GTC
General Teaching Council
for England

Monitoring and evaluation

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

Assessing the impact of your professional learning community

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department for
education and skills
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Introduction

A critical but sometimes neglected process in creating and sustaining a professional learning community (PLC) is assessing the impact of your efforts and feeding this into the future development of the PLC. The difference PLCs make can be judged in three ways.

1 Ultimately an effective PLC makes a difference to *pupil outcomes*. Our research found evidence of this[1], and while this is difficult to assess, it's vital to keep this in mind as the bottom line and be considering what evidence you have of this.

2 An effective PLC also makes a difference to *staff morale and practice* and should help to build *leadership capacity* throughout the school.

3 A PLC is also effective when *all of the characteristics are in place and the processes are operating smoothly as a matter of course in order to sustain the PLC.*

Purpose of this activity

This activity is designed to help you:

• assess where you have had an impact that you can attribute to attention you have paid to developing your PLC
• give examples of the evidence you have to demonstrate that this is the case

Asking questions is at the heart of this activity. 'Inquiry mindedness'[2] is also centrally important to professional learning communities; a need to understand better what you are doing, to whom it makes a difference and how. One of the headteachers in the project had a poster on her door which exemplified this.

A place of questioning where you must ask the question and the answer questions you
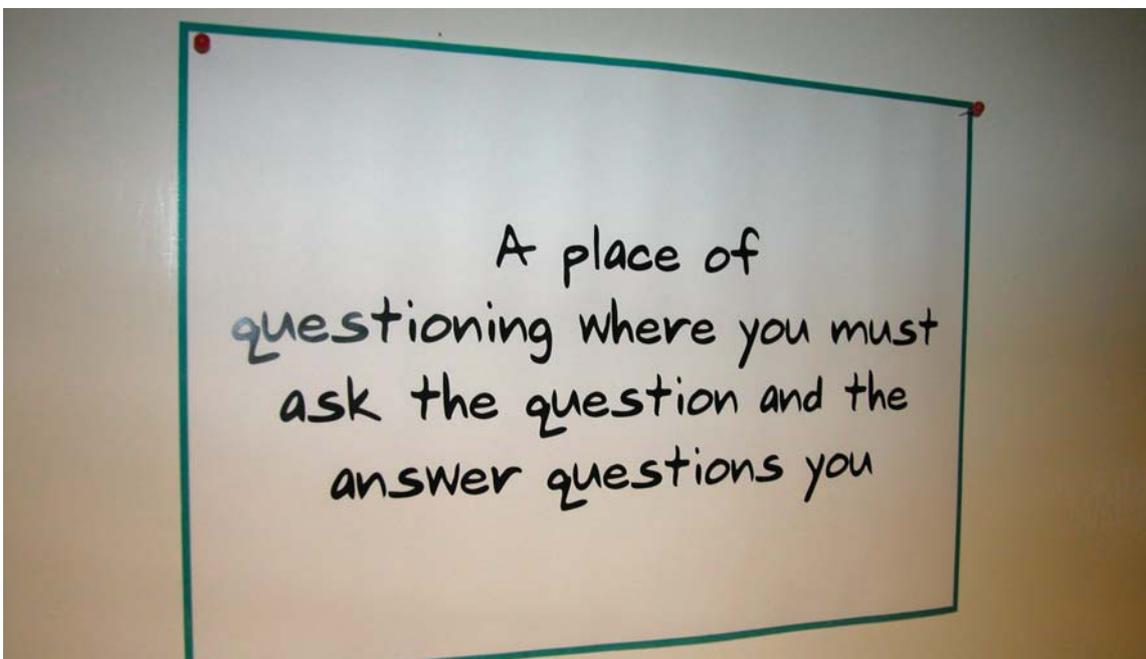
Notice on headteacher's door

How can you use this activity?

Work collaboratively to complete the following charts to answer four questions.

Question 1: What is the overall impact?

Using the scale of 4=high and 1=low, rate the extent to which you feel your efforts to develop a professional learning community have had an impact on:

a each of the eight characteristics of professional learning communities *(write in the numbers at the top of Evaluation Grid A)*

b staff and leadership practice *(write in the numbers at the top of Evaluation Grid B)*

c pupil outcomes *(write in the numbers at the top of Evaluation Grid B)*

Question 2: What is the evidence of impact on your PLC's characteristics?

The eight characteristics of professional learning communities identified in our research are listed as headings at the top of *Evaluation Grid A*. For each characteristic where you feel you have had a positive impact, write down in the grid *specific evidence* you have of particular processes you have used that you think have contributed to the positive impact. We have given some examples of the kind of processes that we found in our project in the vertical column in the framework, but you will find others on the resource card, ***What is a professional learning community? A summary*** in the introductory source materials.

We suggest that you focus on each process in turn, first reflecting on what actions you took and then considering how the action impacted on the different PLC characteristics. For example, under 'optimising resources and structures', if the allocation of rooms were changed so that each subject department, several year groups/grades or a key stage group had classrooms close together, what effect has this had on staff collaboration on learning? Has it increased? You may well have done additional things that you would categorise under each process. You can add these at the bottom of the grid.

Question 3: What is the evidence of the characteristics' impact on outcomes?

Using *Evaluation Grid B*, first answer questions 1b) and 1c) rating the impact you feel your efforts have had on staff, leadership and pupil outcomes. Then, for each area of staff and leadership practice and each pupil outcome where you feel your work in developing a PLC has had a positive impact, write down in the grid specific evidence you have of links between specific characteristics and these outcomes.

Question 4: What can you learn from this, and how will you apply your learning?

Having gathered the evidence, review it and ask yourselves questions about what you can learn from the data and how you intend to apply this learning to your processes of PLC development in order to enhance impact even further. There is a sheet at the back where you can make notes on your dialogue and decisions.

[1] Bolam, R, McMahon, A, Stoll, L, Thomas, S, & Wallace, M, with Greenwood, A, Hawkey, K, Ingram, M, Atkinson, A, & Smith, M, 2005, *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, DfES Research Report RR637, University of Bristol. Available at **www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR637.pdf**

[2] Earl, L, & Lee, L, 2000, Learning, for a change: School improvement as capacity building, *Improving Schools*, 3 (1): 30-38

Evaluation Grid A – Characteristics

	Shared values and vision	Collective responsibility for learning	Collaboration focused on learning	Reflective professional enquiry	Individual and group learning	Openness, networks and partnerships	Inclusive membership	Mutual trust, respect and support
Question 1a: *Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low*								
Question 2: Examples of evidence of impact on each PLC characteristic as a result of working on PLC processes								
Optimising resources and structures to promote the PLC eg use of time, space, communication								

Evaluation Grid A – Characteristics

Question 2:
Examples of evidence of impact on each PLC characteristic as a result of working on PLC processes

	Shared values and vision	Collective responsibility for learning	Collaboration focused on learning	Reflective professional enquiry	Individual and group learning	Openness, networks and partnerships	Inclusive membership	Mutual trust, respect and support
Promoting professional learning eg co-ordinating continuing professional development; arranging joint learning activities with network partners								
Evaluating and sustaining the PLC eg consciously working on developing PLC processes; monitoring the process, progress and impact of the PLC								

Evaluation Grid A – Characteristics

	Shared values and vision	Collective responsibility for learning	Collaboration focused on learning	Reflective professional enquiry	Individual and group learning	Openness, networks and partnerships	Inclusive membership	Mutual trust, respect and support
Question 2: Examples of evidence of impact on each PLC characteristic as a result of working on PLC processes								
Leading and managing to promote the PLC eg developing and spreading a learning vision and focus; building trust; distributing leadership								
Other things you have done that have made a difference								

Evaluation Grid B

Question 1b: Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low

Question 1c: Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low

Question 3: Examples of evidence of the characteristics' impact on outcomes

	Staff and leadership practice outcomes			Pupil outcomes		
	Staff morale	Staff learning and teaching practice	Leadership capacity throughout the school/centre/college	Attitudes, attendance and well-being	Engagement with learning	Academic progress and achievement
Shared values and vision						
Collective responsibility for learning						
Collaboration focused on learning						
Reflective professional enquiry						

Evaluation Grid B

Staff and leadership practice outcomes

Pupil outcomes

	Staff morale	Staff learning and teaching practice	Leadership capacity throughout the school/centre/college		Attitudes, attendance and well-being	Engagement with learning	Academic progress and achievement
Individual and group learning							
Openness, networks and partnerships							
Inclusive membership							
Mutual trust, respect and support							

Question 1b: *Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low*

Question 1c: *Rating of level of impact 4=high, 1=low*

Question 3: Examples of evidence of the characteristics' impact on outcomes

Question 4: What can you learn from this, and how will you apply your learning?

Learning from the data

What do these data tell you about your efforts to develop your professional learning community?

Are you more successful in certain areas of PLC development than in others?

Have you had a greater impact on certain aspects of your school, centre or college and on certain groups than others?

What else do you need to know, and how might you find this out?

Applying your learning

What should you continue doing?

What should you start doing and how might you go about this?

What should you stop doing?

Monitoring and evaluation

Reflecting on the progress of your professional learning community
Assessing the impact of your professional learning community