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## What are we **learning about...?**

LEA involvement in school networks

# LEAs brokering school networks

Cornwall LEA

An illustrative example of what  
LEA brokerage of school networks  
looks like in practice.

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

# LEAs brokering school networks

The case studies and accounts of practice presented within this series aim to provide concrete examples of the ways in which LEAs are contributing to networking and collaboration between schools and within learning networks. In particular, they provide a practical illustration of how LEAs are going about the practice of 'brokerage' within their work, in bringing together, supporting and sustaining networks of schools.

“Brokerage describes the act of arranging or negotiating relationships and partnerships. A broker is an intermediary or matchmaker engaged in the ‘acquisition of obligations’ from different parties in a purposeful relationship.”

LEAs perform many roles and functions in relation to schools. However, we have identified five distinct brokerage roles through which LEAs appear to be able to add greatest value to networks of schools. We have characterised these five roles as 'brokerage' in order to distinguish these functions from traditional LEA roles and ways of working.

## Brokerage roles for LEAs

- 1 *Brokering network membership.*
- 2 *Brokering network relationships.*
- 3 *Brokering partnerships beyond the network.*
- 4 *Brokering the network's access to resources.*
- 5 *Brokering knowledge-exchange within and beyond networks.*

The case studies and accounts of practice in this series explore, in different ways, and with differing emphases, a range of brokerage roles and help to explain what LEA brokerage of school networks looks like in practice. □

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## Cornwall brokering school networks

With two nurseries, 241 primary schools – many of which are small, 31 secondary schools and four special schools, Cornwall has a real challenge to establish effective brokerage across this large, rural county.

Cornwall Learning Forum was established in 1999 with the aim of helping schools in Cornwall to provide the highest quality education by being at the forefront of developments in teaching and learning. It was founded on the principles which are drawn from work on *The Intelligent School*<sup>1</sup>.

We share with our headteachers the belief that innovation, creativity and pedagogy must be at the forefront of education in Cornwall, as the elements most likely to have an improving impact on the learning experiences of our pupils.

Since its inception, the Learning Forum has grown and adapted to meet the challenges and changes that have presented themselves locally and nationally.

### The aims of the Learning Forum are to support schools in:

- innovation
- evaluation
- investigation
- collaboration
- communication
- dissemination

### How do we broker network membership, partnerships and relationships?

Cornwall Learning Forum is a community of enquiry, where everyone who wishes to be can be involved. The Learning Forum is as much a part of the LEA Directorate Management Team as it is of individual schools and networks.

We engage with outside agencies through the 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, the wider creative community, the Sports Action Zone, the Cornwall Youth Music Action Zone, the EAZ–Excellence Cluster, the further education colleges, the business community and many other organisations. By working in this way we believe that we have the potential to develop system-wide reform.

Schools form mutually supportive collaborative groups, according to their own priorities and interests. There are three networked learning communities, five Leading Edge partnerships, an EAZ which will shortly become an Excellence Cluster, 12 schools in the Learning to Learn partnership with the Campaign for Learning, Global Institute for Student Aspirations schools, UFA schools, numerous specialist school networks, as well as clusters and collaboratives based around geographical or interest groupings. These can be categorised as emerging clusters or established clusters and schools can be in both kinds at the same time.

The role of the Learning Forum is to support the establishment and emergence of the networks and to go beyond this – to 'network the networks'.

<sup>1</sup> McGilchrist, B. (1997) *The Intelligent School*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing

## Cornwall brokering school networks

Not only must there be a clear knowledge and understanding about where each school is in relation to its connection to others, but it is important that no school is left behind by this wave of networking. In a large, rural county it is crucial to combat geographical isolation with connectedness to a larger infrastructure. The challenge, therefore, is to ensure that we have schools connected through a social and cultural infrastructure, through meetings and events which bring people together, as well as through an ICT infrastructure.

Cornwall, in common with other LEAs, has to deal with a high volume of issues from both local and national government. The Learning Forum can help networks, schools and even individuals to keep abreast of developments at all levels.

With the *Every Child Matters*<sup>2</sup> agenda and the move towards an integrated Children's Service, our networks will extend to include social services, health trusts, the police and other partners. This process has already begun and we are able to use the knowledge that we have gained about the development of networks to inform the process. We believe that the close collaboration between schools, and between schools and the LEA, will enable all stakeholders to set the strategy for the future of Children's Services in Cornwall.

### How do we broker knowledge-exchange?

In Cornwall, action research is extensive. There are over 1,000 teachers actively engaged in research. Some schools have every teacher engaged in some form of research or enquiry. The power of this to raise standards, to develop teachers' knowledge and to increase energy and capacity cannot be overstated.

The Cornwall Centre for Educational Development, the training arm of the LEA, has a leading role in promoting this research, supporting teachers and enabling the publication and dissemination of findings.

The Learning Forum Think Tank has formulated a set of five focusing questions, which formed the basis of the Compact with the DfES and which will underpin the Children's Services plan.

#### These five questions are:

- 1 How can we sustain improvement in performance through self, peer and external evaluation and appropriately targeted support, challenge and intervention?
- 2 How can we facilitate the diffusion of best practice so that individuals, groups, organisations and communities learn with and from each other?
- 3 How can we promote a consistent language of learning to move from potential to performance?
- 4 How can we ensure collaboration between all relevant agencies to ensure that all children receive the support they need within an inclusive education service?
- 5 How can we maintain and develop a strategic overview of the infrastructure needed to support and transform learning organisations?

The Learning Forum has a number of experienced researchers who contract to undertake official evaluations of projects. The Learning Forum has evaluated many projects including the pilot of the Extended Schools scheme, the Global Institute for Student Aspirations initiative, Creative Partnerships and the Early Years Foundation Stage Learning Networks, to name a few. By undertaking these evaluations, the Learning Forum maintains its credibility as a research institution and its role in the identification of best practice.

It would be very easy, given Cornwall's geographical isolation, to fall into the trap, so clearly articulated by Michael Fullan, of 'recycling bad ideas'. That is why the Learning Forum actively seeks to engage with national and international research, through thinkers and speakers, who inspire and challenge. Throughout the year, conferences and seminars bring together all those interested in and involved with teaching and learning to disseminate best practice and stimulate debate and enquiry. A strategic group, the Think Tank, meets regularly to plan events, manage research and share information and ideas.

### What the LEA has learned

Some of the networks of schools in Cornwall are well-established, others are just getting off the ground. Some schools are in multiple networks, others just one. But all of the networks are based on shared purpose, all have learning at their heart and all are changing constantly.

As pupil numbers fall, some schools in the county are facing huge challenges on top of the normal pace of change. These schools need to be plugged into the oxygen supply of a network if they are to have any chance of viability in the future. We know that networks can provide this oxygen – the capacity for schools to continue to meet the needs of all pupils. Whether it is the needs of primary pupils in tiny village schools or of 14-19 pupils in secondary schools, networks and partnerships may be the only way to ensure that there is adequate provision for pupils in the future.

We have learnt that the leadership of headteachers is crucial to the success of networks, but that that alone is not enough. Networks can develop leaders at all levels and the networking must extend beyond the headteachers to the teachers, pupils, parents and governors.

We know that working with networks increases the capacity of the LEA to engage with schools more efficiently and effectively and we consciously plan to develop this way of working in the future.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education and Skills, 2003, *Every Child Matters*, London, DfES

## Cornwall brokering school networks

### What next?

Within the next 18-months all primary and secondary schools will be connected to the South West Grid for Learning and will have access to a number of learning communities online. This ICT infrastructure will be developed in response to the learners' needs, to maximise the benefits for pupils and teachers. It will also maximise communication between educational professionals across the LEA and beyond.

The networks in Cornwall are generating the adaptive capacity that they need to continue developing, rapidly changing to meet the needs of their pupils and the demands of government policy.

Through the Cornwall Learning Forum, we will continue to build this adaptive capacity by providing the support for individuals, schools, networks and 'networks of networks', by focusing relentlessly on effective teaching and learning. □

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# What are we learning about...?

The 'What are we learning about...?' series is designed to make public the learning that has emerged from NLCs in the last two years.

The first six titles in the series will focus on:

## **What are we learning about...?**

- **LEA involvement in school networks**
- Establishing a network of schools
- The impact of school networks
- Professional development within school networks
- Leadership within school networks
- Sustaining a network of schools

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