
UPDATE REPORT ON NORTHERN ALLIANCE REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE

BACKGROUND

The Northern Alliance is a Regional Improvement Collaborative [RIC] between eight local authorities, across the north and west of Scotland: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar [Western Isles], Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands. The Northern Alliance is committed to improving the educational and life chances of children and young people.

A Lead Officer has been appointed on a seconded basis to ensure that the Northern Alliance has clear strategic direction and to oversee collegiate working with clear expected outcomes. His role involves working with Scottish Government, Education Scotland, other RICs and other bodies in a variety of fora to represent the Northern Alliance at a national level. He has been very active across the Northern Alliance authorities since his appointment and has regular discussions with Directors/Heads of Service and Chief Executives. His role has continued to build on communications across the Alliance and increasingly to create opportunities for staff at all levels to influence work which will impact on young people. This has involved meeting with teachers and staff across the Northern Alliance to promote collaborative working and to hear the views of colleagues in determining priorities and ways that collaborative working will have an impact in classrooms and beyond.

Further work to reflect on developments with empowerment and ensuring digital approaches support effective working and learning are also in development. In addition, a Quality Conference is being organised for May 2014 to celebrate positive outcomes from the work across the Northern Alliance. Further details will be provided in due course.

To date the Northern Alliance continues to make overall good progress. The Lead Officer has met with all workstream leads to discuss progress and a mechanism for providing evidence of impact. The workstreams are:

- **Emerging Literacy workstream:**
 - 344 primary schools are involved in the workstream.
 - School support consists of initial whole-day training (for new schools) and six network sessions throughout the year (for all schools).
 - There is a skeleton school improvement plan insert for the 18/19 session which can be used by schools, following their self-evaluation, and linked to the whole-school Emerging Literacy audit.

- Practitioners have access to online resources to support the observation/ assessment of and planning for learning in early literacy, language and communication.
 - Practitioners have access to and are signposted to online training resources which can be used as part of whole-school CPD.
 - There is an Early Level Literacy and English progression framework linked to the Benchmarks. This is being woven into the network sessions.
 - The Emerging Literacy workstream is in the process of working with early years, school, educational psychology and allied health professional teams at local level to plan for sustainability of the approach into the 19/20 session and beyond.
 - An interim review of this work has produced very positive impact and results. This has been published as a separate report.
- **Numeracy workstream:**
 - NA Numeracy Progression completed and made available to schools (Early, First, Second Levels).
 - A lead officer for numeracy is working with colleagues across the Alliance to discuss approaches for learning and teaching in numeracy.
 - General agreement that each LA shares good practice and is currently identifying key areas for collaborative support.
 - Baseline data collected from P3 and P4s in Dec'17 using assessments. This is being used to provide evidence and benchmarking for improvement events and professional development.
- **1 +2 Modern Languages workstream:**
 - Developing 1+2 in secondary BGE – building on last year's Scotland wide languages roadshows and sharing and comparing models across authorities.
 - Started to share NA models and strategic documents to support schools.
 - Planning development of sustainable training to meet the varying needs of primary teachers.
 - Gathering of authority strategies to identify baseline of activity (using Government Survey responses and Insight data to establish current picture and measuring improvement).
 - Identification of key workstreams for 1+2 this session including P1-S3 entitlement, Developing Young Workforce/business links, Transition, Professional Learning.
 - Establishing collaboration and partnerships: Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, Education Scotland, University of Highlands and Islands, Initial Teacher Education and Aberdeen University.
 - Trialling development of smarter communication – using 'Teams' on Glow.
- **Community Learning and Development workstream:**
 - Across the workstream smaller groups are analysing data / information and measurements.
 - The group is identifying how they might target family learning within each of the Local Authorities.
 - Link in with Emerging Literacy to explore interdependencies.

- **Leadership Development workstream:**
 - Development group established with all NA LAs represented.
 - 3 meetings (including 1 in Orkney).
 - Leadership frameworks discussed and developing.
 - Leadership development strategy for NA being developed.
 - Practical professional development tools and resources to be developed
 - Practical leadership development events and digital approaches being developed at the moment.

- **Systems Development workstream:**
 - Group reconstituted with new members have met to discuss the school element of this workstream.
 - Have agreed in principal a way forward to support improvement by collaborating on a common approach to evaluative language and a means of developing a shared understanding and expectations of standards. How Good Is Our School 4 to be used as our supporting framework.
 - Discussion has taken place with our Education Scotland Regional Advisor to plan the delivery of this involving QIOs and HTs from across the Northern Alliance.
 - Discussion around sharing our different approaches and local agreements to classroom observations.
 - Yammer group set up for those involved in this workstream as a means to communicate quickly and share any documentation etc.
 - Some piloting of quality improvement support for schools has involved colleagues across NA as a means to begin to share approaches, practice and develop shared standards etc.

- **Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)**
 - Early Years Lead and Early Year Improvement Advisor in post from 1/10/18 until 31/03/2020. Both posts are 0.6FTE.
 - A NA brief for infrastructure projects has been delivered. All other improvement plan actions are ongoing.
 - Individual meetings with LAs to discuss progress/challenges with delivering the expansion.
 - Representing NA at National ELC Partnership Forum.

- **Data Sharing and Performance workstream:**
 - Continues to work constructively with Education Scotland to take forward a new process for sharing and interrogating data.

- **Equalities workstream:**
 - LGBTI group has presented at the Scottish Learning Festival.
 - It has been decided however to open out this group to make it a wider Equalities workstream. The young people themselves have asked that we have some way of identifying and supporting group practice in schools, so that this can be spread across the NA and are keen to work with us on a Charter Mark for equalities.

- **Children’s Services and Children’s Services Planning workstreams:**
 - The Northern Alliance is evaluating the aforementioned workstreams to consider whether it would be more effective to merge the two programmes.
 - The collaborative is also reviewing group membership and looking to identify a sponsor and lead for Children’s Services and refreshing the agreed purpose of the workstream.

- **E-learning workstream:**
 - Shetland Islands’ Council and Highland Regional Council have appointed staff to the e-Sgoil Management Team.
 - The team is currently standardising policies, practices and procedures in order to avoid duplication of effort and ensure that inter-authority delivery is as efficient and streamlined as possible:
 - QA procedures
 - Internet Safety Policy e-Learning
 - Pupil, School and e-Sgoil Contract
 - E-Sgoil Handbook
 - E-Sgoil Improvement Plan
 - Working group to develop digital learning pedagogy.
 - Working closely with the GTC and EIS to ensure that all practices and documentation comply with national guidelines and agreements.

- **Sustaining Education**
 - The Sustaining Education in Communities Conference was held on 14th September in Inverness and brought a range of stakeholders together to try and better understand the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention, falling school rolls as well as new models that will enrich rural communities. This workstream is now named ‘Sustaining Education In Our Communities’ and will look to develop agreed principles, sharing good practice and identifying supportive collaboration opportunities. The lead officer has been appointed in January 2019 to take forward this important area. An event is also planned for February 2019 at Holyrood to provide an opportunity for MSPs to be involved in understanding the approaches that we are undertaking.

- **Rural Poverty workstream:**
 - This area is building on previous work and ensure that research reflects the breadth of the Northern Alliance, including developing a practical metric approach for assessing poverty related issues. This practical work is to reflect the unique aspects relating to rural poverty in the Northern Alliance and to work with colleagues in Scottish Government on producing a new method of recognising and measuring such poverty and how this relates to funding and improving outcomes.

- **Additional Developments**

The Northern Alliance is developing a range of areas of work which supplements our workstreams. These include:

- Producing support for secondary curricular areas
- Using data and evidence to identify areas within the Northern Alliance where structured and systematic support can be targeted to assist in improvement
- Seconded workstream leads have been appointed now for Sustaining Education, Rural Poverty, Maths/numeracy, School and System Improvement and research support. This is as a result of the Scottish Government funding. Start dates are currently being agreed.
- A Northern Alliance Secondary Head Teachers' Group has been established to take forward agreed areas of work for curriculum development, raising attainment and professional development.
- Working with Aberdeen University on creating a teacher hub where both physical and virtual opportunities to support teachers' professional development is on offer.
- Continuing to build the empowerment agenda throughout the workstreams.

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