Excellence in Headship Stretch 1

Headteacher agency for system change

Context and Think Piece Summaries.

Contents

Context

Excellence in Headship Stretch (EiH Stretch) commenced in October 2019 as a strand within the Excellence in Headship programme.

EiH Stretch is designed to stretch and challenge headteachers seeking opportunities to create positive change in the Scottish education system. The programme explores the key elements of collaborative systems and aims to provide further development opportunities for 50 experienced headteachers from 24 Local Authorities to support their capacity to contribute to system leadership in an empowered system.

A major element of the programme is a collaborative professional enquiry around key areas of educational policy and theory identified by the group. The purpose of the enquiry is not simply to research and deepen shared knowledge but also to inform future action and improvement. The collaborative enquiry groups seek to nudge the system at the most appropriate level(s).

School leadership is a key driver for improvement. Evidence from the OECD and elsewhere demonstrates that leaders, at all levels, who are empowered and collaborative, and who empower others, are well placed to ensure the highest quality of learning and teaching. In an empowered school-led system, school leaders should be part of the collective leadership of the system, as well as leaders within their own organisation. The leadership skills required include: working across organisational boundaries; building shared values and trust; drawing on a wide range of perspectives and resources across systems to design local solutions; and reflecting local context, communities and aspirations.

An Empowered System – School Leaders July 2021

Local Authority

Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Sector
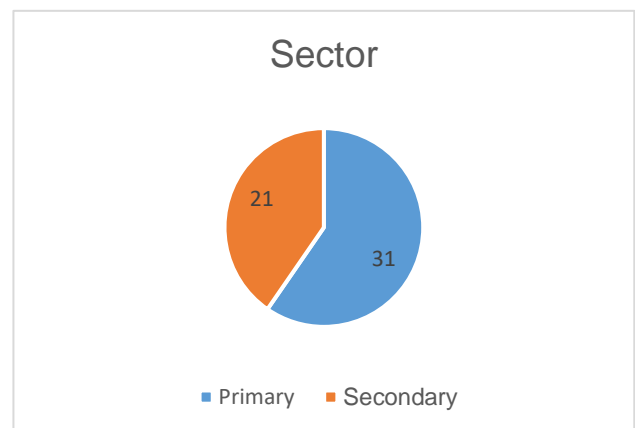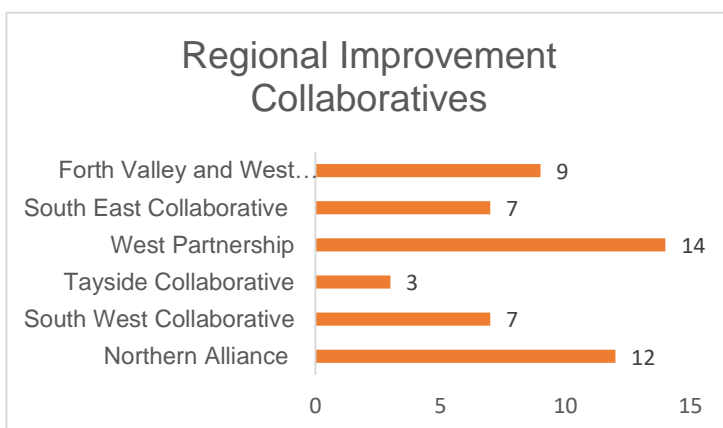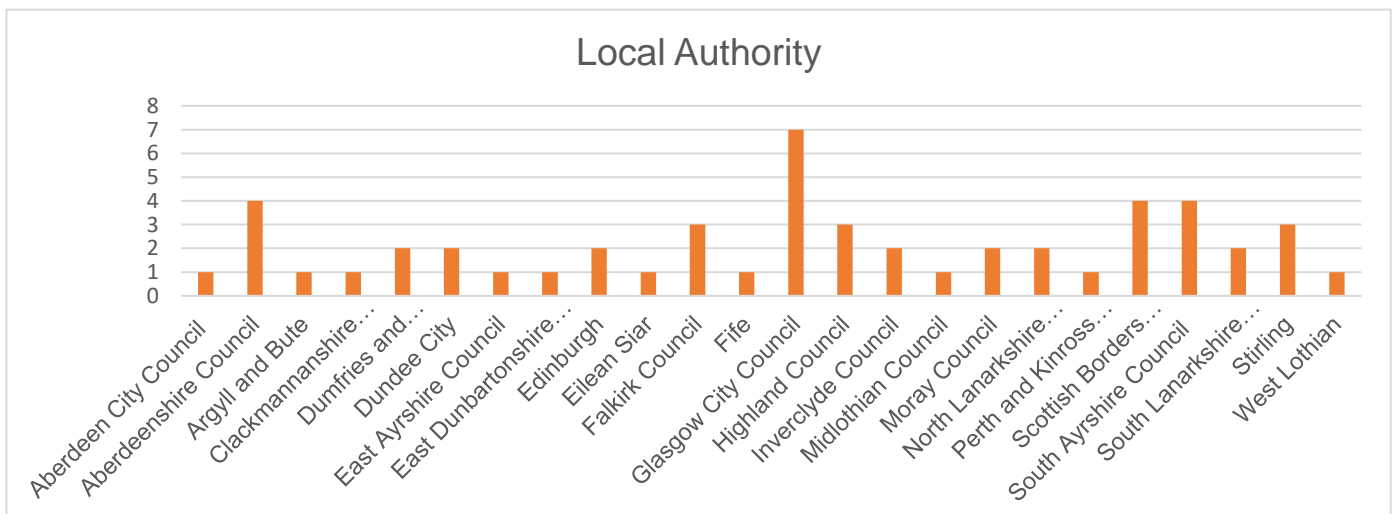
Key elements of the programme

Collaborative Enquiry

- EiH Stretch Induction facilitated by Education Scotland
- Collaborative enquiry
    - 3 sessions on the concepts, process and practice of collaborative enquiry.
    - CE groups have met together frequently and the PLL link has attended as requested.
    - CE groups met with members of the PLL team to review plans, progress and discuss next steps.
    - CE groups have made links with school leaders, local authorities, Education Scotland, academics and international contacts.

Big ideas

- EiH Stretch sessions on the 'big ideas' by leading academics
    - The Myth of Poverty of Ambition, Professor Morag Traenor, Heriot Watt University
    - Curriculum Making, Professor Mark Priestley, University of Stirling
    - Headteacher Health and Wellbeing, Dr Karen Edge, University College London and Louka Parry, The Learning Future.

International links and contributions

- EiH Stretch participants were automatically given a place on the Education Scotland 20-21 International series of blethers and the majority of participants have taken up this opportunity. International and ICoEA partners including Paul Bloomberg and Peter de Witt from America, Simon Breakspear from Australia, Tri Nations colleagues from Scotland, Ireland and Wales, Jeni Donohoo and Carol Campbell from Canada, Alma Harris from Wales, Pasi Sahlberg from Finland, Steve Mumby from England, Avis Glaze and Andy Hargreaves from Canada and Kathryn McEwan and Fleur Johnston from Australia.

- CE groups held meeting with headteachers in Estonia and Australia.

- The CE Assessment group made links, through Professor Hayward, to the International Education Assessment Network.

- CE groups are meeting with headteachers in Slovenia. This has been facilitated by Education Scotland and National School of Leadership in Education (NSLE).

Coaching

- EiH Stretch Advanced Coaching was offered by Education Scotland.

- EiH Stretch participants were offered places on the CollectivEd Knowledge Exchange (Leeds Beckett University) Collaborative conversations which create powerful professional learning programme.

Collaborative Enquiry Questions

EiH Stretch participants were encouraged to consider a range of system issues and formed collaborative enquiry groups addressing the following aspects:

- How do we maximise the impact of pedagogy using digital learning?
- How might the assessment system evolve to better reflect both the aspirations of the curriculum, and 21st century skills, enabling all young people to demonstrate their full potential?
- In what ways can Head Teachers be empowered to work collegiately and efficiently to proactively influence decision making locally and nationally?
- To what extent does amplifying BME voices increase racial literacy within a school community?
- In what ways can professionals work together to ensure a better future for all?
- What Lessons have been Learned from the Global Pandemic in order to 'Build Back Better' for everyone?
- What systems changes need to take place for headteachers to enact their empowerment in a collaborative manner?

Sharing the Learning

An important part of the process is sharing the learning from these collaborative enquiries with the wider system. A series of channels and events have been scheduled to enable enquiry findings to be cascaded and communicated.

- **ICSEI ELN Virtual Conference 2021** – **August 2021 (Concluded)**
  Presentation of a paper on the purpose and practice of EiH Stretch with input from the participants.

- **Scottish Learning Festival – September 2021 (Concluded)**
  A session to provide an overview of EiH Stretch and breakout sessions where participants can share their findings.

- **Scotland Listens Event – December 2021**
  An opportunity to interact with the think pieces from Excellence in Headship Stretch for the wider education system.

- **Education Scotland website – December 2021**
  Think Pieces will be posted on the ES website with communication strategy supporting dissemination.

- **Excellence in Headship Learn session: Making Sense of Empowerment - February 2022**
  EiH Stretch participants leading EiH Learn sessions on the purpose and practice of collaborative enquiry and how this demonstrates empowerment in action.

- **Into Headship Conference – March 2022**
  EiH Stretch participants hosting sessions to share their experience of collaborative enquiry.

Scotland Listens

Throughout the challenging times of the global pandemic, headteachers from across Scotland have undertaken collaborative enquiries to identify and interrogate the big issues in Scottish education. This future-oriented study preceded the recent OECD report however the areas encapsulate and complement many of the themes and observations made within the report. Education Scotland, working in collaboration with the system to create agency for system change, has invited leading stakeholders and policy makers to engage with their findings as part of 'Scotland Listens: An opportunity to interact with the think pieces from the Excellence in Headship Stretch programme.

This event will serve to amplify the work school leaders have been engaged in as part of EiH Stretch and provide a platform to share their findings and conclusions with influencers in the system, aligning and demonstrating the vision in action of role of school leaders in an Empowered System:

"In an empowered school-led system, school leaders should be part of the collective leadership of the system, as well as leaders within their own organisation. The leadership skills required include: working across organisational boundaries; building shared values and trust; drawing on a wide range of perspectives and resources across systems to design local solutions; and reflecting local context, communities and aspirations. Effective school leaders support cultures that welcome and foster teacher agency, supporting and enabling collaborative professionalism, including teacher-led professional learning."

An Empowered System July 2021

Beyond Excellence in Headship Stretch

Developing a culture of empowerment is reliant on releasing true agency for all partners that play a role in improving outcomes for children and young people. This can be achieved through collaboration, co-creation and systemic trust.

A collective shared commitment and vision of the purpose of an Empowered System and what it can look like, can support communication, collective efficacy and interaction between partners. Thus enhancing coherence and fostering a joined up approach for all, which is needed, particularly when overcoming challenges that may arise. EiH Stretch is an example of agency in action, a way of making sense of empowerment.

True agency is achieved when partners draw on their own experience and context and work with others to use that information to direct, influence and make positive changes for improvement. A system that is fluid, responsive and listens to the needs of children and young people from a local, national and global perspective is key. EiH Stretch demonstrates what can be achieved when we work together in a climate of professional trust, holding each other accountable through trust as opposed to performance.

School Leaders working together to create networks of enquiry and professional learning contribute to the development an empowered culture which is essential for the success of an Empowered System.

Opportunities for participants to extend their experience and action their learning beyond EiH Stretch will be crucial. A range of pathways and opportunities will be explored, including how the headteachers can support and enrich national Professional Learning and Leadership, in addition to how they can build on their experience to continuously inform policy and influence system change.

Lead Specialists: Our role in facilitating Excellence in Headship Stretch

EiH Lead Specialists have acted as facilitators and connectors; signposting participants to relevant contacts, resources and networks, related to their area of collaborative enquiry. Through the exploration of collaborative enquiry we have supported our colleagues in developing a shared understanding of collaborative professionalism and enquiry. The communication of these Think Piece summaries is an important stage in this process as headteachers communicate their learning journey, findings and further explore empowerment and headteacher agency.

Key Observations and Recommendations

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- Digital Learning CE Group

Participants

Robin Chapman HT Eyemouth High School, Scottish Borders
Jill Lothian HT Kelson High School, Scottish Borders
Siobhan McGarty, HT St Margaret's Academy, West Lothian
Jon Reid – HT Larbert High School, Falkirk
Justin Sinclair HT Earlston High School, Scottish Borders
Tracey Stewart HT Belmont Academy, South Ayrshire
Pauline Walker HT The Royal High School, Edinburgh

Key question: How do we maximise the impact of pedagogy using digital learning?

The true power of digital is to open up learning to everyone. Empowering learning through ICT gives us a unique opportunity to unlock the potential across schools to innovate education for all.
Our enquiry group have looked at how we can encourage positive action in ICT and implement positive pedagogical changes in our classrooms which benefit all learners.

We have focused on three areas:
- What evidence is there that digital learning makes a positive difference?
- What key aspects of digital learning make a difference?
- How should we move forward to create a Scottish education system with strong digital pedagogy?

How do we know what's happening now?
- Research based in our own schools as early adopters of ICT - sharing interesting practice and successful professional enquiries.
- We have been collaborating locally, nationally, and internationally to explore excellence through ICT.
- Meeting with colleagues from across the national learning community.
- Meeting with international educators including groups of HTs from Slovenia, Estonia & Australia.

What conclusions are emerging?

- What evidence is there that digital learning makes a positive difference?

ICT cannot replace a good teacher - the craft of guiding learning in young people needs nurtured in all our teachers and ICT complements a skilled practitioner. Internationally, evidence is emerging that the best blended learning being exemplified in lockdown scenarios was observed in experienced teachers who understood how young people learn best and used ICT effectively to enhance and complement this.
(Pedagogy Before Product)

We need to ensure our best practitioners are encouraged to lead alongside those who have well matured digital skills. Pedagogical confidence in digital learning needs to be developed alongside the rollout of devices to avoid shallow learning experiences through ICT. We need to redefine learning to transform learning and enhance higher order skills development.
How young people learn best does not change with the introduction of ICT for example, excellent feedback is still one of the leading methodologies for young people to be successful. Complementing this strategy with ICT can add significant value.

What key aspects of digital learning make a difference?

A blended approach in learning (Multi-Modality Approach) is what works best. Digital learning is just one aspect and it is important that rigorous planning makes the best use of ICT to complement good learning and teaching.

Promoting this approach in schools can be achieved through sharing practice and encouraging robust professional dialogue. Outdated attitudes to learning also need to be challenged to ensure an equitable approach to excellent learning and teaching.

Assisted learning through ICT removes barriers for many young people with additional needs and provides an equitable approach for all. This can include those with additional support needs in class, learning from home or who require a blended approach to learning.

How should we move forward to create a Scottish education system with strong digital pedagogy? *(Global Connectivity & Future Workforce Capability-Lessons Learned from Early Adopters)*

Ensure there is ICT support on site to ensure every learner has a working device, every lesson, every day

Ensure that there is a sustainable programme for refresh and replacement of devices

Ensure there is a high-quality programme of professional learning to support transforming pedagogy

Key Messages Emerging- Considerations:

Scotland is the first country in the world to invest in the digital productivity of all our young people providing a national strategy for world class digital success in the future.

Infrastructure & Sustainability

- A robust timetable of implementation needs to be undertaken to ensure all schools have an equitable digital learning strategy in place for pupils in schools.
- All schools need to have the correct, up to date, working digital equipment and infrastructure to enable learning in the classroom.
- Schools need access to high quality IT support which meets the needs of a learning environment.
- Scotland wide connectivity needs to be considered to ensure equitable access for all pupils.
- Funding for sustainability of a digital learning needs to be built into the project.
- Equitable access to ICT needs to be in place for all schools that means there is a no long-term gap in provision between schools nationally.

Training & Support

- Schools need access to high quality national training for all to ensure a consistent approach across Scotland. This should be through Education Scotland to equitably impact learning for all.
- Making creative use of digital technologies to connect teachers nationally and internationally to develop digital pedagogy.
- Embracing the opportunity afforded by reform of national agencies.
- Encouraging the use of the extra 90 minutes non-contact to embrace an ambitious plan for developing skills and knowledge in digital learning.
- Young people need to be educated to use devices to contribute to their wellbeing not create further difficulties. Wellbeing issues such as sleep deprivation and cyber bullying are impacting on young people. There needs to be a consideration on how we as a nation safeguard young people once they are given these devices.

Framework for Learning

- There needs to be a clear framework for digital learning which allows everyone to agree what 'good' digital learning looks like.
- There should be a realignment of key documents to support the rollout of digital learning.
- HGIOS 5, refreshed GTC standards and Initial Teacher Education need to clearly embrace changes in digital learning and how teachers need to develop and embed digital skills. All staff should be required to have a depth of knowledge and understanding of digital technologies to support learning.
- Planning is key and encouraging schools to engage in for example Digital Schools Scotland will create digitally confident communities who can make the best use of ICT.
- Collaborating to enhance the pedagogical practice in schools is essential and we need to explore how this can be strategically improved.
- The use of ICT can enhance curriculum planning and widen access for young people.

Link to associated presentation: Digital Learning EIH Collaborative Project

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- Assessment CE Group

Participants

Lyndsay McRoberts, HT at Duncanrig High School, South Lanarkshire
Graham Hutton, HT at Grove Academy, Dundee City
Kirsty Ayed, HT at Kingspark Secondary School, Glasgow City
Frances Murray, HT at The Nicolson Institute, Highlands & Islands
John Rutter, HT at Inverness High School, Highland
Elaine Bannatyne, Balfron High School, Stirling
Ruth McFarlane, HT at Queen Anne High School, Fife.

Our Collaborative Enquiry Question

How might the assessment system evolve to better reflect both the aspirations of the curriculum, and 21st century skills, enabling all young people to demonstrate their full potential?

Inspiration for our enquiry

Reflection of assessment practice in schools throughout session 2019/20 and 2020/2021 following the cancellation of SQA examinations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Report, specifically Professor Gordon Stobart's suggestions. We have also been inspired by Professor Mark Priestley's thoughts in the context of the Stobart Report.

Our professional learning journey

Our CE group have met several times, and this has proved to be a productive network. We have discussed observed assessment practice across the seven schools, teased out parallels with Professor Stobart's suggestions and made connections with Professor Priestley's focus on an empowered system and the importance of teacher agency. Several members of the group have also had discussions with academics and school leaders both in Scotland and abroad which have helped inform our thought process. Many of us are considering assessment arrangements this session, which build on the increased capacity of our schools. We are also nudging our school communities to imagine assessment methodology which could lead to real change and enable young people to demonstrate their full potential.

Our group is committed to adopting an active approach and challenge existing structures. Professor Priestly describes 'a refocusing of macro policy making, from a primary focus on the measurement of outputs to a greater emphasis on the quality of inputs' and a move away from 'the evaluative use of data for accountability purposes'. We must challenge this historical and central driven approach and do more to empower and develop teacher agency in and across schools.

Considerations

The last 24 months have forced a shift in mindset, increased professional capacity and enhanced the digital skills of teachers. Scottish Education is currently well placed to embrace change. As headteachers we would like you to consider more flexible articulation of courses and programmes across the SCQF framework to provide equally valued vocational and academic pathways to meet the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence.

To achieve this, it is our belief that schools need:

- Digitally progressive solutions:
  o A national digital curriculum resource to support the in-school offer
  o Availability of centralised, ongoing digital assessment opportunities e.g. adaptive literacy & numeracy assessments generating attainment across a continuum of SCQF levels supporting progression at the point of exit.

- A variety of assessment methods in the senior phase:
  - A slimmed down diet of examinations only once across the entirety of the senior phase.
  - Oral and practical assessment opportunities using teacher professional judgement to better prepare young people for their future careers modelling best assessment practice from further and higher education.
  - A certificate for leavers in S4 which would reflect each learner's achievement using teacher judgement of both internally assessed and moderated elements, their literacy & numeracy SCQF level and core components reflecting the four capacities.

- Build capacity:
  - Consider the role of the RICs and how they could support assessment practice. There is an opportunity for these to become moderation and verification networks to support staff with professional judgements.
  - Increased staffing to enable a more varied curriculum in situ.

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- Empowerment CE Group

Participants

Peter Bain, HT, Oban High School, Tiree High School and Tiree Primary School, Argyll and Bute
Jonathan Cordiner, HT, Meiklemill School, Aberdeenshire
Campbell Hornell, HT, Lasswade High School, Midlothian
Barry Smith, HT, North West Community Campus, Dumfries and Galloway
Michelle Smith, HT, Pollokshields Primary, Glasgow
Michelle Wright, HT, St Catherine's Primary, Glasgow

Our Collaborative Enquiry Question

Our team came together with a shared interest in headteacher empowerment to consider the ways in which headteachers are and could be empowered. More importantly, we wanted to explore how a strong culture of empowerment could facilitate headteachers to be strong stakeholders, and influence decision making locally and nationally within Scottish Education. With this in mind, our Collaborative Enquiry question was:

In what ways can Head Teachers be empowered to work collegiately and efficiently to proactively influence decision making locally and nationally?

This question was explored through a series of semi-structured interviews with over forty stakeholders across Scotland and the UK. Our findings are supported by extensive academic research by the group.

Key Observations

There is a lack of clarity around the term 'Headteacher Empowerment' and consequently the systemic conditions required to establish a culture of empowerment. In practice, there is no shared understanding of the term. Consistent key themes emerged, however, around headteacher empowerment, including;
- contextualised and local decision-making with associated responsibility and accountability
- the necessity of a wider system and structure to support a school community
- collaborative working within and across schools
- working with partners and within a wider structure to contribute at a system level
- recognition that positive relationships between stakeholders are central to a successful system; 'trust' is commonly cited though our research

Context is crucial and 'one size does not fit all'; headteachers have a range of experience. There are 'empowered headteachers' in particular aspects of our work, e.g., aspects of Curriculum, Improvement Planning, Finance, Staffing and Recruitment where they are trusted to lead and make decisions on, but this is not consistent nationally or indeed locally. There appears to be a sectoral divide with Primary colleagues believing they are less empowered in these areas than those in Secondary. This may be related to leadership capacity issues that appear particularly acute in Primary.

Austerity related efficiencies across the system in recent years have limited the capacity of most headteachers, and their schools, to work in a sustained collaborative context with other schools and partners. The 'corporate' role most headteachers acknowledge they have within their Local Authority and Regional Improvement Collaborative is not a significant feature of their work.
Nevertheless, within the Covid-19 context, headteachers report a significant amount of collaborative working and local decision making, albeit in the context of current Scottish Government Guidance. In terms of headteacher empowerment this is potentially a silver lining in a heavy Covid-19 cloud.
 Headteachers, within this significantly narrower focus and less cluttered system, have in many instances worked collaboratively, accepted their responsibilities and accountabilities, and provided high quality leadership impacting positively within significantly challenging local contexts.
Headteachers interviewed are not positive about their place in the system. Almost all do not see all partners as contributing positively to an empowered system. Positive relationships are essential for a successful and improving system yet they are currently fragile. Themes that emerged through interviews is of a system that is:

- overly centralised and policy-led at national and political level
- highly politicised with often oppositional or antagonistic relationship between stakeholders
- not listening to headteachers at national policy making level
- lacking systemised, sustainable partnership working and the sense of a weak or non-existent collaborative role between schools and RICs
- lacking clarity and overly cluttered with too many fragmented strategies

There are a range of barriers to headteacher empowerment. These include:

- cultural barriers; our system is resistant to change, encourages conformity and lacks creative thinking. There is a lack of trust, of and by headteachers, in the system.
- structural barriers: our system is too cluttered, there are too many agencies/bodies/organisations. This causes confusion, results in overload, and impacts on the pace and quality of improvement. We have identified an issue around the off-loading of responsibility at times masquerading as empowerment. This usually does not result in positive outcomes
- austerity has limited capacity at school level; in effect staffing levels at school level are inconsistent and insufficient to allow headteachers to mobilise school resources to sustainably contribute to an empowered system; resource allocation across the system does not support headteacher empowerment. There is limited capacity for strategic thinking and/or sustainable collegiate or partnership working.
- short-termism; the system is dominated by short-term annual cycles of impact and accountability.
- Barriers vary geographically and are influenced by the size of a local authority as well as the structures in place. Larger local authorities can sustain a range of teams within their model to support headteachers and enable a focus on learning and teaching.

Almost all interviewed, as well as our research, believe that their view of headteacher empowerment would result in improved decision-making, as schools would be more responsive to their context, leading to better outcomes for children and young people.
Many headteachers want to play their part to nudge and influence the system, particularly as we emerge from the pandemic and in the context of the recent OECD Report and process of Reform. Headteacher empowerment must be part of the process of reform and improvement.

February 2023 Update/Afterword

Members of our Collaborative Enquiry have continued to engage on the topic of empowerment, this has included

- Empowerment session at Scottish Learning Festival in 2022
- Headspace Events, x 2, in 2022
- Development of Podcast series

This has allowed us to add to our Think Piece with a new and wider perspective.

Key Additional Observations

- The term 'empowerment' may not be a helpful term, particularly empowerment in relation to one 'agent' within the system as that may reinforce silo working, hierarchical systems, and command and control leadership styles
- The HT role in practice across the country and sectors is complex and significantly impacted upon by the local context, this makes the optimisation of the appropriate balance between localism and centralisation extremely difficult
- The desired outcomes for young people in our system are not clear, are overly complex and not necessarily shared and understood by all in our system

- Some of our key current practices actively contradict and/or undermine a connected and collaborative system; School Inspection and traditional School Metrics reinforce silo and short-term approaches where schools prioritise resources and approaches for 'quick-wins' within a public and semi-competitive perspective
- Professional learning opportunities are highly valued and may be a crucial aspect of changing the culture of our landscape and switching the mind-set of the 'agents' within our system

Key Additional Recommendations

- Reframe our thinking on empowerment in terms of a 'connected and collaborative system focussed on improved outcomes for all children and young people', and from a strategic perspective the associated 'systems leadership' that is required
- Synthesise responses to the National Discussion to support a clear and shared understanding of our purpose and therefore our systems 'common cause'; inspire us and give us hope
- Align the metrics of school and system accountability around sustained positive and productive destinations for school leavers
- Build upon the consultation phase of Education Reform, particularly the Hayward Model, to systemise and sustain opportunities to listen to school leaders as key agents within the system
- Remove key current practices that actively undermine our capacity to sustain a connected and collaborative system that supports improvement over the medium/long term, e.g., Inspection Grades
- Actively consider and adopt practical measures to rebalance the localism/centralisation dichotomy in favour of localism

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- Equality and Diversity CE Group

Participants

Claire McInally, HT, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, Glasgow
Judith Mohammed, HT, Oldmachar Academy, Aberdeen City
Wendy Cameron, HT, Broomhill Primary, Glasgow
James Kerr, HT, St. Paul's Primary (Whiteinch), Glasgow
Maureen Nugent, Formerly HT, St. Brendan's Primary, Glasgow (Education Scotland)

Background to Collaborative Enquiry

Through the Excellence in Headship (EiH) Stretch programme a group of experienced Headteachers came together with a common interest in examining equality in the context of their own school communities. This group which was a random choice from across Scotland, had four schools from the West End of Glasgow and one from Aberdeen City, collaborating to understand what equality means and working together to better understand this in terms of race. Although each of the school communities were unique in characteristics and contexts – St. Thomas Aquinas Secondary, Broomhill Primary, St. Brendan's Primary, St. Paul's Primary Glasgow and Oldmachar Academy, Aberdeen, we recognised that each of us could examine equality from our own perspectives.

Our Enquiry Question

In our collaborative group we collectively wanted to examine the question:

To what extent does amplifying BME voices increase racial literacy within a school community?

At our initial meeting we tried to organise our thinking into a question that would enable us to examine equality within each school context. We started to look at this through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory. Through this lens we were able to see that the goal which we wanted to achieve was to ensure that all children and young people, including and especially Black and Minority Young people, would feel confident within their place in school and society and that this was influenced by external and internal factors.

Our Professional Learning Journey

In our initial discussions it was clear that we had been moved by the recent racial tensions that had happened across the world and in our own country. With the killing of George Floyd and the rise of the 'Black Lives Matters' movement and the growing interest in decolonising the curriculum.

Within some of our settings there have been a number of racial incidents and a growing tension amongst the Black and Minority young people who wanted to talk about racial equality openly and freely. In some of our settings were keen to ensure that the growing number of Black and Minority young people felt affiliated to the school community. It was also identified that there was a growing need to ensure that the culture within each school enabled equality to develop and flourish and that Black and minority children felt represented within the school community.

In this context, we were particularly interested that 'The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights' stated that 'all teachers in Scotland should feel confident in building a curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse range of learners and improves relationships between children and young people…This can feel like a challenge when divisive influences, bias and stereotypes are present in our society.'

This led us to enquire about the role that schools play within a growing movement for equality. By examining the role of our schools within the society, and acknowledging that we had been influenced by the media, Politics and the Human Rights Movement, we decided that we must create an atmosphere in our schools which is open, accepting and where dialogue can take place.

Considerations

Clearly there is a need for strong and informed leadership and racial literacy at all levels of the education system.

Much work is required to achieve better outcomes for all our young people and for all young people to feel affiliated to their school community.

Much work is also needed to ensure that 'All teachers in Scotland should feel confident in building a curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse range of learners and improves relationships between children and young people'.

Much work is needed to increase racial literacy in our school communities and society.

How can we affect change at systems level to accelerate our progress in these areas? How can teachers and school leaders influence this more strongly in your view?

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- System Improvement CE Group

Participants

Lesley McCabe, HT, St Ninian's Primary School, Inverclyde Council
Mark Ingram, HT, Sacred Heart Primary and St Cuthbert's Primary, South Ayrshire Council
Gordon Bone, HT, formerly Prestwick Academy, South Ayrshire Council

Our Enquiry Question

Initially our question was: **'In what ways can support for children and young people be developed to ensure a better future for all?'**. Subsequently this evolved to be **'In what ways can professionals work together to ensure a better future for all?'** as we identified the critical importance of reciprocal and respectful working across Service areas.

How we got to our question

- Our experiences of interagency/professionals working together pre, during and post lockdown highlighted an aspect of our role we wanted to explore further with the aim of improving the effectiveness of cross system working to support children and families.
- We discussed the range of services involved in our particular schools, sharing the level of collaboration and agency each of us experienced in our own context.
- We kept returning to the Jesuit assertion that 'it takes a village to raise a child'. We shared honestly the challenges within this metaphor agreeing that there must be smarter ways of working.
- Cost was raised repeatedly as a blocker to achieving best outcomes for each child yet we acknowledged that genuine and effective collaboration across services was critical.
- We agreed that lessons learnt in the 'New Community Schools' initiative had, to some extent, been lost.
- We agreed that GIRFEC needed 'a light shone on it' again as in some senses, it appeared a collective eye had been taken off the ball and it was 'not as aligned as it should be'.
- We talked about how Systems leadership, to which we all aspire, should look, sound and feel 'on the ground' and used this as a catalyst in our enquiry.
- We agreed that every service wants to do the right thing but questioned; 'is this working as effectively as it c ould?'

Our professional learning journey

Our collaborative enquiry question stimulated us to look nationally and internationally at practice being developed for supporting children and young people and to ascertain how professionals were working together. Individually, we bring to the collaboration a rich and deep range of experiences from Primary and Secondary. Through dialogue, shared reflection and listening to each other thoughtfully and respectfully, we were able to share our experience, current practices and what we had identified from research.

Think Piece

 Our aim became:

- to find ways of achieving an integrated approach to meeting the needs of 'at risk' children and families with the aim of reducing over time, the number of families being referred to support services thus creating a more effective system respondent to needs
- to focus on the individual child, his or her family and the community

We believe we have a responsibility to meet each child's needs in the round with the key being integrated provision of services – teachers, social workers, health professionals, charities and others working as a single team.

Based upon our enquiry, we intend to

- Establish a link with one of the local authorities in England who are now implementing the 'What Works for Children's Social Care – Social Workers In Schools' project to ascertain further details of policy in action.
- Liaise with 'Schools as Learning Organisations', Wales to discover its impact on the larger learning system.
- Share our findings with relevant contacts within the Scottish system

Considerations

How we can work together as system leaders to achieve:

- Collective values driven leadership all focused on achieving national policy aspirations
- An open and robust culture of communication, support and challenge underpinned by trust, respect and a high level of organisational, collaborative, social and intellectual capital.
- Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge
- The development and delivery of high quality joint professional development to create deep partnerships

References/ Professional Learning Experiences

o Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential, Scot Gov. June 2020

o What Works for Children's Social Care – Social Workers In Schools: An Evaluation of Pilots in three local authorities in England, Cardiff University, May 2020

o Press Release – trial Testing Impact of School Social Workers extended to 21 areas, August 2020

o A Self-Improving School System: towards maturity, Hargreaves (NCSL, 2012)

o Coming back stronger: leadership matters : A UCL Centre for Educational Leadership (CEL) think piece intended to support schools leading learning into collaborative thinking, planning and action (April 2021)

o What makes a school a learning organisation? OECD 2016

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- School Recovery CE Group

Participants

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Collaborative Enquiry Question

What Lessons have been Learned from the Global Pandemic in order to 'Build Back Better' for everyone?

Inspiration for our Enquiry Question

Our collegiate enquiry into international research and literature on successful school systems identified a conundrum. It was evident that while Scotland has many similar systems and approaches to the highest performing countries, we perform less well in many respects. This led to examining our lived experience as headteacher leaders across our five different areas of Scotland (and seven schools). We aimed to identify why similar systemic approaches appeared to be resulting in less favourable outcomes for young people.

COVID, with unprecedented challenges in adapting pedagogical and leadership approaches, acted as a catalyst in acknowledging issues that limited getting the best for all children and families in a school community. The group explored together how we could genuinely 'build back better' and not revert to previous norms- learning from the positives experienced as a result of COVID challenges, including:

- More flexibility in the home learning curriculum, led by greater professional creativity and collaboration increasing teacher agency
- Home learning involving parents in deeper ways and more intense involvement with more vulnerable parents and families
- School becoming 'more than school' with direct, practical and strong support with the school at the centre of the community
- The role of digital technology in learning

Using our experience of being lead pedagogues alongside being the 'COVID headteacher' for the duration of the enquiry, we set out to unravel and 'surface' practices or systemic blocks that limit full benefit of existing systems. Through collaborative discussions of real-time experiences and discussions of difficulties we all faced in different schools and communities, the gap between rhetoric and reality became obvious. In the challenges and context of 'lockdown' and COVID times, there was a common realisation of previously unnecessary practices and the need to streamline processes.
However, we embraced the opportunity for change and the chance to do things differently seeing an opportunity to influence the education system with the common motivation not to lose the positives gained during the COVID pandemic.

Our Professional learning journey

The journey has been challenging in many ways. Remote communication was difficult due to technical issues as well as finding time and space for reflection. Remote networking was initially a barrier to building working relationships, avoiding being pulled to do the day job.

Our focus was 'building back better' and yet we were doing this whilst in the middle of a pandemic where everyday challenges often pulled us away from strategy and futures thinking. However, a wealth of current international research was available due to the global pandemic. Our own journey provided an opportunity to network locally, nationally and internationally in online sessions. This work helped in making informed decisions in the unprecedented challenges we faced each day and allowed us to discuss and consider the detail and practicalities in 'building back better'.

Situational Analysis: During Covid 19 Pandemic

Schooling
- Anecdotal evidence: Models are evolving due to the pandemic.
- Local Source: Lockdown learning provided a window into the classroom for parents (which many liked and now miss). Covid Recovery Group.
- National Source: "Skills development needs clear definitions and progression frameworks linked to knowledge acquisition and skills." Gorman, G.
- International Source: We need to "Build back equal". Jenkins, R. Unicef.

Leadership
- Anecdotal evidence: There have been additional responsibilities and altered roles due to the pandemic
- Local Source: Leadership at all levels must be nurtured by senior leadership team. Covid Recovery Group.
- National Source: The global pandemic is a litmus test of trust. BMJ.
- International Source: "When faced with a true crisis a strong organisational vision founded on clear values enables school leaders to respond in intentional and highly effective ways." McLeod, S. Dulsky, S. Resilience reorientation and reinvention.

Learning
- Anecdotal evidence: Varied experiences both positive and negative.
- Local Source: Internet and hardware issues negatively impacted learning. Hoddom, Hottsbridge and Eaglesfield PS.
- National Source: "For every £1 spent on students in state schools, roughly £3 goes on pupils in private education.". The Guardian Newspaper
- International Source: "For those from the bottom quartile of the socio-economic distribution, only 43% of students reported having a computer they could use for school-work" OECD

Curriculum
- Anecdotal evidence: Curriculum needs to be increasingly focused on core elements and creative in design.
- Local Source: Broad general education should be about learning how to learn and fostering a love of learning. Covid Recovery Group
- National Source: New pedagogies are needed for deeper learning. Fullan.M,
- International Source: Value people and processes over classrooms and devices.

Relationships
- Anecdotal evidence: Mental Wellbeing of School community is central.
- Local Source: We need connected learning.
- National Source: Ultimately the corona virus pandemic is an opportunity for parents and schools to realise what allies' parents can be.
- International Source: Embrace holistic and flexible learning interventions that enhance the multiple worlds of the learner. OECD.

Recommendations: Recovering Covid 19 Pandemic

Schooling
- Continue to ensure school is central in the community.
- Continue to focus on skills for learning, life and work.
- Develop locality planning leading to efficient use of resources.

Leadership
- Embrace the empowerment agenda: leadership at all levels.
- Leaders knowing the needs of their community and pushing for change.
- Professional dialogue with decision makers.

- Systems led leadership

Learning
- Education for parents/school community – understanding the why and the how of their children's education
- Easier access to digital platforms at home.

Curriculum
- Context driven funding.
- Declutter the curriculum.
- Encourage children's natural curiosity.
- Develop teacher agency.

Relationships
- Greater focus on staff, pupil and community mental wellbeing.
- Commitment to strong community partnerships.
- Homelink worker role centrally funded as standard.

Considerations

1. The role school leaders played in lockdown particularly brought a spotlight to the critical importance of school at the heart of the community, including: care, support, learning, mentally healthy relationships, tackling the effects of poverty head-on working in place-based ways. Can the benefits that accrued from the work on 'New Community Schools' be resurfaced (eg the role of home link workers in connecting home, community and school).

2. How can learning from the challenges and creative school and community actions in COVID be used to support tackling the poverty gap in concrete terms?

Teacher agency and the empowerment agenda can be experienced by headteachers as tokenistic. Yet in the COVID context, there were numerous examples of agency being demonstrated at all levels in the school community. How can this be captured and systemised to create dynamism and higher performing school systems?

Excellence in Headship Collaborative Enquiry Summary- System Collaboration CE Group

Participants

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Jamie Petrie, HT, Wardie Primary School, Edinburgh City Council

Collaborative Enquiry Question

What systems changes need to take place for Headteachers to enact their empowerment in a collaborative manner?

Inspiration for our Enquiry Question

As a group we discussed our own interests and areas to research. Once we had established these, the group split naturally into two. One group looked at the national perspective (Looking Inwards), the other the international (Looking Outwards).

Our Professional learning journey

The group each took on areas to research. We created a space on MS Teams to share our research and regularly met on Teams to update our research findings. Some members created a survey to ask fellow Head Teachers views on collaboration.

The group had a session with Professor Mark Priestly on their subject area. The group also attended numerous Education Scotland Stretch events with highly respected speakers. These collaborations and sharing of knowledge and experience helped to mould the group's thinking.

As a group of Head Teachers we set up a WhatsApp group. Whilst this was great for sharing information, the real strength of it was the support it offered each other. Professionally it was great, personally, it was crucial. The group meet regularly and actually in person during the Summer Holiday. There is no doubt that the collaboration between the group has significantly impacted our ability to do our jobs.

Think Piece

This was the most challenging aspect of the project. All of the research, both nationally and internationally, along with views from experts and fellow headteachers, shows that effective collaboration has the potential to significantly improve systems.

Our research and comparison to the highest performing countries showed that Scotland has everything in place to be at that table.

What it has shown is that even with the correct infrastructure, a system will struggle to improve without effective collaboration from the ground up. In Scotland we have a very top heavy support system with far too many layers between the Policy and the classroom. Each layer dilutes the information so by the time it gets to the very place that makes the most impact, much of the message is lost.

This raises the question, 'How Can We Change This?' The OECD Report (2021), Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence; Into The Future identified much of what we had discovered in our research.

Scotland has a fantastic vision. It has all the structures in place. What is missing is the opportunities for teachers to be given the time and space to effectively collaborate. Our teachers spend significantly more time teaching than their highest performing colleagues.

- We have a fantastic organisation responsible for learning (Education Scotland) yet every authority (and school) is 'reinventing the wheel'.

- We have a world leading process for ensuring our teachers are highly qualified through the GTCs.

- We have (to date) a body ensuring qualifications are robust and fit for purpose within the SQA.

- We have an organisation who ensure our care is excellent within our early years settings, The Care Inspectorate.

- We have an Initial Teacher Education Programme where Scottish student's get their tuition fees paid.

- On paper this is world leading. It can be argued that this is a more robust and effective system than some of the highest performing countries.

Considerations

In our professional opinion, and based upon our research, we would make the following recommendations to support more effective systems collaboration;

More coherence between the key bodies creating policy within the system. One such example would be to integrate the evidence of meeting the professional standards to be aligned within Education Scotland and to be part of the school self-evaluation process.

One of the key areas identified of most challenge was the difference between each of the 32 local authorities. As a national priority Education should be nationally funded so that every child in Scotland has the same access regardless of where they live.

We would recommend that Education Scotland produce clear and coherent curricular resources so that every child in Scotland has access to the same learning. It makes no business sense to have the same development work happening in every school when ultimately concepts to learn are the same everywhere. This is not an effective way for teachers to use their time. By decluttering, it will give teachers more time to collaborate and share practice.

We would recommend that headteachers, in partnership with Education Scotland, have opportunities to undertake supported school visits to validate and challenge. We would see this as a safe and effective way to lead improvements within the system rather than having external validation out with the system. Our vision would be a portal within Education Scotland to submit and share supported self-evaluation visits. In our opinion, doing this regularly would be more effective than a visit every 8-15 years. It would also be led by professionals who deliver on the ground, day in day out.

Finally, and most importantly. We would reduce the amount of time our teachers are in front of children and recommend that Regional Improvement Collaboratives work to support collaboration and professional research and learning opportunities for teachers to engage in across authorities. Linked to the Professional Standards, the accreditation for this process would feed into the Education Scotland Portal for school self-evaluation.

Next Steps

This process has been a voyage of discovery. We began EiH Stretch before the world was changed by a Global Pandemic. For the last 2 years the demands on schools and Head Teachers has been like no other time. As a system we changed the way we delivered our service overnight, led by headteachers in collaboration with teaching staff. This happened in every floor in every school, not through policy change or top down. It was highly successful and shows that the professionals on the floor make the most difference.

As a group we will continue to support each other. We plan to put in place what we have discovered during this journey. We will begin a programme of supported school evaluation where we visit each other's schools to validate or challenge identified areas within our School Improvement Plans.

If collaboration was the aim of the project, it has certainly been realised and we will likely collaborate for the rest of our time in education.

At Columba 1400, we are continually told that we are the group who can lead the change. If we give headteachers the task to make the change, just like with Home Learning, we will make the change. Empower us and collaboration will follow.