

Monitoring and evaluation



Professional Learning Communities:  
source materials for school leaders and  
other leaders of professional learning

# Reflecting on the progress of your professional learning community

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Creating and developing a professional learning community isn't easy; it's time-consuming and ongoing work. Nor is it neat and linear – there are no guarantees that everything you do will be successful and life in schools, centres or colleges isn't all plain sailing, as a nursery headteacher told us:

*“You can't be growing all the time. There are ebbs and flows... There are phases when you have spurts, or when you chill out, or when the waters are distinctly choppy.”*

Of course, ebbs could be hindrances or diversions, but they may also be times for consolidation – relentless improvement without a break and ongoing nurturing can be exhausting at the very least. The good

news is that our evidence demonstrates that working on the four processes identified in our research and highlighted in these source materials made a positive difference to many of our project schools. One of those processes involves monitoring and evaluating where you are. This booklet and ***Assessing the impact of your professional learning community*** (Booklet 13) are designed to help with this.

## Purpose and use of this activity

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Here, we have included two complementary methods – a progress chart and a reflective timeline – to help you:

- think back over what you have done
- consider actions you took at different stages
- reflect retrospectively on their value in helping develop your PLC
- celebrate successful strategies and their impact
- focus your planning of what to do next (see ***Planning your professional learning community*** in Booklet 9)

We suggest you select one of the methods and complete the activity at regular intervals – perhaps at the end of each term or semester – to help any necessary refocusing for the following term or semester. Alternatively, you may prefer to do it annually. If you continue updating it each year, it will be a useful record of your PLC's achievements.

First, consider who would benefit from participating in the activity (might you involve pupils in some way?) and then decide whether it would be best to have individuals complete

the progress chart or reflective timelines before discussing them in small groups and then as a whole group, or whether to start straight with small groups reflecting collaboratively.

You will find it helpful to have three resources to hand:

- 1 The resource card ***What is a professional learning community? A summary*** (see introductory source materials) to remind yourself of definitions of an effective PLC and its characteristics and processes
- 2 ***Deciding where you are as a professional learning community*** (see booklet 8), the implementation rubric, for four possible phases of PLC development (*starting out; developing; deepening; sustaining*) and for illustrations of how PLC characteristics and processes change over time
- 3 Calendars and diaries so that you can more easily refer back to key dates and events. Keeping an ongoing reflective diary may prove particularly useful

## Method A

## Professional learning community progress chart: how far have you progressed?

Think about the broad phase you have reached in your journey, what has helped you and what has held up progress.

What phase have you now reached?				
	<b>Starting out</b> <i>Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas</i>	<b>Developing</b> <i>Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment</i>	<b>Deepening</b> <i>Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits</i>	<b>Sustaining</b> <i>Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life</i>
When, approximately, did this happen?				
What were the most valuable processes in helping you to reach this phase?				
Which things didn't work, and why?				

**Were there any internal or external factors that hindered the school's development as a PLC? If yes: what were these? How were they overcome?** If they weren't, you may wish to try a force-field analysis<sup>1</sup>. (For an outline of the force-field analysis process, see *Extending your learning community through* networks and partnerships in the *Developing your professional learning community* materials in booklet 10.)

What might you do next?

<sup>1</sup> Lewin, K, 1947, Frontiers in group dynamics, *Human Relations*, 1 (1): 5-41

## Method B

### Reflective timeline

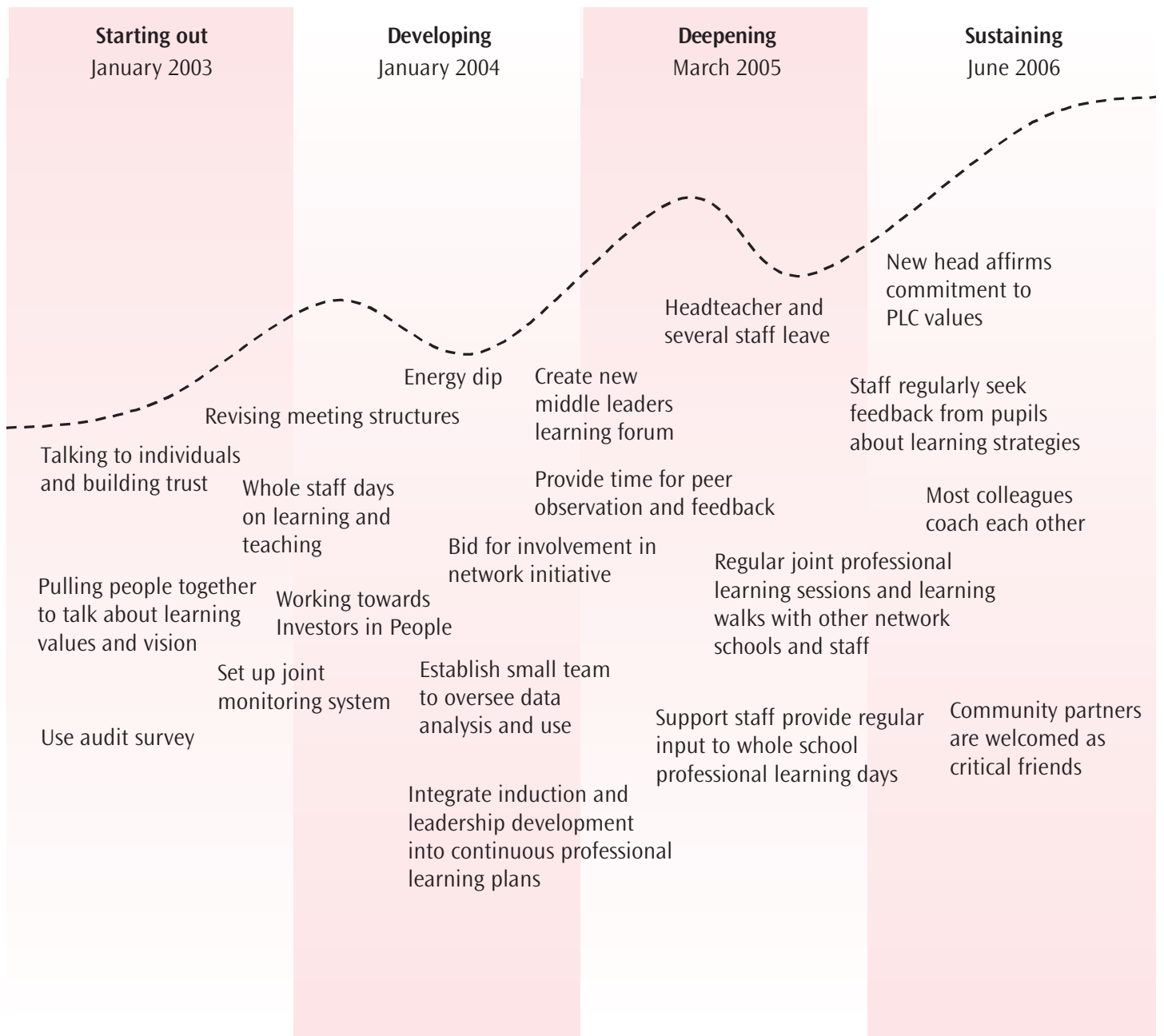
A reflective timeline allows you to think back periodically over the work that you have done to consider the actions that you took at different stages and, in retrospect, to reflect on their value in helping to develop the professional learning community.

Think back over what you have done and fill in the blank reflective timeline. We have provided an example timeline for you. You'll see it isn't

straight. There are peaks and dips to represent the peaks and dips in real life. We have added a few processes in the example, but you will want to create your own timeline, with approximate dates and highlighting 'ebbs' and 'flows' and reasons in the appropriate places.

When you have filled in the timeline, go to the end of the document where you will find questions to reflect on and discuss.

#### Example



Create your reflective timeline here

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the user to create a reflective timeline.

### Questions for reflection and dialogue



Which were the most successful strategies and actions? Why? Did the timing when they were done have anything to do with their success?

Which were the least successful strategies and actions? Why? Did the timing when they were done have anything to do with their lack of success?

Were there any internal or external factors that hindered the school's development as a PLC? If yes: what were these? Were they overcome successfully or not? If they weren't, you may wish to try a force-field analysis<sup>2</sup>.

How can you build on the process?

If you were advising or supporting colleagues in other schools starting on the journey, what might you suggest they do?

<sup>1</sup> Lewin, K, 1947, See previous reference

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Assessing the impact of your professional learning community

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