

# NORTHERN ALLIANCE PROGRESS & IMPACT REPORT 2019-2020

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### INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of actions taken by the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative over the past year. Details of workstream activity and progress is provided as follows:

- **Part One – Progress Summary and Key Activities**
- **Part Two – Northern Alliance Response to Covid-19 Pandemic**

The 2019-2020 Progress and Impact Report also tells the story of how the Northern Alliance Central Team has collaborated to develop a strategy and next steps in order to achieve our Northern Alliance vision, strengthening the golden thread of collaboration.

***‘Developing a culture of collaboration, sharing of expertise and creating local and regional networks to improve the educational and life chances of our children and young people.’***

*Northern Alliance Vision*

In addition to this report, qualitative and quantitative data evidencing impact and improvement can be accessed via our Data Sway – [Supporting Evidence](#).

## PART ONE: PROGRESS SUMMARY AND KEY ACTIVITIES

Workstream Leads have been working closely with practitioners across the Northern Alliance and national partners in order to work towards the priorities set out within our Regional Improvement Plan – Phase 3:

KEY THEMES FOR COLLABORATION			
Attainment Gap	Empowerment	Excellence & Equity	Improvement
Digital	Leadership	Parental Engagement	Place
NIF PRIORITIES			
1. Improvement in attainment, literacy and numeracy	2. Closing the poverty related attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children	3. Improving the structures which help children and young people's health and wellbeing	4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people
WORKSTREAMS			
CURRICULUM	RAISING ATTAINMENT AND CLOSING THE POVERTY RELATED ATTAINMENT GAP	SUSTAINING EDUCATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES	LEADERSHIP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop curriculum-specific supports and CLPL for key curricular areas;</li> <li>- Develop specific supports for Head Teachers in developing their curriculum rationales for the BGE and Senior Phase;</li> <li>- Develop and share practice in relation to the development of skills for learning, life and work, linked to DYW;</li> <li>- Develop digital approaches to curriculum delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practitioners and young people will have an understanding of poverty within their context and place;</li> <li>- Agree measurement tools for rural poverty in collaboration with communities;</li> <li>- Educational establishments will plan interventions for children, young people and families using the appropriate measurement tool(s) where appropriate;</li> <li>- To close the attainment gap more effectively, including the use of Attainment Scotland Funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a Learning Estates Strategy for the whole RIC area;</li> <li>- Develop a toolkit for use by individual authorities;</li> <li>- Exploring framework to facilitate change in our communities;</li> <li>- Develop the e-learning model across the Northern Alliance, widening access to curriculum;</li> <li>- Improve the digital CLPL offer for staff;</li> <li>- Improve environments for learning across the Northern Alliance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop leadership at all levels;</li> <li>- Develop RIC wide leadership development programmes for classroom, middle, senior and system leaders;</li> <li>- Develop and share succession planning approaches across the RIC;</li> <li>- Champion school empowerment and self-improving schools approaches across the RIC.</li> </ul>

A summary of progress towards the priorities over session 2019-2020 can be found below.

### CURRICULUM

#### NUMERACY & MATHS

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>A <b>NAT 5 CONFERENCE</b> was held in September 2019 and saw attendance of close to <b>100 PRACTITIONERS</b> from our authorities. Feedback from the event has given it a satisfaction rating of 4.6/5. The event tied in with Maths Week Scotland and gave delegates an opportunity to participate in workshops covering a number of themes, including the <b>NATIONAL STANDARD, IMPROVING PEDAGOGY AND BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION (BGE) PATHWAYS</b>. This event was supported by colleagues from Education Scotland's Northern Team</p>	<p>As a result of the conference practitioners reported changes in pedagogy and changes in approaches to assessment at SCQF Level 5, with several schools revising presentation policy to provide opportunities for N4 learners to achieve N5 Applications. Insight data will be reviewed in September and a similar conference will be delivered online in November to maintain a drive on improving performance in N5.</p>
<p><b>THE SMALL SCHOOLS' NETWORK</b> was established providing support from the Northern Alliance and Education Scotland for Principal Teachers within single member departments in secondary schools, developing peer-to-peer collaboration digitally and subsequently reducing professional isolation. Accompanying this is the <b>TEACH MEET</b> approach, the aim of which is to encourage local practitioners to share examples of what's working in their classroom practice.</p>	<p>Using the TEACH MEET approach we delivered 3 physical events. Evaluations were very positive with the sessions providing opportunities to network, collaborate and build confidence. The Northern Team also took the opportunity to share key national messages. Moving forward, this approach has been adapted for online delivery and will be offering twilight sessions throughout 2020-21 as part of the Northern Alliance CLPL offer.</p>
<p>The Northern Alliance Numeracy and Maths <b>PROGRESSION DOCUMENT</b> was completed in December 2019 and now provides support from Early Level through to Level 4.</p>	<p>Feedback has been positive, and the document now sits within Education Scotland's recently updated numeracy &amp; maths PLC. Feedback is being used to improve the document - a comprehensive package of support for fractions is being developed. The content and format of this is being shaped by CLPL evaluations and the results of</p>

	two Collaborative Action Research projects supported by the Northern Alliance.
<p><b>A STRONG PARTNERSHIP HAS BEEN FORGED WITH THE EDUCATION SCOTLAND</b> northern numeracy and maths team. Working to a joint plan around the recommendations of "<b>MAKING MATHS COUNT</b>" there has been improved collaboration with Local Authorities through working directly with clusters around progression and pedagogy. Five online CLPL events were developed and delivered during lockdown, resulting in positive feedback from practitioners. One event concentrated on how to improve performance in Higher mathematics, which is part of an overall plan to work alongside Local Authorities on achieving the government's stipulated target of a 10% increase in SCQF level 5 passes in mathematics by 2022. The remaining 4 were devoted to improving teacher knowledge and confidence in the teaching and assessment of fractions.</p>	<p>A comprehensive programme of support is now in place for NQTs, as well as a small schools' network. Colleagues also collaborated to facilitate a joint Professional Learning Event for Aberdeen City/Aberdeenshire teachers and supported the Moray Maths Conference with input around improving pedagogy. Improvements in the teaching, learning and assessment of fractions have been identified, as well as proportional reasoning, as being pivotal in order to ensure sustained improvement in performance at SCQF Level 5.</p> <p>Partnerships with both the UHI and the University of Aberdeen are being developed. As a result, the workstream is now contributing to the MEd programme at Aberdeen University. A workshop to 150 second year students was delivered in early March, and this is to be developed further to include direct input across all four years of the course.</p>

## 1+2 LANGUAGES DEVELOPMENT

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>Class teachers engaged with development officers to ensure <b>HIGH-QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1+2 LANGUAGES POLICY</b>. As part of this activity, <b>ONLINE LANGUAGE RESOURCES</b> for practitioners in both French and Gaelic have been developed. These accessible bite sized resources aim to upskill practitioners effectively to implement and deliver high quality additional language learning within the classroom, at no cost.</p>	<p>Early years to S3 website and resource links shared on the 1+2 Northern Alliance Languages Sharepoint. Online short- and long-term courses have been uploaded and CLPL provided around supporting teachers with digital language learning using various platforms. French language upskilling Northern Alliance CLPL will be available in Term 2 based on the online language course content. Through increased accessibility, resources are building an increased shared understanding of high-quality implementation across the Northern Alliance.</p>
<p>Connections have been further developed with the <b>UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN, VIA THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE LEARNING HUB</b>, hosting joint project meetings with PGDE tutor and students, Northern Alliance Modern Language Assistants, German Educational Trainees and other language volunteers in partnership with the British Council.</p> <p><b>SECONDARY LANGUAGE PRINCIPAL TEACHER TEAMS GROUP</b> to support professional discussion and resource and information sharing.</p>	<p>This effort of pooling language expertise has provided the opportunity to develop shared resources and peer-to-peer collaboration further. There has been a specific focus on building strong connections between secondary language specialists and primary colleagues, leading to shared developments between settings and supporting the uptake of a language. Language expertise is being shared across Local Authorities. Partners have developed and shared resources such as the online French course, the Northern Alliance language challenge sheets, collation of language websites and resources and the CLPL associated resources offered last session.</p>

## EARLY YEARS

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>In October, the network delivered an <b>ELC QUALITY WORKSHOP</b> for local authority ELC central team members in October. The Quality workshop explored the themes self-evaluation, curriculum design, outdoor learning and play and building leadership capacity. This event saw representatives from across the Northern Alliance come together for two days of rich discussion, shared practice and great networking. The event also gathered national representation from <b>SSSC</b>, <b>EDUCATION SCOTLAND</b> and the <b>CARE INSPECTORATE</b>.</p>	<p>Actions arising from this event informed the Network's improvement agenda for the year ahead. Colleagues valued the time spent sharing learning and making connections for future collaboration.</p>
<p><b>EXPANSION OF ELC TO 1140 HOURS</b></p> <p>A calendar of meetings was developed for Early Years Leads from each Local Authority to meet online or face to face each month to support one another and share practice within the expansion of ELC to 1140 hours. This calendar of meetings also included engagement with key</p>	<p>In the final stages of the expansion of ELC, colleagues reported that they valued the opportunity to meet monthly in order to share practice and work alongside national partners. Over the course of the year, there were three new members of the network and they reported that the monthly meetings were a valuable source of information and support.</p>

<p>national Early Years leaders and experts – e.g. National ELC Delivery Team, Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland.</p>	
<p><b>MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO ENSURE ELC PRACTITIONERS FROM ACROSS THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE CAN HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE IN ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY.</b></p> <p>Colleagues from the SSSC shared an overview of online CLPL resources for ELC practitioners – ranging from starting out in the profession to ‘Step into Leadership’ – resources for leaders/ aspiring leaders within the sector.</p> <p>In December, technology facilitated an online training session for all Excellence and Equity Leads across the Northern Alliance. Colleagues met in one venue within each local authority along with a facilitator for the meeting. This enabled colleagues to engage with training online and then reflect on local practice with one another offline.</p>	<p>In partnership with the SSSC, a list of online resources was developed to share with ELC colleagues – initially within the Northern Alliance, and now across Scotland. This has been particularly useful for colleagues accessing CLPL during the lockdown period.</p> <p>Meeting online every month and fortnightly Skype calls provided Early Years Leads with the opportunity to build a shared understanding of key national policies and share practice without extensive travel to meetings.</p> <p>The Excellence and Equity Online Development Day proved to be successful, with participants rating the format and content of the day 4/4. Comment from participant below:</p> <p>‘I find these days extremely helpful and value the opportunity to network with E&amp;ELS from other authorities. This time it made me really self- reflect and look at what I need to change to improve. It also made me realise how much I have learnt throughout my 1<sup>st</sup> year as an E&amp;EL.’</p>
<p>In January, the Northern Alliance Emerging Literacy Network was re-formed with representation from each of the Local Authorities. This network worked together to evaluate the implementation of Emerging Literacy across the Northern Alliance and report on progress. Partnership working included colleagues from the <b>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE (CYPIC) AND THE NATIONAL AHP LEAD</b>. Links have also been made to the National Practice Guidelines for the Early Level - <b>‘REALISING THE AMBITION’</b>. There was a slight delay to the timescale of the evaluation and report, however, the process was complete by the end of September 2020.</p>	<p>A series of recommendations has been included within the Evaluation Report which will further support the quality and sustainability of Emerging Literacy across the Northern Alliance.</p> <p>During Lockdown, online CLPL delivered by colleagues in Highland was made accessible to colleagues across the Northern Alliance and uptake was significant. Colleagues have acknowledged the role Emerging Literacy can play in meeting children’s individual development needs in starting school and moving forward– particularly relevant following the period in lockdown.</p>
<p><b>ESTABLISH A NETWORK OF ELC EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY LEADS ACROSS THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR THE CHILDREN IN THEIR SETTINGS AND TO SHARE THEIR LEARNING WITH SETTINGS ACROSS THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE.</b></p> <p>Through a series of developments sessions (both online and face to face), <b>ELC EXCELLENCE &amp; EQUITY LEADS</b> from across the Northern Alliance were brought together, upskilled and empowered to apply newly gained knowledge and skills to their local settings. The aim of this activity was to generate a <b>QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT</b> which will be co-constructed with settings, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for children within respective settings using the <b>MODEL FOR IMPROVEMENT</b> approach.</p>	<p>Almost 100% of Northern Alliance Excellence and Equity Leads have attended two face to face sessions and two online network and training sessions across the year. During these sessions, colleagues also engaged in Model for Improvement training, which they are now able to use within their own settings in order to better understand whether a change they have made has led to an improvement. Sharing practice around self- evaluation has led to the use of floor books to support greater ownership, communication and collaboration. Sharing practice has also led to a greater confidence and shared understanding of the core role of the Excellence and Equity Lead. This has built a supportive network, which should generate a self-sustaining model for continuous improvement, as well as providing an improvement model which can be applied to other contexts.</p>

## RAISING ATTAINMENT & CLOSING THE POVERTY RELATED ATTAINMENT GAP

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>Working and consulting with <b>CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP</b> and the <b>SCOTTISH POVERTY AND INEQUALITY RESEARCH UNIT</b>, various workshops have been developed to look at <b>POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIVIDUAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND SETTINGS</b>, using local data and understanding pupil voice.</p>	<p>Workstream Leads have engaged directly with various schools across the Northern Alliance and feedback has highlighted an increase in awareness and understanding of the effects of child poverty in the unique context of each school. This has subsequently led to schools reporting revisions within school policies and examining the effects of poverty within their setting in a greater level of detail.</p>

Respective <b>LOCAL CHILD POVERTY ACTION REPORTS (LCPAR)</b> have been pooled and shared widely.	This has led to bespoke support to one local authority in the development of their statutory LCPAR. This specific support to one local authority has supported them to fulfil their statutory function and provides a strong benchmark to assess performance and take a whole systems approach to closing the poverty related attainment gap.
<b>UPSKILLING OF PRACTITIONERS</b> continues through twilight sessions, <b>BREAKING DOWN AREA DEMOGRAPHIC DATA</b> as well as exploring the opportunities to gain insight from children, young people and families with lived experience with the ' <b>OUR VOICE</b> ' <b>PROJECT</b> . This aims to provide a place-based approach to informing school priorities and interventions.	This has facilitated Local Authorities and schools to find and interpret data based on their local context in order to understand the nature of poverty in their community and therefore implement policy and practice to best tackle the attainment gap. There has therefore been improved practice regarding specific policy in schools in mitigating the barriers to learning that poverty has created. Capturing the voice of children and young people with lived experience of poverty has led to a better understanding of their needs in terms of what place-based approach should be implemented to remove the barrier to education that poverty creates and have the greatest impact.

## SUSTAINING EDUCATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

### SUSTAINING EDUCATION – LEARNING ESTATES

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
Working with individual authorities, training has been provided on the <b>MODERATION OF BUILDING CORE FACTS ASSESSMENTS</b> .	This will enable teams to take a more holistic approach to these assessments, which in turn will lead to more accurate assessments of the learning estate and subsequently ensure that the best quality learning environments are available for children and young people.
The <b>PLACE-BASED APPROACH</b> has been developed within the context of a <b>LEARNING ESTATE STRATEGY</b> , which aims to collectively bring educational benefit at the heart of the strategy. This has contributed towards the development of associated <b>TOOLKITS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION, BUILD CAPACITY</b> within the central teams of local authorities and contributes to the fulfilment of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.	The work has highlighted the necessity and significance of collaborating within the local authority and beyond with the aim to support local authority planning and the fulfilment of statutory duties, as well as ensuring that learning environments are safe, inclusive and nurturing.

### E-LEARNING

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
An <b>INTERRUPTED LEARNERS PROGRAMME</b> was developed by e-Sgoil to support and reengage learners from across the Northern Alliance with education where this has not been possible. This model was developed with extensive input from multidisciplinary professionals (such as an educational psychologist, occupational therapist and an autism practitioner).	This innovative approach provides an online, interactive and supportive learning community where pupils feel in control. This proof of concept provides a model of working for which young people can learn in a safe and comfortable environment and remain engaged in their learning. The prospect of extending or replicating this model provides an opportunity to support vulnerable young people within a number of contexts.
Working with the <b>SCOTTISH NATIONAL CENTRE FOR LANGUAGES (SCILT)</b> , a series of online learning and teaching inputs were co-designed with the aim of providing equity in language learning experiences. This came with a focus on languages such as Arabic, but there has also been relative focus on Gaelic to support the Gaelic Medium policy agenda.	This work was expected to support the implementation of the 1+2 policy, especially within settings who struggled to introduce additional language provision. However, this has since evolved into a national offer which has engaged pupils with multiple languages being delivered over the lockdown period.

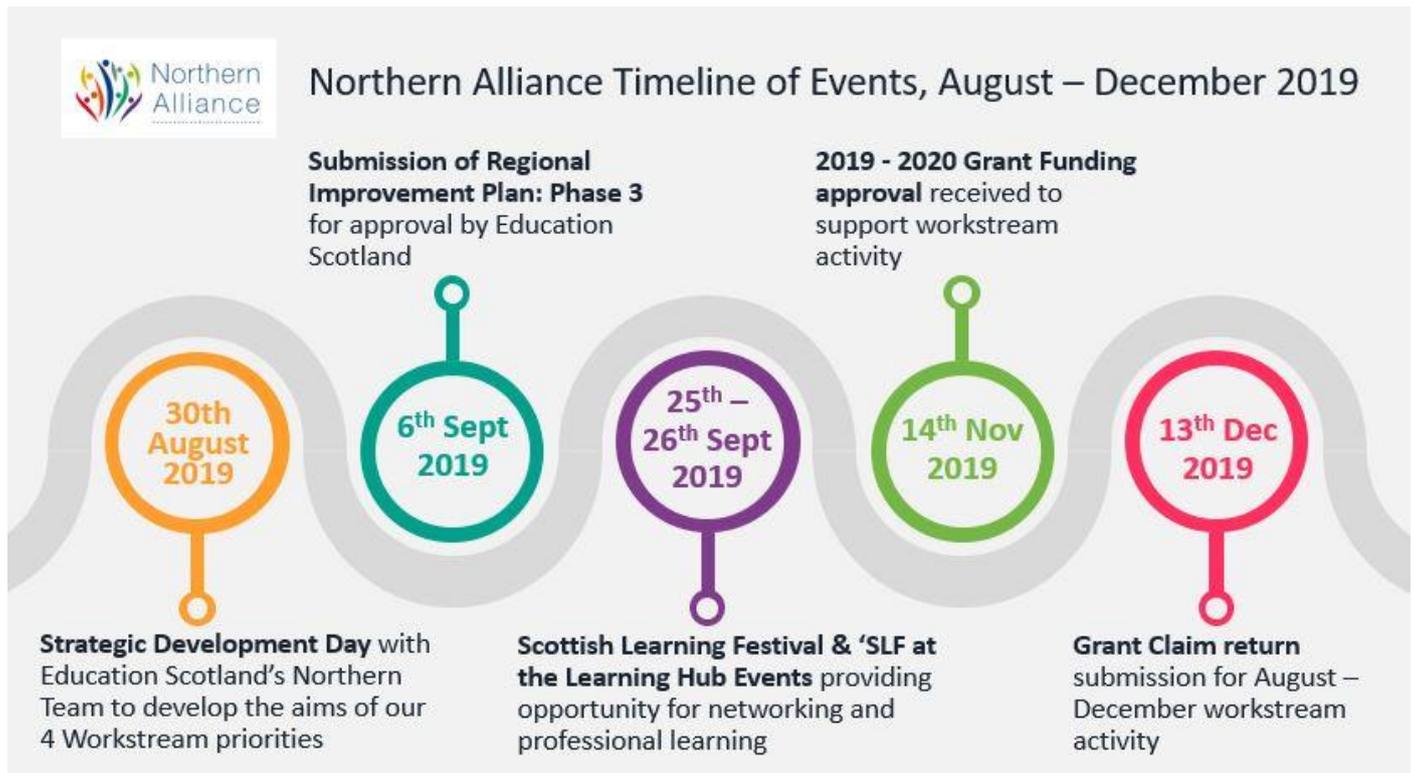
## LEADERSHIP

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>An increased range of professional learning programmes and activities for <b>LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS</b> including <b>REGIONAL OFFERS OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME, ASPIRING TO MIDDLE LEADERSHIP</b> and <b>EVOLVING SYSTEMS THINKING</b> (in partnership with Education Scotland). These programmes enable participants to work collaboratively with colleagues to <b>ENHANCE AND EXTEND THEIR OWN LEADERSHIP SKILLS</b> and consider how they apply them in their own context.</p>	<p>Feedback from the Aspiring Middle to Leadership prototype was very positive and the programme will run next session co-facilitated by the workstream lead. Evolving Systems Thinking was paused with 3 days remaining and is now underway again in a revised online format. A final evaluation will be carried out once the programme is completed.</p>
<p>Colleagues from Argyll &amp; Bute and Aberdeenshire participated in cohort one of a programme of <b>FACILITATOR TRAINING</b>. Evaluation feedback shows improvements in confidence, knowledge and skills to plan, design and facilitate adult learning and plans are underway for the <b>CREATION OF A FACILITATOR NETWORK</b>. The continued positive impact of this training can be seen as cohort one included three members of the Northern Alliance Central Team and this training enabled those team members to successfully facilitate the discussion and development of the Northern Alliance Support Strategy in response to Covid-19.</p>	<p><b>Self-reported Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 88% strongly agreed they have a better understanding of adult learning (100% agreed or strongly agreed).</li> <li>- 63% strongly They will confidently apply learning in their context (100% agreed or strongly agreed).</li> <li>- 75% strongly that the CLPL had provided now opportunities for collaborative working (100% agreed or strongly agreed).</li> <li>- 100% reported that they thought the PL would have a positive impact on children and young people.</li> <li>- 100% reported it would have a positive impact on their colleagues.</li> <li>- 100% reported it would <i>or would maybe</i> have a positive impact on families.</li> </ul> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>In a recent training event where I was able to apply my new facilitator skills, I believe that practitioners attending had a greater depth of understanding of the course - which will have a direct impact on the experiences they provide for children.</i></li> <li>- <i>I will be far better placed to lead learning that meets their desired outcomes and enables them to apply their learning in their context. I will facilitate daily interactions more confidently.</i></li> </ul>
<p>In partnership with GTCS, the first cohort of the <b>COACHING DIPLOMA</b> began in February.</p>	<p>Individual's personal coaching skills were developed in order to build capacity and support the development of coaching as a strategy for improvement across the Northern Alliance.</p>
<p>A Peer Coaching programme ran as a prototype with colleagues from Argyll &amp; Bute, Aberdeenshire and Highland. This proved very popular with registration selling out in 36 hours.</p>	<p>This programme received positive feedback. Participants are currently involved in co-creating the next phase of the programme.</p>
<p>The <b>NORTHERN ALLIANCE LEARNING HUB</b> was officially launched in February 2020 which coincided with a professional learning event for officers and practitioners looking at the issue of equity within education, '<b>BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: EQUITY AND EDUCATION FOR ALL</b>'.</p>	<p>Initial evaluation of the opening of the Learning Hub event indicated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 88.9% of attendees agreed/strongly agreed that the hub had facilitated greater opportunity to access professional learning.</li> <li>- 94.5% attendees agreed/strongly agreed that the hub had provided new opportunities to collaborate with other professionals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A SERIES OF WEBINARS TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b> across the school community ran during the period we were in lockdown. These were facilitated in partnership with colleagues within the Northern Alliance and beyond and based on positive psychology approaches.</p>	<p><b>Resilient and Resourceful webinar</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 25 practitioners engaged with this session.</li> <li>- 100% respondents reported that they thought the PL would have a positive impact on children and young people.</li> </ul> <p><b>Using Character Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 45 practitioners engaged in this session ran on 2 occasions.</li> <li>- Evaluation feedback was generally positive with all respondents thinking it would or would maybe have a positive impact on children, families and staff.</li> <li>- <a href="#">Wakelet</a> was used to capture staff feeling during this time. (copy and paste link into chrome browser).</li> </ul>

## ADDITIONAL AREAS

ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>The CLD Teams across Scotland continue to share expertise in relation to <b>FAMILY LEARNING, STEM</b> and <b>SHARED PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT</b> to better meet the Scottish Government regulations for CLD.</p>	<p>Analysis of strengths and areas for improvement by CLD Lead Officers drawn for CLD inspection reports in all 8 authorities has led to identified actions for improvement – now under way. Use of our Northern Alliance Family Learning pack in each of the authorities has enhanced shared approaches to Family Learning and provided a good platform for further collaboration and delivery. Access to external funding has allowed CLD Leads to build on the successful 2019 Regional Youth Conference strengthening participation and youth voice.</p>
<p><b>UNLOCKING STEM IN CLD</b> – a funded project almost completed and selected as a best practice case study in collaboration for learning by Education Scotland.</p>	<p>Over 100 practitioners trained through co-produced workshops in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Over 100 Youth Scotland STEM Toolkits distributed to participants Practitioner application of their learning evident in case studies across all three collaborating partner organisations capturing positive staff and learner feedback</p>
<p>Within the <b>EQUALITIES WORKSTREAM</b>, the principal educational psychologist from Highland has liaised with school pupils from Nairn Academy with the intention to co-design a <b>CHILDREN'S CHARTER</b> for the RIC which focuses on creating a <b>POSITIVE SENSE OF SCHOOL BELONGING</b> for both pupils and staff. The Children's Equalities Charter was being refined and this review was due to be completed in June 2020 for implementation in session 2020-21. However, with schools closing in March, this review was delayed.</p>	<p>The pupils from Nairn have included in the reviewed document, the views of other young people from across the Northern Alliance through survey responses and research. There is only one section of this Charter left to update and now schools have returned this is due for completion by December 2020.</p>

## KEY ACTIVITIES AUGUST – DECEMBER 2019



### STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT DAY

30<sup>th</sup> August 2019 saw the Northern Central Team come together with the Regional Improvement Forum Directors and Chief Education Officers along with Education Scotland's dedicated Northern Team for the first time. Working in groups focussing on each of the four key workstream; Curriculum, Raising Attainment & Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap; Sustaining Education in Our Communities, and Leadership; aims and priorities were developed.

### IMPACT

This day facilitated the strategic linking of national, regional and local colleagues to support a co-ordinated and cohesive approach to regional improvement activity. Colleagues within the Northern Alliance central team made connections and built relationships with the newly formed regional improvement team, which has enhanced the delivery of educational improvement support across the system.

### SCOTTISH LEARNING FESTIVAL 2019 & SLF AT THE LEARNING HUB

A parallel event with the Scottish Learning Festival took place in Aberdeen at the Northern Alliance Learning Hub at the University of Aberdeen. In recognition that attendance at the official event in Glasgow can prove difficult for practitioners across the Northern Alliance, the event at the Hub provided an alternative opportunity for practitioners to engage in the content and with colleagues.

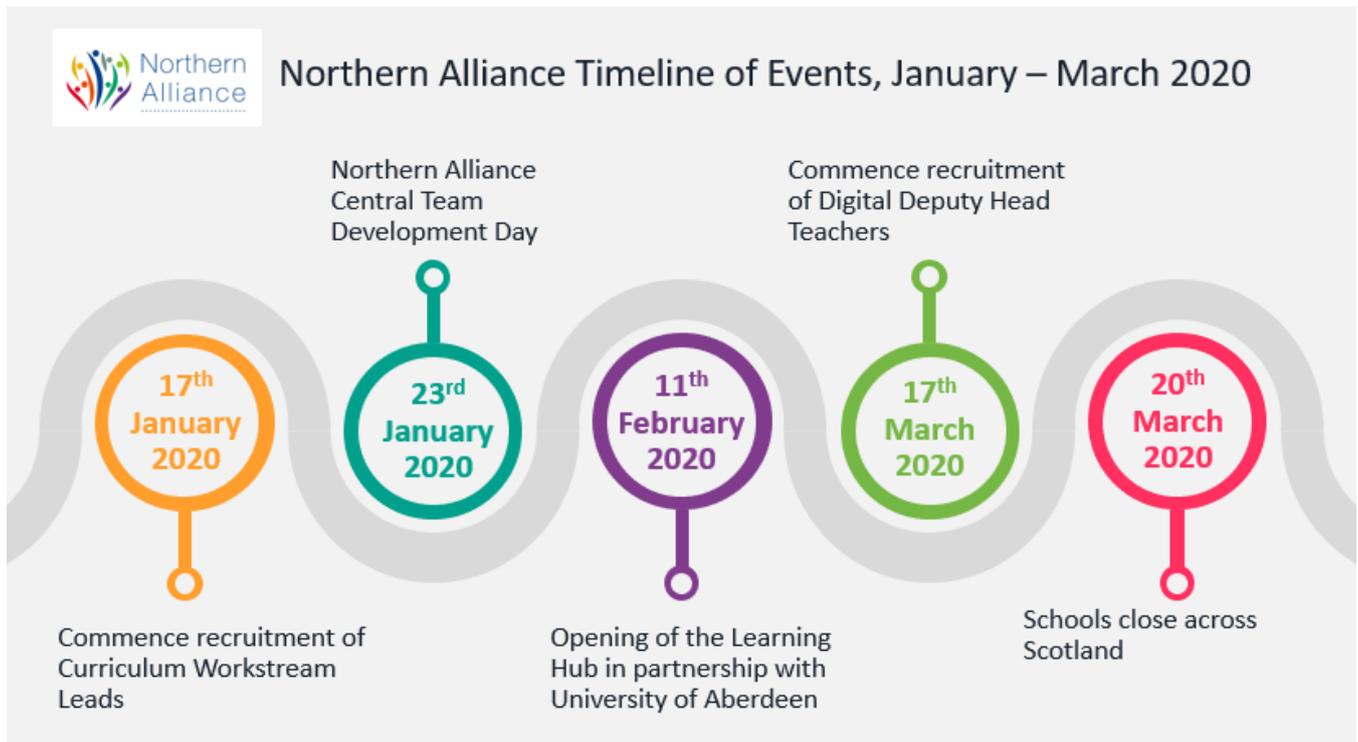
Attendees were able to enjoy live streamed sessions from the Glasgow event whilst also networking with colleagues and engage in professional learning in Aberdeen. The SLF at the Learning Hub event featured a 'Blether in the North' with presentations from Education Scotland, the University of Aberdeen and the Northern Alliance with sessions including facilitating and improving research based approaches to pedagogy in numeracy and mathematics; barriers to collaboration and how we can overcome them; and an introduction to improving gender balance and equalities.

## IMPACT

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This event supported the delivery of high quality, collaborative professional learning within a local context and improved engagement with the national event. It demonstrated the strong partnership between national partners hosting the conference, as well as regional and local partners in the facilitation of collaborative discussion throughout the Northern Alliance. This included academic partners within the University of Aberdeen, who supported the delivery of the event. Ultimately, this event introduced the equitable medium for high quality professional learning to be delivered by a range of professionals from across the country, to anyone across the Regional Improvement Collaborative.

## KEY ACTIVITIES JANUARY – MARCH 2020



### NORTHERN ALLIANCE DEVELOPMENT DAY

Following the launch of our new RIC Improvement plan at the beginning of the year, workstream lead officers and the wider central team came together with the Northern Alliance directors to share learning and aspirations for the year ahead. This also provided an opportunity for the Leads to hear about each other's work and increase their awareness of activity across the collaborative. Each Workstream Lead shared their plans for the future through a 10-minute presentation, followed by questions from the Directors.

#### FEEDBACK FROM THE DAY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD INCLUDED:

- *Really useful day hearing from all the leads – for the next team meeting there should be 4 presentations, 1 for each priority and everyone feeds into them as appropriate.*
- *It would be great to have a session with Education Scotland Northern Team to see how they are working with the RIC.*
- *What is the model of the future? – we should be shaping it.*
- *Important to focus on measuring and evidencing a difference/impact. Thinking more about improvement methodology and other tools. Work with leads to use improvement methodology would be great.*
- *Anything that supports a common approach is good.*
- *Issue of key contacts needs to be addressed; this information should be available to all.*
- *Opportunity to reduce bureaucracy – all messages being shared in all authorities.*
- *The opportunity to meet more frequently as a group to collaborate would be welcomed.*

#### IMPACT

Our Central Team Development Day brought the existing workstream leads together for the first time since August 2019, and as the feedback above illustrates, there was a desire to meet as a central team more often – and to work more cohesively. Interestingly, the actions taken from the suggestions above weave their way through the Northern Alliance Covid-19 Strategy (Part 2) and through the shared team action plan for the year ahead (part 3).

Our RIC Research Officer also shared an overview of a more systematic approach to collecting evidence of impact. It was agreed that this approach would be taken forward as of January 2020. Methods of capturing processes:

- **MAGPI+** - a mobile app which will record the number and type of collaborative engagements.
- **TEACHER REPORTED OUTCOME MEASURES** – an electronic form which will evaluate professional learning events, capturing core outcomes in line with the new model of professional learning.
- **WEBSITE ENGAGEMENT & RESOURCE SHARING** – website analytics will present information on the frequency of downloads, but every resource will have an evaluation form embedded within it.

## IMPACT

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- Captures data over time, which allows us to monitor impact on an ongoing basis and capture the impact of actions taken almost straight away.
- There is shared understanding of its purpose and a cohesive approach to collecting data.
- Colleagues are able to analyse individual workstream data and also look at what the key learning points are by analysing data collated from all workstream activity.
- Some data collection processes are built into what we are doing anyway – e.g. Sharepoint, Teams and Twitter analytics – therefore do not require an additional process to collect this data.

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## CURRICULUM LEADS - PRIMARY BGE AND SECONDARY BGE/SENIOR PHASE

We began a recruitment campaign mid-January 2020 for two new Workstream Leads to build capacity in the central team in relation to curriculum and collaborative curriculum delivery activity. A Primary and Secondary lead would work together to develop collaborative practice across the Northern Alliance local authorities in relation to curriculum development.

## IMPACT

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Recruitment of the Curriculum Leads is a key addition to the Central Team. Now that the Leads are in post, they are driving forward curriculum priorities within our RIC improvement plan. In addition, they aim to work alongside colleagues at classroom level to build a shared understanding of the importance of curriculum rationale. This is particularly relevant following the return to school in the 2020-21 school session. Our Secondary Lead has worked with colleagues to overcome challenges around timetabling and our Primary Lead is exploring different pedagogical approaches with colleagues in understanding how creativity and innovation will play a key role in future curriculum developments.

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## LAUNCH OF THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE LEARNING HUB

A highlight within our RIC year was when Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills John Swinney MSP officially opened our Learning Hub at the University of Aberdeen in February 2020. The Learning Hub, established in partnership with the University of Aberdeen and the Northern Alliance, was created to bring together practitioners, academics, researchers and others to share their knowledge and to encourage innovation in learning.

The official opening of the Learning Hub coincided with a professional learning event, '**Breaking Down Barriers: Equity of Education for All**', for practitioners across the Northern Alliance with attendance in the physical hub space or online. The event included sessions looking at inclusive practice and transformability, how poverty impacts the children in our schools and teacher confidence in the use of digital tools to reach learners. The event also included an overview of the **E-SGOIL INTERRUPTED LEARNERS PROGRAMME** developed to help and support those pupils disengaged from education in a traditional school setting.

Regional Improvement Lead officer Helen Budge explained: *“We’re passionate about helping people and about making the delivery of learning and teaching opportunities the best this can be across our urban, suburban and rural communities. This fantastic new shared space at the university promotes joined up thinking among those teaching the teachers, those carrying out important research and those directly involved in learning and teaching in our schools and early years settings.”*



David Gregory, Senior Regional Advisor for Education Scotland’s Northern Team and works alongside colleagues across the Northern Alliance added: *“I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues at the University of Aberdeen and the Northern Alliance as we encourage collaboration amongst practitioners and support professional learning through the new Learning Hub.”*

David Smith who is Head of the University of Aberdeen’s School of Education commented: *“It is a privilege for the School of Education to work with the Northern Alliance on the Learning Hub. As we work together, with our different perspectives, experiences, and understandings, around a common commitment to improving the lives of others, I hope that new research-informed solutions will emerge to the challenges faced by our schools and communities across the Northern Alliance.”*



## IMPACT

The launch of the Learning Hub signifies the value the Northern Alliance places on partnerships –maintaining a clear focus on our vision for increasing opportunities for collaboration and for learning across the RIC. Preliminary evaluation of the opening of the Learning Hub indicates that 88.9% of attendees agreed/strongly agreed that the hub had facilitated greater opportunity to access professional learning, and 94.5% attendees agreed/strongly agreed that the hub had provided new opportunities to collaborate with other professionals. As we move forward within our education system following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Learning Hub will become an even greater asset to colleagues across the Northern Alliance. In particular, facilitating further opportunities for learning and development at all levels through partnership working with the University of Aberdeen, e.g. through online CLPL opportunities for our partnership with the Leadership workstream (funding dependent).

## RECRUITMENT OF DIGITAL DEPUTY HEAD TEACHERS AND E-SGOIL

As a RIC covering such a diverse geographical area we have always made use of technology in our activity across our eight authorities to help as effectively engage and collaborate. Reflecting on the ever-increasing successes of e-Sgoil, a resource available across the RIC and the desire to expand our Northern Alliance digital agenda, a team of Digital Deputy Head Teachers has been recruited.



The Digital DHTs will lead the development of remote teaching and online learning across their own local authority, form part of the team of remote teaching delivery from e-Sgoil and add further capacity to our central team, collaborating with other Workstream Leads in relation to digital curriculum delivery. The recruitment to this team has highlighted the wealth of experience and appetite that exists within our RIC to the development of online learning and digital curriculum delivery. The development of the Team is ever more pertinent whilst we navigate our way through these unsettled times.

E-Sgoil is proving to be a significant development in terms of digital development across the Northern Alliance – with a particular focus on expanding the provision of specialist teachers and improving breadth of subject choice across the Northern Alliance. In addition, there is also a focus on I-Sgoil, the Interrupted Learner programme. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, there is an even greater demand on digital connectivity and learning. Evidence of E-Sgoil’s agile response to supporting learners online across the Northern Alliance – and beyond- has been astonishing and has been recognised at national level. As well as making an agile response to school disruption, e-Sgoil has demonstrated by continuing uninterrupted the delivery of all courses that were underway before lockdown, the inherent resilience that online teaching brings.

The recruitment of our digital DHTs will support E-Sgoil activity at a local authority level across the Northern Alliance. There can be times when issues such as connectivity and user skill levels can be problematic. With the Digital DHTs in post, issues can be resolved at a local level much more quickly. In addition, the Digital DHTs are seen to be ‘catalysts of change’ - driving forward digital improvements across the Northern Alliance.

Data to evidence improvement activity can be found on our Data Sway - [Supporting Evidence](#).

### **20TH MARCH 2020 – SCHOOLS CLOSE ACROSS SCOTLAND DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

On Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, schools in Scotland officially closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as indicated within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, Article 28), every child and young person has the right to an education. Out-with the provision of childcare requirements for key workers, local authorities, school staff and support staff have engaged in considerable effort to fulfil this right.

Given the need for flexibility in supporting the education system in the context of a global pandemic, the Northern Alliance has adapted to new and emerging circumstances to ensure that the offer of support remains adequate and responsive to emerging needs from a diverse geographical area.



## SITUATION

When Covid-19 resulted in all schools closing across Scotland at the end of March 2020, the Northern Alliance central team felt the need to connect with one another during this unsettling time. In order to facilitate this, one of our team members set up informal online coffee breaks twice a week. Initially the focus was around getting to know one another, but as can be expected, our role as a RIC and our priorities gradually crept into conversations. Common themes emerged:

- A desire to make a difference to our local authority colleagues who were under such pressure
- Greater clarity around our purpose during this time – what is our role during this pandemic? How can we help?
- The aspiration to continue to strengthen relationships within our central team and to work more cohesively moving forward.

## HOW WE RESPONDED

Three members of our team had recently attended Facilitator Training. This training had been organised by the Lead Officer from the Leadership workstream and was the first of a series of four sessions planned for delivery across the Northern Alliance.

Our newly trained Facilitators worked alongside the team to plan 4 sessions which would support us to identify how we were going to use this time most effectively to prepare for working with local authority colleagues when the time was right. We used the '4Mat' approach to planning our first session – using the four stages to support us in our thinking.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where?</li> <li>• With whom?</li> <li>• When?</li> </ul> <p><b>APPLY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Situation</li> <li>• Context</li> <li>• Environment</li> </ul>	<p><b>4.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reason</li> <li>• Need</li> <li>• Gain</li> </ul> <p><b>WHY?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefit</li> <li>• Advantage</li> <li>• Ideal</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill</li> <li>• Behaviour</li> <li>• Action</li> </ul> <p><b>HOW?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process</li> <li>• Flow</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Practice</li> </ul>	<p><b>3.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Clarity</li> </ul> <p><b>WHAT?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• New Thinking</li> </ul>

As a result of the 4Mat planning process, we had identified three priorities which would shape our strategy for moving forward:

**1. REFOCUS OUR RIC VISION IN RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT SITUATION (SHORT TERM)**

- Use this time to refocus our RIC’s direction and common purpose in response to the significant changes which are taking place within our current system

**2. UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING THE NEEDS WITHIN THE SYSTEM**

- Facilitate the development of sustainable systems whilst retaining a focus on quality of learning experiences
- Focus on equity /accessibility for all learners

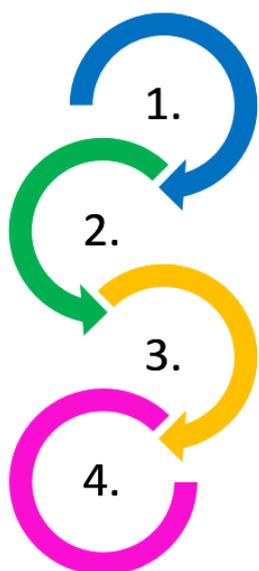
**3. BUILD AND GROW CONNECTIONS (LONGER TERM)**

- Further develop cohesion across Northern Alliance central team / local authorities / establishments / children and families
- Work with local and national partners
- Connect and collaborate with other RICs
- Build ownership and motivation

Next, we visited each of the three priorities in more depth – to ensure there was a shared understanding of each priority across the team and shared expectations around what we were aiming to achieve.

**1. REFOCUS OUR RIC VISION IN RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Listed below are our steps towards building greater clarity and shared expectations around our Northern Alliance vision. In developing this approach, we could see the value and relevance not only for the current situation, but in moving forward as a RIC.



<p><b>As a group, revisit our Northern Alliance Vision</b>  <i>‘Developing a culture of collaboration, sharing of expertise and creating local and regional networks to improve the educational and life chances of our children and young people.’</i></p>
<p><b>Separate our vision into distinct sections</b>          Developing a culture of collaboration; sharing of expertise; creating local and regional networks – <i>in order</i> to improve the educational and life chances of our children and young people</p>
<p><b>Clarity and Purpose</b>          How does our vision support clarity and purpose to our individual workstreams during this current period?</p>
<p><b>Build Shared Understanding and Expectations</b>          How do we move forward with this vision and share this across the Northern Alliance?</p>

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## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS WITHIN THE SYSTEM

One of the main actions of a Regional Improvement Collaborative is to ‘add value’ to the work of our local authorities and schools. During this pandemic, how could we avoid adding to the layers of resources and guidance being shared across Scotland? How could we ensure that the work we focused on helped colleagues at a time when they were looking for clarity and reassurance in working with their children and families?

Our second priority was to **UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT THE NEEDS WITHIN THE SYSTEM**. In planning for this priority, we placed quality, equity and accessibility at the centre of this process:



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## 3. BUILD AND GROW CONNECTIONS (LONGER TERM)

The final priority within our Strategy is focused on another key component of a Regional Improvement Collaborative – meaningful collaboration.

How could we work alongside our local authority teachers and ELC practitioners, Education Scotland’s Northern Team and other national partners to further improve outcomes and address some of the barriers which colleagues were experiencing? Again, we identified key questions to support our team in building shared understanding and expectations around how we build and grow connections – in order to address need during the pandemic and in order to build firm foundations for future developments.



## WHAT NEXT?

Each Lead Officer developed a plan for moving forward within individual workstreams in the short term which incorporated all three priorities outlined above. In addition, we agreed on a set of shared actions for the central team, in order to raise the profile of our work and also to signpost colleagues to sources of information and support which would add value to their work within their local authority.

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### OUR SHARED ACTIONS WERE:

- Create a calendar of CLPL activities which was based on each workstream's understanding of need
- Use Eventbrite to make the booking process more streamlined and accessible
- Each workstream lead to update their Glow Sharepoint sites to include appropriate resources, advice and guidance and signposting to national CLPL
- Raise awareness of activity through social media
- Share our strategy and actions through our monthly Northern Alliance newsletter

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### NORTHERN ALLIANCE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY GROUP

The workstream Lead for 'Sustaining Education in our Communities' has worked alongside 'Response and Recovery' representatives from every local authority in the Northern Alliance. Officers collaborated through weekly meetings and sharing of practice. This group has enabled local authority colleagues to discuss challenges and successes. Northern Alliance learning estate developments prior to this current situation have also supported local authorities through utilising profiles for schools, leading to ease of preparation for returning to school and ELC.

The Northern Alliance Recovery and Response Group has covered:

- Covid-19 capacities
- Risk Assessments
- PPE
- Closure Procedures
- Transport
- Catering
- Sharing committee reports.

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### WIDER ACTIVITY

In addition to the work of the central team, the Directors within the Northern Alliance meet once every two weeks to share learning at strategic level and to move shared Northern Alliance priorities forward. Throughout the pandemic period, meetings were increased to weekly in order to maintain effective communication and provide peer support during an ever-changing period of time.

Several Northern Alliance Directors were also members of the National Recovery Workstreams, as well as one of our Northern Alliance Lead Officers who was a member of the 'Infrastructure and Organisation' workstream. Throughout this fast-paced planning period at national level, effective communication between the Directors and the Workstream Leads ensured that the national workstreams had feedback on proposed actions from our unique Northern Alliance perspective – which went on to influence their recovery guidelines and frameworks.

As a result of coming together to create a shared support strategy, the Northern Alliance Central Team had a clear, shared understanding of how we should move forward in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, firm foundations were being made for developing a longer-term plan for working together as a central team and how we should work alongside our stakeholders. Data which may evidence the impact of these actions can be accessed through our data Sway - [Supporting Evidence](#).

It is clear from the data that following an initial dip in collaborative engagements in early April, data increased significantly towards the end of April and throughout May and June. This shows that the combined efforts of the Central Team is evidenced both through quantitative data and the qualitative statements from stakeholders. However, it is important to recognise that most education staff will have had increased time and opportunity to access CLPL online prior to the return to school in August. In addition, we had two new members join the team, which could increase overall numbers of engagements. Barriers to collaboration which existed before such as travel and cost are no longer issues with the increased use of online platforms for meeting and learning.