EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF EDUCATION SCOTLAND'S LOCALITY WORK
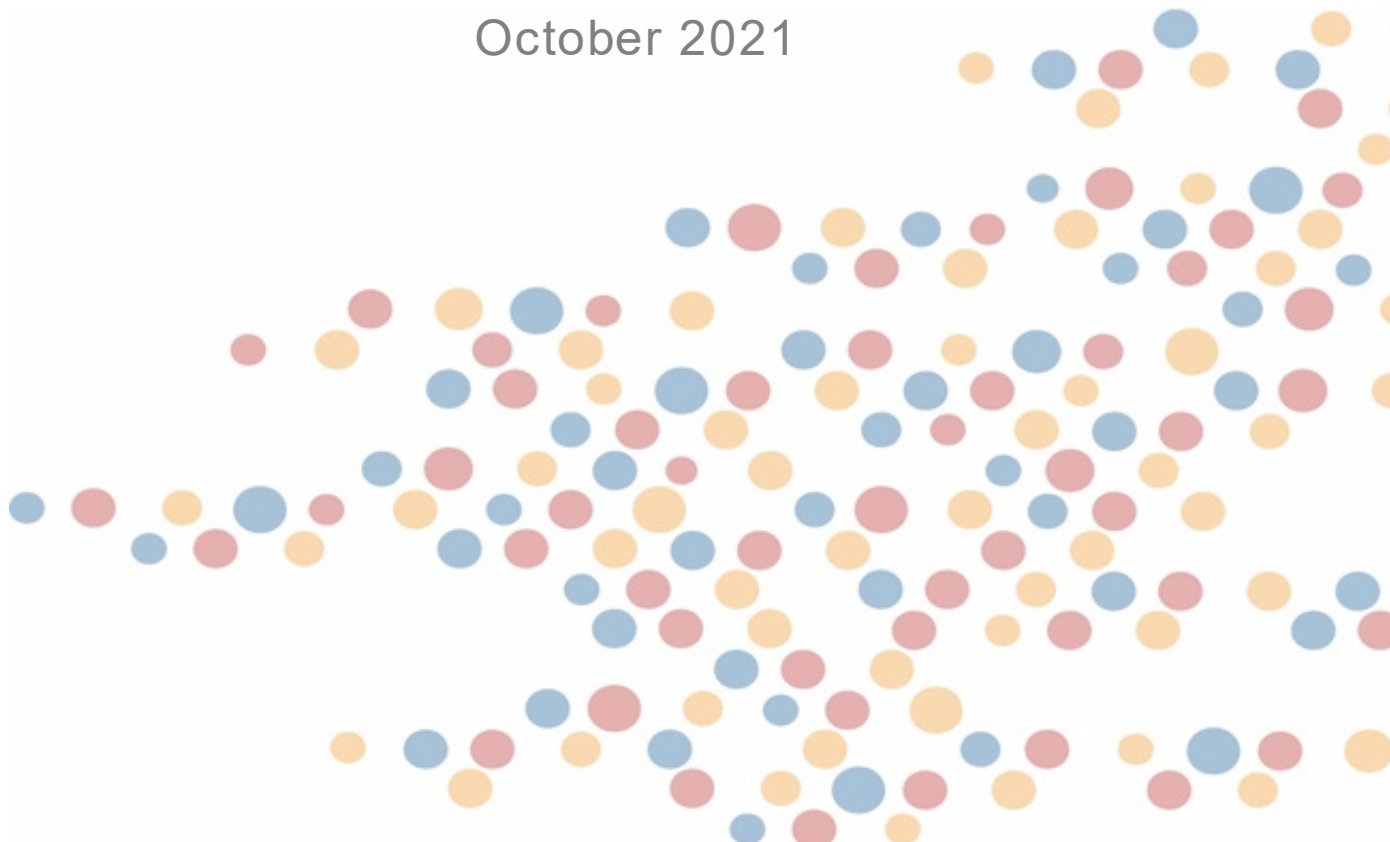
FINAL REPORT

October 2021

Contents

Executive Overview

JRS was commissioned by Education Scotland to evaluate the organisation's locality support for the education system during the Covid-19 pandemic. The evaluation work was carried out over April to August 2021.

Education Scotland's Locality Support during Covid-19

To support the education system during Covid-19, six locality teams were established which comprised staff from across Education Scotland's Regional and Scrutiny directorates. This meant that specialisms were able to be targeted while also deployed flexibly across the localities where that skillset was required. The intention was that staff in each authority would benefit from collaboration with Education Scotland's multi-disciplinary teams.

Each of the locality teams (one in each of Education Scotland's six regions) were headed by Locality Leads – one Senior Regional Advisor and one Head of Scrutiny/Senior Inspector. Therefore, collaboration between Scrutiny and Regional colleagues has been common across all of the organisation's locality work.

The process of delivering locality support began in September 2020 with the Locality Leads making initial contact with each local authority to outline the Education Scotland approach to recovery and open discussions about the support requirements in the authority. Support requests were received at these initial meeting and have continued to be received through ongoing meetings and through email, phone or through contact with Education Scotland staff.

The above engagement has resulted, across Scotland, in a diverse mix of locality support being provided. Many hundreds of requests for help have been met by Education Scotland's staff. For example, in one of the regions (South East) over 600 locality support engagements were reported.

The breadth of locality support covers topics such as:

• Targeted support	• Learner pathways
• Leadership	• Broad general education
• Inclusion, equity and additional social needs	• Health and wellbeing
• Continuous professional learning and development	• Assessment
• Early years	• Outdoor learning and learning for sustainability
• Family learning and parental engagement	• Senior phase
• Digital learning	• Data and planning
	• Learner pathways

All of Education Scotland's locality support during Covid-19 has been delivered remotely. The decision to deliver support remotely was taken by the Scottish Government, and was based on considerations around Covid-19 restrictions. The online platform Microsoft Teams has been widely used for meetings between Education Scotland staff and local stakeholders and for the delivery of workshops, training and support sessions and webinars.

Research questions

Four key research questions were addressed:
- What worked well/did not work well in terms of how Education Scotland engaged with and supported the education system since March 2020?

- What have the main benefits, if any, been of engaging with Education Scotland?
- What key issues have emerged through Education Scotland's work across the localities?
- Based on the findings of the evaluation, what recommendations can be made about how Education Scotland can support the education system going forwards?

The research questions were explored through a qualitative, case study-based approach. A total of 6 locality case studies were selected for in-depth investigation. The process of selecting the 6 case studies was done in conjunction with Education Scotland Locality Leads. Leads compiled a total of 18 possible case studies, along with a brief outline of each and an indication of what level of support from Education Scotland had been given. The research team then worked with this information to select 6 case studies for evaluation.

Selecting the case studies

In choosing the case studies, primary selection criteria was: regional spread, with one case study selected from each of Education Scotland's six localities; and achieving a mix of levels of locality support provided. Education Scotland provided three levels of locality support, namely: support for Early Learning Centres and Schools; support at Local Authority level; and support at Regional Improvement Collaborative level.

While achieving regional spread in case study selection, the research team was also able to ensure that the case studies reflected a mix of demographic settings (e.g., urban and rural) and a range of different Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) cohorts.

The list of case studies and the localities that each was drawn from (including the local authorities covered by each locality) was as follows:

Education Scotland locality	Local authority areas covered by locality	Name of case study
Tayside	Angus, Dundee City, Perth and Kinross	Programme of Family Learning and Parental Engagement Webinars
South East	Edinburgh City, East Lothian, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders	Supporting Improvement in Three Primary Schools in Midlothian
West Partnership	East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	Inverclyde Community Learning and Development Plan
Northern Alliance	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Western Isles	Promoting Equity Week
Forth Valley and West Lothian	Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian	Support for Early Learning and Childcare Area Support Managers in West Lothian Council
South West	Dumfries and Galloway, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire	North Ayrshire Parental Engagement

Methodology

Within the overall qualitative approach, each case study had its own bespoke methodology. The research team worked with each of the Education Scotland Locality Leads and other appropriate staff to gather detail on the support that was given and to identify staff other stakeholders that could be contacted as part of the evaluation.

This allowed the research team to develop – for each case study - a mini-evaluation plan, with appropriate data collection sources and methods. Across the case studies, interviews and mini-group discussions were frequently used, with observation of professional development webinars, surveys of event participants and review of desk material also used where required.

Another important part of the methodology was the circulation of draft case studies to the interviewees. The research team attempted to get these drafts to every key individual who had participated in the evaluation process, including stakeholders and Education Scotland staff, giving time for them to read and feedback.

Feedback was received on all of the draft case studies circulated. The content was then revised accordingly. The research team is, therefore, confident that each case study presents an accurate account of the local experience and the lessons that can be drawn from it.

The main body of this report presents the 6 case studies, each structured around the research questions above. A summary of the findings from each case study is presented below, following which, conclusions and recommendations are made.

Summary of case study findings

Below is a summary of the salient points from each case study presented in the main report.

Tayside – Series of Family Learning and Parental Engagement Webinars
Engagement with local stakeholders commenced with meetings between a Senior Inspector, the three local authority Directors of Education and Education Scotland's Senior Regional Advisor. A common theme - Family Learning – was identified as an area where Education Scotland support could benefit the localities. Scoping meetings between Education Scotland and nominated local authority contacts opened a collaborative process through which a plan for a series of four webinars was developed and delivered.

The webinars were made available to local practitioners. Cross-team working within Education Scotland, and in close collaboration with local stakeholders, featured positively in the engagement process. New and valued relationships were developed. The sessions were well received, particularly the examples of practice that were shared, and participants reported an increase in their knowledge and skills likely to impact their practice. Going forward, the resources and video recordings created for the webinar series will be promoted and shared with a wider population of practitioners with a view to discussing how the momentum and partnership links created by this project can be further built upon.

South East – Supporting Improvement in Three Primary Schools in Midlothian
The support involved forming a team of three Education Scotland staff, drawn from the two directorates (Regional and Scrutiny) consisting of an Her Majesty's Inspector of Education (HMI), Attainment Advisor and Senior Education Officer. The team engaged remotely with the three schools and local authority to form a tripartite partnership and develop and deliver improvement action plans.

A real strength of the engagement was the collaborative, flexible and responsive style adopted, which saw initial plans to deliver across the schools and to large groups of staff replaced by more targeted sessions with Headteachers, Senior Leadership Teams and other smaller groups of staff. Good relationships were built up and a wide mix of support sessions delivered over many months. The critical friend role of Education Scotland was recognised and valued by the schools, e.g., helping to reassure senior teaching staff that they were on the right track.

Feedback from the schools highlights many benefits and impacts and a positive direction of travel. The case study raises important possibilities about cross-directorate working within Education Scotland (seen as having been key to what has been achieved), and the value of the tripartite model adopted.

West - Inverclyde Community Learning and Development Plan
In the autumn of 2020, Inverclyde Council responded to the general offer of Education Scotland support by requesting assistance with developing their recovery plans, and to draft the new Community Learning and Development Plan for 2021-24. This built on good previous collaboration between Education Scotland and the Council, including earlier Community Learning and Development (CLD) inspections, and a recognition of the positive inputs Education Scotland provides to national work via the Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS).

Education Scotland support was requested to assist further development of the digital CLD offer – important before, but given increased impetus due to the realities of Covid-19. In addition, direct CLD resources were stretched by the need to practically respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, and in this context additional support was particularly welcome.

The support provided by Education Scotland was considered very valuable by the Council - particularly in the context of Covid-19, which in the first wave had disproportionally impacted on Inverclyde. It consisted of general advice, the sharing of good practice from elsewhere, and direct inputs to CLD partner development sessions. Key areas of support included advice on: developing the CLD digital offer further (but in a way that did not lead to further digital exclusion); ensuring a strong service offer to the most disadvantaged people and communities; and recording and measuring impact of CLD interventions. It also supported the Council to ensure CLD plan development was a collaborative process across all local CLD partners.

The approach adopted by Education Scotland was considered appropriate and very positive. The Council benefitted greatly from Education Scotland staff having very good local knowledge to complement their national expertise and perspective. It was a two-way dialogue, with Education Scotland listening and responding throughout to the priority needs of the local authority. Education Scotland's ability to supplement support from their CLD Regional Officer with the input of an HMI was also considered of value.

At the time of writing, the new CLD plan was being drafted: Council staff reported that it will be a better, more comprehensive and inclusive document due to Education Scotland support.

Northern Alliance - Promoting Equity Week (PEW)
The Northern Alliance (NA) 'Promoting Equity Week' (PEW) was a series of 25 online events over 5 themed days in the autumn of 2020. These provided an opportunity to collaborate on what is working, share research, and provide professional learning opportunities to educators across the NA area in understanding equity, raising attainment, and closing the poverty related attainment gap for young people.

The events were mainly targeted at teachers, headteachers, and other relevant education services staff. Sessions were delivered by a range of people, including Education Scotland and Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) staff - bringing varying perspectives, and significant specialist expertise.

The development and delivery of PEW was rooted in a strong partnership between Education Scotland and the RIC, with the approach throughout demonstrating many of the best features of collaborative working.

The PEW was viewed as a very positive experience by all the stakeholders and participants consulted. It was considered very relevant, well attended at a particularly challenging time for education, and achieved significant reach across the NA area. It successfully engaged a wide range of beneficiaries who recorded significant positive learning experiences, and importantly included the 'pupil's voice' in a number of sessions. Online delivery methods responded well to the reality of Covid-19, and the unique NA context.

The approach throughout was premised on a mix of partnership-based reflective practice and review. This has left a strong legacy to inform future developments, alongside a suite of transferable online resources. These have specific relevance to the NA, but also offer learning and support to future developments elsewhere in Scotland beyond the Covid-19 disruption.

Forth Valley and West Lothian - Support for Early Learning and Childcare Area Support Managers (ELCASMs)
Activity stemmed from a decision by the West Lothian Council (WLC) Leads team to expand the role of the Early Learning and Childcare Area Support Managers (ELCASMs) so they could support Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Heads of Centres with Quality Improvement and Self Evaluation (QI&SE). When, in November 2020, Education Scotland then presented WLC with the opportunity to utilise Attainment Advisors and HMI team members in Continuous Professional Learning it was quickly agreed that the focus of the learning programme should be on QI&SE.

From this, the initiative's Education Scotland team (including one Attainment Advisor and one HMI) developed a programme of six training sessions. These were delivered in 90-minute online sessions to the team of sixteen ELCASMs and one ELC Head of Centre. Two supplementary webinars were added to the latter part of the initiative, allowing a wider team of 80 West Lothian ELC Heads of Centres and Deputy Heads of Centres to gain an understanding of some of the key themes covered in the core sessions.

Feedback was widely positive. Key ingredients of the programme identified as being strong included: the use of remote delivery; the use of protected time; and the spread of sessions across a two-month period that allowed momentum to be built while also allowing time for the participants to consider the implications of each session's content. There was very strong praise for the semi-structured system used to develop the course content. This was achieved by Education Scotland having a set of six sessions which were then each reviewed immediately after delivery (by all participants) so that subsequent programme elements could be evolved to best meet the needs of the ELCASMs. The delivery style of the Education Scotland team was felt to be excellent.

There were no parts of the programme that were felt to have not worked well. Indeed, the recommendations focus on the desire, held across the research sample, to ensure that this initiative is not a one-off and that it is used as a model for future Continuous Professional Learning collaborations between Education Scotland, WLC Leads, the ELCASMs and potentially the ELC Heads of Centres directly.

South West - North Ayrshire Parental Engagement
Activity involved the Headteachers of one primary school and one early learning centre. The Headteachers, along with their Cluster Lead at North Ayrshire Council, engaged with a three-person Education Scotland team on the topic of quality improvement around stakeholder engagement, a theme requested by the Headteachers The initiative involved 2 online meetings. In addition, Education Scotland shared a variety of links to information and documents that related to the theme of parental engagement.

The Headteachers appreciated being able to choose the topic and to work with the Education Scotland team, all of whom brought value to the initiative, to gain insight into parental engagement best practice. The coaching style approach used created a relaxed and open learning environment. As a result, the Headteachers felt their confidence had increased in relation to parental engagement. They also felt the initiative had allowed them to feel closer to Education Scotland and to appreciate more the value of the organisation as expert in best practice. Overall, the Headteachers felt there was real value in the initiative and that similar opportunities should be offered to other Headteachers in the future.

That said, the ultimate value of the initiative was limited by a variety of factors. First, the Headteachers stated that their relationships with Education Scotland had been positive before the initiative, albeit distant. It was also limited by the Headteachers already being strong in the area of parental engagement and therefore not necessarily in need of significant additional support. Beyond this, it had been the hope of one of the Headteachers that the initiative would have focused on engagement with children and staff, as well as parents, but this did not happen.

Conclusions

Across the case studies, both feedback from Education Scotland staff and local stakeholders presents a very positive picture of the locality work delivered. Education Scotland staff have been very responsive to local requests for help. Furthermore, the flexible and collaborative approach adopted by Education Scotland – which has featured across the case studies - was widely valued.

Local stakeholders often pointed to the pressures they were under during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the additional resources available from Education Scotland had helped. They have been able to tap into, and draw many benefits from, the wider expertise, knowledge and good practice available within Education Scotland. This supported local capacity at a time when it was under great pressure due to Covid-19.

The new collaborations that built up around the locality work have allowed both existing relationships between Education Scotland and the local education systems to develop and strengthen, and for many new relationships to form that may enable more new joint initiatives to happen in future. In addition, valuable new resources (e.g., webinars and other online materials) have been developed. These stand as a positive legacy of the locality work that will potentially reach and help a wider range of beneficiaries in the months ahead.

The evaluation also raises questions relating to the future. Not least, is what role Education Scotland can, and should, play beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. Many stakeholders questioned what is going to be possible when staff who have played a key role in the locality work revert to normal duties and responsibilities. The locality work has been valued, across the board, by local stakeholders, but there is considerable uncertainty about what the future holds.

Numerous stakeholders, for example, were also concerned about how some of the positive developments seen over the last 18 months could be sustained and further built upon should the close, collaborative relationships enjoyed with Education Scotland staff no longer be possible. This concern also feeds an appetite, across the case studies, for many of the relationships that have been built up to be protected and nurtured, and for the local momentum of the locality work to continue in some form. Indeed, this is reflected in many (often very specific) recommendations that are made in the case studies reported below.

Recommendations

While there are numerous recommendations made below that are specific to the case studies in question, the main recommendation for Education Scotland to consider is whether the work of Regional Improvement Teams can accommodate (in the longer-term) the kind of responsive, collaborative, partnership-based work with local authorities that draws down expertise and experience from across the organisation, and that has been a hallmark of the locality work over 2020/21.

Findings from the Case Studies

CASE STUDY NO. 1: Tayside – Series of Family Learning and Parental Engagement Webinars

Project description

In late Summer 2020 a Senior Inspector engaged with the 3 Directors of Education and Education Scotland's Senior Regional Advisor to explore areas of possible support. At this stage, discussions with local stakeholders were very 'open' and a range of 'top line' requests for help were received from the local authorities with the theme of Family Learning common to all

Contacts within each local authority were identified to engage further and to scope out, in more detail, the ask locally. The HMI wrote to these contacts with a range of dates to meet in November 2020. Stakeholders were asked to give some thought, in advance of the meetings, to their specific area of interest so that Education Scotland could provide support tailored to local need.

The HMI leading at this time had been involved as part of the team within Education Scotland who had carried out a thematic inspection of Family Learning at the start of 2020. The report was due to be published at the end of November. It was brought to the attention of stakeholders that this might be a useful resource in taking the work forward.

Education Scotland staff – in the form of an HMI and an Education Officer - engaged with the nominated local authority contacts in November (one meeting for each local authority area). One of the Education Officers recalls:

- *"We did not go into the meetings with any set ideas, we were responsive and looking to make links and take a regional perspective".* (Education Scotland)

At each meeting, three members of staff (two Education Scotland and one local authority) worked together to scope out what support might look like. The Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative (TRIC) then considered the feedback gathered from the local authorities and a short paper was produced on 7th December. As this paper highlights, at this stage in the process, Education Scotland was preparing an initial offer and outline which could be further adapted and developed. Education Scotland continued to make connections within and across the local authorities with a view to developing an offer that was reflective of the needs of the individual local authorities and the TRIC as a whole:

- *"The ambition was to be able to target and include the right staff at the right time, in order to ease pressure on staff workload both within Education Scotland and across stakeholders that might be involved".* (Education Scotland)

It also recognised that opening up the offer to include professional learning opportunities across the region could be considered.

The above point is significant, as the eventual product (a series of webinars) was made available across the three local authority areas. However, at this stage of the engagement process, those involved were possibly envisaging an outcome that would be bespoke to each area. For example:

- In Perth and Kinross – the interest was for a 1 hour conversational-style webinar targeted at Headteachers, possibly linking with Community Learning and Development managers to support this.
- In Dundee – the discussion explored how a 'critical friend' role could be developed to help local stakeholders reflect on practice in the Baldragon cluster, with Education Scotland providing experienced colleagues to support this request.

- In Angus - building on the request to focus on supporting reading through Family Learning, the idea of drawing on examples of developments in other localities, e.g., where Education Scotland had run professional learning sessions to support literacy, outdoor learning, and learning at home through Family Learning and/or parental engagement, was discussed.

The Education Scotland team drew together the results of the scoping work to firm up a plan (that recognised the shared theme of Family Learning and Parental Engagement) for a series of four webinars. Further meetings took place to work out the detail of each session, and the presenters met in advance of delivery. The four webinars covered: What is Family Learning? What is Parental Engagement?; Effective Partnerships; Supporting Literacy and Numeracy at home; Self-evaluation in Family Learning and Parental Engagement.

Each webinar involved presentations aimed at practitioners and staff across all sectors with responsibility for, or involved in, supporting children and families. The programme ran March to June 2021, with one (1 hour) session per month. The programme was marketed in Tayside through the local authority leads, e.g., Headteachers' newsletters, then cascaded to other staff, and via Education Scotland regional contacts. Participants booked on using the Eventbrite platform.

Methodology

The approach used a mix of methods:
- Interviews with 4 Education Scotland staff – Regional Locality Lead, HMI, Development Officer, Education Officer
- Interviews with 2 local stakeholders – Education Officer and Quality Improvement Officer
- Observation of the webinars by the researcher
- Review of written material prepared by Education Scotland over the engagement process
- Review of evaluation data collected by Education Scotland (i.e., participant feedback on webinars)

The above mixed methods approach provided a well-rounded evaluation, with key perspectives feeding in and the researcher being able to get a good feel for the participant experience, by virtue of observation and session evaluation surveys. In terms of limitations of method, it was not possible (due to retirement) to interview the HMI who played an important early role or one of the three local authority leads.

Assessing Education Scotland's engagement and support

What worked well

Strong Education Scotland lead and collaborative approach from the outset – A senior HMI was instrumental in getting the process going and brought very relevant topic knowledge to bear as a result of his involvement in Education Scotland's national review of Family Learning. From the very start, the effort was viewed as a collaborative project within Education Scotland, involving both regional and national colleagues. This has made it easier for the locality work to benefit from Education Scotland-wide experience and resource (see below).

Tapping into wider expertise and knowledge within Education Scotland - The Education Scotland team was able to link with colleagues in other regions and those with national responsibility for Family Learning and Parental Engagement. Education Scotland staff worked closely with the national Family Learning Network, Scottish Parental Involvement Officers

Network and the National Literacy Network which helped identify suitable inputs to the webinar series. By working across Education Scotland teams, a mix of staff were involved from both the TRIC and beyond, including: Education Officers with responsibility for Community Learning and Development, Numeracy and Maths, Literacy and English, and Parental Engagement; a representative from HMI with responsibility for Community Learning and Development; and a Development Officer responsible for Family Learning. Local stakeholders commented positively, e.g.:

- *"It was good to see the willingness to share expertise. Education Scotland brought the regional and national picture that we don't have in our local bubble".* (Stakeholder)

Co-designing a programme to share and reflect on practice – Similarly, by drawing on their networks, both Education Scotland staff and stakeholder leads were able to learn about local needs and identify a rich mix of relevant practice about Family Learning and Parental Engagement that has been adapted throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This both fed the webinar presentations and evidenced the strong co-design element to the programme:

- *"The groundwork was done. We learned about the importance of local needs and gathered the evidence and insight to be audience focussed. We made sure we were responding to what practitioners on the ground were saying and tailoring it to what was important to people. We were confident that we were on the right track because of the dialogue with the local authorities."* (Education Scotland)

Stakeholders from across Tayside and beyond were able to input to the webinars, e.g.: a School and Family Development Worker (Dundee); a Family Learning Practitioner (Angus); Parental Involvement Officer (Angus); a Family Learning Officer (Perth and Kinross); and the Read Write Count project (Edinburgh Collaborative).

Broadening out the target audience – Although the original idea was for a conversational-style webinar to be delivered to each participating local authority, and in some cases to very specific audiences (such as Headteachers), through engagement with local stakeholders the idea developed and broadened out. This was based on a recognition that there were common themes shared across the region, and that a wider population of practitioners stood to benefit from the webinars.

What worked less well

Promoting to the target audience – Although not a major or lasting problem, Education Scotland organisers received early feedback from local practitioners who identified that they were unable to get booked onto sessions: the Eventbrite platform indicated that sessions were fully subscribed. Although the webinars were only promoted across Tayside, they were visible more widely on Eventbrite. Participants from other regions of Scotland were therefore booking onto the sessions which reduced the number of places for Tayside practitioners. It may be worth noting that, of the 11 participant responses Education Scotland received to the follow-up survey, 3 were from Glasgow, Fife and Shetland.

Turnout at the webinars – Overall, turnout at the webinars ranged between 20 and 40 participants. While there had been no targets set, some stakeholders had anticipated higher turnouts from their local area. That said, it was also recognised that turnout had less to do with the quality of the programme and more to do with the chaotic situation and demands that the Covid-19 pandemic had created for the intended audiences.

Evaluation of the programme – Education Scotland conducted post-webinar surveys of the participants, but these did not generate a large response. The evaluation data provided to the research team by Education Scotland (see below) is for a total of 11 participants. This is perhaps an opportunity missed to gather a more robust body of feedback about the value of the programme and what (if anything) practitioners would value in future. However, it should be recognised that participants attending online sessions during the pandemic will be getting

multiple requests to complete surveys. Positive feedback was received verbally at the sessions and in the chat as the sessions progressed. Looking forward, consideration could be given to capturing and including this feedback in the overall evaluation data. In addition, a link to the evaluation form could be placed in the chat at the end of the session, allowing participants to download it (and possibly complete it) there and then.

Benefits and outcomes

Helping focus and challenge - The availability of Education Scotland staff added to the capacity in the region to look at Family Learning, and this capacity was mobilised in a focused support and challenge approach. One of the two local authority leads stressed that while Family Learning was not her core remit, the Education Scotland team was able to:

- *"drill down (into Family Learning) in a quality way that was difficult for staff to do that had wider remits and had to juggle a range of other responsibilities".* (Stakeholder)

After the first webinar, a request was received from one of the local authorities to facilitate and deliver a bespoke session for staff in their area. This focused on Family Learning and Parental Engagement policy, strategy, planning and delivery. Education Scotland staff worked in collaboration with the local authority to deliver on this additional request.

New partnership relationships created across local authorities – Similarly, links created between practitioners working in different authorities within Tayside are valued and likely to continue:

- *"I've now got good contacts in Angus and there's a willingness to work together in future."* (Stakeholder)

Changing perceptions of Education Scotland and building partnerships – Positive relationships between local stakeholders and Education Scotland were forged during the engagement process and over the course of working together to create a valued product (i.e., the webinar series):

- *"The Education Scotland team were great, very professional, calm and open …..having a task and clear purpose was important."* (Stakeholder)
- *"This programme has made it more likely to see Education Scotland as colleagues. You feel they are part of your team who you can take a problem-solving approach with".* (Stakeholder)
- *"It's very helpful when you have got a contact in Education Scotland, just knowing who they are. But how to keep the momentum going is a question."* (Stakeholder)

Positive feedback from primary schools - Stakeholder reported positive feedback from Headteachers in primary schools:

- *"The sessions were good quality and make them realise that the course they were taking was broadly the right one, but also encourage them to think about new opportunities to engage with parents to deepen their role and influence in schooling and learning."* (Stakeholder)
- *"There's definitely a sense that we need to look at things differently and listen to our own feedback on what is, and what is not, working in terms of how teachers and parents can work better together."* (Stakeholder)

Positive feedback from participants – The data from the 11 participants who responded to the follow-up survey covers all 4 webinars. When asked to rate their webinar experience on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being high), the majority gave a very positive rating. Of the 11 participants, 10 rated the webinars either 4 or 5.

Ten (out of the 11) respondents found the sessions easy to access and agreed that their confidence and knowledge on the topics covered had increased. Some 9 of the 11 felt their

skills had improved, and 10 said they were likely to implement what they had learned into their practice. When asked what the most valuable aspects of the session/s were, respondents frequently pointed to the case studies presented and the discussions that took place around practice, e.g.:

- *"The primary school / CLD project was fascinating and showed the time it takes to build trusting relationships".* (Webinar participant)

Closer relationships between teachers and parents - There was a sense that, over the pandemic, one positive outcome has been the closer relationship that has developed between teachers and parents. This has helped create a platform of opportunity: something that can be further built upon to strengthen Parental Engagement and Family Learning:

- *"We need to build on the closer relationships established over the pandemic."* (Stakeholder)

Key issues

Education Scotland's role beyond Covid-19 – An issue raised by this case study (and indeed by others in this report) relates to what is going to be possible in future as the additional staffing resource within Education Scotland revert to their normal core roles and responsibilities. Education Scotland staff provided a catalytic role in the collaborative effort represented by this case example. Demand was expressed from one of the stakeholders interviewed for an ongoing partnership with Education Scotland in some form, i.e., to find and focus attention on themes of common interest:

- *"We need to keep the momentum going, maybe getting together a few times a year around a common purpose…..it would be good to talk about what we can do next, then have a problem-solving conversation".* (Stakeholder)

How to enhance sharing and learning examples from practice – The value that local stakeholders and practitioners place on being able to identify, hear and learn from case studies - often from other parts of the country – is high. They perceive themselves as often not being in a strong position to source this knowledge for themselves, and this is a role that Education Scotland, partly by virtue of its national network of contacts around different themes, is able to support.

Recommendations

Using the resources created - The webinars have been recorded and stand as a valuable resource that can reach a wider practitioner audience outwith Tayside. There is an opportunity to use these resources to further build on the conversation around Family Learning and Parental Engagement, linking this with key Education Scotland and Scottish Government documents, and reach a wider audience of practitioners. In doing so, Education Scotland could invite suggestions from stakeholders about other themes that could provide the focus for further sessions.

Identifying a new theme – Education Scotland and local stakeholders should consider what next steps are possible to build on the valued partnership created by the project. In addition to making plans to maximise the reach of the existing recorded material (as suggested above), this could involve scoping another topic that resonates with practitioners across the region and provides a platform to continue the effective collaborative partnership approach pioneered by the Family Learning and Parental Engagement webinar series.

CASE STUDY NO. 2: South East – Supporting Improvement in Three Primary Schools in Midlothian

Project description

The locality work focussed on delivering support to three primary schools in Midlothian. It involved a three-person team from Education Scotland working with the local authority Schools Group Manager, the three Headteachers, their senior leadership teams and other school staff. The team was carefully selected by Education Scotland locality leads for the South East (SE) - the Senior Regional Advisor and a Senior Inspector - to ensure a good fit in terms of how team members would work together and the expertise they would bring.

Prior to the launch of Education Scotland's locality support, Midlothian had already approached the organisation about the three schools. This, therefore, became an early request for locality support.

Working together, Education Scotland's Senior Regional Advisor and Senior Inspector then met with the Executive Director and the Schools' Group Manager to discuss the broad themes that Education Scotland could support and what that could involve. Thereafter, the Senior Regional Advisor and Senior Inspector considered the needs of the schools alongside the strengths and experiences of the staff when selecting and agreeing the team that would provide the direct support. This three-person team then worked with the Schools Group Manager and the Headteachers to develop the package of support.

An HMI joined the team, along with two members of the SE Regional Improvement Team – a Senior Education Officer (SEO) Inclusion and Additional Social Needs (ASN) and the Attainment Advisor for Midlothian. Apart from the Attainment Advisor the other team members had little or no previous contact with the schools (although the SEO had previously worked with other settings across the authority).

The support plans developed for each school identified: areas for improvement; intended outcomes, agreed supports; and the specific inputs that Education Scotland would make. In two schools, support was given in relation to 'school leadership capacity at all levels and planning for improvement'. In the third the support was for 'school leadership capacity and ASN provision'. These plans were then delivered, with some important changes, by the team.

Methodology

The methods used for this case study were small group discussions and interviews, supported with some desk review. Specifically, the work programme involved:
- 2 paired interviews with the Senior Regional Advisor and the Senior Inspector
- A mini-group with the 3-person Education Scotland team
- Interviews with 2 local authority staff (Executive Director and Schools Group Manager)
- Interviews with Headteachers from 2 of the primary schools
- Review of the support plans for the schools; and a report on a 'reflections and feedback' session held between Education Scotland and 2 of the Headteachers.

The fieldwork successfully engaged with key stakeholders involved in the project. One limitation – though not one associated with the method - was that it did not prove possible to engage directly with one of the Headteachers. However, this school was involved in the reflection and feedback session with Education Scotland, so information on what worked well and key learnings pertaining to that school was available to the researcher from the Education Scotland write up of that session.

Assessing Education Scotland's engagement and support

What worked well

The local authority and the schools were already 'open' to support - This helped move the engagement process along. There was already a demand from the locality for help which coincided with Education Scotland's provision of locality support during Covid-19. As one stakeholder described it:

- *"It was a great meeting of minds".* (Headteacher)

For a member of the Education Scotland team, it was:

- *"Like pushing on an open door".* (Education Scotland)

Pre-existing relationships helped ES to 'hit the ground running' - In the South East region, prior to Covid-19, local councils had regularly attended meetings of the Improvement Collaborative Board, which is attended by the Education Scotland Senior Regional Advisor. The Senior Regional Advisor also held individual meetings with each local authority. Consequently, relationships had been established and the Locality Leads were known to local Directors of Education. These existing relationships also served to make for relatively smooth progress with the locality support, both in Midlothian and across the region.

A close and collaborative process - As an element of the engagement process, this was (for some stakeholders) 'the' most important feature of the engagement experience. One commented:

- *"The collaborative partnership established was the most important part. Education Scotland were at pains not to be seen as 'HM Inspectors'…there was less of a scrutiny edge and much more emphasis on engaging with the schools and working with them to improve"* (Stakeholder).

This project has involved sustained, collaborative work over many months, beginning in November 2020. It was still continuing when the fieldwork for this evaluation was carried out. The Education Scotland team – with an HMI lead involved – initially met with local stakeholders in advance of developing an Action Plan. The Plan was then discussed with stakeholders, including the local authority and the Headteachers in the schools, before it was agreed and implemented.

A local authority stakeholder recalls being:

- *"able to be part of the process. … as much a driver in the process as others"….."The process has allowed Education Scotland colleagues to develop a continuous relationship and keep more in touch with what happens in a school over the year".* (Stakeholder)

The general feeling - across stakeholders - is that the process enabled very good, collaborative relationships to be built up. As an engagement process, it was different, more intensive, responsive and sustained than had previously been experienced with Education Scotland.

Flexibility in action planning and delivering support - Flexibility has been feature of the process, enabled by the collaborative relationships established. The original Action Plan developed by Education Scotland envisaged a strong focus on middle leadership and working across the three schools. However, once it was discussed with the Headteachers, the focus changed.

It was quickly realised that a more bespoke approach that tailored support to each school was required. This need for flexibility was partly driven by the schools having different working time

agreements in place, but it also reflected Education Scotland's sensitivity to the pressures the schools were under simply coping with the disruption caused by the pandemic and trying to support the health and wellbeing of their staff.

As it turned out, the majority of Education Scotland's work was with individual schools: with the Headteacher, other senior individuals or particular groups of staff. One Headteacher pointed out:

- *"The plan was never set in stone, it was always flexible. We started with whole school sessions, then moved to layered support, for example with sessions for the SLT only, and to more 1-2-1s".* (Headteacher)

The model has allowed further cross-directorate working within Education Scotland - For the Education Scotland staff involved, a key point of difference with this approach is that it has brought different people and skills together from within the organisation: allowing staff from different directorates within Education Scotland to work together in new ways. Staff had not previously been involved in this way of working. There is a strong sense that all three Education Scotland staff benefited from engaging in this way:

- *"It felt right...it felt good. We've been able to support each other".* (Education Scotland)

The Senior Regional Advisor underlined that his working relationship with the other locality lead (a Senior Inspector) had been a strong one with their skills and experiences complementing each other. The Senior Regional Advisor pointed out that feedback from the other local teams had also been very positive about the 'one Education Scotland' approach that has been modelled across the locality work.

Wider Education Scotland expertise and knowledge of good practice was 'on tap' to local stakeholders - There are a few important dimensions to this. The very close relationship that the local stakeholders had with the Education Scotland team allowed them direct access to a breadth of expertise and support (principally from the HMI and Inclusion and ASN members of the team) that was not previously available. Members of the Education Scotland team brought wider national knowledge and expertise to the local process. For example, the schools were able to draw on the national level understanding of often complex legal inclusion and equity issues available within the team. Being able to tap into this expertise and knowledge proved to be important to Headteachers and senior staff in their relationships with the wider body of staff. Colleagues were aware that Education Scotland was working closely with the school and its leaders, which in turn generated confidence and trust in the direction the school was taking.

What worked less well

Education Scotland support being online as opposed to staff being in the school - While it was the Scottish Government's decision (for safety reasons) that Education Scotland staff would not go into schools, some – but not all – stakeholders would have welcomed a face-to-face relationship. As two stakeholders put it:

- *"I couldn't see why Education Scotland could not put a member of staff into a school for a few weeks….You have to be in and around to understand context and absence behaviours."* (Stakeholder)
- *"There was a feeling that it would have been good to have Education Scotland in the school to see what we are doing, because dealing with Covid-19 day to day was taking away from a learning and teaching focus."* (Stakeholder)

The above requires two important caveats:

- Remote working did not negatively impact relationships between the Education Scotland team and stakeholders. These have been very strong and positive throughout: a point endorsed by all the interviewees.

- One of the Headteachers would not have wanted Education Scotland staff on site during the pandemic and was comfortable with the remote approach:
  - *"What would have been the benefit? The Education Scotland team we worked with were so open and listened to what we said about context. We tried very hard to keep each other safe and were clamping down on visitors. The technology allowed us to stay in touch with Education Scotland – emailing and sharing documentation – there was never a time when they were not in reach or that we felt they 'didn't get it'"* (Headteacher).

Staff perceptions of Education Scotland - Despite communication about the role that Education Scotland would play through the locality work, some school staff were initially uncertain about what its staff would be doing, some finding it difficult to:
- *"separate support from inspection"* (Headteacher).

One Headteacher who had been working hard to lift staff morale commented:
- *"It took a bit of work to get staff clear on the role of ES"* (Headteacher).

The Education Scotland team also made deliberate efforts to reassure staff and alleviate concerns; effort that were recognised by the schools:
- *"I really needed my team to be reassured that we were on the right track and laying the right foundations"* (Headteacher).

Engagement with the Education Scotland team sessions - In one school, the Headteacher reported less initial enthusiasm about working with Education Scotland than had been expected. The Education Scotland team had arranged a drop-in session for staff, expecting staff to submit questions in advance. However, few questions were forthcoming. The Headteacher – keen to take advantage of the Education Scotland resource available - then turned to the SLT and asked it to provide questions that staff had been asking.

The other Headteacher noticed relatively low staff engagement when meetings were large, whereas:
- *"Conversations were better when the group was smaller…When it was the whole team it wasn't that interactive."* (Headteacher)

This Headteacher also felt that staff responded better when it was senior staff at the school who were delivering messages. Nevertheless, staff being aware of Education Scotland's involvement was important: it raised the level of trust in the information they were getting. However, they wanted to hear it directly from senior colleagues who knew the local situation.

Over time, perceptions of Education Scotland changed, with staff recognising the value that Education Scotland brought in knowledge and experience.

Benefits and outcomes (perspectives from the different groups of stakeholders)

The local authority's perspective – For the local authority stakeholder who was most closely involved with the Education Scotland team, the experience was:
- *"A really beneficial piece of work for us in terms of supporting the three schools"* (Stakeholder).

Engagement also brought significant professional development benefit:
- *"Regular meetings really helped me benefit from high quality professional dialogue about what support, and the different levels of support, were required"* (Stakeholder).

The progress made, however, was also attributed to a number of actions (e.g., on staffing) taken by the local authority in its role as a key partner in the tripartite model that saw Education Scotland, the local authority and the schools working together.

The Education Scotland team's perspective - Across the schools, while all appreciated the input from Education Scotland and had a much better idea of the journey ahead, there was felt to be some variation in the extent to which the 'critical friend' role that the Education Scotland team developed was embraced and the number of challenges and difficulties faced.

The Headteachers' perspective - Engagement with Education Scotland brought a range of benefits to the schools, e.g.:

- Headteachers highlighted the calming and reassuring effect that having trusted Education Scotland knowledge and expertise to hand has had*: "Just having someone that was plugged into the national picture telling you that you're doing the right things…that really took the pressure off"* (Headteacher).
- One feels the mentoring and coaching received from Education Scotland had a 'ripple effect' though the school: *"A lot of teachers are saying they want to be mentored or to mentor others. This is really having a cultural change in our school".* (Headteacher).
- Teaching staff feel that Education Scotland has also benefited as a result of the continued connection and communication with them: *"They know the school better, know what we've gone through, know what we are doing in response to what they are saying."* (Headteacher).
- Staff have more insight into what is happening elsewhere and are making use of this information to do things differently. For example, information on tracking and monitoring has created interest in setting up 'Achievement and Equity Clinics' which involve getting staff skilled up on data and how to use it.

Education Scotland held a reflections and feedback session with two of the schools. Some of the benefits highlighted by the Headteachers were:

- SLT being more open and more explicit with staff about the purpose of improvement activities which is helping to encourage more ownership of school improvement
- Planning underway to make tracking and monitoring more systematic, with challenges planned for and greater stakeholder engagement
- SLT planning to embed self-evaluation across different areas of work and seeking to ensure stakeholders are more included in this work
- The focus during attainment meetings being reviewed to ensure it is as effective as possible in supporting attainment of all learners
- All staff agreeing to take on 'leadership of learning' roles for the new school year, linked to the GTCS professional standards
- Staff committing to working with a 'critical friend 'in session 21/22 to support improvements in learning, teaching and assessment
- Teachers more focused during Professional Review and Development and attainment discussions, and more confident in speaking with members of the SLT about school improvement.

Key issues

Visibility and role of Education Scotland – Education Scotland has been more visible on the ground as far as the three schools are concerned. Indeed, across the local authority and the wider region, visibility of Education Scotland will have increased in the many situations where locality work has been delivered. For example, in Midlothian alone, Education Scotland reported 200 locality support engagements in addition to 213 Regional Improvement Team engagements over the last academic session. It is worth noting that Education Scotland has been able to respond to all requests for help received during the Covid-19 period. This raises questions about the future of the locality work in general, what new demands might come

forward, and how Education Scotland can respond to these, as we look beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

Lasting, longer-term and 'yet to be seen' impacts - People closely involved in the locality work have been positively impacted. Interviewees recognised the capacity building, the support for learners, and the professional development benefits delivered and there have been many valuable resources (e.g., presentations) that remain a lasting legacy for schools and others to use. There are also numerous specific benefits reported by the schools and evidenced in their forward plans. However, despite these visible benefits, it seems unlikely that the full benefits of the locality work can yet be seen: there are probably other learnings still to be drawn from the experience.

Sustainability of the model - There is consensus that what Education Scotland has done has been valued, but it is less clear what the future holds for this model of working. The repurposing of Education Scotland's scrutiny resource meant that this expertise was available to become an integral component to the locality support. However, a further question surrounds the locality model that took shape – i.e., the tripartite collaboration between Education Scotland, the local authority and the school. Is this a model for the future? If so, what will it look like and how will it be delivered?

Recommendations

A full review and sharing of learnings - At the time this case study was being carried out, the locality work was still ongoing. Education Scotland and the schools had started to reflect and feedback on their experience. There were also signs that there may be further activities being planned to share learnings across the parties involved. A full review of the project at some point in the near future, involving all of the key stakeholders, would be appropriate. This review could possibly extend to embrace other locality work.

Continue and build on the Education Scotland-Schools Group Manager relationship - The Schools Group Manager involved in the locality work left her post in the Summer of 2021. It is recommended that Education Scotland Locality Team and the local authority staff member who is picking up this role establish a positive and constructive relationship and continue to work together to improve outcomes for the three schools.

Continue cross-team working within Education Scotland - The Education Scotland staff involved feel that the cross-directorate working was crucial to capacity building and supporting learners. Education Scotland should, therefore, explore the possibility of continuing to work in this way, perhaps through new pilots or/and a separate enquiry that looks in-depth at a number of examples of cross-directorate working that have taken place across Scotland during the pandemic.

CASE STUDY NO. 3: Forth Valley and West Lothian - Support for Early Learning and Childcare Area Support Managers (ELCASMs)

Project description

West Lothian Council (WLC) established a need to expand the roles and build capacity of ELCASMs. The role of the Early Learning and Childcare Support Manager (ELCASM) was established in early 2019 to support ELC Heads of Centres with the 1140-hour expansion requirements within the area. The ELCASMs specific role focused on operational support for Heads of Centres. ELCASMs were recruited from a wide range of backgrounds, with differing skill levels and experiences in education. There were originally 12 ELCASMs employed, but at the time of the initiative of relevance to this case study, the team had grown to 16.

Further to this, WLC Senior Leads in November 2020 decided to expand the role of ELCASMs so they could support Heads of Centres with Quality Improvement and Self Evaluation (QI&SE). At that time though, there was no clear path established to allow the required training for ELCASMs to take place.

Before Christmas 2020, Education Scotland's locality leads approached WLC with an offer that would allow the Council to utilise an Education Scotland Attainment Advisor and an HMI for the purpose of Quality Improvement. The WLC team quickly saw the Education Scotland offer as an opportunity for delivery of quality Continuous Professional Learning for the ELCASM team. Education Scotland and WLC held two meetings to discuss how to take advantage of the offer. During these meetings there was a collective decision taken to focus on QI&SE as the key theme. Beyond this, the key topics within QI&SE were agreed and the Education Scotland team developed a structured programme of six Continuous Professional Learning sessions.

Between mid-January and late-March 2021 a programme of six training sessions for ELCASMs focusing on QI&SE was delivered. All ELCASMs attended all six of the sessions. In addition, an ELC Head from within West Lothian was invited to join the sessions for continuous professional learning. All the sessions were held online using Microsoft Teams and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The sessions were undertaken during 'protected' time and were run approximately fortnightly. The topics explored ranged from understanding, gathering and utilising data, to informing improvement to report reviewing and writing. Running of the core sessions was split between the two Education Scotland team members (the HMI and Attainment Advisor), with support provided by the WLC Lead. Some breakouts meetings were held based on the needs of the ELCASMs and to aid delivery of the content.

A review and evaluation of content and delivery style was undertaken collectively by all participants after each session. Following analysis of the feedback the Education Scotland team and WLC Lead tailored the subsequent elements of the programme to more specifically meet the needs of the ELCASMs.

In March 2021, two supplementary webinar sessions were held involving a gathering of ELC Heads of Centres from across West Lothian. The sessions were undertaken to help start the process of sharing some of the key learning from the initiative with the wider team of ELC Heads of Centres across West Lothian. It is estimated that up to 80 Heads of Centres and Deputy Heads of Centres attended these sessions along with the ELCASMs. To assist in delivery of the content, the ELC Heads of Centres were sent the webinar presentations in advance of the sessions. The webinars were delivered either by the two Education Scotland team members who had led the core six sessions of the initiative, or by additional Education Scotland representatives from out with West Lothian (invited based on their specific areas of expertise).

Methodology

The core programme presentation materials were supplied to and reviewed by the research team. It should be noted, these materials were only reviewed for background, with the content not being assessed in any way. Following this, the project utilised a series of nine one-to-one or paired interviews. All the interviews were qualitative in nature and were structured around a loose topic guide of questions. The interviews lasted up to one hour and were held online between late May-mid-June.

A total of 15 participants were interviewed as part of this case study:

- 1 paired interview with the Education Scotland team members involved in the initiative - 1 HMI and 1 Attainment Advisor
- 1 interview with the WLC Lead responsible for coordinating the initiative
- 5 paired interviews and 1 interview with representatives of the ELCASM team
- 1 interview with the ELC Head who participated in the initiative

The project involved interviews with all leads of the initiative and a sample of 11 of the 16 ELCASMs, along with the participating ELC Heads of Centres. This allowed a full and comprehensive review of the initiative to be taken from all perspectives. That said, given the timing of the research, it has not been possible to fully assess the longer-term value of the initiative in terms of its direct impact on the role of ELCASMs as Quality Improvement and Self Assessment supports to their Heads of Centres.

Assessing Education Scotland's engagement and support

What worked well

Education Scotland, WLC and ELCASM participants in the initiative engaged in a positive and supportive way – Respondents widely recognised that all involved in the initiative had participated with a positive and professional attitude.

- *"They (ES) hit the right note."* (ELCASM/ Head of Centre)
- *"(WLC Central Team) they were really central to making this successful."* (ELCASM/ Head of Centre)

The timing of the approach by Education Scotland was felt to be ideal – The team of the WLC Lead and Education Scotland worked well together to utilise the additional time made available by the pandemic and for the benefit of the ELCASMs.

Remote access was felt to be highly beneficial – Holding the sessions remotely over Teams allowed a significant amount of engagement over a period of wide-reaching pandemic restrictions. It was noted that the amount of time dedicated to the sessions over the 2-month period would not have been possible if the meetings had been held face to face. No participant had felt under undue pressure by the requirements of participating in the initiative.

- *"Remote access (via Teams) made it so easy."* (WLC Lead)

The sessions were held within 'protected time' for all – It was also noted by the ELCASMs and WLC Lead that having time ringfenced for the programme sessions was positive and helpful. Through this, participants were able to commit to the programme in a way that would have been more difficult if other responsibilities had been allowed to take over.

Holding the six sessions every two weeks allowed time for consideration of the content without there being too big a series of gaps that meant the flow was lost – The ELCASMs noted that they had appreciated the time available between the sessions, during which they were able to review the output and consider the practical implications of the learnings for their

own hubs. That said, it was also noted across the participants that the whole programme was undertaken over a manageable amount of time.

- *"Each session built on the momentum of the last."* (WLC Lead)

The semi-structured and collaborative approach to content development was felt to be excellent – Central to the semi-structured and collaborative approach was the review and evaluation process after each session which helped to ensure that the content and delivery format of each subsequent session was tailored to the specific needs of the ELCASMs. While the six core sessions were pre-planned to cover the QI&SE themes regarded as important by Education Scotland and WLC, it was clear that the ELCASMs really appreciated being asked for their views at the end of each session. This allowed them to flag up specific needs they had for clarification and hopes for future sessions. As an example of this process working well, it was noted that some ELCASMs were not confident with collation of data. As such, this topic was revisited, with the subsequent session being developed to give the additional clarity required. This process allowed the programme to feel highly relevant and even tailored to the needs of the participants.

The delivery style of the two core programme leaders from Education Scotland was felt to be very good – Across all interviews with the course participants there was positive feedback about the style of both the Education Scotland team members. Words used to describe their style included: "*relaxed", "approachable", "human", "tailored", "collaborative",* and *"practical"*. Specifically, the content was felt to be delivered in a way that made it clearly relevant to the context within which the ELCASMs work and the specific roles they perform. The content was also felt to be delivered in a way that recognised the diverse backgrounds (both in terms of existing skill levels and experiences) the ELCASMs had before the programme and while appreciating the value that the ELCASMs can bring to the ELC system in West Lothian.

- *"They made it about the ELCASMs."* (WLC Lead)

The size and homogeneity of the whole group was manageable – The group size during each core session helped foster a relaxed atmosphere of open and honest interaction. This allowed participants to talk about their limitations and concerns around the core themes. The sense of openness that was shared across the sessions was also helped by the homogeneity of the groups, with all ELCASMs appreciating that they shared core responsibilities and desires to do a good job. Beyond this, it was noted that the addition of the one ELC Head of Centre within the programme added a different dimension while not distracting from the focus on the ELCASMs' needs.

- *"We learned from each other."* (ELCASM)
- *"I think she (the participating Head of Centre) learned a lot about the ELCASM group....she can share that with the executive team (of ELC)"* (WLC Lead)

Breakout sessions further helped the content to be delivered in a more tailored way – The breakout sessions used by Education Scotland to allow more tailored and practical interaction around core themes fostered a positive learning environment for participants.

- *"The breakout session was very valuable....we had a task to do which was very relatable....and practical."* (ELCASM/ Heads of Centre)

Conversational-style webinar sessions were felt to be a valuable additional component of the programme – Engaging with the wider group of ELC Heads of Centres from across West Lothian allowed the process of sharing the key learnings from the initiative to begin quickly and while some of the core content from the sessions was still front of mind for the ELCASMs. The involvement of a wide team of up to 80 Heads of Centres and Deputy Heads of Centres within the webinars meant that they were not as intimate as the core sessions, but this was regarded as a positive reflection of their attitudes to the process. Beyond this, it was noted that a strong specific element of the webinar sessions was the inclusion of additional

Education Scotland team members, who had not previously been involved in the initiative, but who were brought in as experts in key areas of relevance to the discussions. It was felt that they were able to bring additional real examples of relevance which further added a sense of practical value to the initiative.

What worked less well

The research did not highlight any specific elements of the initiative, either in the format, the content, or delivery, that was felt to have not worked well. As such, the only 'issues' noted related to hopes for the future.

At the time of the interviews there had not been a chance to implement the key learnings as much as would have been liked – This was primarily due to the responsibilities the ELC Heads of Centres and the ELCASMs had in relation to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Many ELCASMs could not see how the programme would go on, in practice, to directly support them as they start to implement the learnings they have taken from the initiative – The ELCASMs accepted that it was early days, but noted that the programme concluded without any formal lines of potential engagement between themselves and the Education Scotland team. This left some concerned that they would struggle to implement some of the more complex learnings for the programme.

- *"Maybe there needs to be a follow up session in the future….maybe relating to data use."* (ELCASM)

Further to this point it should be noted that the Education Scotland team have stated that WLC Leads were aware that ongoing support is available, through the Attainment Advisor role, in key areas such as QI&SE and that a catch-up session with the ELCASMs was planned for September or October 2021 in relation to QI&SE. However, this research suggests that at the time of interview the ELCASMs were not aware of these services and plans.

Some participants felt that virtual engagement was not ideal – A small number of respondents stated that they felt there was a limit to the level that relationships could be built through a programme that involved remote, online engagement. However, this was a minority view with most respondents stating that the use of remote online engagement had significantly helped the initiative and their ability to engage with the programme. As noted earlier, for safety reasons, the Scottish Government had decided that all locality support needed to be given remotely.

Benefits and Outcomes

All participants felt they had benefited from the experience in a range of ways:

There was practical learning of direct value to ELCASMs that helped provide them with the ability to expand the support they give to ELC Heads of Centres – at the most simple level, ELCASMs and the WLC Lead recognised that there had been valuable learnings gained from the programme, and that this was in a key area of future responsibility for the ELCASMs. It was recognised that this would give them the ability and confidence to help them support ELC Heads of Centres better in the future.

- *"The ELCASMs gained increased knowledge and understanding of self evaluation."* (WLC Lead)

Enhanced levels of confidence and motivation for ELCASMs to use the programme learnings when working with their ELC Heads of Centres – an additional benefit of the programme was that it enhanced the sense of value of ELCASMs in their role. This in turn would encourage them to commit even more to supporting their Heads of Centres.

- *"I felt inspired to improve the setting."* (ELCASM)
- *"There was growing confidence (for ELCASMs)….you could see that coming through."* (WLC Lead)

Enhanced sense of value of the roles of the Education Scotland team members – beyond the increased sense of value felt by the ELCASMs in their role, it was noted that the Education Scotland team had also appreciated the opportunity to engage with and help develop the ELCASM team. This, in turn, helped enhance the sense of value in their roles.

Closer relationships were formed between ELCASMs, the WLC Lead and Education Scotland – the programme helped change perceptions of Education Scotland across the ELCASM team. ELCASMs acknowledged that there was an element of fear in how they viewed Education Scotland before the initiative. Thanks to the initiative though, ELCASMs were able to appreciate the value of Education Scotland team members far better. This in turn, it was felt, would help allow them to support their ELC Heads of Centres better throughout future inspections. It was also noted that this benefit of the programme was also appreciated by the Education Scotland team. Ultimately it was hoped that this programme, and potential future programmes of the same type, will be able to change the culture within the education system in Scotland to one where Education Scotland is more clearly and widely regarded as being there to support the development of the best quality education system and as part of the education team that is *"all in it together"….* rather than as (as some stakeholders may see it) 'a detached and feared policing body'.
- *"I was quite apprehensive of Education Scotland before….you don't want to say the wrong thing!"* (ELCASM/ Head of Centre)
- *"Now I am not scared (of Education Scotland)…..I see they are there to support and to help."* (ELCASM/ Head of Centre)

The programme also helped bring the team of ELCASMs closer together – by bringing the ELCASMs together in a positive learning environment, it was believed, by the WLC Lead and by the ELCASMs, that there would be closer engagement between ELCASMs. This future engagement, it was hoped, would allow ELCASMs to continue to support and challenge each other.

Key Issues

There was only one overarching concern raised by ELCASMs. This related to the level to which they would be able to access on-going support from Education Scotland. ELCASMs stated that they had hoped that future support would ideally come at two levels. First, with support being available in relation to the QI&SE theme and specifically relating to elements of the course content that participants had felt were potentially more difficult to implement, such as use of data. Further to this, while it is noted that this support is regarded as being offered by Education Scotland, the ELCASMs were not aware of this. Second, ELCASMs hoped they would get ongoing support in relation to other themes that could help them, or ELC Heads of Centres directly, to do their jobs better. From this, it was felt that the true value of the programme will be if it is run on an ongoing basis. That would be with repeated Education Scotland-led initiatives set up to satisfy the needs of the WLC Leads, the ELCASMs or indeed the ELC Heads of Centres directly.
- *"I'd like to see this six-week block on a yearly basis….to keep building up relationships….and skills."* (ELCASM/ Head of Centre)
- *"There are still lots of issues that can be focused on."* (ELCASM/ Head of Centre)
- *"I like to think we will have scope to do this in the future as we have built the relationship and progress has been made"* (Education Scotland)
- *"I am more comfortable going to (the ES team) now and asking the questions, but I am still aware we have to go through this formal approach."* (WLC Lead)

Recommendations

Establish a programme for delivery of future, regular engagement - These engagements could be offered as regular sessions that are fixed in the annual calendar; or they could be triggered by specific needs of ELCASMs, WLC Leads or as identified by the Education Scotland team.

Themes of future programmes could be based on identified needs revealed though three main routes:
- Specific needs identified by the WLC Leads during quality improvement or Continuous Professional Learning discussions; or as part of plans to change or enhance the roles of ELCASMs or other key team members
- Needs identified through ongoing reviews of themes highlighted within local or Scotland-wide inspection reports
- Or based on Continuous Professional Learning opportunities triggered by best practice from around the world.

The number of any future programmes would primarily be determined by the capacity of the ELCASMs, Heads of Centres, WLC Leads and the Education Scotland team members - That said, it was hoped that each recipient of Continuous Professional Learning (provided in the format of this initiative) would be able to participate in a programme at least once per year, if not twice.

Other recommendations for development of a future programme of Education Scotland-led learning opportunities would be based on the strengths of the QI&SE programme tested within this case study research:
- Use the remote access format to ensure that the programmes can be participated in without undue time pressures being created
- Use protected time, and as such, avoid the risk of distraction
- Delivery style - ensure future programmes are presented in a way that allows open and honest discussion of specific challenges that are being faced
- Ensure the stages of programmes are spread out to allow a good balance between creating momentum and allowing participants to digest and consider practical implementation of learnings
- Base the sessions on semi-structured formats - that start with core structures focusing on agreed themes, then developed through ongoing evaluation to ensure the course content and delivery style is tailored to the needs of the participants
- Ensure content of future programmes is practical and easily implementable in day-to-day work
- Involve key roles in Education Scotland to deliver future programmes as relevant to the themes and bring in support from experts in the fields of relevance - from elsewhere in Education Scotland, or from anywhere across the international ELC community
- Ensure the number of participants engaged is small enough to allow the programme to be tailored to the specific needs of the individuals, and not to become too general.

Ensure that future programmes incorporate the possibility of ongoing, formal or informal, connections between the recipients of the learning and the Education Scotland team who delivered the programme – From this, allow participants to re-engage with Education Scotland team members while they are implementing the learnings received.

CASE STUDY NO. 4: South West - North Ayrshire Parental Engagement

Project description

In late 2020, Education Scotland's Senior Regional Advisor approached Cluster Leads in North Ayrshire Council (NAC) to offer help and support, and specifically quality improvement engagement opportunities. Subsequent to this, during a regular quality improvement conversation, the Cluster Lead in NAC of relevance to this case study asked the Headteachers of 6 learning establishments (1 High School, 4 Primary Schools and 1 Early Learning Centre) for ideas for support from Education Scotland. Parental engagement, and more generally stakeholder engagement, were suggested as key themes. Following consideration of options, the NAC Cluster Lead decided on the theme of parental engagement. This decision was based on the broad acceptance that parental engagement was a key component flagged in the National Improvement Framework.

All 6 Headteachers in the cluster were subsequently asked if they wished to engage with the initiative. Two (one from a primary school and one from an early learning centre) accepted the opportunity. It is worth noting that both these Headteachers acknowledged the importance of parental engagement and wanted to learn more about best practice. This, in effect, meant that they wanted to learn more about how to make parental engagement, as well as engagement with other stakeholders (staff and children) in the case of one of the Headteachers, as meaningful and valuable as possible, and to avoid the process simply being about 'box ticking' and 'playing lip service' to engagement. Both Headteachers wanted engagement to be more of a 'consultative' process whereby genuine, constructive and helpful feedback would be gathered that could help in planning. It is worth noting that both regarded themselves as broadly accomplished in parental engagement, but that they wanted to explore new ways to do this part of their jobs better.

- *"We wanted to hear about more innovative and creative ways of engaging with parents"* (Headteacher)

In mid-December 2020 an online Microsoft Teams meeting was held with participants from Education Scotland, NAC and the two Headteachers. This meeting was used to explore the needs of the two Headteachers and to broadly discuss themes around best practice in parental engagement.

Based on the initial meeting, in early 2021, Education Scotland emailed the Headteachers a series of links to online resources, professional development reports and inspectorate reports that Education Scotland felt provided insight into best practice. In addition to these links, Education Scotland provided details of North Ayrshire local authority services which were felt may have been of interest to the Headteachers, including those relating to: Family Learning (which included the NAC performance report), and Community Engagement Teams. Education Scotland also offered the Headteachers professional learning on any aspect of the resources and links shared.

A follow up meeting was then held in February 2021, at which point the Headteachers relayed their thinking on the materials. This led to a broad discussion around potential areas for use of best practice in parental engagement. Part of this discussion focused on outdoor learning, which was regarded by both Headteachers as an important area of future planning. The meeting was concluded with Education Scotland requesting that the Headteachers get back to them if they have any more requests or questions. As of June 2021, there has been no further engagement as part of this initiative.

Methodology

The project utilised a series of six one-to-one interviews. All the interviews were qualitative and structured around a loose topic guide of questions. All lasted up to one hour and were held online during June 2021. The sample consisted of:

- 1 interview with NAC Cluster Lead (that is the cluster lead relevant to this parental engagement initiative)
- 3 interviews with the Education Scotland team members who were involved in the initiative - 1 HMI, 1 Attainment Advisor, and 1 Community Learning and Development Officer
- 2 interviews with the Headteachers of the 2 localities involved in the sessions

The project involved interviews with all key participants. This allowed a full and comprehensive review of the initiative to be taken from all perspectives. In planning the methodology, it had been anticipated that some members of staff, and potentially parents of children who attend the relevant learning establishments, would be involved in the research. However, following interviews with the two Headteachers, it was clear that the initiative had not, at that time, allowed for any relevant engagement, by them, with staff or parents.

Assessing Education Scotland's engagement and support

What worked well

All participants in the initiative engaged in a positive and supportive way – The Headteachers, Education Scotland and the NAC Cluster Lead all recognised that they had all participated with a positive and professional attitude. Within this, it was also noted that the Headteachers were clearly committed to the process and keen to learn and develop.

The core theme of the initiative, that is parental engagement, was one that was chosen by the Headteachers based on their own desire for development – While there was collaboration regarding the finer detail of the topics explored in the initiative, it was clear that the Headteachers appreciated the opportunity to suggest they got help in an area that they recognised as important to them.

The theme chosen for the initiative was widely accepted by all participants as important – Parental engagement was seen as a priority issue by all participants. It was also recognised as a theme of particular importance to areas of multiple deprivation, such as the one in North Ayrshire where the two participating localities are based.

The Headteachers recognised that there was real value in having involvement in the initiative from across the roles in Education Scotland and from their Cluster Lead at NAC – All participants were felt to provide a valuable and or unique perspective. The Cluster Lead at NAC provided the required connection between the Headteachers and Education Scotland. The Education Scotland team members all provided key insights: HMI crucially giving insight into what is being sought by inspectors in relation to parental engagement and into best practice; the Attainment Advisor gave valuable local knowledge, and the Community Learning and Development Officer provided valuable understanding in relation to the core theme of parental engagement.

The coaching style used was felt to be ideal by the Headteachers – The Headteachers recognised the value of the more intimate approach to training and development. The ability to have the topic of discussion focus on their particular needs, in contrast to the inevitable more general presentation provided at conferences, was really appreciated.

The ability, or need, to undertake the training initiative online via Microsoft Teams provided an excellent way of saving time during a period when responsibilities for Headteachers were significant – Covid-19 restrictions required the initiative to be undertaken online. That said, the use of Teams had the benefit of saving a significant amount of time. This time would simply not have been available if participation required travel to face-to-face meetings. Beyond this, the general approach taken to the initiative, which was not overly burdensome on the Headteachers, was suitable for a time when the Headteachers were under a significant amount of pressure managing Covid-19 restrictions and remote learning for pupils.

What worked less well

The Headteachers who participated were self-selected volunteers which meant it was less conducive with benefiting those localities that were most in need – While it is clear that both Headteachers were enthusiastic about the idea of engaging, it appeared that they both already had positive attitudes towards engagement with Education Scotland. These positive attitudes were based on either having significant experience of working with the organisation, or having previously had positive experiences during inspections. As such, it is likely that Headteachers that had more distant relationships with Education Scotland, and/or who had received poor inspections, would have benefited more through engagement with Education Scotland if they had participated.

The theme of parental engagement was based on a self-determined need by the Headteachers – Both Headteachers were keen to learn more about Stakeholder Engagement. However, all participants learned quickly within the initiative that both Headteachers were already strong in the area of parental engagement and, as such, neither was able to gain a significant amount of value from the initiative.
- *"They were both on a positive journey already"* (Education Scotland)

There was a narrow focus within the initiative on parental engagement – One Headteacher had hoped to gain a greater understanding of how to engage with staff and children, in addition to parents. This issue was, it appeared, at least partly due to the decision by Education Scotland to focus on parental engagement to ensure that the topic was manageable in scope.

The initiative was less practical than had been hoped by the Headteachers – Both Headteachers indicated that the ideal output from the initiative would have been clear and useable techniques for engaging with stakeholders. In contrast, the Education Scotland team, as a result of the 'light touch' format of the programme, had anticipated that most of the *"heavy lifting"* in gaining an understanding of how to engage with parents would have been performed by the Headteachers themselves, based on the materials provided and on their own needs.

The timing of the initiative was not ideal – All participants were conscious of the fact that the timing of the initiative, and specifically the period during which the Headteachers would have needed to gain value from the document links provided by Education Scotland, was tied up with dealing with the second Covid-19 lockdown. This meant that the Headteachers had limited time to more fully engage with the topic of parental engagement after the second meeting.

The initiative concluded in too open-ended a way – Relating to the issue of unfortunate timing, was the fact that Education Scotland had left the Headteachers with a request or offer to get back in touch when or if they had any additional needs relating to parental engagement. This request, it appeared, was less structured and more reliant on the Headteachers than would have been ideal.
- *"I thought the request to get back in touch was politeness"* (Headteacher)

Benefits and Outcomes

Despite the limitations of the initiative as outlined above, it was clear that all participants - the Headteachers, Education Scotland and the NAC Cluster Lead - felt they had benefited from the experience. It was also clear that the benefits experienced overlapped between the three groups of participants.

All participants recognised the potential value of initiatives that allow Education Scotland to get closer to localities across North Ayrshire – North Ayrshire was recognised by Education Scotland to be an area where it would ideally like closer relationships. The Headteachers, Education Scotland and NAC Cluster Lead recognised that a close and intimate engagement between Headteachers and Education Scotland had the potential to break down barriers and foster closer ties. These ties, it was felt would be formed around a recognition that Education Scotland, Headteachers and Cluster Leads are all aiming for the same goal, that is, to ensure that young people get the best possible start to life and education they can. More specifically, both Headteachers acknowledged that the initiative had led to them feeling that Education Scotland was more accessible than it had been before, and that they had enhanced confidence about potentially utilising the services offered than they had before.

- *"It opened my eyes to Education Scotland being the facilitators of good practice across the country and ideally good practice internationally"* (Headteacher)
- *"When you see Education Scotland (up close) you see that they want every establishment to do well….they are trying to get the best out of staff"* (Headteacher)
- *"I think we were seen as more human and approachable….and as part of the wider collective (than had been the case before)."* (Education Scotland)

The initiative enhanced the confidence of the two Headteachers in relation to parental engagement – As a consequence of the Headteachers being told by Education Scotland that they were already performing well in relation to parental engagement, there was an increase in confidence. This, ultimately, had the potential to allow the Headteachers to engage with parents, as they had been, without concerns that they were not doing it as they should or could be.

The Headteachers had appreciated the specific insight relayed that had encouraged them to engage with parents earlier in the planning process – Although limited in scope, this insight was felt to be practical and to give, at least for one of the Headteachers, a different perspective on how to engage with parents. It was acknowledged that they had historically focused parental engagement on gaining an understanding of how parents had viewed initiatives after they had been implemented. The specific change of focus would allow more scope to include parents early and gain more of a collective perspective on how plans should be developed.

Key Issues

The review of Education Scotland's locality work in North Ayrshire throws up one key issue. That is, that it will be important to build on the benefits experienced by the participants in this initiative. While the programme brought benefits for those involved, not least of all by allowing Education Scotland and the participating Headteachers to form closer ties, this value will be of little benefit across the wider North Ayrshire area without further engagements.

Within this core issue is the related need to ensure that Education Scotland works to engage with and help Headteachers who are most in need of support. It will be important to consider the requirement to make sure that future initiatives are accessible to all those who need

support, even those who face challenges finding the time to be involved with Education Scotland for the purpose of professional development.

Recommendations

Further to the core issues outlined above are six recommendations:

- Develop and clearly communicate the availability of a formal programme of quality improvement initiatives that allow key topics to be reviewed and best practice to be shared between Education Scotland and key stakeholders. This would help to break down barriers to engagement between Education Scotland and key stakeholders and build stronger and more collaborative relationships.
- Ensure the general approach to future quality improvement initiatives is based on the same values as used in this programme. That is, engagement should be open, relaxed, collaborative and built around a coaching approach.
- Base decisions on who should participate in future initiatives, and what the themes should be, on the collective assessment of need from Headteachers, Cluster Leads and Education Scotland. This can be undertaken: informally through quality improvement discussions between Cluster Leads and Headteachers; more formally through review of HMI reports for specific learning establishments; and/or through recommendations put forward by Education Scotland based on their understanding of best practice.
- There should ideally be co-creation of the key content of initiatives allowing a tailored focus on needs of Headteachers within the wider agreed topic. This can happen while also providing a more structured approach to output generation that is based on practical recommendations. There should also be opportunities for on-going and more informal engagement between Headteachers, Cluster Leads and Education Scotland built into the quality improvement system.
- For future engagements, Education Scotland representatives should be able to speak about the needs of the inspection process. Through this, Education Scotland will be able to allow Headteachers and Cluster Leads to see what is best practice from those who will be assessing them in the future.
- To ensure accessibility for time stretched Education Scotland team members and Headteachers it is recommended that future initiatives utilise remote engagement, e.g., through use of Teams.

CASE STUDY NO. 5: West - Inverclyde Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plan

Project description

The Education Scotland support offer for the development of the Inverclyde CLD Plan came from a general offer of support to the Council in the context of Covid-19. This was then developed through a series of meetings between Education Scotland staff, and the Inverclyde Council CLD Manager. These discussed precise needs in more detail, the Inverclyde context as of October 2020, and the best ways Education Scotland could add value. This was based on recognition that a new plan was required by September 2021 – within the reality that the uncertainties around Covid-19 presented many new challenges in producing this.

Developmental discussions led to a definition of required Education Scotland support in 4 areas:

- **Support to develop short and longer-term priorities to develop digital learning** - This was a recognised gap, linked to staff time commitments during the pandemic, a lack of devices to deliver learning, and the lack of a local digital platform. Advice, support, planning, and ideas were provided on the new 'digital norm' within the new strategy, and in other priority areas including English for Speakers of other Languages and the Scottish Attainment Challenge (which provides additional education resources for practitioners, school and system leaders to support the achievement of equity and closing of the poverty related attainment gap).
- **The Scottish Attainment Challenge and CLD -** Support focused on developing a strong voice nationally, regionally, locally on the role of CLD in supporting attainment – via youth work, and family support and learning.
- **Outcome planning with CLD partners and community organisations -** Developing outcomes and processes for measuring impact for community organisations in receipt of LA funding to support vulnerable families/communities during the pandemic and beyond.
- **Advice on training CLD staff -** Support, ideas and wider practice for local plans to bring in younger/less experienced staff. This included advice on training route options for un-qualified staff, such as work-based and part-time learning.

Practical Education Scotland support included a combination of: meetings with CLD staff; direct inputs to wider partnership development sessions via 4 professional dialogue sessions between Education Scotland, Inverclyde Council and wider CLD partners; and ongoing advice and research support. This work was all focused on bringing wider practice options from elsewhere and introducing them through the lens of the Inverclyde context and local priorities.

In the context of Covid-19, this work benefitted from support from two Education Scotland officers – the CLD Regional Officer, and an HMI. The latter was temporarily deployed to the West Regional Collaborative as a result of the pausing of inspection in March 2020.

Education Scotland staff did not get involved in the actual drafting of the local CLD Plan: this is the responsibility of the Council supported by the local partnership. Rather, support was focused on ensuring clarity and bringing key intelligence and ideas for its potential content. Ongoing advice was available on request, however, throughout the drafting process.

Methodology

The method to undertake the case study included:
- Initial discussions 2 with Leads on the Education Scotland support provided

- Discussions and feedback from 4 people in the Inverclyde Council CLD management team
- Depth discussions with 1 lead CLD officer (including reflections from CLD operational staff)
- Review of background documents, supporting presentations, and developmental e-mail trails.

The method of review was limited in scope, but it provided a good reflection of the process and experience. One slightly limiting factor was the absence of views on Education Scotland support from representatives of CLD partners beyond the local authority. It was felt that the visibility of Education Scotland support – though of considerable value – would not perhaps be particularly visible to them. Consequently, discussions would be unproductive and difficult to justify.

Assessing Education Scotland's engagement and support

What has worked well

Education Scotland's engagement with the Inverclyde CLD team was reported very positively.
- *"At points in the pandemic, the demands on front line CLD staff were unprecedented – delivered on a needs must, and consistently changing basis. In this context, Education Scotland's offer of support was invaluable, and developed from listening and responding to our needs".* (CLD Manager)

Support was assisted by well-established links and joint working over many years – locally, and via national networks and activities. Particularly strong elements of success included that:
- Education Scotland's offer of support was based throughout on responding to and understanding the needs of Inverclyde Council's CLD team. After initial contact, a series of follow up discussions detailed precise areas of support needed, and associated timelines. This worked well, with a recognition that Education Scotland delivered what was expected and added significant value to the process
- The Education Scotland support officers started with a strong understanding of the Inverclyde context, and realised that, whilst bringing ideas and intelligence from a national level or other local examples, these had to be assessed in an Inverclyde setting. There was no sense of Education Scotland suggesting a 'one size fits all' approach
- Time was spent fully understanding the immediate and changing context of Covid-19. Initial discussions identified key issues and challenges, including: the frontline and very well respected role CLD staff had taken in the pandemic emergency, and what this could mean for increased recognition of CLD work going forward; the ongoing challenge of poverty in Inverclyde, and how Covid-19 has in ways added new dimensions and understandings of this; additional mental health challenges arising from the pandemic; anticipated rises in unemployment (particular amongst young people); and the critical funding challenges facing key local voluntary sector organisations. These meetings also scoped out how many aspects of the CLD service were beginning to reopen at what was (as is now known) the end of the first wave of the virus
- The 'team' Education Scotland could apply to supporting Inverclyde was important and very valuable. In addition to historic CLD development support, released capacity enabled the HMI who had undertaken the 2018 CLD inspection to contribute. This brought additional capacity, a different and locally well-informed perspective, and a helpful balance of Education Scotland support
- The approach and style of Education Scotland support was important and valued. There was no sense of 'top down' direction, but a genuine two-way dialogue between

Education Scotland and the Council CLD team. This maximised the application of complementary skills. Importantly, Council staff praised Education Scotland's commitment to 'listening to the field' alongside 'gently tapping them on the shoulder' when national guidance required to be adhered to

- It was clear from the outset that it was not the role of Education Scotland staff to contribute to actually writing the new CLD plan. Rather, it was to inform and advise on its key elements, and contribute ideas and intelligence from elsewhere. This was understood, respected, and considered appropriate by local partners.

What worked less well

Overall, partners were very positive about Education Scotland's role – both in its content and approach. But the visibility of Education Scotland support to wider local partners beyond the Council's CLD staff was not considered significant – with Education Scotland possibly viewed as an 'extension' of the Council team. This made engaging these wider stakeholders in the case study process problematical. At an outcome level, this is not perhaps significant, and in many ways could be viewed as representing strong integration. It does not detract from the impact of Education Scotland's inputs. But from an organisational perspective it may be significant, with the value of the agency's support in the wider context not visible and potentially underplayed.

- *"We knew how valuable Education Scotland's support was, but I am not sure how clear this was to other CLD partners"* (CLD Manager)

Benefits and outcomes

The benefits of Education Scotland's contribution, in the context of supporting this work in Inverclyde, are not straightforward to precisely evidence beyond qualitative observation, and in many ways are necessarily indirect. That should not detract from the fact that they were very significant.

The key benefit was that Education Scotland delivered the support initially agreed with Inverclyde Council's CLD team, and that this was viewed as having added the value anticipated. It left local partners confident that they could prepare a robust CLD Plan for 2021/24 – relevant to the local context, and fully informed by national learning and good practice from elsewhere. In particular, a number of priority areas were strengthened in the plan: the future digital offer; further work on tackling the impacts of poverty and supporting the most disadvantaged young people and families; and monitoring and recording impact. Moreover, Education Scotland support provided a further level of confidence and reassurance that the plan will fit with and advance national priorities. It will also seek to further increase the profile of CLD locally, building on the enhanced recognition of these services during the pandemic.

- *"We started from a good place with Education Scotland staff, who we have worked well with for many years. It made this all pretty easy".* (CLD Manager)
- *"Connecting local national work is really important. Education Scotland staff really help with this. But they did not come with laid down national solutions, more advice based on a specific understanding of Inverclyde. This builds credibility on the ground"* (CLD Manager)
- *"Given formal inspections had halted we could bring additional and different Education Scotland resources to the table. I think this was appreciated"* (Education Scotland)

The ultimate outcome of the locality support work will be the quality of the final Inverclyde CLD Plan produced. Local partners were finalising this when interviewed, and they were confident that Education Scotland support assisted this outcome. In addition, it was anticipated that the plan would be completed and submitted by September as required by regulation, which was seen locally as a significant achievement given the additional and unpredictable pandemic challenges and demands.

Key issues

The support provided to develop the CLD plan in Inverclyde was relatively straightforward, but valuable. Key issues suggested by the experience include:
- The need for agility in the Education Scotland support offer – given the ongoing uncertainty in the nature of the pandemic
- The level and range of support offered was clearly linked to the specific circumstances of Covid-19 – including inputs from an HMI officer. It has also led to some reflections from the officers involved on the future balance of Education Scotland support and scrutiny, and the degree to which these sit comfortably together. This may be an important debate in the forthcoming organisational restructuring process underway. It is beyond the scope of the case study to comment further, but this experience may be worth revisiting within future structural change
- All Education Scotland support to CLD plan development was delivered remotely. This generally seems to have operated well, and more use of this technology by choice is anticipated in future
- The visibility and impact of support to wider local stakeholders beyond the Council CLD team appears to have been low. This effected the ability of the case study process to engage wider local partners.

Recommendations

Generic learning Education Scotland and partners may wish to consider from the Inverclyde CLD study includes:

- The importance of a responsive, flexible and partnership style and approach – listening and working with local partners: advising, not telling
- The importance of agility within an ever-changing context, as presented (in this context) by the various phases of the pandemic
- The need in a post Covid-19 pandemic world for Education Scotland to consider the longer-term benefits/options of offering a wider range of expertise from within the organisation in development work of this nature
- The need to compliment Education Scotland work at a local level, and CLD/Education Scotland links at a national level – with both strengthening partnership working
- Offering this type of Education Scotland support in other Council areas – critically allying national knowledge and perspectives with a good understanding of specific local circumstances
- Recognition that the promotion of ongoing support from Education Scotland to CLD work is helpful in reducing perceptions that the agency's work focuses almost exclusively on schools
- The potential use of remote technology beyond Covid-19 as a way of increasing participation numbers in learning and development sessions
- Consideration of ways to increase the visibility and impact of Education Scotland support to wider local stakeholders beyond solely the lead Council officers, particularly given the forthcoming restructuring of national support arrangements.

CASE STUDY NO. 6: Northern Alliance - Promoting Equity Week (PEW)

Project description

The PEW was part of a support offer in response to Covid-19 jointly developed by Education Scotland and the Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC). It consisted of a series of 25 interactive online events delivered in the week 28th September to 2nd October 2020; having initially been anticipated as smaller event which evolved in response to interest and opportunity. The process began with a discussion on Covid-19 and related challenges between key Education Scotland and RIC staff, initially considering a single authority project. In discussion, it became apparent that it could develop further across the area. This was then tested with all 8 local authority Directors responsible for Education, and subsequently endorsed as a Northern Alliance (NA) wide initiative.

The aims of the week were to: increase awareness of child poverty and the impact this has on learning; investigate the pressures the Covid-19 pandemic has had on vulnerable and disadvantaged children (and how to mitigate these); and allow teachers to explore how they can best use Attainment Scotland funding in school.

The week centred on a wide range of varied activities across with 5 daily themes:
- Day 1 – understanding poverty across the Northern Alliance
- Day 2 – Attainment Scotland Fund: understanding the national picture
- Day 3 – participation and engagement
- Day 4 – collaboration and equity
- Day 5 – moving forward and local discussions

Activities normally included a live presenter-led session, pre-recorded videos/presentations, and related shared resources.

Recruitment to the PEW was supported by a range of ongoing mechanisms available to Education Scotland and RIC partners, alongside the development of a bespoke website and various social media activities. Importantly, all Directors of Education supported the initiative, and publicised the week through direct channels.

The sessions were delivered by a wide range of people, bringing varying perspectives and significant specialist expertise. This included: staff from Education Scotland, the NA RIC, local authorities; and the Scottish Government. Further inputs were provided by educational psychologists, the Child Poverty Action Group and the Children's Commissioner.

Sessions were held at various times of the day, reflective to a degree on the nature of participants. This included late afternoon/twilight sessions. A number of events included direct participation by pupils and were held during the day. Most, but not all, sessions were recorded.

Methodology

The method used in this case study included:
- Initial discussions with NA Education Scotland Regional Leads
- Discussion with the lead Education Scotland Attainment Advisor for the PEW
- A workshop discussion with 6 Education Scotland Attainment Advisors across the NA area

- 1:1 discussions with the RIC lead officer for the project who also leads the RIC's 'Poverty and Closing the Attainment Gap' workstream, and the Regional Improvement Lead Officer for the NA
- A review of background information – including planning papers, the PEW website, and various evaluation, review and learning papers prepared by Education Scotland and the RIC
- Design and circulation of a short electronic survey to c20 representative PEW participants to gather further reflections on week, and how this learning had been applied since last autumn. The survey participants were identified through Attainment Advisors, and 11 replies were received within the short completion timescales set prior to the summer break.

This process was inclusive and appropriate to the development of the case study and was helpfully supported by lead Education Scotland and RIC officers. The support materials and various review and reflection activities undertaken prior to and after the event were particularly valuable.

Assessing Education Scotland's engagement and support

What has worked well

The approach and style of partnership working was positive throughout. It started with a clear recognition of the 'win-win' in terms of the respective priorities of both core partner agencies. This was supported by a dual recognition that the PEW was firmly rooted on the 'right issue at the right time' – the continued political priority to close the attainment gap, and a recognition Covid-19 demanded new and innovative delivery mechanisms.
- *"I am proud of what we achieved here, and very grateful to the hard work and commitment of the key officers. It ended up much more then we initially anticipated"* (RIC Education Lead).

Evolving the PEW was characterised at every stage by a sense of playing to respective organisational strengths – with the RIC's local knowledge and perspectives complemented by the national overview and networks of Education Scotland. It was progressed as an 'equal' partnership, with no sense of hierarchy. Organisational and individual levels mattered - and this was assisted by the fact that the key lead officers already had a good and established working relationship prior to PEW. The added value of the partnership is recognised across all stakeholders: whilst some form of PEW could have been advanced by one partner, the combination of skill sets, contacts, and experience enabled this to be done on a much broader level and at greater scale.
- *"Throughout there was a sense of really working together, with no sense of either partner trying to claim the credit. This matters!"* (RIC officer)
- *"Getting the buy in of Directors of Education was key. I think we'd hit the right issue at the right time"* (Attainment Advisor)

Allied to this, is the recognition that key officers were prepared to devote considerable time to the development process, especially at critical moments. This reflected both personal commitment to the issues, but also that the objectives of PEW aligned very closely to established work commitments and programmes. In this sense it did not require any significant additional resources, and utilised capacity already in the system.
- *"It fitted with and advanced key workstreams underway, which was real strength"* (RIC partner).

There was a strong, clear and consistently applied recognition in terms of what PEW was about and what it was trying to achieve. This was underpinned by clear and shared objectives;

these remained constant throughout the process, but this was also balanced by a positive level of operational agility which enabled the programme to grow and adapt to new ideas and opportunities.

- *"Keeping a clear focus on poverty and the attainment gap was important, and not always easy"* (Attainment Advisor).

PEW was in origin, design and delivery very much a NA initiative – sensitive and responsive to the unique characteristics of the area. It responded to practical realities, and a historic sense of a 'central belt centric' tendency in many previous professional development activities. This helped local buy in. Nonetheless, this does mean the learning from the week is not to some degree transferable to other settings.

- *"People can get fed up always travelling to Glasgow or Edinburgh to discuss what can seem like central belt issues"* (RIC officer)

Good practice in partnership working extended into post-programme review, learning, and legacy. Importantly, this reflected genuine joint ownership, and within this shared organisational recognition across partners on the PEW's success. This was supported by a strong and refreshing approach to joint review and reflective practice. This has generated key practical learning that can be shared with further development activities in the NA area and beyond. Linked to this, a significant set of tools and resources are available for future use, such as videos, presentations, and practical guidance documents.

- *"Throughout the process we recognised the need to continually record learning. This means we will do it even better in future"* (Attainment Advisor)

Both partners also recognised that the impacts of the PEW needed follow-up, and this is reflected in a number of follow-up/spin-off supports at an operational level that are underway, such as the new Improvement Offer operating across a total of 18 schools, other equity and quality improvement projects, and the launch of an 'Include' document at one of the schools involved.

- *"We always knew we needed to maintain momentum at local levels after the event"* (Attainment Advisor)

What worked less well

While, overall, a very positive story is told, inevitably, some specific areas of operational improvements have been identified to inform future developments. One area was the uneven engagement of participants across the NA 8 constituent local authorities. However, this should not be interpreted as a failure of Education Scotland's engagement – rather the fact that partners struggled here is linked to timings of the week, and other local circumstances.

Benefits and outcomes

A key benefit of the programme was it achieved its intended reach across various stakeholder/participant groups. This included Headteachers, teachers, Education Authority staff, and Community Learning and Development staff. Very importantly, a number of the sessions also directly engaged pupils to gather their critical perceptions and experiences.

Tangible evidence of benefits and outcomes from the PEW is available through a combination of sources:

Quantitative information on participant engagement - Over the week there were 1,032 event registrations, across 598 individual registrants. The average session attendance rate was 58%. No targets were set on participation, but all consultees reflected these numbers were very positive, and far exceeded the reach of the previous face-to-face NA Festival. Moreover, this was a new event, applying technology which was less familiar to many of the

targeted groups, and was also delivered in the very uncertain and changing pandemic context of autumn 2020.

Pre and post attitudinal/knowledge change survey work conducted around PEW - PEW partners designed and applied a pre and post-PEW attitudinal survey which captured the views of 11 participants. This provided positive endorsement of the key change aspired to by event planners – with a measurable increase in participants knowledge of the impact poverty can have on children. Feedback from individual sessions was equally positive, with approval scores ranging from 63% to 92% on questions covering: improved knowledge; new opportunities for collaborative working; positive impact on children and young people, families, and colleagues; and the overall quality and operation of the sessions.

The consultations and mini survey work conducted to present this case study - These discussions and the survey largely confirmed messages from other sources. They specifically highlighted:
- The overall relevancy and priority of the agenda addressed in PEW, within and beyond the Covid-19 context, and the recognition of its fit with key strategy and policy priorities
- A strong sense that PEW events increased an understanding of poverty, particularly from the lens of how it impacts in many NA contexts, where high volume incidences of poverty are less prevalent, but poverty for individual pupils and their families are nonetheless acute
- Practical reflections on how the PEW increased understanding of how to maximise the use and flexibility of the PEW
- How the delivery mechanisms of PEW turned the Covid-19 context from a sole focus on the challenges, to thinking about some more positive opportunities in the longer-term
- Reference to practical application of the learning to staff and others, and a sense of building momentum and changing perceptions on the closing the gap agenda
- For some, a sense of confirmation and verification of practical approaches already underway through PEW events, which was also of value.

Overall, 10 of 11 survey respondents rated the session very good or good; 10 considered the sessions very or quite very useful; and 8 felt that the remote digital approach was preferable to face to face activities.
- *"The content and style of delivery was ideal. I wish I could have attended more"* (Participant)
- *"Involving the pupils directly was great, and quite different"* (Participant)

Other reflective and review work undertaken by the delivery partners - An important and positive feature of the PEW initiative was the commitment of partners to learn and review throughout the process. This involved the evaluation process noted above, and the preparation of other key reflective documents. The latter provide very practical advice for subsequent work of this nature – within and beyond the NA area and include:
- A short, but comprehensive paper 'Lessons from PEW', which includes reflections on: planning; communications; technology; organisation prior to the event; information for facilitators/presenters; information for attendees; and during the event and post-event learning
- A 'Lessons Learned Template' which summarises key actions, what worked well, what could be improved, and shared learning opportunities across: initial planning; the organisation of live sessions; the registration process; PEW launch; resources; website development; continual advertising campaigns; and the evaluation process.

Key issues

The PEW initiative has highlighted some key issues Education Scotland and partners may wish to consider. For most of these, the week demonstrated very significant and positive good practice. However, they cannot be taken for granted in replicating the impact of the PEW, and are issues and success factors that should be considered in any planning to replicate the week's impact:

- The importance of ensuring and articulating the relevance of professional learning to wider policy and strategy priorities. A fundamental reason for the success of PEW was its clear focus on the right issue
- The partnership added value in the PEW context – this was based on understanding and applying a series of good operating principles throughout the process. These are not always present in other initiatives, should not be taken for granted, and celebrated. For the PEW, strong prior working arrangements and mutual trust were in place between key staff, additional work will be required where this is not the starting point
- PEW was driven by a small and consistent partnership team. This worked well and ensured continuous energy and momentum in the process. This was assisted by the fact the PEW objectives were embedded in existing work programmes and priorities
- The potential of the future use of digital remote technologies was highlighted and confirmed in practice. Many people responded to and liked this approach, believing it gave them easier and improved access to learning opportunities. However, others indicated that this should not be the sole focus of future approaches, and a balance required to be struck with traditional face to face activities
- PEW secured good engagement levels through positive commitment and promotion from a number of key sources and mechanisms. Critical to this was the buy-in of Directors of Education. Without this, participation rates are likely to have been much lower, and the credibility of the PEW reduced
- Despite overall impressive numbers, some local authority areas were not significantly represented in PEW events. This appears to have been for variety of reasons, and these need to be (and are being) addressed in future activities
- The range of audiences and inputs to the programme contributed to its success. The inclusion of sessions directly engaging pupils was positive and gave the programme a strong additional component. The variety of inputs from Education Scotland, the RIC, and wider expertise was impressive, and the ability to secure these was assisted by the partnership basis of development
- Alongside strategic relevance and design, the practicalities of running PEW were substantial and challenging. Partners were very good and open about reflecting on and recording these, and this will be of value in improving and giving confidence to future developments. Key learning on timings, targeting, and recording all sessions has been gained, and should be applied
- The style of delivery of PEW was important. This recognised that it was critical not to tell participants what to do but to resource, advise, and empower
- The PEW has left a strong legacy in terms of learning, changing perceptions, and materials/resources. This must be used and built upon. It is apparent this is now happening.
- How to maintain momentum – particularly in a post Covid-19 context - is a challenge. The pandemic created a unique set of circumstances that forced people to think and act differently. The PEW is a good example of a positive outcome of this – in terms of remote delivery mechanisms, and also how it placed a further focus on addressing equity issues. A key challenge will be to ensure the momentum created is not diminished in the longer-term.

Recommendations

The PEW has already triggered a range of related and spin-off activities, which by late summer 2021 were well underway. These recognise that the attitudinal change and knowledge gained during the week needs to be picked up and followed through in practical settings.

Other more generic learnings Education Scotland and partners may wish to consider from the PEW experience includes:

- The proven potential to deliver learning and professional development of this nature in the longer-term using digital and remote technologies – balancing this with situations where some face-to-face activities may still be of relevance in a post Covid-19 context
- Recognition that whilst approaches such as the PEW have a particular relevance and traction in the NA setting, they still have replicability and use in other areas of Scotland
- The need to fully reflect on the good practice in partnership working and collaboration apparent in the PEW experience across both inception, development, delivery and review – in terms of both *what* was done and *how* it was done
- Continuing to use the many materials and resources accessed and developed by PEW, and available at:
  https://sites.google.com/as.glow.scot/promotingequityweek/home
- Maximising the use of the practical review and reflection papers produced after PEW, which provide invaluable learning and advice to anyone planning a similar event in future.
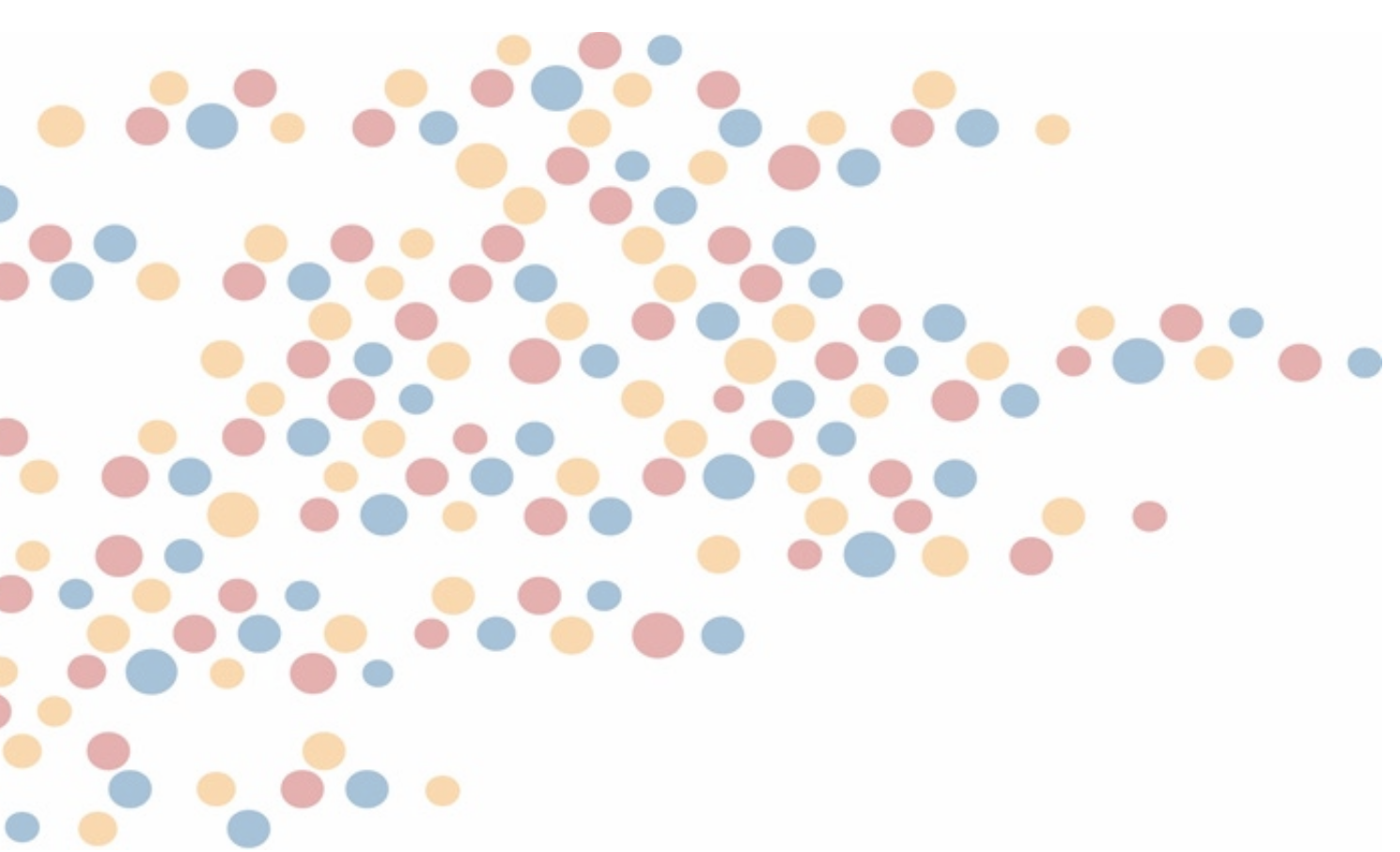
Contact details:
Dr Andy McArthur
SMG
andy@smgateway.co.uk
07970 512 249