

Child poverty, education and children's rights: An analysis of the UK
'Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable
Development Goals'

Clare Rhatigan

MEd, BA (Hons) CQSW, PGCE, SFHEA, NNEB.

May 2026

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational Research

Lancaster University

UK

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my personal work and has not been submitted in the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

None of the sections of the thesis has been published or submitted for a higher degree elsewhere.

Signature ...Clare Rhatigan

Previous Work

The following are two of the assessed pieces of work, unpublished, from Part One of my thesis:

Rhatigan, C. (2022) '*Food security for social justice: access to food to achieve social justice in education: a conceptual examination*', Lancaster University, unpublished

Rhatigan, C. (2022) '*Child Poverty Action Group as social activism that impacts on education in UK*', Lancaster University, unpublished

Abstract

This thesis is a document analysis of the United Kingdom's 'Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals' (UKVNR, 2019) (SDGs) regarding Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4, child poverty and children's rights. My focus is on three aspects of the UKVNR: first, early years provision; secondly, the attainment gap; thirdly, access to nutritious food and its impact on children's education. I consider the similarities and differences relating to the framing of poverty, and whether the UK government and the governments of the Devolved Administrations, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, recognise children's rights as underpinning the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015). Drawing on both the capability approach and human rights, I consider the extent to which the UKVNR recognises poverty's impact on children's lives and their access to and participation in education. I undertake document analysis of the UKVNR (2019), using a reflexive thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2022) to question whether the UKVNR reflects the multidimensional nature of poverty and explore the visibility of children, and poverty's impact on their education and rights.

My thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge, by focusing on child poverty SDG-1, education SDG-4 and rights in the UK with respect to the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales that has not previously been undertaken. My research shows that across the Four Nations, issues of social inequality had worsened, that this manifested itself with respect to early years' provision, the attainment gap and access to nutritious food. I argue that child poverty is not being comprehensively addressed and, consequently, the connected social injustices impact on children's education and children not achieving their full capabilities. My research also identifies the differing approaches to framing poverty in the UKVNR and by the Devolved Administrations. I argue that the UKVNR has a limited framing of poverty by failing to recognise that Poverty SDG-1, deals with the multidimensional nature of poverty, which in turn impacts on Education SDG-4, and the full implementation of children's rights. Poverty reduction is seen as an individual responsibility addressed through welfare reform and full employment. However, a more nuanced, broader multidimensional framing of poverty is offered by Scotland and Wales, with a recognition that poverty impacts on children's education and is a rights based issue that places obligations on government to uphold children's rights. Based on my analysis, I highlight the

UK government's lack of commitment in the UKVNR to children's rights and offer recommendations relating to tackling the impact of poverty on children's education.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to my supervisor Dr Ann-Marie Houghton. This thesis would never have been completed without her consistent guidance and support. Her understanding of inclusive education made it possible for me to deal with the lifelong obstacles of an often inhospitable educational landscape that does not fully appreciate how difficult any level of study is with dyslexia, and particularly doctoral work.

To my Mum and Dad, no longer here but always in my heart. Thank you for everything you did for me, you always supported my dreams.

And a heartfelt thanks to my family. Without you and all the love, support and encouragement you have shown me, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. Thank you just does not seem enough.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vii
Abbreviation list	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Content of the Chapter	1
1.2 Relevance of my research	1
1.3 The context of my research	2
1.4 Why I am interested and motivated in this research area	4
1.5 Aim and approach of the research	4
1.5.1 Research questions	6
1.5.2 Statement of originality	7
1.5.3 Structure of thesis	7
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND RIGHTS	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Background to the SDGs	10
2.2.1 United Nations - Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	10
2.3 Rights and children	11
2.3.1 Background	11
2.3.2 Rights and obligations	13
2.3.3 Rights and General Comments (GCs)	14
2.4 SDGs, children and their rights	15
2.4.1 The presence of children	15
2.4.2 Leave No One Behind (LNOB)	17
2.5 Education, Poverty, Children and the UKVNR	18
2.6 Summary	22
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	23
3.1 Introduction	23
3.1.1 Framing the search	23
3.2 Child Poverty in the UK	25
3.2.1 Framing poverty, including child poverty	25
3.2.2 Development of the UK poverty narrative	28
3.2.3 Impact of poverty	31
3.3 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) as a Research Resource	35
3.3.1 Using Voluntary National Reviews	35
3.3.2 Human rights and the SDGs in VNRs	37
3.4 Visibility of children in research	39
3.5 Summary	41
CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL APPROACH	43
4.1 Capability Approach (CA)	43
4.1.1 Introduction to the Capability Approach	43
4.1.2 Development of the Capability Approach	44
4.1.3 Capability Approach and Children	46
4.2 Capability Approach, Human Rights, the SDGs and Children	48
4.2.1 Capability Approach, Poverty and Education	49

4.3 Summary	52
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY	54
5.1 Introduction	54
5.2 Ontology and Epistemology	54
5.3 Ethics and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)	55
5.4 Document analysis	56
5.5 Reflexive Thematic Analysis: A Methodological Framework	58
5.5.1 Phase 1 - Familiarising yourself with the dataset	58
5.5.2 Phase 2 - Coding	59
5.5.3 Phase 3 - Generating candidate themes	62
5.5.4 Phase 4 - Developing and reviewing themes	63
5.5.5 Phase 5 - Refining, defining, and naming themes	67
5.5.6 Phase 6 - Writing up	69
5.6 Summary	70
5.6.1 Preface to the next three chapters	70
CHAPTER 6: RQ1: HOW DOES THE UK FRAME CHILD POVERTY WHEN ADDRESSING POVERTY-SDG1? ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	72
6.1 Introduction to RQ1	72
6.2 Poverty, welfare reform and full employment	72
6.3 Government accountability regarding Poverty SDG-1	75
6.4 Troubled Families Programme	79
6.5 Devolved Administrations	81
6.5.1 Scotland	81
6.5.2 Wales	83
6.5.3 Northern Ireland (NI)	85
6.6 Summary - RQ1: How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty-SDG1?	87
CHAPTER 7: RQ2: HOW DOES THE UK FRAMING OF POVERTY IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION SDG-4? ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	90
7.1 Introduction to RQ2	90
7.2 Education and Poverty	90
7.2.1 Devolved Administrations	93
7.3 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	94
7.3.1 Devolved Administrations	96
7.4 Attainment Gap	98
7.4.1 Devolved Administrations	99
7.4.2 Capability Approach	101
7.5 Education and access to nutritious food	102
7.5.1 Devolved Administrations	103
7.5.2 Capability Approach	106
7.6 Summary of RQ2: How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4?	107
CHAPTER 8: RQ3: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE RIGHTS SEEN AS INTEGRAL TO THE UK APPROACH TO MEETING THE 2030 AGENDA WITH RESPECT TO CHILDREN'S EDUCATION? ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	111
8.1 Introduction to RQ3	111
8.2 The related Human Rights obligations	112
8.3 Acknowledgment of rights in UKVNR	113
8.4 Devolved Administrations	116

8.4.1 Scotland	116
8.4.2 Wales	120
8.4.3 Northern Ireland (NI)	122
8.5 Summary of RQ3 – To what extent that rights are seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children’s education	122
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	125
9.1 Introduction	125
9.2 Revisiting the RQs	126
9.2.1 RQ1 - How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty SDG-1?	126
9.2.2 RQ2 - How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children’s Education SDG-4	127
9.2.3 RQ3 - To what extent are rights seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children’s education?	128
9.3 Theoretical and methodological approaches	129
9.4 Original contribution to academic knowledge	130
9.5 Limitations of research	131
9.6 Recommendations for the government and researchers	131
REFERENCES	134
APPENDICES	156
Appendix 1 – Sustainable Development Goals, UNGA 70/1 (2015)	156
Appendix 2 – Lists of Capabilities	157
2A Nussbaum’s Central Human Capabilities	157
2B Biggeri’s List correlated to CRC (1989) Rights	159
Appendix 3 – Code sets	160
First Code List	161
Penultimate Code List	162
Final Code List	162

List of Tables

Table 5.1: List of documents used	58
Table 5.2: Codes identified at different stages of analysis	61
Table 5.3: Development of Themes	63
Table 5.4: Poverty Statistics and Themes	64
Table 5.5: Breakdown of references by sub-code	64
Table 5.6: Codes and Themes	66
Table 8.1: (EHRC, 2017:66–67, Table 5.1)	115
Table 10.1: First Code Set	161
Table 10.2: Penultimate Code List	162
Table 10.3: Final Code List	162

Abbreviation list

AHC	After Housing Costs
APPGH	All Party Parliamentary Group on Health
ATD	All Together in Dignity
BASW	British Association of Social Work
BHC	Before Housing Costs
CA	Capability Approach
CDP	Committee for Development Policy
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
COs	Concluding Observation(s) (UN)
CPA	Child Poverty Act
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CteeRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN)
CWIP	Child Welfare Inequalities Project
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DfE	Department for Education
DfID	Department for International Development.
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
EPI	Education Policy Institute
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FE	Further Education
FNP	Family Nurse Partnership (Northern Ireland)
FSMs	Free School Meals

GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GCs	General Comment(s) (UN)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HBAI	Households Below Average Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HE	Higher Education
HLPEP	High Level Panel of Eminent Persons
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Office
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIS	Minimum Income Standard
NCMD	National Child Mortality Database
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NI	Northern Ireland
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NPF	National Performance Framework (Scotland)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDG	Pupil Development Grant (Wales)
PfG	Programme for Government (Northern Ireland)
RCPCH	Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health
RQ/s	Research Question/s
RRS	Rights Respecting Schools (UNICEF)
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goal/s
SSR	Scotland Supplementary Review - Scottish Government (2020). Scotland and the Sustainable Development Goals: A national review to drive action

TA	Thematic Analysis
TFP	Troubled Families Programme
UC	Universal Credit
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UKVNR	United Kingdom Voluntary National Review – HM Government (2019). Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WSR	Wales Supplementary Review – Welsh Government (2019). Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals – Supplementary Report to the UK Voluntary National Review 2019

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, the Labour party lost the general election. From 2010 to 2015, there was a coalition government between the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrat party. A general election in 2015 resulted in the Conservative government gaining a majority to form the government alone (Bochel & Powell 2016). The United Kingdom Voluntary National Review (UKVNR 2019) was written by the Conservative government whose term of office was from 2015 until 2024. As I complete my thesis, a new government, under Labour has come into power in July 2024. Consequently, the thesis and its examination of the UKVNR should be viewed from the standpoint of the Conservative government's time in office up to April 2024. My research is based on documents that clearly state that they are not written within the context of COVID-19. My thesis, although referring in places to the impact of COVID, has not focused on the pandemic.

1.1 Content of the Chapter

This chapter provides an introduction to the whole thesis. It has five sections:

- Content of the Chapter (1.1)
- Relevance of my research (1.2)
- The context of my research (1.3)
- Why I am interested and motivated in this research area (1.4)
- The aim and approach of the research (1.5)
 - Research questions (1.5.1)
 - Statement of originality (1.5.2)
 - Structure of thesis (1.5.3)

1.2 Relevance of my research

There is research on the negative impact of poverty on children's educational progression and well-being. A systematic review of 34 studies identified links between low income and impacts on children's cognitive development and school achievement (Cooper and Stewart, 2013), which were then supported by an additional 27 new studies (Cooper and Stewart, 2017). Longitudinal research in the UK has identified the impact of persistent poverty on

poorer cognitive and behaviour outcomes of children (Dickerson and Popli, 2016, 2018). OECD (2020) research on early years and well-being of five year-olds in the UK, Estonia and USA found a relationship between children's early learning and the social economic status of the child's family; the more affluent the family, the better the progress of the child.

Primary school children in Northern Ireland participated in research to share their experiences of the impact of poverty on their education. The research found that the children's experience of school is determined by the level of disadvantage that they live with, and that they were aware that outcomes were different for children from more affluent families (Horgan, 2009). Feedback from children highlights how poverty impacts on their education (Naven et al., 2019) and their everyday lives (Ridge, 2011).

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights' report (De Schutter, 2021), drawing on global academic research studies by international organizations, highlighted the negative impact poverty has on children's access to and achievement in education, with consequences into adulthood. De Schutter argues that persistent child poverty is a human rights violation. He recommended improved access to inclusive education, increased investment in high quality early education, and an end to discrimination due to socio-economic disadvantage (De Schutter, 2021).

The protection of the rights of the child in implementing the 2030 Agenda was seen as sufficiently important to warrant a report to the UN from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2017). The OHCHR report, supported by academic research and studies by a range of organizations, establishes the importance and relevance of tackling child poverty to achieve fairer overall educational outcomes. It argues that addressing child poverty is a priority as it is detrimental to children's outcomes and leads to a denial of their rights. They recommend states must ensure that even if resources are limited, children's rights should not be overlooked and equitable investment in all children is a priority in decision making.

1.3 The context of my research

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the 2030 Agenda by setting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved globally by 2030 (UNGA, 2015)

(see Appendix 1 list of SDGs). The UN affirmed that the 2030 Agenda is underpinned by human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other international instruments (UNGA, 2015:6). The United Kingdom (UK) has ratified most international human rights instruments and the European regional ones.

As part of keeping a record of how governments are working towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, the General Assembly called on governments to produce regular Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of their progress towards meeting the Goals (UNGA, 2015). Under the then Conservative government, the United Kingdom produced one such review in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. My thesis fills a gap in the academic research on the UKVNR in relation to how child poverty is framed and its impact on children's education and their rights. This research has not been undertaken before and so is of relevance in terms of identifying the strengths and limitations of the UKVNR as it relates to child poverty, education and rights. It could shape future UKVNR submissions and offers ideas for academics interested in examining VNRs. It also adds to other VNR evaluations that have been undertaken in other countries, such as how health is framed in Norway and Sweden (Lillehagen et al., 2020).

Specific research on Education SDG-4 was carried out by Smith (2021) and Smith et al. (2024). That looked at 33 VNRs including the UK submitted in 2019, to the Higher-Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLPF). My own research of the UKVNR supports Smith's (2021) observation that the UKVNR places emphasis on the importance of early childhood as necessary to inclusion and participation in meeting Education SDG-4. Similarly, Smith's (2021) and my own research highlight that the UKVNR places emphasis on the need for greater efforts to be made in developing countries rather than in the UK. In a follow up study, Smith et al. (2024) examined 28 VNRs from 2022, again looking at Education SDG-4. Both studies by Smith are comparative research on a broad range of countries and their findings highlight that different countries have adopted national-centric approaches when submitting their reports. To date, the UK has only submitted one UKVNR. Although Smith et al., (2024) advocates that states should commit to regular reporting, not just one VNR submission, they nevertheless acknowledge that there are benefits from a wholly voluntary process in terms of making countries comply with the voluntary targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda.

1.4 Why I am interested and motivated in this research area

Forty years' experience across statutory, voluntary, and private provision as an early year's practitioner, social worker, and lecturer have informed this research. It has enabled me to become aware of how government legislation, policies and societal attitudes regarding poverty impact in a daily way on families, children and their outcomes, including educational. In both my professional and personal life, I have been very conscious of the impact of poverty on people's lives and its consequences and its continuing presence in UK society. As I come to the end of a long career, I have felt both angry and saddened that the causes of poverty are still not addressed in any meaningful manner and that the inequalities that flow from poverty are still present.

I have acquired a range of professional qualifications, all of which have been vital in developing my skills, practice and thinking and which have shaped the development of this thesis.

Part One of the PhD programme allowed me to begin to reflect on the complex, multidimensional nature of poverty. The following are assessed pieces of work from Part One of my thesis:

- 'Food security for social justice: access to food to achieve social justice in education: a conceptual examination', (Rhatigan, 2022)
- 'Child Poverty Action Group as social activism that impacts on education in UK', (Rhatigan, 2022)

This thesis is an opportunity to refine my thinking after 40 years of practice and engagement.

1.5 Aim and approach of the research

The aim of the research is to focus on how the UK frames child poverty, its impact on children's education and their rights, domestically, in relation to the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015). To do this I make use of the UKVNR of the SDGs, and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales as a way of highlighting good practice and areas to be developed. To

date, there has only been one UKVNR and a date for the next one has not yet been announced by the government.

My data sources are:

- Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, June 2019. (UKVNR, 2019)
- Scotland and the Sustainable Development Goals: A national review to drive action (SSR, 2020)
- Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals. Supplementary Report to the UK Voluntary National Review 2019 (WSR, 2019)

The UK has a complex constitutional structure, made up of four nations, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Westminster government can legislate for the UK, but it has devolved some powers to the three Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. My approach to using the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales, as my source material is qualitative and reflective in nature.

The document analysis of the reports is influenced by Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA).

My research is a desk-based study of the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown was underway when I was deciding on my research. This influenced my choice of carrying out desk-based research and to undertake document analysis of the government documents. My research could, therefore, be undertaken in a manner that did not require responses from participants, either from interviews or through questionnaires with groups or individuals, when the lockdown restricted interactions and behaviour.

My theoretical approach is underpinned by the capability approach (CA) as initially set out by Amartya Sen (Sen, 1980, 1983, 2005) and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000, 2003, 2013) regarding how people's capabilities can flourish or diminish given the environment around them. I also use a human rights lens to further underpin my theoretical approach, as rights underpin the SDG Agenda (2015), and the UK has obligations and duties to uphold

human rights as set out in international treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989).

1.5.1 Research questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to examine the UKVNR in relation to child poverty, education and rights. Three main research questions (RQs) form the basis of and guide my research. Although each can stand alone, I aim to show the interlinking of the RQs, and in the building on one another, provide a way of examining the UKVNR in a qualitative and comprehensive manner that considers how child poverty, education and the rights of children are framed.

RQ1: How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty SDG-1?

RQ2: How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4?

RQ3: To what extent are rights seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education?

Beginning with RQ1, I consider how the UK frames child poverty when addressing Poverty SDG-1. This involves considering the extent to which poverty is seen as multi-dimensional and where responsibility and accountability for poverty lies. Following on from this, RQ2 explores to what extent the UK government's framing of poverty impacts on children's education. RQ2 considers if the intersectionality between poverty and education is acknowledged and addressed in the UKVNR. Finally, RQ3, considers the extent to which rights are seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education.

In answering the RQs, this thesis highlights the importance of examining government documents, such as the UKVNR, which have been submitted to the UN. Human rights are seen as integral to underpinning the 2030 Agenda. Considering how far rights and particularly children's rights are incorporated and seen as important within the VNR and supplementary reports, highlights the visibility and status of children. A rights-based approach demands that child poverty is also addressed as an independent element of Poverty SDG-1 which is crucial when looking at Education SDG-4, where the focus will naturally fall on children's educational experience.

1.5.2 Statement of originality

My thesis is an original contribution to knowledge; it identifies the differing approaches to framing poverty in the UKVNR and by the Devolved Administrations. Additionally, the UKVNR has a limited framing of poverty unlike the more nuanced, broader framing of poverty offered by Scotland and Wales. I argue that the UK government has an unsophisticated and very individualised approach to poverty. It has not sought to utilise a rights-based approach as required by the SDGs. I also highlight that the UK government in the UKVNR revealed a lack of commitment to children's rights and the impact of poverty on children's education. To my knowledge, similar research focusing on child Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4 and rights in the UK, as set out in the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales, has not been undertaken before.

1.5.3 Structure of thesis

The thesis is divided into nine chapters.

Chapter 1, Introduction, explains the relevance, my motivation and interest for the study, it outlines the aims and approach to the research, the three RQs and, my original contribution, finally, the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2, Background to the 2030 Agenda and rights (UNGA, 2015), gives an overview of children within the SDGs, it considers the premise of Leave no one behind (LNOB) and the connection between the VNRs and rights.

Chapter 3, Literature Review, provides the background in relation to the areas covered and underpinning my research including: framing of child poverty in the UK, the development of the poverty narrative, and how people in poverty who need to access welfare benefits are required to meet certain conditions. This chapter also considers the literature in relation to the impact of poverty on the important interconnecting aspects children's lives, their education and access to food, all of which relate to my examination of the UKVNR.

Chapter 4, Theoretical Approach, draws on the capability approach (CA). The areas covered include the link between the CA and human development and rights, how the CA has been used in research concerning children and education, and the link between the CA, human rights and children.

Chapter 5, Methodology, outlines my use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of reflexive analysis, I undertook a qualitative analysis of the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 provide my analysis and discussion of the RQs in relation to the UKVNR (2019) and the supplementary reports of Scotland (SSR, 2020) and Wales (WSR, 2019). The three RQs are explored in turn, with a context for each given at the beginning of each chapter and a summary at the end.

Chapter 9, Conclusion, draws together the main points from all the RQs, the links between them and the overall findings of my analysis of the UKVNR (2019), and supplementary reports of Wales (WSR, 2019) and Scotland (SSR, 2020). I summarise how the RQs explore government claims in the VNR and how children living in poverty are impacted *vis-à-vis* their education and, consequently, throughout their lives. I draw on the main points from, and the influence of the theoretical approach used to answer the RQs, outlining how the former Conservative government approached Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, that are designed to ensure the rights of all children are met through an inclusive and equitable educational experience. Chapter 9 also addresses the limitations of my research and offers ideas for future research with respect to child poverty, education and children's rights going forward to 2030 and beyond.

Chapter 2: Background to the Sustainable Development Goals and Rights

2.1 Introduction

The SDGs are the culmination of decades of progress towards promoting human development through rights. This chapter outlines the context, starting with a background to sustainable development and moving onto an overview of the 2030 Agenda. Consideration is then given to the presence of children within the Agenda, their rights, education, the fundament of the Agenda to Leave No One Behind, and in the context of VNRs. The chapter concludes by considering the links between education, poverty and children.

This research is concerned with contemporary events and activities rather than an in-depth historical evaluation of the concept of sustainable development. Nonetheless, it is useful to acknowledge and signpost a beneficial overview given as to the historical roots of sustainable development (Du Pisani, 2006). Du Pisani outlines an historical overview across the centuries of how ideas of human development, progress and resource allocation were identified and understood within various philosophical traditions, taking account of social and economic issues relating to equality and social justice.

The chapter is structured as follows:

- Background to the SDGs (2.2)
 - United Nations - Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2.2.1)
- Rights and children (2.3)
 - Background (2.3.1)
 - Rights and obligations (2.3.2)
 - Rights and General Comments (GCs) (2.3.3)
- SDGs, children and their rights (2.4)
 - The presence of children (2.4.1)
 - 'Leave No One Behind' (2.4.2)
- Education, poverty, children and the UKVNR (2.5)
- Summary (2.6)

2.2 Background to the SDGs

The SDGs reflect decades of thought on development and the relevance of rights (Ala-Uddin 2019). The UN had promulgated the Millennium Declaration in 2000 (UNGA Res, 2000) setting out the Millennium Development Goals to be met by 2015 (MDGs). The 15 MDGs aimed to reduce by half the number of people globally in extreme poverty, provide access to universal primary education, promote gender equality, and reduce child mortality (UNGA Res 2000). As Alston (2005) highlighted, they were based on human rights, even if there was no reference to rights in the MDGs. To meet the limitations of the MDGs, in 2015 the UNGA promulgated the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2.2.1 United Nations - Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The SDGs were adopted in 2015 by all member states of the United Nations, including the UK. They consist of 17 Goals for sustainable prosperity and equality across the globe (See Appendix 1). Each goal has a set of targets to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs were created through an inclusive approach that also engaged NGOs, business, and civil society from across the world. The SDGs embed the importance of rights in a more concrete, fundamental and explicit manner than the MDGs had.

The 2030 Agenda sets out a “plan of action ... for all countries and stakeholders to achieve the 17 Goals” (UNGA, 2015:5) and outlines the manner in which the SDGs should be seen in terms of being integrated and indivisible and should affirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948). Important for this research, the 2030 Agenda (2015) affirms the centrality of the fulfilment of rights as an enduring principle through its acknowledgment of the importance of the tone set within the founding UN Charter of 1945 (UN, 1945).

The 2030 Agenda further builds on the principle of human rights in a stronger more inclusive manner by recognising not just adults, but also the important role of the involvement of all individuals, including children. It acknowledges the agency and involvement across diverse groups by committing to the opening of the UN Charter (1945) that is rooted in ‘We the Peoples’: as such, the 2030 Agenda dovetails nicely with its core idea of no-one being left behind, discussed in section 2.4.2.

The SDGs therefore may be understood as an evolution from the opening words of the 1945 Charter. Given the developments in society since then, the SDGs reflect an inclusive approach. They are intertwined with the international human rights law framework, started in 1948 by setting out a range of obligations for states, particularly with respect to children (CRC, 1989). SDGs are discussed directly in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 in relation to my research questions (RQs).

2.3 Rights and children

2.3.1 Background

Before 1948, the way a state treated its own citizens was not a matter of concern for other states. However, in the UDHR (1948) the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) set out core principles that should apply to all human beings without any discrimination on grounds “such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (UDHR, 1948, Article 2). Although merely a Declaration of the UNGA and, as such, not binding, the UDHR has led to the promulgation of treaties that bind states parties (ICESCR, 1966; CEDAW, 1979; CRPD, 2006; CRC, 1989). States have to respect, protect, and fulfil these rights, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, for everyone within their territory and jurisdiction (Eide, 1987; UN, 1993).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), signed and ratified by the UK, places obligations on states to uphold children’s rights (Lansdown, 2010).The Preamble to the CRC has been viewed as important in justifying a moral case for the importance of rights for children and for childhood, with the inclusion of the terms “inherent dignity” and “inalienable rights ... of all members of the human family” (Freeman, 2019:17). I would further suggest that the CRC, Article 3, regarding the paramountcy of the best interests of the child, if implemented in practice, reflects the principles of respect, protection and fulfilment of rights.

The 2030 Agenda, although acknowledging its principles are based on rights, would have been even more powerful in meeting the SDGs and fulfilling children’s rights if it had made greater use across the document of the importance of the CRC (1989). The CRC, ratified by

every state in the world except the USA, recognises childhood as entitled to special care and assistance and the need for positive interventions to uphold the centrality of children's rights (CRC, 1989). Thus, the CRC is a parallel set of universal obligations alongside the UDHR and the SDGs. The responsibility of member states in achieving the SDGs is to respect, protect and promote human rights and dignity and that must include all children (UNGA, 2015).

For Nolan (2020), the SDGs are a crucial framework in which to address child poverty and, if implemented effectively, should advance children's rights. However, Nolan cautions on the limitations of the SDGs, as they are not binding on member states in the way that rights are under international law. As Nolan suggests, although limiting effectiveness, they may nevertheless encourage member states to be willing to take on the Agenda's vision. The 2030 Agenda is therefore seen as important in terms of offering a framework and narrative regarding global challenges that could be used to apply influence at a national and international level (Fukuda-Parr, 2019). Thus, despite the SDGs not imposing binding legal obligations on member states, there are targets which, when coupled with the VNR mechanism, ensure a method by which to evaluate state compliance and indirectly hold them to account.

A limitation of the earlier Millennium Development Goals was the focus on human development in developing countries, whereas the SDGs apply to all countries. The 2030 Agenda has been regarded as more comprehensive *vis-à-vis* children and their rights (Dornan, 2017). Although rights underpin the 2030 Agenda, there is no comprehensive mapping of all the SDGs to the UDHR (1948) or other United Nations multilateral international human rights norms, especially the CRC (1989). If this had been provided at the outset, I suggest this would have given greater signposting to member states as to the interlinking of SDGs and state obligations to fulfil the rights of all citizens. Furthermore, it would have given a stronger direction at both national and international level to governments when undertaking implementation of the SDGs. However, a useful, if perhaps underused interactive tool that shows the synergy between the CRC Articles and the SDGs was produced on behalf of UNICEF to show how integrated and interdependent the SDGs and the CRC are, has been provided by Wernham (2016). A mapping across between the SDGs and all human rights has also been undertaken (OHCHR, 2016).

Thus, when looking at the SDGs and their implementation as 2030 approaches, human rights provide a framework for judging how far a state has managed to meet those goals. In my thesis, Poverty SDG-1, needs to be seen in the context of, for example, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to education (ICESCR, 1966, Articles 11-14) and always implemented in a non-discriminatory manner, which applies as much to children as anyone else.

2.3.2 Rights and obligations

The centrality of rights and their implementation are considered vital in progressing towards the fulfilment of the SDGs by 2030 (UNGA, 2015). Rights have this position due to the near global ratification and incorporation. The 2030 Agenda highlights the ‘responsibilities’ of all states to “respect, protect and promote human rights” (UNGA, 2015:6). Arguably using the term ‘responsibilities’ in the 2030 Agenda limited states’ obligations to uphold rights. Williams & Blaiklock (2016) suggest that if the 2030 Agenda had incorporated the term obligation with more rigour in the text, it would have helped reinforce links between rights and the SDGs. Sengupta (2018) also makes a pertinent point in relation to textual decisions relating to the UN Agenda and Poverty SDG-1:

It feels wrong that the 2030 Agenda re-commits states to realising their international human rights obligations on the one hand, while suggesting, on the other, that they need to meet only national benchmarks while striving for these goals. (Sengupta, 2018:14)

I suggest that greater clarity and consistency is needed across UN documents issued to states to avoid confusion and to reinforce state obligations to fulfil implementation of the rights of everyone. This would in turn give a clearer steer to states, such as the UK, when writing the VNRs.

UN human rights treaty bodies issue General Comments (GCs) concerning Conventions, including the CRC (1989). They use the term obligations *vis-à-vis* states, such as GC5 regarding the implementation of the CRC (CRC/GC 5, 2003). The purpose of GCs is to aid states, including the UK, to interpret Conventions and identify obligations. My thesis aims, in part, to explore consistency in meeting state obligations within the UKVNR of progress

towards Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4 and children's rights. This is underpinned by an understanding of the UN Conventions, particularly the CRC, and, where appropriate, GCs.

2.3.3 Rights and General Comments (GCs)

GCs are pertinent to inform the UK regarding children's rights and meeting Poverty SDG-1 and the interlinking SDGs on Education SDG-4, Food SDG-2, and Health and well-being SDG-3. For example, there are GCs in relation to early childhood, adolescence, health, education, disabilities, best interests of the child, the right to be heard, and public budgeting. GCs enable states to interpret the CRC Articles to aid understanding and implementation of the Convention which is regarded as a dynamic living instrument for protecting, fulfilling and upholding rights. I agree with Hunt (2016) that GCs can be used by states to act as a bridge between Conventions, implementing rights, and fulfilling state obligations in practice. Nolan (2019a:33) further emphasises the importance of GCs in interpreting the CRC and the "authoritative interpretations" that they give regarding states obligations: for example, eradicating Poverty SDG-1 in all its dimensions, links to CRC Article 4, on state obligations to provide for the appropriate measures for a child's rights to economic, social, and cultural rights. This in turn needs to be read alongside CRC/GC 19 (2016) regarding states' obligations, which highlights children living in poverty as vulnerable to rights violations. CRC/GC 19 (2016) also references the 2030 Agenda and outlines states' obligations in producing public budgets that uphold children rights:

To achieve budgets that contribute to positive outcomes in terms of children's enjoyment of their rights, States parties are required to address inequalities among children by reviewing and revising relevant legislation, policies and programmes, by increasing or reprioritizing certain parts of the budget, or improving the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of their budgets ... (CRC/GC 19, 2016, para 44)

The obligation imposed on states parties by Article 4 (CRC, 1989) to realize children's economic, social, and cultural rights "to the maximum extent" also means that they should not take deliberate retrogressive measures in relation to such rights. States parties should not let the existing level of enjoyment of children's rights deteriorate.

It is worth noting that guidance and recommendations for states to use GCs to fulfil their obligations was produced by CteeRC (UNICEF, 2006) and GC 19 was issued in 2016.

Consequently, both were available to the UK government when planning, writing and submitting their VNR. My research analyses how the UKVNR framed its obligations regarding the SDGs in relation to child poverty, education, and rights. CRC Article 4 should be implemented in relation to policies on: sanctions to Universal Credit; the 2-child limit to benefits; and equal access to non-means tested FSM (see 3.2.3).

2.4 SDGs, children and their rights

While SDGs refer to rights, I now highlight how rights are interwoven and underpin SDGs on eradicating poverty, building inclusive and transformative education, and are core to 'leaving no-one behind'.

2.4.1 The presence of children

All the SDGs are relevant to the well-being of children across the world: for example, the Goals on ending poverty SDG-1, ending hunger and achieving food security SDG-2, health SDG-3, education SDG-4, gender equality SDG-5, and reducing inequalities SDG-10. Unlike the earlier MDGs, encompassing children within the SDG agenda is regarded as an important step in recognising how a range of issues and circumstances are related to children's well-being and their rights (Minujin and Ferrer, 2016). Only gender equality SDG-5 specifically refers to children ('girls').

This thesis is not measuring progress towards meeting the SDGs by 2030 but, rather, is examining how the UK government framed poverty and its effect on children's education in the UKVNR. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the targets and indicators that should shape government thinking on the SDGs do refer to children, childhood, youths, boys and girls. While it is not part of this thesis to examine how far indicators are being met, their content shows how the drafters thought the pertinent SDG should be understood, helping to provide a context for comprehending the extent to which children and their rights are being overlooked. As an example, Poverty SDG-1, Target 1.2, Indicator 1.2.2, refers to "the proportion of children living in poverty in all its dimensions" (UN, 2017:4). The inclusion of children within this specific indicator is noteworthy in that it recognises the impact that poverty has on children and not just as an adjunct to adult poverty. Moreover, the Agenda overall recognises that the impact on children, regarding issues of poverty, inequality, and education, is greater than that experienced by adults (Minujin and Ferrer, 2016). With

respect to Education SDG-4, Target 4.1 concerns the importance of completing quality education that is free, and equitable for all girls and boys that leads to effective outcomes.

While Indicator 4.5.1 requires:

[parity] indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, ...) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated. (UN, 2017:8)

In terms of gender SDG-5, the 2030 Agenda refers to girls more than boys. The difference in emphasis reflects the acknowledgement by the United Nations of the impact of gender inequality experienced by females across the globe. The 2030 Agenda considers the fulfilment of rights as an important vehicle to address such inequalities. This emphasis on access to equality and rights of women and girls is highlighted in *Goal 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*:

The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. Women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources, and political participation. (UNGA, 2015:41)

Furthermore, more children living in lone parent households experience poverty in the UK than children growing up in households with two parents (Padley and Stone, 2022), with women more likely to be a lone parent (Bennett and Daly, 2014), and lone mothers with young children highlighted in the UK Millennium Cohort study as experiencing poverty (Bradshaw and Holmes, 2010). Intersecting issues, such as employment patterns and family commitments, lack of affordable and available childcare, the gender pay gap and low pay, and changes to the benefits system, can all play a cumulative role in the dynamics of poverty experienced by women and their children (Reis, 2018).

The success of the SDGs will only be achieved by acknowledging the interconnections between the various SDGs: for example, how Poverty SDG-1 is linked with achieving progress in Health SDG-3, Education SDG-4, Gender Equality SDG-5, and Reduced Inequalities SDG-10, (Pradhan et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

A key aspect of the 2030 Agenda is to no-one should be left behind. An earlier version of this concept was provided in an NGO report on child poverty that offered a framework for building on the previous MDGs (Save the Children, 2012). The need to realise the implementation of human rights, and to acknowledge that to understand the complexity of poverty as experienced by women and children, there needed to be a realisation of “... the millions of people left behind ...” (Save the Children, 2012:2). The concept of LNOB and the broad groups it encompassed was taken up and included in the broad consultations leading to the 2030 Agenda (Fukuda-Parr and Hegstad, 2019) and used as a key tenet to set the tone of expectation on member states, including when they are engaging in VNRs:

[VNRs] will be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind (UNGA, 2015:31)

LNOB is more complex on examination, making it less straightforward to put into practice. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the phrase LNOB in documents aimed at a wide range of international audiences does allow a simple narrative to be woven through text that is attempting to outline complex global issues. LNOB provides a shorthand that is used by stakeholders, including member states in their VNRs, when trying to present an inclusive environment necessary for successful implementation of the SDGs. However, it is problematic if LNOB is used as a sound bite, with little or no explanation or justification as to who is *left behind*, and, more importantly, why have they been left behind. This is because the 2030 Agenda expects states to fulfil the other aspect of the pledge regarding the imperative to reach the furthest behind first. The 2030 Agenda is an international framework and, as such, countries may answer who is left behind differently depending on national context (Stuart et al., 2016), but states have agreed that they will prioritize the most vulnerable, the furthest behind, first.

Rights are key to considering the extent to which the SDGs are addressed and implemented globally; for example, Williams & Hunt, (2017) concluded that monitoring and accountability of ‘Health and well-being SDG-3’, and its associated targets and indicators, is not consistently understood or undertaken. Their work identified gaps in fulfilling the right to health when mapped against the SDG targets and indicators of success. Nevertheless, the full realisation

of rights with the fulfilment of the SDGs remains an ongoing discourse. Equality and rights are seen as central to the underpinnings and success of SDGs and, in particular, the premise that “no one is left behind” (UNGA, 2015:1).

The 2030 Agenda does emphasise that member states should take account of the following:

We emphasize the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or **other status**. (emphasis added) (UNGA, 2015:6)

However, the vagueness of LNOB has allowed a broad interpretation by states within their VNRs (Fukuda-Parr & Hegstad, 2019). In their definition of groups whose rights should be respected, protected and promoted, the 2030 Agenda finishes with an umbrella term **other status** but does not provide a clear definition of what that might mean or which groups or individuals might fit under the **other status** umbrella. I suggest the inclusion of the term **other status** is useful as it allows groups and individuals that may otherwise to be overlooked or viewed as an appendage to another group, to have a vehicle to seek a rightful inclusion. For example, it encompasses the consideration of the **status** of age and, within the context of my research, the **status** of children and childhood to be given a more central positioning when examining the UKVNR’s interpretation and implementation of the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda uses the concept LNOB to signify the importance of viewing development outcomes between and within countries and acknowledges that marginalisation of groups can be intersectional and lead to discrimination and inequality and the marginalised and the vulnerable must be empowered (UNGA, 2015). However, if LNOB is viewed without regard for the fulfilment of human rights, including the implementation of children’s rights, then the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the SDGs will not have been understood or achieved.

2.5 Education, Poverty, Children and the UKVNR

The UKVNR is the official governmental response to the UN’s request to provide progress reports on meeting the 2030 Agenda and includes all Four Nations. The Scottish and Welsh

administrations produced supplementary reports to be viewed in conjunction with the UKVNR. NI did not produce a supplementary report.

This section addresses the core elements of my thesis: education, poverty, children within the UKVNR. Education, poverty and children are all interrelated in a complex manner that does not allow for a single linear explanation. This section raises aspects of that interconnectedness and prepares for the fuller examination throughout the rest of this thesis.

Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4 are multidimensional in their nature; both interlink across many aspects of children's social, economic, and health circumstances that impact on their education. In relation to understanding poverty and its impact on children, Bessell (2022) notes that children, more than any other group, are usually positioned within the structure and institution of the family and schools, with the consequence that their individual experiences and knowledge may be lost. Within official documents, such as the UKVNR, I suggest that children can easily be subsumed and made less visible when the dominant narrative within a document is presented via the general umbrella of household data or educational targets and outcomes. To avoid losing sight of children, my examination of the UKVNR is less quantitative and more qualitative in approach. Consideration is given to the relational positioning in documents of children in families and educational provision, the multidimensional nature of poverty and its impact on education and children's rights.

There are similarities when considering the status and agency of children in relation to education and poverty. Children have little say over where they live or where they will attend educational provision, the two often going hand in hand, or over the quality of that education. Neither do children have any choice over the social economic circumstances and environment in which they live or the political power of voting to influence societal change. Children are thus dependent on the adults around them and the state to provide an environment that upholds their rights. States should make decisions affecting their childhood based on the principle of the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (CRC, 1989, Article 3).

Education impacts on children's lives at an individual level directly in terms of acquiring knowledge and skills which enable them to develop their abilities to their full potential. Education, in turn, can impact on the development and realisation of capabilities and choices throughout childhood and into adulthood. Peleg (2013, 2019) notes how the child's right to development is fundamental to enabling the child to have options, choices and freedom in life. The right to education and its implementation should, Peleg argues, support development and enable the child to fulfil potential that can only be achieved when duty bearers, including the state, protect children's rights, including when they take decisions and undertake actions (Peleg, 2013). A positive educational experience can enhance well-being and quality of life, including health and well-being. Education also benefits wider society when citizens are educated and healthy, contributing and participating economically and socially (Schuller et al., 2007). However, in the same way that education can have a positive impact on people's lives individually, unequal access to high quality education can reinforce and maintain inequalities, thus restricting opportunities (Schuller et al., 2007).

The right to education is provided for in a range of international instruments that have been adopted and/or ratified by the UK government. The UDHR (1948, Article 26) emphasises that education concerns the full development of the human personality and the respect for human rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966, Article 13) a binding treaty, went on to emphasise that education is the right of everyone and is also concerned with full development of and dignity of all. Lundy & O'Lynn (2019) note that the right to education was further endorsed and importantly, made child specific, with the implementation of Article 28 of CRC (1989), which focuses on access to education, and Article 29, that deals with the aims of education. To help states implement the right to education, the UN has issued guidance via General Comments. For example, CRC General Comment No.1: The Aims of Education. It notes that:

Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates. Thus, for example, education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child and enables the child to express his or her views freely in accordance with article 12(1) [UNCRC] and to participate in school life A child's capacity to participate fully and responsibly in a free society can be impaired or undermined not only by

outright denial of access to education, but also by a failure to promote an understanding of the values recognized in this article. (CRC/GC 1, 2001:3).

Across the UK, children may have experienced early years provision that focuses on the care and educational needs of pre-school children before moving into compulsory primary and secondary education, with access to further education and training up until the age of eighteen.

Compulsory education in the UK is universal and free at the point of access. However, different circumstances, which may intersect, such as children's social and economic background, special educational needs, gender, and ethnicity can all impact on the education and learning experience. Just as education is not exclusive to children, the same can be said of the experience of poverty. However, children have been identified as having higher risks of experiencing poverty in the UK compared to the whole population, and the risk increases for families with three or more children (JRF, 2023).

Finally, the 2030 Agenda starts with the word "transforming" (UNGA, 2015:1). In 2016, governments adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2016) to capture the importance of the transformative nature of education, with Education SDG-4 a driver for development. The Incheon Declaration outlined the purpose of education as very far-reaching, in that not only is education a public good, but it is essential for human fulfilment based on human rights and dignity. It is a way of achieving employment and the eradication of poverty. The Incheon Declaration makes clear that Education SDG-4 can only be achieved if inclusion, equity, and quality of education are part of a transformative education agenda, and to this end, exclusion, marginalisation and issues of access and participation of the disadvantaged, are addressed. Like Schuller et al. (2007), the Incheon Declaration also links the important role that education plays in developing key areas across the life course, impacting on health outcomes for the individual and across generations, gender equality, the promotion of inclusion, and rights of people with disabilities, as well as impacting on productivity and employment. UNICEF, in a joint report with ILO (ILO-UNICEF, 2019), also highlight the importance of education in the fulfilment of SDGs, reinforcing that education is a human right and has a role to play in reducing poverty and inequality and empowering children.

This section has indicated the links between poverty and education and how they impact on children's lives and on their futures. It shows the interconnectedness of rights obligations of states and how the 2023 Agenda, especially Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, rooted in human rights can be transformative for children.

2.6 Summary

My research focuses, in the main, on what I believe to be the under-researched area of Poverty SDG-1, and Education SDG-4 in relation to the UKVNR (2019) with respect to children in the UK. My intention is to add to the body of academic knowledge in relation to the VNRs with an original contribution to knowledge by focusing on the understanding of poverty within the UKVNR and the impact of poverty on children's education and their rights.

SDGs become real only when considering the groups that should not be left behind by reference to the international human rights law framework. Thus, in this research, the focus is on children and their rights in relation to education, as set out especially in the CRC (1989) because of the concentrated period of access to education in childhood, and how Education SDG-4 has to be seen alongside the other SDGs, in particular Poverty SDG-1. This thesis will make clear the symbiotic relationship between rights and SDGs so that children, in this case, are not left behind.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

My literature review seeks to underpin my three research questions (RQs) set out in Chapter 1 (1.2.1), and Chapters 6-8, research analysis and discussion. Just to recap, my research considers: the framing of poverty in the UKVNR, how that framing impacts on children including the impact of poverty on education, and how prominent are children's rights within the UKVNR. After setting out the content under review, I then explore the literature that provides the context for the methodology, analysis and discussion. As Braun and Clarke (2022) note, discussion and analysis, and thus the associated literature, can be combined.

The review has four areas

- Introduction (3.1)
 - Approaching my Literature Review (3.1.1)
 - Framing the search (3.1.2)
- Child Poverty in the UK (3.2)
 - Framing poverty, including child poverty (3.2.1)
 - Development of the UK poverty narrative (3.2.2)
 - Impact of poverty (3.2.3)
- Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) as a Research Resource (3.3)
 - Using Voluntary National Reviews (3.3.1)
 - Human rights and the SDGs in VNRs (3.3.2)
- Visibility of children in research (3.4)
- Summary (3.5)

3.1.1 Framing the search

It became clear to me that the wide scope of academic literature across a broad range of disciplines, including economics, politics, social work and education, to name but a few, have all had some input into the discourse on considering the framing of poverty. Narrowing this down to make it manageable for the scope of this thesis involved search words and terms for poverty, child poverty, sustainable development goals, education, early years,

participation, rights, nutrition, and VNRs. I then linked poverty, education and the SDGs, rights and the capability approach.

I only used literature that was published in English but with no exclusion based on geographical area. My review is made up of peer reviewed journal articles and chapters in academic textbooks, along with Grey literature, for example, United Nations documents such as UN conventions, UN General Comments, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reports, UN Rapporteur reports, as well as non-governmental reports. The databases used were ERIC, EBSCO, SocINDEX and JSTOR. Dates ranged from 1945 (Charter of United Nations) through to 2025, but were mainly concentrated on approximately 10 years up to the publication of the UKVNR (2019) and the subsequent years until the end of the Conservative government in 2024. The strands of the literature review encompass child poverty in the UK, including the framing of poverty, the development of the UK poverty narrative and the impact of poverty on children. How voluntary national reviews have been used as a research resource is considered. The literature review also highlights the visibility of children in research who experience poverty. Excluded literature were those studies focusing on particular groups of children, for example, those with special education needs, children in the care of the local authority, children from ethnic minorities, children in poor housing.

In addition to pure academic texts, there is other material written by experts working within the United Nations, often by leading academics, that is directly relevant to human rights, the SDGs, poverty and education. The membership of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CteeRC) that drafts the General Comments referred to in this thesis include academics from across the world; this material adds expert depth and insight.

What to include or exclude has been part of my reflective process, trying to be aware of my own unconscious bias and influence of my social work, teaching, and personal background. My reflexive approach, having looked at the principal sources for overlapping materials and commentary, has allowed me to root my analysis, the influence of which is seen throughout Chapters 6, 7 and 8, in the seminal sources coupled with the works that address VNRs and their content *vis-à-vis* poverty and education and rights.

3.2 Child Poverty in the UK

3.2.1 Framing poverty, including child poverty

In relation to children, it is useful to note that Poverty SDG-1 is concerned with ending poverty in all its forms everywhere for everyone, with a Target given to all states for ending extreme poverty by 2030 (Poverty SDG-1.1) and another target that expressly includes children, not just adults:

By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in **poverty in all its dimensions** according to **national definitions** (SDG-1, 1.2, UNGA, 2015:15)

Target 1.2 of Poverty SDG-1 is noteworthy. First, it recognises that children of all ages, not just adults, experience poverty (Chzhen et al., 2018a; Roelen, 2015). Secondly, by emphasising **poverty in all its dimensions**, it acknowledges the multidimensional nature of poverty, and not one limited to measuring extreme poverty (Dornan, 2017). I would add that the inclusion within the Target 1.2 of both children and dimensions of poverty recognises that children are not solely an appendage to adults, acknowledging the status of an easily overlooked group. Next, it recognises that children may experience poverty differently. Lastly, recognising that poverty should be defined according to **national definitions**, Target 1.2 acknowledges that poverty occurs in both rich and poor countries (Chzhen et al., 2018a). The UN, recognising that there may well be a range of definitions across countries, offers the 2030 Agenda as an international framework, but success in delivery is in the hands of national governments (Dornan, 2017).

The framing of child poverty in the UKVNR (2019:29-30) comes from official poverty estimates provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) via its annual UK survey of approximately 20,000 Households Below Average Income (HBAI). The survey looks at household income, earnings, benefits, before housing costs (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC). Using the HBAI figures, relative poverty is defined as a line set at 60% of the median UK household income in that particular year. Absolute poverty is defined as living in a household with income less than 60% of the median for 2010/11 adjusted for inflation. There are strengths to such measures in that it provides an accessible way to monitor poverty rates across the years, including those of children, that can be used as a comparison

between countries with a similar Gross Domestic Product (Lister, 2021; Nolan and Pells, 2020).

The limitation of using the HBAI data to define poverty in relation to children is that the focus within the HBAI is on household income and children are not visible when poverty is both measured and defined in monetary terms (Nolan and Pells, 2020). Another limitation is that it gives little insight into intra-household inequalities in terms of how money and resources are distributed between adults, between adults and children, and between children in terms of age or gender (Rodríguez Takeuchi, 2015).

In addition, children, due to age, maturity or status, may have little input into the allocation of resources, therefore, household income alone may not reveal fully children's experiences of poverty (Chzhen et al., 2018; Main, 2019; White et al., 2002). When the emphasis is on household income, there is concern that policy responses to poverty will not be child-centred (Bessell, 2022). Taking this further, I argue that some of the decisions families may have to make regarding the distribution of money and resources may be due to the negative impact of government policies, such as the two-child limit on access to certain benefits (Reader et al., 2022; Sefton et al., 2019).

Another measure of poverty is the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) that frames poverty in relation to society. Developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in collaboration with Loughborough University, it is based on what the public think is needed for a dignified socially acceptable standard of living. It considers that people need more than just food, clothing and housing, but also having what you need to have choices and opportunities to participate in society. People living below 75% of MIS are at a higher risk of deprivation than those with income above MIS (Padley and Stone, 2023). Such an approach allows a broader framing of poverty as relational to the society in which you live (Townsend, 1979). An indicator such as MIS, using what the public think is an acceptable standard of living, highlights a higher income is needed than would be suggested by official poverty lines. If taken into account in addition to HBAI, a more sensitive and effective policy response to poverty may be possible.

The academic literature on poverty takes a broader view of how to frame poverty. Townsend in his seminal 'Poverty in the United Kingdom' explains this broad conception:

Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. (Townsend, 1979:31)

The UK Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG website) refer to Townsend's (1979) definition of poverty on their website.

Having the right tools to measure who should be deemed poor does not fully explore the consequences for those experiencing poverty (Lister, 2015). The lack of capacity to participate is especially relevant to the connection between Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, Ensuring *inclusive and equitable* quality education (emphasis added) (UNGA, 2015). Townsend's broad conception, while different in approach, aligns with Sen's definition of poverty and its relevance to the capability approach, more fully discussed in the next chapter. For Sen, income poverty in and of itself is not the sole focus – poverty must be understood in terms of not being able to achieve capabilities, "... to reach certain minimally acceptable levels" (Sen, 1992:109). Simpson Reeves et al. (2020) argue that Townsend and Sen have changed the understanding of poverty to involve more than simply income, but also its multidimensional nature and its impact on lives.

A multidimensional approach to framing poverty also needs to take into account the situation of children. The UN General Assembly Resolution on the rights of the child recognised:

... that children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full

potential and to participate as full members of society. (UNGA Res, 2007, para 46)

Nandy and Minujin (2012) consider that the above internationally agreed definition of child poverty was significant in highlighting to governments the need to recognise how poverty in all its dimensions impacts on children and their rights (6.3, 7.2).

For UNICEF:

Children living in poverty [are those who] experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society. (UNICEF, 2005:18)

Minujin et al. (2006) note that UNICEF's definition highlights the interrelated nature of child poverty and the need for a rights based approach to address inequalities and to recognise how poverty in all its dimensions impacts on children and their rights.

I suggest that given SDG-1's call to consider poverty in all its dimensions, the above two definitions make children and their rights more visible when framing poverty. Lister suggests that there cannot be a single 'correct' definition, there will always be an element of political choice (Lister, 2021:14). Commenting on Townsend and Sen, amongst others, her conclusion on definitions is that any definition of poverty:

... needs to be understood within a wider social scientific framework concerning 'well-being', 'capabilities', 'human flourishing', 'quality of life' and 'social quality' so as not to ghettoize poverty in a residual category of little or nor apparent import to wider society. (Lister, 2021:43)

In sum, while there are mechanisms to frame poverty that are crucial to understand what needs to be addressed, it needs to be borne in mind that different disciplines bring their own perspectives, as will be seen throughout the thesis. However, as I highlight in my research, relying in part on the CRC (1989), one also has to bring in the voice of those with lived experience of poverty, and that includes children (Lister, 2013).

3.2.2 Development of the UK poverty narrative

In 2010, the Labour government, recognising growing concern over increasing child poverty, introduced the Child Poverty Act (CPA) (Crown, 2010a). It set targets for the reduction of the

percentage of children living in relative low income, combined low income and material deprivation, absolute low income, and persistent poverty, (now superseded by the HBAI measurement). The implementation of this legislation was influenced by New Labour's welfare of work approach as a means of tackling child poverty (Newman, 2001). Under the CPA (Crown, 2010a), it became the responsibility of the Secretary of State to produce a child poverty strategy reporting regularly on its progress, enabled through the establishment of a Child Poverty Commission, later renamed under the then Coalition Government as the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

The Conservative Government replaced the CPA with the Welfare Reform and Work Act (Crown, 2016). The latter legislation renamed the Child Poverty Act (2010a) to the Life Chances Act (2010). However, Calder (2018:8) argues that the change in the title of the legislation was not just an "... innocent change in terminology..." but was used to redirect the focus from wider economic and structural issues to focus on the individual and families.

The Welfare and Reform Act (2016) removed the child poverty targets and replaced them with indicators, not targets, of household worklessness and children's educational achievement at sixteen. The premise was that paid work and not a reliance on benefits would address poverty and in particular, child poverty. The move to using indicators rather than targets in relation to child poverty may make it harder to gain a comprehensive view of the situation that may hinder holding the government to account:

Poverty measurement is highly political: what is measured and reported on is what enables governments to be held to account, and in turn drives policy (Stewart and Roberts, 2019:540)

The points made by both Calder (2018) and Stewart and Roberts (2019) offer insight into the importance of recognising how terminology and definitions are presented in understanding the differing narratives and framing of poverty. For example, it is not that the including the term 'life chances' within the context of legislation and strategies is not welcomed, but that any strategy may only become effective if the connection between life chances and poverty is made. They cannot be addressed separately, nor without a comprehensive strategy that includes the ending of child poverty.

However, the requirement to have a child poverty strategy was also removed from the legislation and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission was replaced with the Mobility Commission. The need for a cross-party child poverty strategy to be once again implemented has been recommended in a review of child poverty in the UK by the Work and Pensions Committee (2021). It is interesting to note that it was government ministers in the cross-party review that called for the reinstatement of a national strategy.

Using the term ‘worklessness’ as a principal indicator under the (renamed) Life Chances Act (2010a) is worth further examination, in terms of the impact it has on the narrative and framing of poverty and the restricted understanding that such an umbrella term provides when seeking to implement policies that are aimed, in part, addressing child poverty. Wiggan (2012) suggests this can result in feelings of stigma and penalise the unemployed rather than treating people in a dignified manner. As Lister explains:

So long as the poverty debate is framed by politicians and the media in terms that treat people living with poverty as ‘the Other’, so that they continue to be shamed, the recognition and respect for human dignity required by a human rights perspective are unlikely to be achieved. (Lister, 2015:159)

The framing of worklessness limits understanding of why people may be unable to access paid work such as childcare. The austerity cuts also impacted on the provision of services, particularly in the most deprived areas, that are needed by families with children (Webb et al., 2022). Again, it is useful to see these challenges in relation to inclusive and equitable Education SDG-4, Target 4.2, “... access to quality early childhood care and education provision ...” (UNGA, 2015:17).

In sum, the government put no comprehensive assessment in place regarding the impact policies such as the benefit cap and restrictions on accessing child benefit, that flow from the 2016 legislation, nor any evidence that such policies lead to the objective of the legislation, which was to increase employment and reduce poverty, including child poverty (Abrahams, 2021).

3.2.3 Impact of poverty

Conditionality and poverty

The experience of poverty is further exacerbated by the Welfare Reform Act (2012) imposing conditions that must be adhered to or risk restrictions and sanctions on claiming benefits (Williams, 2021). These conditions may keep people in poverty or push them into it (Cheetham et al., 2019). The conditionality aspect of accessing benefits once again has a disproportionately negative impact on lone mothers and their children when there is a lack of affordable childcare and only low paid employment available (Carey and Bell, 2022). I argue that conditionality to accessing benefits fails to recognise the human rights of both women and children to their social and economic rights under ICESCR (1966).

In addition, implementing conditionality on adults has had unintentional consequences on children. A failure by the UK Government to take a child-centred approach to policies resulted in children being excluded and becoming invisible (Bessell, 2022). Nonetheless, the resulting poverty impacts on children and parents. In 2019, Professor Alston, then UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, on a UK visit, concluded in relation to conditionality and Universal Credit (UC) that the government had imposed punitive conditions on “... the lives of those least capable of coping” “... over a genuine concern to improve the well-being of those at the lowest economic levels of British society” (Alston, 2019:5). What is interesting to note in relation to Alston’s conclusions is that they were made in part, after gathering information from face-to-face discussions with people with lived experience of poverty from across the Four Nations. The final report submitted to both the UK Government and the UN (Alston, 2019) recognised the importance of the participation of many sectors of society, including the voices of the often marginalised members of society. In doing so, Alston’s report highlighted and documented, in a way not evident in the UKVNR (2019), the lived experience of the daily hardship encountered because of poverty exacerbated by government policies.

When considered in relation to the 2030 Agenda, and the principle of Leave No One Behind (LNOB) (UNGA, 2015), conditionality within the UK legislation amounts to indirect negative impact on the implementation of human rights (ICESCR, 1966) and specifically Article 27 CRC (1989) regarding the child’s right to an adequate standard of living. If the conditionality of

accessing benefits continues to be implemented in the current punitive manner, the UK will find it very difficult to meet Poverty SDG-1 by 2030.

Poverty and Education SDG-4

Poverty and the resulting inequalities in childhood have implications and consequences on children's outcomes (Wickham et al., 2016). The UK longitudinal Millennium Cohort Study has shown the impact of poverty on children's early cognitive development. Looking at children aged three, five, and seven, poverty was shown to have a negative impact on cognitive development compared with children who had never experienced poverty (Dickerson and Popli, 2016; Schoon et al., 2012).

A wide range of skills are needed to be able to access and participate fully in education, not confined to early literacy and numeracy skills, but also communication, memory, listening, social and emotional skills. The negative impact of poverty has been seen to impact on the development of such skills when starting school, and, if poverty is not addressed, it will continue to have a negative impact on educational outcomes throughout childhood (Engle and Black, 2008; Wickham et al., 2016).

From 2010-2011, the role of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provision to counter inequalities had been highlighted in reports to the government (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011). Longitudinal research has highlighted that attending high quality early education provision does support children's development and can play a part in providing a better start to school for disadvantaged children (Sylva et al., 2010; Melhuish, 2016; Melhuish and Gardiner, 2018). Access to high quality early years provision may not be able to eliminate the negative impact of poverty but may help improve opportunities and outcomes for children (Taggart et al., 2015; Marmot et al., 2010, 2020). As such, Moss (2020) makes the important point that access to high quality ECEC should not be dependent on parental employment needs, but on the young child's right to education.

However, the attainment gap remains between children experiencing poverty and those who do not, even for children attending early years provision. Research with ECEC practitioners in the UK and USA (Simpson et al., 2017) explored attitudes to poverty and found that staff felt that ECEC policies emphasised preparation and assessment of children

against early learning goals, with a lack of time available for listening to children and understanding the context of their lives:

Many of those responding in our research indicated children in poverty were seen but not heard (Simpson et al., 2017:186).

The research highlights the need for:

Reasserting the importance of pedagogy of listening in the contexts where our practitioners were situated appears necessary if they are to make any progress in reducing the attainment gap between children in poverty and their peers. (Simpson et al., 2017:186)

Access to early years provision has been highlighted within the 2030 Agenda as an important vehicle in working against inequalities exacerbated by poverty (UNGA, 2015). Willow (2014) considers the important role that ECEC practitioners have as advocates for children's rights, shown in the way they interact with children, listening and responding to their views, sensitive to their feelings, providing fulfilling experiences. The research by Simpson et al. (2017) raises pertinent points for my thesis when viewed alongside Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4, the status of young children and their access and experience of ECEC provision.

Education and nutrition

Children who experience poverty as they progress through the education system continue to face negative impacts on their educational outcomes (Engle and Black, 2008; National Education Union and Child Poverty Action Group, 2018). This is evident across affluent countries, including the UK (OECD, 2018). Children experiencing poverty have a higher rate of ill-health than children not experiencing poverty which impacts on attendance and outcomes at school (Griggs and Walker, 2008).

A review of 201 studies from Europe, including the UK, provided evidence that adverse social factors, including low parental income, impacted negatively on development in early childhood (Pillas et al., 2014). Data from the UK Longitudinal Millennium Cohort Study (2017) showed that compared to children who have never experienced poverty, children living in persistent poverty had increased risk of poor mental and physical health outcomes in adolescence (Lai et al., 2019).

Although it may seem obvious that food is important to children's development, children in low-income households may lack access to nutritious food (Attree, 2006). Higher rates of childhood obesity have been identified in the UK for children living in lower social economic status households, where low income restricts the range and quality of food bought, with lower priced food, higher in fat and sugar, more affordable than fruit and vegetables (Kinra, 2000). Consumption of a nutritious breakfast has been shown to impact on the ability to engage effectively with the school day (Adolphus et al., 2013; Wesnes et al., 2003; Widenhorn-Müller et al., 2008). A link has been identified between breakfast consumption and performance in SATs tests for 9–11 year-olds (Littlecott et al., 2016). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who rarely consumed breakfast on a school day were less likely to achieve higher GCSE maths grades compared to children who did consume breakfast and were also from lower social economic background (Adolphus et al., 2019). Based on an expert panel looking at obesity in the UK, Moore and Evans (2020) recommend that local authorities should support primary and secondary schools in providing targeted provision to free breakfast clubs as a way of providing adequate nutrition to children. International research has also highlighted the link between the consumption of a nutritious breakfast and improved mental health outcomes in children and young people (Lien, 2007; O'Sullivan et al., 2009).

In the UK, being in receipt of free school meals (FSM) is one indication of economic disadvantage (DfE, 2018). The educational attainment gap across the key stages is greater for children in receipt of FSM compared with children not from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The relationship between poor nutrition and its impact on educational outcomes has been highlighted as a contributory factor (EEF, 2018) and in lower GCSE grades obtained in maths and science (Banerjee, 2016). Inevitably, this has consequences for young people's future education, employment opportunities and well-being (Cooper and Stewart, 2017).

In 2014, under the Coalition government universal FSM were introduced for all children in State schools until the age of seven, after which it is linked to benefit entitlement (DfE, 2018). However, there are children whose families do not meet the criteria for FSM but who are still experiencing poverty (Cribb et al., 2023). In addition, due to the fragmented nature of ECEC provision, access to free early year meals is not universal. Children from low-income

families in all ECEC settings that provide funded hours ought to receive universal free early years meals (Cooper and Jimenez, 2024).

Consumption of a healthy balanced nutritious diet is more evident in more affluent households than for lower income households. The limited food choices people are able to make has been identified as interlinked with income, living in disadvantaged areas that have less access to a range of food, and the availability of wider community facilities, such as access to physical activities, impacting on health and well-being, including educational attainment across the life course (Azizi Fard et al., 2021).

Research has indicated that the right to access to nutritious food (CRC, 1989, Article 24) is an issue for some young people attending educational establishments, where access to free meals is not uniformly available to disadvantaged young people (Graham et al., 2022). However, it is important to recognise that children and young people have reported experiencing inequalities, exclusion, stigma, marginalisation and a lack of dignity, due to restricted access to nutritious food and the way FSM and food banks are perceived within society (Farthing, 2012; O'Connell et al., 2019). Failing to provide access to nutritious food impacts negatively on children's rights and in achieving progression towards meeting Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4, for children in the UK by 2030.

3.3 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) as a Research Resource

3.3.1 Using Voluntary National Reviews

When adopting the SDGs in 2015, States agreed to conduct VNRs of progress towards their implementation. VNRs are written by governments and submitted to the UN SDG High Level Political Forum (HLPF) as a means of global monitoring and sharing of progress. The VNR documents are seen as a vehicle for each country to review and accelerate progress towards the global deadline of meeting the SDG targets by 2030.

Bexell & Jönsson, (2019:404) note that VNRs:

... are important study objects because they are part of the politics of sustainable development, launching knowledge claims upon which political solutions and priorities are eventually based. Moreover, the reporting process is shaped by inclusion and exclusion in terms of who gets to

participate, who provides its data and who is the recipient of the report. In brief, reporting involves exercise of political power rather than solely being an administrative act.

Focusing on aspects of the SDGs has been a path already undertaken in academic research in relation to analysis of VNRs. Tosun and Leininger (2017) studied VNRs submitted during 2016-17 to examine how VNRs view interlinkages between the SDGs and climate change, employing qualitative analysis and coded direct text references to climate change. Elder & Bartalini, (2019) analysed VNRs from 15 countries submitted in 2018 to investigate how much emphasis countries placed on policies and budgets. With regard to Education SDG-4, the extent to which universal participation and holistic education are present in 33 VNRs was explored by Smith (2021).

Lillehagen et al. (2020) conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse and compare the framing of Health SDG-3 in the VNRs of Norway and Sweden.

... how words and phrases can act as frames to create dominant understandings of problems and solutions, or more simply, how language can structure political thought and action. (Lillehagen et al., 2020:3)

The Norwegian and Swedish comparative study concluded that there were differences between the two VNRs in the framing of health inequalities and how States respond. Their research highlighted the differences in approach between Norway's more simplistic framing of health, leading to less transformation, and Sweden's framing of health as a human right, linking health outcomes to wider inequalities, offering greater transformative strategies and policies.

Health is again considered within an analysis of twenty VNRs by Bickler et al. (2020), who make use of content analysis as part of their research methodology to provide an assessment of the VNRs in terms of the extent to which Health SDG-3 was being implemented; they used word searches, key phrases, concepts and themes.

Eskelinen (2021) used textual analysis of VNRs from the UK, South Africa and Tanzania to explore how international development is framed and represented within those three VNRs, allowing for the emergence of patterns and themes. Kim, et al. (2022) made use of VNRs

from 115 countries to focus on Gender SDG-5 and how it was interpreted, using keywords and codes as part of their methodology.

In addition, The End Child Poverty Global Coalition produce a briefing paper on VNRs to identifying key mentions of child poverty and SDG-1. In relation to VNRs submitted in 2019, including the UK, Scotland was highlighted as having a strategy to tackle child poverty. However, the briefing noted that although the UKVNR did cover child poverty, the increasing rate of UK child poverty needed action from the government (The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, 2020).

The above research utilising VNRs confirms my view that VNRs are an important data source for academic research. It focuses on the content of the VNRs in different ways. My research, influenced by Lillehagen's et al (2020), considers the framing of Poverty SDG-1 in relation to the UKVNR and the Devolved Administrations. All the above research contrasts VNRs with other VNRs in much the same way as I utilise, where appropriate, the SSR (2020) and WSR (2019) to critique the approach in the UKVNR in terms of its framing of Poverty SDG-1 and its impact on Education SDG-4 (*cf* (Lillehagen et al., 2020)).

3.3.2 Human rights and the SDGs in VNRs

Each member state is responsible for submitting its own VNR to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development ([HLPF](#)). The UN HLPF online platform is a global resource that provides access to all VNRs. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) provides an annual compilation of main messages for the VNRs submitted. ECOSOC presents the main themes regarding the progress on implementation of the SDGs within each VNR submitted each year (UNDESA, 2019). The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) includes a subgroup on VNRs that reports to the UN Economic and Social Affairs Council (ECOSOC). Since 2016, CDP group has the role of providing a general overview and evaluation of all VNRs submitted (CDP, 2019).

Examination of state reports, such as the UKVNR, can evidence state progress on rights *vis-à-vis* SDGs: any lack of engagement with rights by states is considered detrimental to achieving equality for all and realising the full potential of the SDGs (Winkler & Williams, 2017). Kilkelly and Liefwaard (2019) suggest a human rights backed approach should always be adopted.

Carmona (2024) examines Nordic countries incorporation of human rights into their VNRs, using content analysis *vis-à-vis* the use of human rights language and reference to rights instruments and mechanisms. They concluded that human rights are more evident in relation to foreign and international development and less so at the national level.

According to the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the report to the Human Rights Council:

The 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind and reach those furthest behind first is strongly aligned with the human rights imperative to tackle inequality and discrimination, which undermine the realization of the rights of children worldwide. (OHCHR, 2017, para 16)

A content analysis of 43 VNRs submitted to the UN in 2017 was undertaken to assess how member states from low, middle and high-income countries, include the pledge to 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) (Fukuda-Parr & Hegstad, 2019). Of the 43 VNRs, 39 included the term LNOB and 10 countries included the term 'putting the last first' or 'furthest behind'. A further content analysis of 46 VNRs submitted in 2018 was undertaken (CDP, 2019) focusing on LNOB, global partnership SDG-17, and SDG-4 quality education. Out of the 46 countries, 41 mention LNOB in their VNR. However, there was a vagueness about the term and how it would be implemented in practice. The report also noted that women and children were most frequently mentioned in relation to LNOB, followed by people with disabilities. SDG-17 received limited attention. For SDG-4 quality education, most countries discuss issues of access and quality of education. Developed countries did this by focusing on teachers' performance, curriculum and its relation to the labour market.

A content analysis of VNRs submitted in 2019, including the UK submission, was undertaken (DESA/CDP/Paper 50, 2020). All VNRs mentioned LNOB, this being an improvement on the 2018 submissions, but there remained a vagueness about how LNOB would be implemented in practice (DESA/CDP/Paper 50, 2020).

However, Fukuda-Parr & Hegstad (2019) note that there is a lack of detail across the VNRs on how the pledge to LNOB would be implemented. With regards to the 43 VNRs and children, 28 countries identified children /youth as needing attention, six of the countries being high income countries (Fukuda-Parr & Hegstad, 2019). It is not clear from Fukuda-Parr

& Hegstad (2019) if the VNRs they examined refer to children and youth living within the reporting state of the VNRs examined or to children in other parts of the globe.

My analysis of the UKVNR documentation, along with the supplementary reports from the Scotland and Wales, although on a much smaller scale than Fukuda-Parr & Hegstad's research (2019), allows me to consider how the premise of LNOB relates to child poverty and education within the UKVNR (7.2).

Furthermore, I make use of the capability approach (CA) as a framework to consider the UKVNR. I argue that it is important to recognise the link between CA, rights and the 2030 Agenda in a way that had not been undertaken before with regard to children, poverty and education in the UKVNR. Given that the SDGs are rooted in Sen's CA and human rights, I take the innovative stance of assessing the UKVNR by reference to both (Fukuda-Parr and Cid-Martinez, 2019).

3.4 Visibility of children in research

Although my research has not involved direct research with children, I want to signal that others have undertaken research on children's views on poverty and its impact on their education and well-being. I believe it is important to include children's views to raise their visibility, signifying that their voice must be included in any discussion on poverty, education and rights (7.2).

Children who experience poverty have direct knowledge of the impact that it has on their lives. Children's participation in research on the impact of poverty has enabled multidimensional poverty to be considered from their perspective. My practice and research have been influenced by the seminal work undertaken by Ridge (2009) involving a review of qualitative research with families and children from low incomes. By incorporating the voices and perspectives of children with the lived experience of poverty, Ridge clearly demonstrated how children recognise that poverty impacts and "... permeates every facet of their lives" (Ridge, 2009:2). Research that seeks and includes the views of children regarding their experiences of poverty moves the focus from solely an adults' perception of children's needs, to raising the visibility of children by highlighting children's own perceptions of poverty (Ridge, 2002, 2011, 2013; Bessell, 2022).

With respect to access to education, exclusion from full participation may be experienced by children from low social economic backgrounds, where limited financial resources can impact on access to educational provision. Children have eloquently expressed their lived experience of the impact of poverty on their access to and participation in education via the 'Cost of the School Day' project (Naven et al., 2019). In the research, primary- and secondary-school children shared their experiences of the impact that low income had had on accessing the school day, including school trips, correct school uniform, course materials for more specialised GCSE courses, such as design & technology, or adequate amount of money for nutritious food. Children's participation in the Cost of the School Day project highlighted issues of stigma and its impact on their sense of self.

Children's access to out of school activities to enhance learning and development, such as sport and drama, was also explored (Bullock et al., 2010). Their research found that children from lower income families were dependent on the school to provide access to extracurricular activities, as transport and money needed to access them in the wider community was not available. In contrast, children from more prosperous households had access to a wider range of activities and experiences both within and outside of school, with access to transport and money for clubs and a range of activities to widen their participation in social and cultural experiences. Bullock et al., (2010) reported that children considered participation in extracurricular activities, whether in the school day or within the wider community, enhanced development, and social skills and that the lack of opportunity and choice to partake, impacted on their sense of self.

Similar research has been undertaken by the University of Bath on behalf of the Social Mobility Commission (established under the Welfare Reform & Work Act, 2016) to examine children's participation in extracurricular activities (Donnelly et al., 2019). The research included questionnaires given to children aged 10-15, as well as interviews and questionnaires with those aged over 16. The research found that extracurricular activities enhanced educational outcomes and helped develop confidence, teamwork and soft skills, offering opportunities for fun and socialising. However, the research concluded that children face unequal opportunities in accessing extracurricular activities. The chance to participate is hindered by the interconnecting issues of social economic status, the school attended and the geographical area; families on low income and with more than one child found it difficult

to find the money for children to engage in activities that require transport costs, equipment, or fees.

3.5 Summary

My literature review endeavours to show the multidimensional nature of poverty and how it impacts on the educational outcomes. I highlight how the framing of poverty is also linked to the development of policies that then worsen the lived experience of children who must deal with poverty and resulting inequalities.

I argue that although some of the research identifies the link between poverty, nutrition and educational outcomes, my research aims to highlight the importance of identifying the centrality of human rights obligations in ensuring that everyone has equal access across all of society – poverty of access affects inclusivity and unfulfilled capabilities, as will be considered in Chapter 4. This is pertinent for my research of the UKVNR when viewed in relation to international human rights treaties and the SDGs, in particular poverty and education.

I have also shown how VNRs from various countries and covering a range of SDGs, have been used as an important source for academic research as a means for evaluating countries understanding of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. My research of the UKVNR contributes to this knowledge base and fills a gap in the literature, as to date I am not aware of any research that has been undertaken that considers the UKVNR in relation to child poverty and its impact on children, education and their rights.

My thesis, although concerned with secondary data of the UKVNR, seeks also to bring a focus on children's participation in research on their views and experiences of poverty. Inclusion of their views in my literature review is to aid understanding of their status and visibility in the UKVNR in relation to how poverty is framed and understood and its impact on children's education and rights.

My thesis builds on research that focused on document analysis alone *vis-à-vis* the VNRs and SDGs, e.g. (Lillehagen et al., 2020; Bickler et al., 2020). It extends this type of analysis to UK documentation across the Four Nations. My research goes on to address gaps in the existing

literature by developing and contributing to the knowledge base surrounding the SDGs and associated rights with respect to the extent the UKVNR frame and recognise child poverty in the UK. In addition, I examine the UKVNR through the lens of the CA in relation to the SDGs and human rights. My research considers how poverty impacts on achieving social justice, particularly as regards the position of children.

The next chapter concerns my theoretical perspective, capability approach (CA). Using the lens of a CA in relation to the SDGs and human rights, I consider how poverty impacts on achieving social justice, particularly as regards the position of children. I believe CA aids examining the UKVNR in relation to the SDGs and human rights, and on how poverty impacts on achieving social justice, particularly as regards the position of children.

Chapter 4: Theoretical approach

The focus of this chapter outlines my theoretical framework that draws on the Capability Approach (CA). The choice of CA as a theoretical framework informs my understanding of the broader situation around poverty, outcomes and human rights. It facilitates my analysis of the UK's approach to meeting the SDGs, with specific reference to the impact of Poverty SDG-1 on children's Education SDG-4.

- Capability Approach (CA) (4.1)
 - Introduction to the CA (4.1.1)
 - Development of the CA (4.1.2)
 - CA and Children (4.1.3)
- CA, Human Rights, the SDGs and Children (4.2)
 - CA, Poverty and Education (4.2.1)
- Summary (4.3)

4.1 Capability Approach (CA)

4.1.1 Introduction to the Capability Approach

The CA was initially set out by Amartya Sen (Sen, 1980, 1983, 1985b, 2005, 2009). It was further developed by Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2003, 2007, 2012) and Dixon & Nussbaum (2012) as a framework that can be used to explore how people's capabilities can flourish or diminish given the circumstances that surround them and the agency and freedom that people can access and achieve over their own life.

The CA has been used in the UN Human Development Report (UN, 1990) in relation to understanding human development, the multidimensional nature of poverty (UNDP, 2019) and the implementation of rights (UNDP, 2016). At a national level, CA has been used as the basis for equality and human rights monitoring by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for England, Scotland and Wales and reports to Parliament (Burchardt and Vizard, 2011).

What I find useful about CA is the way that over the many years of its development, it has been expanded to recognise differences and intersections between gender, race, class, and

age, and the need to take on board the views of CA beneficiaries (Sen, 2005). Sen's background is economics, but he does not adopt a simplistic analysis of poverty and deprivation but incorporates well-being more generally. Thus, I found the CA framework useful in aiding my analysis of the UKVNR regarding poverty, education and rights.

For Sen (2005), what is important are 'functionings' and the capability to achieve them. In that regard, Sen distinguished between 'functioning', 'capability', the functioning 'n-tuple', and the 'capability set'. It should be noted that they are interrelated and are not always clearly distinguishable.

- A 'functioning' is what an individual has achieved and what they can do with the resources at their disposal
- a 'capability' is the capacity a person has to achieve a function
- a functioning 'n-tuple' is the number of things a person might achieve and, therefore, the type of life they can lead
- the 'capability set' is the number of functioning n-tuples achievable and, thus, the choices and opportunities open to everyone' (Sen, 1985b).

For example, the capability to read means the individual can achieve an education, a functioning, that increases capabilities; functioning and capability scaffold each other. Sen went on to incorporate choice into capability as he developed the approach (Sen, 1992).

Choice may itself be a valuable part of living, and a life of genuine choice with serious options may be seen to be - for that reason - richer. In this view, at least some types of capabilities contribute directly to well-being, making one's life richer with the opportunity of reflective choice. But even when freedom in the form of capability is valued only instrumentally (and the level of well-being is not seen as dependent on the extent of freedom of choice as such), capability to function can nevertheless be an important part of social evaluation.

4.1.2 Development of the Capability Approach

Sen's original CA was extended by Nussbaum (2003:12) who developed a list of ten capabilities "... as central requirements of a life with dignity" (see Appendix 2). According to

Nussbaum's list, with respect to access to education, learning and poverty, I suggest that the most relevant elements would be:

- "life" and "bodily health" (especially nourishment), to enable "senses, imagination and thought";
- "emotions" and not having emotional development hindered by anxiety;
- "affiliation, having social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation", which would involve being treated with dignity which entails non-discrimination.
- "play - being able to play, to enjoy recreational activities." (Nussbaum, 2003:12–15)

Nussbaum's list is to be viewed as work in progress and not inflexible; it could be extended and adapted, which is what Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) did. They undertook focus group sessions within communities to examine Nussbaum's list, and they collected the different interpretations which were then disseminated. This dissemination produced a broader debate on the way that an inventory of capabilities must also address how disadvantage encompasses insecurity in relation to capabilities and functions that has a negative effect sequentially on the achievement of those capabilities. Consequently, there is cumulative disadvantage and inequality. For example, as set out in my literature review (3.2.3), research has shown the link between diet and educational outcomes and socio-economic inequalities (Littlecott et al., 2016). The consequences can lead to children being unable reach their full cognitive abilities and in turn their educational potential, impacting on future educational and employment opportunities and may lead to fewer opportunities to achieve maximum well-being (EEF, 2018; Banerjee, 2016; Cooper and Stewart, 2017).

Nussbaum's list applies to everyone at all stages of their lives, but it has been specifically applied to children. Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) highlighted the link between CA and children's rights, in that all human beings, including very young children, are entitled to both agency and protection. I found it useful to consider Nussbaum's list in conjunction with the CRC (1989) - Article 6, right to development, Article 2, non-discrimination, Articles 28, 29 right to education, and Article 31 right to play. Considering CA and children's rights together permits more attention to be paid to the development of capacity and for the child's agency related to their well-being, which affects both current and future development.

Subsequently, Biggeri et al. (2011) produced a list of 14 capabilities which they linked to the

CRC (1989) to show the synergy between CA and rights (see Appendix 2B). Children's ability to access education and to participate are key. For Biggeri et al (2011), the CA encompasses the idea that an education system is to provide an environment where children can flourish. Even though capabilities, choices and conditions experienced during childhood impact on children's capabilities as an adult, Ballet et al. argues that:

... children are much more than future adults as they are already social actors before they become adults: more attention should be dedicated to the understanding of children's well-being for children themselves, rather than projecting them to future outcomes. (Ballet et al., 2011:22)

In responding to the multidimensional character of poverty, it is essential to address not just well-being but achieving the most comprehensive access to and participation in education with consequent positive results, thereby impacting on childhood and well-becoming. Peleg (2013) considers the status of children and childhood. He uses the CA and an understanding of rights to argue for the child's right to agency and participation. Peleg (2013) makes the observation that Nussbaum's (2003) and Biggeri et al's (2011) lists of capabilities should be seen in relation to the obligations on states to international treaties, such as the CRC, to promote capabilities to the maximum.

What is particularly pertinent for my research is the way Nussbaum draws attention to the importance of recognising the **context** of people's lives:

The CA asks us to figure out what human beings are actually able to do and to be, in the totality of their circumstances: material, political, and social. It therefore cannot be implemented without the ability to understand the manifold ways in which **context** bears on individual striving. (Nussbaum, 2007:25)

Thus, CA is used in my thesis as an underpinning framework against which to consider whether the UKVNR framing of poverty contributes to the capability of children to access and participate in education in a manner that fulfils their development and rights.

4.1.3 Capability Approach and Children

Sen (2007) focuses attention on children and on human rights when considering deprivations experienced by children and the significance of freedom from deprivations,

such as hunger. Sen argues it is human rights that give 'action' for those in a position to help children to promote their freedoms. Children themselves may not be able to access their rights and freedoms because of their age or status in society. Robeyns (2017) explains how Sen outlines that we live in an interdependent world and the ability to exercise choice and freedom will at times depend on the actions and assistance of others. This is pertinent to understanding the CA in relation to the UKVNR and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda "... pledge that no one will be left behind" (UNGA, 2015:1), in relation to children and Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4. For children to have freedom to live a life of opportunities, it will, at times, depend on adults. I see a useful parallel here to the principle of the best interests of the child that must be the primary consideration in all actions that affect the child (CRC, 1989, Article 3) and the Children Act (1989). Sen (2007:244) notes:

... the opportunity aspect of freedom is immensely important for children. What opportunities children have today and will have tomorrow, in line with what they can be reasonably expected to want, is a matter of public policy and social programmes, involving a great many agencies.

In relation to the multidimensional nature of poverty, Chzhen et al. (2018b) note that Sen's CA broadens the view of poverty as more than a lack of income, to encompassing poverty as a deprivation of opportunities to achieve. Chzhen et al (2018b) suggest that using CA with a child's rights approach allows for focus on not just lack of material resources that may impact on children's development, but also to view the status of children as active citizens with rights, not solely as dependent on adults. Similarly, Lister (2015) considers the relationship between the CA and the social, economic and cultural rights when examining the impact of poverty in terms of what people are able to *be and do* in order to develop and flourish. Robeyns (2017) agrees with Sen that whether capabilities are available to allow freedom and development will depend on decisions and choices made by others. As an example, I would suggest that the decision by the government to implement the Welfare Reform Act (2012) and the Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016), resulted in policies relating to Universal Credit that restricted entitlement to welfare benefits, such as, benefit sanctions and the two-child limit. The consequence was that children were denied access to the resources needed to pursue capabilities because families received less by way of financial support.

4.2 Capability Approach, Human Rights, the SDGs and Children

The CA and human rights allowed me to consider education in a holistic context with the objective of achieving social justice through the SDGs in relation to the UKVNR Poverty SDG-1, and Education SDG-4. They were the vehicle through which to examine dimensions of poverty and inequalities as regards the impact of poverty on children's education and to address the attainment gap.

According to Sen (2007), human rights must be implemented to create a socially just society where there is freedom from poverty. Like Townsend (1979), Sen's analysis of poverty embraced much more than just income-poverty. Sen (1983, 2001, 2009) went further though, linking poverty with restricting the ability of all citizens from achieving their full capabilities and thus freedom, choice and opportunities.

Both Sen (1981, 2009) and Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2003; Dixon and Nussbaum, 2012) root the CA in an integrated understanding of human rights. Like the UDHR (1948), the CA upholds the inherent dignity of all persons by linking human freedom with social justice:

... CA highlights the critical importance of the substantive freedoms and opportunities of individuals and groups, whilst the human rights approach highlights the importance of values such as freedom, dignity and respect, equality and non-discrimination, participation and autonomy, and the arrangements that are needed to protect and promote these. (Vizard et al., 2011:1)

Recognising that I could combine the CA and rights within my own research was an important step in developing my position. An understanding and implementation of rights in my own professional practice has underpinned my career. So too has a need to understand how rights can be undermined by inequality within social structures that people and children, in particular for my thesis, must navigate daily. It is not that CA offers all the answers, but I can draw on aspects of its conceptual framework to highlight how children's well-being and development can flourish or diminish when seen through the freedoms and opportunities open or closed to them.

4.2.1 Capability Approach, Poverty and Education

Education that is accessible and which allows for participation is essential and central to creating a society that upholds and promotes social justice. The CA along with a human rights-based approach provides a context for considering the meaning of and need for equality of access to education.

The aim of the SDGs is to remove constraints on people's lives and to level-up the playing field by reducing inequality SDG-10 and LNOB. For the opportunity aspect of freedom, the idea of 'capability' (that is, the opportunity to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings: what a person is able to do or be) can typically provide a helpful approach. The CA draws attention to the relationship between the means available to individuals and groups and the actual opportunities that they have (Sen, 2004). Being aware of this relationship aided my analysis of the UKVNR by considering how the effects of poverty impact on children reaching their educational potential.

I consider that the CA is a useful lens through which to analyse how the UKVNR embraces the multidimensional nature of poverty and the impact that poverty may have on children's education. Failure to address child poverty impacts on children's education and, therefore, on what children are "... able to do or be ..." (Sen, 2004:33). CA offers a framework to consider how poverty may impact on what freedom and choice children have over opportunities to participate in a fulfilling childhood, one where their rights are promoted and protected to avoid 'falling into' the attainment gap. The CA with the SDGs, especially Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4 and Inequality SDG-10, along with the corresponding rights under the UDHR and UNCRC, provide a framework to achieve access to a decent standard of living through fair, inclusive and equitable quality education.

Following Hick (2018), CA provides a conceptual framework that moves the focus of poverty from one solely limited to inequalities of income to the multidimensionality of inequality, encompassing the non-economic dimensions of inequality that aids understanding of the quality of life. This is pertinent for my research in that I focus on children and the extent they have freedom and opportunities that are advantageous for their well-being or lead to disadvantage and a lack of fulfilment of their rights.

For Sen (2004) opportunities open to an individual are at least as important as the resources at their disposal. For capabilities to develop, an individual needs opportunities alongside resources. Given that freedom, agency and choice are so central to the CA, the importance of opportunities should hardly be a surprise. What a person can do and be, based on opportunities and resources, affects directly their capability to function (Nussbaum, 2000). External factors may well have a significant role in allowing an individual the freedom to develop their capabilities (Hart and Page, 2020).

Just because the United Kingdom provides free, universal education for children, if they lack access to other resources, such as nutritious food, they lack the opportunity to fulfil their capabilities because they will not be able fully access and participate in that education. Therefore, capabilities are not equally available to all, leading to a “capability deprivation” (Sen, 2009:256). Accessing education is not simply about the universal provision of schools for children free of charge as the UK has implemented. Even with a national curriculum that aims in part to ensure equality of provision across the country for children in terms of content (Hargreaves et al., 2023), to achieve social justice in education requires more than procedurally just processes in ensuring access (Rawls, 1999). Full enjoyment of, and full participation in, education cannot be achieved simply through the provision of free schooling especially if other consequences of poverty, broadly understood, prevent children achieving their full capabilities.

More generally, the stigma associated with poverty in the UK, even in relation to how children interact (bullying and exclusion from different groups), means that the school experience and the learning environment are inextricably intertwined with social relationships. Thus, poverty has impacts on the school day for some children (Naven et al., 2019).

The CA is linked to the human rights of children. As stated above (4.1.2), Peleg (2013) examines the status of children and childhood using the CA and an understanding of rights to argue for the child’s right to agency and participation. Biggeri & Cuesta (2021) explored multidimensional child poverty focusing on child well-being. The CA and rights have also been used to explore issues of children’s status, participation and agency within educational

provision and the role that schools need to play in promoting the opportunities for children to “be and become what they value” (Hart and Brando, 2018:294).

As regards adults, Townsend (1979) had previously identified the comprehensive, holistic, and interconnected aspects of poverty and how those aspects influence social and cultural participation. Ferragina et al. (2013) recognised that poverty could restrict a child’s opportunities for full participation in society. Given that childhood is taken up so much with education and schooling, the link is clear between the effects of poverty on educational opportunities and fulfilled capabilities throughout life.

Recognising the lived experiences of people are crucial to implementing a society that is socially just through the CA. The lived experiences of child poverty include the negative social, and economic conditions that hinder children flourishing. They affect how freedom, opportunities and choices might be enjoyed or not enjoyed by individuals and, therefore, how far capabilities can be achieved. Thus, children’s right to participate and express their own views is intrinsic to ensuring that their lived experience is factored in to ensuring a socially just society that allows capabilities to be achieved.

Although my research does not involve primary research with children, I feel it important to briefly highlight how the CA has been used to consider children’s views and experiences. This builds on the arguments in the Literature Review (3.3.3).

Gladstone et al. (2020) have undertaken synthesis of the literature on the way that the CA has been used in research with children in their social contexts. They conclude that the CA has been used mainly in qualitative participatory educational research. The areas of research covered included children’s perception of quality of life, poverty and education. In addition, the importance of children’s voice in the research process was included in the synthesis of research. Gladstone et al. (2020), citing research by Lundy (2007) and Lundy & McEvoy (2011), notes that their research placed emphasis on children’s rights and agency, and research **with** children rather than **on** children. Gladstone et al. (2020) concluded that the CA is useful for understanding childhood disadvantage not just at an individual level, but also in relation to understanding the structural barriers to well-being.

Overall, the insights generated by research with children allows the premise of Education SDG-4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, to be viewed from the child's perspective and reinforces the connection with the importance of children's right to participation (CRC, 1989).

The CA also enabled me to understand as a priority the premise of LNOB in the 2030 Agenda, referred to within the UKVNR (UKVNR, 2019:5) The multidimensional nature of poverty makes the lived experience for some children not just that they are not left behind, but that they should benefit from the commitment "... to reach the furthest behind first" (UNGA, 2015:3). Only that commitment would avoid limiting their freedom and choice and any further widening of social disparities. For example, my literature review highlighted the gap in outcomes already evident before children start school, that then continues throughout childhood and is evident in lower GCSE grades and future opportunities, the so-called attainment gap (3.2.3).

Poverty impedes children from having comprehensive access and the degree of participation that they need to achieve their full capabilities within and through education. As a consequence, children are denied the right set out in Article 31 CRC to participate in the cultural life of their society because capabilities cannot be fully realised (CRC, 1989). It is important to note that due to the situation of children in society, adults almost always provide the resources, social and economic, which provide children with resources such as education, food, health, housing and clothing. Without that full access to all the necessary supporting contextual services and resources, and the concomitant social interactions, children will find it difficult if not impossible to have the degree of control over their own futures to be able to attain a life with fulfilled capabilities. As provided by Article 27 (CRC, 1989), they have the right to an adequate standard of living that permits them to achieve their full development.

4.3 Summary

Sen's CA with its linking to and development of freedom (Sen, 1985b, 2001) is crucial to how I have advanced my analysis and understanding within this thesis. Traditionally, development is confined to discussions of economic growth, industrialization and technological progress. While those factors do play a role in relation to the freedom of people in society in terms of

the politics and economics, Sen goes much farther. He sees freedom as the very foundation of all development. Consequently, where freedom of individuals is inhibited by things such as poverty or hunger, their development in all its forms is hindered. Sen sees all freedoms as linked, integrated and interdependent. To fully attain freedom and development (Sen, 1985b, 2001) the individual needs to be able to access opportunities which then allow for the advancement of that individual's capabilities. Drawing together the concepts of indivisibility and interrelatedness which underpin the ethos and implementation of SDGs and human rights, the CA provides a theoretical framework for me to consider the extent to which children who experience poverty have their capabilities and rights fulfilled or curtailed. Income poverty has direct consequences for decisions families must make regarding food, housing, clothing, and heating. All those matters directly impact well-being and development and the ability to "... fulfil potential in dignity and equality" (UNGA, 2015:2). Poverty denies the fulfilment of capabilities and restricts the full enjoyment of human rights, even though human rights are state obligations owed to everyone within their territory and jurisdiction (Peleg, 2013).

In relation to Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, the CA provides me with the lens through which to examine how poverty impacts on children's education, the "context" (Nussbaum, 2007:25) of children's lives. By considering capabilities and rights, I can reflect on any relationship that may exist regarding the effects of poverty on children's development and how that may then impede access and participation in education, contrary to the CRC (1989) and the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015:31) "to ensure that no one is left behind".

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5 I explore how my methodological approach (ontology and epistemology) dovetails with my reflective professional background.

The chapter explains the reasoning for my choice of using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and how its reflexive and reflective basis was useful in examining the UKVNR (2019) the SSR (2020) and the WSR (2019). I then outline the RTA's six phases that I undertook to analyse the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales.

- Introduction (5.1)
- Ontology and Epistemology (5.2)
- Ethics and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (5.3)
- Document Analysis (5.4)
- Reflexive Thematic Analysis: A Methodological Framework (5.5)
 - o Phase 1 – Familiarising yourself with the dataset (5.5.1)
 - o Phase 2 – Coding (5.5.2)
 - o Phase 3 – Generating initial themes (5.5.3)
 - o Phase 4 – Developing and reviewing themes (5.5.4)
 - o Phase 5 – Refining, defining and naming themes (5.5.5)
 - o Phase 6 – Writing up (5.5.6)
- Summary (5.6)
 - o Preface to the next three chapters (5.6.1)

5.2 Ontology and Epistemology

My thesis focuses on poverty, children, education, and rights. I consider that there is an interlinking across all four. In terms of ontology, I consider poverty as linked to inequality, evident in social structures and institutions, and as such the inequality leads to and flows out of violations of human rights. I have been influenced by Krumer-Nevo's poverty-aware social work research (2016) and the premise that a human rights approach extends a structural analysis of poverty. My epistemological understanding of poverty is that there is a link with

how the production of knowledge can be related to politics and power and shaped by an imbalance in power relationships (Foucault, 1998). Thus, it is important to acknowledge and include the lived experience of people who experience poverty. My thesis considers how the production of knowledge is used in relation to the framing of poverty and its impact on children, especially their education and rights.

5.3 Ethics and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

My research was desk-based using publicly available documents and did not involve any direct contact or involvement with any participants and therefore there was no review by an ethics committee. I am aware that all research has ethical dimensions and responsibilities.

The choice of my research area was influenced by my professional background and experience in education and social work, having worked across the age range from infants through to adults. As a registered social worker, I am bound by professional ethics and standards (Social Work England, 2019), many of which are applicable and resonate with undertaking this research. These include being reflective in my work, promoting the rights, strengths and well-being of people, families, and communities, promoting social justice, and helping confront and resolve issues of inequality. The ethics and standards offer an important reminder of the responsibility when undertaking research that aims to position rights and equality of children at its centre. The traditional focus of studies on poverty and social inequalities is often low- or middle-income countries, whereas my research focuses on the UK, which is a high-income country in the global North. I believe it is important that the northern gaze reflects on itself.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), devised by Braun and Clarke (2022), gives a framework for undertaking an investigation of documents such as the UKVNR. Braun and Clarke's (2019:34) work takes account of the need to understand that: "Reflexive TA offers guidelines rather than rules for the process of analysis".

Other research that has used VNRs as data (3.3.1) revealed a range of approaches to analysing the VNR documents, making use of aspects of TA, such as identifying codes and generating "candidate" themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022:89) that are used to understand the "story" of the data. As Braun and Clarke suggest, RTA is a flexible method that allows for

different approaches to sit within its spectrum. Braun and Clarke's (2019) development of reflexive practice as an aspect of TA was useful to me as it builds on my ongoing use and understanding of reflective practice that I have utilised within my social work and education background. With respect to reflexivity within TA, Braun and Clarke (2022:5) note that: "... **reflexivity** involves the practice of critical **reflection** on your role as researcher your research practice and process" It is pertinent to me that Braun and Clarke use **reflexivity** and **reflection** in the same sentence, signifying one impacting on the other.

Within social work, reflective practice, is recognised as "the ability to analyse one's own practice" (Nash et al., 2022:2) by reflecting on how and why a situation was approached and dealt with, what was learnt and what might be changed in the future. Such an approach is integral within social work (Mantell and Scragg, 2016) and has been required and present in my social worker evidence to maintain registration (Social Work England).

In addition, reflective practice has been regarded as an integral component of working within education (Benzies et al., 2013; Clutterbuck, 2004), and beneficial in my role as a lecturer and mentor and in providing my evidence to achieve Senior Fellow (D3) for the Higher Education Academy.

For my thesis, I examined my judgements and belief systems and the impact they have on my role as a researcher in the decisions and choices I made throughout the process of knowledge production. For example, questioning myself on why I chose certain codes over others and how I then interpreted them. The research process was dynamic as I questioned my assumptions and positioning. Like Nash et al. (2022), I appreciate the complementary nature of both reflective and reflexive practice and how they can build on one another and be a component of my research using RTA.

In sum, my RTA readily incorporates and is shaped by my ethical approaches and underpins and draws on my epistemology and ontology.

5.4 Document analysis

Document analysis involves close reading and analysis of pre-existing texts, such as

newspaper articles, books and institutional and government reports, and is a valuable approach to research (Morgan 2022). Karppinen and Moe (2019:252) note that policy documents: “... *frame issues in a certain light ... Although official documents are often read as objective statement of facts, they are always socially produced*”. I use document analysis to examine how poverty and children’s rights are framed in the UKVNR (2019) and supplementary reports from Scotland (SSR 2020) and Wales (WSR 2019), all official government documents. Document analysis requires the researcher to recognise who has written the documents and the intended purpose and audience. The UKVNR (2019) was written by the Conservative government with input from the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and presented to the United Nations. Morgan (2022:73) suggests that when undertaking document analysis “... *thematic analysis is an ideal method for this process*”, signposting Braun et al (2019) reflective thematic analysis when conducting qualitative document analysis, so that the researcher acknowledges how their own values and history influence their research in a reflective and reflexive manner when analysing text. To do this, I used Braun and Clarke’s (2022) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. I initially skim read the document/s to get an overview and then re-read thoroughly from start to finish, observing the structure and format. I needed to do this several times in order to feel I had a competent grasp of the texts. The close reading enables ideas about the text to build and, in turn, aid in the selection and synthesis of meaningful and relevant excerpts of text (Bowen 2009). RTA requires selecting direct excerpts from the text that are then coded to identify themes. As will be shown below (5.5), there is a constant need to go back and forth between the phases of RTA in order to reexamine the text, codes and themes, checking that I was able to identify and organise clear arguments. At the same time, it was important to revisit the literature review, integrating it with my research analysis. By doing this, I was able to undertake a document analysis of the text of the UKVNR (2019), viewed and interpreted in relation to the wider academic literature that I had already undertaken. In addition, document analysis allowed me to analyse and draw conclusions on similarities and differences in the text between the UKVNR (2019), SSR (2020) and WSR (2019).

5.5 Reflexive Thematic Analysis: A Methodological Framework

My research uses Braun and Clarke’s (Braun and Clarke, 2022:35–36) ‘Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis’ (RTA) to undertake the analysis of the UKVNR (2019), and supplementary reports from Scotland (2020) and Wales (2019).

- Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the dataset
- Phase 2: Coding
- Phase 3: Generating candidate themes
- Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
- Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes
- Phase 6: Writing up.

5.5.1 Phase 1 - Familiarising yourself with the dataset

I read all the UKVNR plus the separate supplementary reports by Scotland and Wales. The UK submitted its first, and, to date, only VNR in 2019. My thesis is based on analysis of the UKVNR, supplementary submissions from the Scottish and Welsh Governments (see Table 1 for a list of documents). These documents incorporate national and local strategies, policies, and Activity Snapshots from across the Four Nations aimed at current and further progress towards fulfilling the SDG targets by 2030.

Document	No. of Pages
UKVNR (2019)	235
Scotland (SSR, 2020)	245
Wales (WSR, 2019)	87

Table 5.1: List of documents used

Phase 1 gave me an overview of all the documents, such as layout, content pages, chapter headings, and graphics. I made some initial brief handwritten notes of my first impressions, items of interest in the documents that proved useful in my subsequent interpretation of the data.

The supplementary reports from Scotland (SSR, 2020) and Wales (WSR, 2019) include material that is also included in the UKVNR. However, sometimes the supplementary reports provide greater detail on how Scotland and Wales approached the 2030 Agenda. For

Scotland, this was via the National Performance Framework (NPF), and for Wales, through the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 which includes seven well-being goals. Where the statements in the SSR and WSR are unique, fuller, more insightful or stronger, I have used direct quotations from those documents rather than the UKVNR.

Scotland's format of their supplementary review presents a very similar approach to that found in the UKVNR, in that each SDG goal is addressed in turn. Although published during the pandemic, the supplementary report is based on pre-COVID feedback and highlights the ambition of Scotland to meet the 2030 Agenda. The Welsh document, on the other hand, differs, in that rather than addressing each SDG, the seven well-being goals from the Future Generations Act frame the report. Interestingly, the Act is underpinned by consultation with the Welsh people. Like Scotland, Wales acknowledges that its implementation depends in part on Westminster policies.

I read online Portable Document Format (pdf) versions of each document, making use of the Notability programme on my iPad to upload the documents as an additional way of reading and annotating with an Apple pencil. I considered printing off all documents but decided to read online, only printing off a few pages as necessary.

5.5.2 Phase 2 - Coding

A combination of elements influenced the emergence of the codes. First, the literature review that I undertook highlighted areas of interlinking ideas, particularly relating to the effects of poverty on children's education and their rights. Secondly, reading the data, potentially interesting segments were identified, which Braun and Clarke (2022:35) suggest should be: "... relevant or meaningful for your research question...". Thus, codes were also developed from my RQs. Keeping the RQs always in focus when examining the data set enabled the further refinement of codes that could be applied to the data to capture meanings or concepts.

After reading the UKVNR, the SSR and WSR several times, I tested an initial list of 41 one- and two-word codes, using Atlas.ti software. This felt unmanageable and lacked focus, more written in beginner's panic than with confident skill of the task in hand. Reading Braun and Clarke (2022) again on how to approach coding, backed up with their online video on an

introduction to RTA, helped me see that one-word codes, such as ‘policies’ or ‘poverty’, were not enough as it would fail to capture what might be interesting about the data. This led me to attempt a couple of coding refinements to reduce to 20 codes, and then refined again to 19 codes where there was repetition in the data generated (see Appendix 3 for list of codes).

As an example of the refinement process, in the first set of 41 codes, one code ‘disadvantaged children’ produced several quotations that were also found by coding on ‘single mothers’, ‘single parents’, ‘unemployed parents’ and ‘universal credit’. In the second code list, I combined them into one more substantial code label, the ‘effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes’ and the new SDG-focused code of ‘Leave No One Behind’. In a similar vein, the two original codes of ‘food hunger’ and ‘nutrition budgeting’ eventually became part of a single code on ‘lack of access to services: ... food’. Finally, having reviewed the second set of 20 codes, I recognised that ‘attainment gap’ found exactly the same quotations as ‘effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes’. Thus, the final code set has only 19 codes. Table 5.2, below, reflects these processes in the development of the code lists, including how they marry-up with the continuous review of the materials, such that ‘Leave No One Behind’, not in the first set of codes, became a code that could also incorporate ideas that overlapped with the ‘effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes’.

First Set of Codes	Penultimate Set of Codes	Final Code Set
attainment gap	attainment gap	Effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes
disadvantaged children	effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes	
single mothers		
single parents		
unemployed parents		
universal credit		
	Leave No One Behind	Leave No One Behind
food hunger	lack of access to services/resources: a) education, b) health, c) food	Lack of access to services: a) education, b) health, c) food
nutrition budgeting		
framing of and response to childhood poverty	Framing of childhood poverty	Framing of childhood poverty

Table 5.2: Codes identified at different stages of analysis

Sub-coding

The 19 codes were then used for the UKVNR (2019) submission to the UN that incorporated sections from Northern Ireland (NI), Scotland and Wales. First, I had coded the whole UKVNR to take in the introduction, conclusion, and summary of each SDG. While inclusive, the first results were unsophisticated and did not reveal different approaches by the Four Nations. I refined it by separately sub-coding England, Scotland, NI and Wales for each code. A second run of Atlas.ti was undertaken concentrating on each of the Four Nations within the UKVNR. Focusing on each Nation in turn allowed me to begin reflection on how each Nation approached implementing the SDGs and the distribution of the codes across each Nation. I then ran Atlas.ti on the supplementary reports from Wales (WSR, 2019) and Scotland (SSR, 2020).

The reflexive element of TA became evident for me in examining whether a code was explicit, semantic in meaning, or more implicit, latent in meaning, and how codes can capture my "... analytical take on the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2022:35). For example, the code 'Accountability of government to alleviate child poverty' at a semantic level can be viewed via the extent the government make use of child poverty statistics; at a latent level, this code also allows reflection on the Governments use of language within the VNR for

example, how it frames accountability to alleviate child poverty. Pertinent for my research was Byrne's (2022) observation regarding the flexibility of the dual aspect of semantic and latent coding and how they may stand alone or be overlapping. This was relatable to my research when attempting to understand and reflect on the language used by the UK Government and how this might aid my interpretation of levels of meaning regarding poverty, education, and rights.

The advantages and limitations of using computer software for thematic coding have been identified in terms of how the software may aid investigation and visualisation of the data; however, computer software does not necessarily aid with the nuances of analysis that may only come from the researcher immersing themselves in the data (John and Johnson, 2000). Using Atlas.ti computer software in my PhD had the advantage of allowing data to be uploaded, coded, and aided the identification of quotations.

To undertake the analysis, I used pdf versions of the UKVNR 2019, SSR 2020, and WSR 2019, printing off a few pages at a time when necessary, and the Atlas.ti software, as stated in 5.4.1. As a sole researcher, I did not have co-researchers to discuss code choices, although my supervisor proved a vital critical sounding board here. Whilst working with a co-researcher can be useful to explore assumptions and act as a "check", on the other hand it is also possible that co-researchers may not always agree or code in the same way. Braun and Clarke (2022) note that RTA is not aiming to provide a right or wrong answer. It is my reflective engagement as a researcher with the data that aids the coding and the analytical process that follows on from this (Byrne, 2022).

5.5.3 Phase 3 - Generating candidate themes

From the immersion in the data, 19 separate codes were identified that captured my "analytical take on the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2022:35). As the coding of the UKVNR progressed, it was apparent that certain sections of the VNR were relevant to several different codes. The result was the development of four initial candidate themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022:89): A) Areas of poverty; B) Rights; C) Educational outcomes; D) Visibility of children. At this phase, the four themes offered a broad view of the data. Identifying codes that were interlinked in the data helped me to capture where there were shared meanings in the data that could then provide insight when clustered together under a theme. The four

themes related to my RQs (1.2.1), supported by ongoing reflections of the data and reinforced in the context of my literature review. RTA is a process as Phase 4 (5.4.4) indicates and, as the themes developed (5.4.5), I identified the parameters of the final Theme-Code table (Table 5.6).

5.5.4 Phase 4 - Developing and reviewing themes

Phase 4 proved very time consuming as the reflexive and reflective nature of thematic analysis is premised on the ongoing questioning and re-emergence in the data by the researcher, moving backwards and forwards between methodically the phases. Reviewing my four chosen themes against my codes and quotations across the dataset of documents allowed me to examine in more detail if each theme still worked, both individually and collectively within the overall data as a way of presenting a coherent narrative – it goes to “validity” and “richness” of the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022:97). The movement between Phases 3 and 4 supported this process. At the start of Phase 4, for example, rechecking and making amendments to my code allocation to themes proved useful in clarifying patterns of meanings when seen in relation to highlighted quotations. This process required each theme in turn to be reviewed again against their assigned codes for me to confirm that each theme was coherent in its own right and the coding assigned to each theme justified that theme. Before the themes were finalised (5.4.5), some were rejected for being too prescriptive – for example, Candidate Theme A referred to a ‘Systemic understanding of poverty’, rather than a ‘framing of poverty’, which better captures the sense of the quotations generated from the UKVNR. However, Theme B, Rights, was consistent throughout. The repeated process of revising code labels, referring to the generated quotations, and then reflecting on the themes in the light of the codes and the RQs, led to the final set of themes.

Initial Candidate Themes	Candidate Themes	Final Themes
Areas of poverty	Systemic understanding of poverty	Framing of poverty
Rights	Rights	Rights
Educational outcomes	Poverty and children’s education	Impact of poverty on children’s education
Visibility of children	Status and visibility of children	Status and visibility of children

Table 5.3: Development of Themes

With 19 Codes and only four themes, it led to numerous codes in each theme and overlap. Codes have no content in and of themselves. It is the quotations they generate that gives them substance that can then indicate themes. For example, the code ‘Poverty statistics’ generated several quotations, but some clearly were applicable to Theme A, Framing of Poverty, while others showed the impact of poverty on children’s education, Theme C.

Code/ Theme	A) Framing of poverty	B) Rights	C) Impact of poverty on children’s education	D) Status and visibility of children
Poverty statistics	✓		✓	

Table 5.4: Poverty Statistics and Themes

Phase 4 also helped to clarify my thinking and aided in the critical evaluation and reflections on my interpretations of the data thus far. I agree with Braun and Clarke (2022) that RTA is not always linear in its execution and when mistakes are made to understand that as part of the process. For example, realising that I needed to sub-code by reference to the Four Nations, there was no way to readily see the differences in approach by the Devolved Administrations. While the codes remained the same, I revisited each and the associated quotations; initially, all codes were generic to the United Kingdom, even if it was a policy or practice in only one or two of the Four Nations. Scotland and Wales, for instance, had utilised a legislative approach to fulfilling the SDGs, so the Code ‘National legislation and child poverty’, was dominated by references to the sections of the UKVNR focusing on those two Devolved Administrations: 39 out of the 45 quotations.

Code: ‘National legislation and child poverty’/ Sub-codes	References
England	1
Scotland	20
Wales	19
NI	2
UK	4
Total	45

Table 5.5: Breakdown of references by sub-code

Although adding the sub-codes was time consuming, it allowed me to make use of the flexibility of RTA and move between Phase 1 and 2, further immerse myself in the data,

whilst also allowing reflection on how the allocation of codes to quotations could start the initial process of looking for patterns within the data.

With the finalised themes, it was possible to clearly set codes against themes and recognise the patterns.

Code/ Theme	A) Framing of poverty	B) Rights	C) Impact of poverty on children's education	D) Status and visibility of children
Accountability of government to alleviate child poverty	✓	✓		
Child poverty & parents	✓			
Effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes	✓		✓	
Effects of poverty on child physical and mental health	✓		✓	
Framing of childhood poverty	✓			✓
Framing of human rights in response to poverty		✓		✓
Lack of access to services: education, health, food			✓	
Leave No One Behind	✓	✓	✓	✓
National legislation and child poverty	✓		✓	✓
Partnership across groups			✓	✓
Policy responses to child poverty	✓		✓	✓
Poverty - marginalised and vulnerable groups	✓	✓		✓
Poverty statistics	✓		✓	
Rights, participation and child agency		✓	✓	✓
Rights, social justice and poverty	✓	✓		
SDG framework to alleviate child poverty	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stigma and poverty	✓		✓	✓
UN international treaties		✓		
UNCRC and poverty		✓		✓

Table 5.6: Codes and Themes

There were two codes, 'Leave No One Behind' and 'SDG framework to alleviate child poverty' that appeared under every theme, but that is hardly surprising. My thesis is addressing the UK Voluntary National Review of **progress** towards the 2030 Agenda, so codes rooted in that Agenda would logically appear in relation to every theme. For example, coding UKVNR text as 'LNOB' generated 115 quotations, but some of them clearly attached to the 'Framing of poverty' while others were pertinent to the 'Status and visibility of

children'. Likewise, the code 'Framing of childhood poverty' produced quotations that fitted the themes 'Framing of poverty' and 'Status and visibility of children'. Themes, as a whole, should be "aiming to develop a rich, nuanced analysis that address [the RQs]" (Braun and Clarke, 2022:97).

As set out in the next section (5.4.5), the allocation of codes and associated quotations to themes, is a dynamic process that required me to reflect on the four components of my methodology: codes, generated quotations, themes and the RQs. The coding of the UKVNR, SSR and WSR through Atlas.ti generated quotations that had to then be understood and interpreted in the light of the three RQs. The quotations indicated the four themes within the documents and, thus, the appropriate code allocation to themes (Table 6). The fluid approach needed when undertaking RTA, understanding that "it is not strictly linear" as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022:36), may sound easy, but I have found it has required not just time to engage in both the reflexive and reflective nature of RTA, but the confidence to be an active intuitive researcher.

5.5.5 Phase 5 - Refining, defining, and naming themes

In Phase 3 (5.4.3), I generated four candidate themes covering general areas that I believed gave a framework for considering the narrative of my research. Working on the themes is a dynamic and interactive process and one that required me to re-examine regularly. Braun and Clarke (2022:36) suggest "... writing a brief synopsis of each theme" in phase 5. I found this a useful, necessary, but taxing exercise to do, but approached it as a means to evolving and refining my reflective thinking.

Theme A: Framing of poverty

This theme offers a picture of how poverty, and in particular child poverty, in the UKVNR is framed. The framing of poverty can incorporate the language used within the documents that may highlight issues of inclusion or exclusion of certain groups. This in turn leads to consideration of how the government's framing of poverty and its interlinkages is reflected in the implementation of policies. How the UK government frames poverty and implements policies can offer insight and allow for interpretation of how the government views the role of individual responsibility of the people experiencing poverty. In relation to child poverty,

what is the government's understanding of the state's responsibilities and necessary responses required to effect structural change that would offer a transformative difference.

Theme B: Rights

This theme considers the relationship of rights to the UKVNR, with a particular emphasis on children's rights. The 2030 Agenda (2015) is underpinned by the principles of rights and urges states to uphold, implement and protect the rights of all their citizens. The UN urges states to be particularly mindful of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society, and the obligations of states in protecting the rights of such groups. The UK, in agreeing to the 2030 Agenda, has undertaken a commitment to rights in progressing towards the SDGs. The extent the UK acknowledges the importance of rights, and their implementation allows for an assessment of how rights are framed within the UKVNR, both nationally and across the Devolved Administrations. This theme considers how the UK government frames issues of child poverty and education in relation to upholding children's rights as a means of meeting the 2030 Agenda.

Theme C: Impact of poverty on children's education

This theme examines the extent to which the UKVNR shows the government's understanding of the impact that poverty has on children's education. It explores how the UKVNR presents the role of the state and its response to addressing the multidimensional nature of poverty in relation to the educational needs of children and young people. It examines the extent to which the UKVNR considers whether there are links between poverty, food, health, the attainment gap, early years and educational outcomes, and any policy responses geared toward addressing inequalities in these areas so that the 2030 Agenda is met.

Theme D: Status and visibility of children.

This theme explores the status and visibility of children within the UKVNR. The 2030 Agenda promise of LNOB encompasses the most marginalised and vulnerable in society, including children experiencing poverty. The well-being of children and upholding their rights is seen as integral to the success of the SDGs. Examination of how the UK government positions children within the UKVNR allows for the investigation of the status assigned to children and their visibility within policies. The extent that children's needs and rights in relation to

poverty and education are addressed in the UKVNR, and not solely as an adjunct to adults', is worthy of analysis.

Reflection

After writing the synopsis of themes and leaving them to settle into my thinking regarding my RQs, I considered if there was a clear enough demarcation between the themes, as on revisiting codes and quotations for the themes, I found there was some overlap between them, for example, Themes A and C, but there was also significant distinction.

At the same time as I was undertaking this stage of the research, I was also undertaking my Social Work annual registration which requires the undertaking of a minimum of two pieces of continuous professional development with a compulsory reflective element. First, I reflected on BASW Anti-Poverty Strategy (2019), which highlights the structural nature of poverty and calls for a rights-based approach to anti-poverty practice. Secondly, considering ATD's Fourth World Report (2019) based on people's lived experiences of poverty in the UK, enabled me to gain a greater insight into the dimensions of poverty. These aspects of my professional life, coinciding and overlapping, have aided my contemplation on my research. RTA always requires the researcher to engage and re-engage with the data, the coding, and the themes in the light of the RQs so that the process of writing up is dynamic, reflective and reflexive.

5.5.6 Phase 6 - Writing up

Chapters 6 to 8 contain analysis and discussion and the conclusions to analysing the UKVNR. As the methodology used RTA, 'Phase 6, Writing up', may appear to be the last phase in the methodical approach. However, taking on board Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance, I concur it was an ongoing process during the research. As I went between phases 3-6, I constantly revisited the text.

Reflecting on the 'writing up' phase, I acknowledge there are influences from long before undertaking this PhD. My research draws together not just the examination of the UKVNR, but analysis of my own personal experiences, my understanding and knowledge gained over forty years as an early year's practitioner, lecturer, registered social worker, advocate, and member of various NGOs concerned with child poverty and the rights of the child and education.

5.6 Summary

My methodology, utilising Braun and Clarke's RTA (2022), enabled me to understand and frame my RQs in relation to the text of the UKVNR (2019), SSR (2020) and WSR (2019). Through RTA, I explored the connection between Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, along with the links to human rights. RTA allowed me to understand the impact of poverty, in many of its dimensions, on children's education. As such, without the essential aspect of addressing poverty, education cannot be fair and accessible and consistent with human rights, which allow all children in the UK to achieve their fullest potential.

5.6.1 Preface to the next three chapters

The following Chapters, 6 – 8, present my findings from examining three reports: 1) the UKVNR (2019) and the supplementary reports from 2) Scotland (SSR, 2020) and 3) Wales (WSR, 2019). The UK government has not indicated whether it will produce a further VNR to the United Nations on its progress towards meeting the SDGs. Although all the Devolved Administrations contributed to and are included in the UKVNR (2019) submission to the United Nations, Northern Ireland's (NI) sections were less substantial than the others. The political difficulties at that time within NI's devolved government may have impacted on their ability to fully engage with the VNR process.

In the UKVNR, the term *Activity snapshot* is used to highlight examples of good practice; I include examples within the analysis and discussion of the RQs to indicate practical implementation that the governments saw as important.

The RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was used to underpin the exploration and analysis of my RQs in relation to the UKVNR:

RQ1: How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty-SDG1?

RQ2: How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4?

RQ3: To what extent are rights seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education?

My three RQs, although addressed separately in chapters 6-8, build on one another. The UK's failure to frame a broad understanding of child poverty impacts on fulfilling the 2030 Agenda and respect for the right to education. To avoid the impression of finality, I follow Braun and Clarke's (2022) suggestion to use the term analysis rather than results or findings. This distinction fits with my qualitative, reflective approach, where I integrate the direct quotations, I have selected and embed them in a narrative that builds a picture of my analysis of the three reports. I make use of the Capability Approach (CA) to aid my analysis of the RQs by considering how the framing of poverty may contribute to the capability of children to access and participate fully in their right to education.

The UKVNR (2019:10) notes that there are differences and similarities in the implementation of legislation, policies, and frameworks for the SDGs across the Devolved Administrations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (NI). By highlighting some of the Devolved Administrations' different approaches, I hope to continue building my own narrative of how poverty is understood and responded to.

As regards Chapters 6 (RQ1) and 8 (RQ3), the discussion of the Devolved Administrations' approaches could be taken vis-à-vis the RQ. However, with respect to Chapter 7, each aspect of RQ2 examined in the analysis and discussion of the UKVNR was discrete and, as will be seen, the specific responses of each Devolved Administration could be more coherently addressed in that section of the chapter rather than *en bloc* at the end.

Chapter 6: RQ1: How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty-SDG1? Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction to RQ1

Agenda 2030 has adopted a multidimensional framing of poverty:

We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, ..., is the greatest global challenge ... We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality (UNGA, 2015:1–2)

According to Townsend (1979), Sen (1985b), the UN (1995), Gordon et al. (2000, 2013) and Lister (2021), poverty encompasses not just a lack of income, but also reduced access to resources and services, which in turn impacts on individual and group capacity to participate fully in society. Whereas the UKVNR (2019) makes similar indications to the broader framings of poverty, its focus is on employment and higher pay resolving poverty, indicating a simple income-related framing. I consider how the framing of poverty by the government is reflected in the implementation of policies, illustrating the extent the government appears to address the interlinking dimensions of poverty in a transformative manner for children. Furthermore, my thesis offers insight and allows for interpretation of how the government views individual responsibility of the people experiencing poverty.

The main interconnecting areas considered in relation to RQ1 are:

- Poverty, welfare reform and full employment (6.2)
- Government accountability regarding Poverty SDG-1 (6.3)
- Troubled Families Programme (6.4)
- Devolved Administrations (6.5)
- Summary - RQ1 (6.6)

6.2 Poverty, welfare reform and full employment

As stated in Chapter 3, poverty is multidimensional. My research identifies the government's approach to welfare reform, employment and poverty within the UKVNR and highlights the

cumulative negative impact that policies can have on children when their best interests are not the focus.

The UKVNR states clearly the importance of the SDGs generally in tackling injustice:

The UK is determined to tackle **injustices** The Goals ... reflect the most significant global challenges of modern time. The issues they relate to are complex and interlinked. The Voluntary National Review shows some of the action being taken. (UKVNR, 2019:5).

The government acknowledges that the state is central to the implementation of the SDG Agenda 2030. However, although they recognise that the SDGs are complex and interlinked, the UKVNR lacks a commitment and clarity about achieving this objective. The Conservative government's response did not reduce the number of children who experience poverty or improve all children's outcomes in a manner that enables them to reach their full potential (UNGA, 2015). My analysis of the UKVNR indicates that this is because the UK government fails to address and assess the interlinking inequalities experienced throughout childhood which impact on educational and holistic development.

Despite having received the 2016 CteeRC concluding observation (2016) that raised concerns over child poverty, there is little in my analysis to indicate in the UKVNR that the UK government ever had a holistic and effective plan to address child poverty, even though the UKVNR narrative purports otherwise:

The UK is **committed** to tackling all forms of poverty, including childhood disadvantage and in-work poverty, at home and abroad. The UK government supports full employment and higher pay as the best long-term route out of poverty. (UKVNR,2019:28)

While the UK government uses the word "**committed**" in relation to tackling poverty and links child poverty with childhood disadvantage, full employment and higher pay are the proposed routes out of poverty. This approach fails to take account of the different circumstances that can impact on being in full time paid employment. Caring responsibilities, which are predominantly undertaken by women (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2016) are not always aligned with access to affordable high quality childcare, and are limited in the range of provision, particularly in the most deprived areas. The UKVNR

recognises the need for increased childcare provision for parents and lone parents in particular to access full time work (UKVNR, 2019:30). However, the focus remains fixed on resolving poverty by:

Promoting full-time work and making sure it sufficiently pays is a key plank of the UK government's anti-poverty strategy. (UKVNR, 2019:32)

There is acknowledgment that work should pay sufficiently, which, may relate to the implementation of the living wage. However, decisions on what sufficient pay should be are rarely made by the recipients of that pay. The above quotation refers to the government's anti-poverty strategy, but this was not backed up in terms of a clear, implemented strategy. It is pertinent to note that post-UKVNR at a national level, the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2021) recommended a cross-departmental strategy to address present and future child poverty, encompassing the cost of living and the causes of poverty.

The UK Government nevertheless appears to see the SDGs as embracing a holistic response to poverty:

Poverty is complex. Income transfers alone do not break the cycle of long-term disadvantage. (UKVNR, 2019:28)

It is not just about incomes, but also about values. It is not just about avoiding catastrophe, but about letting everybody reach their full potential – Leaving No One Behind. (UKVNR, 2019:4)

However, there is no mention in the UKVNR on how a lack of access to services impacts on children reaching their full potential and leaves people behind. The UKVNR reveals a lack of concerted policy to address poverty and its manifold dimensions, and which, due to that failure, does not address the underlying, interrelated causes. In the main, my analysis of the UKVNR reveals the UK government focused its values and emphasis on income-poverty, to be addressed via full employment. This places the responsibility on parents and away from government and its policies. It does not fully address all aspects of child poverty, with detrimental consequences for children and their development.

The UN CteeRC issued to the UK concluding observations in both 2016 and 2023 (2016; 2023) and noted serious concern over the high child poverty rates across the UK. The 2023

report noted “the large number of children living in poverty, food insecurity and homelessness” and advised the government and the Devolved Nations to:

- a) Develop or strengthen existing policies ... to end child poverty and ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living, including by increasing social benefits to reflect the rising cost of living ...
- d) ... Ensure that measures to combat poverty comply with a child rights-based approach and include a particular focus on children in disadvantaged situations ... (CRC/CO 6-7, 2023, 46.a-d)

While the quotations in this section, drawn from Theme A and related Codes, (5.4.5) show recognition that income transfers alone do not address the complexity of poverty, the government’s apparent insight has not shaped its framing and response to poverty. There seems to be some contradiction by the government in the VNR, with its focus on addressing poverty through full-time work rather than a clear strategy to address multidimensional poverty.

6.3 Government accountability regarding Poverty SDG-1

The UK Government positioned itself as crucial to the development and adoption of the 17 SDGs in 2015, especially the promise to ‘Leave No One Behind’ (LNOB) which is central to achieving Poverty-SDG1 (UNGA, 2015). The inclusion of the words, “commitments”, “promise”, “priorities” at the beginning of the UKVNR sets a tone from the outset that gives an impression of the government’s sincerity and accountability to fulfil the SDG Agenda to LNOB (UKVNR, 2019:5).

Children who experience poverty in the UK are left behind in terms of their development and outcomes in comparison to children not experiencing poverty. Government commitments, promises and priorities have not become a reality in terms of how they have responded to addressing child poverty in the UK. Based on my analysis of the UKVNR, this lack of commitment to the application of LNOB undermines the UK government’s practical implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is evident in the number of children living in poverty in 2018, 4.1 million children were living in relative poverty, after housing costs are considered (DWP, 2019). The government’s commitment within the VNR to addressing poverty and child poverty has not been borne out in the years since the publication of the

VNR, as reflected in the increasing numbers of children living in poverty; in 2023, it had risen to 4.2 million (Devine, 2024).

The government positions itself as central to the development of the LNOB principle of the SDGs:

The UK played a key role in ensuring that Leave No One Behind became a core principle of the Goals, and **pledged** to put the last first by **ensuring** that:

- every person has a fair opportunity in life no matter who or where they are;
- people who are furthest behind, who have least opportunity, and who are the most excluded are prioritised; and
- every person counts and will be counted. (UKVNR, 2019:26)

There is both reference to and recognition of the need to put the last first regarding ensuring fair opportunity, and a recognition that greatest opportunity is given to those furthest behind and excluded. It is the government who is making themselves accountable through the pledge of **ensuring** to LNOB.

The word **pledged** is used and interactively linked within the UKVNR (2019:26) to a government policy briefing paper, 'Leaving No one behind: Our promise', which notes that the government has to hold:

... [itself] and each other accountable for designing policies and building inclusive institutions that put the furthest behind first and sustainably address the root causes of poverty and exclusion. (DfID & FCDO, 2019:3–4)

Here there is acknowledgment from the government of their accountability for designing policies and institutions that seek to address poverty. It is pertinent to note that the DfID policy briefing goes on to acknowledge that children who experience poverty are a group that are left behind and need to be listened to (DfID & FCDO, 2019:3–4).

The UKVNR (2019) needs to be understood against the background of the welfare reforms from 2012 onwards. Universal Credit imposed a range of conditions and obligations on claimants, mainly low-income families that had a cumulative negative impact on people's lives, which the government failed to consider in the implementation of the welfare reform

policies (Meers, 2022). Welfare reform policies increased the risk of poverty by reducing household income. For example, the two-child limit on income-related benefits and the benefit cap (JRF, 2023; Try, 2024). The implementation of Universal Credit with punitive sanctions and benefit caps, and the two-child limit within universal credit to accessing benefits, have not shown an integrated approach to reducing poverty and inequality. Children from larger families, single parent households and children from black and ethnic minority families are more likely to experience poverty (JRF, 2024).

My analysis of the UKVNR indicates that these policies exacerbate poverty and push children further behind. The analysis discloses that there is a contradiction in what the government acknowledges needs to be done in the VNR and the lived reality of children who experience poverty:

... when people are marginalised or excluded...when left behind ... **everyone** suffers the consequences (UKVNR, 2019:26).

Children who live in poverty can experience marginalisation and exclusion from opportunities and therefore be the very group that the government would need to ensure are put first and are given a fair opportunity across every aspect of their lives, including access to and participation in quality education. I question the premise that “**everyone** suffers the consequences” of being left behind to the same degree.

Sen’s CA (1985b) provides a useful lens here to consider how poverty is more than just about experiencing relative poverty with respect to the environment in which you live but is also about the lack of opportunities to achieve well-being and capabilities. It is the intersection and interconnectivity of the issues that aids the narrative of this thesis in fully comprehending the impact of poverty on children and their education, discussed in Chapter 7.

If the multidimensional nature of poverty is not recognised and addressed by the government, then the impact on children and families may be felt across the generations. Longitudinal research has shown how the impact of poverty in the early years of a child’s life can continue to negatively affect development (Dickerson and Popli, 2016, 2018). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) have also been

shown to experience adverse impacts on educational outcomes, such as lower GCSE results, that then affects employment and earning opportunities (Farquharson et al., 2022).

Inequalities experienced in health and education can impact the choices and opportunities available regarding essentials such as access to good quality food and housing that have a consequential effect on both the physical and mental health of adults and children, which may go on to negatively affect the next generation (Marmot et al., 2010, 2020). Poverty and the impact on children's education is further addressed across Chapter 7 and *vis-à-vis* nutrition in 7.5.

The government uses **committed** to acknowledge that poverty has many dimensions and can be inter-generational:

The UK is **committed** to addressing poverty in all its dimensions and believes that, in the long run, **the cycle of inter-generational poverty** can only be broken through a focus on **the root causes of poverty** (UKVNR, 2019:29).

Despite the UK Government's commitment, there is no clarification as to what all those dimensions of poverty would include. The government links **the cycle of inter-generational poverty** and **the root causes of poverty**. However, there is a lack of clarity as to what the government consider to be "root causes of poverty", indicating that the government's focus and commitment appears not to extend identifying and understanding the causes of poverty to enable a more nuanced response to tackling poverty. The discourse around the **cycle of inter-generational poverty** may suggest that the cause, blame and failings of poverty lie in individual families, rather than recognising and addressing the multifarious nature of poverty that families living in the most deprived and marginalised areas may experience for generations (MacDonald et al., 2020). I identified the narrative of blame in relation to the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) (see 6.4).

Unlike Scotland, Wales and NI, England does not have a child poverty strategy. In 2016, the UN raised concerns over the high levels of child poverty in the UK and urged the government to implement child poverty strategies (CRC/CO 5, 2016). My research highlights how a lack of a coherent poverty strategy made the government's commitment to address Poverty-SDG1 appear hollow and deficient in conviction. The resulting poverty inequalities cause a

lack of well-being and opportunities to fully participate in society with dignity, attain their true capability and impacts on their human rights.

The framing of poverty showed how government policies reflect a narrow view of poverty that fails to properly address Poverty-SDG1. The VNR attempts to shift some of the responsibility for childhood poverty on to the families.

6.4 Troubled Families Programme

The inclusion of an activity snapshot to highlight the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) within the UKVNR is an example of the government's framing of poverty and offers an insight into a limited understanding of poverty and child poverty, in particular:

Activity snapshot:

To target particularly **disadvantaged children**, around 150 local authorities across England are delivering the Troubled Families Programme to support families with multiple and overlapping disadvantages. The second phase was launched with a £920 million investment in 2015 to support a further 400,000 families by 2020 through dedicated and coordinated 'whole-of-family' support. (UKVNR, 2019:30).

Within the UKVNR (2019:30) the TFP is in the section on child poverty and lone parents. It conflates lone parent families as troubled families and further conflates **disadvantaged children** with "Troubled Families", as the target group. The implementation guide for the TFP (established 2011) makes no mention of poverty (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). Crossley (2018) makes the important point that the TFP presented a narrative of families that are poor as the cause of the problem and the solution focuses solely on the family. By doing this the government directs the narrative away from recognising and dealing with structural inequalities.

Further, my research discloses that the government thereby abdicates its responsibility to tackle child poverty in any transformative manner. There is a lack of emphasis on improving universal services for all families so that support from the state and its agencies is geared to the holistic well-being of children and their families. There is a lack of attention given to the causes of poverty, and a lack of understanding that the framing of initiatives, such as the TFP,

can lead to children and families feeling stigma when targeted as troubled or in need of support (Lister, 2021).

Since the UKVNR was published, the TFP has evolved into the “Supporting Families” Programme. The government guidance document on implementing the new programme makes no mention of poverty (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021). However, the emphasis is still on the responsibility for change within families, with limited focus on the wider social issues of the causes of poverty. By focusing on families, the government present a negative rhetoric about families (Barnes and Ross, 2021).

Language can be used to either favour or negate individuals or groups and can highlight issues of power, inequality, and justice (Fairclough, 2013; Mullet, 2018). I identified how language may be used to exclude and marginalise children and families that encounter statutory and voluntary agencies. Terms such as “Troubled Families”, focus on the individual or groups rather than on the responsibility of agencies to recognise and address the barriers to accessing and engaging with services. Additionally, families lived experience of poverty, and the role of the state in relation to the structural causes of the poverty, is where the focus and narrative need to be redirected if Agenda 2030 (UNGA, 2015) is to have any meaningful impact within the UK.

Gupta’s (2017) work on child protection has been influential. Although my research is not focused on child protection, Gupta’s research showed how to incorporate CA and human rights as a lens through which to examine the multidimensional nature of poverty, as discussed in 6.3. Gupta’s research not only emphasised individual circumstances, but highlighted the need to understand social and economic circumstances of children and families that encounter child protection agencies.

In relation to my research regarding RQ1 and the narrow framing of poverty in the UKVNR, the TFP can be viewed through the CA. Children and their families were addressed in terms of their individual circumstances that needed to be changed, but there was little understanding as to the wider structural, socio-economic system that impacted on their choices and freedoms.

In sum, the government refers to the multidimensional character of poverty, but its policies focus on “disposable income” as the appropriate metric (UKVNR, 2019:37). The government analysis always come back to the simplistic idea of full employment that can never address all aspects of poverty.

6.5 Devolved Administrations

What follows is a discussion of how each of the devolved administrations has approached the UKVNR. It necessarily emphasises differences in approach and critiques by the Devolved Administrations of the Westminster government. It also raises the constraints and problems the Devolved Administrations face because of the limitations of devolution.

Even though the Devolved Administrations have their own government and legislature, the UK parliament legislates on reserved issues such as “Macroeconomic and fiscal matters and National living wage” for the whole of the UK (UKVNR, 2019:10). Throughout, the power of the UK Parliament to implement fiscal policy across the whole of the country and the impact this was seen to have, was an issue highlighted by Scotland and Wales in their contributions to the VNRs on their ability to respond to poverty.

6.5.1 Scotland

The Scottish government acknowledges that poverty impacts on opportunities and children are identified alongside adults, rather than subsumed:

No child or adult should have their chances limited by poverty Our NPF [National Performance Framework] states that “we **tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally**”. (SSR, 2020:8)

Rather than relying simply on full employment, the Scottish government proposes **tackling poverty by sharing opportunities, power and wealth more equally**. They also indicate the role that wealth and power play in achieving opportunities that protect against poverty. The NPF shows how Scotland uses legislation as a vehicle to aid the implementation of the SDG Agenda. However, Sinclair (2022) notes that although Scotland has a different approach to policy and legislation relating to tackling child poverty, rates in Scotland have not decreased.

Scotland identifies and focuses on:

... three key drivers of child poverty reduction: increasing income from work and earning; reducing household costs; and maximising income from social security and benefits in kind. The need to mitigate the detrimental effects of poverty on those children who have already experienced it – improving these children’s life chances so that they do not grow up to become the parents of children in poverty – has also been taken into account. (SSR, 2020:12)

The visibility of children is enhanced by the way Scotland frames the persistence of intergenerational poverty, if multifarious causes of poverty are not identified and addressed.

With respect to poverty and social protection, the Scottish government identifies the UK Government, and the welfare reforms it introduced, as detrimental to the people of Scotland (SSR, 2020:14–15, 18, 30). The Scottish interventions impact on households that have children which may explain why Scotland takes:

... a whole systems approach to tackling poor health outcomes, poor diet and food insecurity, working towards achieving targets 2.1 and 2.2 with a close connection to Goal 1 and wider connections to Goal 3 on Health, Goal 8 on the Economy, and Goal 13 on Climate Action. (SSR, 2020:21)

Here the Scottish government takes a joined-up approach to achieving the SDGs, interlinking the impact of poverty with food insecurity and health. Although not mentioning education in particular, Scotland asserts that poverty needs to be even more broadly understood, shown by recognising that Poverty-SDG1 and Hunger-SDG2 are linked to Health-SDG3. The intersectionality of poverty, hunger, poor physical and mental health have been seen to have a negative impact on children’s education (Wickham et al., 2016; Marmot et al., 2020).

Scotland’s response to the multidimensional character of poverty is addressed through its National Performance Framework.

Scotland’s National Performance Framework (NPF) has reducing inequalities at its heart. A range of legislation plans and policies in Scotland support the agenda to Leave No One Behind. ... [and] actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcomes caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. (UKVNR, 2019:27)

The Scottish government is linking their accountability and responsibility to LNOB through its legislation and policies. Accountability of the government and public bodies is reinforced by

imposing a legal responsibility to actively consider socio-economic disadvantage in making decisions. By acknowledging that inequality from socio-economic disadvantage exists, Scotland's approach to accountability differs from the UK government's approach that promises to design policies that put the furthest behind first, but without any legal responsibility in place so to do.

Scotland presents a different narrative in the VNR from the UK government's, regarding the causes of socio-economic disadvantage. The Scottish focus highlights the impact of decisions made by people in authority on the outcomes of citizens, rather than the focus being on the changes the individual who experience socio-economic disadvantage should make to change their circumstances. My analysis of the SSR 2020 shows the Scottish government has adopted a broader framing of poverty and its causes by comparison to the Westminster government. Children have very little agency over government decisions but feel the impact of strategic policy decisions that affect the level of inequality they will experience throughout their childhood.

6.5.2 Wales

As in England, NI and Scotland, child poverty rates in Wales have not decreased in any meaningful manner (Stone, 2023). The Welsh government does affirm a commitment to tackle poverty and links it with inequality. It notes that "relative poverty in Wales has remained steady for over a decade and is highest amongst children" (WSR, 2019:39), raising the visibility of children by acknowledging their position in relation to poverty.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides a comprehensive approach to sustainable development that mirrors the Agenda 2030 framework It lays out seven **well-being** goals for Wales, which address the four dimensions of sustainable development in Wales (environmental, economic, social, and cultural), places legal duties on public sector bodies and establishes the world's first Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. (WSR, 2019:11)

However, Sindall et al. (2021) note children are not mentioned specifically in the well-being goals for Wales; this omission was a missed opportunity for further raising their status.

The term **well-being** rather than sustainable development is given prime positioning in the naming of the Welsh legislation. The reasoning being that sustainable development was a concept people view mainly in relation to environmental issues, whereas well-being is easier to understand and encompasses not just personal well-being but societal well-being (Wallace, 2019). Like Scotland, Wales uses legislation to place legal duties on public sector bodies which leads to accountability of Welsh ministers in meeting the SDG Agenda.

The legislative expectations of the Futures Generations Commissioner for Wales to monitor progress of the SDG Agenda is a further example of how the Welsh government view their accountability under the SDGs. Together with the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2017) they produced guidance to help public bodies adopt a commitment to the CRC in relation to meeting the well-being goals for Wales. The guidance is considered important in the way it supports public bodies in a practical way to bring together children's rights and the SDGs in implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, (Croke et al., 2021).

The implementation of Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is seen as significant in that its focus is on equality across communities and deals with both the present and future generations' well-being rather than limiting the focus to purely economic responses to social issues (Messham and Sheard, 2020). Wales focuses on a **preventative** approach through early years provision and, like the UK government, employability:

The Child Poverty Strategy underlines the importance of a **preventative** approach to tackling child poverty, focussing on the early years and employability. (UKVNR, 2019:34)

However, even with a child poverty strategy, Wales has the highest rate of child poverty across the Four Nations (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). This needs to be understood when considering the position of Wales as a devolved administration in terms of policy development and funding from central government:

Responsibility for the policy development of welfare reform is not devolved. Wales does not have the resources available to fully address the impact of these changes. However, it continues to mitigate, where possible by providing additional funding to support those most affected. (UKVNR, 2019:35)

Wales is highlighting where they consider the responsibility and accountability for development in welfare reform lie, that is, with the Westminster government, and how the lack of funding available to them as a Devolved Nation hinders how they can address any negative impact of welfare policies. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the Welsh response is to provide funding as a buffer to negative welfare policy changes. In this way, Wales indicates that their accountability to fully tackling poverty should be seen within the wider policy restrictions imposed by the UK central government *vis-à-vis* the degree of devolution.

6.5.3 Northern Ireland (NI)

While there is no separate supplementary report from NI, there are references to the NI approach in the UKVNR (2019):

the principles of sustainable development are embedded in the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Programme for Government. Following the suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive in March 2017, the draft Programme for Government framework has been used as the basis for the Northern Ireland Civil Service Outcomes Delivery Plan. (UKVNR, 2019:212)

Although NI notes that the principles of Sustainable Development are implanted in their delivery of the SDGs, there is no indication of their understanding of the SDG principles. The reference to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive, though, explains why there was limited input from Northern Ireland within the UKVNR.

The NI contributions to the VNR draw on Northern Ireland's draft Programme for Government (PfG) Indicators. A mapping exercise has been carried out to highlight how the draft PfG (12 Outcomes and 49 population Indicators) align with the Goals. (UKVNR, 2019:23)

The draft Programme for Government aligns to the SDGs. A child poverty strategy was introduced in 2016, and the NI Executive agreed to extend the strategy until 2022; the NI strategy is now being reconsidered in relation to implementing a wider anti-poverty strategy that is still to be implemented (Carville, 2024).

... the Outcomes Delivery Plan is prepared around 12 outcomes in key areas of societal and economic well-being. It sets out how the work of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) will contribute to the objective of

‘improving well-being for all – by **tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth**’. (UKVNR, 2019:27)

It appears there were plans for the SDGs and the principles of the SDGs to be embedded into NI’s Executive strategies. Although no mention is made of children, there is acknowledgment that the SDGs are linked to improving well-being and tackling disadvantages for all. Societal and economic well-being are seen as key areas that NI needs to address. The emphasis is not on individual well-being but on societal well-being and improving well-being for all, indicating how one scaffolds the other. Like Wales, the emphasis is on improving well-being to tackle disadvantage. There is no mention of the causes of disadvantage, but it is noteworthy that NI focuses on **driving economic growth to tackle disadvantage**. Like Wales, “achieving well-being for all” is the unifying concept underpinning their approach to implementing the SDGs.

Like the UK government, though, NI sees employment as the answer to poverty.

... more needs to be done in tackling poverty and disadvantage and in supporting those who need it most. Northern Ireland is continuing to help economically inactive people to move towards the labour market and to find and retain good jobs. (UKVNR, 2019:36)

Again, poverty and disadvantage are linked. However, there is very limited input from NI in the UKVNR on Poverty-SDG1. It has been suggested that this lack of input from NI Departments in comparison to the other Devolved Nations demonstrated their lack of commitment to the SDG Agenda (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2023).

Teenage mums are a particular example who have been identified as disadvantaged and in need of partnership input from health agencies so that they are not left behind.

Leave No One Behind: In Northern Ireland, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) will break the cycle of disadvantage and transform children’s lives by raising the profile of nurse’s partnerships with **teenage mums**. The FNP **significantly** improves outcomes for parents from disadvantaged communities facing multiple adversities. (UKVNR, 2019:49)

Tackling disadvantage for children is seen to **significantly** transform their lives and, in doing so, implies a link with intergenerational disadvantage that needs to be addressed. The role

of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) with the **teenage mums** is linked to improving outcomes for parents, and in doing so transforms their children's lives. The FNP initiative could be considered a preventative approach to tackling disadvantage. However, no detail is given as to what causes a community to be disadvantaged in the first place and the scope of the 'adversities' that result, such as, the extent that communities are disadvantaged through limited educational, career and employment opportunities with access to affordable childcare and well-paid flexible employment.

6.6 Summary - RQ1: How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty-SDG1?

This chapter has identified the varying approaches from the UK Government and from the Devolved Administrations regarding their framing of poverty. The UK Government frames poverty as the result of individual and family life choices regarding employment. The Government considers full employment as the route out of poverty and places the responsibility on families to affect that change within their own circumstances.

Poverty is not just about household income and my analysis of the UKVNR discloses that the Government's approach fails to recognise the contextual framing. The UK Government's policy paper in relation to the SDGs promises and pledges to Leave No One Behind (DfID & FCDO, 2019). However, the UK government did not implement legislation aligned clearly to the SDG Agenda to LNOB or implement a strategy to end child poverty.

Any such strategy needs to align to the SDG Agenda 2030, particularly those related to poverty, education and relevant Articles under the UNCRC (Wernham and UNICEF, 2016). At an international level, the UN has also made recommendations to the UK government to address poverty by implementing policies that are non-discriminatory as regards children and their families who are socio-economically disadvantaged (Alston, 2019; CRC/CO 6-7, 2023).

The 2030 SDG Agenda (UNGA, 2015:1) notes the "integrated and indivisible" nature of the Goals as a part of achieving the Agenda by 2030; the "interlinkages" are referred to within the UKVNR (2019:7–8, 22). However, UK policy approaches to tackling poverty and inequality have exacerbated children's experience of poverty rather than positively

transformed them, as can be seen by the child poverty rates, currently at 4.2 million (Devine, 2024). Contrary to the UN SDG Agenda of LNOB, Government policies have widened the inequality gap leaving children further behind. However, the temporary uplift to Universal Credit during the COVID-19 Pandemic does show that policies can be introduced that make a difference to people's lives (JRF, 2023). I recommend that financial support via an uplift in universal credit that tracks the cost of living, needs to be incorporated into long term budget plans if policies to reduce poverty are to be effective.

This thesis uses the prism of the CA throughout, which allows consideration of how the government's failure to recognise and address the intersectionality of the impact of poverty denies children the necessary opportunities needed to fulfil their capabilities and potential. The result is that the children who live in poverty are unable to access all opportunities to fulfil their potential, available to their peers who do not live in poverty.

In relation to the approach taken by the Devolved Administrations, NI would be the most aligned to the UK Government, in that their approach to framing of poverty is also to focus on income growth via employment. NI uses the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to embed the SDGs into their Programme for Government (PfG). However, there is limited input from NI to the VNR regarding making clear reference to poverty. I acknowledge this as a hindrance to greater analysis here. It appears that the limited input from NI regarding poverty makes it harder to show their broader framing of poverty in comparison to the contributions from Scotland and Wales.

Both Scotland and Wales offered a more holistic framing and response to poverty and identify socio-economic disadvantage as cause for inequalities in outcomes. Wales and Scotland have implemented legislation and policies as a response to the SDG Agenda and as a vehicle to tackling poverty. In doing so, accountability and duties are placed on the governments of Wales and Scotland. Wales is clearer than the rest of the UK in its framing of legislation to tackle disadvantage, acknowledging the need to encompass both present and future generations. Both Scotland and Wales have seen the need to mitigate the worst impact of austerity policies from central government. The UN Special Rapporteur commented that:

For devolved administrations to have to spend resources to shield people from government policies is a powerful indictment. (Alston, 2019:18)

The next chapter focuses on RQ2 and considers how the UK government's narrow framing of poverty undermines the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education-SDG4. If the understanding of the scope of poverty is not comprehensive, then it will not be possible to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNGA, 2015:14).

Chapter 7: RQ2: How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4? Analysis and Discussion

7.1 Introduction to RQ2

Chapter 7, in line with Themes A and C (5.4.5), addresses RQ2 regarding the government's framing of poverty in relation to children's education. I analyse how the UKVNR presents the role of the state and its approaches to addressing the multidimensional nature of poverty in relation to the educational needs of children and young people. In addition, I explore how the VNR across the Devolved Administrations provides a view of the impact that poverty has on children's education. I draw on the capability approach (CA), where applicable, to aid my analysis.

Areas to be covered:

- the extent to which the UKVNR considers the links between education and poverty (7.2), and within the Devolved Administrations (7.2.1)
- how approaches to early years provision are viewed in relation to addressing social inequality (7.3), including within the Devolved Administrations (7.3.1)
- educational attainment across childhood and the link to poverty (7.4), plus within the Devolved Administrations (7.4.1) and in light of the CA (7.4.2)
- education and access to nutritious food (7.5), and within the Devolved Administrations (7.5.1), again in line with the CA (7.5.2)
- Summary of RQ2 (7.6)

7.2 Education and Poverty

Education SDG-4 is designed to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNGA, 2015:14). For Education SDG-4 the UKVNR states:

Education transforms lives. Every generation should have better access to a good education than the last, while ensuring that **no one is left behind**.
(UKVNR, 2019:62)

The UK government's approach is a commendable starting point that recognises the transformative nature of education to people's lives and aims to achieve the principal objective of the SDGs that **no one is left behind** (LNOB). The premise that education transforms lives is also present in the UNESCO Incheon Declaration on Education (UNESCO, 2016), which makes clear that education is one of the best ways for societies to tackle inequality and poverty (UNESCO, 2016) and links human rights principles and social justice. Eradicating poverty is fundamental to this rights-based approach to achieving Education SDG-4 which is transformative when it is based on inclusion, equity, access, and quality.

Both the Marmot Review (2010) and the Social Mobility Commission Report 'State of the Nation 2017' (Social Mobility Commission, 2017) had highlighted the link between the level of deprivation in a geographical area and educational attainment and recommended that reducing inequality in children's educational outcomes was a priority. The UKVNR sets out that:

In England, the 2017 Social Mobility Plan is helping to build an **inclusive education** system, **with social mobility** at its heart. The plan commits to **raising standards for all and leaving no community behind**, targeting efforts and resources at the people and places that need it most. (UKVNR, 2019:62).

An interactive link is provided to the Social Mobility Plan (DfE, 2017) which is aimed at improving social mobility through education. The government is acknowledging that access to an **inclusive education** is linked with **social mobility** and the need to target communities most in need. **Leaving no community behind** also ties in with the premise of the 2030 Agenda of LNOB. However, there is no direct connection made between **poverty**, social mobility, and educational outcomes in the Social Mobility Plan (DfE, 2017). Therefore, my analysis of the UKVNR suggests that the government's commitment to **raising standards for all and leave no community behind** (UKVNR, 2019:62) appears to fall short in terms of achieving social justice for children living in poverty and in different parts of the country.

The UK government acknowledges:

The interlinkages between the Goals mean that progress in one area, such as education or gender equality, will have a direct or indirect impact on others, such as poverty, justice and decent work. (UKVNR, 2019:7)

Although there is no direct mention of children in the above quotation, they may experience the direct and indirect impacts of poverty. Research has highlighted how poverty directly impacts on children when their parents have inadequate finances to meet their needs, as well as indirectly by generating stress and pressures within the family which adversely affect family relationships (Oppenheim and Milton, 2021). Poverty in childhood has been shown to have a negative impact on children's development, well-being and educational attainment (Wickham et al., 2016).

The government presents a positive narrative on their progress in education:

... the UK has a strong story to tell domestically on many of the Goals, including:

- high and rising standards of education, including putting inclusivity at the heart of education policy, supporting the full potential of learners of all ages (UKVNR, 2019:5)

However, research indicates that children who experience poverty encounter exclusion, not inclusion, due to policies relating to school uniform, FSM, and school behaviour management policies (Naven et al., 2019). There is a disconnect between the government's claim in the VNR and the lived experience of children who experience poverty and live in more disadvantaged areas where access to high quality education, even in early years, is not universally available (Mon-Williams et al., 2023).

The UK government failed to tackle the injustice of poverty resulting in children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds still experiencing poorer educational outcomes than children from more affluent families, with the consequence that their full potential is not being realised. It is interesting to note the government's statement that inclusivity in education "[supports] the full potential of learners of all ages" (UKVNR, 2019:5), whereas children from disadvantaged socio-economic groups are hindered from reaching their full potential within education (Ridge, 2011). My research and analysis suggest that a combination of factors experienced by children both within the school environment, such as stigma and exclusion

from full participation, and wider structures of inequality that result in the hindering of children's educational development and potential rather than enhancing opportunities and potential.

7.2.1 Devolved Administrations

Scotland & Wales

Scotland and Wales have taken similar approaches to acknowledging the links between poverty and education:

To support young people from low-income families continue with post-16-year-old education, either in school or on a college course, the Educational Maintenance Allowance is provided by local authorities and colleges on behalf of the Scottish Government. Changes to the programme were made in January 2016 making support available to part-time college students and increasing the eligible income threshold for households. (SSR, 2020:107)

... People in Wales benefit from services outside of direct welfare income that improve people's lives (known as a "social wage"). These include the education maintenance allowance for those in further education (UKVNR, 2019:36)

These statements from Scotland and Wales indicate that young people from low-income families need financial support to continue their education. The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is an example of a policy that provides targeted financial support to enable students from lower income families to continue with education, showing a direct link between tackling Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4. There is an income threshold for receiving EMA so the link between Poverty SDG-1, Education SDG-4 and Inequality SDG-10 is even more evident. It is pertinent to note that Northern Ireland also provides an EMA, whereas UK government withdrew it from England in 2010 (Maguire, 2021).

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, over £77 million of targeted **social need** funding will be distributed to schools via the common funding formula. The funding is used to support pupils, by employing teachers, engaging with parents and communities, providing literacy and numeracy support, supporting transition between schools and supporting emotional health and well-being. (UKVNR, 2019:74)

There is no mention of child poverty and education, but rather a general encompassing reference to **social need**. Funding is considered important to deal with the social need which is clearly linked to supporting children's education. Purdy et al's (2021) report on educational underachievement in NI found that although the targeted social need funding is distributed equally to all schools, not all schools are reporting on its impact. Purdy et al. recommend mandatory reporting on targeted social funding with a focus on children from low socio-economic backgrounds. This research indicates that to enable Education SDG-4 to be fulfilled in NI in line with what my analysis of the UKVNR has highlighted, the recommendations for targeted social funding for children's education would need to be progressed and implemented comprehensively.

7.3 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

The 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015) places an emphasis on the importance of quality early childhood provision. In addition, the UN CteeRC General Comment (GC) No.7 (CRC/GC 7, 2006) sets out for states the significance of ECEC for a child's holistic development and well-being and for the need to recognise young children as rights holders. The GC (CRC/GC 7, 2006) highlights the state's requirement to be aware of the most vulnerable children, such as children who experience poverty in their early years, and the obligation to implement policies and provisions to counter the inequality that poverty brings. Access to and participation in high quality early years provision is important to counter inequality.

The UKVNR provides as follows:

Affordable, quality childcare is the key to unlocking **women's economic participation**. In the UK, 74% of childcare time was carried out by women in 2015-16 and 89% of people who are inactive due to looking after the family and home are women. From September 2017, the childcare **entitlement** for working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds, was doubled from 15 to 30 hours a week in England. The **most disadvantaged 2-year-olds** are entitled to 15 hours a week of free early education. Eligibility for the 30 hours entitlement is based on parental income (see Goal 4). (UKVNR, 2019:77)

Links are made between **women's economic participation**, affordable **quality childcare** and **entitlement** of the **most disadvantaged 2-year-olds** and reference is made to Education SDG-4. However, young children are positioned as adjacent to parents' economic

participation, rather than as rights holders to high quality ECEC provision (CRC/GC 7, 2006). The two objectives of affordable quality childcare and women's economic participation are both important and I champion both. However, the focus of high quality ECEC to meet SDG-4 should focus on children and, thus, I consider it important to comment upon how children are positioned in the UKVNR.

The emphasis in the UKVNR is to see children through the vehicle of childcare policies to increase parental (mother's) employment. Increasing childcare sessions for parents, without increasing the quality of the provision, may limit the positive impact on children, particularly children who experience poverty (Archer and Merrick, 2020). Insufficient funding to provide high quality early years provision together with the conditionality of work under Universal Credit may not be prioritizing the best interests of young children (Stewart and Waldfogel, 2017). Under the CRC, Article 3 (1989) in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Within the UKVNR, the positioning of the **most disadvantaged** children is subsumed into a narrative of employment and adults' economic participation. There is no clear indication of the context of who the disadvantaged are, their lived experiences and the wider structural inequalities that flow from this.

The gendered nature of childcare both within the home (Stewart and Waldfogel, 2017) and in early years settings (Peeters et al., 2015), predominantly provided by women in both cases, is hindered by welfare policies that maintain inequalities experienced by women (Bennett, 2021). However, if the government focus is on employment, particularly for women, without access to universal high quality childcare provision, it will fail to address the needs of children who experience poverty (Melhuish, 2016).

In England, innovative expansion of **school-based nursery** provision and training for early years professionals in **disadvantaged** areas will give children a better start at school. (UKVNR, 2019:73)

The expansion of early years school-based provision, along with training for early years staff, is part of the plan for England to give children in **disadvantaged** areas a better start at school. It is interesting that it is **school-based nursery**, but there is no clarity as to whether this will include employment of early years teachers or a range of other early years

qualifications. Nutbrown (2021) argues for a workforce policy that addresses issues of staff qualifications, as high quality provision is critical for closing the attainment gap. Lumsden (2019) makes the vital point that policy makers need to acknowledge the important role that early years professionals make in tackling **disadvantage** and recognise and address the poverty and low status in the early years workforce. Also, my analysis of the UKVNR would suggest that if the focus is on **school-based provision**, areas that do not have the facility for this expansion will need to have a range of other high-quality provision available, so children are not disadvantaged.

From my own experience of working in early years and teaching on ECEC programmes, there remain unresolved issues of low pay, low status and lack of a clear career structure for early years practitioners. Central government funding lacks the necessary coherence to have the desired impact on the provision of services, range of qualifications, retention and morale of staff. My observations are similar to research undertaken around this issue (The Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021; Nutbrown, 2012, 2021).

7.3.1 Devolved Administrations

Scotland

Scotland has a strong commitment to early years support.

The earliest years of life are crucial to a child's development and have a lasting impact on outcomes in health, education and employment opportunities later in life. In Scotland, we are committed to reducing these inequalities and are making an unprecedented level of investment in the early years – through universal measures including the expansion of the Early Learning and Childcare Entitlement (ELC) (SSR, 2020:42).

Scotland recognises that inequalities exist and that investment in early years provides a vehicle to reduce inequalities in outcomes throughout life.

Scotland go on to highlight how early years provision may support better outcomes for children and their families by reference to the **LNOB agenda**:

Scotland is in the midst of an unprecedented level of investment in early years, to support better outcomes for children and their families. Universal measures including the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1,140

hours for all three- and four-year-olds by August 2020, is relevant to this and other Goals and will save a family around £4,500 per child a year. The **[LNOB] agenda** is supported by funded early learning and childcare for around a quarter of two-year-olds where parents are in receipt of specified benefits (UKVNR, 2019:34)

Scotland's emphasis is on children and not employment of parents, so differs in this respect to the framing used by the UK government for England. However, like England, there is a combination of universal access to early years provision for certain age groups and targeted support for families on specified benefits.

Wales

The Welsh child poverty strategy positions early years provision as a preventative approach to address poverty. Wales established programmes for young children and their families:

Flying Start supports more than 36,000 children under the age of four and their families each year in some of Wales's most disadvantaged communities. The Families First programme aims to bring about a change in **prevention** and early intervention services for children and families. (UKVNR, 2019:34)

Since 2019, the uptake of its services has increased. However, there is concern that a lack of recruitment and retention of qualified practitioners in the most deprived areas will limit provision and impact on its expansion (Alma Economics, 2024). The problem of recruitment and retention within the early years sector is not confined to Wales but is an issue that can be found throughout the UK (The Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021). Although I do not deal with Employment and decent work SDG-8, I highlight here its interconnection with Education SDG-4, Poverty SDG-1, and Inequality SDG-10. High quality provision of early years provision is generally provided by women and is traditionally underfunded and undervalued – societal level inequalities preserve poor educational opportunities for children living in already disadvantaged circumstances.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Sure Start programme provides targeted support to around 39,000 children 4 years old or under (and their families) to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of children in areas of greatest **disadvantage**. (UKVNR, 2019:62)

Although not mentioning poverty, NI acknowledges that certain groups, which include young children, face **disadvantage** and need targeted support in the early years. The Sure Start programme is an important contribution to counter child poverty and inequalities in NI (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023). However, not all young children living in poverty have access to funded Sure Start places (Moore and Campbell, 2017).

7.4 Attainment Gap

Being in receipt of free school meals (FSM) is used as an indication of disadvantage by the DfE and correlates with poorer educational outcomes for children (DfE, 2024). Children eligible for FSM have lower attainment in GCSE results than children who do not need FSM, and the attainment gap has remained constant since 2019 (DfE, 2024). The UKVNR and all the Devolved Administrations recognise that receiving FSM as an indication of disadvantage and is also linked to lower educational attainment across childhood (UKVNR, 2019:39, 45, 70).

The link between poverty and the impact on attainment and achieving potential has been established in research (Mowat, 2019; West, 2007).

Socio-economic disadvantage remains a key factor for inequality in educational attainment. In 2018, the attainment gap in England, measured by the disadvantage gap index, had narrowed by 6.5% since 2015 at primary school. In 2017/2018 the gap had narrowed by 3.1% by the end of secondary school compared to 2014/2015, but there is **no room for complacency**. (UKVNR, 2019:73)

This quotation recognises that there is a link between socio-economic disadvantage and the attainment gap. As discussed in 7.2 above, the Social Mobility Plan seeks to address the attainment gap across the age range (UKVNR, 2019:62). However, even though the government states there is **no room for complacency**, it remains an ongoing issue.

The attainment gap is present in early childhood, an issue that the UKVNR acknowledges when highlighting the link between poverty and education and attainment across the age range where:

A 2018 analysis by the Education Policy Institute showed that, on average, disadvantaged children are four months behind at age 5. That grows by an

additional five months by age 11, and a further nine months by age 16. Universal early education is addressing this by giving children in England 15 hours a week of free early years education for 38 weeks after their third birthday, or second birthday for disadvantaged children. (UKVNR, 2019:63)

Here, early years care and education are considered important in tackling disadvantage and there is acknowledgment that there are differences in outcomes and attainment for children experiencing disadvantage.

A post-UKVNR Education Policy Institute report (EPI, 2023) shows, however, that the gap in attainment has not narrowed but widened for disadvantaged children:

At age 5, disadvantaged pupils were 4.8 months behind their peers in 2022, a wider gap than in 2019 (4.2 months)

By the end of primary school...the disadvantage gap was 10.3 months – one month wider than in 2019 and higher than its 2012 level. ... By the end of secondary school disadvantaged pupils were over 18.8 months behind their peers. This gap has widened since 2019 (by 0.7 months) to reach its highest level since 2012 (EPI, 2023:1)

Research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies has also found the attainment gap is wider for children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, and the gap in attainment continues through primary and secondary school (Farquharson et al., 2022).

It has been highlighted that the issue of the attainment gap occurs and continues across all the Four Nations. Reports outline attainment data across the UK (JRF, 2025; Knox, 2025). However, it should be acknowledged that since the UKVNR, the COVID pandemic has occurred which may impact on educational outcomes. The pandemic set back achievement of the SDGs and governments need to frame new strategies (Kauzya, 2020). My thesis, though, does not deal with the pandemic's effects.

7.4.1 Devolved Administrations

Scotland

Scotland recognises the link between poverty, areas of deprivation and the impact on educational attainment:

Raising attainment and focusing on ending the poverty related attainment gap are particular priorities for Scotland, as expressed through work on the Scottish Attainment Challenge and attendant Pupil Equity Funding. ... [However], social deprivation remains challenging to tackle in broader terms. Improvements in pre-primary provision **is expected** to produce benefits to assist with this in the longer term. Lifting children out of **poverty** will help to reduce the multiple negative impacts of poverty. **The intention** is for positive outcomes from education to support individuals enter higher paid sustainable employment, which in turn should reduce **poverty** (SSR, 2020:45)

The language used by the Scottish government is somewhat lacklustre here on tackling the attainment gap, "... Improvements in pre-primary provision **is expected**, ... **[t]he intention** is for positive outcomes". Nevertheless, the SSR recognises the link between **poverty** and attainment. There is acknowledgement that progress remains limited on closing the multi-dimensional, poverty-related inequalities, as does Audit Scotland (2021).

The **educational attainment gap and poverty** are again identified as linked and an example is given of an approach in place to try and counter inequity by partnership working between youth groups and schools:

YouthLink Scotland, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland have worked together on this programme to strengthen the partnership between youth work and schools to close the **poverty related attainment gap**. The programme is part of a collective effort the Scottish Government is taking to close the attainment gap as part of the wider Scottish Attainment Challenge. (SSR, 2020:55)

The idea is that young people need not just teachers within the school hours but also youth workers that work within schools and local communities offering outside school provision that delivers a range of opportunities to engage in formal and informal learning with more choice and co-operation offered to young people. A review of the programme found young people reported an increase in their confidence and skills (YouthLink Scotland, 2020).

Wales

The information from Wales is somewhat vague in terms of making a link between the attainment gap linked to disadvantage and poverty:

Wales is identifying new and effective ways to measure and improve learner well-being. The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is being expanded, building on its success in **narrowing the attainment gap** and breaking down the barriers faced by learners. (UKVNR, 2019:73)

Wales acknowledge there is an **attainment gap** and barriers to learning, although no clarification on what the barriers faced by learners might be. The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is mentioned, but no additional information is given in the UKVNR (2019) or the supplementary report for Wales (WSR, 2019). However, a review of the PDG (Tiesteel et al., 2023) has noted that the aim of the grant is to tackle the impact of poverty on the educational attainment gap. Wider issues faced by children from socially deprived areas, such as poor housing, crime rates and retaining teachers, are additional disadvantages that learners can face. Long-term funding for PDG is needed, rather than an annual allocation approach so as to improve the attainment and opportunities for the most disadvantaged children through a concerted programme to tackle links between income poverty and educational attainment (Tiesteel et al., 2023).

Northern Ireland

NI acknowledges gaps in attainment due to low income and the need to provide intervention:

The 'Sharing the Learning Programme' in West Belfast improved attainment levels across the education spectrum for children and young people experiencing disadvantage through poverty, exclusion and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. (UKVNR, 2019:70)

It is interesting to note that the Sharing Learning Programme works with a range of age groups who experience poverty and all the difficulties that can result from it that can impact on attainment.

7.4.2 Capability Approach

In sum, my analysis and research uncover how child poverty restricts children's educational opportunities and in turn their choices when their ability to reach their full potential is restricted. When Sen (1983) defines poverty as more than just a lack of income but also a deprivation of opportunities to achieve, the impact of poverty on educational attainment becomes a stark reality for many children. Poverty reinforces and exacerbates inequalities in

the educational outcomes and experiences of children. Nussbaum's (2007:25) view of the importance of recognising the context of people's lives as part of the CA and "what they are able to do and be" reinforces my understanding of the cumulative disadvantage that child poverty has on children reaching their full educational potential.

7.5 Education and access to nutritious food

The right to food is covered by several international human rights instruments: UDHR (1948), the ICESCR (1966) the CRC (1989). All of them note the obligation on states to implement appropriate measures to ensure the provision of adequate nutritious food. Food poverty and food insecurity have been seen as a dimension of poverty (Dowler, 2002). There is a link between access to nutritious food and its impact on learning and educational attainment (Azizi Fard et al., 2021; Jyoti et al., 2005). Children from low-income families experience food insecurity more than children from more affluent families and experience not just lower educational outcomes but also feel the impact on their overall well-being (O'Connell et al., 2019).

According to UNICEF, when considering poverty and access to food, which, as I have shown, have consequences for children in fully attaining their educational opportunities and capabilities, the position of children is regularly disregarded when they deserve special consideration:

Children are a unique group. Poor diets have lifelong impacts on their physical growth and brain development. (UNICEF, 2019:20)

What is not so clear within the UKVNR, however, is whether the UK government and the Devolved Administrations fully appreciate why nutritious food is so important to children's full participation in education and their overall well-being.

It is important to note how access to healthy food is linked with education and the role of schools/nurseries and the need to tackle the impact of low income. In addition, the right to food is highlighted explicitly by the Devolved Administrations, but not expressly, perhaps implicitly, by England. The UKVNR provides the following example of policies related to access to food:

Healthy Start Food Vouchers encourage a healthy diet for pregnant women, families and young children from low-income households in England ...

- The School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme provides children aged four to six at state-funded primary schools in England with a portion of fresh fruit or vegetables each day.
- The Nursery Milk Scheme provides a reimbursement to childcare providers for a daily portion of milk to children and babies. (UKVNR, 2019:40)

The UK policy responses to food insecurity target pregnant women and children in low-income families, both within their own homes or when in a school or early years environment. Thus, early years provision and schools, where children can spend many hours a day learning, are seen as vital opportunities for children to be also able to access nutritious food. However, it is limited to certain age groups rather than being universally offered across childhood for children and young people in families on low incomes. The use of vouchers to supplement a healthy diet rather than increasing income undermines the dignity and agency of the recipients.

England is helping the most vulnerable afford and have access to nutritious food through initiatives such as ... free school meals for disadvantaged pupils. (UKVNR, 2019:39)

There is acknowledgment that vulnerable and disadvantaged children need access to nutritious food during the school day. Consideration as to why parents may have difficulty in providing sufficient food for their children is not addressed with any clarity. For example, means testing for FSM results in limited availability for households on the very lowest income - families who work and claim universal credit are still living in poverty, but may not meet the financial criteria to receive free school meals for all children.

7.5.1 Devolved Administrations

There is acknowledgment across the Devolved Administrations that families with children at different stages need access to nutritious food before and during school, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. A range of policies to provide food, both in early years and school settings are given. Inclusion of the various initiatives within the VNR is an indication of how important access to free or subsidised food for children is, particularly children from low-income homes, and that many of these initiatives are facilitated within educational

establishments is relevant in terms of acknowledging the intersectionality with education and the amount of a child's and young person's life spent in educational environments.

Scotland

Scotland aligns itself vis-à-vis Food SDG-2 with international human rights law standards:

... The **right to food** is protected in human rights law A partnership approach to provide **dignified access to food** and trial new approaches to food insecurity in school holidays, through the Fair Food Fund, is underway. From summer 2019, smart payment cards will replace Healthy Start Food Vouchers to reduce stigma and increase choice for families in accessing good value healthy foods. (UKVNR, 2019:43)

When discussing a **dignified access to food**, Scotland is linking its approach to an underpinning concept of both the CRC (1989) and the 2030 Agenda. The issue of dignity and stigma in accessing food has been raised by children and their families (Azizi Fard et al., 2021; Jyoti et al., 2005; MacLellan et al., 2008). I can see that smart payment cards, as opposed to vouchers, is an improvement in terms of increased agency and choice, although eligibility and scope are still somewhat restricted within the confines of such schemes.

Scotland again highlights the impact of poverty on access to food before the school day and during the school holidays:

The health and well-being of children is important when considering the **poverty related attainment gap**. If children are arriving at school **hungry** or are suffering hunger during school holiday periods, then we know that it will be more difficult for them to reach their potential. (SSR, 2020:13–14)

Scotland makes a clear link between **poverty, hunger, attainment gap** and difficulty in reaching potential. The health and well-being of children is seen as important, with a focus on children's education, their holistic development and the intersections between health, well-being, poverty, food and attainment. Importantly, Scotland recognises that what happens in a child's life outside of the school day has an impact on what they will experience once at school.

Wales

Welsh initiatives linked to education and access to nutrition include:

- The School Milk Subsidy Scheme ... aims to increase consumption of milk and milk products by primary and secondary school children.
- ... All children at primary schools maintained by a local authority can have a free breakfast at school, if provision is available.
- Free school meals are available to eligible pupils who attend school full-time. (UKVNR, 2019:45)

The school environment is seen as central for the delivery of food to children both before and during the school day. A nutritious diet is vital for reaching developmental milestones and full potential in educational attainment (Azizi Fard et al., 2021; Jyoti et al., 2005).

The obligation to achieve the SDGs lies with the government of Wales implementing legislation and policies, and the following indicates initiatives to support equality:

The Welsh Food and Fun ... programme supports schools in areas of high deprivation to provide a nutritious breakfast, lunch, education about healthy eating and wider enrichment activities. In 2018 approximately 2,500 learners benefited across 56 schools. The aim of the scheme is to address issues like food insecurity, holiday **learning loss** and social exclusion. (UKVNR, 2019:39)

Wales recognises that access to nutritious food is an important issue throughout the year for children and their families, including during the school holidays and links food insecurity to **learning loss**. The most recent evaluation of the Food and Fun programme highlights its continued rollout and the positive impact on children's and family's well-being and engagement with education and improved attainment (Arad Research, 2023). The programme is used within the VNR as an example of how LNOB is put into practice and to address Food SDG-2. Wales recognise both the multidimensional nature of poverty and the interconnection between Poverty SDG-1, Food SDG-2, Health & Well-being SDG-3, Education SDG-4 and Reduced Inequalities SDG-10, thus giving an indication that Wales comprehends how failing to deal with each of them impacts on the education experiences of children, both in and outside of education environments.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's Food Poverty Plan for Belfast, a collaborative response from 27 organisations, tackles food poverty across seven themes, including **holiday hunger** and diet-related ill health. (UKVNR, 2019:28)

Although children are not directly mentioned, **holiday hunger** would be applicable to children during school holidays because FSMs are available term-time. Lack of adequate nutritious food during school holidays may have consequences on the health and well-being of children and impact on their learning (Stewart et al., 2018). The NI Poverty Plan shows the multidimensional nature of Poverty SDG-1 that is related to Food SDG-2 and Health and well-being SDG-3, while holiday hunger is directly associated with Education SDG-4.

Activity snapshot:

Belfast Food Network A Right to Quality, Affordable Food, with partners in Scotland and Wales, to strengthen existing networks, build knowledge, share learning and test methods for implementing a **Right to Food** approach (UKVNR, 2019:46)

NI is indicating its collaboration with Scotland and Wales on the **right to food** and the emphasis is on the quality and affordability of food. Although children are not directly mentioned, it indicates that there is recognition that citizens have a **right to food**.

7.5.2 Capability Approach

The CA is useful in viewing how the UKVNR deals with access to food and the availability of FSM in terms of policies that support or hinder the development of children's capabilities, choices and freedoms. Hart and Page (2020) used the CA to consider how school food culture can support pupils' capabilities to make healthy choices and behaviours. I consider CA useful in the context of FSM to view how far children who experience poverty have choice and freedom when making decisions about the quality and quantity of the food they can eat. They may want to eat a range of nutritious food but may be restricted in their choices and freedom to do so by what is on offer to them. This is important as nutritious food impacts on educational outcomes (Azizi Fard et al., 2021; Jyoti et al., 2005).

More generally when viewed from a CA lens, access to nutritious food is related to poverty and social participation by Sen:

... in the capability view, the poverty line may be defined to represent the level at which a person can not only meet nutritional requirements, etc., but also achieve adequate participation in communal activities ... and be free from public shame from failure to satisfy conventions (Sen, 1983:167)

Not all children who experience poverty are eligible for FSMs and my literature review (3.2.3) already highlighted research on the inadequacy and lack of choice available; even for those that do meet the criteria. Receipt of FSM may still not permit full participation in school life (Farthing, 2012; O'Connell et al., 2019; Cribb et al., 2023). Food plays an important role not just in meeting the nutritional needs of children, but also in offering opportunities to participate and share in their cultural environment. Restricting children's freedom and opportunities to partake equally in the communal activity of eating with peers is an example of capability deprivation (Sen, 2009). If there is only a focus on the lack of money to buy food at school, it will fail to understand the multidimensional aspects of child poverty and to realise the depth and breadth of deprivation that children face in terms of what they can do and be. As Hick and Burchardt (2016) note, CA is more than an income-centric approach and can be used to understand the multidimensional nature of poverty. States, therefore, should adopt policies and practices that address and counteract the traditional lack of status and power that children have in society. Full participation, or the lack thereof, by children in their educational environment and, indeed, the wider community, is part of the much broader framework of children's general position in society due to their social, cultural and economic experiences (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010).

7.6 Summary of RQ2: How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4?

The UN imposes an obligation on states to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education. The UN has noted that education is a right and is the vehicle by which marginalised groups, including children, can move out of poverty. Poverty is seen to impact educational attainment, with children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds experiencing the greatest negative impact. Across the Four Nations there is evidence in the UKVNR (2019) and the SSR (2020) acknowledging these links.

I have used aspects of the VNR to consider the links between poverty SDG-1 and its impact on education SDG-4. The areas of early years, attainment and access to nutritious food, although distinct, also overlap and impact on one another.

Access to and participation in high quality early years and care is important for all children, even more so for children who experience poverty. If the disadvantages children start school with are not addressed, the inequalities of outcome will continue throughout their education and can have long-term negative implications into adulthood (Marmot et al., 2020). However, the most disadvantaged communities may have less access to high quality provision, making addressing inequalities more difficult. Linked to the issue of access to high quality ECEC is the connecting issue of poverty and the attainment gap.

The attainment gap remains an issue across the UK. Although across the Four Nations reference is made to poverty, disadvantage and education, major strides in closing the attainment gap have not been realised:

In 2019, the year before the pandemic, progress in closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had already started to stall. We had seen signs of the gap starting to widen in the early years and secondary phases, but 2019 also saw worrying signs emerge in the primary phase. The pandemic then accelerated that trend, and, between 2019 and 2022, we have seen the disadvantage gap widen across all phases of education. The attainment gap is even wider for persistently disadvantaged pupils (EPI, 2023:1)

Therefore, if child poverty is not tackled, the attainment gap and resulting inequalities will remain. Research also shows a continuing North /South divide in the UK in terms of lower educational outcomes for children in the North from disadvantaged communities (Marmot et al., 2020). Inequalities experienced by children in the North have resulted in negative impacts on pre-school development and school attainment levels by comparison with children in the South (Pickett and Taylor-Robinson, 2021). The government allocates less money and resources in the North of the country than the South, which continues to impact negatively on children's education and health outcomes, particularly affecting children from disadvantaged communities (Mon-Williams et al., 2023).

The All-Party Parliamentary Group, 'Child of the North', receives and follows up on collaborative research involving Health Equity North and Universities in the North of England. The report on 'Addressing Education and Health Inequity' (Mon-Williams et al., 2023) incorporated the lived experiences of young people and highlighted the intersections between health and education, demonstrating how inequalities in one adversely affected the other across the life course. The research found that there is a disproportionate number of children living in poverty in the North of England compared to the rest of the UK. Schools have inadequate funding allocated to them even though they have more children who experience the negative impact of poverty on "their readiness and ability to learn" (Mon-Williams et al., 2023:9). The Child of the North Research highlights how, without the intervention of multi-agency working and increased allocation of funding, the consequences for children's education will be felt throughout childhood and beyond.

The multidimensional nature of poverty also needs to take account of the impact that a lack of access to nutritious food has on educational attainment and self-identity. There are differences across the UK regarding food provision, child eligibility to, and implementation of initiatives to support children. These initiatives include the availability of free or subsidised breakfast clubs before school, universal FSM for Key Stage 1, and eligibility for FSM for older children from very low-income families. There is not universal free access to nutritious food for all school age children and even the access to FSM is not always sufficient in terms of quantity or choice to provide full agency for children (Naven et al., 2019).

However, my professional experience of working with children and young people has informed my belief that there is no separation for them of the many areas of their daily lives: going to nursery/school, playing and learning, enjoying food. That is why I deem it important to highlight the position of children who experience poverty. My research on the UKVNR indicates that in failing to address the intersectionality between poverty and education, the government deny children their right to education and access to social justice.

My research in this chapter highlights the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, the framing of which is considered in relation to RQ1, impacts heavily on educational outcomes considered here. These ideas are dealt with again in Chapter 8 on RQ3 with respect to the CA and its links to rights (EHRC, 2017:66–67, Table 5.1).

In chapter 8, I address how far the UK government has integrated human rights into meeting the 2030 Agenda. I also explore the interlinkages between the SDGs, tackling poverty to fulfil the capabilities of children *vis-à-vis* their education and rights.

Chapter 8: RQ3: To what extent are rights seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children’s education? Analysis and Discussion

8.1 Introduction to RQ3

Chapter 8 focuses on RQ3 by exploring the extent to which rights are treated as integral to the UK approach to children’s education, building on Theme B and Theme D, as well as the UK’s framing of poverty (RQ1) and the impact of poverty on education (RQ2). Although it is not linear, there is a coherent thread through the RQs, with different aspects of the RQs drawing from and adding to the other RQs. In answering RQ3, I identify examples from the UK as a whole and, where applicable, from the Devolved Administrations, to explore whether the concept of rights is evident in the VNR. For example, I survey the presence of rights in legislation, guidance and education.

As was seen in the discussion and analysis of RQ2, the focus of Education SDG-4 is to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNGA, 2015:14). In addition to Education SDG-4 and Poverty SDG-1, two other SDGs are closely related to human rights within the VNR as they pertain directly and indirectly to the education of children. These are Reduce Inequality SDG-10 and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, SDG-16.

Chapter 8 sets out:

- The related human rights obligations (8.2)
- Acknowledgement of rights in the UKVNR (8.3)
- Devolved Administrations (8.4)
 - Scotland (8.4.1)
 - Wales (8.4.2)
 - Northern Ireland (NI) (8.4.3)
- Summary of RQ3

8.2 The related Human Rights obligations

The 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015) is underpinned by human rights that emphasise the responsibility of all states to uphold, implement and protect the rights of all their population, including children and young people and those experiencing poverty. Under the SDG's pledge that "...no one is left behind" (UNGA, 2015:3), the UN urges states to be particularly mindful of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society. In agreeing to meet the 2030 Agenda, the UK has undertaken a commitment to uphold rights as part of progressing towards the 2030 Agenda and its Goals.

The implementation and protection of children's rights, particularly in relation to poverty and education, is vital as a means through which the governments of the UK and Devolved Administrations can move towards meeting the 2030 Agenda. The welfare of children and upholding their rights are seen as integral to the success of the SDG Agenda (Nolan, 2019b). Examination of how the UK government positions children within the VNR allows consideration to be given to the status assigned to children and to their visibility within policies with respect to rights, reflecting Themes B and D. My analysis of the extent to which children and their rights are addressed in the UKVNR, not simply as an adjunct to adults and their rights is an important original contribution to academic research. My illustrating how far children and their rights are recognised, in line with the UK's human rights obligations, produces an insight into government adherence and omissions in meeting the 2030 Agenda.

Given that the United Kingdom has ratified several international agreements, outlined below, that provide for the right to education for children, there should be little or no debate that rights should be seen as an important vehicle for progressing the SDGs. Further, as has been stated previously, the SDGs are founded generally on international human rights law standards, and Education SDG-4 is concerned with ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. Like human rights, the SDGs are indivisible, integrated, and interdependent, so meeting Poverty SDG-1, in no way impinges upon achieving Education SDG-4, where children and young people having the right to development is fundamental. Thus, rights regarding freedom from poverty are intrinsically linked to ensuring that the child's right to "... inclusive and equitable quality education ..." is met (UNGA, 2015:14).

The context for the links between rights and Education SDG-4 is outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international treaties with respect to children and education. The CRC (1989) is the starting point for establishing the scope of the right to education. Article 28 CRC concerns the right to education, which is to be accessible and based on equality of opportunity, linking Education SDG-4 with Reducing Inequalities SDG-10. The CRC provides:

States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (CRC, 1989, Article 29.1.a)

In addition, the four general principles of the CRC (1989) are non-discrimination (Article 2), best interests of the child (Article 3), maximum development of the child (Article 6), and the right of children to express views in matters affecting them (Article 12). The four general principles have been seen to underpin the education of children and their rights, which can only be fully realised when issues of access to education, the quality of education and the right to respect in education are addressed (Lansdown et al., 2022).

In common with Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015:7) identifies children who experience poverty as a vulnerable group which needs special protection. The Preamble to the CRC also notes that "... childhood is entitled to special care and assistance ..." (CRC, 1989:1). Alongside the CRC, the UK has adopted, signed and ratified a range of other international agreements that also include the right to education. In doing so, the UK has committed to accepting the external obligations in those various treaties to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education: UDHR (1948, Article 26), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006). A common thread across these international documents and their subsequent interpretation is the focus that education should be directed towards the full development of a person's potential, ensuring non-discrimination and dignity.

8.3 Acknowledgment of rights in UKVNR

The introduction to the UKVNR links the SDGs and rights from the very outset:

The Goals are not just about doing more; they are about **protecting** what we have: **protecting the rights of vulnerable groups** (UKVNR, 2019:4)

Although the UK government acknowledges the importance of **protecting rights of vulnerable groups**, children are not expressly mentioned. However, under the CRC, childhood is entitled to special care, assistance, and protection.

The **protection of rights** is again mentioned toward the end of the UKVNR:

The UK has a long tradition of ensuring that **rights** and liberties are **protected**. (UKVNR, 2019:194)

The UK government asserts again that rights are **protected**. However, the UN CteeRC has consistently found that the UK could do better in protecting the rights of its child citizens. For example, the UK was criticised by the UN in 2016 and in 2023 for the high child poverty rates and for persistent inequalities in education for children in disadvantaged situations, including socio-economically disadvantaged situations (CRC/CO 5, 2016; CRC/CO 6-7, 2023).

The UKVNR's assessment of its progress in relation to Reduce Inequality SDG-10 refers to several organisational and legislative changes related to:

... strengthening [UK] policy and institutional framework on equality [and]
... tackling the injustices in UK society and overseas so that no one is left behind (UKVNR, 2019:128, 126).

These include the Equality Act (Crown, 2010b), adopting the CRPD (CRPD, 2006) guiding principles, creating a more co-ordinated approach by moving Government Equalities Office to the UK government Cabinet Office and establishing the independent and UN recognised Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (UKVNR, 2019). The EHRC developed a monitoring framework consisting of six areas of life considered necessary for leading a fulfilling life. This included education and an adequate standard of living, and monitoring and assessing implementation of human rights and equality across England, Scotland and Wales. The framework is underpinned by Sen's (1985a, 2005) capability approach (CA) which the EHRC recognised as "the most compelling theoretical underpinning for equality and human rights monitoring" (EHRC, 2017:35) so much so that they adopted it for their framework relating to equality and children. The EHRC, established by the Coalition government in

2010, affirmed that the CA was the best framework for assessing how far the UK was meeting the SDGs, including Education SDG-4. Of note is how EHRC highlight rights, early years, attainment and the impact of poverty, all areas relevant to my thesis, particularly in relation to RQ2. The table below sets out how the EHRC links the CA to children’s education:

Capabilities – the central and valuable freedoms and opportunities	Outcomes - the future we want	Indicators – how we measure progress	Topics
Every person should be capable of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attaining the highest possible standard of knowledge, understanding and reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People’s right to education is respected, protected and fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational attainment of children and young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years education • Attainment at school-leaving age • Impact of poverty and social exclusion on educational attainment

Table 8.1: (EHRC, 2017:66–67, Table 5.1)

Both the UDHR (1948) and the CRC (1989) are rooted in the idea that human rights are intrinsic to human dignity. Sen considers the centrality of human rights and places a focus on **human rights of children** and, in doing so, raising their status and visibility:

The discipline of human rights has much to offer in systematizing the perfect and imperfect obligations that society has towards children. Not only is there no contradiction here, the social perspective on **human rights of children is** quite central to the demand of a good - or of an even acceptable - society. (Sen, 2007:235).

However, children are deprived of that full human dignity in the context of poverty. If equitable education is unavailable in any society, then my research indicates that some children cannot access and participate in schooling and that in part will be due to their context of poverty. The result of this negative impact on opportunity and freedoms is that children cannot fully develop their rights and their capabilities. The negative impact extends to the development of a child’s cognitive skills that clearly impact on their ability to access and participate education. The EHRC (2019) noted the inequalities children experience

because of poverty, recommending that for the government to achieve Poverty SDG-1, “... [it] should restore the binding targets from the Child Poverty Act 2010 and develop a strategy for achieving them” (EHRC, 2019:205). The recommendation has yet to be implemented in England. The latest report from EHRC (EHRC, 2023a) again notes the continuing issue of child poverty and repeats recommendations the government should implement policies to address child poverty.

The UK government recognises that human rights have the capacity to reduce inequalities. There may be no direct mention of children in the text, “Promoting social, economic and political inclusion of all ... ” (UKVNR, 2019:128), but if human rights are implemented, that should encompass children’s rights under ICESCR (1966), (Nolan and Pells, 2020), which includes the right to education.

8.4 Devolved Administrations

8.4.1 Scotland

In their VNR supplementary report, Scotland as a Devolved Administration, criticised the UK government’s approach to protecting and upholding rights as they relate to children:

Brexit also presents a series of potential challenges. The need to ensure children have additional protections through the incorporation of the principles of the **UNCRC** into Scots law is greater than ever. EU Exit may result in a regression of legal rights and protections through the loss of the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**, including its provisions on social security ... (Art.34) and children’s rights (Art.24). Further potential challenges include risks to **EU funding for breakfast clubs**, education, and training and youth work projects. (SSR, 2020:18)

In distancing itself from the Westminster government regarding Brexit, Scotland considered it important to highlight the consequences of Brexit on children and their rights. The above quotation outlines the loss of protection granted by the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** that may have consequences on children and young people regarding **EU funding for breakfast clubs** and education projects. Scotland emphasises that it is the **UNCRC** coming into domestic law that remains important for upholding children’s rights. The UN (CRC/CO 6-7, 2023:2) has recommended that the UK government assess the impact of the withdrawal from the EU on the enjoyment of children’s rights.

The SSR (2020:18) also refers to the participation of children aged between 8-19 with NGOs and local government, so that their views are involved in policy development. This is an example of making children more visible in the VNR and their right to be heard (CRC, 1989, Article 12). It also shows how different agencies in Scotland are viewing children and young people as active participants with decision makers within the Scottish government.

Referencing the World Conference on Human Rights Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), the UN General Assembly called on states to **respect, protect and promote** human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UNGA, 2015:6).

Scotland has national human rights institutions and a **National Action Plan for Human Rights** which has outcomes that have explicitly embedded the Goals. Scotland has a specified National Outcome to “**respect, protect and fulfil human rights** and live free from discrimination ...”. (UKVNR, 2019:196)

Once again, Scotland is making a clear link to rights and the SDGs via a National Action Plan for Human Rights and the National Performance Framework (NPF).

Scotland highlights its obligation to the respect, protect and fulfil human rights principles, to underpin their approach to the 2030 Agenda. Scotland, in using the word **fulfil** in the above quotation, is more affirmative in its commitment within the VNR to making rights a reality, rather than using the word promote that is used within the SDG Agenda.

The next two examples from Scotland emphasise the importance of children’s rights for learning that involve partnership across a range of NGOs.

My Rights My Say service is a partnership between Children in Scotland, Enquire, Partners in Advocacy and Cairn Legal. The project aims to support young people ages 12-15 to access new rights to have a say in decisions about their learning. (UKVNR, 2019:66).

The example indicates a way for schools to implement Article 12 and 13 of the CRC (1989) on the right of children to have their views considered, and to uphold their freedom of expression. Lundy (2007) makes the important point that Articles 12, 13, should not be seen in isolation but part of the of the whole of the CRC. Scotland asserts that UNICEF claims that

... Scotland is leading the way in embedding children's rights in school with 1,400 schools in Scotland (over 50%) involved in UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRS) An important aspect of the RRS approach is that it seeks to embed rights across the life and work of the school and to consider rights in a detailed and careful way across the curriculum Children's rights are embedded within our teaching standards in Scotland. (SSR, 2020:50)

By Scotland including this example in its VNR, it signifies the role that education plays in enhancing knowledge of rights into the daily lives of children in schools and the adults who work with them. The example of the UNICEF RRS makes visible the importance of children's rights and how Scotland is working towards the state's obligations under the CRC (1989) Article 42, to make rights widely known to children and adults. It is pertinent to note that the RRS award does operate across the UK, but it is only Scotland that includes it in their SSR, indicating the emphasis they placed on children's rights. In addition, the explicit connection between teaching standards and children's rights is worthy of note and was considered a useful model to replicate (Jerome et al., 2015).

In Scotland's supplementary report (SSR, 2020:45), mention is made of the 'Cost of the School Day' project, which involved listening to children's views who had lived experience of poverty and how they felt policies could be changed to enhance rather than hinder their participation in education and this resulted in an increase in the school clothing grant. Research undertaken on the 'Cost of the School Day' project highlighted how children who experience poverty are very aware of the barriers to their education (Naven et al., 2019).

The Scottish government highlight policies within education to eradicate discrimination:

... the Scottish Government sets itself equality outcomes, including one on education The Scottish Government's strategic approaches to equality, such as ... Action Plan on Children's Rights and the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, capture actions that we are taking in education to eradicate discrimination. (SSR, 2020:53)

Children's rights and the child poverty delivery plan contribute towards equality in education. Scotland identifies how they see the interrelatedness of child poverty, children's rights and Education SDG-4. By identifying and linking children's rights and child poverty as

part of Scottish strategic plans for education, children and adults become part of the narrative of seeking to achieve Education SDG-4 rather than subsuming them under more general approaches that focus on adults. The Scottish government highlights how it sets itself equality outcomes in relation to equality and education. The EHRC reports (EHRC, 2018, 2023b) have recommended that Scotland should adopt a more integrated approach to national equality outcomes to reduce the education attainment gap between the most and least deprived pupils.

Under Education SDG-4, Scotland has linked rights to access and opportunities:

Our vision is to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. A place where rights are respected and where children can access all the opportunities and support they need when they need it. Our focus on challenging inequity in order that every child can succeed and gain the skills for life is recognised through the Attainment Challenge and the National Improvement Framework for Education. Health and well-being is at the centre of this approach. (SSR, 2020:52)

Reference is made to educational policies aimed at countering inequality in education, to uphold children's rights and well-being. As such, one can see how this focus on human rights is part of achieving the 2030 Agenda with respect to SDGs 1, 4 and 10.

All children and young people in Scotland have rights to education under the [CRC], the [ICESCR], the [HRA] and the [ECHR]. These rights have been incorporated in Scots Law In carrying out their duty to provide that education, education authorities must ensure that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential. (SSR, 2020:52)

The above quotation indicates how Scotland is signposting the importance of the right to education under national legislation and international treaties. The right to education is identified as a duty of the state to provide an education to fulfil the potential of all children, in line with the CA. Scotland raised the visibility of children and their rights within Scottish legislation and to children's rights within that education. Human rights and children's rights

are present in both their contribution to the UKVNR submission and their supplementary Scottish report when outlining their approach to Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4.

The following example considers how an equitable and inclusive education requires more than free access to schooling and concerns children's mental health:

Scotland: "Scotland's Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027" sets out actions to tackle poor mental health for people to get the right help at the right time, expect recovery and fully enjoy their rights free from stigma. The delivery of a package of support in schools, colleges and communities is underway that will see new school nurses and counsellors. (UKVNR, 2019:55)

Scotland is highlighting the links between mental health, accessing rights, and how support is needed within educational settings. It identifies a mental health strategy that can be used in educational provision. A commitment to multi-agency working for access to mental health services allows action beyond the health sector (McDaid et al., 2023). This is important as research has shown a correlation between poor mental health and the experience of poverty (Lai et al., 2019) and that poor mental health can impact on educational outcomes. Longitudinal research has highlighted the link between poverty, mental health issues and educational outcomes (Smith et al., 2021). School based interventions appear to improve mental health awareness and reduce stigma (Ma et al., 2023). However, the issue of adequate funding and access to appropriate mental health services for all children in the UK has been raised by the Children's Commissioners for the Devolved Administrations (2022) noting that access to Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services are inconsistent in geographical areas covered and in meeting the diverse needs of children. As such, it is not possible to say there is equitable and inclusive education in the UK.

Through this range of policies, Scotland has shown how they see the relationship of child poverty, children's rights and Education SDG-4 on "equitable" education.

8.4.2 Wales

Wales like Scotland, makes rights and children's rights visible. Under the heading of 'Leave No One Behind', Wales affirms the importance and relevance of the 2030 Agenda, and its

underpinning of rights with the responsibility of states to **respect, protect and promote** human rights, acknowledging the empowerment among others, children and young people:

The 2030 Agenda envisages “*a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination*”. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and international human rights treaties and emphasises the responsibilities of all states to **respect, protect and promote** human rights. There is a strong emphasis on the empowerment of vulnerable groups such as ... children, young people (WSR, 2019:58)

Wales affirms the importance and relevance of the SDG Agenda (2030) and its underpinning of rights with the responsibility of states to respect, protect and **promote** human rights, acknowledging the empowerment among others, children and young people. The word **promote** is used, unlike Scotland, who use the more forceful **fulfil** in relation to rights.

Wales goes on to highlight how legislation will be used to bring rights, and particularly rights for children:

People, young people and children are important to The *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011* is landmark legislation incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Welsh Law ... [sic]. Wales is in an excellent position to progress toward implementation and integration of SDGs through policy and action on human rights. (WSR, 2019:58)

This quotation gives prominence to children and their rights. It is recognised as important that legislation that incorporates the CRC in the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The legislation places a duty on the Welsh government to have due regard to children’s rights and the state’s commitment towards them when making strategic decisions. The merging of legislation and the SDG Agenda in Wales has been seen as useful in moving towards accountability for children’s rights (Croke et al., 2021). However, the EHRC (2023c) recommended that the Welsh government still needs to enhance rights implementation of all UN treaties into domestic law so that rights are fully accessible and would be an important next step for Wales to fully achieve its accountability.

8.4.3 Northern Ireland (NI)

With respect to NI, there is no direct mention of children's rights in the UKVNR. However, although they have not been explicit in linking rights to policies, the following is an example that evidences alignment with the principles of the CRC (1989) regarding participation in decision making:

Belfast Healthy Cities ... seeks to put Child Friendly Places higher on the public sector agenda in Belfast and Northern Ireland by **using feedback from children engagement events to influence options for planning policy and other place-shaping strategies**, for example by developing guidelines for policymakers. (UKVNR, 2019:132)

This NI initiative shows evidence of engagement with and participation by children to influence policies and planning. There is recognition that children who live in and use the environment around them have the right to participation in planning. Although not mentioning rights directly, the phrasing ... **using feedback from children engagement events to influence options for planning policy and other place-shaping strategies** ... is in line with CRC (1989) Article 12, the right to express views, and Article 13, the right to impart information.

8.5 Summary of RQ3 – To what extent that rights are seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education

Human rights are central to addressing education for children under the SDGs. As previously stated, human rights underpin the whole of the 2030 Agenda. Whilst the UK government open the VNR (UKVNR, 2019:4) highlighting the importance of protecting the rights of the most vulnerable and cites its duties under international treaties to uphold those rights (UKVNR, 2019:128), its failure to act since the publication of the VNR is noticeable. At the time of the UKVNR, only Scotland and Wales appeared to have embraced a rights-focused approach. Regrettably, in 2023 the CteeRC had to reiterate their earlier concern over the impact of poverty on education and on children's rights in the UK (CRC/CO 6-7, 2023).

The right to education for children living in the UK is not explicitly referenced by the UK government in the VNR, which contrasts with the assertion regarding the right to education for children in developing countries (UKVNR, 2019:65). It is not evident in the UKVNR that

the UK government considered the significance of children's rights in the UK when it comes to meeting the 2030 Agenda. Although there are references to protecting rights, what is not evident is the fulfilment or signposting of progress on their commitment to their obligations. My analysis of the UKVNR that evidences the lack of emphasis on children's rights in the document highlights the low status assigned to children, relegating them and their visibility to the margins of policy considerations. The indivisible and interrelated nature of the rights of children include their right to education and their development to its fullest potential. There is a lack of connectivity in the Conservative government's actions - for example, the right to an adequate standard of living for that development (CRC, 1989, Articles 6, 27, 29) is not seen in the UKVNR in any joined-up manner. Similarly, NI does not have explicit mention of rights in the VNR in relation to children.

Scotland and Wales have a stronger and more affirmatively operational approach to children's rights. Both refer to the incorporation of rights into legislation and policies that impact on children's education and their well-being. A commitment to the incorporation of the CRC and its guiding principles into domestic legislation has become a reality for Scotland and Wales. Such incorporation is deemed important as it has been seen to legally embed children's rights and, in doing so, act as a vehicle for change in seeking to fulfil the 2030 Agenda (McCall-Smith, 2023).

The approach offered by Scotland and Wales in their contributions to the VNR is indicative of the different positions of each of the Devolved Administrations vis-à-vis rights within the UK. It draws attention to how Scotland and Wales have made children and their rights visible in their approach to the 2030 Agenda, whereas for England and NI, children's rights are not explicitly referenced or linked to the 2030 Agenda.

Human rights are integral to addressing education for children under the SDGs. Therefore, when a government highlights their human rights obligations under international treaties that are externally driven with respect to tackling inequality, poverty and LNOB, then the right to education should be part of their programmatic response and commitment to meeting Education SDG-4.

The 2023 Concluding Observations of the CteeRC to the UK recommended meaningful participation of children to achieve all 17 SDGs, a review of how all legislation aligns with the CRC, and to integrate the CRC into national legislation (CRC/CO 6-7, 2023)

Given that the UK signed and ratified the CRC over thirty years ago, it is somewhat disappointing that it has not fully incorporated it into national legislation. The UK government should take a leaf from Scotland's 'book' and make a commitment to do so as soon as possible. I advocate that a useful first step and part of any planning for the next UKVNR submission would be for government ministers to familiarise themselves with the UN reports and to take on board the recommendations so that rights form the underpinning of the UK's approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda.

In RQ3, I focused on the status of children and their rights and considered how far the UK government, and the Devolved Administrations see rights as integral to children's education and meeting Education SDG-4. Using the UKVNR, my thesis explored how child poverty hinders socially just access to education and learning, particularly with respect to school-aged children. Additionally, there are concomitant consequences on the fulfilment of children's rights, freedoms, and choices that children have during their childhood, but with the impact felt into adulthood. Incorporating the CA and a rights framework has enabled me to consider the position and status of children, and the impact that poverty may have on their educational opportunities.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, follows and includes a summary of all the RQs, then brings together the conclusion of the entire thesis and recommendations for the future.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis has been on the examination of the UKVNR (2019) and the Supplementary Reports from Scotland (SSR, 2020) and Wales (WSR, 2019) regarding their framing of child poverty relating to Poverty SDG-1, and the closely related Education SDG-4. So far, the UK has submitted only one VNR with both Wales and Scotland of the Devolved Administrations producing separate supplementary reports to the UKVNR. My argument has been that to meet Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, children's rights to access and participate in education need to be understood in relation to the impact of poverty. Under international law, the role of government is to uphold their obligations to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of all persons, including children. Policies and legislation should aim to transform children's lives and their families in a positive way, rather than hinder and restrict children's opportunities, capabilities and enjoyment of their rights.

While the 2030 Agenda is not legally binding on states, it is explicitly rooted in the human rights obligation's states have already adopted. For example, the CRC (1989) is ratified by every government in the world apart from the USA. Thus, when addressing the intersections of poverty and education, the rights of children underpin meeting the 2030 Agenda and 'leaving no-one behind' (LNOB). My research identifies that where rights are not the focus and resources are not allocated accordingly, it is not possible to ensure children in the UK attain their full capabilities because of the impact of poverty on educational and life outcomes.

This Chapter brings together the central themes of my thesis and goes on to set out recommendations and areas for future research

- Revisiting the RQs (9.2)
- Theoretical and methodological approaches (9.3)
- Original contribution to academic knowledge (9.4)
- Limitations of research (9.5)
- Recommendations for the government and researchers (9.6)

9.2 Revisiting the RQs

To recap, my three RQs are as follows:

RQ1 How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty SDG-1?

RQ2 How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4?

RQ3 To what extent are rights seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education?

While the three questions are independent, they build towards an analysis of how far the UK has integrated its human rights obligations when addressing child poverty and education. No new international commitments were taken on since the 2030 Agenda was adopted in 2015, so in submitting the UKVNR in 2019 to the UN, the obligations owed to everyone in United Kingdom were already in place. What my analysis sought to reveal was how far the UK government understood that international human rights law, especially the CRC (1989), should frame its response to end Poverty SDG-1, in all its forms everywhere, and ensure inclusive and equitable quality Education SDG-4. Of course, like international human rights norms, the SDGs are all integrated, interdependent and indivisible, and all are underpinned with the overarching principles of non-discrimination, also affirmed in reducing Inequality SDG-10, within and between countries.

9.2.1 RQ1 - How does the UK frame child poverty when addressing Poverty SDG-1?

What was clear from the UKVNR with respect to the framing of child poverty when addressing Poverty SDG-1 was that the Westminster government saw poverty reduction as an individual responsibility to be addressed through welfare reform and full employment. As my analysis presents, poverty is multidimensional and complex. The different forms of poverty beyond income poverty have an impact on achieving education that is inclusive and equitable, and which allows children to reach their full capability, a point further developed in RQ2. My analysis of the UKVNR highlighted the close relationship between poverty, education and well-being, and that any strategy addressing that relationship needs to be aligned to the relevant SDGs, along with relevant Articles under the CRC (Wernham and UNICEF, 2016). I conclude that the Conservative government's strategies and policies

reported in the UKVNR exacerbated multidimensional poverty, maintaining and deepening inequality in educational attainment relative to child poverty (CRC/CO 6-7, 2023).

Government policies related to welfare reform also undermined the underpinning LNOB principle of the 2030 Agenda and, in fact, increased the risk of poverty. See chapters 3 (3.3.3), 6 (6.3), 7 (7.4) and 8 (8.3, 8.4) for research showing that not only does poverty worsen opportunities for children's education, but it also reduces life opportunities.

To achieve the SDGs, it is important that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. In chapter 4, I made the case for how the CA provides the appropriate framework to view the UK government's policies in relation to Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4 in terms of the extent to which opportunities are available and capabilities fulfilled. RQ1 also emphasised how the policies developed in Scotland and Wales, rights-based and legislation-based respectively, have a more holistic understanding of poverty and show the links between RQ1 and RQ3. Unlike Westminster, Scotland and Wales recognise poverty as a rights issue and place responsibility on the government to address inequalities that flow from poverty if the 2030 Agenda is to be fulfilled. Northern Ireland's input on poverty is limited in the UKVNR and is more closely aligned with Westminster, but there is an indication that, unlike England, Northern Ireland has had a child poverty strategy in place from 2016 to 2022.

9.2.2 RQ2 - How does the UK framing of poverty impact on children's Education SDG-4

The aim was to see how the UKVNR framing of poverty reflected its approach to reducing poverty and thereby achieve greater social justice in relation to children's education. In failing to address the intersectionality between poverty and education, the government denied children not only their right to education, but also to social justice more broadly, for example, in relation to Education SDG-4 and the importance of access to quality early years' provision. The focus in the UKVNR is on the needs of the economy rather than meeting the child's rights and promoting their full capabilities. Even though the UKVNR and the supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales recognise that there is a need for funded, high quality early years' provision, it is not in place universally and the most disadvantaged areas of the country have the least provision, resulting in worsening social justice and impacting negatively on children's education throughout the whole of school life.

Poverty also affects the attainment gap, putting at risk the child's opportunity to reach their full capabilities. The UKVNR acknowledges the negative impacts of the attainment gap on children from poorer backgrounds, but despite the fact that Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4 should be seen as interconnected SDGs, major strides towards eradicating the gap have not been made (EPI, 2023; Mon-Williams et al., 2023). Part of the reason for the lack of progress is the failure by the UK government to recognise the holistic character of poverty and address all elements. I make the links between food poverty SDG-2, the lack of access to adequate nutritious food and the effects on "inclusive and equitable quality education" as required for Education SDG-4. The analysis and discussion of RQ2 revealed that across the Four Nations, issues of social inequality had worsened, that this manifested itself with respect to early years' provision, the attainment gap and access to nutritious food. I conclude, therefore, that child poverty is not being comprehensively addressed and, consequently, the connected social injustices impact on education and children not achieving their full capabilities.

9.2.3 RQ3 - To what extent are rights seen as integral to the UK approach to meeting the 2030 Agenda with respect to children's education?

I conclude that the UK government has an unsophisticated and very individualised approach to poverty. It has not sought to utilise a rights-based approach as required by the SDGs. For example, it has not addressed poverty with respect to access to nutritious food and education. The UKVNR indicates the government was not addressing these broader elements of poverty because it failed to engage fully with the relevant rights frameworks.

I examined whether one reason for continuing failure to respond to child poverty and its effects on "inclusive and equitable quality" Education SDG-4 (UNGA, 2015:14) is down to the level of engagement in the UKVNR with human rights, especially those established in the CRC. In this regard, there is a stark contrast with the way the Devolved Administrations, Scotland and Wales in particular, have addressed rights in the VNR and their supplementary reports. Nevertheless, although the latter highlight and incorporate the role of rights as integral in meeting the 2030 Agenda, investment of resources is still required and that may be under the control of the UK government in Westminster, frustrating the Scottish and Welsh approaches.

The 2030 Agenda set out that it is underpinned by international human rights law, which would include the CRC (1989). In achieving the SDGs, states should, as was established in the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights (UN, 1993) respect, protect and fulfil their international human rights obligations. The CRC (1989) has four underpinning principles, and all are relevant for the SDGs: Article 2, non-discrimination; Article 3, best interests of the child; Article 6, the right to survival and development to full potential; and Article 12, participation, so that the voice of the child is part of discussions about their rights. When looking at child Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, those human rights obligations that the UK has already assumed when it agreed to and ratified the CRC (1989) alongside other international human rights law duties, should shape its framing when responding to the 2030 Agenda.

9.3 Theoretical and methodological approaches

The 2030 Agenda highlights the importance of protecting and implementing all human rights if its aims are to be met (UNGA, 2015). I used the capability approach (CA) as the lens to examine and reflect on the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales in relation to poverty, education and children's rights. Like the 2030 Agenda, the CA considers the importance of fulfilling human rights as central to achieving equality and well-being for all citizens (Sen, 1981, 2009; Nussbaum, 2003; Dixon and Nussbaum, 2012). Poverty in both the 2030 Agenda and CA is regarded as multidimensional and not just income related. This is pertinent when reflecting on the impact of poverty on children and their education. Agency, freedom of choice and opportunities can all be restricted and impeded when living in poverty restricts what children are "... able to do or be ..." (Sen, 2004:33). Nussbaum (2007:25) highlights the importance of understanding and recognising the full "context" of people's lives. To this end, I have endeavoured to reflect on and highlight the position and status of children who experience poverty when examining the UKVNR.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis for my methodological approach enabled me to bring together interlinking aspects of my professional and ethical positioning that endeavours to be both reflective and reflexive in how I approach my work. Thus, when undertaking this thesis, it was important for me to be able to bring the reflective element into my research. Braun and Clarke's six flexible phases of exploring data builds on the importance of reflection for the researcher and develops it to combine the related idea of

reflexive research. This involves not just reflecting on what I have read but how I, as a researcher, respond to my interaction with the data. This engagement became evident in combining my discussion with my analysis when dealing with my three RQs (Chapters 6-8). The incorporation of my methodological and theoretical approaches, with a focus on rights, has resulted in a unique analysis of the UKVNR (2019) and supplementary reports for Scotland (SSR, 2020) and Wales (WSR, 2019) into the framing of child poverty and its impact on children's education and their rights, status and visibility.

9.4 Original contribution to academic knowledge

First, my original contribution to academic knowledge was to identify the following. My focus is on child poverty and its impact on education related to Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4. Backed up by my research and analysis, this is an important original contribution as others have not focused on the UKVNR with reference to children who experience poverty and the impact that this may have on their education as individual rights-holders.

Secondly, having regard to the RQs, my thesis identifies that there were differing approaches to framing poverty in the VNR across the UK and the Devolved Administrations. The UKVNR fails to address poverty in a comprehensive fashion. The Conservative government did not adopt a rights-focused approach in drafting the UKVNR and its progress towards the 2030 Agenda. However, Scotland and Wales, in their submissions, showed a more nuanced framing of poverty and children, and children's rights are more visible. The contrast with Scotland and Wales in the VNR and in their supplementary reports is striking – Scotland has adopted a very explicit rights-based approach and Wales's legislative response is founded on human rights principles.

My research offers something important to other academics who work in the area of the UKVNR, Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, by extending understanding of how poverty is framed in official government documents. It explores how individuals who experience poverty are seen. My thesis renders children more visible by highlighting children within the UKVNR and supplementary reports with a focus on child poverty and the impact this has on their education and rights, an area of research that has been underexplored.

9.5 Limitations of research

I acknowledge that as with every PhD, there are boundaries to my research based on my RQs and word limits. First, I only deal with a small data source, the UKVNR and supplementary reports from Scotland and Wales, as a basis for my research. It is confined to the UK and Devolved Administrations, but it is a focused piece of PhD research, and I have endeavoured for it to be detailed in its own way. Secondly, I am aware that my research focuses on child poverty generally rather than on how it might relate to certain groups of children, for example, ethnic minorities, children with SEND, children who may be experiencing poor housing, or children in the care of local authorities. This is due to wanting to offer a deeper focus on poverty, education and children.

9.6 Recommendations for the government and researchers

The 2030 Agenda (2015) outlines how all the SDGs should be seen in terms of being integrated and indivisible and should be based on upholding human rights of all, including children's rights (UNCRC 1989). Thus, Poverty SDG-1, ending poverty in all its forms, and Education SDG-4, ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education, are both multidimensional and interlink across children's holistic development, and need to be implemented in a manner that protects, promotes and fulfils children's rights. My document analysis of the UKVNR (2019) is evidence that the Westminster government and Northern Ireland had a very narrow understanding of SDG-1, seeing it in limited economic terms and not in a multidimensional way that impacts on every aspect of children's lives and opportunities. Thus, there was a failure to understand and recognise the interrelatedness of the SDG-1 and SDG-4. This in turn led to a failure to fully recognise the importance of implementing children's rights in order to meet SDG-1 and SDG-4 and meet their obligations to protect children's rights, with the best interests of the child as a priority in welfare policies and provision of services (UNCRC 1989, Article 3). However, Scotland and Wales were more affirmative in recognising the importance of children's right and their duty to uphold the rights of children as central to working towards the 2030 Agenda, and SDG-1 and SDG-4, in particular. Wales and Scotland's wider framing of poverty as multidimensional and a human rights issue encompassed the importance of the UNCRC and a child's rights agenda. By doing this, Scotland and Wales raised the visibility of children who experience poverty and the role

of the government in addressing the inequalities that flow from poverty. The UNCRC 1989, Article 42, covers the obligation of governments to actively work to make sure that children and adults know about rights. An important starting point is for all those working in government to realise this obligation and implement it in meaningful ways so that a child-rights agenda is seen as integral to recognising the vital role that government plays in protecting the rights of all children.

Since 2019, no additional VNR has been produced by the UK Government or any supplementary reports from the Devolved Administrations. As I write, the political landscape in the UK has changed and new political parties have come into office across the Devolved Administrations, too.

I would recommend that:

- The UK Government and Devolved Administrations when producing VNRs should ensure that children and their families who have the lived experience of poverty are listened to, and their views incorporated. The ongoing progress and future development of the 2030 Agenda in the UK will not be fully achieved if Poverty SDG-1 and Education SDG-4, in particular, are not seen as intersecting and impacting on children, their rights, and their future opportunities.
- The government should act on the recommendations by the UN to fully incorporate the CRC into domestic legislation (CRC/CO 5, 2016; CRC/CO 6-7, 2023).
- The government should act on the recommendation to conduct child rights impact assessments of budget and economic decision-making processes and outcomes, including austerity measures, in areas that are directly or indirectly related to children's rights (CRC/CO 5, 2016).
- That a child poverty strategy is implemented that addresses the multidimensional nature of poverty in every aspect of children's lives.
- The government end the 2-child limit and the cap on benefits while also ensuring that welfare payments keep pace with inflation.
- Geographical inequalities of access to resources and provision of services are addressed so that children's postcodes do not restrict their opportunities and choices (Marmot et al., 2010, 2020; Mon-Williams et al., 2023).

- Access to high quality early childhood education and care is properly funded. Issues of pay, continuing professional development and the status of early years practitioners are addressed as part of a transformative approach to making a reality of Education SDG-4, access to quality ECEC (UNGA, 2015:17).

I would conclude by recommending that any subsequent VNRs by the UK government and the Devolved Administrations consider the long-term impact of the COVID Pandemic on fulfilling the 2030 Agenda in relation to child poverty, education and rights, and how progress will be made beyond 2030.

References

- Abrahams, D. (2021) *The health effects of the 2016 welfare reform and work act on children and disabled people*. London.
- Adolphus, K., Lawton, C.L. & Dye, L. (2013) The effects of breakfast on behavior and academic performance in children and adolescents. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2013.00425 [Accessed: 23 November 2022].
- Adolphus, K. Lawton, C.L. & Dye, L. (2019) Associations between habitual school-day breakfast consumption frequency and academic performance in British adolescents. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 7, 283. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2019.00283
- Ala-Uddin, M. (2019) ‘Sustainable’ discourse: a critical analysis–2 of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 29(2), 21424. doi:10.1177/1326365X19881515
- Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An Independent Report to Her Majesty’s Government*. London: The Cabinet Office. HM Government.
- Alma Economics (2024) *Process evaluation of the phased expansion of Flying Start: Main report*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Alston, P. (2005) Ships passing in the night: the current state of the human rights and development debate seen through the lens of the millennium development goals. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27(3), 755–829. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Alston, P. (2019) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. Geneva: UN General Assembly.
- Arad Research (2023) *Evaluation of Food and Fun School Improvement Programme: Impact report*. Cardiff. Available at: www.arad.wales
- Archer, N. & Merrick, B. (2020) *Getting the Balance Right. Quality and quantity in early education & childcare*. London: The Sutton Trust & Early Education. The British Association for Early Childhood Education.
- ATD Fourth World (2019) *Understanding Poverty in All its Forms: A participatory research study into poverty in the UK*. London.
- Attree, P. (2006) A critical analysis of UK public health policies in relation to diet and nutrition in low-income households. *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 2(2), 67–78. doi:10.1111/j.1740-8709.2006.00055.x
- Audit Scotland (2021) *Improving outcomes for young people through school education*. Edinburgh: Audit Scotland.

Azizi Fard, N., De Francisci Morales, G., Mejova, Y. & Schifanella, R. (2021) On the interplay between educational attainment and nutrition: a spatially aware perspective. *EPJ Data Science*, 10(18), 1–22. doi:10.1140/epjds/s13688-021-00273-y

Ballet, J., Biggeri, M. & Comim, F. (2011) Children's Agency and the Capability Approach: A Conceptual Framework. In: Biggeri, M. et al. (eds) *Children and the Capability Approach*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Banerjee, P.A. (2016) A systematic review of factors linked to poor academic performance of disadvantaged students in science and maths in schools. *Cogent Education*, 3, 1–17. doi:10.1080/2331186X.2016.1178441

Barnes, M. & Ross, A. (2021) The Problems with Troubled Families: Rethinking the Analysis Behind the 120,000 Troubled Families Statistic. *Social Policy and Society*, 1–19.

BASW & CWIP (2019) *Anti-poverty Practice Guide for Social Work*. Birmingham: British Association of Social Workers.

Bennett, F. (2021) How government sees couples on Universal Credit: a critical gender perspective. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 29(1), 3–20. doi: 10.1332/175982720X16022658214309.

Bennett, F. & Daly, M. (2014) *Poverty through a Gender Lens: Evidence and Policy Review on Gender and Poverty*. University of Oxford: University of Oxford Dept of Social Policy & Intervention for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Benzies, A. Turnbull, C. & Mowat, E. (2013) *Empowerment of academic staff through mentoring and coaching*. Napier University.

Bessell, S. (2022) Rethinking child poverty. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 23(4), 539-561. Available at: doi: 10.1080/19452829.2021.1911969

Bexell, M. & Jönsson, K. (2019) Country reporting on the sustainable development goals—the politics of performance review at the global-national nexus. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20(4), 403–417. doi: 10.1080/19452829.2018.1544544

Bickler, G., Morton, S. & Menne, B. (2020) Health and sustainable development: an analysis of 20 European voluntary national reviews. *Public Health*, 180, 180–184. Available at: doi: 10.1016/j.puhe.2019.10.020.

Biggeri, M. & Mehrotra, S. (2011) Child Poverty as Capability Deprivation: How to Choose Domains of Child Well-being and Poverty. In: Biggeri, M. et al. (eds) *Children and the Capability Approach*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Biggeri, M. & Cuesta, J.A. (2021) An integrated framework for child poverty and well-being measurement: reconciling theories. *Child Indicators Research*, 14(2), 821–846.

Bochel, H. & Powell, M. (2016) *The Coalition government and social policy: restructuring the welfare state*. Bristol; Policy Press.

Bowen, G.A. (2009) Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40. Available at: doi: 10.3316/QRJ0902027

Bradshaw, J. & Holmes, J. (2010) Child poverty in the first five years. In: Hansen, K. et al. (eds) *Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): the first five years*. Bristol, United Kingdom: Policy Press.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. Available at: doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N. & Terry, G. (2019) Thematic analysis. In: Liamputtong, P. (ed) *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. Singapore: Springer Singapore. Available at: doi: 10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. London; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

Bullock, K. Muschamp, Y., Ridge, T. and Wikeley, F. (2010) Educational relationships in out-of-school-time activities: are children in poverty missing out again? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 5(2), 103–116. doi: 10.1177/1746197910370728.

Burchardt, T. & Vizard, P. (2011) ‘Operationalizing’ the capability approach as a basis for equality and human rights monitoring in twenty-first-century Britain. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 12(1), 91–119. doi: 10.1080/19452829.2011.541790

Byrne, D. (2022) A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1391–1412. doi:10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Calder, G. (2018) What would a society look like where children’s life chances were really fair? *Local Economy: The Journal of the Local Economy Policy Unit*, 33(6), 655–666. doi:10.1177/0269094218803553

Carey, M. & Bell, S. (2022) Universal Credit, lone mothers and poverty: some ethical challenges for social work with children and families. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 16(1), 3–18. doi: 10.1080/17496535.2021.1939756

Carville, D. (2024) *Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*. NI: Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Cattan, S., Fitzsimons, E., Goodman, A., Phimister, X., Ploubidis, G.B. & Wertz, J. (2022) *Early childhood and inequalities*. London: IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities.

CEDAW - UN (1979) *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*.

Centre for Longitudinal Studies (2017) *Millennium Cohort Study Sixth Sweep technical report. (MCS6)*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Cheetham, M. Moffatt, S., Addison, M. & Wiseman, A. (2019) Impact of Universal Credit in North East England: a qualitative study of claimants and support staff. *BMJ Open*, 9(7), e029611. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2019-029611

Children's Commissioners of Northern Ireland, Scotland & Wales (2022) *Report of the Children's Commissioners of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*. Northern Ireland, Scotland & Wales.

Chzhen, Y., Gordon, D. & Handa, S. (2018a) Measuring multidimensional child poverty in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals. *Child Indicators Research*, 11(3), 707–709. doi: 10.1007/s12187-017-9490-7

Chzhen, Y., Bruckauf, Z. & Toczydlowska, E. (2018b) Monitoring progress towards sustainable development: multidimensional child poverty in the European Union. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 26(2), 129–150. doi:10.1332/175982718X15154249173514

Clutterbuck, D. (2004) *Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent in Your Organisation*. 4th ed. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Cooper, K. & Jimenez, E. (2024) *How can we reduce food poverty for under-fives?* Education Policy Institute.

Cooper, K. & Stewart, K. (2013) *Does money affect children's outcomes?: A systematic review*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Cooper, K. & Stewart, K. (2017) *Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes? An update*. Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE.

Copenhagen Declaration - UN (1995) *The Copenhagen Declaration for Social Development 6-12 March 1995*. United Nations Department of Publications.

CPAG – Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) website, 'What is poverty': <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/what-poverty>, accessed 25/6/23.

CRC - United Nations (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. UN.

CRC/CO 5 - UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. UN.

CRC/CO 6-7 - UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2023) *Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. Geneva: UN.

CRC/GC 1 - *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) UNCRC General Comment No. 1 (2001), Article 29(1), The aims of education.* UN.

CRC/GC 5 - *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) General Comment No.5 (2003): General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.* UN.

CRC/GC 7 - *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) General Comment No. 7 (2005) Implementing child rights in early childhood.* UN.

CRC/GC 19 - *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4).* UN.

Cribb, J., Farquharson, C., McKendrick, A., Waters T. & Payne, J. (2023) *The policy menu for school lunches: options and trade-offs in expanding free school meals in England.* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies. doi: 10.1920/re.ifs.2023.0253

Croke, R., Dale, H., Dunhill, A., Roberts, A., Unnithan, M. & Williams, J. (2021) Integrating sustainable development and children's rights: a case study on Wales. *Social Sciences*,10(3) (100),1–22. doi: 10.3390/socsci10030100

Crossley, S. (2018) *Troublemakers: The construction of 'troubled families' as a social problem.* 1st edn. Bristol University Press.

Crown (1989) *Children Act.*

Crown (2010a) *Child Poverty Act 2010 (after 2016: Life Chances Act 2010).*

Crown (2010b) *Equality Act 2010.*

Crown (2012) *Welfare Reform Act 2012.*

Crown (2016) *Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.*

CRPD - UN (2006) *International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).* UN.

De Schutter, O. (2021) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. The persistence of poverty: how real equality can break the vicious cycles.* Geneva: UN General Assembly.

Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *Working with troubled families: a guide to the evidence and best practice.* London: Crown.

DESA/CDP/Paper 49 - Committee for Development Policy (2019) *Voluntary National Reviews Reports – What do they (not) tell us?* New York: UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs.

DESA/CDP/Paper 50 - Committee for Development Policy (2020) *Voluntary National Reviews Reports: What do they (not) reveal?* New York: UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs.

Devine, B.F. (2024) *Poverty in the UK: Statistics*. London: House of Commons.

DfE (2017) *Unlocking talent, fulfilling potential: a plan for improving social mobility through education*. London: Department for Education.

DfE (2018) *Free school meals. Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools*. London: Department for Education.

DfE (2024) *Key stage 4 performance*. London: Department for Education.

DfID & FCDO - Department for International Development, and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (2019) *Leaving no one behind: Our promise*. Crown.

Dickerson, A. & Popli, G. (2018) The many dimensions of child poverty: evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *Fiscal Studies*, 39(2), 265–298. doi: 0.1111/1475-5890.12162

Dickerson, A. & Popli, G.K. (2016) Persistent poverty and children's cognitive development: evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 179(2), 535–558. doi: 10.1111/rssa.12128

Dixon, R. & Nussbaum, M.C. (2012) Children's rights and a capabilities approach: the question of special priority. In: The Law School, The University of Chicago *Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper*. [Online]. Chicago: The Law School, The University of Chicago. Available at: <http://www.ssrn.com/abstract=2060614> [Accessed: 2 September 2020].

Donnelly, M., Lazetic, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kameshwara, K. & Whewall, S. (2019) *An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility*. Social Mobility Commission.

Dornan, P. (2017) Children, poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals. *Children & Society*, 31(2), 157–165. doi: 10.1111/chso.12209

Dowler, E. (2002) Food and poverty in Britain: rights and responsibilities. *Social Policy & Administration*, 36(6), 698–717. doi: 10.1111/1467-9515.00312

Du Pisani, J.A. (2006) Sustainable development – historical roots of the concept. *Environmental Sciences*, 3(2), 83–96. doi: 10.1080/15693430600688831

DWP (2019) *Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the UK income distribution: 1994/95-2017/18*. London: Department for Work and Pensions.

EEF (2018) *The Attainment Gap, 2017*. London: The Education Endowment Foundation.

- EHRC (2017) *Measurement Framework for Equality and Human Rights*. EHRC.
- EHRC (2018) *Is Scotland Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2018*. EHRC.
- EHRC (2019) *Is Britain Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2018*. EHRC.
- EHRC (2023a) *Equality and Human Rights Monitor*. EHRC.
- EHRC (2023b) *Equality and Human Rights Monitor – Is Scotland Fairer?* EHRC.
- EHRC (2023c) *Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Wales Fairer?* EHRC.
- Eide, A. (1987) *Report on the right to adequate food as a human right submitted by Mr. Asbjørn Eide, Special Rapporteur*. Geneva: UN Economic and Social Council.
- Elder, M. & Bartalini, A. (2019) *Assessment of the G20 Countries' Concrete SDG Implementation Efforts: Policies and Budgets Reported in Their 2016-2018 Voluntary National Reviews*. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21873> [Accessed: 17 February 2023].
- Engle, P.L. & Black, M.M. (2008) The effect of poverty on child development and educational outcomes. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1136(1), 243–256. doi: 10.1196/annals.1425.023
- EPI - Education Policy Institute (2023) *Annual Report 2023: Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners*. London: Education Policy Institute.
- Eskelinen, T. (2021) Interpreting the Sustainable Development Goals through the perspectives of utopia and governance. *Forum for Development Studies*, 48(2), 179–197. Available at: doi: 10.1080/08039410.2020.1867889
- Fairclough, N. (2013) Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies. *Critical Policy Studies*, 7(2), 177–197. doi: 10.1080/19460171.2013.798239
- Farquharson, C. et al. (2022) 'Education inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities. IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities. London: Institute Fiscal Studies.
- Farthing, R. (2012) *Going Hungry? Young people's experiences of Free School Meals*. London: Child Poverty Action Group & British Youth Council.
- Ferragina, E., Tomlinson, M. & Walker, R. (2013) *Poverty, participation and choice: the legacy of Peter Townsend*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Field, F. (2010) *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults. The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances*. London: Cabinet Office.
- Fitzpatrick, C., Loader, R., McCartney, S., McConnell, B., McMullen, J., Murry, C., Orr, K., Purdy, N. & Simms, V. (2023) *The Consequences of the cuts to education for children and young people in Northern Ireland*. Belfast. Available at:

<https://www.stran.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-Consequences-of-the-Cuts-to-Education-for-Children-and-Young-People-in-Northern-Ireland-Final.pdf>

Foucault, M. (1998) *Polemics, Politics and Problematizations: Interview by P. Rabinow*, May 1984. In: Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Essential Works of Foucault*. London: The New Press.

Freeman, M. (2019) *A Magna Carta for Children?: Rethinking Children's Rights*. 1st edn. Cambridge University Press.

Fukuda-Parr, S. (2019) Keeping out extreme inequality from the SDG Agenda - the politics of indicators. *Global Policy*, 10(S1), 61–69. Available at: doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.12602

Fukuda-Parr, S. & Cid-Martinez, I. (2019) Capability Approach and Human Development. In: Nissanke, M. & Ocampo, A. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Economics*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.

Fukuda-Parr, S. & Hegstad, T.S. (2019) “Leaving No One Behind” as a site of contestation and reinterpretation. *Journal of Globalization and Development*, 9(2), 1–12. doi: 10.1515/jgd-2018-0037

Gladstone, B., Exenberger, S., Weimand, B., Lui, V., Haid-Stecher, N. & Geretsegger, M. (2020) The capability approach in research about children and childhood: a scoping review. *Child Indicators Research*, 14, 453–475. doi: 10.1007/s12187-020-09766-0

Gordon, D., Levitas, R., Pantazis, C., Patsios, D., Payne, S., Townsend, P., Adelman, L., Ashworth, K., Middleton, S., Bradshaw, J. & Williams, J. (2000) *Poverty and social exclusion in Britain*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Gordon, D., Mack, J., Lansley, S., Main, G., Nandy S., Patsios, D & Pomati, M. (2013) *The Impoverishment of the UK PSE UK first results: Living Standards*. Available at: https://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/The_Impoverishment_of_the_UK_PSE_UK_first_results_summary_report_March_28.pdf

Graham, P.L., Haskell-Ramsay, C., Fothergill, M. & Young, J. (2022) Food insecurity, poor dietary intake and a lack of free meal uptake amongst 16–17-year-old college students in the northeast of England, UK. *Children & Society*, 1–16. doi: 10.1111/chso.12623

Griggs, J. & Walker, R. (2008) *The costs of child poverty for individuals and society*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Gupta, A. (2017) Poverty and child neglect – the elephant in the room? *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 6(1), 21–36. doi: 10.1332/204674315X14207948135699

Hargreaves, E., Quick, L. & Buchanan, D. (2023) National curriculum and assessment in England and the continuing narrowed experiences of lower-attainers in primary schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 55(5), 545–561. doi: 10.1080/00220272.2023.2253455

- Hart, C.S. & Brando, N. (2018) A capability approach to children's well-being, agency and participatory rights in education. *European Journal of Education*, 53(3), 293–309. doi: 10.1111/ejed.12284
- Hart, C.S. & Page, A. (2020) The capability approach and school food education and culture in England: 'gingerbread men ain't gonna get me very far'. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 50(6), 673–693. doi: 10.1080/0305764X.2020.1764498
- Hick, R. (2018) Inequality, disadvantage and the capability approach: bridging conceptual framework and empirical analysis. *Social Work & Society*, 16(2), 1–10.
- Hick, R. & Burchardt, T. (2016) Capability Deprivation. In: Brady, D. & Burton, L., M. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty*. New York (N.Y.): Oxford University Press.
- Horgan, G. (2009) 'That child is smart because he's rich': the impact of poverty on young children's experiences of school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(4), 359–376. doi: 10.1080/13603110802707779
- House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2021) *Children in poverty: Measurement and targets*. London: House of Commons. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/38570>
- Hunt, P. (2016) Interpreting the international right to health in a human rights-based approach to health. *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 18(2), 109–130.
- ICESCR - UN (1966) *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. UN.
- ILO-UNICEF (2019) Towards universal social protection for children: Achieving SDG 1.3. ILO-UNICEF Joint Report on Social Protection for Children. New York & Geneva.
- Jerome, L., Emerson, L. & Lundy, L. (2015) *Teaching and learning about child rights: a study of implementation in 26 countries*. UK: Queen's University Belfast & UNICEF.
- John, W.S. & Johnson, P. (2000) The pros and cons of data analysis software for qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 32(4), 393–397. doi: 10.1111/j.1547-5069.2000.00393.x
- JRF - Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *UK Poverty 2023: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- JRF - Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*. York & London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- JRF - Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) *UK Poverty 2025: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

- Jyoti, D.F., Frongillo, E.A. & Jones, S.J. (2005) Food insecurity affects school children's academic performance, weight gain, and social skills. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 135(12), 2831–2839. doi: 10.1093/jn/135.12.2831
- Karppinen, K. & Moe, H. (2019), Texts as Data I: Document Analysis. In: Van den Bulck, H., Puppis, M., Donders, K. & Van Audenhove, L. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research*. Cham, Springer International Publishing. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-16065-4_14.
- Kauzya, J.-M. (2020) Reflections on the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs. In: Maron, F., Joyce, P. & Reddy, P.S. (eds) *Good Public Governance in a Global Pandemic*. 1st edn. [Online]. Brussels: The International Institute of Administrative Sciences. Available at: <https://qrd.by/rywcfm> [Accessed: 28 June 2024].
- Kilkelly, U. & Liefwaard, T. (eds) (2019) *International Human Rights of Children*. [Online]. Singapore: Springer Singapore. Available at: <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-981-10-4184-6> [Accessed: 2 May 2024].
- Kim, N.Y., Bang, Y. & Kim, E.M. (2022) Women's empowerment without power: strategic v. practical interests in SDGs and the voluntary national reviews. *Global Policy*, 13(3), 371–389. doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.13107
- Kinra, S. (2000) Deprivation and childhood obesity: a cross sectional study of 20 973 children in Plymouth, United Kingdom. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 54(6), 456–460. doi: 10.1136/jech.54.6.456
- Knox, C. (2025) *Educational underachievement in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016) Poverty-Aware social work: a paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcv118.
- Lai, E.T.C., Wickham, S., Law, C., Whitehead, M., Barr, B. & Taylor-Robinson, D. (2019) Poverty dynamics and health in late childhood in the UK: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 104(11), 1049–1055. doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2018-316702
- Lansdown, G. (2010) The realisation of children's participation rights: critical reflections. In: Percy-Smith, B. & Thomas, N. (eds) *A handbook of children and young people's participation: perspectives from theory and practice*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Lansdown, G., Covell, K., & Vaghri, Z. (2022) Article 29: The Aims of Education. In: Vaghri, Z. et al. (eds) *Monitoring State Compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [Online]. Cham: Springer International Publishing. Available at: https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-84647-3_27 [Accessed: 19 August 2024].

- Lien, L. (2007) Is breakfast consumption related to mental distress and academic performance in adolescents? *Public Health Nutrition*, 10(4), 422–428. doi: 10.1017/S1368980007258550
- Lillehagen, I., Heggen, K.M., Tomson, G. & Engebretsen, E. (2020) Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals: how is health framed in the Norwegian and Swedish Voluntary National Review reports? *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*. doi: 10.34172/ijhpm.2020.221
- Lister, R. (2013) ‘Power, not Pity’: poverty and human rights. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), 109–123. Routledge.
- Lister, R. (2015) ‘To count for nothing’: poverty beyond the statistics. *Journal of the British Academy*, 3, 139–165. doi: 10.5871/gba/003.139
- Lister, R. (2021) *Poverty*. 2nd edition. Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press.
- Littlecott, H.J., Moore, G.F., Moore, L., Lyons, R.A. & Murphy S. (2016) Association between breakfast consumption and educational outcomes in 9–11-year-old children. *Public Health Nutrition*, 19(9), 1575–1582. doi: 10.1017/S1368980015002669
- Lumsden, E. (2019) The Early Years Professional: Holding a Mirror up to Policy Makers. In: Basu, C. & Anderson-Patton, V. (eds) *Children and Childhood: Practices and Perspectives*. Boston: Brill.
- 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(6), 927–942. doi: 10.1080/01411920701657033
- Lundy, L. & McEvoy, L. (2011) Children’s rights and research processes: assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood*, 19(1), 129–144.
- Lundy, L. & O’Lynn, P. (2019) The Education Rights of Children. In: Kilkelly, U. & Liefwaard, T. (eds) *International Human Rights of Children International Human Rights*. [Online]. Singapore: Springer Singapore. doi:10.1007/978-981-10-4184-6_11 [Accessed: 26 February 2025].
- Ma, K.K.Y., Anderson, J.K. & Burn, A-M. (2023) Review: School-based interventions to improve mental health literacy and reduce mental health stigma – a systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 28(2), 230–240. doi: 10.1111/camh.12543
- MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T. & Furlong, A. (2020) ‘Cycles of disadvantage’ revisited: young people, families and poverty across generations. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(1), 12–27. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1704405
- Maguire, S. (2021) Early leaving and the NEET agenda across the UK. *Journal of Education and Work*, 34(7–8), 826–838. doi: 10.1080/13639080.2021.1983525

Main, G. (2019) Child poverty and subjective well-being: The impact of children's perceptions of fairness and involvement in intra-household sharing. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 97, 49–58. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.031

Mantell, A. & Scragg, T. (eds) (2016) *Reflective practice in social work*. 5th edition. London: Learning Matters.

Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., McNeish, D., Grady, M. & Geddes, I. (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives. The Marmot Review. Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*. London: Institute of Health Equity.

Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Herd, E. & Morrison, J. (2020) *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review ten years on*. London: Institute of Health Equity.

McCall-Smith, K. (2023) Entrenching children's participation through UNCRC incorporation in Scotland. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 27(8), 1181–1204. doi: 10.1080/13642987.2021.1969920

McDaid, S., Adell, T., Cameron, J., Davidson, G., Knifton, L., McCartan, C. & Mulholland, C. (2023) Recent policy developments in promotion and prevention: a scoping review of national plans in Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales. *Advances in Mental Health*, 21(1), 67–80. doi: 10.1080/18387357.2021.2022502

Meers, J. (2022) The 'cumulative impact' problem in social welfare: some legal, policy and theoretical solutions. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 44(1), 42–62. doi: 10.1080/09649069.2022.2028408

Melhuish, E. (2016) Longitudinal research and early years policy development in the UK. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 10(3), 1–18. doi: 10.1186/s40723-016-0019-1

Melhuish, E.C. & Gardiner, J. (2018) *Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Impact Study on Early Education Use and Child Outcomes up to age four years*. Department for Education.

Messham, E. & Sheard, S. (2020) Taking the long view: the development of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 18(33), 1–12. doi: 10.1186/s12961-020-0534-y

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) *Supporting Families Programme Guidance 2021-22*. Crown.

Minujin, A., Delamonica, E., Davidziuk, A. & Gonzalez, E.D. (2006) The definition of child poverty: a discussion of concepts and measurements. *Environment and Urbanization*, 18(2), 481–500. doi: 10.1177/0956247806069627

Minujin, A. & Ferrer, M. (2016) Assessing Sustainable Development Goals from the standpoint of equity for children. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, 32(2), 98–115. doi: 10.1080/21699763.2016.1200111

Minujin, A. & Nandy, S. (2012) Introduction. In: Minujin, A. & Nandy, S. (eds) *Global child poverty and well-being: measurement, concepts, policy and action: studies in poverty, inequality and social exclusion*. Bristol, Chicago: Policy Press.

Montgomerie, J. & Tepe-Belfrage, D. (2016) A feminist moral-political economy of uneven reform in austerity Britain: fostering financial and parental literacy. *Globalizations*, 13(6), 890–905. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2016.1160605

Mon-Williams, M., Wood, M.L., Pickett, K. & Taylor-Robinson, D. (2023) Addressing Education and Health Inequity: Perspectives from the North of England. A report prepared for the Child of the North APPG. Health Equity North. Available at: <https://www.healthequitynorth.co.uk/child-of-the-north/>

Moore, A. & Campbell, M. (2017) *Tackling the Poverty-Related Gap in Early Childhood Learning in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Save the Children.

Moore, J.B. & Evans, C. (2020) *Tackling childhood food poverty in the UK*. Policy Leeds, University of Leeds. [Accessed: 21 November 2022].

Morgan, H. (2022) Conducting a qualitative document analysis, *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 64-77. doi: 10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044

Moss, P. (2020) Towards a unified and unifying ECEC system from birth to 6 years. In: Moss, P. & Cameron, C. (eds) *Transforming Early Childhood in England*. London: UCL Press.

Mowat, J.G. (2019) Exploring the impact of social inequality and poverty on the mental health and wellbeing and attainment of children and young people in Scotland. *Improving Schools*, 22(3), 204–223. doi: 10.1177/1365480219835323

Mullet, D.R. (2018) A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 29(2), 116–142. doi: 10.1177/1932202X18758260

Muñoz Carmona, L. (2024) Synergies or silos? Exploring human rights considerations in sustainability reporting practices in the Nordics. *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 42(1), 71–89. doi: 10.1177/09240519231223692

Nash, C., MacPherson, A.C. & Collins, D. (2022) Reflections on reflection: clarifying and promoting use in experienced coaches. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.867720

National Education Union & Child Poverty Action Group (2018) *Child poverty and education: A survey of the experiences of NEU members*. Child Poverty Action Group.

Naven, L., Sosu, E. M., Spencer, S. & Egan, J. (2019) The influence of poverty on children's school experiences: pupils' perspectives. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 27(3), 313–331. doi: 10.1332/175982719X15622547838659

Newman, J. (2001) *Modernising Governance: New Labour, Policy and Society*. London: Sage.

NICVA (2019) *NICVA and NI Environment Link join forces to progress the Sustainable Development Goals*. Northern Ireland Council Voluntary Action.

Nolan, A. (2019a) *Protecting the Child from Poverty: The Role of Rights in the Council of Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Nolan, A. (2019b) Children's Economic and Social Rights. In: Kilkelly, U. & Liefwaard, T. (eds) *International Human Rights of Children* International Human Rights. [Online]. Singapore: Springer Singapore. doi:10.1007/978-981-10-4184-6_10 [Accessed: 10 June 2025].

Nolan, A. (2020) Poverty and Children's Rights. In: Todres, J. & King, S.M. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Rights Law*. [Online]. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190097608.013.21 [Accessed: 23 March 2021].

Nolan, A. & Pells, K. (2020) Children's economic and social rights and child poverty: the state of play. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 28(1), 111–132.

Nussbaum, M. (2000) *Women and human development: the capabilities approach*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2003) Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: SEN and social justice. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2–3), 33–59. doi: 10.1080/1354570022000077926

Nussbaum, M. (2007) Constitutions and capabilities: 'perception' against lofty formalism. *Harvard Law Review*, 121(1), 4–97.

Nussbaum, M. (2013) *Creating capabilities: the human development approach*. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Nutbrown, C. (2012) *Foundations for quality. The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications*. Final Report. Crown.

Nutbrown, C. (2021) Early childhood educators' qualifications: a framework for change. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 29(3), 236–249. doi: 10.1080/09669760.2021.1892601

O'Connell, R., Knight, A. & Brannen, J. (2019) *Living Hand to Mouth: Children and Food in Low-Income Families*. London: Child Poverty Action Group.

OECD (2018) *Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility*. OECD. doi:10.1787/9789264073234-en [Accessed: 16 November 2022].

OECD (2020) *Early Learning and Child Well-being: A Study of Five-year Olds in England, Estonia, and the United States*. OECD. doi:10.1787/3990407f-en [Accessed: 27 February 2025].

OHCHR (2016) *Legally binding human rights commitments: Sustainable Development Goals and Related Human Rights*. UN. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/legally-binding-human-rights-commitments> [Accessed: 5 April 2022].

OHCHR (2017) *Protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Geneva: UN.

Oppenheim, C. & Milton, C. (2021) *Changing patterns of poverty in early childhood*. London: Nuffield Foundation.

O'Sullivan, T.A., Robinson, M., Kendall, G.E., Miller, M., Jacoby, P., Silburn, S.R. & Oddy, W.H. (2009) A good-quality breakfast is associated with better mental health in adolescence. *Public Health Nutrition*, 12(2), 249–258. doi: 10.1017/S1368980008003935

Padley, M. & Stone, J. (2023) *A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2023*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Padley, M. & Stone, S. (2022) *Households below a Minimum Income Standard: 2008/09–2019/20*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation & Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough.

Peleg, N. (2013) Reconceptualising the child's right to development: children and the capability approach. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 21(3), 523–542. doi: 10.1163/15718182-02103003

Peleg, N. (2019) *The Child's Right to Development*. [Online]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781316146804 [Accessed: 29 December 2024].

Percy-Smith, B. & Thomas, N. (eds) (2010) *A handbook of children and young people's participation: perspectives from theory and practice*. London; New York: Routledge.

Pickett, K. & Taylor-Robinson, D. (2021) *The Child of the North: Building a fairer future after COVID-19*.

Pillas, D., Marmot, M., Naicker, K., Goldblatt, P., Morrison, J. & Pikhart, H. (2014) Social inequalities in early childhood health and development: a European-wide systematic review. *Pediatric Research*, 76(5), 418–424. doi: 10.1038/pr.2014.122

Pradhan, P., Costa, L., Rybski, D., Lucht, W. & Kropp, J.P. (2017) A systematic study of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) interactions. *Earth's Future*, 5(11), 1169–1179. doi: 10.1002/2017EF000632

Purdy, N., Logue, J., Montgomery, M., O'Hare, K & Redpath, J. (2021) *A Fair Start: Final Report and Action Plan of the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland*. Bangor, Northern Ireland: Department of Education.

Rawls, J. (1999) *A theory of justice*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Reader, M., Portes, J. & Patrick, R. (2022) *Does cutting child benefits reduce fertility in larger families? Evidence from the UK's two-child limit*. London: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE.

Reis, S. (2018) *The Female Face of Poverty Examining the cause and consequences of economic deprivation for women*. Coventry: Women's Budget Group & Coventry Women's Partnership.

Rhatigan, C. (2020) *Food security for social justice: access to food to achieve social justice in education: a conceptual examination*. Unpublished assessed paper. Lancaster University.

Rhatigan, C. (2022) *Child Poverty Action Group as social activism that impacts on education in UK*. Unpublished assessed paper. Lancaster University.

Ridge, T. (2002) *Childhood poverty and social exclusion: from a child's perspective*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Ridge, T. (2009) *Living with poverty: a review of the literature on children's and families' experiences of poverty*. London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Ridge, T. (2011) The everyday costs of poverty in childhood: a review of qualitative research exploring the lives and experiences of low-income children in the UK. *Children & Society*, 25(1), 73–84. doi: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00345.x

Ridge, T. (2013) 'We are all in this together'? The hidden costs of poverty, recession and austerity policies on Britain's poorest children. *Children & Society*, 27(5), 406–417. doi: 10.1111/chso.12055

Robeyns, I. (2017) *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-Examined*. Open Book Publishers.

Rodríguez Takeuchi, L. (2015) *Intra-household inequalities in child rights and well-being – A barrier to progress?* Research report 02. ODI.

Roelen, K. (2015) *Reducing all forms of child poverty: the importance of measurement for getting it right*. Institute of Development Studies.

Save the Children (2012) *Ending Poverty in Our Generation: Save the Children's Vision for a Post-2015 Framework*. UK.

Schoon, I., Jones, E., Cheng, H. & Maughan, B. (2012) Family hardship, family instability, and cognitive development. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 66(8), 716–722. doi: 10.1136/jech.2010.121228

Schuller, T. & Desjardins, R. (eds) (2007) *Understanding the social outcomes of learning*. Paris: OECD.

- Sefton, T., Tucker, J. & McCartney, C. (2019) *All kids count: The impact of the two-child limit after two years*. London: Child Poverty Action Group & Church of England.
- Sen, A. (1980) Equality of What. In: McMurrin, S.M. (ed.) *The Tanner Lectures on Human Value*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Sen, A. (1981) *Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation*. Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (1983) Poor, relatively speaking. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 35(2), 153–169. doi: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.oep.a041587
- Sen, A. (1985a) A sociological approach to the measurement of poverty: a reply to Professor Peter Townsend. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 37(4), 669–676. doi: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.oep.a041716
- Sen, A. (1985b) Well-being, agency and freedom: the Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 82(4), 169–221. doi: 10.2307/2026184
- Sen, A. (1992) *Inequality reexamined*. New York: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, A. (2001) *Development as freedom*. Oxford: New York.
- Sen, A. (2004) Elements of a theory of human rights. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 32(4), 315–356. doi: 10.1111/j.1088-4963.2004.00017.x
- Sen, A. (2005) Human rights and capabilities. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(2), 151–166. doi: 10.1080/14649880500120491
- Sen, A. (2007) Children and human rights. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 1(2), 235–245. doi: 10.1177/0973703020070201
- Sen, A. (2009) *The idea of justice*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Sengupta, M. (2018) Transformational change or tenuous wish list? a critique of sdg 1 ('end poverty in all its forms everywhere'). *Social Alternatives*, 37(1), 12–17.
- Simpson, D., Loughran, S., Lumsden, E., Mazzocco, P., McDowall Clark, R. & Winterbottom, C. (2017) 'Seen but not heard'. Practitioners work with poverty and the organising out of disadvantaged children's voices and participation in the early years. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(2), 177–188. doi: 10.1080/1350293x.2017.1288014
- Simpson Reeves, L., Parcell, C. & Liu, S. (2020) Towards a phenomenology of poverty: defining poverty through the lived experiences of the 'poor'. *Journal of Sociology*, 56(3), 439–454. doi/10.1177/1440783319851204
- Sinclair, S. (2022) Challenges to the strategic state: welfare reform lessons from a devolved polity. *Journal of Social Policy*, 1–18. doi: 10.1017/S004727942200068X

- Sindall, C., Lo, S. & Capon, T. (2021) Governance for the well-being of future generations. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 57(11), 1749–1753. doi: 10.1111/jpc.15813
- Smith, N.R., Marshall, L., Albakri, M., Smuk, M., Hagell, A. & Stansfeld, S. (2021) Adolescent mental health difficulties and educational attainment: findings from the UK household longitudinal study. *BMJ Open*, 11(7). doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-046792
- Smith, W.C. (2021) An Exploration of SDG 4 Coverage in Voluntary National Reviews. In: Zajda, J. (ed.) *Third International Handbook of Globalisation, Education and Policy Research*. [Online]. Cham: Springer International Publishing. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-66003-1_55 [Accessed: 6 February 2023].
- Smith, W.C., Susu, A., Jackaria, I., Bohorquez Martinez, J., Qu, M. & Niwa, M. (2024) Prioritisation of indicators in SDG 4: Voluntary National Reviews as a tool of soft governance. *International Review of Education*, 70(4), 621–649. doi: 10.1007/s11159-024-10067-9
- Social Mobility Commission (2017) *State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain*. London: Social Mobility Commission.
- Social Mobility Commission (2021) *State of the Nation 2020–21: Social Mobility and the pandemic*. London: Social Mobility Commission.
- Social Work England, website, 'Registration', www.socialworkengland.org.uk/registration.
- Social Work England (2019) *Professional standards for social workers: Professional Standards Guidance*.
- SSR (2020) - Scottish Government (2020) *Scotland and the Sustainable Development Goals: A national review to drive action*. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2020/07/scotland-sustainable-development-goals-national-review-drive-action/documents/scotland-sustainable-development-goals-national-review-drive-action/scotland-sustainable-development-goals-national-review-drive-action/govscot%3Adocument/scotland-sustainable-development-goals-national-review-drive-action.pdf>.
- Stewart, H., Watson, N. & Campbell, M. (2018) The cost of school holidays for children from low income families. *Childhood*, 25(4), 516–529.
- Stewart, K. & Roberts, N. (2019) Child poverty measurement in the UK: assessing support for the downgrading of income-based poverty measures. *Social Indicators Research*, 142(2), 523–542. doi: 10.1007/s11205-018-1880-9
- Stewart, K. & Waldfogel, J. (2017) *Closing Gaps Early. The role of early years policy in promoting social mobility in England*. London; New York: The Sutton Trust.

Stone, J. (2023) *Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs 2021/22. Summary of estimates of child poverty after housing costs in local authorities and parliamentary constituencies, 2014/15-2021-22*. Loughborough University: Centre for Research in Social Policy.

Stuart, E., Bird, K., Bhaktal, T., Greenhill, R., Lally, S., Rabinowitz, G., Samman, E., Sarwar, M. & Lynch, A. (2016) *Leaving no one behind: a critical path for the first 1,000 days of the Sustainable Development Goals*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2010) *Early childhood matters: Evidence from the effective pre-school and primary education project*. 1st edn. Routledge.

Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P. & Siraj, I. (2015) How pre-school influences children and young people's attainment and developmental outcomes over time: Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3-16+) Project. London: Department for Education.

The Early Years Workforce Commission (2021) *A Workforce in Crisis: Saving Our Early Years*.

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2020) *Voluntary National Reviews for the Sustainable Development Goals: Are countries committed to ending child poverty by 2030?* The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty.

Tiesteel, E., Whiteley, H., Grigorie, A., Sultana, F., Lynch, L., Egan, D., Sibieta, L., Tudor-Edwards, R.T. & Hughes, J.C. (2023) *Review of the Pupil Development Grant: Final report - September 2023*. Wales: Welsh Government.

Tosun, J. & Leininger, J. (2017) Governing the interlinkages between the Sustainable Development Goals: approaches to attain policy integration. *Global Challenges*, 1(9), 1700036. doi:10.1002/gch2.201700036

Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A survey of household resources and standards of living*. London: Allen Lane & Penguin Books.

Try, L. (2024) *Catastrophic caps. An analysis of the impact of the two-child limit and the benefit cap*. Resolution Foundation.

UDHR - UN General Assembly (1948) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. UN.

UKVNR (2019) - HM Government (2019) *Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. Crown. Available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d28c296ed915d2feeac499e/UK-Voluntary-National-Review-2019.pdf>.

UN (1945) *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*. UN.

UN (1993) *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*. UN.

UN - United Nations (1990) *Human development report 1990*. Published for the United Nations (New York) Development Programme. Oxford New York, N.Y: Oxford Univ. Pr.

UNDESA - High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (2019) *Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report*. Geneva: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).

UNDP (2016) *Human development for everyone*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme.

UNDP (2019) *Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: inequalities in human development in the 21st century*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme.

UNESCO (2016) *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. UNESCO.

UNGA - UN General Assembly (2015) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. UN.

UNGA Res – UN General Assembly (2000) *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. Millennium Declaration, A/RES/55/2*. UN.

UNGA Res - UN General Assembly (2007) *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. Rights of the child. A/RES/61/146*. UN.

UNGA Res - UN General Assembly (2017) *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017. Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. UN.

UNICEF (2005) *The State Of the World's Children 2005*. New York: UNICEF.

UNICEF (ed.) (2006) *General comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: including CD with concluding observations in Europe and Central Asia*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

UNICEF (2019) *Children, food and nutrition: growing well in a changing world*. New York: UNICEF.

Vizard, P., Fukuda-Parr, S. & Elson, D. (2011) Introduction: the capability approach and human rights. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 12(1), 1–22. doi: 10.1080/19452829.2010.541728

Wallace, J. (2019) *Wellbeing and Devolution: Reframing the Role of Government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*. 1st ed. 2019. [Online]. Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Pivot. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-02230-3

Webb, C.J.R., Bennett, D.L. & Bywaters, P. (2022) Austerity, poverty, and children's services quality in England: consequences for child welfare and public services. *Social Policy and Society*, 1–22. doi: 10.1017/S147474642200001X

Wernham, M. & UNICEF (2016) Mapping the Global Goals for Sustainable Development and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF.

Wesnes, K.A., Pincock, C., Richardson, D., Helm, G. & Hails, S. (2003) Breakfast reduces declines in attention and memory over the morning in schoolchildren. *Appetite*, 41(3), 329–331. doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2003.08.009

West, A. (2007) Poverty and educational achievement: why do children from low-income families tend to do less well at school? *Benefits: the Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 13(3), 283–297. doi: 10.51952/XLJA4165

White, H., Leavy, J. & Masters, A. (2002) *Comparative perspectives on child poverty: a review of poverty measures*. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Wickham, S., Anwar, E., Barr, B., Law, C. & Taylor-Robinson, D. (2016) Poverty and child health in the UK: using evidence for action. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 101(8), 759–766. doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2014-306746

Widenhorn-Müller, K., Hille, K., Klenk, J. & Weiland, U. (2008) Influence of having breakfast on cognitive performance and mood in 13- to 20-year-old high school students: results of a crossover trial. *Paediatrics*, 122(2), 279–284. doi: 10.1542/peds.2007-0944

Wiggan, J. (2012) Telling stories of 21st century welfare: The UK Coalition government and the neo-liberal discourse of worklessness and dependency. *Critical Social Policy*, 32(3), 383–405. doi: 10.1177/0261018312444413

Williams, C. & Blaiklock, A. (2016) Human rights discourse in the Sustainable Development Agenda avoids obligations and entitlements comment on 'rights language in the Sustainable Development Agenda: has right to health discourse and norms shaped health goals?' *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 5(6), 387–390. doi: 10.15171/ijhpm.2016.29

Williams, C. & Hunt, P. (2017) Neglecting human rights: accountability, data and Sustainable Development Goal 3. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21(8), 1114–1143. doi: 10.1080/13642987.2017.1348706

Williams, E. (2021) Unemployment, sanctions and mental health: the relationship between benefit sanctions and antidepressant prescribing. *Journal of Social Policy*, 50(1), 1–20. doi: 10.1017/S0047279419000783

Willow, C. (2014) Upholding children's rights in early years settings. In: Sage *Foundations of early childhood: principles and practice*. London: Sage.

Winkler, I.T. & Williams, C. (2017) The Sustainable Development Goals and human rights: a critical early review. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21(8), 1023–1028. doi: 10.1080/13642987.2017.1348695

Wolff, J. & De-Shalit, A. (2007) *Disadvantage*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

WSR (2019) - Welsh Government (2019) *Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals – Supplementary Report to the UK Voluntary National Review 2019*. Available at <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Wales-SDGs-VNR-Supplementary-Report-for-Wales-Version-10.1-Final-w-cover-ENG.pdf>.

YouthLink Scotland (2020) *National Case Study Evaluation Scotland 2020: Youth Work's Contribution to the Scottish Attainment Challenge*. Edinburgh: YouthLink Scotland.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Sustainable Development Goals, UNGA 70/1 (2015)

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Appendix 2 – Lists of Capabilities

2A Nussbaum's Central Human Capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003:12)

1. **Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. **Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter. 12 See further discussion in Nussbaum (forthcoming c).¹³

3. **Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. **Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason

-- and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

5. **Emotions.** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. **Affiliation.** A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.¹⁴

8. Other Species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. **Play.** Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over one's Environment. A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

2B Biggeri's List correlated to CRC (1989) Rights (Biggeri, M. et al., 2011:59)

Children's capabilities	CRC	
Domains	Direct	Indirect
Life and physical health	6, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29	(17), (19), (33), (37), (39)
Love and care	7, 9, 18, 20, 21, 26, 27	(3), (10), (22)
Mental well-being	23, 25, 27, 29, 37	(17), (19), (33), (39)
Bodily integrity and safety	19, 25, 26, 37	(23), (24), (39)
Social relations	15, 27, 29	(12)
Participation	12, 13, 15, 17, 23, 29	(40)
Education	13, 24, 28	(32)
Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation	19, 32, 34, 36	(33), (35)
Shelter and environment	24(c), 27(3), 29(c)	
Leisure activities	31	(40)
Respect	16, 19, 23, 30, 39(2)	(2)
Religion and identity	8, 14, 29, 30, 31	(2), (7), (37)
Time-autonomy		(31), (37)
Mobility		(31), (37)

Appendix 3 – Code sets

The following 3 tables demonstrate the codes generated during the process of coding the UKVNR, SSR and WSR.

The **First Code Set** reflects my ideas for the most important issues based on having read the UKVNR, the SSR, the WSR and the papers in my Literature Review, as well as my experience as a social worker and educator along with my knowledge of children's rights. Applying those 41 codes to the UKVNR, SSR and WSR through Atlas.ti produced a wealth of relevant extracts, but it also showed the need to consolidate ideas (Braun and Clarke, 2022) also suggested that single-word codes should be avoided).

To assist in that consolidation, I produced a new list of 20 combined codes that provided a clearer analysis of the documents. That allowed me to see themes (see Chapter 5, Table 5.6) and how they could be linked to my RQs.

Finally, I decided that one code, 'attainment gap', simply repeated what the 'Effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes' had already found. The **Final Code Set**, therefore, was 19.

NB. In the Final Code Set, each code was sub-coded with the UK and each of the Four Nations (England, Scotland, Wales and NI) so that comparisons of approach could be drawn.

First Code List

FIRST CODE SET
1. attainment gap
2. child limit
3. committed goals
4. dignity rights
5. disadvantaged children
6. effects of poverty on adolescent mental health
7. effects of poverty on child health
8. empowerment agency
9. exclusion education
10. food hunger
11. framing of and response to childhood poverty
12. global challenges
13. Human rights
14. inclusion exclusion
15. indivisible indivisibility SDGs
16. inequalities discrimination
17. legal obligation
18. legislation national international
19. limitation on rights and child agency
20. marginalised and vulnerable groups
21. nutrition budgeting
22. parent employment
23. parent responsibility
24. partnership
25. policies
26. poverty
27. poverty measurement
28. poverty statistics
29. rights access
30. single mothers
31. single parents
32. social justice
33. state responsibility
34. treaty/ treaties
35. UNCRC
36. unemployed parents
37. universal credit
38. universal rights
39. voice participation
40. young children
41. young people

Table 10.1: First Code Set

Penultimate Code List

PENULTIMATE Codes
1. accountability of government to alleviate child poverty
2. attainment gap
3. effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes
4. effects of poverty on child physical and mental health
5. framing of childhood poverty
6. framing of human rights in response to poverty
7. child poverty & parents
8. lack of access to services/resources: a) education, b) health, c) food
9. Leave No One Behind
10. national legislation and child poverty
11. partnership and accountability across groups
12. policy responses to child poverty
13. poverty - marginalised and vulnerable groups
14. poverty statistics
15. rights, participation and child agency
16. rights, social justice and poverty
17. SDG framework to alleviate child poverty
18. Stigma and poverty
19. UN international treaties
20. UNCRC and poverty

Table 10.2: Penultimate Code List

Final Code List

FINAL CODES
1. Accountability of government to alleviate child poverty
2. Child poverty & parents
3. Effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes
4. Effects of poverty on child physical and mental health
5. Framing of childhood poverty
6. Framing of human rights in response to poverty
7. Lack of access to services: education, health, food
8. Leave No One Behind
9. National legislation and child poverty
10. Partnership across groups
11. Policy responses to child poverty
12. Poverty - marginalised and vulnerable groups
13. Poverty statistics
14. Rights, participation and child agency
15. Rights, social justice and poverty
16. SDG framework to alleviate child poverty
17. Stigma and poverty
18. UN international treaties
19. UNCRC and poverty

Table 10.3: Final Code List