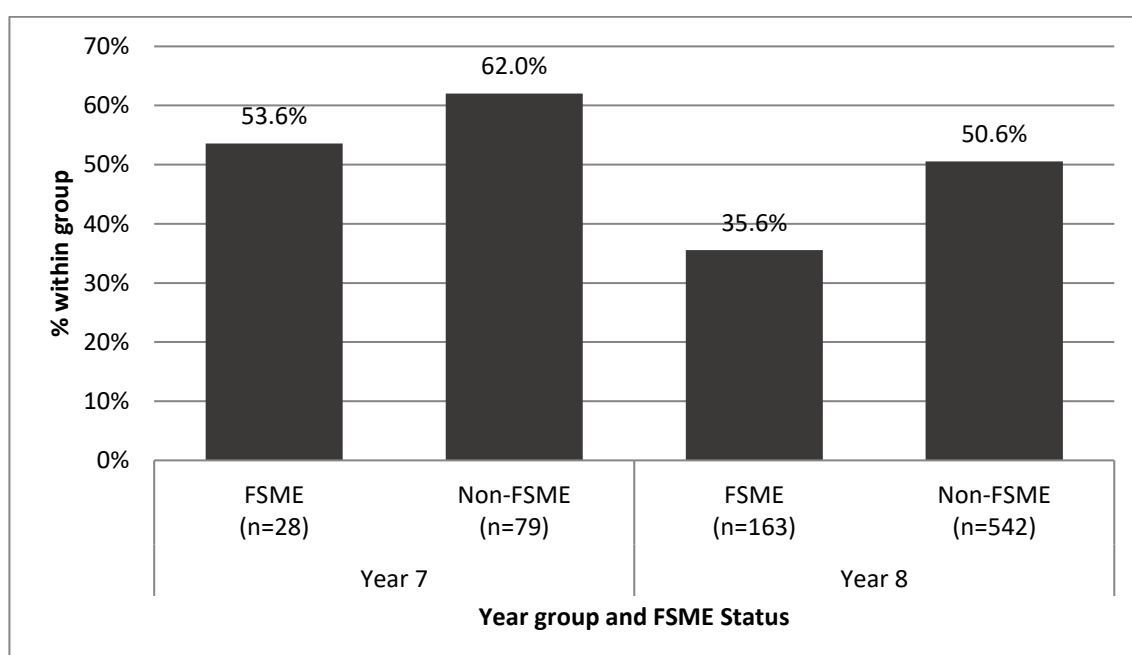


Figure 6.6 shows the variation in the proportions of FSME and Non-FSME children, in Years 7 and 8, who had access to a tutor. For Year 7, 8.4% more Non-FSME than FSME respondents reported having access to a tutor whilst for Year 8, the difference was 15.0%. A Chi-Square test found a statistically significant association between self-reported access to a tutor and FSME Status ($p=0.001$, Chi-Square=11.123, $df=1$). Although the effect size was found to be small ($\Phi=0.117$). The results of this test confirm an association between access to a tutor and FSME status but the strength of the association should not be overstated. However, where tuition is being provided for FSME children this is certain to create an additional financial burden on the families who are least likely to be able to afford it.

Table 6.12: Comparison of access to a Tutor for FSME and Non-FSME pupils by religious identity (Years 7 and 8) (n=790)

Religious identity	Did you have a tutor?	Free School Meal Entitlement				Total
		FSME		Non-FSME		
		#	% ¹	#	% ¹	
Catholic	Yes	47	37.6	171	55.0	218
	No	78	62.4	140	45.0	218
	Total	125		311		436
Protestant	Yes	8	27.6	81	47.6	89
	No	21	72.4	89	52.4	110
	Total	29		170		199
Mixed, No and Other religion	Yes	14	43.8	64	52.0	78
	No	18	56.3	59	48.0	77
	Total	32		123		155
Total	Yes	69	37.1	316	52.3	385
	No	117	62.9	288	47.7	405
	Total	186		604		790

1 Percentages calculated within Religious identity and FSME status groupings

Table 6.12 shows numbers and proportions of respondents who had access to a tutor by FMSE status and religious identity. The inclusion of religious identity as a control variable sought to investigate the possibility that differential access to a tutor was experienced by different sub-groups of children, particularly since religious identity had been associated with test preparation in school (Table 6.10). For each of the religious identity groupings a lower proportion of FSME children had access to a tutor when compared with Non-FSME children. For example, within the Catholic survey population those who accessed a tutor account for 37.6% of FSME and 55.0% of Non-FSME children. This pattern, whereby a smaller proportion of FSME than Non-FSME respondents had access to a tutor, persists for the Protestant children and for the composite category comprising Mixed (Catholic and Protestant), No religion and Other religion. Notably, the proportion of FSME children who accessed a tutor differs by 10.0% between the Catholic (37.6%) and Protestant (27.6%) respondents.

The relationship between the three variables was further investigated using a Chi-Square test. The test focused only on those respondents who had identified themselves as Catholic or Protestant. The three remaining religious identity groups

were excluded due to the relatively small number of cases and the use of a composite category was deemed inappropriate because of demographic differences between the original groupings. The three way test calculated the pearson chi-square value for the relationship between access to a tutor and FSME status within the religious identity groupings. Within the Catholic grouping the relationship was found to be statistically significant ($p=0.001$, Chi-Square=10.778, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi = 0.157$). Amongst the Protestant respondents a similar pattern was found, with a statistically significant association ($p=0.045$, Chi-Square=4.033, $df=1$) and small effect size ($\Phi=0.142$). Both tests suggest that there is a difference in a child's likelihood of accessing a tutor depending on their FSME status and that this pattern is evidenced in the two main religious groupings. However, account must be taken of the difference in the proportions of FSME children from the two main communities who have had access to a tutor.

Feelings of pressure because of the transfer test

Data from KLT (2008, 2010 and 2013) shows a large majority of the children who sat a transfer test experienced some or a lot of pressure. Some differences were reported for boys and girls and similar findings result from the survey data within this research. However, no statistical tests by gender were carried out due to sample bias in relation to gender and attainment in transfer tests within the survey sample. The specific issue relates to an overrepresentation of respondents from highly selective all-girls grammar schools.

Table 6.13: Feelings of pressure experienced because of the transfer test: breakdown by gender and total (Years 7 and 8) (n=853)

Did you feel under pressure because of the transfer test?	Boy		Girl		Total	
	% within Boy/Girl Groupings				% of total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes, a lot of pressure	103	29.9	145	28.5	248	29.1
No, no pressure	66	19.2	88	17.3	154	18.1
Felt somewhere in between	170	49.4	268	52.7	438	51.3
Not sure	5	1.5	8	1.6	13	1.5
Total	344		509		853	

Table 6.13 shows that of 853 respondents who sat a transfer test 80% experienced some level of pressure because of the tests. We know that transfer tests have been previously found to create additional, and unnecessary pressure, on children at this age and these results confirm that 29.1% of the sample felt ‘a lot of pressure’ resulting from transfer tests which is higher than the proportions reported in the KLT (op cit.). There was a small difference between the proportions of boys and girls who reported experiencing no pressure at all, with 19.2% of boys and 17.3% of girls indicating this response.

Table 6.14: Sources of pressure experienced as a result of the transfer tests (Years 7 and 8) (n=853) (percentages of respondents)

Source of pressure reported	Gender				Total	
	boy		girl			
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Pressure from teachers	46	13.4	75	14.7	121	14.2
Pressure from parents or someone at home	81	23.5	83	16.3	164	19.2
Pressure from self	196	57.0	290	57.0	486	57.0
Pressure from other kids, friends or people in class	49	14.2	100	19.6	149	17.5
Not sure where pressure came from	31	9.0	63	12.4	94	11.0
Total	344		509		853	

Table 6.14 shows sources of pressure reported by respondents, with the most popular response being ‘*Pressure from self*’ which accounted for 57.0% of boys and girls. For boys the second highest response rate was for ‘*Pressure from parents or someone at home*’ which was selected by 23.5% of boys, whilst 16.3% of girls indicated this to be a source of pressure that they felt. The second most popular response amongst girls was ‘*Pressure from other kids, friends or people in class*’ which was selected by 19.6% of female respondents and 14.2% of male respondents. Similar proportions of boys (13.4%) and girls (14.7%) reported experiencing pressure from teachers.

Where respondents chose to elaborate on their response several key issues emerged. Firstly, that pressure was related to children's aspirations of achieving a 'good' test outcome: *'Thinking I had to get the highest [mark] and if I didn't I would be a failure'* (Lydia, Colebrooke High). Secondly, a tendency to compare their own performance with that of their peers: *'I thought all my friends were smarter than me and I was going to get a horrible score while everyone else got brilliant results'* (Ciara, Glenelly Grammar). These comparisons extended to whether their performance in the tests would translate to successful entry to the school of their choice: *'thinking about [it] made me feel scared in case I didn't get in but others did'* (Kevin, Torrent Grammar). Finally, some children expressed that they wanted to attend the same school as peers or family members, for example, *'my twin and I were trying to get to [the] same school so we won't be split up'* (Faith, Callan High School). In addition to a desire not to be split up from those currently attending the school some respondents made references to maintaining a family tradition of attending a particular school: *'that my mum and my two aunties got into Faughan so I wanted to carry the tradition'* (Poppy, Faughan Grammar)

6.3 Pupil outcomes and the uses to which they are put

This section considers limited publicly available information to understand how the use of test outcomes operates in practice. Firstly, addressing school level admissions policies related to the consideration of transfer test outcomes. Secondly, analysing highest and lowest test outcomes reported to be accepted by grammar or partially selective schools for September 2013 admissions (thetransfertest.com, 2013). Due to the different formats used to report outcomes in the two tests direct comparisons are not possible and will not be made.

Use of the two transfer tests

This section documents the use of the two transfer tests to inform selective school admissions. The purpose is to confirm whether patterns of use reflect existing community divisions or show regional variations.

Table 6.15: Number of schools using Transfer Tests by Test Type and School Type

School Type	Transfer test used			Total offering entry at 11
	AQE	Both	GL	
Protestant Grammar	31	3	3	37
Catholic Grammar		1	26	27
Integrated (Grammar stream)		1	1	2
Total schools using test(s)	31	5	30	66
Total for each test - includes 'both'	36		35	

Table 6.15 shows that of the 66 selective schools, 31 (47%) use the AQE and 30, (45.5%) use the GL tests exclusively. A further 5 schools (7.5%) accept pupil outcomes in either test. The exclusive use of the AQE test is confined to Protestant grammar schools and the GL test is predominantly used by Catholic grammar schools. This breakdown of test use by school type reinforces our understanding of a testing system broadly divided along community lines (Elwood, 2013a) which perpetuates existing divisions by school religious character within the system.

Table 6.16: Use of Transfer Tests by school type and ELB area

ELB		Belfast		North East		South East		South		West		total	
Test Type		AQE	GL	AQE	GL	AQE	GL	AQE	GL	AQE	GL	AQE	GL
Rel Char	Prot	10 ⁽³⁾	3 ⁽³⁾	9	2	7		3		5	1	34	6
	Cath		6		3	1 ⁽¹⁾	3 ⁽¹⁾		8		7	1	27
	Int				1	1 ⁽¹⁾	1 ⁽¹⁾					1	2
<i>Total</i>		10 ⁽³⁾	9 ⁽³⁾	9	6	9 ⁽²⁾	4 ⁽²⁾	3	8	5	8	36	35
ELB Total		16		15		11		11		13		66	

Table 6.16 describes the use of AQE and GL test outcomes in admissions to different categories of selective school within each ELB. Numbers appearing in brackets indicate the number of schools in the category which accept both tests and these duplicates are removed for the overall ELB totals. The AQE test is more popular than the GL in the North East (9:6) and South East (9:4) and less popular in the South (3:8)

and West (5:8). The popularity of both tests is similar in Belfast (10:9). The only region with no overlap in test use between Catholic and Protestant schools is the South. One challenge of a system based on two tests is that, depending on where they live and which schools they wish to apply to, a child may sit between 2 and 5 different transfer test papers. This data shows the two tests are used in each ELB area and by different school types, meaning a decision to sit both assessments would enable children to maximise their chances of accessing a grammar place. This confirms children's reports that decisions to sit both assessments was influenced by schools' requirements and improved their chances of accessing a grammar school place (See Table 6.5-Table 6.6).

How test outcomes are considered in school admissions policies

It is important to remember that 'passing' or 'failing' a transfer test is determined by whether or not a child gains entry to a grammar place. This means that all NI grammar schools are 'super-selective' because they engage in a practice of using test outcomes to prioritise applicants in the admissions process (Allen, et al., 2017). The documentary analysis of school level admissions policies shows that 66 schools use *Not Recommended (NR1): Academic Admissions Criteria*.

Table 6.17: The use of test outcomes as primary criteria

Code	Description	1.01	1.02	1.03	total
NR1.01	Rank order of score	27	2		29
NR1.02	Proportion in rank order of score (specify)	7			7
NR1.03	Rank order in bands	6	1		7
NR1.04	Proportion in rank order in bands (specify)	1			1
NR1.05	Grade order	23			23
NR1.06	Use of a pool		7	1	8
O3	Boarder Preference	2	1		3
	Total	66	11	1	

Table 6.17 shows the number of grammar schools using each of the six discreet sub-criteria, numbered NR1.01-NR1.06, within *NR1 Academic Admissions Criteria*. The criterion is applied in up to three stages: first (1.01); second (1.02); and third (1.03). A total of 64 schools (96.9%) apply NR1 at the first admissions stage (1.01) whilst the remaining two (3.1%) prioritise boarding applicants (O3). Test outcomes are being considered in a range of ways and at different stages of the admissions process. The analysis shows NR1.01 *Rank order of score* and NR1.05 *Grade Order* to be the dominant ways of considering test outcomes, with 50 (75.7%) schools using one of these. Of the 27 schools using NR1.01, accepting applicants in *rank order of score*, 20 consider AQE outcomes and 7 GL outcomes. The 23 schools using NR1.05 as their first admissions criterion admit applicants in order of GL grade band (with A candidates admitted before B1, B1 candidates admitted before B2 and so on). The admissions policies of a further 6 schools (9.0%) use NR1.03 *rank order of band* with 3 of these considering AQE outcomes and the other 3 accepting both tests. Some schools use the same system of banding and others devise their own.

The remaining 10 schools (15.1%) operate a first (1.01) and second (1.02) stage in considering test outcomes. NR1.02 *Proportion in rank order of score* is used to consider AQE outcomes, at the first stage (1.01) of admissions, for 7 schools, which accept between 75% and 95% of their intake in this way. The second stage (1.02) for 6 of these schools is to accept applicants to remaining places from a pool of applicants who have not yet been admitted. The seventh school considers boarding pupils before using a pool to allocate remaining places. One school admits 70% of the intake using NR1.04 *Proportion in rank order of bands* and the remaining 30% of places are allocated from a pool. Of the two schools applying O3 *Boarder preference*, as the first admissions stage (1.01), the remaining applicants are admitted using NR1.01 *rank order of score*, by 1 school and NR1.03 *rank order in bands* by the other.

This analysis shows that, whilst test outcomes are given high priority in selective school admissions, individual school policies can have vastly different outcomes for individual children. For example, were a school to consider the AQE test outcome of a child using NR1.01 *rank order of score* or NR1.03 *rank order of band* the final admission decision could have a different outcome. This applies equally to the use of NR1.01 *rank order of score* or NR1.05 *Grade Order* for the GL test.

Where a test is designed to measure outcomes using standardised scores and these scores are then arranged in bands by schools, or groups of schools, good assessment practice would suggest that information pertaining to the rationale for this should be available to test takers, in this case children and parents who are engaged in the process. The use of bands also presents an issue in terms of creating *false* boundaries which will operate similarly to grade boundaries, although suitable cut-off scores have not been identified by the testing agency. Similarly, the inverse could be proposed with reference to the GL test whereby the use of strict rank order of score would not take account of the distribution of scores in relation to grade boundaries. However, GL results notifications provided to candidates detail the Grade, Combined Standardised Score, and Cohort Percentile which to some degree addresses the issue of how to interpret the test outcomes using the various criteria employed by schools.

Lack of transparency and potential for admissions decisions to differ according to the ways in which test outcomes are considered mean that the processes of academic admissions are problematic. However, a further key issue is that both these factors create additional complexity in the system for parents and children as they navigate the processes and attempt to understand how a test outcome would translate to successful admission to a grammar place.

Test outcomes accepted for grammar school admission

No complete information about NI transfer test outcomes is published by test providers or schools which use these tests within Year 8 admissions. This section makes use of publicly available information: highest and lowest outcomes accepted by schools who responded to a Freedom of Information (FoI) request made by a local newspaper, the Belfast Telegraph. This data has been collated by an independent website which provides information for parents about NI Transfer Tests (thetransfertest.com, 2013). This secondary data source is used to explore the range of test outcomes which were accepted for grammar admissions in September 2013. Secondary analyses of accepted test scores provided in Tables 6.18-Table 6.23 rely on test outcome data collected by The Transfer Test website (*ibid.*).

GL Test outcomes

For each school using the GL assessment the highest outcome resulting in admission is reported as A. This applies whether the school reports outcomes as a score or grade. Where schools have reported the score the highest outcome was a combined standardised score of 282 which is calculated to be the highest available score where the highest Standardised Age Score on each paper is reported as 141 (PPTC, 2015).

Table 6.18: Lowest GL outcome accepted for Grammar entry

Grade	Combined Standardised Score	Schools accepting each outcome	
		#	%
A	234-282	3	10.0%
B1	229-233	4	13.3%
B2	224-228	9	30.0%
C1	219-223	5	16.7%
C2	213-218	3	10.0%
D	138-212	6	20.0%
Overall total		30	

Table 6.18 shows a breakdown of lowest GL grades accepted for grammar admissions. This demonstrates that 80% of schools accepting GL test outcomes admitted only pupils who achieved scores above the mean, 100 on each paper (PPTC, 2015) and 200 when combined for the two papers. The use of bands or grades does not allow full analysis of scores above and below the mean. In the case of the GL test there is no way to break down scores within the D band which ranges from scores above the mean to the lowest available score.

AQE Test outcomes

For schools basing admissions on outcomes in the AQE test the highest reported scores range from 111-125. These outcomes fall within Band I or Band II. The lowest reported scores accepted ranged from 52-106. It is not clear how a score lower than the published lowest available standardised score of 55 (AQE, 2017, p. 8) was awarded, nonetheless, this score was reported. For the purposes of gaining a better

understanding of the range of scores accepted these are shown in bands, as published in ELB transfer booklets (2014).

Table 6.19: Lowest AQE outcome accepted for Grammar entry

Score band	AQE Standardised Score	Schools accepting each outcome	
		#	%
I	113-145		
II	106-112	1	3.3%
III	103-105	1	3.3%
IV	99-102	6	20.0%
V	94-98	7	23.3%
VI	88-93	6	20.0%
VII	55-87	9	30.0%
Overall total		30	

Table 6.19 shows that of the 30 schools accepting the AQE test, 22 (73.3%) accepted scores below the mean of 100 (AQE, 2017, p. 8). A further 2 schools (6.6%) accepted only pupils who achieved above the mean. For the remaining 6 schools which accepted scores in Band IV (99-102), similarly to the D band for the GL test, it is not possible to understand whether these were above or below the mean score of 100.

Schools accepting outcomes in both tests

The data provided in Tables Table 6.18-Table 6.19 account for 60 schools. The remaining 6 grammar schools accept outcomes in either transfer test. Of these six schools two have not reported highest and lowest accepted scores. Two schools accepted highest grade A and lowest grade C2. One accepted a highest score from Band I (113-145) and lowest from band VI (88-93). The final school used different bands for the AQE test and reported a highest score of 121-125 and lowest score of 101-105.

Comparing pupil outcomes by ELB

The use of transfer test outcomes to inform academic admissions are broadly perceived as a fair way to allocate limited resources (see section 6.1). This section shows the lowest transfer test outcomes, for each test, accepted for grammar entry in the five ELB areas and demonstrates inequities in access to grammar places.

Table 6.20: Lowest AQE outcome accepted for Grammar entry compared by ELB

Score Band	Standardised Score	ELB area				
		Belfast	North East	South East	South	West
		Schools accepting each outcome				
I	113-145					
II	106-112			1		
III	103-105	1				
IV	99-102	1	2	1	1	
V	94-98	1	1	2	1	1
VI	88-93	1	3	1	1	
VII	55-87	2	3			4
	Overall total	6	9	5	3	5

Table 6.21: Lowest GL outcome accepted for Grammar entry compared by ELB

Grade	Combined Standardised Score	ELB area				
		Belfast	North East	South East	South	West
		Schools accepting each outcome				
A	234-282	2				1
B1	229-233	1	1	1	1	
B2	224-228	1	3	1	2	1
C1	219-223	1	1		1	2
C2	213-218		1	1	1	1
D	138-212	1			2	3
	Overall total	6	6	3	7	8

Table 6.20 shows children who sit the AQE test have the potential to experience differential access to grammar school places depending on where they live. For

example, in the South East a score of 88-93 secured a place in one of the five grammar schools in the area whilst in the West a score of 87 or below provided access to four of the five available schools.

Table 6.21 shows variation in test outcomes which result in grammar admissions. For example, Grade D is accepted for admission in three of the four areas whilst a C2 is the lowest accepted outcome in the remaining two ELB areas. In Belfast, the two highest grades, A and B1, are required for entry to half of available Grammar schools whilst in the West the two lowest available grades, C2 and D, are accepted by half of schools.

Table 6.20-Table 6.21 illustrate the variety of lowest pupil outcomes used to inform admissions and demonstrate that securing a grammar place may require different outcomes, in the two tests, and that accepted outcomes vary depending on external factors. This data raises issues around fairness and equal access to grammar provision, where the same test outcome can result in different admissions decisions because of where children live, the gender profile of schools available to them and which grammar school they would like to attend.

Table 6.22: Availability of Grammar places and Lowest Transfer Test outcome required for Grammar entry

ELB	Grammar as % of Protestant Places	Lowest AQE score accepted	Grammar as % of Catholic Places	Lowest GL Grade accepted
Belfast	73.5	85	46.0	D
North East	50.4	52	32.6	C2
South East	49.0	90	39.1	B2
South	19.3	90	33.4	D
West	54.7	74	40.7	D

Table 6.22 brings together data about grammar place availability (Table 5.7) and lowest test outcomes resulting in grammar admissions within each area. The purpose is to identify whether variations in the availability of places has an impact on test outcome requirements for grammar entry across areas. It was anticipated that higher availability of grammar places would result in lower test outcomes being accepted by schools in the area. However, the breakdown shows a more nuanced pattern. For example, an AQE score of 90 was the lowest outcome accepted in the South East and Southern areas, although the proportion of grammar places was much higher in the former, 49.0%, than the latter, 19.3%. Similarly, in Belfast, where the proportion of Catholic grammar places is higher than any other area the lowest outcome, Grade D, in the GL assessment was accepted. It is likely that these differences can be accounted for by cross-boundary flow (BELB, 2013): depending on whether schools in an area are geographically accessible to children who live outside it.

Table 6.23: Lowest Transfer Test outcomes accepted for Grammar School access

Test Type	AQE Score			GL Grade		
	Boys	Girls	Co-Ed	Boys	Girls	Co-Ed
Belfast	92	85	99	D	C1	A
North East	52	87	66	-	-	C2
South East	96	90	95	-	B2	B1
South	-	-	90	D	B2	D
West	-	96	74	D	D	A

Table 6.23 provides a comparison of lowest pupil outcomes required in each area to access grammar school places for each test used, shown by school gender profile. Schools which use both tests in admission have been excluded from this analysis due to differences in the format used to report accepted outcomes.

In Belfast access to co-educational places, for schools using the AQE and GL tests, required Standardised Age Score (SAS) 99 and Grade A respectively. In both cases this is a higher outcome than would be required for access to a single-sex school. For those hoping to access single sex places, Protestant girls and Catholic boys can achieve a lower outcome than their opposite sex co-religionist peers and still be successfully placed.

In the North East there is a significant difference, of 35marks, between the lowest score accepted for entry to a Protestant all-girls (SAS 87) and all-boys (SAS 52) school. Entry to a Protestant co-educational school is based on a significantly lower score than in any other ELB. No single sex schools are available to Catholic children in this area and a co-educational grammar place can be accessed with a grade C2.

In the South East there is smaller variation in lowest accepted scores for Protestant schools, with access to an all-girls school requiring the lower of the three scores reported. There is no provision of single sex places for Catholic boys and access to single-sex girls and co-educational places is broadly comparable, requiring grades B2 and B1 respectively. The South East is the only area where Catholic children cannot access a grammar place with a GL grade lower than B2.

In the South there are no single-sex places available to 'Protestant' children and the lowest score accepted at transfer is SAS 90. Catholic pupils can access a grammar school place with a grade D. However, access to a single sex all-girls school in this category requires grade B2.

In the Western area 'Protestant' pupils can access a co-educational place with SAS 74, single-sex all-girls places required a minimum score of 96 and there are no single-sex places available to boys. Conversely access to single-sex places for both Catholic boys and girls could be secured with a grade D whilst co-educational places were not secured by any pupil with an outcome lower than grade A.

This analysis shows significant variations in the pupil outcomes required to access selective school places by ELB and school gender profile and raises issues of fairness and equality of access to schooling. School places within each ELB are accessible to

children living outside that area and therefore children could apply to a school where lower test outcomes have been accepted in the past when compared to, for example, their preferred choice or nearest school. Therefore, the significant differences in test outcomes likely to be accepted by different schools are likely to have an impact on children's school choice decisions even where those children have no specific preference for particular school characteristics (see section 5.2). It also demonstrates that whilst transfer test outcomes are used to inform academically selective admissions that the school intakes resulting from such decisions can ultimately reflect pupil attainment which spans the full range from the highest to lowest possible outcomes.

Applicants who did not sit a transfer test

The analysis of admissions policies shows many grammar schools, which ordinarily apply academic criteria in admissions, have made a provision for accepting pupils who did not sit a transfer test.

Table 6.24: Grammar schools with provision for accepting applicants who did not sit a transfer test

	Catholic Grammar	Protestant Grammar	Integrated	TOTAL
BELB	1	6		7
NEELB	3	8		11
SEELB	2	5		7
SELB	5	3		8
WELB	4	5		9
Total	15	27	0	42

Table 6.24 illustrates that 42 of 66 grammar schools have made provisions within their admissions criteria to admit applicants who did not sit a transfer test. These provisions along with the wide range of scores and grades accepted suggest that almost two thirds of grammar schools have committed to actively prioritise filling their Year 8 enrolment number regardless of candidates' academic ability. This may be an effort to address open enrolment requirements that schools fill all available places and that

refusing to admit an applicant on the basis of academic criteria would be unlawful. It is therefore unclear what the remaining 24 schools would do should the number of applications from children who have completed the required tests be lower than their approved enrolment number.

6.4 Children's self-reported transfer test outcomes

The survey of transition age children carried out as part of this research asked children to report their test outcomes for the GL and AQE transfer tests using the same categories as the KLT survey (2010; 2013). The following section considers the self-reported test scores in three areas: the distribution of test scores for each test (GL and AQE); a comparison of the distribution for children who sat both tests; and the relationship between test scores and FSME.

Distribution of GL Grades and AQE scores

This section illustrates the distribution of survey respondents' self-reported outcomes for the GL and AQE tests using histograms.

Figure 6.7: Distribution of GL Grade achieved shown as a percentage of respondents who sat the tests (Year 8) n=419)

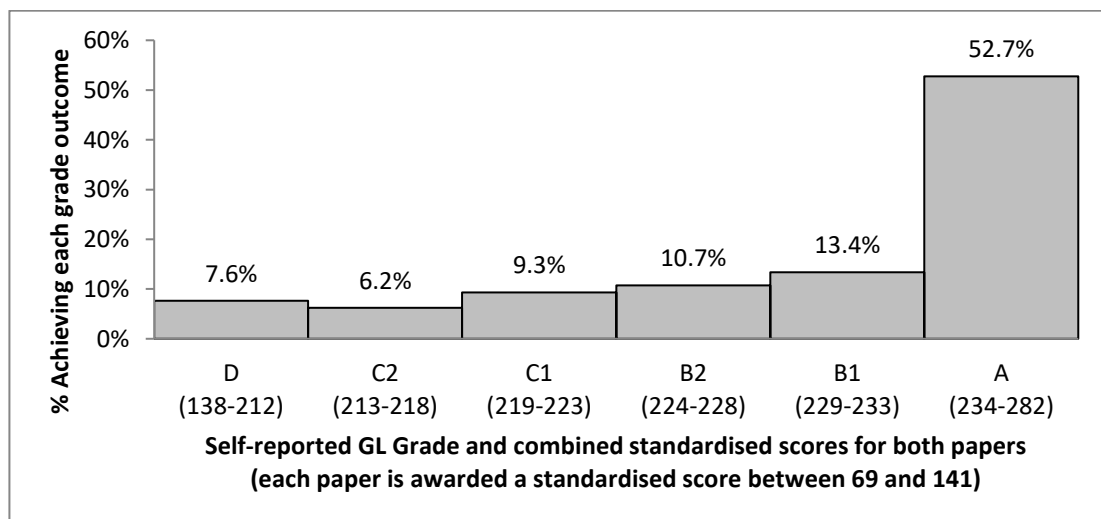


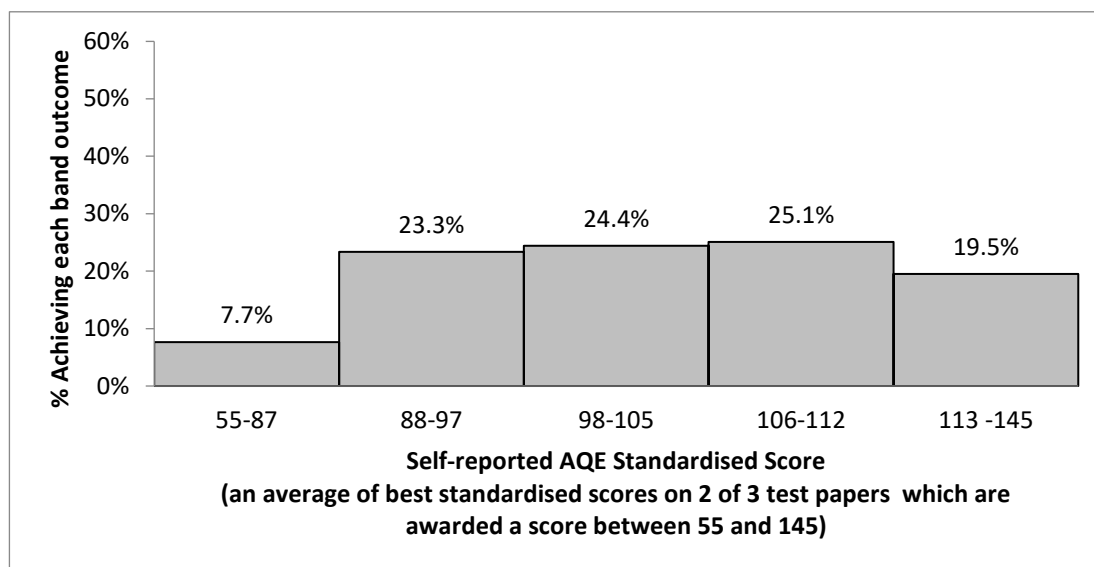
Figure 6.7 shows the percentage of Year 8 respondents who reported achieving each GL Grade. It shows clearly that the distribution does not follow a normal distribution pattern and is skewed towards the higher end. The grade boundaries for grades B1,

B2, C1 and C2 are separated by 4-5 (combined standardised) marks whilst grade D spans 26 marks and grade A spans 44. From this distribution it is evident that mark differences between a grade A at the lower end of the grade boundary and a D at the upper end of the grade boundary would be greater than the difference between top and bottom A grades. For example, Grade A – 234 marks and Grade D – 212 marks account for difference of 22 marks. Whilst a Grade A – 282 marks and Grade A – 234 marks account for a difference of 48 marks. GL test outcomes are standardised using the raw score and age (completed months) compared to the national (UK wide) sample (PPTC, 2017) and grades are calculated according to the specification of PPTC (ibid.). However, no rationale or parameters for the calculation of grade boundaries is provided in the specification (PPTC, 2017). It may be suggested that the distribution of test performance in the NI test population, which predominantly comes from the Catholic community, does not reflect the performance profile of the national sample. However, it is also possible that the skewed distribution relates to grade boundary calculations specified by PPTC.

Different approaches to considering test scores in school admissions policies (grade bands, percentile rank bands, and rank order of combined standardised score) have been raised as potentially unsuitable (Table 6.17). However, in light of the data illustrated in Figure 6.7 it is anticipated that this issue is compounded by the distribution of test outcomes and differences in the range of combined standardised scores within the grade boundaries. This data suggests that these differences could result in significant variations in the intake profiles of different schools and have the potential to be unfair to individual children.

Figure 6.8 (p. 219) shows the percentage of Year 8 respondents who reported achieving AQE standardised scores, within bands. The distribution of scores is shown to follow a normal distribution pattern with a smaller percentage (7.7%) of children achieving in the '87 or less' band. Several schools operate different bands for the AQE test. AQE standardised scores, based on age to the nearest month, are calculated for each of the three tests, with an average SAS calculated from the best 2 of 3 test outcomes (AQE, 2017). From documentation provided by AQE it appears that score standardisation is carried out within the test taking cohort (ibid.).

Figure 6.8: Distribution of AQE Score achieved shown as a percentage of respondents who sat the tests (Year 8) n=287)



Differences in ways in which schools consider AQE scores to inform admissions (score bands, and rank order of standardised score) are potentially unsuitable. Different approaches to considering and interpreting the test outcomes have the potential to result in differences in which children are admitted to grammar places. Greater transparency around different approaches to aggregating scores into bands would help to ensure that the processes of interpreting test outcomes were perceived as fair and robust.

Comparison of the distribution of test outcomes for children who sat both tests

One concern around the current testing arrangements is that many children, depending on their circumstances, sit two transfer tests. There is no information about how the tests might be compared beyond the bands published in admissions criteria for schools which accept outcomes from either test. However, since the tests are used for the single purpose of admission to grammar school, they are perceived as comparable.

Within the survey sample 132 children indicated that they sat both transfer tests, representing 15.8% of respondents who had sat a test. This number accounted for 31.5% of the 419 children who sat the GL test and 45.9% of the 287 who sat the AQE test. This section provides analysis of self-reported test outcomes for 98 respondents

who were able to give their test score for both tests. Since this subsample is small no attempt is made here to generalise and the table is intended to be indicative of the experiences of these 98 children.

Table 6.25: Comparison of GL and AQE Test outcome for children who sat both tests (Years 7 and 8) (n=98)

Self-reported GL Grade and combined standardised scores	Self-reported AQE Standardised Scores within bands				
	145-113	112-106	105-98	97-88	87-55
A (234-282)	26	18	6	1	1
B1 (229-233)	1	6	5	3	1
B2 (224-228)	0	1	3	1	1
C1 (219-223)	3	3	4	4	0
C2 (213-218)	0	0	1	4	2
D (138-212)	0	0	0	1	2

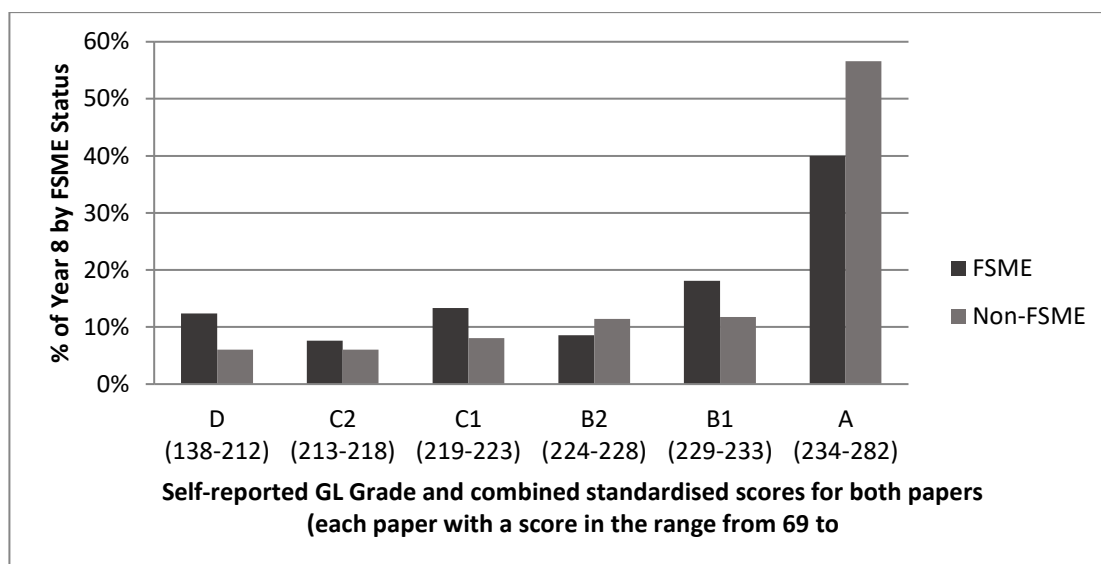
Table 6.25 shows how individual respondents' test outcomes in the GL and AQE tests overlap. For example, those achieving a Grade A in the GL assessment have achieved across every band of the AQE test. Reviewing the performance of individual children in these two tests shows a degree of variation in where these individuals appear in the distribution. This data shows multiple examples for individuals where their performance in one test or the other would have a higher likelihood of resulting in successful admission to a grammar school. This data highlights that the use of two different tests, as if they are comparable, would require improved transparency.

The relationship between test scores and FSME

Previous research (Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Gardner & Cowan, 2000; Gardner & Cowan, 2005) shows transfer test performance is mediated by socio-economic status. Under current arrangements the GL test is provided free of charge to all test takers, whilst the AQE test incurs a fee for those who do not provide evidence of FSME. The concern with this system is the different financial implications which may result in the tests being differentially available to Catholic and Protestant children, and to families of different socio-economic status within these groupings. As outlined earlier in this

chapter children's decisions to sit a test has a relationship with their FSME status (Figure 6.3) and that relationship is more pronounced amongst Protestant children (Figure 6.4). Different financial implications of sitting the GL and AQE tests may have an influence on children's decisions to sit a test. Since no test data is published by the test providers or schools which use the tests in their admissions it is very difficult to explore the relationship between transfer test outcomes and FSME. This section shows comparisons of the self-reported test outcomes of Year 8 survey respondents in the GL and AQE tests who are entitled to Free School Meals and those who are not.

Figure 6.9: Distribution of GL Grade achieved shown as a percentage of FSME and Non-FSME respondents (Year 8) (n=402)

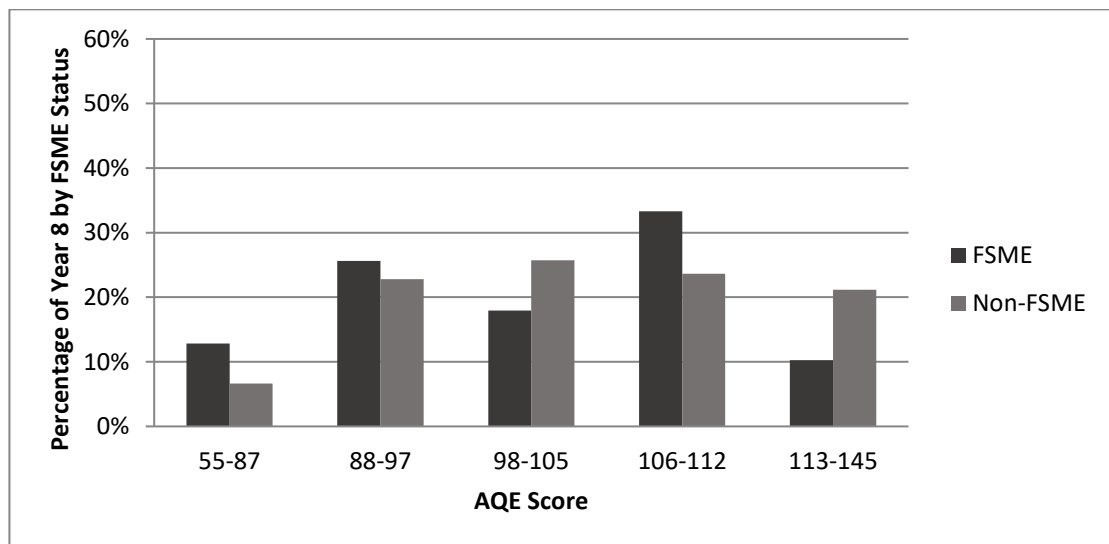


See appendix 2 for a breakdown.

Figure 6.9 shows variations in the pattern of attainment across different grades for FSME and Non-FSME respondents. For example, a higher proportion of Non-FSME than FSME pupils achieved a grade A (57%: 40%) and a lower proportion of Non-FSME than FSME pupils achieved the three lower grades (Total C1, C2 and D grades 20%:33%). It is unclear why the B1 grade band was achieved by a higher proportion of FSME (18%) than Non-FSME (12%) respondents. However, the overall proportion who achieved the top three grades (A, B1 and B2) is higher for Non-FSME (80%) than FSME (67%) respondents.

A Mann-Whitney test was used to investigate the possibility that there are differences in GL test grades for FSME and Non-FSME children. The test shows Non-FSME children had a lower mean rank (218.88) than FSME children (267.06). This outcome indicates that Non-FSME children did receive higher self-reported grades than FSME children ($p < 0.001$, Mann-Whitney $U = 16327.5$, $Z = 3.682$). A small effect size of $r = 0.171$ was calculated. This finding shows that test outcomes are significantly associated with FSME status. These findings rely on limited self-reported test score data and additional data would allow for a more robust statistical analysis.

Figure 6.10: Distribution of AQE Score Achieved shown as a percentage of FSME and Non-FSME respondents (Year 8) (n=280)



See appendix 2 for a breakdown

Figure 6.10 also shows variations in respondents' outcomes depending on their FSME. The pattern for Non-FSME respondents follows a normal distribution whilst for the FSME respondents this is not the case. Achievement of Non-FSME and FSME respondents differs for the highest score band (113-145), with 21% and 10% respectively of each grouping achieving in this band. The proportion of Non-FSME respondents (30%) achieving in the two lower bands (88-97 and 55-87) is less than for their FSME (39%) peers.

Direct comparisons between the two tests are not possible because of differences in the ways of reporting test outcomes. However, patterns of achievement are similar with higher proportions of FSME respondents achieving lower test outcomes and higher proportions of Non-FSME respondents achieving higher outcomes.

A Mann-Whitney test was used to investigate differences in AQE test scores for FSME and Non-FSME children. The test shows Non-FSME children had a lower mean rank (167.53) than FSME children (191.69) and demonstrates that Non-FSME children received higher self-reported grades than FSME children within this sample. However, the test did not show the difference to be statistically significant ($p=0.103$, Mann-Whitney $U=6140.0$, $Z=1.631$) and the effect size was calculated ($r=0.088$) to be small. Similarly to the test outcome data for the GL test the information about AQE scores is limited. Therefore, this finding cannot be understood to demonstrate a negative association, in other words that there is no relationship between FSME and AQE test outcome, rather it highlights the need for more complete test outcome data to give a more robust picture of performance for sub-groups of children.

Since previous research has confirmed the relationship between transfer test attainment and socio-economic status it is likely that FSME continues to be a mediating factor in performance. There are two possible explanations as to why this research has established a relationship between test outcomes and FSME for one transfer test and not the other. The first possibility is a sampling issue whereby the ratio of FSME: Non-FSME children differs for those who sat the GL (26.1%:73.9%) and AQE (13.9%:86.1%) tests. However, this difference may reflect a real difference in the population since the average proportions of FMSE pupils also differs for grammar schools of Catholic (16.2%) and Protestant (9.4%) religious character (Table 5.14). The second possibility is that access to the AQE test is mediated, for financial reasons, by FSME and that this group is therefore underrepresented in the test taking population.

The potential implications of accessibility, comparability and validity of the current assessment arrangements are incredibly complex and the current analysis remains inconclusive. Therefore, it is not intended to suggest that there is differential equity

between the two different tests, rather this analysis underlines the need to explore patterns of attainment on both tests for different subgroups of children. This would inevitably require additional test data which has not been made available in the public domain due to the unregulated nature of the current assessment arrangements.

6.5 Chapter summary

Given the lack of existing research evidence, the results outlined in this chapter offer significant insight into arrangements for assessment for selection. The acceptability of the current arrangements have become embedded over time and reflect a dominant socio-cultural script (Elwood & Murphy, 2015): that high-stakes assessments are the fairest way to allocate limited grammar places. Nonetheless, the data shows varying degrees of acceptance of the suitability of the current tests, and different preferences for proposed alternatives which are likely to change over time to reflect children's own transition experiences.

There is evidence that children's experiences of navigating the assessment system continue to be associated with socio-economic status and other ascriptive characteristics: for example, that provision of in-school and out-of-school test preparation may differ raises significant questions relating to equality of access in children's opportunities to learn. The data shows the most significant factor influencing children's decisions to participate in tests is school admissions requirements. Furthermore, ways in which test outcomes are considered in admissions criteria, and resulting variations in test outcomes required to gain admission to a grammar place, raise questions about the likelihood that decisions made on the basis of transfer tests are fair and robust. The analyses of children's own self-reported test outcomes show differences in the pattern of distribution for the two tests and possible sub-group differences in children's test performance according to FSME status. In addition to raising equity concerns, evidence pointing to between-group differences illustrates the potential difficulties of making admissions decisions on the basis of selection tests.

Chapter 7: Children's perspectives: the academically selective system and school admissions arrangements

School admissions policies are the means by which applicants are selected for admission to individual schools. Regardless of whether admissions prioritise academic or non-academic criteria research evidence shows them to be socially selective (OECD, 2012; Sutton Trust, 2013), with social stratification more pronounced where schools are responsible for setting their own admissions criteria (Allen, et al., 2012). In effect, admissions criteria exert control over individuals' school choices, ensuring that the power of choice rests primarily with schools (Walford, 2006; West & Hind, 2016). Little is known about how admissions criteria are used in the NI context or how children experience admissions arrangements and decisions. This chapter explores children's views of the academically selective system, which is suggested as the aspect of secondary education provision which has the greatest impact on school admissions, and has been identified as a barrier to inclusive admissions arrangements (Shewbridge, et al., 2014; Tomaševski, 2003b; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008; 2016). The chapter continues by exploring children's experiences of applying to secondary school and their perceptions of school admissions decisions.

7.1 Children's perceptions of the academically selective system

The survey was intended to gain insight into children's opinions of the academically selective system, as distinguished from specific arrangements for academic selection. Existing evidence of children's accounts describe two distinctive school types: grammar schools characterised by an ethos of high academic standards; and non-grammar schools depicted as supportive and caring environments (Gallagher & McKeown, 2000). Both quantitative and open-response data were elicited from survey respondents, in relation to which type of school children perceived to be 'better' and explanations justifying their opinion.

Judgements about which school type is 'better'

No quantitative data relating to children's perceptions of the different school types within the selective system has previously been collected. The following tables show participant responses indicating their judgements of which school type is 'better'.

Table 7.1: Judgement of which secondary school type is 'better' compared by primary school year group (Years 6 and 7) (n=378)

Primary Year Group	Judgement of which secondary school type is 'better'									
	Grammar		Secondary		Both the same		Don't know		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Year 6	82	42.3	45	23.2	23	11.9	44	22.7	194	100
Year 7	57	31.0	49	26.6	56	30.4	22	12.0	184	100
Total	139	36.8	94	24.9	79	20.9	66	17.5	378	100

Table 7.1 shows primary respondents' opinions about which school type is 'better'. The proportion who chose grammar as 'better', accounts for 42.3% of Year 6 and 31.0% of Year 7 respondents, a difference of 11.3%. There is only a small difference, with 3.4% more Year 7 than Year 6 pupils expressing a judgement in favour of Secondary schools. Those who believe both schools to be the same account for 11.9% of Year 6 and 30.4% of Year 7 respondents, an 18.5% difference. Whilst the proportion unable to express a clear preference is 22.7% in Year 6 and 12.0% in Year 7, showing that 10.7% fewer respondents in Year 7 have distinguished a clear choice between the two types. The Year 7 students were surveyed during May and June, by which time almost all pupils, aside from those whose decisions are being appealed, had been allocated a secondary place and we might conclude that their views about which school type is better have been informed by their own experiences. However, this does not negate the fact that grammar schools are the more desirable school type as established by analysis of school oversubscription patterns (See Chapter 5).

The relationship between the judgement of which secondary school type was 'better' and the year group of the primary school pupils was shown to have a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square = 25.538, $df = 3$). A small-medium effect size was found (Cramer's $V = 0.260$). This confirms that there are differences between the two groups of respondents which suggests that judgements about the academically

selective system may change as pupils become immersed in the process of transition, and may be influenced by children's own experiences at different stages of transition.

Table 7.2: Judgement of which secondary school type is 'better' compared by selectivity of secondary school attended (Year 8) (n=938)

Selectivity of secondary school	Judgement of which secondary school type is better									
	Grammar		Secondary		Both the same		Don't know		Total (row)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Grammar	330	51.4	22	3.4	184	28.7	106	16.5	642	100
Non-Grammar	14	4.7	155	52.4	78	26.4	49	16.6	296	100
Total (column)	344	36.7	177	18.9	262	27.9	155	16.5	938	100

Table 7.2 shows Year 8 pupil judgements of whether grammar or non-grammar schools are 'better' grouped by their current school's selectivity. Overall proportions (column totals) of each response are broadly comparable with the primary sample. However, the responses of secondary respondents show a clear division in opinion depending on school type currently attended, with 51.4% of grammar pupils indicating grammar schools to be 'better' and 52.4% of secondary pupils opting for secondary schools as 'better'.

Comparing views of Year 8 grammar and non-grammar pupils, the relationship between school type attended and perception of which school type is better was found to have a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square = 377.846, $df=3$). A large effect size was found (Cramer's $V = 0.635$). Similarly to the patterns in responses for children's own preferences for school by selectivity (Chapter 5), it is clear that the type of school a child attends has a relationship with their perceptions about different school types. As discussed above, following transition to a particular school type, children accept it as most suitable for them. However, this data suggests that their perceptions of which school type is 'better' is also connected to their own experience of attending a particular school type. After transition children become

accepting of system level divisions and their views reflect a broader public rhetoric around the suitability of a two-tier system.

Children's explanations for judgements about school type

The open-response data offers additional insight into children's views of the academically selective system. Broadly, grammar schools are described as providing a rigorous academic education and having competitive entry requirements, whilst secondary schools are perceived as catering for a wide range of abilities and being inclusive. The themes emerging from this strand of data (see Figure 4.11) describe a two-tier system whereby differences created by academic selection characterise the secondary education landscape.

Amongst the respondents who perceive grammar schools as 'better' there is a focus on: the provision of a rigorous academic curriculum for high ability children; a school environment characterised by better resources and high expectations; and improved future opportunities for students.

Grammar intakes were perceived as academically homogenous: *'everyone is roughly at the same level of smartness'* (Abbi, Cusher Primary). Many respondents described grammar schools as better because they were academically selective: *'the students are more intelligent, because they have been selected out of the few that applied.'* (Sophie, Cladagh Grammar). Children also perceived higher achievement in transfer tests to have long-term benefits: *'You come out with slightly more education because you need a higher AQE score to get into them'* (John-Curtis, Roogagh Primary).

The sense of achievement which comes from grammar school entry was important to some children: *'it makes you more confident and proud because you have to work to get to the school'* (Poppy, Faughan Grammar). Whilst for others 'passing' a transfer test demonstrates a child's ability to benefit from a grammar school education *'because you passed the test so it proves that you are able to be in that school'* (Susan, Cladagh Grammar).

Quite negative comparisons were made between grammar and non-grammar schools' pupil intakes: *'Grammar schools are better because the people that go aren't stupid and it's not as rough'* (Jack, Termon High). Another described grammar pupils as having a different attitude to learning. Grammar schools are better *'because the people in them want to learn and in non-grammar schools they just want to mess about'* (Shaun, Owenbream Grammar).

Differences were also made between the two school types in terms of curriculum content and academic standards: *'I think grammar schools and secondary schools are the same but their grade and work are different [at] a secondary, for example, their grade A would be worth a grade B or C in a grammar'* (Francesca, Cladagh Grammar). This view expresses a more generally held belief that grammar schools provide a more 'academic' education which is demanding and rigorous compared to non-grammar provision. A large number of responses described grammar schools as having a culture of high expectations which made them unlike other schools: *'in Grammar Schools, you are expected to work hard but in other schools, you aren't.'* (Curtis, Torrent Grammar). This was often described as being 'pushed': *'I just think that I am challenged to do better in everything I do but in an all ability school I feel like I wouldn't be pushed to my very best'* (Holly, Faughan Grammar).

Grammar schools were also perceived to be better resourced financially and in terms of teaching staff: *'They have better facilities, the teachers are considered better along with the teaching.'* (Maeve, Cladagh Grammar); *'the one grammar school I've seen (the one that I am going to) seems the most pristine school in my area'* (Ethan, Roogagh Primary); and *'the education is better and has a better budget'* (Craig, Owenbream Grammar). There is also a relationship made between teacher quality and the culture of high expectations: *'the teachers are highly qualified and the marks are set higher for students'* (Aisling, Cladagh Grammar).

Improved future opportunities are described in terms of access to sixth form and higher education: *'I think grammar schools are better because you stay in school longer than children in high schools'* (Summer, Castletown Integrated Primary); and *'a higher percentage of people go to a university if they go to grammar School'* (Isabel, Faughan

Grammar). Respondents also identified the potential impact on future employment: *'I think they can get me a better job'* (Oisín, Owenbream Grammar).

Where respondents identified non-grammar schools as 'better' their responses describe diversity and inclusion as this school type's key strengths which provides: learning opportunities for every child; a welcoming and inclusive environment; and a more suitable preparation for life.

Non-grammar schools are perceived by children to provide diverse learning opportunities: *'I think it's better because we provide help for everyone with different abilities'* (Emily, Callan High). This is important because *'they give a chance for all children to work hard and learn.'* (John, Camowen Primary) and ensure that *'everyone can get help and have a good education'* (Taylor, Sillees Integrated). The non-grammar is described as an environment where *'you can be yourself and won't be pressured by work or worrying if you are the worst in the class but you are equal'* (Kate, Callan High).

Whilst grammar schools are perceived as exclusive: *'grammar school only [takes] the people who are smarter than most people'* (Alison, Callan High); non-grammar schools are inclusive because *'they let children [in] from being really smart to people with difficulties and they don't make a difference'* (Jacob, Annacloy High). All-ability schools are described as *'a school where everyone goes to and no one is left out'* (Cameron, Glenshesk Primary). This inclusive environment is unlike academically selective schools because *'They don't judge people based on a test and they believe everyone is the same'* (Colette, Callan High).

The diversity of the learning environment was perceived by many children as a key strength of all-ability schools. This was the case for religious and ethnic differences: *'They have different religions and different types of people this makes you more ready to handle the world in my opinion'* (Beth, Dun Grammar); and *'You get to learn about other cultures and make different friends'* (Henry, Sillees Integrated). A large number of respondents referred to the strengths of schools which were inclusive of all abilities: *'people can learn at different paces and levels and it's better because we are all at the*

same school even if some learn quicker than others' (Louise, Sillees Integrated). Children wanted to be part of a diverse community *'because you mix with other people that might not have the same ability'* (Katy-Anne, Faughan Grammar). All-ability schools had the additional benefit of accommodating groups of friends who might otherwise go to different secondary schools: *'you don't be split up with your friends if you aren't as smart as them'* (Georgia, Callan High).

Respondents who described both school types as *'the same'* identified common functions of secondary schools: delivering the same curriculum; preparing students for the same certification exams; and offering equal outcomes for students in terms of employment or further study.

'I think they're the same because they do the same tests' (Finton, Camowen Primary) and *'everyone has the same opportunities whether they're in grammar school or not'* (Marcus, Torrent Grammar). Although this group identify both school-types as the same there is clear evidence of perceptions that a two-tier secondary system operates with grammar schools which cater for higher ability children: *'they all have the same curriculum only it's just grammar schools have a higher standard'* (Claire, Quoile High). Furthermore, secondary schools are perceived to provide for a different group of students: *'It's the same work but for secondary schools set out in a different or easier way'* (Jessica, Faughan Grammar).

For one respondent there is a recognition that the paths of children attending both school types will converge again at 16 and 18: *'Well we all have different abilities, what some find hard we find easy, but in the end we all do the same GCSEs and A levels and when you are applying for university or jobs you will never be asked for your transfer test scores. So in the long run they really don't mean much.'* (Maura, Glenelly Grammar). This understanding of transfer test outcomes as serving a single purpose, as a passport to a selective school, emerges elsewhere in the data and is discussed later in this chapter.

Some students perceive the act of naming the difference as a contributing factor in perceptions of difference between the two school types: *'I think if the school is named*

Grammar at the start it's a better school. That's why I came to Owenbream because it was a grammar' (Eamonn, Owenbream Grammar). For Corinne both types of school are the same but for their name: *'They all go in a uniform and everything, just grammar school has grammar in front of it'* (Corinne, Quoile High). However, she continues by highlighting the higher 'ability' required for grammar entry: *'people with higher knowledge get there...'* (ibid).

7.2 Applying to a secondary school

This section considers children's aspirations and experiences of applying to secondary school. Previous research into the current transfer arrangements primarily focused on the transfer tests (NICCY, 2010; KLT, 2010-2013) and much less on the processes of admission. The following data contributes significantly to our understanding of children's experiences of school choice and applying to secondary school.

Choosing a school

This section considers children's experiences of choosing a school, factors which inform their judgement of a school as 'good', the extent to which they report having a say in the choice of school and their experiences of making that decision.

Table 7.3: Factors considered important when choosing a school by school type attended (n=1243)

What is important when choosing a school?	School Type							
	Secondary				Primary		Total	
	Grammar		Non-Grammar					
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
The school is a good school	550	92.0	246	88.2	320	87.4	1116	89.8
Other family members go (or went) to the school	159	26.6	89	31.9	109	29.8	357	28.7
Friends or classmates are going to the school	225	37.6	111	39.8	136	37.2	472	38.0
The school is close to home	239	40.0	97	34.8	155	42.3	491	39.5
Total	598		279		366		1243	

Table 7.3 shows the number and percentage of each group of respondents who selected factors deemed important in making a school choice. A significant majority in each group indicated it to be important that *'The school is a good school'* with the proportion of responses in this category showing small variation between 87.4% and 92.0%. Non-grammar respondents were most likely to indicate the importance of existing family connections (31.0%) to the school, but again the difference was quite small with 5.3% fewer grammar pupils selecting the *'Other family members go (or went) to the school'* response. More than a third of children in each school indicated the importance of *'Friends or classmates are going to the school'* with the non-grammar pupils (39.8%) choosing this more often than grammar (37.6%) or primary pupils (37.2%). However, once again these differences are very small.

Chi-Square tests checked for statistically significant associations between whether respondents attended a grammar or non-grammar and each of the variables. The differences were not found to be significant in each case: *'The school is a good school'* ($p=0.070$); *'Other family members go (or went) to the school'* ($p=0.104$); *'Friends or classmates are going to the school'* ($p=0.540$); and *'The school is close to home'* ($p=0.140$). The preferences expressed by respondents from the two groups included in this analysis suggest that pupils' school choices rely on very similar factors regardless of school type.

Table 7.4: Factors considered important when choosing a school by FSME status (n=1072)

What is important when choosing a school?	FSME		Non-FSME		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
The school is a good school	265	86.3	689	90.1	954	89.0
Other family members go (or went) to the school	126	41.0	218	28.5	344	32.1
Friends or classmates are going to the school	122	39.7	321	42.0	443	41.3
The school is close to home	125	40.7	337	44.1	462	43.1
Total	307		765		1072	

Table 7.4 compares the importance attributed to factors influencing school choice for respondents by FSME status. The differences in the views of the two groupings are small for three of the four categories. The highest priority for both groups is accorded to *'The school is a good school'* with 86.3% of FSME and 90.1% of Non-FSME pupils

selecting this option. A higher proportion of non-FSME pupils chose *'Friends or classmates are going to the school'*, with the difference being 2.3%, and *'The school is close to home'*, with a 3.4% difference. The pattern for *'Other family members go (or went) to the school'* shows a much greater variation with 41.0% of FSME and 28.5% of non-FSME respondents choosing this option, a difference of 12.5%.

Chi-Square tests showed that the differences between the priorities expressed for two factors showed no statistically significant variation: *'Friends or classmates are going to the school'* ($p=0.196$); and *'The school is close to home'* ($p=0.707$). Chi-Square tests showed differences in priority accorded by FSME and non-FSME respondents for two factors were statistically significant: *'The school is a good school'* ($p=0.033$, Chi-Square=4.561, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi=0.074$); and *'Other family members go (or went) to the school'* ($p=0.005$, Chi-Square=7.923, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi=0.097$). The data suggests that whilst some small differences were found between the priorities expressed by children of different FMSE status that their priorities in making school choice decisions are similar overall.

Table 7.5: Characteristics of a 'good' school by School Type (n=1285)

What makes a 'Good' School?	School Type						Total	
	Secondary				Primary			
	Grammar		Non-Grammar					
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Pupils do well in exams	331	52.2	128	45.1	186	50.7	645	50.2
Prepares pupils for adult life	447	70.5	145	51.1	206	56.1	798	62.1
Teachers who care about pupils	520	82.0	201	70.8	276	75.2	997	77.6
Good after school activities	327	51.6	111	39.1	151	41.1	589	45.8
Pupils are 'happy' at the school	551	86.9	214	75.4	280	76.3	1045	81.3
Total	634		284		367		1285	

Table 7.5 shows characteristics of a 'good' school indicated by respondents. The most popular overall response was *'pupils are happy at the school'* which was selected by more than three quarters of respondents in each grouping. A difference of 11.5% was

found between the proportion of grammar (86.9%) and non-grammar (75.4%) pupils choosing this response. However, this pattern persists for each response and it therefore seems appropriate to consider the preference accorded to each response by different groupings of respondents. The second most popular response was *'Teachers who care about pupils'* suggesting that children accord significant importance to relationships with teachers. The third and fourth preferences expressed by each grouping were *'Prepares pupils for adult life'*, and *'Pupils do well in exams'* which shows that respondents accorded less importance to personal and academic progress, in judging a school as 'good', than to being happy at school and having positive relationships with teachers.

Table 7.6: Characteristics of a 'good' school by FSME Status (n=1222)

What makes a 'Good' School?	FSME		Non-FSME		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Pupils do well in exams	185	51.5	427	49.5	612	50.1
Prepares pupils for adult life	211	58.8	548	63.5	759	62.1
Teachers who care about pupils	264	73.5	686	79.5	950	77.7
Good after school activities	154	42.9	407	47.2	561	45.9
Pupils are 'happy' at the school	281	78.3	712	82.5	993	81.3
Total	359		863		1222	

Table 7.6 repeats the analysis of 'good' school characteristics for sub-groupings of respondents according to FSME status. Again, only small differences are shown in the proportions of each grouping selecting each response. Furthermore, the priority accorded to each response is the same as for the previous table. This demonstrates that, regardless of the parameters used for the sub-group analysis, transition age children's perceptions of the characteristics of a 'good' school overwhelmingly prioritise children's likelihood of being *'happy'* at school, followed by having *'teachers who care about pupils'*.

Table 7.7: Children's participation in school choice (n=1088)

How much of a say did you have in choosing a school?	School Type						Total	
	Grammar		Non-Grammar		Primary			
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
The decision was mostly mine	354	56.8	155	53.8	105	59.3	614	56.4
I made the decision with my family	212	34.0	99	34.4	60	33.9	371	34.1
The adults in my family decided	57	9.1	34	11.8	12	6.8	103	9.5
Total	623		288		177		1088	

Table 7.7 shows respondents' perceptions of how much of a say they had in choosing a secondary school, grouped by current school-type. Amongst secondary students very similar proportions of grammar (90.8%) and non-grammar (88.2%) pupils had input into the decision with more than half in each case indicating '*The decision was mostly mine*'. It is therefore reassuring that 90.5% of respondents, overall, indicate some level of participation. However, the remaining 9.5% did not experience participation in the decision and this raises concern in terms of children's right to participate in decisions about matters affecting them (art. 12). Whilst this data reflects a relatively positive picture of children's participation in the decision making process it should be noted that the power to be involved in the decision is, in effect, gifted by adults at home.

A weighty decision

A key finding of the documentary analysis is variation across NI in school place availability by school gender profile, school religious character and selectivity. School choice emerged from the survey data (Figure 4.10) as both a source of positive and negative 'stress' in the form of '*having to choose between all the different types of schools*' (Kathy-Ann, Roogagh Primary). For example, one respondent explains how she would have been happy to apply to multiple schools and found it difficult to decide between them: '*I had so many schools I really liked, Glen Grammar, Farset Grammar, and Glenshesk Integrated, but I finally settled on Faughan Grammar School.*' (Lucy, Faughan Grammar).

Some respondents reported their feelings of stress during transition resulted from a lack of control in the process. For example, a feeling that the decision had been imposed on them: *'I wanted to go to a secondary school but my family made me go to a grammar school'* (Jessica, Faughan Grammar). As discussed above, a relatively small proportion of children, 9.5%, reported the choice of school had been made for them. Where this is the case, as with Jessica's experience, there is potential for the lack of agency to be experienced as additional stress.

A small number of respondents reported the source of their stress to be the application forms which suggests that some children are involved in completing these. The complexity of application processes and the need to demonstrate how admissions criteria are met by the applicant on the application form, as discussed earlier, requires a certain level of knowledge of school requirements. Jill identifies that *'there was so much information to fill in'* (Jill, Arney Grammar), implying the complexity of the forms, whilst others suggest implications if the form is not completed correctly: *'you didn't want to put your details down wrong'* (Kim, Roogagh Primary); *'you have to fill in so many forms and if you made a mistake you would have to [get a] whole new sheet and re-do it again'* (Emily, Callan High). In cases where children are asked to assist in completing forms it may be that parents lack confidence in their ability to navigate the system independently. One respondent also implied that the forms were a burden on her family because *'there was strict hand in times for the paper work and me and my mum didn't have much free time'* (Gemma, Callan High).

A clear parallel can be drawn between the above examples, of children who experience 'extended agency' (Urquhart, 2001), and children who are facilitated by family support: *'it was an easy process as my parents did most of the forms I only had to do the transfer test and pick which school I wanted to go to'* (Alexandra, Arney Grammar). School choice was a source of stress because of the perceived finality of decisions: *'It was a big choice in my life, if I picked a school I didn't like then I'd be there for a while.'* (Stephen, Owenbream Grammar); and the potential to make *'the wrong move'* (Jonathan, Sillees Integrated). However, some respondents shared perceptions that school choice decisions were predictive of future achievement and career potential. *'It was stressful because it determined where I would go every morning and do my exams to get a career.'* (Stacey, Quoile High). Such perceptions

align with children's descriptions of grammar schools as offering improved life chances discussed in section 7.1.

Children's experiences of applying to a secondary school

This research attempts to build on our understanding of children's feelings of worry and anxiety during transition. A key focus of previous studies has been the stress caused by sitting a transfer test at age 10 or 11. The survey data builds on existing findings to understand if the sources of anxiety reflect what we know from previous research and to gain insight into the worry caused by the application process itself.

Table 7.8: Feelings of stress experienced because of applying to a secondary school: breakdown by whether respondents sat a transfer test or not (n=1072).

Did you do a transfer test?	Did you find applying to a new school stressful?							
	Yes		No		Not sure		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	327	38.9	386	46.0	127	15.1	840	100
No	80	34.5	115	49.6	37	15.9	232	100
Total	407	38.0	501	46.7	164	15.3	1072	100

Pupils in Years 7 and 8 were asked if they felt applying to a new school had been stressful. Table 7.8 shows responses broken down by whether respondents had sat a transfer test or not. Overall 38.1% reported finding the experience stressful, 46.7% had not found the experience stressful and the remaining 15.2% were not sure. Those who had experienced stress accounted for a higher proportion of those who sat a transfer test, 38.9%, than those who had not, 34.3%, demonstrating a small difference of 4.6%. Conversely, those who did not experience stress accounted for a lower proportion of those who had sat a transfer test, 46%, compared to those who had not, 49.8%, where the difference is 3.8%. However, these small variations between the two groups were not found to be statistically significant when a Chi-Square test was carried out ($p=0.243$, Chi-Square = 5.465, $df=4$). These findings show the experience of application stress reported by children who sat a transfer test and those who did not to be broadly comparable.

Table 7.9: Feelings of stress while applying to secondary school: breakdown by whether respondents sat a transfer test and gender of respondent (n=1072)

Did you do a transfer test?	Gender	Did you find applying to a new school stressful?						
		Yes		No		Not sure		Total
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Yes	Boys	130	38.3%	165	48.7%	44	13.0%	339
	Girls	197	39.3%	221	44.1%	83	16.6%	501
No	Boys	37	28.7%	73	56.6%	19	14.7%	129
	Girls	43	41.7%	42	40.8%	18	17.5%	103
Total	Boys	167	35.7%	238	50.9%	63	13.5%	468
	Girls	240	39.7%	263	43.5%	101	16.7%	604

Percentages shown for responses within rows.

Table 7.9 shows an analysis of reported application stress for children who sat a transfer test and those who did not with additional subgroups for gender. For boys and girls who sat transfer tests similar proportions experienced stress as a result of applying to secondary school, 38.3%:39.3%. A small difference of 4.6% can be seen between boys, 48.7%, and girls, 44.1% who sat a transfer test and did not report experiencing stress as a result of the application process.

Much greater differences can be seen in the responses of those respondents who had not sat a transfer test. Within this category girls who experienced stress accounted for 41.7% whilst boys accounted for 28.7%, representing a 13% difference. A similar pattern emerged amongst respondents who had not experienced stress with a higher proportion of boys, 56.6%, than girls, 40.8%, representing a 15.8% difference.

A Chi-Square test did not find these differences to have a statistically significant relationship ($p=0.252$, Chi-Square = 5.366, $df=4$). However, a further Chi-Square test considering the relationship between gender and reported application stress amongst those children who had not sat a transfer test ($n=232$) did show a relationship between the two variables ($p=0.050$, Chi-Square= 5.995, $df=2$) with a small effect size (Cramer's $V = 0.161$). This data suggests that children overall report similar experiences of stress regardless of whether they sat a test or not. However, it seems that amongst those

who did not sit a test a higher proportion of girls than boys experience application related stress.

Table 7.10: Perceptions that the wait for the admissions decision letter was too long broken down by whether respondents sat a transfer test or not

Did you do a transfer test?	When children apply to a school do you think that they have to wait too long for their offer letter?							
	Yes		No		Not sure		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	529	63.0%	171	20.4%	140	16.7%	840	100%
No	83	35.9%	72	31.2%	76	32.9%	231	100%
Total	612	57.1%	243	22.7%	216	20.2%	1071	100%

Table 7.10 shows a higher proportion of pupils who sat a transfer test perceived application decisions to take too long with 63.0% of test takers and 35.9% of non-test takers believing children wait too long for their decision letter. This represented a 27.1% difference between the groups. There were also large differences between the two groups when 'No' and 'Not sure' responses were considered, 10.8% and 16.2% more non-test takers indicated these responses compared to test-takers. These differences were found to have a statistically significant relationship using a Chi-Square test ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square = 56.200, $df = 2$) with a small-medium effect size (Cramer's $V = 0.229$). This difference may be explained by the differences in the period of time focused on transition decisions between test-takers and non-test takers. Those children who do not sit a transfer test begin to engage with transfer arrangements in the January of the transfer year whilst those children sitting a transfer test would register for tests between April/May and September of the previous year (thetransfertest.com, 2017). Therefore differences in perceptions of the length of the process accurately reflect the two groups' different experiences.

A lengthy and uncertain process

A prominent theme in the open-response data was that children experienced feelings of uncertainty and anxiety during the wait for notification of an admissions decision (Figure 4.10). The underlying cause of worry was whether or not applicants would be

offered a place: *'What if I didn't get in, I was really worried about that.'* (Ben, Sillees Integrated). However, open-response data shows a relationship between the ongoing nature of the uncertainty and growing feelings of anxiety: *'You had to wait for a really long time and you got really worried.'* (Tanya, Glenelly Grammar); and *'I didn't know where I was going so it only allowed more time for nervous reactions.'* (Geraldine, Castletown Integrated Primary).

This relationship was confirmed by a Chi-Square analysis of quantitative data for the variables *'When children apply to a school do you think that they have to wait too long for their offer letter?'* and *'Did you think applying to a new school was stressful?'* This test demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($p < 0.001$, Chi-Square=67.025, $df=4$) with a medium effect size (Cramer's $V = 0.177$). There is no way to identify the causality of this relationship and it is therefore unclear whether the length of time applicants have to wait for a decision results in stress or whether applicants who feel stress perceive the length of their wait with greater awareness. However, evidence of a relationship between the two experiences from the perspective of survey respondents may be present across the broader population of transition age children.

Data evidences reported stress to be caused by the perceived uncertain nature of admissions decisions: *'You had to do lots of preparation for a test then you're made to wait months until you find out if you qualified'* (Carol, Arney Grammar). The respondent's use of the term qualified reminds us that even after receiving their test result children cannot ascertain whether it will result in successful entry. Respondents related the ongoing uncertainty to the possibility of being rejected by the school: *'The fact that even though I got an A, there was so many people applying for the same school, and because of this I didn't think I would get in.'* (Sarah-Jane, Cladagh Grammar); and *'Waiting on the letter and being very scared of what school I get into'* (Megan, Roe Primary)

Stress experienced by respondents related to admissions decisions being in the hands of the school and the potential for being rejected. One applicant described *'all the nerves whether they would accept you or not'* (Erin, Quoile High) whilst another related

her stress to *'the anticipation of maybe being rejected.'* (Saoirse, Glenelly Grammar). Both transfer test-takers and non-test-takers made reference to the arbitrary nature of admissions decisions: *'You have to wait and you have no idea what's going to happen'* (Elizabeth, Faughan Grammar); and one girl reported that she *'Finger promised to hope you got into that school.'* (Joanne, Sillees Integrated). These issues will be revisited later in the chapter (section 7.3) with a detailed analysis of children's perceptions of admissions decisions.

Effects on children's relationships

Application processes were reported to have an impact on children's relationships with their families at home and their peers in school. The effects on family life were predominantly reported by transfer test-takers with preparation for and outcomes of the transfer tests as sources of pressure and anxiety. One survey respondent described how his relationships with family members were affected because *'everyone kept nagging in my ear about revision and work'* (Peter, Arney Grammar). This feeling of parental pressure dominated references to stress being related to family expectations and potential to disappoint others: *'there was a lot of pressure from parents and I felt that if I didn't get in people would be very disappointed in me'* (Brooke, Arney Grammar). As discussed above the fear of being rejected by a school was a source of stress in itself but the potential for such rejection to affect family relationships creates an additional dimension of stress. This was the case for Jake, who worried about *'getting rejected and then family not liking you'* (Jake, Torrent Grammar). For Michelle it was the ongoing uncertainty combined with parental pressure *'because you didn't know how well you did or what school you would get into and you felt like you needed to get a good score to please your parents'* (Michelle, Faughan Grammar). Interestingly, she goes on to define a 'good' score: *'that means getting into the school of your choice'* (ibid.). This confirms evidence from the literature and documentary analysis that a test outcome is defined by the resulting admissions decision.

We know the existence of selective and non-selective schools has the potential to exacerbate the division of friendship groups at secondary transition (Gallagher & Smith, 2000). Child survey respondents described their experiences using language that draws out how their feelings about friendships was overshadowing their ability to

make a school choice and that choices, or limitations on choice, had the potential to impact their friendships both now and in the future.

Children found making a school-choice decision difficult because of existing friendships. However, respondents were keen to make the right decision: *'I didn't want to move school and go away from all my friends, but I wanted to choose the right school for me'* (Lydia, Colebrook High). An understanding of some schools as 'better' also emerged from data in this section, which reinforces the idea of a two-tier system and that children may begin to sort themselves into groupings based on secondary destination during the final year of primary school (Gallagher & Smith, 2000). For example, Caolan explains *'because the school that your friend is going to you might want to go to it but it is a bad school'* (Caolan, Owenbream Grammar).

Following receipt of admissions decisions these divisions manifested in other respects. Some children were worried about being bullied, and their source of stress was *'not to [be] made fun of if you got a bad score or a 'bad school' [original emphasis]'* (Maggie, Arney Grammar). Others felt isolated: *'All of my friends were talking about the schools they were now going to when I couldn't go there'* (Clodagh, Callan High).

For many respondents transition meant inevitable separation of existing friendship groups in school: *'It is leaving a lot of your old classmates behind'* (David, Arney Grammar); and a realisation that *'you then know that you probably won't see your old friends anymore'* (Gareth, Owenbream Grammar). Beginning at the new school was a source of apprehension because of potential difficulties in making friends: *'just the fear of picking a school you weren't going to like and that you felt like you had to pick the same schools as your friends because it felt like you weren't going to make new friends'* (Jane, Glenelly Grammar). Some respondents worried about not fitting in: *'you might not know anyone and it might be a school with smarter people than you'* (Barry, Owenbream Grammar). Others were concerned about being bullied: *'I was coming on my own to a new school and didn't know anyone. I also was coming from the country and was a bit afraid I might get bullied for that.'* (Isla, Callan High).

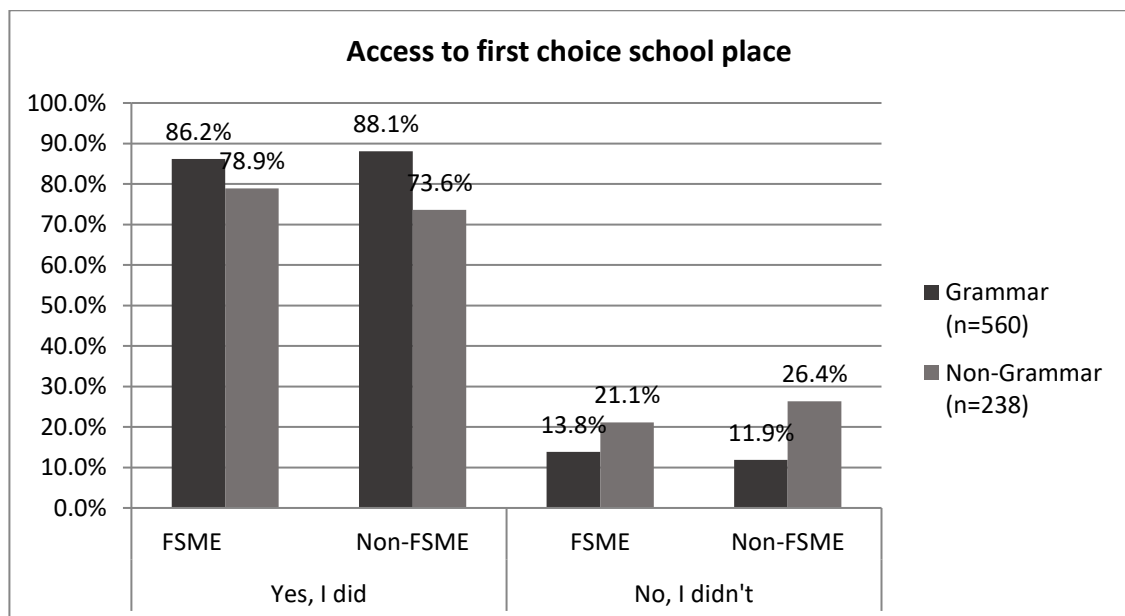
7.3 School admissions decisions

The proportion of FSME children within the pupil populations of different schools shows significant variation, however, the overall pattern is of underrepresentation of FSME children in the grammar school sector. Whilst, the literature suggests there may be differences in school choice aspirations amongst children and families from different socio-economic status backgrounds, the analysis shown in section 7.2 indicates significant similarities in priorities accorded to different school characteristics. This section considers children's experiences of accessing a school place and their perceptions of school admissions decisions.

Accessing a school place

The following analysis considers the possibility that placement in a child's first choice school is associated with their FSME status.

Table 7.11: Access to first choice school place (Year 8) (n=798)



A chi-square test was used to explore the relationship between being offered a place at the first choice school and FSME status (n=798). The association between the two variables was not found to be significant ($p=0.646$, Chi-Square=0.211, $df=1$). The effect size was calculated ($\Phi=0.016$). A two-way chi-square test then used the

selectivity of the school type accessed as a control variable. This addressed the possibility that since grammar schools have a much lower proportion of FSME pupils that a difference may have been present for children at the two school types. However, the relationship between the variables for those attending grammar ($p=0.567$, Chi-Square=0.328, $df=1$ with $\Phi=0.024$) and non-grammar ($p=0.361$, Chi-Square=0.834, $df=1$ with $\Phi=0.059$) schools was not found to be significant. This evidence should not be taken as an indication of no relationship existing, particularly given significant differences in the representation of FSME pupils in the populations of the two school types. Rather the evidence indicates that no relationship has been identified within the data set.

A further test was carried out to establish if there was any difference in the experience of being offered a place in the first choice school for respondents who attend a grammar or non-grammar school. Amongst grammar school respondents 87.7% were offered a place at their first choice school whilst only 54.3% of those attending a non-grammar school had been offered a place at their first choice school. A Chi-Square test showed the relationship between these two variables to have a statistically significant association ($p<0.001$, Chi-Square=18.117, $df=1$) with a small effect size ($\Phi=0.151$). It is unclear why there is a difference in the likelihood of being offered a first choice place. It may be that there are different levels of engagement with school admissions policies between families applying for grammar or non-grammar schools. Since the decision to sit a transfer test is made much earlier than the expression of school choice, those considering a grammar school place may have a higher level of awareness of admissions requirements enabling them to make a more informed decision. Therefore, amongst those attending a non-grammar school there may have been less familiarity with admissions criteria set out by their preferred schools, or a proportion of this group of pupils may have been refused entry to a grammar school and subsequently been offered a place at a (non-grammar) school lower down their preference list.

Children's views and experiences of admissions decisions

Survey respondents' descriptions of applying to a new school show their experiences to be overshadowed by uncertainty (section 7.2). This shows that despite a policy which prioritises parental choice, the ultimate decision making power lies with schools.

This section draws on open-response data relating to children's experiences of being placed in a secondary school (Figure 4.10). Their responses build on findings from the documentary analysis and offer significant insight into children's transition experiences and their perceptions of school admissions decisions. The responses are presented in two sections focusing on: how the transfer test outcomes have informed admissions decisions; and how other criteria have been applied.

Transfer tests

A large number of pupils attending a grammar school attributed admissions decisions to transfer test outcomes with a large number of responses referring to high scores or grades: *'I think I got a place as I got an A in my transfer test'* (Patricia, Glenelly Grammar). Other children seemed to have an appreciation that a particular outcome in itself would not secure a place, but this would be dependent on availability of places: *'I think I got a place in my first preference school because there was enough spaces and I got an A in my transfer'* (Katrina, Cladagh Grammar). In one notable example Natasha describes how her own commitment to applying for a grammar school place had led to a positive outcome: *'I think I deserved to get in because I had prepared. My teacher told my mum and dad and myself I wouldn't get in and that there was no chance but I proved them all wrong.'* (Maggie, Arney Grammar)

The admissions data (Chapter 6) shows schools generally accept pupils in rank order (of score, band or grade) and actual cut-off scores are not used as they may be outside NI (Wareham, et al., 2015). The responses generally reflect that decisions are made on a comparative basis and that successful entry relies on whether applicants achieved *'a high enough score to get in'* (John-Curtis, Roogagh Primary). Some pupils gave information about the range of outcomes accepted for admission and how their test score related to the requirements. For the GL test there is evidence that different schools had different requirements, confirming the findings of the documentary analysis. For example, the two all-girls Catholic Grammars accepted only A grades: *'I got the asking grade, an A'* (Sarah, Glenelly Grammar); and *'I got an A grade in the transfer test and they were only accepting As.'* (Orla, Cladagh Grammar). Whilst the all-boys Catholic grammar was reported to accept a broader range of outcomes *'I got a B2 and this school accepted As, Bs and Cs'* (Kieran, Owenbream Grammar). For the AQE tests children referred to specific marks: *'The school I was put down for accepted*

people who got 86 and I got over one hundred so it was fine.' (Tammy, Arney Grammar); and *'The mark I had to at least get or above was 90. My mark was 111.'* (Emma, Faughan Grammar). However, descriptions generally refer to *'high enough'* or *'good enough'* marks rather than specific marks required in their entry year.

The data also shows evidence of children with comparable outcomes who report different admissions decisions. As discussed in Chapter 5, variations in the number of places available by gender profile, ELB region and which test is accepted, mean that there are differences in test outcomes required for grammar entry. Since the survey asked children to share their test outcome it is possible to cross-reference this data both within the survey for individual children and with the secondary analysis of accepted test outcomes to give a richer picture of how these outcomes translate to admissions decisions.

One respondent explains he was not offered a place at his first choice school because *'My result wasn't high enough'* (Mark, Quoile High). His self-reported score was in the 98-105 band which, according to the documentary analysis (Table 6.23), was accepted for entry to an AQE school in each ELB region. Of the 85 survey respondents who report their score to be in the same band as Mark, 75.3% were offered a place at their first choice school, and at least 56.5% of these were at a grammar school (because secondary destinations of primary respondents are unspecified). Similarly, Clodagh states *'I failed the transfer'* (Clodagh, Callan High). Clodagh's self-reported grade was C1 which was accepted for grammar entry in four of five regions. Of the 49 survey respondents who reported their test outcome as C1, 61.2% were offered a place at their first choice school and at least 36.7% were at a grammar school. A further example of two girls with the same grade, a B2, have experienced different outcomes with one refused grammar admission and the other admitted: *'I didn't get into my first choice school because I didn't get the grade'* (Stacey, Quoile High School) and the other's perception that being admitted to a grammar school resulted from *'My transfer result'* (Natasha, Glenelly Grammar). This data confirms that the test outcomes which qualify for grammar entry do vary for individual children depending on circumstances, such as where they live and types of school place available to them. Essentially, the consequences of the transfer arrangements indicate an inherent lack of fairness which became visible in the data at the individual pupil level.

The documentary analysis provided no evidence that non-selective schools used transfer outcomes in admissions decisions (apart from two Integrated schools with grammar stream entry). However, a small number of pupils attending non-Grammar schools reported that their test outcome may have been the reason they were offered a place: *'maybe it's because I got an A but I'm not too sure'* (Anthony, Termon High); and *'maybe because I got a high score in the AQE transfer test.'* (James, Sillees Integrated). Whilst both pupils must be mistaken in their belief it is worrying that they are not aware that sitting, or achieving a particular score in the transfer test had no bearing on their successful admission.

Many pupils who were awarded a place at their preferred school were able to describe admission decisions which took account of additional factors beyond a transfer test. For example, criteria relating to family relationships: *'My score was 'good' (original emphasis) and my sister already went here'* (Anna, Arney Grammar). Proximity of their home to school was also cited: *'I got a good result and I live close to the school'* (Karen, Glenelly Grammar). For some children accessing the school of their choice was not sufficient in limiting disappointment about test performance: *'I am still disappointed because my teachers said that I could do better and they thought that I would get over 120, but I didn't. My brother went to Faughan Grammar school years ago, [other family relationship cited - suppressed for confidentiality] and I'm close to the school'* (Emma, Faughan Grammar). For Suzanne, the interaction of the different admissions criteria resulted in a disappointing decision: *'I missed my school by 1 point as there were 4 people with my score and 2 got in.'* (Suzanne, Faughan Grammar).

A small number of responses referred to exceptional circumstances and appeals. Cathal achieved a B1 in his GL test but states *'The school I wanted to go to are strict and didn't let me in even though they let someone in with a C2 and not me.'* (1180, Cathal, Owenbrean Grammar). This description suggests that children perceive the application of exceptional circumstances, where they favour another applicant, to be unfair. Where an applicant can be demonstrated to meet the admissions criteria they can appeal admissions decisions. Pursuing an appeal would require a certain degree of capacity, on the part of parents, to navigate related administrative arrangements. In the case of Beth such an appeal was successful: *'The school didn't have enough places so my parents had to fight. In the end I got in.'* (Beth, Dun Grammar). There

were multiple accounts from children who had initially been refused admission but on appeal had those decisions overturned.

Non-academic criteria in school admissions decisions

The use of a broad range of non-academic criteria is evidenced in grammar and non-grammar schools' admissions policies (see section 5.4). A number of children identified criteria as the reason for being admitted to their first choice school without specifying the nature of the criteria, for example, Rebecca says *'I met most of the criteria for the school'* (Rebecca, Glenelly Grammar). The majority of respondents indicated specific non-academic criteria which they perceived as the reason for admissions decision outcomes. The CRAG analysis of admissions decision data identified criteria as a major theme with three sub-themes: the following paragraphs discusses themes in these three areas.

The theme of 'self' considers the codings 'Name' and 'Age'. Explanations referring to consideration of these characteristics were cited by small numbers of respondents for both grammar and non-grammar admissions. Respondents showed an awareness of how their name related to the particular alphabetical order used in the school admissions policy: *'because it was my first choice and my surname was close to the alphabetical order system'* (Sinead, Sillees Integrated). Furthermore, they also demonstrated an awareness of how criteria could be adjusted from one year to the next: *'The school I wanted to go to did a random alphabet and M was at the end. So, I did not get in. If I was a year ahead I would have got in because the year before M was near the start'* (Eimear, Annacloy High). For applicants citing their age as a factor in admissions decisions there was a degree of understanding that this characteristic would interact with other criteria giving a potentially different outcome: *'I have a younger birthday than other people so that put me down a bit'* (Clara, Callan High). A further example also shows awareness of the potential interaction of multiple criteria, in this case age and family relationships: *'I am very young and have no siblings'* (Jay, Callan High).

'Home life' considered responses in two categories: family relationships and distance. Evidence from the documentary analysis showed family relationships were considered in several ways and children's survey responses demonstrate an awareness of these

differences. For some applicants decisions related to having siblings currently attending (*R2 Sibling – current*) or who had previously attended (*R3 Sibling – alumni*) the school. Jasmine gained admission to her first choice school '*because my older siblings go to that school*' (Jasmine, Camowen Primary) whilst Lena believes it was because she had a sibling alumni: '*I think mostly because my brother used to come to this school*' (Lena, Quoile High).

Other respondents indicated decisions which extend beyond consideration of sibling relationships. Ellie described a long family history of association with the school: '*My two grannies, my mum and my aunts went here, my granny taught here for 27 years and I got a very high A in the test*' (Ellie, Cladagh Grammar). The rationale for recommending against criteria which consider relationships beyond current sibling is that they have the potential to discriminate unnecessarily against some applicants (DENI, 2013a). The use of such criteria have also been criticised for their potential to be socially selective (West, et al., 2006). Alice perceived her family relationships to have influenced the decision to admit her: '*all my aunts went here and my uncle goes here with me*' (Alice, Drumragh High). Cross-referencing Alice's response with the documentary analysis it emerged that her school did not consider family relationships of this nature, although several schools did consider, for example, applicants with an aunt who had attended the school. This particular example is of great concern because it is indicative of significant potential for criteria to be misinterpreted and for school choice decisions to be made on the basis of mistaken interpretations of admissions policies.

'Eldest child of the family' is categorised as relating to family relationships, because this criterion does not refer to age per se but rather the absence of older siblings. For example, Katherine explains: '*I think I got in because I'm the oldest child in the family and the oldest girl*' (Katherine, Roe Primary). Notably, the two criteria *R2 Sibling currently attending school* and *R3 Eldest child of the family* are often applied concurrently in admissions policies. Some responses were indicative of this: '*I didn't have an older brother and wasn't the first child.*' (Joshua, Owenbreen Grammar).

Distance takes into account the use of geographical criteria. Generally explanations suggested that respondents perceived a decision to take account of multiple criteria,

both academic and non-academic: *'Because I got 117 in my AQE test and I was well prepared. Also because I live within 5 miles of it'* (Karolina, Arney Grammar). In many cases respondents linked familial criteria and geographical criteria: *'Because it's close to my house and my sister went'* (Heather, Faughan Grammar). Similarly, Eoghan perceived that he was not offered a place at his first choice school because *'No family went to it and I lived a good bit away from it'* (Owenbreen Grammar). Some respondents identified the role of catchment areas, giving a more nuanced description of geographical criteria: *'I am the oldest in the family and I live in the catchment area'* (Zara, Camowen Primary). The use of specific criterion-related vocabulary was evident in many responses which suggests that children, in addition to having a high level of awareness of school admissions requirements are also familiar with the language used within the policy documents.

Responses in the theme 'School life' related to consideration of primary school attended. From the data the CRAG identified the two key ways in which this information is considered. Firstly, where preference is given to children who attended an identified feeder primary school: *'my primary school was the feeder'* (Ruth, Arney Grammar). This example is another case where the respondent is mistaken in their perception of the factors influencing the admissions decision, since her school neither provides a list of feeder primary schools, nor prioritises applicants from a particular primary school type. Secondly, where preference is given to applicants who attended a primary school of a particular character: *'I previously went to an integrated primary school'* (Nicole, Sillees Integrated). The two categories reflect the categorisations used in the documentary analysis, although additional detail as to how the criteria were applied emerge from that analysis (Table 5.17).

The analysis of open-responses demonstrates a good level of awareness amongst children that admissions decisions result from the application of multiple criteria. This is evidenced where pupils have given multiple reasons why they think they were offered a place: *'I feel I got into my school because I have cousins in the school, I live very close by, I am oldest girl in my family and I got the grade I needed.'* (Grace, Cladagh Grammar). Some respondents refer specifically to criteria without specifying which criteria they met: *'I fitted most of the criteria'* (Paul, Roe Primary); and *'I had the second thing on the booklet'* (Therese, Roogagh Primary). Similarly to the evidence

relating to grammar school admissions decisions a number of non-grammar applicants identified that they had not initially been admitted to their first choice school and subsequently appealed the decision: *'When I didn't get in we appealed it and because I had the right criteria I got in.'* (Shannon, Sillees Integrated).

A theme emerging from the documentary analysis was the continued use of *NR5 Preference Criteria*. This factor was not identified in the CRAG analysis, possibly due to the small number of respondents who referred to it or because it is a more abstract concept. It is important to acknowledge that respondents did indicate this to be a factor in being admitted to their first choice school: *'It was my first preference school'* (Morgan, Annacloy High). Furthermore, the language used in some responses suggests that respondents made an active decision: *'I put it as my first choice and where I live they always accept people'* (Andrew, Quoile High). For other applicants it was one of the criteria, which in combination led to a positive admissions decision *'because my brother already went here and it was my first and only choice'* (Matthew, Quoile High).

Some respondents did not identify specific criteria as the reason for being placed in their first choice school, instead these applicants felt a positive admissions decision was related to their choice being a non-grammar school: *'I think I got a place in my first choice because it wasn't a grammar school'* (Katelyn, Finn High); or that a transfer test was not an entry requirement: *'because you didn't need to do the transfer to get in'* (Hannah, Callan High School). Some respondents implied that it was not difficult to gain admission to their first choice school: *'Because everyone gets in'* (Caroline, Sillees Integrated College).

7.4 Chapter summary

This chapter considered children's perceptions of the academically selective system and their experiences of applying to secondary school. The system of secondary education is depicted in this data as a two-tier system (Hammarberg, 1997), with the education offered at one school type perceived as more academically rigorous whilst emphasis is on the pastoral support and inclusivity of the other school type. Of concern is that children's perceptions of which school type is 'better' seem to change

as they transition from primary to secondary school, at which point a dichotomy of preference emerges with children's perceptions associated with the school type they are placed at. The implication is that children experience an acceptance that they belong there (Reay & Lucey, 2003). Grammar school pupils' perceptions of their non-grammar peers as lacking intelligence or aspiration further contributes to the position of grammar schools as elite establishments. In addition to conceptualisations of the two schools as having different academic standards there is a further issue with the perceived superiority of human and material resourcing at grammars which would represent a serious inequity. Nonetheless, children's priorities in forming judgements about schools and performing school choice are shown in the data to be remarkably similar with the main priority of each subgroup of children to be '*happy at school*'. Whilst the process of applying to secondary school was an agentic experience for a majority of children it was also a stressful, lengthy and uncertain journey for a significant number of them. Largely this related to an absence of control in admissions decisions which remained in the power of schools.

The data emerging from the documentary analysis of school admissions policies has shown that school admissions decisions rely on numerous criteria and appear as needlessly complex. The experiences described by children with recent experience of navigating the system describe admissions decisions, for both grammar and non-grammar schools, which are based on complex combinations of characteristics. It is known that needless complexity in school admissions policies, particularly where schools have control over their own admissions (Allen, et al., 2012), is likely to make the system less accessible, particularly to less well educated parents (West, et al., 2011). Children are shown to have a relatively sophisticated vocabulary relating to admissions criteria and an understanding of the multi-faceted nature of admissions decisions. However, multiple issues emerge in children's reports of criteria which they believe to have influenced whether they were or were not admitted to the school of their choice. It is therefore of concern that the data shows multiple instances of misconceptions of the basis upon which admissions decisions are being made. Furthermore, where the misunderstandings evidenced in this data are used to inform school choice decisions, it is likely that children and their parents will face additional difficulties in navigating admissions arrangements.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to gain a greater understanding of the arrangements for transition to secondary education in NI in relation to three main issues: children's aspirations within a context of school choice; the assessments used for selection; and the admissions procedures used by schools in making admissions decisions. This chapter provides a discussion of the results of this thesis which are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The key themes emerging from the data are discussed in this chapter, with reference to the relevant empirical and theoretical literature. Four areas are considered in sections 8.1 - 8.4: equitable availability of school places; equity and assessment for selection; children's agency and school choice; and quality and equity in the education quasi-market. In section 8.5 the implications of the findings are then discussed in relation to several provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) which were outlined in Chapter 3. It is proposed that an approach to transfer underpinned by a children's rights perspective has the potential to improve children's transition experiences.

The current arrangements for transfer raise multiple equity issues, despite a policy objective that every child have an 'opportunity of gaining access to the most appropriate school to meet their needs and enhance their life chances.' (DENI, 2015a, p. 3; 2016, p. 4). The content of the four themes outlined above (to be discussed in sections 8.1 - 8.4) align with the concepts of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability (Tomaševski, 2001) of education at transition. Each section of the thematic discussion relates primarily to one of the 4-As, although, the indivisibility of rights generally and of concepts within the framework itself, is evidenced by multiple overlaps. Firstly, differential provision of school places, a known structural barrier to equity, is evidenced and creates significant concerns about non-discriminatory *availability* of education. Secondly, the use of unregulated assessments for selection are shown to have the potential to create inequities in the *accessibility* of grammar school places. Thirdly, the processes of school choice are dominated by the interests of schools in ways which limit their *accessibility*, and the agency of children (*participation*) and their families in a system which appears to prioritise the right, at least of parents, to choose. Consequently, in addition to limiting the *accessibility* of school places the failure to fully recognise children as rights holders (for example, in terms of participation (art. 12)) limits the *acceptability* of these arrangements. Finally,

evidence of a two-tier system and children's differential experiences of transition point to a lack of *adaptability* within the system which, rather than accommodating the needs of every individual pupil, requires students to adapt to the education available and accessible to them. In essence the discussion focuses on how the processes and practices of transition have significant consequences for children, particularly in relation to their rights as conceptualised by Tomaševski (2001) in her 4-As framework and a summary is provided in Table 8.1. The chapter concludes by proposing an analytical tool which may be used to consider the extent to which transition to secondary education aligns with children's rights principles in relation to school choice, the assessment arrangements for selection and the admissions processes which mediate access to secondary education.

Table 8.1: Summary of findings and their relevance to the 4-As

Discussion theme	Aspects of the 4-As related to themes			
	Availability	Accessibility	Acceptability	Adaptability
<i>8.1 Equitable availability of school places</i>	pp. 255-258	p. 255	p. 256	p. 257
<i>8.2 Equity and assessment for selection</i>	p. 262	pp. 258-263	p. 259	p. 262
<i>8.3 Children's agency and school choice</i>		p. 265-266	pp. 263-268	p. 266
<i>8.4 Quality and equity in the education quasi-market</i>		p. 269	p. 269, 271	pp. 268-272

8.1 Equitable availability of school places

The analysis of Year 8 pupil population data, conducted as part of this research, very clearly shows differential availability of school places by school gender profile, religious character and school selectivity, both within each ELB region and overall (See sections 5.1 and 5.2). In her conceptual framework of rights *to, in and through* education (building on Verhellen's (1993) conceptualisation), Tomaševski (2001) discussed the need for alignment between school availability and the number and diversity of the

school-aged population, as discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, she highlighted that the monitoring of education provision would rely on statistics relating to school places (Tomaševski, 2003a). It is argued in this thesis that analysis at the level of school places, rather than for example, the number of schools, bring to light stark disparities in provision. It is further proposed that the differential availability of school places represents a structural barrier which has direct consequences for school choice.

The provision of 'separate' schooling can be described as 'inherently unequal' (Tomaševski, 2003b, p. 11), however, the evidence shows that in NI system level constraints represent a challenge to achieving non-discrimination (art. 2) in secondary level admissions. Therefore, not only is there an ethical argument against the segregation of education, in principle, but there is an equally compelling argument that, in practice, the complexity of the provision of secondary education in a context of multi-dimensional separateness results in significant inequalities in accessing a school place.

Integrated schools

The analysis of school places demonstrates inequities in provision which are a structural constraint on school choice. There is a particular ethical concern where Integrated school places are differentially available in light of the largely segregated provision of schooling. The proportion of Year 8 places available at Integrated schools is 7.1% (Table 5.2), however variation exists across the five ELBs, with the extremes being 3.7% of places in the Southern region and 11.6% in the South East. It is evident that this difference of 7.9% is quite significant in terms of children's opportunity to access a place in this school type. Furthermore, grammar stream places in Integrated schools were found to be available in only two of the regions, therefore, this category of place equates to 0.6% of all Year 8 places. Existing research points to 'consistently strong public endorsement' (Gardner, 2016, p. 350) for integrated schooling. It has been suggested that 'abstract' preferences for the ideals of Integrated education do not reflect 'real' choices because the decisions of individual families are being made between specific local schools which are considered viable options (Gallagher & Hughes, NIA Committee for Education, 2014). Nonetheless, the analysis of school oversubscription carried out as part of this research found Integrated schools to be disproportionately oversubscribed (Table 5.12).

The 'abstract' preferences of child survey participants in this study reflect demand for a school place other than at the school-type currently attended (Table 5.5-Table 5.6). Abstract preferences are those choices indicated by children without consideration of potential constraints which may emerge in performing a 'real' choice between different specific schools. An example is the 27.6% of Year 8 Protestant school pupils who express an abstract preference for Integrated education. These disparities are evidenced despite overt policy priorities of promoting school choice (The Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, p. Art. 9) and Integrated education (The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, 1989, pp. Arts. 64-93). For a significant proportion of children there is a mismatch between 'abstract' preference and 'real' choice, with the data confirming the suggestion of Gallagher and Hughes (NIA Committee for Education, 2014) and providing much needed evidence that structural barriers limit school choice for individual and groups of children. Structural barriers, in terms of 'the absence of opportunities and conditions for them to be realised' (Baker, et al., 2014, p. 539) are known to exert limits on children's educational aspirations, it is argued here that such barriers represent a challenge to children's school choice aspirations.

Grammar schools

This research showed that a comparable proportion of Year 8 places are available in the Catholic (46.5%) and Protestant (46.4%) sectors. It confirms the findings of previous research which considered the numbers of Catholic and Protestant schools and concluded that there was 'good access' (Lundy, et al., 2012, p. 8). However, because this research addressed the availability of school places by considering the interaction of system level divisions it was possible to highlight inequities in provision which are hidden when only one characteristic is under consideration. The data clearly showed inequity in the proportions of grammar places within the Catholic (38.2%) and Protestant (48.8%) sectors (Table 5.7). In the NI context where the provision of schooling continues to be largely separated along community/religious lines, this disparity in provision represents a significant equality issue. This finding represents an original contribution to knowledge since existing research has not identified this gap in provision.

Some evidence has been reported in the media which demonstrates that cross-sectoral attendance of Catholic children at Protestant grammar schools is much higher

than of Protestant children attending Catholic grammar schools (The Irish News, 2015). This has been interpreted by commentators as an indication that a perceived overt religious ethos in Catholic schools may dissuade Protestant parents from choosing to make a cross-sectoral school choice. However, the evidence from this PhD research shows that the structural barrier presented by the more limited availability of Catholic grammar places may account for the higher proportion of Catholic parents who make cross-sectoral choices.

The differential availability of school places represents system-level disadvantage for sub-groups of children. The UNCRC specifies that the right of the child to education must be provided 'on the basis of equal opportunity' (art. 28.1) and 'without discrimination of any kind' (art. 2) (UN, 1989). The specific categories discussed in article 2 include sex, religion, and 'other status' which are all evidenced in the data resulting from this research. In order for education to be provided on an equitable basis differential availability of school places must be addressed by policy-makers and an acceptable remedy implemented.

8.2 Equity and assessment for selection

Significant equity issues emerge in relation to the assessments used in academic admissions. Long-standing differential access to grammar places persists under the current arrangements, as shown by the significant differences in the representation of FSME children in the grammar and non-grammar sectors (Table 5.13). This data reflects the findings of previous research in relation to the use of 11-plus tests which has found that test performance and resulting grammar school admission are associated with children's socio-economic background and social class (Allen, et al., 2017; De Lisle, et al., 2012; Institute of Education, 2015). The assessments used for selection therefore represent an obstacle to compulsory schooling (Tomaševski, 2001).

The analysis of the numbers of schools using each test (Table 6.15) confirms that the tests are used with almost equal prevalence, in a pattern which broadly reflects existing community divisions (Elwood, 2013a), resulting in 'separate 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' test systems' (Gardner, 2016, p. 358). However, this more recent analysis shows two variations on the previous data: firstly, that a small number of Protestant grammar schools exclusively accepted the GL test, suggesting that a factor other than desired

alignment with other Protestant schools has influenced this decision; and secondly, that the small number of schools accepting outcomes in both tests has increased (from 3 to 5) despite the additional complications inherent in making robust admissions decisions using assessment data which has no proven comparability. Furthermore, the greater detail offered by the analysis in this study shows variations in the school types accepting each test across the five regions according to school religious character. What emerges is a complex landscape within which different groups of children are more or less likely to improve their chances of accessing a grammar school place by sitting both tests. Since children's decisions about which tests to sit are directly influenced by the requirements of schools, with 74.9% of survey respondents who sat a test reporting doing so because their preferred school 'asked for a test' (Table 6.1), and 80.3% of those who sat both tests perceiving that decision to have given them 'a better chance of getting a grammar school place' (Table 6.5).

These findings raise significant issues in terms of equitable access to the tests themselves, and ethical questions in relation to how well the current arrangements facilitate the equitable assessment of children's suitability for a grammar school place. Furthermore, they contribute to a body of evidence which suggests that the current system prioritises the best interests of schools rather than children which is a children's rights concern (DENI, 2017d; Elwood, 2013a).

Test outcomes

A robust analysis of pupil attainment in the current selection tests is not possible in the absence of more complete data relating to test outcomes. This section discusses the contribution of the findings of this research to our understanding of children's test outcomes. First, how the use of two different unregulated tests for selection do have the potential, as has been proposed, to perpetuate or magnify 'inequalities in access along community/religious lines' (Elwood, op. cit., p. 215). Second, indications that differential outcomes may persist under the current selection arrangements for children of different FSME status.

This research sought to maximise the use of publicly available data to gain insight into the processes and practices of transition. By comparing schools' self-reported lowest accepted outcomes, published annually in the media, significant variations in the pupil

outcomes which result in admission to a grammar school are shown (Table 6.19). Furthermore, the data confirms that these differences cannot be explained by variations in the availability of grammar places across the different regions (Table 6.22). It would be reasonable to assume small differences in the test outcomes which result in admission, however, the data presented in Chapter 6 showed successful admission to a grammar school place for pupils who have achieved across a broad range of possible outcomes. Whilst direct comparisons cannot be made between the schools using the AQE test and GL test, because of the ways that outcomes are reported, it is possible to see how the use of the two tests has the potential to create additional inequity as the following examples show (Table 6.23). Firstly, access to a single-sex school in the Belfast ELB can be secured with a lower score for girls, with the AQE test, than boys, however, the opposite is true with the GL test, whereby a higher grade is required for girls than for boys. In effect, this example illustrates the potential for differential access, within an ELB region, for girls and boys depending on the religious character of their preferred school. Furthermore, the lowest test outcomes resulting in access to Co-Ed grammar schools, across the five regions, for the AQE test range from 66 to 99 (on a Standardised Age Score range from 55-145) and for the GL test from Grade D –A (the full range of available grades). Once again these are significant differences, which raise issues of fairness and equitable access to grammar schools for different sub-groups of children. Differential access to grammar school places by FSME status is well established in the literature (Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Gallagher, 2015). However, the findings of this PhD research offers evidence that variations in the outcome which qualifies as a ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ can be associated with a child’s circumstances, such as which schools are geographically accessible to them or whether they are applying to a Catholic or Protestant school, which violates the principle of non-discrimination (art. 2).

The evidence shows how the use of the two tests may compound inequity by magnifying the impact of ascriptive characteristics in the processes of selection (Francis & Mills, 2012; Waldow, 2013). Therefore, the analysis shows that the social uses of transfer test outcomes in making admissions decisions, whilst publicly perceived to be robust and fair, bring to light consequential validity (Messick, 1989) concerns. The intended function of the tests is to select the most ‘suitable’ candidates for a grammar school place (Gardner & Cowan, 2000), however, the admissions data shows that the suitability of candidates varies for different categories of school. In

addition to being potentially discriminatory it is evident that the consequences of the uses of test outcomes fails to be 'supportive of the intended testing purposes' (Messick, 1989, p. 8), and thus violates a key aspect of the principle of consequential validity as described by Messick.

Using children's self-reported test score data it is possible to demonstrate the difficulties of making robust and comparable admissions decisions on the basis of test outcomes in these two unregulated tests. The distribution of the scores in the AQE test show a broadly normal distribution (Figure 6.7) whilst the distribution of GL grades is concentrated in the A band (Figure 6.8). This difference does not necessarily present any particular concern in relation to fair admissions. However, when considered in light of the data emerging from the documentary analysis, which shows different approaches to interpreting the test outcomes (Table 6.17) used in school admissions policies, it becomes evident that significant variations in which children are admitted to a grammar school place may result. For example, depending on whether test outcomes are considered in rank order of score, or in bands by score or grade. The responses of those children who participated in the survey illustrate how these variations manifest in successful or unsuccessful applications to a grammar school (See Chapter 6.4). For example, one respondent said 'I failed the transfer' (Therese, Callan High School), when in reality her grade was C1 and at least 36.7% of respondents with the same grade were successfully placed in a grammar school. Multiple examples emerge from the data where children with the same test outcome have been both successful and unsuccessful in securing a grammar school place: for example, Karen and Joanne who both got a grade B2 but one was successfully admitted to a grammar place whilst the other was not (p. 246). These experiences demonstrate that assessment based selection decisions may not be fair and robust.

Different patterns of performance for FSME and Non-FSME children can be seen for the two tests, in terms of the distribution of self-reported test outcomes for children with different FSME status within the survey sample (Figure 6.9-Figure 6.10). For example, Non-FSME children outperform their FSME counterparts in the highest available band for the AQE, and Grade for the GL tests. Furthermore, for both the AQE and GL tests Non-FSME children have a higher mean score than their FSME counterparts. These differences are shown to have a statistical association with FSME for the GL test, whilst for the AQE test there is no evidence to show this. Previous research has not

addressed the relationship between FSME and transfer test performance under the current arrangements, however, it is known that FSME children continue to be underrepresented at grammar schools (Gallagher, 2015). Therefore, whilst these findings are relatively tentative, on the basis that they rely on limited self-reported data and are far from conclusive, they do suggest that transfer test performance may differ for children depending on their FSME status, particularly since the pupil population data has shown a persisting relationship between FSME and grammar school attendance (Table 5.13), as previously identified by Gallagher (2015). As was the case under the previous transfer arrangements, it is likely that both test performance and subsequent attendance at a grammar school continue to be mediated by FSME (Gallagher & Smith, 2000; Gardner & Cowan, 2000) under the present arrangements which would reflect research emerging in the English context which shows similar patterns (Allen, et al., 2017). This research suggests that there is a very real need, beyond meeting the principles of fair assessment, for concerns around the lack of transparency in relation to the test data, as identified by existing research (Elwood, 2013a; NICCY, 2010), to be addressed by the test providers and schools which make use of the test outcomes in their admissions procedures.

Preparing for the tests

Several findings offer insight into children's test preparation experiences, the quantitative data addresses a particular gap relating to preparation both in and out of school which have not been treated separately in many years (Caul, et al., 2000), or under the current assessment arrangements. Despite the policy position prohibiting in-school test-preparation (DENI, 2010) this study found a majority of children (83.3%) experienced in-school preparation, demonstrating persistent curriculum washback effects (Alderson & Wall, 1993) of the unregulated tests which are 'driving and possibly distorting the curriculum' (Shewbridge, et al., 2014, p. 69). This data, similarly to previous research (NICCY, 2010), confirms that in-school preparation is widespread, however, additional detail is offered here which shows significant variations in children's opportunities to learn for the test. Perhaps reassuringly, the proportion of children found to access in-school preparation was broadly comparable regardless of FSME status (Table 6.9) with no statistically significant differences found between the two groups. However, it is acknowledged that since the data did not allow for analysis by school socio-economic profile that inequitable access to in-school preparation may

exist on that basis, as has been found in the English context (Allen, et al., 2017). The data relating to out of school preparation shows that access to test preparation, at home and with a tutor (Table 6.12), to be higher amongst Non-FSME than FSME children. In both cases these findings were statistically significant, albeit with relatively small effect sizes, and may suggest that access to out of school preparation is associated with FSME status.

These findings highlight one way in which the use of unregulated transfer tests may compromise the policy objective of improved equity, particularly in terms of exacerbating potential social imbalance due to parental capacity to pay for private tuition (Shewbridge, et al., op. cit.). Whilst it is important not to overstate these findings they highlight the need to assure equal opportunities to access the learning required for tests as a pre-condition of equitable assessment (Pullin, 2008). As might be expected differential provision of test preparation has been linked to differences in children's test performance (Allen, et al., op. cit.). Therefore, any likelihood that extrinsic factors, such as gender, FSME, or the socio-economic profile of a child's school, are associated with access to test-preparation must be more closely examined.

8.3 Children's agency and school choice

This research found a majority of respondents (90.5%) reported being involved in school choice decision-making, whilst 9.5% reported that adults in their family had decided. This finding, whilst new in the NI context, reflects previous research in the English context: that a majority of children's experiences of school choice decisions made within families are agentive (Reay & Lucey, 2003; Walford, 2006). For some children the process of choice was described positively, with decisions made between multiple acceptable options. However, other children's accounts demonstrated their involvement in decisions as secondary to the powerful position occupied by adults.

The dynamic of children having a say but within the constraints of what adults find acceptable is embedded in policy, with the transfer guidelines recommending that parents be advised to consider 'The child's own views on where he/she would be happiest' (DENI, 2014a, p. 27). Therefore, whilst children often experience an agentive role within a family 'decision making team' (Walford, 2006, p. 147) the level of control in that decision should not be overstated, particularly since parental preference

is safeguarded, in legal and administrative arrangements under The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, 1997, article 9.

A further issue is the absence of any mechanism to ensure children's views are accessed and taken seriously in the processes of school choice, as would be necessary in order for the procedures to be conducted in compliance with article 12 of the CRC (UN, 1989). The system as it presently operates places children's participation in the gift of their parents which fails to recognise these rights as 'a legal imperative' (Lundy, 2007, p. 931). As discussed in Chapter 3, the focus in school choice policies on parental *preferences* rather than children's *rights* has been identified as a lapse in compliance with state party obligations under the CRC (Tomaševski, 2000).

Experiencing agency

Children's experiences of agency in school choice were associated with feelings of pressure and stress (p. 236) because decisions are perceived as high-stakes and final. Children's descriptions emphasise the importance of decisions and the desire not to make the 'the wrong move' (0439, Jonathan, Sillees Integrated College) which conveys children's feelings of responsibility. The literature, considering the perspectives of parents rather than children, portrays school choice as a *burden* which can 'generate anxiety and an unwanted sense of responsibility' (Exley, 2014, p. 5). Such feelings are magnified where high-stakes consequences exist, for example, potential variations in educational quality between schools (ibid.). However, children's experiences of this burden can be mitigated by appropriate support at home.

Conversely, school choice was an explicitly agentic experience for many children because they played an active role in completing administrative tasks in relation to the school application, sharing both the burden of making a good choice but also responsibility for the implications of not navigating the admissions process effectively. It is anticipated that these differences in children's experiences are related to differing levels of capacity amongst parents to navigate the system on their child's behalf. Of particular concern is evidence of some children exercising 'extended agency' which has been found to disproportionately affect working class families (Urquhart, 2001).

Choosing a school

Factors prioritised by children in performing school choice have never been documented in NI. This study found that the factors which children considered important were similar regardless of school type attended or FSME status. Existing family connections, friends going to the school and it being close to home were similarly prioritised by grammar, non-grammar and primary pupils with only very small variations between groups (Table 7.3). Similarly small variations emerge in comparisons between FSME groupings (Table 7.4). Aside from priority for a school with an existing family connection where a higher proportion of FSME than non-FSME children (41.0%:28.5) indicated this preference which may suggest different levels of reliance on the experiences of others and pre-existing knowledge. Therefore, non-FSME children may more readily seek school options based on personal judgements of school quality. The literature points to the strong association between school choice and social class differences which may magnify social segregation (Gewirtz, et al., 1995; West & Currie, 2008). Therefore, whilst this study has not used a social class measure to understand patterns of choice there is evidence which reflects existing knowledge that in choices made by working class families higher priority is given to direct experience and the accounts of other family members (Gewirtz, et al., op. cit.).

This research aimed to gain insight into which qualities children perceived to make a good school. In NI, public rhetoric portrays grammar schools as 'good' (Elwood, 2013a; NICCY, 2010). However, children's understandings of characteristics of a 'good' school have not been examined in the literature where emphasis is placed on how schools are *known* to be good, in terms of sources of information and the social construction and identification of 'good' schools. The priority accorded to each characteristic differed very little across sub-groups of children, whether grouped by school type (grammar, non-grammar or primary - Table 7.5) or FSME status (Table 7.6). The two most commonly identified characteristics were that *pupils are 'happy'* at a 'good' school and it has *teachers who care about pupils*. Both responses were chosen by over 70.0% of respondents in each sub-grouping which suggests that personal happiness and positive relationships with teachers are viewed by children as significant indicators of school quality regardless of the school that they attend or their social background. Furthermore, those characteristics are prioritised above

preparation for adult life, doing well in exams and provision of extra-curricular activities. This data illustrates the potential difference between children's conceptualisation of a good school, particularly since these are not mediated by FSME or school type attended, and those of parents documented in other research who prioritise a school's attainment profile, albeit to differing degrees depending on socio-economic status.

Being chosen by a school

The findings of this research demonstrate that children perceive decision making responsibility in school choice to be in the power of schools. Therefore, whilst parental preference is upheld in policy, children's experiences show that the processes are less about their own, or their parents', performance of choice but rather about being chosen by a school. These findings reflect research in England which shows that under the current admissions arrangements the power of choice lies with schools (West & Hind, 2016). Schools' selection of pupils relies on the application of criteria outlined in school admissions policies. Children show high-level awareness of admissions criteria, for example, those describing academic admissions decisions accurately identify the interaction of academic and non-academic criteria in the decision making process and perceive these decisions to be arbitrary. However, other children hold misconceptions about admissions processes, for example, where a non-grammar admission decision is ascribed to a transfer test outcome.

Regardless of whether schools operate academic or all-ability admissions, children who participated in this study perceived admissions decisions to be lengthy, uncertain and beyond their control (p. 240). Again these findings can be compared to research in the English context where admissions policies are needlessly complex and lack transparency (DCSF, 2008, par. 3.3; West, et al., 2011, p. 17). Furthermore, data resulting from the documentary analysis of school admissions policies confirms the complexity of arrangements and suggests the potential for the system to be difficult to navigate (See sections 5.4-5.5 and 6.3), with this difficulty being magnified for less well educated parents and carers (Ibid.), particularly because the information published about the transition arrangements may be less well understood by some groups of parents (Hastings & Weinstein, 2008).

The analysis of school admissions policies shows significant variations in the criteria used by schools and the ways in which these are applied and interpreted. Since schools in NI act as their own statutory admissions authority they must 'have regard' to DENI statutory guidelines (DENI, 2010) in setting admissions criteria. However, the complexity of, and potential difficulties associated with, navigating the system to make informed school choices is illustrated by the use of 31 different criteria which are not recommended in statutory guidance. Since academic admissions are discussed in a previous section (See p. 258), the focus here is on non-academic admissions. The purpose of admissions criteria is to effectively distinguish between applicants 'down to the last available place' (DENI, *op. cit.*, p. 9), although some criteria may unfairly disadvantage some groups of children, for example, those who live in a rural location. For this reason transfer guidance (*ibid.*) recommends against the use of certain criteria which continue to be used. One pertinent example is preference criteria, where schools prioritise applicants who have indicated the school as their first choice on the transfer form, which is believed to increase 'tactical' performance of choice (*ibid.*) and presents a potential barrier to genuine choice, as has been found in research conducted across six London boroughs (Butler & Hamnett, 2011) and in the NI context (Lundy, 1996; 2001).

Variations in the proportions of FSME children within grammar and non-grammar school populations (Table 5.13) are clearly evidenced in this research, with further differences between schools within these sectors. For example, the average proportion of FSME children attending non-grammar schools is 37.7% but in 5 non-grammar schools more than 65.0% of children are FSME and in a further 10 schools fewer than 20.0% of pupils are FSME. A similar pattern emerges for the grammar sector, although the differences are less extreme. What this data suggests is that in addition to a clear disparity in access to grammar places for FSME children there is also an alarming element of socio-economic stratification within the non-grammar sector. The 'First Criterion recommended for all Schools' (DENI, *op. cit.*, p. 13) is the proportional admission of FSME children, where the proportion of FSME children admitted to a school should be equal to the proportion of first preference applications received from that group. However, the analysis shows that only 10 (non-grammar) schools include this criterion in their admissions policies (Table 5.20). Of the remaining 195 schools a further 52 do prioritise FSME applicants, however, because a majority

do this beyond the fourth stage of their admissions procedure, this group is unlikely to be afforded any meaningful advantage in being admitted.

Failure to adequately prioritise FSME children and continued use of academic admissions (discussed on p. 258) are examples of schools exercising a significant degree of autonomy in how they operate admissions policies. Furthermore, the analyses presented in the results chapters (sections 5.4-5.5 and 6.3) demonstrate that school admissions policies are often not aligned to the statutory guidance (DENI, 2010). Whilst the requirement to 'have regard' to the guidance represents a legal obligation, in practice there is little onus on schools to comply. A parallel can be drawn with the English context where schools' ability to set their own admissions criteria is associated with higher levels of social stratification (Allen, et al., 2012). However, whilst mandating compliance with the school admissions code (DfES, 2007) has had some success in addressing some forms of inequality in admissions practices, for example, the priority given to looked after children (Pennell, et al., 2006), the wider issue of social segregation between schools has not been resolved (Allen, et al., op. cit.). Inconsistencies in admissions policies make the system generally difficult to navigate and less accessible for those with less sophisticated knowledge or understanding of the system. The complexity of the admissions process is compounded by both the number of criteria used and the lengthy sequences in which they are applied. Possible ways to further control admissions proposed in the research literature relate to the introduction of incentives for schools to diversify their intakes and to appoint an independent body to oversee school admissions and achieve consistency in the approaches adopted by schools (ibid.; West, et al., 2011).

8.4 Quality and equity in the education quasi-market

The quasi-marketisation of education, underpinned by the principle of parental choice, was intended to improve quality and equity in schooling (Friedman, 1955; Hoxby, 2003). However, the evidence presented in this PhD research portrays a two-tier system, both in rhetoric and practice, within which access to secondary education is potentially limited by system-level inequities in provision and questionable uses of assessments for selection. Furthermore, the dominance of school level decisions in the procedures for transfer have a limiting effect on the agency of children and parents

in terms of genuine school choice. This section considers aspects of the education quasi-market in NI and the acceptability of the current arrangements for transfer.

The education quasi-market in Northern Ireland: a two-tier system

The findings of this research illustrate the two-tier nature of academically selective provision of secondary education. Firstly, the documentary analysis shows that under the current arrangements for transfer grammar schools retain their position as the more desirable school type. Secondly, children's descriptions of the academically selective system situate grammar schools as providers of a rigorous academic education and non-grammar schools as diverse and inclusive. This positioning of grammar schools as academically 'better' reflects a dominant public rhetoric (Elwood, 2013a; Gallagher & Smith, 2000; McKeown, 2006; NICCY, 2010). Indeed, in the perceptions of children, accessed and documented in this research, as well as in public perception, it seems to align with Hammarberg's definition of a two tier system with 'an elite education for some and low quality education for the rest' (1997, p. 6). Furthermore, the provision of secondary education in NI has been described as a two tier system (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008), with the current unregulated testing arrangements identified as a barrier to 'truly inclusive education' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016).

The analysis of school oversubscription shows that grammar schools are disproportionately oversubscribed, with all but 1 of the 67 grammar schools receiving more applications than they have places available, which confirms the dominant position of grammar schools as the more desirable school type in terms of parents' expressions of school choice. As discussed in Chapter 2, parent's reliance on measures of absolute performance to inform their school preferences (Berry Cullen, et al., 2005) are likely to disguise the extent to which pupil attainment is actually related to any differences in the quality of the education provided (Coe, et al., 2008). However, by exerting control over student admissions schools can improve their market position (Lubienski, 2006). Therefore, the possibility of *cream-skimming* 'more able or easier to teach pupils' (Allen, et al., 2014, p. 11; Leitch, et al., 2017) enables schools to retain their advantage in the secondary level 'marketplace' (McKeown, 2006, p. 102).

Children's comments portray two distinct types of provision: grammar schools which offer a rigorous academic curriculum and improved future life chances; and non-grammar schools which are characterised as being diverse and inclusive environments which provide for a wide range of abilities (See section 7.1). The data shows multiple references to superior resourcing, both physical and human, which represents a concern in terms of the equal provision of quality education. Furthermore, representations of the ethos of grammar schools as superior often demonised the non-grammar sector. Although, the inclusivity of the non-grammar sector is identified in the data as a key strength, and reflects a similarly 'supportive' non-judgemental environment described by children who participated in the Gallagher and Smith study (2000). An interesting aspect of this data was that grammar and non-grammar students alike considered the diversity of non-grammar intakes to be a strength, for example, children of different ability, those with special educational needs and children from different religious and cultural backgrounds. This is particularly relevant in the context of NI's education system which is characterised by system level divisions by ability, community background and gender (Hughes, 2011).

The two types of provision are further characterised by perceptions of their differing levels of selectivity, in terms of their operation of admissions, although the documentary analysis shows that a significant number of non-grammar schools are also oversubscribed. Therefore, this data suggests that in addition to the potential for grammar schools' admissions decisions to reinforce the intergenerational transmission of privilege (Tomaševski, 2003b) it is also likely that a similar pattern is present in relation to oversubscribed schools in the non-grammar sector. Nonetheless, under the current arrangements grammar schools have both the reputation and capacity to dominate the landscape of secondary transfer by appearing to be the more desirable, higher quality schools. A significant feature of this data is that children's views of the academically selective system are strongly associated with the academic selectivity of the school they currently attend. Furthermore, the data suggests that children will develop and express acceptance of the school type in which they are placed regardless of whether it represents their original preference (Reay & Lucey, 2003).

Children's descriptions suggest that grammar schools are elitist, both in their operation of selective admissions and in the quality of education that they provide. Furthermore, some children's comparisons demonise the non-grammar sector which demonstrates

an undertone of elitism. However, the strengths identified in the non-grammar sector suggest that ‘an elite education for some and low quality education for the rest’ (Hammarberg, 1997, p. 6) may be an oversimplification. Indeed, it is the inequities in access to the different school types, the problematic assessment arrangements and the structural barriers to genuine school choice which represent the main concerns about the quality of education provision in NI. Nonetheless, the disparity in attainment of children who attend grammar and non-grammar schools cannot be ignored, albeit that headline attainment data is an imperfect measure of the quality of education provision.

The acceptability of the current transition arrangements

This research has demonstrated that the current arrangements for transition in NI are strongly associated with differences in experiences according to extrinsic factors such as FSME status, community background and where children live. The structural barriers to equitable access to secondary education are mainly associated with the provision of separate school types: by ability, community background and gender (Elwood, 2013a; Hughes, 2011). School choice policies are known to increase pupil segregation by ability, socio-economic status and ethnic background (Musset, 2012; OECD, 2012). Similarly, academic selection reduces socio-economic and academic inclusion (OECD, 2016b). Nonetheless, the findings of this research show that children perceive the current arrangements for selection at transition to be broadly acceptable (Figure 6.1), although there is evidence of differing levels of preference for proposed alternatives (Figure 6.2).

Children’s accounts of transition show that a key concern is the potential for diverse school choices to lead to the disruption of friendship groupings, both in terms of the initial impact of moving to a new school alone and the longer-term consequences of losing contact with existing friends. Some children explicitly described their concerns as a source of information in making school choice decisions. These concerns are similar to the findings of existing research which identify friendship as a source of both anxiety and excitement at transition (Galton, 2009; McGee, et al., 2003) and suggest that children’s school choices are informed by the possibility of maintaining friendship groupings (Reay & Lucey, 2003; West, et al., 1991). A second issue relates to the impact on children’s friendships during the last few months of primary school,

particularly where one friend had not been placed in the same school as several other children in the friendship grouping who would be moving together. Whilst it seems normal for children to express disappointment that they would not be going to the same school as their classmates from primary school some of the data described an undertone of a hierarchy of admissions. With respondents expressing concern that they would be made fun of or criticised for being placed in a *bad* school. Furthermore, the evidence reflects the potential for children to sort themselves into new friendship groupings according to transition destination during Year 7, which has been identified in existing research (Gallagher & Smith, 2000).

Children's views of the processes of academic selection are underpinned by a belief in admissions decisions based on merit which are ultimately robust and fair. Many respondents describe the legitimacy of selection and transfer tests as a fair mechanism for sorting children to the most suitable schools. This between-school grouping of students, described by Gardner as an 'almost unique system of state-endorsed academic segregation in secondary education' (2016, p. 353), has become institutionalised in the NI context, which lends the practice a degree of legitimacy (Waldow, 2013). Children's descriptions represent academic ability and hard work as a passport to grammar school admission. The perceptions of children are underpinned by a strong meritocratic ideal, whereby an individual's progression through the education system is secured by individual achievement (Hemelsøet, 2012). However, as the evidence discussed earlier shows, comparable test outcomes do not always translate into successful placement in a grammar school (see section 8.2).

8.5 A children's rights based transfer procedure

A first step in taking children's rights seriously is to place importance on children's experiences through engagement with them (Freeman, 2007). From the outset this research intended to consider the children's rights implications of the transfer procedures. This was achieved through a critical examination of transition policy and children's transition experiences. The use of a rights based approach sought to ensure that the engagement with child research participants was meaningful. Following on from the thematic discussion offered in sections 8.1-8.4, this section outlines how the findings of the research could inform the development of a children's rights based transfer procedure. The discussion focuses on how the various inequities at transition,

and their implications for children's enjoyment of their rights, could be addressed by approaching the development of transition arrangements through a children's rights lens.

A rights-based approach to education has been described as an *imperative* (UNICEF, 2007), and multiple rights based approaches have been developed in relation to education, an example being Tomasevski's 4-As scheme (Tomaševski, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 3, this framework, whilst intended to apply to education provision generally, has multiple references to issues which are relevant to educational transitions. For example, 'identification and elimination of discriminatory denials of access' (ibid., p.12). The findings of this research demonstrate multiple concerns relating to the extent to which children's rights are provided for by the current transition arrangements. For example, the absence of a mechanism to meaningfully take account of children's school choice preferences (Art. 12). Therefore, whilst the 4-As have been integral to the development of the study, the intention is to draw on and supplement the work of Tomaševski in addressing the need for a transition-specific rights based analysis.

Rights based approaches have been developed to address specific education issues. For example, a children's rights approach to assessment reform (Elwood & Lundy, 2010), which proposed questions to guide policy makers, test developers and teachers in considering the extent to which assessment policy and practice aligns with children's rights principles, as provided for under the CRC. A similar approach which draws on Elwood and Lundy's (ibid.) analytical tool is adopted here. However, rather than concentrating on key stakeholders the intention is to address the three aspects of transition considered in this research: school choice; assessment arrangements; and admissions procedures. A transfer procedure underpinned by children's rights principles, it is suggested, would take account of CRC provisions with a particular focus on the following areas: education rights (art. 28 and 29) as conceptualised by Tomasevski's (2001) work; three of the cross-cutting 'general principles' (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1991) of Non-discrimination (art. 2), Best Interests (art. 3) and Participation (art. 12); and consideration of the right to parental guidance (art. 5) which underpins adequate provision of all other rights set down in the CRC (Eekelaar, 1992). The resulting analytical tool, which outlines the key areas which should be addressed in any attempt to develop a children's rights based

approach to secondary transfer, is discussed here and detailed in Table 8.2 (p. 276). It is intended as an accessible guide to be used in the evaluation of children's rights compliance in transition arrangements.

The intended audience are predominantly those who have responsibility for education policies associated with transition, usually policy makers within ministries of education. In the NI context, this includes: both legislators and the Department of Education, at the system level; and school Boards of Governors, in their capacity as the statutory admissions authority for each school. It is decisions taken at each of these levels which create the transition policy landscape (Chapter 1). Outside the NI context other organisations, such as a local authority, may hold statutory responsibility for admissions and would therefore be a relevant decision-maker in the development of admissions policies. In addition, due to the significant impact of assessment arrangements on the landscape of transition, the role of test providers must also be acknowledged (*ibid.*). Table 8.2, by providing accessible questions, is intended to open up and guide discussions when decision-makers are undertaking a rights based assessment of transition arrangements. Varying degrees of responsibility for each specific issue lies with one or more actors: the government; schools; or test providers. For example, whether different forms of education have been developed (question 1) is a governmental responsibility, whilst responsibility for the fair and transparent application of criteria in admissions decisions (question 24) lies with schools. For a majority of issues presented in the analytical tool the responsibility is shared, for example, the need to put in place mechanisms to take children's views into account in admissions decisions and administrative proceedings (question 38). Since this would relate to each stage of admissions processes, including making initial applications, requesting consideration under special circumstances procedures and in appeals of test outcomes or final admissions decisions, the responsibility is shared by the government, schools and test providers.

The analytical tool would enable duty bearers, that is the government and its agents, to more easily identify potential breaches in the policies which they have developed. Such breaches, once identified, can be considered and addressed in order to propose and implement improvements to transfer arrangements. Whilst this analytical tool represents a platform for action (Elwood & Lundy, 2010), a significant challenge is achieving the 'buy-in' of duty-bearers (Freeman, 2007). Particularly since the evidence

suggests that the powerful interests of adults dominate political decision making (Hammarberg, 1997). Nonetheless, more recent evidence shows an appetite amongst policy-makers, in multiple contexts, to seek compliance with the CRC in aspects of domestic law, both at statutory and constitutional levels (Lundy, et al., 2013). The most relevant examples are from two of the devolved UK regions: Wales, Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure, 2011; and Scotland, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014. These measures require due regard to be given to the provisions of the CRC in the development and review of new and existing legislation and policy (Lundy, et al., op. cit.). Were a similar measure to be applied in the NI context it would have potentially wide-ranging impact on education policy and provision. The evidence emerging from this research shows that transition policy and practice present multiple risks to children's rights, and children's responses confirm and illustrate the implications of policy level decisions in this area. Therefore, transition and selection policies provide a pertinent example of domestic education policy which would be impacted by a measure which sought CRC compliance. In such a context an analytical tool which facilitated a rights based review of transition arrangements, in addition to serving a practical purpose, would fulfil a clear legal imperative.

State responsibility (Article 6)

This research has identified multiple instances of inequity at transition, and confirms the absence of an adequate state response to address the concerns of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2002; 2008; 2016) in relation to inclusive and equitable access to education. This is despite the responsibility to assure the 'development of the child' (art. 6) lying with the state. Significant insight has been gained into how lapses in policy formation and implementation impact the lived experiences of children and place constraints on their school choices. It is therefore necessary to highlight the state's responsibility to ensure, monitor and report on the degree to which transition complies with CRC obligations. Although article 6 is not featured in Table 8.2 as a discreet area, in terms of how transfer arrangements could be more rights based, it is integral as a cross-cutting principle with relevance to each of the rights which are considered individually. In effect, the inherent 'governmental obligation' (Tomaševski, 2001, p. 8) mandates the state to assure that each dimension of transition is developed and managed in accordance with the CRC.

Table 8.2: A children's rights based approach to secondary transfer

	Article 28 Right to education	Article 29 Goals of Education	Article 2 Non-discrimination	Article 3 Best interests	Article 12 Participation	Article 5 Adult guidance
School choice	1. Have different forms of secondary education been developed? 2. Are general and vocational education available to every child? 3. Are school places available and accessible to children in terms of number and diversity of provision?	7. Is the education provided through each form of secondary education of comparable quality, both in resourcing and outcome? 8. Does each form of education enable the development of the child to their fullest potential? 9. Do the different forms of education each provide (at least) a minimum accepted level of education for every child?	15. Are the different forms of education equally accessible to all children and groups of children? 16. Have barriers to choice been removed? 17. Are there procedures in place to monitor the extent to which school choice is available to all children? 18. Have specific legal measures addressed any potential, or real, inequalities in provision?	25. Are the best interests of children a primary consideration in the provision of different forms of secondary education? 26. Do the processes of school choice operate in line with the best interests of children and to improve the potential for successful transitions? 27. Do the legal and administrative arrangements take adequate countenance of the best interests principle?	33. Are there provisions for children's views to be heard and taken into account in the performance of school choice? 34. Have children been given access to the information necessary to have an informed view?	39. Is information (Art. 14) and adult guidance (Art. 5) about the different forms of education available to every child? 40. Have parents been facilitated to provide effective direction and guidance to children in relation to school choice processes and decisions?
Assessment arrangements	4. Have children been provided opportunities to access the learning required for assessments?	10. Do assessments reflect the goals of education set out in statutory curriculum documents and in line with CRC provisions? 11. Do assessments used in selection contribute to pupils' learning experiences? 12. Are there mechanisms in place to monitor the extent to which this is achieved?	19. Are the assessments equally accessible to all groups? 20. Are suitable monitoring procedures in place to safeguard equal access and fair assessment? 21. Are uses of multiple tests comparable? 22. Do schools use test results in equitable ways?	28. Have the best interests of children been a primary consideration in the development and administration of assessment practices? 29. Are assessments appropriate and fit for the purposes of school placement? 30. Are the assessment arrangements provided and accessed on a fair and transparent basis?	35. Have children's views been sought and considered in the development and reform of assessment arrangements? 36. Has any decision to participate in assessments been freely formed and respected?	41. Are appropriate information and guidance (Art. 14 & 5) about the assessments available to all children, and their parents? 42. Have parents been adequately informed in order that the guidance they offer to children is appropriate?
Admissions procedures	5. Are admissions arrangements transparent and accessible to all groups? 6. Do admissions arrangements safeguard against potential exclusion from the different forms of education?	13. How far do admissions arrangements enable every child to access an education which has the potential to facilitate their development to their fullest potential? 14. To what extent are admissions decisions acceptable in the context of recognizing children as rights-holders?	23. Do admissions arrangements ensure equal and fair access to school places for all groups? 24. Where criteria are applied is this done in a fair and transparent manner which can be understood regardless of status?	31. Are the best interests of children a primary consideration in the development of admissions arrangements? 32. Does the principle of best interests underpin the legislative and administrative arrangements for academic and non-academic selection?	37. Have children's views been considered in developing statutory and non-statutory admissions arrangements? 38. Have mechanisms been put in place to ensure that children's views are taken into account in admissions decisions and administrative proceedings, for example but not limited to, appeals?	43. Are parents equally well-informed about admissions procedures in order that they can effectively facilitate decision making in collaboration with their child? 44. Have parents been facilitated to support children in having their view heard and taken account of in admissions decisions?

The right to education (Article 28)

The findings of this PhD research show that, in addition to evidence of differential access to grammar school places, children perceive there to be a difference in the education provided by grammar and non-grammar schools, particularly in relation to academic rigour and future life chances. Therefore, despite the existence of two school types which embody symbolically different forms of education the current provision shows no evidence that general and vocational pathways have been developed despite the requirement under the CRC (art. 28.1.b). The analytical tool (Table 8.2), in addition to proposing that different forms of education are developed, highlights that these must be made available and accessible to all children (Tomaševski, 2001). This would include the provision of appropriate numbers of places across the different school types (ibid.). The absence of which is identified in this research as a system-level barrier to children's school choices.

The right to education at transition is limited in unacceptable ways by structural and administrative barriers (availability and accessibility) in relation to assessment arrangements and admissions procedures. Differences in children's experiences of test preparation, and the ways in which test outcomes are reported, call into question the appropriateness of academically selective admissions decisions under the current arrangements. Several approaches are identified as having the potential to eliminate school level barriers to access to education. Comparable opportunities to access the learning required for the assessments, a key aspect of achieving equity in assessment practice from a socio-cultural perspective (Moss, et al., 2008b), are necessary to avoid discriminatory denials of access (Tomasevski, 2001). Similarly, information about the assessments must be made available to children and equality of access to the tests themselves assured (Elwood & Lundy, 2010). The needless complexity of school admissions criteria, illustrated by variations in children's understandings of admissions procedures and decisions, and the potential for some of these criteria to differentially disadvantage sub-groups of children in terms of admissions decisions ought to be addressed to improve their accessibility. These procedures must be made transparent and accessible to all groups to safeguard against potential exclusion and to demonstrate admissions to be fair and robust.

The goals of education (Article 29)

Many survey respondents identified grammar schools as offering opportunities for higher academic outcomes. A key goal of education is to ensure that 'no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life' (UN, 2001, para. 9). Transition decisions are high-stakes in NI because in addition to a significant proportion of young people (32.1%) completing compulsory schooling without achieving the 5+ GCSE benchmark, grammar pupils are 19 times more likely than non-grammar counterparts to achieve the benchmark (DENI, 2017b). This demonstrates that provision is not adapted to the needs of the individual child but rather the expectation is that children adapt to the education on offer (Tomaševski, op. cit.). If the intended means of addressing diversity is to place children in schools which have the greatest potential to facilitate their development then both actual and perceived differences in the quality of provision must be addressed.

Children's experiences of choice at transition are shown to be limited by arrangements for assessment and admission, as discussed above. The assessments used for selection are shown to have a significant impact on the curriculum delivered in schools despite being in tension with the statutory curriculum and assessment arrangements (Shewbridge, et al., 2014). Elwood and Lundy (2010) draw attention to the potential for assessment systems to be inconsistent with the aims of article 29 and for this to have wider implications for children's experiences of education. Since current statutory KS2 assessments rely on teacher judgement (CCEA, 2007a) the potential for incorporating this approach in assessment for selection could be explored on the basis that appropriate assessment arrangements have been demonstrated to eliminate social selection effects (Driessen, et al., 2008). For example, the introduction of a system of recommendation in the Netherlands which is based on both standardised tests and teacher judgement has resulted in pupil placements which are genuinely meritocratic (Ibid.). In order to mitigate against both curriculum washback and social selection, assessment at transition should reflect the curriculum which is delivered in schools and contribute to children's learning opportunities. In terms of admissions arrangements, these must facilitate engagements with children which are cognisant of their position as rights holders and enable every child to access a quality education which facilitates the development of their fullest potential.

Non-Discrimination (Article 2)

Although many children's accounts portray a faith in the infallibility and fairness of transition processes this research has shown multiple instances of potential discrimination in relation to the current arrangements for transfer. Of significant concern is the evidence that comparable test outcomes do not necessarily result in successful admission to grammar school places, and that grammar places are differentially available to sub-groups of children. These findings, whilst deeply concerning, are relatively unsurprising since evidence of differential access for sub-groups of children has been extensively explored in existing research, both within NI (Elwood, 2013a; McKeown, 2006), and in other contexts (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Coe, et al., 2008). To assure that choice at transition operates on a non-discriminatory basis barriers must be removed to ensure that school places are made available and accessible to every child.

The assessment system does not operate in compliance with the principle of non-discrimination (art. 2) because access to test preparation, the tests themselves and to grammar places are not equally provided to all children. The current assessment arrangements are shown to reflect pre-existing religious divisions within the education system and to result in differences in admissions decisions for children with comparable test outcomes. In order to address these inequalities the assessments must be made accessible to all children. Furthermore, the outcomes of tests must be used in comparable and transparent ways and procedures be put in place to monitor the extent to which this is done.

School admissions procedures have been shown to have the potential to unfairly impact sub-groups of children. Admissions arrangements which ensure fair and equal access, as discussed in Chapter 3, are essential in achieving Non-discrimination (art. 3). The 4-As scheme did not identify admissions criteria at transition as potentially problematic and these have not been included in more recent indicators (Right To Education, 2013), although both documents address the need for non-discrimination to be safeguarded in university admissions. It is argued here, as it is in Chapter 3, that school-level admissions criteria can result in both active and hidden discrimination and therefore must be assessed for their capacity to ensure fair and equal access for all children. In order for the processes of transition to safeguard against discrimination it

is essential not only that school choice, assessment arrangements and admissions procedures are equally accessible to all groups (Tomaševski, 2001), but also that robust procedures are in place to monitor the extent to which non-discrimination is a reality within the system (United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999).

Best Interests (Article 3)

The powerful position of schools in the processes of school choice was a key finding of this research with data showing transition arrangements seemed to operate in the interests of schools rather than children which confirms evidence from previous research (DENI, 2017d; Elwood, 2013a). Children reported their experiences of school choice as a process of being chosen, rather than choosing. Indeed, there is no evidence that the best interests (art. 3) of children have been a primary consideration in the development or evaluation of current arrangements. This sits in contention with the need for education to be child-centred (art. 29.1) and for educational processes to reinforce respect for children's rights (UN, 2001). The provision of different forms of education and the associated legislative and administrative arrangements in place to manage access to them, should consider the best interests of children as a precursor to meaningful school choice.

A key theme emerging across the data was the uncertainty experienced by children throughout the application process with this magnified for those who sat a transfer test. Children reported that sitting a test improved their possible school choice options, however, the potential for the processes of transition to negatively impact children, in academic, social and emotional terms, as discussed in Chapter 2, are evidenced. For example, due to the high-stakes nature of test-based admissions decisions some children felt that the test was taken at too young an age. Since both assessment arrangements and admissions procedures have the potential to prioritise the interests of schools as discussed above, it is essential that these are conducted in a fair and transparent manner in order to safeguard the best interests of children. Furthermore, these arrangements must be monitored to identify areas with the potential to put children's interests at risk. Were transition to operate in children's best interests the likelihood for children to experience successful transitions would be maximised.

Participation (Article 12)

There is no evidence that the views of children have been taken into account in policy development, as they ought to be were policy decisions made in compliance with the principle of children's participation (art. 12). The voices of children in relation to academic selection have been repeatedly documented in research (Leonard & Davey, 2001; NICCY, 2010). Indeed, the attempted abolition of academic selection in NI appears to be broadly evidence-based, and certainly uses the language of children's rights and social justice (Ruane, 2007). However, as discussed in Chapter 3, adult interests dominate the policy landscape. Therefore, it is necessary that any future policy reform, at school and system levels, would address this gap.

This research has found that whilst most children experience some degree of agency in school choice decisions, that there is no mechanism within the transfer procedures for children's views to be directly taken account of. Therefore, the recommendation that parents take their child's view into account in identifying school preferences (DENI, 2013b, p. 27) positions a child's right to express their view (art. 12.1) as an option rather than a legal imperative (Lundy, 2007). This gap, in addition to violating the principle of participation (art. 12), limits children's right to seek, receive and impart information (art. 13). Since parental decisions, which are currently made on behalf of children, are undermined by the powerful position of schools, as mentioned above, this represents a failure to take account of the views of children, even where these are transmitted on the child's behalf.

In relation to secondary transfer, article 12 should afford children meaningful participation in navigating transfer procedures. Decisions relating to children's own pathway through the transition landscape should assure their right to express a view and for that view to be taken seriously, particularly in final admissions decisions. This would include the provision of information and guidance (art. 5, 28.1.d), in relation to school choice and decisions to participate in assessments. It is children's meaningful participation at this personal level which may be the area of the analytical tool with the greatest potential to enable children to enjoy successful transitions (Evangelou, et al., 2008) and mitigate against the likelihood of children experiencing powerlessness at transition (Reay & Lucey, 2003).

Adult guidance (Article 5)

This research has shown that children experience differential provision of parental guidance (art.5) in school choice decisions and applications for a school place. The most concerning example of this is children who experience extended agency by having responsibility for completing the transfer form with the likelihood being that their parents experience particular difficulties navigating the system. In order to remedy this situation parents themselves must be provided with direction and guidance in order that the information that they impart to children is reliable and enables effective school choice decisions to be made within the family. Several means of doing this are proposed in the literature, including the provision of accessible transfer information to the full range of parents (Hastings & Weinstein, 2008) which has the potential to improve parental capacity to fulfil their duty to provide 'appropriate direction and guidance' (art. 5).

School admissions criteria, in general, are complex and difficult to navigate. However, there is a particular concern about academic admissions because these are not included in the mainstream transition arrangements. Applications to sit a test must be made months ahead of the publication of the transfer booklets which detail admissions criteria, this requires parents to show sufficient capacity to pre-empt school requirements. It is therefore essential that parents are adequately informed about academic admissions in order that their children can access the assessments for selection which in turn offers the potential for them to apply for a grammar school place should they wish to do so.

Children's experiences documented in this research show that parental capacity to challenge schools' decisions to refuse admission can result in successful admission on appeal. This brings to light a broader concern relating to the capacity of parents to advocate on their child's behalf as would be consistent with article 5. In order that children experience appropriate adult guidance in their transition experiences all those acting in a parental capacity must be as fully informed as possible, with information made equally accessible to the full range of parents. More generally parents must be facilitated to support their child in being respected as a rights holder at transition (Tomaševski, 2001) which would include having their views heard and taken into account in admissions decisions.

8.6 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

A key purpose of researcher reflexivity is critical engagement with the process of discovery inherent in conducting original research (Lincoln, et al., 2011). At the outset, it is likely that a researcher anticipates learning a great deal about the topic of the research, and perhaps mastery of unfamiliar methodological approaches, but may ignore the potential for self-discovery (Richardson, 2000).

Despite beginning from a position of valuing the theoretical principles of a participatory approach (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b) it is also important to reflect on my own learning in relation to its practice. One particular aspect of this learning was the extent of the benefits that a meaningful collaboration with children can bring to the research. In the initial stages of the research I experienced doubts about the value of the collaboration with child research advisors and my own capacity to maximise its potential value. However, it became apparent that working with the CRAG improved the potential effectiveness of the research: in terms of identifying and therefore including issues which children perceived to be important; and through the negotiation and mediation of complex information, improving the accessibility of the research instrument for other children. In essence, the contributions of children go beyond their own lived experiences (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b).

I had previously underestimated the extent of the impact that a long period of collaborative work with child research advisors would have on my own research perspectives. Through engaging in this process I came to more fully appreciate that children are experts in their own lives, and that we as adult researchers are outsiders to that experience (Lundy, et al., 2011). For me, the key learning was in relation to the need to advocate for the meaningful participation of children, in research and in decisions about education policy and practice, because they have the ability to provide powerful insights which should be taken seriously in decisions which have such significant impacts on their lived experiences (Barrance & Elwood, 2018b; Elwood, 2013b).

8.7 Limitations and further research

In light of the significant gap in understanding relating to the current arrangements for transfer this research represents a necessary and overdue account of transition in NI. Nonetheless, as with all research, there are limitations which are acknowledged here. There are also several areas for further research which have been identified in the course of this research.

Sampling

To safeguard transparency in this research the limitations of the sampling are discussed in Chapter 4 and relevant sample information is given alongside the data presented in the results chapters (5-7). In regard to the documentary analysis, due the absence of any complete source of secondary data, multiple data sources were compiled to form a database of school population information and admissions criteria. Whilst combining multiple data sources can be problematic the decision to base the analysis on the full population, rather than a sample, produced a robust descriptive data set which offered significant insight into the administrative landscape of transition. Where data is drawn, for example, from media sources this is fully acknowledged and is not thought to detract from the conclusions which are drawn from the analyses.

The survey sample achieved was generally satisfactory and enabled comparative analysis for different year groups and school types. However, there were limitations in terms of the over representation of some sub-groups of the population. Therefore, each analysis was carefully considered in terms of its potential to be influenced by sampling issues and where appropriate, in addition to providing details of the relevant sample, additional information is given relating to sub-groups of respondents. Several strengths of the sampling include: the representation of children from each school type which gave insight into a broad range of children's views; good representation of children of different FSME status which gave the potential for robust analyses using this demographic variable; and a large number of respondents who had experience of the transfer tests made the analyses relating to assessment experiences more robust.

Survey design and administration

Overall the design of the survey and its administration were effective, with no issues reported by schools in terms of functionality. As I visited several schools during the completion of the survey I was able to witness this first-hand. I expect that a key reason why the questions were generally well understood by respondents and the completion rate was high within the individual schools, although there was no mechanism to quantify non-completion, was due to the collaboration with the CRAG in designing and evaluating the questionnaire. Only one question was poorly understood, to the point of being excluded from the analysis. This was disappointing because it gave children an opportunity to reflect on which applicants should be prioritised in admissions decisions and was likely to produce very interesting data. A further gap in the data relates to the absence of data pertaining to children's rationale for choosing or excluding schools in the process of school choice. At the design phase the intention was to access quantitative data pertaining to preferences for schools of different types within an educational landscape characterised by multiple separate school types, however, this aspect of the data would have been greatly enriched with an additional open-response item asking children to explain more about their own choices of school. Nonetheless, the survey has resulted in comprehensive data-set which, in addition to the data presented as part of this thesis, would provide insight into several other aspects of transition. I would be particularly keen to consider data relating to emerging relationships with secondary level schools prior to transition and how these have contributed to children's transition experiences.

Research focus

The decision was taken to concentrate the research on school admissions policies using documentary analysis and accessing and documenting the views and experiences of a broad sample of children in relation to transition using a survey. Therefore, whilst this research offers additional insight into the transition landscape and children's experiences of navigating it, there are numerous other avenues which would enrich this understanding. It is anticipated that in-depth qualitative data would be a useful way to explore the intricacies of school choice decisions, for example, the use of paired child/parent interviews would further explore the issue of 'abstract' and 'real' choices in the context of NI's horizontally and vertically divided education quasi-market. This is an area where additional research is much needed, particularly in a policy

context where system level constraints represent a significant barrier to meaningful school choice.

Further research in the area of school choice may also benefit from analyses which use a more sophisticated measure of socio-economic status. This would give a more complex picture of the differences and similarities in the priority accorded to school characteristics in the decision making process. Similarly, engagement with the full range of stakeholders, particularly in-depth qualitative work with children relating to their conceptualisations of choice and qualities of schools considered in that choice, would allow for a deeper understanding of the processes of school choice and shed light on the multiple barriers which are undoubtedly present in a system underpinned by choice but rife with social division.

Two additional forms of quantitative data would contribute greatly to a more complete understanding of transition. Firstly, in relation to the current assessment arrangements: although the analysis of assessment outcomes throughout this research relies on partial data, several issues relating to equity and fairness have been identified in relation to the use of transfer tests. Therefore, it is clear that a more complete and robust analysis of full test data is required to draw comprehensive conclusions about how test outcomes are arrived at by the organisations providing the tests and the full range of outcomes accepted by schools which consider the test outcomes within their admissions procedures. Secondly, in relation to the provision of school places: this research has provided a comprehensive analysis of the availability of school places, which shows significant variations which demonstrate differential effects for sub-groups of children. In order to gain additional insight into the nuances of choice additional school intake data would be useful in mapping the cross-boundary flows and assessing whether 'local' provision meets demands.

The experiences of transition to secondary education considered by this research are those experienced by children transferring through mainstream transition and does not consider two other aspects of the transition arrangements: firstly, the procedures in place for children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN Statement) whereby placement at a secondary level school may be carried out as part of the

review of a child's statement (EANI, 2016); and secondly, the special circumstances and special provisions aspects of the admissions procedures which make additional accommodations for children whose test performance may be affected by medical or other problems and those who have not completed more than half of their primary education in NI (ibid.). It is anticipated that where these transition routes are used the potential for admissions decisions to vary significantly are increased and this represents another under-researched aspect of transition.

8.8 Conclusion and recommendations

Transition to secondary education in NI takes place within a chaotic policy environment using transfer procedures which lack transparency and have significant consequences for children, parents, and schools. This research addresses these issues by concentrating on the processes, practices and experiences of transition to secondary education. Although both school admissions policies and the use of two assessments for selection have been raised as children's rights concerns neither have been considered using a children's rights based approach. Whilst the approach adopted differs from previous research the findings reflect much existing knowledge around the problematic nature of transition arrangements, particularly in terms of the nature of social stratification in selective systems and the complexity of school admissions criteria.

This thesis represents a contribution to knowledge in relation to the arrangements for transfer in NI and how these arrangements impact on the rights and lives of transition age children. The use of both publicly available data and original research illustrate the complexities of a system which is publicly perceived to be founded on meritocratic principles but is shown to result in differential access to education and experiences of transition. The multiple inequities evidenced in this research illustrate the potential of structural and administrative factors to limit school choice which result in discriminatory denials of access within a two-tier system. However, in addition to socio-economic inequities in children's transition experiences, there is also evidence that inequities exist in relation to school religious character and gender profile. The research underlines the need to take seriously the impact of policy level and school level decisions relating to secondary transition. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that children, in addition to having the right to express their view and to have that view

given due weight under international law, have a valuable contribution to make to the debate around the suitability of the current assessment practices and admissions processes.

The analytical tool for a rights based approach to transfer, presented in section 8.5, is proposed as a means to assess the extent to which transfer arrangements operate in compliance with children's rights principles and therefore would provide a basis for any evaluation of the procedures used to mediate children's transitions to secondary education. However, attention is drawn to several specific issues. Firstly, the rationalisation of the school estate, under initiatives such as area planning, must address the differential provision of school places for different sub-groups of children which has been discussed extensively in this research. This is essential in order to adequately safeguard children's right to have education made available to them on the basis of equality. Secondly, the practice of using two different tests for the purposes of selection have been previously identified as problematic in terms of equity and transparency, and this research goes some way in confirming these patterns, albeit using relatively limited data sources. It is therefore essential that these issues are addressed in any future decisions which will impact the policy and practice of assessment for selection at transition. Thirdly, the admissions arrangements for transition to secondary education in NI are shown through this research to be needlessly complex and uncertain, with the potential for differences in these policies to impact on the choices of individual children and their eventual admission to a secondary school. To some extent these issues have been addressed in other contexts and it is recommended that the Department of Education seek to standardise admissions policies using a statutory admissions code and appropriate structures for monitoring compliance with it.

Despite a policy objective prioritising parental preference, the evidence shows that the system safeguards the interests of schools and limits the potential for children and their parents to be agentive in the processes of choice. The use of a rights based approach and the inclusion of a broad range of children's views and experiences have ensured that children's voices are positioned as a central component of this research. Furthermore, the decision to include the admissions arrangements for grammar and non-grammar schools is significant in ensuring that the research has the potential to

contribute to a broader transition debate which includes both academically and socially selective admissions arrangements. The remedies proposed in this thesis have the potential to improve the extent to which children's entitlement to have their rights safeguarded at transition becomes a reality.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Admissions criteria for pupils transferring to Secondary Education

This table shows a complete list of admissions criteria resulting from the documentary analysis of school admissions policies. The coding mapped to the statutory guidance document (DENI, 2013b) and criteria were coded according to whether the guidance deemed these to be recommended or not, for example, R1 indicates ‘Recommended criterion 1’ and NR1 indicates ‘Not-Recommended criterion 1’. A total of 45 criteria were identified: 14 recommended; 13 not-recommended; and 18 ‘Other’ which had not been considered in the statutory guidelines (DENI, op. cit.). The admissions criteria provided for each secondary school, as detailed in the ‘Transfer 2014’ booklets (BELB; NEELB; SEELB; SELB; WELB, 2014), were annotated using the coding indicated.

Table i. Admissions criteria coding

Code	Label	Explanation	Value
Recommended criteria (R)			
R1	FSME (representative)	The proportion of admissions of FSME children should not be less than the proportion of FSME 1 st Preference applicants	Numerical order
R2	Sibling – current	Applicants who have a sibling currently attending the school	Numerical order
R3	Eldest child	Children who are the eldest / eldest eligible child of the family	Numerical order
R4.01	Feeder Primary	Applicants from feeder / named primary school(s)	Numerical order
R4.02	Prep Dept	Applicants from the Preparatory Department of the school	Numerical order
R4.03	Additional feeder primary schools	Where two separate levels of preference are given to specified groups of feeder primary schools	Numerical order
R5	Named Parish	Applicants residing in a named Parish (with nearest suitable school)	Numerical order
R6	Catchment Area	Applicants residing in a defined catchment area (with nearest suitable school)	Numerical order
R7	Nearest school	Applicants for whom the school is the nearest suitable school	Numerical order

R8.01.A	Age tie-breaker (eldest to youngest)	Prioritises applicants by age (eldest to youngest) established by date of birth as entered on a Birth Certificate	Numerical order
R8.01.B	Age tie-breaker (youngest to eldest)	Prioritises applicants by age (youngest to eldest) established by date of birth as entered on a Birth Certificate	Numerical order
R8.02.A	Alphabet tie-breaker (Random)	Prioritises applicants by where the letters of their name fall in a random order of the letters of the alphabet	Numerical order
R8.02.B	Alphabet tie-breaker (Alphabetical order)	Prioritises applicants by where the letters of their name fall in the order of the letters of the alphabet	Numerical order
R8.03	Random selection tie-breaker	Use a random selection technique, such as computerised random selection, which is capable of leaving a clear audit trail.	Numerical order
Not Recommended criteria (NR)			
NR1	Academic Ability	Criteria related to academic ability – academic selection based on the use of an unregulated transfer test	Y/N
NR1.a	Specify	Specify which test(s) are being used	AQE/PPTC
NR1.01	Rank order of score	Where the scores are put in order from highest to lowest and applicants are admitted in that order	Numerical order
NR1.02	Proportion in rank order of score (specify)	Where the scores are put in order from highest to lowest and a proportion of applicants are admitted in that order	Numerical order
NR1.02.a	Specify proportion (%)	Specify the proportion of Y8 intake admitted by rank order of score	Percentage
NR1.03	Rank order in bands	Where the scores are put in bands and applicants are admitted by band	Numerical order
NR1.04	Proportion in rank order in bands (specify)	Where the scores are put in bands and a proportion of applicants are admitted by band	Numerical order
NR1.04.a	Specify proportion (%)	Specify the proportion of Y8 intake admitted by band	Percentage
NR1.05	Grade order	Where applicants are grouped in grade bands and admitted by grade	Numerical order

NR1.06	Use of a pool	Where a proportion of the intake has been admitted the remaining places are allocated from a pool	Numerical order
NR1.06.a	Specify size of pool	Specifies the percentage of applicants which makes up the pool	Percentage
NR1.06.b	Admitted from pool	Specifies the percentage of applicants which are admitted from the pool	Percentage
NR2.01	Sibling alumni	Where a sibling has previously attended the school	Numerical order
NR2.02	Sibling attending/ attended linked school	Where a sibling is currently attending or has previously attended a linked establishment	Numerical order
NR2.03	Parent alumni	Where a parent has previously attended the school	Numerical order
NR2.04	Other familial criteria	All familial criteria beyond those identified in other categories e.g. cousin / grandparent attended the school	Numerical order
NR3	Distance tie breaker	Where admissions are based on the distance from the school of an applicant's household	Numerical order
NR4	Children of staff/governors	Where priority is given to the children of teaching, non-teaching or ancillary staff, church leaders or the governors of the school	Numerical order
NR5	Preference criteria	Where the level of preference for the school as indicated on the transfer application is used as a criterion	Numerical order
Other criteria (O)			
O1	FSME (not representative)	Children with FSME are given preference but not to ensure equal proportions of applications and admissions	Numerical order
O2	Highest score/ grade tie-breaker	Where the transfer test score or grade is used as a tie-breaker	Numerical order
O3	Boarder preference	Where boarders are given preference over other candidates	Numerical order
O4	Sat test	Where those applicants who sat test(s) are considered	Numerical order
O5	Did not sit test	Where those applicants who have not sat a transfer test are considered	Numerical order

O6	SEN	Where applicants with special needs, medical or other compassionate circumstances are given preference	Numerical order
O7	Church affiliation	Where members of / those with a specified affiliation with a named church / church type are given preference	Numerical order
O8	Preferred P.S. category	Where children attending a particular type of primary school are admitted: e.g. a controlled, an integrated or a maintained school	Numerical order
O9	Outside preferred P.S. category	Where children attending a primary school outside the preferred category are admitted	Numerical order
O10	Defined catchment area	From a primary school or residential area defined by the school as a catchment area with no suitable school criterion attached	Numerical order
O11	Outside defined catchment area	From outside a primary school or residential area defined by the school as a catchment area with no suitable school criterion attached	Numerical order
O12	First child to transfer to Grammar School	Where the applicant is the first child of the family to transfer to a grammar school	Numerical order
O13	Sibling unsuccessful applicant	Where the applicant is the sibling of a pupil who was the eldest child, achieved a grade A but was not admitted to the school	Numerical order
O14	Normal transfer age	Where the applicant is the normal age for transfer to secondary school	Numerical order
O15	Shortest name tie-breaker	A tie-breaker where the applicant with the shortest name is given preference	Numerical order
O16	Hat tie-breaker	A tie-breaker where applicant names are drawn from a hat	Numerical order
O17	By lot tie-breaker	A tie-breaker where applicant names are chosen by lot	Numerical order
O18	All other applicants	All applicants not considered for admission in a previous grouping of students according to other criteria	
Additional Notes (AN)			
AN1	Simultaneous criteria	Some criteria are applied simultaneously	Y/N

AN2	Criteria 2 final place tie-breaker	Secondary criteria are applied to distinguish between candidates for the final place	Y/N
AN3	Criteria 2 within band tie-breaker	The secondary criteria are applied to distinguish between candidates within a band / grade	Y/N
AN4	Preference to NI residents	Preference is given to applicants resident in Northern Ireland	Y/N
AN5	Comments	Additional comments required may be entered here	Free text

Appendix 2: Breakdown of Year 8 survey respondents' outcomes for GL and AQE tests

Table ii. GL Grades of Year 8 pupils by FSME Status

	FSME		Non-FSME	
GLGRAD	#	%	#	%
D (138-212)	13	12	18	6
C2 (213-218)	8	8	18	6
C1 (219-223)	14	13	24	8
B2 (224-228)	9	9	34	11
B1 (229-233)	19	18	35	12
A (234-282)	42	40	168	57
Total	105		297	

Table iii. AQE Scores of Year 8 pupils by FSME Status

	FSME		Non-FSME	
AQE Score	#	%	#	%
55-87	5	13	16	7
88-97	10	26	55	23
98-105	7	18	62	26
106-112	13	33	57	24
113-145	4	10	51	21
	39		241	

Appendix 3: Survey Sampling Strategy: Stratified random sampling

The most up to date school enrolment data for post-primary and primary schools (DENI, 2015c) was used to calculate the number of each type of school required to create a broadly representative sample of schools. An Excel spreadsheet was created which held reference information and details of the pupil population of every post-primary and primary school¹. Exclusion criteria were developed in order to limit the list to schools suitable for inclusion². School categories which did not contain more than 5 schools were excluded due to the potential for identification of these establishments in the resulting data³. A total of 14 post-primary schools and 244 primary schools were eliminated from the sample of suitable schools at this stage. At post-primary level Controlled Integrated and Grant Maintained Integrated were combined into one category called 'Integrated Schools' ensuring that the 4 Controlled Integrated Schools remaining in the sample would not be identifiable within the resulting data. The 'Integrated Schools' category was also applied at primary level for the purposes of consistency. The resulting lists, of 194 Post-primary schools and 592 Primary schools, provided the basis for the stratified random sample.

In previous years the school level data published by DENI distinguished between voluntary grammar schools under Roman Catholic Management (RC Managed) or voluntary grammar schools under Other Management (Other Managed) (e.g. DENI, 2014b). However, the most recent data (DENI, 2015a; 2015b) made no distinction between the management types of Voluntary grammar schools. For the purposes of effective sampling, treating the two categories as separate was important, and the management types of voluntary grammar schools were manually added to the 2014/15 post-primary school data file prior to stratification. The samples were based on stratifications as described in table iv.

¹ [DENI Reference number; School name; School Postcode; School type; School management type; Number of pupils in relevant year groups (Years 6, 7 and 8); Total number of pupils; Percentage of FSME pupils; Percentage of boys and girls within total number of pupils; Percentage of pupils within each community (Catholic, Protestant, Other or no religion); and Percentage of newcomer pupils].

² Primary schools with no children in the upper school (Primary 5, 6 and 7) (total 6), fewer than 10 children in Primary 7 (total 162), Primary 6 (additional 46) or Primary 5 (additional 30).

Post-primary schools with no Year 8 intake: Senior High Schools (total 4); and schools in the process of a phased closure where no Year 8 intake was approved for the 2013/14 academic year (total 3).

³ Junior High (pupils aged 11-14) (total 4), Non-Selective Grammar (total 2), and 'Other' maintained (total 1) schools were excluded from the post-primary sample.

Due to the nature of the project, which in part investigates the impact of transfer testing, and particularly the use of two unregulated transfer tests the number of grammar schools was increased meaning that these schools would be overrepresented in the sample.

Schools were sorted into the strata as outlined above and within the strata using postcode and DENI Reference number. Each school was then allocated a number (in numerical order). Catholic Maintained Primary schools were numbered 1-268, Controlled primary schools 269-538, the composite category 'Integrated' primary schools 539-573, Other Maintained 574-582 and Voluntary Preparatory Departments 583-592. The same process was carried out for the post-primary list.

To select the schools which would be contacted by letter an online random number generator was used to generate a sequence of integers within the range for each school category. The lists were then saved and this provided a master list which set out the order in which schools within each strata would be contacted, from the first schools to the final schools. The sample schools were contacted by letter in April and May giving information about the study and requesting permission to involve transition age children in the online survey during May and June 2016. Letters were followed up by telephone calls to schools where no opt-out was received following contact by letter. Where schools did not wish to participate in the research they were eliminated from the sample and the next schools on the list were contacted. As schools were recruited the required number of schools was achieved.

Where a school had amalgamated or merged since the publication of the data (i.e. between June 2015 and September 2015), and the school was selected using the sampling method described, the introductory letter was sent to the newly formed school.

Table iv. Number of each school type within strata

Primary school category		Number of schools	Category as percentage of schools in phase	Number of schools required for sample
Catholic Maintained		381	46%	5
Controlled		373	45%	5
Controlled Integrated		19	2%	1
Grant Maintained Integrated		23	3%	
Other Maintained		29	3%	1
Voluntary (Prep Dept)		11	1%	-
Total Primary schools		836		12
Secondary school category	Grammar/ Non-Grammar			
Catholic Maintained	NG	68	33%	3
Controlled	NG	51	25%	3
Controlled	G	18	9%	1
Controlled Integrated	NG	5	2%	1
Grant Maintained Integrated	NG ⁴	15	7%	
Other Maintained	NG	1	0%	-
Voluntary (Catholic Managed)	G	29	14%	3
Voluntary (Other Management)	G	21	10%	2
Total secondary schools		208		13

⁴ Two Grant Maintained Integrated Schools use unregulated transfer tests to admit a proportion of their pupil intake

Appendix 4: Sample achieved

Table v. Overall sample achieved by Gender and Year Group

Year Group	Survey Respondents			Population			Respondents as percentage of population (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
YR6	92	106	198	11556	11161	22717	0.80	0.95	0.87
YR7	103	84	187	11494	11100	22594	0.90	0.76	0.83
YR8	392	548	940	11020	11179	22199	3.56	4.90	4.23
Total	587	738	1325						

N.B. Two respondents did not indicate their gender as Male or Female, therefore the total number of respondents is 1327

Table vi. Number of Year 8 respondents by Gender and School Type (Grammar/Non-Grammar)

School Type	Survey Respondents			Population			Survey Respondents as percentage of population		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Grammar	248	395	643	4440	4524	8964	5.59%	8.73%	7.17%
Non-Grammar	144	153	297	6583	6652	13235	2.19%	2.30%	2.24%

Table vii. Number of respondents by FSME & Year Group

Year Group	Survey Respondents		Population		Survey Respondents as percentage of population	
	FSME	Non-FSME	FSME	Non-FSME	FSME	Non-FSME
YR6	60	125	7163	15554	0.84%	0.80%
YR7	67	108	7124	15470	0.94%	0.70%
YR8	248	652	6198	16001	4.00%	4.07%

Table viii. Number of respondents by Religious Identity & Year Group

Year Group	Survey Respondents			Population			Survey Respondents as percentage of population		
	Cath	Prot	Other	Cath	Prot	Other	Cath	Prot	Other
YR6	52	96	42	10102	9025	3589	0.51%	1.06%	1.17%
YR7	93	55	32	10048	8977	3570	0.93%	0.61%	0.90%
YR8	510	232	177	11319	8538	2342	5.97%	2.72%	7.56%

Table ix. Number of respondents by School Religious Character & Year Group

Year Group	Survey Respondents			Population			Survey Respondents as percentage of population		
	Cath	Prot	Other	Cath	Prot	Other	Cath	Prot	Other
YR6	39	132	27	10507	10649	1247	0.37%	1.24%	2.17%
YR7	90	79	18	10180	10796	1272	0.88%	0.73%	1.42%
YR8	497	371	74	10171	9830	2080	4.89%	3.77%	3.56%

Appendix 5: School pseudonyms

Table x. School pseudonyms – Survey participants

	School pseudonym	Gender Profile	FSME Status		# Respondents	
<i>Catholic Non-Grammar</i>			FSME	Non-FSME	Male	Female
1	Drumragh High School	Co-ed	41.7	58.3	12	14
2	Quoile High School	Co-ed	38.5	61.5	9	17
3	Moyola High School	Co-ed	60.0	40.0	8	7
4	Annacloy High School	Co-ed	31.6	68.4	12	8
5	Callan High School	All-girls	40.5	59.5		43
Sector total					41	89
Sector Average Proportion			41.3	58.7	31.5	68.5
<i>Protestant Non-Grammar</i>						
6	Termon High School	All-boys	47.4	52.6	39	
7	Finn High School	Co-ed	66.7	33.3	12	6
8	Colebrooke High School	Co-ed	33.3	66.7	16	20
Sector total					67	26
Sector Average Proportion			45.3	54.7	72.0	28.0
<i>Integrated Non-Grammar</i>						
9	Sillees Integrated College	Co-ed	30.0	70.0	36	38
Sector total						
Sector Average Proportion			30.0	70.0	48.6	51.4
<i>Catholic Grammar</i>						
10	Dun Grammar	Co-ed	15.0	85.0	7	13
11	Cladagh Grammar	All-girls	16.0	84.0		109
12	Glenelly Grammar	All-girls	23.0	77.0		82
13	Owenbreen Grammar	All-boys	40.5	59.5	154	
Sector total					161	204
Sector Average Proportion			27.9	72.1	44.1	55.9

<i>Protestant Grammar</i>						
14	Arney Grammar	Co-ed	8.5	91.5	34	72
15	Faughan Grammar	All-girls	18.4	81.6	1	119
16	Torrent Grammar	All-boys	18.0	82.0	52	
Sector total					87	191
Sector Average Proportion			14.4	85.6	31.3	68.7
<i>Catholic Primary</i>						
17	Glenshesk Primary		82.6	17.4	16	8
18	Roe Primary		73.0	27.0	17	23
19	Camowen Primary		28.3	71.7	34	31
Sector total					67	62
Sector Average Proportion			52.5	47.5	51.9	48.1
<i>Protestant Primary</i>						
20	Derg Primary		52.8	47.2	30	27
21	Glen Primary		16.7	83.3	11	7
22	Cusher Primary		46.7	53.3	14	18
23	Roogagh Primary		15.6	84.4	57	47
Sector total					112	99
Sector Average Proportion			30.5	69.5	53.1	46.9
<i>Integrated Primary</i>						
24	Castletown Integrated Primary		9.3	90.7	16	29
Sector total					16	29
Sector Average Proportion			9.3	90.7	35.6	64.4

Table xi. School pseudonyms - admissions policy sample

		Religious character	Gr/NG	Gender Profile
1	Bush Grammar	Protestant	Grammar	Co-ed
2	Kells Grammar	Protestant	Grammar	Co-Ed
3	Tall High	Protestant	Non-Grammar	All-boys
4	Six Mile Grammar	Catholic	Grammar	All-girls
5	Mourne High	Catholic	Non-Grammar	All-girls
6	Swanlinbar High	Catholic	Non-Grammar	Co-ed

Appendix 6: Children's pseudonyms

Table xii Survey respondent pseudonyms – qualitative data excerpts

	Name	School	Year group	Religious Identity	Sex	FSME Status
1	Eimear	Annacloy High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
2	Jacob	Annacloy High	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
3	Morgan	Annacloy High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
4	Adam	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	M	FSME
5	Alexandra	Arney Grammar	8	Mixed	F	Non-FSME
6	Anna	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
7	Brooke	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
8	Carol	Arney Grammar	8	No religion	F	FSME
9	David	Arney Grammar	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
10	Jill	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
11	Karolina	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
12	Maggie	Arney Grammar	8	Mixed	F	Non-FSME
13	Oliver	Arney Grammar	8	No religion	M	Non-FSME
14	Peter	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
15	Ruth	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
16	Tammy	Arney Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
17	Alison	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
18	Clara	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
19	Clodagh	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
20	Colette	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
21	Emily	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
22	Faith	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Not given
23	Gemma	Callan High	8	Protestant	F	FSME
24	Georgia	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
25	Hannah	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
26	Isla	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
27	Kate	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
28	Jay	Callan High	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
29	Abigail	Callan High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
30	Finton	Camowen Primary	6	Catholic	M	FSME
31	Gary	Camowen Primary	6	Catholic	M	FSME
32	Jasmine	Camowen Primary	7	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
33	Zara	Camowen Primary	7	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
34	John	Camowen Primary	7	Catholic	M	FSME
35	Geraldine	Castletown Int. P.S.	7	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
36	Summer	Castletown Int. P.S.	6	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
37	Hayley	Castletown Int. P.S.	6	Not given	F	Non-FSME
38	Aisling	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
39	Alisha	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
40	Ellie	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
41	Francesca	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
42	Grace	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME


43	Julia	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
44	Katrina	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	FSME
45	Maeve	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
46	Mairead	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
47	Orla	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	FSME
48	Sarah-Jane	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
49	Sophie	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
50	Susan	Cladagh Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
51	Lydia	Colebrooke High	8	Mixed	F	FSME
52	Abbi	Cusher Primary	7	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
53	Caoimhe	Cusher Primary	7	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
54	Alice	Drumragh High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
55	Ava	Drumragh High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
56	Beth	Dun Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
57	Alana	Faughan Grammar	8	Not given	F	Non-FSME
58	Charlotte	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
59	Elizabeth	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
60	Emma	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	FSME
61	Heather	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
62	Holly	Faughan Grammar	8	No religion	F	Non-FSME
63	Isabel	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
64	Jessica	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
65	Katy-Ann	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
66	Kerry	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
67	Lucy	Faughan Grammar	8	No religion	F	Non-FSME
68	Michelle	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
69	Poppy	Faughan Grammar	8	Other	F	Non-FSME
70	Suzanne	Faughan Grammar	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
71	Katelyn	Finn High	8	Protestant	F	FSME
72	Ciara	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	FSME
73	Jane	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	FSME
74	Karen	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
75	Maura	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
76	Natasha	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	FSME
77	Patricia	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
78	Rebecca	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
79	Saoirse	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
80	Sarah	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
81	Tanya	Glenelly Grammar	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
82	Cameron	Glenshesk Primary	7	Catholic	M	FSME
83	Dominic	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
84	Barry	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
85	Caolan	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
86	Craig	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
87	Eamonn	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
88	Eoghan	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
89	Gareth	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME

90	Joshua	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
91	Kieran	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Not given
92	Oisin	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
93	Oran	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
94	Patrick	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
95	Shaun	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
96	Stephen	Owenbream Gr	8	Catholic	M	FSME
97	Andrew	Quoile High	8	Catholic	M	FSME
98	Claire	Quoile High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
99	Corinne	Quoile High	8	Catholic	F	FSME
100	Lena	Quoile High	8	Mixed	F	Non-FSME
101	Erin	Quoile High	8	Other	F	FSME
102	Harriet	Quoile High	8	No religion	F	Non-FSME
103	Mark	Quoile High	8	Mixed	M	Non-FSME
104	Matthew	Quoile High	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
105	Stacey	Quoile High	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
106	Dylan	Roe Primary	7	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
107	Gavin	Roe Primary	7	Catholic	F	FSME
108	Katherine	Roe Primary	7	Catholic	F	FSME
109	Megan	Roe Primary	7	Catholic	F	FSME
110	Mia	Roe Primary	7	Catholic	F	FSME
111	Paul	Roe Primary	7	Catholic	M	FSME
112	Ethan	Roogagh Primary	7	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
113	John-Curtis	Roogagh Primary	7	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
114	Kathy-Ann	Roogagh Primary	7	Mixed	F	Non-FSME
115	Kim	Roogagh Primary		Protestant	F	Non-FSME
116	Lewis	Roogagh Primary	6	No religion	F	Non-FSME
117	Liam	Roogagh Primary	7	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
118	Therese	Roogagh Primary		No religion	F	Non-FSME
119	Ben	Sillees Integrated	8	Catholic	M	FSME
120	Caroline	Sillees Integrated	8	Mixed	F	Non-FSME
121	Henry	Sillees Integrated	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
122	James	Sillees Integrated	8	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
123	Joanne	Sillees Integrated	8	Catholic	F	FSME
124	Jonathan	Sillees Integrated	8	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
125	Louise	Sillees Integrated	8	Catholic	F	FSME
126	Nicole	Sillees Integrated	8	Catholic	F	Non-FSME
127	Shannon	Sillees Integrated	8	Catholic	F	FSME
128	Sinead	Sillees Integrated	8	Protestant	F	Non-FSME
129	Taylor	Sillees Integrated	8	Protestant	F	FSME
130	Anthony	Termon High	8	Catholic	M	FSME
131	Jack	Termon High	8	No religion	M	Non-FSME
132	Curtis	Torrent Grammar	8	Catholic	M	Non-FSME
133	Jake	Torrent Grammar	8	No religion	M	Non-FSME
134	Kevin	Torrent Grammar	8	Protestant	M	Non-FSME
135	Marcus	Torrent Grammar	8	No religion	M	FSME

Appendix 7: CRAG Material examples

Figure i. A Children's Rights Based Approach

Children's Research Advisory Group



What is a Children's Rights Based Approach (CRBA*)?

The UNCRC is a list of 49 promises that governments all over the world have made to children



Article 12
Children have a right to participate in decisions about their lives

Every child has the right to **express a view** and to have it listened to

All children should be **treated equally**

Every child has the right to **information and guidance** from adults

Every child should be **safe**

Decisions about children should consider what is **best for all children**

Let's think about what this means for our group meetings...

How should we behave towards each other?

What if we don't agree?


What does Leanne need to do?

Should we talk to other people outside the group about what people said?


★ Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. British Educational Research Journal, 33: 927-942.

Figure ii. A Transfer Timeline

A Transfer Timeline



- Write the key events in the transfer journey on post-it notes. Stick these where you think they go on the timeline. Don't worry we can move them around when we talk about it.



- Let's talk about whether these events might be positive, negative or somewhere in between. Think about what children might feel in general: Put a smiley face, a confused face or sad face on each event if you think that MOST children feel that way about the event.

- Let's think about who is affected by these events. Is it children, families or schools? We can move the events to where they fit best.

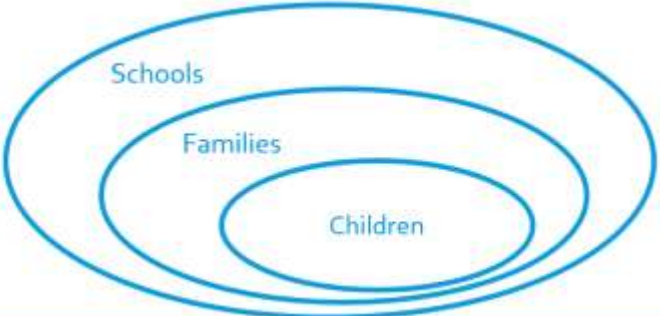


Figure iii. Review of Transfer Timeline

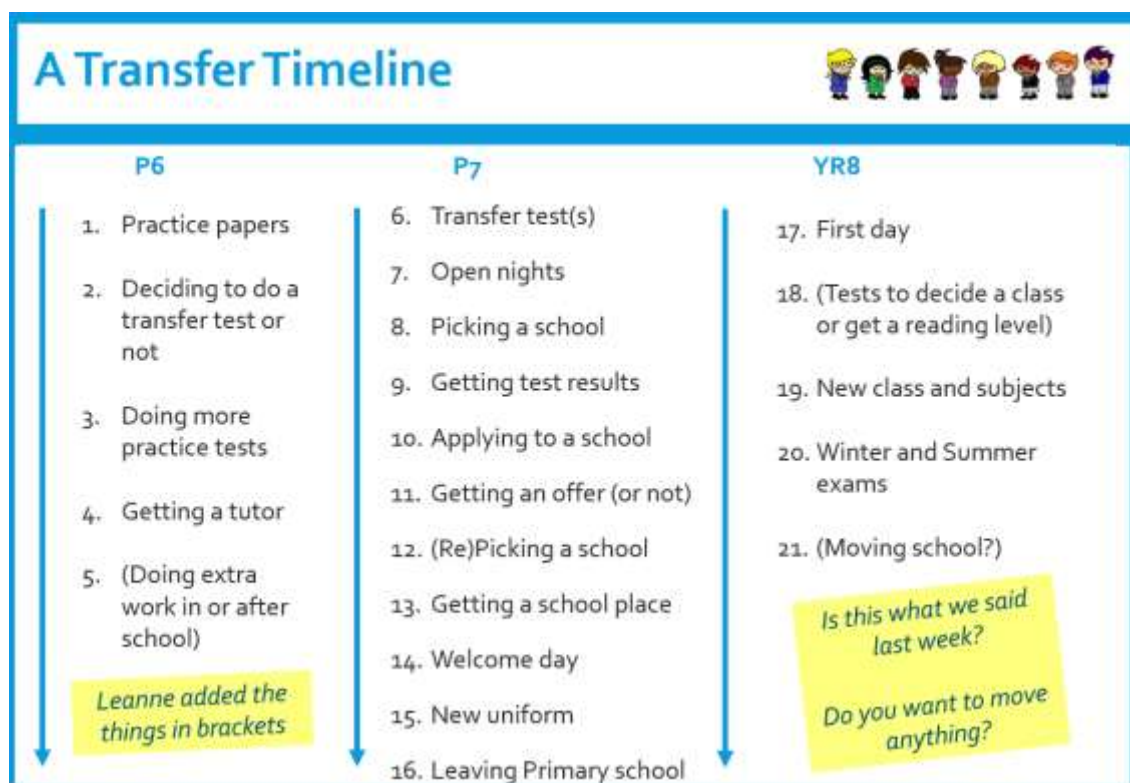


Figure iv. Designing a survey

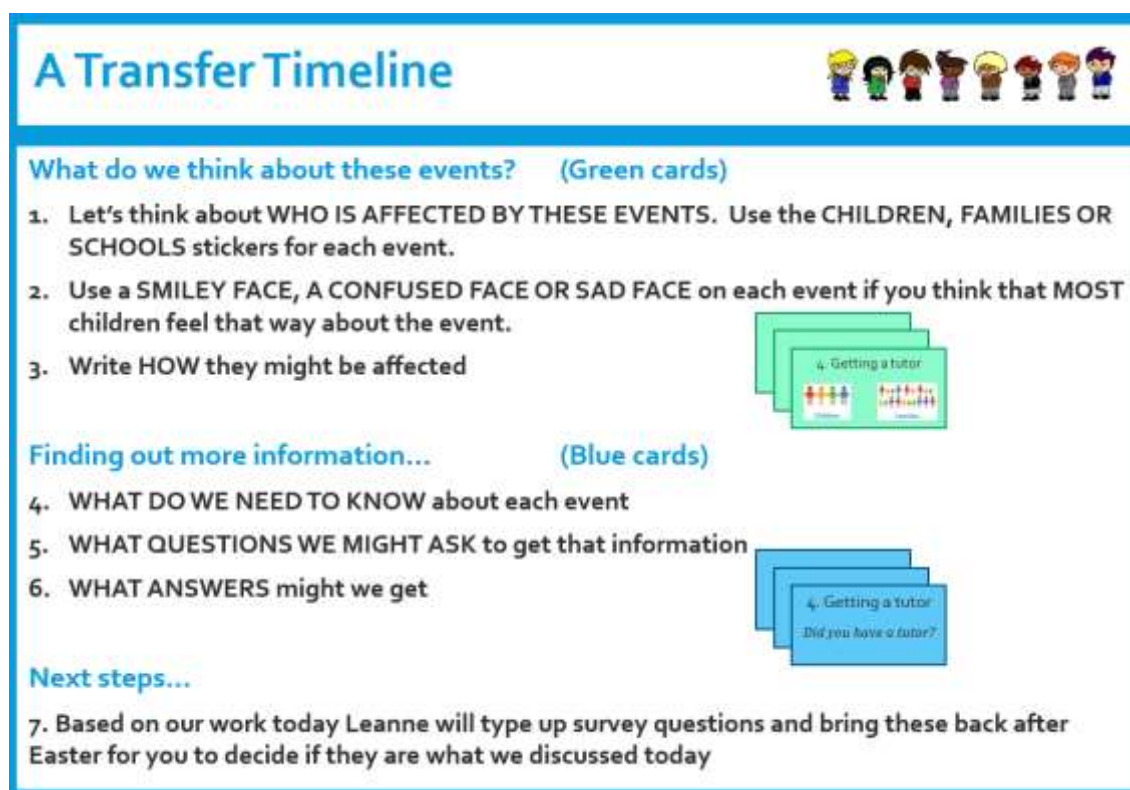



Figure v. Piloting the Survey

Children's experiences of moving on from primary school				
<p>This survey is for P6, P7 and YR8 children. YR8 pupils in your school helped to design it.</p> <p>More than 600 children in primary and post-primary schools are going to fill in the survey.</p> <p>What am I asking you to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete the online survey today https://response.questback.com/leannehenderson/LVS <p>Why am I asking you to do this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I need to check that the survey works and that other children will understand the questions <p>Your ideas will help me</p> <table border="1"><tr><td>Tell me if the survey works well and if children will be able to fill it in</td></tr><tr><td>Tell me if any of the words or questions are hard to understand</td></tr><tr><td>Are there any questions that I should ask children but haven't?</td></tr></table>		Tell me if the survey works well and if children will be able to fill it in	Tell me if any of the words or questions are hard to understand	Are there any questions that I should ask children but haven't?
Tell me if the survey works well and if children will be able to fill it in				
Tell me if any of the words or questions are hard to understand				
Are there any questions that I should ask children but haven't?				

Thank you for checking the survey.
We will use your comments to make it better.

Figure vi. Post-survey planning

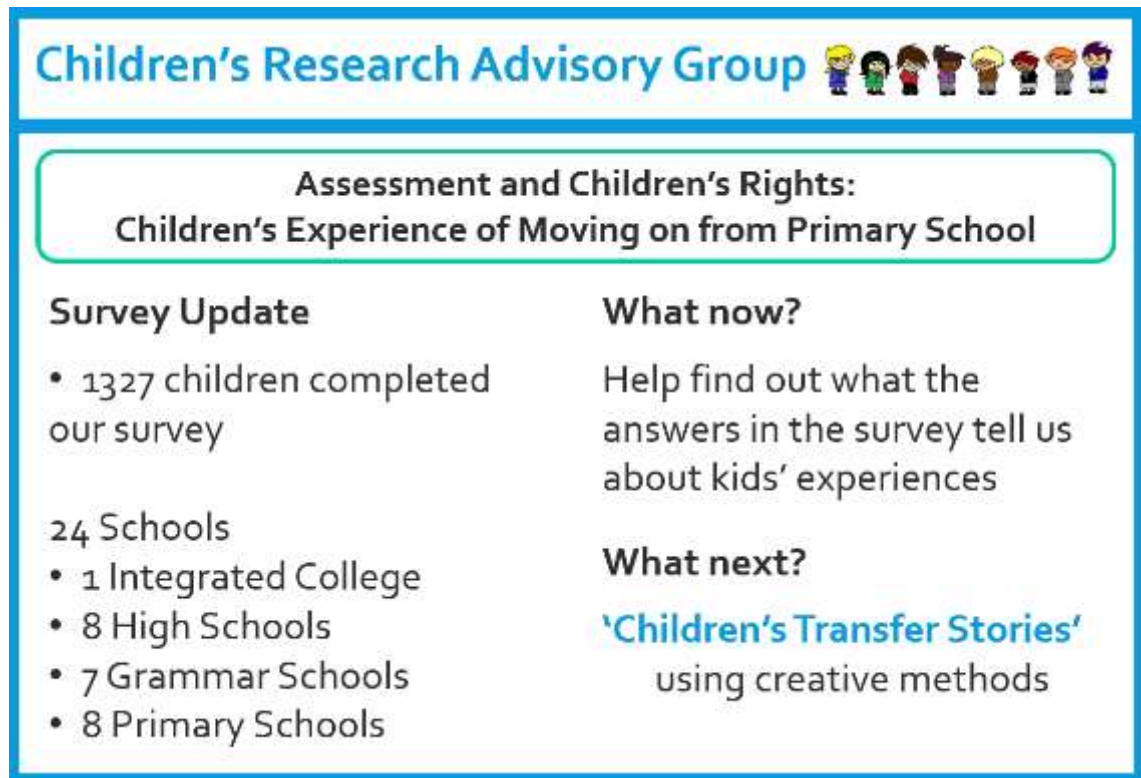
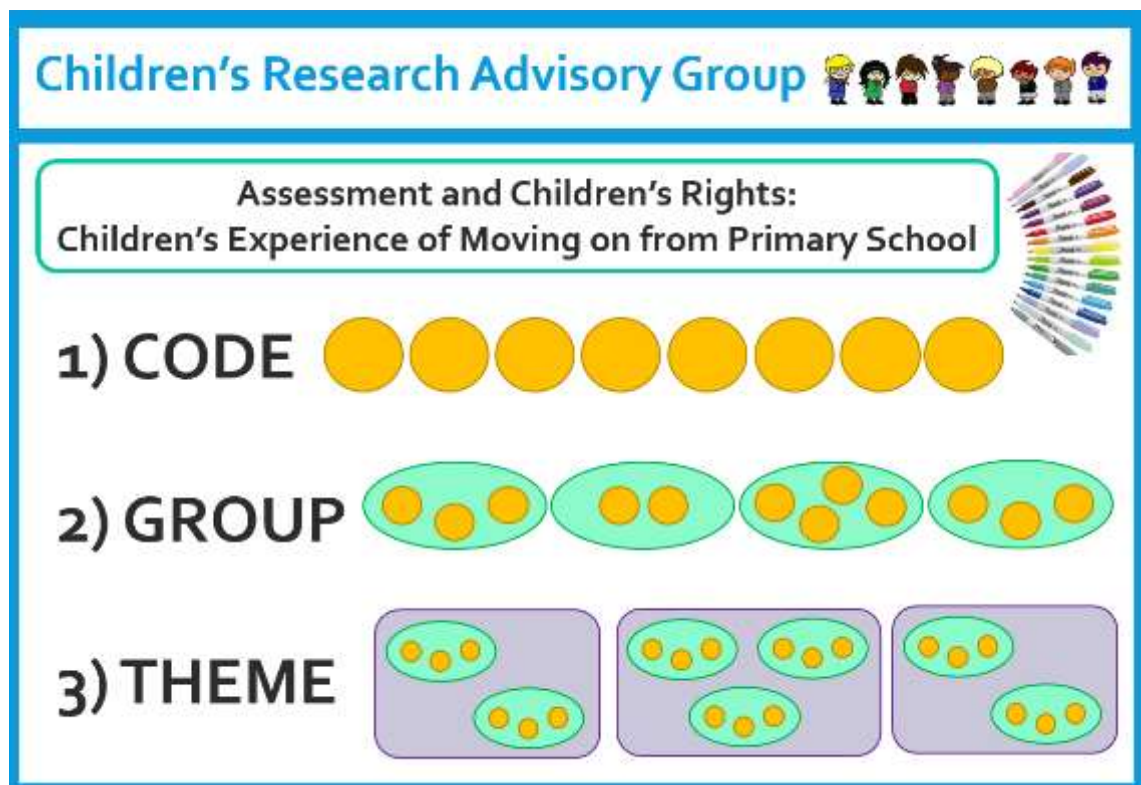


Figure vii. Coding procedure



Appendix 8: Online survey

**Children's experiences
of moving on from
primary school**



Online Survey for Children in Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8

Hello, my name is Leanne. I want to find out about your experience of moving from primary school to your next school.



Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey which has been designed with help from other children.

All of your information will be kept private.

1) Select 'start' and then click next to begin the survey.

☐ Start

About you

This section asks for information about you. It will help me to understand your answers to other questions in the survey.

Remember that your information will be kept private and only the adults doing the research will see it.

2) What is your name? (Give your second name too. For example, Ashley Johnston)

3) Are you a boy or a girl?

- ☐ Boy
- ☐ Girl

4) Which year group are you in?

- ☐ Primary 6
- ☐ Primary 7
- ☐ Year 8

5) In what year were you born?

- ☐ 2003
- ☐ 2004
- ☐ 2005
- ☐ 2006
- ☐ 2007

6) In what month were you born?

- ☐ January
- ☐ February
- ☐ March
- ☐ April
- ☐ May
- ☐ June
- ☐ July
- ☐ August
- ☐ September
- ☐ October
- ☐ November
- ☐ December

7) Do you get free school meals?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Don't want to say

8) Do you have a disability or Special Educational Need? (For example, a hearing difficulty or learning difficulty)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

9) What is your disability or Special Educational Need? Do you get any extra help in school because of it?

10) Which school do you go to? Give the school name and town.

11) Where do you live? Give the name of your street and town.

12) How do you travel to school? (On a normal school day)

- ☐ Walk
- ☐ Bicycle
- ☐ Car
- ☐ Taxi
- ☐ Bus
- ☐ Train
- ☐ Other (give an example)

13) How long does it take you to get to school? (On a normal school day)

- ☐ Less than 15 minutes
- ☐ Between 16 and 30 minutes
- ☐ Between 31 and 45 minutes
- ☐ Between 46 and 60 minutes
- ☐ More than one hour

Background

In Northern Ireland there are people from different religions, backgrounds and countries.

These questions ask how you describe yourself.

14) How would you describe your religion or community background?

- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Protestant
- ☐ Mixed background (Catholic and Protestant)
- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Other religion (for example, Muslim, Jewish)

15) How would you describe your ethnic or cultural background?

- ☐ White - British
- ☐ White - Irish
- ☐ White - Northern Irish
- ☐ White - Lithuanian
- ☐ White - Polish
- ☐ White - Portuguese
- ☐ White - Slovakian
- ☐ White - Other
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Black- Caribbean
- ☐ Black - African
- ☐ Black - Other
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Irish Traveller
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Asian - Other
- ☐ Romanian Roma
- ☐ Mixed Race
- ☐ Other (Tell me what)

Your opinions

**All of the questions in the survey are asking what you think.
It is not a test and there are no right answers.**

**If you don't understand a question or don't want to answer it
please leave it blank and click 'NEXT'**

This section asks about your experience of school

16) What is your favourite subject at school? For example, Science, History or Art.

17) Is there a subject you don't like at school? For example, Science, History or Art.

18) Are you looking forward to P7?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

19) Tell me why.

20) In P6 how often did you do the same work as the other children in your class?

- ☐ Almost all of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ About half of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Almost never

21) What was different about the work you did?

22) Was P7 a good year for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

23) Tell me why.

24) In P7 how often did you do the same work as the other children in your class?

- ☐ Almost all of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ About half of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Almost never

25) What was different about the work you did?

School system

These questions ask your opinions about the school system and types of schools.

26) After primary school children either go to: Grammar schools; or All-Ability Secondary schools. In your opinion are Grammar schools or Secondary schools better?

- ☐ Grammar
- ☐ Secondary (All-Ability schools)
- ☐ Both the same
- ☐ Don't know

27) What makes grammar schools better?

28) What makes All-Ability Secondary schools better?

29) What makes Grammar and All-Ability Secondary schools the same?

Transfer Tests

These questions ask about your opinions and experiences of transfer tests

30) Why do you think we have transfer tests?

31) We have two different transfer tests: the AQE test and the GL test. Before 2010 there was only one test. How fair do you think it is to have two different tests?

- ☐ I think it's fair
- ☐ I think it's neither fair nor unfair
- ☐ I think it isn't fair
- ☐ Not sure

32) What do you think should happen to the transfer tests?

- ☐ Keep two transfer tests
- ☐ Have one transfer test
- ☐ Don't have any transfer tests
- ☐ Use other primary school tests instead
- ☐ Use teacher assessments from primary school
- ☐ Not sure

33) Have you done any practice papers for the transfer tests?

- ☐ Yes, AQE papers
- ☐ Yes, (multiple choice) GL papers
- ☐ Yes, AQE and GL papers
- ☐ Yes, but not sure if they were AQE or GL
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

34) Where did you do the practice papers? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ At home
- ☐ With a tutor
- ☐ In class at school
- ☐ At an after school club

35) Which practice papers were easier?

- ☐ The AQE practice papers
- ☐ The GL practice papers
- ☐ Both the same
- ☐ Don't know

36) Are you going to do a transfer test?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

37) Which transfer test will you do?

- ☐ AQE
- ☐ GL (Multiple choice)
- ☐ AQE and GL
- ☐ I don't know

38) Why are you going to sit a transfer test? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ The school I want to go to asks for a test
- ☐ I don't really want to do the tests but I think I should
- ☐ I want to do the tests
- ☐ My parents want me to do them
- ☐ My teacher said I should
- ☐ Other children in my class are doing them

39) Why are you not going to sit a transfer test? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ The school I want to go to doesn't ask for a test
- ☐ I don't want to do the tests
- ☐ I think the tests are too hard
- ☐ My parents don't want me to do them
- ☐ My teacher said I shouldn't
- ☐ Other children in my class aren't doing them
- ☐ I didn't know I could do them

40) Did you do a transfer test?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

41) Why did you not sit a transfer test? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ The school I wanted to go to didn't ask for a test
- ☐ I didn't want to do the tests
- ☐ I thought the tests were too hard
- ☐ My parents didn't want me to do them
- ☐ My teacher said I shouldn't
- ☐ Other children in my class weren't doing them
- ☐ I didn't know I could do them

42) Which transfer test did you do?

- ☐ AQE
- ☐ GL (Multiple choice)
- ☐ AQE and GL
- ☐ I don't know

43) Why did you sit a transfer test? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ The school I wanted to go to asked for a test
- ☐ I didn't really want to do the tests but I thought I should
- ☐ I wanted to do the tests
- ☐ My parents wanted me to do them
- ☐ My teacher said I should
- ☐ Other children in my class were doing them
- ☐ I thought I had to do them

44) Why did you do two transfer tests? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ The schools I liked asked for different tests
- ☐ The school I liked accepted both tests
- ☐ It gave me a better chance of getting a grammar school place
- ☐ Adults at home said it was a good idea
- ☐ My teacher said it was a good idea

45) Did you do any transfer test practice papers to help you prepare for the transfer tests?

- ☐ Yes, AQE papers
- ☐ Yes, (multiple choice) GL papers
- ☐ Yes, AQE and GL papers
- ☐ Yes, but not sure which ones
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

46) Where did you do the practice papers? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ At home
- ☐ With a tutor
- ☐ In class at school
- ☐ At an after school club

47) Did you do any transfer test practice papers?

- ☐ Yes, AQE papers
- ☐ Yes, (multiple choice) GL papers
- ☐ Yes, AQE and GL papers
- ☐ Yes, but not sure which ones
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

48) Where did you do the practice papers? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ At home
- ☐ With a tutor
- ☐ In class at school
- ☐ At an after school club

49) How many practice papers do you think you did?

- ☐ Less than 10
- ☐ Between 10 and 19
- ☐ Between 20 and 29
- ☐ Between 30 and 39
- ☐ More than 40
- ☐ Don't know

50) How many practice papers do you think you did?

- ☐ Less than 10
- ☐ Between 10 and 19
- ☐ Between 20 and 29
- ☐ Between 30 and 39
- ☐ More than 40
- ☐ Don't know

51) Which practice papers were easier?

- ☐ The AQE practice papers
- ☐ The GL practice papers
- ☐ Both the same
- ☐ Don't know

52) Did you get any help in school to prepare for the tests? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ Yes, we did work in class to prepare for the test
- ☐ Yes, we did work after school to prepare for the test
- ☐ Yes, we got homework to prepare for the test
- ☐ No, we didn't get any help in school to prepare for the test

53) Did you have a tutor at any time to help you prepare for the tests?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

54) When it came to do the test(s) did you feel that you were well prepared?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

55) Did you feel under pressure because of the transfer test?

- ☐ Yes, a lot of pressure
- ☐ No, no pressure at all
- ☐ Felt somewhere in between
- ☐ Not sure

56) Where do you think the pressure came from? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ Pressure from teachers
- ☐ Pressure from parents, carers or someone at home
- ☐ Pressure from self
- ☐ Pressure from other children, friends or people in class
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Somewhere else (Give an example)

57) What grade (or score) did you get in the GL test?

- ☐ A (234-282)
- ☐ B1 (229-233)
- ☐ B2 (224-228)
- ☐ C1 (219-223)
- ☐ C2 (213-218)
- ☐ D (138-212)
- ☐ Don't want to say
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Can't remember

58) Were you pleased with your GL grade (or score) or disappointed?

- ☐ Pleased
- ☐ Disappointed
- ☐ It was okay
- ☐ Didn't really care

59) What score did you get in the AQE test?

- ☐ 113 or higher
- ☐ 106-112
- ☐ 98-105
- ☐ 88-97
- ☐ 87 or less
- ☐ Don't want to say
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Can't remember

60) Were you pleased with your AQE Score or disappointed?

- ☐ Pleased
- ☐ Disappointed
- ☐ It was okay
- ☐ Didn't really care

61) Which transfer test was easier?

- ☐ The AQE test
- ☐ The (multiple choice) GL test
- ☐ Both the same
- ☐ Can't remember

62) For each of the statements say if you agree or disagree

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
The test asked questions about things I learned in primary school lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The test was like other tests in primary school (For example, Half-Term, Christmas or Summer tests)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that the tests were fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There were too many tests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I didn't like doing the tests on Saturdays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tests meant that I couldn't enjoy after school or evening activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tests meant that I couldn't enjoy weekend activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The test was expensive (for adults who look after you at home)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

63) Would you like to say anything else about transfer tests?

Choosing a new school

These questions ask about your opinions and experience of choosing a new school for Year 8

64) How many open days or evenings have you been to at new schools?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ More than 5

65) Are open days or evenings helpful in deciding on a new school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

66) How are the open days or evenings helpful?

Choosing a new school

These questions ask about your opinions and experience of choosing a new school for Year 8

67) How many open days or evenings did you go to before choosing your new school?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ More than 5

68) Did the open days or evenings help you decide on a new school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

69) How are the open days or evenings helpful?

70) Did any teachers come from a nearby post-primary (Grammar or Secondary) school to talk to you about moving on from primary school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

71) Tell me which school or schools they came from

72) Did you go to a 'Welcome day' at your new school during P7?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

73) Did you like the 'Welcome day'?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

74) Tell me why you did or didn't like the 'Welcome day'

75) What is important when choosing a school? (Choose as many answers as you like)

- ☐ The school is a good school
- ☐ Other family members go (or went) to the school
- ☐ Friends or classmates are going to the school
- ☐ The school is close to home
- ☐ Something else (give an example)

76) How much of a say did you have in your choice of school?

- ☐ The decision was mostly mine
- ☐ I made the decision with my family
- ☐ The adults in my family decided

77) Did you or your family get advice from teachers about choosing a new school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

78) Would you prefer

- ☐ A Grammar School
- ☐ An All-Ability Secondary School
- ☐ Don't really care

79) Would you prefer

- ☐ A Catholic School
- ☐ A Protestant School
- ☐ An Integrated School
- ☐ Don't really care

80) Would you prefer

- ☐ An all boys school
- ☐ An all girls school
- ☐ A school with boys and girls
- ☐ Don't really care

81) What do you think makes a good school? (Choose as many as you like)

- ☐ Pupils do well in exams
- ☐ Prepares pupils for adult life
- ☐ Has teachers who care about pupils
- ☐ Has good after school activities
- ☐ Pupils are 'happy' at the school
- ☐ Something else (Tell me what)

82) Did the adults at home get help with the application form for your new school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

83) Tell me who helped them with the application form.

- ☐ Another family member (for example, Grandparent, Aunt)
- ☐ A friend (of your parents or carers)
- ☐ A teacher from Primary School
- ☐ The Principal of your Primary School
- ☐ Someone else (Tell me who)
- ☐ I don't know

84)

When children apply to a school do you think that they have to wait too long for their offer letter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

85) Did you think applying to a new school was stressful?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

86) What made applying to a new school stressful?

87) Did you get a place in your first preference school?

- ☐ Yes, I did
- ☐ No, I didn't
- ☐ I don't know

88) Why do you think you got a place in your first choice school?

89) Why do you think you didn't get a place in your first choice school?

90) How did you feel when you didn't get a place in your first choice school?

- ☐ Really disappointed
- ☐ A bit disappointed
- ☐ Didn't really care

91) Did you do a test in your new school at the beginning of Year 8?

- ☐ Yes, we did a test that decided our class
- ☐ Yes, we did a test so that teachers could see our level
- ☐ No, our first tests were at half-term (Halloween)
- ☐ No, our first tests were at the end of term (Christmas / New Year)
- ☐ I don't remember doing a test

92) Imagine you are a Principal looking at applications for Year 8. Which children would you choose first? (Choose 3 of the answers: 1st, 2nd and 3rd) Children who...

	1st	2nd	3rd
Live near the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have brothers and sisters at the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are from a family that doesn't have much money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A teacher said worked hard in primary school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did well in a transfer test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did well in other tests in P7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

93) This is the last question. Is there anything else you would like to say about moving on from Primary school?

Survey administered using Questback Essentials <https://www.questback.com/uk/>
provided courtesy of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work,
Queen's University Belfast.

Appendix 9: Survey code book excerpts

32) What do you think should happen to the transfer tests?

- 0 Keep two transfer tests
- 1 Have one transfer test
- 2 Don't have any transfer tests
- 3 Use other primary school tests instead
- 4 Use teacher assessments from primary school
- 5 Not sure

TTHAPPEN

Numeric 12 0 {0, Keep two transfer tests}... None 12 Right Nominal
Input

		TTHAPPEN			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Keep two transfer tests	379	28.6	29.2	29.2
	Have one transfer test	396	29.8	30.6	59.8
	Don't have any transfer tests	188	14.2	14.5	74.3
	Use other Primary school tests instead	61	4.6	4.7	79.0
	Use teacher assessments from primary school	75	5.7	5.8	84.8
	Not sure	197	14.8	15.2	100.0
	Total	1296	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	31	2.3		
Total		1327	100.0		

87) Did you get a place in your first preference school?

- 0 Yes, I did
- 1 No, I didn't
- 2 I don't know

FRSTCHC

Numeric 12 0 87: Did you get a place in your first preference school? {0, Yes, I did}...
 Right Nominal Input



87: Did you get a place in your first preference school?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, I did	846	63.8	78.0	78.0
	No, I didn't	159	12.0	14.7	92.7
	I don't know	79	6.0	7.3	100.0
	Total	1084	81.7	100.0	
Missing	System	243	18.3		
Total		1327	100.0		

This box is shown in preview only.

The following criteria must be fulfilled for this question to be shown:

(If "Did you get a place in your first preference school?" equals "Yes, I did")

88) Why do you think you got a place in your first choice school?

Qualitative Data

This box is shown in preview only.

The following criteria must be fulfilled for this question to be shown:




(If "Did you get a place in your first preference school?" equals "No, I didn't")

89) Why do you think you didn't get a place in your first choice school?

Qualitative Data

Appendix 10: Sample information leaflets and consent forms

Information leaflet: Survey Participant

<p>Assessment and Children's Rights: Using a Children's Rights Based Approach to (re)consider the impact of the transition to post-primary school</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Information for children in Primary 6, Primary 7 and Year 8 </div> <p>Hello, My name is Leanne. I want to find out about children's views and experiences of moving from Primary to Post-Primary school. I hope you might like to help me.</p>  <p>The information in this leaflet explains more about what I am asking you to do.</p> <p>I hope this will help you to decide if you would like to take part in the research or not. If you want to take part your teacher will tell me.</p>  <p>Document 3a</p>	<div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">What is the research about?</div> <p>The research is about children's views and experiences of moving to post-primary school.</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">Why are children being asked to get involved?</div> <p>Children are being asked to help because they are experts in their own lives. If children tell me about their views and experiences I will be able to understand more about this stage in children's education.</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">Do I have to be involved?</div> <p>No, you do not have to be involved in the research. You, and the adults who look after you, choose if you want to volunteer or not.</p> <p>You can decide at any time that you no longer want to take part and you can stop without giving a reason.</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">What do I need to know about the online survey?</div> <p>Children will be asked to complete an online survey lasting around 30 minutes that will ask</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; text-align: right; padding: 2px 5px;">Page 2</div>
<div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">Information for children completing an online survey</div> <p>questions about their experiences of transfer to secondary school. The survey is asking for children's opinions and there are no right or wrong answers.</p> <p>The survey will have questions designed by other children. I hope that it will help me to find out what lots of children think about this stage in their education.</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">What do I have to do to be involved?</div> <p>Your teacher will arrange for you to complete the survey in school.</p> <p>At the beginning of the online survey you will be asked to complete a consent form which asks you to give me permission to look at your answers to the survey. At the end of the survey you will be asked again if you are still happy to let me see your answers. This means that you can change your mind without giving a reason.</p> <p>You will also be given information for the adults that look after you at home so that they know what you are being asked to do.</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; text-align: right; padding: 2px 5px;">Page 3</div>	<div style="background-color: #800000; color: white; height: 20px;"></div> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">Who is organising the research?</div> <p>Leanne is organising the project and she works with her supervisors Jannette and Laura at Queen's University Belfast.</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">What if I have more questions?</div> <p>If you have any questions about the project or want more information you can email me lhenderson04@qub.ac.uk</p> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 2px 5px;">What if I change my mind?</div> <p>If you decide that you do not want to take part you can stop at any time without giving a reason. Just tell your teacher or me.</p> <p>Contact Information Leanne Henderson, Postgraduate Research Student School of Education, 69-71 University Street, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1HL Email lhenderson04@qub.ac.uk Tel 07399085275</p> <p>Supervisor: Professor J. Elwood, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast. Contact j.elwood@qub.ac.uk</p>  <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; text-align: right; padding: 2px 5px;">Page 4</div>

Information leaflet: Survey School Principal

**Assessment and Children's Rights: Using a Children's Rights Based Approach to
(re)consider the impact of the transition to post-primary school**

Consent Form for School Principals

If you are happy for your school to participate in the research please **complete and return this form.**

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet about the Post-Primary Transition Project.

I _____ agree to the research being carried
out in _____ school

I consent to data being collected from children in school and understand that each participant will be asked to give consent.

I know that the data will be stored anonymously and securely. The data may be used for reporting, dissemination, publication and presentation.

I understand that I am free to withdraw the participation of my school at any time.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Document 1c



For withdrawal of consent sign below

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Document 1c



Information leaflet: Survey School Principal

Assessment and Children's Rights: Using a Children's Rights Based Approach to (re)consider the impact of the transition to post-primary school

Project information for School Principals

The following information will give details about the research that your school community is being asked to contribute to. I hope that it allows you to understand more about the research and to make an informed decision about your school's participation.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research will investigate pupil perspectives on transfer to post-primary school using a Children's Rights Based Approach (CRBA). The aims are to find out about their experiences of the process and the impact of this on them. I am interested in children's views of this stage of education.

I am also interested to in the views of school Principals and the parents of transition age children.

Why has my school been asked to take part?

A stratified random sampling technique has been used to identify a number of schools who are being approached to provide access to young people, and adults, who may be interested in participating.



Document 1b

Page 2

Who is responsible for giving Voluntary Informed Consent?

The school Principal is required to give permission for any research activity to be undertaken within the school.

Each child participant will be asked to sign a consent form prior to becoming involved in the research. This will ensure active voluntary informed consent from children.

Their parents, guardians or carers will be given information about the study. An opt-out consent form will be used for the online questionnaire and an opt-in form for the focus groups. All parents will be provided with full contact details for the researcher.

Adult interviewees will be asked to give active voluntary informed consent by completing a consent form prior to being interviewed.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The data will form part of a PhD Thesis, and may result in the publication of research reports or papers.

Document 1b

Page 3

What will my school be asked to do?

Your school will be asked to distribute information (provided by the researcher) to children, and their parents, guardians or carers.

You will also be asked to facilitate the completion of online questionnaires, which will last around 30 minutes, or researcher visits to your school to conduct focus group meetings which will last less than an hour.

As a former teacher I am aware that the research should seek to minimise the potential disruption to the school day and all operational constraints and time limits will be adhered to in the strictest fashion.

Will my school's participation be kept confidential?

The confidentiality of all persons and institutions involved in the research will be assured.

All data will be stored securely in compliance with Queen's University data management policy. The researcher undertakes to check that no pupil, group of pupils, or institution will be identifiable from the data.

Who is organising the research?

Leanne is organising the project and she works with her supervisors [Jannette Elwood](#) and [Laura Lundy](#).

This research has been approved by Queen's University Belfast.

What if I have more questions?

If you have any questions about the project or want more information you can email me lhenderson04@qub.ac.uk

What if I decide that I no longer want my school to be involved?

You may choose to withdraw the participation of your school at any time without giving a reason. Where data has been collected a participant, or group of participants can withdraw consent following the collection of data and before the date indicated on the letter that you received.

Contact Information

Leanne Henderson,
Postgraduate Research Student
School of Education, 69-71 University Street,
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1HL
Email lhenderson04@qub.ac.uk
Tel 07399085275

Supervisor: Professor J. Elwood,
School of Education, Queen's University Belfast.
Contact j.elwood@qub.ac.uk

Page 4

Information for teachers of classes completing the survey

**Children's experiences
of moving on from
primary school**



Information for teachers

Thank you for agreeing to allow your class to complete the Transition Research Project Online Survey. I realise that it is a busy time for teachers and pupils. The survey should take children 25-30 minutes to complete.

Before completing the survey Year 8 pupils should have received an information leaflet and a leaflet for the adults who look after them at home which includes an opt-out consent slip.

The link to the Online Survey for the Year 8 pupils in your school is

<https://response.questback.com/leanehenderson/transfer/>

- The survey is asking for children's opinions and there are no right or wrong answers.
- The instructions should make it clear that pupils are not obliged to answer any questions and they can click 'next' where they feel that they don't know an answer or are uncomfortable responding.
- The questions that each pupil is asked will depend on their answers to previous questions. This means that their questions may be different from those of their neighbour and that some children will be asked more questions than others.

It is very important that pupils give their name so that they can be withdrawn from the research should a parent, or child, retrospectively request this.

Researcher contact details:

Leanne Henderson

Email: lhenderson04@qub.ac.uk

Tel: 07399085275

Supervisor contact details:

Prof. J Elwood

j.elwood@qub.ac.uk

Tel: 028 9097 5941



Appendix 11: Memorandum of Ethical Approval



School of Education
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Memorandum

To Leanne Henderson

From Katrina Lloyd, Chair, Ethics Committee

Date 07/01/2016

Distribution Supervisor Jannette Elwood
School of Education Office
File

Subject Ethics Approval for Research Proposal "Assessment and Children's Rights: Using a Children's Rights Based Approach to (re)consider the Impact of the procedures for pupils"

The School of Education Ethics Committee has approved your proposed research.

Note that this approval applies only to the procedures outlined in your submission.

Any departure from these must be discussed with your supervisor, and may require additional ethical approval.

Note for the supervisor: It is the responsibility of the supervisor to add any research projects involving human participants, material or data, to the University's Human Subjects Database for insurance purposes. (The Human Subjects Database is accessible through QOL under 'My Research').

The Committee wishes you every success with your research.