



**A Cross-Border Exploration of the Professional Development Needs of Heads of Year in a sample of Comprehensive Schools (Republic of Ireland) and Integrated Schools (Northern Ireland).**



**Authors:** Patricia Mannix McNamara, Eva Devaney, Tom Geary (University of Limerick) and Caryl Sibbett and Willie Thompson (Queen's University Belfast).

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## Research Background

Pastoral work in schools is about meeting students' needs. However, in the context of an increasingly changing society, students' needs are also rapidly changing. The expectation that schools should assume more responsibility for mental health promotion coupled with an increase in poor mental health and distress among young people have placed increased pressures on parents and schools (Shucksmith *et al.* 2005). In schools it is often the pastoral care team, and in particular the year heads who have to deal with situations that they often feel unprepared for (Wilson *et al.* 2004, Rothi *et al.* 2008). It is therefore important to seek the views of year heads specific to their needs for support and professional development to enable them to perform their pastoral care duties more confidently and effectively. There is little published research specific to Northern Ireland (NI) or the Republic of Ireland (ROI) in this area, so this study fills a gap in the literature in addition to informing policy development, and the provision of supports and professional development for year heads on the island of Ireland.

This project is a cross-border initiative between researchers from the University of Limerick and Queen's University, Belfast, and has received funding from SCoTENS (Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South). Researchers at both institutions have a shared interest in the welfare of students, in particular their social personal and health education entitlements at second level education, and in the professional development of teachers. The project has the potential to create a network of teachers and others, north and south who have key roles in the provision of support for students such as pastoral care systems. This network could develop appropriate web based support, organize and deliver cross boarder conferences and motivate exchange programmes for teachers of pastoral care. There is currently a dearth of research in the Ireland in the provision and entitlement of pastoral care within second level schools. This project has potential to act as a catalyst to focus educators on the range of social and personal issues, which effect students' lives.

## Research Aim

To explore the perceptions and needs of year heads relevant to their professional development.

## Research Objectives

- To explore year heads' perception of their role
- To explore year heads' views on challenges and supports specific to performing their pastoral care roles
- To explore year heads' perceived needs for professional development

This study has been conducted both in the North and South of Ireland. A brief synopsis of the educational systems in NI and ROI is provided in Box 1.

### **Northern Ireland**

Overall responsibility for education lies with the Department of Education. A number of agencies administer education, including five Education and Library Boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

Education is compulsory between ages 4 and 16. At age 11, a selection process (The Transfer Procedure) takes place for secondary schools, and which determines if students attend grammar or secondary school. The secondary level curriculum is five years, ending with General Certificate Examinations (GCSE). Some students then continue their schooling with a two year programme, leading to Advanced level (A level) examinations.

### **Republic of Ireland**

Overall responsibility for policy and administration of education lies with the Department of Education and Science.

Education is compulsory between ages 6 and 16, but many 4 year olds and most 5 year olds attend school. First level (primary) education lasts six years. Second level education is divided into a three-year Junior Cycle with Junior Certificate Examinations. Some schools offer an optional or compulsory transition year, followed by a two-year Senior Cycle leading to Leaving Certificate Examinations.

Box 1: Brief overview of educational systems in NI and ROI (Department of Education, 2008, Department of Education and Science, 2008, Institute of Public Health in Ireland, 2008).

## Report Outline

Chapter two of this report reviews the literature in the field. Chapter three describes the research design that was employed to address the aims and objectives of the research. A qualitative approach was chosen, and data was collected using four focus groups with a total of twelve participants from ROI and twelve from NI. Two focus groups were conducted in NI and two in ROI. The data were analysed and presented in chapter four of the report. Chapter five discussed the significance of the findings and this section concludes with recommendations.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature**

The entitlement of children [is] to be valued supported and developed.

(Best *et al.* 1995: vii)

## **Introduction**

This review of literature will provide context for the research project by briefly tracing the chronology of pastoral care in the UK and Ireland. It will highlight some tensions that pastoral care has experienced during its development. The review will also define the concept of pastoral care and introduce its underpinning principles. It will provide a conceptual framework for pastoral care and briefly examine best practice models from international perspectives. The chapter will then focus on the specific topic for the present study. The traditional and emerging role and specific needs of the year head/head of year teacher will be reviewed. The chapter will conclude by discussing issues of professional development for pastoral care staff.

## **Pastoral Care-Then and Now (a brief chronology)**

### **Pastoral Care-UK**

The concept of pastoral care is often referred to when discussing the holistic educational needs of the child in the education system. The word itself has Latin roots (*pascere*, meaning ‘to feed’) and Christian Church symbolic connotations, such as the Good Shepherd caring for his flock. Best (1995) maintains that it is a particularly British term, which had its origins in the Christian Church schools in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but was later applied to secular State schools. In Britain it was particularly popular in state comprehensive schools from the mid-sixties and onwards.

Internationally, the British model of pastoral care has influenced practice in countries with traditional connections to the UK for example Australia and New Zealand even Singapore (Lang 1995).

Even though the concept has existed for quite some time in education, published literature and research in pastoral care only began to appear in the 1970s in the UK.

Early writings informed practice, but also provided critique: that pastoral care lacked clarity in its scope, the conflict between care and control, and the focus on structure over practice (Best *et al.* 1995). In the 1980s there was significant progress in the area of pastoral care, because of the move towards developmental and curricular approaches. It was thought that the practice of pastoral care was not only based on individual intuitional needs but also needed skills development and its own pedagogy (*ibid.*). The decade saw the formation of the National Association for Pastoral Care. At least in theory, pastoral care moved from being a 'bolted-on extra' to becoming professionalised and integrated in the curriculum using a whole-school approach.

In the UK, the Educational Reform Act (1988) placed a strong focus on National Curriculum and assessment, while it also included clauses that promoted pastoral care. Best *et al.* (1995) argued that the reforms dramatically challenged the pastoral care system. As education became more fragmented and subject focussed, in some cases, the pastoral care systems in schools suffered and became devalued. Ironically, at the same time, interest in pastoral care also grew and its practice became more consolidated in schools (Best *et al.* 1995). So while it may have lost focus in policy teachers continued to respond from pastoral care perspectives.

More recent developments such as the international Health Promoting Schools initiative (WHO 1999) and the Healthy Schools Standards in England (DfEE 1999), renewed an interest in how the school environment, curriculum and pastoral care could influence children's social, emotional and behavioural well being (Hearns *et al.* 2006). Within these developments pastoral care is viewed as a component of a whole-school approach to meet students' personal, social and academic needs.

Educational reforms have continued in the UK. School accountability is now at the forefront (evidenced in published school inspection reports and league tables) and new initiatives such as extended schools<sup>1</sup> have continued to drive change in schools. The perceived academic/pastoral dichotomy has continued to be a cause of much concern. Pastoral head teachers have confirmed feelings of "anger and frustration"

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<sup>1</sup> A Government led initiative as a way of delivering *Every Child Matters* outcomes. It involves partnerships between schools, local authorities, and local services and parents/guardians in delivering core services and activities to meet needs of children, families and the wider community (DfES 2005).

over on-going educational reforms (Nelson and While 2002:24). Conversely Roberts (2006) argues that recent reforms have consolidated pastoral care systems in schools where it has been accepted and valued. However, in many schools pastoral care may be under threat. Watkins (2004:3) reported on trends in UK schools, which he suggests “could lead pastoral care in UK schools to be de-emphasised, marginalized, or distorted.” These trends include:

- An emphasis on pupil performance in one-off tests
- Learners who do not perform well in tests thinking less well of themselves
- Pupils from disadvantaged groups becoming more disadvantaged in tests
- More teacher centred class rooms
- A narrowing of the curriculum
- A mechanistic view of teaching and of schools as organizations

Factors related to the school environment itself and to staff and teaching problems impact negatively on pastoral care work. These include overcrowded schools, large classes, poor buildings and maintenance, lack of privacy and intimidating security systems (environmental factors); and the national curriculum, lack of time, child protection constraints, shortage of teachers, reluctance of teachers (teachers' attitudes towards pastoral care), lack of specialist pastoral training and lack of parental support, staff and teaching problems (Nelson and While 2002).

### **Pastoral Care-Ireland**

The Irish educational system also underwent reform in the 1990s. Following debate, evaluation and appraisal, the Government issued a White Paper, *Charting Our Educational Future* in 1995, which recognised the value and need for pastoral care in schools. Collins argues that although pastoral care was not formalised in Ireland until 1994, it had long been part of the ‘good school experience’ and has undergone its own growth and development during the two previous decades. This was linked with the formation of large comprehensive and community schools and the changing needs of the students attending these (Collins 1999). The first book on pastoral care in an Irish context was published in 1980, authored by Collins. Since then, there have been little publications in Ireland on the subject. During the 1990s, developments such as the

SPHE National Curriculum, in-service training, and provision of post-graduate study in pastoral care along with the formation of the Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education have helped to consolidate pastoral care in schools.

In Ireland, there has also been a continued emphasis on accountability, high academic performance and measurable outcomes (including league tables) in the recent past. This has increased the pressure on teachers and on students to produce high academic results with already over crowded timetables. The result is unfortunately a decrease in student access to health promoting curricula such as SPHE and pastoral care initiatives.

Watkins (2004:5) strongly argues that the contribution of pastoral care in school, promoting 'relationships for learning' needs to be reclaimed, stating:

...if our schools of the twenty-first century are really to support the development of life-long learners, rather than a life-long addiction to teachers, then the focus on learning and the importance of relationships needs to be emphasized.

## Defining Pastoral Care

The Department of Education and Science (ROI) provide a comprehensive definition of pastoral care. It appears to have stood the test of time.

Pastoral care is concerned with promoting pupils' personal and social development and fostering positive attitudes; through the quality of teaching and learning; through the nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers and adults other than teachers; through arrangements for monitoring pupils' overall progress, academic, personal and social; through specific pastoral structures and support systems; and through extra-curricular activities and the school ethos. Pastoral care, accordingly should help a school to achieve success. In such a context it offers support for the learning, behaviour and welfare of all pupils, and addresses the particular difficulties some individual pupils may be experiencing. It seems to help ensure that all pupils, and particularly girls and members of ethnic minorities, are enabled to benefit from the full range of educational opportunities which a school has available (DES 1989:3).

This definition demonstrates the complexity and scope of pastoral care. Significantly, the definition implies that pastoral care is not only an institutionalised structure, but a whole school approach to holistic education. Best (1995) summarises pastoral care as the *quality of relationships* that reflects the values and attitudes in the school.

The composition of the pastoral care team varies between schools and their local contexts. There are many potential members for pastoral care teams and in practice they often comprise of year heads, class tutors, guidance counsellors, PSHE/SPHE/PSE coordinators, chaplains, deputy principal, resource teachers, home-school liaisons, chaplains and school nurses. While some schools adopt vertical (house) systems, others have implemented horizontal (year) systems.

Best *et al.*(1995, pp. 288-296) have outlined a number of principles that ought to underpin the philosophy of pastoral care.

### Pastoral Care Principles

- Education must begin from a commitment to meeting the developmental needs of the individual
- Education properly conceived must be oriented towards the development of the whole person in a balanced and measured way
- The identification of the educational needs of the individual requires the willing participation of the learner in the needs-identification process
- Respect for persons
- Equality of opportunity
- Learning experiences which promote personal-social and moral development are an entitlement, and any reduction of pastoral care to reactive casework is an unacceptable dilution of the mission of the school
- The professional judgement of the teacher
- It is not only the pupils who need pastoral care: teachers are human too!
- Pastoral care and personal-social education are whole-school responsibilities and require whole-school policies and schools should be properly organized and appropriately resourced to this end

Best (1995:6) summarises pastoral care as influenced by and engaging with several facets of school education. The bureaucratic structure of status positions and role definitions heavily influence the role and function of pastoral care teachers. Such structures also influence the way in which those functions are carried out. Pastoral care is bound up in the quality of relationships between members of the school, the

attitudes those members adopt towards one another, and the values to which these give expression. Perhaps of greatest influence is the ethos or climate of the school as a whole and whether it is conducive to the practice of pastoral care.

Hearns *et al.* (2006:19) who reviewed the international literature in the field concluded that there are four central pillars of pastoral care:

- The promotion of health and well-being
- Building resilience (discussed within the context of self-knowledge, healthy risk taking and empowerment). This has emphasised reducing risk factors<sup>2</sup> and enhancing protective factors<sup>3</sup>, acknowledging that risk taking is a normal part of adolescent development.
- Enhancing academic care (the effect that learning experiences and relationships can have on pupils' well-being, resilience and success).
- Social capital, which is defined as: “the creation of opportunities for establishing strong community networks and supportive environment including good school, family and peer group relations, is empowering and plays a role in improving health, well being and resiliency of children.”

Pastoral care systems are important for vulnerable pupils, particularly as pastoral care can contribute by identifying and supporting pupils who experience adverse circumstances. Teachers can play an instrumental role in retaining adolescents at school, by fostering caring and concerned relationships that help connect students with school (Barrowman *et al.* 2001:80).

Sometimes, pastoral care is equated with the concept of guidance; however, this may not be in the best interest of pastoral care (Best 1995:9). While there is “common commitment to the welfare or well-being of the individual child” between both, guidance, is a narrower concept<sup>4</sup>, compared to the broader scope of pastoral care. Best (*ibid*) views counselling as a set of practices used in guidance, using a client-centred

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. violence, bullying, alienation, isolation, disengagement, low academic achievement

<sup>3</sup> E.g. sense of security, opportunities and skills for communication, involvement in school and community activities, close, confiding relationship with at least one adult

<sup>4</sup> Best refers to guidance as encompassing three main activities: giving information, assessing needs/diagnosing problems and provision of advice (1995: 9).

approach such as those based on Rogers or Egan. Counselling aims at enabling individuals to learn more about themselves – while it does not aim to advise, counselling often provides relevant information that supports decision making processes (McLaughlin 1995).

Many countries do not use the term pastoral care; therefore the term affective education might be more appropriate for international comparison of pastoral care provision. Affective education has been defined by Lang (1998:5) as:

...that part of the educational process that concerns itself with attitudes, feelings, beliefs and emotions of students. This involves a concern for the personal and social development of pupils and their self-esteem... concerns the effectiveness of their relationships with others...the provision of support and guidance...that the affective and cognitive dimensions of education are interrelated.

### A Conceptual Framework of Pastoral Care

Regardless of the label that is placed on the activity, Best (1995) maintains that the identification of welfare and developmental needs of the child is at heart of pastoral care. It is about meeting three objectives that are separate but linked namely reactive, proactive and developmental care. Initially, these were categorised into four pastoral tasks<sup>5</sup>. The framework has since developed, and now includes five categories (Best 2002).

**Reactive Pastoral Casework** includes the one-to-one activities that teachers do 'in place of the parent/guardian'. This includes meeting children's needs for security, belonging, guidance and moral/emotional support. It also includes the need for forgiveness, warmth, patience and understanding. In reality, casework involves responding to problems that are of a personal, social, emotional or behavioural nature. The type of problems can range widely, but often include school work, disabilities, relationships, behaviour, physical and sexual abuse, anxiety, substance use, pregnancy, smoking, truancy, bullying, bereavement, transition and suicide (Best 1999: 22-23). Teachers need specific skills to work effectively in this category: they need "to be accepting and approachable and to have skills in active listening, negotiation, guidance and counselling" and to know to refer when appropriate (ibid).

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<sup>5</sup> In reality the pastoral tasks often overlap.

**Proactive, Preventative Pastoral care** aims to pre-empt the need for reactive casework. This type of care helps to develop children's practical knowledge and coping skills in anticipation of predictable 'critical incidents' in the school career. Topics could include assertiveness training, substance use education and discussing death and loss (Lang 1998). Proactive pastoral care could also include activities such as presentations, tutorial programmes or assemblies (Best 2002).

**Developmental pastoral curricula** refer to "intentional provision of learning experiences which relate to the child's welfare and contribute to her or his personal and social development" (Best 1995:11). The needs addressed here include "opportunities to acquire facts, practise skills and develop attitudes...*examine beliefs* and *explore feelings*." This includes subjects such as PSE/PSHE/SPHE, but also incorporates the tutorial programmes and pastoral care content in other subjects.

**Promotion and maintenance of an orderly and supportive environment (2002)**

This was originally called control/community by Best (1995). The tasks include addressing the needs of children as citizens in the community of the school (1995:14). In adopting a needs-based approach, Best takes a positive stance towards issues of control, behaviour and conformity, traditionally viewed as negative concerns.<sup>6</sup> A deep understanding of pastoral care principles means that discipline and care do not need to be at separate end of a spectrum (Monahan 1996). The focus needs to be on the needs and rights of all school community members, not just those who misbehave.

The right to live one's life in a peaceful environment; a set of sensible rules and a system of sanctions to ensure that the one's freedom is not infringed by the excessive behaviour of others; opportunities to participate in corporate activities (including decision-making) and to develop a positive self-image; and opportunities to feel that one belongs and thus to share in mutual concern for the well-being of one's fellow citizens (Best 1995:14).

**Management and administration** is the fifth pastoral task. This refers to the infrastructure that facilitates the implementation of pastoral tasks, and in so doing meets the needs of the child. Management and administration is central to supporting pastoral care teachers. Pastoral care in schools needs to be supported by school policy

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<sup>6</sup> Often discussed in the context of discipline, unacceptable behaviour and disorder in schools.

and ethos in order to have a framework of shared norms, procedures and sanctions as Best (ibid) advocates. It is important for leadership, coordination, motivation and inspiration. It is necessary for availability of resources and facilities (e.g. time and rooms). In order to support the sustainability of pastoral care in schools teachers need clear job descriptions, sensitive appraisals/feedback and staff development opportunities. They need to be facilitated to have time for meetings that are regular, purposeful, carefully planned and competently managed and to have opportunities to participate in corporate activities and to feel valued as members of the team.

Being a pastoral care teacher makes strong emotional demands on a teacher and as such counselling, guidance and moral support in the face of the demands and stresses of their pastoral work is necessary (ibid). There is a case for the implementation for professional supervision in this area. Generally, however given the hierarchical nature of subject specialism in schools it is important that pastoral care teachers are appreciated and are supported to develop positive self-image as pastoral care practitioners. It is also interesting to note that many of these needs are similar to the pupils' needs previously outlined.

### **Pastoral Goals for Schools**

The National Association for Pastoral Care in Education (NAPCE) have defined specific pastoral goals for the school (NACPE, 1986). These goals were identified as follows:

#### **Pastoral Care Goals (NACPE 1986)**

- To provide a point of personal contact with every pupil (usually the role of the tutor)
- To provide a point of personal contact with parents (most likely the role of the tutor)
- To monitor pupil progress across the curriculum
- To provide support and guidance for pupil achievement
- To encourage a caring and orderly environment (should be the responsibility of all staff and pupils, while in some instances it has become the main function

of pastoral staff)

- To promote a school which meets pupils' need
- To provide colleagues with information to adapt teaching
- To engage wider networks as appropriate

In 2005, the pastoral goals were modified to reflect changes in schools and society at large (Lodge 2006:8). There were re-defined as follows:

#### **Pastoral Care –Goals Revised**

- Creating a point of personal contact with every student
- Creating a point of personal contact with parents/carers
- Monitoring students' progress across the curriculum
- Promoting a school which identifies and meets young people's needs through providing information about students' learning between teachers, other professionals and young people
- Providing support and guidance for young people related to their learning
- Encouraging a caring and orderly environment
- Engaging wider networks as appropriate

For pastoral goals to be achieved, a whole-school approach must be adopted (Lodge 1995). This whole school approach needs to include a pastoral policy, structures for effective coordination and communication, team working and teacher training. Lodge describes different structural models of pastoral care, and while not promoting one over another, suggests that team working is essential for effective practice. Lodge also maintains that teams require effective leadership, clear goals, tasks, responsibilities and resources.

## Best Practice (some international perspectives)

Best practice guidelines for pastoral care have been developed. These have built on early research in pastoral care with the added influence of developments such as the health promoting schools concept. Hearn *et al.* (2006: 72) having reviewed models of best practice in pastoral care from an international perspective, concluded the need for these features to ensure best practice in pastoral care:

- A clearly articulated pastoral care policy
- A healthy culture that promotes student connectedness
- A relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum which is linked with the broader community and global context
- Effective and productive pedagogies
- Well established internal and external support structures and networks
- An alternative flexible learning environment

In England, the Local Healthy Schools programme, an accredited partnership programme between education and health, has national quality standards with related components and an assessment process (DfEE 1999).

Scotland has demonstrated a national commitment to pastoral care, and has published standards for support to meet children's and parents' personal, social and learning needs in schools (Scottish Executive 2005). The standards are grouped under three headings: learning for life, review of individual progress and access to support. One of the fundamental principles is that 'teachers make a difference' and a 'vision for caring school communities' that includes children/young people, parents and carers, school partnerships and community partnerships.

In Western Australia, a whole-school approach is advocated, as well as targeted approaches for group with specific needs in the school, and individuals with needs. This model incorporates Best's research on the five pastoral task areas outlined earlier, and includes components of promotion and universal provision, selective prevention, indicated prevention and casework (Hearn *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, pastoral care is

included in three levels of activities: curriculum, teaching and learning; school organization, ethos and environment; and partnerships and services. Hearn et al. (2006:73-75) subsequently propose a set of standards for pastoral care in education, with key focus areas which include whole school promotion, universal and primary prevention; targeted groups and individuals with a focus on early intervention, intervention; and post-intervention. Central to these key focus themes are clear and specific aims, outcomes and indicators for each area.

### **The Role of the Year Head**

The year head/head of year is a key pastoral position in a school, and part of the school management team. Traditionally, year heads were responsible for coordination of the work of class tutors for an age-related cohort of students – a year group. Traditionally, year heads “oversee the welfare of the year group [and] ... will be at an intermediary level between Form Teachers [Class Tutors] and principal/vice principal” (Monahan 1996: 34). However, there have been changes to the role in the context of educational reform, societal and school changes. In the UK, the curriculum is now divided into key stages and planning has to take place both at key stage and year levels; consequently, in some schools, the head of year has taken a key position in curriculum planning and coordination (Best 1999).

With educational reforms (and a stronger focus on academic performance and pupil attainment), the role of the year head has broadened in the past decade to include monitoring pupil's performance across subjects and applying various interventions for pupils who are not progressing, which in reality often means "trying to change the children to fit the school" (Lodge 2006: 6). In some schools, this role has expanded to include support for learning, a more positive, student-centred response as Lodge points out: "a resource to support the students developing their own understanding of how they learn and how to become better learners" (ibid). As a result, in some schools

the job title of the Year Head has changed along with the new focus on student progress and learning (Roberts 2006).

Lodge discusses other developments, which may impact on the future role of the year head. The call by some for a change in focus from the traditional grouping of pupils by age to change towards a more individualised approach to learning (based on students' needs) will impact on traditional structures in schools. Changes to the work force in schools, most significantly, more non-teachers included in the staff, will also impact on future school structures. Lodge (2006) suggests the possibility that in the future, in some schools, some or all aspects of the year head's role will be undertaken by persons who do not have teaching experience. Roberts (2006:63) concurs, stating:

...they deal with many issues that may have previously been perceived as the work of the tutor or the pastoral manager, but when used effectively, they can only strengthen the support offered to youngsters in schools.

School activities are becoming more visible (as a result of demands for accountability) and are increasingly linked with the wider community. Schools are forming new partnerships with outside agencies that deal with young people. While partnership work has obvious benefits, there are also challenges to prevailing values, beliefs, practices and priorities of the different partners. Relevant agencies (including the school) will need more transparent processes to communicate more effectively and share information. Year heads have traditionally served as a link between the school and the home and are likely to become key stakeholders in these partnerships.

Despite the changes, Lodge (2006:5) maintains that two aspects of the year head's role have persisted. The first is to provide the link between home and school. The second aspect is the "system for administration" of welfare provision and "behaviour management." In the paper, Lodge describes the frustration that head of years experienced in having to spend so much time on 'behaviour':

Heads of Year were being called upon to respond to the disaffection shown by the young people to their experiences of school, which means putting pressure on the children to better fit in with the demands of the schools.

A sample job description (Appendix G) reflects the current responsibilities and variety of areas of duty for head of years, including staff management, student progress, student behaviour, student guidance and support (TeacherNet 2008).

## The Needs of the Year Head

Because the year head holds such a key position on the pastoral care team, their views on their needs for effective practice are significant. Listening to their voices can help to inform development of pre-service and in-service training and informal and formal support structures to enable year heads to perform their duties more confidently and effectively. There is a scarcity of research specific to the needs of year heads. Nelson and While's (2002: 27) study involving head teachers provide good insights into the needs and concerns of participants in the study. They articulated their needs as:

- Compulsory in-service training
- More time for pastoral issues
- Counselling service for teacher and pupils
- More non-teaching time
- More responsive professional support
- Time to share with other teachers
- Closer links with Social Services
- Better home-school links

Head teachers or principals also have particular concerns which they articulate as:

- Teacher stress
- Staff shortage
- Overcrowded classes
- No specialist emergency support
- Poor inter-professional collaboration
- No school nurse
- No parental support
- Lack of respect for teachers
- Run-down school buildings

It is hoped that the present study will address the gap in literature that exists specific to the needs of year heads and support the development of professional development for pastoral care generally.

### **Professional Development in Pastoral Care**

Proper care for students depends on proper care of the staff – by management and by each other (Griffiths 1995: 85).

It has been argued that training in pastoral care has been ad hoc at best, as it is competing with so many other priorities in the school, and with so many other subject areas at pre-service and in-service levels (Best *et al.* 1995). Lang (1995) argues that teachers need specific skills to conduct their pastoral roles and that these need development similar to subject specific professional development. Staff development for pastoral care needs to address two key processes: firstly organizational development which considers both the needs of the individual/team and the whole organization. Secondly dialogue, using a counselling approach is also central to the process (O'Sullivan 1995). The number of teachers who engage in professional development in the field of communication practices and counselling is limited. Priority in professional development is generally given to subject specific training over pastoral skills courses. Existing course provision outside of specific guidance and counselling education is limited in availability.

Changes in educational policy mean that mainstream schools are now increasingly expected to include more children and adolescents with special educational needs. They are also expected to play a significant role in mental health promotion of children and adolescents. It is likely that teachers with pastoral care roles will play important roles in these developments. Rothi *et al.* (2008:1221) argue that while teachers "accepted that they have a degree of responsibility to care for the mental well-being of their pupils," they do not feel adequately prepared for these roles. Thus there is pressing need for training in mental health related skills. Teachers need new skills to manage the changes in the pupil population; particularly, in the areas of "...expert advice on recognition and sources of support... information on appropriate

referral agencies and...practical training on how to manage children with mental health problems in the class room” (Rothi *et al.* 2008: 1223).

Teachers felt disempowered by the current educational climate, often highlighting the link between feeling ineffective and untrained on the one hand and, and the high demands placed upon them by inclusion... reduced school exclusions, raising school standards, time constraints and ...the decline in their pastoral role.

(Rothi *et al.* 2008:1228).

Pastoral care staff needs support beyond the informal support network that might exist in the staff room (Griffiths 1995). This can include formal structures for support and supervision, similar to what exists in other professional areas (e.g. social work and counselling). Its function is to “monitor, enhance and make more effective the work of the individual” (Griffiths 1995: 84). Griffiths suggest that “each teacher concerned with tutoring and guidance has an entitlement to regular management supervision sessions which have a similar framework to the guidance sessions with the students” (ibid). Formal support structures are not commonplace in schools.

A review of UK research in pastoral care found a paucity of studies that investigated training and support for pastoral roles (Best 2002). Some focussed on teachers' stress, including teachers' perceptions of stress (for themselves and the pupils) and coping strategies. In the study by Nelson and While (2002), only 11 % of schools in the sample had a formal system in place to support teachers who experienced stress. Others have evaluated in-service training, such as intensive experiential learning courses. There are also research articles that have addressed the lack of training for pastoral roles at pre-service level and induction/mentoring at the start of teachers' careers. Because of the scarcity of research about support needed for pastoral care teachers, and in particular the support needed for the year head role, the present study will address a significant gap in the literature.

## Conclusion

The review of literature has demonstrated that the concept of pastoral care in education is not new in the UK or in Ireland. However, it was only formalised relatively recently, for example in the UK in the seventies and in Ireland in the mid-nineties. It is a concept that has undergone constant change and challenges in the previous decades because of the changing contexts within which it operates, by educational reforms and societal changes at large. However, the fundamental understanding of pastoral care has not changed. Pastoral care is about meeting children's personal, social and learning needs; it is about the promotion of well-being; it is about building quality relationships in schools that enhance learning; and it is about a caring school ethos and culture.

Pastoral care in education is also about care of the staff in schools and about meeting their needs relevant to their pastoral care roles. The year head plays a key role in the pastoral care team. The review has highlighted some traditional and emerging roles for the year head. As the role is developing, the year head is likely to express changing needs to enable them to perform their role confidently and effectively. Some needs have been highlighted in the chapter. Clearly however, there is a scarcity of published literature in this area.

Perceived needs are linked with need for support systems and professional development for year heads and other pastoral care team members. The chapter has explored issues in pastoral care professional development and found that this area may not have been prioritised by schools. Formal support systems and professional supervision are also not commonplace in schools. New challenges for pastoral care workers are likely to include mental health promotion and inclusion of more children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Research has demonstrated that teachers do not feel fully prepared for this role. Support and professional development for year heads and other pastoral care team members is key to future best practice in this area, which will benefit all children in schools, staff in schools, families, communities and wider society at large.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

## Introduction

This chapter will describe and provide rationale for the research design that was chosen for the present study. It will discuss the research approach (naturalism), the data collection tool (focus group interview), development of the topic guide, sampling, data collection, and analysis of the qualitative data, issues of validity and reliability and finally ethical considerations.

## Research Approach

To address the aims of the project, a naturalistic research paradigm was chosen. The naturalistic approach is particularly suited to answer research questions relevant to complex and messy social settings, such as schools, and where participants' meanings and understandings of their own world are sought after (Cohen *et al.* 2007). It is also suited to exploratory research questions, where one attempts to add new knowledge to a body of research. While smaller numbers of participants are involved, compared to positivist (scientific) research, this approach yields in-depth, detailed and rich data not only in the forms of words but also in the non-verbal interactions.

### Research method

The chosen method for data collection was focus groups. Focus groups allowed for the gathering of subjective views of a common experience in the form of the participants' own voices. The potential for group interaction can allow for several perspectives of an issue to be expressed, possibly yielding richer data compared to individual interviews. The aim is to gather a collective view; however, not necessarily one of consensus. Focus groups also gather non-verbal data from interactions among the participants in the group. Focus groups are also efficient, producing a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time (Cohen *et al.* 2007). The synergy created by participants generates rich data providing multiple perspectives. The strengths of the method are also its weaknesses. Because the number of participants is small (compared to a methodology such as a survey) and those participants were specifically recruited because of their expertise in the field, findings cannot be

generalised to the general population. Group dynamics can create imbalance in participation, where some participants may dominate the interview, and others not participate at all. If this happens, reliability may suffer (Cohen *et al.* 2007). In this case group participation was relatively egalitarian thus no such concern arose.

The key to successful focus group interviews is a skilful facilitator. The facilitator's task is to ensure that everyone in the group is given a voice; and to keep the conversation on track, while not being too directive. The facilitator is also a potential source of weakness of the method, as personal biases can affect the validity of the data. The facilitator must be self-aware and constantly check his/her style of questioning (so they are not leading) and non-verbal directions. Open-ended questions should be used to reduce the possibility of bias in the data collection process. The facilitator must be aware of what is being said (and not said) in the group as this can affect the quality of data being generated. How the facilitator is perceived by the participants may affect the quality of the discussion in the group.

### **Topic Guide**

A broad schedule of questions was developed to ensure a degree of consistency between the groups. The topic guide was informed by aims and objectives of the project, review of literature and agreed in meetings between the researchers. A concept map was developed to inform the topic guide (Appendix F). While there were some minor differences in the questions between the focus group in the ROI and NI, the key areas of year heads' perceived challenges and perceived needs in terms of professional development and supports were addressed in all groups.

## **Sampling**

Four focus group interviews were conducted, two from the ROI and two from NI.

***School A:** Mixed gender Comprehensive school, located in an urban location in ROI. The school has an enrolment of 900 students. The Year Heads in this school are responsible for a particular year, for one year only. In other words, they meet a new*

cohort each September. There were eight participants in the focus group conducted in this school, three males and five females.

**School B:** Mixed gender Comprehensive school, located in a town in rural ROI. The school has an enrolment of 600 students. The Year Heads in this school follow their cohort from First Year to Sixth Year. There were five participants in this focus group, one male and four females.

**School C:** Mixed gender Comprehensive school, drawing pupils mostly from urban contexts in NI. The school has an enrolment of approximately 1200 students. The Year Heads in this school either follow a cohort from First Year to Fifth Year or from Sixth to Seventh Year. There were 6 participants in the focus group conducted in this school, 3 males and 3 females.

**School D:** Mixed gender Comprehensive school, located in an urban location in NI. The school has an enrolment of approximately 800 students. The Year Heads in this school either take First Year, or follow a cohort from Second Year to Fifth Year or from Sixth to Seventh Year. There were 6 participants in the focus group conducted in this school, 3 males and 3 females.

Criterion sampling was used to recruit participants. This is where all those who meet some stated criteria for membership of the group or sub class under study (Cohen *et al.* 2007: 176). All participants were year heads and a total twenty five participants took part in the study.

## Protocol

The focus groups took place in the different schools at a pre-arranged time convenient to the participants. The focus groups were facilitated by experienced moderators who were also the main researchers in the study. The facilitator(s) explained the purpose of the research and explained that the data would be treated with confidentiality. This

included removing any identifying details from the data. Permission to audiotape was sought from all participants prior to the start of the focus group interview. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour. The focus groups took place in April and May 2008.

## Data Analysis

The tape recordings were transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This approach is particularly useful when there are no predefined themes determined by the researchers. It aims to systematically generate themes as they emerge from the data, to include similar and different views and also to take account of focus group dynamics (Kitzinger 1995).

The research assistant read through the transcripts several times to gain familiarity with the data. A systematic process of data analysis was undertaken. Relevant data were identified, coded and categorised into themes as they emerged in the transcripts. The context of the data was carefully recorded. A constant comparison method was used; this is where new data are compared with existing data and categories, allowing for a good fit between them, because new categories can be created to fit the data (Cohen *et al.* 2007).

Concept generation followed, and patterns and inconsistencies in the data were noted. The research assistant used a process of interpretive analysis to move from description to provide meaning to and understanding of the data. In Chapter Four, the themes are discussed in narrative form, interspersed with quotations from the transcripts, illustrating the themes and allowing the participants' own voices to be heard.

## Validity

When discussing validity in qualitative data, it means the degree of truthfulness of the findings. It can be addressed through the "...honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the

disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher" (Cohen et al. 2007: 133). Internal validity in qualitative research is about "confidence... authenticity... cogency... credibility... auditability... dependability... confirmability of the data... [and] the soundness of the research design" (LeCompte and Prissle 1993 in Cohen *et al.* 2007: 136). In the present study, validity was addressed by inclusion of multiple researchers, data collection from different groups and locations (triangulation), careful construction of the topic guide, skilful moderation of the focus groups to minimize possible sources of bias in the data collection process, the recording and transcription methods, systematic and consistent analysis of the data using constant comparison, and a balanced presentation of the findings.

External validity, or "the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population, cases, or situations" (Cohen *et al.* 2007: 136) is often referred to as comparability and generalisability in qualitative research approaches. Because of the inherent limitations associated with the methods of sampling and data collection, findings cannot be generalised to the wider population of all schools and Year Heads in the ROI and NI. However, they can be compared and translated into the context of similar participants and settings. This is enhanced by careful description of participants (without identification) and the natural setting of the research. The multi-site approach used in the present study also enhances comparability of the findings.

## Reliability

In qualitative research approaches, the aptness of the term reliability is contested, but researchers can instead strive for replication (Cohen *et al.* 2007). In the present study, this has been considered. Involvement of multiple researchers, development of a topic guide for the focus groups, using the same facilitators for the focus groups and transparent reporting of the data collection and analysis processes all served to enhance replicability.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study had received ethical approval from the UL Ethical Committee. Ethical considerations in the present study included those of informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. The topic areas discussed were not considered to be of a sensitive or personal nature. Before taking part in the focus groups, participants were informed of the purposes of the research, potential risks (considered to be minimal to none) and benefits of the research, the process of the focus group, the process of handling and analysing the data and data storage procedures (see appendices A-E for information sheets and consent forms). They had access to the contact details of the researchers. Participants gave their permission for audio taping. Participation in the focus groups was completely voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Confidential and secure treatment of tapes and transcripts was ensured. Names or identifying details of the participants were not revealed on the transcripts or in the report.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the research design of the present study. A naturalist paradigm was chosen because of the exploratory nature of the research questions and the opportunity to generate depth of data that is rich and reflects the experience and understandings from the participants' point of view. Four focus group interviews, two in the ROI and two in NI were used to collect data. A total of twenty five participants, all year heads in Comprehensive schools, formed the sample. The main researchers moderated the focus groups, which set out to seek the views of participants on the perceived needs of year heads in terms of professional development and supports. The focus groups were audio taped, transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory approach. Measures to address validity and reliability considerations were built in to the research design. The key ethical considerations of informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were addressed in the research design and discussed in the chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

## Introduction

This chapter will describe the findings arising from the focus group interviews. The findings will be presented under the broad themes of the role of the year head, perceived challenges and supports for performing the role effectively, and perceived needs for working effectively. Where relevant, similarities and differences between individual schools and regions (ROI and NI) will be outlined. Illustrative quotations are used throughout the chapter to provide examples of statements that underpin the themes. The participants are identified from the school they work in, as A, B, (ROI school) C, or D (NI school). No other identifying details have been provided to protect the identities of the participants and their schools.

## The Role of the Year Head

The year head role was explored in the focus group interviews. The findings reflect both traditional and emerging roles. Traditional roles have been described below under the pastoral tasks of casework; and promotion and maintenance of an orderly and supportive environment. More recent roles are described under the themes of management of student learning and school-home-community liaison work.

### *Casework*

It was evident that year heads in the focus groups are engaged in traditional casework, addressing students' holistic needs and responding to problems that are of an emotional, personal, social and behavioural nature. It is apparent that these activities take up a large proportion of the year head's time.

### Meeting student needs

Much of the year heads' time is spent addressing various student non-academic needs, such as security, belonging, and emotional support. The 'in loco parentis' role was evident:

*"...you are like their mother...they are still only children...and they still, you know...like somebody to be there as a kind of security bank for them when they run into a problem you know"*

*(School B).*

It was perceived that reassurance and confidence building were needed for students from all age groups, but that some issues/concerns were more specific to the developmental stages of the adolescent and the specific challenges of the different years. This was discussed more extensively in the conversations conducted in the schools in the ROI.

### **Meeting student needs- first years**

For first years, year heads supported many issues that were linked to transition and adjustment to secondary school. These included the longer school day (for many students compounded by travelling long distances to and from school), coping with the timetable while in school, adjusting to the constant changes of teachers and subjects, and participation in extra-curricular activities. The support that the year heads provide to these students includes advice on time management and organizing skills.

Participants agreed that students in all years needed reassurance and confidence building, but especially those in first year. They are predominantly worried about school work:

*"...school work...very concerned about things that are very minor...you are trying to get them to sort of...relax a little bit about it..."*

*(School B).*

Participants agreed that relationship building was a key activity in supporting a successful transition. It was also perceived that relationship building can prevent future behavioural or discipline problems by enhancing students' self-confidence. A participant from School B remarked that if the year head comes across as

*"...a friend, a helper, an adviser, the other problems will sort themselves out."*

### Meeting student needs- second years

Participants noted the special needs of second year students.

*"I feel at that time in their lives they are not the little ones any longer and they are aspiring to be the bigger ones and they haven't got there yet, and it's a difficult time for them...confidence and reassurance at that time is very important and if that can be nurtured in them I think a lot of the discipline problems that take up a lot of our time may not arise..."*

*(School A).*

During this year, the participants perceived issues relating to peer pressure and group formations. Year heads have to be vigilant for children who may become isolated or introverted as a response, or others who come under pressure to misbehave to fit in with the peer group. Participants in School A noted that first years get a lot of attention from the Pastoral Care team, and when moving up to second year they meet a new year head, and that it can take a few months for the year head and students to get to know each other, and in the mean time some may have fallen out of the awareness loop.

*"...some of them would have slipped..."*

*(School A).*

### Meeting student needs- third years

Third year students also had specific needs, relevant to state exams. Supporting time management and study skills emerged as key activities for the year heads for this group.

*"In third-year now you would find a particular emphasis on...study skills or trying to plan budget time for...studying...and revision"*

*(School A).*

### Meeting student needs-senior students

The senior students were generally perceived as more mature, with smaller concerns. Even so, participants agreed that fifth and sixth year students had unique needs, including reassurance and encouragement. This group also needed academic advice, for example, whether to do a pass or honours course for their State Exam.

## Meeting student needs-other issues

Because of restriction on available time, year heads may need to prioritise attending to individuals and groups of students who come to their attention for misbehaviour and discipline problems. As a result some students who do not come to their attention for negative reasons may get overlooked but may still need time and attention: those who do well academically and behave well and a silent group who may not perform well academically but stay out of trouble:

*"A huge cohort there remains anonymous because they don't stick their heads up in any wrong way. They may be slipping academically and it's not very noticeable..."*

*(School A).*

Participants in one school (B) noted student needs differing by gender, particularly referring to boys. While they were 'open to talking' in first year, the year heads noted a change in this openness in second year. One participant stated it was a challenge to engage boys with emotional issues.

*"I just worry that the needs of say the girls that I have dealt with the needs of the fellows...appear to be different in a sense that the girls are very quick to tell you exactly what happened...when boys are inclined to either react with an incident and it takes an awful lot of information to get it out of a fellow..."*  
*"I can understand lads don't want to be thought of as a failure if they have to admit that they have an issue...yeah"*  
*"First year boys are very open...by second year they change"*

*(School B).*

### **Mediation and conflict management**

Mediation and conflict management were perceived to be key year head casework activities. This included mediating between students themselves and between students and teachers. Some of the participants expressed great personal satisfaction when they had been able to resolve conflicts between people. Participants in School B spoke about mediating between the requirements of the school system and the experiences of the student. They sometimes equated mediating with understanding:

*"Just let them see that the system is there for their good and whatever happens is for the greater good basically...and they are very understanding once they see that it fits into the overall plan"*

*(School B).*

### ***Changing student needs reflect a rapidly changing society***

It was a common sentiment in all schools and in both Ni and ROI that adolescents today are growing up in an increasingly more complex society with many external challenges, and that this is being reflected in the casework the year heads are engaged in. This topic engaged the participants in a lengthy discussion, particularly in Schools A, C and D. The following extract from the transcripts illustrates the type of discussion that this topic generated in the groups:

*"I can't ever remember at the beginning of my time as a year head to encounter so many difficulties...family difficulties...a traditional family background is quite...not rare but is..."*

*(School C)*

*"Disappearing" (School C)*

*"...the one parent family or the family that have separated...it brings other pressures to the job..."*

*(School C).*

*"..Because you are always looking out for the vulnerable children within your year group"*

*(School C).*

*"And they are the ones that you are trying to make a relationship with a wee bit more intimate... if there is any kind of help that you can put in their way..."*

*(School C).*

It was generally acknowledged by ROI and NI participants that many of the problems that they as year heads addressed in the school setting were rooted in personal and family circumstances and general adverse living conditions that they had little or no control over. One participant remarked that year heads were:

*"...dealing with much more complicated situations now" (School A).*

Participants acknowledged the difficult home situation that some of the children may experience and how that impact on their school experience:

*"There may be a reason why their blouse isn't washed all the time...its just really very often children who display poor uniform have other things going on in their lives as well and quite a lot of the problems that happen in this school would be to do with marriage break ups and family break-up"*  
(School C).

Another cause of changing student needs is educational policy that calls for mainstream schools to enrol more children with special educational needs. One participant specifically brought this up when discussing changing student needs:

*"I am not sure whether the children have more problems now...but certainly they have more identified problems...so you would have at least I would say a quarter of the year group which would have some defined special educational need...they are trying to be more inclusive and put more children into more main stream schools..."*  
(School C).

Some of the participants perceived that year heads may not be able to meet the changing needs or it may be outside their remit:

*"...can we as a group or as year heads deal with those things? Or can we really be expected to deal with all those things?"* (School A).

### **Advocacy**

Year heads often have access to more confidential information about individual students than teachers and form tutors.

*"When you as a year head hear the personal story that that child is going through then you understand why it's [misbehaviour] happening...it's amazing that they are in school at all"*  
(School D).

Some year heads in the study perceived that 'knowing more' had led them to an increasingly advocating role.

*"I find myself trying to take almost their side...almost to try and will them to make it through the year against all the adversities that they come across...I can see it from both sides...as a pastoral year head you tend to empathise much more with the students...and find myself backing them up more than I should perhaps sometimes"*  
(School D).

The advocacy role can also be a source of frustration. There are expectations from teachers and tutors about solving problems that certain children may cause that year heads cannot often meet:

*"Teachers look at you as someone who knows what they are going to do about this, you have all the answers and you are going to solve all the problems in the world and this is going to get sorted out...you don't always have the answers and sometimes there aren't even answers...its very very frustrating"*  
(School A).

### ***Responding to specific problems: Suicide***

In one school (D), participants perceived that suicide was a significant issue. It was linked to a wider issue of suicide in the community that had permeated the school. This extract from the transcript reflects how this is source of concern, worry and stress for the all participants in the group from School D:

*"I think from my point of view my worst fear is missing something where a young child leaves me because I haven't dealt with something that day and goes home and commits suicide out of it..."*

*"Because its happened...we've had a student where it's happened to...you've got one at the moment where a relative committed suicide and...that's the pressures of the job at the moment"*

*"...sometimes you actually don't know that something like that has taken place within a family until for example you see a child behaviour starting to get worse or...poorer behaviour or attendance, there is always a trigger there and I had one student this week when that happened and ...thankfully I got to him at the right time but the incident happened a week previous and it was only through attendance and behaviour that we actually got to the bottom of it but considering the stress of the child you know that was a week where he had no support whatsoever..."*

### ***Responding to specific problems: Bullying***

Addressing bullying is part of the year head's role, and this issue emerged in the focus groups in Schools B and C. The year heads in School B discussed the whole school approach used in their school:

*"...we feel its treated well and seriously here...school is proactive, gets to the root of it...important to become aware of it, its very hard to spot...everyone comes in to address it...zero tolerance".*

The year heads in School C stressed that addressing bullying is complex and problems are usually not solved with a quick fix solution. They articulated the pressure they experience as they perceived a quick fix is often expected from parents:

*"...it may take a few weeks, it may take a few months...it may take a year...I find they are very pushy that way and they put you under pressure so their expectations...may be too much...they want a quick fix with bullying issues and its hard to get"*

*(School C).*

### **Promotion and Maintenance of an Orderly and Supportive Environment**

Addressing issues of discipline and misbehaviour is still a key task for the year heads in all the schools (ROI and NI) that took part in the study.

*"Unfortunately we spend a lot of our time dealing with discipline"*

*(School A).*

Most participants did not feel a great tension between their pastoral 'caring' role and their disciplinary role, but instead viewed the two roles as part of a continuum. However, they believed that other staff members, who were not members of the pastoral teams, perceived a clear difference between pastoral and discipline roles.

Most participants adopted a positive and empathetic approach towards discipline and misbehaviour. There was a feeling that a positive and preventative approach could be taken towards behaviour. If students were given support and a good relationship had been built up, there would be fewer problems with discipline. Some pointed to the usefulness of being an outsider (not teaching the classes) in resolving problems that related to discipline. One participant in School B stated,

*"As a year head the issue is not you, it's a 3<sup>rd</sup> party...the discipline issue is not really yours".*

Many took a pastoral approach to solving class room issues, with some trying to work with the student to try to positively alter the child's perception of experiences:

*"...you are not going to get on with everybody but you know you have to kind of live together..."*

(School B).

Participants in school B also took an understanding, balanced and pragmatic approach to teachers reporting on students as illustrated by this exchange:

*"The teacher might give twenty notes"*

*"One teacher will have written a note in everybody's journal"*

*"yes, and that's a bad day for a teacher"*

*...you kind of cop things like that...and you'd say well we all have bad days"*

It appeared that many of the year heads in both ROI and NI looked 'beyond the behaviour' when having to deal with discipline or misbehaviour issues. As year heads they had better insights into the children's personal lives and family circumstances, and this had helped them to understand the (mis)behaviour better.

*"When you as a year head hear the personal story that that child is going through then you understand why it's happening...It's amazing that they are in school at all"*

(School D).

Participants also pointed to the positive and preventative influence of good structures and policies on discipline, again emphasising a positive and preventative approach.

*"When they see the system is fair and that teachers is trying their best, they are quite understanding...they don't push the boundaries too far"*

(School B).

However, some participants in ROI and NI felt that the pastoral approach to behaviour was not well understood by other staff in the school. Some participants in School A pointed out that they felt the "*weight of expectations*" from other teachers around discipline, that they were "*the enforcers*". This was echoed by the participants from School B. They felt that other teachers perceived that "*the year head deals with misbehaviour problems*". One participant stated that other teachers felt: "*the year*

head that focus on pastoral ends of things are useless". In School C, a similar sentiment was felt, illustrated by this conversation:

*"you feel very guilty...I would tend to feel that if I haven't done something oh what's the staff going to think oh I am a useless year head...you can end up you know the more you do the more they expect you to do"*

*"The judging of heads of year is still ongoing you know if someone in your year group is misbehaving. And it falls on you..."*

The year heads in school C indicated the personal impact the judgement of colleagues can have:

*"It's your fault...it's your fault, absolutely sometimes we take it quite personal."*

## Management of Student Learning

Reflecting educational reforms, such as the Learning for Life and Work programme, responsibility for the management of student learning has emerged as a key pastoral role, particularly in Schools C and D (NI). The year head has responsibility for managing children's performance and learning across the curriculum.

*"When I applied to be year head it was promoted very much as learning manager...rather than dealing with pastoral problems and pastoral crises although in reality that's maybe what you do a lot of the time"*  
(School C).

Another year head stated:

*"...there is an onus now on people who are in the pastoral side of things to be very aware of the ...ways in which good pastoral care can enhance the learning"*  
(School C).

Because pastoral care now had an increased responsibility for learning, some commented on the reducing gap between the academic and the pastoral aspects in schools:

*"...the sort of barriers between the two has become blurred...over the past number of years...and I think it's a good thing"*  
(School C).

However, not everyone viewed this in a completely positive light. Some of the participants from School D perceived that some of the responsibility for learning should be shared with departments:

*"...whether there is a problem in science or whether there is a problem in maths or English or wherever it may be that problem should really be contained within ...that department...because that's where the learning takes place."*

Some participants also did not feel fully prepared for the new role:

*"I as a year head myself and when I have received no training in it no nothing about it and I am expected to suddenly come up with a programme this year"*  
(School D).

Participants from School C also commented on the changes that the new curriculum had brought into the pastoral programme. Previously form tutors had been responsible for delivering the pastoral care programme (the curriculum) to their class. Now, a trained personal development teacher delivers the pastoral programme. The participants from this school viewed this as a positive change because the teachers have special training and the programme is now in their view more coherent.

### **Home- School -Community Liaison Work**

Findings from this study confirmed that the traditional year head role as a link between the school and the home is still evident. More recently, this has also involved more contact with other agencies, and this was evident from the conversation among the participants in School C in particular. Year heads may participate in meetings with social workers and psychologists about a case involving a child that they are responsible for as a year head. This relatively new role may not be easy to assume. One participant spoke of the unease of hearing confidential information about a child that they are teaching and how it can affect their personal life:

*"I find situations where I am invited with other social workers and psychologists and...perhaps you know intimate family details are discussed and...maybe you were or maybe in some cases you were not aware of those situations...I sometimes find the repercussions of that in dealing with a child...who has to be then viewed in a different way...I find that aspect of the*

*job quite difficult...at the end of the day you know what I mean we are first and foremost teachers and we go home...when you are taking it back home with you..."*

*(School C).*

### Views on Pastoral Care/Year Head Role

In some of the focus groups, reasons for the choosing to become a year head were explored. The year heads stated these reasons for choosing a pastoral career: having an interest in pastoral care, having had the experience of working as a form tutor and wanting to continue that career path, wanting a challenge, interest in developing young people, and few opportunities in furthering career in other areas of the school.

Overall, all participants viewed the pastoral care role in the school as very important. However, the participants were not convinced that other staff in schools always felt the same way or that they had a clear understanding of the role of the year head. Some of the participants perceived the year head role as a dumping ground for sometimes very minor problems:

*"this child has been sent to your class room because they haven't brought the homework books"*

*(School C).*

They perceived that the sometimes non-visible, but time consuming tasks, such as having a simple conversation with a student was a very important part of their role, as it might be:

*"...the most supportive conversation they will have with someone in a while"*  
*(School A).*

Yet, they felt that there was a perception that this part of the job was viewed by others as "*doing nothing*" (School A). It was perceived that it was not a valued part of the job (by others). One participant stated that:

*"...you feel inadequate really as the year head...when you have spoken and you have been talking to a few pupils for a few hours and when you walk into that in the staff room and when you hear...that first year class is the worst class in this school, you feel disappointed"*

*(School A).*

The participants in School A stated that this perception by others is something you need to prepare for, and especially new year heads may need reassurance. They perceived that a clear role description would help to clarify exactly what the year head should be doing. There was also a common sentiment among most participants that there was a need for other staff to understand what pastoral care is about and the specific role of the year head. This is linked to a frequently occurring theme in the transcripts; the meeting and managing (of sometimes unrealistic) expectations.

### **Differing Systems**

The different year head systems were discussed in some of the focus groups. In the system where the year group changed each year (School A), some of the perceived draw backs included that participants felt that it took time to get to know the year group each September, and that this could impact on the effectiveness of the role. Linked with this was that knowledge about a particular year group (and particularly about pupils at risk) was not necessarily passed between year heads. On the other hand, it was felt that a level of expertise was developed in having to manage a specific year group each year, as different years encountered their own unique challenges.

However, they were not certain if moving on with the with the same year group cohort was the preferred way either. In school A, it was felt that being a first year head needed special skills and experience, and that it might not be suitable for anyone. Instead, school A suggested that more formal structures be implemented to enhance the handover. These included having an assistant year head in first year that moves up with the group into second year, rotating the second and third year head, having the second year head take over in May, and having a structured system to highlight students at risk.

The school that kept the same year head for the full schooling cohort (School B) perceived it was positive for the students and the year head. *“You get to know the group and they know you”*. The felt it facilitated time to build a relationship with the students over the years. This school also has a mentoring system, which supports the year head, where fifth and sixth year students mentor first year students. Table 1 details the particulars about the mentoring system in School B.

<b>Peer Mentoring</b>
<p>This is viewed as part of the pastoral system in School B.</p> <p>Fifth and sixth year students apply for the positions, and get one day of training.</p> <p>The system is viewed positively by the year heads as they believed it supports them.</p> <p>The mentors also serve as a channel of communication for early intervention: <i>“they come to us if they notice a problem”</i>.</p> <p>According to the year heads, it is also beneficial for the mentors: it makes them more caring about the younger students, and develops their interpersonal skills.</p> <p>It was also believed to be a potentially positive addition for students’ CV.</p>

Table 1: Description of the Mentoring System in School B

### **Challenges to Working Effectively**

Many different types of challenges to being able to carry out the year head role properly were explored in the focus group interviews. Time (or lack of it) emerged as the most significant challenge for the participating year heads. Other significant challenges included addressing the changing needs of students in a changing society, poor communication, and managing sometimes unrealistic expectations from other staff members and parents.

Participants from all school, NI and ROI agreed that lack of time was a barrier to effective working. It was a common source of frustration for many of the participants.

All year heads were responsible for the well-being of a large cohort of students at the same time as being responsible for a teaching timetable. The following statements exemplify the sentiments of the participants:

*“There is always things to do if you want to do them...I'm always there for them”*

*(School B).*

*“there is no ceiling as to how much time you can spend with the kids”*

*(School C).*

*“liaise with social workers, EWO's, doctors, parents, other staff, friends...if you scratch the surface of an issue you often find that there is a big one still there...and you can get embroiled very very at all kinds of different levels like with professionals...the social and emotional needs of a particular child can literally consume you”*

*(School C).*

*“you see...several incidents can come up in a day...say I have an hour free a day...I might have to deal with these incidents...its record keeping as well...plus we are still teachers you know you still have your course work, you still have your lesson plan”*

*(School D).*

*“if you were to do your job really really really the way you want to...really well...that's what I find frustrating most of all...I don't ever seem to achieve an end....I don't feel I have achieved you know...”*

*(School A).*

The year heads were acutely aware of the wider family, community and societal influences on adolescents. While the symptom of these influences may be misbehaviour, the roots of the problem are often issues over which the year heads have little or no control (but may be expected to 'do something about' by others). Participants viewed this as a challenge, and some felt that they were not prepared to deal with such complex situations.

Some participants perceived that poor communication was a challenge to effective working. They referred to communication between year heads themselves, between teachers and year heads and sometimes between year heads and parents.

Having responsibility but not authority was viewed as a barrier by some of the participants in the focus group in School D:

*“...somebody's just completely out of order in class you have to wait for a vice principal or principal to be able to allow a parent to come in and pick that child up or suspension...we don't have the authority to do that whereas we see it at first hand...”*

One of the schools (C) had recently undergone growth in numbers of students. This was perceived to be a challenge as it had impacted on the depth of relationships with the students.

*“There were 174 in my group and now this present year eight there is 210, that doesn't seem a massive amount but that to me is quite a change you know in terms of how much you can do on top of your teaching role...I don't feel I got to know my year group as much as my last year group that I had for five years.. you get to know the bad ones...the ones who are misbehaving or the ones who are having emotional or you know outside difficulties...”*

*“I feel exactly the same I am year Nine same number as M...don't know a lot of them...know all the ones causing trouble but it is the extra 30 kids in the year group...”*

This clearly was an issue for school C as the sentiment was echoed by everyone in the Focus Group in that school.

Many of the participants spoke about the often unrealistic expectations that other staff and parents had of them. Often, as referred to earlier, problems such as bullying or discipline are complex and simple solutions cannot be found. Year heads are expected:

*“to be fixing and solving and providing answers...and at the end of the day we're all teachers you know...we all have a time table of classes...we're responsible for getting the grades and getting those kids through the exams...I mean you know parents I think, think whenever they ring pastoral care or year head that we are sitting in an office all day...and we have a secretary...? (all laugh)”*

*(School C).*

Another participant commented:

*“The other thing I find difficult like in doing the job is the weight of expectation...from our colleagues on the staff first...for some people a good Year head is essentially a Rottweiler...who will...you know enforce the rules”*

*(School A).*

This was partly explained by the participants as a lack of complete understanding on the part of other staff as to what pastoral care is about and indeed of the specific role of the year heads itself.

## Supports

The participants in the focus groups also discussed factors that supported their roles as year heads. The team approach to pastoral care was viewed by all as a positive and supportive factor. Regular meetings also supported their role. Other supportive factors included having counselling available for staff (only reported in one school); having school policies, structures and systems that are enforced and fair; and having a shared school vision that embraced pastoral care.

Teamwork was noted as a supportive factor by many of the participants. The class tutor/form tutor system was perceived by all as a positive factor in pastoral work. Some participants felt that the tutors were generally more accessible than the year head and often served as the first point of contact if any problems emerged. They work on the ground and meet their students on a regular basis, serving as an important source of information to the year head.

*“...you are only as good as your team...when you are in a management position...but your tutors are the people you depend on to actually implement all the school policies and actually make the difference on the ground to the individual because there is no way with a group of 200 students that you could be an individual mentor...”*

(School C).

Table 2 illustrates one tool used in a school to support the function of the year head.

<b>The Red Book</b>
Participants from School B described a record keeping system that had been developed in the school, which participants felt had helped to improve communication between subject teachers, class tutors and Year heads, and made earlier intervention with students possible. On a weekly basis, the class tutors collected all the student journals and made entries of relevant notes into a “Red Book” specific to the class. The year head reviewed the “Red Book” on a regular basis, and if necessary, followed up if there were issues or problems with individual students. It was acknowledged that a lot of goodwill went into the implementation of the system, especially from the class tutors, who kept records during their own time.

Table 2: Description of the Red Book

Regular meetings are perceived as supportive. *“Discussing things helps a lot”* (School B). Most often, the meetings are with other year heads and senior management, such as the Principal/Head teacher and Deputy Principal/Head teacher. It also emerged that a significant amount of informal support was given among the year head groups in the different schools. They seek and give advice from each other and *“hear how other people are doing the job”* (School B).

### **Health Impact and Self Care**

The perceived health impacts of the year head role varied between the schools. It was mainly participants from School D who discussed negative impacts on health as a result of their professional activities. They reported effects such as worry, sleeplessness and not being able to completely separate their professional and personal lives. This brief extract from the transcript illustrates this:

*“You are thinking about the kids you are not thinking about yourself and the effect on you”*

*“It's what you do yourself whenever you are finished for the night when your head is just going...”*

*“You do have nights when you are tired and you are lying in bed but just can't sleep”*

In contrast, participants in School B found the year head role *“more busy than stressful”*. Other participants stated that:

*“even when I am driving home I forget about it” (School A).*

Others were clearly affected by situations they had to deal with as of their role:

*“I can't bear to hear another horror story when you are ringing perhaps about behaviour and then you hear what's happened in the background...”*  
(School D).

Knowing the boundaries of the year head role was also perceived to be important. It was felt that it was important to recognise that sometimes there were no solutions to a problem, or that sometimes that the problem had to be delegated to someone else:

*“I would find myself referring to the guidance counsellor as soon as I feel I am getting out of my depth”*  
(School A).

It was important to understand that the role of the year head was not to do everything: it is important to have *“an understanding of what is within your remit and when to refer on” (School A).*

## Perceived Needs

The year heads expressed needs in terms of training, opportunities to network and share experiences, more time allocated to the year head duties, clear job descriptions and role definitions for every person on the pastoral care team, effective communication channels and more resources for pastoral care. Some participants perceived that teachers that choose pastoral care roles may have innate personal qualities, including the ability to relate well to young people and a special interest in the area. Most participants had undergone no special training for their year head roles,

and a common sentiment was that professional development had often been about 'learning on the job' and learning from others. Many had learnt from experiences, from being a form tutor and even a parent. One participant commented on the lack of course provision:

*I have never in the entire time that I have been a Year head been on a course with other Year heads...where we have discussed...pastoral issues or how it has been dealt with in another school”*

*(School D).*

Nevertheless, they also perceived the need for training and in-service back up for the role. The participants would like to feel affirmed and reassured that “*what we are doing is the right thing*” (School A). A wide range of areas for training that were suggested by the participants are listed in Table 3

Suggested Training Fields
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Computer skills</li> <li>▪ Bereavement counselling</li> <li>▪ Pastoral skills</li> <li>▪ Intuitive skills</li> <li>▪ Counselling skills</li> <li>▪ Organizing skills</li> <li>▪ Time management skills</li> <li>▪ Communication skills</li> <li>▪ Discipline – best practice</li> <li>▪ Study planning skills</li> <li>▪ Review of code of practice</li> <li>▪ Review of adolescent development and related issues and concerns</li> <li>▪ Familiarity with and knowledge of what it is like to be a young person (issues and pressures)</li> <li>▪ Management of learning</li> <li>▪ Management of other staff (e.g. assistant year head)</li> </ul>

Table 3: Suggested Training Fields

Many participants felt that training should be formalised and not a once-off event.

Some agreed that it should be an accredited process.

*“I would like to see a pastoral course...with people from other schools and you talk about scenarios...see how people have dealt with them...and try to take good points from that”*

*(School D).*

Some participants suggested that ideally it should be specific to the local context of the school, using a whole school approach.

More time allocation to perform the duties of the Year head was on the wish list of the participants from all the schools. Some Year heads also held other roles within the school, which took up additional time, and would prefer just to focus on their Year head role (as well as the subject teaching). Some of the Year heads also perceived that they would like more time for forward planning.

A common need expressed by participants from all the schools was for opportunity to share experiences and provide/receive support from colleagues. They perceived a need to increase sharing of experiences within the school:

*“It would be good even as a group within the school to share ideas with each other or you know come up with strategies or plans to work together”*  
(School C).

A common expressed need among all the participants was the opportunity to share experiences and best practices with Year heads from other schools. Some participants from School C had the opportunity to have done this once previously and had found the experience very useful.

Most participants also called for a clear job description. It was felt it was particularly important to clarify the pastoral and discipline roles of the Year head. While the team approach to Pastoral Care was perceived to be very positive, some participants perceived a need for better clarity around individual roles in the team. It was also found to be important to communicate the role of the Year head to the rest of the school community and the parents. Participants from School C recalled a positive experience when they had met with staff to clarify the role of the Year head:

*“it was good that people are made aware...what the year head is to be used for...they were sending people regarding homework or they forgot their pencil today, what do I do with them, that sort of thing”*

*“There was clarification of expectations...that was really useful”*

*“We were given scenarios of things, I mean the teachers had discussed on how they would have dealt with it and I think it was sort of awakening for some teachers where they realised you know, hang on a sec, some of these things I*

*should have been dealing with within my own department rather than just going straight to the year head or should have went to the form tutor first...”*

Depending on local context, some Year heads perceived a need for more material and human resources, including office space, computers, and phones, as well as language translation support, a removal unit and more counselling support in the school.

Participants from the NI schools perceived that the year head role should be valued more in terms of remuneration.

Effective channels of communication were perceived as important for performing the job effectively. This involved teachers and parents as well as handovers when the Year head is changed on a yearly basis.

## Conclusion

The data show that the year heads in the study perform traditional year head roles, such as casework. This includes meeting students' developmental needs and responding to problems of a personal, emotional, social and behavioural nature. A pastoral, pro-active and preventative approach was preferred when addressing discipline. Advocacy, mediation and conflict management were perceived to be key activities in casework. All year heads agreed that student needs had changed, reflecting the rapidly changing societal contexts that schools operate in. The adverse circumstances that many adolescents find themselves in were very much acknowledged by the participant as a root cause of individual problems in the school. Suicide and bullying were highlighted as specific problems that year heads responded to in some schools.

Year heads are central in promoting and maintaining an orderly environment. While the year heads in the study did not perceive a dilemma between their pastoral and discipline role, because they viewed issues of discipline from a pastoral perspective, they perceived that other staff members did so. More recent year head responsibilities were most prominent in the NI schools, and these included management of student

learning and liaison work with other agencies. Negative health impacts were found primarily among participants in one school.

The perceived challenges for year heads included lack of time allocation to perform their duties, the complex and changing student needs, poor communication and unrealistic expectations from other staff and parents possibly due to a lack of clarity of the role of the year head. Supportive factors were found to be team working, having regular meetings, informal support, school policies and structures that were reinforced and fair and a school vision that embraced pastoral care.

All participants in the study had learnt the year head role on the job and from other colleagues. There was a perceived gap in structured courses that address professional development in pastoral care generally and for year heads specifically. Year heads' perceived needs included training in specific pastoral care areas; opportunities to network and share best practice with colleagues informally and formally, both within their schools and with year heads from other schools; more time allocation to do the duties of the year head; clear job descriptions, and communication of the year head role to the school community; effective communication channels; and more resources for pastoral care.

## **Chapter 5: Research Significance**

## Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings that emerged from four focus group interviews conducted with year heads in the ROI and NI. The chapter will also make recommendations for professional development in pastoral care, specific to the perceived needs of year heads in the ROI and NI.

## The Year Head Role

### Pastoral casework

The current roles of the year head were explored in the focus groups. Their role is clearly a pastoral one, as they are responsible for identifying and meeting the welfare and developmental needs of the students, the 'in-loco parentis' role. A large proportion of their daily activity is reactive casework, characterised by Best (1999) as responding to problems that are of a personal, social, emotional or behavioural nature. Often, year heads serve a mediating role, managing conflict between students, between students and teachers, and between students and the 'school system'. Casework requires specific skills and personal qualities, such as active listening, negotiation, conflict management, guidance and counselling (Best 1999), and some of these were indeed perceived to be key areas for training by the year heads in the study.

Specific problems that year heads in the study were responding to included bullying and suicide. Suicide in particular was a concern and a source of worry for year heads in one of the schools. Clearly, it is very important for staff in schools to have proper informal and formal supports in place as well as training in suicide awareness and prevention.

It was clear from the findings that the year heads in the study perceived casework to be a time consuming task, and that often, there was not enough time allocated to do casework adequately. Not surprisingly, lack of time allocation for the year head role emerged as the most commonly referred to challenge to their current practice, and there was a perceived need for more time to be allocated to this role.

The findings revealed an acute awareness among the year heads both in the ROI and NI that students' needs have changed in the recent past, and that this was linked to the influences of the student's family and socio-economic circumstances, and wider community and societal influences. It was perceived that often students' adverse circumstances expressed themselves as misbehaviour or other problems that the year head responded to, while, as one participant had noted, it was an achievement for some of the students to get in to the school in the first place. As year heads, they accessed more detailed and confidential information about the students, and because of this some perceived that they were in a position to empathise with individual students and indeed advocate for these students at risk. This is very important, because there is evidence that quality relationships that build trust between the school and the student can have positive effects on mental well-being of the student (Nadge 2005, Spratt *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, fostering school connectedness (where students feel close to school staff and the school environment) can have positive effects on health risk behaviour of adolescents and prevent early school leaving (Barrowman *et al.* 2001, Bonny *et al.* 2000, Voisin *et al.* 2005, Patton *et al.* 2006). Promotion of school connectedness is a feature of best practice in pastoral care (Hearns *et al.* 2006), and needs to be valued and supported.

Development of quality relationships in the school is at the heart of pastoral care (Best 1995). Adolescents need to feel that someone in the school environment cares about them, listens to them and respects them. Some year heads spoke of the time they dedicated to 'just talking' to students, and one year head poignantly noted that these conversations may be the most supportive ones that some children have with adults at that particular time in their lives. Barrowman *et al.* (2001) noted that relationships that are "caring and concerned" (p.80) can help to retain students in school, and a review by Hearns *et al.* (2006) found that "academic care" can have powerful effects on students' well-being, resilience and success. Positive relationships between students and teachers can also have protective effects on teachers' mental health (Kovess-Mastefy *et al.* 2007, Unterbrink *et al.* 2008). However, some year heads perceived that this aspect of their job was not always valued by others. Clearly, there is a need for awareness raising among the whole school community on the importance of

relationship building and the potential positive impacts on students' health, students' engagement in school and future educational attainment.

### **Promoting and maintaining an orderly and supportive environment**

Another aspect of the year head role is to promote and maintain an orderly and supportive environment, another pastoral task in Best's (2002) framework. The year heads in the study did not perceive a tension between their caring and their disciplinarian roles. This reflects a true understanding of pastoral care principles (Monahan 1996). The year heads in the study in the main adopted a positive and preventative approach to discipline. They believed that if students were supported and nurtured, and had developed positive relationships; and where there were fair structures and policies in place that were consistently enforced, there would be fewer problems with discipline in the school. The year heads' views reflect recently published guidelines for schools in the ROI for developing a code of behaviour (National Education Welfare Board 2008:42). The guidelines aim to "promote positive behaviour and prevent inappropriate behaviour" using three key principles: strategies that affirm and promote good behaviour, quality relationships between students and teachers, and use of reward systems.

Findings suggest that some year heads perceived that the pastoral approach to behaviour was not always well understood by some of the other staff members in schools. Sometimes they felt 'caught in the middle' between the expectations of other teachers to 'sort out the problem' and their preferred pastoral approach to behaviour. They noted a perception that they were the 'the enforcers', and that they were solely responsible for managing misbehaviour in the year group. This view goes against principles of pastoral care, where promotion of good behaviour and prevention of inappropriate behaviour is the responsibility of the whole school (NACPE 1986, NEWB 2008).

### **Managing student learning**

A more recent year head role is the management of student learning and monitoring of students' performance. While this role was referred to all focus groups, it was

discussed in more detail in the schools in NI. This probably reflects educational reforms in the UK as highlighted in the review of literature. The findings agree with previous literature, which describes and discusses this emerging aspect of the year head role (Lodge 2006, Roberts 2006, TeacherNet 2008). It can be argued that this development has reduced the academic/pastoral split, in fact, some of the year heads in the study agreed with this view, noting the 'blurring' of the pastoral and academic lines in their school. However, not all year heads perceived the development to be entirely positive, as some felt that this responsibility should be shared with subject departments. In addition, some year heads did not feel adequately prepared for this aspect of their role.

### **Home-school-community-agency link**

Findings from the study suggest that the traditional aspect of the year head role - serving as a link between the home and the school – is still a key task for year heads. However, the more recent emphasis on interagency work was also evident in the findings, reflecting recent developments in educational policy as previously discussed (Lodge 2006). Interpreting the findings, it appears that these new inter-professional collaborations can cause some unease. Liaising with other agencies can be time consuming, and add to the year head workload that needs to be performed in the allocated time. Sharing and receiving confidential information can be a source of stress for year heads, particularly as it is likely that they do not have professional support structures for debriefing. A formal structure for support and supervision of pastoral care staff, similar to that of other professions (such as social workers and counsellors) has been endorsed by Griffiths (1995) and found to be an expressed need by head teachers in previous research (Nelson and While 2002). However, this is not commonplace in schools (Nelson and While 2002). The provision of internal and external support structures and networks is a feature of practice in pastoral care (Hearn et al. 2006) and needs serious consideration.

## Challenges

### **Lack of time and other resources**

As referred to earlier in this chapter, all participants were in agreement that their pastoral role was time consuming and that there was not enough time allocated, which sometimes led to feelings of frustration. They strongly felt that they needed more time to perform the job comprehensively. This finding concurs with previous research on constraints to pastoral care in schools (Nelson and While 2002). Some of the participants also referred to a lack of other resources such as office space, phones, computers, and language translation support. The need for adequate resources and facilities form part of the infrastructure of pastoral care, and this needs to be in place to enable effective pastoral work to take place.

### **Addressing the increasingly complex needs of students**

The fact that student needs are more complex today has already been discussed. The findings indicate that year heads are faced with 'problems' to address (and expected to solve), such as misbehaviour, which are really symptoms of underlying issues that may stem from complicated home, family or community situations. Many year heads viewed this as a real challenge to their current practice and some questioned their ability to address complex social problems or if this was even within their remit. It is clearly important that year heads are aware of the limitations to their pastoral care role and have knowledge of when and where to refer on to other professionals internal and external to the school.

### **Large year cohorts**

One of the schools in the study had undergone an expansion, with increasing growth in student enrolment. The year heads perceived that the growth in numbers had impacted on the depth of the relationships they had with the students. The importance of the quality of relationships in the school has already been referred to. It is probable that there are an ideal number of students that a year head can effectively build quality relationships with. Once the number of students exceeds this, the quality of

relationship may suffer. Some groups of students (for example, those who behave well and/or perform well academically but still may need pastoral intervention) may not be prioritised by year heads, and some students at risk may not be identified in the early stages. This review of literature did not access any specific research on the ideal year head to student ratio, and this area may be an area for further research.

### **Communication**

Insufficient communication can be a challenge to effective working, and some year heads perceived a need for improved communication structures within the school. Some felt a need for better communication between year heads, specifically in the year head system where a new year head takes over each year. Participants in one school made some practical suggestions on how the hand-over could be improved. Some year heads perceived that while feedback systems often worked well with the class tutors, they could improve their own communication with subject teachers. Participants in one school described a recording system that while time consuming had helped to improve communication between subject teachers, class tutors and year heads, and this model could prove useful for other schools.

### **Meeting unrealistic expectations**

Findings indicate that the year heads in the study felt that other staff members and sometimes parents had unrealistic expectations of what they could achieve in their capacity as year heads. They perceived expectations that they would address (and solve) discipline and behaviour problems in particular. As referred to earlier, in best practice guidelines on behaviour a whole school approach is recommended. It is clear that a job description that clearly outlines the boundaries of the year head role is beneficial.

### **Lack of role clarity**

Best (1995) stated the need for clear job descriptions as a part of the infrastructure that facilitates other pastoral tasks. While the year heads themselves seemed clear about their role, there was a perception that other school staff did not have the same understanding. Some perceived that they had to address problems that could have

been dealt with by a subject teacher or a tutor. As discussed previously, they perceived that the important but 'invisible' activities, such as talking with students were not valued enough by others. Findings indicate that the year heads perceived a need for clear job descriptions for their role. It was also felt to be important to disseminate the job description to the school community. In one of the schools, year heads had disseminated information about their role during an in-service day in an interactive manner with other staff, and perceived it had been a useful experience.

## **Supports**

Year heads in the study also discussed factors that supported their role. The team approach to pastoral care merged as a strong supportive factor in all schools. This concurs with Lodge (1995) that strongly promoted the team approach to pastoral care as the most effective. Regular meetings with school management and other year heads were also viewed as supportive. It was clear from the findings that the year heads in the study also relied on informal support from other year heads in their schools. None of the participants in the study referred to formal support or supervision systems as supports.

## **Health impacts and self-care**

The perceived health impacts of the year head role varied between the schools. In particular participants from one school reported negative impacts, including worry, sleeplessness and difficulty in separating their professional and personal lives. Fundamental principles for pastoral care also include pastoral care for teachers, and they need "counselling, guidance and moral support in the face of demands and stresses of their pastoral work" (Best 1995: 14). The need for informal and formal support systems for year heads has already been articulated.

## **Professional Development**

The study explored reasons for the career choice of year head and found that personal interest, previous pastoral experience (e.g. as a class tutor), wanting a challenge and lack of other career opportunities had led them down this career path. Most noted the

lack of specific professional development in this area, and a majority of the participants had learned on the job, sometimes informally mentored by other year heads. Some noted that teachers who choose pastoral care roles may have innate personal qualities that attract them to this role; nevertheless, they perceived a need for in-service training and professional development in this area. This concurs with the view of Lang (1995) who argued that pastoral care roles are specialised roles within the school that need specific staff development.

Participants suggested a number of areas from training, which can be broadly divided into counselling/interpersonal skills, skills for effective administration and management, and topic specific areas such as adolescent development, behaviour management, and management of student learning. Some participants perceived that training should be accredited, formalised and on-going.

There was a strong sense of a need for sharing of experiences and sharing of best practice models. Year heads wished for more opportunities to share experiences within their own school, and with year heads from other schools. This finding concurs with previous research with head teachers, who perceived a need for time to share with other teachers (Nelson and While 2002).

## Conclusion

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it is worth noting that findings cannot be generalised to be considered the views of all year heads on the island of Ireland. However, they provide an insight into current perceptions and views of year heads, an indication of current challenges, concerns and needs; in doing so the findings from this study help to inform future planning of professional development and support structures that enable year heads to perform their role more effectively.

It is clear from the voices of the participants in this study that year heads have an acute awareness of the needs of today's students. Many deal with challenging and sometimes stressful situations and often perceive unrealistic expectations from others of what they can achieve. Sometimes they perceived that some of the pastoral tasks,

such as building relationships with students, were less valued than other tasks, such as managing behaviour. They expressed their needs as adequate resources in terms of time and material; a shared understanding of the role of the year head in the school; internal and external support structures and networks; professional development specific to pastoral care roles and opportunities to share expertise and experiences with other year heads.

## Recommendations

This section details recommendations that address the professional development needs of year heads. As is to be expected there are financial implications to such recommendations and the researchers advocate that adequate resources need to be allocated to allow the recommendations to be implemented. The recommendations are offered under three broad headings a) valuing and supporting pastoral care b) professional development of year heads c) development of support structures and networks.

### Valuing and Supporting Pastoral Care

The positive impact of pastoral care on health, welfare and educational attainment of students needs to be recognised and valued both in the local context of schools and at school governance levels. The contribution of pastoral care in this field should be a specific discourse within governmental departments with responsibility for education in ROI and NI.

Pastoral care should be promoted wherever and whenever possible in pre-service education in order to raise awareness among pre-service teachers of the protective effects of fostering school connectedness and quality relationships within the school.

Pre-service teachers need to be supported to understand how the principles of pastoral care can enhance their current understanding of best practice models in managing behaviour.

Professional educators (i.e. those in their level education responsible for the education of teachers) need to be supported to understand the principles, role and function of pastoral care in order to effectively integrate it into third level curricula.

In-service training for teachers and other school staff should include raising awareness among practicing teachers of the protective effects of fostering school

connectedness and quality relationships within the school. The important activity of pastoral care needs to be adequately valued and supported in schools.

Teachers and other staff in schools need to be supported to understand how the principles of pastoral care can enhance their current understanding of best practice models in managing behaviour.

Year heads need adequate infrastructure to enable them to perform their role effectively. This includes timetabling that allows for adequate time allocation to pastoral work. Year heads need administrative tools such as office space, access to computers and telephones. Where they may already exist the pastoral care staff structures may need to be revised to ensure that the best quality pastoral care will be provided for all students.

Year heads need clear job descriptions that outline their roles and responsibilities as part of the pastoral care team.

It is important that all members of the school community (including parents) are made aware of the role of the year head. Teachers may need to be supported to develop understanding of how the year head supports their role as teacher and how they can contribute to the enhancement of pastoral care in their school.

### **Professional Development for Year Heads**

A formalised in-service programme should be developed to meet the specific training and skills development needs of year heads. A modular third-level post-graduate programme may be a suitable model for some.

Specific areas for development include skills development in the area of counselling, administration/management and interagency collaboration; and specific topics suggested by the participants, including behaviour management, adolescent development, suicide, bullying and management of student learning. Such

professional development programmes also need to address esteem and confidence building and self-care for teachers with pastoral care roles.

Year heads and pastoral care practitioners generally need access to professional supervision as an integral aspect of their work. Professional supervision would help mitigate the effects of stress that the role and function of pastoral care can engender for some.

### **Development of Support Structures and Networks**

Year heads and other staff with pastoral care roles should explore ways to develop informal support networks within the school.

Locally, year heads need adequate resources to allow for networking and opportunities to share expertise and experiences with year heads from other schools.

Regionally, schools should explore the creation of opportunities for regular meetings and sharing of experiences among year heads. Formal regional and national networks of year heads should be established similar to subject associations which provide support and access to best practice in the field.

On an international level pastoral care should be an integrated characteristic of a health promoting school. Pastoral care practitioners would benefit from membership of the Schools for Health Europe network which would also support them in keeping up with international best practice and research.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Clearly the preparation and support for pastoral care teachers is inadequate. A national study in this field of inquiry would be beneficial in both NI and ROI.

A controlled study which measured the impact of pastoral care intervention in schools comparatively with those who do not have a pastoral care system would greatly aid in providing evidence of the impact of pastoral care.

An investigation of the role of scope of pastoral care from the perspectives of key stakeholders such as principals, head teachers, students, parents and others teachers would increase what is known about pastoral care in the wider school community.

An investigation into how to more effectively incorporate pastoral care as a key component of the health promoting schools programme would greatly aid the development of pastoral care in education internationally.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### **Cross Border exploration of C.P.D. Needs of Heads of Year in a Sample of Comprehensive and Integrated Schools.**

#### **School Principal Letter of Invitation**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

We are seeking to conduct a study to explore the perceptions of heads of year specific to their continuous professional development needs in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. It seeks to explore whether the needs of heads of year in each geographical region are reflective of each other. This study is funded by the Standing Committee on Teacher Education North and South.

Your school has been chosen to participate in this study should you deem it appropriate. The school's participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice. The data collected will form the basis of a research report that may be placed on the SCoTENS web-site on completion no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to your school. Therefore, we are seeking to conduct a focus group with heads of year in your school should they choose to participate.

Should you decide to participate or simply wish to hear more before deciding I will meet with you at your convenience to discuss the project in more detail?

Yours Sincerely,

---

Course Director, Grad. Dip/M.A.. Health Education & Promotion  
Education & Professional Studies  
e-mail: [patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie](mailto:patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie)  
Phone: 00 353 61 20 27 22

## Appendix B : Principal Information Sheet



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

### **Cross Border exploration of C.P.D. Needs of Heads of Year in a Sample of Comprehensive and Integrated Schools.**

#### **School Principal Information Sheet**

##### **What is the study about?**

The study seeks to explore the perceptions of heads of year specific to their continuous professional development needs in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. It seeks to explore whether the needs of heads of year in each geographical region are reflective of each other.

##### **What will I have to do?**

Participants (members of your teaching staff) are asked to take part in a focus group of two hours in duration with colleagues in their staff who are also heads of year. The focus group will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be transcribed verbatim with all identifying features removed.

##### **What are the benefits?**

It is the intention of the researchers to use the findings of the research in order to further educational discourse in the field of the professional development needs of year heads. The researchers seek to focus attention on the changing nature of student needs which in turn influences the professional development needs of heads of year in order to respond more effectively to the demands of their role.

### **What are the risks?**

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. However the changing nature of student needs does at times mean heads of year may discuss sensitive topics. Other than those normally arising from participants themselves no other topics or sensitive areas will be introduced. The focus group moderators are skilled facilitators and experienced educators and will bring that experience to the focus group process.

### **What if I do not wish to take part?**

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish your school to take part there is no pressure to do so.

### **What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?**

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time, even after the data has been collected. If this should arise any data pertaining to you will be removed.

### **What happens to the information collected?**

The focus group will be tape-recorded. The recording will then be transcribed verbatim with all identifying features removed. The transcripts will then be returned to you for your verification. Once that is received the data will be analysed and a research report completed.

### **Who else is taking part in the focus groups?**

Colleagues in your school who are also heads of year will be invited to participate. This research will be conducted with four schools in total (two in the republic of Ireland and two in Northern Ireland).

### **How will the results be disseminated?**

The research report may be published on the SCoTENS web-site.

## **Freedom of Information**

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.

## **What if I have more questions or do not understand something?**

If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix Mcnamara,  
Lecturer Social, Personal and Health Education,  
College of Education and Health Sciences,  
University of Limerick,  
Tel: (061) 202722.

If you have concerns about this study and you wish to contact an independent person you may contact:

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics  
Committee,  
C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar's Office,  
University of Limerick,  
Tel: (061) 202022.

## Appendix C: Year Head Information Sheet



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

### **Cross Border exploration of C.P.D. Needs of Heads of Year in a Sample of Comprehensive and Integrated Schools.**

#### **Research Participant Information Sheet**

##### **What is the study about?**

The study seeks to explore the perceptions of heads of year specific to their continuous professional development needs in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. It seeks to explore whether the needs of heads of year in each geographical region are reflective of each other.

##### **What will I have to do?**

Participants are asked to take part in a focus group of two hours in duration with colleagues in their staff who are also heads of year. The focus group will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be transcribed verbatim with all identifying features removed.

##### **What are the benefits?**

It is the intention of the researchers to use the findings of the research in order to further educational discourse in the field of the professional development needs of year heads. The researchers seek to focus attention on the changing nature of student needs which in turn influences the professional development needs of heads of year in order to respond more effectively to the demands of their role.

### **What are the risks?**

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. However the changing nature of student needs does at times mean heads of year may discuss sensitive topics. Other than those normally arising from participants themselves no other topics or sensitive areas will be introduced. The focus group moderators are skilled facilitators and experienced educators and will bring that experience to the focus group process.

### **What if I do not wish to take part?**

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.

### **What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?**

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time, even after the data has been collected. If this should arise any data pertaining to you will be removed.

### **What happens to the information collected?**

The focus group will be tape-recorded. The recording will then be transcribed verbatim with all identifying features removed. The transcripts will then be returned to you for your verification. Once that is received the data will be analysed and a research report completed.

### **Who else is taking part in the focus groups?**

Colleagues in your school who are also heads of year will be invited to participate. This research will be conducted with four schools in total (two in the republic of Ireland and two in Northern Ireland).

### **How will the results be disseminated?**

The research report may be published on the SCoTENS web-site.

## **Freedom of Information**

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.

## **What if I have more questions or do not understand something?**

If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix Mcnamara,  
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College of Education and Health Sciences,  
University of Limerick,  
Tel: (061) 202722.

If you have concerns about this study and you wish to contact an independent person you may contact:

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics  
Committee,  
C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar's Office,  
University of Limerick,  
Tel: (061) 202022.

## Appendix D: Year Head Consent Form



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### **Cross Border exploration of C.P.D. Needs of Heads of Year in a Sample of Comprehensive and Integrated Schools.**

#### **Research Participation Consent Form**

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research project is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with this study.

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I am aware that the data collected will form the basis of a research report that may be placed on the SCoTENS web-site on completion and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to both myself and my school.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

## Appendix E: Principal Consent Form



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

### **Cross Border exploration of C.P.D. Needs of Heads of Year in a Sample of Comprehensive and Integrated Schools.**

#### **School Principal Participation Consent Form**

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research project is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving my school, and of any risks and benefits associated with this study.

I know that the school's participation is voluntary and that we can withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I am aware that the data collected will form the basis of a research report that may be placed on the SCoTENS web-site on completion and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to my school.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

## Appendix F: Focus Group Topic Guide



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### **Cross Border exploration of C.P.D. Needs of Heads of Year in a Sample of Comprehensive and Integrated Schools.**

#### **Focus Group Topic Guide**

Focus group questions will centre on asking participants their perceptions of their role as:

- ❖ Teacher / professional scholar,
- ❖ Pastoral care /academic care / responsibilities
- ❖ Challenge of dealing with discipline / pastoral role
- ❖ Understanding the year head role in relation to class tutor role (personal/professional development needs)
- ❖ Networking skills e.g. how does the year head relate to Guidance Counsellor, Class Tutor, Principal/ Assistant Principal and Students
- ❖ Role clarity (or lack thereof) and terms of reference
- ❖ The place of consultation and collaboration
- ❖ Levels of professional development given to year heads
- ❖ Student disaffection
- ❖ Student special needs
- ❖ Changing needs of students in keeping with new pressures on young people
- ❖ Student health and health issues such as suicide etc...
- ❖ The role of professional qualifications for heads of year
  
- ❖ What role do they play in
- ❖ Mission Statement
- ❖ Bulling Policy
- ❖ SPHE and RSE Policy
- ❖ Critical Incidence Policy
- ❖ Code of Behaviour
- ❖ Child Protection Guidelines
- ❖ Substance Use Policy
- ❖ Pastoral Care Policy

## Appendix G: Teacher Net Job Description

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### Teaching assistant

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# Teaching assistant job description

The following may be adapted and used as a basis for a job description for the specified post. Where extra detail would be helpful, this is indicated in italics.

**Post:** Teaching assistant  
**Responsible to:** Head teacher  
**Job purpose:** *optional summary*  
**Responsible for:** *optional*

### Duties

This job description describes in general terms the normal duties which the post-holder will be expected to undertake. However, the job or duties described may vary or be amended from time to time without changing the level of responsibility associated with the post.

**Note:** When writing this job description reference should be made to the [24 non-teaching tasks](#) that should have been transferred from teachers to support staff by September 2003.

### Teaching and learning

1. Assist in the educational and social development of pupils under the direction and guidance of the head teacher, SENCO and class teachers
2. Assist in the implementation of Individual Education Programmes for students and help monitor their progress
3. Provide support for individual students inside and outside the classroom to enable them to fully participate in activities
4. Work with other professionals, such

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## LEA websites

Click on the appropriate link to go to the website of your chosen LEA.



## Registration

Login name (email):

as speech therapists and occupational therapists, as necessary

5. Assist class teachers with maintaining student records
6. Support students with emotional or behavioural problems and help develop their social skills

- [Membership benefits](#)
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### Administrative duties

1. Prepare and present displays of students' work
2. Support class teachers in photocopying and other tasks in order to support teaching
3. Undertake other duties from time to time as the head teacher requires

### Standards and quality assurance

1. Support the aims and ethos of the school [*provide detail*]
2. Set a good example in terms of dress, punctuality and attendance
3. Attend team and staff meetings
4. Undertake professional duties that may be reasonably assigned by the head teacher [*provide examples*]
5. Be proactive in matters relating to health and safety

### Other duties and responsibilities

*List other duties that the head teacher may from time to time ask the post-holder to perform.*

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