

An OECTA Guide

Association Roles and Responsibilities for Department Heads

2007

ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

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Part I

THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

The genesis of this document rose from needs identified by department heads seeking guidance from the Association in navigating between their duties as OECTA members and their obligations to the board. In addition, many of our current members, working as and with department heads, have articulated a need to both clearly define the role and limit its expansion.

The intent of this resource is to provide guidelines for teachers who act as department heads. It is hoped that professional relationships between principals and teachers will be strengthened by a document that clarifies the role of a department head in facilitating the implementation of the *Education Act* and OECTA collective agreements. Ultimately, the impetus has been to provide Association members with a practical and OECTA-friendly resource.

What Does the Law Say?

Under the *Education Act*, Ontario Regulation 298 – Operation of Schools is the primary statutory reference for department heads.

Section 14 of the Act stipulates that secondary schools may be organized by departments (organizational units), and a teacher may be appointed to direct and supervise the department, subject to the authority of the principal.

Section 17 also refers to coordination and supervision of subjects and programs, but is normally the reference used to establish coordinator and consultant duties and positions.

Section 20 indicates that it is the duty of a teacher to cooperate fully with the department head in matters of instruction.

Section 11 (3) (a)-(c) states that the duties of the principal, which are fulfilled in whole or in part through the department head, include the requirement to,

- (a) supervise the instruction in the school and advise and assist any teacher in co-operation with the teacher in charge of an organizational unit or program;
- (b) assign duties to vice-principals and to teachers in charge of organizational units or programs;
- (c) retain on file up-to-date copies of outlines of all courses of study that are taught in the school.

In addition, Section 11 (3) (j) provides that a principal shall make recommendations to the board with respect to,

- (i) the appointment and promotion of teachers, and
- (ii) the demotion or dismissal of teachers whose work or attitude is unsatisfactory.

(Neither (i) or (ii) above are part of the role of the teacher or department head.)

There is a need to define the role of the department head and limit its expansion.

Part 2

LOOKING BACK

Prior to the 1995-96 school year, there was a regulated job description for department heads. In addition, the norm was for a department head to have release time of one period per year, such that heads would teach five of six periods normally assigned to a teacher. With the centralization of revenue and expenditure in 1998 and the accompanying dismantling of a regulated job description, the release time allowance was removed, and only a responsibility allowance for department headship was included in the funding model. Only a change in the current funding model can affect a return to a teaching load of five of six periods and a specific job description for department heads.

The role of department head in the current school environment is limited and streamlined in recognition that department heads now carry a full course load, and have limited time in which to perform any duties above those of a teacher. While the responsibility allowance provides some limited remuneration, it does not address the crucial element of time needed to perform department head duties.

Part 3

TODAY'S REALITY

Department head responsibilities are primarily resource and curriculum related. Because department heads are within the teacher bargaining unit, they must decline any involvement in managerial functions related to evaluation and reporting. As stipulated in the *Education Act*, management duties and the promoting and hiring of teachers are the exclusive responsibility of the principal who is outside the bargaining unit.

The current Ministry of Education programs designed to support the growth and professional development of teachers have made this division of duties more apparent. With the implementation of Regulations 96/07 and 97/07, teachers are now evaluated by their principals through the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) process in five-year cycles. The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) regulates TPA for new teachers and formalizes mentoring for teachers and teacher mentors, not necessarily department heads. It is important to note that there is no formal process within TPA for evaluating a department head beyond the role of teacher.

The Department Head's Role as an OECTA Member

1. A department head can provide resources and support to foster exemplary teaching and a collegial, collaborative work environment within a department.
2. A department head can provide curriculum support for all teachers within a department. In departments with multiple subject areas, this curriculum support may vary according to the department head's qualifications.
3. A department head can advocate for a department and department members within the school and within the board.
4. Upon request by a teacher, a department head may help identify exemplary practices.
5. A department head is not to evaluate a teacher or attribute evaluative commentary on a teacher's performance.
6. There is no requirement or expectation for a department head to be a mentor under NTIP, but a department head may volunteer for this role.
7. A department head is not to participate in the promotion or hiring of teachers or in any other management function.

Management duties fall to the principal and not to the department head.

What about workplace safety?

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, all teachers including department heads are responsible to report hazards and any contravention of the Act. The department head must also provide safety rules and procedures within their department to staff. If an area or item is thought to be unsafe or dangerous, the department head, like any employee who is aware of a hazard, must notify the supervisor, principal or designate, about the specific hazard or safety concern and also notify the appropriate Worker Health and Safety Representative or Association Representative, depending on the local structure.

Part 4 CURRENT ISSUES

The following frequently asked questions and answers are offered to assist a department head in fulfilling his/her duties as an OECTA member:

1. If there are new teachers within your department and the principal assigns you to be a mentor, what advice does OECTA offer?

Remind the principal that mentoring relationships are voluntary. All teachers who are not NTIP candidates may participate. A department head, like any other teacher, may volunteer to be a teacher mentor within NTIP but is not required to act in this capacity.

2. *A department head may be asked to review examinations or mark summaries. What is the role of the department head regarding the scope of the review and what obligations exist for reporting to administration?*

A department head may inform a teacher of department, school and board evaluation policies in order to promote consistency. However, the scope of any review is limited to providing support around curriculum delivery. The exchanges between the department head and teacher are confidential and non-evaluative. There is no duty to report to an administrator.

3. *What role does a department head play in the Annual Learning Plan (ALP) process for teachers in his/her department?*

A department head has no role in the teacher-controlled ALP. Upon request from a teacher, a department head may act as an informal mentor. The principal and the board have obligations to provide support for all teacher learning and to foster effective teaching and satisfactory performance.

4. *During the implementation of ministry or board initiatives, what role does a department head play?*

There is no requirement or expectation that a department head has a role other than that of a teacher when it comes to ministry or board-wide policy initiatives.

However, a department head may have access to critical information on such issues as class sizes, staffing and student success initiatives. It is crucial that this information be relayed to Association representatives in order to ensure that local collective agreements are respected.

The role of the department head is limited to subject-specific curriculum initiatives.

5. *If a principal approaches a department head with a concern over lack of diligence demonstrated by members of his/her department, what role does a department head play?*

Supervising teachers in the performance of their duties is the exclusive role of the principal. Department heads are responsible for the supervision of their students, not their colleagues' students.

6. *Voluntary extra-curricular activity is often associated with certain curriculum areas. Is there a role for a department head as a member of the Association in soliciting, selecting, or removing member volunteers involved in extra-curricular activities?*

No. Participation is voluntary and should result in a collaborative and collegial process which allows members to maximize the benefits of their voluntary services.

7. *A department head may be asked to intervene in parental complaints. What advice does OECTA offer?*

Principals have the responsibility for all school community and parental matters; but however, upon request of a teacher, a department head may advocate for that teacher.

8. *A department head may be asked to intervene in a personal conflict between members. What advice does OECTA offer?*

It is the duty of the employer through its agents to provide a workplace free from harassment. However, should a dispute between members arise, a department head is advised to avoid any involvement in such conflict. Department heads and teachers are advised that any information provided to administration may be used in discipline, demotion, or termination of teachers. Therefore, all information must be disclosed to the teacher concerned.

Part 5

CONCLUSION

This document is intended to provide clarity around the Association role of members acting as department heads to effectively fulfill their school-based responsibilities within an OECTA context.

Secondary school department heads are curriculum leaders within their respective schools. Curriculum leadership and support is required at all levels. It should be encouraged by commensurate compensation practices and the provision of time for teachers to work together during the school day.

The current legislative regime excludes a department head from performing management roles and functions which leaves curriculum leadership and support as the primary focus. OECTA relies upon the knowledge and professionalism of these peer leaders to foster exemplary teaching practices to build a strong Association.