

REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVES: GUIDANCE ON DEVELOPING REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Background and Introduction

1. The June 2017 publication Education Governance: Next Steps document set out the Scottish Government's proposals for an empowered school led system which is constantly striving to improve and to deliver our vision of excellence and equity for every child in Scotland to thrive.

2. These proposals clearly recognised that such an empowered school led system will need excellent, easily accessible, improvement support which is aligned to the National Improvement Framework and informed by performance data. It is clear that whilst such improvement support is available in some parts of the country, this is not consistently the case.

3. Six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) are being established, with the clear purpose of bringing together a range of professionals with a relentless focus on supporting teachers, and a range of other staff who provide support to improve children and young people's educational attainment. Each RIC will include access to sector and subject specialists. It may also include other expertise to reflect local priorities. They will provide carefully targeted and well-judged advice and support in order to drive improvement. In doing so, they will make use of all available evidence and data. They will help to ensure that staff access the practical improvement support they need, when they need it.

Education Bill consultation-Regional Improvement Collaboratives

4. The legislative underpinning of RICs is the subject of consultation as part of the wider Education Bill. In particular, the potential for a requirement set out in legislation that local authorities participate in RICs. The outcome of the consultation process will inform how RICs continue to develop.

Design and Implementation Progress

5. Since June this year Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Local Government have worked closely together through a joint Steering Group to develop an agreed model of how RICs could work effectively, whilst at the same time retain local and national accountability. The report produced by the Steering Group has secured the agreement of the Deputy First Minister and COSLA Leaders.

6. A key component of that agreement is that each RIC will formulate its own regional improvement plan. The Steering Group were clear that the RICs were about all partners working differently, as well as about securing "additionality" through collaboration, thereby protecting against displacement or replication of activity. This should be borne in mind in developing plans which will be based on a robust process of analysis and sound prioritisation. It will draw on existing school improvement plans and local authority improvement plans and the forthcoming national improvement plan which will be published in December 2017. Each plan should be agreed with the Chief Inspector of Education. Support and challenge from

within the collaborative teams and from Education Scotland Regional Lead Officers will ensure that each of the regional improvement plans take account of all available evidence on performance, and that the selection of educational strategies and interventions is appropriate to the particular regional context.

7. Once regional plans are in place, it will be important for each RIC to develop a sound communications and engagement strategy in order to ensure it is clear to schools how they can best access the improvement support they need.

Key Principles to inform Regional Improvement Plans

8. It is very important that RICs have a degree of flexibility in order that their regional improvement plan reflects appropriately the needs and improvement priorities of the schools they support. A number of key principles should inform regional improvement planning. Each plan should indicate clearly how the RIC intends to reduce inequalities, target improvement in the four national priorities from the NIF.

9. The Scottish Government, Local Government and Education Scotland have agreed that plans should reflect the functions set out in their joint Steering Group report. However, it is understood that an iterative process may be necessary before every collaborative reaches a position where the full range of functions are reflected in their plan. Over time, plans should:

- reflect the full range of functions agreed by the Local Government/Scottish Government Steering Group (copy included in annex A);
- be based on a detailed analysis of all available evidence on educational performance within the region;
- draw on data and information from other key sources such as health, justice and local community planning information;
- make clear how schools will access the support for improvement they require;
- make clear to headteachers what is being provided by the RIC, what is being provided by their individual local authority, and where to go for specialist advice;
- support continuous improvement in curriculum design and development, including literacy and numeracy and other national priorities, such as STEM, 1 + 2 languages, DYW and the Learner Journey;
- be underpinned by a clearly understood approach to improvement/theory of change/change model;
- include clear information about how the RIC will go about measuring progress/the impact of the plan;
- be designed in a 'bottom-up' manner, based on the needs and improvement priorities of schools;
- outline clearly how key partners such as parents, communities, third sector and young people have contributed to the development of the plan;
- include how priorities will be delivered and outline the professional learning offer from the collaborative;
- include subject specific support and advice across all eight curriculum areas, for example through networks of teachers;

As the first step towards this, initial Regional Improvement Plans due to be developed by 30 January 2018 should set out regional priorities for improvement and approaches to address them taken from existing school, local authority and NIF plans. There should also be a clear indication of how the RIC will take forward work to develop their plan further through additional analysis and consultation. A further iteration of the Regional Improvement Plan would then be expected in the Autumn of 2018.

Format

10. The format of the plans is flexible and it is anticipated that each Regional Improvement Lead will formulate a plan suited to local needs. No template will be issued; however it is expected that all plans will take account of the key principles outlined above.

RICs Staffing and Workforce

11. Schools will be able to draw on a range of expertise and targeted support to address identified need through their RIC. The required support may be delivered by their local authority, Education Scotland, third sector or other sources such as Speech and Language Therapists or other NHS Allied Professionals. RICs will add value by bringing a collective focus to driving continuous and system wide improvement, particularly in relation to raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. They will demonstrate, strengthen and support collaborative working, innovation and the sharing of best practice between schools and across traditional local authority boundaries.

12. Each RIC will be required to develop a workforce plan which flows from its improvement plan. Across local authorities and their partners, a wide range of expertise exists with the potential to contribute to the staffing of the RICs and mapping this out across each region will help to identify where this expertise lies. The allocation of staff to specific activities within the plan is an important part of the workforce plan and this includes leadership time and capacity. As well as including the time allocation for the regional improvement leader, this may also include the time commitment from key staff such as workstream leaders.

13. Each workforce plan will be considered as part of the process of approval by the Chief Inspector of Education to ensure that the RIC has the capacity to deliver, at pace, the range of activity within the improvement plan. It is expected that the both the initial Regional Improvement Plan and the reviewed plan which will follow in the Autumn will be appropriately resourced to deliver the agreed improvement priorities each has set out. All contributors, including Education Scotland, have a key role to play in resourcing the work of each RIC.

Education Scotland

14. Education Scotland has a number of staff with expertise in curriculum or specialist areas. Regional needs identified through the improvement planning process will determine how these resources are deployed. A new Corporate Plan

with a strong focus on reducing inequity in educational outcomes through collaborative working is currently under development. It will outline the key aspects of Education Scotland's regional offer, including support for practitioners and leaders to develop their own knowledge and skills; and support for system-wide collaboration.

15. At present Education Scotland has nine national priority programmes. This will be significantly streamlined. Most staff will be allocated specific activities within regional improvement plans for set amounts of time, based on their skills and experience. Most of the work of the agency will be planned in a responsive way, reflecting the needs of the RICs.

16. Education Scotland has identified a Regional Lead Officer (RLO) for each of the six RICs. Each RLO is an HMI with experience of working effectively with Directors of Education. They will provide support and challenge to Regional Improvement Leads as they embark on improvement planning and workforce planning. RLOs will coordinate Education Scotland's contribution to the work of the RICs.

17. Education Scotland is committed to investing in the professional learning of key members of staff within RICs. The functions currently carried out by SCEL will facilitate the development of a suite of professional learning resources which will form part of the regional offer.

18. Given the geographical challenges associated with collaborative working across local authority boundaries, Education Scotland is anticipating the use of a digital platform. The use of Glow will deliver a range of benefits, including reduction of administration/IT overheads for RICs.

Timing

19. Regional Improvement Leads are now in place for each RIC and key Education Scotland staff have been identified to provide support and challenge. Given that the primary purpose of the RICs is to support schools and teachers in the delivery of educational improvement, the views and priorities of schools will be crucial in developing the plans. The improvement plans of RICs should flow from those identified by individual schools, both through Local Authorities and as part of the National Improvement Framework process. Each RIC must also consult with schools and wider interests on the continuing development of their improvement plan and their workforce plan.

20. Initial plans must be agreed by the Chief Inspector of Education by the end of January 2018 in alignment with National Improvement Framework timescales. There should be a clear indication of how the RIC will take forward work to develop their plan further through additional analysis and consultation with a further iteration of the Regional Improvement Plan expected in the Autumn of 2018.

Agreed functions for Regional Improvement Collaboratives

The Steering Group agreed that the following functions are undertaken by all ICs:

- Identify **priorities** for improvement within the region, based on an **analysis** of all available evidence on educational performance within the region, including school attainment data, and consideration of the priorities set out in the **National Improvement Framework (NIF)**.
- Formulate a **regional improvement plan**, based on the process of analysis and prioritisation mentioned above, and drawing on school improvement plans, local authority improvement plans and the national improvement plan. The plan should be agreed with the Chief Inspector of Education, to both ensure that it takes account of all available evidence on performance, and to support and challenge the selection of the educational strategies and interventions. 'Next Steps' refers to this plan being an annual requirement for all ICs. **The Steering Group discussed whether it would be preferable to require three year regional plans, with a clear commitment for an annual review of performance.** This would empower colleagues to tackle more systemic change and to develop more substantive and sustainable programmes of work, whilst retaining a clear commitment to pace and delivery. It would also match the three year budget planning timeframe within local authorities which could help unlock new ways of allocating resource to improvement activity. **It is proposed that this is considered alongside the current legislative requirements for annual reporting on the National Improvement Framework.**
- Enhance and improve **professional learning** for teachers, other professionals and key partners within the region, within a national framework, to ensure delivery on identified local priorities.
- Ensure that an appropriate **range of support, interventions and programmes** are in place to raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap within the region. This should include proportionate and tailored support to schools and early learning and childcare providers.
- **Identify, promote and share good practice** in learning, teaching and assessment within the region, and with other regions. This should operate at all levels, and include developing networks of teachers and other professionals to share good practice, through **peer-to-peer and school-to-school collaboration**. These networks should include subject or sector specialisms across the region and build on areas identified for improvement, ensuring an appropriate level of challenge is injected into these groupings.
- Support schools **to interpret and implement key educational developments** and insights gained from research.

- Ensure and enhance **subject-specific support and advice** across all eight curriculum areas, with a clear focus on literacy and numeracy and the areas of improvement identified for that region, and their contribution to attainment.
- Facilitate access to **sector-specific support and advice** which may include areas such as early learning, Gaelic Medium Education, and additional support for learning.
- Build capacity in **improvement methodology**, through review, collaboration and shared approaches. This will include working with local authorities to ensure appropriate support is in place for schools to 'manage change' successfully through training, support, peer review and challenge.
- Take a **regional approach to supporting staffing challenges**, including recruitment and retention; promoting shared approaches to building capacity and securing improvement.
- Work with local authorities and other partners to **support wider collaborative working** across the 'system', including education, social work, health, Community Planning Partnerships and others to ensure that together, 'we get it right for every child'.

The Steering Group agreed that the following functions should be tailored to local needs by individual ICs:

- The '**improvement offer**' should be proportionate depending on school performance and capacity for self-improvement. Within a region, some schools may need a 'light touch' approach and others may need more significant support or intervention to secure improvement. It will therefore be the responsibility of the IC, in collaboration with the constituent local authorities, schools and other local partners, to determine the nature of activity and how that is delivered in practice.
- Following on from this, it should be the responsibility of each individual IC to decide on their '**model of staff deployment**', to ensure they are able to deliver on the core functions and agreed priorities.
- Each IC will have a different starting point as they consider how best to deliver on the core activity and priorities. It is anticipated that all the ICs will develop over time and that in order to secure real improvement, each IC will need to **test new and different ways of working** to assess the impact on improvement in their area. What works in one area may not work in another. Whilst all ICs should encourage innovation, there will need to be flexibility and variation in the approaches taken.

Once regional plans are in place, it will be important for each IC to **simplify and clarify the landscape to avoid any confusion in schools and learning centres**, in terms of where to go for different types of improvement and support. This will be particularly important for headteachers given their changing role and responsibilities, as well as by other professionals, who will need clarity as to what is being provided

by the IC, what is being provided by their individual local authority, and essentially where to go for specialist advice.