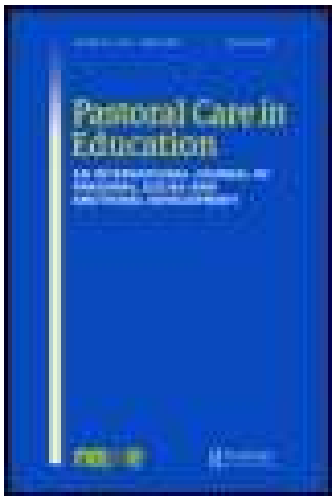

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The Pastoral Agenda at Easter 1990

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The Pastoral Agenda at Easter 1990

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In this paper Chris Watkins, Vice Chair of NAPCE, reflects on the situation as he saw it at the time of the National Conference, Easter 1990. He reviews what he considers to be the main characteristics of the situation at that point, and goes on to suggest some issues for schools in the 1990s. He concludes his discussion with a formal elaboration of what he argues are the main tasks facing NAPCE members and pastoral care in the coming decade.

The occasion of NAPCE's National Study Conference is a good one to stimulate thinking about the pastoral agenda. In our education system there is currently a lot of change, and perhaps a lot of pseudo-change, in both curriculum and management. In this article I aim to identify some of the items on the pastoral care agenda in that context.[1] The task is a broad one: while my main aim is to describe, some clear pointers to action for the reader may emerge.

My remarks are arranged in three sections:

- first, and most generally, some thoughts about the present climate at Easter 1990;
- second, the issues for schools, whole schools in this new decade;
- third, the agenda for us as NAPCE members and for pastoral care.

1. The Professional and Emotional Climate

I think it is important to give some introductory attention to the social context in which we all find ourselves in 1990 and in particular to the impact it is having on our schools and our pupils.

Looking back over the last decade, I am amazed and angered by the increase in authoritarianism and divisiveness I see. The government has been characterized by the 'them and us' attitude that is a hallmark of the authoritarian mind, and its policies have served to increase differences between 'haves' and 'have nots', in the name of supposed improvement and progress.

I was staggered to find recently that the 'Social Fund', the much-vaunted way of combating all those social security 'scroungers', refuses loans to half a million applicants a year. People who are much worse off than us are told 'No' when asking for a *loan* which they would have had difficulty paying off anyway. There are about half a million teachers in this country: so for each one of us there's someone who is told 'No'.

At the same time, there has over the last decade been an increase in consumerism. Ron Davie, the now retiring Director of the National Children's Bureau, said at their recent AGM in the north-east that 'British children growing up in the 1990s could be the most materialistic, the most self-centred and the most emotionally damaged children ever.'[2] He added: 'The education system is in danger of becoming over-competitive at the expense of the necessary values of co-operation and socialization on which the fabric of our society depends.'

Some of those who have been growing up in recent years, finding themselves among the 'have nots' and probably feeling dispossessed, have already started to demonstrate their anger. By chance I was in London's St Martin's Lane on the evening of that Saturday in March when the anti-poll-tax demonstration was held. To be picking my way through broken glass from every shop window, amid burnt-out cars, a Volvo on its roof and a Jaguar in the middle of the road, stopped in its tracks with every window smashed, was a disorientating and frightening experience. This action had within it a measure of revenge which differs markedly from the emotion of young dispossessed people five years ago, who, as revealed in research by Coffield *et al.* (1986) on unemployed youth, *blamed themselves* for not getting a job.

It is in this climate that the education system is trying to do more on reduced resources, and is trying moreover to do the always complex job of supporting the personal and social development of pupils. I found myself last term in a school in a development new

town full of self-made nuclear families where a skilled teacher of PSE said, 'I've given up the unequal struggle of talking about co-operation with this lot.' I could understand what she meant, but I'm not suggesting we give up; nor am I suggesting that everywhere is like that town.

One other aspect of the last decade, which is linked with authoritarianism, is the anti-democratic trend. In government and in public life, decision-making bodies are stacked with people chosen because they will adopt a particular line. We have seen the same process in education concerning school governors in some LEAs.

Education has also witnessed an anti-intellectual trend, to the point where professional debate at a national level is almost non-existent. What we have instead is political infighting between such bodies as DES, NCC and SEAC, all of them caught up in the attempt to create change in schools by over-legislation and administrative fiat (that well known little red car full of red tape).

Meanwhile the Prime Minister's views on the curriculum have on occasion carried more weight than those of all teachers put together, and in the absence of any real invitation to debate cross-curricular issues, NAPCE was reduced (and I mean reduced) to looking out for leaked drafts of NCC documents on personal and social education.

So this is the climate: what has been happening, in these conditions, to all of us, the various staff of the education service?

One thing that has amazed me about teachers is their resilience. I know it has been sorely stretched and that there are signs of breakdown at times, but I am amazed nevertheless. I am reminded of the Kelly doll: that small doll, sitting on a weighted hemispherical base, that every time you knock it sideways it rights itself. It appears to me that teachers have been developing the responses of the Kelly doll:

Crunch: National Curriculum	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: New salary structures	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: Abolish ILEA	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: Local Management of Schools	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: Reorganize secondary schools	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: Articled teachers	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: No negotiating rights	Boing!!	Up!
Crunch: Licensed Teachers (definitely one from behind)	Boing!!	Up!

How are we to understand this resilience? On what is it based? I think it is based on the fact that for someone to stay in education nowadays s/he has to have, to carry on my analogy with the Kelly doll, a pretty weighty base. S/he has some view about the role of the educator in the context of which the views of teaching that have come to beset us show up as trivial. It seems to me that, as we have always maintained the importance of pupils growing up having their own valuation of themselves, so we have to have our own valuation of the job we do. In that way we will be less influenced by, less dependent on the passing views of outsiders such as undemocratic authoritarian governments. I will develop this point with regard to schools a little in the next section.

Do not think that I am trying to play down or gloss over the feelings of devaluation, disruption and grievance which exist in the profession at the moment. These feelings, collectively described as 'low morale', do require attention. Some people say you *cannot* talk about the problem because that only makes it worse. My experience suggests otherwise. Both in groups of teachers and with individual teachers I have seen that talking about the low ebb of things at school has a parallel to talking about other painful experiences, such as bereavement or other loss. In fact, the problem gets worse if you *don't* talk about it. Sure enough, when you do start to talk the pit may seem bottomless, but my experience suggests that the feelings find their own low point on a curve and then start to pick up, in much the same way as you have probably experienced in talking over difficult things with a pupil or anyone else.

So we must not allow 'morale' to become a new taboo topic in the 1990s; instead, we need to remember that the feelings of staff in any organization are crucial to its performance and success. They must be listened to, and pastoral care of staff is likely to be increasingly important. We have to accept that some people will take themselves off to other jobs at times. On those occasions it is important that we do not cast ourselves as individual martyrs ('I'll be the last one to desert my post'). We must recognize the trends and their causes, and that more than individual commitment on each of our parts is going to be needed to ensure that the profession retains people who actually want to stay in it.

These are some of the points I want to highlight about what has been happening to us in the 1980s. Is anything changing as we embark on the 1990s? Are there any rays of sunshine? It is, I suppose, a positive sign at least that schools are not being blamed for so many of society's ills now as they were a few years back. And perhaps there are signs of softening in the timescale of introducing the National Curriculum, given the Prime Minister's comments in April and the decision to limit testing to core subjects in our primary schools. But I do not trust those an inch. As the *Times Educational Supplement* said in an editorial when national support for Records of Achievement was withdrawn, 'Government decisions made in the

name of easing overload conceal ideological victories for the hawks.'

2. The Agenda for Schools as they Enter the 1990s

In this section I want to pinpoint three imperatives for schools in this decade.

a. they must work to carry on being proactive and take care not to become merely reactive;
b. they must avoid thinking that everything is new and remember the place of certain fundamentals;
c. they must resist the pressures towards fragmentation and keep an integrated view.

I am beginning to believe that not only must schools do these three things in order to be effective and educative places, but they must do these things in order to *survive* in the future context.
Let me take them one by one.

a. Staying Proactive

In the last few years many schools have become reactive, in effect rolling over on their backs and waving their legs in the air. Some of them are now starting to realize what a vulnerable position this is; but some seem to have paralysed themselves and their thinking. I was in more than one LEA during February and March of this year where schools were saying 'we're not doing any development work on PSE until the magic papers come out from NCC.' I felt it necessary to disabuse them of their fantasy that there is magic coming from that quarter, and I believe events have proved me correct, given the woolliness of the guidance on the Whole Curriculum (National Curriculum Council, 1990). The point I want to stress here is that what those schools were doing is potentially very dangerous: they were losing sight of their own goals. It is perhaps a sign of how disempowered they feel, but in my view they cannot blame the legislation. It may seem paradoxical, but I think the present legislation actually *increases* the challenge to get it right at the local level, at school level. We must be proactive in our schools, plan ahead in new ways, develop school goals which are active, realistic and achievable and to make sure that our schools learn how to survive in the new environment.

I want to use an image here from organizational psychology, about how organizations learn. Many organizations are involved in what is called 'single loop learning' (see Figure 1). In step 1 they scan the environment in some way or other, either to gauge demand or see how their products are faring; in step 2 they compare what they find against what they have been doing and planning, that is, their targets; and in step 3 they take whatever action is needed. Schools sometimes learn like this, perhaps in rudimentary ways: they monitor how well their leavers did, they think about changes in what young people will need to learn in the future, and they may (*may*) make some changes in how they work.

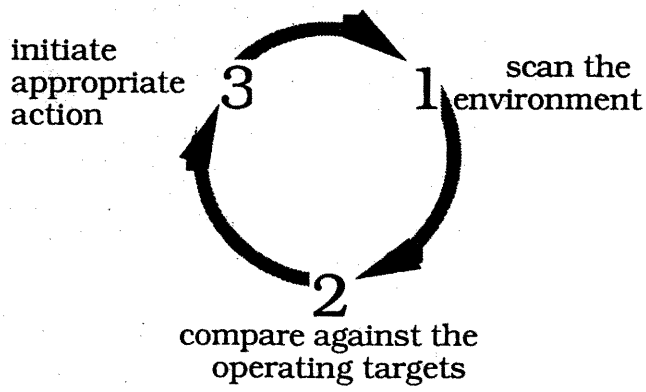

Figure 1. Single Loop Learning

I believe it is very important to recognize that the National Testing System is designed on a notion of accountability based on this sort of view of an organization. *However,* single loop learning may not be a very effective form of learning. It can be going on in even the most unhealthy, bureaucratic organizations, in organizations that are fragmented, in organizations whose employees are not encouraged to think for themselves; and the whole thing is very constricted. Indeed, single loop learning may keep an organization on the *wrong* goals and *prevent* success, especially in a fast-changing environment. What is needed for an effective organization (and it is the hallmark of much human learning) is 'double loop learning' (see Figure 2). This process includes the crucial step of

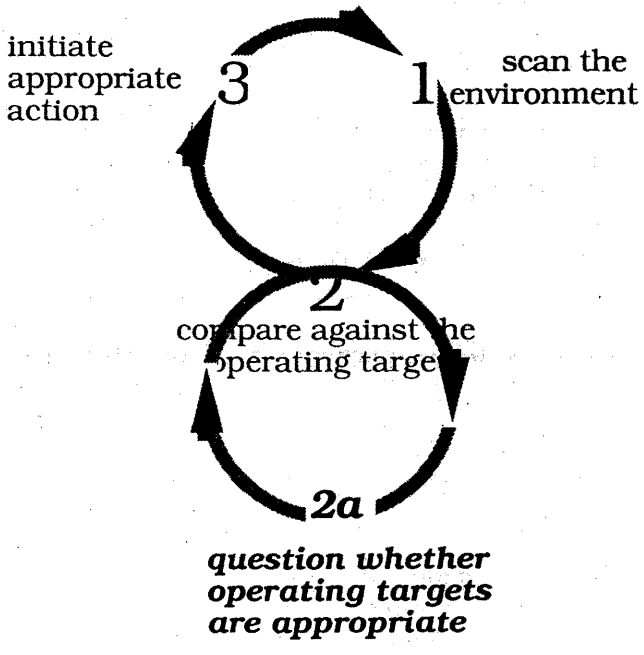

Figure 2. Double Loop Learning

questioning whether the operating targets are appropriate; that is, asking whether we are right to measure our activity in this way.

For schools this means not getting stuck on a single loop of 'Are we doing all right with the attainment targets?' – that could destroy you – but introducing the question 'What targets do we think are appropriate?', and making a statement about that. In this all members of staff in a school have a responsibility, but I think it is important to point out that staff who provide this function of questioning the targets are often made to feel unwelcome. Nevertheless I see it as on the agenda for all staff in the 1990s.

b. Remembering What is Fundamental

My second thought on what schools need to do in the 1990s is not to get caught up in the cult of the new and think that everything is – or should be – being changed. There *is* a degree of change; but there is a lot that is just rhetoric too, and a lot that does not change. We will need to make sure that we can distinguish between the useful and the not-so-useful ideas which come our way: between the practical, the impractical, the inappropriate and the merely rhetorical. We need therefore to look critically at a lot of the material currently being directed at schools, no matter how slick or 'authoritative' its presentation. Perhaps it will help to remember what I believe is an old Czechoslovak saying (and I blame Clement Freud for having got this one into a national newspaper): 'If you put shit on a shelf it thinks it's cake.'

Schools may need to remind themselves of something we have known for years about curriculum change: that 'brute sanity' does not work. Neither does brute legislation: so we should not be drawn into thinking that just because there is a lot of *legislation* on National Testing and LMS, they are the core aspects of what we do. If we fall into suggesting this, then we ourselves are narrowing what school means. Rather, we have to keep on the agenda those more complex aspects of education which make schools effective: the *nature of relationships*, the *negotiation of learning*, the *engagement in the ethos*. These form the fundamental base of what we do, and they will need re-stating.

If we follow these principles we will be able to view the school budget with an appropriately broad vision, we will be able to keep the National Curriculum in its place, and we will be reasserting the important things which keep teachers engaged and bring them job satisfaction.

Here is an example of such a reassertion from a school I know. I'm not, of course, setting it up as a model, but to exemplify two points. The passage I quote is the start of their curriculum statement, agreed by governors, which is strategically brief. The first paragraph reads:

> The curriculum of —— School is broad, balanced and coherent, and provides students with a wide range of learning experiences and opportunities. These incorporate the National Curriculum and TVEI entitlements, including cross-curricular dimensions, themes and skills. We recognize that all aspects of school life provide learning opportunities.

I take this to say 'Yes, of course we're coping with all this new stuff.' The second paragraph states:

> The curriculum helps students in their personal and social development, and in acquiring the knowledge and critical skills to understand their world and the means to change it. Learning demands rigour and challenge from students and teachers.

Here I see a distinctive and important statement of the school's priorities; and it is these that we need to keep in the picture and re-state for the present times.

c. Maintaining an Integrated View

The third thing I would urge schools to do in the 1990s is to resist the pressures toward fragmentation. We need to get past the harmful talk which has been generated about percentages of the timetable, and all the arguing that generates. (As an aside it's worth remembering that no Secretary of State is allowed to legislate timetable arrangements for schools; it is worth identifying clearly where the talk of percentages comes from.) We need to understand that the secondary school in particular is prone to fragmentation, especially under stressful conditions (including urban stress), with particular staffing arrangements, and particular management styles. At a national level Mrs Thatcher has provided us with a glaring example of the 'push' style of management and its polarizing effects. Our schools do not need that: they need an integrative style of management and all of us need to ensure that we make our contributions to that rather than leaving it up to others. That is why the whole theme of NAPCE's 1990 study conference is so clearly important: Whole School, Whole Person, Whole Teacher.

In order to keep an integrated view, all of us in schools are going to need to exercise all the skills of consensus-building, of working in groups, and so on; all the skills that we say the pupils need.

3. The Pastoral Agenda

The pastoral agenda will include all the things I've referred to up to now: staying proactive, remembering fundamentals, keeping an integrated view. But it

also includes getting these things right in a whole-school context, not in a fragmented way, and in the face of reduced resources. So pastoral care has got a fight on; but the important thing to remember is that this is not a win–lose fight. It has always been true that resources given to effective pastoral care *enhance* the achievement of the overall system, rather than detract from it. So it is a win–win fight, and we have to be clear about that.

This raises the issue: What is pastoral care fighting for? I was impressed this year by an article (Ascherson, 1989) in one of the Sunday newspapers entitled 'Less "caring", more justice'. In it Neal Ascherson quoted the comment: 'I do not want to live in the "caring society" . . . I would much prefer to live in a society which struggles to be just, which respects and enhances people's rights and entitlements.' He argued that to pose as a carer is to think of entitlements as if they were a matter of moral generosity, when in fact they are a matter of right. I was reminded of this point again recently when someone on the NAPCE Executive passed on the question 'Is NAPCE a tame association for carers?' In reply to that question it is important to remember that one of the key skills of an active carer is *advocacy*, the ability to argue for improvements on behalf of those less well equipped to argue. We are going to have to argue on behalf of all pupils and all teachers for all aspects of pastoral work.

To examine the pastoral agenda further I will look at various facets of pastoral work under headings I have used for some years (see for example Watkins, 1985):

pastoral casework, where our focus is on an individual pupil, and her/his development;
pastoral aspects of the curriculum, where our focus is on pupils and the personal–social skills they need (at school, for study, out of school, in later life);
pastoral management, where our focus is on the school, its curriculum, its relation to parents and others, and the effectiveness in reaching pastoral goals.

These different facets are most effective when well interrelated, but it is useful to list them separately as a reminder of the various different skills and strands of expertise we need in pastoral work.

Pastoral Casework

It seems to me that pastoral casework is getting hidden at the moment while all the other issues are grabbing the headlines in the prevalent 'teach teach teach' climate. Yet I have no doubt that it is still going on, for pupils and teachers, day in and day out, on a thousand and one complex and important issues. They may be everyday questions, like reviewing progress, when the role of the tutor is so clearly valued. Or they may be the more disturbing matters which we are only now finding ways to talk about, such as child abuse (thanks to excellent work by people like Peter Maher: see for example Maher, 1987), bereavement, coping with family break-up and step-families or other family arrangements, adolescent suicide. On the last of these, I was contacted by a TV channel wanting to do a sensitive programme on the rise in adolescent suicide rates. When they asked what school initiatives I knew of in this area, I had to say that I knew of *none*. I know of many committed teachers who give of themselves beyond the call of duty; I know of some who are probably overcommitted; but I know of no educational policy or educational programmes in this area.

We need to *get pastoral casework more into the limelight*. It is a core activity. In school, we must create more occasions when we talk in a structured and positive way about our work with individual pupils, and perhaps more joint work between teachers and tutors. We also need to draw attention to pastoral casework with audiences out of school, including perhaps through well written accounts – without, of course, breaking the confidentiality of our work. Pastoral care workers seem to me reluctant to write about their casework; a feeling that is understandable but one which we need to re-examine if the hidden aspect of our work is to have any visibility at all.

Pastoral Aspects of the Curriculum

Here schools have a chance to get things right at the local level and do something creative with tutorial programmes, personal–social education, and all subjects. We are past the most reactive stage, when people feared it was all off the agenda; we can take a cue from the increasing talk of whole-school processes and develop a proper whole-school approach to personal–social education which pupils deserve.

This will mean we have to stop thinking of PSE as just a course. In places PSE courses have such a bad name that the very term is difficult to use. One tutor I worked with this year told me that PSE stood for 'Perfectly Sordid Experience'! It will also mean that we have to come out of the corner of tutorial programmes, if that is where we have got stuck.

It is crucial to adopt a whole-school perspective. This does *not* mean 'it's all delivered through the subjects'. It means clarifying what the subjects contribute, clarifying what the PSE course contributes, clarifying what is special about the tutorial contribution. In so doing it is important to develop active, effective whole-school policies. This has to be more than one of those audits where everybody ticks boxes and nothing happens. We need proper co-ordination with senior management behind it, not just a lonely PSE co-ordinator on Incentive Allowance B (or A!). And it will need to be based on a whole-person view of the

pupils in our schools, a view which recognizes young people's developments in bodily self, sexual self, social self, vocational self and moral/political self. These are core aspects of personhood, not just bits which the National Curriculum Council chooses to label 'cross-curricular themes' because there are strong lobbies behind them. Whether the NCC gets its thinking straight or not (and now that its guidance on the whole curriculum has eventually been published you can make up your own mind), schools are going to have to do the real work, without becoming controlled by, or merely reactive to, those papers. We in pastoral care will need to work with more colleagues, with all subject teachers at times, crossing some of the old divides and making special links with colleagues in careers, health and so on.

A changing aspect of this picture is the relation of whole-school PSE to religious education. I feel confident that in those schools which have an agreed syllabus for RE that is modern and realistic, this relationship can be a very positive one, especially if schools do not react to the absurdities of the legislation on this front (the school of which I am a governor has taken the most straightforward approach, which is to apply to the SACRE for disapplication). But tensions may remain; I am regularly asked 'Where is the spiritual self on your list?' I have an answer which satisfies me – that I cannot so easily demonstrate the phenomenon of the spiritual self – but I recognize that this answer does not satisfy others, and further examination is required.

Pastoral Management

The changes that are under way in the curriculum offer a good opportunity for pastoral teams to undertake some of their management tasks more fully.

For years we have been saying that one of the important things about pastoral care is that it creates an overview of the pupil's experience of curriculum and school. So tutors and the tutorial team are in a key place for bringing to life much of the whole-school planning which is now being more talked about.

Those schools which have reviewed the Head of Year title, re-casting the role in terms of a Year Curriculum Co-ordinator, have probably given themselves a powerful tool, not least because those tutor team leaders can take a more proactive and less reactive stance. Indeed, there may be the chance here for those team leaders to get away from the 'discipline trap' which has distorted their roles for so long, loading them with inappropriate issues to cope with and ignoring the aspects of school which *generate* 'discipline' problems.

Departmental hierarchies are not going to be enough for whole-school management. We have to develop more effective structures which do not give rise to so much competition and in-fighting. In this connection we should remember that the pastoral team has always provided an important function for teachers, enabling them to be members of *more than one team.* That feature has got to be more effectively used in our schools, and some 'pastoral people' will have to loosen their old affiliations and habits. We need much better communication among the various teams to which a staff member belongs.

In moving towards a conclusion, I want to stress that this pastoral agenda is important, *not* because people in pastoral care are enthusiastic about it or committed to it, but for two linked reasons:

1. because it supports pupils' development and *supports pupils' achievement;*
2. because *it is an entitlement.*

I hear about curriculum entitlement. I believe we need to specify the pastoral entitlement too: not in a separate way but in a whole-school way. The following section sets out some of the items I would want to include. No doubt there are others to be added.

The Pastoral Entitlement

Every pupil has an entitlement to:

- someone who has continuing personal contact with them;
- someone who knows the profile of their overall performance;
- someone who will offer guidance and help;
- someone who will know of other sources of help;
- opportunities for personal–social development/ taking responsibility.

Every parent has an entitlement to:

- someone who has a continuing contact with and real knowledge of their child;
- someone who aims to hear their hopes for their child.

Every tutor has an entitlement to:

- information on, and time with individuals;
- time with group;
- time with parents;
- time to prepare and access to resources;
- support for development via reflection, review and training.

Every tutor team leader has an entitlement to:

- clear realistic goal-setting and job description;
- time and supporting resources: secretarial, advisory and training;

- support for policy development and review;
- equal opportunity of access to senior management positions.

Every teacher has an entitlement to:

- consult with colleagues who may know more about the pupils they are teaching;
- have information conveyed about pupils they teach, their responses, etc.;
- training in tutoring and enhancing personal–social development;
- have their own requirements and perspectives heard in the school organization.

My final point is that the people to whom we are advocating this entitlement include some new players in the 1990s. I am thinking particularly of school governors. In some places governors are not the very powerful people the new rhetoric claims they are, but in other places they are becoming more so. They are people to engage in what we are doing, to explain to, to show the value of our work. In doing these things you will use your skills as educators towards them as you do towards parents, developing clarity about the pastoral aspect, showing them in active ways what is involved, and drawing on their perspectives to help you give effective guidance, to evaluate and review. You'll be using your skills as *whole-school, whole-person* educators. I hear of many examples of teachers adopting this style with governors and with parents, and I do not know of any failures. Nor do I know of any evidence which suggests parents want other than a whole education for their whole children.

To conclude, I believe it to be important that everyone in schools takes confidence in this pastoral agenda, and in the task needed to make those entitlements real. The ideas laid out in this paper are only some of those we will need; there are others which we probably cannot even anticipate yet. In order to maintain as much effective pastoral provision as possible it will be crucial to have at our disposal clear rationales and appropriate structures. These require a creative blend of both old and new.

Notes

1. This article has been developed from the opening talk given to the NAPCE National Study Conference, Charlotte Mason College, April 1990.
2. Reported in *Times Educational Supplement*, 9 March 1990.

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