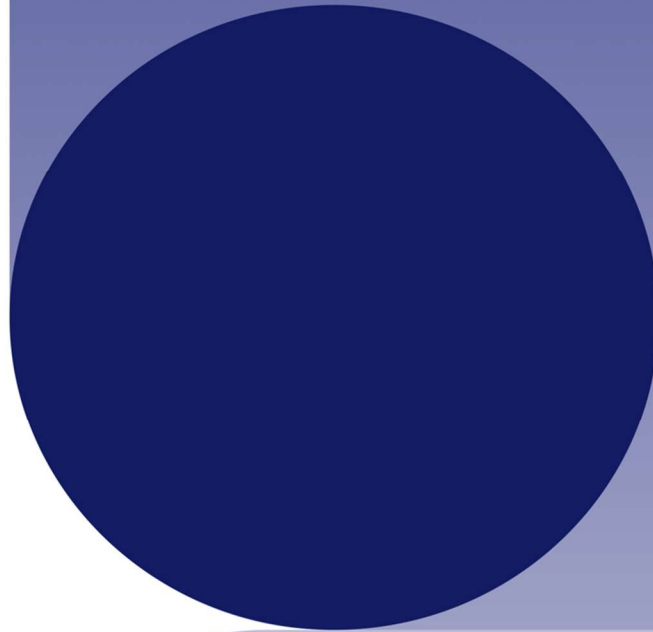




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Supporting transitions between educational phases to improve learner outcomes

Protocol for an integrative evidence review

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Background and review rationale

Context

Educational transitions represent critical junctures in learners' trajectories, requiring adjustment to new learning environments, expectations, relationships, and institutional structures (Benner et al., 2017; Donaldson et al., 2023; Lorijn et al., 2024). Evidence suggests that poorly supported transitions can negatively affect academic attainment (Galton et al., 1999; Scottish Government, 2019), engagement (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025), and social-emotional wellbeing (West et al., 2010; Fane et al., 2016), with risks accumulating over time and contributing to persistent educational disadvantage (Kaplan et al., 2022). Conversely, effective transition support has the potential to promote continuity, resilience, and positive long-term outcomes (Jun et al., 2025).

This integrative evidence review focuses on four key educational transitions within the English education system:

1. transition into Early Education school-based settings (i.e., Reception or school nursery)
2. transition from Reception to Year 1,
3. transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, and
4. transition from secondary school to post-16 education.

Each transition represents a distinct ecological shift involving changes at the level of the learner, family, educational setting, and wider system.

The **transition into Early Education** is often a child's first major ecological transition, involving separation from home, adaptation to institutional routines, and the formation of new relationships with adults and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Griebel & Niesel, 2002). This transition extends beyond children, to also involve parents and carers who must adjust to new roles and relationships with early years providers, with implications for children's subsequent adjustment and engagement (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

The **transition from Reception to Key Stage 1** has been identified as a point within English primary education when pedagogical continuity is often disrupted. Children move from the play-based, child-initiated pedagogy of the Early Years Foundation Stage to more formal, subject-led teaching approaches in Year 1. This shift is compounded by a misalignment between the Early Learning Goals and National Curriculum expectations, alongside increased assessment pressures, all of which have been associated with reduced engagement and progress for some learners (Brooker, 2008; Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). Together, these discontinuities create what has been described as a "curriculum cliff edge" at the point of transition (Fisher, 2010; O'Sullivan & Ring, 2018).

The **transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3** represents a crucial stage of educational progression, encompassing significant academic, social, and emotional adjustments as pupils move from primary to secondary education. Consistently highlighted is the "*Year 7 dip*"—linked to discontinuities in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 1999; Galton & Hargreaves, 2003). Learners also face socio-emotional challenges associated with changes in school environment (Mumford & Birchwood 2021), disruptions to peer networks and learner-teacher relationships (McLoughlin et al. 2024), and increased expectations for learners (Howe 2011), including changes in home support for learning (Lukey 2024). Developmental changes, such as puberty and associated physical changes further compound these challenges (Anderson et al., 2000). Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are particularly at risk of negative outcomes (Evangelou et al., 2008; West et al., 2010).

The **transition from secondary school into post-16 settings** such as further education institutions, school-based sixth forms and sixth form colleges have significant academic, social and emotional implications, and are best understood as an ongoing process rather than a single event (Packer, Abbinett & Morris, 2022). The expansion of FE provision to include both academic and vocational pathways has widened participation, attracting learners for diverse reasons such as progression to higher education, entry to employment, or recovery from negative school experiences (Smothers et al., 2021). This transition represents a period of exploration and increasing independence, closely linked to learners' educational trajectories and future employment aspirations (Gaona et al., 2018). Central to this process is identity change, as learners simultaneously 'become' and 'unbecome', a transformation that can be motivating for some but

challenging and unsettling for others, particularly when they feel unprepared for new academic and institutional expectations (Ecclestone, 2008, cited in Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019). Where such needs are not recognised or supported, learners' confidence and motivation may be undermined (Packer, Abbinett & Morris, 2022). Disadvantaged learners may lack access to quality information, guidance, and academic preparation, resulting in lower participation, reduced confidence, and higher attrition (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

Although research exists across each of these transition points, there is limited synthesis of educational programmes, practices, and approaches that support learners across transitions, particularly in relation to academic, social-emotional, and engagement outcomes and equity considerations.

Definitions

To support clarity and consistency in the synthesis and interpretation of findings, this section defines key terms and concepts used throughout the review.

Educational transitions are defined as the set transition points within the education system. They are therefore normative experiences in childhood and adolescence that involve movement within or between educational levels and settings (Harris et al, 2024). For the purpose of this project, mid-year or mid-phase transitions by individuals between settings or contexts are not included. Educational transitions can be understood as ongoing psychological, social, and educational adaptations shaped by changes in learning contexts, interpersonal relationships, and learners' developing identities (Jindal-Snape et al. 2021). Thus, educational transitions are characterised by both socio-emotional and academic dimensions. Consequently, understanding how to effectively support learners during transitions between educational phases involves identifying the specific challenges they face, as well as the protective factors and supportive measures associated with them:

- *Academic transitions* centre on curriculum alignment and continuity of learning to support learners' academic progression when transitioning between educational phases (Fonger et al. 2018, Kift & Nelson, 2005, Shuey et al. 2019). The literature foregrounds that academic transitions involve vertical planning in relation to curriculum content, instructional experiences and assessment practices (Fonger et al. 2018, Jin et al. 2019), alongside attention to the relevance and accessibility of learning for individual learners, particularly those in disadvantaged contexts, such as those with special educational needs (Carpenter, 1998). Academic transitions are therefore often conceptualised and understood through a subject-specific lens (e.g. Chapman 2002, Fonger et al. 2018, Robinson 2000), although they can also focus on transferable and cross-curricular knowledge and skills, such as literacy (e.g. Melzer 2014). Disruptions in teaching practices and mismatches between learners' expectations and their actual classroom experiences may trigger socio-emotional responses that influence learners' behavioural engagement and ultimately shape longer-term academic outcomes.
- *Socio-emotional transitions* centre on learners' psychological development and emotional wellbeing as shaped by developmental changes and shifts in social relationships and interactions, including reconfigurations of student-teacher and peer relationships. Although the literature lacks consistency in how psychological and wellbeing constructs are defined and distinguished, it highlights a broad distinction between self-perceptions as learners, reflecting more explicitly academic or scholastic dimensions of identity, and broader aspects of identity and self-concept as experienced within the school context (Symonds & Galton 2014). Moreover, these socio-emotional processes, relating to both scholastic and broader self-perceptions, may be reflected in observable internalising outcomes (e.g. anxiety, withdrawal, depression), externalising responses (e.g. behavioural adjustment or disruption), self-concepts (self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of identity) and relational experiences such as learners' sense of belonging and experiences of victimisation and bullying (Beatson et al., 2023). Together, these processes may shape longer-term behavioural engagement and academic trajectories. This conceptual diversity emphasises the need for synthesis across theoretical perspectives in order to identify common challenges and translate them into coherent, practice-relevant insights and recommendations for supporting learners during educational transitions.

- *Family-engagement and home-school interface* challenges centre on the parental experience of stress and anxiety around school transition points, underscoring the need for meaningful parental involvement in decision making and for clear home-school communication (Rheinberger et al. 2025). These challenges are defined as those experienced by parents/carers before, during and after transitions. These may come about because of a lack of engagement with parents due to factors such as work patterns, EAL and cultural differences, a lack of capacity in schools, limited understanding of the transition process and education system, and inconsistent or poor communication (Rheinberger et al. 2025, Nuske et al. 2019, Gasper and Jahromi 2024). Parents may find it difficult to advocate for their child and may be fearful of being seen as adversarial and 'difficult' (Fontil et al., 2020, Rheinberger et al. 2025). The parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may experience these challenges more keenly (Nuske et al., 2019, Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2023).
- *School and stakeholder collaboration* challenges centre on the potential lack collaboration and coordination in both intra and inter professional context. For example, between different educational contexts as well wider stakeholders in the transition process, such as those from the health field – speech, language and communication specialists, educational psychology, or occupational therapy (see for example Fontil et al., 2020). These may come about due to a lack of capacity and resource, uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, a lack of training and poor or inconsistent communication (Gasper and Jahromi 2024, Nuske et al., 2019). Again, evidence indicates that support can be experienced as most lacking where children have the greatest needs (Fontil et al., 2020, Rheinberger et al.2025).

Timing of transition refers to the point at which a transition occurs in a learner’s educational trajectory, typically defined in relation to age, but varying according to the country’s education system (Bagnall et al. 2021). For example, in England, learners typically enter primary education at age 4–5 and transition to secondary school at age 11. In the United States, formal schooling usually begins at age 5–6, with learners transitioning from elementary to middle school at around age 11–12 and later to high school at approximately age 14–15. In Finland, formal primary education begins later, at around age 7, with learners remaining in a single school setting until approximately age 15–16 before transitioning to upper secondary education. This has implications for how the timing of support is considered in the synthesis and interpretation of evidence across approaches. However, school transitions commonly occur during periods of significant developmental change, when many learners are also experiencing concurrent physical and psychological changes (e.g. Berenbaum et al., 2015). Changes in school environments can therefore constitute cumulatively stressful time points for learners (Bagnall et al. 2021).

Transition period refers to the stages at which transition approaches are implemented, which may occur before and/or after transfer, and over varying durations. For example, Beatson et al. (2023, p. 5) defined the primary-secondary school transition period as “the last two years of primary school or the first year in the new school setting (whether middle or secondary school)”, while Simpkins et al. (2025) focused their review on studies investigating the primary-secondary transition within the first year of secondary schooling only. This underscores that transitions, although marked by specific time points, are best conceptualised as ongoing processes in which different dimensions of the transition unfold over varying timeframes. This has implications for how the duration of support is considered in the synthesis and interpretation of evidence across approaches.

Transition approaches concern the intentional, formalised activities, setting-level programmes, measures and policies designed to support learners during transitions between educational phases. Transition approaches may involve the implementation of discrete programmes or interventions, but also contextually informed practices developed locally by settings and their staff. While the broader transitions review (see ‘Overarching project’), of which this integrative review forms one component, includes consideration of system-level policies and practices, the integrative evidence review limits its scope to transition support policies and provision at the setting level.

Mainstream education refers to educational provision delivered in settings that serve the majority of learners with teaching approaches designed for the general student population, notwithstanding variation in organisation across international contexts. This is distinct from specialist or alternative provision. While transition planning is a key component of special education and as part of compliance with inclusion legislation (Landmark & Zhang 2012, Shaw 2017), this review focuses on evidence drawn from the application of transition approaches within mainstream settings. In

doing so, it examines how inclusion for learners with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, can be achieved through transition support within mainstream educational contexts.

Disadvantage is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing socio-economic factors, disability or special educational needs, language background, and other demographic and contextual conditions. In education, disadvantage is commonly understood as circumstances that place learners at increased risk of lower educational participation, engagement, or attainment (Kellaghan 2001, Machin 2006). As Kellaghan (2001) notes, disadvantage is often rooted in discontinuities between the competencies, dispositions, and forms of capital developed in the home or community and those expected and valued within school settings. Educational transitions can therefore represent periods of heightened vulnerability for learners affected by disadvantage. Disadvantage can also emerge or be compounded through the intersection of multiple identities and overlapping forms of insecurities (Harris et al. 2024, Bucelli et al. 2025). For the purposes of this review, disadvantage is primarily examined in relation to socio-economic disadvantage and SEND, while recognising that these indicators of disadvantage may also intersect with other social and demographic characteristics, including gender, sexuality, language background and ethnicity. This focus on intersectionality is reflected in our data extraction process.

Overarching project

The activities outlined in this protocol form part of a larger project with four strands. This protocol covers the integrative review of the evidence (i.e. strands one and two from Table 1).

Table 1. Details of overarching project on educational transitions in education.

	Strand	Summary
Integrative review of the evidence (covered by this protocol)	1. Overview of reviews	The overview of reviews aims to provide insight into the challenges present for pupils, parents, educational contexts and other stakeholders at each of the four transitions, and to explore commonalities and differences at these points. Additionally, it informs the design of searches and data extraction framework for the systematic review.
	2. Systematic review of impact evidence	The systematic review of impact evidence aims to examine the impacts of transition support approaches. In contrast to the overview of reviews, this strand involves a pre-specified design and formal appraisal of primary empirical studies on transition approaches.
Not covered by this protocol	3. Review of policy	The review of policy will explore how transitions are conceptualised and implemented across different governance structures across the education phases. This includes sampling 80 educational contexts across the transition stages and reviewing available transition policies, alongside collating grey literature including government, third sector and high-quality reports from other relevant bodies. These will be analysed thematically, examining the extent to which current transition policies reflect evidence-informed practice and variation across educational phases and contexts.
	4. Review of practice	Primary data gathering will investigate how academic attainment and other outcomes most consistently evidenced in the literature are interpreted and supported in everyday settings. This will include surveys and qualitative data collection at transition points 1-3. Online surveys will be targeted at setting leaders, teachers, and other relevant staff involved in transition planning and delivery across diverse settings and contexts exploring attainment, engagement, wellbeing, and attendance. Approximately 15 remote interviews per transition will be conducted, aiming for balanced representation across phases, regions, and governance. Interview data will be transcribed and analysed thematically to identify key patterns and insights across the different transition phases, using a shared coding framework linked to the research questions, allowing us to explore how schools and settings plan for, deliver, and reflect on transition practices, and how these influence pupil outcomes.

Together the policy review and primary data collection will answer the following research questions.

1. What are perceptions of key challenges to pupils, educators, educational settings, and families encountered at each transitional stage throughout the 2-19 educational journey?
2. How do leaders, teachers and those in transition leadership roles aim to mitigate these challenges?
3. How are transition challenges perceived to be shaped by pupils' demographic characteristics and their schools' socio-economic contexts, particularly in settings with higher levels of deprivation?
4. How do current approaches supporting disadvantaged pupils at transition points differ in their perceived effectiveness?
5. What baseline data do schools and settings collect to measure pupils' initial skills and attainment levels?
6. Which valid and reliable assessments are most frequently used by schools and how?

These different strands will enable triangulation of evidence, linking what is internally evidenced with what is common nationally and what is distinctive locally. This mixed-methods approach will ensure that findings capture both the breadth of current practice and the nuanced, real-world factors that shape how transitions influence learners' academic and wider developmental outcomes.

Review design

This integrative review of the international literature aims to identify setting-level approaches that effectively support pupils during transitions between educational phases, examining both approaches shown to be effective at specific transition points, and those demonstrating robust evidence of effectiveness across multiple transition points. In doing so, the review will not only update earlier systematic reviews focused on specific transition points (e.g. Beatson et al., 2023; Bharara, 2020; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020; Van Rens et al., 2018; West et al., 2010; Evangelou et al., 2008), but also extend these by synthesising evidence across multiple transition points to generate overarching findings that maximise relevance for leaders across different educational settings.

Given the breadth of educational transitions examined and the substantial heterogeneity in theoretical perspectives, methodological traditions, and study designs across transition phases, a single search strategy would risk either becoming unmanageable or obscuring important phase-specific insights. In response, this integrative review adopts a two-search strategy design that intentionally draws on complementary bodies of evidence. This approach results in two evidence strands enabling both broad mapping of the transition literature and in-depth systematic synthesis of the evidence on transition support provision, thereby balancing breadth and depth in addressing the objectives of the review.

This integrative review therefore has two strands:

1. **Strand one: overview of reviews.** This exploratory scoping review was conducted prior to the development of the present protocol and was not pre-specified. The methodology for this strand is therefore described in past tense throughout this protocol.
2. **Strand two: systematic review of impact evidence.** This review aims to examine the impacts of transitions approaches. It adopts a traditional systematic review methodology, and the searches have not yet taken place.

Strand one: Overview of reviews

The first search strategy targeted review studies. In fields characterised by a large and fragmented body of intervention research spanning multiple contexts and transition points, overviews of reviews represent a logical and efficient first step in evidence synthesis. Systematically identifying and appraising existing reviews enables rapid yet robust problem-identification, assessment of the quality and coherence of the evidence base, and comparison of conclusions across reviews (Foster & Hammersley, 1998; Smith et al., 2011; Whitemore & Knafl, 2005).

The overview of reviews had two purposes. Firstly, to provide a structured synthesis on the breadth of experiences and challenges associated with the four key educational transitions, the implications of these challenges where possible, and the approaches that can be implemented to support the associated outcomes. Secondly, it shaped the search strategy and design of Strand two. Specifically, the overview of reviews provided insight into the extent of evaluation evidence available for each of the four transitions, whether areas of focus were consistent across transitions or specific to transition points, and the implications of these patterns for the design of our searches and data extraction framework for

Strand two. Given its focus on mapping and problem-identification, Strand one does not include a formal weight of evidence appraisal, instead providing a systematised and structured synthesis of transition experiences across phases.

In this way, the overview of reviews combines an exploratory scoping function with a targeted, structured synthesis of extant educational transitions research, thereby supporting clear and detailed problem-identification and contributing to the articulation of potential mechanisms and pathways across and within transition phases. The later enhances the rigour and coherence of the overall integrative review (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

Strand two: Systematic review of impact evidence

The second strand comprises a systematic review of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods evaluation studies, with the aim of examining the impacts of transition support approaches. In contrast to the overview of reviews, this strand involves a pre-specified design and formal appraisal of primary empirical studies on transition approaches. In this way, it will extend the overview of reviews by tracing evidence that links implementation to outcomes, moving beyond challenges toward a more detailed examination of effectiveness, acceptability, and feasibility, recognising that the strength of causal inference will vary across study designs (Andrews, 2005).

Together, these strands will support more nuanced and context-sensitive decision-making by educational stakeholders. By presenting findings from the overview of reviews alongside evidence from evaluation studies, the review will enable recommendations to be tailored to the distinctive challenges, contexts, and evidence bases associated with each transition point. The design balances coverage and rigour by including the strongest available evidence across multiple educational transitions, recognising that randomised controlled trials are unevenly distributed across phases. It enables assessment of effectiveness alongside mechanisms and equity impacts, supporting the identification of approaches that improve outcomes and reduce inequalities across transition points.

Objectives

This integrative review aims to (1) identify and synthesise the challenges associated with educational transitions reported in the research literature, examining how these challenges vary across transition points, and learners and school demographics, and (2) identify and critically appraise approaches used to support transitions between educational phases, including the strength and nature of the evidence underpinning approaches targeted at disadvantaged learners.

Strands one and two will answer the corresponding research questions, respectively:

1. What challenges associated with educational transitions are identified in the extant research, and how are their implications described across the evidence?
 - a. To what extent do reported transition challenges vary across different transition points, and what common challenges are reported?
 - b. How are transition challenges shaped by higher levels of socio-economic deprivation, and/or disadvantage related to SEND?
2. Which approaches are identified in the extant research as effective in facilitating and supporting learner transitions between educational phases?
 - a. How do the approaches identified as effective vary across different transition points, and what common challenges do they address?
 - b. Which approaches to supporting learners at transition points are most effective for learners disadvantaged by higher levels of socio-economic deprivation, and/or SEND?
 - c. What role do leadership, teachers and those in transition leadership roles play in the design, implementation and effectiveness of transition support approaches?

The final report will be structured to reflect the overarching aims of the review and to support transparent reporting of the evidence base in line with the Campbell Standards for systematic review standards (The Methods Coordinating Group of the Campbell Collaboration, 2019) where relevant. In addition, the synthesis will draw on complementary approaches suited to mixed and heterogeneous evidence, including the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al. 2018) and integrative review guidance (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

As the findings for each of the overarching review questions are generated through two different search strategies, each limited to different study designs (see ‘Methodology’), results will be presented separately for each strand. For each strand, results will be reported, firstly, through a descriptive overview of the included studies identified through each search strategy, outlining key characteristics such as educational phase and transition point, transition type (socio-emotional or academic), geographical context, study design, participant characteristics, and any relevant intersections. This section will provide a foundation for understanding the scope, breadth, and distribution of the evidence base underpinning the findings on the first and second research questions respectively. For Strand two, this first section will also describe the evidence base in terms of the quality of included studies, organising them according to their level of evidence using the EPPI-Centre Weight of Evidence framework (Gough, 2007) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al. 2018), which provide standards for the appraisal of mixed methods reviews (see ‘Data extraction and management’).

For **Strand one**, the report will then synthesise evidence relating to challenges associated with educational transitions, presenting thematic findings across transition points and examining how these challenges are shaped by learner and setting characteristics. This first section will also draw out how the literature describes the implications of these challenges, including for learners disadvantaged by socio-economic deprivation and/or SEND.

For **Strand two**, the subsequent findings section will synthesise evidence relating to approaches designed to support transitions between educational phases that are intended to improve learner outcomes. This section will present a structured synthesis of the different transition support approaches identified in the literature, alongside the outcomes they are reported to influence where available, or the theoretical rationale and proposed mechanisms through which they are intended to support learners where outcome data are not reported. The roles of setting leadership, teachers, and those in transition leadership roles in approaches to addressing or mitigating transition challenges will be reported. Findings, claims and conclusions made in this second findings’ section will be calibrated to the strength and type of available evidence, with reference to the level of evidence assessments set out in the first descriptive section where relevant.

Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used for each evidence strand in the review. As detailed above, the integrative review adopts a two-strand design drawing on complementary contextual and evaluative bodies of evidence: an overview of reviews that maps key challenges and approaches associated with educational transitions to support clear problem-identification and the formulation of context-sensitive recommendation, and a systematic review of primary evaluation studies, involving formal appraisal and synthesis of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research examining the impacts of transition support approaches.

The interconnection of Strands one and two

Preliminary findings from the overview of reviews (Strand one) have informed the design of the systematic review of impact evidence (Strand two) in several important ways. The overview of reviews suggested that the number of published intervention studies, randomised controlled trials and evaluation studies relating to early years and post-16 transitions is limited, alongside a comparatively rich body of research describing learners’ and stakeholders’ transition experiences for these phases. This highlighted, firstly, the value of engaging deeply with the broader transition experiences literature to ensure the coherence and contextual grounding of the overall integrative review and, secondly, that the search strategy for Strand two needed to extend beyond narrowly defined intervention and evaluation terminology to capture the transition support provision and research for these transition points. The overview of reviews also provided insight into the terminology used to describe transitions across different phases, supporting the development of phase-specific search strategies. Lastly, the preliminary analysis informed the theory of change underpinning Strand two by helping to define the scope of outcomes to be included and identifying meaningful ways to synthesise transition support approaches in relation to clearly identified and described challenges (problem-identification).

The overview of reviews has thus become a substantive component of the integrative review, and detailed analysis is ongoing at the time of writing this protocol. The thematic components of the data extraction frameworks presented below may therefore be refined as the analysis progresses, while retaining a focus on the four core dimensions of transition

challenges (academic, socio-emotional, family engagement and stakeholder coordination) identified through the overview of reviews. Beyond its scoping function, the overview of reviews will provide important contextual insight for interpreting the findings from the evaluation studies and for shaping the final recommendations. Moreover, it will provide a reference framework against which programmes or intervention approaches can be mapped, enabling the identification of evidence gaps and priorities for further intervention research.

Strand two (a systematic review of impact evidence) comprises a review of the effectiveness of approaches designed to support learners during educational transitions. This second strand builds on the first by tracing the evidence that links implementation to outcomes in order to assess the levels of effectiveness or potential of different approaches in response to identified transition challenges. It appraises and synthesises empirical studies evaluating intentional, formalised, setting-level activities, programmes, measures or policies that support learners through key educational transitions.

The methodological approach for each strand is described in detail below.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review

While the two strands of the integrative review share several inclusion and exclusion criteria, they also differ in important respects. To clarify both the common and distinct elements, the criteria for each stage are summarised side by side in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for each strand and overarching research question of the integrative review

Criteria	Strand 1: Overview of Reviews (RQ1)	Strand 2: Systematic review of impact evidence (RQ2)
Phenomena of Interest/Intervention	<p>Challenges experienced by learners, teachers, parents, and setting leaders across four different transitions.</p> <p>INCLUDE: transitions into Early Education, Reception to Year 1, Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, secondary school to post-16 education</p> <p>EXCLUDE: transitions outside of those above, including into HE, into different school/non-mainstream context, atypical transitions (e.g. transition mid-school year, alternative provision), outside of educational contexts e.g. into work, adulthood, into/out of health-related context, distance learning, home schooling</p>	<p>Educational setting-level, intentional and formalised activities, programmes, interventions, measures or policies designed to support learners during transitions across the four specified educational phases</p> <p>These approaches can take the form of discrete programmes or interventions implemented in settings, but also contextually informed practices that are developed locally.</p> <p>INCLUDE: transitions into Early Education, Reception to Year 1, Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, secondary school to post-16 education</p> <p>EXCLUDE: transitions outside of those above, including into HE, into different school/non-mainstream context, atypical transitions (e.g. transition mid-school year, alternative provision), outside of educational contexts e.g. into work, adulthood, into/out of health-related context, distance learning, home schooling</p>
Population/Sample	<p>Learners in mainstream education who are preparing to, experiencing, or have recently experienced, transitions between educational phases.</p> <p>Parents, teachers, and leaders, where their perspectives relate to or inform approaches intended to support these learners during transitions.</p>	<p>Learners in mainstream education who are preparing to, experiencing, or have recently experienced, transitions between educational phases</p> <p>Parents, teachers, leaders, where their perspectives relate to or inform our understanding of the effectiveness or promise of approaches intended to support these learners during transitions. However, eligible interventions must be intended to benefit learners, directly or indirectly</p>
Study design	<p>INCLUDE: Systematic reviews (incl. meta-analyses), scoping review, thematic reviews. Review studies can be quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods.</p> <p>EXCLUDE: primary research, non-review studies</p>	<p>INCLUDE: Evaluation studies that examine the feasibility, implementation, or impact of transition support approaches, using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs. Eligible study designs will include experimental and quasi-experimental between-group studies, longitudinal cohort studies,</p>

Criteria	Strand 1: Overview of Reviews (RQ1)	Strand 2: Systematic review of impact evidence (RQ2)
		pre–post designs, and case study evaluations, provided they contain an explicit evaluative component EXCLUDE: Studies that are theoretical or design-based or focus solely on implementation or process without evaluative intent
Outcomes	No specific outcomes will be used as inclusion or exclusion criteria.	Studies reporting academic, socio-emotional, behavioural, engagement, or adjustment outcomes during or following educational transitions <i>Primary outcomes:</i> Learner outcomes <i>Secondary outcomes:</i> Outcomes for other stakeholders (e.g. teachers, leaders, parents), where these inform mechanisms of action or the theory of change underlying learner outcomes
Context	INCLUDE: OECD/PISA countries or Western Europe EXCLUDE: other national contexts	INCLUDE: OECD/PISA countries or Western Europe EXCLUDE: other national contexts
Language	English Language only	English Language only
Publication status	Peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters	Only peer reviewed journal articles
Timeframe	2020-2025 (last 5 years)	2016-present (last 10 years)

Phenomena of interest

With regard to eligible approaches, the timing and duration of transition approaches will not be used as inclusion criteria but will be captured during data extraction to examine their relationship with targeted challenges and intended or measured outcomes. In addition, while the review does not focus primarily on subject-specific transitions, studies centred on particular subjects or academic skills will be included where they offer broader insights into academic and curricular transition planning.

Population/sample

Learner age will not be used as a primary inclusion criterion, reflecting the diversity of transition support approaches in terms of timing (e.g. pre- or post-transfer) and duration (short- or longer-term). Where school contexts dictate that learners transition from primary-middle school-secondary, the primary-middle school transition will be excluded, as this transition represents a structurally different transition that does not map directly onto the UK system and therefore has limited applicability for UK-focused policy and practice. Moreover, studies focusing on specific learner subpopulations, such as learners with SEND, social, emotional, or behavioural challenges, or a history of school disengagement, will be included where they are educated within mainstream schools. The same inclusion principle will apply to studies examining other subgroups, including those defined by socio-economic status, gender or sex, or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Studies reporting on transition related interventions or programmes involving parents, teachers and other stakeholders will only be included where there is evidence of impact on learner outcomes.

Study design

Qualitative research meeting the inclusion and appraisal criteria will be included on a comprehensive basis for both strands of the review. The systematic review of impact evidence (Strand two) will include evaluation studies, understood for the purposes of this review as studies that examine whether, how, or under what conditions intervention approaches are associated with intended aims or outcomes. Given the limited availability of randomised controlled trials in this field, particularly in early years and post-16 education transitions, high-quality non-randomised studies with clearly defined comparison conditions will be included. Mixed-methods and qualitative evidence will also be included where it contributes to the assessment of outcomes, mechanisms of action, or implementation processes related to educational transitions. In Strand two (review of intervention evidence), most qualitative evidence is expected to be embedded within, or directly linked to, evaluative study designs rather than arising from a separate corpus of standalone qualitative

research, with the exception of qualitative case study evaluations. More detail on the study quality assessment applied to included evaluations studies is provided below.

Outcomes

Review studies may or may not synthesise learner outcomes explicitly; however, given the focus of the first research question on developing a rich understanding of transition-related challenges as experienced by a range of stakeholders, the absence of reported outcomes was not used as a reason for exclusion. Where available in the review studies (Strand one), evidence of the implications of the challenges associated with educational transitions will be identified and tracked through data extraction. For evaluation studies (Strand two), outcomes may include improvements in transition experiences as well as positive academic, engagement, and social and emotional outcomes. The primary outcomes of interest are those relating to learners. However, where learner outcomes are not reported, outcomes for other stakeholders (such as teachers, leaders, or parents) are included where they provide insight into mechanisms through which learner outcomes are expected to be achieved. In this way, the review takes both short- and long-term outcomes to signal evidence of promise and effectiveness.

Timeframe

The search timeframe for the was limited to the past five years to prioritise the most recent and policy-relevant evidence and to support timely completion of the review. However, preliminary scoping through the overview of reviews indicated that the evidence base for intervention and evaluation studies is more limited for certain transition points, particularly the early schooling transitions and the secondary–post-16 transition. To ensure sufficient coverage of relevant evidence for these transition points, the publication timeframe for Strand two will therefore be extended to ten years (2016–present). Keeping in mind that the pace of educational research and publication can be relatively slow, and that studies often report approaches implemented several years earlier, a ten-year timeframe (2016–present) was chosen to balance adequate coverage of the evidence base with maintaining relevance to the current educational context.

Search strategy for identification of studies

Search strategy

Sheffield Hallam University Library curates several key education databases: the *British Education Index*, *Education Abstracts (EBSCOhost)*, and education databases from *ProQuest*, *Scopus*, and *Web of Science*. However, for the overview of reviews (Strand one), book chapters were also considered, as this strand focused on developing an in-depth understanding of transition-related challenges. Given the breadth of both reviews, the primary sources will be peer-reviewed English-language journal articles. To maintain feasibility and fit within the larger Transitions Review, the integrative review will be limited to the databases specified and will not extend to additional sources, such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) database of education studies. Reference lists of review studies included in Strand one will be checked against the Strand two search results as a supplementary method to identify any eligible studies that may have been missed.

The search strategies for the overview of reviews (Strand one) and review of intervention evidence (Strand two) are distinct. Database thesauri guided inclusion of equivalent terms across education sub-disciplines for both search strategies. Initial insights from the review of reviews informed the search strategy for the review of evaluation studies (Strand two)

Overview of reviews (Strand one)

Initial search terms combined concepts related to *educational transitions AND review*.

Appendix A gives further detail on the searches conducted in the different education databases for this strand. In order to manage the volume of returned records, searches for the overview of reviews were restricted to article titles. All papers returned for the overview of reviews were double screened.

Systematic review of impact evidence (Strand two)

Searches for the review of impact evidence will adopt a dual strategy, combining a general search strategy with more targeted searches tailored to specific transition points. This approach reflects variation in terminology used to describe transitions and transition-related practices across different stages of the education system. Searches will be restricted to article titles and abstracts only.

The general search strategy will combine *transition-related terms* AND *study design terms*. To focus specifically on evaluative evidence, searches will be limited by study design rather than by intervention-related terms. The overview of reviews indicated the language around interventions at transition was frequently associated with special educational needs, particularly in the early years and post-16 literature, and that including such terms risked disproportionately retrieving studies focused on specific subgroups rather than the general learner population. Accordingly, the general search strategy will use similarly broad transition terminology as the overview of reviews (see above), while recognising that some approaches may address transition-related challenges without being explicitly labelled as “transition” approaches, and limiting inclusion to evaluation studies:

- transition* OR 'educational transition*' OR 'transition planning' OR 'transition phase' OR 'curriculum alignment' OR 'continuity of learning' OR 'psychological adjustment' OR 'emotional adjustment' OR 'academic identity development' OR 'learner identity development'
- AND evaluation study OR experimental OR quasi-experimental OR between-group studies OR longitudinal cohort studies OR pre-post design OR feasibility OR case study evaluation OR randomised control
- NOT employment OR work

However, informed by findings from the overview of reviews, the transition phase and transition-associated terminology will be expanded to incorporate alternative terms that capture key aspects of the transition process. Targeted searches will therefore be conducted for each transition point, specifying both the transition phase and relevant alternative terminology:

- Transition to school terms: 'home-to-Reception' OR 'Reception-to-primary' OR 'starting school' OR 'entry to school' OR '(early) school adjustment' OR 'nursery transition'; as well as combinations of 'transition' terms with the following early years terms: 'early childhood education' OR 'early childhood' OR 'early school years' OR 'early years' OR kindergarten OR preschool OR pre-school OR prekindergarten OR pre-K* OR nursery OR Reception OR 'school readiness'.
- Transition to secondary school terms: 'primary-to-secondary' OR 'high school'
- Transition to post-16 terms: 'school-to-college' OR 'post-16 transition' OR 'college transition' OR 'post-secondary transition' OR 'post-school transition' OR 'further education (FE)' OR 'community college' OR 'transition services' OR 'vocational readiness'

This approach is adopted to ensure coherence across the review and across transition stages, while preserving important opportunities for phase-specific insights.

The searches will not explicitly include terms related to disadvantage. For the purpose of the searches, we keep the concept of disadvantage broad and data-driven, but with a primary focus on aspects of socio-economic disadvantage and SEND. This means that these characteristics will be coded during data extraction rather than used as a search limiter to enable subgroup and intersectional analyses where possible. The primary aim is to identify recommendations that work for all learners, and particularly those who experience socio-economic disadvantage, with subgroup and intersectional analysis providing secondary insights into how recommendations may be tailored for learners of varying characteristics, where the evidence allows.

Selection of studies

For both reviews, the selection process will involve title and abstract screening and then full text screening in line with our inclusion/exclusion criteria. This will be completed by two independent reviewers, with disagreements discussed and/or referred to a third reviewer. All reviewers will pilot the same sample of titles and abstracts, and subsequently full texts, at the start of each screening stage to align decisions and ensure consistent interpretation of inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria will be refined to ensure conceptual clarity and increase inter-rater agreement. Results of this process will be documented using a PRISMA (Page et al., 2021) flow chart.

Should a large number of studies (in excess of 500) be returned for the intervention evidence searches, 20% of papers will be randomly selected for double-coding by a second reviewer, in line with PRISMA guidelines. Double coding will continue

until an interrater reliability threshold of Cohen's kappa of at least 0.60 has been achieved. This step will aim to ensure efficient use of resources and time.

For the systematic review of impact evidence (Strand two), if multiple publications are returned from a single interventions study, these will be treated as one intervention, but all eligible papers will be included as they may provide short and long-term outcomes.

Covidence systematic review software (2026) will be used for removing duplicates, screening, data extraction, and generating PRISMA (Page et al., 2021) flow diagrams. Either Excel or NVivo are likely to be used for further thematic analysis of the qualitative data extracted. The data extraction and synthesis process is detailed next.

Data extraction and management

Data extraction differs between Strand one and Strand two, reflecting their distinct purposes of mapping and contextualising the evidence base versus assessing impact. All included studies will be coded for the transition stage it examines.

Strand one: data extraction

Strand one is focused on in-depth problem-identification within and across educational transition points. Data extraction has not involved formal study appraisal, but instead categorises challenges related to academic and socio-emotional transitions, alongside their reported implications for learners. Approaches suggested in the review literature to address these challenges are also extracted. The data extraction template for this strand is presented in **Appendix B**. Given the emphasis on rich qualitative description and textual data, data extraction for Strand one was conducted using open text fields for all categories except 'transition stage'.

At the time of writing this protocol, full-text data extraction had been completed in Covidence using overarching coding categories. For transition challenges, textual data were extracted relating to academic and socio-emotional challenges, as well as family-engagement and home-school interface challenges, and school and stakeholder coordination challenges. For implications, data were extracted concerning impacts reported for learners, school staff, and parents. Data extraction also captured learner-level disadvantage factors, including differential experiences associated with socio-economic deprivation and SEND, with an additional category used to record any other reported factors influencing transition experiences.

Textual data extracted in Covidence were exported to Excel for further thematic synthesis (see below). So far, this synthesis has resulted in the subcategories presented in **Appendix B**. As this analysis is ongoing, these remain subject to refinement.

Strand two: data extraction

Strand two data extraction will distinguish between transition stage, outcome types, and evidence relating to implementation and mechanisms. Judgements about effectiveness and promise will be made during synthesis by integrating these complementary dimensions of evidence across studies, including evidence of consistency across studies. In addition, all included studies will undergo appraisal process as described further below, with weight of evidence scoring also being considered during synthesis (see data synthesis below). The full data extraction template, including detailed categories associated with study appraisal, is presented in **Appendix C**.

Extracting transition approaches

In addition to recording the 'transition stage', the thematic focus of the data extraction is the categorisation of transition support approaches. Preliminary analysis of the Strand one review studies indicated that these approaches can be meaningfully characterised along several analytical dimensions: their substantive focus, type, timing relative to the transition process, duration, and the stakeholders involved in their implementation. The categories relating to the focus of transition approaches were developed inductively from the overview of reviews and refined through iterative analysis of the extracted data. Through this process, thematic saturation was reached, with no additional focus categories emerging from the included studies.

Extracting outcomes

Outcomes are conceptualised as part of a theory-of-change pathway. Studies may report ‘proximal socio-emotional’, ‘intermediate behavioural’ or ‘distal academic’ learner outcomes. Mapping evidence across these outcome levels will allow the review to assess the strength and coherence of the evidence supporting different transition approaches. Studies reporting transition-related interventions involving parents, teachers, or other stakeholders will be included only where there is evidence of impact on learner outcomes. Outcomes pertaining to parents, teachers, or other stakeholders are treated as mechanisms within the systematic review and are extracted as textual evidence to inform the assessment and description of the ‘promise of effectiveness’ (see **Appendix C**).

Extracting promise of effectiveness

(Promise of) effectiveness, in turn, is understood as the extent to which an approach is associated with positive learner outcomes, supported by converging evidence on impact, implementation, and plausible mechanisms of change. Judgements of effectiveness therefore draw on quantitative evidence of outcomes alongside qualitative and mixed-methods evidence relating to feasibility, acceptability, and explanatory mechanisms, describing different levels of promise of effectiveness. With regard to evidence of impact, the review considers the direction of the reported evidence as a broad signal of impact rather than estimating effect size (see **Appendix C**).

Extracting contextual factors

In line with research questions 2b and 2c, data extraction for Strand two includes moderator analysis focused on learner-level disadvantage, geographical and community context of implementation, and setting-level roles and actions in implementation relating to leaders and teachers, tracing how these learner and contextual factors influence effectiveness. Free text boxes are provided alongside categories to extract qualitative, textual information to evidence how these factors may influence outcomes.

Extracting study design

In terms of data extraction on study design, Strand two recognises that different methodological traditions contribute evidence at different points along the causal pathway from implementation to longer-term learner outcomes. Quantitative studies most commonly report intermediate and distal outcomes, while qualitative and mixed-methods studies frequently provide evidence on implementation processes, mechanisms of change, and proximal outcomes. Integrating these complementary forms of evidence enables a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and promise of transition support approaches. Study design is captured during data extraction through the application of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018), which forms the study appraisal assessment for the Strand two systematic review, as described next.

Strand two: appraisal of included studies

Given the heterogeneity of study designs and the limited availability of randomised controlled trials in educational transition research, the review will apply the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al. 2018a, 2018b), a critical appraisal tool developed for use in mixed studies reviews. Study appraisal using the MMAT will be applied to the included evaluation studies, as generated by the second search strategies underpinning Strand two.

For copyright reasons, the details of this tool are not reproduced in **Appendix C**, and readers are referred to the original publication and accompanying supplementary materials published by BMJ Open (Hong et al. 2018b). The MMAT will be applied using the following procedure:

- The MMAT includes two optional screening questions applicable to all study types (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), assessing whether studies present clear research questions and whether the collected data allow those questions to be addressed. These screening questions will not be used as exclusion criteria in the Strand two systematic review, in order to retain all potentially relevant evidence and support a fuller understanding of both impacts and mechanisms.
- The MMAT provides a list of five quality criteria for five categories of study design: (1) qualitative, (2) randomised controlled, (3) nonrandomised, (4) quantitative descriptive, or (5) mixed methods. These criteria are rated using one of three responses: ‘yes’ (criterion met), ‘no’ (criterion not met), and ‘can’t tell’ (not enough information to judge if met or not). In such cases, companion papers will be searched for to identify additional information about the study. However, given the timeframe for the review, study authors will not be contacted to request further clarification or additional data.

- Rather than using a summative score by dividing the number of criteria met by five, which is not recommended by the authors because it hides important differences across criteria (Hong et al. 2018a), an interpretive overall judgement of MMAT criteria will be made, placing each study along a scale a high-medium-low, alongside free text comment box to specify what methodological concerns are raised (see **Appendix C**).

All coders will receive training in the application of the MMAT. Study appraisal using the MMAT will be conducted independently by two reviewers, with discrepancies resolved through consensus or adjudication by a third reviewer where necessary. This study appraisal will be conducted alongside an assessment of the ‘promise of effectiveness’, informed by implementation science (see ‘Data extraction’), which conceptualises effectiveness not only in terms of impact but also in relation to adoption, delivery, and sustainability (Shelton & Brownson, 2023), dimensions that are particularly informative for policy and implementation recommendations. Accordingly, the effectiveness of transition support approaches will be assessed based on the strength of the evidence in relation to: (a) the methodological quality of the research, (b) the extent to which different study designs provide evidence on mechanisms, intermediate processes, and learner outcomes along the review’s theory-of-change pathway, and (c) the consistency of findings across studies. Together, these elements enable appraisal of methodological quality and evidential contribution across quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, and supports calibrated judgements regarding effectiveness and promise as part of the data synthesis.

Data synthesis

The two strands will be written up separately, using narrative synthesis approach. Quantitative and qualitative data will be presented using descriptive synthesis, i.e. text and tables for both reviews. For both strands, data synthesis will include a focus on learner-level and context-level factors associated with disadvantage (socio-economic deprivation, SEND and other relevant characteristics emerging from data extraction), exploring whether and how transition challenges and support approaches vary between different groups of learners. The data synthesis work will be divided across the research team based on sector expertise, after which cross-phase patterns will be identified.

Strand one

Given the rich detail of the overview of reviews, findings will be written up as a narrative, with thematic sections for each transition stage, as well as overarching findings. In line with the data extraction template, findings will be presented, both within and across transition stages, around the key domains of transition challenges (i.e. socio-emotional, academic, parental engagement and stakeholder coordination), and their associated implications for learners, setting staff and parents. A further section will examine and set out the support approaches mentioned in the review studies. Within this, we will identify how challenges, implications and suggested approaches may differ for disadvantaged groups.

Strand two

For Strand two, the study characteristics and intervention components and how they address the transition challenges will be written up for each transition point. Any additional overarching findings will be presented separately. A meta-analysis of quantitative data will not be carried out. Given the possibility of a diverse set of interventions and the outcomes of interest this narrative approach is the most appropriate.

Similarly, given the mixed-method nature of the integrative review, moderator analysis will be conceptual rather than statistical. Data synthesis will trace the impact of programme characteristics and geographic and community context (rural, urban, regional deprivation). With regards to setting-level factors, the moderator analysis will focus on leadership structure and leadership and teacher behaviours and actions, separating out senior leadership from designated transition leadership.

As described in the study appraisal section, judgements about effectiveness and promise will be made during synthesis by integrating complementary dimensions of evidence across studies (quality of study, promise of effectiveness and consistency across studies). This will be done interpretatively, rather than applying overall scores to studies, so each dimension can be used to inform a calibrated judgement.

Timeline

Table 3: Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible / leading
March 2026	Protocol drafting and peer review	EEF, Dieuwerke Rutgers, Josephine Booth, Eleanor Byrne, Sarah Boodt
April 2026	Searches, screening	Dieuwerke Rutgers, Josephine Booth, Eleanor Byrne, Sarah Boodt, Emma Rempe-Gillan
April- May 2026	Screening, data extraction, reporting	Dieuwerke Rutgers, Josephine Booth, Eleanor Byrne, Sarah Boodt, Emma Rempe-Gillan
June-July 2026	Reporting	Dieuwerke Rutgers, Josephine Booth, Eleanor Byrne, Sarah Boodt, Emma Rempe-Gillan, Sally Pearse

Team

Table 4: Members of the systematic review team

Team member	Role in project
Dr Josephine Booth	Project lead, systematic review
Dr Dieuwerke Rutgers	Systematic review lead
Eleanor Byrne	Expertise in early years transitions , systematic review
Professor Sally Pearse	Expertise in early years transitions , advisor
Dr Sarah Boodt	Expertise into transition to 16-19 education , systematic review
Dr Emma Rempe-Gillan	Expertise in primary to secondary transition , systematic review

All team members are employed by Sheffield Hallam University.

Conflicts of interest

We are not aware of any conflict of interest relating to this review.

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Appendix A – Overview of reviews searches

Database	Date of search	Search terms	Filters	Returns
British Education Index (EBSCO-host)	12/11/2025	(('school transition' or 'school transitioning' or 'school transitions' or 'transition planning' or 'transition phase' or 'educational transition')) AND ((review or 'systematic review' or 'literature review' or meta-analysis))	Past 5 years Peer-reviewed	Title and Abstract: 39 Title only: 10
Education Databases from ProQuest (ERIC, Education Database, Sports Medicine & Education Index)	12/11/2025	(('school transition' or 'school transitioning' or 'school transitions' or 'transition planning' or 'transition phase' or 'educational transition')) AND ((review or 'systematic review' or 'literature review' or 'meta-analysis' or synthesis or 'evidence synthesis' or 'evidence base' or evidence-base))	Past 10 years/past 5 years Peer-reviewed Language - English	Title only: 35
Education Abstracts H.W. Wilson/EBSCO-host	17/11/2025	: (('school transition' or 'school transitioning' or 'school transitions' or 'transition planning' or 'transition phase' or 'educational transition')) AND ((review or 'systematic review' or 'literature review' or meta-analysis) NOT (employment OR work))	Past 5 years Peer-reviewed	Abstract: 66 Title: 15
SCOPUS	17/11/2025	TITLE (('school transition' OR 'school transitioning' OR 'school transitions' OR 'transition planning' OR 'transition phase' OR 'educational transition') AND (review OR 'systematic review' OR 'literature review' OR meta-analysis OR synthesis) AND NOT (employment OR work)) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "PSYC"))) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) TITLE-ABS (('school transition' OR 'school transitioning' OR 'school transitions' OR 'transition planning' OR 'transition phase' OR 'educational transition') AND (review OR 'systematic review' OR 'literature review' OR meta-analysis OR synthesis) AND NOT (employment OR work)) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "PSYC"))) AND (LIMIT-TO (Language - English Past 5 years Peer-reviewed	Title and Abstract: 113 Title: 1

Appendix B – Overview of reviews data extraction template

Overarching categories (data extraction in Covidence)	Sub-categories (data synthesis in Excel, preliminary)
<p>a) Transition stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. into Early Education school-based settings i.e. Reception or school nursery, II. from Reception to Year 1, III. from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, and IV. from secondary school to post-16 education. 	<p>N/A</p>
<p>b) Transition challenge domain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Academic and learning adjustment challenges II. Socio-emotional and relational adjustment challenges III. Family-engagement and home-setting interface challenges IV. School and stakeholder coordination challenges 	<p>Preliminary sub-themes identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Academic and learning adjustment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. lack of curriculum continuity (including new/unfamiliar subjects) II. lack of teacher knowledge and understanding of transition process (e.g. knowledge of previous setting, skills in transition support) III. change in instructional practices (e.g. multiple teachers, play-based versus structured learning) IV. change in setting culture and behavioural expectations V. changes in physical environment of setting (e.g. larger buildings) b) Learner socio-emotional and relational adjustment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. change in relationships – peers II. change in relationships – staff III. academic self-regulation IV. socio-emotional self-regulation V. academic belonging VI. socio-emotional belonging VII. self-efficacy VIII. identity IX. mental health (including anxiety) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased levels of autonomy and independence c) Family-engagement and home-setting interface challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. communication challenges, including cultural and language barriers II. collaboration challenges, including barriers to support (parent time, resource) III. parental advocacy challenges IV. lack of parent/carer knowledge and understanding of transition process d) Setting and stakeholder coordination challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. in-school transition team (e.g. communication and collaboration, time, resource) II. intra-professional, between settings challenges (e.g. communication, collaboration, time, resource) III. inter-professional education/Health (e.g. SCI, OT) IV. local and district-level administration communication and collaboration challenges V. other

<p>c) Moderators for disadvantage characterised through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. socio-economic status/deprivation II. SEND III. other 	<p>Synthesis ongoing, sub-themes not yet defined</p>
<p>d) Transition challenges – implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. learner implications II. parent implications III. school staff implications 	<p>Synthesis ongoing, sub-themes not yet defined</p>
<p>e) Transition support approaches</p>	<p>Preliminary categories identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Transition preparation and orientation activities II. Academic and learning and organisation skills support III. Improve curriculum continuity IV. Ongoing transition support structures (including ‘home’ rooms or mentor groups, dedicated transition staff and roles) V. Peer and social support approaches (including peer mentoring and buddy systems) VI. School climate and supportive learning environments VII. Family engagement and communication VIII. Professional coordination and collaboration IX. Individualised transition planning X. Other

Appendix C – Systematic review of impact evidence data extraction template

Transition stage (tick only)

- into Early Education school-based settings i.e. Reception or school nursery,
- from Reception to Year 1,
- from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, and
- from secondary school to post-16 education.

Approaches (tick only, unless specified otherwise)

- substantive focus
 - transition preparation and orientation activities
 - academic and learning and organisation skills support
 - improve curriculum continuity
 - ongoing transition support structures (including 'home' rooms or mentor groups, dedicated transition staff and roles)
 - peer and social support approaches (including peer mentoring and buddy systems)
 - school climate and supportive learning environments
 - family engagement and communication
 - professional coordination and collaboration
 - individualised transition planning
 - other (tick with comment box)
- type of intervention
 - Universal
 - Targeted
 - Differentiated intensity
- timing of approach relative to transition
 - Pre
 - During
 - Post
 - Across
- duration of transition intervention
 - Up to 1 month
 - More than 1 month to 6 months
 - More than 6 months to 12 months
 - More than 12 months to 24 months
 - More than 24 months
- stakeholder involvement/collaboration (tick and comment box)
 - intra- professional (educators)
 - in-school transition team
 - parents/families
 - learners
 - inter- professional education/Health (e.g. SCI, OT)
 - other
- additional approaches/intervention characteristics
 - tick with comment box (free text – brief note)

Outcomes (tick and comment box for each category)

- distal outcomes:
 - academic attainment/achievement
 - progress
 - retention/drop-out
- intermediate outcomes (behavioural):
 - school engagement (attendance, behaviour, motivation, participation)
 - home behavioural adjustment

- proximal outcomes:
 - socio-emotional (psychological and relational)

Moderators (tick and comment box for each category)

- learner-level disadvantage
 - socio-economic status/deprivation
 - SEND
 - other
- geographic and community context of implementation
 - rural
 - urban
 - social economic characteristics
- setting-level roles and actions in implementation
 - leadership structure
 - leadership actions
 - transition leads actions
 - teacher actions
 - other staff actions

Promise of effectiveness (tick only, unless specified otherwise)

- Evidence of impact
 - Quantitative evidence reported (Y/N)
 - Effect size reported (Y/N)
 - Statistical significance reported (Y/N)
 - Direction of findings
 - Positive
 - Mixed
 - Null
 - Negative
- Evidence of mechanism
 - Mechanism or Theory of change described (Does the study explain how the approach is expected to improve outcomes?)
 - Yes – clearly described
 - Partial – implied or briefly described
 - No – not described
 - Key mechanisms identified (comment box)
- Evidence of implementation
 - feasibility (was the approach reported as practical to deliver?)
 - Yes
 - Mixed / challenges reported
 - No
 - Not reported
 - acceptability (did participants view the approach positively?)
 - Positive
 - Mixed
 - Negative
 - Not reported
 - fidelity (was the intervention delivered as intended?)
 - High fidelity reported
 - Partial fidelity / adaptations
 - Fidelity problems reported
 - Not reported
 - reach / participation (did the intended participants engage?)
 - Good uptake / participation

- Uneven uptake
- Low uptake / attrition issues
- Not reported
- Sustainability / scalability (did the study discuss long-term use or scaling?)
 - Yes
 - Some discussion
 - No
 - Not reported

Weight of evidence (WoE) (tick with comment box)

- MMAT study appraisal (WoE A – Hong et al. 2018))
- Interpretive judgement of MMAT criteria
 - High (meets most MMAT criteria with no major limitations, please specify)
 - Medium (some methodological concerns, please specify)
 - Low (Multiple important limitations, please specify)

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