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Reflections on the West Partnership Recovery to Renewal: Reimagining the Future

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The Robert Owen Centre (ROC) for Educational Change, University of Glasgow, hosts the Network for Social and Educational Equity (NSEE). NSEE works with schools and their communities to co-produce work that meets the specific needs of each locality.

NSEE is a 'collaborative intervention' rather than a quick fix. It is designed to impact on student outcomes by investing in high quality professional learning and leadership development. This is a flexible sustainable model.

We use research evidence and data to empower teachers, school leaders and other key stakeholders within the network to lead change and build capacity within their own setting.

NSEE builds on previous research and development initiatives within Scotland, the UK and beyond that have worked. The approach focuses on:

- data use and collaborative enquiry
- building relationships and trust
- embedding and extending activities
- sustaining new ways of working so they become part of everyday practices.

NSEE focuses on the positive by identifying and mobilising people and organisations and by playing to the local community's strengths. This might include activating and extending local networks and drawing on external expertise. It combines structured collaboration with integrated school improvement planning.

The use of research evidence, data and collaborative enquiry to understand what works and why are key to the NSEE approach.

NSEE shifts assumptions and expectations of students, staff and the community. It encourages positive attitudes to learning, enhances school culture and builds stronger relationships with wider communities.

Contents

Acknowledgements 5

Executive Summary 6

1.Context 7

2. Key Findings 7

On a design-based approach 7

On building effective networks – key enablers 8

On key features which enabled progress - achievements and successes 9

On challenges to progress and constraints on network effectiveness 12

3. Reflections on Key Research Questions on West Online School (OS) and Improving Our Classrooms (IOC) 15

Has West OS built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved? 15

Has IOC built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved? 19

4. Conclusion 23

Key learning/themes and critical reflection 23

Key research questions and critical reflection 23

5. From Recovery to Renewal – Reimagining the Future 28

REFERENCES 30

APPENDIX - TECHNICAL REPORT 30

West Partnership evaluation survey 34

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the West Partnership (WP) Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) with **the findings from an external evaluation on its response to the pandemic through its Interim Action Plan,** (January – August 2021). The main aim of the evaluation was to address four co-produced key research questions, which centre on the contribution of the WP to the local authorities (LAs) in their efforts to build-back better, the impact of the WP response on the nature and type of collaboration across the RIC and the extent to which Improving our Classrooms (IOC) and West Online School (OS) have built collective agency to drive improvement in schools.

The **key findings** suggest that the WP has **'come into its own**' during the pandemic. It has been able to **respond agilely and flexibly to the interests and needs of the system and practitioners** within. There has been a **notable shift**, [since our previous evaluation, February 2021], in the **culture and ethos of collaboration as relationships have become embedded and increased trust established amongst the key stakeholders.** There's growing evidence of **transformative systems change**, through **West OS**. There are also other examples of WP **networks**[1] **building collective agency and capacity that otherwise would not have existed, adding value to the local authorities** (LAs) in their efforts to build-back-better, which has translated **into significant leadership and learning and teaching developments to drive improvement**. Put simply, the WP is exhibiting the characteristics of what has been described as a Networked Learning System (ICEA, 2020).

The key features which have enabled workstream progress and network effectiveness are: **changes to the internal architecture to streamline the workstreams** (Ws) into three, with a reduced number of priorities; **responsiveness of the WP to sector needs (**including a rapid, successful move to online delivery) and **WP building effective networks** through, **structure providing focus, a common or shared purpose; collaborative and networked learning, and transparent processes which rely on key capacities in individuals to perform particular roles.**

Key features which have presented challenges or slowed workstream progress and network effectiveness, (outwith the pandemic) are: **sustaining the eco-system**, (this is mainly in relation to the impacts of the secondment model); **network membership 'churn**', a **lack of clarity of goals, and roles** of workstream members, in a minority of network groups; key messages and ideas **reaching teachers**; **follow-through on impact** on practitioners and in the classroom; **communications between and across networks** and **perceived WP expectations of LA input and engagement.**

With relatively limited resources, the WP has made **a significant contribution to the LAs efforts to build-back better**; evidenced in **added value and driving improvement in services and schools**. There is increasing evidence that this is now penetrating classrooms through interventions such as improving our classrooms. The WP has provided a **safe and supportive environment conducive to effective collaboration in sharing and developing knowledge, practice, and resources** during the pandemic. West OS has had a **significant impact on learning and teaching** and the system more broadly in Scotland. The IOC programme has had **a significant impact at various levels within and across the system**; through improvement in learning both in and out of school, including enhanced

[1] We use the term `network(s)` throughout the report, unless otherwise indicated, to capture all WP activity.

learning for the LA officers involved. This has made a difference to learner experiences in classrooms. A key point for reflection is how the WP will be able to maintain and extend impact, building on the momentum gained during this period into the future.

1. Context

The global pandemic brought severe disruption and unprecedented challenges to education systems across the world. The impacts of the pandemic on health and wellbeing, interrupted learning, if not loss, and increased equity gaps for the most marginalised learners in Scotland are well documented (c.f Scottish Government, 2021). Whilst this necessitated agile action by each of the eight local authorities in the west of Scotland, the West Partnership (WP) Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) was able to harness the power of its unique liminal space in the middle tier, by catalysing 'creative disruption' and galvanising the system to a place, where otherwise, it would have taken years to get to.

This report provides insights into the response of the WP through its interim Action Plan (January – August 2021) to the pandemic, which draws on evidence collected for the external interim evaluation of that period. However, we have allowed for some flexibility in our timeframe as participants, were keen to acknowledge WP achievements, which were initiated or occurred just outwith then. In addition, the research framework was predicated on two phases, which unfortunately due to unavoidable delays in collecting the data, meant the second phase had to be postponed. Therefore, the `findings` have been updated where possible and appropriate.

The main aim of the evaluation was to provide a narrative of the WP's response to the pandemic and recovery, addressing four key research questions developed in conjunction with WP leadership. These questions focus on the contribution of the WP to the local authorities in their efforts to build-back better, the impact of the WP response on the nature and type of collaboration across the RIC and the extent to which Improving our Classrooms (IOC) and West Online School (OS) have built collective agency to drive improvement in schools.

This report is structured into five chapters. In the first, we provide the context for the evaluation, in the second we present an overview of the key findings. The third offers some reflections on the key research questions on West OS and IOC and in the fourth chapter we conclude with some critical reflection on key learning/themes and key research questions, drawing out some issues for consideration and possibilities for the WP to drive improvement. The final chapter offers some ideas to stimulate further WP thinking around 'Reimagining the Future`.

2. Key Findings

On a design-based research approach

The WP 'Learning system' was developed around a set of principles and processes, including the use of appropriate evidence to act as a 'key lever of innovation and system improvement', drawing on a range of literature, outlining the impacts of such an approach, (e.g., Fullan, 2013; Chapman et al.; and Chapman& Hadfield, 2010). It is unfortunate that the Collaborative Learning Networks (CLN) established by the WP, were at a pivotal point when the pandemic hit, which mitigated against school-to-school visits. However, much of the approach and underpinning theory lends itself to the concept of the Networked Learning System (ICEA, 2020) and will be explored through West OS, (pp.15-18). Some of those aspects of collaborative learning and practitioner inquiry continued throughout the pandemic in the Virtual Leadership Networks (VLNs) and IOC. The HT Learning Sets (HTLS) are another example of the WP

Learning system adapting to LA needs at the time by being implemented in a more local, contextualised way. The remainder of this section reflects on the key features which made the WP networks effective, and which led to many identifiable achievements and successes.

On building effective networks – key enablers

Much of the literature on 'building effective networks' focuses on aspects of structure (S), purpose (P) (and agency) and process (P). (McGuire, 2003; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Nowell & Kenis, 2019). Effective networks are often characterised by high levels of cohesion, strength of connections and good communications. Similarly, one of the key features identified in network literature to achieve those are the key capacities evident in the network (or absent from it): leadership, coordination, facilitation, internal research, and external research, partners. The following discussion reflects on the 'operation' of the networks in the WP and those key enabling features within (the loosely based) Network S-P-P paradigm.

Network Structure – the focus of the network was a key enabler for those interviewed. They appreciated the uniform approach to using the same framework in each network, in that each had to collectively agree a small number of priorities, how to take them forward and how success would be measured. These were self-generating in the sense they originated in LA priorities. This 'drilling-down' of priorities and increased focus was contrasted with how some of the original WP groups operated and established their aims/goals. This was not mentioned as a criticism but as an observation of the RIC still in its 'infancy' and how the WP had progressed. Some participants mentioned they felt 'empowered' by this approach, as it led to a sense of ownership.

The focus of the network determined its aims or goals, and these were different for each network, but underpinned by a common vision in relation to the overarching WP strategic vision and goals. Health and wellbeing focus also underpinned activity in each of the workstreams, some with specific dedicated activity, others with a more nuanced approach. The composition of the networks reflected their focus, but there was a general belief that they weren't 'just talking shops'; what was said was listened to and informed decision making, because those involved had a certain level of authority within the system. This also, to an extent, influenced roles and responsibilities within the network. Individual perceptions of the network environment, as cited above, suggests improved self-efficacy and participation in decision making. In addition, some network members belonged to national networks, therefore there was a collective benefit from having that national perspective, which could be applied in a local context. This was seen to be particularly beneficial in terms of current government reviews and reports, e.g., in aspects of Additional Support Needs (ASN) and Personal and Social Education (PSE) provision.

Network Purpose – There was a belief that common or shared purpose increased collaboration to achieve greater consistency in the approach across the LAs. There was an opportunity to share learning and develop collectively and a sense of empowerment in using the network as suited the participants best. This was particularly demonstrated through impact on staff wellbeing across the system in trying to drive forward improvement but in a much more measured way during the pandemic. Participants felt the WP was providing the tools and strategies to deal with the challenges of the pandemic e.g., leadership in an online environment featured quite strongly.

The VLNs` members were very clear on how initial training on e.g., Microsoft Teams (MT) led to more effective leadership in schools at the time. Similarly, there were many references to

shared learning through the networks regarding Covid directives. Those in ASN schools were particularly aware of the benefits of collaboration with similar schools across the WP, such as capacity building, increased knowledge and skills and access to resources.

Network Process – Effective network processes should, and did, create opportunities for collaboration, co-creation and knowledge mobilisation, as highlighted previously and in the following section. Network capacities were also vital to enabling network effectiveness, demonstrated through the leadership, management, and coordination of the networks, initially, through the WLOs. However, as the networks grew and progressed, they were able to use their reticulist abilities to identify those best-placed to perform certain roles e.g., in West OS, (but not limited to that network). Other capacities required for engaging system leaders during the recovery period of the pandemic, were motivational, in promoting positive mindsets in a supportive environment e.g., in VLNs, and HTLS. Facilitation was also crucial as part of that environment; training was co-delivered by the WP and ES for some HTs in the VLN to perform their role effectively online and by the WP and Mudd Partnership for the HTLS. This built individual and systems' capacity and demonstrable network achievements and successes across the three workstreams. High levels of cohesion are associated with trust, and this is evident across the WP networks during this period. Participants felt confident that they could openly share concerns or 'wicked issues', ideas, and practice, in a safe and supportive environment. It also meant that some, particularly from the smaller LAs didn't feel as isolated during the extremely challenging time of the pandemic, as they were able to access a much wider group of similarly placed colleagues. This led to further embedding of relationships and increased collaborative activity in e.g., sharing and developing joint-practice and co-creation of resources.

Cohesion was partly enabled by the Workstream Lead Officer (WLO) and LA Leads, playing various roles, but also by accessibility of MT as the main communication vehicle. It was also dependent on the origins, (some had existing relationships, either through previous WP involvement or their LA), focus and make-up of the network. There were other indications that open-mindedness of individuals played a role in fostering cohesion. Where this was evident it translated into a culture of honesty, and transparency. Workstream leads (WP and LA) played a key role in effecting good communications, partly through their coordination activity, but also by responsiveness to collective and individual queries. In some instances, WP network – LA communications were enhanced by LAs embedding a WP communications strategy in individual officers' roles.

On key features which enabled progress - achievements and successes

The following interrelated key themes highlight the progress of the WP, in what can only be described as exceptional times:

- **Internal Architecture** – the streamlining of the WP into three workstreams, with reduced number of priorities**,** has been beneficial to the WP Networks in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic, in that there has been clearer direction and increased focus. Action Plans and Outcome Trackers have provided a structure for well-defined progress against priorities.

- **Networked Learning** – West OS most obviously evidence this. This teacher-led response to the challenges of the pandemic is one of the major achievements of the WP. There have been positive impacts upon staff and learners. Staff have been 'upskilled' in digital pedagogy and practices and learners have been able to access

learning out of school at a time which suits them. This transformational approach to online schooling and systems leadership West OS also provided opportunities for school practitioners to become digital leaders in the system. This achievement was enabled by teacher responsiveness and commitment, individuals driving the development forward, strategic direction and support and good external partner relationships. The WP core team was crucial to the successful implementation and roll-out of this initiative across Scotland.

- **Developing Agency and Collective Capacity** – this goes beyond sharing of practice and ideas, although there are many examples of this and the positive impacts of such. However, there is a belief that networking with people from and across other local authorities has led to a sense of 'validation' and confidence in approach, and in some cases to developing joint practice. This confidence and feeling of agency, also in part, led individuals to be more creative by trying new approaches in practice, e.g., in health and wellbeing. HTs were also keen to stress the benefits of 'collaborative learning' and impact on leadership capacity and style. Sharing of practice, data, and research to develop baseline evidence helped to inform and drive improvement across LAs and in turn, schools. School senior leaders believed that their experience in WP networks, e.g., the VLNs, had added value to their respective LA and impacted on their school improvement planning. This was enabled by refining focus on improvement priorities around responses to the pandemic, which had been ratified by Education Scotland (ES). This was also due to feeling more autonomous and empowered to make decisions and, in that regard, built agency to drive improvement in school by working with other schools (outwith LA). Collective capacity has been built by responding to the needs of networks and groups within, by offering bespoke training and discussion sessions e.g., in the Learner Wellbeing Network. These led to the co-creation of outputs such as, CLN Transition Storyboards and Case Studies. Furthermore, the Microsoft training which many had received through the VLNs, and West OS was of note in supporting HTs/DHTs in the initial stages of the pandemic and beyond. This 'digital upskilling' was then cascaded to other staff in schools.

- **The IOC Programme`s** focus on self-evaluation and quality improvement to increase attainment and achievement at classroom level was seen as building agency and capacity in empowering classroom teachers and developing high-quality learning and teaching, in addition to moving knowledge round the system, (pp. 19–22).

- **WP Responsiveness to Sector Needs** – this was commented on in relation to the WLOs` openness and willingness to listen to ideas and suggestions from network members and respond accordingly in adjusting the professional learning on offer. This was mentioned particularly (outwith West OS) in relation to the Health and Wellbeing Networks, Senior Phase Assessment and Moderation Network and Virtual Leadership Networks, but not exclusively so.

- **The VLNs** were perceived as crucial in providing a supportive and safe environment to meet the needs of leaders (HTs/DHTs) to address the challenges of the pandemic. This peer collaboration also allowed for space to reflect upon those challenges and to inform strategic and operational improvements for both staff and students in their schools. VLNs were designed to offer integral support to the system. Almost 500 HTs and DHTs took part, which represented a significant proportion of school senior leaders, from all the WP LAs at the time. In addition, many examples of 'collective

learning' spring boarded individual learning, as leaders in the system sought more qualifications or knowledge on areas of interest.

- **A `Safe Space`** - this 'safe space' was not confined to the VLN, WP network involvement had helped with dealing with the challenges of the pandemic for most of those involved in network activity. This was mainly in relation to shared experiences and shared resources and ideas on how to cope with the challenges. Collaborative relationships were built on openness and trust. This was enabled by the WP providing a safe space for open dialogue and support e.g., the WP provided a series of professional learning sessions co-delivered with ES and RIC colleagues for home link workers or their equivalents. Other resources were co-created, particularly at the onset of the pandemic, such as the Health and Wellbeing Matrix Document and Families and Communities Self-Evaluation Toolkit.

- **Organic Growth/Regenerative Networks –** there is also evidence to suggest that the networks are reproducing other more informal networks, which in some instances is leading to input to policy and practice. The WP has created the conditions for additional collaboration, and knowledge mobilisation has been facilitated by establishing teams within MT and creating local networks of practitioners. There are many examples of these 'spin-off` networks across the three workstreams and LAs, some facilitated by confidential discussion on Teams, but not all.

- **WP Adding Value to the Local Authorities –** the key findings suggest that the WP has made a considerable contribution through adding value to LAs in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic. This is manifested in many ways, some of which have been outlined previously. However, it has also been through 'strategizing' by individual officers and services, to avoid duplication of activity or provision. There is a growing recognition that local authorities can access professional learning or programmes delivered by the WP and concentrate resources and reduce workloads, by focussing on priority or complementary activity. This, in part, has been enabled by the following bullet point. We previously identified collaborative and networked learning and sharing (on a systems scale) as key enablers in building agency and collective capacity during the pandemic. The WP supported LAs in their concentration on Covid related priorities, by offering complementary provision at the time. This saved time and money which may have been spent trialling something and provided a focus for LA and schools to prioritise. It added value through the range of themes available on professional learning sessions because of the capacity of WP to provide collectively and due to the high-quality professional learning on offer, often in partnership with ES, the Robert Owen Centre (ROC), and others. These were opportunities for professional learning and development, which otherwise may not have existed, or due to budget constraints local authorities could not fund individually.

- **WP Reputation and Quality of Provision –** there is a sense that the WP has a growing reputation for its high-quality professional learning provision that makes a difference to learning and teaching in classrooms. This was mooted against a perceived backdrop of a 'cluttered learning landscape' and variability in the quality of professional learning. Some of the examples highlighted were West OS, which was perceived by many as providing an excellent resource for practitioners, the Subject Specialist Networks, as MT had enabled 2,000 plus subject specialists to collaborate, share learning and resources during the timeframe, and greater consistency in

assessment and moderation activity. Some were noticeably clear on the impact it had had on their own professional knowledge and practice, and impact on teachers and schools. In addition to the previous examples, many pointed to the work done around staff professional knowledge and accreditation re the Alternative Certification Model, (ACM) and in PSE. There was also a suggestion that the WP was acting as an informal 'broker' for a variety of information and people were more readily consulting that source. West OS communications during the period in question received much praise, for its timely information and motivational messaging.

- **Joint-practice development – inter-authority moderation** – not all LAs could present in every subject, re the ACM, so moderation was openly provided in other LAs through the WP. The Senior Phase Assessment and Moderation Network offered moderation training with a pool of shared resources as a network, members went into different/their own LAs to deliver to ensure consistency of approach and alignment to Education Scotland (ES) standards.

- **Partnership with ES –** this collaboration had a positive impact on network development and progress, with network members appreciative of the specialist knowledge and expertise offered to the groups and the named contact support for activity in schools and local authorities. They felt they also benefited from national up to date knowledge. The Spring Webinar Series was of note; ES`s response to WP network `need', co-delivered with WP. Where relationships had already been established this was seen to be of value in the pandemic as practitioners and LA reps could reach out to known ES staff for advice and guidance.

There is much to suggest that many of the WP networks, due to density of the networks and their formal and informal ties, cited previously, have increased collective efficacy and the potential to lead to improved outcomes for respective constituents. The WP created the conditions for collaboration and for more organic growth through the generation of informal networks.

On challenges to progress and constraints on network effectiveness

The main challenge of course has been the pandemic itself, hence the need for an `Interim Action Plan`. We reflect that the WP contributed to the system in dealing with some of those challenges and recognise that some presented below are outwith its control:

- **Sustaining the eco-system** was an 'Issue for consideration' identified in our previous evaluation, in relation to the potential vulnerability of the eco-system, by those 'reticulists' being recalled to their local authorities and the potential impact upon WP sustainability. This is a challenge for all RICs of course. In the context of the WP, this was specifically highlighted in relation to the sustainability of activity in the CLN Workstream and the Subject Specialist Networks within the Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Workstream. However, it is also an issue for the membership of some of the networks, as existing members left, and new local authority representatives joined the groups. This can delay the progress of the group as new members need to be brought up to date with the purpose, practices, and progress of the group/network. It may, in some cases, also necessitate individuals moving forward on their own priorities, as individual members are accountable to others outwith the WP. This was also applicable to changes in ES staff at the same time; whilst there are both advantages and disadvantages to this model, it did seem

that a great deal of `institutional knowledge` from all the key stakeholders was lost at this time.

- **Reaching teachers** – there is evidence to suggest that the WP is making many more inroads into classrooms, reaching more teachers, and having more impact on practice. e.g., West OS, IOC. and HTLS. However, the evidence suggests that there are still many who have not heard of the WP. One reason could be that many teachers do not use Twitter, one of the main WP communication tools, or other types of social media. They may not also engage with the WP`s newsletters or highlight reports.

- **Communications** – the connectedness of networks to networks. There does not seem to be a lot of awareness of what other networks are doing or are involved in across the WP. This may be a missed opportunity for cross-over of interests and activity. Messaging was also important, particularly in reaching teachers, in being clear about 'What benefits can I get or what difference is this going to make to me?' Some expressed disappointment that they did not know about the status of CLN or VLNs, after being heavily engaged in those networks and (most) willing to re-engage. This is despite communications being sent to all those involved. How LA officers communicated WP involvement to and across their respective LAs was also important to network members; suggesting that each should have a communications strategy in their remit.

- **Follow-through: capturing learning and impact in the classroom** – whilst there is evaluation of WP sessions and programmes, there's limited but emerging evidence on follow-through relating to how practitioners have used their learning in the classroom or the impact on children and young peoples' learning. In addition, there was a belief, not widely held, that more could be done in terms of workstream/network evaluation; whilst recognising that evaluation was a complex area, even at local authority level. In capturing learning, the networks internal processes previously relied on mid and end point evaluations which informed the WP`s Highlight Reports. A revised evaluation process has been implemented since August 2021[2]. Informal feedback was also deemed to be important in determining progress or impact. There was some uncertainty regarding systematic approaches to capturing learning within the networks. WP research papers were perceived to be of value to participants, in pre-reading for e.g., CLN sessions, particularly around blended and online learning. Additional value was added through external expertise and professional knowledge. ES partners were valued for their specialist expertise and knowledge of current national policy. ROC and other university partners were seen to bring key research capacities and systems knowledge to the networks.

- **Variations in LA priorities and resources –** there was a perception amongst some that the WP had the same `expectations` of engagement and input from each of the LA, regardless of individual (LA) capacity and resources. (This is a perception as the WP are keen to stress that they don`t have expectations regarding LA engagement and input). This was mainly, but not wholly regarding small authorities, where there was one person on many WP networks. (This does not negate the many advantages of WP collaboration, as identified previously by participants from small LAs). In

[2] It is the authors understanding that the Evaluation and Reporting Group has developed and implemented initial follow-through activity with practitioners to assess learning impact.

addition, some from large authorities indicated that due to differing stages of progress on identified priorities (e.g., some were more advanced at LA level), it wasn't conducive for them or their team to commit as much time and energy to the network as perhaps was anticipated. This could sometimes hinder progress or the collaborative process.

- **Clarity of goals and roles** – whilst we previously identified the streamlining of the workstreams and increased clarity regarding establishing network priorities as a `success`, there was a feeling amongst some, which was not widespread, that it was less clear in some networks. It affected those networks where there seemed to be an overlap of aspects of work and where LAs had different approaches/structures in place for less clear-cut agenda. The role of the WP Lead Officer was clear but, in some instances, there was less clarity about other key stakeholders, such as ES and LA officers. Clarification of roles between key stakeholders: WP officers, LA officers, and Education Scotland RIT, would benefit collaboration. Membership of networks – whilst we previously identified that having senior leaders/power brokers was seen to be an advantage - some others did suggest that individuals required the appropriate knowledge and expertise to make a meaningful contribution to their networks, otherwise the 'work' fell to a few, already overstretched individuals. There was a feeling, not widely held, that some workstream direction of travel was guided by a couple of members with a great deal of authority, which was not conducive to effective collaboration. Overall, commitment to the networks and corresponding activity seemed to be high. It is of note that many of the network sessions took place outwith school times, therefore in the main e.g., HTs and DHTs participated after their working day. Commitment was partly dependent on how clear the network aims, or goals were and the composition of the group. If the goals lacked clarity or individuals could not see benefits to collaboration, then they were less invested in it.

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3. **Reflections on Key Research Questions on West Online School (OS) and Improving our Classrooms (IOC)**

Has West OS built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved?

Context

The WP Interim Action Plan provided a focus on priorities to help support practitioners and the system to deal with the challenges of the pandemic. West OS was in existence at the outset of the pandemic; however, it spurred the growth of this teacher-led response to a need in the system for online learning, accessible in and out of school. This comprised of quality assured video lessons, initially in specific subject areas in the senior phase. The aim of West OS was clearly aligned with the strategic vision and drivers of the WP, in terms of inclusion and raising attainment, in addition to equity drivers such as lessons being made accessible, regardless of individual circumstances and situation.

Building collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement – in schools, learning and local authorities

The West OS appears to be a leading edge example of people coming together, within and across the education system at local, regional, and national level to deliver online learning accessible to the whole school population of Scotland. It is a very powerful example of effective collaboration, comprising a wide range of organisations including ES, through the national e-learning offer, E-Sgoil, all six RICs, the 32 local authorities and a range of other stakeholders.

It has had a major impact in enhancing online learning within, across and out of schools; providing the collective capacity and understanding of how to use and create video lessons, which otherwise would have meant schools attempting to identify/create resources themselves. This would have had a significant impact on workloads and school capacity. Every LA can use West OS, through ClickView including small departments and minority subjects, which would not have the time or resources to create a whole catalogue of resources for students and then disseminate them. This removed considerable pressure from the LA to provide that resource. Individual LAs were already doing lots of good work in online learning. However, West OS gave the LAs opportunities to develop other aspects of digital learning and strategies and supported officers to manage challenges in e.g., the ACM within their own LA.

This also applied to individual leadership capabilities within schools, in enhancing practice and supporting students in learning choices and wellbeing. Teachers were ‘upskilled’ in digital development, pedagogy, and online assessment. This involvement, new experience and seeing impact on learners, had for some, increased their motivation and commitment. Learning from each other, co-learning and collaboration had improved teaching skills more broadly. Other practitioners pointed to the impact on their own learning and confidence, in witnessing how the video lessons contributed to schools understanding of issues such as retention. West OS has enabled a more accessible learning environment for students, parents and carers and those teachers involved have reported positive impacts on attainment or leading to it. However, the participants pointed to the `digital divide` for learners in recognising that not all LAs (and learners) had access to the same digital devices and subsequently West OS, so there may not have been the same impact on inclusion and attainment, for everyone.

West OS is a vehicle for learners to be empowered and to develop and sustain new patterns of engagement with learning and for educators to find the best way to support that learning in their journey to become independent learners.

Collective capacity was built in several ways, not least of which was through the sharing of a huge amount of expertise across LAs due to the number of teachers involved. This enhanced opportunities for formal and informal collaboration for both teachers and LA officers who became involved in the network, who then developed personal networks across Scotland, which otherwise they would not have been able to access.

Building collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement – at scale and pace
The collaboration has generated an organic e-learning offer, which started from a zero base to producing just under 3,000 videos online by August 2021. The relative timescales involved were very tight in terms of what was achieved; established a national presence, through powerful collaboration based on relationships built, trust established and willingness to be involved.

This scale of 'impact' is demonstrated by the analytics data generated by West OS, in terms of number of schools accessing and viewing the lessons in the WP and across Scotland, which run to hundreds of thousands of impressions. This capacity for analytics was supported by the WP data information officer who in turn supported members of the core team in their use of data. Similarly, the large number of teachers volunteering to act as contributors and coordinators, from a wide geographic net, again which grew exponentially in the timeframe, is an indication of the 'reach' of West OS and the system responding to need.

It has surpassed its aim of achieving an e-learning offer to support the senior phase, in National 5 and Higher, and now has a new suite of Broad General Education (BGE) and National 4 and expanded range of National 5 and Higher. It is now available to every LA in Scotland; every learner and practitioner has access to it and every school in the WP has used it.

Building collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement - how was this achieved?
West OS would not have existed without the WP. The WP gave the strategic impetus to the initiation of the West OS, through commitment, direction, and funding. Collaboration and partnership working, both at the strategic level through the Implementation Board (wider national e-learning offer and E-Sgoil) and operationally through the West OS 'core team' of officers from every RIC in Scotland and ES, extended this commitment, development, and support to make it a priority. West OS was primarily a regional project but benefitted from having access to that national network which meant that the usual 'pitfalls' of initiating a large-scale project were avoided.

Engagement and feedback were crucial enablers in steering the direction of travel. There was a substantial amount of digital Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) events delivered, which included a range of stakeholders e.g., LA directors, HTs and students. In addition, training projects were delivered to learners, parents/carers, and individual schools. The scale of the CLPL offer was a remarkable achievement given the limited capacity of the core team. This was complemented by circulating papers on learning during a pandemic, training events for contributors and communications out to the system about developments. Feedback from young people and teachers indicated that they believed the material was strong and helpful, very positive and good quality. This feedback included survey results from students/schools.

ES also gathered feedback on West OS e.g., giving presentations which included information about West OS to teachers, to increase reach of the online school.

The commitment and dedication of individuals involved; driven by a small core team of people and delivered by (practicing) teachers under very challenging circumstances, was seen as key to the success of West OS. Evaluation participants were keen to acknowledge that the teacher coordinators and contributors 'went above and beyond' their normal school commitments to make it happen. They stressed the importance of having access to appropriate practitioners across a wide range of the curriculum and that those practicing teachers were best placed to produce engaging and interactive videos. They also provided leadership and coordination capabilities to drive the initiative forward.

Other capacities evident in the network, particularly in the core team were those of the reticulist - leadership, innovation, engagement, positivity, and perseverance, to name but a few. The ability to motivate and inspire to get people involved were also crucial to success and for that an openness to sharing and mutual support, was vital. MS Teams was also an enabler in effective communications between the core team.

The unique position of the RICs in the system has meant that the West OS could come to fruition. They have given energy to collaboration, support to the system and a voice to the LAs.

Building collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement – what were the challenges?

The achievements of West OS were understandably, not without some challenges. The initial challenges centred on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) issues between the host provider Clickview and LAs, with each LA having to sign an agreement with Clickview to source West OS and sign third-party agreements. Given the usual time it takes for any type of legal agreements to be reached, it is remarkable that it was achieved at such speed with all the LAs signed up to it. There were also some fears and concerns in those initial days as to how it would be perceived and received, which proved to be unfounded.

However, as it grew, there does not seem to have been any major hindrance to its development. The main challenges mentioned were time and capacity (both in staffing, in equipment and for developing CLPL) to grow faster. Producing the videos were deemed to be time consuming and resource-intensive, so contributors would have welcomed more training and for additional practitioners to be involved. This would also allow for further opportunities to moderate the lessons. Contributors were also using different equipment, with different capacities to produce the videos, which could impact on 'turn-around' time. A minor issue was the different levels of video production skills amongst resource creators. (This seemed to be rectified by training and co-learning). Some of the contributors thought the West OS video template was a bit restrictive, but understood it was for consistency in quality assurance. The issue re time and training was also an issue for those leading and coordinating West OS; developing CLPL offering at local, regional, national, LA, and RIC level, equalled a significant amount of time, for what was a very small amount of people involved in its delivery.

Reach and communications were mentioned by a minority in the evaluation in that they believed there were still practitioners who do not know about West OS and believed clear communications about what it is and how it could benefit teachers, would result in greater uptake.

Reflections on embedding and sustaining West OS

West OS appears to be on track to achieve its long-term goals and interviewees were keen to highlight the need for an online learning system regardless of a pandemic situation, as there will always be learners who cannot access school for a variety of reasons. In addition, the existence of West OS provides learning choice and, if adequately supported, should encourage independent learning. Any development should be in the context of, and complement, face-to-face learning. There is a belief that it is still being widely used primarily as a revision tool, even although schools have reopened, which indicates a need in the system.

However**,** there are concerns that to fully embed it in the system and sustain it in the long-term, it should be properly resourced. These concerns mainly revolved around staffing; leadership, succession, and continuity. There is an *impression* that West OS has lost its momentum and that needs to be built again. This would require leadership to provide the strategic direction to embed and improve accessibility for young people, parents and carers and evolve it in the system via a wide range of media. There was also a belief that not having anyone currently at operational level who was there from its inception, could be detrimental to development through lost collective knowledge and memory, which may result in a lack of continuity and have a potential impact on the sustainability of the platform in the long-term.

There was an acknowledgement that there were some gaps in provision and content, but also that West OS was a remarkable achievement over 18 months. There was speculation on what it could look like in five- or ten-years' time. Some suggestions for development centred around consistency in regular meetings and having permanent leads. (It is the authors understanding that whilst there was some staff turnaround during the period in question, momentum continued through West OS operations, support for the platform and regular reporting meetings at various levels of the WP). The main suggestion was to build teachers' networks**,** building on the already established networks, using the WP links to good practice exchange across the LAs to increase collaboration and encourage wider stakeholder involvement. This could be enabled through additional resources to support more teacher involvement and if truly an online 'school', should be supported as such with a similar structure.

The WP RIC has given a huge opportunity, through the West OS, to practitioners to influence the system, by adding value to learning and teaching, promoting equity and empowering them to 'have their say' on 'what works'. There is a real opportunity now to build on that agency and collective capacity through teacher networks. There is scope for increased national collaboration, with more partners to take forward digital learning. The system revealed a 'gap' when the pandemic struck and the West OS stepped into that space to ensure online learning was accessible and available, in an out of a school setting.

The West OS is relatively speaking still in its infancy. However, there is evidence that it has built collective agency amongst those strategic key stakeholders who were responsible, for providing the foundations and framework through their organisations, and LAs for driving improvements in learning during the pandemic. 'Acceleration' in learning appears to have been mainly driven by the agency and collective capacity of practitioners involved as coordinators and resource contributors, supported by the core team**.** It is too early, given the length of time the West OS has been in existence, and the fact that there were many school closures during the identified timeframe, to meaningfully comment on the delineation between learning in and out of school or the 'extent' to which it happened. What we can say is that West OS has had a significant impact on learning and teaching and the system more broadly in Scotland, during the pandemic.

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Has IOC built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved?

Context

The WP has been supporting the IOC programme for three years, although it was originally a Glasgow City Council (GCC) initiative, started 12 years ago. The programme has grown since then to include a pilot 'whole school model', now named Improving Our School (IOS) and to operate across the WP local authorities.

The aims of the IOC programme are to achieve good quality learning and teaching in the classroom to achieve better outcome for leaners using enquiry-based research methods. The focus is on literacy and numeracy to raise attainment in the class. For teachers it aims to develop a deeper understanding of pedagogy, provide collaborative opportunities, and develop professional learning on improvement in self-evaluation and better use of data.

Building collective agency to drive improvement – in learning and teaching and schools

Expectations are stated at the outset that the aim is to create high-quality classroom practitioners, gaining Masters` credits, and if the participants are fully engaged in the process, they will see improvements in attainment in their classroom. The participants were clear that the IOC programme had achieved its goals and thought it a particularly good model because of the impact at classroom level on learning and teaching and the school more widely.

Evidence of IOC`s impact is gathered in a variety of ways and at different levels of the system.

Learning is mainly 'captured' through a detailed *Case Study of Improvement*, (CSfI) which participants are required to complete on impact on learner outcomes in their classrooms. In addition, feedback is regularly obtained from teachers themselves and their HT on impact at classroom level, and observations are made by their mentors and within their trio. There are regular discussions, both formal and informal, between the LA Leads, the participants, and the WP WLO.

The practitioner mentors play a key role in the process in terms of support and guidance and through the trio model, where teachers form trios to encourage self and peer evaluation and collaborative working through e.g., visiting each other's classrooms to provide constructive evidence-based feedback on practice. These visits allow the mentor to observe, on a continual basis, evolving practice, or embedded practice in teachers' classrooms.

The interviewees were keen to highlight that during the pandemic, the focus of IOC remained on learning and teaching. They believed that teachers this year were particularly eager and enthusiastic because of the recovery curriculum approach; that taking time to reflect on fundamental questions such as, what am I doing in my class? how am I supporting this child or this group of children in their learning? and what small aspect of change does make a big difference? This helped the practitioners focus on their case studies. The use of practitioner enquiry methods enabled this more reflective approach. There were also indications that the challenges of the pandemic had increased practitioners' creativity in looking at different ways to approach learning and teaching and had also enhanced digital skills, as projects were required to contain a digital element.

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Collective agency was also driving improvement by cascading knowledge and learning from participation in IOC, as some of the previous schools who had participated in the programme, had extended involvement by 'signing-up' more of their teachers, which led to building capacity in the system.

Building collective agency to drive improvement – in local authorities

There have been many impacts on the LA officers who have been involved in the IOC programme, which have fed into improvements in services, and learning and teaching more broadly. This may be seen through increases in professional capital, agency, and capacity. At an individual level, professional learning, knowledge, and understanding has been enhanced through developing a better understanding of the enquiry process and evidence-based research, increased knowledge of current learning and teaching research and resources and greater confidence in terms of understanding what works in improving outcomes. The impact on individual's learning has been very positive, e.g., they have an opportunity to be markers on the CSfI, and whilst this was at first deemed to be challenging, subsequent training led to additional learning and confidence in approach. In addition, support provided to the LA officers by the IOC team was acknowledged as improving agency and capacity in e.g., digital upskilling of individuals which was then used in their broader LA role.

This has influenced LA strategic learning and teaching plans, which have been shared across the authority and impacted positively on other officers. This is evidenced through using and sharing webinars from the programme which fed into updating LA assessment frameworks, and providing up to date responses to general curriculum, learning teaching and assessment queries from learning and teaching colleagues in the LA.

The IOC programmes were seen to add value to the work of the LAs by rolling out the key themes more broadly leading to a wider impact. The focus on practitioner enquiry and raising attainment and using data was also seen as beneficial to LAs. There is recognition that the IOC programme provided very good opportunities particularly for those teachers in small LAs who would find it difficult to provide something similar in quality and link to a Master's level degree. Plus, additional support from other LAs was of great benefit to individuals, particularly those officers new to the programme.

Building collective agency to drive improvement – how was this achieved?

Successful collaboration was a key factor in network effectiveness. On one level this was collaboration between the practitioners on the programme and their mentor, the trio model, at another, there was support given through LA lead officers to the participants and designated WP officers who oversaw the quality assurance and consistency of the process. There was, finally, the added value of the formal and informal networking between the LA officers themselves.

This support structure worked well and benefitted from sharing a common purpose in driving improvement in outcomes for children and young people. Networking was enabled by good relationships established and a willingness to be open, share and engage. The new LAs which had joined the programme benefitted from those relationships and capacities. There was a recognition that the WP had enabled opportunities that had not existed and the opportunity to collaborate was very good.

Feedback, regular discussions, and check-in days, especially when face-to-face, have been particularly effective in enabling the evaluation of practitioner learning and to see how

participants have made sense of the process. Plus, there is a formal evaluation at the end of the programme. There were also positive and transparent discussions between members of the WP IOC core team which helped review and forward planning. MS Teams was also believed to have been beneficial in providing a 'safe space' for discussion and sharing.

Reflections on embedding and sustaining the IOC programme

The IOC is a programme, which has had several years to be developed to meet the needs of teachers. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the evaluation did not identify any major challenges or hinderances to achievement or progress, but interviewees did make some constructive suggestions as to how the programme may be improved.

There was a feeling that the programme would benefit from more flexibility, pointing to fixed times for pre and post webinar discussions which 'locked' teachers into 'attending' at fixed times in the evening. In addition, some believed that the programme was too basic in some content areas and would like to see more challenge. However, in both cases there was a recognition that this was 'controlled' by the university involved. There was also recognition, that in terms of 'challenge', it would be difficult to deliver at an ideal level for everyone. For the former example, it was suggested this could be overcome if the LA had more control over, or input to, the schedule. (There is some indication this is already being addressed).

Some also believed that the programme was too narrowly focussed on just raising attainment in literacy and numeracy and should be extended to the broader curriculum, perhaps using the approach being used in the pilot secondary school, such as in social subjects. This would then allow for interdisciplinary learning (IDL). Others felt there was good reason for the focus on literacy and numeracy. Everyone believed it was a good model, but perhaps it could be widened and the whole school model may provide opportunities for that.

In terms of online delivery of the programme, the initial move to online delivery of the programme resulted in a lot of pressure because of very tight timescales, but this had been overcome and the model has changed this year. The interviewees highlighted the pros and cons of face-to-face and online delivery of the programme. The former building good relationships from the outset, more discussion and interaction in groups, which generally increased engagement and collaboration. The latter ensured consistency in delivery, rigour, and equity in access by being able to revisit webinars. MS Teams was also seen as important in enabling relationships. The consensus seemed to be that nothing could replace face-to-face delivery, but if online was to continue then practitioners hoped this would be a hybrid model where the balance was tipped towards the former.

Promoting the programme more through LAs, would let teachers and schools see the learning and teaching benefits of it and the impact on schools. This could aid in recruiting teachers to the programme. Communications could have been improved by more timely messages, but there was an understanding that things had moved very quickly during the pandemic, so this may not always have been possible.

Given that successful completion of the programme leads to 30 Masters credits, it requires a degree of rigour that needs to be supported and the time to do that, which was sometimes challenging for individual officers. There was a suggestion that it would be beneficial to have two leads from each authority to enable expansion of the programme. The different levels of support make it quite resource-intensive and as such, represents a significant investment for the WP.

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There was a gap in follow-up monitoring and evaluation of those who had gone through the programme This was an area identified for future development, to see if they are still building capacity, although there were indications that this is being pursued by the WP.

There was a broad consensus that networking is a success of the WP generally, which has given many opportunities to collaborate and learn from colleagues, and that this aspect of the WP is very important. There was also a broad consensus that awareness amongst teachers could be raised.

When reflecting on their involvement and the IOC programme itself, interviewees believed it was a good model that made practitioners and themselves think more deeply about high-quality learning and teaching, and that it had made a significant impact at various levels in and across the system: classroom teacher, mentor, whole school, across schools and learning communities. It had also enabled more collegiate working between LA officers in similar roles. The IOC programme has built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning both in and out of school, from the impact on teachers' pedagogy and self-evaluation capabilities to learner outcomes and attainment. The challenges of the pandemic brought greater focus on the foundations of good learning and teaching and more reflection on practice. LA officers' learning was also enhanced by being involved in the programme and gaining the added value of networking and collaborating with a wider pool of colleagues across the WP.

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4. Conclusion

As we highlighted in Chapter 2, the WP was able to respond quickly and agilely to the challenges which were presented by the pandemic; through its unique position in the system and due to the well-established partnerships and relationships it has developed since its inception. The following interrelated key learning/themes summarises how the RIC has evolved, since then, but particularly during the evaluation timeframe.

Key learning/themes and critical reflection

Our research has shown/revealed a shift in mindsets, culture, and ethos across the WP, propelled by the power of networks and agency within them. Our previous evaluation report highlighted that the WP had built solid foundations in establishing good collaborative relations within and between the eight local authorities and key stakeholders. However, this phase has shown those relationships have moved to a new level, are now embedded and networks are reproducing break-away groups and informal networks.

The added value (to the local authorities) of this approach is evidenced in upskilling of staff, individual empowerment and agency, knowledge mobilisation, professional capital, improvements in learning and teaching, changes in policy and practice and networked learning. It is impressive that the WP is achieving these results with relatively limited resource. This is exemplified by, but not limited to, Assessment and Moderation networks, HWB networks, VLNs and West OS. There is a collaborative advantage from the network-based approach and evidence of collaborative learning leading to collective agency and capacity. These are indications that the WP is building an networked learning system.

This timeframe has not been without its challenges of course, and these are detailed in Chapter 2, but can be summarised as sustaining the eco-system, increasing the reach to teachers, improving network-network connections, follow-through on impact in the classroom, variations in LA priorities and capacity re WP input or involvement and increased clarity re network goals and roles.

The WP is in a very good position to build on the momentum gained during the pandemic. Its agility and flexibility in responding to the needs of the system worked very well. How does the WP capitalise on this in a post-pandemic environment and sustain and build momentum? Possibly, by gauging the temperature of the system, by continuing to listen to the key stakeholders within it and identifying the main opportunities where it can add value, in collaboration with the LAs and ES; the co-location aspect of ES staff support for the networks, is also important.

The WP could further develop the structures, environment and conditions in which networks flourish and evolve. Some of the WP networks have survived the period in question, others have evolved into different entities e.g., some of those into the Wellbeing for Learning WS. A minority of networks have come to an end after careful analysis and stakeholder feedback.

There is a broad view that WP has ‘come into its own’ during the pandemic. It has been able to successfully respond to the needs of the system and practitioners by creating effective networks. Those have been built on clarity and ownership of aims, identification of roles and listening to and supporting the needs of the system. There is an opportunity now to capitalise and build momentum by using the lessons learned from this period.

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Key research questions and critical reflection

The evaluation framework was predicated on four key research questions summarised at the beginning of the report:

1. How has the `Recovery` response of the West Partnership during the period of January – August 2021 contributed to the work of the local authorities in their efforts to build-back better?

2. How has the `Recovery` response of the West Partnership impacted on the nature/type of collaboration across the RIC?

3. Has West OS built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved?

4. Has Improving Our Classrooms (IOC) built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved?

It should be recognised that the points/themes addressed in each of the four questions are closely inter-related, which result in some unavoidable overlap, which only serves to demonstrate the complexity and scale of the WP and the environment in which it operates. The following reflection on questions one and two represent a summary conclusion as the detail is covered in Chapter 2. The WP requested an emphasis on key research questions three and four and are those are detailed in Chapter 3.

West Partnership contribution to local authorities efforts to build-back better

The response of the WP, during the identified timeframe has contributed to the work of the LAs in myriad ways in their efforts to 'build-back better'. This is evidenced in added value and driving improvement in services and schools. It has provided: agency to build collective capacity and upskilling, evidenced mainly through digital proficiency and leadership; increased professional knowledge, learning and development; driven developments in learning and teaching; and resulted in changes to policy and practice. This is exemplified through e.g., West OS, VLNs and the assessment and moderation work done in supporting young people through the senior phase. It has also allowed increased focus for LA priorities directly through RIC activity and indirectly by offering professional learning, which otherwise the LAs would not have been able to. Most of LA Officers were clear that the WP had added value to the LA during the pandemic in their efforts to build back better. This happened through building agency and developing collective capacity; confidence, knowledge and skills, which have developed through sharing practice and networked learning.

The impacts of the West Partnership response to the pandemic on the nature/type of collaboration across the RIC

The WP response to the pandemic has impacted on the nature and type of collaboration by building more trust between key stakeholders, embedded relationships and provided time and space in a safe and supportive environment conducive to more effective collaboration during the pandemic. Key to this was the structure of the network providing a focus for the development of goals, roles, and responsibilities. The sense of shared purpose created opportunities for deeper collaboration, co-creation of resources and increased knowledge mobilisation. The key capacities within the networks, particularly the reticulist abilities of the WLOs and LA Leads led to increased cohesion, a sense of trust and enabled better

communications between the members. This, in turn, led to the development of spin-off groups and informal networks.

West OS driving/accelerating improvement in learning, both in and out of schools, (pp.15-18)

There is evidence that West OS has built collective agency amongst strategic key stakeholders and partners who were responsible for establishing and developing the foundations and framework for the online school, in addition to LAs for driving improvements in learning during the pandemic. 'Acceleration' in learning appears to have been mainly driven by the agency and collective capacity of practitioners involved supported by the core team**.** It does appear, even allowing for the `challenges` identified on page 17, that West OS has had a significant impact on learning and teaching and the system more broadly in Scotland, during the pandemic.

The IOC programme driving/accelerating improvement in learning, both in and out of schools, (pp.19-22)

The evidence suggests that the IOC programme has had a significant impact at various levels in and across the system: classroom teacher, mentor, whole school, across schools and learning communities. It has built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning both in and out of school, ranging from the demonstrable impact on teachers` pedagogy and self-evaluation capabilities, to improvement in learner outcomes and attainment. It has enhanced learning for the LA officers involved and added value to the LAs by `mobilising` that knowledge to their teams.

The WP response to the pandemic through further streamlining of its workstreams and prioritisation of projects has led to significant impacts on learning and teaching, has enabled knowledge mobilisation and effected systems change, by individual and collective capacity building, driven by a network-based approach to learning and practice. The following `Issues for consideration` reflect the evaluation findings presented in the report and offer some potential opportunities or possibilities for the WP to further drive improvement in the system.

Issues for consideration and opportunities/possibilities for the WP to drive improvement

One of the main challenges for the WP, and no doubt other RICs, has been the fragility of the eco-system as we identified in Chapter 2 and in our previous evaluation report**,** of secondees returning to substantive posts, which although designed to move knowledge around the system is viewed as being disruptive by most.

1. ***Issue for consideration: WP could engage in dialogue with other RICs and Scottish Government (SG) on alternative workforce development models to the secondee one,*** *to ensure optimal opportunities for individuals/practitioners and to maximise effective systems change in strengthening the middle tier. This issue as detailed on page 12, impacts on sustainability of the RIC, network membership, progress and `institutional knowledge', which overall could result in a sunk asset to the system.*

There is clear evidence that the WP has increased its reach to teachers, particularly through West OS, however there is a perception that to improve 'reach' the benefits of involvement

need to be clear to those practitioners and should be communicated through teacher-friendly media.

2. ***Issue for consideration: Continue to develop a range of systematic strategies for reaching teachers*** *– continual, consistent, and clear messages about benefits to them and what the WP is, using an alternative or complementary communications strategy, i.e., if teachers do not respond to Twitter, [Key tool for both WP and ES] or other social media, then gather more evidence of where they do respond.*

The following issue for consideration is aligned to the previous one in that once 'reached' through an effective communications strategy, how do you engage teachers?

3. ***Issue for consideration: Continue to develop systematic approaches to 'engagement',*** *including analysis of stakeholders and defining their interest. This could be aided by more analytical and extensive use of the WP heatmap, to mine the data on those establishments and practitioners who have already engaged. This could facilitate a more targeted approach to moving knowledge round the system, e.g., in encouraging potential `RIC ambassadors`. It could also enable increased follow-up on impact in the classroom.*

The evaluation findings revealed a clear demand for expanding the network-based approach, particularly in expanding teacher networks. The following issue for consideration is allied to the previous one, in reviewing existing data and using it in a more strategic way to strengthen the middle tier and empower teachers in the system and ultimately, be impactful at classroom level.

4. ***Issue for consideration: Build teacher networks with a broader range of practitioners and empower them to connect to, and collaborate with, each other****. Targeting individuals who have been active in the WP, particularly those senior leaders as in Ifc number 3, could be particularly useful in moving knowledge round the system, informing systems change and enabling teacher networks. In addition, teacher networks could be developed along the lines of the West OS model, where teachers, with different roles and responsibilities, responded to or rallied round a single interest/issue.*

It is clear from the evaluation findings that WP members welcomed the streamlined approach and focus during the pandemic and commented favourably on how that impacted on network effectiveness. What they would like to know, though, is what other WS/networks are involved in and what progress they are making, they believe this would benefit all network activity if this transparency existed, as they would be able to make more informed choices of involvement or follow-up on specific areas of interest.

5. ***Issue for consideration – Mapping and Messaging*** *– clarity of messages – to get the message out about what the networks are and what they are doing. Encourage embedding communication strategies in LA WP roles. One possibility may be to* ***Map all networks and activity and publish*** *clear network themes in advance and a calendar of events to feed into school improvement planning. Sharing of network activity, achievements, and progress – share Action Trackers, between networks. – to enable increased knowledge and understanding of wider WP activity and encourage increased networking.*

A great deal of trust has been established between the key stakeholders in the WP and relationships have evolved and been embedded in the system since its inception. However, for the WP to continue in that direction, it may want to consider the following:

6. ***Issue for consideration: clarify roles of key stakeholders, such as WP staff, ES representatives and LA officers; where all working as closely and efficiently as possible, to reach optimal outcomes.*** *Allied to this is to recognise that each LA is at a different stage in its journey and particularly for smaller authorities, where individuals often play multiple roles, increased clarity of goals and roles, greater visibility and transparency of activity and offer, (as in previous point), should enable increased engagement and collaborative working. The authors believe that the WP has now developed Terms of Reference for all WSs, Board and Committee Members.*[3]

Given the scale and complexity of the WP and the time it takes for impact to become apparent at classroom level, it is not surprising that there has not been a lot of follow-up (outwith the end of programme internal evaluation) with those engaged in WP activity during the timeframe.

7. ***Issue for consideration - whilst impact takes time, WP may consider more targeted follow-up evaluation in classrooms/of teachers who have engaged****, in an appropriate point in the future when teachers are feeling less pressurised. This is aligned in part to Ifc number 3. The authors believe that the WP Evaluation and Reporting Group has planned and developed a holistic approach to such activity.*[4]

Participants were aware of current education reviews and reports and highlighted the benefits they received from WP network discussions which focussed on those. They believed this presented an opportunity for them and their LA, to gain and share learning, which could feed into policy development. This could provide opportunities for increased dialogue, learning and alignment between national policy and research between the WP and its constituent LAs.

8. ***Issue for consideration – the WP WSs could encourage and enable more high-level policy discussion by network participants****– informed by recent education reviews and reports, which may inform more system-wide conversations.*

Whilst West OS has had a significant impact on learning and teaching practice across Scotland, there is uncertainty in the system about what is happening with and in West OS, due to a *perceived* drop-off in communications.

9. ***Issue for consideration - how to consolidate and develop West OS*** *to monitor how online learning can address the diverse needs of students and enhance the opportunities for quality learning.*

The IOC programme has built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning both in and out of school, from the impact on teachers' pedagogy and self-evaluation capabilities to learner outcomes and attainment. However, the level of support required may necessitate some reflection by the WP on future development of the programme.

10. ***Issue for consideration - for the WP now may be one of capacity and scale****, in that if it commits to expanding the programme, does it use the same model in terms of*

[3] Information correct as of August 2022
[4] Information correct as of August 2022

support mechanisms for individual practitioners, which we have already identified as 'resource-intensive' or does it commit to rolling-out the IOS model, with different types of support, or consider a different model entirely?

5. From Recovery to Renewal: Reimagining the Future?

The WP has built a solid evidence base to demonstrate the progress of the WP since its inception. through its internal evaluation mechanisms and external ROC evaluations, *West Partnership Conditions for Change Interim Highlights Report* (2020) and a summary report *Progress & Challenge: Reflections on the Development of the West Partnership 2018-2020,* (2021). These have been recognised and disseminated in various forums e.g., in a book chapter, *Creating a learning system: possibilities and challenges*. (Bell, I. and Donaldson, G., 2021) and in the Muir Report*, Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education* (2022). The SG Educational Research seminar series featured our paper on *Regional Improvement Collaboratives: Crossing Local Authorities To Promote Educational Equity; Possibilities And Challenges In A Time Of Change,* (June 2022).

The education system is at a critical time in Scotland, not only due to the severe and wide-ranging impact of the pandemic, but schools and LAs must also grapple with the outcomes of the various recent policy reviews and reports: OECD Report on Curriculum, (2021), the National Qualifications and Assessment Review, (2021) and the Muir Report (2022), to name but a few. 'Reimagining' education systems in pursuit of educational equity requires a revitalised evidence-informed approach to organising learning and pedagogy, which has a focus on collaborative research/working, leadership for change and networked learning to develop creative and innovative ways to respond to system need.

The `pandemic experience' of the WP has shown that it is well-placed to tackle this challenge and has the appropriate leadership, structures, and embedded relationships to support 'build back better' education systems for the longer-term in a more imaginative way. Central to this would be considering, with other key stakeholders, roles, and relationships across different parts of the system, to avoid duplication and ensure collective capacity is built. But most important of all is a radical rethink of the purposes of education and schools in the 21st century that meet learners' and societies' needs. This also necessitates 'reinventing teachers' who have the capacity and self-efficacy to 'reinvent` schools, appropriately supported and facilitated by local and national leadership.

Teachers played many parts during the pandemic, some of which were heavily tilted towards health and wellbeing and who found mutual support from collaborating with, and learning from, peer networks such as the VLNs in the WP. Other roles were in driving digital platforms and pedagogies to support online and independent learning and resilience for learners through West OS. What is their role now or in the future? One way to support teachers in their "new" roles would be to encourage and promote knowledge sharing through professional networks, with opportunities for collaboration across schools and communities. Given the success of those networks during the pandemic, the WP is very well-placed to support and provide the tools for scaling-up teacher networks; building the capacity and creativity to reinvent schools in the 21st Century.

We would argue that in the context of the evaluation period, the WP has strengthened the middle tier, supported the LAs in leading from the middle and generated 'learning from the middle', (Fullan, 2015). There is an appetite in the system to continue that journey through

expanding a network-based approach, particularly through teacher networks and adopting a more 'unified' perspective across the key stakeholders e.g., in the professional learning offer, to enable more effective planning for LAs and schools. Figure 1, depicts a typology of collaboration continuum, building on Ainscow and Chapman, 2003; West and Ainscow 2005. Each of the `types` are characterized by increasing degrees: of short-long term commitment to the endeavour; of willingness to share or develop knowledge and resources and of a belief in common values and vision.

Figure 1. A Typology of Collaboration Continuum



All the evaluation evidence suggests that the WP is moving along the typology of collaboration continuum, to collegiality:

> *Collegiality – long-term commitment to a shared enterprise underpinned by shared long-term vision and set of common values with a focus on sharing and developing new knowledge, resources, and practice*. (Ainscow et al., 2020, p.117)

This 'long-term commitment' is partly dependent on the policy context and SG's commitment to the RICs, which of course includes the risk factors associated with secondees to the RICs and workforce development more generally across the LAs in Scotland. The WP made a rallying call for a collective response to the pandemic and the system answered. It is a testament to all those who responded in terms of their commitment, dedication, and resilience, during the worst of times. The `lessons learned` during the pandemic puts the WP in a very good position to help shape the direction of travel in reinventing education to support the enhancement of education systems in Scotland and beyond. The investment in the WP is beginning to yield strong returns, and the trajectory of the partnership continues to move on a steep upward trajectory despite the relatively limited allocation of resources to the RIC.

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APPENDIX - TECHNICAL REPORT

Context

The COVID pandemic and subsequent lockdown periods presented an unprecedented interruption to education both locally and nationally. The West Partnerships immediate response to the pandemic was to produce an Interim Action Plan in January 2021. This plan outlined the partnership's seven priority network-based projects within its streamlined three workstreams, to tackle the challenges faced by practitioners and learners as a result of the pandemic.

Methodology

The research team adopted a mixed-method approach, using quantitative and qualitative techniques to address the key research questions outlined below. The evaluation report, *Reflections on WP Recovery to Renewal: Reimagining the Future* represents the combined results for both the qualitative strand of our research methodology, and our quantitative approach by survey. These complement other evidence gathered, previously including a quantitative survey of classroom/establishment practitioners and the senior leadership team (SLT) to assess the effectiveness of collaboration and related enquiry across the West Partnership in 2019. Those findings were reported in the *West Partnership Conditions for Change Interim Highlights Report* (December 2019). In addition, qualitative research conducted in 2021 to evaluate process and impact of the WP since its inception in 2018, resulted in the *Progress & Challenge: Reflections on the Development of the West Partnership 2018-2020*, summary report in 2021.

Qualitative methods have included gathering primary and secondary data from a range of relevant sources within and outwith the West Partnership. Primary data has mainly been gathered from a range of practitioners and other key stakeholders in the partnership. This has been through ethnographic notetaking, and observation at online professional learning events and professional dialogue with workstream leads and facilitators. The major source of primary data for this report is a series of interviews conducted mainly from January – April 2022. These are detailed below.

Table 1 Interviewees by Local Authority/Organisation

Local Authority/ Education Scotland	Number of interviewees	Workstream
East Renfrewshire (includes WP staff)	9	CLN, CLTA and LEI
Glasgow	6	CLN, CLTA and LEI
South Lanarkshire	6	CLN, CLTA and LEI
Renfrewshire	4	CLN and LEI
East Dunbarton	3	LEI
West Dunbarton	2	LEI
North Lanarkshire	2	CLTA
Inverclyde	1	CLN and LEI
Other Authority	1	CLTA
Education Scotland	5	Not Disclosed*
Total	**39**	

*****To disclose would potentially identify interviewee

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Key: CLN: Collaborative Learning Networks. CLTA: Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (including West OS). LEI: Leadership, Empowerment, and Improvement (including Improving Our Classrooms)

Key Research Questions

1. **Has the 'Recovery' response of the WP during the period of January – August 2021 contributed to the work of the local authorities in their efforts to build-back better?**
2. **How has the 'Recovery' response of the WP impacted on the nature/type of collaboration across the RIC?**
3. **Has West OS built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved?**
4. **Has IOC built collective agency to drive/accelerate improvement in learning, both in and out of schools? If so, to what extent and how has this been achieved?**

The key research questions were co-produced with the WP, to align with its Interim Action Plan and focus on seven priority projects: Headteacher Mentoring Scheme, Leadership Learning Sets and Virtual Leadership Networks in the Leadership, Empowerment, and Improvement (LEI) Workstream. West OS and Support for practitioners through curriculum networks in the Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CLT&A) Workstream. Health and Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing and Supporting learners with Additional Support Needs in the Collaborative Learning Networks CLN) Workstream.

The decision to use in-depth, structured online interviews as the focus of the qualitative element of our research was seen to be the most appropriate way to address those questions and provide a rich narrative of WP response during pandemic period of January – August 2021. These structured questions were supplemented by appropriate sub-questions, as deemed necessary.

Interview Design and Implementation

Interview question design was informed by the afore-cited key research questions and supplemented by network-based questions on aims/goals; individual network roles; network effectiveness and what enabled or hindered it; capacities within the networks; impact of the networks and challenges of the pandemic and the extent to which networks drove agency and capacity across the system, including adding value to the LAs.

The questions were only slightly modified to reflect participation from the range of WP key stakeholders.

Individual invitations to take part in an interview were sent to approximately one hundred of the West Partnership workstream/network members. Those recipients were selected based on a cross section of positions across the strata of the partnership, dual or more representation on the workstreams/networks and geographical spread across the local authorities. In addition, as the WP had specifically requested a focus on West OS and the IOC programme, the number of invitations to those networks were disproportionate to others. The IOC interviewees were interviewed in small group interviews and Education Scotland representatives took part, in the main, in paired interviews. The remainder were individual interviews with WP staff, senior LA managers, QIOs, HTs/DHTs and teachers. Given the flux in the system due to the pandemic, there were understandably, some interruptions and delays to the interview

schedule. Therefore, it is a testament to the commitment and resilience of those individuals who were willing to be interviewed at that time.

This resulted in 39 people being interviewed in total as indicated in Table 1. Confirmed interviewees were sent three documents beforehand, a Project Information Sheet a Research Consent Form and an Interview Topic Guide. Individual interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each. Interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and interviewers took notes during the interview. Interview recordings were transcribed, and transcription data ran to almost 700 pages, which was content analysed using thematic coding.

Secondary data was collected through document scanning from a variety of sources, both internal and external to the partnership. These included the relevant WP regional improvement plan; the Interim Action Pan January – August 2021, WP Highlight Reports, Scottish Government publications and other relevant policy context reports. This has been underpinned by literature on networked systems and learning and partnership and collaborative working.

Findings from the interviews and other data were triangulated with our survey results, as follows, to produce the evaluation report*: Reflections on WP Recovery to Renewal: Reimagining the Future.*

West Partnership evaluation survey

The survey, whose results are presented here, was one strand of the external independent evaluation looking at how effective the West Partnership's network-based response was in supporting practitioners in overcoming such challenges and the extent to which those practices and strategies were embedded and sustained in the learning system.

In total, 105 responses to the survey were received. Figures provided by West Partnership colleagues indicated that approximately 564 were or had been engaged in workstream network activity. This gives a simple response rate of 19%.

Who responded to the survey?

The majority of the 105 respondents (54%) occupied senior positions; establishment Senior Managers, Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs), or Attainment Advisers. There were no responses from early years practitioners, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) or student teachers. This may reflect the likelihood of their participation in workstreams and networks or it may indicate a lack of representativeness in the survey responses. Table 2 summarises the designations of survey responders.

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Table 2 – Designation of respondents

Designation	Frequency	Percentage
AHT/DHT/ Depute officer in charge/Depute Head of Centre	24	23
HT/Head of Centre/Officer in Charge	20	19
Class teacher	15	14
Principal teacher	15	14
Quality Improvement Officer	11	10
Faculty Head/Team leader	3	3
Education Development Officer	3	3
Educational Psychologist	2	2
Attainment Adviser	2	2
Community Learning and Development Practitioner	1	1
Educational Technologist	1	1
Other	8	8
Total	**105**	**100**

Given the 'top heavy' response profile to the survey it is no surprise to find that:

- 69% of respondents had more than five experience in their present establishment or organisation
- 66% were aged 41 or older.

Additionally, 94% of respondents worked full-time and 79% were female.

Which Local Authority were respondents based in?

Table 3 indicates which local authority informants were based in. Without information on the numbers involved in workstreams/networks from the local authorities it is difficult to comment on the representativeness of respondents by Local Authority. However, the lack of responses in general means that any analysis beyond the reporting of aggregate basic frequencies would be spurious.

Table 3 – Responses by Local Authority

Local Authority	Frequency	Percentage
Glasgow	32	31
South Lanarkshire	19	18
East Dunbartonshire	16	15
Renfrewshire	13	13
East Renfrewshire	7	7
Inverclyde	5	5
North Lanarkshire	5	5
West Dunbartonshire	3	3
West Partnership RIC	4	4
Total	**104**	**100**

Involvement in West Partnership supported workstreams and networks

Respondents indicated which workstreams and networks they had or were currently involved with. These were grouped within the following three areas:

- Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- Collaborative Learning Networks
- Leadership, Empowerment, and Improvement Workstreams.

Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Sixty-three respondents indicated being involved currently or previously with a workstream/network in relation to: *Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment*. Table 4 summarises which particular workstreams respondents are/were involved with.

Table 4 – Involvement with *Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment* workstream/networks

Workstream/network	Frequency	Percentage
West OS – a teacher led response to learning interruption because of the pandemic with an initial pilot focused on aspects of the 3-18 curriculum	40	63
Support for practitioners through curriculum – professional learning activities/groups	25	40
Support for practitioners through curriculum – Curriculum network team	13	21
Support for practitioners through curriculum – Assessment & moderation teams	13	21
Support for practitioners through curriculum – Subject specialist networks	13	21
Support for practitioners through curriculum – Other virtual networks	9	14

Collaborative Learning Networks workstream

Thirty-two respondents were currently or had previously been involved in a workstream/network in relation to Collaborative Learning. Table 5 details involvement in this activity.

Table 5 – Involvement with Collaborative Learning workstream/networks

Workstream/network	Frequency	Percentage
Health & Wellbeing -Tracking Learners' Wellbeing: Professional learning activities/group	12	38
Health & Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing: families & Communities Officers' Network	6	19
Health & Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing: Engaging families in transition networks	6	19
Health & Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing: Virtual Community Learning and Development (VCLD Managers' network	5	16
Supporting Learners with Additional Support Needs – ASN Officers Network	5	16
Health & Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing: Other virtual networks	4	13
Health & Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing: The Learner Wellbeing Network (including nominated schools and Early Learning Centres)	3	9
Supporting Learners with Additional Support Needs – ELC and ASN/English as an Additional Language (EAL) practitioners	3	9
Health & Wellbeing – Tracking learners' wellbeing: Additional Support Needs (ASN) Officers' network	1	3

Leadership, Empowerment and Improvement Workstream

Thirty-three respondents were currently or had previously been involved in a workstream or network associated with Leadership, Empowerment and Improvement. Table 6 details involvement with each workstream/network.

Table 6 - Leadership, Empowerment and Improvement Workstream/networks

Workstream/network	Frequency	Percentage
Virtual Leadership networks – A virtual network of HTs/DHTs providing an opportunity for peer support and collaboration to address challenges within the context of the pandemic	20	61
Improving our Classrooms (IOC) – course aimed at classroom practitioners to promote improvement in the class and review impact	15	45
Leadership Learning sets – A professional learning programme for HTs exploring different leadership challenges within the context of the pandemic at the time, using the 'learning set' model	7	21
HT Mentoring scheme – A scheme to enable mentoring for school leaders as identified by local authorities	4	12

Reviewing their involvement with workstreams and networks, respondents were asked to indicate which one they had had most involvement with. Fifty-three provided a response. However, not all respondents provided sufficient detail to identify a specific network and we have opted to group them under the general workstream/network headings. Most frequently respondents identified *Leadership, Empowerment and Improvement workstream/networks* (30%) or *West OS* (25%). Table 7 summarises responses.

Table 7 – Respondents indicated most involvement with the following workstream/networks

Workstream/network	Frequency	Percentage
Leadership, Empowerment and Improvement workstreams	16	30
West OS	13	25
Health and Well-being workstreams	7	13
Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment workstreams	6	11
Other/unknown	11	21

Finding out about Workstreams and Networks

Respondents found out about networks and workstreams from a number of sources. Most commonly this involved information; *from a local authority* (39%), *from their line manager* (30%), or *from the West Partnership* itself (26%).

Deciding to join a Workstream or Network

Respondents' decisions to join the workstream or network were influenced by a range of factors and expectations but were generally positive in nature. Of the 52 participants who addressed the question, 25% clearly saw the workstream/network providing the opportunity to develop their teaching and/or leadership skills. Twelve (23%) welcomed the opportunity to network and be part of a national collaborative initiative while a further 12 indicated that the workstream or network was associated with their existing remit. Eight responses (15%) noted the opportunity to communicate and share experiences with colleagues while seven (13%) reported having an interest in the workstream/network and a further seven saw the evolving workstream/network as a positive response to the pandemic.

Involvement with the Workstream/Network

The majority of respondents (84%) indicted being involved with the network either since it began or close to when it started operating. Thirty-two respondents (57%) indicated that they were still involved with the network.

Deciding to leave the network

Twenty respondents indicated why they had left the workstream/network. Most commonly (seven responses), this was a result of the group either completing its set tasks or its

timetabled sessions had finished. Six respondents reported leaving their workstream/network as a result of work commitments elsewhere and/or a general lack of time. Five left because they had not found the workstream relevant, helpful, or challenging enough. Finally, four comments indicted that the respondent's role had changed, and attendance was no longer relevant for them.

Roles within the network

Respondents occupying various roles within the networks. Thirty-eight (68%) described themselves as 'members' of the network while 11 (20%) indicated 'resource creator', nine (16%) 'co-ordinator'. and seven (13%) identified themselves as 'facilitators'.

Characterising the network

Respondents provided evidence that workstreams and networks were, to some extent, dynamic and collaborative groupings.

Asked to characterise the network, 33 (59%) respondents agreed that *the network was/is full of people keen to drive things forward,* while 23 (41%) *indicated that the network could have done/could do with more people driving things forward.*

A majority of respondents, 31 (55%), also indicated that the workstream/network exhibited *some collaborate activity*, while 21 (38%) indicated that the network/workstream exhibited *a lot of collaborative activity*.

Aims of the network

Respondents generally reported similar main aims for their respective networks, i.e.: *to bring practitioners together across the West Partnership to share knowledge and collaboratively develop learning resources that would enhance practice and consequently learner outcomes.* This aim originally emerged out of a need to address the challenges presented by Covid but has also facilitated mobilisation of knowledge and resources that would benefit practitioners and their learners in the long term. In the case of West OS, this had allowed the development of quality assured, online recorded lessons that enabled learners to access subject-specific content.

Some respondents highlighted networks that focused on a collaborative inquiry approach to help promote achievement and others saw networking aims and benefits as helping to improve understanding and coherence across the system, for example to improve collaboration between so called 'formal education structures and CLD'. While not an explicit aim of the networks, some respondents, for example, highlighted the value-added support of networks promoting effective leadership and offering moral support in challenging times.

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How successful has the network been in meeting its aims?

There was good evidence to indicate that the workstreams/networks had been relatively successful in meeting their aims with the vast majority of respondents, 50 (89%), indicating that the workstream/network had been *somewhat* or *very successful* in meeting its aims. Table 8 details responses.

Table 8 – Meeting the workstream/network aims

Success of workstream/network	Frequency	Percentage
Very Successful	18	32
Somewhat successful	32	57
Not very successful	4	7
Don't know	2	4
Total	**56**	**100**

Increasing the success of the network

While respondents generally reported that their networks were successful and had worked well, suggestions were made regarding enhancing their operation and impact. These were often based on more of what was already happening by, for example, allocating more time and more personnel to the activities. However, other comments suggested ways to improve the network's efficiency and effectiveness. These included:

- Making the underpinning rationale, focus and aims of each network clear from the outset so that participants understood what would be involved. One comment described how a participant had joined a network looking to explore curriculum rationale ideas but discovered that this network involved taking forward a project. While this was seen as having a positive impact on the writing of the school's rational, the approach was not what the participant had expected.

- Providing more time for network activities and planning. While some informants noted limits on the time available for teachers and local authority officers to devote to the WP networking activities, a number would have appreciated more time devoted to network planning and activities.

- Improving awareness of network activities and outputs across the teaching community. This also included improving links to outputs and promoting how to get the most from the resources.

"More awareness of clips among schools; School leaders showing staff where clips can be found rather than just emailing out, texts to parents to let them know, adverts on tv! More resource creators on board."

FT Class Teacher – West OS - A teacher-led response to learning interruption - Coordinator, Resource creator, Volunteer

"I would have nominated reps from each subject to go to schools and demo the network. They could have shown teachers in their own subject how to share videos etc and shared good practise on how to use it best."

FT Faculty head/Team leader – West OS - Online video lessons (+ 2 more networks), Coordinator

- More diversity in subjects covered by the resources, so that the emphasis extended beyond literacy and numeracy.

- Ensuring quality of all resources. While the production of subject resources took quality assurance into account, there were some comments that noted that there were still improvements to be made.

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"More people would be needed to allow for moderation of materials to ensure the standards were consistent. I feel that this can still be achieved, by investment in creating short working groups to thoroughly review the resources. Then ensure that any areas requiring adjustment or areas missing content should be completed."

FT, Class teacher – West OS - A teacher-led response to learning interruption, Resource creator, Volunteer

"I personally feel that there needs to be a team working through the resources to quality assure them and make adjustments to allow greater streamlining."

FT Class teacher – West OS - A teacher-led response to learning interruption Resource creator, Volunteer

- Looking at leadership arrangements and having clear strategic guidance. While promoting practitioner agency and empowerment is a goal of the West Partnership, a small number of comments suggested the need for more coordination and leadership of activity. For example, one comment suggested that there could be improved leadership in their network.

"I felt that too much responsibility was placed on teachers who were running the subject area. Leadership from above this level was ...very poorly organised…"

FT Class teacher - West OS - A teacher-led response to learning interruption Resource creator

One respondent suggested that having a constant West Partnership Development Officer to support the network during the period of change would have helped, while another wanted continued support from each local authority representative, as this was seen as crucial to the network's success. Having greater strategic clarity of how each network group sits within the wider context and more strategic guidance on focus and impact was suggested. These were seen as helping participants focus their efforts and continue to drive forward change and innovation.

- Increasing face-to-face networking opportunities where appropriate. While the on-line nature of much of the networking activity and their outputs was seen as successful, some respondents reported that they were looking forward to more face-to-face working as part of their network. This, it was suggested, would help build stronger relationships and enhance the networks.
- Payment arrangements. One respondent noted that the often-lengthy time commitment in producing the resources should be reflected in the payment provided for their creation. This in turn would encourage more ongoing creation.

Impact of the workstream/network

The survey asked about the impact of the workstream/network on practice, establishments/organisations and pupils. Table 9 summarises results in rank order of *significant positive impact*. Considering the range of workstreams and their varied aims and objectives there is good evidence to suggest that positive impact has occurred across a number of West Partnership workstreams/networks. Indeed, a majority of respondents indicated the workstream or network had had a *positive* or *significant positive impact* on the following:

- Widening my networking practice (85%)
- My professional practice (82%)
- Greater access to colleagues' knowledge (79%)

- Impact on learners (73%)
- My leadership capabilities (73%)
- Confidence in my own abilities (71%)
- Fostering collaborative working across schools (70%)
- Greater insights into promoting change in establishments (70%)
- My digital pedagogy skills (63%)
- Empowered in my current position (61%)
- Greater insights into curriculum development (60%)
- My pedagogical knowledge (60%)
- Improvement in children and young peoples' health and wellbeing (56%)
- Enhanced remote learning for children and young people (55%)
- Improvement in pupil attainment (54%)
- Confidence in using inquiry-based methods in improvement planning (51%)
- Improvement in pupil achievement (53%)
- Fostering collaborative working across classrooms (51%).

Given the nature of the networks it is understandable that, for example, *widening network practice*, *greater access to colleagues' knowledge,* and *fostering collaborative working across schools* should feature prominently. However, it is perhaps more notable that *impact on learners* also features strongly. It is also noteworthy that negative impact is virtually non-existent in survey responses.

Table 9 – Workstream and Network impact on respondents

Impact	Significant positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Significant negative impact	Don't know
Widening my networking practice (n=52)	29	56	15	-	-	-
Greater access to colleagues' knowledge (n=52)	23	56	19	-	-	2
Enhanced remote learning for children and young people (n=51)	20	35	35	-	-	10
Impact on learners (n=52)	19	54	21	-	-	6
My professional practice (n=52)	13	69	17	-	-	-
Confidence in my own abilities (n=52)	13	58	29	-	-	-
My digital pedagogy skills (n=52)	13	50	35	-	-	2
Greater insights into promoting change in establishments (n=51)	12	58	29	-	-	-
Empowered in my current position (n=51)	12	49	37	2	-	-
Confidence in using inquiry-based methods in improvement planning (n=51)	12	39	47	-	-	2
My leadership capabilities (n=52)	10	63	27	-	-	-
Greater insights into curriculum development (n=52)	10	50	37	-	-	4
My pedagogical knowledge (n=52)	10	50	40	-	-	-
Improvement in children and young peoples' health and wellbeing (n=52)	10	46	39	-	-	6
Improvement in pupil attainment (n=50)	10	44	36	2	-	8
Fostering collaborative working across schools (n=52)	8	62	25	-	-	6
Improvement in pupil achievement	8	45	36	2	-	8
Fostering collaborative working across classrooms (n=51)	8	43	41	-	-	8
Greater insights into supporting children with additional support needs (n=52)	8	21	60	-	2	10

Fostering collaboration with other agencies (e.g., psych. Services, social work) or other services (n=51)	8	16	61	-	2	14
Encouraging me to seek promotion (n=50)	4	18	78	-	-	-
Fostering collaborative working across early learning centres (n=51)	4	12	59	-	2	24

Involvement in the network and dealing with the pandemic

Since the West Partnership network-based response was largely aimed at supporting practitioners in overcoming the challenges imposed by the pandemic it was important to gather their views on the extent to which networking had helped them deal with such challenges. Forty-four practitioners responded to this question with 34 (77%) indicating that their involvement with the network had clearly helped them deal with challenges brought by the pandemic. Many of these respondents provided additional detail in their response indicating various ways in which the networks had supported them. This included: sharing experiences; tackling isolation; providing pedagogical examples; accessing teaching resources; and supporting student learning.

The following responses were typical:

"Helped provide resources for my students which has been helpful in coping with workload."

FT class teacher - West OS teacher led response to learning, Member

"Definitely ... It has given me a real solution to help re-engage pupils and allowed me to communicate with pupils still struggling to stay in school."

FT Faculty Head/Team leader - Support for practitioners (Curriculum Network team and Subject specialist networks) Network Coordinator

"Yes, I doubt we could have achieved a similar provision (video library) on our own – certainly not of the same quality, range of resources or within the same timeframe. Doing this work in partnership with other LAs meant we could continue to focus on supporting our own schools in other ways, but knowing that this resource was being developed to further enhance our offering to them to support learners."

FT Education Development Officer - West OS - (and 2 additional networks); Member

"It was good to have a group to discuss things with. Share experiences and expertise."

PT class teacher - Support through practitioners professional learning, Member

"Yes, it was a way to discuss similar issues with a variety of colleagues from other establishments, other sectors and other authorities. It allowed for support and collaboration at a time when face to face interaction with colleagues was extremely difficult."

FT Principal teacher - Virtual leadership network (+5 more networks), Member

"Yes, more focus on mental health for young people and raising additional skills for health and well-being."

FT Principal teacher - PSHE Development (+3 additional networks), Member

"Supporting students and colleagues by encouraging the creation of high-quality resources has been a rewarding consequence of a challenging two years."

FT Class teacher, - West OS teacher led response network, Coordinator

"Yes. Teams has allowed me to connect easily with members of my network. I would not have been collaborating in the same way had I been office based. This has allowed much more sharing of ideas and good practice."

FT Education Development Officer - Health and Wellbeing network (+ 3 additional networks); Coordinator

Only two of the 10 respondents who indicated that the networks had not helped them deal with the pandemic provided additional elaboration in their response.

"It has simply confirmed that everyone has challenges. Didn't provide any solutions."

FT Head-teacher/officer in charge - Virtual Leadership Networks of HTs/DHTs, Member

"I was fortunate to have good networks to help me with this. I hoped the partnership would have helped also, but I didn't find this."

FT Head-teacher/officer in charge - HT Peer support network (+3 other networks) Member

Embedding and sustaining effective practice

Looking towards the longer-term impact of networking development. Thirty-three respondents (77%) indicated that their involvement with the network had had a positive impact on embedding and sustaining effective practice. Again, many of these respondents provided additional detail exemplifying their initial response. A number commented on their own practice and its development, resources, their engagement in Collaborative Action Research (CAR) and improvements in teaching and learning. For example,

"Yes, I use the video and content in my daily practice. I also use flipped leaning approaches. It has improved my leadership skills."

FT Principal teacher - West OS Network (plus 1 additional network) Coordinator

"It has enabled me to improve [the] quality of revision resources available to my pupils."

FT Principal teacher - West OS Network (plus 1 additional network, Coordinator/Resource coordinator

"The CAR project has allowed a focussed approach to play and allowed a greater understanding of the intricacies of play and its impact on learning and health and wellbeing."

FT, Head teacher, Regional Improvement Collaborative (5 additional networks), member

"Yes, deeper understanding of how teachers learn and how to support this."

PT Class teacher - PGCE Strathclyde (support for practitioners through curriculum, professional learning activities/groups, member

"Yes, the use of key speakers from Ed. Scot and other agencies to help enforce the message of the importance of PSHE not only in terms of HWB but also in personal development."

FT Principal teacher - PSHE development (+4 additional networks), member

"Definitely. As part of a professional enquiry with my own school and students within E-Sgoil – I will hopefully identify that the resources are very effective as alternative strategies and promote positive impact on attainment. Providing students who are absent/self-isolating etc. with curated high-quality resources is essential in fostering [a] supportive approach."

FT Class teacher - West OS, Coordinator

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"Involvement has supported development of aspects of our improvement plan, reinforcing effective approaches to learning and teaching in numeracy and maths."

FT Education Development Office - Curriculum Maths and Numeracy (+ 3 additional networks, Member

One informant provided a degree of qualification in their response, pointing out that evaluating the impact of the networks on sustaining effective practice could be difficult and that the project itself could have had a greater reach. However, these comments were set alongside an acknowledgment that the network(s) had, *embedded an easily accessible way of sharing skills and knowledge***.**

Summary

While the response rate to the survey is not as high as we would have hoped for it is also clear that a majority of those who did respond to it have seen a positive impact on a wide range of issues, no doubt reflecting the range of networks established and their individual foci, but also underlining the effort and commitment that the West Partnership channelled into their Interim Action Plan. Collaboration, drawing on colleagues' experiences, developing teacher skills and confidence and supporting engagement with learners were big themes in the survey responses.

At the same time, it was also evident that the workstream networks also gave practitioners and colleagues an opportunity to reduce isolation and share problems and solutions at a time when face-to-face contact was not possible or much reduced. It was also apparent that many in education have taken a big step forward in online networking and realised some of the benefits which can accrue to themselves and their learners as a result. It is important that these developments are maintained and advanced at a time when we are increasingly recognising a return to a more 'normal' situation, albeit one with a degree of uncertainty.

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