

# Network leadership in action:

# What does a Local Authority broker do?

**One of the distinctive features** of successful networks is dedicated facilitation and leadership. This may come from one person or from a small team, depending on the scale of the network and the nature of its activities.

As part of the Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) has been conducting research amongst network leaders and others in leadership and support roles in school networks to find out how they have interpreted their roles. What has emerged is an understanding of the key issues facing leaders and an appreciation of the complexity and importance of their role in school networks.

The tools in this series have been generated largely through the work of the Networked Learning Communities programme over the past two years. They draw upon the findings of a research seminar, the outcomes of a collaborative enquiry undertaken by Ron Ritchie and the NLC steering group, and from collaborative work with Demos.

## **Key roles**

This tool is structured around a series of key roles. Although they might not all become critical immediately after the launch of the network, they may become issues if they are not planned for at the beginning. This approach was informed by the question 'What would I have liked to have known before I started?'

## **Reflective questions**


The reflective questions are designed to challenge thinking about the systems and processes of a network to enable the key roles to be tackled successfully.

## **Possible starting points**

These provide suggestions and ideas about how you might approach the questions. Sometimes these are quite formal, where they have been synthesised from a discussion or taken from some of the outcomes generated. Occasionally they are statements or direct quotes from an individual.

## **Examples from practice**

Also included are some examples from practice to illustrate how network leaders and others in leadership and support roles in school networks have tackled certain issues and challenges.

A background image of a bee on a flower, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The bee is positioned in the center-left, facing right, and is on a light-colored petal. The flower's center is on the right side of the image, showing a dense cluster of small, light-colored florets. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

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networked learning communities visit:  
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*“Networks offer the possibility of new patterns of leadership – more lateral and more distributed – they offer new possibilities for Local Authorities and schools to engage in co-leadership.”*

Michael Fullan

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

## Key roles

## Reflective questions

### Brokering network membership

Local Authorities are better placed than most organisations to influence membership of school networks and to ensure appropriate diversity of school types because they have a responsibility for ensuring all children have access to high quality education.

- What can the Local Authority do to help unlock discretionary effort amongst practitioners and school leaders?
- What can schools only achieve in networks that they cannot achieve alone?
- Does the appropriate mix of schools change for different network purposes or learning focuses?
- Where is the optimum balance between similarity and diversity?
- How can the Local Authority encourage voluntarism actively and sensitively?

### Brokering network relationships

Local Authorities know more about the schools in their area than any other organisation. They know their strengths and development needs and they know which schools might complement one another.

- How can the Local Authority deploy collaborative self review processes to enable schools to identify an aspect of pedagogy, an area of the curriculum and a group of children as a focus for their development work?
- How important is it for school networks to share common goals and values?
- How can the Local Authority optimise the connection between a school network's learning focus and related CPD?
- What role does the Local Authority have in building leadership capacity in school networks?

### Brokering partnerships beyond the network

Local Authorities are in a position to network the networks to broker partnerships that encourage communication and a flow of information between different sectors locally and nationally. This might mean networking between schools and other agencies such as social services, the police, universities and colleges.

- Are school networks in danger of putting artificial boundaries around their learning?
- What effect might constant recycling of existing knowledge have on the sustainability of the network?
- What role can FE and HE institutions play in extending learning opportunities for school networks?

### Brokering the network's access to resources

Local Authorities can identify and attract new funding streams and support networks of schools to put together successful bids. Local Authorities themselves can be a source of funding, allocating resources through the Education Development Plan and releasing time for Local Authority personnel to facilitate the work of the network.

- How can a network be a fund holder or employ personnel?
- What effect might devolving funding direct to school networks have?
- How might the relationship between schools and the Local Authority change if the schools are in networks?

### Brokering knowledge exchange within and beyond networks

Local Authorities are ideally placed for this strategic knowledge management function. They can operate with a network, encouraging the exchange of practice, expertise and personnel. They can also build connections network-to-network, including themselves networking with other Local Authorities.

- How can the Local Authority help to make visible the range of expertise within the network?
- What networks exist within the Local Authority? What can they do? What do they know?
- What opportunities exist for the Local Authority to connect with other regions to share practice and ideas?
- What knowledge management structures and processes exist that might be put to work for school networks?
- How are performance data shared with schools?
- What would be the effect of publishing network, rather than school, level data?

## Possible starting points

- Raise awareness, disseminate information and promote networking opportunities to all schools.
- Generate enthusiasm by promoting the ideas and potential of school networks.
- Build a sense of community and shared moral purpose.
- Challenge leaders of school networks about membership.
- Hold the strategic overview: how does this network complement other Local Authority/national strategies?

- Support school and network collaborative self-review processes.
- Help the network design and plan CPD.
- Assist with action planning for collaborative work programmes.
- Facilitate relationships.
- Develop a cadre of network facilitators and leaders.

- Support schools to form links with the local HEI to accredit CPD, support enquiry and purchase consultancy.
- Assist networks to establish ITT partnerships linked to training schools or HEIs.
- Help schools to access other CPD opportunities such as NCSL leadership programmes.
- Negotiate partnership arrangements for groups of schools to jointly access other Local Authority resources.

- Providing Local Authority personnel as external facilitators or consultants to networks.
- Offering to be the fund holder or notional contractor for networks.
- Allocating standards fund, school improvement, inclusion and special education needs funding to networks.

- Expanding knowledge to access and ideas.
- Encouraging disciplined enquiry, to generate good ideas and expose bad ones.
- Create models for sharing ideas and evidence across the network.



## Examples from practice

The Local Authority led a review of all the networks that local schools were in to see who was involved in lots of things and who was a bit out on a limb. It was interesting to find out why those schools who didn't usually participate chose not to. On the whole, we learned that it was a lack of confidence about their capacity to contribute and to 'keep their end up' that was the barrier to participation, and a bit of encouragement was all they really needed.

In any kind of coaching relationship, the coach learns at least as much as the coachee. When it comes to schools, we have learned that putting underperforming schools in the position of 'coaching' other schools in an aspect of practice that the first school really needs to improve has helped both schools far more than a more traditional 'best leading the rest' model.

You realise quite early on when you work to bring different organisations like schools together that really what you're doing is bringing individual people together, with all the complications that that entails. We have introduced a set of protocols, like a contract for collaboration, which everyone signed up to. It felt a bit artificial at first, especially between schools with long standing relationships but it's become a hallmark of the networks.

One school network in the Local Authority was using networked learning walks as a method for school-school learning. We have adapted learning walks to help leadership teams to understand each other's contexts better.

Enrichment activities for NQTs are now entirely linked to the teaching and learning focuses for the networks. We used to try to offer a central course but now use the funding to support the networks to provide relevant CPD through mentoring and coaching arrangements and facilitated enquiry groups.

We engage with outside agencies through a Learning Forum and encourage them to contribute to our knowledge about teaching and learning. There are links with the National College for School Leadership, the University of the First Age, the Campaign for Learning, Creative Partnerships, FE colleges and the business community.

We are learning – quickly – that we need to look outside education if we really are going to make a difference for the children in our schools. Working with social services, the police and health service is difficult. But the Local Authority is the only place where that can happen so we're persevering.

Adviser and teacher adviser time has been allocated to each school network as an external partner. Bespoke continuing professional development and leadership development programmes are made available to networks and we work with networks as partners to deliver and accredit training as well as to mentor participants.

Project management and administrative posts and strategic leadership time for heads and Local Authority officers are funded by the Local Authority. It's a good investment.

The Local Authority is reconfiguring the way it funds and otherwise supports ASTs. Until recently there was little co-ordination and even where there was, we tended to fall back on inverse proportion and additional support approaches, which in the long run create dependency. We are trying to co-ordinate ASTs in collaboration with the network leadership so that the resource contributes to building overall capacity, rather than dealing with one classroom at a time.

Action research in the Local Authority is extensive. There are over 1000 teachers actively engaged in research. Some schools have every teacher engaged in some form of research or enquiry. The power of this co-ordinated approach to raise standards, to develop teachers' knowledge and to increase energy and capacity cannot be overstated.

Our website contains a directory of networks which includes:

- A network identification sheet that networks can complete and return to the Local Authority with details of their collaborative work.
- Details of school networks, their leaders and learning focuses, promoting cross network information and knowledge sharing.
- Links to other network based initiatives such as small schools, excellence clusters, specialist schools, leading edge schools etc.