

**An Investigation of the Barriers to Running Extra-curricular  
Clubs and Environmental Initiatives Faced by Secondary  
School Teachers in Northern Ireland**

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By

Patrick Magee BSc (Hons), PGCE

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## Abstract

This study was funded by the Foundation for Environmental Education to investigate why there isn't better uptake of the Young Reporters for the Environment programme in schools in Northern Ireland. This study investigates the barriers faced by secondary school teachers in Northern Ireland when running extra-curricular clubs and environmental initiatives. The study also explores participants knowledge of the Foundation for Environmental Education and the Young Reporter's for the Environment programme and the attitudes of school leaders towards extra-curricular activities and environmental initiatives. A sample of six teachers were interviewed and the data was analysed using an interpretivist approach. The data revealed that barriers include workload pressures, scheduling clashes with other extra-curricular activities and ongoing industrial action. Also, while school leaders value environmental clubs and initiatives they are not given the same level of priority as sports clubs, music, literacy initiatives and revision classes.

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## Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| FEE    | Foundation for Environmental Education                        |
| YRE    | Young Reporters for the Environment                           |
| ECA    | Extra-curricular Activities                                   |
| GI     | Green Infrastructure  |
| NASUWT | National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers |
| ES     | Eco-Schools   |

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will outline the rationale for carrying out this study and the questions it aimed to address. It will also give an overview of how the research was conducted, this includes an explanation of how the study was funded and steps that were taken to reduce bias.

### 1.1 Foundation for Environmental Education

This study was funded by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in order to get a better understanding of the barriers experienced by teachers in Northern Ireland when undertaking extra-curricular clubs or environmental initiatives. This was of interest to them because they wanted an insight into why there was not better uptake of their Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) programme.

### 1.2 Bias and Reflexivity

In order to reduce bias in this study a proposal was submitted to Queen's University who gave ethical approval for the study to take place. The research was then carried out under the supervision of an academic researcher from Queens. FEE played no part in data collection or analysis.

### 1.3 Rationale for the study

This study was funded by the FEE, they have successfully run their YRE programme in other countries around the world but have been disappointed that there has not been greater uptake of the programme in Northern Ireland. They want to investigate what barriers might exist in Northern Ireland that prevent better uptake.

The research literature discussed in Chapter 2 shows that extra-curricular activities enrich school life for both teachers and pupils. However increasing job pressures make teachers more reluctant to participate in extra-curricular programmes. Teachers in Northern Ireland are currently engaged in industrial action in response to disputes over pay and workload. Therefore this study set out to investigate what barriers exist within the context of secondary school in Northern Ireland to teachers undertaking extra-curricular activities.



As a secondary school teacher in Northern Ireland the author of this study has first-hand experience of the issues that arise in this study. The author is also conscious of the current climate emergency and feels that schools could do more to engage young people in environmental activism. Furthermore the author is on the MSc Educational Leadership pathway and is interested in how school leadership impacts upon the extra-curricular life of a school and the uptake of environmental initiatives.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The study had one main research question and three subsidiary research questions, as outlined below.

What are the challenges faced by teachers delivering environmental initiatives as part of the extra-curricular programme within schools in Northern Ireland?

What knowledge do teachers have of Young Reporters for the Environment?

What barriers are there to running extracurricular clubs or initiatives?

What are the attitudes of school leaders towards environmental clubs and initiatives?

#### 1.5 Research Methods

A sample of 6 teachers from secondary schools in Northern Ireland were interviewed. A semi-structured interview protocol was used and NVivo was used to analyse the data. An interpretivist approach was used to code the data and to derive themes. An interpretivist approach is based on questioning and making observations in order to understand the thought processes of the participant (Preissle 2006).

#### 1.6 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In order to reduce community transmission of SARS-CoV -2 (corona virus) schools closed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020. While approximately 450 schools remained open in order to provide for vulnerable children or the children of key workers normally schooling ceased for the majority of children who moved to remote learning for the remainder of the academic year (Julius and Sims 2020).

Schools reopened in August 2020 with guidelines in place to reduce the spread of the corona virus. This included the use of facemasks, fixed seating plans and restrictions on what learning and extra-curricular activities could take place. Attendance in school was impacted by pupils and staff having to isolate at home if they were in close contact with someone who tested positive for the corona virus or if they displayed symptoms of the corona virus (Sharp et al. 2020). When schools closed for the Christmas break in 2020 they did not reopen until April 2021. When schools reopened the same guidelines were in place as were in August 2020 and schools remained open until normal school closure for the Summer in June 2021. When schools reopened in September 2021 some restrictions were still in place, this included the use of face masks, the requirements around self-isolation was reduced and better testing was available. After the Easter break in 2022 pupils and teachers were no longer required to wear face masks. When schools returned in September 2022 all restrictions were removed and lessons were taught as normal.

When schools closed in March 2020 all Summer examinations were cancelled and pupils were awarded teacher predicted grades based where possible on work that had already been completed. In the academic year of 2020/2021 some modular examinations were completed however Summer examinations were cancelled and therefore pupils were again given grades awarded by teachers based on a combination of modules completed, coursework completed and informal examinations.

The main pressures on school leaders when schools reopened were concerns about reopening schools, the health and wellbeing of staff and directives from the government. At this time their sources of support were mainly local authorities, professional associations e.g. their trade union and senior leaders in other schools (Sharp et al. 2020).

Teachers, meanwhile, reported the main pressures to be having to award teacher determined grades to pupils who were due to sit examination, balancing their workload with caring for and supporting their own children at home and supporting pupils who were absent from school with remote learning. The main sources of support for teachers were senior leaders within their school and their peers within school. It was noted that when teachers felt supported by senior leaders within their school in increased the level of job satisfaction they felt (Sharp et al. 2020).

## 1.7 Outline of the Dissertation

Following the introduction, Chapter two gives a description of FEE and the YRE programme, it then reviews the academic literature on extra-curricular activities and environmental initiatives in schools, barriers to the uptake of extra-curricular activities and leadership approaches adopted by school principals. The methodological approach adopted is explained in Chapter 3 including the research approach, ethical considerations, reliability and validity of results and the limitations of the study. In Chapter 4 the findings are reported and discussed in the context of current literature and Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the findings, recommendations and suggestions for further study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will set the context in which the study was carried out and review existing literature. The work of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and their Young Reporter for the Environment programme will be outlined. Existing literature on the role of extra-curricular activities in schools will be discussed, particularly the benefits of participating in extra-curricular activities and barriers that impact upon the uptake of extra-curricular activities. School leadership styles and their impact on attitudes and school culture will be explored and attention will be given to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the leadership approaches adopted during this time.

### 2.2 Outline of the Foundation for Environmental Education and the Young Reporters for the Environment Programme

The Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) was founded in 1981 with the aim of making young people more conscious of environmental issues. Programmes were set up to empower these young to become involved in addressing environmental issues. The programmes use a solutions based approach where participants might for example identify a local problem, carry out an analysis of the issues and then present ideas for a solution. This would serve to educate future potential activists and engage them with environmental issues. By 2021 FEE had 99 member institutions in 77 countries worldwide, including the United Kingdom, thus creating a global community for participants to engage with.

In 2020 FEE laid out a 10 year strategic plan named GAIA 20:30(FEE 2020); they set out to help young people to develop in to future leaders who can inform and engage the public in practical actions to solve environmental problems. Young Reports for the Environment (YRE) is one programme run by FEE. YRE uses a multimedia approach to promote the aims of the organisation through writing, photography or video. For example, as part of the GAIA 20:30 commitment to accelerate the transition to climate neutrality the YRE programme will raise awareness of climate change neutrality and its importance by highlighting and promoting positive case studies that demonstrate progress towards a climate neutral status and the impact these initiatives have at a local and regional level.

In 2017 FEE began incorporating the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) laid out by the United Nations (UN) for the period of 2015-2030 in to the YRE programme (FEE 2017). The primary focus for YRE is always an environmental issue, however, by incorporating the 17 SDGs in to the programme and expanding the range of topics available to students the participants can come to learn that environmental, social and economic issues are interrelated and are all an important part of education for sustainable development. An example of this includes projects carried out in keeping with SDG 3 'Good Health and Well-being'. YRE participants in this context may look at environmental issues that affect health and wellbeing in their community, examples include traffic congestion, pollution and smoking.

### 2.3 Benefits and Successes Associated with the Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) Programme

YRE is an experiential programme, participants identify a local or regional problem e.g. a lack of Green Infrastructure (GI) in their local area. An issue like this is important to FEE as part of their commitment to 'Preserve existing and create new forests/natural areas' (FEE 2017). Participants will then have the opportunity to collaborate with students in the Eco-Schools (ES) programme to promote the 'Tiny Forest' programme which emphasises the importance of increasing tree cover and GI in urban areas.

Eco-Schools is a programme introduced by FEE in 1994 to support classroom teaching about sustainability and local activism on environmental issues in the school's community. When FEE introduced their Litter Less Campaign (LLC) through their Eco-Schools (ES ) and YRE programmes they found that participants littered less and were more likely to conserve resources (FEE 2021). This was determined by an impact assessment report which estimated there to be a 38% increase in this positive behaviours. Furthermore, participants were more likely to persuade family and friends to recycle thus acting as positive role models and supporting others as they adopt more responsible behaviours. Students who were involved in the programme were also found to be more likely to organise others to work together to address littering incidents in their own community (FEE 2021). The impact assessment report found that participants in the LLC-YRE campaign improved they opinion leadership skills by 26% (FEE 2021). This allowed them to develop analytical skills and communication skills that are transferable and will make them more employable when they join the workforce. There has been some debate around the focus that is placed on littering campaigns with some suggesting that there is too much focus on littering to the detriment of other environmental issues. However it was reported by DAERA (2021) that the amount of litter found on Northern

Ireland beaches is increasing each year and is having a negative impact on both marine life and the economy.

## 2.4 Extracurricular Programmes in Schools

Extra-curricular activities (ECA) have been defined as activities that are undertaken within school that are not part of the core curriculum (Shulruf 2010). Although definitions may vary, using this as a working definition provides a context to set YRE in so that we can evaluate the impact that YRE and similar programmes have. Some studies have shown there to be a correlation between uptake of ECA and higher academic performance, however it is unclear if there is a causal link (Buoye 2004, Shulruf 2010). A causal link has however been found between uptake of ECA and increased social and cultural capital (Buoye 2004). These are the same benefits that are espoused by FEE and supported by their impact assessment report (FEE 2021).

### 2.4.1 Barriers to Uptake of Extra-curricular Activities

As with any additional activity or responsibility ECA put additional pressures on teacher's time. It has been reported that while the majority of teachers understand the benefits of ECA for pupils only a minority are prepared to deliver these programmes when they feel they are pressured for time within their timetable (Whiteley and Richard 2012). In these circumstances it may be the case that when under time pressure teachers have to prioritise core parts of the curriculum. Therefore if school leaders wish to have ECA in their school then it is for them to make sure that teachers have sufficient time to deliver these programmes (Whiteley and Richard 2012).

The attitude of policy makers within schools has been found to impact upon the effectiveness of ECA. Where ECA are viewed as a way to attract students from middle class backgrounds to a school they may be poorly resourced and ineffective in terms of achieving positive outcomes for pupils (Shulruf 2010). However where ECA are seen as an opportunity to support more vulnerable pupils and to keep them engaged with the school life and community then pupil attendance improves (McCabe et al. 2020). These findings demonstrate the important role that the attitudes of school leadership have on the success of ECA.

#### 2.4.2 Culture within Schools

As extra-curricular activities are not compulsory in Northern Ireland it stands that they are at the discretion of teachers and school leaders. While external pressures can impact the scope of a school to offer ECA it has been demonstrated that sufficiently motivated principals can exercise their own agency in this matter (Yemini and Addi-Raccah 2014). Yemini et al (2014) found that the principal's top priorities were determined by external pressures for high performance and to meet governmental pressures. This created a top down system of setting priorities. However there is evidence of a distribution of authority to principals, middle managers and teachers which creates pressure from the bottom up (Yemini and Addi-Raccah 2014). These dual pressures can be difficult for practitioners to manage and much depends on the academic success of the school. Schools that are performing well academically as measured against governmental standards often enjoy a greater degree of freedom when setting their own curricular and extra-curricular policies (Yemini and Addi-Raccah 2014).

It has been established that the culture within schools has a strong influence on the choices pupils make and the behaviours they adopt (Ferreira, Ryan and Tilbury 2006). This finding underlines the importance of schools not only promoting positive behaviour but in creating a culture where these behaviours become the norm and where pupils pick up on cues and positive peer pressures from others. Littering is an example of where this can be utilised, if littering comes to be seen as social acceptable or if pupils take pride in keeping their school litter free pupils might be more likely to dispose of their litter properly and encourage their peers to do the same (Yemini and Addi-Raccah 2014).

#### 2.4.3 Teacher Workload

It has been reported that engaging in ECA has benefits for both teachers and students, in terms of the quality of the teacher-student relationship and student engagement with the school community. However while acknowledging these benefits teachers are often reluctant to be undertaken ECA if they feel that the pressure on their time is already too great (Sutton 2015). Despite this it is known that teachers are sometimes judged by their involvement in the extra-curricular life of the school (Shulruf, Tumen and Tolley 2008). This might indicate that while school leaders recognise the importance of ECA for students they do not necessarily consider the impact of this additional pressure on the teacher and indeed on the core curriculum they teach (Gold 2003). Perhaps the quality of ECA, provided by teachers who

already feel over worked should be evaluated. Maybe the true value that schools place on ECA would be revealed if the amount of additional time given to the teachers involved was examined. However, this should be considered in the context of the pressures faced schools to provide these activities within the constraints of their budget (Whiteley and Richard 2012).

While pressure for teachers to take on ECA exists it is important to consider how this impacts upon other duties they carry out, particularly considering that delivery of the core curriculum is their primary responsibility, not ECA. A case study (Pacaol 2021) examining the impact of increasing teachers' workload found that increased workload had a negative effect on a teachers' ability to supervise pupils and produce teaching resources. However they found that overall quality of teaching was not impacted. It might be interesting to investigate whether or not the quality of teaching can be maintained in the long term despite the quality of teaching material having decreased (Pacaol 2021). Further investigation would be required however to determine if maintaining teaching quality under these circumstances is sustainable in the long term.

While it has been reported that involvement in ECA is associated with improved academic performance (Buoye 2004) the relationship between ECA and improved academic performance has not been clarified. It would therefore be interesting, in light of the impact on a teachers capacity to prepare teaching materials to investigate the impact if any that the additional pressure of delivering ECA has on pupils who do not participate in these activities.

Pressure on teachers can come from a number of areas including pressure of accountability, administrative duties and ECA (Penrice 2011). Perhaps if workload is increased through involvement in ECA the how other responsibilities are allocated could be looked at in order to address these issues. While bureaucratic tasks are often complained about in terms of being unnecessarily burdensome Penrice (2011) found that bureaucracy does not significantly increase the workload of teachers. However, if it is the perception of teachers that paperwork and other bureaucratic activities are problematic then maybe it should be looked at.

#### 2.4.4 Industrial Action by Teachers

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) which is the biggest trade union for teachers in Northern Ireland issued action short of strike action instructions to all members in grant-aided schools, part of the instruction was to withdraw from any voluntary activities outside of school sessions (NASUWT). This action short of strike commenced on Monday 9 May 2022. Throughout the



course of the academic year of 2022/23 there have been escalations in this action which have led to a half day strike in March 2023 and a full day strike in 2023.

In their letter notifying members of the industrial action NASUWT specifically instruct members not to participate in the implementation of any new or existing policies within school that has not been agreed with NASUWT (Article 1) also members should not undertake extra-curricular activities unless agreed with NASUWT.

## 2.5 Attitudes towards Environmental Education and Activism

When investigating the attitudes of students towards environmental activism it is important to consider school level factors for example socio-economic background or environmental action policies already in place within the school (Mónus 2022). Where these factors have not been considered conflicting results have been found. In one study it was found that pupils attending eco-schools were less likely to engage in environmentally responsible behaviours. However further investigation revealed that the over-riding factor was socio-economic background (Mónus 2019). It did not however appear to have been considered that a lower level of environmentally positive behaviours may have been due to lack of opportunity rather than an issue of attitude e.g. if more environmentally responsible options are prohibitively expensive.

It has also been found that pupils who are educated in a school environment where environmental education initiatives are promoted are more likely to discuss environmental issues and initiatives at home (Mónus 2022). This gives young people the opportunity to begin developing the skills that will allow them to act as opinion leaders in the future. Learning to articulate their views and persuade others of their opinion in the comfortable environment of home may allow them to hone their skill and build confidence (Eccles 2003).

The role of socio-economic background on a person's environmental behaviours is, however, unclear and there have been some conflicting findings. It has been found that if people have strong intrinsic motivation and hold strong views on environmental they will adopt environmentally responsible manner regardless of their socio-economic background (Owen, Videras and Wu 2010). There may be an opportunity here whereby FEE through YRE can support students in developing an identity within environmental activism that will empower them to behave in a responsible way regardless of their background. There have been some conflicting findings which have found that increased income positively correlates with making more responsible behaviours (Moser and Kleinhüchelkotten 2018). It has been proposed that this is because people on higher incomes have more money to afford adopting positive

behaviours or supporting charities and their causes. However, it has also been found that people who choose to demonstrate their higher income through the purchase of commodities like expensive cars or big houses may be damaging the environment (Moser and Kleinhüchelkotten 2018). Also these people will often make poor decisions regularly as part of their lifestyle e.g. driving their car in situation where it may also be convenient to walk. It is clear from these findings that socio-economic background and income only tell part of the story and that in fact personal motivation and intrinsic beliefs or values.

## 2.6 Leadership

This will be broken down in to two subsections in order to discuss situational leadership and distributed leaderships. Both of these approaches to leadership are used in schools and the literature on each will be discussed separately.

### 2.6.1 Situational Leadership

Situational leadership as an approach proposes that in order to be effective, leaders should adopt different approaches to leadership depending on what is the situation demands (Hersey and Blanchard 1969). This approach to leadership has two dimensions; directive leadership and supportive leadership. Each should be applied appropriately to a given situation. This requires the leader to assess followers to determine their competence and commitment to the task. As skill levels and motivation may vary over time, it is important that leaders are adaptable and can adjust the level of direction or support they give in order to meet the needs of followers (Blanchard, Zigarmi and Nelson 1993).

A directive approach to leadership primarily suits two styles; directive and coaching. Where leadership is directive the leader will focus on activities like setting goals and deadlines, monitoring performance and outlining how goals should be achieved. Communication usually happens in one direction – from the leader to the follower, and is concerned specifically with goals and how they should be achieved. A coaching style is similar to this but also considers the social and emotional needs of followers (Blanchard et al. 1993).

Where a supportive approach is employed the two styles that may be adopted are support and delegating. Where support is the style used, the leader does not focus on goals, instead the focus is on supporting the follower so as to create an environment that allows the follower to perform well. This involves listening, encouraging and asking for input from the follower. Delegating offers only a low level of input in terms of performance and social support, therefore followers must be highly competent and motivated in order for this style to be effective (Blanchard et al. 1993).

The first task of a leader adopting the situational approach to leadership is to determine what the goals of the organisation are and what levels of skill and commitment to the job the followers have. This will determine whether their approach should be more supportive or directive. However, leaders must be flexible in order to accommodate a follower's movement along a developmental continuum. That is to say that the skill level and commitment varies over time as situations change. This has been described as a developmental continuum and can be used by leaders to determine what leadership style they should adopt. Leaders should not rigidly stick with the same approach as situations change (Thompson and Vecchio 2009). This contrasts with the "traits approach" which proposes that it is successful traits which make them good leaders. It proposes that leaders should base their approach on their own personal skills and qualities rather than the situation that exists and without considering the skills or commitment levels of the followers (Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991).

The situational approach has been widely used by successful companies within the Fortune 500 (Blanchard et al. 1993). There is evidence of this approach being used successfully by school principals in Northern Ireland in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, at this time a principal had to react quickly to the situation as it unfolded before them (Beauchamp et al. 2021). This may be in part because the approach is practical and intuitive, it is straightforward to follow and the principles of the approach can be applied in a range of settings (Fernandez and Vecchio 1997). Furthermore, while some models are descriptive, the situational approach is prescriptive and outlines what styles should be adopted in a given circumstance (Thompson and Vecchio 2009). The flexibility at the core of the situational approach allows leaders to be responsive to the needs of their followers and to adapt to them. It recognises that the behaviour of followers changes when goals or aims change. In this approach, leaders change their style according to the needs of their followers and the requirements of the organisation's goals (Rajbhandari et al. 2014). However, while there is some benefit in treating individual followers differently according to their needs, the situational approach does not give account of how leaders should apply this approach to a group of followers (Carew, Parisi-Carew and Blanchard 2008).

### 2.6.2 Distributed Leadership

The idea of distributed leadership was first discussed within the field of organisational theory which is a sociological study of the structures within formal organisations (Barnard 1968). Distributed leadership has been defined within a school context as the delegation of leadership tasks between individuals with a variety of different roles within the school (Scribner et al. 2007). It has been praised as a powerful approach to leadership that empowers educators

and is a tool for transformational change (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2004). Spillane et al (2004) describe responsibility as being 'stretched' across a group of individuals arguing that the terms stretched and distributed can be used interchangeably where the term stretched allows a clearer visualisation of what is happening. This view is not universally accepted, to some distributed leadership merely represents the repackaging of managerialist principles whereby the organisation is seen more as a piece of infrastructure within society rather than a grouping of individuals with their own distinct thoughts, feelings and relationships (Fitzgerald and Gunter 2007). These are interesting points because it has been argued that distributed leadership empowers individuals thus benefiting the person (Spillane 2004) while others have asserted that although individuals benefit there is not always a net benefit for the organisation.

Distributed leadership can be viewed in two different ways, it can be seen as an approach which creates more leaders and therefore the burden of responsibility is spread across more people or it can be viewed as a holistic approach where the emphasis is on collaboration and co-operation (Gronn 2002).

Distributed leadership can facilitate improved development within the organisation, particularly in relation to organisational change and better professional development for teachers and leaders. Organisational benefits have been particularly well demonstrated where barriers have existed because of organisational structures or because of the culture that has existed within the school. There have been benefits seen when people can operate outside the normal structure of the curriculum and collaborate with other departments on shared projects (Scribner et al. 2007). Furthermore, including teachers in decision making and strategic planning has been found to improve relationships within the school. Ultimately creating a culture of collaboration has led to positive outcomes (Harris and Muijs 2004). In terms of professional development it has been found that distributed leadership improves staff efficiency and morale (Harris and Muijs 2004). Organisational benefits and improved professional development are not mutual unrelated benefits in fact it has been found that developing the leadership capacity of individuals within the organisation makes the organisation as a whole more efficient and more productive (Gold 2003).

Increasingly, schools are moving away from traditional approaches to professional development. Rather than senior staff or invited speakers delivering staff development courses, professional learning is becoming more decentralised and tailored towards the specific needs of different groups or individuals (Dinham and Rowe 2009). This has created a move towards action learning where a small group work together in order to address a problem e.g. a gap in knowledge or skills within the organisation. Involvement with small groups like

this was found to support individuals in becoming more active and have greater influence within the school thus increasing their leadership capacity (Aubusson et al. 2007).

The benefits of a distributed leadership approach are not limited to the confines of the individual school where it is employed. Professional learning communities, where a group of schools work together to share ideas and resources have been found to raise levels of student achievement. Within these communities distributed leadership approaches are widely used (Louis and Marks 1998). The distribution of leadership responsibilities has long term advantages in terms of sustaining professional learning communities, it has been specifically highlighted that benefits exist where the responsibility for leadership has been extended beyond the principal (Louis and Stoll 2007).

Despite the merits discussed previously there are considerable practical implications when it comes to adopting a distributed leadership approach within a school. Within schools there is an established hierarchy where leadership is formally assigned to specific people. Delegating responsibilities within this structure can strain relationships between individuals. This is a particular problem where individuals have different aims and priorities or work to different time scales. It is difficult for informal agency to be exercised within such as fixed structure (Timperley 2005).

### 2.6.3 Distributed School Leadership and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Prior to Covid-19 Pandemic distributed leadership was considered by some to be the most effective approach to leadership within schools in Northern Ireland (Brown et al. 2020). However it had been previously argued that when evaluating the success or indeed the suitability of distributed leadership models within schools the impact of this approach on relationships within the school had is not always considered (Lumby 2013). Lumby highlighted the problems that can be caused when distributed leadership is not suited to the structures already in place in a school, particularly if it cause power imbalances. Indeed Lumby's findings supported the arguments of (Hatcher 2005) who reported that distributed leadership most common involved the delegation of responsibility in a manner that could be given out to individuals but then taken back from them.

When the Covid-19 Pandemic began the increased pressured placed on teachers and school leaders meant that strategies and activities that had been planned previously were put on hold. Instead planning and strategic thinking became more reactive as the situation developed. Distributed leadership approaches were replaced by a situational leadership style.

Furthermore the additional pressures put on teachers meant that they were less able to undertake additional responsibilities (Brown et al. 2021).

It has previously been argued that distributed leadership is characterised by the interactions of the people in an organisation and the context within which they find themselves rather than the role played by an individual leader (Spillane 2004). Furthermore distributed leadership models have been reported as having success during the Covid-19 Pandemic, in fact it has been described as they most effective model of leadership during this time because of the amount of pressure put on schools at this time (Harris and Jones 2020). The increased reliance on educational networks and communities has been reported to lend itself to distributed leadership models (Azorín 2020). The success of distributed leadership models during the Covid-19 Pandemic maybe be related to the leadership model used before the pandemic. It has been found that were a distributed leadership model was well established in a school before the pandemic it was found to be advantageous during the pandemic (Beauchamp et al. 2021).

## 2.7 Extracurricular Clubs, Environmental Initiatives and School Leadership

School leaders have a responsibility towards the personal development and academic progress of the pupils in their school. As outlined in this chapter extra-curricular activities have been shown to be beneficial for pupils in terms of developing skills, building confidence and raising academic attainment. Environmental initiatives offer a way to engage young people in environmental activism during a time when there is a climate emergency. However as discussed there are a number of barriers preventing teachers from engaging in extra-curricular activities and environmental initiatives.

## 2.8 Summary

This chapter has given a review of the literature on extra-curricular activities in school, attitudes towards them, barriers to their uptake and the benefits of undertaking extra-curricular activities. The work of FEE and the YRE programme and their objectives outlined. The role of school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic and role in navigating it was discussed, along with the impact their approach has on the culture and attitudes within the school.

The Foundation for Environmental Education funded this study, their aim is to understand why there is not better uptake of the Young Reporters for the Environment programme in Northern Ireland. They have demonstrated success with this programme in other countries and wish to investigate what barriers to participating in YRE may exist in Northern Ireland.

Research literature demonstrates that participation in extra-curricular activities is beneficial for pupils and teachers, particular in relation to teacher-pupil relationships. Teachers do recognise this and are prepared to participate in extra-curricular activities, however there are barriers such as workload and industrial action that prevent some teachers from running extra-curricular clubs.

In this study a sample of secondary school teachers from Northern Ireland will be interviewed to gain an insight into their views. A semi-structured interview protocol will be used, and they will be asked about their knowledge of Foundation for Environmental Education and the Young Reporters for the Environment Programme, barriers to the running of extra-curricular programmes and environmental initiatives and the attitudes of school leaders towards environmental clubs and initiatives.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the aims of this study and outlines the research questions. The methods by which the data was obtained and analysed are discussed. The ethical considerations that arose and the methods by which they were addressed are also explained.

### 3.2 Research Approach

The researcher adopted an interpretivist approach with the aim of understand thought process of the participants in this study. In order to do this qualitative data was required and a semi-structured interview was decided upon as the most suitable approach. This allowed the researcher to address the research questions in a high degree of detail using follow up questions to explore the thought process of the participants (Almeida, Faria and Queirós 2017).

### 3.3 Research Aims and Question

#### 3.3.1 Research Aims

The Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) run a programme called Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE), they believe that they have a programme which is good and has been successful in the schools that it has been delivered in globally. They are however concerned that there has not been better uptake within Northern Ireland. This study aims to investigate barriers that impede teachers when undertaking extracurricular activities in school. Using the information gathered FEE can better support teachers in delivering their programme.

#### 3.3.2 Research Question

What are the challenges faced by teachers delivering environmental initiatives as part of the extra-curricular programme within schools in Northern Ireland?



What knowledge do teachers in Northern Ireland secondary schools have of Young Reporters for the Environment?

What barriers are there to running extra-curricular clubs or initiatives?

What are the attitudes of school leaders towards environmental clubs and initiatives?

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

An ethics application was made to the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast following the university's guidelines before any research took place. The application included information on the research process, storage of data, recruitment of participants and participant confidentiality agreements. All information to be sent to participants including; participant information letters, consent forms and draft letters were included. The university granted permission for research to proceed in July 2023.

Permission was sought for the interview to be audio recorded so that it could be transcribed before being coded and anonymised. It was explained to participants that they could stop at any time, and they could have their data removed. It was explained that once their data was anonymised it could not be removed from the study. It was explained to participants that their data would be confidential and would be stored securely on the university's system. However, confidential in so far as any disclosure of illegal activity or a child protection issue would have to be passed on to the appropriate authorities e.g. the Police Service of Northern Ireland. This is explained in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2).

### 3.5 Steps to Reduce Bias as a Funded Study

This study was funded by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) which can create a bias. To protect against this the study was carried out under the supervision of an academic researcher from Queen's University. FEE were not involved in the research process and the study was submitted for an independent ethics review by Queen's University before the study commenced.

## 3.6 Methods

### 3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to allow participants more freedom when expressing their opinion (Flick 2009, p150). This approach allowed the researcher to explore teacher's perceptions of the barriers they face and the issues that impact upon them (Flick 2009). A limitation of semi-structured interviews is that information can be missed if it falls outside the scope of the questions asked. To mitigate this the researcher carried out a thorough literature review and liaised with an academic supervisor in order to make sure that the interview schedule gave sufficient coverage of the issues under investigation and addressed the research question

### 3.6.2 Sampling

A non-probability sample was used because of the specific nature of the research question. Purposive sampling can be used when evaluating a specific program (Flick 2009), in this case the Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) program. It was important that participants had the required knowledge and experience of the program in order that the research question could be addressed. This means that the results are less generalisable. However, while their answers are not representative of the general population, they do relate to people who are involved with the YRE program.

### 3.6.3 Data Collection

Once ethical approval was granted by the university, data collection began. Schools were contacted by email using the email address published on their school website. Principals were provided with a Gatekeeper Information Sheet and asked for permission, thus giving them a gatekeeper role. Once the principal had given consent the researcher contacted individual within the school who had acted as FEE's point of contact within the school, they were provided with an information sheet and a consent form. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that the information they gave would be treated confidentially, the limits of this confidentiality was explained verbally as well as through a participant

information sheet (Appendix 2). Semi-structured interviews were then conducted and recorded online through Microsoft Teams, they were subsequently transcribed, coded and analysed. Conducting interviews online was advantageous because the research was not required to travel to meet any of the participants in the study, furthermore interviews were transcribed through teams which helped with the coding process.

#### 3.6.4 Analysis of Data

The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews using Microsoft Teams, the data was then coded and analysed. Themes within the data were identified and comparisons were made between the responses of different participants in order to determine similarities and differences.

The following steps were followed (Nowell et al. 2017);

- Familiarisation – recordings of the interviews were listened to transcripts were read.
- Coding – codes were identified within the data.
- Identification of themes – coded data is studied and relevant codes are collated together, themes are then generated from this.
- Revision of themes – themes are analysed and defined.

#### 3.6.5 Participants

The sample consisted of a small group of six classroom teachers from four different secondary schools in Northern Ireland. None of the participants were involved with the Foundation for Environmental Education at the time of the study but one had previously participated in the Young Reporters for the Environment programme. Participants were assigned using anonymous codes so as to maintain confidentiality. The table below contains each participants anonymous code along with details on the position they hold, the length of their service in teaching and they nature of the school they teach in.

| Participant | Position                                  | Years Teaching | Selective/Non-selective | Single sex/Co-ed  | Size      |
|-------------|---|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| P1          | Technology Teacher, Deputy Head of Year   | 5-10           | Non-selective           | Single sex (Boys) | 1000-1500 |
| P2          | Science Teacher, Head of Department       | 20<            | Non-selective           | Co-ed             | 500 - 100 |
| P3          | Geography Teacher, Head of Sustainability | 10-20          | Non-selective           | Co-ed             | >1500     |
| P4          | English Teacher                           | 5-10           | Non-selective           | Co-ed             | >1500     |
| P5          | Physical Education Teacher                | 10-20          | Non-selective           | Co-ed             | 1000-1500 |
| P6          | Music Teacher                             | <5             | Non-selective           | Co-ed             | >1500     |

### 3.7 Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research data is not measured with numerical value as in quantitative research, rather it is an interpretive approach which therefore cannot be assessed for validity and reliability by repeating the process (Guba and Lincoln 1994). However qualitative research can be evaluated using different criteria in order to establish its credibility, verification strategies have been developed for this purpose. Such strategies include; methodological coherence, selection of appropriate sample, concurrent collection and analysis of data, theoretical thinking and theory development (Morse et al. 2002). These principles were adhered to as far as possible during the processes of data analysis and collection.

The researcher carefully designed an interview schedule under the instruction of an academic supervisor and a purposive sampling method was used to select participants. Analysis of the

data was carried out as soon as practicable after data collection and themes drawn from the data were set within a theoretical context of the existing literature. Confirmability has also been set out as a method of validating qualitative data (Koch 1994), therefore an audit trail was created by keeping interview notes, audio recording and transcripts of interviews along with notes on coding and the development of themes.

### 3.8 Limitations

Qualitative research has been criticised by cause because often the research is not a neutral agent within the process (Preissle 2006). This is true of this study as the researcher has received funding from FEE. The researcher worked closely with a Queen's University academic in order to minimise this bias.

A sample size of six is sample and makes it difficult to make generalisations based on the data (Almeida et al. 2017). It is also possible that teachers responses to questions will have been impacted upon by the them having the knowledge of their answer being recorded as per the Hawthorne effect (Merrett 2006).

Data was collected during a time when the main teaching unions in Northern Ireland were engaged in industrial action, this may have impacted upon the sampling process as some individuals may have chosen not to participate because of the union action.

### 3.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methods used by the researcher to collect data from teachers who have been approached by the Foundation of Environmental Education (FEE) with a view to them running the Young Reporters for the Environment program in their school. This investigation was carried out in order for FEE to identify what barriers deter teachers from delivering this program. In the following chapter the themes that were derived from this data will be discussed.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by teachers delivering environmental initiatives as part of the extra-curricular programme within schools in Northern Ireland. This was specifically examined in the context of a study funded by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) who hope to increase the uptake of their Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) programme within Northern Ireland. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six teachers across four schools in Northern Ireland. The interviews focused on their knowledge and experience of YRE, environmental clubs and initiatives in their schools and the attitudes of their school's leadership team towards extra-curricular clubs and initiatives in school. They were carried out over Microsoft Teams in September/October 2023. A computer software called 'NVivo' was used during analysis, data was coded using this software and then a process of analytic induction was used to form themes as described in Chapter 2. As a result of this the themes sub-themes listed below arose and as such they are discussed in the order that they occurred in the interviews;

1. Knowledge of Young Reporters for the Environment
  1. Environmental Initiatives in Schools
  2. Literacy Initiatives in Schools
2. Barriers to Running Environmental Clubs or Initiatives
  1. Clashes with other Extra-curricular Initiatives
  2. Pressures on School Resources
  3. Nature of Interactions with External Organisations
  4. Industrial Action
3. Attitudes of School Leaders Towards Environmental Clubs and Initiatives
  1. School Leadership's Priorities within the Extra-Curricular Programme
  2. Senior Leaders Support for Extra-curricular Activities and Environmental Initiatives
  3. Situational Leadership
  4. Distributed Leadership

## 4.2 Theme One: Knowledge of Young Reporters for the Environment

FEE is active in 77 countries world-wide including Northern Ireland, however, only two of the six teachers interviewed had heard of the organisation. All of the teachers interviewed had heard of the Eco-schools initiative which is run by FEE and they were aware of their schools being a part of that programme. None of the teachers interviewed were actively participating in YRE, however, one teacher had participated in the past.

Eco-schools contacted the participant's school by email and this brought about their involvement in YRE. Initial motivation for the teacher was in order to get *'more responsibility in school'*(P2) in the hope of this leading to opportunities for career progression and YRE was appealing for this participant as a teacher of Science because *"the environment is part of the Science curriculum"*(P2). Therefore YRE may have appeal for teachers who are looking for career development through an initiative that is related to the curriculum they teach.

Pupils who participated in the project had the opportunity to present their findings and this was reported as a positive experience which they benefited from;

*"they would never have (otherwise) presented in front of a lecture theatre of people...it definitely gave them a lot of confidence and it built relationships that translated into the classroom."*(P2)

This indicated that participants had opportunities that would not have otherwise arisen within the curriculum and that this was beneficial for them within their classroom studies.

Although the teacher reflected positively on the experience, she gave up the programme when other pressures on her time arose from being promoted in school. This is interesting in light of a previous study which found that when teachers undertake additional responsibilities or experience other pressures such as an increase in workload they are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities (Whiteley and Richard 2012). Pacoal (2021) reported that when there is an increase in teachers' workload they perceive that the quality of their teaching is negatively impacted. The programme had been run in conjunction with a teacher of English who was interested in journalism however that teacher left at which point there was no longer anyone with the time and inclination to run the programme. Interdepartmental collaboration on this project demonstrates the opportunities that YRE creates to develop cross-curricular skills. It has been reported in Savage (2012) that collaboration between departments requires careful and then it should be specifically included in pedagogical plans for the individual teachers involved rather than just being part of a departmental or whole school plan. It is also evident

that for the programme to work it requires staff to feel motivated to get involved and then the time and resources available in order to deliver it.

This theme will be broken down in to two subthemes; Environmental Initiatives in Schools and Literacy Initiatives in School. Environmental Initiatives in Schools will be addressed first as it directly addresses the research question, what are the challenges faced by teachers delivering environmental initiatives as part of the extra-curricular programme within schools in Northern Ireland?

#### 4.2.1 Environmental Initiatives in Schools

All participants in this study reported being aware of environmental initiatives in their school. Each of the four schools from which the sample was drawn were involved with Eco-schools and were working towards 'Green Flag' accreditation. A range of initiatives were described including litter picking and education about littering, recycling and the maintenance of green spaces and/or vegetable gardens. All participants reported that environmental initiatives were considered to be the responsibility of the Science and Geography departments because the environment is taught to the pupils in these subjects. However all participants also felt the YRE would specifically appeal to the English department because of the journalistic aspect involved in the final presentation of the project. It could be said that the knowledge content of YRE falls within the remit of Geography and Science but the literacy skills content lies within the English department. This may be true at Key Stages 4 and 5 when pupils are being prepared for public examinations, however the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (2007) allows greater scope for a more holistic approach where value is placed on teaching cross-curricular skills. While this provides an opportunity for collaboration between departments it may create a barrier to the uptake of the programme. It has been reported that if cross-curricular collaboration is to be successful it should be planned at the level of an individual or group of individual teachers' pedagogy, rather than at a whole school curricular level (Savage, 2012).

One teacher described an initiative in his school called the '*connected unit*' (P3) which is a unit delivered collaboratively between the English and Geography departments. It was described as similar in nature to YRE but without any submission or presentation to any external organisation. The explanation of its long-term success was, '*it has been built in to the schemes of work*' (P3) and that the responsibility for the programme is assigned to a specific person who undertakes it as part of a paid role. This links the success of a programme with



resourcing. Where schools value a programme and resource it properly, it runs for longer. This has been reported by principals who have found that when they have more funding they can employ more staff to run the extra-curricular programme more effectively. They also found a similar effect if they manage teacher appropriately because more teachers are then willing to give their own time free of charge (Bromley 2022).

#### 4.2.2 Literacy Initiatives in Schools

All participants described a range of literacy initiatives in their school and reported that school leaders, teachers and parents all considered literacy initiatives to be important. One teacher described the teaching of literacy skills as *'our bread and butter'* (P4) while another said, *'every teacher is a teacher of literacy'* (P2). The importance of literacy was linked to academic achievement and future employability. All participants interviewed reported that literacy initiatives are included within the curriculum (Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum 2007) and extracurricular activities that promote literacy are valued.

#### 4.3 Theme Two: Barriers to Running Environmental Clubs or Initiatives

In terms of barriers to running environmental clubs or initiatives the findings from this study will be discussed in turn; clashes with other extracurricular activities, pressures on school resources, nature of interactions with external organisations and industrial action.

##### 4.3.1 Clashes with Other Extra-curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities are not compulsory within schools in Northern Ireland however it has been found that extra-curricular activities have social and cultural benefits for the pupils who participate in them and the school generally (Buoye 2004, Shulruf 2010). Participants in this study reported that the benefits are known in their schools and that they had experience of this themselves, with one teacher saying, *'relationships are better outside of the classroom and (they) form through the extra-curricular clubs'* (P1), another commented,

*'If you're willing to get involved and do additional things with them that they are interested in, that helps with the working relationships within the classroom.'* (P2)

Benefits in terms of school cohesion and relationships between pupils were also reported,

*'The beauty of SU (Scripture Union) is that it's lovely to have the different year groups mixing together and the older ones looking out for the younger ones.'* (P4)

There were also benefits in terms of increased levels of competence found through clubs run within the music department. This allows the pupils there to achieve more academically within the subject,

*'...extracurricular activities, that is the gateway in which they're able to access a lot of the things that we do at key stage four and five.'* (P6)

In fact the music department see extra-curricular clubs as an integral part of their process of recruiting pupils on to their key stage 4 and 5 courses.

All of the schools who participated in this study had busy extra-curricular schedules with numerous activities undertaken on every day of the school week. There were a wide range of clubs mentioned, ranging from sports and music clubs to pet clubs and gardening clubs. This means that pupils are not able to attend all clubs as there are clashes in terms of scheduling and therefore there is some level of competition for numbers. In one school it was reported that pupils are included to attend some club every other week so that they can participate in more clubs. However invariably some clubs, particularly sports clubs are more popular than others and it is difficult for a new or smaller club to establish itself if it clashes with a popular activity. This was considered to be a barrier to running environmental clubs (Holland 1994).

According to the participants in the current study, how well particular clubs are attended is determined by a number of factors including, popularity among pupils and the value placed on them by parents. Across all participants in the study it was reported that a high level of value was placed on sports and music clubs with one teacher reporting that 50% of the clubs in her school are sports clubs. It was also reported that literacy initiatives and revision classes were considered to be particularly important. This highlights that even outside the classroom schools are conscience of the pressures put on them for pupils to achieve academically and look for ways which they can improve their results.

It was reported that parents value sports and music clubs but are also aware of the need for their children to achieve academically and as such place value on literacy initiatives, homework clubs and revision classes. When asked about the value placed on environmental clubs teachers felt that some parents placed some level of value on them but that they were not considered as important sports or academics. It has been found in a previous study that participation in extra-curricular sports is thought to improve social status motivates participation in these activities (Holland, 1994).

#### 4.3.2 Pressures on School Resources

The main pressures on school resources for extra-curricular activities were reported to be teacher workload and funding. Sutton (2015) found that teachers were less likely to undertake extra-curricular activities when they felt that their workload was too high. It was reported that teachers were concerned that if participation in extra-curricular activities increased pressure on their time then their classroom teaching would suffer. However it was found that participation in extra-curricular activities did not actually have a negative impact on the quality of lessons (Pacoal, 2021). The findings of this study support his, in fact at the time of this study teachers in Northern Ireland have been advised by the largest teaching union in Northern Ireland (Chapter 2.4.4) that they should not undertake any additional responsibilities other than what they are paid for because the current teacher workload is too high. It was reported in this study that the nature of job has changed, and workload has increased over time, one teacher commented;

*'I think maybe the expectations of the job have changed over the years and we don't always have time to do the nicer things of the job, which would be extra-curricular activities and I think the admin side of the job is quite demanding now.'* (P1)

This comment is interesting in light of the finding by Penrice (2011) that although teachers perceive there to be an increase in administrative duties these duties have not significantly increased the teachers workload. Whether or not it has materially increased workload for teachers this study indicates that there is a perception that workload has increased and as such teachers are less willing to undertake extra-curricular activities.

It is clear that time is a significant factor with one teacher commenting about undertaking an extra-curricular club, 'automatically it obviously limits the amount of planning time that you have in school time' (P6). Although it is clear from this study that teachers are concerned about the impact of reducing the time they have for planning, Pacoal (2021) reported that where planning time was decreased because of teachers undertaking extra-curricular activities this did not have a negative impact upon the quality of their lessons.

Difficulties with funding have been reported as a barrier to running extra-curricular clubs, particularly where additional or specialist equipment is required. One mentioned that there is a start-up fund in his school which is helpful while another mentioned that support staff such as classroom assistants are often paid to run clubs. Some had received help from outside agencies who provided staffing and equipment to help with some activities this reduced the burden of costs. However, where this help does not exist or is withdrawn it is a barrier to the long-term running of clubs. It was also felt that it is becoming increasingly difficult to access

funding. It has been found that this has resulted in parents having to pay more for their children to participate in extra-curricular activities and this is creating an inequality between the children of parents who can afford to pay and those who cannot (Holloway, 2014).

#### 4.3.3 Nature of Interactions with External Organisations

Some teachers reported successful engagement with outside agencies including FEE, one teacher described how the YRE programme run by FEE introduced pupils to activities that were *'new and interesting'* (P2) and that *'gave them (the pupils) a lot of confidence'* (P2). Another organisation supported a gardening club in one of the schools. A member of their staff grew seedlings which were ready for planting when she took them in to the school, 'she put the background work in' which was supportive for the school staff because it reduced the amount of additional workload placed on them.

Although there is support available when a relationship has been established and this has been found to be beneficial, establishing that relationship is not always straight forward. Initial communication from outside agencies most commonly happens through email. This was described as *'ad-hoc'* (P3) and *'overwhelming'* (P3). Further examination of these communications revealed that the volume of emails is a problem. Sometimes an organisation will email the schools main email address whereupon there are a number of ways this is communicated out, it may be announced at a staff meeting or briefing, it might be forwarded to all staff members or if particular individuals are known to be interested in a specific area they might just be contacted. If a relationship has been established between an organisation and a teacher then an email will be sent to that teacher directly. The result of all of this is that teachers receive a high volume of emails and it can be an arduous and time consuming task for them to read all the emails and determine which initiatives are useful for them. If an initiative does not stand out and make it immediately clear what is being offered then it can easily be overlooked without its merits being fully considered.

One teacher reported having been consulted about the development of software called Earth Hub. Earth Hub will allow 80 environmental organisations based in Northern Ireland to create a central database of resources which will be open to all sectors, including education. This project has been undertaken by Northern Ireland Environment Link and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful expect that this will reduce duplication of resources and cut costs. The initiatives would be coded and categorised so that teachers could access the database and search for

programmes that they would be interested in. He believes that this will be a more effective way of communicating with teachers rather than the current approach of emailing schools.

#### 4.3.4 Industrial Action

Teachers in Northern Ireland are currently engaged in action short of strike. There were one and a half days of strike action in the academic year 2023-24 which result in school closures during that action (NASUWT). The teacher members have been balloted and agreed on this action in protest against perceived issues with pay and workload (NASUWT). Teachers have been specifically instructed not to participate in any activities that they are not contracted to participate in and not to implement any new initiatives. This is a barrier to the delivery of extra-curricular programmes in schools in Northern Ireland. However the significance of this barrier varies from school to school as there are varying levels of adherence to the union's directive.

One teacher reported that in her school, *'teachers are still running their after-school clubs'* (P5) while another stated that;

*'Union action has a massive impact on staff willingness to participate (in extra-curricular clubs), particularly after school.'* (P1)

It is clear from this that there is a range of positions taken by teachers on this issue but that extra-curricular programmes have been impacted. The differences in responses to the union's directives might in part be explained by teacher's personal motivation for becoming involved in extra-curricular activities.

Some teachers talked about wanting more responsibility in school and career progression while others talked about being interested in the environment and educating young people on how to be more environmentally responsible. One teacher talked about teachers leaving a *'legacy'* (P3) and making the best of his time teaching young people. It appears that industrial action is impacting upon the extra-curricular programme of schools generally but that teachers who feel intrinsically motivated towards running a club will continue to do that.

Union action has not only impacted upon the running of extra-curricular clubs but also the undertaking of new initiatives. Teachers have been instructed by the union not to undertake any new initiatives within school. Therefore, if a senior leader or middle manager within a school wants to introduce a new course or policy, it is difficult to get support for it because of union action. Although an individual or a small group of teachers might feel motivated to participate, if the initiative requires wider support, then it is unlikely to succeed.

Lack of support for environmental initiatives has been cited as a reason for initiatives not succeeding generally. One teacher talked about a previous initiative that had failed and he attributed that to lack of support in a general sense within the school, commenting,

*'... it kind of fell on its face because it looked like it needed a whole school approach and the whole school wasn't really on board with it... it wasn't embedded at every level of the school.'* (P3)

This appeared to be particularly relevant when considering recycling or litter initiatives.

#### 4.4 Theme Three: Attitudes of School Leaders towards Extra-curricular Clubs and Environmental Initiatives

It has been reported that the attitudes of school leaders can impact upon the uptake of extra-curricular clubs and other initiatives in a number of ways. Yemini et al. (2014) found that although external factors affect what extra-curricular activities are offered in schools, principals have the capacity to exert their own influence. This influence can manifest in a number of ways including the nature of clubs or initiatives in the school and the uptake of those clubs by pupils. If they operate a top-down system the clubs offered often reflect the priorities of the senior leadership.

Yemini et al. (2014) also reported instances of teachers being given increased responsibility and authority within the extra-curricular programme which increased teacher's motivation to be involved and increased the breadth of clubs offered. They also proposed this can create its own challenges and pressures, particularly if there are clashes in the schedule.

This theme will be broken down in to the following sub-themes; School Leadership's Priorities within the Extra-curricular programme, Senior Leaders Support for Extra-curricular Activities and Environmental Initiatives, Situational Leadership and Distributed Leadership. It is important to distinguish between what is meant between 'priorities' and 'support', priorities discusses what senior leaders consider to be most important and is important when there is a scheduling clash or competition for resources. Support refers to the practical help given towards the running of extra-curricular activities e.g. funding, time on the extra-curricular programme or staffing.

#### 4.4.1 School Leadership's Priorities within the Extra-curricular Programme

All teachers interviewed reported a high level of importance being placed on sports and music as extra-curricular activities, some reported that more than 50% of clubs in their school were sports clubs and one teacher commented, 'there's a clear value placed on music making' (P6). This perhaps reveals that there is importance associated with the process of learning and playing an instrument rather than an end product such as a concert or recital.

It was also reported that extra-curricular literacy initiatives and revision classes were valued by senior leaders, which perhaps reflects the fact that external pressures to achieve academically influence school life beyond the curriculum. It also hints that perhaps there is not sufficient resources within the curriculum to meet the academic standards that are expected.

Two teachers felt that the senior leadership in their school placed value on offering a wide range of clubs in order to cater for a diverse range of interests within the student body. McCabe et al 2020 reported that participation in extra-curricular activities increased pupil engagement in school life and improved attendance, particularly among vulnerable pupils. Perhaps these principals are aware of the benefits of catering for all pupils rather than just those who participate in the popular activities.

It was reported that principals of the schools that participated do place value on environmental clubs and initiatives. One teacher had recently been appointed to the newly created position of Teacher in Charge of Sustainability, this involves co-ordinating all aspects of sustainability as it is taught in the curriculum. Additionally he runs a gardening club. He felt that a strong indicator of the school placing value on environmental initiatives was the creation of the role he held, furthermore he felt supported in the role and he reported that the school was prepared to fund new initiatives. However he felt environmental initiatives are not '*the priority*' (P3) in so far as school leaders place more emphasis on exam performance, whereas he feels that environmental initiatives should be the highest priority in school.

One teacher reported that her school was involved with Eco-schools and was working towards the Green Flag award. She went on to say, '*Eco-schools is part of the school development plan*'(P5). A school development plan is a strategic plan for improvement and it is a statutory requirement that every school should have one in Northern Ireland. It is significant that this school has included achieving an Eco-schools Green Flag on their school development plan and indicates that there is a high level of priority associated with it.

#### 4.4.2 Senior Leaders Support for Extra-curricular Activities and Environmental Initiatives

This study has found that support from senior leaders within the school has a significant impact upon the success of extra-curricular clubs and environmental initiatives within a school. It has been reported that the attitude of policy makers impacts upon the effectiveness of extra-curricular activities, McCabe et al 2020 reported that where principals see extra-curricular activities as an opportunity to improve student engagement and create a sense of community within the school. The findings of this study are in agreement with this, with one teacher commenting,

*'I would say that as a school we have a diverse range of pupils with a diverse range of interests and that's really reflected in the broad range of clubs that we have on offer. There really is a club for almost anything you can think of which is brilliant because it obviously means that we're catering for a wide range of interests and helping people to feel involved in their wider community, which is great.'* (P4)

This indicates that where senior leaders place value on extra-curricular activities the offering from the school increases and a sense of community develops. However workload and time pressures have made some teachers feel reluctant to run extra-curricular clubs. Participants have made the following comments, *'A lot of people don't want to give up their time after school'* (P1) and *'we're not increasing our workload if we are not increasing our pay'*(P3).

Principals do have the capacity to act to reduce these pressures (Yemini and Addi-Raccah 2014), one teacher reported that in her school, teachers who undertake extra-curricular activities at lunchtime are given planning time in lieu of that during normal school hours,

*'So if you're willing to do a lunchtime activity, you don't have to give up your lunch...it is timetable as extra-curricular and then your lunch will be before or after that.'* (P1)

Tilbury et al 2006 found that the culture school leaders establish has a strong influence on pupil's behaviour and that where positive behaviours are promoted, pupils may adopt them and they can then become a part of the culture within the school. The findings of this report support this but also highlight that if these behaviours are not completely aligned with the values and priorities of parents then there can be some resistance to them. One teacher reported that in her school an anti-litter campaign was introduced whereby pupils were told to lift one piece of litter each and put it in the bin before re-entering the school building after break time. The teacher said,



*'it really promotes the importance of putting your litter in the bin and it has an impact whenever you don't... it's about respect for the whole school environment and it is not just one person's job' (P1).*

However there was some resistance to this and some parents phoned in to complain because their children did not want to be picking up other people's litter. Another teacher reported that for an initiative to have an impact on the culture of the school it must be *'embedded at every level'* (P3) however, that is a challenge at the moment because some teachers are not willing to participate in new initiatives because of the industrial action taken by the teacher's union.

#### 4.4.3 Situational Leadership

Blanchard et al 1993 identified two dimensions within the situational leadership approach – directive leadership and supportive leadership. This study has found evidence of both directive and supportive leadership demonstrated in the delivery of extra-curricular programmes. School leaders adopted a directive approach when they made it clear to teachers what the priorities are in their schools in terms of extra-curricular activities. All the teachers interviewed were aware of these priorities, *'sport and revision classes'* (P2) for example and they were able to identify what value was placed on environmental clubs or initiatives, *'it's not the priority...it is valued somewhat'* (P3). In one school where the school include progression with Eco-schools Green Flag programme in the school development plan, this was a strong directive action and emphasised the value they placed on it.

There was also evidence of a supportive approach being adopted where responsibility was delegated to individual teachers. A clear example of this was the creation of the sustainability coordinator position. However there were other indications of supportive leadership and delegation, *'they are very relaxed and they just let you run it'* (P2) indicates that responsibility has been delegated and *'there is a lot of material support from senior management'* (P6) along with, *'there's support if you need training'* (P3) spoke to the fact that senior leaders are prepared to provide resources that are required for the running of the club or initiative while they are not directly responsible for it themselves.

When delegating in this way it is important to make sure that staff are competent and motivated. When the sustainability coordinator was appointed there was a selection process which involved a written application and an interview. In terms of motivation teachers reported undertaking certain responsibilities because it might lead to opportunities for career

progression, while another described wanting to leave a *'legacy'*(P3) for future generations by protecting the environment.

#### 4.4.4 Distributed Leadership

All the teachers interviewed described leadership structures in their schools that were broadly similar; a principal at the top, supported in senior leadership by two vice-principals, middle managers (heads of department and heads of year) and then classroom teachers. Running alongside this structure, leadership duties are formally distributed to people in roles such as deputy heads of year who are responsible for maintaining satisfactory levels of punctuality among pupils and additional roles such as sustainability coordinator. This formal distribution of leadership responsibilities is comparable to that outlined by Spillane et al 2004, they found that this model has been successfully used to bring about transformational changes in schools and has become a popular model for leadership within education.

Having described the benefits of extra-curricular activities as, *'it gave them a lot of confidence'*(P2) and *'it built relationships that transferred into the classroom'* (P2) it is clear that the value of extra-curricular activities is recognised within schools. However in this context leadership responsibilities are not distributed in a formal sense rather the responsibility is spread across a group of people who work collaboratively together in the manner described by Gronn (2002). Gronn proposed that the demands created in workplaces are creating interdependent relationships between employees so that the co-ordination of how they work together is not controlled centrally. That is to say that if teachers collaborate on an extra-curricular initiative they may distribute tasks and responsibilities between themselves rather than being directed by members of the formal leadership structure.

#### 4.5 Summary

This study made a number of findings about what teachers in Northern Ireland know and think about the Young Reporters for the Environment programme (YRE), about barriers to operating extra-curricular clubs or environmental initiatives the attitudes of school leaders towards extra-curricular clubs and environmental initiatives.

Two of the teachers interviewed were aware of YRE, one had run the programme. Both spoke positively about the programme. While others had not heard of YRE they were aware of similar programmes and environmental initiatives in their schools. Teachers interviewed felt that communication from external agencies about programmes they run is ad-hoc and at times

overwhelming in terms of the volume of communications received. This may explain why they did not have more in depth knowledge of specific programmes.

The primary barriers to operating environmental clubs or initiatives are primarily work load, clashes with other clubs in the extra-curricular schedule and the current industrial action taken by the main teaching unions. Teachers feel that extra-curricular activities are beneficial for pupils and are an important part of school life. Also they enjoy running them, however they feel that the current barriers limit what they can do.

The teachers interviewed feel that school leaders' value environmental clubs and initiatives but they are not given the same level of priority as sports clubs, music, literacy initiatives and revision classes.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

In this chapter conclusions will be drawn from analysis of the data, recommendations will be made based on the findings, the limitations of the study will be explained and areas for future study will be discussed.

### 5.1 Conclusions

This study set out to address one main research question and three subsidiary research questions, as outlined below.

What are the challenges faced by teachers delivering environmental initiatives as part of the extra-curricular programme within schools in Northern Ireland?

What knowledge do teachers have of Young Reporters for the Environment?

What barriers are there to running extracurricular clubs or initiatives?

What are the attitudes of school leaders towards environmental clubs and initiatives?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the barriers that prevent teachers in Northern Ireland from running extra-curricular clubs and environmental initiatives. The study was funded by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and focused on their Young Reporter's for the Environment Programme. Furthermore, the attitudes of school leaders towards extra-curricular clubs and environmental initiatives were also considered. Interviewees indicated that there is a lot of pressure on teachers' time which can impact upon their willingness and capacity to participate in extra-curricular activities. They also felt that the volume of emails they receive from external organisations like FEE is excessive and can be overwhelming. This makes it difficult for them to make a proper assessment of what opportunities or support external agencies are offering. Within schools, sports clubs are considered to be the most valuable and this is reflected in how they are resourced by schools and attended by pupils. Academic activities such as literacy initiatives or revision classes are also considered to be important and some value is placed on environmental extra-curricular clubs and initiatives. However, parents and school leaders do not consider environmental clubs to be as important as sports clubs and initiatives that support academic progress.

The findings of this study indicate that industrial action taken by teachers is having an impact upon how schools are functioning. However, there is limited information on this within the research literature. Teachers reported that one of the main barriers to their participation in extra-curricular activities is teacher workload. These findings are connected in the sense that the current union action has been taken in response to workload issues.

Participants in this study have reported that proper funding is an important factor in the success of environmental initiatives in school. Initiatives that are properly resourced run for longer and have a greater impact.

There is evidence of situational leadership and distributed leadership approaches being used in school. Both approaches can have positive impacts on the extra-curricular life of a school. The situational approach allows schools to be directive about initiatives that they place the most value on or that require specific actions to be taken. It also allows a supportive approach to be adopted where teachers are sufficiently competent and motivated to run a club or initiative. The distributed model allows teachers to be appointed to roles where they are designated specific responsibilities.

Senior leaders place value on offering a broad range of clubs in order to engage with pupils with diverse interests. It was reported that they support this because they recognise that when pupils engage with extra-curricular activities it develops a sense of community within the school.

## 5.2 Limitations of the Study

There are two primary sources of bias within this study; the researcher is a teacher in Northern Ireland and the study was funded by the Foundation for Environmental Education. Every effort was made on the part of the researcher to make sure that data collection and analysis was carried out as objectively as possible. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in a reflexive manner whereby the interviewer can be responsive to answers when they are given, it was important that the researcher was mindful of this and followed the interview protocol carefully. When a study is funded by an external organisation there is always the possibility of bias. In the case of the current study the sponsors outlined the area of research they were interested in and the researcher with the support of an academic supervisor proposed a research question which was accepted. At his point they adopted a largely supportive role, offering advice and access to resources when requested, along with meeting to check on

progress. Research decisions, development of an interview protocol and data analysis was carried out by the researcher and their academic supervisor.

The sample size of six people made it difficult to make generalisations based on the data collected. Detailed answers were given by participants and so analysis was possible.

Classroom teachers were interviewed, some held positions of responsibilities, but none were senior leaders. Their opinions on what senior leaders' value were limited by this. Furthermore, the opinions of the pupils' parents were discussed but the parents themselves were not interviewed.

### 5.3. Recommendations

Industrial action taken by teachers is having a negative impact on the uptake of extra-curricular clubs and new initiatives in schools. It is therefore in the interest of both teachers and pupils that the disputed issues around pay and workload are resolved.

If environmental initiatives are to be successful in the long term, they must be embedded at every level within the school.

How external organisations communicate with schools has been identified as a problem, the volume of emails sent is off putting for teachers and often the emails are not sent to the most appropriate person. Earth Hub has been suggested as a resolution to this, Earth Hub is currently in development and is intended to be an online resource that will be available to organisations from all sectors who wish to take part in environmental action. An alternative to the current system of emailing should be sought if engagement between teachers and external agencies is to be improved. Earth Hub offers to reduce duplication of resources and communication and reduce the costs of resourcing environmental initiatives.

Time pressure has been raised as an issue that prevents teachers from participating in extra-curricular activities. If school leaders want to increase teacher participation, then this should be addressed.

The data indicates that parents and school leaders place less value on environmental clubs and initiatives than other activities like sports or music. If FEE wishes to increase the uptake of the YRE programme within Northern Ireland, then this should be addressed.

#### 5.4 Areas for Further Study

There appears to be little academic literature on how teachers and pupils are impacted upon by industrial action in schools. Interviewing or surveying teachers and pupils may give an insight in to this.

Funding has been raised as an issue for the delivery of extra-curricular programmes and environmental initiatives. Future research might look at how these programmes and initiatives are funded and how funding could be used effectively.

The importance placed on extra-curricular activities that aid academic progress was linked to the pressure on schools to meet academic standards. However, no explanations were given for the value placed on sports clubs. A further study could examine the value placed on sports clubs and environmental programmes. This might be useful to organisations like FEE if they wish to add value to their programmes.

It has been reported in this study that some teachers feel the job has changed over time and they spend more time on administrative duties which restricts their capacity to be involved in extra-curricular activities. Whether this is real or perceived it does appear to be a barrier to teachers undertaking extra-curricular responsibilities. Research into what the administrative duties of teachers, the time taken up by them and the pressure they put teachers under could clarify this.

All the schools that participated in this study placed some value on environmental issues. Two of the six teachers interviewed expressed the view that we are in a climate emergency and that environmental initiatives should be at the top of their schools list of priorities. Further studies might look at attitudes towards the climate emergency and what can be done to engage people with initiatives that aim to protect the environment.



Dear Sir/Madam

I would like to invite you to assist me in conducting a piece of research which I am undertaking as a student of Queen's University, Belfast. Below, I have detailed what the research would involve for you and the participating members of staff within your school. If you have any further questions, or would like additional information, please contact me (Patrick Magee) on 07515443914 or at [pmagee14@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pmagee14@qub.ac.uk).

Yours,  
Patrick

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the research is to investigate the challenges and or barriers faced by teachers when delivering extra-curricular activities in secondary schools in Northern Ireland.

### **What am I asking you to assist with?**

I would like your permission to allow me to interview members of your staff. Specifically, Heads of Department and Senior Leaders who have been contacted by the Foundation for Environmental Education or Eco-schools about the Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) programme.

### **What does taking part in the research involve?**

This research is completely voluntary, and it is entirely the participants' decision whether they take part or not. If you choose not to take part, this will have no impact on your relationship with the researcher, your employer or Queen's University, Belfast. The research takes the form of an interview, which should take approximately 30 – 60 mins and will take place over Microsoft Teams. If a participant is happy to take part, a consent form will be provided. Participants are able to withdraw from the process at any point, without having to give a reason. Please note, once the data has been processed and anonymised, it will no longer be possible to withdraw data. It will not be possible to identify any individual or school within the dissertation. The latest date on which data can be removed is the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2023.





## **Participant Information Sheet: Investigating challenges and/or barriers teachers face when delivering extra-curricular programmes in schools**

I would like to invite you to take part in a piece of research which I am conducting as a student of Queen's University, Belfast. It is entirely up to you whether you take part or not. If you have any further questions, please contact me (Patrick Magee) on 07515443914 or at [pmagee14@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pmagee14@qub.ac.uk).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the research is to investigate the challenges and or barriers faced by teachers when delivering extra-curricular activities in secondary schools in Northern Ireland.

### **What is your role in the research?**

This research is completely voluntary, and it is your decision whether you would like to take part or not. If you choose not to take part, this will have no impact on your relationship with the researcher, your employer or Queen's University, Belfast. The research takes the form of an interview, which should not last more than an hour. The interview will take place over Microsoft Teams. If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be asked to complete a consent form. You are able to withdraw from the process at any point, without having to give a reason. Please note, once the data has been processed and anonymised, it will no longer be possible to withdraw your data. If you wish to remove your data you should contact me at [pmagee14@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pmagee14@qub.ac.uk) or [k.kerr@qub.ac.uk](mailto:k.kerr@qub.ac.uk) by the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2023. It will not be possible to identify any individual or school within the dissertation.

### **What will happen after the interviews have been completed?**

After the interviews have been completed, the data collected as part of the interview will be transcribed, analysed and written up as part of the research. The researcher will use anonymous codes (for example School A, participant 1 will be referred to as A1). Due to this, no individual or school will be identifiable from the dissertation. The information obtained during the interviews will be stored in accordance with Queen's University policy.

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/about/Leadership-and-structure/Registrars-Office/Information-Compliance-Unit/Data-Protection/data-protection-policy/>



## Consent Form

I would like to invite you to take part in a piece of research which I am conducting as a student of Queen's University, Belfast. This research involves an interview which should take approximately 30-60 minutes. It is entirely up to you whether you take part or not. If you have any further questions, please contact me (Patrick Magee) on 07515443914 or at [pmagee14@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pmagee14@qub.ac.uk).

If you would like to take part in this research, please return this consent form to me via email at [pmagee14@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pmagee14@qub.ac.uk).

|  |  |
|--|--|
| I have read the attached information letter which explains the purpose of this research  |  |
| I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that I am able to withdraw from the research at any point, up until the interviews have been transcribed and anonymised, should I choose to.  |  |
| I understand that this study is being conducted by researchers from Queen's University, Belfast and that any personal information provided will be stored securely in accordance with University policy. The university policy on Privacy can be found here:<br><br><a href="#">NoticeforResearchParticipants.html</a> |  |
| I understand that I can ask questions of the researcher at any point, before, during or after the interview.   |  |
| I understand that any answers I provide during the interview will be audio recorded and will be used to inform the research. I understand that these interviews will take place of Microsoft Teams (which is supported by Queen's University).   |  |
| I understand that the information I provide may be looked at by authorised individuals within Queen's University (for example, the researcher's supervisor). I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.  |  |

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|---|--|
| I understand that the information I provide may be looked at by authorised individuals within Queen's University (for example, the researcher's supervisor). I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data. |  |
|---|--|

I agree to the following (please mark with an x)

To participate in an interview:                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_                      No \_\_\_\_\_

To have the interview audio recorded                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_                      No \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

Please return this form via email to [pmagee14@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pmagee14@qub.ac.uk)

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