Introduction
This paper presents findings from a small-scale qualitative study (six in-depth interviews) designed to elicit the views and perceptions of professional youth work staff of the way in which they are managed and of the impact of management (and other aspects of their organisational structures and processes) on their motivation and performance (Bigley, 2006). While the theoretical framework for the study was influenced by a range of key thinkers in management theory and the study of human motivation (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg et al, 1959; McClelland 1988; Geen, 1995), the interview schedule was structured specifically to reflect the ideas of Linda Ford (2005) on ‘motivation engines’ and of Dean Spitzer (1995) on ‘demotivators’. Ford was directly influenced by Spitzer, and motivation engines – as the term suggests – are conceived as being the opposite of demotivating forces and factors.

In the following pages each motivating engine or demotivator is very briefly introduced and the experiences and opinions of the respondents are then summarised, with extensive use of verbatim quotation. While this is an exploratory study which makes no claim to being representative of the youth work sector as a whole, or even of paid employees within the sector, it does provide an insight into the circumstances and perceptions of one group of staff at a time when issues related to management and supervision, professionalism and professionalisation, and the implementation of quality standards are increasingly of concern to employers, providers and practitioners.

Profiles of the respondents
Respondents will be referred to using the anonymised and abbreviated form YW [youth worker] 1, 2 and so on. YW1 is female and has been working within her organisation for almost eight years – this has been her only employer in the sector. She works with a small locally-based team, in separate offices to those of the organisation headquarters from where her manager works. YW1 works with young people aged between 8–25 years from socio-economically disadvantaged areas and she sees herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW2 is female, has been working in the field of youth work for over seven years and is with her current employer for just under a year. She works with a small team, is based in the same building as her manager and her work with young people is located
in separate buildings. YW2 sees herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW3 is male, has over eighteen years experience working in the sector in both a voluntary and paid capacity, has worked with five previous youth organisations and has been working with his current employer for under a year. He manages a small team and works directly with young people aged between 8–25 years. He is based in the same building as his colleagues and his work with young people is located in separate buildings. YW 3 sees himself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW4 is male, has seven years experience in the sector, has worked with one previous youth organisation and has been working with his current employer for over six years. Supported by a small number of volunteers, he works with young people between the ages of 12–18 years. YW 4 is based in the building he also uses for youth work purposes which is located a number of kilometres away from head office, where management is based. YW 4 does not see himself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW5 is female, has over twelve years experience in the sector, has worked for two previous employers and has been working with her current organisation for five years. Supported by a small number of volunteers, she works with young people aged between 12–18 years. YW 5 is based in the building she also uses for youth work purposes which is located a number of kilometres away from head office, where management works. YW5 sees herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW6 is female and has been working with her current employer for just under eight years – she has worked with no previous employer in the sector. She works with a small team and with young people aged 7–18 years. Her offices and youth work space are in the same building as her manager. YW6 does not see herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

Ford’s engines of motivation

Lynda Ford’s (2005) motivation engines provide a practical and valuable model which identifies triggers that drive employees to want to succeed. These engines arise out of eight major desires – activity, ownership, power, affiliation, competence, achievement, recognition and meaning. The data collected in the in-depth interviews with youth workers is presented below using Ford’s framework.

Engine of ownership

This relates to the desire to establish ownership of both tangible and intangible possessions as well as the need to have a sense of safety, security and commitment from one’s employer. It encompasses terms and conditions of employment, working conditions, clarity of role and levels of autonomy, quality of relationship with management, the extent to which an employee feels listened to and the extent to which an employee feels their input is valued.

Terms and conditions of employment and working conditions

All six interviewees have job descriptions and contracts of employment and all are satisfied with their current remuneration. Health and safety issues are a major concern for four of them. Issues raised include ventilation, lighting and heating, hazards arising from buildings poor state of repair, overcrowding and dampness. Respondents
referred to heating, ventilation and lighting as ‘wholly inadequate’, ‘dangerous’ and ‘risky’.

One of the respondents indicated that no health and safety policy was in place, claiming that ‘having young people there, I feel I’m really taking a chance’. In all other cases, health and safety policies were in place; however outside of their own premises, the respondents’ employers did not apply such policies or strive to adhere to their own standards and procedures.

The respondents also found the building where they carried out their youth work practice to be unsuitable. Room sizes, overcrowding, multiple use and noise are the principle problems. One respondent found her workspace ‘too small for the required purpose of running group work with young people’. Another stated that her youth work space was constantly interrupted by external sources making large group work ‘almost an impossibility at times’.

Work spaces are also felt to be inappropriate and their keyholders lay down conditions which create great difficulties for youth work practice. Hostility towards young people with perceived challenging behaviour, refusing to allow certain activities to take place and unreasonable demands regarding noise levels are all encountered. One respondent said that art and crafts work is prohibited and art work is not permitted to be displayed on the walls – ‘the caretaker complains about blue tack marks on the walls, he can be quite cranky at times- in fact I think he is allergic to children!’.

All felt that they were making the most of their respective premises and that that they had to, in the words of YW 5, ‘shut up and put up’. Each felt that there was no point in complaining because there was no other option available to them.

Clarity of role and level of autonomy

All respondents felt clear about their role within their organisation. All respondents also report high levels of autonomy in designing and implementing their work plans and programmes of activity with young people. They all felt that the restrictions they encountered arose from factors outside the control of their management such as those imposed by the buildings hired for work space, compliance with insurance policies and inadequate funding.

Quality of relationship with management, the extent to which employees feel listened to and the extent to which they feel their input is valued

All but one of the respondents feel listened to by their manager in most cases and regularly bring issues and concerns to their attention; however, this does not always lead to such issues and concerns being addressed, as management may be either unwilling or unable to offer a solution. Physical proximity to their manager is considered an advantage by one third of respondents with one third experiencing delays in communication because they are based in a separate building. One respondent stated ‘because I work in the same building [as her manager] my issues are dealt with immediately, I have the opportunity to discuss things as they arise’. Another who works in a different building stated ‘sometimes she [referring to her manager] takes a long time to
get back to you and you can get the feeling that you have been forgotten so you need to send constant reminders to get something done’.

Respondents perceived that length of service and local knowledge influenced the extent to which their issues and concerns are taken on board. One respondent stated: ‘I live in the area and I been working in the area for many years – any time I make comments or have an opinion I am most certainly listened to’. Two felt that their input had greater effect when presented from the team rather than just on their own. One respondent said ‘As a team ideas are presented and accepted – however – on an individual basis, no. I don't really feel listened to – people power makes the idea stronger when presented by the team’.

All of the respondents felt that they had decision making power in their work, with each responding that they had responsibility for deciding the programmes and activities that they implemented with their young people. One stated that although sometimes programme ideas were suggested by management, the decision locally as to how it should be run was decided by the local team because ‘obviously materials have to be adapted to suit each particular group’s needs’. All of the respondents also mentioned that the young people that they work with have an input into the programmes and activities that they participate in and they considered this to be important.

Engine of significance
This engine is driven by the desire to contribute to the greater good, a desire to see one’s role within a larger context as well as a need to feel appreciated and proud. It encompasses a clear sense of organisational vision and mission, a feeling of being part of a bigger picture, the extent to which an employee feels valued and supported and the extent to which an employee has a sense of organisational pride.

Clear sense of organisational vision and mission
Five of the six interviewees were not able to state their organisation’s vision and mission but believed themselves to have a general understanding of what it entailed with respondents referring to having a ‘general grasp’ of what their organisations wanted to achieve. All felt that a mutual relationship existed between their work and their organisation’s mission. YW6 stated that ‘We had a staff training event recently and no one was able to articulate the mission, however I know it has to do with young people and is relevant to my work’.

One respondent felt that the lack of a collective understanding led to an absence of a shared vision and mission and this had been highlighted during a recent organisational evaluation. She did not feel confident to adequately represent her employer’s mission and vision in public:

I have my own understanding of what the vision is. We have recently undergone an evaluation and this was one of the issues identified that needed to be addressed – the fact that we all have individual understandings but there is no shared vision of what the organisation’s mission and vision is. I would not be able to speak publicly in a confident manner about the organisation's larger vision.

Another said that a vision and mission existed within her organisation, however she believed that it was not implemented and felt it was just ‘a mission on paper’. One of the respondents was very familiar with his organisation’s vision and mission and he attributed this to the fact that he was ‘part of the working group who helped to develop it’. 
Feeling part of a bigger picture
All of the respondents felt part of a bigger picture. Four thought that this was due to the fact that their employers are regional branches of a national body and that they have a sense that through their work they are empowering local communities. Two of the respondents believed that the good reputation of their organisation at local level and the role it plays in the development of communities gives them a sense of connectedness with a greater endeavour. One respondent said ‘I feel part of change within the community and I think that there’s something good happening for everyone’. Another respondent felt that her direct youth work practice and the satisfaction she derived from her work was a crucial factor: ‘in reality I work with a specific target group of young people and I work towards bringing those excluded young people back into the mainstream’.

The extent to which an employee feels valued and supported
All of the respondents struggled to respond to the question about feeling valued. All felt that their organisations could do more to make staff feel valued and that their employers are missing out on opportunities to celebrate the skills and abilities of their employees. One respondent stated: ‘staff members are not as valued as they should be, I feel this is a lost opportunity within the organisation’. Respondents talked about feeling some sense of value however this sense arose more from their direct work with young people than from management. They also felt that external agencies valued them and their work more than their own employer and they received more positive feedback from these agencies than from their own management. This sometimes resulted in opportunities outside of everyday work and two respondents valued the positive feedback this gave them – ‘sometimes I get opportunities to do stuff outside of my job, staff training for instance, and this gives me an opportunity to use other skills which is great’. Five of the six thought that they were valued by their own team and they felt the strong support of colleagues but felt that management did not do enough to foster this type of support and appreciation right throughout the organisation.

Two interviewees made specific reference to their boards of management and felt that the board did not understand the nature of the work. One respondent stated:

I don’t feel valued by my management committee; I think they have unrealistic expectations. For example, they have an expectation that we would work a set number of hours in the office and this is unrealistic, because the young people require more time and this expectation makes us unavailable to them. Some management committee members are also volunteers and this can cause a conflict with the professional – for them it is a hobby and they can find it hard to understand why we don’t have a 24/7 availability. Ultimately I think they lack respect for our profession and our professionalism.

Four interviewees indicated that they received most of their support from their employers through formal supervision. In each of these cases it was carried out in a formal setting by their manager on a monthly basis, and according to one of the respondents ‘it is probably the only time things are taken very seriously between us’. Supervision was generally thought to be work-task oriented, with the focus on ‘solutions rather than problems’. Two of the respondents felt that an opportunity to reflect on practice and on new skills would be of greater benefit – as one respondent said, ‘sometimes just to have the space to talk would be great’.
In one third of cases supervision was offered in an ad-hoc fashion and one of the respondents said they had formal supervision only twice in the last three years. Sustained support in the form of supervision is not a priority and can be cancelled or postponed by either party at a moment’s notice: ‘supervision is treated as a luxury and a movable feast where I work’.

**The extent to which an employee has a sense of organisational pride**

Respondents had given little thought to this issue and had difficulty responding. One referred to feeling proud of the young people with whom they worked and their own personal achievements but they found it difficult to state that they felt proud of their whole organisation. One of the respondents was clear that despite not always enjoying her job or finding it easy she always had a sense of the potential her organisation could achieve: ‘Even throughout the bad times I always had a sense of the organisation’s potential – this is reinforced by the tremendous goodwill from the board and volunteers associated with us’.

**Engine of belonging**

According to Ford, for many the workplace is a crucial part of their social network and it may meet or entirely frustrate the desire to belong, to feel part of a group and connected to others. The fulfilment of such a desire is determined largely by the culture within the workplace and arises from policies and measures designed to promote and nurture good collegial relationships and teamwork as well as the nurturing of a culture intolerant of bullying, harassment and exclusion.

**Promoting a culture of teamwork and good collegial relationships**

Four out of six interviewees considered the relationship which management strove to develop with staff to be caring and responsive. One said that he was ‘aware that the management is respected by the staff and staff members are respected by management, and I think that’s very important’. Another said that ‘management are seen as very approachable but they’re not always aware of what’s happening. I feel that I am listened to eventually but things don’t always happen as fast as I would like them to’.

Two interviewees thought that there was significant room for improvement in staff-management relationships: ‘relationships are very difficult and communication tends to be one way only – I feel we are continually talked at – relations have always been strained’.

Another respondent felt that it was not possible to develop a good working relationship with her manager:

> He seems to be very busy and wears too many hats. It really worries me to see him so overworked. It makes me hold onto issues for longer than I want to so that I will not overload him – I can see that he has 10 plates in the air!

The concept of teamwork was very important to all of the respondents – one stated that ‘teamwork is crucial to the work we do – not only in terms of working with the young people but in terms of providing support to each other particularly during difficult times’. Two respondents felt that teamwork development processes were necessary to accelerate the building of new teams but these processes were not promoted within their organisations. ‘Our team is very new and we are cautious and hesitant about working things out together. We need to undertake some training together to move this on much faster and management have not taken this on board yet – but I’ll keep pushing it!’
All respondents felt that a culture of mutual appreciation and support was absent from their organisations – the emphasis was on caring for and respecting the ‘clients’ but this same approach was not promoted internally by management and developed from the efforts of individual employees. One respondent stated: ‘I think we are trying to be a small intimate friendly team but in practice, I think we can feel very isolated – I often end up feeling that I am on my own’.

Promoting a culture intolerant of bullying, harassment and exclusion
All of the respondents indicated that their organisations have written policies on the prevention of bullying and harassment in the workplace, but that these are not applied in a thorough manner. One respondent said that she had no memory of anyone undertaking awareness raising or training events on anti-bullying or dignity at work:

> We have a written policy like many other organisations – it’s quite a standard one – but there has never been any effort to raise the issue or sensitise all of us to the issue and how it can manifest itself – my sense is that it would be extremely difficult for any of us to address such a problem with management if it arose.

Another respondent felt that there had been a huge tolerance of bullying behaviour in the workplace for a number of years and a refusal on the part of management to address the behaviour of a colleague:

> She was incredibly difficult to work with and treated all of us with utter contempt – she had been allowed to do this for so long that her impact on the organisation had become all-pervasive and very destructive. The problem went away only when she left but I feel that we have missed out on the opportunity to build our capacity to deal decisively with this behaviour – I do not know how we would deal with it today if it cropped up again.

Engine of recognition and achievement
Ford believes that the achievement of a set goal offers a sense of pride and accomplishment and when accompanied by external recognition can prove a powerful motivating force. It involves effective performance management and appraisal systems; opportunities to take on challenging or new tasks; public recognition for work and celebrating achievements.

Effective performance management and appraisal systems
None of the respondents’ organisations have a performance management and appraisal system in place and all of them felt that they would benefit from such a system. General goals and targets are established for the overall organisation but no specific goals or milestones are set with individual employees. Appraisal is ad hoc and conducted in the absence of concrete goals and respondents all found such appraisal and feedback very unsatisfactory. One respondent stated that she had ‘no idea whether I am improving at what I do – I don’t have a sense that I am identifying my weak areas and working on them or improving my strengths – I do not have a sense of making any kind of steady progress in my profession’. Another two respondents indicated that systems are in the process of development and they were keen to see them implemented. One respondent indicated that ‘sometimes I feel I need more direction’.
Opportunities to take on challenging or new tasks
There was a mixed response to this particular question with one of the respondents stating that she did not think there were such opportunities, but was not sure if she should place the blame for this on her organisation or on herself. Another of the respondents too wondered if this was a responsibility of her organisation stating that any challenging new tasks that she took advantage of she created for herself. One youth worker felt that she was ‘constantly challenged to be innovative’ in her work with another stating that ‘as there are poor facilities, weak infrastructure and little support within the organisation that this in itself could be seen as challenging!’

Public recognition for work and celebrating achievements
All but one of the respondents stated that they received thanks informally ‘as part of a general conversation’ but there was never a formal recognition of an individual’s contribution to the work. YW2 worked under the assumption that she was doing alright and felt that management ‘would be quick enough to tell me if I was doing wrong’. Another was thanked both formally and informally and gifts were given to staff at Christmas time acknowledging the work they were doing. She felt that this was very important and contributed to her having a sense of value within the organisation.

All of the respondents felt that their organisation needed to recognise the achievements of smaller and locally based teams – while teams celebrated their own victories, these were never acknowledged by the wider organisation. In general, respondents thought that their employers were better at celebrating the achievements of the young people and the contribution of volunteers than those of staff members.

Engine of power and authority
Ford believes that today’s manager must work at transforming the systems and structures of their organisations, ensuring that such systems and structures reinforce empowered employees rather than allowing policies, procedures and regulations to control and disempower. This includes providing opportunities for advancement; fostering empowerment and ensuring policies and procedures are not unnecessarily restrictive.

Providing opportunities for advancement
Half of the respondents saw no opportunities for advancement or promotion of any kind within their organisation and this was a frustrating factor for all three. One stated that for her ‘there are no promotional prospects – the organisation encourages employees to challenge themselves but does not really offer any opportunities to do so but the work itself on the other hand – working with young people – certainly offers challenges!’ All three said that the lack of promotional opportunities would prevent them from staying with their employers in the longer term. The other three respondents felt that their employer did hold out real possibilities for advancement and this was very important to them.

Fostering empowerment
All respondents felt that having the autonomy to make their own decisions and freedom to make mistakes was very important. All perceived that they were empowered to an extent by their respective organisations and had control over the work they did. They felt that this allowed them to grow both professionally and
personally. Conversely two of the respondents felt that empowerment was a double edged sword: ‘the downside is that when things go wrong – and indeed badly wrong – this results in there being no soft place to fall’. Another stated that having control meant that he was ‘left with the trouble that this might generate’. One third of respondents felt that the greatest restriction on their sense of empowerment arose from a lack of information about finance and few or inadequate training opportunities.

**Ensuring policies and procedures are not unnecessarily restrictive**

The research confirmed the importance of workplace policies and the generally supportive role that they played in each of the organisations. One respondent stated when questioned that the view of the staff towards the existence of policies was that they were ‘revered’ and are referred to as ‘the Bible’. One respondent felt that only very basic policies were in place and she welcomed the recent establishment of a work group to ‘move them from being merely guidelines to becoming an integral part of the work we do’. There was a sharp divide about organisational policies between those respondents that were part of the process of developing them and those who were not. Where staff had an input in designing policies, they felt they were ‘alive’ and gave them a sense of ownership. Three respondents felt that to some extent organisational policies were ‘just books on the shelf’ and although they did not necessarily experience them as restrictive, they had no sense of ownership of them or desire to implement them fully.

**Engine of competency**

Ford’s engine of competency focuses on the self esteem promoted by awareness that one is competent and skilful at one’s job. It includes access to training and development and encouraging the realisation of employees’ potential.

**Access to training and development**

The research confirmed that access to work related training was considered important to each of the participants and valuable in terms of supporting them in their work. One respondent said that her employer carried out a training needs analysis with all staff annually and internal and external training opportunities were made available. One third of the respondents stated that there is no strategic approach to training and development in their organisation and training may be offered when a need arises and tends to favour those with seniority. Five of the respondents expressed a desire to do further training in a variety of areas.

**Encouraging the realisation of employees’ potential**

All six interviewees thought that they were not realising their full potential in their roles – they felt under-utilised and all felt they had more to offer. One respondent said that as there were no promotional prospects within her organisation she felt that this limited opportunities to develop further skills as well as utilising existing ones. Two of the respondents felt that the lack of deliberate and strategic development of new teams left them feeling frustrated and stressed. Another respondent felt that extra funding would allow her to develop more challenging programmes and free up her time currently spent on fundraising.
Another respondent felt the poor infrastructure and lack of team support frustrated her own and her colleagues’ potential. Finally another felt that since completing her Master’s degree she had developed new areas of interest that her current role would not allow her to develop and this would be a deciding factor for her when looking towards the future.

**Spitzer’s deadly demotivators**

Former academic and consultant Dean Spitzer (1995) believes that the true source of demotivation lies in the systems and in the implicit and explicit values that are built into an organisation. Such influences inhibit and undermine performance in a myriad ways and although they can be remedied, they are difficult to identify as they pervade the normal operations of how an organisation functions. He originally identified ten such demotivators which have been condensed into six key negative influences for the purposes of this research.

**Demotivator 1 – politics and unfairness**

Spitzer believes that employees are aware of and frustrated by unwritten rules which reward those who ‘play politics’. In addition, unfairness which manifests as preferential treatment and special favours disbursed on an unequal basis can have a demotivating influence on a whole workforce.

**Unwritten rules**

Four of the respondents were satisfied that progression opportunities and routes as well as decision making procedures were open and transparent. They expressed trust in their management and had seen evidence within their organisations that ‘playing politics and currying favour’ did not produce results. Two respondents recounted incidents which had occurred with employees who had continually underperformed for a period of some months and compensated through striving to ‘suck up’ to the manager. In both cases, they were impressed with the professionalism shown by management when disciplinary proceedings were brought against both employees. One respondent said: ‘I really respected what they [referring to her management] did and I think this whole incident demonstrated to all of us that it is the quality of work that you do which will advance you in our organisation – you cannot pull the wool over their eyes’. Another respondent said that she was really impressed when she saw how management dealt with a colleague who refused consistently to work cooperatively and to take responsibility for her own workload.

> For years, she had made her own rules and she had instilled fear in her team – they did all the work and she took all the credit. It was really galling to see her get away with this for so long. The new director took this whole situation on board and for the first time addressed it head on – she did everything according to the book and applied the same rules to her as to the rest of us. In the end that colleague left and while I think that was a good result, the best thing that has come out of it is that we really trust that our management ultimately is fair.

Two interviewees were most unsatisfied with the transparency of progression routes and decision making procedures within their organisation. There were no explicit policies in
place for progression and they felt that senior posts were not identified in a strategic manner but were created in response to the needs of employees whose main priority was to ‘stay on side’ with management. Both respondents recounted incidents where senior posts were created overnight and they felt that the staff members were appointed to them on the basis of their relationship to management rather than their abilities. One respondent said:

*It was so unfair. This post was never advertised at all – we were simply told that this staff member was now in a new role. This incident more than anything else has completely undermined any confidence I have in our management – when we speak of transparency and accountability and fairness now, I cannot help feeling really cynical and I know that many of my colleagues feel the same.*

**Preferential treatment and special favours disbursed on an unequal basis**

Just one respondent thought that all systems and procedures were clearly designed and consistently applied throughout their organisation. Policies were applied equally to all staff and there was an openness to adapt procedures or develop new ones as needs arose. Three thought that although systems and procedures were in place, they were inconsistently applied and implemented on what they felt to be an unfair basis. One respondent felt that her organisation had a lackadaisical approach to record keeping, planning and evaluation and the high standards applied by some employees received exactly the same response as the poor standards applied by others. She stated: ‘*There is no recognition of the effort it takes to comply with our own policies – it is as though they don’t matter and I sometimes wonder why I bother at all!*’ Two respondents thought that systems and procedures were very inconsistently applied. One stated: ‘*Sometimes they matter and sometimes they don’t and it is not clear to me where the priorities lie.*’

**Demotivator 2 – unclear expectations and constant change**

Incompetent change management and ambiguous and ill-defined expectations were identified by Spitzer as significant demotivating influences.

**Incompetent change management**

Two of the respondents were satisfied with some aspects of change management within their organisation. They felt that change was well identified and that there was adequate consultation in relation to implementing changes but there was room for improvement in the speed at which such changes were introduced. One stated: ‘*You get all fired up and then nothing happens for ages – it makes me feel a little less enthusiastic each time we have these kinds of discussions.*’

The remaining four respondents felt there was an *ad hoc* approach to identifying and implementing change – according to one respondent ‘*sometimes good, sometimes bad*’. These respondents felt that consultation and communication about change was inadequate in their organisations. Two of the respondents felt that the manner in which their management went about implementing change demonstrated a lack of understanding of the process involved. As one said: ‘*They tend to agree on changes themselves, with no consultation, then signal them up very late in the day, literally impose the changes and are then shocked to find that they are meeting with resistance – I think there has got to be a better way*.‘
Ambiguous and ill-defined expectations

Just one of the respondents felt clear about the goals attached to each specific project for which he had responsibility. He also felt very clear about the expectations which his management had of him. The other five said that while overall strategic plans were in place, they felt the need for goals and targets for their own performance and did not feel clear about the expectations which their management had of them.

Demotivator 3 – dishonesty and lack of transparency

According to Spitzer, poor communications, withholding information, providing false information and refusing to admit and learn from mistakes has a destructive impact on employees’ desire to perform.

Poor communications

All respondents perceived the communication procedures within their organisations to be very poor with responses ranging from ‘could be much better’ to ‘really terrible’. Two respondents felt that there was an over-reliance on informal communications and inadequate mechanisms in place to facilitate formal communications. One respondent stated: ‘We find out about things in our organisation through word of mouth and we have very few staff meetings where clear information can be passed to everyone at the same time’. In relation to communication between management and staff, half of the respondents said that it was very good while the other half believed that it could be much better. One commented: ‘If we were to be compared with a for-profit organisation we would fall way under the mark’.

Two of the respondents stated that they had good communication between staff members and four were not happy with staff communications. While individual relationships between staff members were good, respondents felt that more needed to be done to create the space for new teams to build up their capacity.

Withholding information, providing false information

Three respondents thought that information on all matters was widely available to staff and that they were ‘generally kept in the picture about new issues or issues relating to finance’. The other three felt that their organisation released information on a ‘need to know’ basis or that information was revealed in an inconsistent manner. All three had experienced incidents where information relevant to all staff was revealed to some and concealed from others.

Refusing to admit and learn from mistakes

All respondents thought that project staff had the freedom to innovate and make mistakes and all had experiences where management were supportive in helping to find resolutions. However, all respondents felt that when mistakes were made by management, they were not acknowledged, never admitted and they felt that this had an unhealthy effect on the whole team and deprived the organisation from learning. Two of the respondents referred to appointments which management had made against the advice of other staff. Ultimately these appointments did not work out and a number of them ended badly and had serious consequences for the organisations. Management has never acknowledged the mistakes made in these cases and one respondent said that she was ‘worried that the whole thing could easily happen again – it’s like a kind of denial’.
Demotivator 4 – discouraging responses and being taken for granted

Little or no recognition of employees’ contributions, contempt, ingratitude and disregard for their input over time will undermine and demotivate employees.

**Lack of recognition of employees’ contributions**

All respondents thought that while they received thanks and recognition for their work from the communities in which they worked and from outside agencies, there was little or no formal expression of thanks or recognition of work well done from their own employer. On an informal basis, they received praise and thanks on occasion, but they felt that there was a difference between this and a public acknowledgement of their contribution. All of the respondents said that there were no recognition and reward systems or procedures in place to encourage best practice or a job well done and all felt that even a basic system would have a very beneficial influence on both staff morale and the quality of work.

**Contempt and disregard for employees**

All respondents felt that they were valued to some extent by their employers and none recounted any incident where they had experienced complete contempt and disregard. Two respondents felt that consultation and their inclusion in the building of the organisation was frequently tokenistic. One respondent said: ‘Sometimes we are consulted but most of the time our opinion seems to be ignored and change happens regardless’. Four respondents thought that when they did receive discouraging responses or when their ideas were undermined, it was due more to financial constraints rather than disregard for their opinion. All respondents thought that inadequate resources forced them to work beyond their job description and this remained unrecognised in all of their organisations. All of them felt that this needed to be rectified as ‘resentment will definitely build up over time’.

Demotivator 5 – unproductive meetings

Unnecessary, unfocused and disorganised meetings make individual employees feel powerless and produce a collective lethargy in a workforce. All of the respondents felt that in general their meetings were effective and in addition, two of the respondents had received training in this area.

Demotivator 6 – being forced to do poor quality work

Employers who have poor quality standards and provide insufficient resources leave employees feeling overstretched and robbed of the opportunity to take pride in their work.

**Poor quality standards**

All of the respondents thought that they were producing good quality work. Two of the respondents referred to a national quality standard towards which their organisation had recently begun to work and they thought that this was having a very positive influence on performance. Two others said that procedures for ensuring quality standards were currently being developed. The remaining two respondents thought that there was a need to establish quality standards within their organisations but they felt that management did not see this as a priority.
Insufficient resources
All respondents thought that their organisations were inadequately resourced both in terms of finance and staff. While they thought that this was a feature of the sector in general and did not necessarily attribute blame to their own management for such under-resourcing, they felt that management were not always aware of the compensations which individual employees had to make as a result. They cited poor promotional prospects; no financial incentives; no sick pay or contributory pension schemes, poor work spaces and conditions and overstretching due to inadequate staffing.

Conclusion
The findings summarised in this paper present a mixed picture of the perceptions of professional youth workers of how they are managed and of how this influences their motivation, and an equally mixed picture of other aspects of organisational cultures, structures and processes. Respondents were all satisfied with their terms and conditions of employment, but less so with their general working conditions. Significant health and safety concerns were raised regarding the buildings in which some of them worked. Management were generally perceived as being approachable and as ‘listening’, but organisational communications in general left a lot to be desired (and there were reported examples of relevant information being deliberately concealed). Perhaps not surprisingly given the nature of youth work employment overall, half of the respondents could see no opportunity for advancement within their current organisations, and there were some criticisms of the procedures for creating and filling senior posts.

None of the respondents’ organisations had a formal performance management or appraisal system, and experience of the frequency and adequacy of supervision was variable. While all the respondents’ organisations have written policies on bullying and harassment, in no instance were they perceived to be implemented in a thorough manner. The youth workers reported a high degree of inherent job satisfaction and pride in their work. All said they felt appreciated by young people, by the communities in which they worked and by outside agencies; but also said that recognition, thanks and acknowledgement of effort could be better within their organisations. Young people’s achievements appear to be regularly (and properly) celebrated in youth organisations. In the interest of motivation and good management, the achievement of staff members should also be celebrated. This is all the more important since all the respondents in this study thought they were under-utilising their skills and not fulfilling their potential; and only half expected to be staying with their current employer for more than a few years.

Finally, the fact that in four out of six cases no quality standards were currently in place in the respondents’ workplaces (although two of these reported such standards to be in development) confirms the potential benefit of a framework for the consistent implementation of quality standards throughout the sector. Although inevitably the source of some apprehension in the field, the pilot scheme being implemented in 2008 under the auspices of the Assessor of Youth Work is a welcome start to this process.
References
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Biographical Note
Deirdre Bigley MA worked as a youth worker for a number of years in both rural and urban settings before moving to her current role in management of the national crime awareness programme, Copping On. Although she no longer works directly with young people herself she continues to work alongside those who have a responsibility for working with young people at risk, and believes that satisfied and well motivated staff ultimately have a positive influence on the young people with whom they work.

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