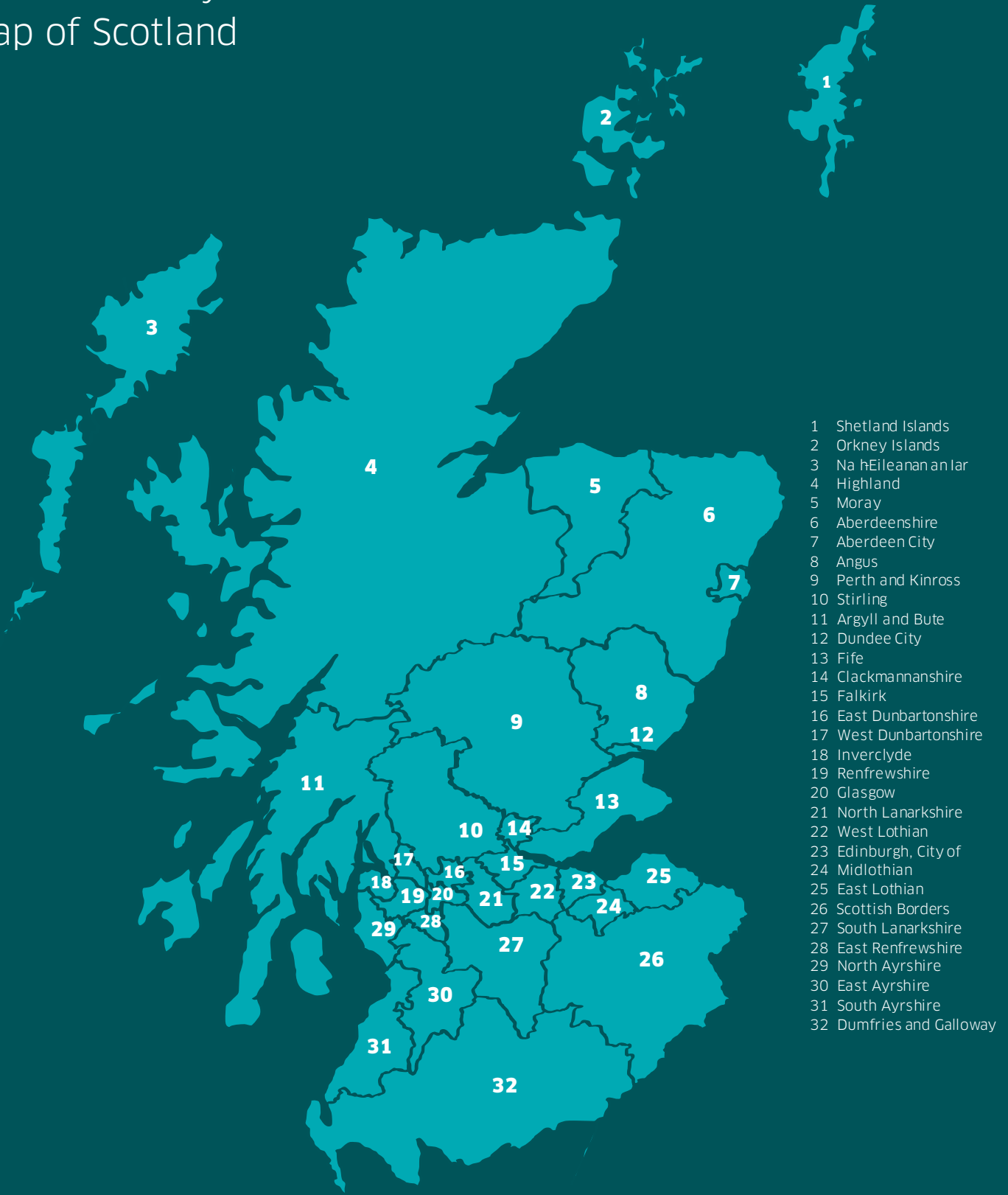# Progress Report of the Programme of Collaborative Improvement

August 2022 – June 2023

September 2023

Local authority map of Scotland

1 Shetland Islands
2 Orkney Islands
3 Na hEileanan an Iar
4 Highland
5 Moray
6 Aberdeenshire
7 Aberdeen City
8 Angus
9 Perth and Kinross
10 Stirling
11 Argyll and Bute
12 Dundee City
13 Fife
14 Clackmannanshire
15 Falkirk
16 East Dunbartonshire
17 West Dunbartonshire
18 Inverclyde
19 Renfrewshire
20 Glasgow
21 North Lanarkshire
22 West Lothian
23 Edinburgh, City of
24 Midlothian
25 East Lothian
26 Scottish Borders
27 South Lanarkshire
28 East Renfrewshire
29 North Ayrshire
30 East Ayrshire
31 South Ayrshire
32 Dumfries and Galloway

What is Collaborative Improvement (CI)?

Scotland's Collaborative Improvement (CI) programme aims to bring together local authorities (LAs) to work collaboratively on shared priorities and to exchange effective practices. It was launched in 2021 by Education Scotland (ES) and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). Each month, a different local authority hosts a CI review. This process typically involves a CI team of around eight/nine members (comprised of Education Scotland staff and volunteers from other local authorities) intensively working with the host authority for approximately three days to support them in their improvement process. The host local authority proposes a topic and discusses it with ES and ADES staff to agree on the focus of the Collaborative Improvement activity, drawing on the local authority's self-evaluation. Once the focus has been established, ADES and ES select members for the core CI team from the ADES pool of volunteers and ES staff team based on their expertise and to ensure the diversity of participating LAs. During the subsequent fieldwork visit, the core CI team works with the host local authority and offers support and challenge. The Collaborative Improvement also encourages the engagement of school leaders and practitioners. After the visit, the host local authority records the process in an evaluative summary, identifying strengths and areas that may require further focus. The reporting of progress on the identified action points is incorporated into the local authorities' regular improvement planning processes.

The CI programme has been well received by local authorities, all 32 of which have joined the programme. The CI process is designed to benefit the host authority, through direct support, while also serving as a professional learning experience for the participating volunteers, who can share the good practices they observed within their own local authorities. Participating local authorities are encouraged to continue their collaboration beyond the visit, thus strengthening the national networked learning system, although this is not formally part of the CI programme. By October 2024, it is envisaged that all local authorities will have hosted a CI review.

The Purpose of this Impact Review Report

An Interim Review of Collaborative Improvement (CI) was undertaken in August 2022 and changes and improvements made to the CI guidance and process as a result. This second report provides a summary of learning gathered over the past year, covering the period August 2022 until the end of June 2023. The report also includes updates on progress since the last interim report and highlights successes and areas for continuing development.

The Collaborative Improvement process has evolved significantly in the two years since its inception. In many ways, it has been a genuinely collaborative and iterative process, building on what we have learnt along the way. This report is the next step in reflection, learning and shaping the process further.

We are now entering the final phase of the Collaborative Improvement programme, having had engagement with twenty local authorities over two years. A number of key points are raised for consideration in this report. Appropriate and proportionate actions will help ensure a successful final phase of the programme.

We have collectively invested heavily and successfully in this development. Nationally, there has been rich learning from it including for example that similar themes have recurred (Appendix 1). We might therefore wish to explore the role of a strengthened, connected learning system in supporting a coherent approach to specific themes and ultimately improved outcomes for learners across Scotland.

'The Collaborative Improvement process has already made a significant contribution to enhancing system improvement across Scotland. It is focused on improving outcomes and experiences for our children and young people and recognises the capacity that exists across the key partners.

It has the potential to enable us to support the delivery of the vision set out by [The International Council of Education Advisors in their 2018-20 report](). In particular, a more connected learning system, which refines practice, builds leadership capacity and delivers improvement for all learners.'

Director of Education

Key points to highlight:

1. The second phase of Collaborative Improvement, involving the next round of Scotland's local authorities from August 2022 – June 2023, has now been undertaken. All available feedback suggests that this has been undertaken very effectively and successfully.

2. All host local authorities involved have been very positive about the process and their involvement in Collaborative Improvement, including their lead role.

3. Large numbers of colleagues have engaged in Collaborative Improvement across the country. There is significant positivity about their experience of it, learning from it and next steps for them as a result of involvement. This includes colleagues who have joined a Collaborative Improvement team from a related establishment and made changes in practice directly related to their experience.

4. The quality of working relationships from all involved remains a strength, with evidence of high levels of mutual trust.

5. Learning from Collaborative Improvement is being shared effectively through networks, meetings and written information on websites.

6. There is a need to review and address a small number of aspects of the CI process in order to ensure sustained progress and further development. No major change is recommended at this stage.

Evidence of Impact

The statements below illustrate the reach of engagement in the CI process and its overarching impact.

1. Individual Collaborative Improvement Reviews

'Of all the improvement developments I have been involved with, I would say that Collaborative Improvement is the one which has had the most impact. Our LA event involved a lot of preparation, but it was absolutely worth it. The information and ideas we got from the three days was invaluable and formed the basis of the Action Plan. However, it is the legacy of the process which has been even more valuable. Our model, very closely based on our LA experience, is gaining momentum with colleagues since they can see the positive benefits being involved in CI can bring. We evaluate events and have lots of evidence which shows this.'
(Head of Service)

'The outcome from the visit has led to significant changes in delivery of our Collaborative Improvement work and has also impacted wider than the direct focus of the visit. Work will be continuing next session to embed the changes that were made following the visit. The visit confirmed for us where we were needed to go next and also gave senior officers an evidence base on which to make the changes to our service.'
(Head of Service)

'The Collaborative Improvement process had a number of benefits including:
• Enhanced our existing approaches to improvement, building on our own self-evaluation and evidence, ensuring that the ownership of the process remained with the Department;
• Clear framework which ensured the process was rigorous and challenging whilst not requiring burdensome preparation;
• Flexibility of the process allowed us to modify the approach adopting by the ADES pilot models, ensuring it was appropriate for our context and added value;
• The model was a very effective way of sharing learning and

promoting partnership working across LAs and schools; as an authority we have continued to follow-up and share practice with one LA during 2022-23.'

(Director of Education)

'I firmly believe that without the Collaborative Improvement, it would have taken a few years to collect the evidence and have improvement discussions. The discussions themselves were excellent since sometimes you can be too close to your processes and structures, and not always see the obvious. Colleagues from other authorities provided the right measure of support in and around what seemed to be working well but also challenge around other issues.'

(Head of Service)

'The visit resulted in not only a review of our Collaborative Improvement process but a much wider piece of work on how we best support our Headteachers. …[It] has had a significant impact on the Education Service in [the LA], as we have undertaken an exercise to realign central officers' roles and remits to better support our schools.'

(Head of Service)

'It allowed for an in-depth discussion on a specific aspect of improvement within a LA that required solutions from multiple partners, effectively pulling together expertise, insights, and resource. This allowed for an honest cross-party conversation in a protected space that lead to a solution focused distillation of thoughts and ideas shared over the duration, an approach that worked effectively in all the CIs I have been involved in.'

(ES team member)

'The approach/structure of the Collaborative Improvement has been replicated as the foundation for the community of practice model in (LA). The CI was not a one off or stand alone activity. The learning from this approach is now part of our improvement cycle and continues to have ongoing impact for our Local Authority'.

(Director of Education and Lifelong Learning)

2   The Networked Learning System

'Our Authority event has had a significant impact on our approaches to improvement. We have developed a school support model based on our experiences of the Collaborative Improvement. It includes a preparation phase supported by the school's quality improvement officer and then two days of CI involving the school and colleagues from other schools (a team of roughly 4-5). Schools decide what the specific focus is but it must be about learning and teaching. Throughout the two days there are discussion meetings. I think this is a fundamental part of the CI process-constantly discussing and exchanging issues and ideas. [....]. Word is out that this is something which can really help you with improvement especially with interventions/issues you are struggling to see an impact in. It is about working alongside schools in a genuinely collaborative way but being honest and challenging when that's needed. I think because it is primarily peers, it really helps schools to feel that this is not something being done to you. We have had several headteachers feedback to colleagues how much it has benefitted them.'
(Head of Service)

'As a result of our participation in the Collaborative Improvement process, we have reviewed our approaches to quality improvement and adopted a similar approach to authority reviews at a school or cluster level. An updated model was put in place last session, with very positive feedback from stakeholders.'
(Director of Education)

'Our Collaborative Improvement with ADES/ES was transformative. This approach brought about Local Authority improvement! It helped us get underneath the surface of our focus issue – we had honest, robust and fruitful activity that led to improved outcomes in 2022/23. This work clearly contributes to the strengthening of the Networked Learning System across Scotland. We have built so many lasting professional relationships with officers in other local authorities, ES and ADES'.
(Chief Education Officer)

'The process allowed Education Scotland staff to connect with people in order to provide collective intelligence and tapping into a wider national perspective around a particular topic of concern. This opened new doors to link up with people and engage with schools/lead staff around key topics and help taking this forward in context of educational development on a longer term basis. On a personal level, Collaborative Improvement offers highly valuable, thematic professional learning opportunities for all involved. Listening to colleagues from across the education sector provided real insight into current issue, highlighted exciting solutions/practice and offered, at times creative solutions to challenges. Personally, I was able to gather resources/tools and exemplification [related to my specialist lead officer remit] that I was able to share further. Also important was the ability to provide reassurance from a national perspective in support of positive approaches already being taken.'

(ES team member)

'I consider Collaborative Improvement to be a highly effective strategy to develop solutions around educational issues. This may be particularly important as we progress the Education Reform Agenda.'

(ES team member)

Developments and improvements since the initial Interim Review Report of October 2022:

The initial interim review report highlighted the need to ensure further development in Collaborative Improvement in a limited number of areas:

1. Guidance

2. The place of self-evaluation in deciding on area of focus for a local authority

3. Reporting

4. Team composition/ size

5. Future evaluation of Collaborative Improvement

The following table summarises progress on these issues and identifies next steps.

Area of focus	What were ES and ADES asked to do here in 2022-2023?	What have we done about it?	What should we do now in session 2023-2024?

Collaborative Improvement Guidance

	Share and highlight the Collaborative Improvement Guidance.
	Now shared more widely through helpful meetings, webinars and other shared sessions. Good use of websites to share further.
	Concerted effort now required by the Strategic Group and ES and ADES CI leads to apply guidance rigorously.

The place of self-evaluation in deciding on area of focus for a local authority

Part of the original rationale for Collaborative Improvement was that the area of focus should be intelligence-led and based on clear self-evaluation by the local authority.

Originally, it had been intended that the choice of area of focus would be identified by the host local authority, with support from Education Scotland and other local authority personnel.

Generally, each individual CI team has worked closely with the host local authority to support and advise them on their selection of area of focus. For example, ensuring that the chosen topic is manageable.

Each local authority has the right to select the area of focus which is most meaningful to it.

It remains important that careful consideration is given to all available intelligence before the final selection is made.

Education Scotland and ADES officers should ensure that they engage in advance with local authorities to advise and support them BEFORE a final decision is made by the host local authority.

Reporting

The initial review of year 1 of Collaborative Improvement identified a number of areas for development within reporting. These included the need for advice on reporting, including the structure of the report; the process for taking a report through the draft stages (including who comments at which stage), and ensuring the report is outcomes focused.

The CI Guidance, including a section on reporting and a reporting outline/template (Appendix 3 of CI Guidance).

In the report-drafting process, the lead link officer from both ADES and ES should be directly involved and engaged in finalising the report. Other team members should also have the opportunity to offer comment. See CI Guidance for further advice.

There is a need for a collective effort to ensure that reports are focused on next steps and improvement. All involved should revisit Appendix 3 of the CI Guidance which offers a very clear Draft Reporting Outline/Template.

Adherence to the timeline for completion of reports is inconsistent. This should be addressed by those actively involved.

Team composition and size

The size of respective teams appears to vary quite considerably at times.

These issues have been discussed briefly.

The guidance does not stipulate team size.

When planning the membership of each CI team, the variation in local authority size and structure should be taken into account. To aid the process, team identification needs to take place as early as practically possible in line with the timescales identified in the guidance.

Further evaluation of the Collaborative Improvement process, including by external partner/s

The Strategic Group had identified the need for a further, external evaluation of the impact of Collaborative Improvement on improving outcomes across those participating local authorities. This should be undertaken at an appropriate point in the future.

This matter has had considerable attention without yet reaching a final decision.

Initially, it was thought that the end of the three-year programme would be the most suitable time to undertake external evaluation to help inform possible next steps for Collaborative Improvement as the Reform Agenda is implemented.

The Strategic Group should reflect on whether there is a need for a formal, external evaluation, given the evidence now gathered.

The success to date of CI has been as a result of the agile approach adopted and the emphasis on minimum bureaucracy but maximum impact.

Should there remain a need for a formal external evaluation, the terms of reference would need to be clear and funding required.

The real urgency should be to build on the considerable achievements to date of Collaborative Improvement so that its potential is harnessed and exploited fully.

Appendix 1

The information below details those local authorities which have engaged with the Collaborative Improvement Programme in 2022 – 2023.

The reports published by each local authority can be found on both Education Scotland and ADES websites.

Education Authority [Date(s)}	Selected focus	Theme
Scottish Borders 29 - 30 August 2022	To what extent do we have a shared understanding of the needs of children and young people exhibiting distressed behaviours and struggling with self-regulation? Do we have a consistent response to meeting the needs of distressed learners across Scottish Borders?	Inclusion
South Lanarkshire 10 – 12 October 2022	How can we improve our central mechanisms of engagement with schools to improve outcomes and destinations for Senior Phase Learners?	Senior Phase curriculum
Midlothian 1, 8 & 9 November, 2022	How can we improve the proportion of Midlothian school leavers in Further and/or Higher Education?	Senior Phase curriculum
Dundee 25 - 27 January 2023	To what extent are our approaches to curriculum design and delivery; learning, teaching and assessment; data use; and central support and challenge helping us to achieve improved outcomes for our young people?	Senior Phase curriculum
Moray February 2023	How do we raise attainment and achievement of all children and young people in Moray through delivery of a high quality curriculum: satisfying their desires, talents and the future needs of the world that will surround them?	Senior Phase curriculum

Education Authority [Date(s)}	Selected focus	Theme
Highland 21 – 23 March 2023	How can we enhance our systems of engagement with schools to improve positive outcomes for our children and young people?	Quality Assurance
East Ayrshire 20 - 21 March 2023	To what extent are our approaches to targeted interventions strengthening an inclusive culture that meets the needs of all our learners and how will we know? How well do they support increased levels of inclusion and participation?	Inclusion/ HWB
City of Edinburgh 24 – 26 April 2023	How effective is our vision for inclusion? How well do our resources deliver our vision? How effective are our processes supporting learners to be included? How effective is our leadership to support inclusion?	Inclusion
Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles May 2023	In the context of island communities, how well does the secondary BGE Curriculum engage and meet the needs of all learners, equipping them for learning, life and work?	Broad General Education
Renfrewshire June 2023	With the number of children with additional support needs increasing, are we future proofing our universal approaches in order to improve outcomes for children and young people?	Inclusion

Appendix 2

Collaborative Improvement Programme for 2023 – 2024

Education Authority	Month/Year	ADES and Education Scotland Leads	Theme
Falkirk	August 2023	Colin Grant Jackie Halawi	Empowerment
North Ayrshire	September 2023	Carol Copstick Michael Woods	Play pedagogy
Aberdeen City	October 2023	Dave Gregory Michael Woods	Early Learning & Childcare
North Lanarkshire	November 2023	Peter McNaughton/ Carrie Lindsay Pamela DiNardo	Inclusion
East Dunbartonshire	January 2024	Michael Woods Pamela DiNardo	
Argyll and Bute	February 2024	Dave Gregory Colin Grant	
East Lothian	March 2024	Jacqui Nimmo Carrie Lindsay	
Dumfries and Galloway	April 2024	Michael Woods Carol Copstick	
Orkney, Western Isles, Shetland	May 2024	Dave Gregory Colin Grant	
Stirling	June 2024	Carrie Lindsay Jackie Halawi	
West Lothian	August 2024	Jackie Halawi Michael Woods	
West Dunbartonshire	September 2024	Colin Grant Pamela DiNardo	
Angus	October 2024	Alan Britton Carrie Lindsay	