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Think piece

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

Establishing a network of schools

# Developing a network perspective

Tom Bentley, David Hopkins & David Jackson

Networked Learning Communities

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

# Developing a network perspective

**This think piece** draws together three perspectives on the development of networks and aims to provide an opportunity to explore some of the important issues associated with establishing a network of schools. It examines the social and political context which surrounds the current interest in the development of networks within the education system, explores contemporary understandings about school networks and considers what is known about collaborative success in effective networks. It is hoped that by engaging with these perspectives readers will be able to explore the rationale for school networks. They might, for example, be used to generate dialogue, discussion and debate amongst those involved in the process of establishing a network of schools.

First, **Tom Bentley** presents the key messages from his foreword to David Hargreaves' recent publication *Education Epidemic.* He gives an overview of issues arising from the current social and political context which are influencing the growing interest in the development of school networks. In the course of this discussion he explores in particular, the rationale for school networks in terms of their role in transforming the education system.

In the second piece, **David Hopkins** explores the theme of '*Making Sense of Networks.*' He examines contemporary perspectives on our understandings about school networks and argues the case for establishing networks in education. This argument points to the ways in which school networks present a potentially powerful means of spreading innovation across the education system.

The third perspective is provided by **David Jackson** who addresses the theme '*Effective Networks: what we know helps collaborative success*'. This discussion brings together research from both the private and public sectors and shows how effective networks enhance the success of their organisational members. In examining the available evidence on successful collaboration, it is suggested that effective networks are dependent upon the relationships and structures that are formed at the beginning stages of establishing a network, and that these make for strong foundations upon which to build the collaborative work of any network. □

# Networks and system transformation

Tom Bentley

**At the time of writing,** after seven years of a New Labour government, public services are approaching a crossroads. Government-by-target is widely accepted to have reached its limits as a strategy. Targets are still an essential part of the toolkit, but setting linear improvement goals and then pushing harder and harder to achieve them can no longer be the dominant principle for reforming the whole school system. The pragmatic delivery focus of earlier years is being replaced by even more ambitious objectives, along with more intense disputes over the costs and consequences of reform.

As a result, a government which began by insisting that 'standards, not structures' mattered most, is now staking its credibility on the introduction of new structures, including Foundation Partnerships, Leading Edge Partnerships, Primary Learning Networks, Networked Learning Communities, city academies and specialist schools.

Politically, public services are the focus of a wider struggle to prove that, amid growing diversity and inequality, public investment and intervention are part of what holds society together. The contention is that a strong public realm can equip us all to thrive in a rapidly changing society, and help make social fairness and cohesion a reality. The stakes could hardly be higher.

That is why the growing use of transformation as a goal is so important. Recent reform has shown that short-term improvements in key areas such as numeracy and literacy scores, hospital waiting times and street crime are possible. However, embedding higher expectations and performance permanently in the workings of public service organisations means changing 'whole systems', often radically, and equipping them to adapt more effectively to ongoing change.

Transformation will only occur by shaping and stimulating *disciplined* processes of innovation within the school system, and building an infrastructure capable of transferring ideas, knowledge and new practices *laterally* across it.

Huge amounts of money, time and effort are spent trying to spread good practice between different schools. Most of that effort is wasted, because what we already know about how such transfer occurs (which is not enough) is not used in the design of dissemination strategies.

The organisational form which can give depth and scale to this process of transformation is the network. With the right kind of leadership and governance, the formation of networks combining collaborative and competitive endeavour could play a vital role in creating a system of world class schools.

The education narrative is already moving from an emphasis on 'informed prescription' towards 'informed professionalism' as the basis for improvement. But by what, or whom, should professionals be informed and challenged to adapt?

One familiar response to this difficulty has always been that government should 'trust the professionals'. Many teachers still feel that if they could just be left to get on with the job, they would be able to perform successfully. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Teachers, like any other professional group, are just as likely to resort to self-protection in the face of disruptive change as they are to embrace new and better practices. The challenge is to build professional identities and professional learning communities that are oriented towards adaptation and radical innovation.

In this way, knowledge-based networks are not the alternative to existing forms of public provision; they are an essential complement. Rather than being represented by a new government agency or a single policy lever, transformation becomes an 'emergent property' of the whole education system as it learns to generate, incorporate and adapt to the best new ideas and practices that get thrown up around it. □

# Why establish a learning network?

**Networks of schools** are capable of making this leap forward for four reasons:

## 1 Networks foster innovation

Good practice has never been something which can be defined and crystallised, but rather must be continually refined and updated. As David Hargreaves (2003) has argued, teachers already innovate constantly – and have always done so – through making subtle changes to their practice based on a mixture of trial-and-error and their own experiences. But now the outcomes of innovation need to be spread further and faster through the system. The model of distributed leadership practised in networks of schools creates the conditions for the continual innovation and renewal in schools that might make this possible.

## 2 Networks are a test bed for new ideas

No school can be expected to innovate in every area of school life. Apart from being virtually impossible in practice, the disruption caused by such an approach would cause more damage than good. Networks offer a platform for *segmented innovation*, allowing different schools to innovate in different areas of school life – but for all to benefit from their work. This kind of process distributes the risks and the workload between schools.

## 3 Networks provide challenge and discipline to teachers' learning

As Charles Desforges (2004) has argued, much of the knowledge about how to refine and update practice is held by teachers themselves. He argues:

> ***"We need the informed help of professionals beyond our parish...because they share our goal, understand our context, but are not blinkered by our assumptions about our immediate settings."***

Through transferring knowledge laterally, networks are capable of offering teachers speedy access to innovation taking place in the classroom next door, or in the school in the next town. As a result, teachers are no longer left to tinker with their practice based exclusively on their own experience, but are able to take decisions based on a wealth of professional knowledge drawn from a wider context.

## 4 Networks help integrate services

It takes more than one teacher to educate a child. The expertise and knowledge required to meet the needs of every child are distributed among a wide range of people including parents, peers, and teachers. Networks offer the opportunity for teachers to draw on the knowledge of other teachers, parents and professionals including those from the health and social services. This networked approach to meeting the needs of every child goes to the heart of the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) agenda. □

# End piece

**Life in this new system** may not be any calmer than at present, but it could become more coherent. One implication of continuous adaptation may be that 'permanent revolution' should be accepted as the norm in organisational life. The payoff is that a series of initiatives which bend the performance of resilient schools could be replaced with continuous efforts to equip the system to learn for itself. □

# Making sense of networks

David Hopkins

**During the last decade** we have become familiar with the emphasis which has been placed upon competition and individual school accountability as drivers for school improvement within our education system. These were important strategies for the first phase of a large-scale, long term educational reform programme. As we move into a new phase of educational reform however, more creative and responsive structures for supporting the work of schools are needed. Among these 'cross-over structures' are the variety of networks and collaborative arrangements schools engage in to support a range of school improvement, professional development and innovation-related activities. Many argue that networks are the essential unit of organisation as we leave behind the false dichotomy between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to educational change.[1]

There are various interpretations of the word network; it is a concept open to a high degree of conceptual pluralism. Although many claims are made for the positive impact of networks on school organisational culture and student standards of achievement, in practice some networks can simply be 'clubs' for sharing 'good practice'. If networks are genuinely to deliver the outcomes claimed for them, we require a far more robust definition of the term and a clearer specification of the processes involved. To make some sense of the network concept is the purpose of this brief paper. In so doing I will draw on the research evidence on school improvement in general and the case studies prepared for the OECD Schooling for Tomorrow programme in particular.[2]

Let me start by proposing a definition for the type of network that has a chance of realising the aspirations many have for them:

***Networks are purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigour, and a focus on standards and student learning. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, networks promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems.***

This definition is admittedly a little dense. In order to amplify the ideas it contains, and in particular the focus on the role of networks in supporting innovation, the discussion presented in the remainder of this paper will explore the following key themes.

**Making sense of networks – key themes**

- Identify a set of conditions necessary to support networks.
- Outline the role of networks in supporting innovation.
- Propose an evolving typology of networks.
- Discuss the role of governments in supporting networks.
- Emphasise the importance of personalised learning. □

# Effective networks

**The qualities of networks** implied by this definition are not easily acquired. All the evidence suggests that a number of key conditions need to be in place if networks are to realise their potential as agents of educational innovation.

## 1 Consistency of values and focus

It is important that networks have a common aim and purpose, and that the values underpinning the network are well articulated and owned by those involved. This consistency of values and purpose also relates to the need for the focus of the network to be unrelentingly on the learning and achievement of students within a socially just education system.

## 2 Clarity of structure

Effective networks are well organised with clear operating procedures and mechanisms for ensuring that maximum participation is achieved within and between schools. These structures promote involvement that is broad-based, preferably with a whole organisation or systemic focus, rather than being narrow, limiting or particular. The clarity of structure needs also to be complemented by an organisational culture that is sceptical about its own rhetoric.

[1] See for example: Hargreaves, DH, 2003 Working laterally: how innovation networks make an education epidemic, *DfES Publications*; Huberman, M, 1995 Networks that alter teaching: conceptualizations, exchanges and experiments, *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp193-211.

[2] An earlier version of this paper was prepared for the second phase of the OECD 'Schooling for Tomorrow' Programme on educational innovation. The first phase of the programme, including the Hiroshima OECD/Japan conference held at the end of 1997, was focused at the level of the individual institution and culminated in the publication in 1999 of "*Innovating Schools*". Since then, the emphasis has broadened to examine innovation through networks, multi-site change, and supporting initiatives.

# Effective networks

### 3 *Knowledge creation, utilisation and transfer*

The key purpose of networks is to create and disseminate knowledge to support educational improvement and innovation. Such knowledge and practice needs to be based on evidence, focused on classroom processes and be available in a form that facilitates teacher learning.

### 4 *Rewards related to learning*

Those who belong to networks need to feel that their involvement is worthwhile. Rewards for networking are best related to supporting professional development and the encouraging of teacher and student learning. Effective networks invest in people.

### 5 *Dispersed leadership and empowerment*

Highly effective networks contain skilful people who collaborate and work well together. The skills required by network members are similar to the skill sets associated with effective teams and include a focus on dispersed leadership and empowerment.

### 6 *Adequate resources*

Networks need to be adequately resourced, particularly in terms of time, finance and human capital. It is not necessarily the quantum of resource that is important. More crucially, there needs to be flexibility in the way in which available resources are deployed for network purposes.

## How networks support innovation

One of the key conclusions from practice and research, as well as common sense, is that networks in education have a key role to play in supporting innovation and development. Accordingly, networks need to be regarded as support structures for schools seeking to be innovative, not only in disseminating good practice, but also in overcoming the traditional isolation of schools, and to a certain extent, even challenging traditional hierarchical system structures. In the past, most school systems have operated almost exclusively through individual units – be they teachers, departments, schools or local agencies. Such isolation may have been appropriate during times of stability, but during times of change there is a need to tighten the 'loose-coupling', to increase collaboration and to establish more fluid and responsive structures. Networks are a means of doing this.

It is important to realise, however, that networks do not just facilitate innovation. By offering the possibility of new ways of working, networks can also be an innovation in themselves. This is particularly important in contemporary educational systems, where traditional support agencies for schools tend to be more effective at buttressing the status quo, rather than supporting change. What is needed to support a networked system are not outmoded institutions, but more creative and responsive structures for working with and between schools.

Networks can provide a means of facilitating local innovation and change as well as contributing to large-scale reform. They offer the potential for re-inventing local support for schools by promoting different forms of collaboration, linkages and multi-functional partnerships. These are sometimes referred to, as earlier, as 'cross-over structures'. In this respect, the network enables stakeholders to make connections and to commit to synergistic activity around common priorities. The system emphasis is not to achieve control (which is impossible), but to harness the interactive capability of systemic forces.[3]

**Networks have the potential to support educational innovation and change by:**

- Keeping the focus on the core purposes of schooling and in particular the focus on student learning.
- Enhancing the skill of teachers, leaders and other educators as change agents, managing the change process and creating and sustaining a discourse on teaching and learning.
- Providing a focal point for the dissemination of good practice, the generalisability of innovation and the creation of 'action oriented' knowledge about effective educational practices.
- Building capacity for continuous improvement at the local level and in particular, in creating professional learning communities, within and between schools.
- Ensuring that systems of pressure and support are integrated, not segmented eg professional learning communities incorporate pressure and support in a seamless way.
- Acting as a link between the centralised and decentralised schism resulting from many contemporary policy initiatives, so contributing to policy coherence horizontally and vertically.

[3] For a further discussion of these points see, Fullan, M 2000, The Return of Large Scale Reform, *Journal of Educational Change*, Vol. 1, No 1, pp1-23.

## Networks and personalised learning

In the opening paragraphs of this paper I argued that we are entering a new phase of educational reform in which networks would play a central role. The aspiration is based on the belief that we require a qualitatively different approach to teaching and learning in the 21st century. This is because both the demands *on* young people and the demands *of* young people are changing. These challenges mean that teaching in the 21st century should embrace not only the transmission of knowledge, but also learning how to learn. As students master information and skills, the result of each learning experience is not only the content they learn, but also the greater ability they acquire to approach future learning in and out of school.

The challenge is how to focus this new relationship on achieving both equity and excellence. The solution is to build on what the most successful teachers do best, to create an education system with personalised learning at its heart. This means a system in which every child matters – careful attention is paid to their individual learning styles, motivations and needs. There is rigorous use of pupils target setting linked to high quality formative assessment and marking, lessons are active, well paced and enjoyable, and pupils are supported by partnerships with others beyond the classroom.

Personalised learning can only be developed school by school. It cannot be imposed from above. If we want to make personalised learning the defining feature of our education system, then we need to develop a new, more focused and purposeful relationship between the Department for Education and Skills, Local Education Authorities and schools. The new relationship with schools will bring a sharper focus to our work at national level and strip out clutter, in order to release greater local initiative and energy. The desire is to free schools to focus on what really matters, building from their strengths, providing more help in identifying their weaknesses and offering more tailored and coherent support.

One thing is clear – individual schools cannot achieve this alone – they can no longer be regarded as the unit of integration. Networks of schools offer more hope. Networks of schools, together with other service providers, may be able to respond creatively and collaboratively to serving each 'whole' learner. Charlie Leadbeater (2004) has argued that we should begin to view schools as 'solutions assemblers', providing individually tailored services. No single school could hope to provide the diversity, flexibility or economy of service provision that this would entail. Networks, though, can. ☐

# End piece

**There is still much** to learn about networks in order to make sense of them. In education, school-to-school networks (as opposed to clusters) are comparatively new organisational forms. Some DfES programmes, such as EAZs, EICs and LIGs, have provided models, as have NCSL's Networked Learning Communities and those networks supported by the Specialist Schools' Trust. Around the country, many local networks also operate – and some of these examples can provide sources of learning.

There are some things that are known for sure – traditional levers for improvement, such as tests and targets, are reaching the limits of their potential and the next phase of education reform will require new ways of delivering 'excellence and equity'. In a system able to respond to the diverse needs of individual learners, teachers and schools will *need* to work together. Networks are perhaps the best way we have at present to create and support this expectation. ☐

## Footnote

**Professor David Hopkins** is writing here in a personal capacity: the views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent a policy position on the part of the Department for Education and Skills. ☐

# Effective networks: what we know helps collaborative success

David Jackson

***“ Good networks are horizontal partnerships which value professional expertise and mutual learning. In doing so, they overcome hierarchy and create connections between different levels of the system. They are support structures for teacher and school development. ”***

**This paper draws** significantly from three sources. The first is *Collaborative Advantage: the art of alliances* (Kanter, 1994) the second, *Schooling for Tomorrow Innovation and Networks* (Hopkins, 2000) and the third, *What Are We Learning About Networked Learning* (Jackson & Horne, 2003). In the discussion which follows, the findings from these three studies are combined in order to provide a series of perspectives on effective networks and what is known about the factors that help collaborative success.

The first of the studies considered is a report by Rosabeth Moss Kanter of a world-wide research study summarising the findings from productive private sector partnership and network arrangements. Becoming a good partner has become a key component of success in the private sector. In this research, 37 companies and their partners from 11 countries were studied, with the findings uncovering three fundamental aspects of successful alliances in the private sector.

**Three fundamental aspects of successful alliances**

1. **They must yield benefits for the partners, but they also must have significance beyond corporate advantage:** networks are living systems that progressively evolve in their possibilities, and the network relationships offer an option on the future, opening new doors and unforeseen possibilities.
2. **Networks that partners ultimately deem successful involve collaboration:** creating new value together rather than just exchange (getting something back for what you put in).
3. **They cannot be ‘controlled’ by formal systems:** they require a dense web of interpersonal connections, supported by an internal infrastructure to enhance learning. Successful networks acknowledge and effectively manage the human aspects of their relationships.

Kanter, 1994

The second report, by David Hopkins, arose from a two day facilitated seminar arranged by the OECD/CERI. It involved representatives from five of the world’s most advanced educational school-to-school networks, seeking to pool knowledge from their collective experience.

The third source is a working paper arising from study within NCSL’s Networked Learning Communities programme, which explores the nature of learning relationships and engagements within the 130 school-to-school networks (1,500 schools) in the programme.

## Pre-conditions – successful relationships

***“ People work well together who break bread together… Successful and full partnerships manage the relationships. ”***

The strongest and most successful collaborations in the private sector are what are called ‘value-chain partnerships’. This involves separate organisations, sometimes quite dissimilar ones, who feel that together they can create higher value for end-users. For school networks, the end users are obviously children and the communities that networks serve. As they share this common concern and aspiration for user outcomes, commitments within these relationships tend to be high. The partners tend to develop joint activities in many functions, operations often overlap, and the relationships thus create substantial change within each partner’s organisation. The network also serves as a gatekeeper to other relationships – individual members are given access to wider network connections through other partner members.

Such successful networks begin with what the OECD seminar called ‘intentionality’. They are effectively a union of purpose between otherwise independent organisations that contain the potential for a range of collaborations. They are built on trust and shared aspirations. Commitment involves a mutual agreement to explore possibilities – thus the added value includes potential for a stream of as yet unknown possibilities to emerge through collaborative work.

## Initiation

Successful organisational relationships nearly always depend, both for their creation and maintenance, on a strong relationship between those in the senior leadership roles. Leaders need to be committed to the network. This seems to be a 'bottom line' finding – networks thrive when leaders work and learn well together. The finding is consistent across all three studies.

The early processes appear to go better if partner organisations look for some or all of the following characteristics.

### The characteristics of early initiation processes

1. **Self-evaluation and peer review:** relationships get off to a good start when partners know themselves and their own organisational purposes well, and when they share that with others. Self-evaluation and peer review are common processes used as a foundation for network planning.
2. **Flexible relationships:** networks seem to work best when they are more like families than organisations. They are less rational than other organisational forms, more spontaneous. Obligations are more diffuse, the scope for collaboration is more open; understanding grows between the individuals. Frequent and intensive communication is important, both to generate involvement and because a rich interpersonal context builds commitment. Only relationships with full commitment tend to endure long enough to create value for all partners.
3. **Organisational chemistry:** organisations in a network have to feel good about one another. They share values, they believe in something together, they are optimistic about possibilities and they feel better for the collaborative relationship. They are prepared to be open towards one another and are committed. They have a will to make it work and they care about each other's success.
4. **Unity of purpose:** effective networks unite around a compelling idea, a shared belief that they can achieve more for their 'end users' together than they can alone. It is only when network organisations are aiming at higher purposes together that the relationship endures long enough to overcome early difficulties and to explore initially unknown possibilities.

## Implementation

What starts out as shared feelings of optimism and a shared vision between partner organisations has to become institutionalised and made public to everyone in the network organisation. Put another way, in school networks the rapport between school leaders and a handful of other school members has to be supplemented by the support and recognition of other adults within the school, as well as other stakeholders. Evidence from both successful public and private sector collaborations shows that they have to overcome four common problems.

### Four common problems faced by collaboratives

1. Members in other positions may not initially experience the same rapport and attraction to the idea as the initiators.
2. Network purposes tend to be aspirational and require discretionary effort. Others may be less keen. They may understandably be more occupied with everyday operational realities and challenges.
3. Staff are often evaluated by their performance in their role within their own organisation – networking has to be legitimised and rewarded.
4. The network will be seen by some to threaten the institutional success of individual organisations (schools). Sharing and giving to other partners can appear high risk. This inevitably creates insecurities, uncertainties and opportunities for sceptics to voice difference.

Many of these reservations can be overcome by the identification of a shared focus that makes explicit the values and purpose of the network. It needs to be something of clear worth to the end-user (in the case of schools, that means pupils), and something also that can clearly be enhanced by joint or collaborative work. In this implementation phase there is also a need for the establishment of broadly based rituals – an equivalent might be the rituals and vows of a marriage ceremony – which form the symbolic substance of relationship-building. The best network agreements contain five important components.

# Effective networks: what we know helps collaborative success

**Five components of network agreements**

1. **They involve a plan,** which incorporates specific joint activity around the focus - the first-step venture or project. This project will make the relationship real in practice and helps the partners to learn to work together. It provides a basis for measuring the value of joint activity. Having real work to do makes it possible to get the relationship started.
2. **The ritual agreement** should include a commitment to expand the relationship further in a variety of ways through additional joint activity, sharing of practice or personnel exchanges. Such a commitment reflects a willingness to connect the fates of the organisations more deeply. It also extends participation and broadens the base of involvement.
3. **The opening rituals** should incorporate clear indications of continuing independence as well as interdependence for all members. This security of identity is important for many who might otherwise feel threatened.
4. **A commitment** to study each other's practice, perhaps by visiting each other's schools, demonstrates a resolve to respect and honour each other's work.
5. **These rituals** need to make visible and celebrate early success. This will need to be further supported by high quality communication strategies that enable both the sharing of practice and the continued endorsement of collaborative working.

It is also in this early implementation phase that the commitment of the organisations' leaders really counts. Joint activity by members requires support – social, technical and practical support. Leaders need to find practical expression for their rhetoric of commitment to the network. Cross-organisational working, for example, can be facilitated by changes in the way that time, space and resources are allocated. At its simplest level, the creation of time common to all the organisations can facilitate quality collaborative efforts.

## Learning to collaborate – five levels of integration

Active collaboration takes place when organisations develop devices – structures, processes, skills – for bridging historical organisational and interpersonal separation. Multiple connections at different levels can help to ensure communication, co-ordination and sustainable learning connections. For example, networks that have created shared time for staff to collaborate are more likely to achieve sustainability, according to the research in other sectors. Rosabeth Moss Kanter's research suggests that the most productive networks achieve five levels of integration.

**Five levels of integration in productive networks**

1. **Strategic integration:** which involves continuing contact and collaborative learning between top leaders (and LEAs and governing bodies).
2. **Tactical integration:** organisational changes that will link the member schools together and facilitate knowledge transfer eg one network has appointed new 'organisational architects' to foster these changes; another has network performance targets for all headteachers.
3. **Operational integration:** such as participation in each other's CPD, shared enquiry teams, staff exchanges and secondments, joint curriculum planning and joint appointments.
4. **Interpersonal integration:** an orchestrated and expanding network of interpersonal ties that grows progressively in density. Plans on paper do not develop in practice until many people in all network schools know one another and become willing to make the effort for one another.
5. **Cultural integration:** all the evidence suggests that this is most likely to be achieved when headteachers learn together and actively study each other's schools. Paying homage to one another's practice demonstrates commitment, interest and respect, and builds the empathy and goodwill crucial to overcoming cultural differences.

Achieving these five areas of integration involves three forms of connection – letting others in; going out to study the practice of other partners; and joint work and enquiry groups existing between organisations, made up of participants from different partner organisations.

## Networks and change

Letting others in involves risk – the risk of external critical friendship and change. This is particularly the case with networks, because the changes that result are not always internally controlled. One reason is that they involve 'unanticipated possibilities'. Another, is because networks operate largely outside traditional hierarchical decision making structures.

Organisations begin this process by generating the openness to studying themselves – knowing oneself with honesty is the first stage to building good partnerships. In Kanter's research, those organisations with strong cross-functional communication, widely shared information and positive internal learning relationships (ie strong internal network cultures) tended to be more productive in wider network activities. Where organisations limited information and power to a small set of people, this internal barrier to learning became compounded by the network.

In contrast, the most successful international companies used the network as a means of opening up internal learning systems. For example, the establishment of forums to exchange ideas with partners built confidence for internal knowledge-sharing. Cross-organisation enquiry and problem-solving groups tended to spawn internal activity of a similar kind. Communication channels for network activity were also used as models for internal purposes. Network leadership and facilitation skills provided models that could be used to coach those same skills for internal purposes. □

# End piece

**Final observations** from the three studies considered here relate to sustainability.

The move from institutional autonomy to sustained interdependence is a huge one. Early optimism and unity around compelling purposes will launch collaborative activity and fuel it well. However, the evidence from all three studies suggests that without conscious planning for sustainability early efforts will flounder and naturally occurring variances (eg changes of leaders, external pressures, varying fortunes of individual member organisations) can cause collaboration to stall.

Planning for sustainability means just that. Successful networks have dedicated internal leadership – and plan for leadership succession. All organisations need structures to sustain them, and networks are no exception. The design of integral, but flexible, network structures (eg work teams, steering groups, governance structures, planning teams) is important. So, too, is having some members whose professional identity becomes bound up with the success of the network – whose job descriptions, time and performance targets are related to network success.

Effective networks maintain and even enhance the individual success of their organisational members. Simultaneously, though, everyone needs to remain aware that collective health is the route both to individual success, and to adding value for all end-users (pupils) served by the network. □

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