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Heads of Year—Rotating or Static

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- and they think more clearly themselves. It also gives the teacher an idea of how well each pupil is getting on.
- ... learning to think for yourself and having to say why you think something.
 - ... helping you learn that if you behave it isn't bad working together. It helps people to learn not to be stupid – if they are they go back to boring work from books and the blackboard.
 - ... role play. I liked that, especially working in two's and acting out what was on the cards. I didn't mind showing other people either even though they didn't always agree with me.
 - ... wanting to do things we wouldn't do before. We get on better, work harder and learn more. I can concentrate better in a group. It's also more fun than listening to the teacher droning on.
 - ... being aware of what's going on around you.
 - ... that I've become more aware of my

- feelings towards other people and also other people's feelings.
- ... making me look at myself and seeing what other people, like my parents, see.
 - ... talking without embarrassment.
 - ... taking roles to understand other people's attitudes.
 - ... learning to respect and trust other people.
 - ... openness.
 - ... getting over the feeling that it's a skive so that the work becomes valuable.
 - ... being forced to make sure that you do the work and not chat.
 - ... thinking about others and not making fun of the quiet, timid people so that they get to hate group work.

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Heads of Year – Rotating or Static

LESLEY BULMAN, Head, Kingsdale School

Ten years ago when pastoral care was a relatively new concept tutor groups frequently contained pupils of all ages and these tutor groups were associated as Houses under the leadership of a Head of House. The vertical tutor group and the House system overcame the dilemmas posed in this article but with the advent of smaller schools and the development of a tutorial programme linked to the critical events of a pupil's life the vertical tutor group has to a large extent disappeared and has been replaced by horizontal tutor groups with a team of tutors being led by a Head of Year.

As each tutor group can be expected

to survive more or less intact from, at least, year one to five, there is the possibility of the Head of Year continuing with her/his tutor team from year one to five – rotating with them. Alternatively, the Head of Year could remain static at a chronological position i.e. year one and receive successive year tutor teams and pupils.

The choice between rotating or remaining static is a very finely balanced one. I would like to look at some of the advantages (and how these may also be disadvantages) for each system and then to look at some patterns that might enable different schools to maximise the positive features of each system.

The case for the rotating Head of Year

Undoubtedly the most important feature of this system is that the Head of Year really knows her/his pupils well. If a year group consists of between 90 and 240 pupils it will take time to know all the pupils. Even if it is accepted that in large year cohorts the Head of Year will not know all the pupils very well, over five years it is likely that real relationship with the vast majority of pupils will have developed. Of course for a minority of pupils this prolonged relationship may be frustrating if there is personal dislike between pupil and Head of Year.

Alongside the development of strong relationships between pupil and Head of Year goes the development of powerful home-school links. One year is a very short time indeed for good understanding and knowledge to develop between parents and the school. Children change enormously during their life at secondary school and it helps parents to cope with these changes (that are not always smooth and harmonious) if a relationship has been established in earlier, less traumatic times.

Tutors almost universally continue with their tutor group throughout the first five years wherever possible. The Head of Year as a leader of this team also needs to build relationships and one year is a short time in which to do this. With an increasing emphasis on the tutorial programme in schools this leadership and curriculum development role is becoming much more prominent. Leading a team of tutors who are known and trusting into these new and difficult areas is easier than the yearly training of a new team but there is then the need to develop the tutorial programme for each successive year rather than improving the same programme. However, by virtue of moving up with the year a coherent programme without undue repetition or omissions is likely to be produced.

This increased knowledge — of pupils, parents, and the tutor team gives a great sense of stability. It is a moot point whether over five years this stability might not turn into inflexibility.

Monitoring of pupils' progress both personal and educational is an important aspect of the role of a Head of Year. Over five years a Head of Year may be tempted to do this instinctively — relying on many personal contacts over a long period of time. Although long-term personal knowledge has immense benefits, its depth can sometimes lead to laziness in communicating knowledge to others. If information is needed for the handing over of the year group it is more likely that a lot of this will be in a written form that is accessible to all.

Finally, apart from the pleasures of knowing pupils well over a long period, some Heads of Year enjoy the different stages their pupils go through — the delightful enthusiasms and nervousness of the first years to the maturity of the fifth years. However, this is not the case with all Heads of Year and the wide range of skills needed to cope with pupils through these transforming years is daunting indeed.

The case for the static Head of Year

During each year of a pupil's life in school s/he will meet different challenges and problems that make demands on the pastoral team. The differences between years 1–5 and the sixth form is widely accepted and commonly the Head of Sixth Year is static, often with a different team of tutors. However, a strong case can be made for a static Head of First Year with all the expertise needed for smoothing the transition. Special expertise is also needed in the third year for the many schools that have considerable choice of options, and also for the fifth year when pupils are preparing for life outside school or in the sixth.

If a Head of Year only meets these critical events once every five or six years, it becomes very difficult for any real degree of expertise to be developed. One of the most common and best ways of improving our work is to note what went wrong and how things can be improved and when repeating the task to build in these modifications. Theoretically this can be passed from a Head of Year to her/his successor but it is not as likely to be effective as if the same person continued. Also a span of five years is a very long time — in the career of a successful and ambitious Head of Year, and in a school. Expertise gained five years ago may have become redundant or unhelpful.

It is an important, but underemphasised, task of a Head of Year to view the academic curriculum of her/his year group 'horizontally': to look across the timetabled subjects and see what is being taught and how throughout the year as an education diet. (It is the task of the Heads of Department to look to the development of their subjects vertically over the years.) As with the development of pastoral expertise, commenting upon and improving the curriculum of the year group will take more than one year. A Head of Year who remained at one stage could develop a familiarity with the academic curriculum, suggest improvements to Heads of Department, and see these changes implemented. It is unlikely that this would happen en passant in a year.

Children are so different in the first year and the fifth year they require very different styles of handling. The best rotating Heads of Year gradually change their style over the years to meet the new challenges — but not everyone can do this. Some Heads of Year are excellent with the younger pupils but unable to cope with the robust maturity of the fifths and vice versa. Given five Heads of Year it is very likely that not all the Heads of Year will have this versatility, and, to an extent, the strength of indivi-

duals should be reflected in the system chosen.

Both cases are strong and there is no simple answer to our question. Let us now look at possible patterns that might provide a satisfactory compromise.

	<i>Rotation</i>	<i>Static</i>
A	Year 1–6 rotating	
B	1–5 rotate	6
C	2–5 rotate	6 and 1
D	1→2→3 rotate 4↔5 rotate	6
E	2↔3 4↔5 rotate	6 1
F	Static 1 2 3 4 5 6	

The argument for entirely static Heads of Year is the most easily dismissed. It would be far too disjointed for pupils, parents and tutors to have a new Head of Year every year.

In many schools there is a considerable decrease in the numbers of pupils staying on onto the sixth — diminishing the argument for continuity. Also frequently the institutional arrangements are very different from the rest of the school and often involve links with other schools and colleges. This latter makes the task of the Head of Sixth Form very different from the task of the other Heads of Year and provides a very powerful argument for keeping the Head of Sixth static. Indeed by far the most common pattern is for a static Head of Sixth Form and the other Heads of Year rotating.

Despite its popularity I am not convinced that a five-year rotation meets the needs of pupils and school. Continuity is preserved but at the expense of any real expertise developing in pastoral care that is year-specific (this is especially so for the first, third and fifth year) and the Head of Year can have little, if any, effect on the academic curriculum.

In my opinion there are extremely powerful arguments for keeping the

Head of First Year static because she/he has many unique tasks to perform. Potential recruits spend a lot of time in secondary schools in the Autumn term finding out about the school and such a programme of visits, open days and evenings is very time-consuming. Any curriculum continuity between primary and secondary schools is to be encouraged, but again this will require of the Head of Year, as well as teachers and Heads of Department, frequent visits to many primary schools. A relationship of trust and understanding needs to be built up between the potential and actual recruits to the secondary school, their parents and the staff of primary schools. Yearly-changing Heads of Year are not in a position to build up such a relationship — it takes a lot of time. The smooth induction of incoming pupils is a task that requires both time and planning. Unless a school has an exceptional ability to hand over and to develop expertise from one Head of Year to another I feel the Head of First Year should be static to allow the post-holder the time to develop systems and expertise; as well as relationships with the primary schools.

D is a compromise that meets some of the continuity argument in that Heads of Year will be three and two years with their year.

In many ways the fourth and fifth year can be taken together to give pupils a sense that they are now in the Upper School. The curriculum in the fourth and fifth is often very different from the first three years and career counselling and expertise needed for the fifth year will not be lost on a two-year cycle. The rotation from years one to three makes sense in terms of the curriculum but I feel that this rotation does not meet the very specific needs of the first year and I would prefer E to D for that reason. Undoubtedly the fixed Head of Sixth and First Years and two mini rotations maximise the advantages of the static system but schools may feel that three Heads of Year in years 1–5 and the lack of continuity that entails is too high a price to pay.

As a 'best buy' my recommendation would go to static Heads of Sixth and First Year with either years 2–5 rotating or years 2–3, 4–5 as mini rotations — but every school is different, as are Heads of Year, and each school will need to find its own answer to this important question.

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A Sixth-Form Induction Course: some theoretical and practical observations

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Introduction

This paper is an account of a residential weekend's activities for students at Highfields, an 11–18 coeducational comprehensive formed in 1982.

The course was planned and organised by the authors and fellow teachers Linda Allen, John Ashworth and Godfrey Curry, and Phil Gregory Principal of Lea Green residential centre.

Accounts of 'Study Skills' initiatives