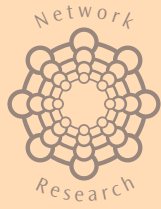


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Evidence from learning networks





Evidence from learning networks

Some key messages for school and network leaders, policy-makers and others interested in exploring the evidence base on learning networks.

Victoria Crowe with Chris Noden and Alison Stott

Network mapping

This page provides information on the context and characteristics of Networked Learning Communities (NLCs).

Networks nationally

- There were 132 NLCs across England, and 28 of these networks worked together with support from NCSL but with no funding.
- These networks involved over 1,500 schools and over 690,000 children.
- Of these 1,500 schools, 50 (3 per cent) were special schools. This was above the national average of 2.5 per cent.
- The NLC programme involved nearly 43,000 teachers and over 10,000 teaching assistants.
- The average size of a network was 11 schools.
- The smallest network had 6 schools as members, and the largest 37.

Networks regionally

In terms of where NLCs were located, the north west was the most populated region, with London one of the least populated regions.

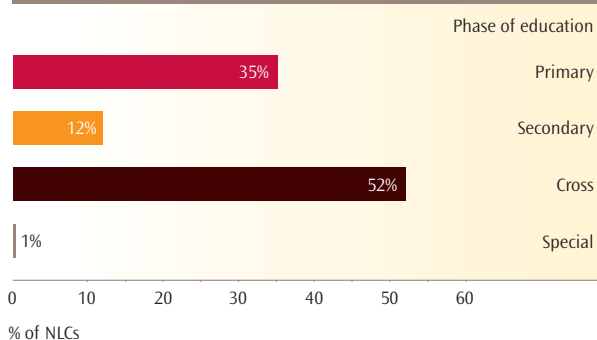
Networks by region

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| North East | 5% |
| North West | 30% |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 6% |
| East Midlands | 5% |
| West Midlands | 15% |
| East of England | 9% |
| London | 5% |
| South East | 14% |
| South West | 12% |

Network schools

Of the 132 NLCs, most were cross phase, ie a combination of primary and secondary schools.

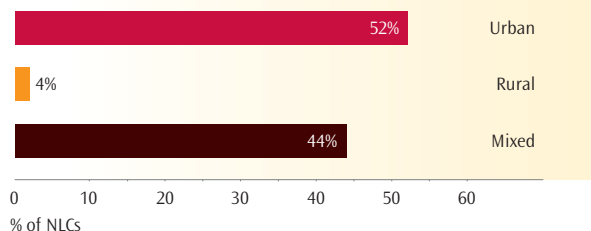
Phase of NLCs



Networks' context

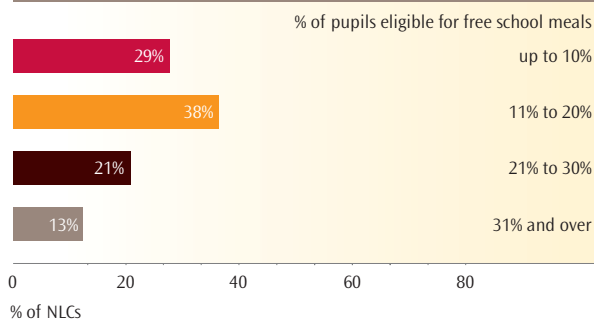
Over half of NLCs were located in urban areas.

Location of NLCs



Free school meal eligibility is commonly used as an indicator of socio-economic deprivation. The table below shows that NLCs were representative of the range of social deprivation.

Free school meal eligibility and NLCs



- The average percentage of NLC pupils eligible for free school meals was 18 per cent. This was above the national average of 15 per cent.
- The average percentage of NLC pupils with statements of special educational needs was 6 per cent. This was above the national average of 3 per cent.

Network research

Research has shown there are seven key characteristics of learning networks:

- 1 purpose and focus
- 2 relationships
- 3 collaboration
- 4 enquiry
- 5 leadership
- 6 accountability
- 7 capacity-building and support

Earl & Katz, 2005¹

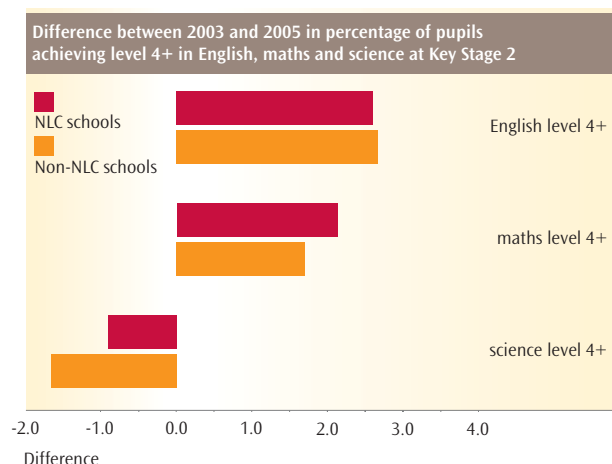
¹ Earl, L & Katz, S, 2005, *What makes a network a learning network?*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham

Network attainment

This page shows evidence of the differences that NLCs helped to make to pupil attainment. These data have been examined over the last three years to show the changes since the NLC programme began.

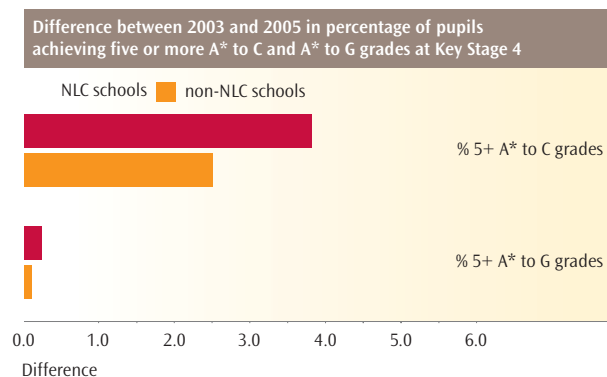
Networks at Key Stage 2

At Key Stage 2 (KS2), the difference between 2003 and 2005 shows that NLC schools rose more than non-NLC schools in the percentage of pupils achieving level 4+ for maths. The results for English at level 4+ show little difference between NLC and non-NLC schools. Where a decline was observed at level 4+ science, the NLC schools showed a smaller decrease than non-NLC schools.²



Networks at Key Stage 4

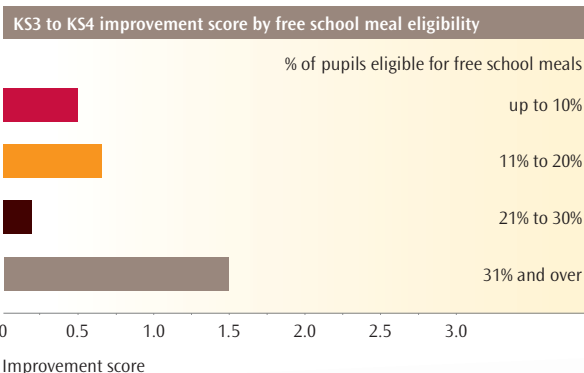
At KS4, the difference between 2003 and 2005 shows that NLC schools rose more than non-NLC schools in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades. A much smaller difference was observed for the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to G grades, with NLC schools showing a small rise over non-NLC schools.²



Network improvement scores

The Fischer Family Trust calculated an improvement score for each NLC. These scores show the rate of change in value added measures over the three-year period from 2003 to 2005.

- 55 per cent of NLCs showed faster improvement than schools nationally at KS1 to KS2.
- 41 per cent of NLCs showed faster improvement than schools nationally at KS2 to KS3.
- 48 per cent of NLCs showed faster improvement than schools nationally at KS3 to KS4.
- At KS3 to KS4, the fastest improvement was shown by NLCs with the most social deprivation, as measured by free school meal eligibility.



Networks and pupils

Data from a survey completed by 1,255 network members in November 2005 showed that, when asked about the importance of networked learning:

- 58 per cent believed it is important in improving pupil behaviour
- 69 per cent believed it is important in improving pupil attainment
- 74 per cent believed it is important in improving pupil motivation
- 76 per cent believed it is important in improving pupil engagement

These results support the data collected in November 2004 by MORI³, where 71 per cent of the 811 teachers surveyed agreed that collaboration with other schools had led to an improvement in children's learning.

Network research

"Through effective networks, teachers and leaders have found real benefits for their teaching, their school and their pupils."

GTCE, 2005⁴

² Please note that the attainment data for 2005 are provisional

³ MORI, 2004, *Teachers Omnibus*, DfES Innovation Unit, London, Department for Education and Skills

⁴ GTCE, 2005, *Networks*, London, General Teaching Council for England

Network learning and development



Professional learning in networks

Data from a survey completed by 1,255 network members in November 2005 showed that, when asked about their professional learning opportunities in the network:

- 60 per cent agreed there were opportunities in relation to leadership
- 67 per cent agreed there were opportunities in relation to collaboration
- 69 per cent agreed there were opportunities in relation to enquiry

These findings are supported by one of the key messages found in the NLC research review (Hadfield et al, 2006).⁵ This review found evidence of the impact of networking on the morale, motivation and practice of professionals in education.

Data from the MORI poll, conducted in November 2004, found that of the 811 teachers surveyed:

- 87 per cent felt that school-to-school collaboration provided them with greater access to new ideas
- 85 per cent said that school-to-school collaboration had led to improvements in staff motivation
- 75 per cent said that collaboration between their school and others had led to improvements in their own teaching practice

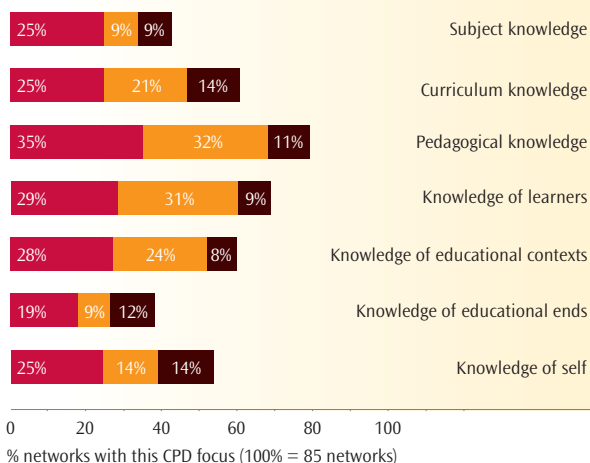


Continuing professional development in networks

The following shows evidence of the continuing professional development (CPD) activities of teachers and school leaders in networks. This data was collected from adults working within NLCs and includes data from interviews and surveys.

Research on 85 NLCs showed that the areas receiving the most CPD focus within networks were pedagogical knowledge (77 per cent of NLCs) and knowledge of learners (69 per cent of NLCs). This would tend to indicate that NLCs chose their CPD focus in areas that would have longer lasting and more permanent impact, ie general issues of teaching and learning, rather than a focus on more specific and potentially short-term areas such as curriculum or subject knowledge.

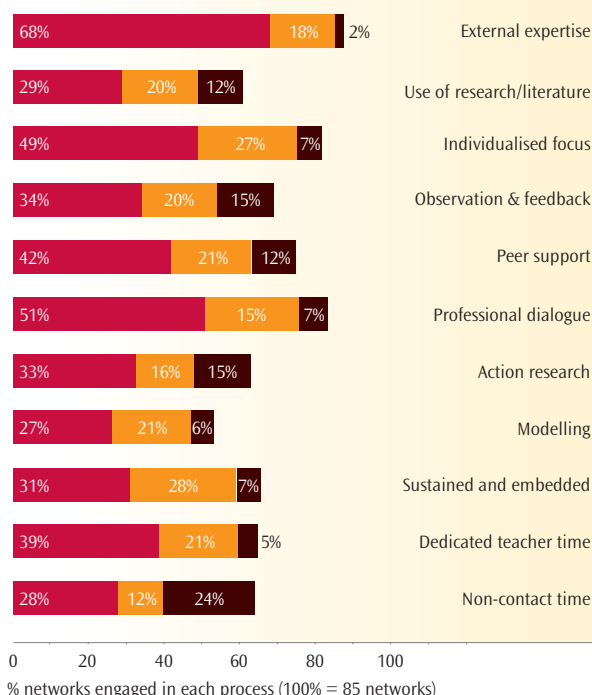
The focus of adult learning within NLCs



good evidence of activity network-wide ■
good evidence, not necessarily network-wide ■
limited evidence ■

Research on 85 NLCs revealed that the most commonly evidenced CPD processes used within NLCs were the use of 'external expertise', processes with an 'individualised focus', the use of 'peer support', and 'professional dialogue'. Of these processes, 2 were evidenced within more than 80 per cent of the networks, and a further 8 within more than 60 per cent. This shows that NLCs used varied combinations of processes to deliver CPD, with very few focusing their delivery on only one.

Adult learning processes undertaken within NLCs



% networks engaged in each process (100% = 85 networks)

Network research

"CPD in school networks is more likely to be collaborative than individual and, therefore, more likely to offer learning gains for pupils as well as teachers."

Cordingley & Temperley, 2006⁶

⁵ Hadfield, M, Jopling, M, Noden, C, O'Leary, D & Stott, A, 2006, *What does the existing knowledge base tell us about the impact of networking and collaboration?*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

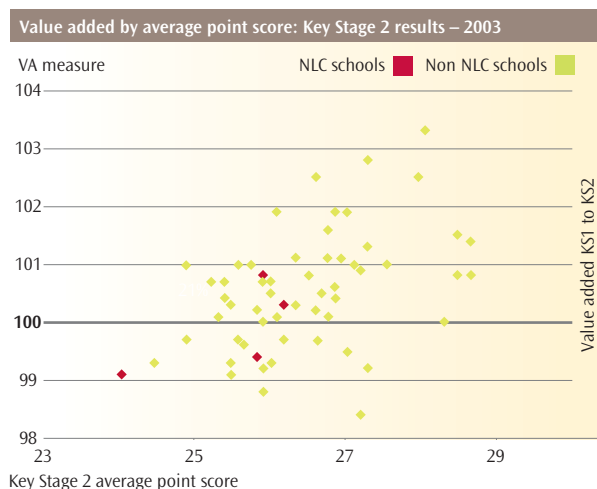
⁶ Cordingley, P & Temperley, J, 2006, *Leading continuing professional development in school networks: adding value, securing impact*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Network snapshots

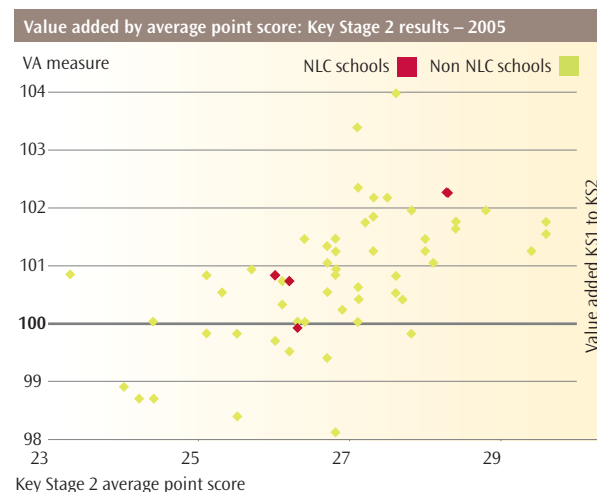
The following examples show details of three NLCs and the differences that were made since the beginning of the NLC programme.⁶

Adding value

From January 2003, the Newham Way Co-operative NLC worked on the development of the curriculum with the aim of promoting creativity in its broadest sense by using the creative arts throughout the curriculum to enhance learning for all the children. In that same time period, the network achieved improvements in its value added (VA) data between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. An analysis of 2003 data revealed that of the 4 primary schools within the network, 2 achieved a value added measure below 100 (the non-NLC group were non-networked schools within the same local authority).



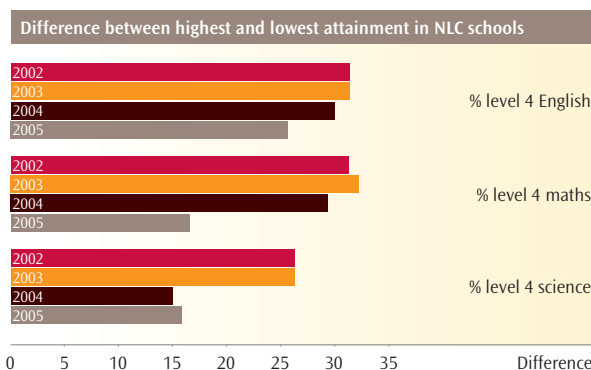
In 2005⁷, these schools displayed improvements in their value added measures, with the result that all the network schools achieved a value added score over 100.



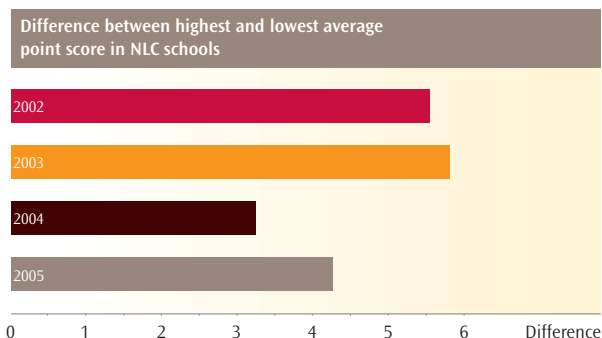
Closing the gap

From September 2002, Janus NLC focused on two curriculum areas – the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and improving literacy at Key Stage 2 using ICT. The tables below use Key Stage 2 attainment data to trace the influence of Janus NLC in closing the gap between the highest and lowest attaining schools in the network. Gaps between the schools were calculated over four years in the Key Stage 2 core subjects to see if these differences were decreasing from year to year and thus closing the gap between schools.

This analysis shows that for English, maths and science, the difference between the highest and lowest attaining schools in the network decreased between 2002 and 2005.



The same calculation was applied to the average point scores of schools within the network.



This analysis shows how the gap between the highest and lowest average point scores closed between 2002 to 2005. At the same time, the bar was raised across the network and the average point score for the networked schools increased by 0.4 points between 2002 to 2005, as compared with a national increase of 0.2 points.

Network research

"Network teacher enquiry projects have been one of the most common ways of spreading innovative practice into more classrooms and schools."

Church et al, 2006⁸

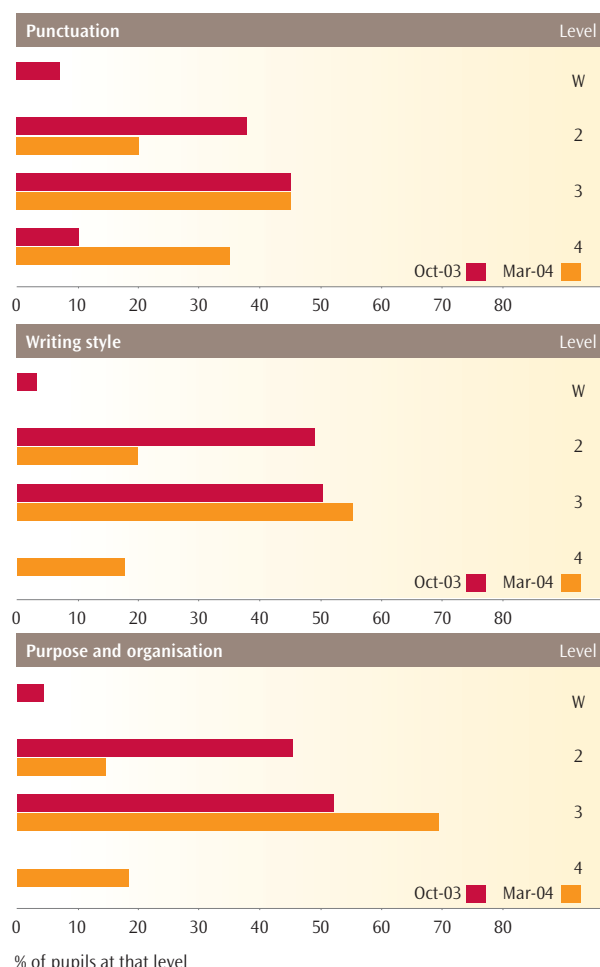
⁷ Please note that the attainment data for 2005 are provisional

⁸ Church, M, Crowe, V, Plummer, G & Worrall, N, 2006, *What does network practice tell us about the impact of networking and collaboration?*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Improving achievement through collaborative enquiry

Initially, the EXCEL NLC focused on raising standards of pupil achievement in language and literacy through a range of mechanisms (one example being cross-curricular approaches to literacy). In one particular project, the network sampled work from five Year 5 'lower achieving' level 3 students from each of the six schools involved in action research to support the development of its story-making project. These 30 pupils were each asked to spend 45 minutes writing a traditional tale in October 2003 and then again in March 2004. During this time, the children had worked extensively using a framework which was designed to increase interest and achievement in constructing and writing stories. The samples of work were assessed and moderated in terms of pupil achievement in punctuation, writing style, and purpose and organisation.

The tables below indicate large improvements in all three areas of literacy for this cohort of pupils. There was a reduction in the number of pupils achieving at the lower levels (working towards level 2 (W) and level 2), and an increase in the number of pupils performing at the higher levels of attainment (level 3 and level 4).



Leading networks

Working in networks

Of the 104 funded NLCs, 72 (69 per cent) had a history of the schools previously working together.

Data from a survey completed by 853 delegates at the NLC annual conference in June 2005 showed that:

- 83 per cent believed that working and learning on behalf of others motivates network members
- 78 per cent felt that the active commitment of headteachers is vital to the success of a network
- 71 per cent believed the most important feature of successful networking was purpose, 20 per cent believed processes were the most important and 9 per cent thought that structure was the most important

Leadership in networks

Ofsted inspection data has shown that, of the 403 NLC schools that have been inspected since September 2003:

- 76 per cent were judged to be good, very good or excellent in the leadership and management of the school
- 88 per cent were judged to be good, very good or excellent in the leadership of the headteacher
- 70 per cent were judged to be good, very good or excellent in the leadership of other key staff

Network leaders

- The leadership of each NLC was shared between two or more co-leaders. There were 314 co-leaders in the NLC programme.
- The majority of these co-leaders were female (186; 59 per cent) and were based in schools (274; 88 per cent).
- Of the 274 school-based co-leaders, 84 (31 per cent) were not headteachers.

Network research

"Emerging evidence suggests that networks are creating environments in which school leaders are responding to the challenge of leading and learning beyond their own schools. Networks create joint work arrangements that are developmental of leadership, making leadership more widely available and developing system leaders."

Jackson, 2006⁹

⁹ Jackson, D, 2006, Foreword. In A, Lieberman, *System leadership in action: Where do system leaders come from?*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

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**National College for
School Leadership**
Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH

T: 0870 001 1155
F: 0115 872 2001
E: nlc@ncsl.org.uk
W: www.ncsl.org.uk