

Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) Interim Review

November 2018

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List of acronyms

ADES – Association of Directors of Education in Scotland

ASN – Additional Support Needs

COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

SOLACE – Society of Local Authority Chief Executives

NHS – National Health Service

NIF – National Improvement Framework

PEF – Pupil Equity Funding

RIC – Regional Improvement Collaborative

QIO – Quality Improvement Officer

Executive Summary

About this research

This report sets out findings of an interim review of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). The overall aim of this review was to explore how RIC establishment had been taken forward in each region.

RICs bring local authorities together, alongside Education Scotland, to secure excellence and equity in education. They facilitate collaborative working across the region, developing different ways of working together to build excellence and equity in the Scottish education system.

This review took place in mid to late 2018, nine months after the RICs were jointly announced in October 2017 and six months after they produced their initial improvement plans. The review therefore covers 'phase one' of RIC development and planning. The research will inform and support further development of the RICs and provides a baseline for future review.

Method

This qualitative research involved exploration of people's experiences and views. It involved in-depth discussions with:

- regional stakeholders – including all six regional leads for RICs, all six Education Scotland regional advisors, and 12 wider regional stakeholders such as colleges, universities, parents, Directors of Education and elected members;
- national stakeholders – including COSLA, ADES, SOLACE, Education Scotland and Scottish Government; and
- school staff – including 39 headteachers and 8 other teachers (largely principal teachers) at 42 schools across Scotland.

It is important to note that the schools involved in this research were selected because they had some involvement in phase one RIC activity. Regional leads were asked to identify schools which had been involved, and schools were then independently sampled from these lists. This report therefore reflects the experiences of the schools most involved in RICs.

Key findings

Overall, stakeholders felt that RICs were in their early days of operation, and that the timetable for setting up structures and developing plans had been tight. Stakeholders also felt it was important to recognise that phase one RIC activity has largely been taken forward without additional resources. The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed.

Governance and planning

Regional and national stakeholders were broadly content with the governance arrangements established for RICs. They felt that arrangements had been set up in a way which suited each region, and which recognised and linked with local authority decision making structures.

Some national stakeholders felt that it was a real achievement to have all local authorities signed up to the RICs, with appropriate structures and early plans in place.

The key factors felt to enable successful governance included:

- buy-in from senior officers and elected members;
- clear links between partners, schools and elected members; and
- a clear focus on overall intended outcomes.

In most cases, regional and national stakeholders believed that there was a shared vision and aims for the RIC at senior officer level within participating authorities. However, a few regional stakeholders were unsure about the rationale of the RIC concept, and there was some lack of clarity about the concept of additionality and what it meant in practice.

Overall, regional and national stakeholders felt that it was a significant achievement to have produced phase one RIC plans within the timescales. Planning processes were felt to work well where:

- plans were informed by data and research;
- each partner had a clear understanding of their priorities; and
- there was a focus on enhancing rather than duplicating activity.

Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that RIC plans were well connected to national priorities. However, regional and national stakeholders felt there was more work to do on connecting the plans with school priorities. The schools involved in the research largely felt positive about the connection between school, local, regional and national priorities and plans.

Most regional and national stakeholders felt that more needed to be done to develop ways of meaningfully measuring progress, including strengthening the sharing, collating and analysis of data across the region.

Stakeholder engagement

Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that more work needed to be done to engage stakeholders and schools more widely, raising awareness and involving them in planning and participating in RIC activity. Engagement with schools and development of the offer to schools were key priorities for phase two RIC activity. However, most felt strongly that the main initial point of contact and

support for schools should continue to be the local authority, with a need for clarity about the role of the RIC and how it fits with and complements existing support.

Support and joint working

Regional stakeholders felt that the support offered by regional advisors was good and helpful. Regional stakeholders were interested to see how the regional offer of support from Education Scotland would develop in the future.

While the availability of resources to support phase two of RIC activity was welcomed, most regional stakeholders felt that the early phases of RIC development were challenged by limited resources and tight timescales. Most regional stakeholders thought the approach by Scottish Government felt top-down, which was hard to reconcile with the local, bottom-up approach required for RICs.

Impact

So far, regional stakeholders believe that the RICs have encouraged joint working between officers in different local authority areas. RICs have also tested approaches to engaging with and supporting schools, often through small scale tests of change and targeted work with schools across different workstreams.

All stakeholders indicated that it would take time to see an impact. However, some school staff gave very positive early examples of sharing best practice, skills development and influencing practice around areas of leadership, self-evaluation, moderation of assessment, improvement methodologies, parental engagement, maths, early literacy and equality.

Overall, school staff were very positive about the idea of learning from one another across the region, and welcomed opportunities for networking, building skills and developing their practice.

1. Introduction

About this research

1.1 This report sets out findings of an interim review of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs).

Research aims

1.2 This review took place in mid to late 2018, six months after RICs were established at the end of January 2018. The overall aim of this review was to explore how RIC establishment had been taken forward in each RIC area.

1.3 The key areas of focus were:

- governance arrangements;
- the process which supported the development of initial RIC plans;
- evidence of initial use and sharing of data to support RIC planning;
- stakeholder engagement;
- use of improvement methodologies; and
- evidence of forward plans.

1.4 The research will inform and support further development, inform wider stakeholders of progress to date, and establish a baseline for future review.

Research context

1.5 RICs bring local authorities together to secure excellence and equity in education. They are intended to:

- provide educational improvement support to practitioners through dedicated teams of professionals – drawing on Education Scotland staff, local authority staff and others;
- provide focus across all partners through a regional plan and work programme – aligned to the National Improvement Framework; and
- facilitate collaborative working across the region.

1.6 RICs are not intended to be formal bodies within the education system. They are intended to bring together local authorities and Education Scotland to develop different ways of working, bring together capacity across a region and add value through collective efforts¹.

1.7 There are six RICs, involving between three and eight local authorities. They are:

¹ RICs for Education: Report of the Joint Steering Group, September 2017

- **Forth Valley and West Lothian Collaborative** – involving Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian Councils;
- **Northern Alliance** – involving Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney and Shetland Islands Councils;
- **South East Collaborative** – involving Edinburgh City, East Lothian, Fife, Midlothian and Scottish Borders Councils;
- **South West Collaborative** – involving East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway Councils;
- **Tayside Collaborative** – involving Angus, Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils; and
- **West Partnership** – involving East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils.

- 1.8 The RICs were established following the Scottish Government’s consultation on education governance and reform, during 2016 and 2017. In June 2017, the Scottish Government published ‘Education Governance – Next Steps’ setting out its vision of an education system centred around children and young people, with decisions taken as close to them as possible. As part of this, Next Steps set out the aim of establishing RICs to provide excellent educational improvement support for headteachers, teachers and practitioners through dedicated teams of professionals.
- 1.9 A joint steering group was set up to develop proposals for RICs, based on the policy direction outlined within Next Steps. The joint steering group involved Scottish Government, local government – including COSLA, SOLACE and ADES – and Education Scotland. The first task of the steering group was to develop options for the role and responsibilities of RICs. This included considering guiding principles, functions, leadership, staffing, geography, accountability and measures of success.
- 1.10 The steering group worked on these issues in summer 2017, and produced a report setting out its interim conclusions in September 2017². This report highlights the important of increased collaboration. It emphasises that RIC development is not about establishing a new formal body, but about developing different ways of working, bringing together capacity from across an area and beyond, to add value through collective efforts.
- 1.11 Scottish Government and COSLA entered into a partnership agreement to establish these new RICs for education, regional improvement leads were appointed, and initial regional improvement plans were required to be submitted for each RIC by the end of January 2018. This is the date from which RICs can be considered to be operational.

² <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/foi-eir-release/2018/03/foi-18-00582/documents/9bb14df1-5a00-4daf-8432-7216cc60c167/9bb14df1-5a00-4daf-8432-7216cc60c167/govscot%3Adocument>

- 1.12 In June 2018, Scottish Government and COSLA entered into a further agreement to continue to support school empowerment and collaboration – as well as parental involvement and pupil participation. At the same time a package of support was announced, including £10 million to enhance regional capacity to support schools – through the RICs and Education Scotland working together. The agreement highlighted that Education Scotland would further develop its core offer of support to RICs and to schools over 2018/19, and will inspect school empowerment as part of its inspection process.
- 1.13 RICs have developed in two broad phases. ‘Phase One’, to which this review relates, covers the initial establishment of the RICs from October 2017 to August 2018. ‘Phase Two’ refers to the period following submission of RIC plans for the 2018/19 school year, in September 2018.
- 1.14 At the time of the fieldwork for this report, RICs were in the process of developing their phase two regional improvement plans and developing their bids to access this regional funding to support RICs.

Method

- 1.15 This interim review involved five key phases:

Desktop review

- 1.16 We undertook a brief desktop review, to inform the fieldwork. This involved a review of national guidance, regional improvement plans, information about the profile of each region, and other relevant information. The main purpose of the desktop work was to set the context for the interim review and to inform the development of the research tools.

Regional level fieldwork

- 1.17 We held telephone interviews with the regional lead and Education Scotland regional advisor for each RIC. We also held telephone interviews with a small number of wider regional stakeholders in each RIC – including Directors of Education, partners such as health, police or further education, elected members and parents. Each regional lead was asked to identify two wider stakeholders who would be able to reflect on the process of establishing the RIC over the first six months. A total of 12 interviews were held with wider stakeholders.
- 1.18 To preserve anonymity, the interviews with RIC leads, advisors and wider stakeholders are all tagged as ‘regional stakeholders’ within quotes.

School level fieldwork

- 1.19 We held telephone interviews with 47 headteachers and teachers, at 42 different schools involved in RICs. This stage focused on gathering the views of schools who had been involved in the RIC and were able to reflect on the process of development and experiences of involvement to date.

- 1.20 Recognising the early stage of RIC development, we worked closely with RIC regional leads and Directors of Education within each RIC to identify a list of schools which had been involved in the RIC. We then independently selected schools from this list and agreed this with each RIC. In some RIC areas, the list provided of schools which had been involved in the RIC to date was relatively short.
- 1.21 The telephone interviews lasted 30 minutes. The discussion guide was adapted depending on how the member of staff had been involved in the RIC – for example through driving or participating in a particular workstream, attending an event, or assisting with RIC development and decision making.
- 1.22 We agreed the number of interviews to be held within each RIC with the Advisory Group for the research. This involved considering how many interviews would be held in each RIC area if an equal split was used, and then adjusting this to reflect the number of local authorities, schools and pupils within each RIC area.
- 1.23 The review involved interviews with 39 headteachers and 8 other members of staff – including two depute headteachers, five principal teachers and one class teacher. Initially we began with a broad target of holding 70 per cent of the interviews with headteachers, and 30 per cent with other members of staff. However, interviews with RIC leads made clear that most of the engagement to date had been with headteachers. This was confirmed by the headteachers involved in the research. As a result, in order to gather a range of perspectives beyond headteachers, we held five supplementary interviews at schools where headteachers identified other members of staff who had been particularly involved in RIC activity.
- 1.24 The final profile of schools involved in each RIC area was:

RIC	Core interviews	Supplementary	Total
Forth Valley and West Lothian Collaborative	5		5
Northern Alliance	10	3	13
South East Alliance	7		7
South West Collaborative	5	1	6
Tayside Collaborative	5	1	6
West Partnership	10		10
Total	42	5	47

1.25 We carried out interviews with school staff in 23 primary schools, 19 secondary schools, one special school, one mixed campus and three early years centres.

National level fieldwork

1.26 We held face to face interviews with:

- Scottish Government – three members of staff;
- COSLA – one interviewee;
- SOLACE – one interviewee;
- ADES – two interviewees; and
- Education Scotland – two members of staff.

1.27 These interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and explored views on RIC governance, planning, joint working, use of data, stakeholder engagement and future plans.

Reporting and analysis

1.28 This report sets out the key themes under each of the main areas explored within the review. Where appropriate, quotes or examples are used to help to illustrate points.

1.29 Notes from discussions were analysed using a system of manual thematic coding, which involves a researcher carefully reading responses to each interview question and coding key themes emerging. The researcher also reads the interview as a whole to ensure that responses are understood in context.

1.30 In analysing research participant views, we explored any key variances of view between respondent groupings, including primary and secondary schools; teachers in different roles; and between different authorities. Where differences of view have emerged by respondent grouping, we have highlighted this within the report.

1.31 Importantly, views are reported completely anonymously. Quotes are tagged broadly, to provide an idea of the type of stakeholder commenting. Comments have been reported carefully to reduce ability to identify the RIC area being discussed.

1.32 Within the report, we used a broad qualitative scale to describe the proportion of people who commented on particular themes and topics:

- one/ an individual – a point raised by just one person;
- a few – just two or three people;
- some – less than half of respondents in that category;
- many – more than half of respondents in that category; and
- most/ almost all – a very high proportion of respondents in that category.

1.33 When summarising survey findings within bulleted lists, the points are listed broadly in order of frequency mentioned.

Note on this report

1.34 It is important to bear in mind that this is an early, baseline review of the RICs. The work of the RICs was at very early stages at the time of the fieldwork for this report. In undertaking fieldwork for this evaluation, a number of stakeholders indicated that they felt it was too early for this type of review to take place. Findings should be interpreted in this context.

2. Setting up the RICs

Key findings

RICs were required to be set up within a relatively short timescale – between November 2017 and January 2018.

In most areas the process of identifying regional leads was felt to be relatively simple. RIC leads often held very senior positions with wide ranging responsibilities within their own local authorities, in addition to the RIC lead role. Where there was a full time, dedicated RIC lead – with support staff – stakeholders felt this helped to drive RIC development and support activity.

The structures established by RICs were varied. Most regional stakeholders were content with governance arrangements, which they felt had evolved in a natural way for their area. The key factors felt to enable successful governance included: buy-in from senior officers and elected members; clear links between partners, schools and elected members; and a clear focus on overall intended outcomes. However, there were challenges bringing senior, busy people together within tight timescales, and some varied views on the value and role of RICs and how they fit with the Scottish education system.

Many school staff indicated that they were not really involved in the set-up of the RIC, and that the timescales for establishment meant this was challenging. However, some felt that even in short timescales there had been good opportunities for schools to be involved.

Overall, the guidance on establishing RICs and developing RIC plans was felt to be helpful in setting the framework and principles for RIC development. However, there were concerns that the guidance came a bit late, was too prescriptive and created tensions between a top down and bottom up approach to RIC set up and planning.

There was concern that in most cases, during the early stages of RIC development, there had not been additional resources available from the Scottish Government. Where available, additional resources were felt to be very useful to kick start activity, allow for secondments, allow for dedicated time on RIC activity, enable cover and backfill and contribute to travel costs. The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed.

Introduction

2.1 This chapter explores the process of setting up the RICs. It explores:

- identification of regional leads;
- views on RIC structures and governance;
- views on guidance; and
- views on resources.

2.2 This chapter draws mainly on the views of regional and national stakeholders.

Identifying regional leads

2.3 An early task for each RIC was to identify a regional lead. In most areas, the process of identifying regional leads was felt to be relatively simple. However, in two areas the process was felt to be challenging, due to restructuring and a high level of change within senior level roles in the participating local authorities. A few found it difficult because they felt the thinking changed around who would appoint RIC leads along the way.

2.4 Where there had been an interview, some felt that the process worked well but others were unsure of the value of an interview. Some felt the role came about naturally, and that an interview process could have put off people from volunteering for the role.

2.5 The way in which RIC leads took on the role varied. For example, in one area there was a full-time secondment to the RIC lead role. This was felt to be very helpful, giving the role the status, drive and emphasis, it needed. In other areas, the RIC lead role was taken on in addition to existing responsibilities. RIC leads often held very senior positions with wide ranging responsibilities within their own local authorities, in addition to the RIC lead role.

2.6 RIC leads also had varying levels of support to drive the RIC locally. For example, in a few areas a support officer had been appointed, which RIC leads felt was extremely useful.

“The policy officer post is a vital role and is likely to grow as activity ramps up over time.”

Regional stakeholder

2.7 In other areas there was no dedicated RIC support role. In two areas, RIC leads had allocated part time support from within their own team, or simply made use of the resources within their own team as needed – in addition to their existing responsibilities.

“Anyone who participates does so in addition to their own job, and within the existing resource.”

Regional stakeholder

- 2.8 At the time of this fieldwork, some RICs were planning to appoint dedicated staff, or had just done so for the 2018/19 academic year. There was a feeling that as RIC activity increased, there would be more need for administrative support.
- 2.9 RICs also had access to regional advisors, through Education Scotland. Views on this support are explored in Chapter Three.
- 2.10 The main activities which RIC leads had been involved in included:
- governance – including establishing governance arrangements, gaining political sign off, updating local authority Chief Executives, brokering resources and reporting on progress;
 - planning – developing RIC plans, setting priorities, setting agendas for meetings and keeping workstreams going;
 - relationships - brokering relationships, facilitating officers participating in RIC activity, building a culture of collaboration, and motivating and galvanising teams;
 - connections – making links between local, regional and national stakeholders and priorities;
 - information – being the public face of the RIC, supporting analysis of information and disseminating information among stakeholders; and
 - events – co-ordinating groups, events, conferences and development sessions.
- 2.11 Essentially, RIC leads indicated that they were responsible for making the RIC happen, and led all activity around the RIC. Some, in areas where the partnership between authorities was relatively new, had spent a lot of time building relationships in the early phases of the RIC.
- 2.12 It was expected that activity would move forward to focus on engaging schools and other key stakeholders more over phase two of the RIC’s work.

RIC structures and governance

- 2.13 RICs were required to be set up within a relatively short timescale – between November 2017 and January 2018.
- 2.14 Regional stakeholders indicated that RIC structure and governance were largely led by senior officers and elected members. In some cases, local authorities were already working together in other ways, or had already been exploring options for collaboration. In other cases, RICs brought together local authorities which had not worked closely together in the past.

- 2.15 Overall, structures and governance options were largely “thrashed out” by senior officers – through considering papers, attending away days or workshops, working with independent advisors, evolving existing arrangements, or tightening governance arrangements for existing partnerships.
- 2.16 Some indicated that they did some consultation with headteachers, but that the timescales for establishing RICs did not enable in-depth involvement of schools and other partners.

“Given the timescale, the approach was mainly top down.”

Regional stakeholder

“The process of setting up the RIC was as good as it could have been given the timescales.”

Regional stakeholder

- 2.17 The structures established by RICs were varied. Generally, structures involved a mix of political oversight (involving elected members); high level forums or boards (often involving Directors of Education and RIC leads); groups including wider stakeholders (including headteachers and external partners such as Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate or other public sector agencies); and workstream groups (involving workstream leads and key deliverers).
- 2.18 Most regional stakeholders were content with governance arrangements. The key factors which were felt to enable successful governance were:
- buy-in from senior officers and elected members – as this was felt to help bring other people together in an agreed approach;
 - mechanisms which build links and connections between elected members, partners, workstream leads and schools;
 - linking with local democratic political processes – which needed to be followed for decision making;
 - focusing on the overall intended outcomes, and the benefit of the RIC to young people and schools;
 - time out to consider governance arrangements – for example through away days – and independent facilitation by external partners;
 - RIC geographies fitting well with other regional boundaries – helping to enable natural partnership working;
 - pooling resources for support posts to lead and support the RIC; and
 - informal, flexible governance arrangements which develop and evolve over time.

“Things have grown in a natural way that is comfortable for people.”

Regional stakeholder

“The governance structure works well. It is not too bureaucratic.”

Regional stakeholder

2.19 National stakeholders were also broadly happy with governance arrangements, and pleased that appropriate arrangements had been put in place in every region.

“Governance must be light touch. Each local authority already has its own governance arrangements.”

National stakeholder

“At a political level, it was a significant achievement that the 32 local authorities actually signed up for RICs.”

National stakeholder

2.20 There were some challenges to establishing RIC structures and governance. A key challenge for RIC leads was getting senior, very busy people together. For some this was particularly hard as they were leading but without line managing staff.

“There was an initial challenge of getting people in the right place. When people got together it was great, but this was not always possible.”

Regional stakeholder

2.21 The timescales for establishing the RICs were also felt to be very tight, with some concern that the timescales were being driven by a political timetable.

2.22 Other key challenges included:

- changes at senior level within local authorities - meaning that work had to be done on building relationships, establishing ethos and joint working arrangements;
- varied views on the value and role of RICs - particularly when local authorities within the RIC were led by different political parties;
- challenges addressing nervousness that RICs would take the education function away from local authorities – particularly in the context of a wider education reform agenda in Scotland; and
- sharing workloads fairly between authorities, particularly when authorities were of very different sizes.

“We had to work hard to get buy-in from all leaders, as there were complex party-political issues to manage...”

Regional stakeholder

“There is pressure on the smaller authorities with less resource.”

Regional stakeholder

2.23 There were also varied views on lines of accountability for schools and headteachers. Most regional stakeholders felt that headteachers should still be ultimately accountable to the local authority for all matters. Some stressed that local authorities had the legislative responsibility for improving education in their authority. However, one regional stakeholder felt that headteachers needed to understand their responsibilities to the RIC, and ensure they were accountable to the RIC for work they are doing on RIC workstreams.

2.24 A few regional and national stakeholders felt that they were still working through how the RICs fit into the education system. In some areas, there were discussions about whether the RICs were collaborations or entities, and a few regional stakeholders felt that this discussion had not been resolved. A few national stakeholders were concerned that RICs could move beyond their remit, with some concerns that local authorities were being by-passed on education matters.

“Are these collaborations or are they entities?”

Regional stakeholder

“RICs are not an entity. We need to be careful that they don’t become one.”

National stakeholder

Example: Agreeing the role of the RIC

In one area, there were different opinions on the role of the RIC, with Directors of Education having a “philosophical debate” about whether the RIC was an entity or a way of working. Some wanted to share staff, while others wanted to focus on enhanced collaboration in other ways.

School involvement in RIC set up

2.25 Many school staff indicated that they were not really involved in the set up of the RIC. Most were content with this and indicated that the process seemed positive and well organised.

“Headteachers are not interested in getting involved in the set up. We want to know how it will benefit our schools and our pupils.”

Headteacher, primary

“The approach has been positive. They have tried to take people along with it.”

Headteacher, primary

2.26 A few felt that while they were not involved, they received good information about the RIC journey, and felt well informed. A small number of headteachers involved in this research who had been involved in RIC boards said that this had been a positive experience.

2.27 A few headteachers indicated that RICs had evolved from previous joint working arrangements, which they felt was a positive starting point. However, a few in other areas indicated that RICs still seemed to be in planning stages, with little impact to date on schools. For example, one headteacher felt that the RIC was more a network of directors and did not yet involve schools. Another was a bit confused about the link between work to close the attainment gap (such as Attainment Advisors) and the RIC.

Guidance

2.28 Overall, the guidance on establishing RICs and developing RIC plans was felt to be helpful in setting the framework and principles for RIC development.

“The Strategic Group report was very clear, good and thorough. It provided a template of a functioning collaborative.”

Regional stakeholder

2.29 However, there were concerns that the guidance:

- came a bit late – when RICs had already done work on governance and planning;
- was too prescriptive – with some aspects seen as “too instructional” or “a bit particular”;
- did not fully recognise the time required to achieve the changes it set out – with a few feeling it did not reflect reality – or was “developed in isolation from the real world”; and
- created tensions between taking a bottom up and top down approach – both due to timescales and need to align to a national agenda.

“The guidance was fine, to a point. It does become a bit inflexible. The plan can’t contain everything in each phase.”

Regional stakeholder

“If the policy intention is about a ‘bottom-up’ approach we are not there yet.”

National stakeholder

Resources

2.30 There was concern that in most cases, over the early stages of RIC development, there had not been additional resources available from the Scottish Government.

2.31 This created challenges as RIC activity had to be dictated by the capacity of local authorities. Some highlighted that budgets had shrunk, and some said that they had to make RIC plans when some of the posts they may draw on were being considered for potential cuts in the authority budget for 2018/19.

“The biggest barrier to success will be resources. All councils are currently struggling due to budget cuts.”

Regional stakeholder

2.32 Regional and national stakeholders indicated that local authorities were largely unable to provide backfill or cover for people involved in RIC activity.

“We were being asked to change the way we were working, and do significant extra work at the same time as carrying on with existing work.”

Regional stakeholder

“They have been constrained by the speed they have had to work at and the resources available to get things done.”

National stakeholder

2.33 However, in some areas there were resources available. For example, in one area, the authorities agreed to contribute to the RIC lead role. And in another, the role was a full time secondment, funded through additional resources. In this instance, the additional resources were felt to be very useful to kick start activity, allow for secondments, allow for dedicated time on RIC activity, enable cover and backfill and contribute to travel costs.

2.34 Two national stakeholders felt that it was a weakness of the RIC model that almost everything had been done without additional funding.

2.35 The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed. However, some regional and national stakeholders felt that RICs should not have to bid for resources. A few suggested funding should have been allocated on a ‘formula’ basis. Some would have preferred to know about the resources at an earlier stage, to enable them to reflect this in their phase two plans.

“The development of the phase two plan would have been helped massively if we knew resources would follow. The range, scope, ambition and pace of our plan would have been significantly different if we had known there could have been dedicated money to support officers for the RIC.”

Regional stakeholder

3. RIC planning

Key findings: RIC planning

Overall, regional stakeholders believed that the initial RIC plans they had produced were as good as they could have been within the timescale. There was a strong feeling that the timescales for producing the plans were too tight. Two national stakeholders felt that it was a considerable achievement that the RICs had managed to develop plans and achieve political sign off.

Overall, stakeholders felt that the development of early RIC plans was led by local authority officials. Stakeholders found engagement with schools challenging within the timescales of their phase on planning – with regions large, hundreds of schools, and school holidays during the planning period. Most regional stakeholders indicated that they had focused on further involvement of stakeholders as part of phase two planning.

Most schools involved in this research said that they were not very involved in identifying priorities for the RIC. However, most felt clear about the priorities for their RIC and were positive that these were appropriate.

The process of identifying workstreams for the RIC plans was felt to work well where plans were informed by data and research; there was a clear understanding of what they needed to prioritise; and there was a focus on enhancing rather than duplicating activity. However, a few regional stakeholders had to think very hard about the concept of additionality and what this meant for the RIC, and would have welcomed more clarity on this.

Overall, schools, regional and national stakeholders felt that RIC plans were well connected to national priorities. While most school staff felt that RIC priorities were useful and relevant to the school, most regional and national stakeholders felt that plans were not so well connected to school priorities, due to the timescales.

The extent to which data had informed RIC plans varied. Most felt that they had used data, but in an “adequate” or “limited” way. This was because of the challenges around sharing, collating and analysing the data within the timeframe. Over time, most regional stakeholders felt that the RIC had helped them to share data and talk about the themes emerging across the region.

In some cases, the identification of baseline data was seen as a real strength, enabling the RIC to set clear, measurable indicators and targets for each workstream. However, most regional stakeholders indicated that more work was needed to develop a meaningful baseline and way of measuring progress against this.

Introduction

3.1 This chapter explores approaches to:

- developing RIC plans;
- identifying workstreams;
- involving stakeholders in planning;
- connecting to local, regional and national priorities;
- using improvement methodologies; and
- using and sharing data.

3.2 It draws mainly on experiences of regional and national stakeholders.

3.3 Links to each phase one RIC plan are included in Appendix One.

Developing a plan

3.4 Overall, regional stakeholders believed that the initial RIC plans they had produced were as good as they could have been within the timescale. Most were very used to developing plans, and confident about the approaches they took to establishing the plan for the RIC. Stakeholders felt that the planning process worked well where:

- external support was available – for example universities assisted with accessing and interpreting research, and some accessed expertise around improvement planning;
- time was dedicated to joint planning – for example away days and events involving senior officials and politicians across RIC authorities were found to be very useful, particularly when facilitated independently; and
- authorities were strong in terms of their performance – and understood well what would and wouldn't work in driving improvement.

3.5 However, there was a strong feeling that the timescales for producing the plans were too tight, and that deadlines came at the same time as other existing pressures and priorities. This was particularly challenging as some regional stakeholders also had to manage complex political tensions around the establishment of RICs. The process of developing plans involved a process of negotiation and compromise, exploring what partners were prepared to do.

“There were many hands that wanted to edit... In planning, you can be in danger of making things too complex.”

Regional stakeholder

- 3.6 One national stakeholder felt that it was “a huge achievement” to achieve political sign off of the RIC plans, with another feeling that managing to develop plans had been “remarkable.”
- 3.7 Some of those involved in the RIC were having to develop plans over the evenings, weekends and holidays to get it done. As they were committed to the overall aim of the RIC, this was not felt to be a major problem – but it did mean they felt that there were some unrealistic expectations about the RIC plans, and a lack of recognition of the resource constraints.

“It was a really busy time for councils in terms of other submission deadlines. Adding the RIC plan process on top of this made it really hard.”

Regional stakeholder

- 3.8 In particular, most felt that plans could not be informed by the views of a wide range of stakeholders, as it was not possible to undertake high quality engagement and consultation activity within the time available. A few highlighted that the RIC plan was iterative and developed over time.

Involvement in planning

- 3.9 Overall, stakeholders felt that the development of early RIC plans was led by local authority officials. This included the Director of Education and Chief Education Officers. In a minority of cases other partners such as NHS, police or employability colleagues were involved.
- 3.10 All were strengthening their approaches to engagement and consultation as part of their phase two plans. Over time, many RICs had worked to involve schools, colleges, universities, young people, parents and other wider stakeholders. Both regional and national stakeholders felt that universities and colleges could be more involved and could offer particular expertise and assistance in relation to improvement methodologies and research.
- 3.11 Stakeholders found engagement with schools challenging within the timescales of their phase on planning – with regions large, hundreds of schools, and school holidays during the planning period.

“This was a particularly hard ask within the timescale.”

National stakeholder

- 3.12 In some areas, headteachers were consulted, for example through a short survey. However, regional stakeholders would have liked to do more, as some felt that this largely focused on checking that the themes were correct, rather than more in-depth consultation. In some cases, teachers and other partners were informed of plans and direction of travel, but not formally given the chance to contribute.

“We are unsure of the extent that priorities have been driven by the need of local schools. The visibility is not there yet.”

National stakeholder

Example: Strengthening involvement in planning for phase two

For the phase two plan, one area set up meetings with teachers and support staff. They analysed the available data in depth. This confirmed the priorities identified in phase one. Consultation with young people in this area also found that health and wellbeing was a key priority – and this is being added as a priority in the phase two plan. Further work is being done to involve young people in the other workstreams – for example they aim to develop a workstream on closing the attainment gap to be led by pupils.

- 3.13 Most schools involved in this research said that they were not very involved in identifying priorities for the RIC, due to the tight timescales.

“In my opinion it probably happened too quickly... They had to have a plan in place by a certain deadline. Is that the best way to go about developing something like this?”

Headteacher, secondary

- 3.14 However, some said that even in short timescales there had been good opportunities for schools to be involved – for example through online surveys or opportunities to comment on draft plans and priorities.

“It was a real opportunity for practitioners to be able to influence what was happening at RIC level.”

Headteacher, primary

- 3.15 Whether involved in the process or not, most school staff felt clear about the priorities for their RIC and were positive that these were appropriate. A few highlighted that while they were aware of RIC priorities, they felt that there would be many other headteachers in the area who were not aware of the plan or priorities. Just two headteachers (both in the same RIC area) highlighted gaps in the RIC priorities – suggesting that there should be a priority around Gaelic medium education.

Identifying workstreams

- 3.16 The process of identifying workstreams for the early RIC plans felt to work well where:

- workstreams were informed by data, research and existing evidence;
- there was a focus on identifying a small number of priorities – helping to build a clear understanding of what they needed to focus on;
- there was a focus on enhancing what local authorities were already doing, rather than duplicating activity;

- where priorities build on joint work that had already been happening, often more informally, between authorities; and
- partners met face-to-face to discuss and agree priorities at senior level.

Example: Identifying workstreams through evidence

In one area, partners quickly became aware that numeracy in primary schools was a challenge. There was a reduction in the proportion reaching the reading level between p1, p4 and p7 across all the authorities involved in the RIC. The same trend was seen, not to the same extent, for literacy. Because of the local evidence, and the clear link to attainment and national priorities, these were clear early priority workstreams for the RIC.

Example: Connecting with school inspection reports

In one area the regional advisor looked at all of the inspection reports across the RIC, from early years to secondary schools. There was a strong correlation with RIC workstreams, and the RIC was clear on what practitioners were looking for.

- 3.17 One regional stakeholder felt that the workstreams were important as a starting point, with the aim of building a new way of working across a much wider range of areas.

“The workstreams were a vehicle for creating collaborating capacity. People would get used to the idea of collaboration and begin to evolve partnership working across schools and authorities.”

Regional stakeholder

- 3.18 However, there were challenges to identifying workstreams. A few regional stakeholders had to think very hard about the concept of additionality, and what this meant for the RIC. A few were unsure whether sharing practice – for example where one authority had a particularly good approach – was a legitimate focus for the RIC, as they felt their activity may need to be entirely new for all partners. A few regional stakeholders said they were still unsure what the term ‘additionality’ meant and how to interpret this within the RIC.

- 3.19 One national stakeholder indicated that it would have been useful to clarify that ‘additionality’ could be achieved through rolling out good practice within collaboratives, building on existing very strong performance of some partner authorities.

- 3.20 There were also specific challenges for different RICs. For example, in one area it was felt that priorities were very high level during phase one, and limited in scope. Conversely in another area it was felt there were too many priorities, and a need to reduce the number of workstreams.

“The scope and ambition of phase one was quite tight.”

Regional stakeholder

3.21 Regional stakeholders felt that the workstreams and priorities they were developing for phase two were stronger. In some cases, further research and consultation had strengthened the rationale for focusing on existing workstreams. In other cases, the research and consultation identified a need for new workstreams, which had been developed for phase two plans. Most indicated that their phase two activity was more informed by research and consultation than their phase one activity.

Connection to school, local, regional and national priorities

3.22 Overall, regional and national stakeholders felt that RIC plans were very well connected to national priorities, as set out in the National Improvement Framework (NIF). Regional stakeholders highlighted that they focused strongly on the priorities within the NIF and felt that their plans were well aligned with NIF priorities. Headteachers also highlighted positive connections with the National Improvement Framework and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

3.23 However, most regional and national stakeholders felt that plans were not so well connected to school priorities. Regional stakeholders felt that more needed to be done to focus on the priorities that are relevant to the region, and the individual schools – but that the timescales for producing phase one plans made this very challenging. Regional stakeholders largely felt that the approach to the RIC plan had been top-down rather than bottom-up, due to the timescales. Most had tried to do some analysis of school priorities, as best they could in the time available.

3.24 Most school staff felt that there was a lot of similarity between school, local authority, regional and national priorities, with everyone working towards the same broad aims. Some highlighted that these were flexible, and could be tailored to meet needs at school level.

“The focus on improving attainment in literacy and numeracy meant it was natural for us to get on board. This was very relevant and could have a positive impact on our school.”

Headteacher, primary

“It is good to see how the priorities translate from the national level to local level in a streamlined way.”

Headteacher, secondary

“There is a clear link between all of the plans. It all ties up.”

Headteacher, early years

3.25 However, a few headteachers felt that there were too many plans. One said that the RIC priorities covered everything that was relevant to schools, and a few felt it would be very interesting to see what was prioritised in terms of areas of focus or activity within RIC workstreams.

“The collaborative must ensure that the priorities and workstreams do not remain too high level, and bring this into the classroom so that it impacts on class teachers.”

Headteacher, secondary

Example: Gathering headteacher views

In one area, the RIC looked at school plans and discussed common themes with headteachers. The RIC plan was based on what schools wanted, and needed, to improve.

- 3.26 While one national stakeholder had expected more alignment with school priorities, another felt that this was too much to ask within the phase one RIC plans, and the short timescales for developing these.

“They are not as connected as we would have hoped, particularly at school level.”

National stakeholder

“It would have been a small miracle if they could have done that.”

National stakeholder

Use of improvement methodologies

- 3.27 Most regional stakeholders indicated that improvement methodologies were used as part of the planning process. This included using driver diagrams and tests of change. In some cases, these approaches were used as part of the planning process, or in workstream development, but were not included within the final RIC plan. Regional stakeholders also highlighted other methods such as action research, population segmentation and outcomes focused planning.

- 3.28 A small number of regional stakeholders expressed concern about a focus on using improvement methodologies, feeling that other approaches to planning – including those already used within authorities - could also be effective. One felt that they already knew what needed to change, and did not need to test approaches.

“We know what needs to be done at systems level. It is about consistency.”

Regional stakeholder

- 3.29 One national stakeholder felt that using improvement methodologies was challenging in view of the tight timescales for phase one plans, and the challenges around capacity with RIC partners also already doing their ‘day jobs’. Another national stakeholder indicated that it would take time before monitoring and evaluation systems were in place for all RICs.

Use of data and data sharing

Use of data in phase one plans

- 3.30 All regional stakeholders indicated that they used data to inform the RIC plan. The extent to which data had informed phase one RIC plans varied. While a few areas said that they experienced few challenges gathering, sharing and analysing the suite of data they needed, most experienced some challenges. Most felt that they had used data, but in an “adequate” or “limited” way.
- 3.31 In some cases, RICs found it challenging to access data at regional level, using robust and reliable data sources. A few found it hard as the data they needed was not produced at RIC level. A few felt they needed support from the Scottish Government in accessing the relevant data at regional level.

“National data needs to be available at the regional level in a frictionless and timely way.”

Regional stakeholder

“They have analysed the evidence at the level they can, but they want to go further and deeper.”

Regional stakeholder

- 3.32 Most said that they did the best they could within the timescales for producing phase one plans. This included:
- using existing data – focusing on the data they already held, including publicly available data; and
 - using data which could be easily shared – including high level or local authority wide datasets.
- 3.33 Regional stakeholders reported that approaches to using and sharing data had continued to develop and were a key focus for phase two plans. This included analysis of data on attainment, attendance, exclusion, school leaver destinations and performance inspections. Regional stakeholders felt that Education Scotland regional advisors had provided access to substantial analysis, to inform phase two plans in some areas.

Example: Focusing on data during phase one planning

In one area, the RIC established a data group led by a local authority data officer. This group looked at data around curricular achievements and school performance. It also looked at local authority plans, children’s services plans and other local and national plans. In addition, it analysed findings from a survey of 1,300 staff, and explored findings from a discussion group with children and young people.

Establishing baselines and monitoring systems

3.34 In some cases, the identification of baseline data was seen as a real strength, enabling the RIC to set clear, measurable indicators and targets for each workstream.

3.35 However, most regional stakeholders indicated that more work was needed to develop a meaningful baseline and way of measuring progress against this. Generally stakeholders felt that this was “work in progress” which would evolve and be refined over time.

“It is still early days, but there is a real focus on how to measure progress and impact over time.”

Regional stakeholder

3.36 In some cases, RICs had lots of data, but found that their baselines and monitoring systems were drawing on a data suite which was too large, had too many indicators, or that their indicators were not smart enough.

“The question is where you stop. The bigger you make the package of data, the harder it is to see the priorities.”

Regional stakeholder

“We need to get a bit slicker. We have a lot of data.”

Regional stakeholder

3.37 There was some concern from regional stakeholders that in some areas the outcomes set were not capable of measurement, because of a lack of data available at RIC level.

Data sharing

3.38 Most regional stakeholders felt that the RIC had helped them to share data and talk about the themes emerging across the region. Data sharing was reported to work well when:

- there were data sharing agreements in place;
- data was shared at the appropriate level – for example sharing local authority level data rather than school level, to reduce concerns about data protection; and
- authorities within the RIC area used the same systems – meaning that collating data was reasonably straightforward.

“We have created a collaboration and had the conversation, so expect that we will share information. A year ago this would have been an individual request to another director, and they would maybe have asked what we would do with it.”

Regional stakeholder

- 3.39 In one RIC, regional stakeholders felt there were no challenges to data sharing. However, most RIC areas experienced some challenges.
- 3.40 A key challenge for phase one planning was sharing data in a way which enabled comparison or collation. Often local authorities recorded information in different ways, and some found it laborious to get data into a similar format across authorities. It also took time to explore key issues emerging where authorities had very different profiles – for example very varied levels of deprivation. In some cases, there was a reluctance to compare authorities – particularly if authorities were performing at very different levels, and worried about being portrayed in a negative light.
- 3.41 A few regional stakeholders found it challenging to access data from wider colleagues – such as children’s services or health.
- 3.42 Some of these challenges arose because the RIC was not a legal entity, with clear organisational responsibilities around data control and processing. This necessitated the development of information sharing agreements.

“There were challenges about different views on the level of data we could share. Was it appropriate to share school level data, or at a higher level.”
Regional stakeholder

- 3.43 A few regional stakeholders indicated they managed to share some data, to enable them to develop the plan, but that further work was ongoing around data sharing. One national stakeholder indicated that it was unrealistic to expect the phase one plan to be underpinned by regional level data, within the timescales.

4. Joint working

Key findings:

Overall, most regional stakeholders believed that there was a shared vision and aims for their RIC, and that partners were broadly signed up to these at senior officer level. However, in one area a few regional stakeholders remained unsure of the rationale for RICs, and the evidence for adopting this approach.

In some RIC areas, a culture of working jointly across the region has developed at senior officer level – including Heads of Service, Directors of Education and Quality Improvement Officers. However, others felt it was too early to point to changes in joint working across the region.

In some RIC areas, a wide range of other stakeholders had been involved – including health, police, community learning, colleges, universities, young people and parents. In some areas, there had been a focus on involving young people in identifying and leading priorities within the RIC.

The main challenges to joint working included taking time to buy into and understand the concept of RICs; practical challenges; senior staffing changes; and cascading the vision to wider stakeholders and the classroom level. However, most felt it was important to note that the RICs had only very recently been set up, and that joint working would take time to develop.

Overall, the support offered by regional advisors was felt to be very good, with individuals perceived to be very supportive. There was recognition from regional and national stakeholders that Education Scotland was going through a period of organisational change at the time of RIC development. There were mixed views on the value of feedback on phase one plans.

Some highlighted that the Scottish Government had worked jointly with RICs through facilitating discussion and events, and producing guidance. However, regional stakeholders largely felt that they were not working jointly with the Scottish Government. Most felt that the Scottish Government set the agenda, and they were expected to deliver. There was a perception that the approach was very top-down, which was hard to marry with the bottom-up approach of the RICs.

Some regional stakeholders felt that it would have been useful if the Scottish Government and Education Scotland had been further ahead and could have given clearer messages about resources and support earlier in the RIC development process.

Introduction

4.1 This chapter explores experiences of joint working, including:

- joint working at regional level; and
- joint working with national stakeholders.

4.2 This chapter is based mainly on feedback from regional and national stakeholders.

Joint working at regional level

A shared vision

4.3 Overall, most regional stakeholders believed that there was a shared vision and aims for their RIC, and that partners were broadly signed up to these at senior officer level. Stakeholders felt that meetings, events and away days had helped partners to develop a shared approach.

“I think that in the work we did for phase one of the plan we have developed a shared vision statement. This will underpin what is in phase two of the plan.”

Regional stakeholder

“We have the right people in the right room at the right time. We came together in genuine collaboration. There was a naturalness to it.”

Regional stakeholder

4.4 However, in one area a few regional stakeholders remained unsure of the rationale for RICs, and the evidence for adopting this approach.

“What problem are they trying to solve by the establishment of RICs? Why the RIC approach? What evidence says this will help?”

Regional stakeholder

4.5 One national stakeholder felt that some RICs had struggled to grasp the concept of the opportunity, and the benefits of collaboration.

4.6 A few regional stakeholders in one area felt that the RIC plan was very education focused in their language, and that the governance arrangements for the RIC excluded wider partners beyond the education sector. These stakeholders felt that more needed to be done on culture and partnership working across sectors and themes, to ensure that people buy in to the positive benefits of the RIC.

Improvements in joint working at regional level

4.7 Regional and national stakeholders gave a range of examples highlighting how joint working at regional level had developed and strengthened over the first six months of RIC operation. In some RIC areas, a culture of working

jointly across the region had developed, particularly with senior level officials working together – including Heads of Service, Directors of Education and Quality Improvement Officers.

“Within their day to day work, officers now think what is happening in the other areas. To be honest, a year ago that wouldn’t have been how they operated.”

Regional stakeholder

“I enjoy working with the other Directors of Education. It feels less isolated and it is better having a collaborative view on things... It is good to extend your view beyond your own local authority and see what is working elsewhere.”

Regional stakeholder

“There is a different mindset at senior level. People are prepared to share experiences and work across council boundaries, and they can see that this will benefit the system in the longer term.”

National stakeholder

- 4.8 However, some felt it was too early to say. A few regional stakeholders indicated that joint working between local authority areas was not new, and it was important to recognise that partnership work had already been taking place.

“There hasn’t been enough time for things to bed in, or to form proper relationships.”

Regional stakeholder

Example: Connecting practice around parental engagement

In one area, collaborative capacity was developed through the authorities and schools within the RIC sharing practice around Pupil Equity Funding. In another, as they looked at PEF approaches, they realised all authorities in the RIC were struggling with parental engagement. They are therefore focusing collectively on this.

Example: Connecting practice around numeracy

In one area, educational psychologists realised that they were all working on small tests of change around numeracy. They have combined this into one workstream, which is linked to the RIC numeracy workstream. This has provided “even greater connectivity”.

Example: Pooling early years resources

In one area, the local authorities pooled their early years resources provided by Scottish Government to provide 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare for pre five children. The authorities pooled expertise across the RIC to deliver on this key Scottish Government priority, and appointed a lead officer to lead this work. They looked at best practice across the region, and there were opportunities for the authorities to learn from one another and share practice.

Challenges to joint working

4.9 Regional stakeholders identified a number of challenges to joint working:

- buy-in to the concept – a few regional stakeholders reported that some local authorities were initially wary of the RIC agenda and not convinced of the benefits;
- confusion about the concept – in one area, stakeholders reported a public perception that the RIC was there because the local authority was not performing well, which resulted in different levels of engagement with the RIC;
- practical challenges – getting key people together (particularly across large geographies), co-ordinating diaries, progressing workstreams and releasing people to be involved in RIC activity;
- changes to high level staff – requiring further work to consolidate vision and build relationships;
- working with wider stakeholders – across regions which have different boundaries from the RICs; and
- cascading the vision to the classroom level – although regional stakeholders felt it was still early days for this.

“It involves compromise, letting go of practice that people probably hold dear, persuasion...”

Regional stakeholder

“We are full of enthusiasm and passion when we meet. Then we go back to our day jobs.”

Regional stakeholder

“We need to work on changing attitudes and improving practice... Local authorities need to be honest with each other and less territorial.”

Regional stakeholder

4.10 Regional stakeholders highlighted the importance of nurturing collaboration over time and keeping momentum, to address these challenges. A few stressed that the RICs necessitated cultural change which would take place over a long time period and required resources.

“Collaboration takes time and resource and can’t be done on a zero budget.”
Regional stakeholder

“There is a real tension for staff about doing what they are paid to do and finding time to get involved in wider RIC work.”
Regional stakeholder

- 4.11 In one area, regional stakeholders strongly felt that a full time RIC lead was required to drive the RIC and support joint working. In another area, a wider regional stakeholder felt it could be very challenging to keep up with the volume of information around the RIC.

“Without a lead, the RIC lost a bit of impetus. It is really important that it is driven... Without someone taking on that as a full-time role, it is very difficult to do.”

Regional stakeholder

Engagement with other stakeholders

- 4.12 In some RIC areas, stakeholders highlighted that a wide range of other stakeholders had been involved – including health, police, community learning, colleges, universities, young people and parents. As part of this review, a small number of these wider stakeholders were interviewed.
- 4.13 One parent interviewed as part of this review was supportive of the RIC plans, but concerned that parents didn’t currently have a mechanism for feeding into priorities at regional level. While recognising the challenges of engaging with parents, as a complex group of people with very different ideas and values, she hoped that RICs would spend time on exploring new methods and approaches for communicating and engaging with parents.
- 4.14 One college interviewed as part of this review felt that its links with schools had developed greatly through involvement in a RIC workstream, focusing on making better links between schools and colleges. Involvement in this workstream had resulted in an increase in the number of students coming to the college from across the region. The college had also begun sharing data with the local authorities and schools, to facilitate joint working.

“Our work with local schools has really taken off as a result of our involvement in the RIC.”

Regional stakeholder

Example: Engaging with universities

In one RIC, a local university is a key partner. The university representative feels very involved in the governance of the RIC. The university plays a key role in ensuring that the RIC takes a research and evidence based approach to its work.

“The RIC is very inclusive and involving.”

Regional stakeholder

- 4.15 In some areas, there had been a focus on involving young people in identifying priorities. For example, in one area, the RIC set up a children’s and young people’s group, led by two headteachers. This group identified mental and emotional wellbeing as a key priority, and there is now a new RIC workstream on this theme, led by young people.

Joint working between RICs

- 4.16 Finally, a small number of regional and national stakeholders highlighted the importance of the relationships between regional leads, who had supported one another in a positive manner. Some regional leads felt that this type of support was very important.

“There is a real feeling that they are all in this together, and there is a real willingness to work together and support each other.”

National stakeholder

“Support is important in a role like this. There is a long list of priorities and the nature of the role could be quite lonely.”

Regional stakeholder

Working with national stakeholders

Working with Education Scotland

- 4.17 There was recognition from regional and national stakeholders that Education Scotland was going through a period of organisational change at the time of RIC development.

“Education Scotland is perhaps currently recognised as being in a state of transition... Arrangements for how Education Scotland will interact with RICS, and the balance between support and challenge, are being rehearsed.”

Regional stakeholder

- 4.18 Overall, the support offered by regional advisors was felt to be very good, with individuals perceived to be very supportive. Advisors had helped with collating and sharing data, sharing information between RICs and providing both support and challenge.

4.19 A few stakeholders felt that the relationship between advisors and RICs could be variable due to the skills, capacity and individual workload of regional advisors. Some regional and national stakeholders suggested that RICs did not feel as supported as they could have been, and that there was a lack of clarity about the role of Education Scotland, and the support available to RICs beyond the regional advisor. However, two national stakeholders and some regional stakeholders felt that the new Chief Executive had helped to bring more clarity and a positive approach.

“The Education Scotland partnership is evolving and getting better.”

Regional stakeholder

4.20 One national stakeholder felt that there was a high level of expectation about phase two support, and that the dynamics of the relationship between RICs and Education Scotland could change depending on the support provided.

4.21 While regional stakeholders in one area found feedback on their phase one RIC plan useful, most others felt it was unhelpful and some felt it was a little patronising. Regional stakeholders felt that there should be more recognition of the expertise and skills of those involved in the RICs, through peer review, and more focus on working collaboratively with Education Scotland – as is planned for the phase two RIC plan review process.

4.22 A few regional and national stakeholders also highlighted that as Education Scotland became more involved in RICs, there was a need to think carefully about how RICs were reviewed and evaluated independently.

Working with Scottish Government

4.23 Some highlighted that the Scottish Government had worked jointly through:

- working with COSLA and others to explore the scope and terms of reference for RICs;
- facilitating discussion between RIC leads through the Scottish Education Council;
- offered access to the thoughts of ministers;
- facilitated access to key groups leading on education reform;
- worked with Education Scotland to produce guidance on RIC development;
- involved some regional stakeholders in developing guidance and templates for bidding for resources; and
- supported the development of PEF (Pupil Equity Fund) workshops based on RIC areas.

4.24 One regional stakeholder felt very included in the development of national policy and practice around RICs.

“We can be part of putting the picture together.”

Regional stakeholder

4.25 However, regional stakeholders largely felt that they were not working jointly with the Scottish Government. Most felt that the Scottish Government set the agenda, and they were expected to deliver. There was a perception that the approach was very top-down, which was hard to marry with the bottom-up approach of the RICs. Many felt that there was a lack of communication and some mixed messages. The tone and language used in some Scottish Government correspondence upset some stakeholders, and created a feeling of distrust and disquiet among some.

“There are so many changes about expectations going forward. What is the direction of travel?”

Regional stakeholder

4.26 Most regional stakeholders were concerned about the timetable for developing RIC plans. One national stakeholder felt that civil service views were very fixed, and that there had been too much influence over RIC development from senior national political figures.

“There is a political requirement to be seen to make progress.”

Regional stakeholder

4.27 Some regional stakeholders felt that it would have been useful if the Scottish Government and Education Scotland had been further ahead and could have given clearer messages about resources and support earlier in the RIC development process.

5. Engagement with schools

Key findings:

School staff, regional and national stakeholders all felt that engagement with schools through the RIC was at very early stages. Often, engagement with schools was targeted, working with a small number of schools to test theories of change and demonstrate proof of concept.

Regional stakeholders indicated that awareness about the support that the RIC can provide, and what is provided by the local authority, was a work in progress. Most felt strongly that the key point of initial contact for schools should be their local authority.

The interviews with schools through this research focused on those who had been involved in the RIC in some way. All had heard of the RIC for their region and most knew who their RIC lead was.

School staff felt that the purpose of RICs related to sharing best practice, making connections and building consistency. School staff felt that this was being done with the aim of supporting school improvement, and ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people. Most were very positive about the RIC concept.

Headteachers and other school staff largely felt that it would take time to see an impact in schools. Most felt that up to this point, the RIC had probably not been visible to the teacher in the classroom.

Some gave early examples of sharing best practice in a more structured way than before. Those involved in sharing practice enjoyed seeing what others were doing, felt it brought a fresh perspective, were energised and were picking up ideas of how to do things differently in their own school.

Some school staff highlighted examples of how their skills had developed through being involved in the early work of the RIC. Some had been involved in targeted work around leadership, self-evaluation, improvement methodologies, moderation of assessment, parental engagement, maths, early literacy and equality. Some gave examples of how the RIC had influenced their practice and school approaches in these areas.

Introduction

5.1 This chapter explores:

- the approaches RICs have taken so far to engaging with schools;
- awareness of RICs among school staff – mainly headteachers;
- the impact of RICs on schools so far – over the first few months of RIC activity; and
- the approaches RICs have taken to ensuring that schools understand what is available from the RIC, and what is available elsewhere.

5.2 This chapter is largely based on interviews with 47 headteachers and principal teachers in 42 schools across Scotland.

5.3 It is important to note that these interviews were specifically targeted at schools which had been involved, in some way, in the RIC.

5.4 The chapter also includes reflections from regional and national stakeholders in relation to their engagement with schools.

RIC approaches to engagement with schools

5.5 Most regional and national stakeholders felt that engagement with schools through the RIC was at very early stages. Stakeholders felt a sense of achievement in establishing their RIC, developing plans, and beginning early stages of engagement. One national stakeholder emphasised that it was a huge achievement that the RICs have developed into something identifiable over their early stages of development, and that it was too early to assess or review levels of engagement with schools.

5.6 Regional stakeholders highlighted that engagement with schools had been targeted, working with a small number of schools to test theories of change and demonstrate proof of concept. Some were reticent about approaching schools and teachers until they had something that all frontline teachers could use in their schools.

5.7 Most RICs had undertaken awareness raising work with headteachers. Approaches varied between different regions, but included:

- RIC launch events and PEF events (jointly with the Scottish Government);
- letters, newsletters, bulletins and question and answer papers;
- presentations to headteacher forums and groups – and providing copies of presentations for headteachers to use with their staff;
- developing a social media presence for the RIC – and using video clips to provide information about the RIC plan;
- consultation with headteachers (and in some cases class teachers);
- conferences for headteachers and teachers – focusing on key themes such as maths; and

- meeting with trade union representatives.
- 5.8 Regional stakeholders felt that the PEF events were a good opportunity to raise awareness of the RIC. Some were focusing on developing digital approaches to engage with schools in the future, particularly those operating over large geographical areas. For example, in one area, partners were setting up a RIC Hub and Microsoft teams to help connect headteachers, practitioners and schools. In another area, the RIC set up a shared database to help share priorities, information and best practice between schools, as part of the school improvement workstream.
- 5.9 National stakeholders felt that within each RIC area, some schools would have been very involved in RIC activity, while others may not know what the RIC is.
- 5.10 In most RIC areas there had been some engagement beyond headteachers with a small number of schools involved in RIC workstreams. These schools were more heavily involved in RIC activity, with a wider range of staff involved including principal teachers and class teachers. And in one area, 80 principal teachers had been brought together at a regional event focusing on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Clarity of provision for schools

- 5.11 Regional stakeholders indicated that awareness about the support that the RIC can provide, and what is provided by the local authority, was a work in progress. Most felt strongly that the key point of initial contact for schools should be their local authority. Stakeholders stressed that the RIC was a collaboration, not an entity within the education system. Local authorities were seen to be the most appropriate place for ongoing support and challenge, with schools signposted by authorities to other sources of support as needed.
- 5.12 However, in some areas, RICs were beginning to co-ordinate their support and develop regional approaches such as:
- developing a regional directory of support;
 - developing a regional subject specialist network for secondary schools; and
 - establishing joint systems for career long professional learning.
- 5.13 Regional stakeholders indicated that care needed to be taken to be clear that RIC activity focuses on what can be achieved jointly, as stated within their plan. There was some concern that RIC leads were being asked to act as a conduit to schools, when this role should continue to be undertaken at local authority level.

“There is a kind of expectation that the RIC will do everything... RIC activity needs to be related to the priorities in the plan.”

Regional stakeholder

- 5.14 It was clear that in some areas, there were different views about the types of activity the RIC should be getting involved in, between partners, and to what extent schools should be able to drive activity.

Example: Barriers to school led approaches

In one area, headteachers attended an event and decided to get together and develop a common approach to maths across the authorities. However, a regional stakeholder reported that one of the Directors of Education was not comfortable with this approach and did not feel that this is the type of work the RIC should be doing. The headteachers therefore ceased their work in this area.

“It shows that at the end of the day, one individual director can say no. We all need to cede a degree of autonomy.”

Example: Barriers to school led approaches

In one area, school staff booked to go to RIC sessions under one of the workstreams but were then told they were not to attend. At this school teachers felt it wasn't clear what parts of the RIC the local authority was committed to, and weren't sure which workstreams the authority was participating in.

- 5.15 In one area, regional stakeholders reported that there was some concern from teachers and headteachers about who they were accountable to, and the RIC worked hard to make sure they understood they remained accountable to the local authority who employs them. However, in two other areas regional stakeholders felt that teachers really wouldn't notice much difference and wouldn't mind whether it was the RIC or local authority providing the support – as long as they were able to access the help they needed.

“Some fear that this is another layer of bureaucracy. But it should be a creative space, an experiment... a test bed for innovation. It is a space not a place.”

Regional stakeholder

School staff awareness of RICs

- 5.16 All of the school staff involved in this research had heard of the RIC for their region. Most knew who their RIC lead was – and those who did not largely referred to a workstream lead who had led the area of work they had been most involved in.

5.17 Interviews with headteachers and other school staff who had been involved in the RICs indicated a clear view that the purpose of the RICs was to:

- share best practice – sharing experiences, approaches and insights across the whole region, beyond local authority boundaries;
- make connections – developing professional networks and enabling professional dialogue, with access to a wider range of people to support schools;
- build consistency and shared priorities – encouraging consistent practice and building common approaches to learning and teaching; and
- share resources and build capacity – in some areas, school staff felt the RIC was there to help authorities to share resources and costs and add value through collaboration.

5.18 School staff felt that this was being done with the aim of supporting school improvement, and ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people.

“We want to keep quality high so that children have uniform quality experiences across the authorities.”

Headteacher, early years

“I see it as an opportunity to pick other people’s brains and to share ideas and approaches.”

Headteacher, primary

5.19 Most school staff were very positive about the RIC concept, welcoming the opportunity to learn from others and share practice.

“We are always keen to learn from other colleagues. It’s really good for teachers to be aware of what other people are doing.”

Headteacher, primary

“As a headteacher it’s about learning and challenging my own practice and improving my school.”

Headteacher, secondary

“It’s what we are looking for. We can all help each other through sharing best practice and true collaboration.”

Headteacher, secondary

5.20 Many were very positive about the opportunity for cross-boundary working that the RIC could offer.

“We are beginning to see the light in terms of the power of collaboration, and not being bound by the local authority.”

Headteacher, secondary

“To share good practice and raise attainment across the authorities, rather than us all reinventing the wheel.”

Headteacher, primary

- 5.21 However, one headteacher felt that the RIC had been forced on local authorities and could not yet see the value for schools. A few stressed that RICs should enhance, and not replace, the support function of local authorities.

“I am not sure where the RICs fit, they have been forced upon us. Where’s the added value?”

Headteacher, primary

School involvement in RICs

- 5.22 Overall, many headteachers felt that communication through the RIC had been good. There was recognition that RICs were still in early stages, and a feeling that leads had tried hard to communicate with headteachers. A few indicated that the pace was good, and not too quick, which could be overwhelming. A few pointed to good use of newsletters, events for headteachers and online communication such as Sway presentations.

- 5.23 Most headteachers had been involved in the RIC through conferences, events, launch sessions or briefing sessions. School staff felt positive and excited by events bringing people together and valued the opportunities to share good practice.

- 5.24 Some schools had been involved in small scale work around specific workstreams, and this was highly valued. This had provided opportunities to network, a source of advice and support, and access to specialist training.

- 5.25 A few school staff felt that there was a need to focus on resourcing joint working, with some finding it hard to get time out of class to attend joint meetings, and fund travel and subsistence in geographically large regions.

“The logistics of collaboration are complicated and also expensive, due to the scale and geography of the region.”

Headteacher, secondary

“Some funding is needed to help run the RICs, and to take some pressure off regional leads. If this is left to the goodwill of senior officers, then this might impact on the sustainability of RICs in the longer term.”

Headteacher, primary

Impact on schools

5.26 Headteachers and other school staff largely felt that the RIC had only recently been established, and that it would take time to see an impact in schools. Most felt that up to this point, the RIC had probably not been visible to the teacher in the classroom. A few school staff felt that this was because of a focus on small scale tests of change, with the RIC taking a gentle approach to testing ideas and then engaging with a wider range of schools.

“Headteachers and senior leads know about the RIC, but it has not had an impact at classroom level yet.”

Headteacher, secondary

“My own school already has a clear plan on how to improve literacy and numeracy, so we haven’t felt any impact of these workstreams... It hasn’t been heavily influential.”

Headteacher, secondary

Sharing best practice

5.27 Many headteachers said it was too early to see examples of schools working together across the RIC to share best practice. However most were very positive about the idea, and keen to take up opportunities to share best practice.

5.28 Some headteachers and principal teachers gave examples of sharing best practice through:

- **Events** – Launch events and briefings for RICs helped some schools to develop new connections and networks, although some were keen for this to develop into deeper joint working. Events focusing on particular themes, such as maths, literacy or closing the attainment gap, were valued as helping to develop new ideas and motivate staff to think differently about their practice.

“It was very collaborative... Everybody came to the table really positive about moving forward. I think it’s really important to have these connections between authorities... for the benefit of children across Scotland.”

Headteacher, early years

- **Visits** – Some school staff had visited other schools, nurseries or family learning centres across the RIC to learn and share good practice, or had hosted visits to their own school. Where this had happened, school staff were very positive that this had built relationships, enabled schools to learn from one another, and provided opportunities to discuss issues.

“We now have a database that can identify schools doing work in certain areas. This helps us to connect with other schools within and beyond our local authority area.”

Headteacher, primary

- **Clusters, partners and networks** – Through the RIC, some schools have been able to develop clusters or networks of similar schools across the region. For example, a few schools in areas of deprivation felt that the RIC enabled them to connect with schools with similar demographics. This could be small scale – for example breakfast meetings with a similar school in a different area – or larger scale – such as a forum or network to discuss maths, literacy or another key theme. This helped make sharing of practice particularly relevant, through linking with similar schools or focusing on a particular theme, across local authority areas.

“It was good to have the chance to talk to people from other schools... It was good to see examples and to have a set of comparisons.”

Headteacher, secondary

- 5.29 Headteachers and other school staff involved in these approaches felt that the RIC had helped them to share practice in a more structured way, enabling this across local authorities. A few mentioned that they may previously have heard about what was happening in another area in a more informal way – for example through friends – but that the RIC was providing more structured opportunities for headteachers, principal teachers and others to come together. Those involved in sharing practice enjoyed seeing what others were doing, felt it brought a fresh perspective, were energised and were picking up ideas of how to do things differently in their own school.

“There is now a more structured approach to making collaborations happen.”

Headteacher, secondary

“It is helping us to find out what others are doing.”

Headteacher, primary

- 5.30 Most regional and national stakeholders also felt that there were signs that schools were willing and positive about sharing practice, and that a culture of sharing practice was beginning to develop – in its early stages. For example:

- In one RIC area, stakeholders felt that school clusters at local authority level now have the disposition to look across the RIC authorities, to see what they can do together and what links they can make.
- In one area, there are twilight sessions for schools involved in tests of change to share their experience.
- In one area, headteachers have agreed to use a common approach to assessment and moderation across the RIC area.
- In one area, the RIC wondered about creating families of schools based on levels of deprivation. However, the schools wanted to work

together on themes, like senior phase pathways. This is felt to be a more genuinely bottom up approach, led by the schools.

- In one area, a high school was identified as a centre of excellence for maths. The school has invited other local authorities to come and see what they are doing and share their experience. So far, two authorities from the RIC have benefited from this.

“The local authorities are talking to each other and we’re starting to align priorities.”

Headteacher, primary

“Being able to share practice has been terrific. I’ve learnt lots.”

Headteacher, secondary

Example: Joint work on equality issues

In one area, the RIC set up a group focusing on equality issues. One principal teacher found this a great opportunity to share best practice, find out what other schools were doing, learn new things and make new contacts. The principal teacher now feels more able to link with other schools across the region, and work with wider partners including equality forums and groups. There were also opportunities for pupils to get involved.

“Schools often work in isolation. They need to be able to find out what other schools are doing and learn from good practice.”

Principal teacher. secondary

Example: Sharing practice through school visits

In one area, colleagues from the region came to one school to see how they were using Word Aware, and the school staff will be going to other authorities to see some good practice in other schools.

“I’m hugely into collaboration and normally we don’t get out enough to see other places – so its hugely inspiring.”

Headteacher, primary

Skills development

5.31 While for most the RIC was in its early stages of development, some school staff highlighted examples of how their skills had developed through being involved in the early work of the RIC. Some had been involved in targeted work around leadership, self-evaluation, improvement methodologies, moderation of assessment, parental engagement, maths, early literacy and equality. The headteachers who had been involved indicated that they had developed new skills through this involvement.

“It has upskilled me. I am now more knowledgeable about parental engagement.”

Headteacher, primary

“It has supported the leadership of the teachers. It’s given them the opportunity to lead.”

Headteacher, secondary

- 5.32 In some cases, skills development opportunities had extended to principal teachers, class teachers and support workers. For example in one school, in a region where the RIC was well established, classroom assistants had been upskilled and were adopting new approaches through the emerging literacy programme. In another school, two teachers attended events on moderation of assessment and returned to the school to cascade knowledge to all school staff. Headteachers felt that staff involved in these events came back to the school feeling more enthused and knowledgeable.

“It has brought more of a coaching approach to the way I lead my team.”

Principal teacher, secondary

“I have really welcomed the support from the numeracy workstream. It has been a great opportunity for my school.”

Headteacher, primary

Example: Maths champions

In one school, a teacher was chosen to be a maths champion for RIC activity. This has involved “rich CPD for staff” and close joint working with other schools. Overall, school leadership felt the approach had worked well. The maths champion has received professional recognition, developed her leadership skills and progressed into a leadership role in the school.

- 5.33 A few headteachers also welcomed learning around models of improvement, which has helped to develop approaches to measure progress and impact within the school.

“The Scottish Government training was invaluable. It was a real treat being able to pick the brains of specialists... It has helped me to develop a more robust approach to evaluation.”

Headteacher, primary

Influencing practice

- 5.34 Most headteachers indicated that it was early days in RIC activity and it had yet to influence practice in their school. However, some gave examples of how involvement in the RIC had influenced their practice and school approaches. This included:

- A new approach to numeracy developed by the RIC had influenced school approaches to numeracy. This was supported by in-service training for class teachers, and champions to support the new approach.
- A new approach to emerging literacy helped to introduce new practices in some schools, and increased collaborative work with speech and language. In one school, staff have thought about using different resources, and have consulted and planned their approach with nursery colleagues. This has had a real impact on planning. They have also developed their own online way of measuring attainment, tracking children from nursery to P1 stage.
- In one area, schools highlighted that the RIC has enabled discussions around consistent use of teachers' professional judgement across a range of subject areas. For example, a joint approach to the curricular progression framework has been developed for design and technology, within broad general education.
- After being involved in RIC work around moderation of assessment, one headteacher immediately implemented some changes – particularly around simplifying the learning intentions and success criteria.
- In one school, involvement in a RIC group around PEF and parental engagement encouraged the school to think about how it engages with parents. The headteacher attended the group and came back to discuss approaches with her depute and principal teachers. This has helped them to develop a more focused approach to engaging with parents.

“It has been collaborative and we have had the flex to take the learning where we wanted.”

Acting headteacher, primary

“There is so much support available. It has had a very positive impact on the class and the children. I am a happier teacher and have a happier class.”

Class teacher, primary

5.35 A few felt that the RIC approach gave them the ideas to develop practice in a way that suited their school.

“It has absolutely transformed my practice. I got to hear about the most current effective practices. It helped me change what I was doing, which, frankly, wasn't good enough. And now that has been spread across the school.”

Headteacher, primary

“It was worthwhile because it made me become really, really methodical about what I was looking for – to really think about what I am trying to teach. And I think that anything that makes you look at your teaching is useful.”

Headteacher, secondary

“My eyes have been opened. It really helps you to have a more strategic approach to looking at priorities and what you are doing in school.”

Headteacher, primary

Sharing data

5.36 Almost all schools involved in this research said that they were not yet at the stage of sharing data across the RIC. However, some said that they had been doing work at regional level on how to measure impact, how to share data and how to target activities. A few said they had learned about data through the RIC.

“I learned a lot about our school and how it compares statistically across my cluster and neighbouring clusters.”

Headteacher, primary

6. Future plans

Key findings:

Engaging with schools was a key priority for regional stakeholders, with many focusing on enhanced communication and engagement as part of their phase two work.

School staff felt it was important to continue raising awareness of the RIC among all school staff and make sure that school staff had the capacity to engage in joint working, both through resources and smart use of technology to reduce travel time and costs.

Some headteachers were excited that there was huge potential for joint working and sharing practice through the RIC. However, some cautioned that it was important to understand that changes are not going to be instant.

RICs were also planning to further develop their governance arrangements, for example through developing mechanisms for sharing costs and resources effectively, and widening membership to include a wider range of partners.

Regional stakeholders indicated that longer term, their vision largely remained as set out in their phase one RIC plans. Overall, there remained a focus on creating spaces to innovate, share practice and learn, in an empowered environment.

Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter explores views on future plans and long term aims for the RICs, from the perspective of schools, regional and national stakeholders.

Plans for engaging with schools

- 6.2 Regional and national stakeholders identified engaging with schools as a key priority for the near future. Many highlighted that enhanced communication and engagement plans were being developed as part of the phase two RIC planning process. This involved engaging with school staff at all levels, as well as others including pupils, parents and wider community stakeholders.
- 6.3 Some regional stakeholders highlighted that as part of this, they were exploring online and digital solutions to enable schools to come together and share practice in an efficient and useful manner.

“Digital media needs to be harnessed to deliver smart solutions that can deliver real impact in the classroom.”

Regional stakeholder

- 6.4 These approaches fit well with the priorities of school staff, who were keen that RICs continued to engage them. Many school staff felt that it was important to focus on small bursts of snappy information which is clear and relevant for school staff, to avoid communication being overwhelming. Many suggested that it would be useful to develop online spaces for RICs and use technology to link people together, such as GLOW, social media or short video clips.
- 6.5 While some felt that it was the role of the headteacher to filter information to other school staff as relevant, others felt that school staff beyond headteachers should be involved in RIC events and networking. A few school staff felt it was important to give the message that everybody doesn't need to get involved in everything, and schools can pick and choose what they participate in. A few felt there was a need for more consultations to get staff views. Overall there was agreement that there needed to be clear benefits for staff, with meaningful and relevant opportunities before too much information about the RIC was disseminated.
- 6.6 Some headteachers were excited that there was huge potential for joint working and sharing practice through the RIC. However, some cautioned that it was important for national politicians to understand that changes are not going to be instant, and need time to bed in.

“Anything new introduced to schools needs time and consistency.”

Headteacher, primary

“It is such an innovative and forward thinking approach. Long may it continue.”

Headteacher, primary

Strengthening RIC governance

- 6.7 Priorities for developing governance arrangements varied between RICs. Priorities included:
- developing mechanisms for sharing costs and staff resources effectively;
 - strengthening governance through more formal structures;
 - exploring arrangements if partners disagree, or do not attend;
 - developing data sharing agreements; and
 - widening membership to include a wider range of partners.
- 6.8 National stakeholders largely felt that the priorities for developing governance arrangements were all different and should be led by the RICs themselves.

One national stakeholder was interested to see how effective RIC structures would be when it came to managing funding.

Longer term aims

- 6.9 National stakeholders generally felt that future priorities should be set by those involved in RICs, with additionality being different for each RIC.
- 6.10 Regional stakeholders indicated that longer term, their vision largely remained as set out in their phase one RIC plans. Some indicated that consultation, engagement and data use between phase one and phase two plans has deepened their understanding of the priorities, and increased their commitment to focus on these areas. A few regional stakeholders indicated that consultation and joint working had identified new workstreams.
- 6.11 Overall, there remained a focus on creating spaces to innovate, share practice and learn, in an empowered environment. The focus was on taking activity from early planning and development stages through to delivery, getting into schools and classrooms across the region.

“We need to use the scale of the RIC to have more impact and develop work at a faster pace.”

Regional stakeholder

“The key thing is to keep collaboration going and deepen it. We need to work out what works, and share this across councils and schools so that we can improve attainment.”

Regional stakeholder

- 6.12 Some regional stakeholders hoped that over time they would achieve more clarity on the role of the RIC, as a space to develop ideas, and the role of the local authority.
- 6.13 Some regional stakeholders felt that there was great potential for further activity at regional level, as joint working arrangements developed and strengthened. A few suggested that there could be opportunities for collaboration between RICs, to share learning between regions in the future and build expertise to drive innovative future approaches.

“Some of the things where we could have the greatest success and innovation can be achieved regionally.”

Regional stakeholder

7. Conclusions

Introduction

7.1 This chapter sets out overall conclusions from the interim review of RICs. It draws on the reflections of:

- 24 regional stakeholders – including RIC regional leads, regional advisors and a wider range of stakeholders involved in RICs including colleges, universities, parents, elected members and Directors of Education;
- 9 people representing national stakeholders – Scottish Government, COSLA, ADES, SOLACE and Education Scotland; and
- 47 school staff – largely headteachers, but also including a very small number of interviews with other school staff such as principal teachers.

Key findings

7.2 Overall, stakeholders felt that RICs were in their early days of operation, and that the timetable for setting up structures and developing plans had been tight. Stakeholders also felt it was important to recognise that phase one RIC activity has largely been taken forward without additional resources. The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed.

Governance and planning

7.3 Regional and national stakeholders were broadly content with the governance arrangements established for RICs. They felt that structures had been set up in a way which suited each region and recognised and linked with local authority decision making structures.

7.4 Some national stakeholders felt that it was a real achievement to have all local authorities signed up to the RICs, with appropriate structures and early plans in place.

7.5 The key factors felt to enable successful governance included:

- buy-in from senior officers and elected members;
- clear links between partners, schools and elected members; and
- a clear focus on overall intended outcomes.

7.6 In most cases, regional and national stakeholders believed that there was a shared vision and aims for the RIC at senior officer level within participating authorities. However, a few regional stakeholders were unsure about the rationale of the RIC concept, and there was some lack of clarity about the concept of additionality and what it meant in practice.

7.7 Overall, regional and national stakeholders felt that it was a significant achievement to have produced phase one RIC plans within the timescales. Planning processes were felt to work well where:

- plans were informed by data and research;
- each partner had a clear understanding of their priorities; and
- there was a focus on enhancing rather than duplicating activity.

7.8 Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that RIC plans were well connected to national priorities. However, regional and national stakeholders felt there was more work to do on connecting the plans with school priorities. The schools involved in the research largely felt positive about the connection between school, local, regional and national priorities and plans.

7.9 Most regional and national stakeholders felt that more needed to be done to develop ways of meaningfully measuring progress, including strengthening the sharing, collating and analysis of data across the region.

Stakeholder engagement

7.10 Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that more work needed to be done to engage stakeholders and schools more widely, raising awareness and involving them in planning and participating in RIC activity. Engagement with schools and development of the offer to schools were key priorities for phase two RIC activity. However, most felt strongly that the main initial point of contact and support for schools should continue to be the local authority, with a need for clarity about the role of the RIC and how it fits with and complements existing support.

Support and joint working

7.11 Regional stakeholders felt that the support offered by regional advisors was good and helpful. Regional stakeholders were interested to see how the regional offer of support from Education Scotland would develop in the future.

7.12 While the availability of resources to support phase two of RIC activity was welcomed, most regional stakeholders felt that the early phases of RIC development were challenged by limited resources and tight timescales. Most regional stakeholders felt the approach by Scottish Government felt top-down, which was hard to reconcile with the local, bottom-up approach required for RICs.

Impact

7.13 So far, regional stakeholders believe that the RICs have encouraged joint working between officers in different local authority areas. RICs have also tested approaches to engaging with and supporting schools, often through small scale tests of change and targeted work with schools across different workstreams.

- 7.14 All stakeholders indicated that it would take time to see an impact. However, some school staff gave very positive early examples of sharing best practice, skills development and influencing practice around areas of leadership, self-evaluation, moderation of assessment, improvement methodologies, parental engagement, maths, early literacy and equality.
- 7.15 Overall, school staff were very positive about the idea of learning from one another across the region, and welcomed opportunities for networking, building skills and developing their practice.

Appendix One: Links to RIC plans

Phase One Plans

[Forth Valley and West Lothian Collaborative](#)

[Northern Alliance](#)

[South East Collaborative](#)

[South West Collaborative](#)

[Tayside Collaborative](#)

[West Partnership](#)

Note: At the time of this report, some of the RIC plans were only available online within local authority committee papers.