

## Planning



Professional Learning Communities:  
source materials for school leaders and  
other leaders of professional learning

# Planning your professional learning community

Louise Stoll, Ray Bolam, Agnes McMahon, Sally Thomas, Mike Wallace,  
Angela Greenwood and Kate Hawkey

Professional learning communities don't just happen. They need to be nurtured and developed. Planning is an important part of this.

## Purpose of this activity

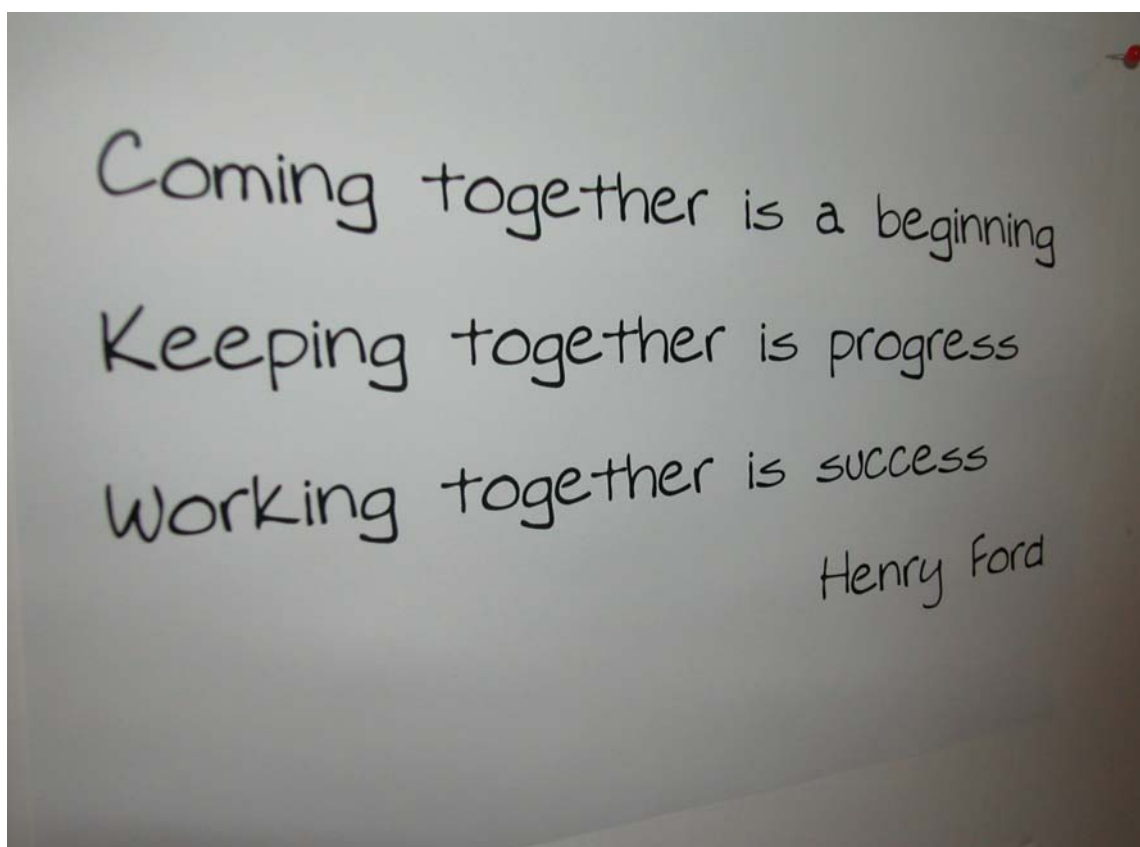


This activity is designed to help you to plan the development of your school, early years setting, centre, college, department or team as a professional learning community (PLC). It enables you and your colleagues to approach planning in three main ways, probably working more or less in parallel with each other:

- 1 planning to develop selected characteristics and processes of the overall PLC
- 2 planning to ensure that individual initiatives and innovations simultaneously draw upon the strengths of the PLC and contribute to its ongoing development over time
- 3 thinking about how you need to adapt your planning over time

To assist in these approaches, we suggest two complementary methods, one using a collaborative planning process, the other using an adapted mind map. The methods could be applied to either task, depending on your preferences.

We have also included a chart at the end to help you reflect on how you might change your planning according to the broad stage you feel you have reached in your PLC's development. In both cases, arrangements should be put in place for the outcomes to be fed into the ongoing process of developing and sustaining the PLC.



*Notice displayed in a project school staffroom*

## Method A: Collaborative planning

### Using the collaborative planning chart

This is designed for a small group or team working collaboratively, but it can be carried out by an individual or adapted for a whole staff. The precise timing of this activity and how long it takes will depend on how far

you have already completed certain other activities. Here we would imagine that you have already completed the ***Exploring the idea of professional learning communities*** activity in booklet 5, and one or more of the ***Audit activities*** in booklets 6–8. There are eight steps in the activity.

### Collaborative planning

#### Topic:

#### Step 1: What is your priority for action?

Review the outcomes of earlier activities (eg from your audits) to confirm or modify priorities for action. It will probably make sense to concentrate on selected PLC characteristics and/or processes rather than trying to tackle too many at once (you will find these in the ***What is a professional learning community? A summary*** card in the introductory source materials). We are using promoting inclusive membership here as a running example but you will want to focus on your own chosen characteristic or process.

*Write in your priority here:*

#### Step 2: What exactly is the present position?

Clarify and agree present practice on *inclusive membership*. If necessary, consult staff via a staff meeting or a quick staff survey.

*Write in present practice in your priority here:*



### Step 3: What needs to be done?

Brainstorm and agree the main action steps for your priority. Perhaps use the relevant parts of the *Developing your professional learning community* materials in booklet 10 (ie on *Promoting inclusive membership*) as a trigger.

*Write in action steps for your priority here:*



### Step 4: What resources are needed?

Identify the resources needed – in terms of time, space, equipment, money – and how they will be accessed and organised.



### Step 5: What are the main driving and restraining forces?

List the forces that are working for and against you and see if you can find ways to increase the driving forces and decrease the restraining forces. You may want to use a force-field analysis to help you with this<sup>1</sup>.



Driving forces promoting change

Restraining forces resisting change



<sup>1</sup> Lewin, K, 1947, Frontiers in group dynamics, *Human Relations*, 1 (1), 5-41

**Step 6: How will you know what has been achieved?**

Brainstorm and agree the main practical objectives and targets and how they are to be evaluated. You may also wish to link this step to the *Monitoring and evaluation* activities in booklets 12–13.

**Step 7: Who does what?**

Agree on roles and responsibilities.

**Step 8: What is the timetable?**

Agree when the various tasks are to be completed and on a procedure for reporting back to this group.



## Method B: Mapping plans

### Using the mapping plan

This method focuses you on making the most of your PLC when you are introducing initiatives and innovations. Mind maps, as described by Tony Buzan<sup>2</sup>, are a creative form of note-taking. Different colours, words and special codes can be used to help identify key points and make connections between them, showing where relationships lie. Because the ideas are captured on one page, mind maps can be helpful in providing a succinct overview of an issue. Use large paper and several different coloured pens for drawing your map.

You will need to choose an initiative to put in the centre of your mapping plan. If several people are doing this, you might want to work in groups, each focusing on a different initiative and then look at all the maps together to see where you can connect up activities, cutting out unnecessary overlap.

In the example map below, the four spheres linked to the initiative are the four main processes involved in creating and developing

a PLC that we found in our project. Each one of these contains more detailed processes (look at the resource card ***What is a professional learning community? A summary*** in the introductory source materials, for specific examples). Working through each process, ask yourselves questions about what you need to do in this area if you want to introduce, develop and embed the initiative you have chosen across your school, early years setting, centre or college. In the questions we have used as examples, we have chosen Assessment for Learning as an initiative people might want to promote.

So, for example, what needs to happen so you or the colleagues you are supporting can:

- **build trust** related to promoting assessment for learning?
- **create time** for staff to work together to develop assessment for learning?
- **strategically co-ordinate continuing professional development** related to assessment for learning?
- **identify factors that might inhibit staff collaborating** to build assessment for learning into their practice?

### Mapping plan




<sup>2</sup> Buzan, T, 1998, *Make the Most of Your Mind*, London, Pan Books

## Thinking about your planning over time

Whether you are focusing on planning the development of the PLC as a whole or a specific initiative in relation to your PLC, it is useful to think about the extent you want to vary your plans according to the broad phase of the journey you have already reached in developing your PLC. The following chart is included as a prompt to help you look back

over the activities and processes you have planned using methods A and B, and consider which ones are priorities to focus on at different points in time. Depending where you currently are on your journey of PLC development, you may find it relevant to fill out only part of the chart.

What will you plan to do at different phases of the PLC development journey?			
Starting out: to begin	Developing: to evolve	Deepening: to start embedding	Sustaining: to continue



### ...and finally

Having planned for the development of your PLC and for its support of your various initiatives, you will clearly want to put your plans into action. You may find the activities on ***Developing your professional learning community*** (Booklet 10) and ***Bringing about change*** (Booklet 11) helpful to support you in this.

To order a copy of this publication,  
please email [dfes@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dfes@prolog.uk.com)  
quoting reference number DfES-0187-2006  
or download from [www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc)  
[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit)  
[www.gtce.org.uk](http://www.gtce.org.uk)

## Planning

### Planning your professional learning community

#### **National College for School Leadership**

Triumph Road  
Nottingham NG8 1DH

T: 0870 001 1155  
F: 0115 872 2001  
E: [nlc@ncsl.org.uk](mailto:nlc@ncsl.org.uk)  
W: [www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc)

#### **General Teaching Council for England**

Whittington House  
19-30 Alfred Place  
London WC1E 7EA

T: 0870 001 0308  
F: 020 7023 3909  
E: [info@gtce.org.uk](mailto:info@gtce.org.uk)  
W: [www.gtce.org.uk](http://www.gtce.org.uk)

#### **DfES Innovation Unit**

Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

T: 0870 000 2288  
E: [innovation.unit@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:innovation.unit@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)  
W: [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit)

#### **Effective Professional Learning Communities**

University of Bristol  
Graduate School of Education  
8-10 Berkeley Square  
Bristol  
BS8 1HH

W: [www.eplc.info](http://www.eplc.info)