

In *What are we learning about LEA involvement in school networks?*

we illustrate some of the important roles LEAs can play in brokering a network-based system. In particular, this involves supporting school networks and connecting networks of schools through fostering lateral knowledge transfer and leadership opportunities.

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

To order a copy of this publication, please email nlc@ncsl.org.uk quoting the reference **WAWLA/From networks**

National College for School Leadership
Networked Learning Group
Derwent House
Cranfield University Technology Park
University Way, Cranfield
Bedfordshire
MK43 0AZ

T: 08707 870 370
F: 0115 872 2401
E: nlc@ncsl.org.uk
W: www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc



www.ncsl.org.uk

What are we learning about...?

LEA involvement in school networks

From networks of schools to a networked system

The LEArning Project and LEArning Forum

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other learning with each other learning on behalf of each other

What are we learning about LEA involvement in school networks?

Through our work with networks and with LEAs, we are learning that there are broadly five brokerage and facilitation roles that LEAs perform that together add greatest value to school networks. We have also written elsewhere about some specific examples of ways that this is happening, drawn from practice both within the UK and internationally.

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.**

It is important to be clear that supporting networking and collaboration is not just another function of the LEA, it is a necessary part of a newly configured system in which collaboration and knowledge-exchange occur laterally, and in which interdependency and co-leadership characterise the relationships between tiers of the system. The growth in understanding about how to support networks of schools will in turn, help LEAs to learn better how to engage in and to model networking and collaboration themselves. This is particularly relevant for LEAs in the developing multi-agency context.

LEA involvement in brokering and facilitating networks of schools can help LEAs to achieve the cultural change envisaged in the creation of Children's Services or Children's Trusts.

LEAs will be able to model collaborative behaviours by networking services and ways of working internally, and by connecting in collaborative learning and working relationships with other LEAs.

All LEAs are currently responding to the proposals and challenges of *Every Child Matters*.¹ Some are recognising that the nature of their facilitation and brokerage roles in school networks is culturally similar to how they need to work to make new Children's Services operate effectively. However, as is the case with any attempt to change the culture of an organisation, developing the skills and capacity of staff to work in this way, and changing habitual organisational norms presents a major challenge. It is easier to achieve through adaptive and collaborative problem-solving approaches than it is by the traditional 'restructuring' approaches.

“What is clear from the work of NLCs, is that the move to a more collaborative and network-based system offers a real opportunity for LEAs to co-design with school leaders a transformation of the local landscape. This involves looking with fresh eyes at the way that schools work with one another, the way that the LEA works with networks of schools, and the way that local authority services, including education, collaborate to meet children's needs.”

NCSL and the Innovation Unit are currently supporting two programmes that are specifically designed to explore the territory outlined above with LEA staff: the LEArning Forum and the LEArning Project. They focus on developing the capacity of LEA personnel to perform brokerage and facilitation roles that support networked learning between schools and in multi-agency contexts. □

¹ Department for Education and Skills, 2003, *Every Child Matters*, London, DFES

The LEArning Project

The LEArning Project is a partnership programme between NCSL, the Innovation Unit and the Local Transformation Group at the DFES. The project started in Spring 2004 and involves a wide range of Local Authorities spread across the country. These authorities share a desire to develop innovative local approaches to collaboration, focusing on school-to-school learning networks and children's services development.

The authorities within the project are committed to influencing both practice and policy, simultaneously working at local and national levels.

The LEArning Project has three key objectives:

- 1 Helping local authorities to develop their capacity for facilitating and supporting networks of schools and children's services partnerships.
- 2 Researching and sharing knowledge about the most effective ways in which authorities can support networking and collaboration.
- 3 Developing new models of practice within local authorities which will influence and shape policy.

Local learning projects

Each authority has identified a specific piece of work related to their needs and context. The common thread across these projects is that they are focused on learning about network-based and collaborative approaches, and on sharing this learning with others, both within and beyond the LEArning Project. Each project is led by LEA personnel and actively supported by the Chief Education Officer.

Policy and system learning

The learning from individual projects, combined with other knowledge being generated by the authorities, comes together and is shared through regular think tank sessions and the development of resources for the wider system. During these sessions, authorities learn from each other and have the opportunity to influence the design and development of policy within the context of the *Five Year Strategy*² and *Every Child Matters*. Policy makers, influential thinkers and the authorities are working together to ensure that new practices developed by these local authorities are utilised at all levels of the system.

² Department for Education and Skills, 2004, *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, London, DFES

Questions the LEArning Project is seeking to answer

The local learning projects are providing research and enquiry around these operational questions:

- What are the most effective network configurations?
- What are the most effective forms of leadership and facilitation for networks?
- How is collaborative capacity best brokered and supported by local authorities?
- How can collaborative capacity support the local implementation of *Every Child Matters*?

The think tank sessions provide a forum for considering these policy and system level questions:

- What conclusions can we draw about the most effective forms of collaboration?
- What are the policy implications for the promotion of effective collaboration?
- What is the contribution of collaborative working to the effective realisation of the government's *Five Year Strategy*?
- How can collaborative capacity contribute momentum and support the effective implementation of *Every Child Matters*?

Further information

If you would like share your views about the work of the LEArning Project, or you have your own learning which you would like to share with others, please email nlc@ncsl.org.uk For more information, visit www.ncsl.org.uk and click on 'learning with LEAs'. □

The LEArning Forum

The LEArning Forum is an informal network of LEAs and other middle-tier organisations committed to learning together about ways in which to best support the development of learning networks of schools. It is sponsored and facilitated by NCSL and the Innovation Unit in partnership. The LEArning Forum is an umbrella community open to staff from all LEAs, diocesan education commissions, and NCSL Regional Affiliated Centres. Above and beyond anything else, it is a communication forum designed to connect together those within LEAs who are advocates of, or who have a responsibility for, network-based practice in LEAs.

So far, members have met together, both face-to-face and online, to learn more about how LEAs are currently working to support networks of schools. The LEArning Forum provides an opportunity for LEAs and their other middle-tier partners to model themselves as learning networks, committed to learning from, with and on behalf of each other.

Further information

To register for membership of the community, or to subscribe to the LEArning Forum e-newsletter, please email learningforum@ncsl.org.uk or visit www.ncsl.org.uk □

